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DOUGLAS DAVID WILLIAMS, JR.

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Abstract

Attempts to trace the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos* have tended to begin with the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, in which the *bios theōrētikos* emerges as an ideal among philosophers as they attempt to articulate and evaluate what it means to live a life dedicated to the pursuit of intellectual activity as an end in itself. In this study, I present a new account of the early history of the *bios theōrētikos* by interpreting this fourth-century philosophical discourse in relation to fifth-century comic discourse about contemporary intellectual culture. Drawing on the work of intellectual historian Hans Blumenberg, I argue that Plato's presentation of the theoretical philosopher as a laughable figure allows us to draw a conceptual connection between the Platonic-Aristotelian *bios theōrētikos* and the comic poets' characterization of Socrates. I show that the comic poets consistently contrast Socrates with the Sophists, presenting him as a thinker who is laughable for his pursuit of useless knowledge to the detriment of his own well-being. Further developing this observation, I challenge the prevailing interpretation of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, demonstrating how in this play, too, Socrates is primarily characterized as an unworldly and impractical theorist who pursues his research with no concern for practical benefits. I argue also that this understanding of the comic Socrates helps us to understand why the comic poets associate Socrates and the tragedian Euripides, who both as a character on the comic stage and as a tragic playwright plays an important role in contemporary attempts to think through the value of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

After demonstrating how we can interpret the comic poets' depiction of Socrates as a mocking critique of a life dedicated to the pursuit of insubstantial and ineffectual knowledge, I consider the influence that this comic discourse exerts on Plato's novel conceptualization of philosophy as a way of life that holds intellectual *theōria* as its highest activity. In tracing how

this comic critique of philosophy functions as a thematic through-line in four Socratic dialogues in which he advances his particular understanding of philosophy, I argue that for Plato, the comic critique of philosophy represents an inherent tension between the philosopher and the non-philosophic political community, one which will eventually lead to the theoretical philosopher's complete rejection of political activity. Thus, through a generically grounded and philosophically informed re-examination of the characterization of Socrates in the extant corpus of Old Comedy, I show that it is not Plato or Aristotle in the fourth century, but Aristophanes and the comic poets of the fifth, who took the first steps in articulating and evaluating the concept of a *bios theōrētikos* understood as a life dedicated to the pursuit of intellectual activity as an end in itself.

A Note on Texts

For the texts of Aristotle and Plato, I cite the most recent OCTs, except for Plato's *Gorgias*, for which I have consulted Dodds (1959). For Aristophanes' *Clouds* and *Frogs*, I cite the texts of Dover (1968, 1993); for the *Acharnians,* Olson (2002); for the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Austin and Olson (2004); for the *Birds*, Dunbar (1995). For the comic fragments, I have consulted both Kassel and Austin's *Poetici Comici Graeci* (K-A) and the published volumes of the *Fragmenta Comica* of the Kommentierung der Fragmente der Griechischen Komödie project (KomFrag). For the fragments and testimonia related to the life of Euripides, I cite Kannicht's *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (*TGrF*), except for *Satyrus*' *Life of Euripides*, for which I have consulted Schorn (2004). Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Introduction and Overview

A New History of the *Bios Theōrētikos*

The concept of the βίος θεωρητικός (*bios theōrētikos*), the "contemplative life," has had a long and storied history in post-classical philosophical, religious, and political thought.[1] The term first appears in Aristotle's *Politics*, which also provides context for its place in fourth-century intellectual discourse:

> Among those who agree that the life accompanied by virtue is the most choice-worthy, there is disagreement whether the political and active life (ὁ πολιτικὸς καὶ πρακτικὸς βίος) is to be chosen or rather the life released from all external affairs, such as some form of *bios theōrētikos*, which some say is the only philosophical life.[2]

Aristotle here sets the *bios theōrētikos* against the *bios politikos* and *praktikos*, "the political and active life."[3] In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he also includes the *bios apolaustikos*, or "the life of pleasure," among the especially prominent ways of life.[4] Each of these ways of life is defined by the end around which it is organized: while the *politikos/praktikos* person pursues the honor or virtue associated with political activity and the *apolaustikos* pursues pleasure, the *theōrētikos* pursues contemplation, or θεωρία (*theōria*). Aristotle's account of the intellectual virtues

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[1] For an overview, see the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* s.v. *vita activa* / *vita contemplativa*; cf. also s.v. *bios* and *theorie*. A recent volume edited by Bénatouïl and Bonazzi (2012) offers contributions on this concept in Hellenistic, imperial, and late ancient philosophy as well as a good overview of recent literature. The work of Arendt (1998, 1981) has led to a revived interest in the concept in modern political thought. The concept also continues to have a prominent place in work on "philosophy as a way of life" stemming largely from Hadot (1995, 2002); e.g., Nehamas (1998), Cooper (2012).

[2] ἀμφισβητεῖται δὲ παρ᾽ αὐτῶν τῶν ὁμολογούντων τὸν μετ᾽ ἀρετῆς εἶναι βίον αἱρετώτατον πότερον ὁ πολιτικὸς καὶ πρακτικὸς βίος αἱρετὸς ἢ μᾶλλον ὁ πάντων τῶν ἐκτὸς ἀπολελυμένος, οἷον θεωρητικός τις, ὃν μόνον τινές φασιν εἶναι φιλόσοφον. 1324a25-29.

[3] Throughout the dissertation I refer to these together as the *bios politikos/praktikos*.

[4] 1095b–1096a; cf. also *EE* 1215a–1216a. For the theme of choices of life in ancient poetry and philosophy, see Joly (1956) and the more recent overview by Harbach (2010, 169-176). Cf. also Verhasselt (2016) for the genre of *peri biōn* that developed from debates about such questions.

culminates in the highest praise of *theōria*, and thus the *bios theōrētikos*, the life organized around the pursuit of the highest end, seems for him to be the most choice-worthy life.[5]

While the collocation *bios theōrētikos* first appears in Aristotle, the concept's origin is usually traced back to Aristotle's teacher Plato, whose writings likewise point to contemporary conversations about the best way of life and the type of education necessary for its attainment.[6] The text most often considered in this context is the *Gorgias*. Although this dialogue is ostensibly about the art of rhetoric, Socrates warns throughout that there is actually something much more important at stake in the interlocutors' conversation, namely the question of the most choice-worthy life:

> For you see that our debate is about that which even a man having little intelligence would pursue most seriously—namely, what way of life one should live (ὅντινα χρὴ τρόπον ζῆν), whether he should live the one you urge me toward—doing all those manly things, speaking among the people and practicing rhetoric and being politically active (πολιτευόμενον) in the way that you modern political men are (πολιτεύεσθε)—or this life of philosophy (τὸν βίον τὸν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ); and how this life differs from that other one.[7]

Here, Socrates presents the choice between two opposite ways of life that, even if not defined with Aristotelian precision, map easily onto Aristotle's *bios theōrētikos* and *bios politikos/praktikos*. The question of the most choice-worthy way of life gives structure to the

[5] There is an enormous body of scholarship on Aristotle's *bios theōrētikos* and *theōria*. I include only a small selection that I have found instructive here: Eriksen (1976), Adkins (1978), Cooper (1987), Gastaldi (2003), Lisi (2004), Richardson Lear (2004), Nightingale (2004, ch. 5), Roochnick (2008, 2009), Natali (2013).

[6] Plato's primary interlocutor in this context is usually taken to be Isocrates; see, e.g., Morgan (2004). For these debates in the context of the protreptic works of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle, see Collins (2015).

[7] ὁρᾷς γάρ ὅτι περὶ τούτου ἡμῖν εἰσὶν οἱ λόγοι, οὗ τί ἂν μᾶλλον σπουδάσειέ τις καὶ σμικρὸν νοῦν ἔχων ἄνθρωπος, ἢ τοῦτο, ὅντινα χρὴ τρόπον ζῆν, πότερον ἐπὶ ὃν σὺ παρακαλεῖς ἐμέ, τὰ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς δὴ ταῦτα πράττοντα, λέγοντά τε ἐν τῷ δήμῳ καὶ ῥητορικὴν ἀσκοῦντα καὶ πολιτευόμενον τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον ὃν ὑμεῖς νῦν πολιτεύεσθε, ἢ [ἐπὶ] τόνδε τὸν βίον τὸν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ, καὶ τί ποτ᾽ ἐστὶν οὗτος ἐκείνου διαφέρων. 500c1-7. Cf. 472c10-11, 487e8-488a2, and 527c5-7. On this theme, see Dodds (1959, 3-5).

dialogue between Socrates, who defends the life of the philosopher, and Polus and Callicles, who attack such a way of life as they make the case for one that is practically efficacious and politically powerful.[8]

If the *Gorgias* shows Plato thinking through the question of the most choice-worthy life, the *Republic* identifies that most choice-worthy life with the intellectual activity that would become the namesake of the *bios theōrētikos*: *theōria*. Here, in books V-VII, Plato conceptualizes the highest form of wisdom toward which the philosopher strives as *theōria*, an intellectual contemplation of metaphysical truths. Hence we can discern in Plato the two central concepts that would be developed and united in Aristotle's *bios theōrētikos*: the life of the philosopher is a distinct *bios* organized around his engagement in the intellectual activity of *theōria*.[9]

Research into the early history of the concept of the *bios theōrētikos* has focused almost exclusively on Plato and Aristotle—with some good reason. From the perspective of historical semantics, the collocation *bios theōrētikos* only first appears in Aristotle, as noted above. Meanwhile, the conception of *theōria* as the particular type of intellectual activity around which the philosopher organizes his life seems to be a novel development of Plato as he sought to define and defend his understanding of philosophy.[10] From the perspective of cultural history, though, these semantic and conceptual developments in the philosophy of Plato in particular must be understood in the context of fifth-century discourse about a less well-defined figure: the apolitical intellectual who forfeits the pursuit of honor and pleasure in his search for knowledge without any concern for its practical purpose. The most developed portrayal and exploration of

[8] Plato's *Gorgias* is treated in more detail in ch. 4, pp. 170-178.
[9] Plato's *Republic* is treated in more detail in ch. 4, pp. 178-191.
[10] See Nightingale (2004), discussed in more detail on pp. 12-14, 16-17 below.

this figure, I argue, appeared in the characterization of Socrates in Athenian Old Comedy. In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, in particular, the comic poet puts Socrates on stage in order to mock the strange way of life of a man who is willing to suffer all sorts of indignities in his single-minded pursuit of obscure knowledge. Or, in other words, he is portrayed as a man who lives a sort of *bios theōrētikos*.

In this dissertation, I seek to understand this aspect of the Aristophanic Socrates in relation to the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos.* To do so, I interpret the comic portrayal of Socrates on the comic stage within the context of the intellectual history of the fifth century BCE, with the aim of understanding how that character and what he represents would eventually influence the fourth-century conceptualization of the philosophical life as a sort of *bios theōrētikos.* Through an analysis of the comic Socrates both in the extant works of Aristophanes and in the comic fragments, I demonstrate that the comic Socrates is what I will call, for reasons I will discuss shortly, a "prototheoretical philosopher," a thinker who pursues useless, abstract knowledge for its own sake. Such an understanding of Socrates emerges clearly in comparison with the comic portrayal of the so-called Sophists, who, in contrast to Socrates, are shown to subordinate their intellectual activity to worldly pursuits. It also gains support from the way in which the comic poets associate Socrates with the tragedian Euripides, who, as a particularly "philosophical" poet, is characterized in a manner similar to Socrates and whose tragedies engaged with the comic poets' portrayal of such unworldly intellectuals.

I thus challenge the established history of the *bios theōrētikos,* arguing that it is not Plato in the fourth century BCE, but Aristophanes and the comic poets of the fifth, who first tried to give expression to and reflected on the significance of a way of life organized around the pursuit of theoretical knowledge without any practical purpose. Recognizing this portrayal of Socrates as

part of the conceptual genealogy of the *bios theōrētikos* also helps us to understand better the development of that concept in Plato, who himself looked back to the figure of the comic Socrates as he explored the character of the philosopher and his pursuit of *theōria.* For inasmuch as the Platonic project is a defense of the same way of life that Aristophanes mocked, his presentation of this way of life must incorporate and respond to this popular, comic critique of the same. Thus the characterization of Socrates in comic discourse functions as a foil for Plato's attempt to define and valorize the character of the philosopher and his *bios theōrētikos*. In short, Plato's presentation of his "theoretical philosopher" is responsive to and in part shaped by the earlier comic presentation of the "prototheoretical philosopher."

Reading the comic Socrates as a sort of theoretical philosopher *avant la lettre* immediately presents a number of methodological problems related to the intellectual history of the late fifth and early fourth centuries. In order to understand these problems and their significance, to refine the scope of my current investigation, and to present my methodological approach, I will first review some significant scholarship on the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos* and on the history of philosophy in this time period more generally.

Previous Approaches to the History of the Concept

The most influential account of the early history of the concept of the *bios theōrētikos* remains Werner Jaeger's essay "On the Origin and Cycle of the Philosophic Ideal of Life," first published in German in 1923 and translated into English in 1934 as an appendix to his seminal *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*.[11] Jaeger's work continues to have a

[11] Throughout this discussion I refer to the second revised edition of 1948.

major impact on scholarly understanding of the emergence and early development of the *bios theōrētikos* as a philosophical ideal in the Platonic and Peripatetic traditions as well as on the historiography of philosophy more generally. It will thus be worth spending some time considering his methods and conclusions.

Jaeger takes as his starting point the vexing biographical tradition that stands next to the doxographical tradition in the earliest accounts of the history of philosophy, particularly the various anecdotes and apothegms in which the philosopher's dedication to the pursuit of knowledge is held up as an exemplar. Consider, for instance, Pythagoras' supposed comparison of life to a festival when Leon, the tyrant of Phlius, asked him to explain what a philosopher is: some men train their bodies hoping to gain honor in the games, others look for profit by buying and selling among the masses, but still others come to the festival to contemplate the magnificent spectacles. This final group—the freest men, according to the anecdote—are the philosophers who contemplate "the nature of things," the comparison playing on the multivalence of the idea of *theōria.* The philosopher, in comparison with the practically minded men who pursue honor or profit, rejects worldly goods in pursuit of the higher good that is pure intellectual contemplation.[12]

For Jaeger, stories such as these are the key to understanding the emergence of the concept of the *bios theorētikos*. For he sees in them the imprint of "men of a definite class . . . who were themselves full of the *ethos* of what was later called the 'theoretic life'," implying that "when these anecdotes arose, the 'theoretic life' . . . had already become a conscious philosophical

[12] Cic. *Tusc*. V.9; cf. the accounts in D.L. VIII.8 and Iambl. *VP* 12. For a recent examination of this story in the context of the conceptual history and historiography of philosophy below, see Moore (2019, ch. 1); Moore argues that the story is more informative for the intellectual history of the fifth century than Jaeger and those in his wake allow; cf. also Gottschalk (1980, 23-35).

ideal."[13] If we could trace the development of such stories, then, we could know when the ideal of the *bios theorētikos* began to take shape. No such anecdotes, though, can be traced to any author prior to the fourth century: the above anecdote about Pythagoras, for example, likely originates in the writing of Aristotle's pupil Heraclides of Pontus. Jaeger thus argues that the proliferation of these anecdotes—as well as counterparts in which many of the same philosophers are cast not as unworldly contemplators but as political men of practical wisdom—are the result of fourth-century debates about the best way of life. Those who argued for the *bios theōrētikos* invested their claim with authority by attributing such a way of life to the venerable thinkers of old, while those who favored the *bios politikos/praktikos* attributed their preferred way of life to those same thinkers.

Though such debates attest to a fracture within the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition on the question of the best life, these thinkers were nevertheless firmly situated within the thought of the Academy and the Peripatos. For, according to Jaeger, "the ideal of the 'life' dedicated to knowledge was created by Plato, whose ethics describes several opposed types of 'life' and culminates in the 'choice of the best life'" (428). That "best life" is, for Plato as it would be for Aristotle, the *bios theōrētikos*, the life dedicated to the pursuit of *theōria*. As Jaeger puts it most directly: "Plato was the first to introduce the theoretical man as an ethical problem into philosophy and to justify and glorify his life" (429). All accounts of pre-Platonic philosophers that are constructed upon this conceptual framework, Jaeger argues, are post-Platonic retrojections of what is essentially a Platonic-Aristotelian concept.

Despite the pride of place that he gives to Plato and his philosophic project in shaping the

[13] Jaeger (1948, 428).

concept of the *bios theōrētikos* as it would be taken up by Aristotle and later thinkers, Jaeger opens his essay by gesturing toward a less lofty tradition that could also make an invaluable contribution to our understanding of this concept: a different set of anecdotes that reflect the popular reaction to "a new type of man, the unworldly and withdrawn student and scholar" with his "paradoxes and freakish peculiarities" (426).[14] Examples include Thales' famous fall into a well as he was observing the heavens and the story of the distracted Democritus, whose cattle consumed his crops while he was lost in thought.[15] Here, the dedicated pursuit of obscure intellectual matters appears not as an ideal to be emulated but as a folly to be mocked. Jaeger ultimately sets aside this line of inquiry on account of its historical obscurity: because these anecdotes express the "feeling of the masses" as opposed to the recorded view of an individual, "we have absolutely nothing to go on" (428).

While Jaeger is surely right that we cannot know the precise time or place at which this popular image of the philosopher and his way of life arose, we do have a key piece of evidence in the text of one fifth-century thinker who was deeply concerned both about the feelings of the masses and with this sort of unworldly thinker: Aristophanes' *Clouds*. In this play, Socrates is characterized in a way that closely parallels the philosophers in Jaeger's anecdotes: he is a thinker who has so dedicated himself to his abstract intellectual inquiry that he fails to take care of his basic bodily needs. As such, the play provides a crucial piece of evidence for a critical popular discourse about this peculiar sort of thinker who only later would be held up by a certain

[14] Cf. the comments of Eriksen (1973, 2-3).

[15] The anecdote about Thales first appears at Pl. *Tht*. 174a-b, discussed in more detail in ch. 4, pp. 192-204. The numerous additional retellings are recorded in Wöhrle *et al.* (2014, 38). The anecdote about Democritus appears at Hor. *Ep*. I.12.12 as well as Phil. *Vita Contemp.* 14 (where Anaxagoras is also mentioned). Cf. Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 628c-d for a similar comic anecdote about Democritus.

sect of the philosophical elite as an exemplar of the best way of life, the *bios theōrētikos*.

I should emphasize here that, like Jaeger, my aim is not to trace a history of practitioners of the *bios theōrētikos*, that is, to determine whether, say, Socrates, Anaxagoras, or Thales could be said to have lived their lives in accordance with a normative definition of this concept.[16] I do not look to Old Comedy to make any claims about the activity and life of Socrates as a historical figure. Rather, I aim to elucidate the origin of the discourse around and concept of the *bios theōrētikos* itself by situating Aristophanes' Socrates within its conceptual genealogy. I seek to establish the character of the comic Socrates as the first extant representation and exploration of a figure who lives a way of life that conceptually maps onto the *bios theōrētikos.* In doing so, I do not claim that Aristophanes and the comic poets created the concept of the *bios theōrētikos* or the figure of the theoretical philosopher: I take the comic portrayal of Socrates—especially that of Aristophanes in the *Clouds*—to be a particularly prominent and thoughtful expression of a critical popular discourse of a new type of thinker whose way of life would later be held up as a philosophical ideal as the *bios theōrētikos.*[17]

My reading of Aristophanes' Socrates as such is aligned with the interpretation of Socrates' significance put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Here, Nietzsche makes a case for understanding Socrates as "the archetype of a form of existence unknown before him,

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[16] Jaeger, of course, recognized that thinkers before Plato had understood the pursuit of knowledge as the highest human activity, but his goals here are distinctly historiographical (cf. 1962, 428 n. 3 and 1947, 150-185). Before Jaeger, Boll (1950) gave a brief account of thinkers who lived according to this ideal; Festugière (1967) gives a more nuanced account of this sort in the wake of Jaeger, reading the works of earlier thinkers against a normative definition of the "theoretical life" drawn from Plato. Cf. also Müller (1960).

[17] For an in-depth examination of another comic, popular discourse parodying more traditional wisdom through the figure of Aesop, see Kurke (2011). She traces elements of this tradition to the fifth century.

the archetype of *theoretical man.*"[18] What distinguishes this type is his "belief that the nature of things can be discovered" and that "to penetrate to the ground of things and to separate true knowledge from illusion and error" is "the noblest, indeed the only truly human vocation."[19] As Christopher Raymond has shown, Nietzsche's understanding of Socrates as "theoretical man" builds on the account put forward by Eduard Zeller in his *Philosophie der Griechen*, then the most influential and well-known history of philosophy.[20] For both Nietzsche and Zeller, Socrates represents the idea that knowledge is the highest virtue and ultimate guide to the good life. They differ starkly, though, in their assessment of such a figure: for Zeller, Socrates is a revolutionary benefactor who sought to reform Greek morals by founding them firmly on knowledge; for Nietzsche, this very same optimistic privileging of knowledge made Socrates the embodiment of the forces that destroyed the pessimistic worldview that produced the highest achievements of the ancient Greeks, most notably Athenian tragedy.

Nietzsche sometimes suggests that Socrates was the first such theoretical man, while at others he suggests that the phenomenon Socrates represents predates Socrates himself.[21] But he is insistent that the figure of Socrates is *the* "archetype" (*Typus*) of the theoretical man.[22] Thus in

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[18] For the various ways that Nietzsche "constructs" the figure of Socrates depending on the philosophical and rhetorical needs of a given context, see Porter (2006). Raymond (2019) convincingly argues that Nietzsche is generally consistent in using Socrates as a figure through whom he can engage with the optimistic rationalism of both ancient and modern times.

[19] §15. Text and translation from Geuss and Spiers (1999).

[20] Raymond (2019, 847-853). For the significance of Zeller and Nietzsche's interpretations of Socrates in the modern historiography of philosophy, see Laks (2018, 20-28).

[21] Nietzsche gives a striking formulation of this latter thought in his second lecture at Basel, cited in Raymond (2019, 845): "Socratism is older than Socrates."

[22] Nietzsche stresses Socrates priority as a theoretical man especially at some points in §15 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, though even here the account builds to and culminates in the more reserved claim that Socrates "appeared to be the exemplar" of this type. Cf. also the more ambiguous phrasing of §17: the spirit of science "first came to light in the person of Socrates" (trans. Geuss and Spiers 1999).

these early writings Nietzsche seems less interested in Socrates as the historically *first* theoretical man than in Socrates as the figure taken up as the clearest, most paradigmatic example of this type, a means for both ancients and moderns to think through the meaning and significance of this phenomenon.[23] While Nietzsche never gives a direct historical defense of Socrates' status as such, we can get a sense of the sources on which he bases his interpretation: Aristophanes and the other comic poets.[24] For in them he finds an ancient authority for his effort to cast Socrates as a rationalistic corruptor of tragedy through his supposed association with Euripides. These poets, he claims, spoke of Euripides and Socrates "in the same breath" as they denounced the "dubious enlightenment" that they saw as corroding the traditional values that gave Athens its strength.[25] He further points to "the deep instinct of Aristophanes" in his stark condemnation of Socratic rationalism and optimism.[26] In his interpretation of the comic poets' treatment of Socrates and Euripides, which I will consider in more detail in chapter three, Nietzsche gestures toward the significance of the comic Socrates for the fifth-century understanding of "theoretical man" that I explore in detail here—but, again, he is less interested in examining this historical development

[23] Cf. Dannhauser (1979, 99-100). The writings after *The Birth of Tragedy*, beginning in the fragments of 1875/76, attest to a development in Nietzsche's already complicated thoughts on this matter: Socrates takes on increasing significance as not only an archetype but the actual first thinker to embrace modern optimism toward knowledge; cf. Laks's (2018, 21) comments in relation to the development of Nietzsche's conceptualization of the "preplatonic" or "presocratic" philosophers.

[24] In his hostile review of the book, Wilamowitz (Babich 2000, 3) already recognized that "Mr. Nietzsche by no means presents himself as a scholarly researcher."

[25] §13. Nietzsche also references the comic fragments suggesting that Socrates helped Euripides compose his poetry, with which he would have been familiar from his work on Diogenes Laertius; on these, see ch. 3.

[26] Nietzsche also here claims that Socrates figures "in Aristophanes' plays as the first and leading Sophist, as the mirror and quintessence of everything the Sophists were trying to do." As Henrichs (1986, 389) shows, the Sophists at this point represent for Nietzsche a general tendency toward rationalism and optimism. Cf. his comments in *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* (Whitlock 2001, 148): "[Aristophanes] sketches the image of an Enlightenment figure in Socrates."

than in repurposing this understanding of Socrates for his own philosophical project.

As we begin to approach some of the methodological problems that such a project must face, it will be useful to consider some significant scholarship in the intellectual history of classical Greece. Here, too, the general historiographical thesis that Jaeger's paper suggests—that "the whole picture that has come down to us of the history of early philosophy was fashioned during the two or three generations from Plato to the immediate pupils of Aristotle" (429)—has had an immense impact on the study of Plato's role in forming our understanding of the history of philosophy. In, for example, his 1960 article "Platon oder Pythagoras? Zum Ursprung des Wortes 'Philosophie,'" Walter Burkert takes up Jaeger's argument in his consideration of the semantic and conceptual history of "philosophy" itself, arguing that in its earliest usages in the fifth century, the word was associated only with some general idea of intellectual cultivation. It was Plato, he argues, who was responsible for refining and ennobling the understanding of the word as a particular intellectual activity. More recently, Andrea Nightingale has built on this work in her often-cited 1994 book *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy*. Here, she expands on the findings of Burkert, exploring how Plato incorporates and engages with traditional genres of Greek poetry and rhetoric in his effort to define and lend authority to his new understanding of "philosophy." Such an interpretation of the Platonic dialogues is, of course, predicated on Burkert's view that a specialized meaning of "philosophy" is a distinctly Platonic development.[27]

For Nightingale, the effort to define and defend his understanding of "philosophy" as a mode

[27] Burkert's account has been challenged by Riedweg (2004) and more recently more by Moore (2019, 20-25).

of living and of thinking is a central part of the Platonic project.[28] Thus, in the fifth century, Plato, as Nightingale strikingly puts it, "was born into a culture that had no distinct concept of 'philosophy,'" a concept that he would later dedicate his intellectual life to defining, understanding, and defending. In doing so, he was thus a key contributor to an emerging fourth-century discourse about "philosophy," the "philosopher," and the "philosophical life"—the same discourse in which the concept of the *bios theōrētikos* comes to play such an important role, as indicated in the Aristotle quote with which we began. Thus while Nightingale's understanding of the conceptual history of philosophy is built on a study of the semantics of "philosophy," it is also the product of developments in our understanding of the intellectual history of the period before Plato and others had come to understand "philosophy" as a distinct intellectual activity.[29] As scholars have sought to understand pre-Platonic intellectual culture on its own terms, they have focused on the wide range of competing claimants to *sophia* ("skill, cleverness, wisdom") that dominate that culture. Whether poets, lawgivers, advice-giving sages, or religious experts, such men could be referred to as *sophoi* or *sophistai* in reference to their supposed *sophia*.[30] The extant evidence points to late fifth-century Athens as a particularly vibrant center of intellectual culture, a "marketplace of ideas" where various such specialists could capture the minds of an audience always craving novel forms of *sophia.*

While the Platonic origin of "philosophy" presented by Nightingale has gained widespread acceptance and remains influential, it has been recently challenged by scholars such as André

[28] Nightingale's account has gained general acceptance and is widely cited; cf. also Cooper (2007, esp. p. 27 n. 4) for one account in agreement.

[29] Cf. Laks (2018, 35-36, 40-42).

[30] On the flexibility of disciplinary boundaries in the late fifth century, see, e.g., Lloyd (2002).

Laks and Christopher Moore.[31] Whle recognizing the deep influence of Plato on the definition and practice of philosophy, both oppose the idea of an *ex nihilo* Platonic invention of "philosophy" by seeking a more refined developmental model, one which emphasizes the continuity between Plato's specialized understanding of philosophy and the intellectual culture of the late fifth century.[32] On Laks's interpretation of the evidence, "philosophy" already signifies a specific type of intellectual activity by the late fifth century, even if the object of that activity had not yet been precisely circumscribed. Particularly suggestive in the context of our investigation is Laks's proposal that "philosophy" had an early connection to theoretical activity in particular.[33]

In Moore's account, based in part on a historically redemptive reading of Heraclides' anecdote about Pythagoras and Leon considered above, the language of "philosophy" first began to take on a marked semantic sense in reference to fifth-century Pythagorean communities. Of particular interest here is his thesis that the word initially carried a derogative sense, being used in mocking reference to "sage-wannabes."[34] This negative valence was only gradually diminished, a process that culminated in a Platonic project of "saving the appearances and redeeming the practices theretofore called *philosophia*."[35] If Moore is right, Plato's attempt to revise the negative connotation of "philosophy" as the name of his own activity offers a nice parallel for my argument about the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos.*

Laks and Moore thus provide important models for my project's attempt to find a continuity

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[31] Laks (2018, ch. 3), Moore (2019).

[32] See esp. Laks (2018, 41-43), Moore (2019, 23, 28-29, 221-222).

[33] Laks (2018, 45-48, 52).

[34] For the idea of "sage-wannabes," see Moore (2019, 1, 6-7). Moore provides a concise overview of his argument on p. 25.

[35] Moore (2019, 25).

between Plato's influential understanding of theoretical philosophy in the fourth century and the burgeoning, pre-Platonic understanding of "philosophical" activity in the fifth. Another important step in this direction is L.B. Carter's 1986 book *The Quiet Athenian*, which presents its own attempt to trace a pre-Platonic history of the *bios theōrētikos* by studying that concept in relation to this broader cultural and intellectual context. In particular, Carter examines the life of the apolitical intellectual within the emerging discourse surrounding various forms of *apragmosynē*, or "political quietism," and attempts to situate Plato's development of the *bios theōrētikos* in relation to this discourse.[36] Carter's synthesis and analysis of the relevant fifth-century material provides an invaluable picture of the cultural *milieu* out of which Plato's conception of the *bios theōrētikos* develops, establishing the figure of the theoretical philosopher within a broader cultural movement of political quietism.

Yet his attempt to situate the Platonic *bios theōrētikos* within that context is less successful. Carter summarizes his conclusion on this front in the final chapter:

> It is my belief that Plato did not arrive at his philosophic position through the inspiration of previous philosophers (Socrates aside), but rather derived it out of the social and political circumstances of his own time; in other words, that his version of the Contemplative Life—the Bios Theoretikos—was a philosophic rationalization of the social and political phenomenon of *apragmosyne*, though his own particular cast of mind, his psychological make-up, in short his genius, is also a significant factor.

Carter's treatment of Plato, with its frequent appeals to the supposed psychology and individual genius of the historical Plato, ultimately adds little to Jaeger's conclusions some fifty years earlier and thus fails to provide a satisfying connection between Plato's fourth-century account and the image of the apolitical intellectual life that had emerged in the late fifth century.

Nevertheless, the book is important for its thorough demonstration that the concept of a *bios*

[36] In addition to Carter, see the early work of Nestle (1926) and Ehrenberg (1947).

theōrētikos developed out of—and needs to be understood in relationship to—the intellectual and political culture of the late fifth century. Here, I seek to establish a firmer conceptual connection between Plato's development of the idea of a life dedicated to the pursuit of *theōria* and fifth-century public discourse about apolitical intellectuals by analyzing concrete points of continuity between the comic Socrates and Plato's theoretical philosopher. Such a project will help us to understand better both how Plato's image of the *bios theōrētikos* develops in response to his intellectual context as well as how that concept began to take shape even before Plato's intervention in valorizing the figure of the apolitical intellectual as the theoretical philosopher. For as we will see, in defining and defending his understanding of philosophy, Plato pointedly incorporates the comical and critical image of this figure that he has inherited.

Nightingale has made another important contribution to such a project in her 2004 book, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context*. Here, Nightingale focuses on this fourth-century construction of "theoretical philosophy." In particular, Nightingale offers a rich and detailed study of how Plato's appropriation of the cultural practice of *theōria,* a sort of state-sanctioned pilgrimage in which the individual travelled to witness sacralized spectacles, informs his understanding of philosophical *theōria*, understood as the rational vision of metaphysical truths, as the highest intellectual activity of the philosopher. Yet when it comes to the *bios theōrētikos* itself, Nightingale ultimately denies that such a way of life plays any role in Plato's conceptual scheme. On her reading, Plato recognizes that the human philosopher must live in the practical and political realm, and that a life completely divorced from practical and political concerns is thus simply impossible. This being the case, Plato does not conceive of a *bios theōrētikos* free from practical and political constraints, but a philosophical life lived within these constraints. While Nightingale's argument is convincing in

terms of the commitments of Platonic philosophy, it is less persuasive from the perspective of conceptual history:[37] though Plato may have denied that it was possible for the human philosopher to live a life of pure contemplation, this denial in itself would seem to presuppose his conceptualization of some such *bios theōrētikos*—unobtainable as it may be.

Even if we disagree with Nightingale's conclusion about the *bios theōrētikos*, her work on the conceptual history of *theōria* helps to focalize an important methodological concern: if *theōria*, the namesake activity of the *bios theōrētikos*, is a particularly Platonic concept, how can we trace the history of the life organized around this intellectual activity in the period prior to Plato? I argue that although Aristophanes and the other comic poets do not have concepts such as *theōria* or a *bios theōrētikos* available to them, their comic Socrates shares defining features with the theoretical philosopher as he is discussed in the key Platonic passages where those concepts are developed in the dialogues. The *Clouds* in particular, with its lengthy presentation of Socrates as a useless thinker who is single-mindedly concerned with his pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself, is, in effect, the first extant attempt to provide a picture of the type of figure whom Plato would later revise as his theoretical philosopher. In the second half of this introduction, I would like to turn to my methodological grounds for reading the comic Socrates as a theoretical philosopher *avant la lettre*.

Methodological Problems, Metaphorological Solutions

As we have seen above, tracing the philological and philosophical development of the *bios theōrētikos* has led scholars to make Plato the focus of their search for the genesis and early

[37] Nightingale's goal here is certainly the former rather than the latter; she does not, for example, engage with Jaeger or other accounts of the *bios theōrētikos* in this context.

development of that concept. Similar problems are faced from the perspective of conceptual history, dependent as it has traditionally been on the tools of historical semantics: tracing the semantic emergence and development of the idea of a *bios theōrētikos* can essentially only carry us as far back as Plato. We saw that the broader perspective of cultural history offered a glimpse of a pre-Platonic history of this concept, but that there has so far been no satisfactory attempt to connect the Platonic *bios theōrētikos* to the more nebulous image of the apolitical intellectual of the late fifth century. If we are to bridge this gap and uncover a pre-Platonic history of the *bios theōrētikos*, it is clear that we will have to expand our approach to conceptual history to include methodologies that will allow us to engage effectively with means of conceptualization beyond what can be studied through the strict application of historical semantics.

In my attempt to establish a conceptual connection between the comic Socrates and the early development of the *bios theōrētikos* in Plato, I draw inspiration from the methods developed by the twentieth-century German philosopher and intellectual historian Hans Blumenberg. Blumenberg's work in the field of conceptual history was, in fact, introduced as a means to expand on the very sort of narrow understanding of philosophical concepts that has limited previous investigations of the *bios theōrētikos*. Particularly concerned with the ways in which philosophical discourse bumps up against the limits of discursive conceptualization, Blumenberg argues that "in constantly having to confront the unconceptualized and the preconceptualized, philosophy encounters the means of articulation found in this nonconceptualizing and preconceptualizing, adopts them, and develops."[38] In other words, as philosophers make efforts to articulate new concepts, their efforts to do so are inevitably shaped by earlier pre-philosophic,

[38] Blumenberg (1993, 30).

non-discursive attempts to express the idea that they are attempting to define.

The most developed methodology that Blumenberg explored for attaining this goal is what he called "metaphorology," a set of interpretive techniques for the analysis of the conceptual function of metaphor in philosophical discourse.[39] As opposed to dismissing metaphor as mere rhetorical ornament that fails to attain the clarity and distinctness demanded of philosophical terminology, Blumenberg traced how metaphors consistently enter a theoretical text precisely where discursive conceptualization fails. By analyzing the work that particular recurring metaphors do in philosophical discourse, we can gain a richer understanding of the philosophical concepts to which they are applied. An example will help to make the abstract point still more clear. An attempt to tell a complete history of the concept of "the truth" cannot rely only on abstract definitions, but must likewise trace the rich metaphorical language to which both philosophic and non-philosophic writings about the truth consistently make recourse: truth is conceived variously as something that has "power," that can bring "light," that can be "uncovered." Such imagery applied to truth tells us something about the concept and its history that an investigation of the discursive definition of truth—say Aquinas' "equation of thing and intellect"—never can.[40]

Attentiveness to metaphor then—particularly the class of what Blumenberg deemed "absolute metaphors," the consistent recurrence of which marks an inability to conceive of or express an idea by means of discursive language—can thus provide crucial insight into the history of concepts and the process of concept formation itself. "Metaphorology," Blumenberg argued in a 1971 volume of *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, "performs conceptual history the

[39] For a good introduction, see Savage (2010).
[40] *Summa Theologiae*, Q.16

auxiliary service of guiding it to a genetic structure of concept formation that, while it may not meet the requirement of univocity, nonetheless permits the univocity of the end result to be recognized as an impoverishment of the imaginary background and the threads leading back to the lifeworld."[41] In another formulation—itself wonderfully metaphorical—Blumenberg explains the project thus: "metaphorology seeks to burrow down to the substructure of thought, the underground, the nutrient solution of systematic crystallization [of concepts]."[42]

While my project is not strictly speaking metaphorological, Blumenberg's more expansive approach to concepts and their histories provides a means for overcoming the limitations of the previous approaches toward the history of the *bios theōrētikos*. To use Blumenberg's language, my hope is to fill out the imaginary background, the substructure of thought that ultimately consolidated into the univocal, crystalized discursive definition of the *bios theōrētikos* that can be drawn from Aristotle. I argue that in the case of the *bios theōrētikos,* we can find such a genetic structure of concept formation above all in the literary portrayal of the embodied figure of the theoretical philosopher, in the depiction of his *bios* dedicated to the pursuit of *theōria*—and in particular, how he is portrayed as the object of comedy.

Indeed, there is good reason to turn to Blumenberg for help with this task beyond these broad theoretical and methodological concerns. For in his 1987 book *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: a Protohistory of Theory*, Blumenberg considers the role that laughter plays in the conceptualization of "theory."[43] Over the course of the book, Blumenberg analyzes various

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[41] Blumenberg (1971, 163); translation from Savage (2010).

[42] Blumenberg (2010, 1).

[43] This work is part of Blumenberg's expansion of his metaphorological project to include related devices that he saw as serving similar functions with regard to conceptualization. Although the project takes place in the context of Blumenberg's broader theoretical shift away from an interest in concept formation and conceptual history toward a general "theory of

retellings of the famous anecdote of Thales' fall, beginning from its appearance in Plato's *Theaetetus* up to its use by Heidegger, who cites the anecdote in his lecture "What is a Thing?" before defining philosophy as "that thinking with which one can start nothing and about which housemaids necessarily laugh."[44] The persistent reappearance of variations of the metaphorically rich building blocks of this anecdote in thinkers of diverse time periods and diverse systems of thought—its capacity to be "reoccupied," to use Blumenberg's terminology—renders it an apt object for something like a "metaphorological" study: philosophers return to the anecdote in the context of discoursing on theoretical activity because it somehow captures an aspect of theoretical activity not so easily expressed by discursive means.

As the book's title indicates, the role of laughter is of central importance for Blumenberg's analysis of the anecdote. Indeed, as the most consistent element recurring in each permutation of the anecdote that Blumenberg analyzes, the project of the book can be read as something like a metaphorology of laughter itself: the recurring preoccupation with the laughter at the expense of the theorist becomes a crucial means for efforts to conceptualize and present the activity of theory.[45] Elsewhere, Blumenberg refers to what this laughter expresses as "the comic aspect of pure theory."[46]

Blumenberg's insight into the role that laughter plays in the conceptualization of the theoretical activity provides a means for tracing a conceptual connection between Plato's

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nonconceptuality," that need not stop us from seeing what insight into the history of concepts we can glean from his research. Savage (2008) once again provides a good introduction. For a suggestion on the growing importance on the role of anecdote in Blumenberg's work as he turned his focus to a theory of nonconceptuality, see Fleming (2012).

[44] Heidegger (1967, 3).

[45] For a suggestion along these lines, see Hawkins (2015, 165-172).

[46] "Die Komik der reinen Theorie"; this term appears in the title of Blumenberg's (1976) first writing on the subject.

presentation of the theoretical philosopher and comic poets' characterization of Socrates—provided that, with Blumenberg, we expand our understanding of "concept." Or, to put it another way, the comic Socrates and Plato's theoretical philosopher are conceptually connected by the laughter that they draw. By tracing this laughter to its common source, we can see in the comic Socrates the first extant attempt to portray and examine a way of life dedicated to the pursuit of theoretical knowledge for its own sake, as the playwrights use the comic, poetical tools at their disposal to express the key features of that life. This comic portrayal, in turn, plays an important role as the thinkers of the fourth century move toward a discursive understanding of the *bios theōrētikos* as a life organized around the intellectual activity of *theōria*. In short, I argue that the comic Socrates represents what I will call, drawing on Blumenberg's terminology, a "prototheoretical philosopher," a character who prefigures Plato's theoretical philosopher in his dedication to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

As noted above, on Blumenberg's interpretation, the comic aspect of pure theory is manifested here in the laughter of the Thracian slave woman at Thales. In this dissertation, I contend that it is also manifested in the laughter at the expense of Socrates on the comic stage: it is the comic aspect of pure theory that makes the comic Socrates—as opposed to other comic intellectuals such as the Sophists, whose theoretical activity is ultimately shown to be directed toward practical purposes—funny; it is the comic aspect of pure theory that Aristophanes thematizes through his comic presentation of Socrates in the *Clouds*; and it is the comic aspect of pure theory that suggests to the comic poets a connection between Socrates and Euripides, the "philosophical" poet. Given the importance of this idea to our investigation, I would like to use the final section of this introduction to consider in some detail what exactly Blumenberg means by the comic aspect of pure theory and how it might allow us to make a conceptual connection

between the portrayal of Socrates on the fifth-century comic stage and the figure of the theoretical philosopher. To do so, I will consider Blumenberg's interpretation of the Thales anecdote of the *Theaetetus* before bringing this analysis to bear on a parallel scene from Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

The Comic Aspect of Pure Theory in Plato and Aristophanes

In the context of the *Theaetetus*, the Thales anecdote appears as a tidy distillation of a long discussion of the ridiculous appearance of the theoretical philosopher. Socrates introduces the so-called "digression" (172a–177c) by noting that he has often thought about "how those who have spent a long time with philosophy understandably appear laughable when they enter the courts as speakers."[47] The contrast with the practical men of the law courts here and elsewhere in the digression serves to demarcate the life of the theoretical philosopher from that of the practically efficacious men of the city. While Socrates, of course, defends those who pursue philosophy, he nevertheless goes on to discuss the myriad ways in which the theoretical philosopher cuts a ridiculous figure.

It is in this context that Socrates presents his anecdote as follows:

> Why, take the case of Thales, Theodorus. It is said that while he was studying the stars and looking upwards (ἀστρονομοῦντα … καὶ ἄνω βλέποντα), he fell into a well, and a graceful, witty Thracian servant girl mocked him because he was eager to know the things in the sky but the things before him at his feet escaped his notice. And this same mockery applies to all who pass their lives in philosophy (ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διάγουσι).[48]

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[47] ὡς εἰκότως οἱ ἐν ταῖς φιλοσοφίαις πολὺν χρόνον διατρίψαντες εἰς τὰ δικαστήρια ἰόντες γελοῖοι φαίνονται ῥήτορες. 172c4-6.

[48] Ὥσπερ καὶ Θαλῆν ἀστρονομοῦντα, ὦ Θεόδωρε, καὶ ἄνω βλέποντα, πεσόντα εἰς φρέαρ, Θρᾷττά τις ἐμμελὴς καὶ χαρίεσσα θεραπαινὶς ἀποσκῶψαι λέγεται ὡς τὰ μὲν ἐν οὐρανῷ προθυμοῖτο εἰδέναι, τὰ δ᾽ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ καὶ παρὰ πόδας λανθάνοι αὐτόν. ταὐτὸν δὲ ἀρκεῖ σκῶμμα ἐπὶ πάντας ὅσοι ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διάγουσι. 174a4-9.

For Blumenberg, the laughter accompanying the Thracian woman's mockery is a manifestation of "the comic aspect of pure theory"—it demonstrates "what is actually laughable about theory."[49] Put in Platonic terms, we might say that it is the manifestation of the comic aspect of pure *theōria*, a theme we will return to in more detail in chapter four. Here, though, we might ask of Blumenberg: what *is* actually laughable about theory? And how might this laughter help us to understand the theoretical philosopher and his prototheoretical forbearer? Because Blumenberg, with his dense, recursive style, is not interested in presenting a direct interpretation of the various aspects of the anecdote, my analysis will begin with a presentation of a few key concepts in Blumenberg's understanding of theory and theorizing, followed by a reading of the anecdote as viewed through the lens of Blumenberg's interpretation.

Let us begin from one of the few definitive interpretive statements that Blumenberg makes about the metaphorics of Plato's anecdote about Thales: the distance and inaccessibility of the stars is said to represent what he calls "the theorist's exoticism."[50] Theory's so-called "exoticism," its utter bizarreness, is a key concept for Blumenberg's study.[51] "Theory," Blumenberg emphasizes in the opening line of this book, "is something that no one sees."[52] Theorizing, as an internal intellectual activity, has no direct external form of the sort that characterizes so many other activities, nor does it result in any sort of concrete production. The intellectual activity of theorizing might manifest itself to outsiders in attendant physical activity––a deeply furrowed brow, intense orbital pacing, a slack-jawed gawp—but these external

[49] Blumenberg (2015, 7).
[50] Blumenberg (2015, 8).
[51] The following derives from the first chapter ("Theory as Exotic Behavior") of Blumenberg (2015).
[52] Blumenberg (2015, 1).

manifestations are not constitutive of theory itself. Theorizing might even be connected to certain physical actions that do have an intentional function for the theorist—think of the nocturnal astronomer with neck craned to the sky, the scientist in a white lab coat operating a peculiar instrument, the student sitting in silence scribbling on a yellow notepad—and which may be recognizable as such by a person familiar with the particular theorizing being undertaken. To the outside observer who is unfamiliar with the theorizing taking place, though, these physical manifestations are unintelligible.

Theorizing is, in short, an internal activity whose external manifestations cannot help but appear unintelligible and bizarre to the observer who is not acquainted with the theorizing being undertaken. This inherent oddness of the physical manifestations of theory to non-theorists is what Blumenberg means by classifying theory as an "exotic behavior." This exoticism is, importantly, indicative of a gulf between the theorist engaging in his or her theoretical activity and the non-theorist observer of that activity, through whose eyes theory appears odd. On the one side, there is the theorist, to whom the activity of theorizing is meaningful, intelligible, and important in itself; on the other, there is the non-theorist observer, to whom that same activity manifests itself as something senseless, unintelligible, and purposeless. In this gap between the theorist and the non-theorist we can begin to see a space for humor to emerge, a misunderstanding or tension between them that can be exploited to comic effect.

For Blumenberg, though, theory's exoticism alone is not the source of its humor. To better understand the comic aspect of pure theory and the laughter that it draws, we need first to better understand the perspectives of both the theorist and the non-theorist, perspectives which for

Blumenberg represent mutually unintelligible and irreconcilable "concepts of reality."[53] Borrowing from the Husserlian terminology that pervades Blumenberg's work on the anecdote, we can call these different perspectives the "theoretical" and the "natural" attitudes.[54] For our purposes, we need not define these concepts with complete phenomenological rigor, but need only move toward a working understanding of the opposed perspectives so as to bring them to bear on the comic image of the theoretical philosopher that I propose connects Plato and the comic poets.

Let us take the natural attitude to signify the mindset of everyday life, a sort of common-sense thinking about objects in the world and our interactions with them. The world is laid out before us and we go about our day-to-day lives within it, directing our attention now toward this, now toward that as we engage in our activities. As we do so, we interact with the objects we encounter in a matter-of-fact, practical way—they are there before us, they have value in relationship to ourselves and other objects, they are useful for accomplishing a particular task, etc. The natural attitude does not critically reflect on the world and its objects except in a practical, end-oriented manner. Their being is simply taken for granted. Again, we can take the natural attitude as the sort of common-sense, practical thinking with which we approach our everyday reality.

The theoretical attitude, on the other hand, represents a different approach to the world laid out before it. While the natural attitude directs its attention toward this or that object in relation to the practical activities of life, the theoretical attitude turns its attention to the way things are as

[53] Blumenberg (2015, 6, 13).

[54] For this terminology, see Husserl (1970, 279-289). Blumenberg's engagement with Husserl is crucial to his larger project of nonconceptuality.

such, to critical reflection about the world and the objects in it in themselves. Their very being, which was previously taken as given, is now called into question and considered in itself. This thematization of the world in itself abstracts from the sort of common-sense thinking of the natural attitude, which simply takes the being of objects it encounters for granted, there to be used, ignored, etc. The world and its objects are no longer considered as means to ends for the activities of our daily lives; rather reflection on the world and its objects becomes an end in itself. To draw on the metaphorical language of the Greek roots of the term, the theoretical attitude is not concerned with actively engaging with the world laid out before it so much as observing and contemplating it.

With theory's exoticism and these distinct attitudes in mind, let us turn back to the situation of the anecdote about Thales to see whether we might understand better the laughter of the Thracian woman and its significance. Every night, Thales goes for an evening walk to look at the stars.[55] This walk, though, is no leisurely stroll. His gait and his gaze betray the intensity of a man on a mission. Moving himself mechanically forward in the pitch black, his head cocked upward toward the heavens, he seems unconcerned with bruised shins, wandering brigands, or other nocturnal dangers. To understand the comic aspect of pure theory manifested in the anecdote, we must understand this curious scene from two perspectives.[56]

With Socrates and his interlocutors, we recognize that Thales' apparently strange behavior can be explained by the fact that he is an astronomer. He has come outside in the night to study the heavenly bodies. The darkness—dangerous as it may otherwise be—provides prime viewing for the stars above, and to observe their movements with precision requires fastidious attention.

[55] On the night and its potential dangers, see Chaniotis (2018).
[56] On the important of perspectives in understanding the anecdote, see Buddensiek (2014).

Thales wants to understand their appearances, positions, relationships, movements; whether they are self-moving or propelled by an external force; whether they are divine entities. He wants to understand, in short, the being or essence of the heavenly bodies. While Thales may also be interested in the relationship between the heavens up there and himself down here on earth, this would not be out of any practical motive. That is to say, Thales' observation of the heavens is theoretical, and he engages in this activity only out of a desire to understand the heavenly bodies.

What does all this matter, though, to the industrious Thracian slave woman?[57] With her, we see the oddity of Thales and his activity: a freeborn man wandering about in the dead of night, neck craned, gaping upward, very serious about something up there. But what? Is he intent on those far-off specks of light? For what purpose? What could he want with those distant, unreachable objects that have nothing to do with us down here? Thales' nocturnal wandering and his peculiar fascination with the sky is unintelligible to the Thracian woman whose concerns are entirely earthly—just as some other unfamiliar theoretical activity might be to us if we saw its peculiar rituals as we were going about our daily chores. From the perspective of the natural attitude, this star-gazing serves no purpose, it makes no sense. From this perspective Thales' activity appears, to use Blumenberg's term, exotic.

This bizarre behavior alone is, perhaps, enough to draw a chuckle from the Thracian slave woman. Suddenly though, looking up at the sky, Thales tumbles over the edge of a well. The woman lets loose her punchline—"Thales, you want to know about the things in the heavens but you fail to notice what's right in front of your feet." On Blumenberg's reading, Thales' fall and

[57] Hdt. V.12ff. suggests that Thracian women were known for their industry; see Osborne 2007. For thoughts on Plato's use of the Thracian servant girl, see Blumenberg (2015, 11-12) and Cavarero (1995, ch. 2).

the woman's gibe represent a clash between the reality of the theoretical attitude—concerned with objects in their essential being—and that of the natural attitude—concerned with objects present in the world over which one can trip and into which one can fall. For Thales, understanding those stars in the heavens is good in itself inasmuch as it contributes to his understanding of the world as such; for the Thracian slave woman, Thales would be better served by paying attention to what is at hand rather than those distant stars that have no immediate relevance.

The humor of the anecdote grows out of this tension, though it must be understood from the perspective of the natural attitude manifested by the Thracian slave woman. The theoretical attitude draws the mind of the philosopher out of the concrete, everyday reality of the natural attitude into the theoretical realm of abstraction, but his body must stay behind. The theoretical philosopher is *absentminded*, his attention having been borne off into his abstract concepts. To the natural attitude of everyday life, this neglect of the body and its physical environs for something so inconsequential is, at first, peculiar; when concrete reality reasserts itself, interrupting the theorist's abstract theorizing, it is funny. As Thales falls down the well, not only is the Thracian slave woman's concrete understanding of reality vindicated, but Thales himself is made to look like a fool for being so serious about his useless abstract pursuits. For all of the mental acrobatics he might be performing in his conceptual realm, his clumsy tumble draws him back to material reality. It is this reassertion of the concrete, common-sense view of reality against the philosopher's flight into theoretical abstraction that is at the heart of Blumenberg's comic aspect of pure theory. The woman's gibe and her laughter at Thales' expense is the expression of this tension being resolved in her favor, of the foolishness of the theoretical philosopher's pursuit being exposed.

Having sketched out Blumenberg's understanding of the comic aspect of pure theory and having come to a better understanding of the laughter of the Thracian woman in Plato's Thales anecdote, I will conclude by briefly turning my attention to the comic Socrates in order to show that the laughter of the Thracian woman is the same laughter that filled the Theater of Dionysus at the sight of Socrates on the comic stage. Put another way, the laughter at the comic Socrates is likewise a manifestation of the comic aspect of pure theory. Understanding it as such helps to bridge the gap between Plato's depiction of the theoretical philosopher and the presentation of Socrates on the comic stage by interpreting him as what I am calling a prototheoretical philosopher. To demonstrate the point, I would like to consider the connection between Plato's Thales and the comic Socrates by briefly considering a representative scene in Aristophanes' *Clouds* that precisely parallels Plato's anecdote.

As I hope will be clear from the reading of the anecdote presented above, Blumenberg's understanding of what the anecdote about Thales and the laughter expressed therein contribute to the conceptualization of theory relies heavily on literary and dramatic elements—he analyzes its rich metaphorical imagery, characterization, dramatic action, etc. The story as told by Socrates conjures up a comic scene, the theatrical elements of which are integral to its interpretation. Its comedy depends on the setting, the particulars of the peculiar behavior, the slapstick fall down the well—all focalized through the viewing of the Thracian slave woman. Indeed, Rodolphe Gasché interprets Blumenberg's work on the anecdote as demonstrating a fundamentally theatrical aspect of theory.[58] In this sense, there is an important point of generic connection

[58] Gasché (2007, ch. 8). Not only is Plato's anecdote theatrical, but Aristophanes' comic theater is, in its way, anecdotal. The heavy influence that Aristophanic comedy had on the anecdotally oriented biographical tradition of the fourth century greatly attests to this fact; cf. ch. 3, pp. 143-145.

between the anecdote about Thales and Aristophanes' play.

Nevertheless, it is still perhaps somewhat surprising when, in our first introduction to Aristophanes' Socrates, we are treated to a strikingly similar anecdote to that which Plato's Socrates will later tell about Thales. Here, a student of the Thinkery, regaling Strepsiades with stories of his master, recounts Socrates' own star-gazing mishap:

> Stud. Recently a serious thought of his was snatched away
>   by a lizard.
> Strep. How's that? Tell me.
> Stud. When he was investigating the paths and revolutions
>   of the moon, gaping upward in the middle of the night,
>   a gecko shat down on him from the roof.
> Strep. I like that, a gecko shitting on Socrates![59]

The basic structure of the pupil's story clearly parallels that of Thales and the Thracian woman.[60] Just as Thales, while "investigating the stars" (ἀστρονομοῦντα) in the night and "looking upward" (ἄνω βλέποντα), had his research cut short by his fall into the well, so Socrates had a "serious thought snatched away" (γνώμην μεγάλην ἀφῃρέθη) when, "gaping upward in the middle of the night" (ἄνω κεχηνότος … νύκτωρ) in order to "investigate the paths and

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[59] ΜΑ. πρῴην δέ γε γνώμην μεγάλην ἀφῃρέθη
ὑπ᾽ ἀσκαλαβώτου.
ΣΤ. τίνα τρόπον; κάτειπέ μοι.
ΜΑ. ζητοῦντος αὐτοῦ τῆς σελήνης τὰς ὁδοὺς
καὶ τὰς περιφοράς, εἶτ᾽ ἄνω κεχηνότος
ἀπὸ τῆς ὀροφῆς νύκτωρ γαλεώτης κατέχεσεν.
ΣΤ. ἥσθην γαλεώτῃ καταχέσαντι Σωκράτους. (168-173)

[60] The parallel is noted by Imperio (1998, 99 n. 105). We cannot be sure whether this is a direct reference to some version of the anecdote about Thales, as the origin of the anecdote is uncertain. According to Blumenberg's interpretation, Plato adapts a more general Aesopic original version of the anecdote for his specific purposes. Most scholars, e.g., van Dijk (1997, with additional bibliography), disagree with Blumenberg's analysis of the development of the anecdote, seeing it as a Platonic creation that went on to be generalized. For me, the most likely scenario seems to be that the Platonic, Aesopic, and Aristophanic versions are all derived from an adaptable fifth-century popular tradition.

revolutions of the moon" (ζητοῦντος αὐτοῦ τῆς σελήνης τὰς ὁδοὺς / καὶ τὰς περιφοράς), he was "shat on" by a lizard (γαλεώτης κατέχεσεν).[61]

As a precise analogue of Plato's Thales anecdote, the scene is helpful in that it provides a starting point for bringing Blumenberg's framework to bear on the comic characterization of Socrates as a whole.[62] Here, Socrates fills Thales' role as the star-gazing theorist; the lizard like the well, both with their chthonic connotations, pulls the theorist out of his theoretical activity;[63] and Strepsiades—and we the audience with him—takes over for the Thracian woman as the earthly observer. It is particularly noteworthy that there is an explicit parallel for the Thracian woman's laughter at the theorist's foolishness, as the rustic Strepsiades cannot help but guffaw upon hearing the story: "I like that, a gecko shitting on Socrates!" (ἥσθην γαλεώτῃ καταχέσαντι Σωκράτους). The first-person aorist form of ἥδομαι with a participle is an idiomatic way to express a reason why one has just laughed at something.[64]

Thus Aristophanes' anecdote not only presents the comedy of pure theory, but like the anecdote about Thales, it also explicitly thematizes the laughter the theoretical philosopher draws. Just as in Plato's story about Thales the action is focalized through the perspective of the Thracian slave woman whom we watch watching Thales, we the audience watch and laugh with Strepsiades as he reacts to the theoretical attitude of Socrates. In the context of the performance of the *Clouds*, Strepsiades *qua* laughing spectator takes on an even greater significance as a

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[61] For a slightly different interpretation of the scene suggested by the joke, see Althoff (2003, 108-109); though he still comes to the conclusion that the humor relies on the misunderstanding of the theoretical activity of Socrates.

[62] It is perhaps noteworthy that Thales himself is mentioned by Strepsiades following the next anecdote (180)—though he seems to be invoked as a by-word for *practical* intelligence.

[63] On lizards in general, see Hurwit (2006); on this lizard in particular, see Anderson (1998).

[64] Cf. Dover (1968) *ad loc*, Olson (1998) *ad*. 1066, and Sommerstein (2009, 106). For a more skeptical view about laughter interjections in Old Comedy, see Kidd (2011b).

model for the members of the audience, who themselves are being prepared for their own laughter at the play's star theorist about to make his airy entrance. The anecdote at the beginning of the play announces to the viewers that they will be treated to what we might call a comedy of pure theory.[65]

This parallel between Plato's presentation of Thales and Aristophanes' characterization of Socrates so early in the play should attune us to seeing in the *Clouds* that same tension between the theoretical attitude, represented by Socrates, and the natural attitude, represented by Strepsiades, that sits at the heart of the comic aspect of pure theory. We will see in the following chapters that this characterization of Socrates pervades Aristophanes' *Clouds*, but is not limited to it alone. In fact, the extant evidence suggests that this theoretical attitude was a defining feature of Socrates and his associates as presented on the comic stage. It is the goal of this dissertation to examine and contextualize this comic portrait of Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher both in the context of fifth-century intellectual history and within the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos*.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter one, I situate Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates within its cultural and generic context. To do so, I analyze the comic characterization of Socrates and the canonical Sophists in the extant corpus of Old Comedy. While scholars have tended to see Socrates and the canonical Sophists as a singular type in Old Comedy, I argue that Socrates represents a distinct intellectual

[65] For the way in which Strepsiades' entrance to the Thinkery sets the tone for and build up to the appearance of Socrates, see Althoff (2003); other examples will be considered in chs. 1 and 2.

phenomenon for the comic poets. In fact, a close contextual examination of the relevant passages reveals that Socrates is characterized in direct opposition to Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias. While Socrates and the Sophists are both mocked for their pursuit of abstract knowledge, these three Sophists are depicted as subordinating their intellectual activity to the pursuit of worldly power and privilege; Socrates, on the other hand, is an object of comedy for his complete dedication to an intellectual activity that brings him no material advantage. Thus the comic Socrates stands as a prototheoretical philosopher, closely paralleling Plato's laughable theoretical philosopher.

In chapter two, I consider how this characterization of Socrates is also prominent in the *Clouds*. In this play, too, Socrates is portrayed primarily as an unworldly and impractical theorist who pursues his research with no concern for practical benefits. To demonstrate how Aristophanes explores this theme, I analyze the ways in which Socrates is characterized in contrast to the protagonist of the play, the rustic Strepsiades. I focus in particular on the ways in which the earthy, practically minded Strepsiades functions as a perfect foil for the airy, theoretical Socrates, and the tension between these two characters is exploited to comic effect throughout the play. In reading Aristophanes' Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher, I argue against the dominant understanding of Aristophanes' Socrates as a venal teacher of practical rhetoric who is motivated by his desire for material gain.

In chapter three, I offer an account of a final curious aspect of the comic Socrates: his association with the poet Euripides. I argue that the comic association of Socrates and Euripides, who is consistently characterized as a particularly "philosophical" poet, is likewise best understood in the context of the comic critique of intellectual pursuits that provide no apparent benefit. To make this case, I analyze the passages in which Socrates and Euripides are explicitly

connected—one in Aristophanes, the rest in the fragments—as well as the way in which Euripides is elsewhere comically characterized in a manner that recalls Socrates the protophilosopher. Along the way, I consider how Euripides himself engages with these comic portrayals of such intellectuals, particularly in his *Antiope*. I conclude the chapter by considering a later body of evidence that supports such an interpretation of the comic Euripides: the biographical tradition, which I argue draws on the comic tradition in establishing Euripides as a philosophical poet who spent his time with Socrates.

Finally, in chapter four, I turn to the Platonic dialogues. Having established how we can read Aristophanes' Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher, I consider the role that the comic critique of this figure plays in Plato's characterization of the philosopher and his conceptualization of philosophical *theōria*. By considering the way in which Plato engages with this comic discourse, I argue that this comic critique of philosophy functions as a thematic through-line in four important dialogues in which Plato advances his particular understanding of philosophy. I begin by considering Socrates' invocation of Aristophanes' *Clouds* in the *Apology* alongside the role that comic discourse plays in Plato's early attempt to define more narrowly the activity of philosopher in the *Gorgias*. From here, I turn to the significant role that laughter plays in Plato's conceptualization of philosophical *theōria* in the *Republic*, focusing in particular on the allegory of the cave and the ship-of-state metaphor. Finally, I return to the *Theaetetus*, considering how the "digression" on the character of the philosopher revisits and reiterates themes from these earlier dialogues. I argue that for Plato, the comic critique of philosophy comes to represent an inherent tension between the philosopher and the non-philosophic political community, one which will eventually lead to the theoretical philosopher's complete rejection of political activity. As such, that comic critique of philosophy as expressed on the comic stage is

shown to play a crucial role in Plato's conceptualization of the theoretical philosopher and the subsequent development of the concept of the *bios theōrētikos.*

Chapter One

Socrates and the Sophists in Old Comedy

Introduction and Overview

While Aristophanes' *Clouds* offers us the most substantial evidence for the portrayal of the comic Socrates, this character appears thirteen additional times in the corpus of Old Comedy. Passing references in Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Frogs* are well known, but less studied are Socrates' appearances in the extant comic fragments of the poets Eupolis, Ameipsias, Callias I, and Teleclides.[1] Properly understood, these comic fragments provide important context for the appearance of Socrates in the *Clouds* by giving us a glimpse at how Socrates was characterized by other comic poets of the fifth century BCE. Likewise, it is instructive to consider the relationship between the comic Socrates and others who are defined by their intellectual activity if we are to understand this character and his place within the intellectual culture of late fifth-century Athens. By doing so, we will be able to see more clearly how the comic poets characterize Socrates as what I have been calling a prototheoretical philosopher. Thus in this chapter and chapter three, I will use these fragments as the basis for such a comparative analysis.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that a clear image of Socrates the prototheorist emerges from a comparison between the comic poets' portrayal of Socrates and their portrayal of the late fifth-century thinkers known as "the Sophists."[2] The Sophists have long played an important role in

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[1] Patzer (1994) provides the most thorough examination of these fragments together. Other treatments of Socrates in Old Comedy beyond the *Clouds* include P. Brown (2007), Mitscherling (2013), and Bromberg (2018).

[2] The historical problems inherent in the label the "Sophists" has been well demonstrated; see esp. Kerferd (1950, 1976, 1981) and more recently Tell (2011), as well as p. 38 n. 4 below. Nevertheless, I retain the label as that which is commonly used to refer to the prominent intellectuals active in Athens in the late fifth century. For a reasonable treatment of the problem with an eye toward the practical functionality of the terms, see Laks and Most (2016, 3-5).

scholarly understanding of the comic Socrates. Since Kenneth Dover's influential analysis of the Socrates of the *Clouds*, it has been generally accepted that Aristophanes assimilates Socrates to the Sophists by depicting him as a paid teacher of rhetoric, understood as the art of persuasion. Plato retrospectively sought to define and defend Socrates' activity as "philosophy" by contrasting it with the "sophistry" of these pseudo-philosophers, who, his account seems to suggest, were really more concerned with money and power than the pursuit of knowledge; but Aristophanes, the argument goes, saw no such distinction between Socrates and the Sophists.[3] Scholars who have considered the evidence for the comic reception of Socrates beyond the *Clouds* have tended to accept and import this framework, despite recent research that has problematized its underlying assumptions about the unity of the Sophistic movement.[4]

Aristophanes and the other comic poets of the fifth century almost certainly did not understand the Sophists as a cohesive group. Such an understanding of these men and their activity would only develop in the wake of Plato's fourth-century critique. But even if they are not yet taken together as members of a particular "movement," the individuals who would come to be recognized as the most prominent thinkers of the Sophistic movement—Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias—all make appearances in the extant corpus of Old Comedy. Meanwhile, the commonly held assumption that the comic poets assimilate Socrates to the Sophists has

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[3] This argument, in its modern form, depends on the authority of Dover (1968), which has since been the starting point for nearly every discussion of the Aristophanic Socrates. For bibliography in the wake of Dover, see ch. 2.

[4] The members of the Sophistic movement are typically drawn together on the basis of supposedly shared features like their radical relativism and skepticism, their teaching of political skills such as rhetoric for pay, and their activity in and influence on Athens during this time period. On the problem of discerning a unified Sophistic doctrine, see, e.g., Barney (2006); on the evidence for the practice of teaching for pay, see Blank (1985) and Tell (2011, ch. 2); on the limitations of our information about intellectual activity outside of Athens, see Wallace (1998), Thomas (2011, 9-11), and Netz (2020, 626-639).

obscured the ways in which they sharply distinguished Socrates from these three soon-to-be Sophists. In fact, not only is Socrates distinguished from these men, but he is in certain respects characterized in stark *opposition* to Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias. It is this difference in the comic characterization of Socrates and the Sophists, I argue, that marks the comic Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher in a manner that prefigures Plato's later presentation of the theoretical philosopher.

In particular, while Socrates and the Sophists are both mocked by the comic poets for their pursuit of abstract knowledge, the latter are depicted as subordinating their intellectual activity to the pursuit of power and privilege, which in typical comic fashion are often reduced to practical success and sensual pleasures. Socrates, on the other hand, is an object of comedy precisely for his failure on these fronts, for his complete dedication to an intellectual activity that brings him no material advantage. In depicting both Socrates and the Sophists, the poets play on the tension between the thinker's abstract pursuit of knowledge and his bodily existence here on earth. What is different, though, is that the Sophists demonstrate the desire and ability to integrate that abstract knowledge into what we might call an accepted hierarchy of worldly, comic goods, whereas Socrates strangely pursues his apparently useless knowledge as an end in itself, even to his own detriment. To use Blumenberg's terminology, the comic Socrates is, like Plato's Thales, distinguished by the "theoretical attitude," which leaves both susceptible to laughable bodily embarrassments of all sorts.

It is important, again, to recognize the limitations of our sources, as the comic fragments that have come down to us survive in authors with their own particular agendas. Most notably, Athenaeus' subject matter results in an abundance of material treating the indulgent pursuit and use of wealth associated with the Sophists, while Diogenes Laertius' sympathy for Socrates is

apparent.[5] Both authors, meanwhile, are writing in the wake of Plato's strong denigration of "sophistry" in favor of "philosophy"—represented by the Sophists and Socrates, respectively—and it is possible that such attitudes have affected their preservation and presentation of texts about Socrates and the canonical Sophists. It should be emphasized, though, that in the extant fragments of Old Comedy, the distinction between Socrates and the Sophists does not correlate to a clear normative judgement about the relative merits of these thinkers, as would become common after the fourth-century development and idealization of "theoretical philosophy." If Plato would take up Socrates and his way of life as his positive philosophical ideal—defining him against the negative example of the Sophists in doing so—the unworldly activity of the comic Socrates and the worldly intelligence of the Sophists merely represent different *types* of intellectual attitudes that the comic poets found suitable for mockery. Nevertheless, it is the comic poets' ability to draw this distinction that makes their Socrates so important for our understanding of the intellectual history of the late fifth century and for the development of "theoretical philosophy" in the fourth. For in the comic Socrates we see the first extant attempt to characterize a figure in relationship to the pursuit of theoretical knowledge for its own sake without concern for practical ends.

The poets draw their distinction between Socrates and the Sophists not through philosophical arguments, of course, but through comic characterization. The ongoing publication of the monumental "Kommentierung der Fragmente der griechischen Komödie" project has put us in a better position than ever to analyze the relevant fragments for indications of the characterization

[5] On Diogenes Laertius' treatment of Socrates, see Giannantoni (1986), Dorandi (2018); for his use of comic fragments in his *Life of Socrates*, see Gallo (1992). For comic fragments in Athenaeus, see Sidwell (2000), as well as Whitmarsh (2000) on parasitism.

of Socrates and the Sophists. My treatment of these figures will also draw heavily on recent work dealing with how the poets of Old Comedy engage with contemporary intellectual culture. The most comprehensive treatment of the topic is Olimpia Imperio's 1998 essay "La figura dell'intellettuale nella commedia Greca."[6] Imperio's paper offers a generically and culturally grounded descriptive account of a wide range of characters—including not only Socrates and the Sophists but also diviners, doctors, musicians, and poets—whom she collects under the title of "intellectuals." Chris Carey's 2000 essay "The Sophists in Old Comedy" is a more focused contribution, reviewing the group of plays that are sometimes taken as a subgenre of "intellectual comedies" and considering the presentation of Socrates and the canonical Sophists within them.[7] Both, though, fail to emphasize fully the important ways in which Socrates is characterized differently than—indeed, even in opposition to—the canonical Sophists. Their accounts thus obscure to some extent the leading feature of the comic Socrates: the dogged pursuit of useless knowledge that marks him as a prototheoretical philosopher.

My argument for understanding Socrates as such will unfold in three movements, with each focusing on the comic characterization of Socrates in comparison with one of these three canonical Sophists. This procedure has the benefit of providing us an opportunity to attend to the characterization of each individual Sophist—for we will see that even among them there is variety—as we focus on how Socrates is contrasted with each. By the end of the chapter, it will

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[6] Imperio (1998). Cf. Zimmermann (1993), from whom Imperio takes some inspiration, and Souto Delibes (1997), who, on the basis of a much less thorough analysis, comes to the same conclusion as Imperio that "el Sócrates de la Comedia no es coherente" (340).

[7] In his conclusion, Carey notes in passing that the poets of Old Comedy—excluding Aristophanes—recognize the differences between Socrates and the Sophists in that they never associate Socrates with wealth and indulgence. He does not, though, draw out the implications of this observation.

be clear that for the poets of Old Comedy, Socrates represents a type of intellectual who is distinct from the canonical Sophists in his status as a prototheoretical philosopher.

First, I consider how a few recurring jokes about Protagoras and Socrates point to the basic distinction in the comic poets' characterization of Socrates and the Sophists. While Protagoras in Eupolis' *Kolakes* is assimilated to the figure of the *kolax*, a flatterer or parasite who efficaciously uses his intellectual skills to indulge his bodily desires, Socrates, in Eupolis and beyond, is regularly presented as a thinker who is so caught up in his unworldly speculations that he is either uninterested in or unable to take care of the practicalities of everyday life.

Next, I demonstrate how the comic Socrates' characteristic indigence informs an important comparison between Socrates and Prodicus in the *Clouds*. By focusing on a recurring joke about Socrates' petty thievery, I show how the comic poets connect Socrates' intellectual activity and his inability to take care of his bodily needs. The salient point of the comparison between the two figures is the contrast between the respectable and efficacious intelligence of the wealthy Prodicus and the absurd, useless theoretical activity of the impoverished Socrates.

In the final section, I analyze the portrayal of Gorgias and Socrates in an ode in the *Birds.* A consideration of Socrates' characteristic haughtiness allows us to see the contrasting way in which these two are characterized in relation to Athenian society. While the rhetorical activity of the foreign Gorgias allows Aristophanes to assimilate him to a typical Athenian type, Socrates' peculiar combination of arrogance and indigence marginalizes him in the eyes of the poet and his Athenian audience, making Socrates a much stranger and more exotic figure in the popular imagination.

Socrates and Protagoras: the Sky and the Earth

Eupolis' *Kolakes* is one of the best attested fragmentary plays of Old Comedy.[8] First performed at the Dionysia of 421 BCE, the play bested *Peace*, Aristophanes' entry for that year, and had a lasting cultural impact. Eupolis' comedy takes its name from its chorus of *kolakes*, variously translated as "flatterers," "parasites," "spongers," "toadies," or the like. The *kolax* of Old Comedy, if not yet quite solidified into the "stock" character that it would become in later Greek and Roman comedy, was associated with a set of stereotyped characteristics related to his ability to secure a luxurious livelihood at another's expense.[9] Here, the *kolakes* seem to have taken over the home of the Athenian Callias, attracted by his notorious inclination toward extravagance and the recent inheritance that has made him one of the richest men in Athens.[10] It is this chorus of *kolakes*—crucial as they are for understanding the play's characterization of Protagoras—who are of most interest to us here.[11]

Given the play's date of production, the presence of Protagoras, and the apparent intertextual relationship between the comedy and Plato's *Protagoras*, some scholars have been eager to interpret the chorus in the context of other fragmentary "intellectual comedies" including Cratinus' *Panoptai* (pre-423 BCE), Ameipsias' *Connus* (423 BCE), Aristophanes' *Clouds* (423 BCE), and Plato Comicus' *Sophistai* (~420-410s? BCE).[12] *Connus*, Athenaeus tells us, featured a

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[8] See Storey (2003, 180-197), Napolitano (2012), and Olson (2016, 27-118).

[9] Ribbeck (1883) remains a seminal treatment of the figure. See more recently Tylawsky (2002) and Edwards (2010).

[10] On Callias, see Nails (2002, 68-74).

[11] Protagoras' precise relationship to the chorus and whether he appeared as a character onstage is uncertain; see Olson (2014, 29, 34). Regardless of whether he was somehow imagined as a "member" of the chorus or whether he appeared on stage, it seems certain that he was characterized as some sort of *kolax*.

[12] For intertextual allusions to the play in the *Protagoras*, see Nightingale (1995, 62-3, 186-7), Storey (2003, 184-185, 323-325), Arieti and Barrus (2010 7-13).

chorus of *phrontistai*, while *Sophistai* likely featured an eponymous chorus; it has been suggested that the title of *Panoptai* likewise refers to a chorus of sharp-eyed polymaths, who with their many eyes saw and knew all.[13] Situating the play in this tradition, some have suggested that Eupolis' chorus of *kolakes* was completely composed of intellectuals.[14] Although Callias is characterized elsewhere as a sort of wealthy cultural impresario with some intellectual inclination, we should be careful about identifying the chorus as a whole with such a specific group.[15] In the *parabasis*, the chorus describes "the way of life that *kolakes* lead":

> Hear that we are altogether clever
> men. First of all, we have a slave who tends to our needs—
> he usually belongs to someone else, for what's my own is somewhat scanty.
> I have these two good-looking cloaks, and
> regularly exchanging one for the other I head off
> to the agora. Whenever I see a guy there who's
> foolish but very rich, I am all over him.
> Whatever this rich man utters, I greatly praise it,
> and I stand in awe, pretending to enjoy his words.
> Then we go off for a meal, each of us going someplace different
> to enjoy another man's bread. There the *kolax* must
> say many witty things right away—or be hurled out the door!

> ἀλλ᾽ ἀκούσαθ᾽ ὡς ἐσμὲν ἅπαντα κομψοὶ
> ἄνδρες· ὅτοισι πρῶτα μὲν παῖς ἀκόλουθός ἐστιν
> ἀλλότριος τὰ πολλά, μικρὸν δέ τι † κάμον † αὐτοῦ.
> ἱματίω δέ μοι δύ᾽ ἐστὸν χαρίεντε τούτω,
> οἷν μεταλαμβάνων ἀεὶ θάτερον ἐξελαύνω
> εἰς ἀγοράν. ἐκεῖ δ᾽ ἐπειδὰν κατίδω τιν᾽ ἄνδρα
> ἠλίθιον, πλουτοῦντα δ᾽, εὐθὺς περὶ τοῦτον εἰμί.
> κἄν τι τύχῃ λέγων ὁ πλούταξ, πάνυ τοῦτ᾽ ἐπαινῶ,
> καὶ καταπλήττομαι δοκῶν τοῖσι λόγοισι χαίρειν.

[13] On the chorus of *Connus*, see Orth (2013, 216-221); on the *Sophistai*, see Carey (2000, 425-426); for the speculative suggestion about the chorus of *Panoptai*—which seems unlikely to me—see Imperio (1998, 100-101).

[14] E.g., Carrière (1979, 236-237) and Dorati (1995).

[15] For Callias as intellectual impresario, cf. esp. his role as host in Plato's *Protagoras* and Xenophon's *Symposium*.

εἶτ᾽ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον ἐρχόμεσθ᾽ ἄλλυδις ἄλλος ἡμῶν
μᾶζαν ἐπ᾽ ἀλλόφυλον, οὗ δεῖ χαρίεντα πολλὰ
τὸν κόλακ᾽ εὐθέως λέγειν, ἢ ᾽κφέρεται θύραζε. (fr. 172.2-13 K-A)[16]

This broad characterization suggests that the chorus more likely consisted of various figures who fit the general type "*kolax*," with what we might call the "intellectual *kolax*" composing a subtype of that group.[17] Thus the members of the chorus can pride themselves on being "clever" (κομψοὶ), a term often used in comedy to connote over-subtle intellectual types, and can describe their *modus operandi* of using their mental prowess to take advantage of wealthy dupes.[18] The ability to entertain a party with "witty things" (χαρίεντα πολλὰ) is likewise a hallmark of the sophistication cultivated among the fifth-century intellectual elite.[19] The foolish and indulgent Callias, who Plato's Socrates claimed "spent more money on sophists than all the others combined," would seem to have made a perfect comic target for this type of predatory intellectual.[20] Thus as Carey rightly notes, to the extent that there were any intellectual figures in this chorus, they were assimilated to the more general type of the *kolax*.[21]

This is certainly the case for the character who is the primary object of our concern—

[16] The text is Olson's (2014). For the apparently corrupt transmitted text of line three, I translate the rearticulation of Hermann (1796, 388-389): μικρὸν δέ τι κἀμὸν αὐτοῦ.

[17] Other figures mentioned who might fit the type include: Alcibiades, who is elsewhere mocked for his clever speaking (e.g. Ar. fr. 205 K-A); a certain Marpsias, who is described by a scholiast *ad* Ar. *Ach*. 702 as a "spouter of nonsense and a rhetorician" (though this could perhaps just be a misinterpretation of a generic comic name, "Snatcher"); and, most interestingly, Socrates' companion Chaerephon.

[18] On the adjective and its connotations, see O'Sullivan (1992, 138-139) and Beta (2004, 142-144).

[19] Ford (2002, 192-194). It is perhaps noteworthy that Socrates is singled out as contributing to a lack of *charis* at *Ra*. 1491-1499.

[20] Pl. *Ap.* 20a; cf. X. *Smp*. 1.10, 4.62. While Olson (2014, 37-38) is particularly critical of speculative attempts to discern the play's characterization of Callias, he tentatively suggests that he was portrayed as a fool for wasting time and money on the company of intellectuals and was mocked for his profligacy.

[21] Carey (2000, 425).

Protagoras, the oldest and most renowned of the Sophists. Originally hailing from Abdera on the Thracian coast, Protagoras gained a prominent reputation in Athens over the course of at least two extended visits to the city. In addition to being a respected political figure associated with the circle of Pericles, he was also well known as a teacher, becoming the first man, according to later testimony starting with Plato, to demand a fee for his lessons, apparently amassing significant wealth by doing so.[22] Given what we know of the reception of Protagoras, it is perhaps not so surprising to find him among Eupolis' luxury-loving *kolakes.* Whether fairly or not, Protagoras and his most famous doctrines—his claim to "make the weaker argument strong" and that "man is the measure of all things"—have been linked with the destructive moral relativism often attributed to the sophistic movement as a whole.[23] While scholars have rightly noted that Plato*,* whose *Protagoras* is also set at the house of Callias on the occasion of the sophist's second visit to Athens, treats Protagoras with great respect, his Socrates does ultimately connect his interlocutor's thought with hedonism, a discussion of which features prominently in the dialogue.[24]

In discussing the date for Protagoras' second visit to Athens, Herodicus of Babylon, in his second-century critique of Plato's chronological accuracy as quoted by Athenaeus, tells us that Eupolis "introduced Protagoras" into his play.[25] While it is uncertain whether Protagoras actually

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[22] On Protagoras' relationship with Pericles, see also O'Sullivan (1995). For teaching and payment: Pl. *Prt*. 328b-c, 349a, *Men.* 91d; D.L. 9.52 , 9.56. For a critique of this evidence, see Notomi (2010a).

[23] On the "relativism" of the Sophists, see Bett (1989).

[24] There has been much scholarship on the discussion of hedonism in the *Protagoras*, most focusing on the issue of whether Socrates endorses some form of the hedonism position; see, e.g., Annas (1999, 167-172), Rowe (2003), Kahn (2003). For the connection between Protagoras' thought and hedonism, see Shaw (2015, esp. 88-99) and Beresford (2013, 159-161).

[25] Test. ii K-A. For the ambiguity of Herodicus' use of the verb εἰσάγω, which is sometimes used to mean "to bring onstage," see Olson (2014, 29); for the general uncertainty about

appeared onstage, two important fragments illustrate how Eupolis characterized the great Sophist's participation in Callias' banquet. In both, much humor is made of the antithesis between Protagoras' intellectual speculation and the earthly pleasures that he enjoys at the feast. The first is composed of three lines of iambic trimeter:

> Within is Protagoras the Tean,
> the accursed spirit who prates on
> about the things in the sky, but as for the things of the earth—those he eats!
>
> ἔνδον μέν ἐστι Πρωταγόρας ὁ Τήιος
> ὃς ἀλαζονεύεται μὲν ἁλιτήριος
> περὶ τῶν μετεώρων, τὰ δὲ χαμᾶθεν ἐσθίει. (fr. 157 K-A = fr. 157a + *157b KomFrag)[26]

First, we note that Protagoras is not properly referred to as an Abderite, but as a Tean, likely a comic epithet meant to call to mind stereotypical Ionian luxury.[27] From here, the joke becomes more explicit in its characterization, playing on the description of fifth-century intellectual speculation into "the things in the sky and the things under the earth."[28] The relative clause in line two moves from blustery talk about airy phenomena to earthly delights for the fulfilment of the body by means of a clever chiasmus (ἀλαζονεύεται … τῶν μετεώρων, τὰ δὲ χαμᾶθεν ἐσθίει),

Protagoras' role in the play, see n. 11 above.

[26] In his KomFrag edition, Olson (2016, 43-47) prints the first verse and the second two as separate entries on the grounds that they are preserved separately and only the first is explicitly attributed to the *Kolakes*. Porson's (1812, 75) unification is printed by Kassel-Austin and has gained wide acceptance, most recently by Napolitano (2012, 97-99) and Storey (2003, 184). While the presence of the unified fragment in the *Kolakes* would certainly strengthen my argument, it is not crucial: Eustathius, the source for verses 2-3, claims the target of Eupolis' mockery here is Protagoras, and the verses' characterization of him, whether in the *Kolakes* or elsewhere, still stands in contrast to the characterization of Socrates considered below.

[27] Napolitano (2012, 100). Cassio (1985, 113-114). For a parallel example of a comically misapplied toponym, cf. the reference to "Socrates the Melian" at *Nu.* 830. The epithet could also somehow relate to the fact that Abdera was refounded by Teos in the 6th century.

[28] See, e.g., Pl. *Ap*. 19b, Hp. *VM*. 1.3. For more on this polar expression, see (Moore 2019, 138-140).

before the concluding paraprosdokian in line three (ἐσθίει) makes Protagoras' abstract investigations concrete as a means to fill the belly. In the second fragment in which Protagoras is named, his inducement to imbibe masquerades as the medical advice of an expert doctor: "Protagoras urged <him> to drink so that / he might have clean lungs before the rising of the Dog Star" (πίνειν γὰρ <αὐτὸν> Πρωταγόρας ἐκέλευ', ἵνα / πρὸ τοῦ κυνὸς τὸν πλεύμον' ἔκπλυτον φορῇ. fr. 158 K-A).[29]

In the context of the grand feasting of the *Kolakes*, the thrust of these jokes is that all of Protagoras' concern for intellectual subtleties is little more than a mask for typical comic indulgence of the body.[30] As with other gibes about contemporary intellectuals who engaged in theoretical speculation, jokes playing on this tension between the thinker's intellectual activity and his bodily existence recur in the extant comic corpus.[31] Thus we find a very similar joke in an unattributed fragment of Aristophanes: "He ponders what can't be seen, / but what's on the ground in front of him—that he eats" (ὃς τἀφανῆ μεριμνᾷ / τὰ δὲ χαμᾶθεν ἐσθίει. fr. 691 K-A).[32] Although the terms have been slightly altered, the underlying point remains the same: the person in question puts on anxious airs in his concern for obscure investigations but is ultimately concerned most about the plate of food right in front of him.[33]

A riff on this recurring joke also allows us to see the way in which the Socrates of Old

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[29] Thus Carey (2000, 424-425), Storey (2003, 187), and Olson (2016, 51).

[30] Storey (2003, 188) considers fr. 166 and 187 K-A in this context as well.

[31] Cf. the repetition of the joke about the sky being a *pnigeus* in Cratin. fr. 167 K-A and *Nu.* 96.

[32] We have no information as to who this "he" is. For commentary, see Bagordo (2017, 43-46).

[33] The operative contrast is between τἀφανῆ ("what can't be seen" and is thus uncertain or unknown) and τὰ χαμᾶθεν ("what's on the ground," "what's at one's feet" in the sense that it is right there or obvious).

Comedy is characterized differently than Protagoras. In particular, an early set-piece in Aristophanes' *Clouds* depicts the nature of Socrates' own investigation into "the things in the sky" and "the things under the earth" when, upon entering the Thinkery, Strepsiades sees Socrates' students strangely bent over, peering at the ground while their butts prominently point upward. When Strepsiades singles out a researcher and asks "why his asshole is looking to the sky" (τί δῆθ᾽ ὁ πρωκτὸς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν βλέπει; 193), his guide responds that "it's learning astronomy on its own" (αὐτὸς καθ᾽ αὑτὸν ἀστρονομεῖν διδάσκεται. 194). In other words, they are, in their grotesque way, studying "the things in the sky." Strepsiades also inquires "why these men are looking at the earth" (ἀτὰρ τί ποτ᾽ εἰς τὴν γῆν βλέπουσιν οὑτοιί; 187), leading to the following exchange:

> Stud. They are investigating the things beneath the earth.
> Strep. So it's bulbs
> they're looking for! Well you can stop thinking about that,
> 'cause I know where the biggest and most beautiful are.
>
> ΜΑ. ζητοῦσιν οὗτοι τὰ κατὰ γῆς.
> ΣΤ. βολβοὺς ἄρα
> ζητοῦσι. μή νυν τοῦτό γ᾽ ἔτι φροντίζετε·
> ἐγὼ γὰρ οἶδ᾽ ἵν᾽ εἰσὶ μεγάλοι καὶ καλοί. (188-190)

As Eupolis does of Protagoras, Strepsiades suggests that Socrates and the students of the Thinkery study the "things of the sky" and indulge in "the things of the earth," that their intellectual activity is being pursued toward the end of attaining a good meal: he is convinced that the students are scanning the earth in order to find edible delicacies in the dirt, and he is eager to assist. But given their sallow, emaciated appearance and the previous comparison between them and the starved Spartan prisoners captured at Pylos (186), the audience has likely already guessed that these are no gourmands. And when the students fail to react to Strepsiades'

offer for help, it becomes clear that their investigation of "the things below the earth" is not a search for food, but a much murkier activity, an investigation of "Erebus below Tartarus" (192).[34]

This interaction at the beginning of the play is one of a series of jokes—including the lizard anecdote examined in the introduction—in which the abstract and essentially useless theoretical research undertaken in the Thinkery is focalized through the more concrete perspective of Strepsiades, who has come looking for a practical means of escaping his debts and pursuing material gain.[35] Thus he concludes that students studying the earth must be looking for something to eat. Of most interest, though, is how Aristophanes' reuse of the "things of the sky" and "the things under the earth" trope suggests an implicit comparison between Socrates and someone like Protagoras. In the case of the latter figure, this polarity is worked into a joke suggesting that for all his posturing, Protagoras' intellectual activity is ultimately subordinated to the fulfillment of his earthly appetites; in the case of the former, it is precisely Socrates' (and his students') *failure* to use his intellectual activity to tend to the needs of the body that makes him such a strange and comic figure.

That this is the aspect of Socrates that the comic poets found so funny is made abundantly clear when we turn to the extant fragments in which Socrates appears. We can see it, for example, in another unattributed fragment of Eupolis:

> I also hate Socrates,
> the babbling beggar
> who has thought of everything,
> except where he might get something to eat—
> to this he gives no heed.

[34] On the phrase, see Dover (1968) *ad loc.* and Segal (1996, 147).
[35] For this theme, see Green (1979), Woodbury (1980), and Althoff (1993) as well as ch. 2.

μισῶ δὲ καὶ † Σωκράτη,
    τὸν πτωχὸν ἀδολέσχην,
ὃς τἄλλα μὲν πεφρόντικεν,
ὁπόθεν δὲ καταφαγεῖν † ἔχοι
    τούτου κατημέληκεν. (fr. 386 K-A)[36]

As with Protagoras, Socrates is first characterized by his intellectual chatter: Protagoras is a prattling quack, while Socrates is a "babbler."[37] After this, though, the two figures diverge: whereas Protagoras' intellectual concerns are comically undermined by his voracious eating, Socrates is a "beggar" who is so occupied with thinking that he has nothing to eat. We should note here, too, that the structure of the joke closely parallels those based on the "things of the sky" and "things of the earth" polarity examined above. The relative clause introduces a set-up suggesting the intellectual activity of the person mocked; then, in the punchline, the poet uses the intellectual's eating habits to further mock the nature of this intellectual activity.[38] The difference, though, is important: Protagoras' intellectual activity is mocked for being directed toward fulfilling his appetite with gusto, but Socrates is mocked for lacking the providence to get even a basic meal.

A number of scholars have argued that these verses likely come from a choral passage of the *Kolakes* in which a series of named individuals faced comic abuse, perhaps a section of the parabasis.[39] These scholars likewise see the *Kolakes* as the likely source for another fragment of

[36] On the status of the text, which is preserved in three different forms, see Olson (2014, 130-132) and Storey (1985a). In one version, Socrates is not explicitly mentioned. Otherwise, the uncertainty is mostly metrical.

[37] Cf. also Eup. fr. 388 K-A. For *adoleschia* in this context, see Natali (1987), Storey (1985a), and Witlox (1951, 141); generally, see Kidd (2014, 16-17).

[38] For intellectuals defined by their eating habits, see Wilkins (2000, 291) and O'Regan (2017).

[39] Napolitano (2012, 28-32), Storey (2003, 322-324; 1985a), and Patzer (1994, 67-74),

Eupolis, considered below, in which Socrates is said to have stolen a cup from a symposium on the grounds that it employs the same idiosyncratic meter of the above-quoted parabatic fragment in which the *kolakes* describe of their way of life.[40] If this assignment of these two fragments is correct, then Socrates, so impoverished and incapable that he resorts to theft, could only be introduced as a pointed *antithesis* to to the *kolakes* and their way of life, a sort of unsuccessful anti-*kolax*.[41] The same is suggested by the characterization of Socrates in an important fragment of Ameipsias: "And yet this man, despite his poverty, has never stooped to being a *kolax*!" (οὗτος μέντοι πεινῶν οὕτως οὐπώποτ᾽ ἔτλη κολακεῦσαι. fr. 9.4 K-A).[42] If Protagoras is the typical intellectual *kolax*, Socrates' inability or refusal to play the *kolax* even in the face of starvation clearly makes him a laughable intellectual of a different sort.

The verse just quoted is, in fact, pulled from a longer series of fragments from Ameipsias presented together by Diogenes Laertius. Taken together, these provide a good overview of the general characterization of Socrates in Old Comedy:

> Socrates, best among a few men but among the many useless, have you
> also come to us? You are hardy indeed! Wherever could this coat of yours be from?
> *　　　*　　　*
> This wretched condition of yours is an insult to shoemakers!
> *　　　*　　　*
> And yet this man, despite his poverty, has never stooped to being a *kolax*!

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building on Bergk (1838, 353-353). For a parallel abuse passage, see Eup. fr. 99.1-22 K-A with commentary by Olson (2017, 296-299).

[40] Fr. 395 K-A. Olson (2014, 131, 157) withholds judgement on fr. 386 K-A, but suggests that it is "not difficult to imagine" the appearance of fr. 172 K-A in the parabasis of the *Kolakes*. The appearance of multiple jokes about Socrates in this play would also help to account for the comments of Luc. *Pisc*. 25 and the scholiast *ad* Ar. *Nu*. 96 about Eupolis' prominent mockery of Socrates.

[41] Compare the gibe about Acestor's failure to properly play the *kolax* in fr. 172.14-16 K-A.

[42] Napolitano (212, 31-32) likewise points to this connection, suggesting that Socrates' refusal to play the flatterer was a standard characteristic of the comic Socrates.

Σώκρατες ἀνδρῶν βέλτιστ᾽ ὀλίγων, πολλῶν δὲ ματαιόταθ᾽, ἥκεις
καὶ σὺ πρὸς ἡμᾶς; καρτερικός γ᾽ εἶ. πόθεν ἄν σοι χλαῖνα γένοιτο;
* * *
τουτὶ τὸ κακὸν τῶν σκυτοτόμων κατ᾽ ἐπήρειαν γεγένηται.
* * *
οὗτος μέντοι πεινῶν οὕτως οὐπώποτ᾽ ἔτλη κολακεῦσαι. (fr. 9 K-A)[43]

To begin unpacking the key features of this important fragment, let us first focus on the way that the poet portrays Socrates' material indigence, which is perhaps the most consistent feature of the comic Socrates. Understanding the nature of his poverty will put us in a good position to consider how Socrates is characterized in relationship to another important fifth-century intellectual: Prodicus. For, as we will see, Socrates' impoverished condition is portrayed as stemming from a lack of forethought in providing for his bodily needs, which is, in turn, to be traced to his all-consuming pursuit of his intellectual activity.[44] Prodicus, on the other hand, is put forth as a foil to such foolishness, a thinker who puts his abilities to good use by maintaining a comfortable existence and a generally respectable reputation.

Socrates and Prodicus: Thinkery and Thievery

In the fragment of Ameipsias, Socrates' destitute physical appearance—surely crucial to the costuming of the character on stage—is mockingly taken as a sign of endurance through hardship. He is shoeless, and although he does have a meager cloak around his shoulders, even

[43] On the text and dramatic situation, see Orth (2013, 132-135), Olson (2007, 236-237), and Totaro (1998, 157-164). Diogenes Laertius presents these fragments successively, though he tells us that Socrates was onstage when these lines were spoken. Thus is it possible that he has excised Socrates' responses. Dover (1968, liv n. 2) suggests that this and the alternate version of *Nu.* 412ff. quoted immediately before it are moralizing versions of the verses altered by Diogenes himself.

[44] Cf. Morosi (2020, 404-414) for the pervasiveness of the comic characterization of various intellectuals as poor.

this is more protection from the elements than one might expect Socrates to be able to procure for himself. Moreover, the speaker's teasing question ("Wherever did this coat of yours come from?"), taken together with evidence from elsewhere in the comic corpus, suggests a dire and demeaning answer: it was stolen. This joke seems to be an instance of the recurring characterization of the comic Socrates as a *lōpodutēs*, an opportunistic thief who haunts public places looking for his chance to snatch some unattended clothing.[45]

What Ameipsias leaves the audience to infer, Aristophanes turns into a running gag in his *Clouds*. In this play, too, Socrates and his students are depicted as dirty, pale, and emaciated as they bear the destitute conditions of the Thinkery in the pursuit of their research. One way they are able to fund their activity, Aristophanes suggests, is through acts of petty thievery. And as in the Ameipsias fragment, carrying off cloaks is Socrates' calling card. This is first suggested when we learn that in accordance with school rules, Strepsiades, too, must suffer the conditions of penury for his learning: before entering the school, Socrates tells him that he must "lay down his cloak" (ἴθι νυν κατάθου θοἰμάτιον. 497), as it is their custom to go unclad. Even if at this point Strepsiades is not worried about his own cloak being stolen, his objection that he is not entering Socrates' school "in search of stolen goods" (ἀλλ᾽ οὐχὶ φωράσων ἔγωγ᾽ εἰσέρχομαι. 499) suggests to the audience that stolen goods are just what someone might expect to find therein.[46]

Aristophanes circles around to deliver the punchline of this setup when Strepsiades returns to his son Pheidippides in order to convince the youth to join Socrates' school. Upon seeing his

[45] Compton-Engle (2015, 76-77). Cf. D. 41.114 and Arist. *Pr*. 952a16–35 for opportunistic stealing from baths and gymnasia.

[46] See Dover (1968) *ad loc.* for the legal context and implications of the phrase.

father apparently still cloakless, the son inquires further:

> Pheid. Is that also why you lost your cloak?
> Strep. I haven't lost it, I've abstracted it away
> Pheid. And what have you done with your shoes, stupid?
> Strep. Just as Pericles, I lost them for what was necessary.
>
> ΦΕ. διὰ ταῦτα δὴ καὶ θοἰμάτιον ἀπώλεσας;
> ΣΤ. ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἀπολώλεκ᾽, ἀλλὰ καταπεφρόντικα.
> ΦΕ. τὰς δ᾽ ἐμβάδας ποῖ τέτροφας, ὦ ᾽νόητε σύ;
> ΣΤ. ὥσπερ Περικλέης, εἰς τὸ δέον ἀπώλεσα. (856-858)

Strepsiades' claim that he has "abstracted" (καταφροντίζω) his cloak away suggests the connection between poverty and the intellectual activity undertaken by Socrates in the Thinkery; it also makes clear that Strepsiades has no idea what has become of his cloak. Meanwhile, the father responds to his son's question about his shoes, the mysterious disappearance of which had been noted earlier (719), by claiming to have spent "what is necessary." Aristophanes here parodies Pericles' defense that he "spent what was necessary" when he came under scrutiny for his large expenditure in suppressing the Euboean revolt in 445 BCE.[47] The poet's substitution of *apōlesa* (*apollumi*) for a conventional verb of commercial exchange creates an ironic paradox in Strepsiades' suggestion that "losing" one's clothes is the necessary cost of hanging around Socrates and makes clear that Strepsiades' loss of his clothing was no consensual transaction. Indeed, once Strepsiades has returned to his right mind—and returned to the Thinkery to exact vengeance on Socrates and his pupils—he rightly recognizes what has happened to his cloak, identifying himself to one of the students as "the man whose cloak you stole" (ἐκεῖνος οὗπερ θοἰμάτιον εἰλήφατε. 1498)

Rather than simply painting Socrates as a morally corrupt figure, the thrust of this common

[47] See Dover (1968) *ad loc.*

comic insult is related to his poverty, his inability to take care of himself.[48] Socrates has, as Eupolis puts it, thought of everything except where to get a meal, and so he must degrade himself by resorting to thievery.[49] This interpretation is strengthened in the most developed example of the joke, which again appears early in the *Clouds*. Here, a student tells Strepsiades an anecdote about Socrates*:*

> Student: And last night we had no dinner.
> Strepsiades: Well then! How did he manage for barley?
> Student: Over the table he sprinkled a fine layer of ash
> and bent a skewer. Then he took up this compass
> to steal a cloak from the palaestra.
>
> ΜΑ: ἐχθὲς δέ γ᾽ ἡμῖν δεῖπνον οὐκ ἦν ἑσπέρας.
> ΣΤ: εἶέν. τί οὖν πρὸς τἄλφιτ᾽ ἐπαλαμήσατο;
> ΜΑ: κατὰ τῆς τραπέζης καταπάσας λεπτὴν τέφραν,
> κάμψας ὀβελίσκον, εἶτα διαβήτην λαβὼν
> ἐκ τῆς παλαίστρας θοἰμάτιον ὑφείλετο. (175-179)

This complicated joke has two movements.[50] First, we are surprised when Socrates, despite clearly not having the means necessary to provide food for himself and his students, appears to play the chef anyway, going through the motions of sprinkling barley flour in preparation for a meal.[51] But, with the introduction of the paraprosdokian at the end of line 177 (τέφρα for the expected ἄλφιτα), we see that he is not sprinkling barley flour and roasting meat on a spit, he is sprinkling ash and repurposing a spit as a compass for a geometric demonstration. In the final

[48] The suggestion of thievery is often made in relationship to poverty; see, for example, *Th*. 817; *Ra*. 772, 1075; *Pl*. 165, *Ec*. 1065; Ar. fr. 322 K-A; Crat. fr. 206 K-A; Telecl. fr. 73 K-A (cf. Eup. fr. 268 K-A). Socrates' close associate Chaerephon is said to be a thief in Ar. fr. 295 K-A.

[49] Cf. fr. 386 K-A, p. 50-51 above.

[50] On the difficulties of the passage and for the interpretation of the scene in relation to cookery, suggested by the scholia (R and V) *ad loc*., see Starkie (1911, 320-322) and Dover (1968) *ad loc.*

[51] Cf. Telecl. fr. 41 K-A, treated in ch. 3, where Socrates is said to help Euripides "cook up" his tragedies, which are elsewhere described as meager fare; cf. Bagordo (2013, 200-201).

line, though, our expectations are upended once more, as the compass becomes a handy tool for reaching into the palaestra and pilfering a cloak, which will presumably be used to furnish a meal in the future.[52]

The humor of the lines depends not on Socrates simply being a thief, but on the linguistically playful way in which the poet points to the fact that this supposedly clever man, who seems to have an answer for every abstract issue imaginable, must depend on degrading acts of theft to provide for his most basic needs. Socrates and his students can content themselves with "food for thought" for only so long before the material needs of the body intrude. And when they do, he imagines that their scientific tools are repurposed for more practical ends. That intrusion is also nicely conveyed in the structure of the second half of the joke itself, where, as again with the Eupolis joke about Protagoras, there is a sudden and unexpected turn from abstract to practical concerns—the difference being that Socrates' haul is embarrassingly meager.

This interpretation of the relationship between thievery and the Thinkery also helps us to make sense of another joke about Socrates' sticky fingers from an unattributed fragment of Eupolis: "Socrates, <singing> Stesichorus with the lyre in accompaniment, / received from his right the cup—which he stole" (δεξάμενος δὲ Σωκράτης τὴν ἐπιδέξι᾽ <ᾄδων> / Στησιχόρου πρὸς τὴν λύραν οἰνοχόην ἔκλεψεν. fr. 395 K-A).[53] The fragment begins with Socrates partaking in a typical sympotic scene, singing traditional songs with companions. But any momentary respectability attributed to him is suddenly undercut when he takes his reception of the wine cup as an opportunity for theft. Although the joke is less pointed as a critique of Socrates' intellectual

[52] Alex. fr. 78 K-A suggests that the previous night's cloak-stealers could be found bartering for food in the morning market. Scholars have been particularly puzzled by the definite articles in line 179; cf. Meynersen (1993).

[53] On the text and supplement, see Olson (2014, 157-158).

activity than the example from the *Clouds*, Eupolis' description of Socrates' opportunistic theft of a cup from a drinking party employs a similar structure, culminating in the unexpected act of thievery that points to Socrates' degrading poverty.

The fragment also recalls the setting of the *Kolakes,* to which play some scholars have attributed the verses.[54] Yet even when he is situated at the symposium, one can sense a distinction in how Socrates is handled. If, according to the comic trope outlined above, thinkers such as Protagoras have a skill for leveraging their intellectual ability to exploit the wonderful dining opportunities that the banquet provides, Socrates shows no such knack. Instead, he is content to make away with a simple pouring cup. In this way, we see again a distinction between figures like Protagoras and Socrates: while the former are willing and able to employ their intellects for their own material gains, Socrates' poverty and penchant for petty theft serve to characterize him as a sort of impractical, imprudent thinker whose mind is so occupied with other matters that he fails to attend to his material needs in any respectable way. In the eyes of a typical Athenian, the sort of "intelligence" that leads to such debased poverty would be questionable indeed, and this seems to be an important aspect of the comic Socrates.[55]

Such a characterization of Socrates also helps us to see how and why he is contrasted to another important Sophist: Prodicus. Although he is only mentioned three times in the extant corpus of Old Comedy, Prodicus crops up in an important passage in Aristophanes' *Clouds*.[56]

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[54] Storey (2003, 323) again follows Bergk (1838) in seeing *Flatterers* as a likely source.

[55] Cf. esp. Antiphon's critique of Socrates' poverty at X. *Mem*. 1.6.1-14, which is surely reflective of a common sentiment. The passage also demonstrates well how Socrates' poverty is a positive expression of his virtue among the Socratics; for some considerations in the context of Socrates' comments about his poverty in Plato's *Apology*, see Griffin (1995).

[56] Prodicus also appears at *Av.* 690-692 and Ar. fr. 506 K-A. See Mayhew (2011, 245) on possible allusions to Prodicus in the *Frogs*. It is possible that Aristophanes' play *Hōrai* is somehow related to Prodicus, who wrote a treatise called *Hōrai;* see n. 71 below. For some

Here his intellectual activity is pointedly contrasted to that of Socrates in order to mock the head of the Thinkery's supposed intelligence: while Prodicus and Socrates are both taken as general representatives of those who are defined by their intellectual inquiry, Prodicus' activity has gained him a high reputation and has allowed him to accrue great wealth, while Socrates' has provided him with no such benefits.

Prodicus appears when the Clouds first address Socrates and explain their relationship to him and the other men whom they support:

> We don't respond to any of the other current celestial smarties,
> except for Prodicus, on account of his intelligence and judgement, and you,
> because you strut around in the streets and cast aside your eyes,
> and, shoeless, you endure all evils and put on a haughty face for us.
>
> οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλῳ γ᾽ ὑπακούσαιμεν τῶν νῦν μετεωροσοφιστῶν
> πλὴν ἢ Προδίκῳ, τῷ μὲν σοφίας καὶ γνώμης οὕνεκα, σοὶ δὲ
> ὅτι βρενθύει τ᾽ ἐν ταῖσιν ὁδοῖς καὶ τὠφθαλμὼ παραβάλλεις
> κἀνυπόδητος κακὰ πόλλ᾽ ἀνέχει κἀφ᾽ ἡμῖν σεμνοπροσωπεῖς. (360-363)

Socrates and Prodicus are clearly marked as two individuals of the same general type.[57] Thus, as he does Socrates and Protagoras, Aristophanes elsewhere characterizes Prodicus as a "babbler": "A book ruined this man—that or Prodicus or some other babbler" (τοῦτον τὸν ἄνδρ᾽ ἢ βιβλίον διέφθορεν / ἢ Πρόδικος ἢ τῶν ἀδολεσχῶν εἷς γέ τις. fr. 506 K-A). Here, Socrates and Prodicus are further united as the only members of this group to whom the Clouds pay any attention. And yet, the Clouds pointedly distinguish their *reasons* for being responsive to these two thinkers.

First, let us consider Prodicus, who is praised for his "intelligence and his judgement." In

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thoughts on Prodicus in Old Comedy, see Willink (1982), Ambrose (1983), Sidwell (2009, ch. 5), and Notomi (2010b). On the importance of the *Clouds* passage, see Dover (1968, liv-lvi).

[57] On the understanding of the word "sophist" in the fifth century, see n. 2 above. I avoid the word in my translation so as to avoid confusion.

accordance with contemporary usage, Aristophanes generally uses *sophia* and its cognates in reference to a sort of efficacious intelligence, a mental facility that allows people to achieve what they desire.[58] That is to say, the "intelligence" of *sophia* is best understood as something like "sagacity," "shrewdness," or "skill." *Gnōmē* and its cognates likewise refer primarily to practical judgement or sound opinions oriented toward concrete action.[59] Prodicus is thus singled out for a sort of effective, practical intelligence.[60] Dover notes that the statement seems to afford Prodicus an amount of respect that is unique among intellectual figures in Old Comedy.[61] Indeed, in the *Birds*, Prodicus is also held up as a well-known intellectual who enjoys at least some sway with the public: as the Bird-chorus introduces their new cosmogony, they assume, however mockingly, that the audience might otherwise rely on the authority of Prodicus for such matters.[62]

The Clouds' characterization of Prodicus aligns well with what we learn about the thinker elsewhere in the ancient sources. Even if Aristophanes could sometimes mock him as a babbler and dismiss his novel cosmological ideas, these ideas were to some extent presented with a sort of public-facing traditionalism that was eminently respectable.[63] This can be seen, for example,

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[58] See Dover (1993, 12-13; 1974, 119-122) and Snell (1924, 1-19).

[59] *Gnōmē* has been most abundantly studied with reference to Thucydides, most thoroughly by Huart (1973, esp. pp. 33-89). For a more concise overview, see Karavites (1990, esp. 15-17). See also Dover (1974, 123-124) and Snell (1924, 20-39).

[60] This efficacy is also, perhaps, suggested—with a negative valence—by the purported association (reported by a scholiast at *Nu.* 361) between Prodicus and the politician Theramenes; cf. scholium *ad Nu.* 361 and *Ran*. 964-979.

[61] Dover (1968) *ad loc*; likewise van Leeuwen (1989). Guidorizzi (2007) and Starkie (1911) *ad loc*. think this praise of Prodicus is ironic; Willink (1983, 25-26) and Mayhew (2011, 168) are also more skeptical of Aristophanes' respect for Prodicus. What is important for understanding the verses, though, is not whether Aristophanes personally had respect for Prodicus, but whether Prodicus had gained enough standing as a sort of public intellectual that he could be employed as the straight man in a joke meant to mock the very disreputable Socrates.

[62] *Av*. 690-692; cf. Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*

[63] Cf. Kahn's (1998, 40-42) assessment of the conservative ethics of Protagoras and Gorgias, which would equally apply to Prodicus.

in his tale of Heracles at the crossroads, a version of which is recorded in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, where Socrates claims that Prodicus was accustomed to reciting this traditional praise of virtue before crowds.[64] Furthermore, during his frequent visits to Athens on official business from Ceos, Prodicus gained a reputation for his skill in addressing the *boulē*.[65] Taking this evidence as a whole, Dover argues that, like Thales, Prodicus' name seems to have become a byword for intelligence to the common Athenian.[66]

Also adding to this public perception of Prodicus' intelligence was his apparent ability to leverage his intellectual distinction into a lucrative career as a teacher and performer, which led to a reputation for great wealth.[67] Evidence from Plato and Aristotle, for example, indicates that Prodicus' expensive "fifty-drachma lecture" was proverbial.[68] Meanwhile, Xenophon's Socrates can ironically mention Prodicus' "needing money" alongside Callias' "longing for philosophy"––which in reality consisted of little more than throwing money at teachers such as Prodicus.[69] Indeed, Charles Willink has argued that Plato's portrait of Prodicus at this same Callias' house in the *Protagoras*—particularly his comparison between Prodicus and Tantalus—should not be taken as one of a toiling "unhappy professor" but instead as that of a soft, luxury-loving *kolax*.[70]

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[64] X. *Mem*. 2.1.21-34. Anderson (2019, esp. 105-116) argues, *contra* Mayhew (2011, 205), that the speech is a Prodicean endorsement of traditional virtue. For contrasting views on the relationship between Xenophon's version and that of Prodicus, see Sansone (2015) and Gray (2006). It is more difficult to assess the public reception of Prodicus' novel cosmogony, though there is no contemporary evidence suggesting that his views made him a particularly controversial figure in his lifetime; see Mayhew (2011, 38-50) for the evidence.

[65] Pl. *Hp. Ma.* 282c, *Prt*. 315c-e.

[66] Dover (1968, lv).

[67] Pl. *Hp. Ma.* 282c, Philostr. *VS* 1.12.

[68] Pl. *Cra*. 384, Ar. *Rhet*. 1415b12; cf. Ps.-Pl. *Ax*. 366c.

[69] X. *Smp*. 4.62; cf. Mayhew (2011, 103).

[70] Willink (1983) also stresses the association between Tantalus and impiety. The older interpretation is well illustrated by Guthrie (1971, 274). Mayhew (2011, 91-92) is sympathetic to Willink's reading.

Keeping in mind the likely intertextual relationship between the *Protagoras* and Eupolis' *Kolakes*, as well as what we have already seen about the comic portrayal of Protagoras himself, it would not be surprising if Plato is here drawing on a now-lost comic representation of the wealthy Prodicus in crafting his own humorous scene.[71]

Leaving speculation aside, we still have a good idea of the associations that the mention of Prodicus in the *Clouds* might bring to mind for Aristophanes' audience: he is a successful public intellectual, who, despite sometimes having his head in the clouds, is essentially respectable in his thought and enviable in his ability to turn that thought to a profit. What, then, of the Clouds' comparison between him and Socrates? As with the bulb-hunting scene analyzed above, staging is a major part of the joke here: given Prodicus' reputation in Athens, the disparity between him and the dirty, indigent Socrates standing nearby on stage could not be more stark. While the former has put his talents to good practical use—speaking in the *boulē*, giving paid public lectures, and establishing a lucrative teaching practice—the latter, according to the comedians, must make his meager living by stealing cloaks.

Aristophanes further accentuates this comparison in the *men/de* structure with the second element falling at the line-end. The contrastive construction implies not only that Prodicus *has* the esteemed qualities of *sophia* and *gnōmē*, but also that Socrates *lacks* them.[72] Thus Prodicus here plays the straight man, introduced to highlight and mock a particular failure of Socrates' supposed intelligence. This is the same failure highlighted by the comic poets' suggestion that he must resort to theft to maintain his bodily needs: the comic Socrates' inability or disinterest in

[71] Cf. Willink (1982, 33). For an extremely speculative attempt to read Aristophanes' *Hōrai* as a play that dealt with Prodicus, see Lebedev (2019, 568-578); cf. the more restrained comments of Mayhew (2011, 247-248).

[72] Cf. Totaro's (1998, 160) comments on Amips. fr. 9 K-A.

using his intellectual activity to tend to practical needs such as putting food on the table—let alone to become a respected public figure—again mark him out as a peculiar type of intellectual.

If Prodicus is known around town as a wealthy, respectable man who puts his intellectual activity to good use, Socrates is known as a strange bird whose haughty disposition is ill-suited to his destitute condition. The Clouds, then, appreciate Socrates not because of any particular intelligence, but rather because of his complete *dedication* to them as the patron deities of his intellectual activity: he bears all sorts of miserable conditions and "puts on a haughty face" for the Clouds. It is this characterization of Socrates' arrogance toward those who do not share his own peculiar values that I would like to turn to next. By doing so, we will be in a better position to see how the Socrates of Old Comedy is distinguished from another important sophistic figure: Gorgias.

Socrates and Gorgias: the Few, the Many, and the Magus of the Marsh

Along with his poverty, this arrogant attitude, or *semnotēs*, is the most consistent feature of the comic Socrates.[73] In addition to the quoted passage from the *Clouds*, Socrates is disparagingly characterized by his "haughty speeches" (σεμνοῖσιν λόγοισι, 1496) in the concluding ode of the *Frogs*.[74] Likewise, in a fragment of Callias Comicus, an unknown character explains that "Socrates is the reason" that she is "haughty" and "big-headed" ({A} τί δὴ σὺ σεμνὴ καὶ φρονεῖς οὕτω μέγα; / {B} ἔξεστι γάρ μοι. Σωκράτης γὰρ αἴτιος. fr. 15 K-A").[75]

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[73] On the positive and negative valences of the term, see Barrett (1964) *ad* E. *Hipp*. 99 and Dover (1968) *ad Nu*. 48.

[74] Cf. Lys. fr. 1.2; on this passage, see Dover (1993) *ad loc.*

[75] Diogenes Laertius quotes this fragment in the context of Socrates' relationship with Euripides. For possible interpretations of this female character, see p. 125-126; for full commentary, see Bagordo (2014, 170-174). For another potential reference to Socrates' haughty

In the *Clouds*, too, Aristophanes' Socrates and his students are characterized by such behavior. The exclusive community of those who dwell in the Thinkery live a life apart, fashioning themselves as a sort of restricted religious sect into which only the privileged few who have been initiated can be admitted.[76] Socrates shows little patience for the beliefs, customs, and abilities of the more down-to-earth Athenians, represented in this play by Strepsiades.[77] Perhaps no image better captures Socrates' *semnotēs* than that of the teacher hanging above the stage in a basket. After the subordinate student's adoring description of his master's intelligence, Socrates himself responds to the call of the rustic farmer below him as a god might a mortal: "Why do you call upon me, O creature of the day?" (223).[78]

A gesture toward Socrates' *semnotēs* in the previously quoted fragment of Ameipsias will help us to discern the significance of this characteristic in the context of contemporary Athenian culture. The speaker here describes Socrates as "best among a few men but among the many useless" (ἀνδρῶν βέλτιστ᾽ ὀλίγων, πολλῶν δὲ ματαιόταθ', fr. 9.1 K-A). The distinction between "the many" and "the few" points to the claims of privileged knowledge familiar from fourth-century philosophy, but which were already beginning to pervade the fuzzier religious and intellectual discourse of the late fifth century, a time when self-declared knowers of all sorts—aristocratic symposiasts, allegorical interpreters, adherents to religious sects—sought to distinguish themselves from the unknowing masses.[79] Such an attitude, with its degradation of

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looks, see *comic. adesp.* fr. 749 K-A with commentary by Borthwick (2001).

[76] E.g., 143, 250-266. On this aspect of the Thinkery, see Adkins (1970), Marianetti (1992, 41-75), and Janko (1997). On the Thinkery as an exclusive space, see Morosi (2015).

[77] E.g., 133-143, 217-224, 263-266, 365-367.

[78] It is also noteworthy that Socrates' *semnotēs* is a particularly comic aspect of his character in the Socratic corpus; cf. Pl. *Smp.* 219c, 221b and X. *Smp*. 3.10-11.

[79] This trope is most accessible to us in fifth-century literary and religious discourse, which are brought together in the Derveni Papyrus (e.g., col. 7.10–11, 23.1-3). It is also attested in the

popular customs and beliefs, inevitably displays as arrogance or a sort of holier-than-though religiosity—as *semnotēs*.[80]

What makes the comic Socrates' *semnotēs* particularly funny, though, is that the knowledge and way of life on which he prides himself is, for those on the outside looking in, neither enviable nor venerable, but ridiculous. This reception is parallel to that of the tumbling Thales, who seems to the Thracian woman a fool for taking his observations of the heavens so seriously while he fails to tend to what is beneath his feet. As Ameipsias' speaker mockingly points out, even if Socrates has a small group of followers who value him as some sort of privileged knower, he is *mataiotatos*, the most useless or foolish, among the many, for whom his intellectual activity manifests no apparent value and who would surely question whether Socrates' supposedly privileged knowledge, which leads only to degrading poverty, is really such a privilege after all.

Meanwhile, if Socrates and his students view themselves as a sort of cultural elite who do not deign to lower themselves to the many, the more traditional cultural elite seem to view them as unappealing wonks who have little success to show for all of their earthly sacrifices.[81] In the *Clouds*, this view is expressed most clearly in the initial opinion of Strepsiades' aristocratic son Pheidippides, who is interested above all in the pursuit of horsemanship. When the young man first learns his father's plan to send him to the Thinkery, he forcefully rejects the idea with a strong expression of disgust ("Yuck!" αἰβοῖ), followed by a scornful string of insults pointing to

flourishing of allegorical interpretation of Homer and in archaic lyric, the authors of which often self-consciously posit an audience of the knowing few (e.g., Pi. *O*. 2.82–89, Thgn. 679–682).

[80] Hunter (2014) discusses the *semnos* Hippolytus in this cultural context. For a treatment of Socrates' *semnotēs* in this context, see Redfield (2010).

[81] Cf. Redfield (2010, 49).

Socrates' sorry state ("Wicked men! … Charlatans, pasty-faced, and shoeless!" πονηροί γ' … τοὺς ἀλαζόνας, τοὺς ὠχριῶντας, τοὺς ἀνυποδήτους 102-103). Later, the young aristocrat refers to them as mad men who have nothing of value to teach (840).[82] To the aristocratic young man, Socrates and his circle are odious outsiders who have little good to offer.

We see, then, that the comic Socrates' peculiar combination of arrogance and indigence marks him as a pariah, a peculiar outsider whose values and activity are defined against both those of the many and those of the traditional aristocratic few. We have already seen that the same cannot be said of the comic depictions of Protagoras and Prodicus, who, even as they are mocked, ultimately pursue easily recognizable and enviable goals. Protagoras is shown leveraging his intellectual activity in the service of luxurious living, while Prodicus is held up as a sort of efficacious public intellectual. For all their high-minded prattling and pretensions, such men are ultimately driven by the same basic desires as are pursued both by the common crowd and the aristocratic elite in Old Comedy. This does not seem to be the case for the comic Socrates.

This contrast is interestingly explored in an important and often overlooked comparison between Socrates and the Sophist Gorgias in the *Birds*.[83] For here Socrates the Athenian is characterized by his societal marginalization, while the foreigner Gorgias is situated firmly within Athenian society. The passages in question occur in a wonderful suite of trochaic strophes that punctuate the scene changes in the final part of the play. This song, evoking the poetic-geographic genre of fabulous ethnography, provides an account of the "many novel, wondrous,

[82] See also the interaction between Pheidippides and Socrates at 868-870 and Pheidippides' final statement before undergoing the Socratic education at 1111.

[83] For contrasting views of the play's general treatment of contemporary intellectual culture, cf. Hubbard (1991, ch. 8; 1997) and Dunbar (1997).

marvelous" sights (1470-72) that the eponymous Bird-chorus has seen in their flights over the earth.[84] Within this song, the verses featuring Socrates and Gorgias are constructed so as to suggest two distinct intellectual phenomena—or, to play along with the ethnographic trope of the song, two distinct fabulous peoples, each with their own defining characteristics.

Let us begin with the depiction of Gorgias in the antistrophe of the second half of the song:

> In Phanai, nearby the
> water clock, there is a wicked
> race of Tongue-Bellies.
> They mow and sow
> and strip vines with their tongues
> as they pluck others' figs.
> They are a race of barbarians,
> these Gorgiases and Philippuses.
> It is from these horse-loving
> Tongue-Bellies that
> all over Attica the
> tongue is separately cut during sacrifice.
>
> ἔστι δ᾽ ἐν Φάναισι πρὸς τῇ
> κλεψύδρᾳ πανοῦργον Ἐγ-
> γλωττογαστόρων γένος,
> οἳ θερίζουσίν τε καὶ σπεί-
> ρουσι καὶ τρυγῶσι ταῖς γλώτ-
> ταισι συκάζουσί τε·
> βάρβαροι δ᾽ εἰσὶν γένος,
> Γοργίαι τε καὶ Φίλιπποι.
> κἀπὸ τῶν Ἐγγλωττογαστό-
> ρων ἐκείνων τῶν φιλίππων
> πανταχοῦ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἡ
> γλῶττα χωρὶς τέμνεται. (1694-1705)

Gorgias and a certain Philippus are counted among the marvelous "race of Tongue-Bellies," an

[84] For a detailed treatment of the song, see Rusten (2013).

Aristophanic creation based on the mythical "Hand-Bellies."[85] While this race was originally envisioned as having hands directly attached to their stomachs, it is likely that by the fifth century, a more mundane, rationalizing understanding of the term had already emerged: they are those who fill their bellies by manual labor.[86] Thus the Aristophanic coinage both evokes this tribe and suggests their characteristic activity: they feed themselves with their tongues, that is, by speaking.

Although Gorgias, Philippus, and the other Tongue-Bellies are characterized as *barbaroi*, an epithet which maintains the ethnographic tone and perhaps mocks the Sicilian Gorgias' non-Attic tongue, they are nevertheless portrayed as enmeshed in institutions that are close to home for Aristophanes and his Athenian audience.[87] The precise activity of the Tongue-Bellies is already suggested when these men are said to dwell "in Phanai by the water clock." The most obvious reason for the choice of Phanai, a harbor on the southern coast of Chios, is the name's suggestion of the verb φαίνειν, "to inform, denounce."[88] The Tongue-Bellies are not just public speakers, but a tribe of sycophants. As Nan Dunbar puts it, the reference to the judicial water clock "confirms that the real scene is the Athenian law-courts," with the ethnographic passage presenting not something distantly exotic, but "the painfully familiar."[89] Aristophanes, then, depicts Gorgias as a representative of what he elsewhere presents as a characteristically Athenian phenomenon: the use of clever oratorical skill to cheat one's way into material gain.

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[85] A scholiast *ad loc.* notes that these two were both known as "rhetorical babblers" and that Philippus was also mentioned in Aristophanes' *Farmers.* The identity of this Philippus is otherwise uncertain.

[86] Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*

[87] On the epithet, see Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*

[88] The port also perhaps evokes the import of fine Chian wine, references to which elsewhere connote luxury; cf. the material gathered at Ath. 1.32ff.

[89] Dunbar (1995) *ad loc*.

Given what we know about his career in Athens, it is no surprise that Gorgias is situated in relation to the burgeoning field of "rhetoric."[90] Like Protagoras and Prodicus, the eminent Gorgias first came to Athens in an official capacity, as an ambassador from his home city of Leontini on Sicily in 427 BCE. While this is his only attested visit, it seems likely that there were others in the course of his travels throughout Greece.[91] In any case, the extent to which Gorgias used his oratorical skills to integrate himself into Athenian institutions is clear from his composition of an *epitaphios* honoring those Athenians who died in the war with Sparta.[92] While it is unlikely that he himself took part in forensic oratory in Athens, Gorgias stunned the Athenian people with his novel and mesmerizing speaking style.[93] Based on his performances, writings, and teaching, Gorgias seems to have inspired and to have been closely associated with the Athenians' increasing interest in oratory in its various forms. Indeed, the only other reference to Gorgias in the extant corpus of Old Comedy once again presents him as an inspiration for the sycophantic practitioners of forensic rhetoric.[94]

Thus even if he himself did not appear in the Athenian courtrooms, the comic poets can

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[90] I am sympathetic to Schiappa's (1999) argument that "rhetoric" did not emerge as a *technē* until the fourth-century development. Major (2013) reads Aristophanes' treatment of public speakers in light of Schiappa's work.

[91] Philostr. *VS* 1.9 portrays Gorgias as a mainstay on the festival circuit and Isoc. *Antid*. 156 suggests he never settled in one place for long.

[92] The material is collected by Laks and Most (2016), D 28-30. The text is usually dated around 420, though some place it in the fourth century. Although it is unlikely that this was an official *epitaphios*, it is uncertain whether it was performed in a less official context. See Kennedy (1963, 156) and Loraux (1986, 225-229).

[93] D.H. *Lys*. 3, D.S. 12.53.2-5, Philostr. *VS* 1.9.3, Paus. 6.17.8-9.

[94] *V*. 421, where he is again associated with Philippus through a mock patronymic, suggesting perhaps a student-teacher relationship. It is possible that the Scythian Archer's confused mention of Γόργος … τὸ γραμματέο ("Gorgo the secretary / writer") at Ar. *Th*. 1102-1104 as a potential reference to Gorgias; cf. A. fr. 258 *TrGF*, which suggests that γραμματεύς could have a wider semantic range in poetic contexts.

assimilate Gorgias to the familiar Athenian type of the self-seeking, sycophantic orator who uses his verbal skill to enrich himself at the expense of others.[95] Gorgias is not the only canonical Sophist to be comically portrayed in this way.[96] In Aristophanes' first play, the *Banqueters*, Thrasymachus is associated with the in-vogue neologisms of the up-and-coming rhetoricians such as Alcibiades and Lysistratus.[97] Elsewhere we can detect signs of a similar comic characterization of Antiphon, whom Philostratus claims was a "theme for comedy" in his capacity as a "clever rhetorician" who "sold speeches composed in defiance of justice for large sums of money" (*comic. adesp.* fr. 66 K-A).[98] This helps to explain a scholiast's claim that Plato Comicus mocked Antiphon for his "love of money" (fr. 110 K-A).[99]

We see, then, that even if he himself never appeared in Athenian courts and had interests

[95] For the connection between intellectuals and rhetoric in Old Comedy, see Hubbard (2007) and O'Regan (2017).

[96] In addition to the following, the hellenistic satirist Timon of Phlius calls Prodicus a "money-grabbing hour-speaker" (λαβάργυρος ὡρολογητής *SH* 792). The comic gibe is likely a reference to his work *Hōrai* (Ὧραι), though it perhaps suggests that he too could be comically lumped in with the rhetoricians who use their speeches to gain wealth; cf. Mayhew (2011, 80-81).

[97] Fr. 206 K-A. Storey (1988) questions whether this is a reference to the sophist Thrasymachus, arguing instead that this is the name of a character in the play. Likewise he thinks that (2011, 345) "the wife of Thrasymachus" mentioned in Theopompus' *Women Soldiers* (fr. 57 K-A) is a reference to the historical Thrasymachus, interpretting it as a thematic name chosen for comic effect in the manner of the women at *Th.* 802-806. The poets could, of course, have used Thrasymachus' name, which seems to have suited his intellectual attitude, as a point of mockery, as other contemporaries are said to have done (Arist. *Rh*. 1400b, Ath. 505c). In any case, if it is a reference to the historical Thrasymachus, the point of the joke is not clear.

[98] There is still uncertainty as to whether the would-be oligarch Antiphon of Rhamnous and Antiphon the Sophist are the same man. Most recently Laks and Most (2016, 2-3) argue that they likely are; see also Pendrick (1987).

[99] It seems likely that Antiphon's alleged nickname "speech chef" (*Sud*. α 2744) is derived from comedy. An Antiphon is also mentioned at *V.* 1270, 1301. This reference in particular is complicated by issues of identification; cf. Sommerstein (1983) *ad loc.* and Storey (1985b) for contrasting opinions. If the reference in *Wasps* is to our Antiphon, his voracious appetite fits well with what we have seen about Protagoras above, as does the characterization of Antiphon the Sophist as a man who appreciates the luxuries of life at X. *Mem*. 1.6.

reaching well beyond forensic oratory, Gorgias' appearance at the water clock in the *Birds* stems from the familiar comic character of the clever orator who uses his rhetorical skills to take advantage of Athenian institutions for his own material gain. It is worth noting that although Aristophanes' *Clouds* associates Socrates with a theoretical concern for "speaking well" broadly understood, the character is never explicitly connected with the practice of oratory in that play or elsewhere in the extant comic corpus.[100] This being the case, it is unsurprising that in the strophe of Aristophanes' ethnographically inspired song, Socrates appears as an intellectual of a very different type. Here, in the strophe corresponding to the description of Gorgias and the Tongue-Bellies, the Birds encounter a different people, and with them a different comic representative:

> By the Shadefeet there is
> a swamp where unwashed
> Socrates conjures spirits.
> Peisander came there
> wanting to see the spirit
> that abandoned him in life.
> Bearing a baby camel to sacrifice,
> he cut its throat
> like Odysseus and backed away.
> And up from below came
> to the blood of the camel
> Chaerephon the bat.
>
> πρὸς δὲ τοῖς Σκιάποσιν λί-
> μνη τις ἔστ᾽, ἄλουτος οὗ
> ψυχαγωγεῖ Σωκράτης.

[100] For the disconnect between Strepsiades' practical desires and what he actually encounters in the Thinkery in the *Clouds*, see chapter two, esp. pp. 93-103. Cf. Schiappa (1999, 70-72) and Ford (2001), who rightly reinterpret the education provided in Socrates' Thinkery with less reliance on claims about rhetoric. In his later comic *Silloi*, Timon refers to Socrates as a "sneerer sneering at speakers" (μυκτὴρ ῥητορόμυκτος *SH* 799.3). One peculiar and difficult unattributed fragment (*comic. adesp.* fr. 940 K-A) seems perhaps to suggest a contrast between one character's efficacy in speaking and Socrates' own lack of practical rhetorical skills; cf. Patzer (1994, 75-77).

ἔνθα καὶ Πείσανδρος ἦλθε
δεόμενος ψυχὴν ἰδεῖν ἣ
ζῶντ᾽ ἐκεῖνον προὔλιπε,
σφάγι᾽ ἔχων κάμηλον ἀ-
μνόν τιν᾽, ἧς λαιμοὺς τεμὼν
ὥσπερ οὑδυσσεὺς ἀπῆλθε,
κᾆτ᾽ ἀνῆλθ᾽ αὐτῷ κάτωθεν
πρὸς τὸ λαῖτμα τῆς καμήλου
Χαιρεφῶν ἡ νυκτερίς. (1553-1564)

Here, situated among the Skiapodes, or "Shadefeet," a fabulous race with gigantic, splayed feet that served as sun umbrellas fitting for the hot African or Indian climes in which they were said to live, we find Socrates. He is, perhaps, assimilated to this race due to his often-mocked shoelessness, and the portrayal here continues to emphasize his destitute bodily condition.[101] He is, for example, described as "unwashed" and inhabits a marsh, a natural feature associated with pestilence, foul odors, and miasma.[102] This inability or lack of desire to care for the body is also the thrust of Socrates' other appearance in the *Birds*: in line 1282, Socrates is made a comic punchline, where the habits of "letting the hair grow, starving, and being filthy" culminate in the habit of "Socratizing" (ἐκόμων, ἐπείνων, ἐρρύπων, ἐσωκράτουν).[103] As with the contrast between Socrates and Prodicus noted in the previous section, that between Socrates and Gorgias, who was likewise noteworthy for his extravagant and ostentatious wealth, is sharp.[104]

Yet there is also a telling contrast between the *activity* of Aristophanes' Socrates and his

[101] Habitually going unshod leads to a widening of the feet. Cf. Byron's likewise mocking presentation of Socrates in *The Deformed Transformed*: "What! that low, swarthy, short-nosed, round-eyed satyr, / With the wide nostrils and Silenus' aspect, / The splay feet and low stature!"

[102] On the connotations of marshes, see Borca (2002). The marsh is also suggestive of the underworld, as at *Ra*. 181-220.

[103] Dunbar (1995) prints ἐσωκράτων, the sense of which she prefers to the majority reading that I print here; see her note *ad loc*.

[104] Ael. *VH* 12.32, Cic. *De or*. 3.32.129, Plin. *HN* 33.83, Paus. 10.18.7, Philostr. *VS* 1.9.4-5; though cf. Isoc. *Antid*. 155-156.

Gorgias. As we saw above, although the "Tongue-Bellies" are characterized as a foreign phenomenon in accordance with the ethnographic scene of the song, Gorgias' association with the water clock, and thus with forensic oratory, assimilated the foreigner to Athenian society. Aristophanes makes the exact opposite move in depicting the Athenian Socrates, who is shown "conjuring up the spirits" of the dead.[105] Scholars of ancient philosophy have been most interested in this passage for its description of Socrates' association with *psychagōgia*, the use of which term does indeed have important implications for our understanding of the historical Socrates' activity and Plato's subsequent depiction of Socratic philosophy.[106] What is more useful for our understanding of the comic characterization of Socrates, though, is his assimilation to the figure of the *goēs*, a sort of private religious expert who employed magical techniques to facilitate interaction between the living and the dead.[107] Although *goēteia* had likely been part of everyday Greek life since the archaic period, these phenomena remained a foreign or exotic concept in the Greek cultural imagination. Thus Socrates' intellectual activity appears as something alien to the everyday experience of the average Athenian.[108] In this way, the portrayal of Socrates here is a continuation of Aristophanes' earlier characterization of Socrates' Thinkery as the home of a sort of exclusive initiatory mystery cult whose members partake in strange, esoteric rites.[109] It is worth noting as well that within the terms of this investigation, the image of

[105] The scene seems to parody both the *nekuia* of Hom. *Od*. 11 and Aeschylus' *Psychagōgoi*; see Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.*

[106] See Bordoy (2020), Moore (2013), and Asmis (1996).

[107] A. Bowie (1998, 112-124) makes a detailed argument for the characterization of Socrates as a *goēs* in the context of the *Clouds*. On the *goēs* and attitudes toward the figure, see Johnston (1999 82-123), Ogden (2001, esp. ch 7 and "Conclusion"), Edmonds (2019, 379-396).

[108] The spirit Socrates leads up is the ghostly Chaerephon, Socrates' equally idiosyncratic companion; cf. similar descriptions of Chaerephon's complexion at *Nu*. 102 and 504, *V*. 1412, Ar. fr. 584 K-A, Eup. fr. 253 K-A. On Chaerephon, see Moore (2013).

[109] On the connection between the *goēs* and mystery religion, see Johnston (1999, 105-108).

Socrates as a *goēs* captures well what Blumenberg calls the "exoticism" of the theoretical attitude.

Thus if Gorgias' intellectual activity is associated with the forensic oratory that is so important to the life of the city, Socrates' is situated at the periphery of Athenian society, almost as if he and his fellow feeble spirits exist in another world entirely.[110] And Socrates' *semnotēs* means that his miserable bodily condition can be humorously exploited as either his *inability* to take care of his bodily needs or his contemptuous *indifference* to the concerns of the many, including the pleasures of the body which feature so prominently in comedy.[111] If it is at first easy to dismiss Socrates and those around him as over-arrogant quacks whose intellectual activity is in reality of little merit and leads only to personal degradation, there is nevertheless an esoteric mystique to their dedicated pursuit of that activity, which can thereby be assimilated to a type of religious magic.[112] What at one time appears as self-serious *semnotēs* can at another appear as a sort of privileged ascetic power. Thus in the comparison with Prodicus, Socrates is

[110] Cf. *Nu*. 94, where "clever spirits" (ψυχῶν σοφῶν) are said to inhabit the Thinkery.

[111] One possible exception to this ascetic portrayal of Socrates is suggested by a claim made by the author of the anonymous *Life of Isocrates* that "the comic poets are wont to mock great men for the sake of laughter, as when they bring Socrates on as a lover of boys." The source is late, though, and gives us little to go off; nor is there any suggestion in the extant corpus of Old Comedy that Socrates was mocked for engaging in pederastic practices. On this piece of evidence, see Patzer (1994, 77-78).

[112] It should be noted here that the characterization of intellectual activity, particularly rhetoric, as having a sort of magical efficacy is attested elsewhere in the fifth century. This is particularly true for Gorgias, who claimed that he was present when his teacher Empedocles performed magic (D.L. 8.58-59; see recently Faraone 2019) and who throughout the *Encomium of Helen* characterizes *logos* in relation to magic. Segal (1962) and de Romilly (1975) remain standard accounts; for a more recent treatment, see Fournier (2013). The poets of Old Comedy do not, to my knowledge, ever make a connection between rhetoric and magic, and despite the Platonic Socrates' later connection between *psychagōgia* and rhetoric (on which, see n. 106 above), I see no indication that the depiction of Socrates here is meant to implicate him as a "magical" rhetorician.

made ridiculous by juxtaposing his haughtiness with his destitute condition; but the comparison with Gorgias renders Socrates ridiculous for the solemn seriousness with which he pursues his strange, otherworldly activity. Both of these are, of course, exploited to comic effect, and both ultimately stem from the characterization of the comic Socrates' dogged dedication to his intellectual activity.

Conclusions

As with the distinction between the ineffectual, indigent Socrates and the wealthy, competent Protagoras and Prodicus, the comparison between Socrates and Gorgias helps us to see how the comic Socrates is characterized in opposition to these canonical Sophists. While they are associated with a familiar form of efficacious—and sometimes cunning—intelligence, which they use in the service of material gain, Socrates is shown to lack any ability or desire to tend to his basic bodily needs, marking his intellectual activity as a stranger phenomenon in the eyes of the comic poets. Far from manifesting any contradiction of characterization, the comic Socrates is remarkably consistent in his leading traits. His poverty and his rejection of the concerns of "the many" distinguish him as a sort of theoretical philosopher *avant la lettre*, a thinker who pursues his intellectual activity for its own sake rather than for any sort of practical ends—or as I have been calling him, a prototheoretical philosopher. In this, he is sharply distinguished from the comic portrayal of Sophists such as Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias, whom the poets depict using their intellectual acumen as a means to achieve a very practical ends of earthly pleasures and public esteem.

Considering the comic characterization of Socrates in relation to the so-called Sophists can thus help us to see how this character stands for a way of life that is conceptually related to the

bios theōrētikos. Yet any attempt to come to fuller understanding of this character must take into account the more substantial evidence of the *Clouds*, the play that is largely constructed around the character of Socrates. In the following chapter, then, I will turn to a close consideration of the characterization of Socrates in Aristophanes' great comic send-up of contemporary intellectual culture.

Chapter Two

Socrates in the *Clouds*

Introduction and Overview

In the previous chapter, we saw that the poets of Old Comedy consistently presented Socrates as a thinker who is so concerned with his intellectual pursuits that he fails to take care of the basic needs of the body. As such, he can be said to represent a sort of theoretical philosopher *avant la lettre*, someone who pursues knowledge as an end in itself without any concern for its practical use. In terms of comic characterization, Socrates was sharply distinguished from the intellectuals who would become the canonical Sophists. In their appearances in Old Comedy, Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias combine an efficacious intelligence with a worldly desire for typical comic goods such as wealth, privilege, and bodily pleasures. The comic Socrates, then, can be said to represent a distinct type of intellectual, what I have been calling the prototheoretical philosopher.

In this chapter, I bring these findings to bear on Aristophanes' *Clouds* as I reassess Aristophanes' characterization of Socrates in that play. While the fragments of the comic corpus can offer otherwise inaccessible insights into Old Comedy's portrayal of a range of fifth-century intellectuals, the *Clouds* ultimately remains our most valuable source for understanding the comic reception of Socrates and contemporary intellectual culture. As we will see in chapter four, Aristophanes' mockery of Socrates' way of life in the *Clouds* also has a particularly important place in Plato's attempt to define and defend his understanding of "philosophy." It is thus important that we understand the precise intellectual phenomenon that Aristophanes' Socrates is meant to represent.

In examining Aristophanes' Socrates within the broader structure and themes of the *Clouds*, I

argue that his presentation of the character is essentially consistent with what we saw in the broader corpus of Old Comedy. Socrates is an unworldly and impractical theorist who pursues his researches with no concern for practical benefits. To demonstrate that this is the case, I consider the ways in which Socrates is characterized in opposition to the play's protagonist, the farmer Strepsiades. I argue that these two characters are mutually defined: the airy and theoretically minded Socrates is established as a perfect comic foil to the earthy and practically minded Strepsiades, and *vice versa.* I show how the tension between the two perspectives of these characters is the driving force of much of the humor of the play: while Strepsiades enters the Thinkery looking for concrete, actionable solutions for escaping his debt, Socrates and his students are comic precisely for their failure to engage in any practically useful activity. As we saw in the introduction in our analysis of Plato's anecdote about Thales, the comic clash between such mutually exclusive attitudes plays an important role in conceptualizing theoretical activity and its adherents.

In the previous chapter, I note that Kenneth Dover continues to loom large in scholarship on the *Clouds* and on the Aristophanic Socrates.[1] On his reading, which is still widely accepted, Socrates is assimilated to the so-called Sophists in that he is depicted as a paid teacher of forensic rhetoric understood as the art of persuasion. I also draw attention to the fact that such a unified understanding of the Sophists is a post-Platonic development and is essentially

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[1] Dover (1968). Dover's influence is attributable both to his authority and to the wide dissemination of his view: an abridged student edition of the book was published in 1970, its introductory essay on the play's portrayal of Socrates was reprinted in Vlastos (1971), and its arguments are reinforced in Dover (1972); his remains the standard edition of the *Clouds*. Nussbaum's (1980, 44-50) post-Dover overview of approaches to the problem of the Aristophanic Socrates remains useful. Additional contributions, to name only some, include: Gelzer (1956), Rossetti (1974), Patzer (1993), Vander Waerdt (1994), Edmunds (2004, 2006, 2007), Konstan (2011), Laks and Saetta Cottone (2013), and Moore (2015).

anachronistic in the fifth century. Our previous consideration of the individual Sophists in Old Comedy, meanwhile, turned up no evidence to suggest that the comic poets associated the wealth of Protagoras, Prodicus, and Gorgias with the particular practice of teaching for pay; only the last was at all associated with the practice of oratory. Socrates was certainly never associated with either. Such findings should make us skeptical about attempts to apply Plato's understanding of the Sophists to Old Comedy.

While this is not the occasion for a full-scale revision of Dover's framework for interpreting the *Clouds*, it is necessary to address one important implication of his particular understanding of the Aristophanic Socrates as a Sophist. For by importing the Platonic framework of Sophists as teachers for hire, Dover and his followers also tend to import the Platonic critique of such activity: in claiming that the Aristophanic Socrates teaches for payment, they also suggest that there is something venal about the Thinkery, that Socrates' intellectual activity therein is ultimately motivated not by the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake but by his desire for material gain. Yet as we saw in chapter one, the comic Socrates' complete indifference toward worldly honors and wealth is crucial for understanding this character as a prototheoretical philosopher. It is important, then, that in considering the *Clouds*, we revisit this longstanding c*ommunis opinio* regarding Aristophanes' characterization of Socrates as a teacher for pay.

This is not to say that Dover's interpretation has previously gone unchallenged, nor that the image of Socrates as a sort of absentminded theorist has been completely ignored. Scholars in the history of philosophy, particularly those who seek to use the play as a source of information about the activity of historical Socrates, have often taken issue with Dover's account of the

Aristophanic Socrates as a Sophist who teaches for payment.[2] Meanwhile, brief articles by Peter Green, Leonard Woodbury, and Joachim Althoff have focused on individual scenes to show how much of the humor of the play derives from the abstract, theoretical attitude of Socrates.[3] Yet Dover's image of the venal "sophistic" Socrates has remained entrenched in the minds of specialists and non-specialists alike, leading to a relative neglect of the prototheoretical Socrates that I explore here. In this chapter, then, I demonstrate that Aristophanes' Socrates is characterized not by any mercenary aspect of his educational program, but by his complete dedication to the pursuit of intellectual activity as an end in itself.

In pursuing this line of interpretation in chapter one, we noted that the body of evidence examined there had certain limitations: the fragments featuring Socrates and the Sophists were relatively sparse and often survived without as much contextual information as we would like. Furthermore, the extant material is preserved by authors whose own programmatic agendas have likely shaped the material they record. In the case of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, we are lucky enough to have an entire extant play in which Socrates is at the center of the action for some 1,100 lines.

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[2] See, e.g., the spirited series of articles by Kleve (1983, 1987, 1989); cf. also Rossetti (1974), Tomin (1988, 1987), Vander Waerdt (1994), and Newell (1999). For an early and still informative defense of Aristophanes' portrayal, see Taylor (1911) with response by Petrie (1911); other scholars who also defend the historicity of Aristophanes' Socrates—which is usually taken to mean his compatibility with the Platonic Socrates—in some respects include Nussbaum (1980), E. Bowie (1998), Noël (2000), Edmunds (2004), Rashed (2009), Broackes (2009), Moore (2015).

[3] Green (1979), Woodbury (1980), and Althoff (1993). Also of note here is the line of interpretation developed from Strauss (1980), who understands Aristophanes' Socrates as a sort of theoretical thinker who suffers from a lack of prudence or practical wisdom; for a good example of Strauss-inspired work on Aristophanes, see the essays in Mhire and Frost (2014), which includes an insightful essay by Stauffer on Strauss's book itself. Hubbard (1991, 88-112) analyzes the play in similar terms, though on firmer philological footing; for readings of the *Clouds* influenced by Hubbard, see, e.g., O'Regan (1992), Vander Waerdt (1994), and Holmes (2019).

Nevertheless, in trying to understand the characterization of Socrates in the *Clouds* we are faced with another set of methodological difficulties. There are two factors to which I would like to draw particular attention, one related specifically to the text of the *Clouds*, one related to Aristophanes' approach toward characterization in general.[4]

The *Clouds* is a play with a unique and notoriously difficult textual history. Initially produced in 423 BCE, the version of the play that has come down to us is now widely accepted to be an unperformed and incomplete revision of the original production.[5] While the compositional date of the extant version is unknown, internal historical references have led most scholars to believe that it was abandoned sometime around 416 BCE. In a genre as topical and timely as Athenian Old Comedy, such a gap in information is no small matter. Furthermore, readers have often taken apparent peculiarities and inconsistencies in the play as a result of its status as an incomplete revision. Early scholars in particular often attempted to sift out material composed for the second version of the play from that belonging to the first.[6] While recent editors and readers have been more hopeful in treating the extant play as a coherent whole, we must acknowledge the extent to which the textual problems of the play can undermine efforts to piece together a consistent, holistic account of the Aristophanic Socrates.

Yet even if we could be certain that the extant version of the *Clouds* is a holistically revised,

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[4] Both of these methodological points will play a significant role in my interpretation of a joke about Hyperbolus' education in particular; see pp. 109-112.

[5] For an overview of the evidence related to the two versions and the textual history, see Dover (1968, lxxx-cxxxv). The "publication" history of the written version of the play is also uncertain; for further thoughts, see Henderson (1993), Rosen (1997). On the debated question of whether the extant version was revised with performance or readership in mind, see Revermann (2006, Appendix C); Marshall (2012) argues the minority view that the extant version was also performed.

[6] Many of these efforts are recorded in Starkie (1911) *passim*; see, e.g., his comments *ad* 412, 492, 804, 1115, 1503, etc.

internally coherent "final draft," there would remain the more general problem of Aristophanes' mode of characterization. As scholars such as Michael Silk and Angus Bowie have recently emphasized, the stylistic mobility and attendant discontinuity that is such an essential feature of Aristophanic poetry can be felt also in his treatment of character.[7] In other words, the poet generally shows little concern for creating the sort of consistent, naturalistic characters that would become the norm in later dramatic genres. While Aristophanes certainly makes efforts toward characterization, he generally tends to subordinate consistency of character to dramatic elements such as humor, plot, and theme.

Thus, in order to provide a laugh, advance the plot, or draw out a theme, any Aristophanic character can take on a voice, make a statement, or act in a way that might seem "out of character" if consistency were Aristophanes' poetic goal. While it has been convincingly argued that the *Clouds* shows some signs of experimenting with a more stable form of characterization––particularly in the domestic dealings of Strepsiades, who demonstrates enough stability of character that some have even seen in him embryonic attempts at naturalistic character development—the play still demonstrates the mobility and discontinuity of style that are hallmarks of Aristophanic drama.[8] The character of Socrates, whose presence is often tantamount to that of a comedic foil and whose role is significantly diminished after the introduction of the Stronger and Weaker Arguments a little over halfway through the play, seems sometimes to display just such mobility.

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[7] Silk (2000, 207-255), A. Bowie (2018)

[8] Indeed, the eponymous Cloud-chorus is, to borrow Silk's term for the phenomenon, one of the most "recreative" characters in Aristophanic comedy: not only is their identity connected to their ability to change shapes, but their attitude and relationship toward all of the other characters undergo an extraordinary and unexplained change over the course of the play; though Silk (2000, 360 n. 19) otherwise stresses that the *Clouds* is the least discontinuous of Aristophanes' plays.

With both of these methodological difficulties in mind, I do not claim to present a definitive, exclusionary reading of the Aristophanic Socrates. Rather, my goal here is to draw out and demonstrate the significance of what I see as the thematic core of Aristophanes' characterization of Socrates, what I would call, with Blumenberg, the "theoretical attitude" that characterizes him as a prototheoretical philosopher.

To do so, I first focus on the thematic significance of Strepsiades' characterization as an *agroikos*. While such rustics are familiar from other Aristophanic context, this character type takes on new significance in the *Clouds*, where it is consistently contrasted with the "airiness" of the intellectual activity of the Thinkery. By considering how Aristophanes employs the connotations of the earth and the sky, I demonstrate that while Strepsiades' connection to the earth reflects his concrete, practical way of thinking, Socrates' association with the air characterizes his thinking as an abstract, insubstantial phenomenon.

From here, I show how this poetic treatment of character maps onto our understanding of Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher. The mutually defined characters of Strepsiades and Socrates, metaphorically represented in the play by their respective associations with the earth and the sky, are defined by their different intellectual attitudes: while the former enters the Thinkery with a practical end-goal in mind, something solid that he can hold in his hands, the latter spends his time there pursuing his airy insubstantial inquiries, unconcerned with practical benefits. I consider in particular the thematization of Socrates' "uselessness," a significant theme in the subsequent discourse about theoretical philosophy.

In the final section, I turn to the above-mentioned interpretation of Socrates as a greedy teacher for pay. After considering the topic of teaching fees in the context of fifth-century educational practices, I review the textual evidence that has been taken to suggest that

Aristophanes characterizes Socrates as such. In doing so, I demonstrate that Aristophanes does very little to characterize Socrates as undertaking his intellectual activity as a means to make money. Rather, his poverty and lack of concern for money is pointedly contrasted with Strepsiades' money-grubbing miserliness.

Working the Earth, Worshipping the Sky

Let us begin, then, by considering some of the imagery of the play as it relates to the characters of Socrates and Strepsiades. In particular, I consider the thematic significance of the rustic Strepsiades' association with the countryside and the earth as it is contrasted with Socrates' association with the clouds and the air. By establishing how the play's poetic imagery contributes to the characterization of Socrates, we will be in a better position to analyze other ways in which Aristophanes characterizes Socrates in relationship to his pursuit of useless intellectual activity that provides no concrete benefits, one of the key characteristics that makes him a prototheoretical philosopher. With this in mind, let us turn to the prologue, where we are first introduced to Strepsiades and his earthly concerns.

The *Clouds* opens with a monologue by Strepsiades, an old man from the rural deme of Kikynna. Strepsiades pines for the days of yore, before personal and political problems interrupted his enjoyment of the simple pleasures of farm life: "I once had," he laments, "the sweetest country life" (ἄγροικος βίος 43). His days were passed outside, "musty, unswept, lying about, teeming with bees and sheep and olive cakes" (44) or driving "the goats from Rocky Bottom wearing a goatskin jacket" (69-70). Now, though, we find our anguished hero unable to sleep in the middle of the night, having left the bed where he was being eaten alive not by bed bugs, but "by expenses, stable fees, and debts" (12-13). These debts have been accrued, we learn,

because of Strepsiades' son, Pheidippides, a young man with an aristocrat's taste for fine horses. While his son sleeps soundly, Strepsiades suffers as he watches the waning moon, which indicates that his debts are coming due. To solve his problems, Strepsiades comes up with a plan: he will send his son to the Thinkery to learn how to win arguments, a skill he plans to use in order to escape the pursuit of his creditors. Strepsiades' son refuses, and although Strepsiades knows that he himself will make a poor student, he decides he must become one anyway.

Such is the basic setup of the plot of the *Clouds* as established in the prologue. The simple country-dweller must get an education so he can use his smarts to cheat his creditors and once more enjoy his carefree life on his farm. In this respect, Strepsiades shares the functional role of other Aristophanic comic heroes. Like Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians*, Trygaeus in the *Peace*, and Chremylos in the *Wealth,* he is a sort of "everyman" Athenian farmer.[9] Like them, he is suffering from his present state of affairs, which has barred him from enjoying the simple pleasures of his rural life; like them, he will attempt to remedy this by recourse to some great plan which he believes will bring him his desired benefits; like them, he will have to overcome considerable obstacles and to endure unforeseen consequences in the wake of his great plan.

While the rest of the play will see this set-up played out, the organizing structure of Aristophanic comedy is, as Silk has persuasively argued, less often manifested in the particular plot of any given play than in "a pattern of mutually defining emblems," or an "antithesis" that "tends to be articulated in the concrete metonymic form of conflicting individuals or groups."[10]

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[9] On this character type, see Ribbeck (1888), Compton-Engle (1999), Konstantakos (2005), Rosen (2006). For an analysis of the scholarly concept of the so-called "comic hero," first introduced by Whitman (1964), see Rosen (2014)

[10] Silk (2000, 289). Silk stresses that these contrasts are *the* organizing element of Aristophanic comedy and are thus not confined to any individual character.

Although a number of mutually defining elements are present in the *Clouds*, there can be no doubt that the duo of Socrates and Strepsiades is the central structuring principal of the first half of the play.[11] As one pole of a mutually defined pair with Socrates, Strepsiades' status as a man of the countryside takes on a significant new thematic role, characterizing his concrete, earthy outlook in opposition to the airy, abstract pursuits of Socrates.[12] By recognizing these two as a mutually defined pair, we can better see how Aristophanes uses the comic hero's status as a man of the earth in order to define Socrates as his opposite: a man with his head constantly in the clouds. Understanding the thematic significance of the dichotomy will, in turn, help us to understand the most salient features of the Aristophanic Socrates.

Socrates and his companions' association with the sky is pervasive and has been well studied.[13] The most prominent instance of this association is, of course, the eponymous Cloud chorus, those heavenly, airy entities who Socrates claims are "the divinities" of the Thinkery (ταῖς ἡμετέραισι δαίμοσιν 253).[14] The Clouds in this respect are closely connected to the

[11] Other mutually defining pairs in the play include, e.g., the rustic Strepsiades and his aristocratic wife, the older father and the younger son, and the Stronger and Weaker Arguments.

[12] The contrast between the two is sometimes read in the context of the country-city dichotomy that Aristophanes often exploits. While "modern" education is sometimes associated with social urbanity, there is nothing about the Thinkery or Socrates himself that is particularly urbane. For a concise overview of comedy's idealization of the countryside in opposition to the city, see Wilkins (2000, 103-107) and Dover (1974, 112-113).

[13] For a thorough overview, see Gelzer (1956), Newiger (2000, 50-74); cf. also Taillardat (1962, 249-252).

[14] Dover's (1968) argument for why Aristophanes chose a chorus of clouds seems to me uncharacteristically short sighted, beginning as it does from the assertion that "there were three possibilities open to Aristophanes for the chorus of a play ridiculing intellectuals … : students, i.e. wealthy young men entranced by the teaching of the sophists who battened on them … ; abstractions, e.g. νοήματα, φροντίδες, μέριμναι, λόγοι; and the phenomena of the heavens" (lxvi). The fragments of Old Comedy suggest that there were essentially endless possibilities for any given comic chorus in any given play. I can thus see no reason to suppose that Aristophanes' choice was so circumscribed.

characterization and conceptualization of the intellectual activity of Socrates, the head of the Thinkery. It is now generally accepted that Socrates' cloud worship is a reference to contemporary philosophical doctrines, in particular, the air-monism of thinkers like Diogenes of Apollonia or Archelaus.[15] While a philosophical parody is likely at play here, I am more concerned with the general poetical and thematic function that the Clouds and related imagery have in the play. In this respect, the Clouds' chief quality is what Segal calls "their 'up-in-the-air' ethereality."[16] The goddesses, who lack a solid form, are introduced in relationship to their ever-changing shiftiness, "they become whatever they want" (348).

As Clouds, they, like the thoughts they inspire in the inhabitants of the Thinkery, are literally insubstantial, and thus hard to grasp. In this aspect, they are the most prominent example in the play of a cluster of poetic imagery traditionally used to express a range of shifty immateriality. Thus, Strepsiades initially has difficulty seeing the Clouds (324-327), even as their voices inspire in him a desire to "speak subtly and to twitter slightly about smoke" (λεπτολογεῖν … καὶ περὶ καπνοῦ στενολεσχεῖν 320). He later confesses that before Socrates set him aright, he thought that Clouds were merely "mist, dew, and smoke" (ὁμίχλην καὶ δρόσον αὐτὰς ἡγούμην καὶ καπνὸν εἶναι 330). The Clouds themselves are associated with—or are conceived as variations of—such substanceless "divinities" as Chaos or Void (τὸ Χάος 424), Tongue or Speech (τὴν Γλῶτταν 424), Respiration (τὴν Ἀναπνοήν 627), Air (τὸν Ἀέρα 627, 667), Shiftiness or Boondoggle (Ἀπαιόλη 1150), and, last but not least, the Heavenly Whirl (αἰθέριος δῖνος, 379-380, 828, 1471-1473). The insubstantiality of the Clouds extends to their pale and emaciated worshippers, who

[15] Betegh (2013, 2016), Vander Waerdt (1994), Laks (1983, 165-168).

[16] Segal (1996, 148). The article is otherwise an important contribution to the study of the Cloud-chorus.

are first referred to as “spirits” (ψυχῶν 94).[17]

Meanwhile, the act of thinking itself is consistently embodied as a movement upward toward the Clouds, whom Socrates first summons to “appear aloft to the thinker” (ἄρθητε, φάνητ᾽, ὦ δέσποιναι, τῷ φροντιστῇ μετέωροι 266). To think as the researchers of the Thinkery do, one must “come together with the Clouds” (συγγενέσθαι ταῖς Νεφέλαισιν 252). This is comically demonstrated in the most famous scene of the play, namely Socrates’ entrance, in which he describes the importance of his effort to lift himself up into the sky while floating overhead, “treading the air” (ἀεροβατῶ 225):[18]

> I never could have
> accurately grasped the meteorological phenomena
> if I had not suspended my mind and mixed my
> subtle thought with its kindred air.
> if, being on the ground, I had observed what’s up there from down here
> I never would have gotten it. For the earth, you see, forcibly
> draws to itself the moisture of thought.

> οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε
> ἐξηῦρον ὀρθῶς τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα
> εἰ μὴ κρεμάσας τὸ νόημα καὶ τὴν φροντίδα,
> λεπτὴν καταμείξας εἰς τὸν ὅμοιον ἀέρα.
> εἰ δ᾽ ὢν χαμαὶ τἄνω κάτωθεν ἐσκόπουν,
> οὐκ ἄν ποθ᾽ ηὗρον· οὐ γὰρ ἀλλ᾽ ἡ γῆ βίᾳ
> ἕλκει πρὸς αὑτὴν τὴν ἰκμάδα τῆς φροντίδος. (227-233)

Socrates’ “thought” (τὴν φροντίδα) is “fine” or “subtle” (λεπτὴν), and to be engaged it must mix together with the likewise fine air. Thus Socrates literally tries to lift himself into the air above as the earth pulls him down. The teacher will later encourage Strepsiades to take up a similar

[17] Cf. also 500ff., where Strepsiades is told that if he studies at the school, his appearance will become similar to Chaerephon’s, i.e. he will look “half-dead” (ἡμιθνὴς).

[18] On the staging, see Revermann (2006, 187-189).

practice, telling him to "cut loose [his] subtle thought" (σχάσας τὴν φροντίδα / λεπτὴν 740-741) and to "unreel [his] thought into the air, like a May bug bound to the ground by its foot" (ἀποχάλα τὴν φροντίδ᾽ εἰς τὸν ἀέρα / λινόδετον ὥσπερ μηλολόνθην τοῦ ποδός 762-763). Thought involves a move away from the hard earth up into the ethereal sky.

While Strepsiades at first claims that the presence of the Clouds has caused his "soul to take flight" upward (ἡ ψυχή μου πεπότηται 319), we soon learn that he is constitutionally incapable of the sort of thought that the upward ascent to the Clouds represents. If Socrates and his companions are constantly lifting themselves up into the air, Strepsiades, bound to the earth below, is the clod who "forcefully draws them down." We already saw in the prologue that Strepsiades, as a self-identifying *agroikos* (43, 47), or rustic, is tied to the land. In the Thinkery, this rusticity becomes an important characteristic in establishing the farmer as an earthy foil to the airy Socrates and his students. This initial introduction of Socrates would have made for a striking visual representation of the thematic tension that Aristophanes exploits in the rest of the play: Socrates is lifted high above the stage, Strepsiades is firmly planted on the ground below.[19] Strepsiades wears the dark, ruddy mask of the typical comic player, Socrates wears the bright white mask typically associated with women—and in this play, with the Cloud-women in particular.[20] Socrates explains the nature of thought, Strepsiades cannot understand a word of it.

Even before Socrates' entrance, though, the tension between the character of Strepsiades and that of the denizens is explored in terms of the farmer's rusticity. Attention is drawn to

[19] On the dynamics of height in the play, see Morosi (2018).

[20] On Socrates' appearance, see Revermann (2006, 189-19). The conjecture is based on the consistent references to the pale appearances of the inhabitants of the Thinkery (e.g., 103, 117, 1112). For the white female mask, see L. Stone (1981, 22–27). For the Cloud-women and their whiteness, see 340-355.

Strepsiades' occupation in his first interaction with a student on the doorstep of the Thinkery. Here Strepsiades' knocking has disrupted the thinking of the student:

> Stud.: Goddamnit you idiot,
> kicking the door so very unstudiously
> And making my newfound notion miscarry.
> Strep.: Forgive me, for I live far off in the fields.
> But tell me about this miscarriage.
>
> ΜΑ. ἀμαθής γε νὴ Δί', ὅστις οὑτωσὶ σφόδρα
> ἀπεριμερίμνως τὴν θύραν λελάκτικας
> καὶ φροντίδ' ἐξήμβλωκας ἐξηυρημένην.
> ΣΤ. σύγγνωθί μοι· τηλοῦ γὰρ οἰκῶ τῶν ἀγρῶν.
> ἀλλ' εἰπέ μοι τὸ πρᾶγμα τοὐξημβλωμένον. (135-138)

Strepsiades excuses his disruption of the student's thinking by claiming that he is from the far-off "country" (τῶν ἀγρῶν). As a rustic, Strepsiades behaves in a way that is "unstudious" or "unthoughtful" and cannot help but get in the way of the intellectual speculation going on within.[21] Here, the sole point of contact between the student and Strepsiades is the reference to a "miscarriage," which terminology the old man is familiar with from his life on the farm. As he does so often, though, he fails to recognize that the student speaks metaphorically of the miscarriage of an idea.[22]

This rustic life and attitude are consistently connected to the farmer's inability to understand and adapt to the new education of the Thinkery. When the farmer is first introduced to the Clouds-goddesses, he nevertheless continues to swear by the goddess with whom *he* as a farmer has a special relationship, Earth (364, 366); and later, even after Socrates has tried to disabuse

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[21] On the intellectual connotations of μέριμνα and related vocabulary, see Dover (1968) *ad loc*.

[22] At the same time that Socrates' thought is conceived as insubstantial, Aristophanes often humorously draws attention to Strepsiades' understanding that ideas are concrete objects; cf. Taillardat (1962, 250-252).

him of his belief in the Olympians, he still swears by the agricultural goddess Demeter (455; cf. also 121). In a similar vein, Strepsiades, in discussions on the divinity of the Zeus and the Clouds, is particularly concerned with their relationship to the rain (267-268, 367-384).

Strepsiades only succeeds in understanding Socrates when the teacher explains his point using language drawn from rural life (135-139, 372) or from the example of the body (385-394). Likewise, the only lessons from Socrates that stick with the old farmer are those that have to do with his agricultural activity, namely the teacher's prescribed names for his grain mortar and livestock (846-853, 1247-1258). Given Strepsiades' narrow frame of reference for engaging with Socrates, it is fitting that his rural attitude is recurrently blamed for his inability to learn: "By Air," Socrates declares, again suggesting the contrast with his own penchant for the air, "I've never seen a man so rustic (ἄγροικον**)** anywhere" (627-628). He follows up with similar complaints about Strepsiades' country qualities: "Go to hell. How rustic (ἄγροικος**)** and dull you are" (646), "You're boorish (ἀγρεῖος**)** and stupid" (655).

The thematic significance of this tension between Strepsiades' earthy concerns and Socrates' abstract inquiries is made particularly clear in one of the many scenes of comic miscommunication between the two. Here the subject is *metroi*, or "measures":

> Soc. Do you want to learn about measures or about words or rhythms?
> Strep. Measures. For recently I was
> Cheated of two quarts by a grain dealer.
> Soc. That's not what I'm asking about, but rather which measure do
> you think is most beautiful, the three-measure (trimeter) or the four-measure
> (tetrameter)?
> Strep. I think nothing's more beautiful than the gallon.
> Soc. You're talking nonsense, man.
>
> ΣΩ. πότερον περὶ μέτρων ἢ περὶ ἐπῶν ἢ ῥυθμῶν;
> ΣΤ. περὶ τῶν μέτρων ἔγωγ᾽· ἔναγχος γάρ ποτε
> ὑπ᾽ ἀλφιταμοιβοῦ παρεκόπην διχοινίκῳ.

ΣΩ. οὐ τοῦτ᾽ ἐρωτῶ σ᾽, ἀλλ᾽ ὅτι κάλλιστον μέτρον
    ἡγεῖ, πότερον τὸ τρίμετρον ἢ τὸ τετράμετρον;
ΣΤ. ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδὲν πρότερον ἡμιέκτεω.
ΣΩ. οὐδὲν λέγεις, ὤνθρωπε. (638-644)

Strepsiades interprets Socrates' discussion of *metroi*, in the sense of poetic meters, to be about units of measurement, a subject with which he is more familiar from his life on the farm. Thus when Socrates asks whether the trimeter or the tetrameter is the finest poetical meter, he responds with a unit of measurement that cannot be interpreted in poetical terms, a *hemiekton*. We should note here that the point is not that Strepsiades is wrong: as he goes on to point out, two "four-measures" of *choinikes* does indeed equal one *hemiekton* (645). Rather, the joke turns on Strepsiades' inability to abstract from the concrete concerns of his rustic life. For him, the measure in question can only be concrete measurements of grain, not the abstract measure of poetry. Given the gulf between the perspective of the farmer who thinks about concrete objects in concrete terms and the thinker who speaks abstractly about intangible objects of thought, a conversation between the two characters breaks down in a comic misunderstanding.

In this interaction between Socrates and Strepsiades, we can begin to see how the metaphorics of the earth and the sky serve to characterize their contrasting attitudes toward the intellectual activity of the Thinkery itself. As Green has rightly emphasized, much of the humor of the *Clouds* comes from insurmountable differences in the modes of thought of Strepsiades, a rustic peasant who is so unable or disinclined to deal in "abstractions, generalizations, or intellectual metaphors" that he fails to grasp the simplest intellectual concepts, and Socrates, the intellectual elite who has a tendency to "abuse" these abstractions, generalizations, and intellectual metaphors to the extent that they cease to have explanatory meaning to any but his

intellectual companions.[23] While Socrates' mind is drawn to the abstract ideas that the Clouds help him cultivate, Strepsiades' can only comprehend "the specific, concrete, and physical." Strepsiades' interest and understanding extends only to that which he can hold in his hands, making him a perfect comic foil to the denizens of the Thinkery, whose whole activity results only in a stockpile of useless and insubstantial ideas.

Useless Solutions to Practical Problems

Green's observations likewise map nicely onto our interpretation of Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher: the Thinkery deals in airy abstractions which have no substantive form and result in no tangible benefits. Or to put the point in the terms of the current investigation, the poetic imagery of Socrates' airiness is related to his theoretical attitude. Just as Thales' eyes are drawn toward the heavens, Socrates' head is in the clouds. Both pursue their intellectual inquiry not for the sake of any concrete, practical purposes, but as an end in itself; both suffer physical consequences from their absentmindedness. Strepsiades the farmer, on the other hand, is resistant to such abstraction away from his everyday reality and is concerned *only* with the concrete, worldly benefits that he thinks studying in the Thinkery will yield. The tension between the perspective of each of these mutually defined characters brings out the humor in the other: the airy Socrates' theoretical investigations appear to be pointless and silly, while earthy Strepsiades' mental obstinacy makes him a typical comic buffoon.[24] Because my current concern

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[23] Greene (1978). Woodbury (1980), building on Greene's work, makes a similar point, though in terms of the clash between "the popular mind" and "intellectual culture."

[24] Plato likewise recognizes that the laughter can cut both ways, as we will see in ch. 4. For the way in which Aristophanes establishes in his audience a sense of intellectual superiority to Strepsiades and thus encourages laughter at his lack of learning, see Althoff (1993) 112-113.

is in establishing the comic Socrates' place in the genealogy of the *bios theōrētikos*, in this section I focus on how Aristophanes channels this tension to create laughter at the expense of the peculiar intellectual attitude of the head of the Thinkery.

We have already seen in the prologue that Strepsiades turns to the Thinkery looking for practical solutions to his practical problems: he wants to learn the skills necessary for escaping his debts.[25] Thus the introduction and initial characterization of the Thinkery and its purpose are also focalized through Strepsiades and his very concrete concerns. Strepsiades has come up with this plan after a sleepless night of thinking: "So now, thinking the whole night through, I've found a singular shortcut, one that's miraculously monstrous" (νῦν οὖν ὅλην τὴν νύκτα φροντίζων ὁδοῦ / μίαν ηὗρον ἀτραπὸν δαιμονίως ὑπερφυᾶ 75). Strepsiades' nocturnal cogitations (φροντίζων) foreshadow the cogitations that give the Thinkery (Φροντισήριον) its name: Strepsiades thinks up a plan to solve his debt problems by bringing the dilemma to the real thinkers.[26] The Thinkery itself thus represents for him a means to an end. Even the metaphor Strepsiades employs—he has found a "shortcut" (ἀτραπόν)—suggests that his trip to the Thinkery will be expressly goal-oriented.[27]

We see, then, the practical purpose that the Thinkery plays in Strepsiades' plan, which sets into motion the plot of the *Clouds*. As noted in the previous section, though, the comic hero of Aristophanic comedy must overcome considerable obstacles in executing his great plan and

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[25] Cf. Greene (1979, 7): "his outlook is unblushingly utilitarian." Cf. also 202ff., 259, 338-39, 648, 1231, 1283-84.

[26] For φρον- vocabulary in relation to the Thinkery, cf. 101, 137, 155, 189, 215, 225, 226, 229, 233, 236, 266, 414, 456, 695, 697, 700, 723, 724, 735, 740, 741, 762, 857, 951, 1039, 1400, 1503. Xen. *Smp.* 6.6 suggests that the play earned Socrates the nickname of φροντιστής.

[27] The contrast is between a ὁδός, a larger road, and an ἀτραπὸν, a shorter one; cf. Starkie (1911) and Dover (1968) *ad loc.,* as well as the proverbial saying recorded by Photius: ὁδοῦ παρούσης τὴν ἀτραπὸν ζητεῖς (*Suda* o 48).

reaping its benefits. And the situation is no different for Strepsiades and his scheme to escape his debts by studying at the Thinkery. For in treating Thinking as a means to his practical end, he has misunderstood the very nature of that institution. When we enter the Thinkery itself, we quickly find that the place is ill-suited to the practical use that Strepsiades has imagined: Socrates and his students do not specialize in solving practical problems at all, but in thinking through theoretical ones. That this is the case is immediately highlighted in Strepsiades' interaction with the door-keeping pupil whom he meets upon his arrival at the school. As Althoff has argued, the series of anecdotes told by this student of the Thinkery prepares the audience for the presentation of the master of the school himself by establishing the character of Socrates' intellectual activity.[28]

The basic comic conceit of this scene is that the student treats the blatantly useless and silly studies of Socrates with a grand reverence. As we saw in chapter one, there is a comic incongruity between Socrates' *semnotēs* and the activity in which he takes such great pride. When, for example, he tells Strepsiades about the great "mysteries" that can only be revealed to fellow students (140-143), the pupil presents Socrates studying the feet of fleas (138-153). If even Aristotle some seventy-five years later must persuade his students and fellow researchers that the lowest animals, too, are worthy of study, we can only imagine what Aristophanes' audience would have made of the seriousness with which Socrates treats such a contemptible topic.[29] For Aristophanes' Socrates, though, fleas are simply another subject to which he can apply his clever mind: when one bites his companion and jumps onto his own head, he is not concerned with the infestation resulting from the squalid condition of the Thinkery, but curious about how far the insect can jump. The humor of the anecdote is connected to the intellectual

[28] Althoff (2007, esp. 103-104).

[29] Cf. Arist. *PA* I.V.

effort Socrates expends to achieve such a useless piece of information and the student's pride in recounting it.[30]

The student's description of Socrates' second entomological exercise widens the gap between theoretical inquiry and practical benefit even further. Here, Chaerephon has asked Socrates whether he thinks that "gnats hum from their mouths or from their butts." The student explains Socrates' answer in anatomical detail:

> He said that the inside of the gnat
> is narrow, and through this fine space air
> is forced through on its way to the backside,
> then, because it is a hollow orifice attached to a narrow tube,
> the rectum resounds from the force of the air.
>
> ἔφασκεν εἶναι τοὔντερον τῆς ἐμπίδος
> στενόν, διὰ λεπτοῦ δ᾽ ὄντος αὐτοῦ τὴν πνοὴν
> βίᾳ βαδίζειν εὐθὺ τοὐρροπυγίου·
> ἔπειτα κοῖλον πρὸς στενῷ προσκείμενον
> τὸν πρωκτὸν ἠχεῖν ὑπὸ βίας τοῦ πνεύματος. (160-164)

This is a long-winded way to say that the gnat's buzzing is a fart.[31] But it is the movement of the response that is the real source of its humor: the self-serious student's pedantic explanation of the bug's buzzing climaxes in the crude eruption of bodily gas. The student's failure to see that the object of his study is something as common and vulgar as a fart makes him ridiculous.[32] The

[30] Note especially the phrasing used of Socrates' experiment at 152: Socrates "measures up the land" (ἀνεμέτρει τὸ χωρίον) but the land he measures is comically small. Cf. Althoff (2007, 105-106) for how the humor of measuring the leap of the fly stems from the tension between the absolute irrelevance of such information and the effort gone through to obtain it.

[31] Compare, e.g., *Pax* 175-176. For a primer on farts in Aristophanes, see Henderson (1991, 195ff).

[32] For a modern parallel, cf. Swift's definition of the same in *The Benefit of Farting Explained*: "I therefore define a *Fart* to be, 'A Nitro-aerial Vapour exhal'd from an adjacent Pond of Stagnant Water of a Saline Nature, and rarified and sublimed into the Nose of a Microcosmical Alembic, by a gentle Heat of a STERCORARIOUS Balneum, with a strong Empyreuma, and forc'd through the Posteriours by the compressive Power of the expulsive

seriousness with which these researchers pursue their investigations, even on objects as inconsequential as the anuses and gas of gnats, is from a more practical perspective, ridiculous for its uselessness and irrelevance—not to mention its baseness.[33]

This is, in its extreme form, the basic comic thrust of many of the interactions between the denizens of the Thinkery and Strepsiades: the theorists proudly make a show of some sort of abstract, erudite bit of learning which appears, when focalized through the common-sense perspective of Strepsiades and his practical effort to overcome his debts, to be utterly ridiculous in its uselessness. It is a strategy that we have already seen at work in the many episodes from this introduction to the Thinkery that we analyzed in the previous chapters. Socrates' unfortunate encounter with the defecating lizard, his clever cloak stealing, his students' investigation of the "things in the sky and those beneath the earth": each of these episodes exploits to humorous effect the tension between the useless intellectual activities of Socrates and the practical purposes of Strepsiades.

Indeed, throughout the play, the poet uses Strepsiades as a foil to point to the uselessness of the activity and education of Socrates. A good example of this theme comes in Strepsiades' reaction to the student's discourse on the buzzing of the fly:

> It's a bugle, then, the gnat's asshole.
> O thrice blessed he is for this look into its innards!
> How easily a defendant who has seen through
> the inside of the gnat could escape conviction!

Faculty." Cf. also the later comparison between *brontē* ("thunder") and *pordē* ("fart") at 385-394.

[33] For more on the joke and its possible references to contemporary scientific theory, see Althoff (2007, 106-108), where he concludes that the humor is dependent on the uselessness of such knowledge to the "normal" man.

σάλπιγξ ὁ πρωκτός ἐστιν ἄρα τῶν ἐμπίδων.
ὢ τρισμακάριος τοῦ διεντερεύματος.
ἦ ῥᾳδίως φεύγων ἂν ἀποφύγοι δίκην
ὅστις δίοιδε τοὔντερον τῆς ἐμπίδος. (165-168)

Strepsiades' excitement, which in a sharper character would read as sarcasm, drips with dramatic irony.[34] No one but the deluded Strepsiades could possibly draw so direct a connection between the study of an insect's buzzing and the ability to successfully plead a case in court. Part of the humor here is certainly at the expense of the comic buffoon Strepsiades himself. But at the same time, the fact that Strepsiades, having been taken in by excitement of the theoretical inquiries that he so little understands, fails to recognize the utter uselessness of the Socratic experiment only highlights that uselessness for the audience, making it all the more comical.[35]

Strepsiades will continue to defend naively the "usefulness" of the knowledge to be gained from the Thinkery against his son's more clear-sighted objections (840-841). Elsewhere, too, this concern for rendering the education of the Thinkery practically useful is made explicit. A pointed example comes in Strepsiades' attempts to understand the scientific instruments introduced early in his visit to the Thinkery. Immediately upon seeing the peculiar objects, Strepsiades asks, referring specifically to a geometrical tool, "What's the use of this?" (τοῦτ᾽ οὖν τί ἐστι χρήσιμον;

[34] Dover (1968) *ad loc.* Cf. Strepsiades' defense of the "usefulness" of the education of the Thinkery to his son at 840-841, as well as the interaction between Euripides and his Kinsman discussed in ch. 3, pp. 134-136. We should also read Strepsiades' reference to Thales (180), who in the fifth century seems to be a by-word for practical genius, in this this context.

[35] The ability for intellectual language to enthuse and entice the listener is a theme that runs throughout Aristophanes' treatment of intellectuals. The point is made most explicitly in the *Birds* by Peisetairos, who himself knows something about the power of language: "The mind is elevated and man is lifted up by words" (ὑπὸ γὰρ λόγων ὁ νοῦς τε μετεωρίζεται / ἐπαίρεταί τ᾽ ἄνθρωπος 1447-1448). It is noteworthy that both verbs employed here can carry a sense of being raised up by *false* hopes. This, I suggest, is on full display in the situation of Strepsiades: as the Clouds will later comment, he is "in awe and clearly lifted on high" (ἐκπεπληγμένου / καὶ φανερῶς ἐπηρμένου).

201). When the student explains that the tool is used for gathering knowledge about the measurements of the earth, Strepsiades cannot comprehend that such knowledge would not be put to immediate use: he assumes the tool is meant for the "useful" (χρήσιμον 205) purpose of reassessing land to be re-allotted.[36] Later, when Strepsiades begins to become increasingly impatient with the theoretical learning that Socrates presents to him, he inquires with frustration into the practical benefits of his lessons about rhythms: "How will rhythms benefit me in getting my daily bread?" (τί δέ μ' ὠφελήσουσ' οἱ ῥυθμοὶ πρὸς τἄλφιτα; 648). Strepsiades' main concern is to reap practical benefits from his education, as he will later suggest to the creditors whom he refuses to pay (τί γὰρ ἄλλ' ἂν ἀπολαύσαιμι τοῦ μαθήματος; 1231). Once his newly educated son has taught him the justice of father-beating, Strepsiades finally realizes that the usefulness and benefits of this education are far outweighed by the harms, as he sarcastically asks his son "what further benefits" such lessons could provide him in addition to this thrashing (δίδαξον γὰρ τί μ' ἐκ τούτων ἐπωφελήσεις 1442).

Meanwhile, Socrates shows little interest in the practical purposes for which Strepsiades has come to the Thinkery.[37] The education provided by Socrates therein is, as the name of the school would suggest, aimed not at cultivating any particular practical skills but at training students how

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[36] Cf. also the immediately following exchange about the map, where Strepsiades immediately insists that the map be put to practical use. For more information on maps, cf. Althoff (2007, 110-111).

[37] The only possible exceptions occur in the scenes surrounding the *agōn*, which from a dramatic standpoint serves as a bridge from the first half of the play, where the primary focus is on the education of the Thinkery, to the second half of the play, where the focus is on the punishment of Strepsiades for his attempt to use that education to twist justice. It is important to note that Socrates himself has essentially no role in the second half of the play beyond returning Pheidippides to his father, a scene in which Socrates is given only six bland lines and which clearly only serves the dramatic purpose of reuniting father and newly educated son.

to think.[38] After some 400 lines of dialogue between them, Strepsiades finds himself frustrated that Socrates still does not actually know that the old man has only come to the Thinkery for the specific purpose of finding a means to escape his debts (737-739).[39] An earlier interaction culminates in a telling exchange. When Socrates continues to ignore Strepsiades' increasingly desperate pleas to move on to teaching him the argument that will allow him to achieve this goal (655-657) come to a head: "Strep. But why are we learning all these things that we already know? / Soc. For no reason at all, by Zeus" (ΣΤ. ἀτὰρ τί ταῦθ' ἃ πάντες ἴσμεν μανθάνω; / ΣΩ. οὐδὲν μὰ Δί'. 693-694).[40] Even if a passing comment, the lines neatly display the different attitudes of Socrates and Strepsiades toward the intellectual activity of the Thinkery. For Strepsiades, there must be some practical reason, some "why" (τί), for learning the variety of abstruse information so strangely abstracted from the readily apparent facts of everyday life; for Socrates and his students, though, the question of some external "why" never enters into the equation. There is no "why" for his investigations: from the perspective of the theoretical attitude, these subjects are of interest for their own sake.

In analyzing the way in which Socrates and Strepsiades are mutually defining characters, I hope to have demonstrated that the theoretical attitude pervading the Thinkery is the crucial

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[38] See, e.g., the culminating lessons in techniques of thinking at 731-790. Schiappa (1999) has rightfully stressed that the emphasis on learning "to speak" (λέγειν) should not be construed so narrowly as lessons in the practice of rhetoric: learning to speak correctly is closely connected to learning to think (cf. esp. pp. 51, 70-71). Cf. also Ford (2001), who argues that what the Sophists provided was a general "advanced education," as well as Gagarin's (2001 and 2002, 23-31) attempts to correct the accepted wisdom that the Sophists were particularly concerned with persuasion.

[39] Cf. Socrates' uninterested response when the topic is first introduced at 240-242.

[40] For the idiom, which can be used as a contemptuous dismissal ("nevermind!"), cf. E. *Med.* 63-64, *IT* 780-781, *Io.* 255-256, 285-286; S. *Tr*. 412-413. I suggest the idiom takes on an added significance in this context.

characteristic of the Aristophanic Socrates. In comparison to the earthiness of the farmer Strepsiades, the airiness of the thinker Socrates characterizes him as a man whose pursuits amount to nothing of substance and result in no concrete benefits. When Strepsiades turns to the Thinkery to find a practical solution to his problems, Aristophanes makes the most of this comic tension, using the concrete, practically minded perspective of Strepsiades to mock the useless, abstract activity of Socrates and the Thinkery. It is precisely this attitude, this lack of concern for the practical usefulness of his studies, that marks him as a prototheoretical philosopher.

We will see in chapter four that questions about practical usefulness will continue to play an important role in the conceptual development of theoretical philosophy and the life dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge in the fourth century, as Plato especially attempts to address the accusations of uselessness that continue to haunt his theoretical philosopher. For now, though, two references to the fourth century's arch-theoretical philosopher, Thales, in Aristotle demonstrate the point. First, in drawing the distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle notes that people call Thales and men like him "wise" but not "prudent" because "they do not know what is beneficial to themselves" (ἀγνοοῦντας τὰ συμφέροντα ἑαυτοῖς). "What they know," they say, "is extraordinary and marvelous and difficult and divine—but useless" (περιττὰ μὲν καὶ θαυμαστὰ καὶ χαλεπὰ καὶ δαιμόνια εἰδέναι αὐτούς φασιν, ἄχρηστα δ' 1141b2–8). Meanwhile in the *Politics*, Aristotle recounts an anecdote about Thales's response to the accusations that philosophers pursue useless studies that are not beneficial to themselves. "Because people reproached him on account of his poverty, saying that philosophy is useless" (ὀνειδιζόντων γὰρ αὐτῷ διὰ τὴν πενίαν ὡς ἀνωφελοῦς τῆς φιλοσοφίας οὔσης), Aristotle tells us, Thales set out to prove a point. Using his knowledge of astronomy to predict that there would be a large olive crop in the coming spring, he put down cheap deposits

on all of the olive presses in Miletus and rented them out at a good profit when they were needed during the springtime harvest. In doing so, he showed his critics that "it is easy for philosophers to become rich if they wish, but that this is not what they are concerned about" (ῥᾴδιόν ἐστι πλουτεῖν τοῖς φιλοσόφοις, ἂν βούλωνται, ἀλλ᾽ οὐ τοῦτ᾽ ἐστὶ περὶ ὃ σπουδάζουσιν 1259a9–18). In light of his practical success, the criticism of his poverty and the supposed uselessness that it suggests becomes not a reproach, but a badge of honor: the philosopher could make a fortune if he wanted to, but his concerns transcend money.

This second example, in which usefulness is equated with money-making, is particularly relevant in considering the Aristophanic Socrates. For while Strepsiades' primary goal in visiting the Thinkery is to find a way to solve his financial woes, Socrates himself is, as we saw in chapter one, depicted as completely indigent. He is uninterested or unable to take care of his own financial needs, to say nothing of his complete lack of concern for helping Strepsiades address his. As noted in the introduction, though, the full significance of this aspect of the Aristophanic Socrates has tended to be overlooked, with the majority of scholars instead following Dover in seeing Socrates primarily as a practical teacher of rhetoric for pay, a huckster who thrives by charging his students for lessons in sham argumentative techniques. While it is possible that these two characterizations of Socrates co-exist, a testament, perhaps, to the Aristophanic mobility of characterization that we highlighted earlier in this chapter, the significance of the question of usefulness and money-making to the figure of the theoretical philosopher means the question deserves more careful consideration.

It thus seems worthwhile to reassess the argument for interpreting Aristophanes' Socrates as a fee-taking teacher, keeping both fifth-century intellectual history and the conceptual development of the *bios theōrētikos* in mind. In the final section of this chapter, I will take a

closer look at the evidence on which the prevailing interpretation has been based. Here, too, a clearer understanding of Socrates and Strepsiades as mutually defined characters will help to clarify the issue: as we will see, concerns about money are focalized through Strepsiades' financial situation and fiscal attitude, while Socrates simply gives no mind to money.

Who Cares about Money?

As noted in the introduction, the characterization of Socrates as a teacher for pay is one of the ways in which scholars have taken Aristophanes to assimilate Socrates to the Sophists, who are commonly grouped together as professional teachers. We also noted that the emphasis on the Sophists' supposed practice of teaching rhetoric for pay owes more to the reception—or to be more precise, the *formation*—of the Sophistic movement in the fourth century, especially by Plato. Plato criticized the Sophists for taking payment for their teaching as part of his effort to distinguish "philosophy," which pursued wisdom for its own sake, from "sophistry," which treated wisdom as a transferable commodity on which one might make a profit.[41]

While I have argued in chapter one that the poets of Old Comedy do also distinguish Socrates from the Sophists in terms of the ends they pursue, this distinction was not at all explored in relation to taking teaching fees, nor am I aware of any other fifth-century sources that suggest this particular distinction in the treatment of education pre-dates Plato.[42] Likewise there is essentially no fifth-century evidence that the Sophists primarily supported themselves by charging for their teaching nor that the topic of teaching fees was particularly prominent in the

[41] Notomi (2010a), Tell (2011, ch. 2), Too (2000, ch. 1).
[42] See Tell (2011, 46-48) *contra* an influential article by Blank (1985).

public consciousness of the fifth century.[43] The men counted among the Sophists were known as—and likely made money from their work as—diplomats, advisors, writers, orators, performers, and, yes, teachers. Yet we need not, with Plato, overemphasize this final aspect of their intellectual activity.

On the basis of such revisionary accounts of the Sophistic movement, we should approach the topic of teaching-for-pay in the *Clouds* with a more skeptical eye. Instead of unquestioningly applying the Platonic image of the Sophists to the Aristophanic Socrates, we must analyze the evidence of the play on its own terms, carefully reconsidering whether Aristophanes really stresses any venal aspect of Socrates' Thinkery in a way that would resonate with his fifth-century audience.[44] Before looking at the evidence itself, then, let us briefly consider just what we are looking for as we consider the role that payment plays in Aristophanes' characterization of Socrates.

While the *Clouds* has most prominently been read as a play about fifth-century intellectual culture and about the Sophists in particular, it also fits within a sort of subgenre of Old Comedy that dealt with education and teachers more generally.[45] This being the case, it will be useful to first consider some aspects of fifth-century education before we can determine whether the play

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[43] For a convenient collection of the evidence, see Loomis (1998, ch.3), who also provides an economically informed assessment of its historicity.

[44] The only effort toward this end that I am aware of is Rossetti (1974), though his primary goal is still to make an argument about the historical Socrates by aligning the Aristophanic Socrates with the Socratic portrayal of Socrates. Tomin (1987), Vander Waerdt (1994), and Newell (1999) make arguments about the lack of payment in the *Clouds* in passing.

[45] Other comedies featuring teachers include Ameipsias' *Connus*, Eupolis' *Aiges*, and an unknown Plato Comicus play apparently featuring Damon. This is not to suggest that the Thinkery is simply portrayed as a typical Athenian school; cf. Morosi (2018, 120-121), who is right to point out that the Thinkery is odd in that it seems to be an institution more in line with fourth-century philosophical schools, containing a community of thinkers dedicated to a common intellectual pursuit, than schools of the fifth century.

and its portrayal of Socrates is really targeting a particularly venal practice of teaching for pay. Although our evidence for fifth-century Athenian education is sparse, many of the conclusions reached by William Harris in his analysis of fifth-century literacy remain reasonable.[46] Most importantly, it is unlikely that education at this period was subsidized by the state, and it was certainly not mandatory.[47] This being the case, even the most basic education was likely to have incurred a private cost for the student, with school masters charging money for space, supplies, and a meager salary. While the wealthy and probably at least some portion of the poorer Athenian population were likely willing to outlay some cost to reap the later benefits that an elementary education could bring, it is also likely that even a small additional expenditure would keep many away from schooling, which was not strictly necessary for, say, an Attic farmer.

In short, in fifth-century Athens all formal teaching was teaching for pay and all teachers charged their students. Whether one would pay a teacher for even a basic education was a matter of individual calculation. If certain men were extracting payment from a small group of patrons for something like an "advanced education," what was noteworthy about such an arrangement in the eyes of the general public was surely not simply that money changed hands, but that anyone would pay anything for such an unnecessary "advanced education."[48] It is certainly possible that, as the later tradition suggests, some such "advanced" teachers were known for charging wealthy clients extraordinarily high amounts for such an education, and this could, indeed, make for good comedy. In this case, though, we would expect such a comedy to emphasize the exorbitant price

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[46] Harris (1991, 96-115). Cf. Griffith (2001, 66-71) on educational institutions and Morgan (1999) on education based on literacy in classical Greece.

[47] See already Marrou (1964, 499-500) and Schmitter (1975) for skepticism about the existence of compulsory schooling.

[48] For the idea of what the Sophists offered as a general "advanced education," see Ford (2001).

of such an education. Thus in reading the *Clouds*, mere references to money are not enough to indicate that Aristophanes critically characterizes Socrates as a mercenary teacher for pay. We must consider whether charging some very large amount of money for teaching is an aspect of the Thinkery that the playwright himself seeks to highlight for comic purposes, or whether this has been imported by later interpreters. With this in mind, let us return to the prologue, where it is first suggested that one must pay money to study at the Thinkery.

In order to appreciate how Socrates and the inhabitants of the Thinkery are characterized in relationship to money, we must first understand how Aristophanes uses financial concerns to characterize Strepsiades. When we considered the prologue of the play in section one, we saw the way in which it establishes the basic characteristics of Strepsiades: he is a practically minded farmer who is suffering under his debts. Strepsiades' debts drive forward the plot, but he himself is primarily characterized not by a lack of financial resources. Rather, his attitude toward money is directly connected to his role as comic *agroikos*, in whom the thriftiness on which Attic farmers prided themselves is caricatured as a comic miserliness. Although Strepsiades laments his financial woes, he is not a poor man, as indicated above all by his marriage into a wealthy and aristocratic Athenian family.[49] As Dover puts it: he is "a son of the soil and smelling of the soil—but one of its richer sons."[50] Strepsiades' comfortable situation makes the well-off and well-connected farmer's exaggerated desperation over his debts, his pride in his frugality, and his despotically tight hand in managing his household all the more funny.[51] The salient point here is

[49] Pheidippides later reminds Strepsiades that he has wealthy uncles on whom he can rely for continued financial support (124-125). For some more speculative thoughts on the circumstances that brought about this marriage, see C. Brown (1991).

[50] Dover (1968, xxvii). Dover, writing in 1968, somehow estimates the value of Strepsiades' land at ~£60,000, which has the buying power of ~£1,000,000 today.

[51] E.g., 53-72, 420-421.

that Strepsiades, for whom money is always on the mind, lives up to the rustic's reputation for comic miserliness.[52]

It is through the attitude of such a man—a thrifty rustic facing mounting debts—that we are first introduced to the activity of the Thinkery. As noted in the previous section, the Thinkery is presented as a potential solution to Strepsiades' financial woes, as a way to escape having to pay his debts: he will send his son to continue his education with Socrates. For, Strepsiades claims, the inhabitants of the Thinkery "provide an education if one gives them money" (οὗτοι διδάσκουσ', ἀργύριον ἤν τις διδῷ 98).[53] Regarding these supposed financial arrangements, Strepsiades' claim itself tells us very little. As we saw above, paying any teacher was expected, and Aristophanes does nothing to mark this as a particularly extraordinary practice. The payment is noteworthy above all to the thrifty Strepsiades, who has calculated that an additional expenditure on education will be a good long-term investment. As we will see below, neither Socrates nor anyone else in the Thinkery themselves ever make mention of any payment. Thus while Strepsiades claims that one must pay to study at the Thinkery inasmuch as it is a school, it is nevertheless a leap to see in this passing comment a characterization of Socrates' attitude toward money.[54]

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[52] Cf. Green (1979, 17): "His dominant aim in life is to get rid of his debts and to make money." For Strepsiades' constant concern with money, cf. 76-77, 116-18, 238-41, 244-45, 433-34, 484-85, 738-39, 1154-62.

[53] On my reading, the evidence of the *Clouds* does suggest that one could get some sort of education in "public speaking" at this time period. Inasmuch as this is what Strepsiades seeks, such teachers must have existed in some form. The fact that he does not get this, though, suggests that Socrates is not to be understood as part of this phenomenon. Moreover, the venality of such a practice reflects more poorly on the paying student, for whom it betrays a lack of natural intelligence, than on the teacher; cf. the joke about Hyperbolus on pp. 109-1112 below.

[54] It is possible that in the context of fifth-century education, the simple statement that the men of the Thinkery are teachers who must rely on private payments for their livelihood is more likely to indicate their contemptible poverty than their grand riches; cf. Harris (1991, 98). For the

That it is Strepsiades, as opposed to Socrates, whose financial motivations are reflected in the prologue is confirmed in the next reference to fees in the play. Here, the farmer brings up the possibility of payment to his potential teacher. After explaining that he is in debt and has come to learn the argument that will allow him to escape his debtors, Strepsiades offers up what he thinks Socrates wants:

St. Whatever fee
you exact from me, I swear by the gods I'll pay it in cash
So. What do you mean you swear by the gods? First of all, the gods
hold no value for us.
St. Then what do you swear by?
Iron coins, as in Byzantium?

ΣΤ. μισθὸν δ᾽ ὅντιν᾽ ἂν
πράττῃ μ᾽, ὀμοῦμαί σοι καταθήσειν τοὺς θεούς.
ΣΩ. ποίους θεοὺς ὀμεῖ σύ; πρῶτον γὰρ θεοὶ
ἡμῖν νόμισμ᾽ οὐκ ἔστι.
ΣΤ. τῷ γὰρ ὄμνυτε;
[ἢ] σιδαρέοισιν, ὥσπερ ἐν Βυζαντίῳ; (245-249)

Instead of responding to the blank check that Strepsiades has just offered him, Socrates quibbles about the nature of his oath. The humor in this exchange stems from the specific way in which Socrates *does* pick up on the mercantile language of the debtor: in claiming that the gods are not νόμισμα among them, Socrates' point is that the traditional gods by whom Strepsiades swears his oath are not acknowledged (νομίζειν) as such in the Thinkery; Strepsiades, meanwhile, thinks that Socrates has rejected the particular currency (νόμισμα) that he has offered up and makes an alternative suggestion.[55] As is so often the case between these two men of such different concern, they are in effect speaking past each other: Strepsiades is concerned about the cold, hard cash he

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general negative reputation that schoolmasters had throughout antiquity, see Booth (1976, 1981).

[55] For an analysis of the joke and how it fits into the broader characterization of the tension between Strepsiades and Socrates in the play, see Woodbury (1980, 108-112).

supposes to be a prerequisite to studying with Socrates, while Socrates himself is more bothered by Strepsiades' ignorance, which he seeks to correct.

From here, the topic of payment is dropped completely, never to be discussed again in the course of Strepsiades' short stay in the Thinkery. The passage foreshadows the fact that throughout the scenes that follow, Socrates is more concerned with the mental shortcomings of Strepsiades than he is with taking advantage of the fact that he seems willing to pay a pretty penny for lessons.[56] In other words, Socrates does not vet newcomers to the Thinkery for their ability to make payments, but rather for their ability to keep up with the intellectual activity taking place therein. The oddity of Socrates' attitude toward money is certainly emphasized by his destitute physical appearance: this is not a man who should be passing up an opportunity to earn. And yet concerned as he is with matters of the mind, he shows no interest.[57]

This characterization of Socrates, which pervades the first half of the play, is important to keep in mind as we turn to the single instance where Socrates himself mentions payment. The relevant lines appear in the beginning of the second half of the play, after Socrates has been introduced to Pheidippides. In assessing the abilities of this potential new student, Socrates claims that Pheidippides' pronunciation is childish and underdeveloped, adducing this as

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[56] See especially 477-505, but also note Socrates' consistent insults about the farmer's stupidity (367, 383, 398, 628-631, 644 646, 655), which is the ultimate reason he is rejected as a student (781-790). That Socrates does at least attempt to teach Strepsiades is, of course, necessary for the comic plot. For a similar preliminary assessment of Pheidippides, see the following discussion.

[57] There remains one further piece of potential evidence related to Socrates and money: 804-812, where the Cloud-chorus suggests that Socrates, having recognized Strepsiades eagerness, "lap up as much as [he] can quickly" (ἀπολάψεις ὅτι πλεῖστον δύνασαι ταχέως). The passage is problematic, both textually and dramatically; cf. Van Leeuwen (1898) and Dover (1968) *ad loc*. I do not treat the passage in detail here as, on my view, it is more important for the characterization of the Cloud-chorus than it is for that of Socrates.

evidence that he himself is too childish and underdeveloped to learn well. Socrates' critique concludes in a comparison:

> How could this boy learn courtroom defense
> Or prosecution or persuasive bamboozling?
> And yet, Hyperbolus learned this for a talent.
>
> πῶς ἂν μάθοι ποθ᾽ οὗτος ἀπόφευξιν δίκης
> ἢ κλῆσιν ἢ χαύνωσιν ἀναπειστηρίαν;
> καίτοι ταλάντου τοῦτ᾽ ἔμαθεν Ὑπέρβολος. (874-876)

Pheidippides' shortcomings are compared to those of Hyperbolus, the recent inheritor of Cleon's role as the leading demagogic politician and comic target of the day. He is said to have learned speaking skills for the extravagant price of a talent.[58] Because this is the sole reference that Socrates makes to money throughout the play, scholars have tended to overemphasize this joke's importance for the characterization of Socrates. For Dover, this is the key example of "Socrates' greed for money" being "brought into prominence": he is a "clever salesman" who belittles Pheidippides so that he can justify charging an exorbitant about of money to train him successfully, just as he trained the talentless Hyperbolus.[59]

This imaginative reading loses some force, though, when we recognize that the line is not an indication of some otherwise-hidden aspect of Socrates' character, but a typical Aristophanic

[58] For an overview of Hyperbolus' career and his treatment in comedy, see Baldwin (1971). It is almost certain that he was not actually a student of Socrates in any sense, nor of any of the men who would become the canonical Sophists; cf. Connor (1992, 166 n. 54).

[59] Dover bolsters his claim, which finds very little textual support, with his own suggested stage directions; cf. his comments at 791, 804, 813. This explanation is possible, though it seems to me to rely on too high a degree of naturalism in dramatic action to have a place in Aristophanic comedy, in which hidden motives are not usually so well hidden nor so subtly suggested. Cf. also Sommerstein (1982, 203), who considers this an accusation that Socrates taught detested political figures.

one-liner that departs as quickly as it arrives.[60] There are a few indications that this is the case. First, the matter of money is dropped as quickly as it is brought up: Socrates at no point follows up on this comment or demands any sort of payment. Even Strepsiades' immediate response is to answer Socrates' concern about Pheidippides' intellectual abilities, not to ensure him of his own ability to pay the extraordinarily large sum that the teacher is allegedly asking for (877).[61] Second, this is one of three instances in the *Clouds* where such passing jokes occur at the expense of Hyperbolus (623-26, 1063-66). All three, moreover, appear in revised portions of the play.[62] As Hubbard has convincingly argued, these are likely cheeky additions playfully giving the lie to the revised parabasis' claims that Aristophanes himself, unlike inferior poets, is above continuously mocking this demagogic politician (549-559).[63] Third, such jokes about Hyperbolus' lack of native wit were otherwise common in Old Comedy, and here we have an even more specific cue to the joke: Hyperbolus is mocked elsewhere for beginning his career as a public speaker at an unusually young age and for his own pronunciation problems, which parallel those of Strepsiades.[64]

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[60] On such jokes, "by far the most common sort of personal joke in Aristophanes," see Storey (1998, 88-89). Although Socrates is more often the straight-man who sets up Strepsiades' jokes, *ad hominem* jokes are also put into his mouth at 296 (rival comic poets), 346-356 (Xenophantus, Simon, Cleisthenes), 399-400 (Simon, Cleonymous, Theorus). Just as in the present case, none of these lines contribute significantly to the characterization of Socrates.

[61] While it is possible to take Strepsiades' response as an attempt to assure Socrates that he will pay, the usage of adverbial ἀμέλει, which is primarily employed to assuage doubts raised by a question, speaks against this reading: what Socrates is questioning here is clearly Pheidippides' ability to learn, and this is what Strepsiades goes on to address at length in his account of his son's childhood activities (878-881). This interpretation is supported by an exact parallel usage earlier (488). On the usage of ἀμέλει in comedy, with these passages cited, see López Eire (1996, 104-105).

[62] I.e. the parabasis, the scene leading up to the *agōn* (see Hubbard 1991, 104 n. 49), and the *agōn* itself.

[63] Hubbard (1991, 104-105).

[64] Crat. fr. 283 K-A, Plat. Com. fr. 183 K-A. For his lack of intelligence, cf. Eup. fr. 208 and

Money, then, is here merely brought up as another barb at Hyperbolus' expense: any political success he has had is not due to native wit, but had to be purchased at a ludicrously high price. As is so often the case with such *ad hominem* Aristophanic one-liners, the joke adds little more to the scene than topical humor. Given how he is portrayed elsewhere in the play, it certainly should not be taken as a definitive characterization of Socrates: surely if Aristophanes' aim was to characterize Socrates in relationship to extravagant teaching fees, he could do so in a more effective and emphatic manner than obliquely sticking this into a throw-away joke. For, again, Socrates never otherwise asks for, and Strepsiades never pays, a fee for his or his son's education.

When, later in the play, the father returns to the school to see whether his son's education has been successful, he does bring some sort of gift for Socrates: "Greetings to you too! But first take this. For one should show some respect for his teacher" (κἄγωγέ σ᾽. ἀλλὰ τουτονὶ πρῶτον λαβέ. / χρὴ γὰρ ἐπιθαυμάζειν τι τὸν διδάσκαλον. 1146-1147). Because there is no clear indication of what Strepsiades hands to Socrates, determining what is indicated by the deictic τουτονὶ is problematic.[65] A scholiast, looking back to a joke in which Strepsiades claims that he will "fill [Socrates'] mortar all around with groats" in return for a particular lesson (668-669), comments that the gift handed over is a sack of grain, and, lacking any more authoritative alternative, this suggestion has gained some acceptance.[66] In any case, Strepsiades' use of the verb ἐπιθαυμάζειν ("to show respect, honor") is likely ironical and indicates the shabbiness of whatever is handed

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195 K-A, where the suggestion seems to be that he learned all he knows from hanging around the barbershops. See also Storey (2003, 196-214) on Eupolis' *Marikas*, which extensively mocked Hyperbolus.

[65] Zieliński (1885, 45 n. 2) inserts μισθόν.

[66] For the scholium, see Dover (1968) *ad loc*. Van Leeuwen (1898) and Starkie (1911) accept the suggestion.

over, rather than an urbane euphemism meant to politely conceal the fulfilment of a contractual obligation—which, as I have emphasized, has never actually been established.[67] While I would not push too hard on this subtlety in the context of an Aristophanic comedy, such observations about this interaction at least confirm that the "pay" that Socrates allegedly receives must certainly be underwhelming to those who want to make Socrates out as an exploitative teacher for pay. It is worth noting too that Socrates himself makes no comment about whatever he has received, but instead answers Strepsiades' subsequent question about his son's education.

Taken together, this seems to be very weak evidence that Socrates is meant to be characterized as a greedy teacher whose Thinkery is a venal school of rhetoric. While some sort of paid education in "public speaking" likely existed at this time period, by insisting on Socrates' role as such a teacher, modern scholars make the same mistake about Socrates as Strepsiades does: they think Socrates is a teacher of practical skills, when really his concerns are primarily theoretical. Furthermore, our interpretation of the references to payment made in the play is distorted if we approach them within Plato's fourth-century framework as opposed to that of a fifth-century viewer. From this perspective it seems to me dubious to draw from this evidence—

[67] The latter interpretation is suggested Dover (1968, *ad* 1147) with reference to the scholium (ἀντὶ τοῦ "δῶροις τιμᾶν")—though *ad* 1146 he agrees that the "payment" here must be pathetically meager, suggesting "an emaciated he-goat or decrepit dog" before settling on a tattered cloak as an even better possibility. While economic transactions could be characterized as "gifts" as opposed to payment so as to conceal the venal nature of the transaction, I see no indication in the text that this is part of the joke here. On the slipperiness between gifts and economic exchanges, see van Berkel 2020, esp. 282 n.83, who reads this exchange as an expression of the ambiguous character of the relationship between Socrates and his pupils: he is not given a contracted payment, but a gift, which is disregarded. With regard to the Socratic tradition, it is worth nothing here that according to some accounts, Socrates willingly received gifts from his companions: cf. the comments of Aristippus at D.L. 2.8.74 and Quint. 12.7.9. Xenophon's Socrates, too, sometimes seems more open to receiving gifts from friends than may be immediately obvious; cf. *Ap*. 16-17 with *Mem*. 2.4-6, 9-10 and *Oec.* 2.8.

which is scant, ambiguous, and clearly not a prominent part of the text of the play as it stands—the conclusion that a desire for monetary gain is a prominent feature of Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates. Any such suggestions in the play are far outweighed by Aristophanes' depiction of Socrates' and his students' complete lack of concern for money or other material goods.

Conclusions

In considering the question of payment for teaching in the *Clouds*, I have tried to move away from the application of an oversimplified framework constructed around the "Sophists" and the "Sophistic movement" in order to approach the comedy on its own terms, considering how Socrates' character fits within the structure of the comedy itself. I have done so throughout this chapter by considering the comic tension between Strepsiades and Socrates, who, according to a common Aristophanic technique, are crafted as mutually defined characters. Strepsiades, our comic hero, is a rustic who has a straightforward outlook and a simple goal: facing mounting debts, he will employ any means necessary to get the better of his debtors and increase his wealth. While he thinks that studying at the Thinkery will offer a solution to his problems, we soon learn that the abstruse studies of Socrates and his students are so far removed from the realities of everyday life that they have little practical value. Much of the humor of the play develops from the clash of the concrete, practical concerns of Strepsiades and the abstract, theoretical inquiries of Socrates and the other inhabitants of the Thinkery. This tension between these two characters and their perspectives provides the central organizational structure of the comedy.

From this analysis, it should be clear that Aristophanes' Socrates aligns with the characterization of Socrates that emerged from comparison with the Sophists in chapter one. In

the *Clouds*, Aristophanes thematizes the characteristics of Socrates that allow us to interpret this character as a precursor to the theoretical philosopher who dedicates himself to the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself. It is what we might call Socrates' theoretical attitude, then, that is the core of this character, allowing us to read him as a precursor to the theoretical philosopher and an important figure in the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos*. As we will see in chapter four, Plato will continuously look back to the themes explored in this comic presentation of Socrates as he articulates his own understanding of theoretical philosophy. Before we turn to this subject, though, I would like to consider another comic tradition that this understanding of Socrates can help us to illuminate: the association between Socrates and Euripides.

Chapter Three

Socrates and Euripides *Theōrētikos* in Old Comedy

Introduction and Overview

In chapters one and two, I considered the characterization of Socrates in Old Comedy, arguing that in both the fragments and in the *Clouds* there is a conceptual connection between this character and the later figure of the theoretical philosopher. By comparing the comic characterization of Socrates and the Sophists in chapter one, I showed how the arrogant and indigent Socrates is comically characterized as a thinker who pursues intellectual activity as an end in itself. In chapter two, I brought this framework to bear on the *Clouds*, demonstrating that this play, too, is primarily interested in exploring the significance of Socrates as such. While at this point I have covered the majority of the comic material featuring Socrates, there is one curious aspect of the comic Socrates that I have not yet broached: his association with the tragic poet Euripides.

In this chapter, I want to show that the comic Euripides, too—both in his explicit association with Socrates and in the characteristics that he otherwise shares with the comic Socrates—is an important figure in the emergent public discourse about the figure that I have been calling the prototheoretical philosopher. The suggestion might at first seem strange: Euripides, after all, is not a philosopher, but a tragic poet. Indeed, for Plato, the poet's need to adapt his poetry to the tastes of his unphilosophic audience would seem to render him constitutionally incapable of engaging in philosophical *theōria* as he understands it.[1] Yet as scholars have long emphasized, it is not *until* Plato and his "old quarrel" that poetry and philosophy begin to be seen as distinct

[1] Cf. *Grg*. 501b-502b, *R.* 496a-d, 493d, and *Tht.* 173a, c.

activities at odds with one another.[2] In the *Clouds*, Socrates is the figurehead of a cultural phenomenon that includes a variety of other thinkers, including poets and musicians. The treatment of contemporary poets—especially those associated with the so-called "New Music"—elsewhere in the comic corpus makes clear that they must be treated as a particular subset of the comic "intellectual."[3] Even if Euripides is only implicitly associated with Socrates in the extant version of the *Clouds*, these two are explicitly associated elsewhere in the plays of Aristophanes and in the comic fragments.[4] In this chapter, then, I will reconsider the comic poets' association of Socrates and Euripides in light of the characterization of Socrates that I have explored in the previous two chapters.

In modern times, the most well-known account of the supposed relationship between Socrates and Euripides comes from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, a book that we have previously considered in relation to its interpretation of Socrates as "the archetype of the theoretical man."[5] There we saw that Nietzsche drew on the comic poets to construct his argument about the influence of Socrates on Euripides, which led to the decline of Athenian tragedy. He claims that the comedians spoke of Socrates and Euripides "in the same breath" as they denounced the "dubious enlightenment" that corroded the higher tragic culture of Euripides' predecessors. While Nietzsche's interpretation of Socrates is most immediately influenced by Zeller, his aesthetic evaluation of the "Socratism" of Euripides draws on August Willhelm and Friedrich Schlegel. So much so, in fact, that Albert Henrichs has convincingly demonstrated that Nietzsche

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[2] E.g., Nightingale (1995) 60-67, Most (1999, 2011).

[3] Imperio (1998, 75ff.).

[4] Euripides is the favorite poet of Pheidippides after he has been educated in the Thinkery (1353-1378). Gelzer (1956, 73-79, 84-92) provides a detailed overview of the connections between the two in Aristophanes.

[5] See introduction, pp. 9-12.

was little interested in Euripides himself but rather took up the Schlegels' rationalist Euripides only to serve "as negative proof for his overall concept of tragedy," which was ultimately concerned with expounding an "existentialist definition of the tragic hero as a paradigm of the human condition."[6]

Looking back on this Romantic reception of Euripides, Bruno Snell demonstrated how Aristophanes himself served as the starting point for the modern condemnation of the tragedian. Setting aside the lofty existential pronouncements of Nietzsche, Snell sees Aristophanes' treatment of Euripides as essentially superficial. Socrates and Euripides, whether taken together or individually, are merely stand-ins for all modern ills plaguing contemporary Athens.[7] For Snell, and many modern critics with him, the real significance of Aristophanes' treatment of Euripides and the "Socratism" that infects his tragedy is the subsequent tradition of aesthetic criticism that it sets off.[8] Scholars also recognize, though, that in the case of Aristophanes' critique of Euripides, poetry and politics cannot so easily be separated.[9] There has thus also been continued interest in the status of Euripides and Socrates as comic representatives of the cultural corruption of contemporary Athens, two figures whom Aristophanes attacked as sort of poetico-political intervention.[10] Both lines of inquiry are important, but both are ultimately entwined with long-standing questions about the social and political role of Old Comedy in general and the

[6] Henrichs (1986, 385).

[7] Snell (1954, ch. 6).

[8] E.g., Dover (1993, 10-37) and O'Sullivan (1992, 131-147), discussing the matter in terms of style. Cf. also Worman (2017).

[9] On the connection between aesthetics and politics in this *milieu*, see, e.g., Csapo (2004), Zeitlin (1996), and Foley (1988).

[10] This approach is taken most explicitly and explored most fully by Jedrkiewicz (2010). Cf. also Arrighetti (1994), Redfield (1962, esp. p. 117), Nelson (2016, 70-71).

poetic project of Aristophanes in particular, questions that are too complicated to treat here.[11]

I thus set aside Aristophanes' critique of Euripidean poetry and its intent. Rather my goal in this chapter is to re-examine the comic characterization of Euripides and thus to understand better the tragedian's place in the intellectual landscape of the late fifth century. In doing so, I build on the work of the two most recent scholars to examine the comic evidence associating Socrates and Euripides, Patzer and Egli, who agree in their shared conclusion that Socrates was presented as the "*spiritus rector*" of Euripidean drama.[12] I argue that to understand fully the significance of this general observation, we need to understand Euripides' association with Socrates and other elements of the comic Euripides' character within the context of the emergence of the *bios theōrētikos*. For, as we will see, Euripides shares with Socrates the very traits that allow us to interpret the latter thinker as a predecessor to the theoretical philosopher. In the comic corpus, as in the later biographical tradition, Euripides is characterized as something like a philosopher-poet and his tragedies are taken to be an expression of his more general engagement with contemporary philosophical speculation.

My pursuit of this line of thought is guided by three related sets of materials. First, I will consider the four comic fragments that directly connect Socrates and Euripides by suggesting that the former helped the latter write his plays. As we saw in chapters one and two, the comic fragments offer a useful supplement to the extant plays of Aristophanes by providing broader generic context. A proper understanding of these four fragments is thus crucial for understanding the single passage in which Socrates and Euripides are directly connected in Aristophanes. On

[11] For a recent overview of Aristophanes and politics broadly understood, see Rosen and Foley (2020).

[12] Patzer (1994), Egli (2003, 157-165); cf. also Wildberg (2006).

the basis of the fragments, I argue that the comic poets associated Euripides with Socrates as men who shared a similar attitude toward their intellectual activity: both pride themselves on their possession of a type of wisdom that is insubstantial and lacks any real benefits.

From here, I turn to the more sustained portrayals of Euripides in the extant plays of Aristophanes, considering the ways in which the comic Euripides shares the characteristics that are central to my interpretation of Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher in chapters one and two. In the *Acharnians*, the poet suggests a connection between Euripides' over-clever poetry and the poets' own poverty and bodily degradation. In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Euripides is presented as an arrogant teacher who insists on sharing his unhelpful wisdom and who looks down on those who are less intellectually inclined. The Aristophanic portrayal of Euripides also gives us an opportunity to consider the significant role that this figure of the philosopher-poet plays in the emergent fifth-century discourse about the value of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. To do so, I look at the ways in which Aristophanes' comic portrayal of Euripides interacts with Euripides' own presentation of intellectual figures in his tragedies, focusing in particular on the fragments of Euripides' *Antiope*. I show how in that play, Euripides' own exploration of the way of life of the philosopher-poet must be understood as a response to comic critiques of the same.

Finally, I consider a peculiar body of later evidence that supports my interpretation of the comic Euripides and his association with Socrates: the biographical tradition. Though this material is of dubious historical value, it is of great interest for the continued reception of Euripides as a particularly philosophical poet. What is more, as Lefkowitz has argued, much of

the surviving biographical material about Euripides can ultimately be traced to Old Comedy.[13] In the final section, then, I consider the relationship between the reception of Euripides as the so-called "philosopher of the stage" in this biographical material and the comic portrayal of Euripides as a philosopher-poet. In particular, I demonstrate that while Euripides' association with *other* philosophers is likely a later development of well-known methods of ancient biography, the association with Socrates should be traced back directly to Old Comedy. Having established Old Comedy as the primary source for this biographical tradition, I show how certain elements of the reception of Euripides as a philosophical poet can be read as developments of themes already present in comedy. In both traditions, Euripides is characterized as a solitary thinker who shows little care for the usual markers of success and who looks down on the opinions of the many. While in the biographical material this attitude is used to characterize Euripides as a "great-souled" poetic genius, in comedy it makes him ridiculous for the very same reasons that Socrates is.

Let us begin by looking at the most well-known Aristophanic passage in which Socrates and Euripides are associated, which will serve as an entry point into the comic fragments.

Socrates and Euripides in Old Comedy

Near the end of the *Frogs,* after Aeschylus has been declared the winner of the poetic *agōn* and Euripides has angrily left the stage, the latter is criticized for the company he keeps and the effects this has on his poetry:

> It's not charming to sit
> beside Socrates and chatter,
> having tossed aside music

[13] Lefkowitz (1979), (2012, ch. 9).

and the best
of the tragic art.
To pass idle time
on arrogant conversation
and hairsplitting nonsense
is the mark of a madman.

χαρίεν οὖν μὴ Σωκράτει
παρακαθημένον λαλεῖν,
ἀποβαλόντα μουσικὴν
τά τε μέγιστα παραλιπόντα
τῆς τραγῳδικῆς τέχνης.
τὸ δ᾽ ἐπὶ σεμνοῖσιν λόγοισιν
καὶ σκαριφησμοῖσι λήρων
διατριβὴν ἀργὸν ποιεῖσθαι,
παραφρονοῦντος ἀνδρός. (1491-1499)

Euripides is said to spend his time sitting with Socrates. The two are united through a number of characteristics that are immediately familiar from our treatment of the comic Socrates: talkativeness (λαλεῖν), haughtiness (σεμνοῖσιν λόγοισι), idleness (διατριβὴν ἀργὸν), and a penchant for talking over-subtle nonsense (σκαριφησμοῖσι λήρων).

As scholars have noted, these valedictory verses are just the most explicit statement of characteristics that the Euripides of the *Frogs* shares with the comic Socrates. The similarity between these characters is most directly apparent in Euripides' claims that he used his art to instruct the audience in intellectual skills that are familiar from the lessons of Socrates' Thinkery: he taught them "to apply subtle rules and to square off their words, to consider, to observe, to understand … to think through everything" (λεπτῶν τε κανόνων εἰσβολὰς ἐπῶν τε γωνιασμούς / νοεῖν, ὁρᾶν, ξυνιέναι / … περινοεῖν ἅπαντα 954-958)—in short, "to think by putting rationality and critical thinking into the art" (φρονεῖν / τούτοισιν εἰσηγησάμην, / λογισμὸν ἐνθεὶς τῇ τέχνῃ / καὶ σκέψιν 971-974). While Euripides and Socrates view their work

in this regard with self-importance, the comic poet is more keen to explore how the proliferation of such talkativeness has negatively affected Athenian culture.[14]

The comic Socrates and Euripides are also united by their peculiar religious beliefs. When Euripides is invited by Dionysus to say a prayer before the *agon* begins, he prays to "private" gods who are his own "novel coinage" (ἴδιοί τινες σου, κόμμα καινόν 888-890): "aether, my nourisher, and pivot of tongue, and smarts, and scent-sniffing nostrils" (αἰθήρ ἐμὸν βόσκημα καὶ γλώττης στρόφιγξ καὶ ξύνεσι καὶ μυκτῆρες ὀσφραντήριοι 892-893). As Socrates and his companions in the *Clouds* are nourished by "their own deities," the Clouds, Euripides is nourished by the related aether. Euripides' other three deities likewise relate to the body's interaction with the air: the tongue that turns air into words, the intelligence that is the result of the body's intake of air, and nostrils that keenly drink up the air. In Euripides' monetary metaphor, we also see a connection to Socrates' claim that the Olympians are "not legal tender" in the Thinkery (νόμισμ᾽ οὐκ ἔστι 248), which culminates in the claim that "Zeus does not exist" (οὐδ᾽ ἐστὶ Ζεύς 367). Along with introducing new gods, Euripides himself is also accused of teaching that "gods do not exist" in the *Thesmophoriazusae* (οὐκ εἶναι θεούς 451).

The *Frogs*, then, gives us a good basis for beginning to understand some particulars of the connection between Socrates and Euripides, primarily in terms of the cultural impact of their way of thinking and acting: both are promoters of critical inquiry through reason, the result of which is a rejection of tradition. Yet relying on the evidence of the *Frogs* to understand the characteristics that the comic Socrates and Euripides share also has its limitations. The point is well demonstrated by Aristophanes' treatment of *semnotēs* in the *Frogs*. We noted that in the

[14] Cf. the precise parallels between Aeschylus' criticism of Euripides (*Ra.* 1070-1071) and the Stronger Argument's criticism of the Weaker Argument (*Nu.* 1053-1054).

final ode, Euripides is said to waste his time in "haughty conversation" (ἐπὶ σεμνοῖσιν λόγοισι) with Socrates. Dover translates the phrase as "theorizing," a translation which, as we will see, the comic treatment of Socrates' and Euripides' *semnotēs* supports.[15]

Yet in the poetic *agon* itself, it is *Aeschylus*, not Euripides, who is characterized as *semnos*. In this instance, *semnotēs* is invoked to make a point about poetic style: the older poet portrays brooding characters with lofty, bombastic language, which even by the late fifth century, apparently, made his plays somewhat inaccessible.[16] Euripides, on the other hand, represents himself as a stylistic populist based on the accessibility of his poetry: he portrays characters from all walks of life, who speak and reason clearly. It is only after the *agōn*—in a passage meant to emphasize that for all his intellectual pretension, Euripides is in fact not a poet of "exacting intelligence" (ξύνεσιν ἠκριβωμένην 1483) and "good sense" (εὖ φρονεῖν 1485)—that *semnotēs* takes on significance in Aristophanes' characterization of Euripides.[17] And when it does, it is specifically in association with Socrates.

The case of *semnotēs* in the *Frogs* is an important reminder of an aspect of Aristophanic characterization that we discussed in chapter two: the comic poet is not concerned with absolute consistency of character as much as drawing out a particular aspect of a character for a particular comic purpose. Thus when Aristophanes is mocking what he sees as the vulgar poetic style of Euripidean poetry, the inaccessible poetic *semnotēs* of Aeschylus makes the tragedian a fitting foil. But, as I demonstrate further below, when Aristophanes is mocking the speculative

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[15] Dover supports his translation by citing a parallel usage in Lys. fr 2.1, where the speaker is discussing the Socratic Aeschines in Lysias For the collocation elsewhere, cf. E. *Hipp*. 957, Hdt. VII.6, Crates Com. fr. 28 K-A, Ar. *V*. 1174. Isoc. XI.9, Isoc. XII.249, Pl. *Tht*. 203E.

[16] O'Sullivan (1992, 8-14), Porter (2016, 324-238).

[17] The tension between Euripides' claims about his style and his character are pointed to in the *agōn* at 951-953.

theorizing of Euripidean poetry, the haughty intellectual *semnotēs* of Socrates makes comedy's prototheoretical philosopher a suitable companion. To understand precisely why the comic poets characterize Socrates and Euripides in relation to one another, then, we must focus on the specific contexts in which the two figures are explicitly connected. For this task, we must turn to the comic fragments. These fragments are admittedly sparse: Diogenes Laertius cites only brief snippets to support his claim that Socrates was thought to have helped Euripides compose his tragedies. Nevertheless, careful analysis of the material within the conceptual framework of the *bios theōrētikos* provides important insight into the grounds on which the comic poets associated Socrates and Euripides.

The significance of the *semnotēs* that Socrates and Euripides share immediately comes into clearer focus in a fragment from Callias Comicus' *Pedetai*.[18] Here, two speakers have an exchange, which Diogenes Laertius claims testifies to the fact that Socrates was thought to have helped Euripides compose his poetry: "{A.} Why are you so proud, and why do you think such lofty thoughts? / {B.} Because I can. And Socrates is the reason" ({A.} τί δὴ σὺ σεμνὴ καὶ φρονεῖς οὕτω μέγα; / {B.} ἔξεστι γάρ μοι. Σωκράτης γὰρ αἴτιος. fr. 15 K-A.).[19] While we noted this fragment in passing in chapter one on the characterization of Socrates, the real target of the gibe seems to be Euripides and his tragedy. The use of the feminine adjective σεμνὴ to refer to the second speaker has led to a number of suggestions as to who this character is such that she can be construed as representative of Euripidean drama: Could it possibly be an earlier version of the "Muse of Euripides" as in the *agōn* of the *Frogs*? Do we have Euripides himself dressed in

[18] Callias' career began before Aristophanes with his first recorded victory likely in 446 BCE, making this perhaps our earliest extant reference to Socrates.

[19] For commentary see Bagordo (2014, 170-174) and Olson (2007, 235-236).

drag *à la* Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae*? Is this a comic re-staging of one of Euripides' heroines? In any case, it seems likely that the *semnotēs* here attributed to Euripides is closely connected to that which contributed to our understanding of Socrates as a prototheoretical philosopher in chapters one and two.

Although the Euripidean character's "great thoughts" are not explicitly connected to any specific content of Euripides' poetry, that they are traced to Socrates, Old Comedy's all-consuming thinker on things aloft, suggests that the haughtiness targeted here has to do with Euripidean intellectualizing. If the speaker is a female abstraction of Euripidean poetry, we can be all but certain she is, as Dover says of the Muse of the *Frogs*, "neither dignified nor attractive," adding a layer of irony: as in the case of Socrates, the character's—and by extension Euripides'—haughty attitude is made ridiculous by the misalignment between her haughty attitude and her lowly appearance.[20] If she is a Euripidean heroine representing the poet by proxy, we might imagine one of Euripides' notoriously clever women—the later Melanippe "the Wise" seems to have been the crowning achievement of this type—whose confident rational argumentation and philosophical speculation could be interpreted by a socially conservative Athenian elite as an arrogant overstepping of the conventional gender roles.[21] While we can only speculate as to the specifics, it seems likely that *semnotēs* attributed to Euripides is closely connected to the remote intellectual content of his poetry, a significant example of which we will return to shortly. The *semnotēs* that connects Euripides to Socrates, then, recalls the peculiar

[20] For the semantic ambiguity adding to this comic irony, see Bagordo (2014, 172-173).

[21] Cf. Arist. *Po*. 1454a with Mayhew (1999) for this attitude toward women. On the Melanippe plays generally and on Melanippe's intelligence in particular see Collard (1995, 240-247, esp. 246-247). A new edition of the fragments by Andriana Domouzi is scheduled to be published in 2021. Mueller (2017) provides a good overview of approaches to gender in Euripides.

theoretical attitude of the comic Socrates.

This reading of the "haughtiness" and "great thoughts" of the Callias Comicus fragment is supported by the remaining two fragments that directly connect Socrates and Euripides. The first comes from the original production of the *Clouds* in 423 BCE and is the only instance apart from the end of the *Frogs* in which Aristophanes explicitly associates Socrates and Euripides. A character speaks of Socrates: "The man composing tragedies for Euripides— / This is him! And they are very verbose, wise ones" (Εὐριπίδῃ δ᾽ ὁ τὰς τραγῳδίας ποιῶν / τὰς περιλαλούσας οὗτός ἐστι, τὰς σοφάς. fr. 392 K-A). As already suggested in our consideration of the *Frogs*, Socrates and Euripides are both individually associated with the *lalia* that Aristophanes here attributes to Euripidean tragedy.[22] While the term and its cognates can be used generally to refer disparagingly to all sort of garrulity verging into nonsense, that these chattering tragedies are ironically called "wise" (σοφός) suggests the sort of intellectual quibbling associated with Socrates and the Thinkery, where this scene is likely set.[23] In the opening of the *Thesmophoriazusae*, which I return to later in more detail, it is likewise Euripides' indulgent cosmological speculation—the sort that is at home in the Thinkery—that leads to his Kinsman's suggestion that he should be counted among the "wise" (σοφαί).[24] *Lalia* is semantically linked to this sort of speculation into "the things in the sky" and "the things below the earth" most explicitly in two extant fragments, one from a Sophoclean satyr play, the other from the comic poet Theognetus.[25] Ultimately, though, we need not so specifically pin down just what this *lalia*

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[22] O'Sullivan (1992, 131-134), Dover (1993, 22). On *lalia* generally, see Kidd (2014, 38-40).

[23] In the extant version of the *Clouds*, Socrates and his companions are comically characterized in relation to their *sophia*; e.g., 94, 331, 360, 412, 489.

[24] The Socratically educated Pheidippides also deems Euripides the "most wise" (σοφώτατον 1378) poet.

[25] On the phrase, see ch. 1, pp. 46-50 above. For such intellectualizing *lalia,* cf. also

is meant to represent. It is enough to note that as Socrates is the “cause” of the unnamed character’s haughtiness in the Callias fragment, Aristophanes suggests that Socrates is the “cause” of the chattery “wisdom” that has made its way into Euripides’ verses.

The shared characteristics of Socrates and Euripides as comic intellectuals can, finally, help us to fill out the meaning of the final fragment in which the two are directly associated. This intriguing joke comes from an unknown play of Teleclides: “That’s Mnesilochus, who is roasting a new play for Euripides—and Socrates is providing the wood!” (Μνησίλοχός ἐστ᾽ ἐκεῖνος, <ὃς> φρύγει τι δρᾶμα καινόν / Εὐριπίδη, καὶ Σωκράτης τὰ φρύγαν᾽ ὑποτίθησιν. fr. 41 K-A).[26] Socrates works with Mnesilochus, Euripides’ father-in-law, to help the poet cook up a new drama. The verb ὑποτίθημι, meaning not only “to set under” but also metaphorically “to suggest,” makes clear that Socrates is more than a mere line cook.[27] Furthermore, as we saw in chapter one, a joke about the impoverished Socrates playing the chef from the *Clouds* points to the tension between his subtle intellectual inquiry and his inability to put solid food on the table.[28] It seems likely that the introduction of Socrates the chef suggests a similar joke here.

As a commentary on Euripidean poetry, this cooking scene is connected to the culinary metaphors that the comic poets often employ as a form of poetic criticism.[29] While we have no other examples extant from Teleclides himself, to Aristophanes’ taste Euripides’ poetry is meager fare. Take, for example, a fragment from his *Geras* in which one speaker describes

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Heniochus fr. 4 K-A and *Eq*. 1375-1381.

[26] The text is from Bagordo (2013, 195-205); cf. also Olson (2007, 237-238).

[27] Cf. also the other fragment of Teleclides cited by Diogenes Laertius: “Euripides … bolted together with Socrates” (Εὐριπίδης σωκρατογόμφους, fr. 42 K-A).

[28] *Nu*. 175-179; see pp. 55-57.

[29] Taillardat (1965, 439-441). Cf. also Wright (2012, 124-140) and Farmer (2017a, 96)

Euripidean style:[30]

> pickles, aromatics, bulbs, white beet,
> sour mash, rissoles, heart of palm, oregano:
> this is all faggotry next to a big piece of meat.[31]
>
> ὀξωτά, σιλφιωτά, βολβός, τευτλίον,
> ὑπότριμμα, θρῖον, ἐγκέφαλος, ὀρίγανον,
> καταπυγοσύνη ταῦτ᾽ ἐστὶ πρὸς κρέας μέγα. (fr. 128 K-A)

Euripides' verses are imagined as an array of subtle spices and dainty delicacies that fail to provide the nourishment and satisfaction of a steak dinner.[32] Elsewhere, a poet-chef is instructed to "add one whole Euripides" (ὅλον Εὐριπίδην) to his drama-dish, but is warned to make sure that it is well "seasoned" (ἐμβαλεῖν ἅλας) but not "verbosely reasoned" (μεμνημένος δ᾽ ὅπως ἅλας καὶ μὴ λάλας fr. 595 K-A).

My somewhat liberal translation of this last fragment captures, I hope, the *homoioteleuton* of the quip while also bringing out the specific connotations of *lalia* that we have already seen as a point of connection between the comic Socrates and Euripides. Generally speaking, these food metaphors also depend upon another aspect of Euripidean poetry that conceptually links him to the comic Socrates: *leptotēs*, fineness or subtlety.[33] We might compare another way in which this *leptotēs* is made concrete in the *Frogs*, where Euripides' verses are always shown to be "light" when weighed against the "heavy" verses of Aeschylus.[34] Likewise, when Aristophanes makes a

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[30] There are other examples of Teleclides as a poetic critic; cf. fr. 15, 17, and 36 K-A; fr. 40 K-A mentions chervil, possibly a reference to Euripides.

[31] For the translation of the culinary details, I rely on Henderson (2008).

[32] καταπυγοσύνη and κρέας also have sexual connotations; cf. Henderson (1991, 129) and Worman (2017) on Euripides' "bumsy" style. But cf. also Dover (1968) *ad* 529 for the generally derogatory meaning of καταπυγοσύνη.

[33] O'Sullivan (1992, 130-134); cf. esp. *Ra.* 828, 956, *Ach.* 445 and *Nu.* 153, 161, 177, 230, 320, 359, 471, 1404, 1496.

[34] 1366-1410.

metaphorical meal out of Euripidean poetry, it is an insubstantial one indeed. Bringing these threads together to interpret the fragment from Teleclides, it seems that these verses are another example of this type of metaphorical critique: with Socrates as *sous-chef de cuisine*, Euripides cooks up subtle, spicy poetry that is ultimately too airy to be of any nutritional value. Or to put it in non-metaphorical language, Socrates' influence is the reason that Euripides' tragedies are filled with subtle, clever reasoning that, from the comic perspective, amounts to insubstantial nonsense.

In sum, the fragments suggest that Socrates helped Euripides to compose his poetry because that poetry attests to a perceived similarity between Euripides' poetic activity and Socrates' intellectual activity: both fancy themselves "wise" for all of their intellectual speculation, but in the eyes of the comic poets, this wisdom adds up to little more than useless, over-subtle babbling.

The Comic Euripides and the Fifth-Century *Bios Theōrētikos*

Taking the evidence of Aristophanes' *Frogs* and the fragments together, then, gives us a good basis for understanding the grounds on which the comic poets associated Socrates and Euripides as characters of a similar type: their shared haughtiness about their supposed wisdom and their subtle babbling is closely connected to what I have been calling a theoretical attitude, including their shared dedication to their useless intellectual work. This being the case, the comic Euripides himself is imagined as a figure of a very similar type to Socrates. Keeping in mind that the fifth-century comic poets do not seem to have thought in terms of Plato's conceptual distinction between poetry and philosophy, we might say that, for the comic poets, Euripides the "philosopher-poet" shares certain defining characteristics with Socrates the prototheoretical

philosopher. In this section, then, I consider the similarities between these two characters in the plays of Aristophanes and situate poet's comic portrayal of Euripides within the fifth-century emergence of the *bios theōrētikos*.

We can begin where we left off in our consideration of the comic fragments, the lack of substance that characterizes both Socrates and Euripides. For all of their chattering and subtlety, Euripides' clever poetry and Socrates' abstract ideas offer nothing of substance in the eyes of the comic poets. A similar sentiment is expressed of Euripides and in his poetry absent of Socrates in the *Acharnians*, where Euripides makes his first onstage appearance in the Aristophanic corpus. The poet here suggests a connection between Euripides' intellectualizing tendencies and his poor material condition in a way that is reminiscent of the treatment of the comic Socrates. Euripides is introduced when the play's hero Dicaeopolis turns to the tragedian to "outfit [him] most wretchedly" (ἐνσκευάσασθαί μ᾽ οἷον ἀθλιώτατον 384) in order that he might appear a piteous sight as he makes his daring speech before the chorus of Acharnians. Euripides, Aristophanes suggests, was fond of costuming his heroes in rags.[35] After rejecting the costumes of a number of Euripidean protagonists, Dicaeopolis pleads with the poet to give him the garments of his most pitiful creation: Telephus.

Most relevant for us, though, is Euripides' own appearance, to which Dicaeopolis draws our attention:

> You compose with your legs up
> even though they could be on the ground? No wonder you compose cripples!
> And why do you wear the rags from your tragedies,
> a piteous raiment? No wonder you compose beggars!

[35] For beggar-heroes in Euripides, see Cecchet (2015, ch. 2), who includes a brief examination of the intellectual context for this dramatic development.

ἀναβάδην ποιεῖς,
ἐξὸν καταβάδην; οὐκ ἐτὸς χωλοὺς ποιεῖς.
ἀτὰρ τί τὰ ῥάκι᾽ ἐκ τραγῳδίας ἔχεις,
ἐσθῆτ᾽ ἐλεινήν; οὐκ ἐτὸς πτωχοὺς ποιεῖς. (410-413)

Dicaeopolis' statement assumes the relationship between the poet and his poetry that is presented in more detail in the parallel Agathon scene of the *Thesmophoriazusae*: Euripides is laid out on his couch because his tragedies often feature characters with debilitating leg injuries; he is dressed in rags because his tragedies often feature characters who have found themselves destitute due to their misfortunes.

But there is a further comic point to the depiction of Euripides, as is made clear in the lead-up to the scene, in which we are introduced to Euripides' slave. As in parallel door scenes in Old Comedy, the doorman's character mirrors that of his master.[36] When Dicaeopolis asks if Euripides is at home, the slave responds with a paradox: "not within yet within he is" (οὐκ ἔνδον ἔνδον ἐστίν 396). As Dicaeopolis recognizes, this is the very sort of clever paradox for which Euripides shows such a fondness in his poetry and which is representative of what Willink, commenting on one such Euripidean passage, calls contemporary "sophistic idiom."[37] This intellectual background is brought out by the slave's appeal to Dicaeopolis' "intelligence" (εἰ γνώμην ἔχεις 396) as well as Dicaeopolis' praise of the slave's "clever" response (ὁ δοῦλος οὑτωσὶ σοφῶς ὑποκρίνατο 401).

The slave goes on to explain further:

His mind, gathering verses outside,
and is not within, but he himself is within with his feet up, composing

[36] For a consideration of this trope, see P. Brown (2008).
[37] See Willink (1986, 218) on one such phrase in *Or*. 819. Cf. e.g. E. *Alc*. 521, *Hec*. 566, *Tr*. 1223, *IT* 512, *Io.* 1444, *Hel*. 138, *Ph*. 272, 357, as well as the Aristophanic parodies at *Ra*. 1082 at 1477 with commentary by Rau (1967**,** 29-30).

a tragedy.

ὁ νοῦς μὲν ἔξω ξυλλέγων ἐπύλλια
κοὐκ ἔνδον, αὐτὸς δ᾽ ἔνδον ἀναβάδην ποιεῖ
τραγῳδίαν. (398-400)

Beyond recalling his disabled protagonists, Euripides' manner of composing and his appearance is related to his status as a comic intellectual.[38] As in the depiction of Socrates and his students in the Thinkery, the portrayal of Euripides points to a tension between the poet's bodily existence and his mental activity: while Euripides' mind is active in gathering up verses, his body is inactive to the point of decrepitude.

We saw in the *Frogs* that the hair-splitting Socratic conversations that ruined Euripides' art were implicated in his "idleness." Such a characterization of contemporary poets goes well beyond the portrayal of Euripides. Poets are included among the "idle" intellectuals whom Socrates' Clouds are said to nourish and are often comically envisioned flying through the air in order to gather their verses.[39] This is where we must imagine Euripides' flittering *nous* to be. According to Aristophanes' comic logic, because the intellectual "work" of these airy poets is not easily recognizable as a valuable material contribution to society, they, like the other intellectuals we have considered in chapter one, are do-nothings who must must either resign themselves to poverty or play the parasite.[40] Thus we have in this first depiction of Euripides on stage the same constellation of characteristics that marked Socrates and his students as

[38] Cf. Morosi (2020, 409 n. 33).

[39] Cf. *Nu*. 333-339, *Pax* 827-837, *Av*. 904-957, 1379-1409. The joke is made mostly at the expense of dithyrambic poets, but given Euripides' general association with airiness and the "new music" elsewhere, the joke would seem also to apply to the tragedian. See Franklin (2017) for the new dithyramb's place in contemporary intellectual culture.

[40] Cf. *Nu*. 316 and 332 with Dover (1968) *ad* loc. On the trope generally, see Imperio (1998, 52-53, 115).

particularly dedicated thinkers: airy intellectual activity, the degradation of the body, and an inability to make money.

While this aspect of Euripides' character is most pronounced in the *Acharnian*s, Aristophanes often invokes Euripides' poverty with continued references to his herb-selling mother.[41] This joke appears, for example, in a passage from the *Frogs* that recalls the characterization of Euripides explored in the *Acharnians*: "Is that so, you scion of the greenery goddess? / … You babble-collector, / you creator of beggars, you rag stitcher!" (ἄληθες, ὦ παῖ τῆς ἀρουραίας θεοῦ; / … ὦ στωμυλιοσυλλεκτάδη / καὶ πτωχοποιὲ καὶ ῥακιοσυρραπτάδη; 840-842). Euripides' own lowly condition is again connected to the wordy, destitute characters he crafts. That Aristophanes could continue to invoke this image of Euripides after a span of twenty years suggests that this was a reliable means for the comic poet to mock his tragic counterpart.[42]

The *semnotēs* that united Euripides and Socrates in both the *Frogs* and in the fragment of Callias Comicus also plays an important role in Aristophanes' portrayal of Euripides elsewhere. On the basis of these passages, we suggested that this *semnotēs* should be understood in the context of the shared intellectual attitude of the philosopher-poet and the prototheoretical philosopher. This interpretation is borne out by Aristophanes' presentation of Euripides in, for example, the opening scene of the *Thesmophoriazusae*, where Euripides' lofty didacticism closely parallels that of Socrates in the Thinkery. We are immediately introduced to the poet as he leads along his Kinsman, who complains that they have been walking all day with no end in sight. The poet's reaction to his relative's very concrete question about their destination is to

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[41] For a thorough treatment of this joke, see Roselli (2005).

[42] That mockery of Euripides was a comic *topos* beyond even the substantial evidence that has survived seems to be suggested by *V*. 61; see Sommerstein (1983) and Olson and Biles (2015) *ad loc.*

theorize quibblingly about the nature of sight and sound, culminating in a cosmogonical lesson on the nature of things:

> This is how these were distinguished at that time:
> for aether, when in the beginning it separated
> and begat within itself living things astir,
> first fashioned that with which we see,
> the eye, counter image to the wheel of the sun,
> and, as a funnel for hearing, drilled the ear.
>
> οὕτω ταῦτα διεκρίθη τότε.
> Αἰθὴρ γὰρ, ὅτε τὰ πρῶτα διεχωρίζετο
> καὶ ζῷ᾽ ἐν αὑτῷ ξυνετέκνου κινούμενα,
> ᾧ μὲν βλέπειν χρὴ, πρῶτ᾽ ἐμηχανήσατο
> ὀφθαλμὸν ἀντίμιμον ἡλίου τροχῷ,
> ἀκοῆς δὲ χοάνην ὦτα διετετρήνατο. (13-18)

The passage, with its mix of high-flown poetic diction and airy philosophical jargon, is the sort of Euripidean parody that Aristophanes so clearly relished, with potential parallels in a number of extant fragments.[43] The emphasis on aether as the primary cosmogonical force also points to the connection with Socrates and the airy thinking that he represents.

Here, though, Euripides' lofty theorizing predictably goes right over the head of his less intellectually inclined Kinsman:

> So it's because of this funnel that I shouldn't hear or see?
> By Zeus, I'm happy to learn this!
> How great it is to keep company with the wise!
>
> διὰ τὴν χοάνην οὖν μήτ᾽ ἀκούω μήθ᾽ ὁρῶ;
> νὴ τὸν Δί᾽ ἥδομαί γε τουτὶ προσμαθών.
> οἷόν γέ πού ᾽στιν αἱ σοφαὶ ξυνουσίαι. (19-20)

This ironic praise of the practical "benefits" that the Kinsman claims to enjoy from these lessons

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[43] See the references in Olson (2002) and Sommerstein (1980) *ad loc.*

reminds us of the way in which Aristophanes used the practical attitude of Strepsiades to comically undercut the airy intellectual pretensions of Socrates in the *Clouds*.[44] Adding to the humor is his relative's suggestion that such unhelpful wisdom means that Euripides should be counted among "the wise"—a suggestion that the poet himself proudly accepts as he declares that whoever spends time with him "could learn many such things" (πόλλ᾽ ἂν μάθοις τοιαῦτα παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ 21).[45] In short, the comic characterization of Euripides and his lessons in this opening scene of the *Thesmophorizusae* plays out much like that of Socrates in the *Clouds*, with the poet taking on the role of the arrogant and incomprehensible intellectual and his Kinsman playing off him as the uncomprehending common man.[46] Yet whereas the comic Socrates' philosophizing takes place in his private "school," Euripides continuously subjects all the audience of the theater of Dionysus to his airy thoughts through his poetry—and we can imagine many viewers being equally as confused as Euripides' Kinsman is here.

Indeed a later episode in the play reprises this tension between the haughty philosophical poet and his listeners. It also neatly captures the interaction between Aristophanes' characterization of Euripides' intellectual attitude and Euripides' own characterization of the intellectual attitude of his tragic characters, particularly Medea. In a famous passage from the *Medea* that has often been interpreted within the context of the negative reception of intellectuals

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[44] Cf. Silk's (2000, 320-326) characterization of Euripides as "Enlightenment Man" who is played against the Kinsman's "*l'homme moyen sensuel.*" See also the analysis by Billings (forthcoming, ch. 2).

[45] Euripides, like Socrates, otherwise shows impatience with his Kinsman, consistently speaking to him in commands and telling him to be quiet four times (σίγα, 27, 45, 95, 99) in this opening scene.

[46] This arrogant attitude can also be felt in the *Acharnians*; cf. Euripides' insistence that he has "no time" (οὐ σχολή 409) to help Dicaeopolis and Socrates' Pupil's claim that he "has no time" (οὐ γάρ μοι σχολή. *Nu*. 221) to help Strepsiades. The joke in both cases is that they are "busy" with such ridiculous, idle activity.

in the fifth century, Medea complains that those reputed to be "clever" (σοφὸς) incur hostility for being thought lazy and useless.[47] A later passage invokes a similar set of ideas, suggesting that an undeserved reputation for "being haughty" (σεμνοὺς γεγῶτας) haunts those who are clever but are not active in political life.[48] In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, we find a reference to these very lines when, after the series of parodies that intricately engage with Euripides' contemporary reception, the character Euripides comments on how the comedy's internal audience has failed to be taken in by his dramatic performances: "Euripides, by bringing new and clever ideas to fools you would toil in vain!" (σκαιοῖσι γάρ τοι καινὰ προσφέρων σοφὰ / μάτην ἀναλίσκοις ἄν 1130-1131). The comment reads both as a reaction to the immediate dramatic situation of Aristophanes' play and as a metatheatrical gag, with the haughty tragedian showing disdain for the theater audience *in situ*, who are accused of failing to appreciate the novel genius of his tragedy.[49]

We see, then, that Aristophanes' characterization of Euripides in both the *Acharnians* and the *Thesmophoriazusae* comically presents the tragedian as a sort of philosopher-poet in a way that parallels the characterization of Socrates in his role as prototheoretical philosopher. We noted that Aristophanes' use of the *Medea* in this last instance also points to an important aspect of Aristophanes' engagement with Euripides as such: in crafting his Euripides, he draws on the

[47] 293-306. I consult the text of Mastronarde (2002).

[48] 214-221. For the anti-intellectual interpretation, usually reading the passage in relationship to the reception of Anaxagoras, see Carter (1986. 146-147), Woodbury (1981, 301 n. 18). The connection between intellectualizing and haughtiness is made even more explicitly in E. fr. 924 *TrGF*: "Don't touch subtle arguments, my soul. Why do you ponder so excessively? Unless you want to exalt yourself among your equals" (μή μοι / λεπτῶν θίγγανε μύθων, ψυχή· / τί περισσὰ φρονεῖς; εἰ μὴ μέλλεις / σεμνύνεσθαι παρ' ὁμοίοις).

[49] For these parodies and their failure within the dramatic context of Aristophanes' play, see Zeitlin (1996) and Hall (2006, ch. 8).

clever characters for which Euripides' tragedies were known. Aristophanes' portrayal of Euripides, then, needs to be understood as part of an emerging public discourse about the figure of the intellectual, a discourse that included the poetry of Euripides himself and that would form the basis for later developments in the concept of the *bios theōrētikos*. The significance of Aristophanes' comic critique of Euripides for our understanding of the early history of the concept of the *bios theōrētikos* becomes fully apparent when we consider how that critique itself drives this discourse forward. The most significant piece of evidence in this respect is Euripides' *Antiope*, a play which itself thematized the character of the philosopher-poet. For certain aspects of this play's treatment of the sort of *bios theōrētikos* lived by this character can only be understood as a response to the comic poets' mocking critique of the same.

The play, dated to the last quarter of the fifth century, was famous throughout antiquity for its *agōn* between its two central figures, Amphion and Zethus.[50] Here, the two brothers debated and defended the virtues of their different ways of life, ways of life that would come to be identified with the *bios theōrētikos* and the *bios politikos/praktikos*. Amphion, a lyre player, argues for a quiet life of music-making and intellectual cultivation, while Zethus, a herdsman, argues on behalf of practical skills that allow one to thrive in a life of action.[51]

Amphion's theoretical attitude and activity is best captured in a choral fragment that scholars

[50] The date of the play is debated. The stylistic analysis of Cropp and Frick (1985) situates the play within the period of 427-419; Tarrant (2008) argues for a date in the late 420s; Collard *et al*. (2004) favor a date between 411-407, recently supported by Jendza (2020, ch. 6). The play was also adapted by Pacuvius, which contributed the continued interest in the *agōn*; cf. Hor. *Ep.* 1.18.39–45; Cic. *Rhet. ad Herennium* 2.27.43, *de Invent.* 1.50.94, *de Orat.* 2.37.155-156, *de Rep.* 1.18.30; Aul. Gel. 13.8.4-5; Dio. Chrys. "On Truth" 73.10. For more on the play, see Collard *et al*. (2004, 259-329) and Kambitsis (1972).

[51] On the relationship between the life of Amphion and the *bios theōrētikos*, see Snell (1964, ch. 4), Carter (1986, 163-173), Bernardini (2016), Gibert (2009), Slings (1991), Natanblut (2009).

have long attributed to the play:

> Blessed is he who through inquiry
> gains knowledge,
> not hastening to harm his fellow citizens,
> or to act unjustly,
> but observing eternal nature's
> ageless order,
> the way it was formed,
> and from what and how.
> ὄλβιος ὅστις τῆς ἱστορίας
> ἔσχε μάθησιν,
> μήτε πολιτῶν ἐπὶ πημοσύνῃ
> μήτ᾽ εἰς ἀδίκους πράξεις ὁρμῶν,
> ἀλλ᾽ ἀθανάτου καθορῶν φύσεως
> κόσμον ἀγήρων, πῇ τε συνέστη
> καὶ ὅθεν καὶ ὅπως. (fr. 910 *TrGF*)

The language here—particularly the praise of "knowledge" through "inquiry" and the "observation" of the "ageless order of nature"—is reflective of contemporary intellectual speculation. Corresponding to the chorus's *makarismos* is an earlier hymn that Amphion had sung in praise of "Aether and Earth" (Αἰθέρα καὶ Γαῖαν fr. 182a *TrGF*) as cosmogonical forces. Meanwhile, Amphion elsewhere indicates how such a man avoids "troubling his fellow citizens" or "acting unjustly": by living a private life disengaged from the affairs of the city (cf. frs. 193, 194, 196, and 202 *TrGF*).[52] Elsewhere, Amphion also seems to have made a case that the knowledge uncovered by his intellectual activity is "a possession better than wealth" (κρεῖσσον ὄλβου κτῆμα fr. 191 *TrGF*).[53] In all of these features, the character of Amphion seems to

[52] Fr. 194, 199, 200, and 201 *TrGF* appear to give a civic-minded justification for the cultivation of intellectual virtues. That the play ultimately aimed to uphold some such political defense of intellectual activity is also suggested by the ending, in which Hermes ordains that Amphion will construct the walls of Thebes with his lyre (fr. 223.86-103 *TrGF*).

[53] Cf. fr. 198 *TrGF*.

correspond closely to that of Euripides and the other intellectual poets of Old Comedy—and Socrates as well, when we strip away his poetic activity.

For our purposes, though, even more significant than the positive characterization of Amphion himself is the characterizing criticism leveled against the philosopher-poet by his more traditional brother Zethus. For Zethus' critique conspicuously incorporates the comic element of personal ridicule that we have been considering here and in the previous two chapters. Indeed, Euripides' *Antiope* has been held up as an example of Euripidean "paracomedy," a play that consciously incorporates comedic elements into its tragic plot.[54] Most remarkable in this respect is a fragment in which Zethus begins his harangue of Amphion and his cosmogonical hymn: "You begin troubles by introducing this Muse / who's lazy, wine-loving, and unconcerned with money" (κακῶν κατάρχεις τήνδε Μοῦσαν εἰσάγων / ἀργόν, φίλοινον, χρημάτων ἀτημελῆ fr. 183 *TrGF*). By personifying Amphion's song as his personal muse, Zethus is here employing a means of literary criticism pulled right from the stage of Old Comedy in which female personifications of poetic figures could be used to characterize a particular poet's relationship to his art.[55] The most prominent example in the extant corpus is the "Muse of Euripides" brought on stage in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1305-1308).[56] While we certainly should not imagine that the *Antiope* actually staged some representation of Amphion's "Muse," Zethus' critique of his song draws on this critical tradition.

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[54] Sutton (1976), Scharffenberger (1996), and esp. Jendza (2020, ch. 6), who offers the first monograph-length treatment of paracomedy.

[55] It is common enough in tragic diction for the nouns μοῦσα to signify a song itself (see examples in LSJ *s.v.* μοῦσα A. II.). What is less common is such an explicit personification of the noun as suggested by the use of these adjectives and the verb εἰσάγω, a sometimes technical term for bringing a character on stage. For other examples, including the personified μουσική and κωμῳδία, see Hall (2006, ch. 6).

[56] Hall (2006, 174).

This comic aspect of the critique is confirmed when we consider Zethus' description of the Muse. Just as the Muse of Euripides is characterized by her vulgarity so as to reflect Euripides' own vulgarity, Amphion's Muse is characterized by the unattractive traits that Zethus associates with his brother's intellectualism. First, she is lazy (ἀργός), a trait we have already seen comically applied to the intellectual Euripides in the *Acharnians*.[57] Here too this idleness is paired with poverty: Amphion's muse is "unconcerned with money" (χρημάτων ἀτημελής). The connection to this comic type is further suggested by Zethus' critique that Amphion's singing is "chattering" (τὸ δ᾽ ἐκλαλοῦν), a comic word that is, again, associated with contemporary intellectuals and intellectually inclined poets, Euripides in particular.[58] Also suggestive is the Muses' love of wine (φίλοινος), which likely refers to the festivities of the symposium, the performance context for the lyre music with which Amphion is associated. Yet such luxuriousness was also often associated with feminine indulgence, and indeed, bibulousness is a primary trait of women in Old Comedy. Zethus emphasizes Amphion's femininity elsewhere, and it has even been suggested that Amphion himself was costumed so as to suggest comic cross-dressing *à la* Agathon in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* (95-267).[59] In that scene, Agathon blends feminine luxuriance with intellectual theorizing about poetry.[60]

Parallels with comedy continue in the other preserved fragments of Zethus' critique. In

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[57] Zethus again characterizes Amphion as ἀργός in fr. 187 *TrGF*; cf. also the political critique of "idleness" in E. fr. 512 *TrGF*.

[58] Fr. 219 *TrGF*; cf. esp. *Ra*. 89, 916, 953, 1069, 1489; on *lalia*, see nn. 22, 25 above.

[59] Note esp. the phrase "γυναικομίμῳ διαπρέπεις μορφώματι" in fr. 185 *TrGF*, considered below. For the thought, see Scharffenberger (1996, 66-67), Jendza (2020, 234, 237).

[60] For the presentation of Agathon, see Zeitlin (1996), Farmer (2017a, 155-94), Billings (forthcoming, ch. 2). If femininity in itself is not a strongly attested characteristic of all contemporary intellectuals on the comic stage, their white skin, a trait associated primarily with women, certainly was; cf. Imperio (1998, 88).

another fragment, for example, Zethus stresses that Amphion's philosophico-poetical activity is useless (μάτην κιθαρίζεις μηδὲν ὠφελῶν) and urges him to go outdoors and dedicate himself to an active life that will provide more material goods (ἀλλὰ ἔξελθε … <εὐ>πόρησον fr. 187a *TrGF*).[61] Just as in comedy, this sort of indoor life is associated with inactivity and degradation of the body: Amphion is "idle at home and in the city" (ἀργὸς μὲν οἴκοις καὶ πόλει fr. 187.4 *TrGF*) and his body has so atrophied that he has taken on the appearance of a woman (γυναικομίμῳ διαπρέπεις μορφώματι fr. 185.3 *TrGF*). In short, Zethus' critique reads like a tragic reimagining of that which we have seen Aristophanes and the comic poets consistently make against Socrates and Euripides: "How could this be wisdom, an art that takes a robust man and makes him worse? (καὶ πῶς σοφὸν τοῦτ᾽ ἐστίν, ἥτις εὐφυᾶ / λαβοῦσα τέχνη φῶτ᾽ ἔθηκε χείρονα; fr. 186 *TrGF*). Such a critique hearkens back to Socrates' claim that the rustic Strepsiades will come away from his education looking like the half-dead Chaerephon (*Nu.* 500-504) and to Pheidippides' return home from the Thinkery with "the tan scraped off" his cheeks (τὸ χρῶμα διακεκναισμένος *Nu.* 120; cf. 1170-1177). We also see a parallel in Euripides' Kinsman's claim that the poet's erudite lessons might teach him "how to go lame in both legs" (ὅπως / ἔτι προσμάθοιμι χωλὸς εἶναι τὼ σκέλει *Th.* 23-24).

Euripides' apparent response to the mocking characterization to which Aristophanes and the other comic poets subject him, his incorporation of the comic critique of the philosopher-poet, is significant for our story of the fifth-century *bios theōrētikos* in two ways. First, it confirms our earlier suggestion that unlike the Platonic theoretical philosopher of the fourth century, the prototheorist of the fifth-century is a phenomenon that encompasses a wider range of intellectual

[61] On this fragment, see Borthwick (1967).

figures. It includes not only a would-be "philosopher" like Socrates, but also a "philosopher"-poet like Euripides or his apparent analogue Amphion. Second, it lends support to our contention that the prototheoretical philosopher figure we have been studying first emerged as an *exemplum horrendum* on the comic stage. Beyond comedy, the *Antiope* is the only extant fifth-century text to offer an in-depth exploration of a pre-Platonic *bios theōrētikos*, and its treatment had a lasting cultural impact. Yet by the time Euripides takes up the prototheorist in the "serious" literature of tragedy, he does so in a way that can only be understood as a defensive reaction against the earlier, critical portrayal of such a figure on the comic stage. Both of these points are important to keep in mind as we look ahead to chapter four, where we will see that Plato looks back to the *Antiope* as he begins to articulate his own understanding of philosophy.

Socrates and Euripides *Philosophos* in the Biographical Tradition

Before we turn to Plato's theoretical philosopher, though, I would like to consider one additional body of evidence that lends indirect support to the interpretation of the comic Euripides that I have been advancing here: the ancient biographical tradition. For in this material, the reception of Euripides as a particularly philosophical poet is expressed in very similar terms to those found in Old Comedy. And in the biographical tradition, too, Euripides' status as a philosophical poet is explored through his supposed personal relationship to Socrates. In this final section, then, I suggest that both of these aspects of the biographical reception of Euripides should be understood as a direct development from the characterization of the tragedian in Old Comedy. In order to understand how this is so, let us first review the nature of that material.

The corpus that we are working with is made up of three main sources that show significant overlap: a late, anonymous *Vita*—itself apparently composed of three originally separate

accounts—of unknown date that is preserved in some of our manuscripts; the fragments of a dialogue *The Life of Euripides* by the third-century BCE peripatetic historian Satyrus of Callatis; and various isolated anecdotes and biographical claims from a variety of contexts.[62] While much of what has come down to us is certainly the result of haphazard accumulation, we know that at least some of it was already known and discussed in the Hellenistic period.[63] Much of the material is of dubious historical value regarding the actual events of the life of Euripides, and the authors who preserve that material vary in their critical attitudes toward it. Despite the difficulties presented by this body of evidence, it does have particular significance for our current investigation into the reception of Euripides in Old Comedy. As previously noted, it has been convincingly argued that a great deal of the surviving biographical material can be traced directly to the presentation of Euripides by the poets of Old Comedy.[64] While the questionable historiographical methods of these earlier biographers initially led scholars to dismiss the lives of the poets as little more than biographical fiction, recent scholarship has shown that they are

[62] In addition to Kannicht's *TrGF* v. 5.1, much of the material is conveniently collected and translated in Kovacs (1994). The major pieces of biographical evidence are also helpfully collected, translated, and discussed online as part of Durham University's "Living Poets" project; see Burges Watson (2016). Schorn's (2004) is the most recent edition (with detailed commentary) of Satyrus.

[63] The Hellenistic Atthidographer and earliest attested biographer of Euripides, Philochorus, challenges the historicity of the recurring Aristophanic gibe that Euripides' mother was a seller of vegetables (cf. *Ach*. 479, *Th*. 387, *Ra*. 84, and *FGrHist* 328 F 218), suggesting that even at this point biographers were wrestling with comedy as a potential historical source. In addition to Philochorus and Satyrus, Hellenistic biographers of Euripides included Heraclides Ponticus, Hermippus, and Duris of Samos. Parts of the *Vita* are likewise thought to be derived from a Hellenistic archetype.

[64] Lefkowitz (1979), (2012) ch. 9. A clear example is the recurring claim that Euripides was a "hater of women" and was thus attacked by a group of angry women, which is taken directly from Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. Lefkowitz overstates the case in arguing that *all* of the biographical material ultimately derives from comic sources.

nevertheless a rich resource for understanding the reception of the poets and their poetry.[65] This is particularly true with regard to the reception of Euripides as a poet who was uniquely enmeshed in contemporary intellectual culture—or as he was known among the Athenians, according to Vitruvius, "the philosopher of the stage."[66] To see how this is so, let us begin by considering some of the main elements related to this tradition.

The anonymous author of the Euripdean *Vita* begins with a standard formula providing the information related to Euripides' birth and giving some sparse details about his early life before moving on to his poetic career. In recounting Euripides' innovations—including the introduction of "natural science" (φυσιολογία) and "rhetorical displays" (ῥητορείας) into tragedy—the author writes that this is no surprise for a man who had such illustrious intellectual influences: Euripides was, according to the writer of the *Vita* and to various other writers, a student of Anaxagoras, Prodicus, Protagoras, Archelaus, and Socrates. According to the second writer in the *Vita*, it was because of this philosophical education that he was "rather proud and pardonably stood aloof from the majority, showing no ambition as regards his audience."[67] This haughtiness is a theme that appears throughout the material and is best exemplified by the repeated references to the so-called "Cave of Euripides" on the island of Salamis, where Euripides escaped crowded Athens to write his tragedies in contemplative isolation.[68] Euripides is depicted as generally having a

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[65] Cf. Lefkowitz's (1981, x) initial comments that the tradition should be "disregarded as popular fiction" with her less dismissive introduction in the second edition (2012, x). Graziosi's (2002) work on the Homeric biographical tradition marks an important turning point for understanding the lives of the poets as an act of reception.

[66] *scaenicus philosophus*, Vitr. VIII.Praef.; cf. Clem. Al. *Strom.* V.688, Ath. IV.158e, S.E. *M.* I.288.

[67] ὅθεν καὶ πλέον τι φρονήσας εἰκότως περιίστατο τῶν πολλῶν, οὐδεμίαν φιλοτιμίαν περὶ τὰ θέατρα ποιούμενος. T 1 IB.2 *TrGF*.

[68] Satyr. fr. 39 IX, *Vita* 22, Aul. Gel. 15.20.5.

contentious relationship with the Athenians and the comic poets in particular. The biographers' claims that the historical Euripides eventually left Athens for the court of Archelaus of Macedon is relatively well attested, though it is less clear that he did so because of his thin skin or lack of popularity.[69] In the end, Euripides faced a gruesome death, torn apart by Archelaus' dogs when he was sitting alone in a royal grove—Thomas Magister even includes the baroque detail that he was passing his time alone in the grove "thinking" (φροντίζων).

It has been noted that the poet's isolation is a theme that runs throughout the tradition, and Lefkowitz is right to stress that going back to Hesiod there is a *topos* of poets describing themselves as "isolated from and superior to other men."[70] Yet more to the point in the context of our interpretation of Euripides as philosopher-poet is Schorn's argument that the image of Euripides as a sort of misunderstood poetic genius is the result of the peripatetic Satyrus' presentation of Euripides as an Aristotelian "great-souled man."[71] In an early fragment, in fact, one of Satyrus' speakers directly claims that Euripides was "great souled"[72] in a manner that was reflected in his poetry. Throughout his fragmentary biography, traces of which can be found also in the later tradition, Euripides is shown to be a man who, like Aristotle's great-souled man "deems himself worthy of great things and *is* worthy of them" on account of his poetry.[73] There

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[69] Arist. *Pol.* 1311b30-40. Scullion (2003), following Lefkowitz's skepticism about this biographical detail, questions its historicity by pointing out the peculiarity of Aristophanes' apparent silence on the matter. Most recently, Lamari (2017, 45-53), following Hanink (2008) and Csapo (2010, 99-100), accepts the tradition on the strength of Aristotle's testimony. Hanink (2008) and Revermann (1999-2000) argue that the story took hold in the Hellenistic period, when the Macedonian kings sought to strengthen their cultural heritage by claiming Euripides as their own.

[70] Lefkowitz (2012, 101).

[71] Schorn (2004, 56-63). For the great-souled man, see Arist. *NE* 1123a-1125a.

[72] τὴν / [ψυ] χὴν μέγας / [ἦν], fr. 8, col. II. For Satyrus, I use the text of Schorn (2004), who provides a fuller papyrological apparatus.

[73] δοκεῖ δὴ μεγαλόψυχος εἶναι ὁ μεγάλων αὑτὸν ἀξιῶν ἄξιος ὤν· *NE* 1123b1-2.

is no indication that he partakes in any other activity apart from his pursuit of poetry, just as Aristotle's great-souled man pursues only great things that will bring him worthy honor.[74] In his pursuit of his lofty activity, Euripides like the great-souled man relies little on others and shows disdain for the opinion of the many. While the democratic masses of Athens thus fail to recognize his greatness because of their ignorance and envy, the elites in Macedon and Sicily rightly recognize him for the great poet he is.

Satyrus' characterization of Euripides, then, must be understood as a purposeful act of peripatetic reception, an attempt to mold the materials he has about Euripides' life and character into the image of the Aristotelian ideal. And if we remove Satyrus' peripatetic lens, what we are left with is an image of Euripides that very much resembles the comic Euripides that we have laid out above. To put it another way, the philosophically inclined poet whom the peripatetic Satyrus would positively describe as great-souled is the very same man that the comic poet mockingly described as an arrogant intellectual quack.[75] Indeed, this is an ambivalence that Aristotle himself already recognized. Because the great-souled man does not care for wealth, power, minor honors, or other external goods, he appears idle and contemptuous.[76] And if he has such an attitude but fails to recognize that he is not actually worthy of great things, he is foolish and senseless.[77] As we have seen, this is precisely the assessment that the comic poets suggest of

[74] Compare the civic activities that often appear in the biographical material related to Aeschylus, who is noted for his military contributions, and Sophocles, who is said to have held prominent political and religious positions. Though see also the less widespread traditions of Euripides' civic activity in Hanink (2016).

[75] Compare Diogenes Laertius' claim about the comic poets treatment of Socrates: they "fail to notice that in their mockery they praise him" (2.5.27).

[76] He is "idle and slow to act" (ἀργὸν, μελλητὴν *NE* 1124b24) and is thought to be "haughty" (ὑπερόπται *NE* 1124a19), though he "justly looks down upon" others (δικαίως καταφρονεῖ *NE* 1124b5).

[77] ἠλίθιος, ἀνόητος *NE* 1123b3-4.

Euripides and Socrates. In the context of our investigation of the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos*, it is even more interesting that Aristotle's description of greatness of soul shares important features with his theoretical ideal as described in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[78] While Satyrus may have been unwilling to put forth the poet Euripides as an example of the theoretical ideal, his characterization of the philosophical tragedian seems to share some important features with that ideal.[79]

My immediate claim, though, is that Satyrus is able to characterize Euripides as an Aristotelian great-souled man simply by reframing the comic evidence that presents him as a haughty, over-subtle poet, and that Satyrus' biographical account of Euripides thus depends directly on the comic account of Euripides. This case can be made most concretely by considering the personal relationship between Euripides and Socrates posited throughout the biographical tradition. For in establishing this relationship, I argue, the biographers likely relied directly on the evidence of Old Comedy that we examined earlier in this chapter. In the second half of this section, then, I would like to first consider the nature of this relationship in the biographical material before looking at two examples of the biographical revaluation of the comic Euripides that I have suggested this material represents.

To consider comedy as a potential source for the supposed relationship between Socrates and Euripides in the biographical tradition, we might begin from a distinction drawn early in the *Vita*.

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[78] Gauthier (1951, 104-117), Gauthier and Jolif (1970, 286-298); Richardson Lear likewise (2007, 170-171) reviews the similarities.

[79] Schorn (2004, 59 n. 263) dismisses the idea that Satyrus portrays Euripides as a representative of the *bios theōrētikos*. Whether or not Satyrus considered himself to be presenting Euripides as an adherent of such a way of life, it is noteworthy that he does present Euripides as having the characteristics shared by Aristotle's great-souled man and his theoretical philosopher.

In recounting Euripides' intellectual influences, the biographer notes that the poet was "a student (ἀκουστὴς) of Anaxagoras, Prodicus, and Protagoras and a companion (ἑταῖρος) of Socrates."[80] It is suggestive that the account separates Socrates, who is counted as Euripides' "companion," from the other three figures, of whom Euripides is said to have been a "student." On what grounds might such a distinction be made by the biographers?[81]

Besides Socrates, the figure with whom Euripides is most consistently associated is Anaxagoras. This connection is first attested in some verses by the Hellenistic poet Alexander Aetolus, who refers to Euripides as "the nursling of Anaxagoras" without any further explanation.[82] Modern scholars have generally agreed that Euripides' poetry bears traces of engagement with contemporary philosophical speculation and have interpreted the ideas expressed in a number of passages with reference to the doctrines of Anaxagoras.[83] In the ancient sources, commentators often go a step further, suggesting on the basis of such passages that Euripides was a student of Anaxagoras. In this, they are applying a biographical method of reading poetical works most often associated with a fourth-century peripatetic biographer, Chamaeleon of Pontus: the commentators and biographers use the ideas present in certain

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[80] T 1 IA.2 *TrGF*.

[81] In addition to those considered below, there are, of course, other potential reasons why Euripides' relationship with Socrates is treated differently from his relationship with other philosophers. It is noteworthy, for example, that they are both Athenians and slightly younger than Anaxagoras and Protagoras. There is also the fact that Socrates left no written works whereas Anaxagoras, Prodicus, and Protagoras all did. Miletti (2007) considers how the later tradition separates Euripides' association with Anaxagoras and Socrates into distinct separate spheres of influence, the former with cosmology, the latter, surprisingly, with rhetoric. Nevertheless, the question of sources and biographical method is, I think, an interesting one.

[82] ὁ δ' Ἀναξαγόρου τρόφιμος, F 7, 3 (Powell). The second writer in the *Vita* attributes a line of this poem to Aristophanes, an attribution rejected by most, but speculatively argued for by Lloyd-Jones (1994).

[83] See most recently Egli (2003, 37-119).

passages from Euripidean poetry to make a historical claim about his studies with a contemporary philosopher with whom those ideas are typically associated.[84]

In the case of Anaxagoras and Euripides, perhaps the most well-known example occurs in a scholium to Pindar's *Olympian* 1, where the commentator claims that Euripides in the *Orestes* describes the sun as a rock suspended in heaven because he was a "student of Anaxagoras."[85] As Arrighetti argues after a helpful review of the evidence connecting the two, the ancient biographical tradition primarily attests to the belief that Anaxagoras influenced the cosmological ideas that are found in Euripides' poetry.[86] On the strength of this evidence, it seems most likely that the biographical claim about Euripides' studies with the philosopher developed in accordance with the Chamaeleontic method. Readers see Euripides' characters espousing ideas associated with Anaxagoras, and thus they draw the conclusion that Euripides was Anaxagoras' student.[87] Thus we also find such a Chamaeleontic claim in Satyrus. After asserting that Euripides "honored Anaxagoras to a remarkable degree," a speaker quotes some verses from a lost tragedy and interprets thus: "Here he has accurately included in three verse-periods the whole of the cosmic doctrine of Anaxagoras."[88]

The situation seems different for the supposed relationship between Euripides and Socrates.[89]

[84] For a concise summary of the Chamaeleontic method, see Godolphin (1932).

[85] *Scholium ad Ol.* 1.91, recorded as T75 in the "Dramatic Appendix" Laks and Most (2016); cf. *scholia ad Orestes* 982 and *Troiades* 884, Clem. Al. *Strom*. 5.14.114.2, D.L. 3.10, Gal. *Plac*. *Hipp*. *Plat*. 4.7, Men. Rh. 8.10.

[86] Arrighetti (1964, 106-107).

[87] In fr. 38, a speaker in Satyrus' dialogue also quotes E. fr. 913 *TrGF* rebuking the *meteōrologoi*, suggesting that there was perhaps some nuance to his account of Euripides' supposed philosophical inclinations.

[88] ἀκριβῶς ὅλως περιείληφεν̣ τὸν Ἀναξ[α]γόρειον [διά] κοσμον̣ [±3] τρισὶν, fr. 37, col. III. For the interpretation and conjectural translation, see Schorn (2004, 209-213).

[89] Compare Arrighetti's (1964, 113-115) collection of the relevant evidence with that for Euripides and Anaxagoras' in n. 86 above.

While modern scholars have sometimes considered particular passages of Euripides in relation to the thought of Socrates, the ancient commentators generally do not.[90] The only example of this practice of which I am aware again comes from Satyrus, where one interlocutor responds to the other's quotation of some verses about the omniscience of the gods with the assertion that "such a suggestion about the gods would be Socratic."[91] I am otherwise aware of no additional evidence for ancient commentators interpreting the words of Euripidean characters "Socratically" in order to make a biographical claim about the poet himself.[92] Satyrus' attempt to establish a relationship between Euripides and Socrates, then, does not seem to be quite so dependent on the Chamaeleontic method as in the case of Euripides and Anaxagoras.

One reason this might be so is that biographers looking to trace Euripides' intellectual interlocutors did not have to rely on such clever biographical techniques in the case of Socrates and Euripides. Rather than scrutinizing the words of Euripides' poems to draw out the influence of Socrates on Euripides' thought so as to establish a student-teacher relationship between the two, they could turn to "good" fifth-century sources directly attesting a personal relationship

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[90] E.g., Snell (1948), Irwin (1983), Dillon (2004, 70-73), Egli (2004, 164-173). As noted above, such a task is further complicated by the fact that unlike Anaxagoras, Socrates left no writings directly attesting to his thought.

[91] εἴη ἂν ἡ τοιαύτη ὑπόνοια περ[ὶ] θεῶν [Σω]κρατική· fr. 39, II. It is perhaps noteworthy that later in the dialogue, the interlocutors agree that Euripides' enmity toward "the entire race of women in his poems" is a *failure* to adopt the Socratic position on the so-called unity of virtues (fr. 39 XIII). In other words, the interlocutors do not draw a conclusion about the relationship between Euripides and Socrates based on "Socratic" views that can be found in the tragedian's work, but rather point to how his plays supposedly suggest a disagreement between the two.

[92] Given the state of the text, Arrighetti (1964, 116) and Schorn (2004, 238-240) are, in my opinion, too confident that the succeeding column, which contains a critique of tyrants and demagogues, originally showed the connection between the political views of Euripides and those of Socrates. Webster (1967, 22) suggests that the passage might have originally alluded to Protagoras.

between them: the comic fragments that we considered earlier.[93] The role that comedy played in establishing this relationship is made clear in Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Socrates*, where the biographer quotes the four fragments in which the comic poets suggest that Socrates helped Euripides to compose his poetry, one of which is also quoted by the first author in the Euripides *Vita*. Narcy, building on Kirk, has likewise suggested that Diogenes Laertius' humorous anecdote recounting a bit of repartee between Socrates and Euripides on the work of Heraclitus ultimately goes back to a lost scene from Old Comedy.[94]

Given that we know of Socratic writings which featured Euripides as an interlocutor, it is unlikely that the biographers' attempts to establish a relationship between Socrates and Euripides depend *entirely* on Old Comedy.[95] Yet Diogenes' citation of the comic poets to attest to this connection, as well as the important role that they play in the biographical tradition in general, suggests that the comic evidence is a strong influence here. This being the case, I would like to consider more carefully how the relationship between Socrates and Euripides posited in the biographical tradition relates to the characterization of these two in the comic tradition. In doing so, I will demonstrate that the poet and the philosopher are connected as a result of the very characteristics that allowed us to read Socrates as a theoretical philosopher *avant la lettre*.

In our earlier examination of the *Acharnians*, we saw that Euripides' degraded bodily

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[93] Compare Wilamowitz's (Babich 2000, 19) comments on the historicity of this relationship, which rightly recognizes the later tendency to connect any two well-known figures whose lives appear to have overlapped: "It suggested itself to future generations to unite the two most popular figures of the time, both from the same city, on a personal level—especially because the comic tradition seemed to confirm this connection."

[94] Narcy (2010, 326), Kirk (1954, 19); cf. also Bordoy (2008, 5). Although I note the possibility here, it seems unlikely to me that the poets of Old Comedy would depict a conversation between Socrates and Euripides on the subject of the book of Heraclitus.

[95] For other classical (though slightly later) references to this relationship, see n. 98 below.

condition—his poverty suggested by his ragged garments and his laziness suggested by his physical incapacitation—was closely connected to Aristophanes' characterization of the tragedian's intellectual attitude. This paralleled the characterization of Socrates that we saw in chapters one and two: Socrates' lack of desire or lack of ability to tend to his bodily needs pointed toward his peculiar dedication to thinking for its own sake. Given this overlap in characterization, it is suggestive that in the sparse surviving fragments of Satyrus, the one way in which Euripides and Socrates are explicitly associated is in their attitude toward poverty. After presenting two Euripidean fragments that criticize the overvaluation and heedless pursuit of wealth, one of the speakers declares that the tragedian "admired Socrates the most by far, so that when he treated the nature of greed in the *Danae*, he singled out him alone as an exception."[96] Though we are missing the evidence that the speaker cites for this claim, scholars have pointed to an extant fragment from that play as a likely possibility: "For no one is stronger than money, unless there is one—but who this is, I do not perceive" (κρείσσων γὰρ οὐδεὶς χρημάτων πέφυκ' ἀνήρ, / πλὴν εἴ τις—ὅστις δ' οὗτός ἐστιν οὐχ ὁρῶ, fr. 325 *TrGF*).[97]

The way in which Satyrus introduces the relationship between Socrates and Euripides aligns with the considerations of the biographical method explored in the previous section. Satyrus does not make a simple Chamaeleontic deduction based on Euripidean verses (i.e., one of Euripides' characters looked down on the pursuit of wealth in his poetry; Socrates looked down on the

[96] θαύμα[ζε]ν τὸν Σω[κρά]τ̣η πολὺ [μάλισ]τ̣α ὥστ' ἀ̣π̣[ο][φ]α̣ινόμενο̣[ς] [ἐν] τῆι Δανάηι [π]ερὶ πλεονε[ξί]ας μόνον [αὐ]τὸν πάν[τ]ων ἐποιή[σα]τ' ἐξαίρετον, fr. 38, col. IV/39, col. I. The fragments are fr. 960, 1007a + b *TrGF*.

[97] See Schorn (2004, 233-235). While it is interesting that Pollux singles out the *Danae* as a play in which the poet "made the chorus come forward and sing something on his own account" (4.111) in the manner of the parabasis of Old Comedy, Bain (1975) is likely right in suggesting that this interpretation itself is the result of ancient commentators' eagerness to draw biographical conclusions from the poet's verses.

pursuit of wealth; therefore Socrates taught Euripides to look down on the pursuit of wealth). Rather, Satyrus employs Euripides' poetry to make a more complicated point about these verses: Euripides looked down upon the pursuit of wealth, and he greatly admired Socrates as someone who lived according to the same values; thus when discussing the nature of greed, he approvingly pointed to Socrates as someone who had the right attitude toward wealth. That is, Satyrus does not use a text of Euripides to establish a relationship between Socrates and Euripides, but rather presupposed a relationship between Socrates and Euripides, which relationship helps to interpret a Euripidean text. In short, the biographer seems to rely on a source for the relationship between these two that is external to the texts of Euripides.

It is also noteworthy that what unites Euripides and Socrates according to Satyrus is not a matter of philosophical doctrine, but one of character or attitude. Socrates is singled out as praiseworthy because he alone does not fall prey to greedy impulses. He, like Satyrus' Euripides, does not care about wealth or honor gained from success among lesser men, but assumedly pursues something greater. While Schorn argues that Satyrus' positive treatment of the relationship between Socrates and Euripides means that he cannot be relying directly on the comic sources that mock that relationship, I have already argued that reframing these negative sources in a more positive, peripatetic light could very well be part of the biographer's strategy. Thus while Schorn posits the Socratic writings as Satyrus' potential source, I suggest instead that Socrates' and Euripides' common association with poverty can ultimately be traced back to their characterization in Old Comedy, in which this poverty is connected to their shared status as comic intellectuals.[98]

[98] Fragments of Aeschines' *Miltiades* show Euripides among Socrates' interlocutors; see Pentassuglio (2017, 184-205). Diogenes Laertius (14.1) reports that Glaucon wrote a dialogue

A similar revaluation of the "Socratic" intellectual attitude of the comic Euripides can be seen with respect to the *semnotēs* that Aristophanes and the other comic poets suggest that the poet and the thinker shared. Both characters are comic for the way that they look down their nose at everyday Athenians as they pursue, each in their way, their useless intellectual activity. In our examination of the biographical material, the theme of Euripides' haughtiness was clear well beyond his and Socrates' supposed disdain of wealth: the poet shows contempt for the masses and their opinions, he pursues his poetry in isolation, and he eventually leaves the unappreciative Athenians for the court of a tyrant who appreciates his poetic genius. For Satyrus, these characteristics contribute to Euripides' status as an Aristotelian great-souled man. Both the negative comic and the positive philosophic valuation of this attitude is present above all in the anecdotes about the so-called Cave of Euripides.[99] Here, Satyrus claims, the poet "spent his days by himself, always thinking (μεριμνῶν) about something and writing, simply disdaining everything that was not elevated or noble (μὴ μεγαλεῖον ἢ σεμνὸν ἠτιμακώς)."[100]

The cave is framed as a place of isolated contemplative escape; Euripides' activity there is described both as distinctly intellectual—he thinks and he writes—and as lofty—his subjects are great and august.[101] As is often the case for Satyrus, the claim is made in praise: the tragedian's concern for his poetry and the elevated objects of his concern are part of what make him great-souled in the peripatetic biographer's estimation. Yet, as argued above, these are the very traits

with the title *Euripides.*

[99] The 1996 discovery of a late fifth-century skyphos bearing a Hellenistic or Roman inscription reading ΕΥΡΙΠΠ[in a cave overlooking the sea and settled above a sanctuary to Dionysus would suggests that this was believed to be Euripides' cave; see Lolos (1997).

[100] ἐν τούτωι διημέρευεν καθ' αὑ[τ]ὸν μεριμνῷν ἀεί τι καὶ γράφων ἁπλῶς ἅπαν εἴ τι μὴ μεγαλεῖον ἢ σεμνὸν ἠ̣τ[ι]μακώς. fr. 39, IX.

[101] Schorn (2004, 272-277), Sauzeau (1998, 93-98).

that the comic poets could mock: we have already seen Socrates' *semnotēs* about his intellectual activity abundantly mocked in chapter one. Beyond the comic treatment of Euripides' *semnotēs* that we have already examined at length, the potential mockery of Euripides for this same attitude is latent in the language Satyrus uses here: the comic poets often use μεριμνάω and its cognates to signal the ridiculous concern that the students of the Thinkery show for their silly subjects.[102]

There is an even more direct suggestion that Satyrus' characterization of Euripides as a high-minded intellectual is continuous with the comic characterization of Euripides. After his description of the tragedian's lofty intellectual activity in his cave, the speaker cites Aristophanes in support of his characterization: "Indeed, Aristophanes says, as if summoned as a witness for this very purpose: 'As he makes people speak, so he is.'"[103] In a moment that acts as a sort of biographical meta-commentary, Satyrus invokes Aristophanes' comic method (the poet uses the tragedian's characters to create the character of the tragedian) as affirmation of his own biographical method (the historian uses the tragedian's characters to draw biographical conclusions about the character of the tragedian). While we are uncertain about the original context for the Aristophanic fragment, its context in Satyrus ("as if summoned as a witness for this very purpose") suggests that even if the biographer is not directly relying on the comic portrayal of Euripides, he recognizes common elements in his depiction of Euripides as a high-minded intellectual poet in the comic portrayal of Euripides.

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[102] *Nu*. 101, 136, 420, 1404; cf. also fr. Ar. fr. 672 K-A, the likely comic verses mocking philosophers at Pl. *Rep*. 607c2, and X. *Mem*. 4.7.6, where this collocation is applied to Anaxagoras in his concern for and pride in his study of the heavens.

[103] ὁ γ[ο]ῦν Ἀριστοφ[ά]ν̣ης φησὶν ὥ[σ]περ ἐπ' αὐτῶι τούτω[ι] κεκ̣λ̣ημένος τ̣ά̣· "[οἷ]α μὲν π[οι]εῖ λέγε̣ιν τοῖός ἐστίν." fr. 39, ψol. IX. For commentary on the Aristophanic fragment (fr. 694 K-A), see Bagordo (2017, 54-55).

In the case of the characterization of Euripides as a particularly "philosophical" poet, then, we once again see comedy exerting an influence on the biographical tradition. Taken together, this body of evidence seems to suggest that the characterization of Euripides in Old Comedy—both as an individual philosopher-poet and as a companion to Socrates—played a significant role in the development of this biographical tradition. This being the case, the biographical reception of Euripides as the "philosopher of the stage" would seem to lend support to the interpretation of the comic Euripides that I have developed here.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that the comic association of Socrates and Euripides is best understood as part of the emerging fifth-century discourse about a way of life that maps onto the *bios theōrētikos*—a discourse to which Euripides himself was an important contributor in plays such as the *Antiope*. In my examination of the evidence from the comic corpus as well as that of the later biographical tradition, I hope to have shown that what unites Socrates and Euripides—from their negative reception by the comic poets to their more positive later reception by Satyrus and the other biographers—is what I have been broadly calling their intellectual attitude. Euripides, like Socrates, is depicted as using his poetry to engage in lofty intellectual speculation that, for the comic poets, is ultimately lacking in substance. Like Socrates, he is a "wise man" whose "wisdom" does no apparent good. Socrates, well-established as a comic intellectual of just this type, is thus mockingly made the source of these aspects of Euripides' poetry, as was suggested by our reading of the comic fragments. The portrayal of Euripides as a comic philosopher-poet is elsewhere expressed in similar terms to and is closely related to the portrayal of Socrates as a comic prototheoretical philosopher.

Euripides' place alongside Socrates in this emerging comic discourse about something like a *bios theōrētikos* is also an important reminder that an understanding of "philosophy" as a distinct intellectual activity had not yet emerged at the end of the fifth century. And yet it is through this lens of triumphant philosophy that later authors would look back at the fifth century: Socrates was not a useless intellectual quack, but a philosopher; Euripides was not an over-subtle poetaster, but a philosopher of the stage. With the benefit of hindsight, such retrospective views take the comic poets' negative assessment of these peculiar thinkers and reframe them as positives. But for them to be able to do so, Plato first had to reconsider, define, and defend as "philosophy" the laughter-inducing activity of his companion Socrates. In the next chapter, then, I turn to the role that this comic critique of fifth-century intellectuals plays in Plato's conceptualization of the philosopher and philosophical *theōria*.

Chapter Four

The Comedy of Philosophy in Plato

Introduction and Overview

Over the course of the first three chapters, I have made a case that the comic Socrates should be understood as what I call a prototheoretical philosopher. In chapter one, we saw that the comic poets distinguished Socrates from the intellectuals soon to be known as the Sophists by portraying him as being completely dedicated to his pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and in chapter two, I focused on the structure and themes of Aristophanes' *Clouds* in order to interpret that play's characterization of Socrates within this same framework. In chapter three, I argued that the comic poets associated Socrates with Euripides because the tragedian, too, was an important figure in fifth-century discourse about this particular type of "intellectual" who is defined by his pursuit of knowledge. From this analysis of the comic characterization of Socrates and other comic intellectuals, an image of a pre-Platonic *bios theōrētikos* emerged. The prototheoretical philosopher is haughty, impractical, and unconcerned for material things. Whether he is a pure "thinker" like the comic Socrates or a particularly intellectual poet like Euripides, he is ridiculous for his dedication to insubstantial ideas and useless knowledge as an end in itself—and at the expense of his worldly well-being.

Within the context of this dissertation, one goal of the investigation into this fifth-century discourse surrounding the comic Socrates has been to demonstrate that this character represents an important pre-Platonic attempt to think about and evaluate a way of life that should be understood as part of the conceptual genealogy of the *bios theōrētikos.* I hope that these first three chapters have borne out my claim that the idea of a *bios theōrētikos* first emerged on the fifth-century comic stage as an *exemplum horrendum*, an aberrant way of life that no right-

thinking Athenian would choose to pursue. In the introduction, I also argued that this comic presentation of the figure I have been calling the prototheoretical philosopher plays an important role in the fourth-century conceptualization of philosophy as a way of life dedicated to the pursuit of *theōria* and the *bios theōrētikos.* In this concluding chapter, I turn my attention from the comic discourse of the fifth century to the philosophical discourse of the fourth, and in particular to the first philosopher to put forward such an understanding of philosophy: Plato.[1]

As discussed in the introduction, it is now well established that one aim of Plato's Socratic dialogues is to articulate and defend his understanding of "philosophy" as the highest form of wisdom at a time when competing claimants to wisdom were vying for cultural authority.[2] If Plato's understanding of philosophy was at first exclusively embodied in the figure of Socrates himself, over the course of the dialogues, he also uses the voice of Socrates to explore a more abstract understanding of philosophy.[3] Scholars have pointed to many competing understandings of philosophy presented in the dialogues, but it is of course the conceptualization of philosophy

[1] While I here emphasize a continuity between fifth-century comic discourse and Plato, Plato's treatment of comedy was undoubtedly also influenced by the continued mockery of philosophers, including Plato himself, in fourth-century comedy. On Plato in comedy, see Farmer (2017b).

[2] See introduction, pp. 12-17.

[3] That Plato's presentation of Socrates, his model philosopher, seems not to align with some of the conceptions of the philosopher that Socrates himself discusses in the dialogues raises difficult questions about Plato's understanding of philosophy. It also points to long-standing debates between the "developmentalist" and "unitarian" approaches to Plato. For one idiosyncratic and informative unitarian discussion of the relationship between Plato, Plato's Socrates, and the different conceptions of philosophy in the dialogues, see Peterson (2011). On the developmentalist interpretation, a strong statement of which can be found in Jaeger (1948, Appendix II), but which is still supported in some form by many interpreters, this phenomenon can be attributed to Plato's move away from a Socratic understanding of philosophy as he developed as an independant thinker. While I do not aim to defend a broadly developmentalist approach to Plato's philosophy, I believe that the theme traced across the dialogues here does attest to a chronological development in Plato's conceptualization and presentation of the activity of philosophy.

as a type of intellectual *theōria* that is most significance for the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos*. In this chapter, then, I consider how the comic discourse discussed in chapters one through three continues to play an important role in Plato's characterization of the philosopher and his conceptualization of philosophical *theōria*. To do so, I trace how Plato incorporates and responds to this earlier comic critique of "philosophy" at moments of significance for the Platonic project of articulating this particular understanding of philosophy.

In short, I turn my attention from the prototheoretical philosopher of Old Comedy to the theoretical philosopher of the Platonic dialogues in order to show how this latter figure, too, is characterized in relation to the laughter that he faces. In doing so, my analysis brings together two strands of scholarship on Plato that have thus far mostly developed independently. These are, on the one hand, work on the conceptualization of philosophy in dialogues and, on the other, research into Plato's engagement with comic discourse. While there has been much research on each of these topics individually, there has not been, to my knowledge, any sustained treatment of the role that comic discourse plays in Plato's characterization of philosophy and philosophical *theōria*.

Some effort in this direction has been made in the two monographs of Andrea Nightingale discussed in the introduction, *Genres in Dialogue* and *Spectacles of Truth in Greek Philosophy*. Both focus on the means by which Plato presents and promotes his particular conceptualization of philosophy. In the first, Nightingale interprets Plato's generic incorporation of poetry and rhetoric into his dialogues as part of his effort to define and legitimize his new understanding of the activity of "philosophy" against established authoritative models of cultural wisdom. In a chapter on comedy, Nightingale provides her own overview of the intertextual relationship between Plato and Old Comedy, arguing that while Plato "objected to the comedians' ignorant

use of ridicule, [he] was quick to appropriate comedy's 'voice of criticism'" in order to establish his own authority.[4] Nightingale recognizes that "in the specific definitions of the philosopher found in Plato, Socrates insists that the philosopher will seem 'ridiculous' to the unphilosophic viewer," and she includes mockery stemming from this ridiculousness among the comedians' "ignorant use of ridicule." Because Nightingale's Plato engages in a primarily polemical and agonistic endeavor—he "wants to set the record straight" about the fact that the philosopher *is not* ridiculous—she is less interested in giving a nuanced account of the substantive debt that Plato owes to comedy as he crafts his image of the theoretical philosopher.[5]

This figure of the theoretical philosopher is central to Nightingale's second book *Spectacles of Truth in Greek Philosophy*, in which she focuses on Plato's particular understanding of philosophy as a "theoretical" activity.[6] Plato, she argues, appropriated the cultural practice of *theōria*, a sort of state pilgrimage in which the individual travelled to witness sacralized spectacles, in order to define and legitimize his understanding of the activity of philosophy. She thus analyzes how Plato conceptualizes the activity of philosophy as a form of *theōria*, a rational "vision" of metaphysical truths, with a reading of the allegory of the cave as the centerpiece of her analysis. While Nightingale considers how the "theoric journey" of the philosopher renders him "strange" and apparently "useless" in the eyes of non-philosophers, making him an object of mockery, she does not fully explore the significance of Plato's presentation of *theōria* as a comic activity.[7]

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[4] Nightingale (1994, 190).

[5] Nightingale (1994, 178). Nightingale in general pays surprisingly little attention to the portrayal of Socrates in Old Comedy, and in her follow-up (2004, 74 n. 7) she dismisses the possibility of reading Aristophanes' Socrates as a figure akin to the theoretical philosopher.

[6] On the subject, see also Rutherford (2013, ch. 19).

[7] Nightingale (2004). For mockery of the theoretical philosopher, see her comments on pp. 2,

Here, I will focus on the way in which Plato's theoretical philosopher is consistently characterized as laughable as well as the significance that this characterization has for Plato's conceptualization of philosophical *theōria* itself. In doing so, I contribute to a continuously growing body of scholarship on Plato that takes the philosopher's engagement with comedy seriously.[8] Much of this work has been focused on Plato's view of comedy and laughter in general, often drawing on some combination of the critique of poetry in the *Republic*, the legislation on comedy in the *Laws*, and the characterization of comedy as a "mixed pleasure" in the *Philebus*.[9] I am here less interested, though, in any potential Platonic theory of comedy and its political implications than I am in Plato's frequent incorporation of comedic elements into his dialogues.[10] The generic link between the dialogues and comedy are strongly suggested, for example, in Diskin Clay's treatment of the origin of the Socratic dialogue, as well as in Leslie Kurke's and Sonia Tanner's respective analyses of Plato's Socrates in relationship to well-known comic characters.[11] Scholars also continue to be interested in Plato's engagement with

79, 98, 104, 106, 131; for his strangeness, pp. 105-107; for his uselessness, pp. 127-131.

[8] The most recent efforts include a 2018-2019 research project based at Durham University on the theme of "Plato on Comedy." The fruits of the project have yet to be published.

[9] For the *Republic* and the *Laws* (often treated together), see, e.g., Trivigno (2019), Naas (2016), Prauscello (2014, ch. 5); for the *Philebus*, see, e.g., Wood (2007), McCabe (2009), Austin (2012). Halliwell (2008) returns to Plato often in his large-scale cultural history "Greek laughter."

[10] Mader (1977), who bases his analysis of Plato's relationship to laughter and the comic on a comprehensive set of all references to laughter and comedy in the corpus, remains an extremely useful resource; de Vries (1985) criticizes his emphasis on the *Philebus*. Brock (1990) offers a more concise and engaging overview of most of the relevant material for understanding Plato's general engagement with and incorporation of comedy. See also Greene (1920), which is still informative.

[11] Clay (1975, 1994); cf. Hordern (2004, 26-27) on the relationship between Plato and the comic prose mime. Kurke (201, esp. ch. 9), considers the relationship between Socrates and Aesop; Tanner (2017), the relationship between Socrates and the figure of the satyr. Cf. also Lombardini (2018), Michelini (2000).

Aristophanes in particular, especially in connection to the *Apology*, where Aristophanes is explicitly referenced; the *Symposium*, where he appears as an important interlocutor; and the *Republic*, where the reforms of book V have been taken as a reference to his *Ecclesiazusae*.[12] Yet if we seek to understand *why* Plato so consistently engaged with comic discourse in his attempt to present his understanding of philosophy, there is nowhere better to look than the passages in which the author explicitly thematizes this engagement.

Thus in this chapter I analyze key passages in which Plato incorporates the comic critique of philosophy into the dialogues, focusing in particular on the *Apology*, the *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, and the *Theaetetus*.[13] While the role that comic discourse plays in each of these dialogues individually deserves a fuller treatment, I work here across dialogues to demonstrate the connections between them. In doing so, I argue that this comic image of the philosopher serves as a thematic through-line as Plato articulates his understanding of theoretical philosophy and the philosopher.[14] In all four of these dialogues—each of which has particular significance for Plato's attempt to present his understanding of "philosophy"—Plato draws directly on pre-Platonic comic discourse about "philosophers." In particular, I demonstrate how Plato consistently uses this comic critique of philosophy in order to define the activity and character of

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[12] For a recent overview, see Platter (2014). On the *Apology*, see, e.g., S. Stone (2018), Bouvier (2000). On the *Symposium*, see, e.g., Sissa (2012), Dover (1965), Manuwald (2012). On the *Republic*, see, e.g., Saxonhouse (1978), Ussher (1973, xiii-xx), Halliwell (1993, 224-225), Thesleff (2009, 251-255), Tordoff (2007). While, due to the nature of the evidence, much of the focus has been on Aristophanes, scholars have, where possible, drawn on the fragmentary evidence of the other poets of Old Comedy as well; see recently Bromberg (2018).

[13] These dialogues are likewise the primary focus of Gigon's (1987) study of *theōria* in Plato and Festugiére's (1967, ch. 3) treatment of Plato.

[14] The relative chronology of these four dialogues in particular is generally well accepted to run: the *Apology*, the *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, and the *Theaetetus*. For detailed discussions of chronology, see Thesleff (1982), Brandwood (1990), Kahn (2000).

the theoretical philosopher in relation to the political community. Understanding the significance that Plato attaches to laughter faced by the philosopher, then, helps us to understand how the figure of the theoretical philosopher comes to be associated with an unpolitical *bios theōrētikos* that is defined against a *bios politikos*/*praktikos*.

I begin by considering together the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*. The former, an early, agenda-setting Socratic text, sets the stage for Plato's continued engagement with the comic portrayal of philosophy through its references to the comic poets generally and Aristophanes' *Clouds* in particular. I next look at how Plato again takes up this critique in the *Gorgias*, the dialogue which represents his first attempt to narrow the definition of "philosophy" to a specific way of life. Here, the comic critique of philosophy acts as a structuring principle for delineating two types of life that represent the germ of the *bios theōrētikos* and the *bios politikos/praktikos*. To show this, I analyze the comic elements of Callicles' mockery of Socrates and his way of life, particularly his re-appropriation of the paracomic elements of Euripides' *Antiope,* which we highlighted in chapter three.

In section two, I move to the *Republic*. I focus my attention on books V through VII, those in which Plato's Socrates first introduces and provides the most detailed account of philosophic *theōria*, highlighting how the implications of the comic characterization of the philosopher that emerged in the *Gorgias* are further developed here. After a brief overview of Plato's account of philosophic *theōria* as presented in those books, I analyze the role that laughter plays in two images that are important to Plato's conceptualization and presentation of philosophic *theōria*: the allegory of the cave and the ship of state. I demonstrate how in both, Plato directly connects the philosopher's *theōria* to the laughter that he will face in the political community, which for Plato is inherently unphilosophic. The comic critique of philosophy seems to stand in for an

unresolvable tension between the philosopher and the city.

I close by considering the *Theaetetus*, the final Platonic dialogue to articulate a strongly "Socratic" understanding of philosophy. I focus on the so-called "digression," in which Plato's Socrates revisits for the final time the nature of the philosopher and his activity, showing how it draws directly and builds on the comic image of the philosopher that Plato developed in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. Beginning from a comparison between the philosopher and the rhetorician, Plato once again frames philosophy as one possibility in a dichotomy between a life dedicated to the pursuit of philosophical *theōria* and one dedicated to efficacious action in the city. Once again, the philosopher is shown to cut a comical figure when he is forced to engage in the affairs of the city. I conclude by comparing Socrates' reaction to this laughter in the *Theaetetus* to his reaction in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, pointing in particular to Plato's resigned final response to the problem of the laughter elicited by the philosopher.

By the end of the chapter, the consistent role that comic discourse plays in Plato's characterization of the philosopher and his conceptualization of philosophical *theōria* will be clear. We will also be in a good position to see how the themes developed through Plato's engagement with comic discourse looks forward to the unpolitical *bios theōrētikos* of Aristotle with which we began. Let us, then, turn to the dialogues.

Plato, Aristophanes, and the Comic Critique of Philosophy in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*

We can begin our exploration of the role of comic discourse in the dialogues with what is generally believed to be an early entry in the Platonic corpus: the *Apology*. This text, also featuring Plato's most notorious engagement with Old Comedy, is important for understanding the extent to which Plato is preoccupied with the comic critique of philosophy from the very

beginning of his project. Although it plays a less significant role in Plato's explicit conceptualization of theoretical philosophy, which will only begin to take shape in the middle dialogues, the *Apology* is an early attempt to provide a defense for Socrates' peculiar philosophical way of life as he presents his account of Socrates' official defense against the charges brought against him in 399 BCE. Whatever the differences in their portrayals, this is, of course, the same peculiar way of life that led to the comic portrayal of Socrates that we have examined at length.

It is thus perhaps unsurprising that Plato attempts to address this comic critique of Socrates and his way of life. Yet the complicated manner in which he does so suggests the significance of that critique to Plato's project. Plato's Socrates devises a complicated argumentative structure by dividing his accusers into two groups: an early group who some time ago brought "unofficial" accusations against him by publicly attributing to him activities that gave him a bad reputation, and a later group who are now bringing official accusations against him in court. It is the early accusers, Socrates claims, who are more troubling since their accusations have long been at work in affecting public opinion about him and his activity. Socrates at first hints and later states outright who these first accusers are: the comic poets.

These accusers claim that "there is a certain Socrates, a wise man, a thinker who has investigated the things aloft and the things below the earth and who makes the weaker argument stronger" (ἔστιν τις Σωκράτης σοφὸς ἀνήρ, τά τε μετέωρα φροντιστὴς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς πάντα ἀνεζητηκὼς καὶ τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν 18b7-9). The use of the comic *phrontistēs*, recalling the teasing nickname for Socrates that likely developed from the *Clouds*, confirms that

this attribution of *sophos* is ironic.[15] Furthermore, the accusations associate Socrates with the same activities as does Aristophanes in the *Clouds*: investigating “the things above and the things below the earth” and “making the weaker argument stronger.” Socrates confirms the comic referent when he complains that these first accusers are “impossible to even name, unless it happens to be some comic playwright.”[16] When Socrates subsequently returns to these accusations, he is still more explicit. These men claim that “Socrates acts unjustly and busies himself in searching what’s below the ground and in the heavens, and makes the weaker argument stronger and teaches others these same things.”[17] He notes that the audience has seen “in Aristophanes’ comedy someone called Socrates swinging around there saying that he treads on air and blathering a lot of other blather.”[18]

Plato singles out Aristophanes’ *Clouds* here, but as we have seen, such a portrayal of Socrates and his activity seems to have been consistent throughout the comic corpus. While there is good reason to believe that Plato views Aristophanes as his primary comic interlocutor—he is the only comic poet known to have treated Socrates at such length, and Aristophanes himself will appear as an interlocutor in Plato’s *Symposium*—we need not insist on the point in the context of the current argument. We also need not dwell on whether Socrates’ insistence that this comic portrayal resulted in hostility against him is a historical fact or a strategic Platonic fiction. What seems clear, though, is that, prior to Socrates’ trial at least, the comic Socrates came to be the

[15] For the nickname, cf. Xen. *Smp*. 6. 6-8 and *Oec*. 11. 3. See also Edmunds (2006).

[16] οὐδὲ τὰ ὀνόματα οἷόν τε αὐτῶν εἰδέναι καὶ εἰπεῖν, πλὴν εἴ τις κωμῳδοποιὸς τυγχάνει ὤν 18c9-d2.

[17] Σωκράτης ἀδικεῖ καὶ περιεργάζεται ζητῶν τά τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ οὐράνια καὶ τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν καὶ ἄλλους ταὐτὰ ταῦτα διδάσκων 19b4-c2.

[18] ἐν τῇ Ἀριστοφάνους κωμῳδίᾳ, Σωκράτη τινὰ ἐκεῖ περιφερόμενον, φάσκοντά τε ἀεροβατεῖν καὶ ἄλλην πολλὴν φλυαρίαν φλυαροῦντα 19c3-5

defining cultural image of Socrates among the Athenians, that his prominent appearance on the comic stage made Socrates, to appropriate a term used by Andrea Capra, "iconic.[19]" Inasmuch as Plato's is a project that aimed to define and defend the character and activity of Socrates, this comic understanding of Socrates offered a popular alternative understanding for Plato to think with and against. And it is an image of the philosopher that Plato will return to again and again as he attempts to express his understanding of philosophy and its significance.

The comic critique is significant for Plato's project because, as Socrates puts it later in the *Apology*, it represents "what's ready at hand against all the philosophers."[20] It is a culturally authoritative image of the ridiculous Socrates to which Plato must respond as he fashions his own image of Socrates the laudable philosopher. In the context of this early dialogue, Plato's response to these comic first accusers is perhaps somewhat unsatisfying: his Socrates offers little more than a blanket denial against these unofficial charges, claiming that they completely misrepresent him and offering an alternative account of his character and activity. Yet later dialogues will return to these topics in a more direct manner.[21] In the *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates offers an alternate account of his investigation into "what's below the ground and in the heavens" by closely connecting that investigation—which now among friends he admits to having had an interest in—to his investigation of the afterlife of the soul.[22] In setting out to do so,

[19] Capra's (2018) piece is about the way in which the comic portrayal of Socrates established the visual characterization of Socrates in particular. I think the point can be broadened: the comic portrayal established the cultural image of Socrates as a peculiar thinker, what I have been calling a prototheoretical philosopher.

[20] τὰ κατὰ πάντων τῶν φιλοσοφούντων πρόχειρα ταῦτα 23d4-5

[21] Cf. Laks (2018, 7-9, 12-15) on the significance of these different responses to Socrates' interest in natural philosophy.

[22] Cf. 97c-99d, where Socrates gives an account in his interest and subsequent disillusionment with Anaxagorean physics and 109a-113d, which Socrates describes as his account of nature. In the latter passage, consider esp. 110b, where Socrates inverts the charge of

he again directly addresses the comic poets and their critique of him: "'I don't think,' Socrates said, 'that anyone—not even a comic poet!—who hears me now would claim that I'm prattling on and making arguments about things that are unsuitable.'"[23] Plato's continuous return to the trope of the comic philosopher suggests that this comic discourse cannot be so easily dismissed as the *Apology* suggests.

The continuing significance of the comic critique for Plato's project can be seen in the *Gorgias*. With this dialogue, we can also begin to trace how Plato's engagement with the comic poets contributes to his conceptualization of theoretical philosophy. For it is here that Plato first sets out to narrow the definition of "philosophy."[24] Likewise, we have already noted in the introduction that the *Gorgias* represents an important moment in the conceptual history of the *bios theōrētikos*.[25] While the dialogue ostensibly deals with understanding the art of rhetoric and its relationship to philosophy, Socrates suggests early in his conversation with Callicles that what is really at stake here is "the noblest of all investigations … what sort of man one ought to be and what he ought to pursue and up to what point he ought to pursue it.[26]" As Dodds emphasizes, the conversation about rhetoric at this point becomes "concerned with ends—the meaning of 'good', or the nature of the τέλος to which action should be directed."[27] In the choice between living "the

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investigating "what's *below* the ground and *in* the heavens" by framing his investigation as as one about "what's *upon* the earth and *below* the heavens" (emphasis added).

[23] Οὔκουν γ' ἂν οἶμαι, ἦ δ' ὃς ὁ Σωκράτης, εἰπεῖν τινα νῦν ἀκούσαντα, οὐδ' εἰ κωμῳδοποιὸς εἴη, ὡς ἀδολεσχῶ καὶ οὐ περὶ προσηκόντων τοὺς λόγους ποιοῦμαι 70b10-c2

[24] Nightingale (1994, ch. 2, esp. 71-73).

[25] See p. 2-3. See also Jordović (2018), Arieti (1993), Nightingale (1992, 121-122), and Carter (1986, 173-179).

[26] πάντων δὲ καλλίστη ἐστὶν ἡ σκέψις … ποῖόν τινα χρὴ εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τί ἐπιτηδεύειν καὶ μέχρι τοῦ. 488e7-a1.

[27] Dodds (1959) *ad*. 500a7-501c8. For the role of the *telos* in defining the *bios theōrētikos*, see the treatment of Aristotle in the introduction, p. 1.

life of philosophy" (τὸν βίον τὸν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ), as advocated by Socrates, and spending one's life "speaking among the people and practicing rhetoric and being politically active" (λέγοντά τε ἐν τῷ δήμῳ καὶ ῥητορικὴν ἀσκοῦντα καὶ πολιτευόμενον), as advocated by Callicles, we can clearly see the germ of the distinction between the *bios theōrētikos* and the *bios politikos/praktikos*.[28]

The comic critique of philosophy is a key structuring element of Plato's characterization of the philosopher in the *Gorgias*, as comedy's negative image of the philosopher is incorporated into the dialogue. To show how this is the case, I will build on the work of the previous chapter to consider the particular way in which Callicles' great *rhesus* draws on Euripides' *Antiope.* I argue there that Amphion's defense of his poetico-philosophical way of life in that play should be understood as a paracomic response to comedy's critique of the fifth-century protophilosopher, which is incorporated into Zethus' attack against such a way of life. In the *Gorgias*, Callicles, who explicitly references the play four times throughout his speech, casts himself as Zethus in his attempt to show Socrates that his "philosophical" way of life is not worth pursuing; Socrates, meanwhile, later claims that he would like to continue defending his way of life against Callicles' attacks until he has "given the speech of Amphion in return for that of Zethus."[29] Nightingale has shown how Plato uses allusions to the play to define his newly invented conception of "philosophy" against the culturally authoritative model of wisdom offered by tragedy.[30]

[28] 500c1-8. Cf. also *Grg.* 472c10-1 and 527c5-7; the question is also posed at *R*. 352d6 and 578c6-7.

[29] ἕως αὐτῷ τὴν τοῦ Ἀμφίονος ἀπέδωκα ῥῆσιν ἀντὶ τῆς τοῦ Ζήθου 506b5-6; quotations of the play are found at 484e, 485e–486a, 486b, 486c. Dodds (1959) provides detailed analysis of Plato's incorporation of passages from the play.

[30] Nightingale (1995, ch. 2). See also Arieti (1993), Trivigno (2009).

Yet it is less the tragic elements of the *Antiope* that are crucial for Plato's conceptualization of the life of the philosopher than the comic ones.[31] For it is the comic element of personal ridicule that Callicles adapts for his own purposes in his critique of Socrates and the philosophic way of life he represents and defends. Plato thus situates his use of the comic critique as expressed in the *Antiope* within a broader context of comic discourse about philosophy.[32] Before the introduction of Callicles, Polus mocks Socrates for "babbling" and for childishly "playing," accusing him of "grinning like a lad" at his interlocutors' missteps and quibbling by "trying to catch out words."[33] Callicles likewise associates philosophy with "those who drivel on and play childish games": when this is seen in a youth, it is suitable and even has some charm; in a man, though, such behavior is "laughable" (καταγέλαστον 485a7, c1).[34] That the adult philosopher is laughable is one of his main arguments advanced against dedicating oneself to philosophy. For both Callicles and Polus, the childish "babbling" of the philosopher is anathema to the noble manliness of the efficacious life of action and is thus worthy only of derisive laughter.[35] Indeed, Plato includes "stage directions" that indicate at least one explicit occurrence of laughter at Socrates' expense in the dialogue. After a Socratic argument that his interlocutors take to be particularly naive and foolish, Polus erupts in laughter, as Socrates response makes clear:

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[31] Nightingale (1992, 89-90, 187-190) points to some comic strands of the dialogue. Both Nightingale (1995, ch. 2) and Trivigno (2009) explore Plato's engagement with the *Antiope* in terms of intertextual relationships (parody and paratragedy respectively), but neither engages with the fact that the *Antiope* itself is paracomic.

[32] For the role of laughter and play in the *Gorgias*, see Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2018).

[33] φλυαρῶν 489b7; φλυαρεῖς 490e4. Socrates is also accused of φλυαρία at 486c7, 490c8, 492c7 and λῆρος at 497a8. Note also the somewhat rude demonstrative οὑτοσὶ ἀνὴρ, often to be found in Old Comedy. ὥσπερ τὰ μειράκια 499b6. ὀνόματα θηρεύων 489b8.

[34] τοὺς ψελλιζομένους καὶ παίζοντας 485b1-c2. The comic tone of the comparison—divorced from the particular criticism of philosophy implicated here—seems to be confirmed by *Nu*. 868-876, where Socrates' mocks Pheidippides for his childish manner of speaking.

[35] ἀνανδρίαν 491b1; for Callicles' praise of manliness, see Dodds (1959) *ad loc*.

"What's this, Polus? Are you laughing?"[36] Callicles' shows his agreement with Polus' response by remarking to Socrates that Polus "rightly laughed" at him.[37]

The comic critique of the philosopher as an effete babbler who fails to live up to Athenian standards of manliness is by now familiar from the portrayal of the pasty, nonsensical Socrates of Old Comedy. But as Euripides does in the *Antiope*, Plato sharpens this critique by setting this figure in contrast to the politically efficacious man of action. The contrast is, again, made by both Polus and Callicles. After his bout of laughter, Polus argues that no one would agree with Socrates' ludicrous claims about the benefits of philosophy and suggests that Socrates take a poll of their listeners. Socrates retorts that he is not "one of those political men" and thus does not understand such institutional procedures.[38] He proves his point with an anecdote: "Last year, I was chosen by lot to be a member of the Council, and when my tribe held the Prytany and I had to order a vote, I gave everyone a laugh (γέλωτα παρεῖχον) since I didn't know how to order the vote!"[39] Here, Socrates' inability to perform even the most basic political activities makes him a laughingstock. Callicles picks up on the theme, claiming that any one who "philosophizes" into adulthood, "even if he has an altogether good nature," will necessarily be incapable of engaging in the political affairs that make one a "good and noble, well-reputed man."[40] Thus whenever a

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[36] τί τοῦτο, ὦ Πῶλε; γελᾷς; 473e2.

[37] καί σου κατεγέλα, ὥς γέ μοι δοκεῖν, ὀρθῶς τότε 482d5-6. For the textual problem related to the laughter here, see Dodds (1959) *ad loc*. It is possible that Callicles' later flippant gibe about "how amusing" (ὡς ἡδὺς 491e2) Socrates is likewise marks an intrusion of laughter into the conversation; cf. Dodds (1959) *ad loc*., who translates the phrase as such.

[38] τῶν πολιτικῶν 473e6.

[39] καὶ πέρυσι βουλεύειν λαχών, ἐπειδὴ ἡ φυλὴ ἐπρυτάνευε καὶ ἔδει με ἐπιψηφίζειν, γέλωτα παρεῖχον καὶ οὐκ ἠπιστάμην ἐπιψηφίζειν. 473e6-8.

[40] ἐὰν γὰρ καὶ πάνυ εὐφυὴς ᾖ καὶ πόρρω τῆς ἡλικίας φιλοσοφῇ ἀνάγκη πάντων ἄπειρον γεγονέναι ἐστίν, ὧν χρὴ ἔμπειρον εἶναι τὸν μέλλοντα καλὸν κἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐδόκιμον ἔσεσθαι ἄνδρα. 484c8-484d2.

philosopher "takes part in some private or political affair (πολιτικὴν πρᾶξιν), they are laughable (καταγέλαστοι), just as, I think, political men are laughable (καταγέλαστοί) when they take part in your studies and discussions."[41] We see, then, how Plato, like Euripides before him, channels this comic critique into a dichotomy between "two ways of life"—that of the philosopher and that of the political man—prefiguring the *bios theōrētikos* and the *bios politikos/praktikos*.

It is also here, right on the heels of his statement regarding what is laughable about the philosopher, that Callicles first introduces Zethus' mockery of his philosophical brother Amphion from the *Antiope*,[42] pointedly incorporating the play's paracomic elements into his own critique of philosophy. One example from the end of Callicles' *rhesis* should demonstrate the point:

> And yet "how could this be wisdom," Socrates, "this art that takes a man with a good nature and makes him worse," able neither to help himself nor to save himself or anyone else from the greatest dangers, but susceptible to being stripped of all his substance by his enemies and to living a life simply deprived of honor in the city? It's possible for someone to—if I might use a rather vulgar expression (ἀγροικότερον)—slap this sort of man on the face and not pay the penalty. But rather, my good man, listen to me: cease your refuting and "practice the good art" of affairs, practice that by which "you will be reputed to have sense, leaving to others these clever things" (τὰ κομψὰ ταῦτα)—whether they should be called silliness or babbling (εἴτε ληρήματα … εἴτε φλυαρίας)—because of which you'll dwell in an empty house. Do not emulate those men making refutations about trifles, but those who have means and repute and many other good things.[43]

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[41] ἐπειδὰν οὖν ἔλθωσιν εἴς τινα ἰδίαν ἢ πολιτικὴν πρᾶξιν, καταγέλαστοι γίγνονται, ὥσπερ γε, οἶμαι, οἱ πολιτικοί, ἐπειδὰν αὖ εἰς τὰς ὑμετέρας διατριβὰς ἔλθωσι καὶ τοὺς λόγους, καταγέλαστοί εἰσι. 484d7-e3.

[42] Cf. 484e4-7 with Dodds (1959) *ad loc* on the reference to E. fr. 184 *TrGF*.

[43] καίτοι *πῶς σοφὸν τοῦτό ἐστιν*, ὦ Σώκρατες, *ἥτις εὐφυῆ λαβοῦσα τέχνη φῶτ' ἔθηκε χείρονα*, μήτε αὐτὸν αὑτῷ δυνάμενον βοηθεῖν μηδ' ἐκσῶσαι ἐκ τῶν μεγίστων κινδύνων μήτε ἑαυτὸν μήτε ἄλλον μηδένα, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἐχθρῶν περισυλᾶσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οὐσίαν, ἀτεχνῶς δὲ ἄτιμον ζῆν ἐν τῇ πόλει; τὸν δὲ τοιοῦτον, εἴ τι καὶ ἀγροικότερον εἰρῆσθαι, ἔξεστιν ἐπὶ κόρρης τύπτοντα μὴ διδόναι δίκην. ἀλλ' ὠγαθέ, ἐμοὶ πείθου, *παῦσαι* δ' ἐλέγχων, πραγμάτων δ' *εὐμουσίαν ἄσκει*, καὶ ἄσκει ὁπόθεν *δόξεις φρονεῖν*, *ἄλλοις τὰ κομψὰ ταῦτ' ἀφείς*, εἴτε ληρήματα χρὴ φάναι εἶναι εἴτε φλυαρίας, *ἐξ ὧν κενοῖσιν ἐγκατοικήσεις δόμοις*· ζηλῶν οὐκ ἐλέγχοντας ἄνδρας τὰ μικρὰ ταῦτα, ἀλλ' οἷς ἔστιν καὶ βίος καὶ δόξα καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἀγαθά. 486b1-d1. The sections in quotations/italics are from the *Antiope*.

A few elements of this concluding apotreptic against philosophy are worth noting within the context of the comic tone of the *rhesis* as a whole. Callicles quotes Zethus' criticism of Amphion's claim to a type of wisdom that leaves the supposed wise man worse off.[44] In chapter three, we saw that this line of criticism was reminiscent of the comic portrayal of figures like Socrates and Euripides, who made similar claims to such useless "wisdom." Here, Callicles appropriates these lines to draw out the personal implications from his earlier critique that those who spend their lives in philosophy do not develop the traits necessary to thrive in the city. Like comedy's protophilosopher, Callicles' philosopher wastes his time on degrading trifles that provide him no material benefit. Such a way of life is again contrasted with the man of affairs who nobly enriches himself and those around him. Not only this, but their physical weakness and practical ineptitude leaves them vulnerable to personal attack against which they are not capable of defending themselves.

Scholars have rightly emphasized that Callicles' reference to the philosopher's helplessness sounds an ominous tone when read with Socrates' eventual execution in mind.[45] Yet in the internal context of this *rhesus*, Callicles' "somewhat crude (ἀγροικότερον)" expression that the philosopher is liable to get a "slap on the face" is rather reminiscent of the *hubris* of Old-Comedy slapstick.[46] Indeed, Socrates himself had earlier associated such "crudity" (ἀγροικία)

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[44] Michelini (1998, 54) points out that there is a hint of humor and irony in the basic premise of the younger Callicles offering advice to the older Socrates, a reversal of the typical age dynamic of such pro- or apotreptics.

[45] See, e.g., Dodds (1959) *ad loc*. For more on the ominous, bitter tone of the *Gorgias* generally, see pp. 201-203 below.

[46] So too Nightingale (1994, 90). For slaps on the cheek in Old Comedy, see Ar. *Nu*. 1323-1324; *V*. 1088; *Pax* 1087; *Lys*. 360-361, 634-635, 821; *Ra*. 149-150, 547; fr. 935 K-A; Pher. fr. 165 K-A.

with comedy in the dialogue, when he feared that by speaking the truth about rhetoric he might appear "rather crude" (ἀγροικότερον) and seem to be "making a mockery of" (διακωμῳδεῖν) Gorgias' activity.[47] While Callicles' crack about Socrates certainly brings out the aggression latent in his otherwise more sly mockery, it is nevertheless an extension of the comic discourse with which he is engaging—even if for Plato and his readers this joking strike to the jaw must necessarily presage the violence that the historical Socrates would face.[48] This comic tone is confirmed when Callicles urges Socrates to stop wasting his time on subtle refutations, characterizing this activity with a variation on the Euripidean phrase τὰ κομψὰ σοφίσματα ("clever sophistries" fr. 188 *TrGF*). The adjective κομψός is, as with other language from Zethus' speech that we have examined, a word that is much more a part of comic idiom than tragic. And again, it is often used to mockingly characterize overly clever intellectuals and their words.[49] Callicles, meanwhile, brings out the comic resonances latent in the word and situates it within his own derisive discourse by glossing it as either "silly talk" (ληρήματα) or "nonsense" (φλυαρίας).

We see, then, that in the *Gorgias*, the first Platonic dialogue that seeks to narrow the definition of philosophy to a particular set of activities and commitments, the mocking laughter

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[47] 462e6-7. On the theme of *agroikia* in the dialogue, see Michelini (1998). Such "rusticity" is also a prevalent theme of Old Comedy; cf. Rosen (2006).

[48] We might compare the burning of Socrates' Thinkery at the end of the *Clouds*, which, though a violent act, is still essentially comic. It is possible that Plato had such comic prescience in mind when crafting Callicles' comic discourse.

[49] Ar. *Ach.* 1016; *V*. 317; *Nu.* 649, 1030; *Pax* 994; *Av.* 195; Eup. fr. 159 K-A; Aristophanes coined a comic word mocking Euripides as a paradigmatic κομψός, κομψευριπικῶς (*Eq*. 18; cf. *Th*. 93, 460, and esp. Crat. fr. 342 K-A, where a κομψός spectator is mockingly called a εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζων). Four of the five other uses of κομψός in the Euripidean corpus (*Supp.* 426, *Tr.* 651, *Rh.* 652, *Cyc.* 315, fr. 16 *TrGR*; it does not appear in Sophocles or Aeschylus) clearly have a similarly mocking tone. In the satyr play the *Cyclops*, it appears alongside the adjective λαλίστατος (315), on which see ch. 3, pp. 127-128.

that philosophy incurs is used as an important structuring element. While the *Apology* is more explicit about the source of this comic critique, it is less direct in addressing it. Meanwhile the focus on Callicles and Polus' mockery of Socrates in the *Gorgias* makes this critique central to that dialogue's attempt to define philosophy. Philosophy, Callicles and Polus suggest, is essentially laughable. Its practitioners are childish quibblers who babble all sorts of meaningless nonsense. Building on the distinction between the *agōn* in the paracomic *Antiope*, this comic characterization of philosophers contributes to the early articulation of the dichotomy that would later develop into that of the so-called *bios theōrētikos* and *bios politikos/praktikos*. The philosopher chooses a particular way of life dedicated to the pursuit of intellectual activity for its own sake, a way of life that is defined in opposition to one that values efficacy in practical action on behalf of oneself and one's city—and in doing so, he becomes laughable.

Yet Plato does not yet mount a defense of philosophy as an unpolitical *bios theōrētikos*.[50] The parallels with Euripides' *Antiope* are again instructive here. For just as Amphion is framed as a particular type of political actor when Hermes ordains that he will use his lyre to build the walls of Thebes, so too is Socrates when he claims that he is the only Athenian to truly practice the art of politics—despite his ridiculous appearance in the realm of politics as traditionally understood.[51] It is in the *Republic* that we can see Plato grappling with the full implications of the tension that the *Antiope* and the *Gorgias* began to bring out. And when he does so, the comic

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[50] Cf. Jaeger (1948, 430-434), who argues that Plato's conception of Socrates as "the one true statesman" in the early dialogues should be traced to Plato's early desire to integrate an apolitical contemplative life with a political one. On his interpretation, this project was only gradually replaced by a drive toward theoretical knowledge, first in the domain of ethics in the *Republic*, then more broadly in the later dialogues. Cf. also Jordović (2018, 279-282), who argues that the *Gorgias* paves the way for understanding philosophy as an alternative to politics.

[51] 521d. On the claim, see Shaw (2011). Cf. Nightingale (1996, 79-92) and Trivigno (2009, 87-92) for the way in which the *Gorgias* incorporates the ending of the *Antiope*.

critique of philosophy again takes center stage.

***Theōria* and Laughter in the *Republic*: The Allegory of the Cave and the Ship of State**

In this section, I move from Plato's early effort to articulate his understanding of philosophy in the *Gorgias* to his most intricate and sustained attempt to do so in the *Republic*.[52] I show that as in that earlier dialogue, comic discourse plays an important role in the conceptualization of philosophy developed in detail in this dialogue. In particular, I consider the role that laughter plays in the conceptualization of the philosophical activity that lends the *bios theōrētikos* its name, *theōria*. By incorporating this comic discourse, Plato continues to explore the tension between the philosopher and the political community that the *Gorgias* introduced by means of Callicles' mockery of Socrates and his activity. Yet while that earlier dialogue mounted a defense of the activity of the philosopher as essentially political, the *Republic* uses the laughter at the philosopher's expense to show how his activity is essentially unpolitical. For in the *Republic*, we see that the very activity that is constitutive of philosophy, *theōria*, renders the philosopher a laughingstock among the inherently non-philosophical political community. Thus the theoretical philosopher is, almost by definition, detached from the life of the city and its worldly affairs.

In the *Republic*, Plato's analysis of the philosopher and his activity proceeds dialogically over the course of three books, beginning in book V with Socrates' notorious suggestion that philosophers should rule, and continuing at least until his equally notorious conclusion in book VII that the philosophers will have to be compelled to rule.[53] It is in the course of this discussion

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[52] Nightingale (2004, ch. 1, esp. pp. 17-19). For the different conceptions of the philosopher in the *Republic*, see Weiss (2012).

[53] 473c-521b. It is worth noting here that book V is, more than any other book of the *Republic*, filled with laughter, being structured around three metaphorical "waves" of arguments

that Plato first introduces the conceptualization of the philosopher's activity as a type of *theōria*. He develops this understanding of philosophy both through the arguments in which Socrates discusses the philosopher and his activity and through a series of images that articulate certain aspects of philosophic activity and characterize the philosopher.[54] In this section, I draw on the former but primarily focus on two particularly important images for Plato's conceptualization of the philosopher: the allegory of the cave and the ship of state. In my analysis of these images, I demonstrate how each incorporates the comic critique of philosophy in direct connection to philosophical *theōria*.

The idea that the philosopher engages in a type of metaphorical *theōria* is introduced in the middle of book V, where the topic of conversation turns to defining the philosopher and his activity. After having heard Socrates explain that the philosopher is one who "desires the whole of wisdom" and thus happily engages in "all learning," Glaucon conflates the philosopher with the urbane "lovers of spectacles" (φιλοθεάμονες) and the "lovers of discourse" (φιλήκοοι), who, he notes, love their respective activities because of the pleasure they take in learning. Socrates agrees that these are *like* philosophers, but he further refines the sort of "lover of spectacles" that the philosopher is: true philosophers are "lovers of the spectacle of truth" (τοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας φιλοθεάμονας).[55] The philosopher, then, is defined in relation to a particular type of metaphysical viewership, one which will come to be known as *theōria*.[56] This understanding of the philosopher

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that Socrates fears will drown him in laughter. On the metaphor, see Sedley (2005), Adam (1902, 361-362).

[54] For the use of non-discursive elements in Plato, see, e.g., McCabe (1992), and in Greek philosophy in general, Lloyd (1987, ch. 4). On Plato's use of images, see recently the essays collected in Destrée and Edmonds (2017), and for the *Republic* in particular, see Smith (2009).

[55] 475d1-e4. On the lovers of spectacles, see Stokes (1992).

[56] The word *theōria* is first applied to philosophy at 486a8, but on the introduction of the concept in this passage, see Nightingale (2004, 78).

as a particular sort of spectator who enjoys a privileged vision of the truth continues to play a prevalent role throughout the discussion.[57]

In the context of Platonic metaphysics, the "spectacle of truth" that the philosopher enjoys is that of the Forms.[58] Because our primary concern is related to the characterization of the activity of philosophy and not the philosophical details of that activity in itself, we need not wade into the murky waters of the ontology and epistemology related to the Forms.[59] It is enough to note that the philosopher's intellectual *theōria* gives him privileged access to knowledge of *what is*, while non-philosophers are relegated to forming opinions about the sensory world and are thus cut off from true knowledge of *what is*. Beyond this, we can focus on the metaphorical language that Plato uses to discuss the Forms, and which thus becomes crucial for his characterization of the philosopher and his activity.

This metaphorical language of spectatorship paves the way for the conceptualization of philosophy as *theōria* that will develop over the course of books V through VII. Although the Forms are commonly understood to be immaterial and non-spatially extended objects, Plato's language and imagery sometimes posits a distinct "realm" in which the Forms reside. This "intelligible" realm, to which the philosopher has access, is opposed to the "sensible" realm of perception, in which non-philosophers must remain. The most well-known example is the allegory of the cave in book VII, the physical topography of which maps onto this metaphysical terrain: the movement from the darkness of the cave into the sunlit world above is said to

[57] Visual language is applied to the activity of philosophy throughout these books; see, e.g., 479e, 486a-d, 518b-c. 525c, 526e.

[58] For a lucid and well-circumscribed introduction to the Forms, see Harte (2019).

[59] For important discussions of the ontology and epistemology in books V-II, see Fine (2003, chs. 3 and 4) and Harte (2017).

represent a movement from the sensible world to the intelligible world. At the same time, although the Forms are intelligible, and thus understood only through an act of intellection, Plato often metaphorically applies visual language, as we saw above, to this intellectual activity. Again, in the allegory of the cave, the sight of the bright world outside of the cave stands for the philosopher's "vision" of the Forms, culminating in the sight of the Form of the good, represented by the sun.[60]

The allegory of the cave is particularly important for our investigation.[61] For in addition to being a key image in the conceptualization of *theōria,* Plato also pointedly uses the allegory to thematize the laughter that the philosopher will face as a result of this "otherworldly" activity.[62] Before we consider how he does so in more detail, though, let us recall the basic features of the passage. Socrates introduces the allegory as an image reflecting "our nature in relationship to education and lack of education."[63] The specific education that the allegory is meant to illuminate, though, is a particular type of philosophical education, one which culminates in the philosopher's metaphorical ascent from the sensory realm into the intelligible, where he engages in the *theōria* of the Forms.[64]

Socrates invites his interlocutors to imagine human beings who live their whole lives in the darkness of a subterranean cave. These cave-dwellers are chained such that they can only look at a wall in front of them. Behind and above them is a solitary fire, in front of which is a path.

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[60] As Nightingale (2004) rightly emphasizes, the spatial and the visual imagery that is applied to the philosopher's intellection of the Forms merge in the conceptualization of philosophy as *theōria* understood as a type of sacralized pilgrimage and spectatorship.

[61] On the allegory of the cave in general, see recently Ledbetter (2017).

[62] See Nightingale (2004, ch. 3) for a detailed interpretation of the *theōria* of the allegory of the cave in relationship to the *Republic* in general.

[63] τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν παιδείας τε πέρι καὶ ἀπαιδευσίας 514a1-2.

[64] Cf. esp. 517b-c.

Along this path, men carry statues and other objects, which cast shadows onto the wall in front of the prisoners. These shadows are all the chained humans can see throughout their lives. Thus they believe the shadows to be "the truth."[65] What, though, Socrates asks, if a prisoner were released from his bonds and turned toward the light? The experience of looking from darkness into the light would be painful. Nevertheless, he has now seen the mechanism by which the shadows, which the former prisoner previously believed to be the truth, were cast. He would thus believe that he had now seen "truer things" than the shadows.[66]

What if the unchained person were compelled to continue upward out of the cave and into the light of the sun? Again, the experience would be painful, but eventually his eyes would begin to grow accustomed to the light. Outside, he would be able to see shades and shadows, then reflections in water; next he would begin to see the natural objects of the outside world themselves; from there, he could look upward into the night sky and consider the stars and the moon in the heavens; finally, when his eyes are fully adjusted, he would be able to see the sun, the source of all light, itself. Seeing the light of the sun, he would reason that it "governs everything in the visible realm and is somehow the cause of all those things which they saw" in the cave and thought were the truth.[67]

Socrates himself interprets the allegory in relationship to philosophical *theōria*:

> This image, dear Glaucon, must be applied in its entirety to what we were discussing before, comparing the place that is manifested through our sight (δι' ὄψεως) to the dwelling of the prison chamber, and the light of the fire in that place to the power of the sun. And if you interpret the trek upward and the sight of what is above (θέαν τῶν ἄνω) as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you will not mistake my intention, since you

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[65] τὸ ἀληθὲς 515c2.

[66] ἀλεθέστερα 515d6.

[67] πάντα ἐπιτροπεύων τὰ ἐν τῷ ὁρωμένῳ τόπῳ, καὶ ἐκείνων ὧν σφεῖς ἑώρων τρόπον τινὰ πάντων αἴτιος 516b10-c2.

desire to hear this.[68]

While people dwelling in the cave are those who unquestionably look upon the objects of the sensory world as the truest reality, the person who escapes the darkness of the cave to "the sight of the things above" (θέαν τῶν ἄνω) is the philosopher whose metaphysical *theōria* gives him access to a truer understanding of *what is*.

Of most interest to us here is the relationship between the person who escapes the cave, the theoretical philosopher, and those who remain below, those who are not philosophers. For just as in the *Gorgias*, Plato emphasizes here that this philosopher's activity makes him laughable when he must engage in the activities that are of concern to non-philosophers, particularly the activities of the city. In that dialogue, Callicles asserts that whenever a philosopher "takes part in some private or political affair, they are laughable, just as political men are laughable when they take part in your studies and discussions."[69] This same dichotomy is present in the allegory of the cave, though this time Plato's account provides more detail about the connection between the intellectual activity of the philosopher and the laughter he faces.

This laughter at the expense of the philosopher is first suggested within the framework of the image. The person who has escaped the darkness of the cave and has experienced visions of the real world outside, Socrates says, would "consider himself happy because of the change" and would rather "suffer anything" than go back to dwell in the world below.[70] If the escapee did

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[68] τὴν εἰκόνα, ὦ φίλε Γλαύκων, προσαπτέον ἅπασαν τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν λεγομένοις, τὴν μὲν δι' ὄψεως φαινομένην ἕδραν τῇ τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου οἰκήσει ἀφομοιοῦντα, τὸ δὲ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐν αὐτῇ φῶς τῇ τοῦ ἡλίου δυνάμει· τὴν δὲ ἄνω ἀνάβασιν καὶ θέαν τῶν ἄνω τὴν εἰς τὸν νοητὸν τόπον τῆς ψυχῆς ἄνοδον τιθεὶς οὐχ ἁμαρτήσῃ τῆς γ' ἐμῆς ἐλπίδος, ἐπειδὴ ταύτης ἐπιθυμεῖς ἀκούειν. 517a8-b6.

[69] 484d7-e3, see pp. 173-174 above.

[70] οὐκ ἂν οἴει αὐτὸν μὲν εὐδαιμονίζειν τῆς μεταβολῆς … ὁτιοῦν ἂν πεπονθέναι 516c5-d7.

have to return, “his eyes would be infected with darkness” after having come from the brightness above.[71] It is this condition that makes him a laughingstock, as Socrates further explains:

> If he had to make out those shadows again and contend with those who remain captive while his sight is weak, before his eyes have adjusted, and since the time for his recovery would be quite long, would he not be a source of laughter (ἆρ’ οὐ γέλωτ’ ἂν παράσχοι)…?[72]

Having become accustomed to the brightness of the sun, the escapee who is made to return to the cave and to make out the shadows will seem to bumble about like a fool to the prisoners who have only known the darkness of the cave. Thus they greet his return with laughter.[73]

By connecting the laughter to the escapee’s journey to the sun-lit world outside and his failure of vision upon his return into the dark cave, Plato puts us in a good position to understand the close connection between laughter and philosophic *theōria*. While the outside world is likened to the intelligible realm in which the philosopher engages in his metaphysical *theōria* of the Forms, the cave—with its “honors, praises, and prizes” for those who best understand the shadows—is likened to the world of the political community.[74] Like the escapee who has experienced clear vision in the light of the sun and so has no desire to return to the darkness of the cave, so too philosophers “are not willing to engage in human affairs, but are always eager to pass their time above” where they engage in *theōria* of the Forms.[75] And, as with the escapee, so

[71] σκότους <ἂν> πλέως σχοίη τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς 516e4-5.

[72] Τὰς δὲ δὴ σκιὰς ἐκείνας πάλιν εἰ δέοι αὐτὸν γνωματεύοντα διαμιλλᾶσθαι τοῖς ἀεὶ δεσμώταις ἐκείνοις, ἐν ᾧ ἀμβλυώττει, πρὶν καταστῆναι τὰ ὄμματα, οὗτος δ’ ὁ χρόνος μὴ πάνυ ὀλίγος εἴη τῆς συνηθείας, ἆρ’ οὐ γέλωτ’ ἂν παράσχοι...; 516e8-517a2. See Mader (1977, 37), who considers this passage in the context of laughter at the “philosophische Exitenz.”

[73] As with the *Gorgias*, there is a darker side to this laughter: Socrates explains that if they could, the prisoners would kill the man who attempts to release and lead them up into the light (517a).

[74] Τιμαὶ δὲ καὶ ἔπαινοι … καὶ γέρας 516c8-9.

[75] οἱ ἐνταῦθα ἐλθόντες οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράττειν, ἀλλ’ ἄνω ἀεὶ ἐπείγονται αὐτῶν αἱ ψυχαὶ διατρίβειν, 517d1-4.

too does the philosopher's *theōria* of the Forms—here with specific reference to justice—render him an object of laughter when he "is compelled in the law courts or elsewhere to contest about the shadows of justice."[76] As Socrates puts it to Glaucon: "Do you think it surprising if someone having left divine *theōria* (θεωριῶν) to come upon wretched human affairs acts unseemly and appears extremely laughable (σφόδρα γελοῖος)?"[77] Laughter and the philosopher's pursuit of *theōria* are, then, closely linked. Having engaged in philosophical *theōria* in the intelligible realm, the philosopher is loath to return to the affairs of the city; when he is compelled to do so, he is now ill-equipped to partake in these affairs and comes off looking like a fool.[78]

The philosopher's engagement in *theōria* in the higher realm of the intelligible is precisely what makes him laughable in the lower realm of practical affairs. An earlier and only slightly less celebrated image from the *Republic* can help us to further understand this conceptual connection: that of the stargazer and the ship of state.[79] After having begun to define philosophers in relationship to *theōria* in book V, Socrates' argument there culminates in his notorious "paradoxical argument" that not only should the laughably incompetent philosophers be involved in politics, but they should be political leaders, ruling in the cities.[80] One reason this claim is so paradoxical is that in book VI, Socrates argues that philosophers should rule by virtue of the very activity that makes them laughable, *theōria.* The philosopher's *theōria* of the Forms

[76] ἀναγκαζόμενος ἐν δικαστηρίοις ἢ ἄλλοθί που ἀγωνίζεσθαι περὶ τῶν τοῦ δικαίου σκιῶν 517d7-9.

[77] τόδε οἴει τι θαυμαστόν, εἰ ἀπὸ θείων … θεωριῶν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπειά τις ἐλθὼν κακὰ ἀσχημονεῖ τε καὶ φαίνεται σφόδρα γελοῖος ... ; 517d4-6.

[78] On the compulsion of the philosopher, see E. Brown (2000).

[79] For the ship-of-state metaphor in previous literature, see Brock (2013, ch. 4).

[80] This "paradoxical" argument is itself, I think, supposed to have some comic effect. For "paradox," understood as part of the broader category of "surprise," as a comic device, see Kanellakis (2020).

provides them, according to Socrates, true knowledge of "what is always the same in all respects," while non-philosophers can only opine about "what is many and varies in all ways."[81] Socrates gains Glaucon's assent by comparing the choice of rulers to one between those who see and those who are blind.[82]

If Socrates' argument about the theoretical virtues of the philosopher is enough for the more philosophical Glaucon, his more practical brother, Adeimantus, points to a problem with the idea as it would play out in reality:

> As things stand, someone might say that in theory he is not able to oppose you in each particular thing asked, but that in practice he sees that whoever rushes headlong into philosophy—not those who engage it for the sake of education when they are young and then cease with it, but those who spend a long time with it—most of these become altogether unusual (ἀλλοκότους), not to say completely bad, while the ones who seem decent nevertheless suffer this one thing from the pursuit that you praise: they become useless in cities (ἀχρήστους ταῖς πόλεσι).[83]

Even if Socrates can string his interlocutor along in speech with an argument as to why philosophers are fit to rule, everyone can clearly see that *actual* philosophers are, in fact, in no way fit to rule.[84] Though more politely stated by Socrates' companion, the connection between

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[81] ἐπειδὴ φιλόσοφοι μὲν οἱ τοῦ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντος δυνάμενοι ἐφάπτεσθαι, οἱ δὲ μὴ ἀλλ' ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ παντοίως ἴσχουσιν πλανώμενοι οὐ φιλόσοφοι, ποτέρους δὴ δεῖ πόλεως ἡγεμόνας εἶναι; 484a2-7.

[82] 484c3-4.

[83] νῦν γὰρ φαίη ἄν τίς σοι λόγῳ μὲν οὐκ ἔχειν καθ' ἕκαστον τὸ ἐρωτώμενον ἐναντιοῦσθαι, ἔργῳ δὲ ὁρᾶν, ὅσοι ἂν ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ὁρμήσαντες μὴ τοῦ πεπαιδεῦσθαι ἕνεκα ἁψάμενοι νέοι ὄντες ἀπαλλάττωνται, ἀλλὰ μακρότερον ἐνδιατρίψωσιν, τοὺς μὲν πλείστους καὶ πάνυ ἀλλοκότους γιγνομένους, ἵνα μὴ παμπονήρους εἴπωμεν, τοὺς δ' ἐπιεικεστάτους δοκοῦντας ὅμως τοῦτό γε ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπιτηδεύματος οὗ σὺ ἐπαινεῖς πάσχοντας, ἀχρήστους ταῖς πόλεσι γιγνομένους. 487c4-d5.

[84] Long (2017, 164) comments that Socrates' argument that "it is possible to prove how philosophers will develop if they are not corrupted, given that the successful pursuit of philosophy requires and encourages certain characteristics" is "one of the parts of the *Republic* that is hardest for us to take seriously." Given Adeimantus' response, we might add that it seems to have been just as hard for Plato's contemporary audience to take it seriously.

Adeimantus' argument and the comic critique is clear: those who pursue philosophy throughout their lives become peculiar and useless.[85] Socrates admits that as cities are now, those who make such claims against philosophy "seem to be speaking the truth," and when Adeimantus asks him to explain the paradox that cities will not be rid of evils until philosophers, who are useless in the cities, rule the cities, Socrates responds by introducing an image.[86]

Socrates invites his interlocutors to imagine a ship at sea on which the various crew members are competing to gain control of the helm from the shipmaster. Neither the shipmaster nor the crewmen know much about seamanship, nor do they even believe that seamanship is a skill that can be taught. Yet by various means—wheedling, plying with drugs and alcohol—the crewmen take control of the ship, expend its resources frivolously, and sail on to their eventual doom. These men fail to realize that the true captain, the man with knowledge of seamanship, must dedicate his attention not to cultivating the skills that allow him to take over the ship, but to acquiring the knowledge that will allow him to pilot the ship most effectively, in particular "the times of the year, the seasons, the heavens, the stars, and the wind."[87] Thus, as the other men battle for control, the true captain stands idly by, staring off at the stars as he is disparaged for his inability to take control of the helm.[88]

Socrates' image is meant to show that the philosopher, the true captain of the ship, is

[85] Adeimantus' claim that philosophers become "bad" or "wicked" (παμπονήρους) is less immediately relevant to our examination of what is laughable about the philosopher. Socrates will deal with this claim at length as well at 490c-492a.

[86] Adeimantus responds to Socrates' method by ironically mocking him (σκώπτεις 487e) because he gives his account through an image. Morgan (2017) notes the humorous tone that accompanies the introduction of the image and argues that Socrates comparison of his image to a far-fetched and fantastic "goat-stag" is meant to recall the equally far-fetched and fantastic combination of philosopher-ruler.

[87] ἐνιαυτοῦ καὶ ὡρῶν καὶ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἄστρων καὶ πνευμάτων 488d6-7.

[88] 488a-489a.

perceived to be "useless" in the city as it is currently organized because his fellow citizens, who do not recognize the usefulness of his knowledge, do not put him to good use by establishing him as ruler.[89] This is, of course, a situation that the regime of the *Republic* seeks to alter through a radical restructuring of society in which philosophers hold the highest position of political power. The extent to which Plato treats the establishment of such a city as an ideal and achievable possibility—that is, whether in reality the apparently absurd philosopher should, can, and will rule—is a central interpretive issue of the dialogue. In the context of the current investigation, though, it is the perceived uselessness of the philosopher in *actual* cities that is of central concern. For as we have seen it is his apparent uselessness that makes the philosopher an object of mockery.

Plato here explores the theme of the uselessness of philosophical activity through the analogy between the philosopher and the stargazing astronomer. The astronomer, whose observation and contemplation of the far-off heavens offers an embodied image of intellectual *theōria*, plays an important role in Plato's presentation of the philosopher. Just as the theoretical philosopher's intellectual activity is conceptualized as a vision of the truth, the astronomer's activity is based on his observation of the celestial phenomena; just as the object of the theoretical philosophers inquiry is located in some metaphysically distant realm, the object of the astronomer's knowledge is located in the far-off heavens.[90] It the context of the ship-of-state metaphor, the distant gaze of the astronomer, who is compared to the "somewhat short-sighted" ship master, indicates that he alone cultivates the specialized knowledge of the heavens that seafaring requires

[89] For the purpose of the image in its context see Long (2017, esp. 164-165).

[90] For connection between the celestial phenomenon and the Forms in the image, cf. also Keyt (2006, 197) and Sedley (2007, 261).

at the same time as it stands in for an image of philosophical *theōria*.[91] The true captain's observation of such celestial phenomena, which draws him away from the immediate affairs of the ship and thus makes him appear unconcerned with seafaring, in fact leads to the knowledge that makes him "fit for rule over a ship." Just so, the philosopher's *theōria* of the Forms, an activity which, as we saw in the allegory of the cave, apparently indicates the non-political orientation of the philosopher, is what, according to Socrates, makes him fit to rule in the city.[92]

Plato's introduction of the stargazer as an image for the philosopher also returns to the comic image of the philosopher and his study of "the things in the heavens."[93] This being the case, it is no surprise that Callicles' rendition of the comic critique of philosophy, with its dichotomy between those who develop political virtues and those who fritter their lives away in quibbling philosophy, also lies in the background of the image of the striving crewmen and the idle stargazer. The crewmen of the image are "prepared to lambaste" anyone who believes that the skills of seamanship which the true captain has are teachable.[94] Likewise, they "pillory as useless

[91] ὁρῶντα ὡσαύτως βραχύ τι 488b1.

[92] For this point, see Long (2017, 165-166).

[93] The comic image of the philosopher as stargazer is somewhat complicated by the ambivalent treatment of astronomy in the education of the philosopher-rulers in book VII (527d-530c). Here, Socrates distinguishes philosophic astronomers, for whom astronomy is a means for the intellectual contemplation of *what is*, from empirical astronomers, who are concerned only with the observation of physical phenomena. In doing so, he attempts to displace the laughter from the philosophic astronomers onto the empirical philosophers in terms that strongly recall Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates in the *Clouds* (see esp. 529b); cf. Blumenberg (2015, ch. 3). As such, the passage should, perhaps, be understood in the context of Plato's attempts to deflect the laughter at the philosopher, on which see pp. 199-204 below. Elsewhere, Plato continues to assert the connection between philosophy and astronomy; cf., e.g., *R.* 509d, *Cra.* 396c, and *Lg.* 821a. For a good treatment of Plato's view of astronomy, see Gregory (1996).

[94] ἑτοίμους κατατέμνειν 488b8. For the metaphorical meaning of κατατέμνειν, insisted on by Adam (1902) *ad loc.*, see LSJ s.v. κατατέμνω a.6, citing this passage and Hyp. *Ath.* 12. While the word certainly also has violent undertones, it is also perhaps noteworthy that Aristophanes uses the verb τέμνω to refer to his mockery of Cleon (*Ach.* 300-302), even if this is also an *ad hominem* attack on Cleon's purported work as a tanner. Socrates' claim that the crewmen believe

(ἄχρηστον)" anyone who is not skilled at seizing the helm of the ship either by persuasion or force.[95]

Socrates makes clear that the stargazer is a comic punchline by filling out the content of the lambasting and pillorying that he faces. The crewmen mock him because they see that he has little concern for taking hold of the ship, but rather focuses his attention upon the celestial phenomenon, which to the crewmen are of little consequence to the piloting of the ship. The theoretical philosopher is likewise mocked because his *theōria* renders him unfit for efficacious action in the city by pulling his attention away from practical and political concerns into the realm of abstract inquiry. This "absentmindedness" of the stargazer, whose head is in the heavens, is another manifestation of the "otherworldliness" that made the theoretical philosopher laughable in the allegory of the cave. Thus the crewmen mockingly call him a "a stargazer, a prattler, a good-for-nothing" (μετεωροσκόπον τε καὶ ἀδολέσχην καὶ ἄχρηστόν 488e4-489a1), taunts that Socrates harps on again in his later summation of the image, claiming that philosophers, the true pilots of the state, "are called useless and prattlers about meteorological phenomena" (ἀχρήστους λεγομένους καὶ μετεωρολέσχας 489c6). These are, of course, the comic terms that we have seen applied to the philosopher throughout the Platonic corpus.

In the non-ideal city, then, the theoretical philosopher, despite his untapped potential to provide the very knowledge necessary for ruling well, will be derided as useless. The continuity between the role of laughter in the images of the *Republic* and the comic critique of philosophy

that the skill of seafaring is not teachable has been taken as an indication that they are meant to represent anti-intellectual democratic politicians; cf. Adam (1902) *ad loc*., Long (2017, 166-167).

[95] ψέγοντας ὡς ἄχρηστον 488d4. For ψόγος and cognates as a terms of comic discourse, see Rosen (1988, 1-7).

in the *Gorgias* suggests that for Plato, there is an inherent tension between the philosopher and the political community. The latter includes both the many, who "are not able to be philosophic," and those practical men of politics and the arts who, because of the nature of their activity, "consort with the mob and long to please it."[96] Thus "it is necessary that those who philosophize are pilloried," that laughter at the philosopher's expense will continue to ring out.[97] As a result, the philosopher, for his part, will stay out of the life of the city, "keeping quiet and minding his own business, just as a man in a storm, when dust and driving rain are blown about by the wind, sits away under a little wall."[98] The allegory of the cave suggests that the person who has experienced the light will need to be compelled to re-enter the cave, and the astronomer on the ship of state shows no interest in taking control of the helm. Likewise, the theoretical philosopher will be unwilling to actively participate in political life, but will rather tend to his own activity. This decision would seem to be the inevitable outcome of the comic critique of the philosopher first raised in the *Gorgias* and further explored here in the *Republic*—and is an important step toward the non-political *bios theōrētikos*.

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[96] φιλόσοφον μὲν ἄρα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, πλῆθος ἀδύνατον εἶναι … προσομιλοῦντες ὄχλῳ ἀρέσκειν αὐτῷ ἐπιθυμοῦσι 494a4-9. The best of such men can, it seems, be philosophic to the extent that they despise the affairs of the city as much as possible (496b). For the inclusion of artists in this group, cf. *R.* 493d, 496a-d, *Tht.* 173c, and *Grg*. 501b-502b. This is an interesting and important point of distinction between the fifth-century discourse examined in the previous chapters. As we saw, Euripides and his character Amphion were both characterized in much the same way as our prototheoretical philosopher.

[97] Καὶ τοὺς φιλοσοφοῦντας ἄρα ἀνάγκη ψέγεσθαι ὑπ' αὐτῶν 494a6. Compare the statement about "necessity" in the conclusion of the digression of the *Theaetetus* (esp. 176a), considered in the conclusion.

[98] ἡσυχίαν ἔχων καὶ τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττων οἷον ἐν χειμῶνι κονιορτοῦ καὶ ζάλης ὑπὸ πνεύματος φερομένου ὑπὸ τειχίον ἀποστάς 496d6-8.

The Last Laughter of the Philosopher in the *Theaetetus*

Plato's incorporation of comic discourse in both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* suggests the significance of that discourse in his attempt to define the philosopher and his activity. Plato characterizes his theoretical philosopher through the laughter that he faces among non-philosophers. This was especially clear in the *Republic*: the characteristic activity of the philosopher, *theōria*, is shown to be the very reason that the philosopher will inevitably be laughed at when he engages with the political community of non-philosophers. The theoretical philosopher is almost by definition the object of popular mockery. Meanwhile, this attempt to explain how the theoretical philosopher appears ridiculous as a result of his *theōria* itself builds on the comic critique of philosophy and the life of the philosopher that is thematized in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*. In all of these dialogues, this comic critique of philosophy is closely connected to the tension between the laughable philosopher and the political community that laughs at him, a tension at the heart of the distinction between the *bios theōrētikos* and the *bios politikos/praktikos*.

In this final section, I conclude by considering how a number of themes traced throughout this chapter culminate in the treatment of the comic theoretical philosopher in the final "Socratic" dialogue and the one with which I began this dissertation: the *Theaetetus*. Although the primary concern of this dialogue is the epistemological problem of defining knowledge, the so-called "digression" on the nature of the philosopher holds particular significance for the Platonic connection between theoretical philosophy and comedy.[99] While we considered one aspect of comic discourse in the digression in the introduction—namely, the anecdote concerning

[99] On the "digression" generally, see Stern (2002), Sedley (2004, ch. 6), Maffi (2019), Burnyeat (1990, 32-39), in addition to Long (1998), discussed below.

Thales—I focus here on the particular significance of the image of the comic philosopher in this dialogue in relation to Plato's broader engagement with comic discourse as he presents his understanding of philosophy in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic.* For like these earlier dialogues, the *Theaetetus*, too, represents an important development in Plato's conceptualization of philosophy.

The special significance of the dialogue—especially the digression—has been well emphasized in an influential article by A.A. Long. Long argues that as the final dialogue in which Plato uses the figure of Socrates to explore the activity and character of the philosopher, the *Theaetetus* represents a turning point from Plato's earlier "Socratic" attempts to articulate his understanding of philosophy to his significantly different attempts to do so in the "late dialogues," in which Socrates is absent or his role is significantly reduced.[100] Plato's shift away from Socrates to other interlocutors represents, the argument goes, a fundamental shift in Plato's understanding of philosophy. The *Theaetetus*, then, represents a final "apology" for Socrates and thus Plato's final attempt to present and defend the significance that Socrates and his way of life held for philosophy. The digression, Long argues, is "integral to [Plato's] farewell to Socrates" in that "it gives a reprise" of the character of and concepts associated with the figure who has been at the center of the Platonic project of defining and defending philosophy over so many dialogues.[101]

Long's persuasive interpretation of the significance of the dialogue and the place of the

[100] Long (1998, 114-118). Long argues that the *Theaetetus* was likely composed after the *Phaedrus* and the *Parmenides*; he acknowledges Socrates' return in the *Philebus*, but characterizes it as "a dialogue that has no setting in time or place" and does not feature a strongly characterized Socrates. Long particularly stresses the fact that Plato pointedly drops Socrates as the primary interlocutor of the *Sophist*, which shows dramatic continuity with the *Theaetetus* and begins with the question of defining the philosopher.

[101] Long (1998, 128).

digression in it are important for us because one feature of the previous dialogues that Plato prominently revisits is the ridiculous appearance of the philosopher. Indeed, Socrates introduces this theme with what can be read as a sort of Platonic citation of his earlier treatments of the theme: "On many other occasions—and even now as well—I have, my friend, thought about how understandably those who spend a long time with philosophy seem laughable (γελοῖοι) when they go into the courts as speakers."[102] Socrates will go on to develop this thought, relying on the dichotomy, introduced in the *Gorgias*, between the efficacious man of action and the philosopher, who are mutually comic to each other. Furthermore, through references to the metaphysical and epistemological doctrines developed in the *Republic*, he connects the philosopher's ridiculousness to the intellectual *theōria* that he spends his life pursuing. Plato's return to the image of the comic philosopher here in the *Theaetetus* thus confirms the importance of this image for Plato's conceptualization of theoretical philosophy and the philosopher. And in accordance with his suggestion here that it is reasonable or understandable (ὡς εἰκότως) that the philosopher should be so laughed at, Socrates' ultimate response to this mockery offers a final confirmation that this laughter—and the tension of which it is a manifestation—is ineradicable. With this in mind, let us turn to the digression itself.

The digression is initiated by Theodorus' suggestion that he and Socrates have plenty of "leisure" (σχολή) to pursue the many arguments that are appearing before them in their discussion of Protagoras' doctrine of knowledge.[103] Socrates explains that their leisure has

[102] καὶ πολλάκις μέν γε δή, ὦ δαιμόνιε, καὶ ἄλλοτε κατενόησα, ἀτὰρ καὶ νῦν, ὡς εἰκότως οἱ ἐν ταῖς φιλοσοφίαις πολὺν χρόνον διατρίψαντες εἰς τὰ δικαστήρια ἰόντες γελοῖοι φαίνονται ῥήτορες. 172c3-6.

[103] Socrates relationship toward leisure is also thematized also in the *Phaedrus* (227b-230c), where it is connected to his *atopia*, or strangeness.

brought the ridiculous appearance of the philosopher to mind because when “those who from youth thrash about in the law courts” are compared to “those who are educated in philosophy and such pursuits,” they appear “to have been educated as slaves in comparison to free men.”[104] While Socrates here focalizes his discussion of the nature of the philosopher through a comparison with rhetoricians, it is clear that, as in the *Gorgias*, his account of the slavish effects of training for public life is applicable to the broader category of those practical men evoked in the *Republic* whose activity demands that they “consort with the mob.”[105] The digression thus evokes the dichotomy between the *bios theōrētikos* and the *bios politikos/praktikos* that we examined in the context of the *Gorgias*.[106] Meanwhile the emphasis on the slavishness of such practical men is reminiscent of the discussion of philosophic education elucidated by the allegory of the cave, where the uneducated non-philosophical men remain chained in the cave, left to argue about shadows, while the philosopher is freed to look upon the Forms. Although such men think they are “clever and wise,” their need to always please their master, the non-philosophic masses, has a corrupting effect on the soul, and thus “they pass from youth to manhood with no soundness of mind in them.”[107]

Opposed to these slavish practical men are those who like Socrates himself “pass their time with philosophy.”[108] Given our previous examination of Old Comedy, it is interesting that

[104] Κινδυνεύουσιν οἱ ἐν δικαστηρίοις καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις ἐκ νέων κυλινδούμενοι πρὸς τοὺς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ καὶ τῇ τοιᾷδε διατριβῇ τεθραμμένους ὡς οἰκέται πρὸς ἐλευθέρους τεθράφθαι. 172c8-d1.

[105] Compare the more general comments about this type of person at 173a. Theodorus explicitly includes poets among this type at 173c.

[106] Burnyeat (1990, 34-35) comments that this element of the digression stimulated the debate about ideal forms of life.

[107] ὑγιὲς οὐδὲν ἔχοντες τῆς διανοίας εἰς ἄνδρας ἐκ μειρακίων τελευτῶσι, δεινοί τε καὶ σοφοὶ γεγονότες, ὡς οἴονται. 173b1-2.

[108] διατρίβοντας ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ 173c8.

Socrates here employs a metaphor from the stage to introduce the figure of the philosopher—Socrates is part of a "chorus of philosophers" whose "chorus leaders" he will characterize.[109] Socrates' description of such men takes to the extreme his self-mockery about his lack of knowledge of political institutions in the *Gorgias*: these philosophers do not even know where the agora, the courthouse, or other public institutions are; they are ignorant of the city's laws and decrees; they are clueless about the political and social ambitions of their fellow citizens. Just as Socrates "gave everyone a laugh" when he had to put a matter to a vote, and just as the philosopher discussed via the allegory of the cave "acts unseemly (ἀσχημονεῖ) and appears extremely laughable (σφόδρα γελοῖος)" when he "is compelled in the law courts or elsewhere to contest about the shadows of justice," so too when the philosopher of the *Theaetetus* "is compelled to speak in court or elsewhere about the things right at his feet and before his eyes, he is a laughingstock (γέλωτα παρέχει)" by displaying his "terrible unseemliness" (ἀσχημοσύνη δεινή).[110]

Meanwhile, Socrates' explanation for why philosophers are laughable relies on the same metaphysical and epistemological background that informs the allegory of the cave. In that image, we saw that the movement from the dark cave to the sunlit world outside stands in for the philosopher's move from the sensory world to the intelligible world where he engages in *theōria*. Here, Socrates explains the analogous situation:

> Really it is only his body that remains there in the city and dwells there; his mind, considering all these things small and of no account, holds them in no esteem and flies about in all directions, as Pindar says, "both below the earth," and measuring the surface of the

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[109] τοὺς δὲ τοῦ ἡμετέρου χοροῦ 173b3, περὶ τῶν κορυφαίων 173c7.

[110] ὅταν ἐν δικαστηρίῳ ἤ που ἄλλοθι ἀναγκασθῇ περὶ τῶν παρὰ πόδας καὶ τῶν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς διαλέγεσθαι, γέλωτα παρέχει 174c2-4; cf. also 174c9: ἀπορῶν οὖν γελοῖος φαίνεται. The laughter is also connected to the philosopher's "inexperience" (ἀπειρίας 174c5), as in both the *Republic* (484d) and the *Gorgias* (484c).

ground, and "beyond the sky," studying the stars, and investigating the universal nature of everything that is, each in its entirety, never lowering itself to anything close at hand.[111]

Socrates' invocation of the investigation of "the things in the sky" and "the things under the earth" recalls the comic critique of philosophy that we already saw invoked in the *Apology*, even if here Socrates gives that activity a more respectable standing by associating it with the lofty lyric poetry of Pindar. While Socrates thus frames philosophical activity in terms of empirical natural science—the philosopher engages in geometry and astronomy—he also suggests that it proceeds beyond the observation of physical phenomena to investigate "the universal nature of everything that is, each in its entirety" (πᾶσαν πάντῃ φύσιν ἐρευνωμένη τῶν ὄντων ἑκάστου ὅλου).[112] In other words, the empirical activity here stands in for the philosopher's metaphysical *theōria*, just as it did in the case of the stargazer in the ship-of-state metaphor. Elsewhere the discussion evokes the visual language of philosophical *theōria* in reference to the philosopher's vision of the whole in a similar manner: from the perspective of the philosopher, the values of these slavish men is that of "those with dim short-sightedness (ἐπὶ σμικρὸν ὁρώντων) who, from a lack of education, are unable to keep their eyes upon (βλέπειν) the whole."[113]

Nowhere, though, is the overlap between the digression of *Theaetetus* and the comic portrayal of the philosopher in the *Republic* and the *Gorgias* clearer than in the crowning image

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[111] τῷ ὄντι τὸ σῶμα μόνον ἐν τῇ πόλει κεῖται αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπιδημεῖ, ἡ δὲ διάνοια, ταῦτα πάντα ἡγησαμένη σμικρὰ καὶ οὐδέν, ἀτιμάσασα πανταχῇ πέτεται κατὰ Πίνδαρον, "τᾶς τε γᾶς ὑπένερθε" καὶ τὰ ἐπίπεδα γεωμετροῦσα, "οὐρανοῦ τε ὕπερ" ἀστρονομοῦσα, καὶ πᾶσαν πάντῃ φύσιν ἐρευνωμένη τῶν ὄντων ἑκάστου ὅλου, εἰς τῶν ἐγγὺς οὐδὲν αὑτὴν συγκαθιεῖσα. 173e2-174a2.

[112] That the astronomy envisioned here goes beyond mere empirical observation is also suggested by the language of the Pindar quotation—his mind is "beyond the heavens" (οὐρανοῦ τε ὕπερ). On the tension between "philosophical" and "empirical" astronomy, see n. 93 above.

[113] παντάπασιν ἀμβλὺ καὶ ἐπὶ σμικρὸν ὁρώντων ἡγεῖται τὸν ἔπαινον, ὑπὸ ἀπαιδευσίας οὐ δυναμένων εἰς τὸ πᾶν ἀεὶ βλέπειν. 174e7-175a2.

of the comic philosopher: the stargazing Thales' fall into the well. Since I treated this anecdote at length in the introduction, I will here only consider briefly its role in the comic conceptualization of the theoretical philosopher. Socrates introduces the anecdote in order to help Theodorus better understand the philosopher's aloofness from the practical affairs of the city:

> Why, take the case of Thales, Theodorus. It is said that while he was studying the stars and looking upwards (ἀστρονομοῦντα … καὶ ἄνω βλέποντα), he fell into a well, and a graceful, witty Thracian servant girl mocked him because he was eager to know the things in the sky but the things before him at his feet escaped his notice. And this same mockery (σκῶμμα) applies to all who pass their lives in philosophy (πάντας ὅσοι ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διάγουσι).[114]

The imagery of the anecdote again recalls that of the philosophical stargazer of the ship-of-state metaphor in book VI. The earlier equation of the empirical observation of the stars and metaphysical knowledge of "the universal nature of everything that is" suggests that we interpret Thales as a theoretical philosopher, his upward gaze as he engages in astronomy as an image of philosophic *theōria*. This interpretation is supported further by Socrates' concluding claim that the Thracian woman's "mockery" is applicable to "all who pass their lives in philosophy.[115]"

Meanwhile, Plato situates the Thracian servant girl herself in relation to"the multitude" among whom the philosopher has a "reputation for silliness."[116] It is this unphilosophic multitude that, as we saw in the *Republic*, the practical and political men of the city must serve, rendering their souls slavish and unfree. The philosopher's freedom from the multitude is a necessary

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[114] Ὥσπερ καὶ Θαλῆν ἀστρονομοῦντα, ὦ Θεόδωρε, καὶ ἄνω βλέποντα, πεσόντα εἰς φρέαρ, Θρᾷττά τις ἐμμελὴς καὶ χαρίεσσα θεραπαινὶς ἀποσκῶψαι λέγεται ὡς τὰ μὲν ἐν οὐρανῷ προθυμοῖτο εἰδέναι, τὰ δ᾽ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ καὶ παρὰ πόδας λανθάνοι αὐτόν. ταὐτὸν δὲ ἀρκεῖ σκῶμμα ἐπὶ πάντας ὅσοι ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διάγουσι. 174a4-9.

[115] So also Nightingale (2004, 23-24). Nightingale (2004, 204 n.33) notes that this is the only sign of *theōria* in the *Theaetetus*; this, combined with her view that Plato did not endorse such a theoretical ideal, leads to her not treating the digression or the dialogue at any length.

[116] τῷ ἄλλῳ ὄχλῳ 174c4, δόξαν ἀβελτερίας 174c6. For thoughts on Plato's use of the Thracian servant girl, see Blumenberg (2015, 11-12) and Cavarero (1995, ch. 2). Hdt. V.12ff. suggests that Thracian women were known for their industry; see Osborne 2007.

condition for his philosophical *theōria*—but is also what necessarily makes him appear humorous in the eyes of the rest of the city. For his philosophical *theōria*, which draws him continuously into the intellectual world of the Forms, can only appear useless to non-philosophers. The philosopher's "otherworldliness" renders him susceptible to all sorts of comic mishaps here in the world of concrete reality. The anecdote about Thales, then, represents a pithy distillation of the image of the comic philosopher that we have been tracing throughout this chapter—and indeed, thought this dissertation.

At this point in the digression, Socrates offers his own response to this laughter faced by the theoretical philosopher. When the philosopher is laughed at by those who pride themselves on having an honorable position in the city, he laughs back, for they are unable "to free their senseless souls from vanity."[117] Socrates further imagines a situation in which such a man is made to consider the goodness of worldly honors in the abstract, generalizing terms of the theoretical philosopher, to engage in "the examination (σκέψιν) of royalty and of human happiness and wretchedness in general (ὅλως), what sort of thing each is (ποίω … ἐστὸν) and in what way humans are naturally (φύσει) fitted to gain the one and escape the other."[118] When called to give an account of such things, "the situation is reversed" (πάλιν αὖ τὰ ἀντίστροφα ἀποδίδωσιν):

> Reeling from hanging at such a height and looking downward from the air, dismayed and perplexed from his inexperience, as he stammers he gives a laugh not to Thracian women or other uneducated persons, for they have no perception of it, but to those who have been brought up as free men, not as slaves.[119]

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[117] γελᾷ οὐ δυναμένων λογίζεσθαί τε καὶ χαυνότητα ἀνοήτου ψυχῆς ἀπαλλάττειν 175b2-4; cf. also his laughter at 174d.

[118] βασιλείας πέρι καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης ὅλως εὐδαιμονίας καὶ ἀθλιότητος ἐπὶ σκέψιν, ποίω τέ τινε ἐστὸν καὶ τίνα τρόπον ἀνθρώπου φύσει προσήκει τὸ μὲν κτήσασθαι αὐτοῖν, τὸ δὲ ἀποφυγεῖν 175c5-8.

[119] εἰλιγγιῶν τε ἀπὸ ὑψηλοῦ κρεμασθεὶς καὶ βλέπων μετέωρος ἄνωθεν ὑπὸ ἀηθείας

To see what is at stake in this response, let us briefly consider parallel passages in the *Republic* and the *Gorgias.*[120]

We can begin by returning to the allegory of the cave. In discussing the laughter faced by the escapee who has experienced the light of the sun and struggles to see upon his return to the darkness of the cave, Socrates claims that "someone with sense" would recognize that there are two ways that vision can become confused: either from a movement "out of the light into the darkness or out of the darkness into the light."[121] Once more, the visual language suggests philosophical *theōria* as Socrates explains the proper response to the theoretical philosopher's strange appearance when he engages in the affairs of the city. When one encounters a "soul" that is "bewildered and unable to discern anything clearly," this person with sense would not "laugh unreasonably" (ἀλογίστως γελῷ) at his failures.[122] Rather, he would rationally consider the specifics of this hapless person's situation. If his bumbling behavior indicates that he has grown accustomed to the light and is suffering from being immersed back into darkness—that is, if he has engaged in philosophical *theōria* and appears maladjusted to the practical world of the city—he would deem him happy, knowing that his apparent absurdity is a result of having become accustomed to the "more resplendent life" of intellectual activity. If it indicates that he is

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ἀδημονῶν τε καὶ ἀπορῶν καὶ βατταρίζων γέλωτα Θρᾴτταις μὲν οὐ παρέχει οὐδ᾽ ἄλλῳ ἀπαιδεύτῳ οὐδενί, οὐ γὰρ αἰσθάνονται, τοῖς δ᾽ ἐναντίως ἢ ὡς ἀνδραπόδοις τραφεῖσιν ἅπασιν. 175d1-7.

[120] For an interesting overview of the related question of Socrates own sense of humor in mocking his interlocutors, see Lombardini (2018).

[121] Ἀλλ᾽ εἰ νοῦν γε ἔχοι τις, ἦν δ᾽ ἐγώ, μεμνῇτ᾽ ἂν ὅτι διτταὶ καὶ ἀπὸ διττῶν γίγνονται ἐπιταράξεις ὄμμασιν, ἔκ τε φωτὸς εἰς σκότος μεθισταμένων καὶ ἐκ σκότους εἰς φῶς. 518a1-3.

[122] ταὐτὰ δὲ ταῦτα νομίσας γίγνεσθαι καὶ περὶ ψυχήν, ὁπότε ἴδοι θορυβουμένην τινὰ καὶ ἀδυνατοῦσάν τι καθορᾶν, οὐκ ἂν ἀλογίστως γελῷ, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπισκοποῖ ἂν πότερον ἐκ φανοτέρου βίου ἥκουσα ὑπὸ ἀηθείας ἐσκότωται, ἢ ἐξ ἀμαθίας πλείονος εἰς φανότερον ἰοῦσα ὑπὸ λαμπροτέρου μαρμαρυγῆς ἐμπέπλησται, καὶ οὕτω δὴ τὴν μὲν εὐδαιμονίσειεν ἂν τοῦ πάθους τε καὶ βίου, τὴν δὲ ἐλεήσειεν 518a4-b2.

emerging from the darkness and experiencing light for the first time—that is, he has caught a brief glimpse of the higher world that the philosopher's *theōria* brings into his sight continuously—he would pity him for his inability to enjoy the higher experience of the world outside the cave.

Yet Socrates also suggests that the man with sense might nevertheless laugh at this unphilosophic soul who is left baffled by his glimpse of the philosophic point of view—though this laughter would be "a less scornful laughter" (ἧττον ἂν καταγέλαστος ὁ γέλως) than that typically faced by the philosopher.[123] Like the *Theaetetus* passage, this explanation amounts to a Platonic effort to turn the tables on those who laugh at the philosopher. If those who remain dwelling in the cave, the non-philosophers, derisively laugh at the apparently absurd philosopher who enjoys the light, the philosopher himself knows that those who remain in the darkness are truly the ridiculous ones, and their foolishness will elicit from him his own gentle laughter. The laughter of scorn that the philosopher faces in the *Republic* is, of course, the very same laughter that resounded in the *Gorgias*, and there too Socrates offers a response. The *Republic*'s insistence that the philosopher's own laughter will not be scornful is particularly interesting when we consider this passage alongside the *Gorgias*' earlier response to the derisive laughter elicited by the comic critique of philosophy.

While in the first section of this chapter I have highlighted the way in which Plato incorporates comic discourse into the *Gorgias,* scholars have more often emphasized the dark,

[123] καὶ εἰ γελᾶν ἐπ' αὐτῇ βούλοιτο, ἧττον ἂν καταγέλαστος ὁ γέλως αὐτῷ εἴη ἢ ὁ ἐπὶ τῇ ἄνωθεν ἐκ φωτὸς ἡκούσῃ. 518b2-4. Alternatively, it is possible to translate καταγέλαστος as "absurd," in which case the point is that the philosopher's laughter is more justified than the non-philosopher's; cf. the discussion of the person who is "in truth ridiculous" in the *Gorgias* below. Both senses are, I think, felt here.

acrimonious tone that the dialogue sometimes takes. What Dodds refers to as the "passionate bitterness" of Socrates in that dialogue can be seen especially well in his response to Callicles and Polus' mockery of philosophy.[124] In the eyes of Polus and Callicles, the most laughable argument that Socrates puts forth is that the wicked man is necessarily unhappy and that he is, in fact, even more unhappy if his wickedness goes unpunished. When, over the course of the dialogue, it becomes clear that neither will be convinced by Socrates' arguments despite the fact that neither can successfully refute them, Socrates responds to their claims that he is ridiculous by suggesting that it is they who are "in truth ridiculous" (καταγέλαστος … τῇ ἀληθείᾳ 509b4-5).[125] As in the case of the *Republic*, it is not the philosopher, but the person who is closed off from philosophy who is the proper object of laughter.

More telling, though, is Socrates' response in his eschatological myth, where his resentment at their mockery is also made apparent. In his *rhesis*, Callicles suggests that if Socrates were called to defend himself in court, he "would reel and gawp, having nothing to say" (ἰλιγγιῴης ἂν καὶ χασμῷο οὐκ ἔχων ὅ τι εἴποις 486b1-2). As we saw in section one, in pointing to such a scenario, Callicles is building on the comic critique of the philosopher as an effete babbler who cannot take care of himself or his friends. And again, while we might recognize the serious implications of Callicles' suggestion about Socrates' helplessness in light of his eventual trial and execution, the "empty-headed expectation" or confusion indicated by such gawping is primarily comic, especially when applied to philosophical navel-gazing.[126] Socrates returns to

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[124] Dodds (1959, 16); Dodd's gives his explanation in a section titled "Why is the *Gorgias* so bitter?" See also Fussi (2000).

[125] Cf. also καταγέλαστος, 509a7.

[126] The phrase is Olson's (2002) commenting on *Ach.* 10, where other comic examples can be found. For the philosopher's gawping and reeling, cf. *Nu*. 171, Pl. *R*. 529b, *Cra*. 411b, and *Chrm*. 168c

this image in his account of the judgement of souls, where he acerbically asserts that when men such as Callicles come before the judges in the afterlife, it is they who will be left foolishly "gawping and reeling no less than"[127] Socrates might be in court. If Callicles scornfully laughs at Socrates for his failures in this world, Socrates even more scornfully suggests that what is ridiculous about men like Callicles is precisely what will lead them to an afterlife of eternal damnation. While the charged language of the myth as a whole is closely connected to its protreptic function, this vindictive retort to the mockery faced by the philosopher is a far cry from the scorn-less laughter of the analogy of the cave.

Where, then, should we situate the reaction of Socrates in the *Theaetetus*—which also stands as Plato's final word on the matter—in relationship to the resentful retort of the *Gorgias* and the gentle smile of the *Republic*? The language used to describe the confused non-philosopher called to give an account of himself from the elevated perspective of the theoretical philosopher directly parallels that of the *Gorgias*—both "reel" (εἰλιγγιῶν, ἰλιγγιῴης) in their confusion and have nothing to say—but the tone has certainly changed. In response to the laughter he faces, the philosopher, Socrates emphatically declares in the *Theaetetus*, "has no personal reproach to offer against any man, because he knows no evil of any man."[128] Thus while he continues to "appear laughable in his helplessness," he nevertheless "openly laughs" at those who praise worldly success—even though doing so makes him seem still more silly.[129] In this last image of the laughing and laughed-at philosopher, the *Gorgias*'s vengeful vision of eternal suffering has given way to the "less scornful" laughter of the *Republic*, a knowing smile at the "small, sharp,

[127] χασμήσῃ καὶ ἰλιγγιάσεις οὐδὲν ἧττον ἢ ἐγὼ ἐνθάδε σὺ ἐκεῖ 527a2-4.

[128] ἔν τε γὰρ ταῖς λοιδορίαις ἴδιον ἔχει οὐδὲν οὐδένα λοιδορεῖν, ἅτ᾽ οὐκ εἰδὼς κακὸν οὐδὲν οὐδενὸς ἐκ τοῦ μὴ μεμελετηκέναι. 174c6-8.

[129] οὐ προσποιήτως, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι γελῶν ἔνδηλος γιγνόμενος ληρώδης δοκεῖ εἶναι. 174d1-4.

pettifogging soul" of the non-philosopher and his misguided worldly concerns.[130]

Conclusions

In both its account of the laughter faced by the theoretical philosopher and the philosopher's response to that laughter, Plato's final treatment of this topic in the *Theaetetus* continues to develop themes that we have traced throughout this chapter. In each of the dialogues we have considered here, Plato pointedly engages with comic discourse that characterizes the philosopher's activity and way of life as laughable as he presents his own understanding of philosophy and the philosopher. If Plato's defense of Socrates' peculiar way of life in the *Apology* first introduced this theme by casting Aristophanes and the other comic poets as his "first accusers," its full significance can first be felt in the *Gorgias*. In this dialogue, the first in which Plato begins to narrow his understanding of "philosophy" to a specific activity and way of life, he does so by having Socrates defend that activity and way of life against an attack that conspicuously borrows elements from the comic poets.

When Plato returns to the figure of the laughable philosopher in the *Republic*, he does so in the context of his most detailed discussion of intellectual *theōria*, the activity that is taken up as the highest goal of the philosopher and that would go on to be the central activity of the *bios theōrētikos*. By tracing what makes the philosopher laughable directly to his engagement in *theōria*, the allegory of the cave and the ship-of-state metaphor seem to suggest that there is an inherent tension between the theoretical philosopher and the political community, that the theoretical philosopher must remain the object of comedy when he engages in the affairs of the

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[130] τὸν σμικρὸν ἐκεῖνον τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ δριμὺν καὶ δικανικόν *Tht.* 175d1-2.

city. Finally, the return to these themes in Socrates' digression on the nature of the theoretical philosopher in the *Theaetetus* reinforces our contention that the comic discourse of the fifth century continued to play an important role in the fourth-century conceptualization of philosophy as a way of life dedicated to the pursuit of *theōria* and the *bios theōrētikos.*

Conclusion

The Comic History of the *Bios Theōrētikos*

In the final section of chapter four, I suggested that when Plato's Socrates returned in the *Theaetetus* to the theme of the comic critique of philosophy and the philosopher's response to it, he seems to have settled on the resigned, smiling response of the *Republic* as opposed to the bitter, resentful retort of the *Gorgias*. In the *Republic*, we also saw that another inevitable response to what this comic critique of philosophy represents is the philosopher's rejection of political life. This reaction stands in contrast to the *Gorgias*, where the philosopher, in the figure of Socrates, is still framed as an essentially political figure. The *Republic* thus posits a picture of the theoretical philosopher who foregoes participation in the city in favor of living an unpolitical life dedicated to the pursuit of *theōria*. Such an understanding of the theoretical philosopher suggests an important step toward the Aristotelian understanding of the *bios theōrētikos* as a life released from external affairs, one understood in opposition to a *bios politikos/praktikos.*

The conclusion of Socrates' comic account of the theoretical philosopher and the man of affairs in the digression of the *Theaetetus* again looks forward to the two opposed ways of life that are present in Aristotle. Summarizing his description of "the way of life (τρόπος) of each" of these figures, Socrates suggests that while the person "whom you call a philosopher" does not think it blameworthy "to seem foolish or of no worth," the practical man, despite his efficacious appearance, does not know how "to acquire true harmony of speech and to sing properly the praises of the life (βίον) of gods and blessed men."[1] When Theodorus urges Socrates that there

[1] οὗτος δὴ ἑκατέρου τρόπος … ὃν δὴ φιλόσοφον καλεῖς, ᾧ ἀνεμέσητον εὐήθει δοκεῖν καὶ οὐδενὶ εἶναι … οὐδέ γ᾽ ἁρμονίαν λόγων λαβόντος ὀρθῶς ὑμνῆσαι θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνδρῶν εὐδαιμόνων βίον. 175d7-e8.

would be "more peace and fewer evils" if he could persuade "all men" of his account of the character and activity of the theoretical philosopher, Socrates is skeptical about the possibility: "But it is impossible," he declares, "that evils should disappear, for it is necessary that there always be something opposed to the good."[2] Because of the impossibility of reconciling the theoretical philosopher and the non-philosopher and thus eliminating worldly evils, Socrates concludes that the theoretical philosopher must reject this worldly life: "therefore we ought to try to flee from this place to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and flight is to become like God as much as possible."[3] On one prominent interpretation of this passage, Plato's call for escape and assimilation to god amounts to a call to an unworldly life of pure *theōria*, a *bios theōrētikos.*[4]

On this reading, the comic image of the philosopher presented in the digression of the *Theaetetus* culminates in Plato's sharpest conceptualization of the theoretical ideal, one which also looks forward to the *bios theōrētikos* of Aristotle, a life divorced from external affairs that takes *theōria* as its *telos.*[5] The comic history of the *bios theōrētikos* has at last, then, brought us

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[2] Ἀλλ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὦ Θεόδωρε· ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη· 176a5-7.

[3] διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· 176a8-10.

[4] For this interpretation, see Annas (1999, ch. 3); cf. Mahoney (2004) and Armstrong (2004) for the alternative interpretive approach, which sees Socrates' subsequent call "to become just" as a call to worldly ethics. The idea of assimilation to god would go on to play an important role in the Christian contemplative ideal *via* Philo and the Middle Platonists; for a full account, see Merki (1952). Thus the treatment of the "*retraite du sage*" in the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus* by Festugière (1967, ch. 3), who is always looking forward to the contemplative ideal in the Christian tradition, culminates in this passage.

[5] On the history of interpreting the *Theaetetus* passage as a statement of the Platonic *telos*, see Torri (2019). Aristotle makes his own call that we "should be like immortals to the extent this is possible" in his account of the theoretical ideal in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle's claim in relation to that of Plato—and for the idea in general—see Sedley (2017). For an interpretation of Aristotle's claim within his broader ethical project, see Richardson Lear

back to where we began. In this dissertation, I have aimed to trace out a new history of this *bios theōrētikos*, one that demonstrates the connection between these fourth-century discussions about the life organized around the pursuit of *theōria* and the fifth-century comic discourse about the life dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself. Drawing inspiration from the work of Blumenberg, I posited a conceptual connection between the comic portrayal of Socrates and Plato's presentation of the theoretical philosopher: the source of the laughter faced by both of these figures is "the comic aspect of pure theory."

This conceptual connection prompted us to return to the corpus of Old Comedy to consider the portrayal of Socrates within this framework. In chapter one, I considered how the comic poets characterize Socrates in comparison with the so-called Sophists. Here an image of Socrates as what I have been calling a prototheoretical philosopher emerged: Socrates is consistently shown in fifth-century comedy to be uniquely dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, even when that pursuit leaves him manifestly worse off. In chapter two, I examined how this same aspect of Socrates' character is thematized in the *Clouds* in particular, arguing against the common interpretation of Socrates as a venal teacher of sophistic rhetoric. This understanding of the comic Socrates also helped us to understand why the comic poets were so keen to associate Socrates and Euripides, a topic which I took up in chapter three: the tragedian, who is characterized as a sort of philosopher-poet, was also an important figure in this fifth-century discourse about the efficacy and value of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

In my final chapter, I brought what we had learned about this comic prototheoretical philosopher to bear on Plato's presentation of his theoretical philosopher. By considering key

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(2004, 188-196).

passages in which Plato incorporates and responds to this comic critique of the philosopher, we were able to see the significant role that this comic figure plays in his attempts to articulate his understanding of "philosophy." The *Republic* and the *Theaetetus* in particular directly connect the laughter faced by the philosopher to the activity conceived as the highest activity of the philosopher: *theōria*. The laughter thus points to a tension between the philosopher and the political community, a tension that Plato suggests would drive the philosopher to choose a life divorced from the affairs of the city, dedicating himself instead to his pursuit of philosophical *theōria*. Plato's engagement with the comic critique of philosophy thus served as a through-line from Old Comedy's prototheoretical philosopher to the unpolitical life of the theoretical philosopher in Plato and beyond. Thus we see that while Plato was the first thinker to conceptualize explicitly a *bios* dedicated to the pursuit of *theōria,* it is on the comic stage of the fifth century that the concept of the *bios theōrētikos* begins to take shape—not as an exalted ideal of the good life, but as a ridiculous example of a bad one.

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