

# Plato's Dionysian Music? A Reading of the *Symposium*

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**ABSTRACT:** Like Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Plato's *Symposium* stages a contest between literary genres. The quarrel between Socrates and Aristophanes constitutes the primary axis of this contest, and the speech of Alcibiades echoes and extends that of Aristophanes. Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates with a satyr, however, contains the key to understanding Socrates' implication, at the very end of the dialogue, that philosophy alone understands the inner connectedness, and hence the proper nature, of both tragedy and comedy. I argue that Plato reflects in the character of Socrates the primordial wisdom embodied in satyric drama. I conclude with a brief consideration of Nietzsche's challenge to Plato's Dionysian wisdom.

From the smile of this Dionysus sprang the Olympian gods,  
from his tears sprang man.—Friedrich Nietzsche

In a talk he delivered at the University of Dallas in 1981, the late David Lachterman set forth a number of preliminary yet characteristically germane reflections on the critical and dramatic accomplishment of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Lachterman suggested that the fanciful contest between Euripides and Aeschylus that is staged in the *Frogs* and is judged by Dionysus pertains essentially to "the appropriate balance, the appropriate *ratio*, between the private pleasures of the body and the public necessities of the warrior or of warfare" (Lachterman 1981: 25). This politically crucial ratio, however, is not "rational" in that cannot be articulated according to the demands of philosophic theory. Instead, it is episodically enacted and reenacted within the collective public experience of the dramatic festivals of Dionysus at Athens. Nor are we to infer from Aeschylus's victory that the older tragedian holds the key to this generative and saving ratio, for Dionysus's

verdict occurs within a comedy authored by one whose “entire preoccupation,” as Socrates justly remarks in the *Symposium*, “is with Dionysus and Aphrodite” (177e1–2). Rather, Lachterman suggests,

it is the comic poet, on the comic stage, who, by representing to the citizens the tension and the possible harmonization of the private and the public, of the intimacy of Aphrodite and the overt warfare of Ares, can best bring home to the citizens, as in a self-mirroring picture, what it is that is at stake in the vitality and survival of the city itself: an inarticulable ratio of *erôs* and *polemos*. (Lachterman 1981: 24)

Lachterman also mentions, in passing, that Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* constitutes a modern “companion-piece” to the *Frogs*. Nietzsche’s mimicry of the *Frogs* is evident in the Dionysian tribunal before which he brings the tragic poets in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in his preference for Aeschylus, and in his suggestion that tragic art died with Euripides owing to the latter’s “loyalty to, and seduction by, Socrates” (Lachterman 1981: 2). In addition, Lachterman maintains, *The Birth of Tragedy* echoes Aristophanes’ perception that beneath the surface of the city there is an “abyss” that somehow generates “episodes of shared civic experience by which the city is kept potently intact and preserves its vitality”—a vitality and integrity that is undermined by the Socratic ambition to provide a rational foundation or grounding for the city’s practices (Lachterman 1981: 26).

Lachterman’s observations prove to be especially illuminating when they are brought to bear upon another work that rivals the *Frogs* in its Dionysian judgments on tragedy, on comedy, and on Socrates. While Dionysus is surely present wherever human beings praise *erôs* while drinking wine, the first and clearest indication that Plato’s *Symposium* is also a companion-piece to the *Frogs*—and hence a mimetic sibling of *The Birth of Tragedy*—is provided when the tragedian Agathon accuses Socrates of *hybris* and then explicitly invokes the god. “A little later you and I will submit ourselves to trial concerning our wisdom,” he prophesies, “and will employ Dionysus as a judge” (*Symposium* 175e7–9). The situation admittedly becomes more complex than Agathon might have expected, for a field of multiple antagonisms develops as Aristophanes’ speech about the primordial arrogance of human beings lays the groundwork for Alcibiades’ own accusation against Socrates. It is Alcibiades who presses the tragedian’s original charge of *hybris* and who effectively puts Socrates on trial, addressing the assembled company as “judges of Socrates’ arrogant disdain” (*Symposium* 219c5–6). As this new and more profound contest takes shape, Socrates’ quarrel with Agathon seems to recede in importance.

While the latter quarrel is one of the dialogue’s conspicuous dramatic themes (cf. 193e1–194e3, 198a1–201c9), it is striking that Plato chooses a second-rank playwright to represent tragedy. Comedy, not tragedy, appears to be philosophy’s main antagonist in the *Symposium*: in the company of Aristophanes and

Socrates—not to mention Alcibiades—Agathon is quite simply out of his league.<sup>1</sup> And while the initial dispute between the philosopher and the tragedian is at least superficially resolved when the latter concedes his ignorance about *erôs* after a brief cross-examination by the former (201c6–7), the *Symposium* contains no philosophical or dramatic denouement of the confrontation between Aristophanes, Alcibiades, and Socrates. Yet this most liquid evening at Agathon's *does* conclude with a perplexing judgment on dramatic poetry, offered not by the god of the vine himself but certainly in his presence: Socrates compels Agathon and Aristophanes "to agree that it belongs to one and the same man to know how to produce both tragic and comic drama, and that he who is by art a maker of tragic drama is also a maker of comic drama" (223d3–6).

In the *Frogs*, comedy asserts itself as the measure of tragedy and of Socratic philosophizing. In the *Symposium*, Socrates implies that philosophy alone understands the inner connectedness, and hence the proper nature, of both tragedy and comedy. Plato presents this dispute more directly than does Aristophanes. The *Frogs* does not attempt to justify its assessment of Socrates, who is not present in this drama and is mentioned almost in passing. After the highly comic character of Dionysus announces his decision to bring Aeschylus back from Hades, the chorus of mystery initiates criticizes Socrates, whom Aristophanes everywhere associates with Euripides.<sup>2</sup> While Aeschylus has proved that he can give useful advice to the city (*Frogs* 1419–21), the chorus charges Socrates—and, by implication, Euripides—with being amusic, anti-tragic, and engaging in idle or profitless chatter (1491–9). That is all.<sup>3</sup> A fair assessment of the latter charges requires an examination of the *Clouds*, in which Aristophanes is wholly concerned with Socrates and the strange phenomenon of his philosophical *erôs*. In the *Symposium*, however, Socrates and Aristophanes face each other and can speak for themselves in presenting the respective cases of comedy and philosophy as judges of each other and of tragedy.<sup>4</sup> Plato's presentation of the quarrel between comedy and philosophy improves upon that of Aristophanes in another way as well. Because of the presence of Alcibiades, the *Symposium* is able to deal with this quarrel more deeply than the *Frogs* and the *Clouds* put together. For the audience of the *Clouds*, the powerful attraction that draws Socrates and his students to the ascetic, philosophic life remains a mystery. Literally and metaphorically, Aristophanes never allows us to go indoors with Socrates.<sup>5</sup> Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* reflects Aristophanes' treatment of Socrates in the *Clouds*, but is more penetrating. Alcibiades takes us where Aristophanes does not—inside the Thinkery, so to speak, where Socrates' most intimate relationship with a young companion becomes visible. Yet Alcibiades' exposé is a curious mixture of the superficial and the profound. Alcibiades says more than he had intended to, and not just because drunkenness has loosened his tongue: there is a fundamental tension in his speech between his essentially Aristophanean interpretation of

Socrates' hybris and the deeper implications of the satyr images by means of which he attempts to reveal Socrates' nature. Alcibiades' inspired images furnish one more indication of the presence of Dionysus in the *Symposium*.<sup>6</sup>

This essay explores the *Symposium*'s presentation of the contest between philosophy, tragedy, and comedy. To this end, I offer a fairly close reading of the speeches of Aristophanes and Alcibiades. I have two main goals in mind. First, I hope to establish that the quarrel between Socrates and Aristophanes constitutes the primary axis of the contest between literary genres that is staged in the *Symposium*. I maintain that the major themes of Aristophanean comedy, as well as the core of Aristophanes' criticisms of Socrates, are present in the comic poet's speech about *erôs*, and that the speech of Alcibiades in important ways extends and deepens these themes and criticisms. Second, I hope to illuminate the philosophical significance of Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates with satyrs and statues of satyrs.

Especially when considered in connection with Alcibiades' satyr images, Socrates' perplexing claim about the underlying unity of the dramatic art invites reflection upon satyr plays—the strange dramas that each tragedian submitted with three tragedies to make up a tetralogy, and that stood between these tragedies and a single comedy in the daily order of performance at the Great Dionysia. At all events, Socrates seems to extend the *Symposium*'s contest between literary genres to include satyr play when he remarks that Alcibiades' speech is a "satyric drama" (222d3–4). I suggest that Socrates' debate with Agathon and Aristophanes at the very end of the *Symposium* is meant to point out the common Dionysian root of tragedy and comedy, as well as the unitary wisdom of their Dionysian source. I argue further that while tragic and comic characters only partially embody the wisdom of Dionysus, this wisdom finds its most adequate dramatic exemplification in the victorious protagonists of satyr plays. In this respect, the human and satyric heroes of satyr play stand to tragic and comic protagonists roughly as Aristophanes' circle-creatures stand to their fragmented halves. In the *Symposium*, in turn, Plato reflects in the character of Socrates the primordial wisdom that is embodied in those satyrs and humans who show proper reverence for Dionysus in the satyr play.

The preceding claims are likely to strike the sober-minded reader as rather extravagant ones. I try to render them more plausible by exploring the superiority of Socrates' "satyric" irony to characteristically comic and tragic modes of self-understanding. Like the mysterious and ambiguous figure of the satyr itself, Socrates' irony seems to intimate a psychic wholeness that cannot properly be represented or conveyed by either tragedy or comedy. Socrates is not, any more than a satyr, an amalgam of tragic and comic elements. He is rather a Dionysian original, of which tragic and comic protagonists are at best one-sided, incomplete imitations.

I conclude with a very brief consideration of Nietzsche's profound challenge to Plato in *The Birth of Tragedy*. My intention is not to try to meet this challenge, but rather to provoke further reflection by underscoring that which is most questionable in my thesis that Plato, too, is a composer of Dionysian music.

### I. ARISTOPHANES

In the *Frogs*, the inarticulate frog-song of "brekekekex, coax, coax" is followed by a humorous sequence in which Dionysus and his slave Xanthias repeatedly exchange masterly garb (a Heracleian lion-skin) for slavish impedimenta (their baggage) so that each may appear, as is convenient, in the guise of the other. In the *Symposium*, Aristophanes' hiccups render him incapable of speaking and force him to switch places with Eryximachus. This substitution not only suits Aristophanes' depiction of *erôs* as a healer of human sickness (189dl–2) as well as his own self-conception as a doctor of the soul, but also anticipates two subsequent instances in which a similar exchange of dramatic voices occurs. First, Aristophanes is interrupted by the entrance of Alcibiades just as he starts to reply to Socrates' speech (212c4–8). Second, Socrates is about to begin his praise of Agathon when a great *kômos* or throng of Bacchanalian revelers bursts into the party (223b2: *kômastas*) and general disorder ensues. These details are highly suggestive. In the first instance, a speech is substituted for a speech: as the dramatic stand-in for what Aristophanes had intended to say, Alcibiades' ambiguously blameful encomium of Socrates may somehow embody Aristophanes' response to the philosopher. In the second instance, drunken chaos replaces *logos*. Some hint of how Socrates might have responded to Alcibiades, however, may be gleaned from his intention to praise the tragedian and his concluding assertion about the unity of tragedy and comedy: both of these dramatic details suggest that the perspective of comedy stands in need of correction by tragedy.

Those who have spent time with the eleven surviving plays of Aristophanes will not fail to be struck by Plato's faithfulness to their recurring themes. The pivot of the comic poet's speech in the *Symposium*—the conflict within the soul between *thumos* and *erôs*, or between the "upward" desire to surpass and dominate others and the "horizontal" desires associated with Dionysus and Aphrodite—finds expression throughout Aristophanes' oeuvre. Indeed, Aristophanes devotes an entire play, the *Lysistrata*, to illustrating the thesis that *erôs* is a kind of political medicine, a healer of the political sickness that is rooted in or manifested by our upward aspirations. The pleasures of sex, wine, and food ultimately vanquish the lust for war in the *Acharnians* and the *Peace* as well. Yet even in the fantastic world of Aristophanean comedy there is no permanent or satisfactory solution to the problem posed by this tangle of human desires.

Consider, for example, the *Clouds* and the *Birds*, both of which leave us with the disturbing prospect of unchecked tyrannical violence. The end of the *Clouds* is just the beginning of Strepsiades' problems with his corrupted son Pheidipides. The strange souls who choose to remain in Socrates' Thinkery are of no great concern to the city; it is rather the one who departs, a young man who has "learned" something from his encounter with Socrates but is unsatisfied with the philosophical life, whose tyrannical ambition poses problems for the political community—and so, indirectly, for Socrates and his students as well. In the *Birds*, Peisthetaerus and Euelpides leave Athens in search of greener pastures and are subsequently transformed into winged men/beasts. The wedding procession with which the *Birds* concludes marks the successful consummation of Peisthetaerus's newly hatched plan to seize the supreme power that once belonged to Zeus by cutting off all intercourse between gods and men. Taken together, the two wandering Athenians exemplify the two fundamental vectors of desire of which Aristophanes speaks in the *Symposium*. While Peisthetaerus's homoerotic sexual preference helps to mark him as a politically ambitious man, Euelpides is associated with softer appetites for food, drink, and conviviality (*Birds* 128–34, 137–42; *Symposium* 191e–192b). In the middle of the play Euelpides abandons Peisthetaerus in disgust (*Birds* 845–6), and thus ultimately refuses to follow the upward trail blazed by Tereus, a savage man who was turned into a bird after raping his sister-in-law and cutting out her tongue. Peisthetaerus's Terean or tyrannical savagery, on the other hand, is most evident in his threat to rape the goddess Iris and in his cannibalistic nuptial feast (*Birds* 15–6, 100–1, 1253–5, 1688ff.; cf. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, p. 187).

One need not advert to the *Clouds* and the *Birds* in order to illustrate the profoundly problematic status of *thumos* within Aristophanean comedy. It is perhaps sufficient to note, on the one hand, that even in the *Lysistrata* and the *Acharnians* the ostensibly gentle pleasures of Aphrodite may also be violent, and, on the other, that extraordinary upward ambition, at least of the intellectual stripe, is indispensable to the effective employment of *erôs* as political medicine. A tyrannical dimension of sexuality, or a sexual dimension of upward ambition, is expressed in the flaming logs with which the chorus of old men in the *Lysistrata* intend to burn down the sacred ground of the Acropolis—and so, in effect, to assault the gods (*Lysistrata* 254–318).<sup>7</sup> There is a similar implication in the violent, pornographic imagery of the scene in which Dikaiopolis purchases two Megarian "piglets" (*Acharnians* 729–835). As for the political usefulness of upward ambition, consider that Lysistrata, like Socrates, deprives herself of sleep in order to think through her big plans (*Lysistrata* 26–7, *Clouds* 420, 705–6 with 75–6; cf. *Symposium* 220c–d), that Dikaiopolis cannot persuade the Acharnians to support the cause of peace without the assistance of Euripides, who is perched aloft to aid thinking and has no leisure to speak with visitors (*Acharnians* 393–

488), and that Aristophanes' description of his own activity as a playwright—"I always sophistically fashion and introduce new and strange forms" (*aei kainas ideas eispherôn sophizomai*: *Clouds* 547)—closely anticipates the language of the second impiety charge against Socrates as recorded by Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.1.1) and Diogenes Laertius (2.40): "Socrates does injustice . . . by bringing in new and strange divinities" (*kaina daimonia eispherôn* or *eisêgoumenos*; cf. Socrates' reference at *Clouds* 479–80 to the *kainas mêchanas*, "new and strange contrivances," that he will bring to bear on Strepsiades).

To recapitulate the main point of the preceding paragraphs: Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* is a microcosm of his comic universe. Plato manages in this speech not only to capture Aristophanes' consistent diagnosis of the soul's deeply troubled condition, but also mimetically to display the rhetorical medicine that the playwright applies through the medium of comic drama. When read against the backdrop of his comedies, Aristophanes' speech accurately exemplifies the comic alternative to both tragedy and Socratic philosophizing.

Let us return to the *Symposium*. In order to illuminate the philanthropic power of *erôs*, Aristophanes must begin by describing our ancient and original human nature (*tên anthrôpinên phusin*) and its subsequent sufferings (*ta pathêmata autês*: *Symposium* 189d5–6). It is striking how derivative and limited *erôs* turns out to be in his exposition. The deepest stratum of the soul is not erotic, but thumotic, or characterized by the ambition associated with spiritedness (*thumos*), and *erôs* cannot satisfy our most fundamental longing. At best, it can deflect this thumotic longing or divert us from acting upon it—this is a good thing, because our primordial desire is ultimately self-destructive—but it can do so only insofar as it remains unfulfilled: an erotically satisfied man, or one who is unmoved by sexual desire, as Socrates seems to be (*Symposium* 219b3–d2; cf. *Clouds* 417), is a dangerous man precisely insofar as he is free to pursue his original ambition.

About our most deeply rooted desire, Aristophanes is quite explicit: in our original state of wholeness and circular self-sufficiency we were "terrific in strength and vigor, and got big ideas [*phronêmata megala eichon*]," and so attacked the Olympian deities. "And what Homer says about Ephialtes and Otus is said about them [the circle-people], namely, that they attempted to make an ascent to heaven, intending to assault the gods" (190b5–cl). It is particularly important to note that Zeus's response to this situation frustrates but does not alter the nature of our primordial desire. By cutting the circle-people in half, he merely diminishes their psycho-physical strength and vigor below the threshold level that is required to make plans against the gods and implement them (cf. 190c6–dl: Zeus's "contrivance" is intended to make human beings "feebler"). This effect is accomplished not just by the act of cutting, which Zeus takes upon himself, but also by inculcating in the newly divided creatures an acute consciousness of their radical incompleteness and its implications. Zeus's assignment of the latter task to

Apollo makes clear his intention to impart moderation by way of self-knowledge. Apollo turns the face around toward the navel, which he leaves as “a reminder of what we suffered long ago” (191a4–5). Even prior to the emergence of human sexuality, the navel betokens a severed connection, dependence on an other, and man’s inferiority to the gods. The gods intend for us to look down, not up. When we look down, we also see our genitals—a fact that prepares us for Aristophanes’ initially surprising teaching about the inherently sober or moderate character of sexual *erôs*.

*Erôs*, however, has not yet appeared among the halved circle-people. While Zeus and Apollo manage to suppress the brutal and unbridled behavior of human beings, their actions also give rise to a new desire—a “longing” (*pothos*) or “appetite” (*epithumia*) to grow together with the other half that precedes *erôs* (191a6, a8). This new desire is an unintended consequence of the division of the circle people, as is evident from the problem it entails. Because they did not wish to do anything apart from each other, the halves neglected to look after themselves and so were dying of hunger and idleness; Zeus’s original plan, however, was designed to keep human beings alive so that they could continue to worship and make sacrifices to the gods (190c4–5). Zeus’s new contrivance—to move the genitals around to the front—is motivated by self-interest no less than “pity” (191b5).

*Erôs* at last arrives on the scene as a consequence—in this case, an intended one—of Zeus’s relocation of the genitals, without which the facing halves could not engage in sexual intercourse. The first mention of *erôs* in Aristophanes’ account of human nature occurs at 191d1, and it specifically connotes sexual desire, which appears only when sexual union becomes possible. The function of *erôs* should be carefully noted, especially since Aristophanes muddies the waters when he praises its tendency to heal human nature by attempting to reintegrate it and make one out of two (191c8–d3). The virtual inseparability and consequent death of the halves, after all, is the problem that *erôs* was meant to solve. It cannot do so merely by stimulating the halves to engage in an act that leads to reproduction—even though birth does bring one from two—since this does nothing to alter the fact that each half neglects to care for itself. Zeus’s relocation of the genitals, we can now see, would be pointless if it did not allow for the satisfaction peculiar to erotic activity. *Erôs* is intrinsically ambiguous: it is rooted in our desire to grow together, but its usefulness from Zeus’s point of view is that it makes it possible for us to live apart. Sexual satisfaction does so by allowing for an intermittent “fullness” of, and so cessation from, “being together” or “intercourse” (*sunousia*), so that the halves can “turn toward their work and take care of the rest of life” (191c6–8).

In sum, Aristophanes’ genealogy of *erôs* reveals that it is a modification of the longing to be together that allows for the temporary satisfaction of this longing, and so for the continuation of the human species. By introducing *erôs* into the psycho-physical economy of human beings, Zeus tries to turn to positive account



the attraction that draws humans together. Yet his alteration of the original nature of human beings involves a delicate balance of dependence and independence, emptiness and fullness, self-directed energy and self-restraint. That much still hangs in the balance is evident from Aristophanes' ominous warning that "if we do not maintain order in relation to the gods, we may again be split in two" (193a4–5).<sup>8</sup> The threat posed by upward ambition is greatest in those who are least in need of others and least susceptible to the charms of *erôs*. Aristophanes adverts to homosexuality as a specific illustration of this general point. With the appearance of *erôs* the longing that draws us together acquires a sexual inflection, and differences in sexual orientation may bear upon the power of this longing to act as a significant counter-weight to our primordial ambition. There is a certain implicit cunning in heterosexual *erôs*, insofar as the widening circle of the family diverts along the horizontal axis energies that might have been directed upward. And although Aristophanes does not speak about the non-sexual affection that binds parents with children and siblings with each other, the experience of familial love is likely to reinforce the lesson Zeus wanted us to learn when he arranged to have us face our navels.<sup>9</sup> Homosexual males, however—those who are sections of the fully male circle-people—"do not by nature [*phusei*] turn their minds toward marriage and making babies, but are compelled to do so by custom [*hupo tou nomou*]" (192b1–3). For these males, erotic satisfaction involves no further psychic investment in a family; it is a relief that frees them to return to themselves and get on with "their work" (191c7). Such men are relatively free to direct their strength and vigor upward, toward competition and war: homosexual boys, Aristophanes says, are "the only ones who turn out in politics to be real men [*andres*]" (192a6–7).

Aristophanes appropriately concludes his encomium by obscuring the ugly origins of *erôs*. His strategy is to beautify *erôs* by linking it with the non-sexual longing for original wholeness, and to remain silent about the rest. Yet it is remarkable that his speech culminates in what looks like a prophetic revelation of the mysteries of the soul. Lovers know only that what they want from each other is not simply sexual; "the soul of each is clearly wishing for something else—what, it cannot say—but it divines what it wants, and speaks in oracular riddles" (192c7–d2). But if Hephaestus were to offer two lovers the opportunity to be fused together as one, they would jump at the chance, thinking that this is what they wanted all along. "The reason," Aristophanes says, "is that this was our ancient nature, and we were whole; and *erôs* is the name for the desire [*epithumia*] and pursuit of the whole" (192e9–193a1).

The latter passage is arrestingly ambiguous. It is, to be sure, a cleverly constructed piece of rhetoric that advances the politically salutary aims of Aristophanes' poetry. Yet it is also possible to read Aristophanes' remark about the oracular character of the soul's utterances as a momentary and perhaps not

altogether intentional admission that his account of human nature may be misleadingly clear, and that in the end he may not fully understand human desire. This admission is itself oracularly provocative and compact. If the soul of the lover divines what it wants and speaks in oracles, *erôs* may link lovers with the gods as well as with each other. *Erôs* may lead upward as well as outward, and human contact with things divine may take a gentle as well as a violent form. All of this goes against the grain of the rest of Aristophanes' speech; all of it is nonetheless consistent with the beautiful epigram that Plato was said to have composed on the occasion of the poet's death: "The Graces, seeking to grasp some sacred ground that would not fall, discovered the soul of Aristophanes."<sup>10</sup> It seems doubtful that Aristophanes could consistently have said the same thing about himself. Perhaps the most one can safely claim is that Aristophanes, like Alcibiades—and possibly like all of the other speakers in the *Symposium* as well—delivers a speech that is marked by the presence of Dionysus just insofar as it points beyond itself in an inspired or prophetic fashion. Specifically, the comic poet opens the way in this passage for Socrates' subsequent exploration of the implicit divinity of *erôs*.

Let us turn now to the conscientiously crafted rhetoric of the passage at hand, which I propose to explore without denying the fundamental ambiguity noted above. By blurring the distinction between *erôs* and the *epithumia* for wholeness in which it is rooted, Aristophanes obscures the moderating influence of *erôs*. *Erôs*, we recall, makes up for the impossibility of gratifying this intrinsically extreme *epithumia*, the pursuit of which—absent its temporary satisfaction through erotic fulfillment—leads ultimately to death. More important, Aristophanes neglects to mention the upward desire that moved our non-fragmented ancestors, and so misleadingly suggests that the recovery of our original human wholeness would be completely fulfilling in and of itself. In order to make *erôs* look simply beautiful, Aristophanes depicts human desire as a strictly horizontal phenomenon. He *must* make *erôs* look beautiful, not only because he has accepted the task of praising it, but because even this occasion to speak presents an opportunity for him to apply his political medicine to the sickness of human beings.<sup>11</sup> Aristophanes always wears the masks of Dionysus and Aphrodite, but he does so in the service of the healing god Apollo.

The comic dramatist is a deeply serious man, the more so because his diagnosis of the human condition is so grave. Aristophanes teaches that attempts fully to satisfy our most fundamental desires—the longing to unite with an other and the aspiration to surpass and dominate others—lead either to morbid lassitude or self-destruction. Human life must be lived in oscillation between the temporary and restrained, which is to say the less than fully satisfactory, gratification of these desires. Aristophanes' encomium of *erôs* circumscribes the intermediate region wherein such modest gratification is possible. It is in this region that his comic art attempts to locate the "inarticulable ratio of *erôs* and *polemos*" that

David Lachterman has aptly described as essential to “the vitality and survival of the city itself.”

## II. SOCRATES

Although it introduces some important themes that are taken up by Socrates, Agathon's speech is by no means as profound as that of Aristophanes. I have suggested that its relative weakness supports the view that comedy, not tragedy, is the main rival of philosophy in the *Symposium*. Put another way, the very weakness of Agathon's speech is an indication that tragedy is closer to philosophy than comedy. While the latter suggestion is more fully supported in the final sections of this essay, we may note here that Socrates' concluding claim about the underlying unity of the dramatic art gives priority to tragedy: it is the tragedian who knows how to produce comedy, not the other way around.

When it is his turn to speak in the *Symposium*, Socrates takes issue with several features of Aristophanes' account of *erôs*. First and foremost, Socrates regards desire as a unitary phenomenon. Aristophanes traces the bifurcation of the human psyche back to the bifurcation of human bodies by the gods, but in Socrates' account there is no original and fundamental animosity between men and gods. Following Agathon, who emphasizes the power of *erôs* to overcome violence, Socrates subordinates *thumos* to *erôs* and treats *thumos* as a relatively tame dimension of the soul: he speaks of ambition only in terms of the quest for honor, which is itself understood to be a form of erotic longing (208c–e; cf. 195b–c). He also extends Agathon's observations about the connection between *erôs* and virtue: the culmination of the Mysteries of *erôs*, the priestess Diotima teaches, is the birth of true virtue (*aretên alethê*: 212a5–6).<sup>12</sup> Socrates views human desire not as a force that sunders the cosmos, but as a daimonic bond that works to bind together its parts (201d–203a). Moreover, sexual *erôs* is not a discretely horizontal desire; it is continuous with, and expands into, upward erotic longing. In effect, Socrates accuses Aristophanes of excessive sobriety in the matter of *erôs*. It is perhaps not too misleading to suggest that Socrates' philosophically intoxicated speech is a Dionysian correction of Aristophanes' praise of *erôs*'s intrinsically moderate or Apollonian character. In any case, Socrates here anticipates Aristotle's accusation that in imitating human nature the comic poet aims too low (*Poetics* 1448a16–8, 1449a32–4).

Diotima at one point explicitly (and anachronistically) objects to Aristophanes' teaching that *erôs* is directed toward one's other half: “My *logos*,” she tells Socrates, “asserts that *erôs* is neither of a half nor of a whole, unless, I suppose, it happens to be good. For human beings wish to cut off even their own feet and hands, if these parts of themselves seem to them to be bad” (205e1–5). Diotima's view is endorsed most enthusiastically by Socrates (206a2: “By Zeus, I don't disagree!”),

but Socrates is, as Allan Bloom observes in commenting on this passage, “a strange duck” (Bloom 1993: 509). While Aristophanes is cut off by the unexpected arrival of Alcibiades just as he begins to remark on the philosopher’s allusion to his speech, his own assessment of Socrates’ strangeness is set forth in the *Clouds*. If we may judge by the *Clouds*, Aristophanes probably would have observed, first, that Socrates has hardly any experience of *erôs* at all, and second, that Socrates’ philosophical desire is itself a veiled form of tyrannical ambition.<sup>13</sup> At all events, both of the latter points play a central role in Alcibiades’ indictment of Socrates.

When the circle-people want to move quickly, they roll head over heels like tumblers (190a5–7). This detail, of which Zeus reminds us when he remarks that he will make humans “walk upright on two legs” (190d34), hints at the inversion of the proper order of the cosmos that their attempt to usurp the place of the gods brings in its train. As portrayed in the *Clouds*, Socratic philosophizing is an expression of the same tyrannical desire that motivates the overtly physical assault upon the Olympian gods undertaken by the circle-people and, with greater success, by Peisthetaerus in the *Birds*. Socrates, too, turns things upside-down in aspiring to replace the Olympians, as is humorously suggested by the fact that in his school the eye takes the place of the anus and the anus does the work of the eye (*Clouds* 191–4). Socrates’ ambition is evident even before he says a single word, for he first appears on stage suspended in the machine that otherwise allows characters playing gods to stand above the dramatic action. Socrates denies the divinity of Zeus and refuses to acknowledge oaths sworn in the name of the Athenian gods (247–8, 367). If he does not physically attack the Olympians, it is only because he regards mastery in speech as sufficient for victory: his inclusion of Tongue among the deities he acknowledges (424) suggests that he views the gods as purely rhetorical entities. Socrates’ disdain for human things is of a piece with his arrogance toward the gods. From the vantage point of his lofty perch, he impatiently addresses Strepsiades as a “creature of a day” (223). His thoughts are elevated even when he is not: he teaches Pheidippides to “look down upon” the established laws (*kathestôtôn nomôn huperphronein*: 1400). From Socrates Strepsiades learns to cheat his creditors, because oaths sworn in the name of the gods can be violated with impunity, and Pheidippides learns that father-beating is acceptable, since Zeus *patrôios*, “Zeus, the protector of fathers,” is a fiction (1468–71). Yet Socrates is more than just a teacher of injustice and insolence: he himself plays the tyrant toward his students, who fear his harshness and whose condition resembles that of captive, ill-treated beasts (184–6, 195). Socratic philosophizing, to adapt a phrase from Nietzsche, is simply a spiritualized version of the hybristic ambition that most often manifests itself in war and politics. “Philosophy,” as Nietzsche says, “is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the creation of the world, to the *causa prima*” (Nietzsche 1966: 16). One should note in this connection that Socrates accepts Pheidippides as

a student only after he is told that the young man is by nature *thumosophos* (877)—in other words, that he is clever (*sophos*) in a way that is undergirded or charged by spiritedness (*thumos*).

Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* helps us to understand that Socrates draws strength for his philosophical pursuits from his extraordinary self-sufficiency and his indifference to bodily pleasures and comforts. In the *Clouds*, Socrates does not long to be with others in any of the ways that ordinary men do. He is singularly unerotic: he has no wife or children and seems to take a purely theoretical interest in the difference between the sexes (*Clouds* 658–693). Moreover, he does not so much as acknowledge the existence of any of the bonds of friendship or familial affection that bind human beings together. Nor does he need others in order to philosophize, since he is able to conduct his astronomical and entomological investigations on his own.<sup>14</sup> And just as Socrates is unusually able to live apart from other bodies, he also seems to enjoy a remarkable degree of independence from his own body: he needs no shoes and is inured to cold weather (103, 363, 416), he cares so little about sleep that he ignores the bedbugs that infest his dwelling (633–4, 699, 707–15), he is used to going without food and wine (175, 415–6), and he does not bother to bathe or groom himself (835–7). In fine, Zeus's plan to chasten human beings seems to have failed in the case of Socrates. If one could depict his soul, it would look like the uncut or atomic body of a circle-person. Socrates continues to look up, not down toward his navel and genitals or outward toward the warmth of others.

### III. ALCIBIADES

We are now in a position to appreciate the fundamentally Aristophanean character of Alcibiades' speech about Socrates in the *Symposium*. Like the *Clouds*, Alcibiades' speech undertakes the task of articulating the various dimensions of Socrates' *atopia* or "strangeness" (215a2–3), the qualities—or perhaps the absence thereof—that mark him as one who is "out of place" or even "without place" (*atopos*). Apart from the *Apology*, Alcibiades' speech is the longest direct discussion of Socrates' nature in the Platonic corpus. The *Apology* comes to mind for another reason as well: it is Alcibiades' intention to try Socrates on the charge of *hybris* and to make the assembled company "judges of Socrates' arrogant disdain" (219c3–6; cf. the references to Socrates' *hybris* at 215b7, 221e2–4, and 222a8). To this end, Alcibiades offers to provide witnesses and to testify under oath (215b7–8, 215d6–e1). In his own way, Alcibiades, like Aristophanes, turns out to be one of Socrates' "first accusers" (*Apology* 18a7–c1, 18c8–d2); this connection is noted in passing by Nietzsche, who in Section 13 of *The Birth of Tragedy* refers to Aristophanes as the "Alcibiades of poetry" (Nietzsche 1967: 87).

Alcibiades' characterization of Socrates' strangeness and *hybris* echoes with remarkable fidelity Aristophanes' portrait of the philosopher in the *Clouds*. More to the point, Alcibiades' entire orientation is fundamentally Aristophanean: he applies to Socrates the same basic assumptions about the human soul and human aspiration that Aristophanes articulated earlier in his own speech. There is, however, a considerable tension between what Alcibiades sees in Socrates and how he explains what he sees, for he differs from Aristophanes in his keen perception of the inner beauty of Socrates' soul. Yet Alcibiades does not know how to appropriate Socrates' beauty for himself or even really what to make of it; he knows simply that Socrates is the only person before whom he has ever felt shame, and that he feels this way because he is unable to devote himself wholeheartedly to the cultivation of his own internal beauty (216a8–b6). If we feel shame especially before those we love, as Phaedrus suggests (178d1–e1), then perhaps Alcibiades is in love with Socrates. Like Aristophanes' fragmented lovers, Alcibiades cannot say what it is that he is longing for. "The result," he says in reference to Socrates, "is that I don't know what I am to do with this man" (216c3). Socrates manages to make Alcibiades feel the same conflicting, erotically charged feelings that the city of Athens felt toward Alcibiades: "she longs for him [*pothei*], yet hates him, but wishes to possess him" (*Frogs* 1425; cf. *Symposium* 216c1–2).

There is, of course, something laughable about Alcibiades' accusing anyone else under the sun of *hybris*.<sup>15</sup> While Alcibiades states that Socrates is prone to become violent if he praises any other divine or human being in his presence, Socrates pretends to be worried that Alcibiades, having discovered him seated next to Agathon, may fly into a fit of jealous rage on account of his "madness [*mania*] and longing to be loved [*philerastia*]" (213d4–6, 214d2–4). That Alcibiades sees Socrates in the light of his own Aristophanean self-understanding does not in itself undermine the adequacy of the comic poet's analysis of the human psyche. Alcibiades' whole performance at Agathon's in fact confirms that Aristophanes understands men like Alcibiades at least as well as they understand themselves. Yet viewed Socratically, Aristophanes fails to do justice to his own extraordinary nature just insofar as he senses, but cannot adequately or consistently articulate, the daimonic character of *erôs*. If Aristophanes lacks this dimension of self-knowledge, how well can he be expected to understand Socrates' daimonic nature?<sup>16</sup>

In celebration of Agathon's very recent dramatic victory Alcibiades crowns the tragedian with a garland of ribbons and then, saying that he wishes to avoid Socrates' reproach, crowns him as well: for Socrates, he tells Agathon, "conquers all human beings in speeches, not only the other day, like you, but always" (213e34). Since Alcibiades insists that he would not undertake to praise even a god in Socrates' presence, Eryximachus proposes (or "prescribes": 214b8) that he praise Socrates. This detail is suggestive. Alcibiades is certainly in need of a doctor, albeit one of the soul rather than the body. Then, too, he himself undertakes a kind of

exploratory surgery of the psyche in attempting to open up Socrates' nature as one might peel back the outer surface of a layered statue (215a6–b3, 216e5–217a2). The delicacy of this procedure, which suits Alcibiades' sense of Socrates' internal godliness, contrasts sharply with the harshness of the wound he himself bears. Alcibiades is a casualty of Socrates' philosophical Siren-song (216a6–7). He has suffered at the hands of Socrates what Zeus did to the circle-people: his psyche has been torn asunder. His praise of Socrates is to be his revenge (214e2–3).

Alcibiades' encomium can be a form of condemnation only because to be a fragmented circle-person is to be in a fundamentally ambiguous condition. While Aristophanes makes Socrates' indifference to others look ugly, Socrates makes Alcibiades' need for others look ugly. Alcibiades initially prides himself on his self-sufficiency, but Socrates makes him acutely aware of his dependence upon others for honor and makes him experience his longing to be loved as an intolerable weakness. Revenge comes at a high price for Alcibiades, for it involves exposing the wound that is the mark of his own post-catastrophic humanity. As an act of revenge, Alcibiades' speech exploits the same strategy Aristophanes employs in the *Clouds*: Socrates is ugly because he lacks this mark of humanity. By the same token, however, we are given to understand that Socrates is superior to all other human beings simply because he wounds but cannot himself be wounded. Coming from a man who measures everything in accordance with his own love of preeminence, Alcibiades' blameful words must also be heard as praise.

The image of Socrates as a satyr serves Alcibiades in multiple ways. Alcibiades chooses this image in part because Socrates' strangeness makes him "unlike any other human being, either among the ancients or among those who are now" (221c4–5). This observation underscores Socrates' resemblance to Aristophanes' circle-people: if he is unique among human beings, he cannot have a matching half. He is certainly not encumbered by the usual variety of horizontal desires. As in the *Clouds*, we learn from Alcibiades that Socrates is immune to the pleasures of Aphrodite and Dionysus and that he enjoys a remarkable degree of freedom from non-erotic bodily needs. He cannot be intoxicated (214a3–5, 220a2–6; cf. 223b2–d12) and he refuses to tumble for the beautiful Alcibiades under circumstances that would try even the most self-controlled Greek male (219b–d). The litany of Socrates' other peculiarities is also quite familiar. He despises or "looks down upon" (*kataphronei*) wealth and honor, just as he "looked down upon" Alcibiades' youthful beauty (216d8, 219c4; cf. *Clouds* 226, 1400). At Potidaea the other soldiers grew angry with him because they, too, thought he was "looking down upon" them, since he wore a thin cloak and went barefoot on the ice (220a6–c1). He proves on campaign that he is inured to hunger as well as extreme cold, and he requires very little sleep—even while doing military service, or after a long night of drinking (219e7–20a4, 223d8–12). His detachment from his own body is manifested also by his consistent bravery in battle (220d5–21c1). Finally, in a

passage that calls to mind the image of Socrates in his basket, we see that he is able to engage in the hard work of thinking, by himself and without interruption, for an entire day (220c3–d4). It is most appropriate that Alcibiades concludes his description of Socrates by borrowing a line from Aristophanes about his swaggering gait and sidelong glance (221b3–4; cf. *Clouds* 362).

Socrates' self-sufficiency may arouse envy, but it does not in itself make him hybriatic. Alcibiades' accusation of hybris is provoked by the way in which Socrates, like the satyr Silenus, "spends his whole life ironizing [*eirōneuomenos*] and playing toward human beings" (216e4–5). "For you see," he observes, "that Socrates is erotically disposed toward the beautiful and is always around them and has been driven out of his senses by them, and in turn is ignorant of everything and knows nothing, as is his habitual pretence. Is this not Silenic?" (216d2–4). If we may judge by Euripides' *Cyclops*, the only complete satyr play that has come down to us from antiquity, the irony of Silenus is peculiarly harsh insofar as it involves the solicitation and subsequent violation of intimacy. The ironic game that Silenus plays in the *Cyclops* consists in gaining the confidence of Odysseus and his companions and then revealing that their hopes and concerns mean nothing to him. Silenus mockingly betrays his Greek guests precisely when they are most exposed and most vulnerable.<sup>17</sup> In Alcibiades' view, this is just what Socrates does to him: his only other reference to irony occurs when he relates how this seeming lover of beautiful bodies "very ironically" rejected his naked charms, and "looked down upon and jeered at [*katephronêsen kai kategelassen*] my youthful bloom, and was hybriatic toward the very thing that I thought was something" (218d6, 219c4–5). Socrates plays the satyr by cruelly lording it over the unfortunate victims of his feigned humanity.

In the *Clouds*, Strepsiades goes to Socrates hoping to become an *eirôn*, an ironist of a crudely self-serving stripe (449). While Alcibiades paints a distinctly Aristophanean portrait of Socrates' slippery, deceptive speech, his own attempted seduction of Socrates—as well as his narration of this attempted seduction—is ironic in a similarly self-serving way.<sup>18</sup> Alcibiades maintains that he sought to gratify Socrates' erotic passion so that the philosopher would be willing to teach him everything he knew; with this knowledge, he tells Socrates, he will be able to improve himself as much as possible (217a4–5, 218d1–3). Yet this account is apparently disingenuous. Alcibiades, after all, has had to pursue Socrates as though he were the lover and Socrates the beloved (217c7–8). Moreover, we have already noted that Alcibiades is unwilling or unable to follow Socrates' advice: "whenever I go away [from Socrates], I am bested by the esteem of the many" (216b4–5).

Alcibiades' motives are unclear, perhaps to himself no less than to anyone else. His pursuit of Socrates seems to be characterized by the same fundamental ambiguity that marked Aristophanes' speech. He seems truly to love Socrates, in that his fragmented soul longs for Socrates' inner beauty as its own complement



and completion. Following Aristophanes, one could say that Alcibiades' *erôs* "speaks" prophetically in the presence of Socrates. Yet Alcibiades is nonetheless determined to prove that he is not inferior to Socrates. As a result, his *erôs* is ultimately frustrated by his *thumos*. In this crucial respect, Alcibiades cannot blame Socrates for his wounded psyche: his soul by itself splits itself in two.<sup>19</sup>

Alcibiades seems to use his body as a weapon in attempting to seduce Socrates. This impression is confirmed by the Homeric parallel Socrates sees in Alcibiades' offer to exchange his body for the philosopher's thoughts: just as Diomedes did with Glaucus, Alcibiades proposes to swap bronze for gold (219a1). The Greek Diomedes and the Trojan Glaucus encountered each other as enemies on the field of battle. So too, Alcibiades on some level seeks to score a victory over Socrates by getting the philosopher to sleep with him. This would prove that Socrates needs his beauty no less than he needs Socrates' beauty. Should Alcibiades succeed, Socrates would actually lose some of his luster, since his capitulation to Alcibiades' charms would establish that he is less self-sufficient than he at first seemed to be. Had Socrates made love to Alcibiades that night, Alcibiades would have had the last laugh on the morning after: with a mixture of elation and disappointment, he would probably have told Socrates that he was joking about needing to learn from him. All along, Alcibiades has sought to "get even" with Socrates: if he cannot rise to Socrates' lofty heights, he can at least bring him down to his own level.

While the image of the satyr highlights the deceptive doubleness for which Alcibiades blames Socrates, it also suggests that Socrates embodies something more than, or perhaps simply other than, hybristic ambition. Two observations are relevant here. First, Alcibiades compares Socrates both with satyrs in general and with particular satyrs such as Marsyas and Silenus, and there is a potentially significant tension between these two kinds of images. Marsyas, we recall, was flayed by Apollo for his hybris. In the *Cyclops*, old Silenus's hybris brings him into conflict with his sons, who together constitute the play's chorus of satyrs. Provoked by the false oath that Silenus swears on their own heads, the chorus denounces their father's shameless attempt to do injustice to the Greek strangers (270–2). The full-blown or Cyclopean hybris that is exemplified in the characters of Silenus and Marsyas is evidently not a universal quality of satyrs. The latter point is driven home by the divine retribution that is woven into the ending of the *Cyclops*: Polyphemus sodomizes the unhappy Silenus, Odysseus metaphorically buggers Polyphemus in blinding him with a sharpened log, and the satyr chorus escapes with the Greeks. In satyr play as in tragedy, great hybris brings great punishment. Second, and still more significant, Alcibiades applies both to Socrates and to his speeches not only the image of Silenus, but also that of the Silenus statue with gods hidden inside. This image of the image of Silenus strains against the rest of Alcibiades's speech insofar as it invites us to explore Socrates's doubleness not in terms of his hybristic deceptiveness, but rather in terms of his

inner, divine beauty. This contrast between ugly surfaces and beautiful depths is a feature of satyrs in general, the examination of which will take us to the heart of Alcibiades' inspired speech.

#### IV. SATYRS

As traditionally depicted in Greek vase painting and literature, satyrs embody a paradoxical combination of low and comical with exalted and serious elements. If Aristotle is correct in asserting that tragedy is an imitation of better natures and comedy of worse (*beltionôn, phauloterôn*: *Poetics* 1449a32–3, 1454b9), the satyr is both a tragic and a comic figure. Satyrs are comical in part because of their distinctive “crudity and animality,” which extends from their physical appearance—a fusion of human and horse-like or goat-like features—to their hedonistic devotion to the pleasures of sex and intoxication (Seaford 1976: 212).<sup>20</sup> They are “wild” as well as animalic in that they live in the uncultivated countryside and may be found alone as well as in groups. In these respects especially, they represent the dissolution of civilization.<sup>21</sup> Yet satyrs resemble politicized humans in that they drink wine and worship Dionysus. Moreover, they share in the nature of the divine as well as the bestial and the human: Theopompus writes that Silenus was “less visible in his nature than a god, but mightier than a human being, since he was also deathless” (*FGH* 115 F75). In addition, satyrs surpass human beings in the possession of special kinds of wisdom and powers of instruction.<sup>22</sup>

Alcibiades in fact begins his encomium of Socrates by touching upon his satyr-like combination of superficial ugliness and inner beauty. Beneath Socrates' ridiculous exterior one will find something like images of gods (215a7–b3). The same may be said of his speeches, whose “laughable” surfaces, like “the hide of a hybristic satyr,” conceal a “most divine” interior (221d7–222a6). Socrates is not a god, but he has the daimonic power to arouse souls and draw them toward that which is divine. Like Marsyas, Socrates is graced by a mysterious power of enchantment: he is able “to make one become possessed and to reveal those who are in need of gods and mysteries” (215c5–6). Yet he surpasses Marsyas in that he does not employ musical melodies, but words alone—words that cause the hearer “to be astounded and become possessed,” even if they are related by a very poor speaker (215d3–6). Socrates' superficially sober speeches turn out to be thoroughly intoxicating. While he sometimes presents himself as a servant of Apollo, his effect upon others bears the stamp of Dionysus.<sup>23</sup>

Alcibiades' remarks remind us of the resemblance between Socratic philosophizing and Mystery initiation that is lampooned in the *Clouds* (143, 254–61) and rehabilitated in Socrates' account of his relationship with the priestess Diotima. Here, too, is an important point of contact with satyrs in general, whose activity in satyr plays seems to have been connected with ritual initiation, and particularly

with the imparting of the kind of knowledge that comes through acquaintance with Dionysus. It has been persuasively argued that the earliest tragedies were also concerned with Dionysiac initiation, and that the genre of satyr play came into being to recapture something of what was lost when, as Aristotle states, tragedy developed *ek saturikou*, or from “satyr play–like” dithyrambic cult hymns (*Poetics* 1449a19–21).<sup>24</sup> In the *Cyclops*, for example, two original tragic themes are discernible in slightly altered form. The tragic theme of Dionysiac initiation is embodied in the intoxication of Polyphemus, who sees divine visions and wants to enter into a Bacchanalian *kômos* with his fellow Cyclopes after drinking “the drink of Dionysus” (139, 507–9, 576–84). The related theme of the capture, bondage, and ultimate victory of Dionysus takes the shape of Odysseus’s wounding of Polyphemus and liberation, not of the god himself, but of the enslaved *thiasos* or band of satyrs devoted to him. As in the *Bacchae*, in which both of these original tragic themes are clearly visible, the process of initiation in the *Cyclops* doubles as the instrument of liberation and punishment. Moreover, Dionysus appears in both plays in a characteristically double form: he is the gentlest of gods to those who acknowledge the sacred character of the community that he makes possible, but the most terrible to those who arrogantly reject him and his gifts.

These striking parallels between tragedy and satyr play harmonize with Demetrius’s assertion that “nobody would think of writing a playful tragedy [or ‘tragedy at play’: *tragôidian paizousan*], for if so he will write a satyr play” (*On Style* 3.169). To be sure, satyr plays are not tragedies because they playfully deflate tragic pretentiousness, and such playfulness is the hallmark of the comic. Yet they resemble tragedies insofar as they allow us to glimpse the implicit divinity of human life. That which is divided in the comic dramas of Aristophanes is furthermore shown whole in satyr plays. In satyric drama *erôs* leads upward as well as outward, for the community of satyrs with each other and with their god rests upon shared erotic attachments to the pleasures of wine, song, dance, and sex. What is more, *thumos* is both tempered and directed by these erotic attachments. While Aristophanes depicts thumotic ambition as a force that separates men from one another and from the gods, Euripides’ *Cyclops* presents in the character of Odysseus a man whose spiritedness is aroused by the noble desire to uphold the divinely sanctioned relationship of *xenia* or friendly intercourse upon which civilization itself depends. In brief, satyr plays are essentially deceptive and daimonic, for they are at bottom concerned with an experience of the mysterious and the sacred that does not announce itself as such but into which one is drawn by a strange and beguiling power. This is also a good description of Alcibiades’ experience with Socrates. No wonder Socrates calls Alcibiades’ speech a “satyric drama” (222d3–4).

It has been said that tragedy is “the epistemological genre par excellence, which continually calls into question what we know and how we think we know it”

(Zeitlin 1990: 78). Exemplary in this regard is Pentheus's encounter in the *Bacchae* with Dionysus, who represents all that is completely foreign to the young Greek ruler's way of thinking. It has perhaps not been sufficiently observed, however, that Socrates' encounters with his interlocutors in the Platonic dialogues mimic the educative antagonisms of tragic drama. In general, Socrates does explicitly what the structure of the tragic plot does implicitly: just as the characters of tragic drama typically learn through a sequence of tragic events that their traditional or habitual assumptions about the world are woefully incapable of guiding them through the complexities and uncertainties of human experience, Socrates typically encounters self-confident antagonists and proceeds to show them that their seemingly sensible and consistent opinions turn out, upon close examination, to be deeply incoherent. In its pedagogical and psychological effect, the otherness of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues closely resembles the otherness of Dionysus in tragedy. By the same token, however, it is also analogous in function to the otherness of satyrs in the satyr play.

Plato at one point comments at length upon the provocative ambiguity of satyrs and satyr plays. In the *Laws*, he locates satyric dances—and by implication satyr plays—in an uncharted space circumscribed by several oppositions of fundamental importance in human life. After distinguishing between “serious” and “low” kinds of dance, and between the “warlike” and “peaceful” forms of serious dance, the Athenian Stranger explains that the kinds of dance associated with satyrs does not fit neatly into any of these categories:

Whatever dances are Bacchic, and everything that goes with these—the dances in which, as they claim, they imitate as drunks the so-called ‘Nymphs,’ ‘Pans,’ ‘Silenuses,’ and ‘Satyrs,’ and thereby celebrate certain purifications and Mystery-rites—this entire class of dance is not easily defined either as peaceful or warlike, or indeed as to just what it intends at any time. To me it seems that just about the most correct way to define it is this: it must be distinguished from the warlike, and distinguished from the peaceful, and one must say that this class of dancing is not political [*ou politikon*]. Let it be lying in that region, while we return to the warlike and peaceful dances, since there is no controversy as to whether they are our business. (*Laws* 815c2–d4)

This passage alerts us to an essential connection between the uncertain identity of satyrs and satyr plays and a host of tensions and ambiguities at the heart of human life. In the *Cyclops*, these ambiguities and tensions include the relationships between divinity, humanity, and bestiality, nature and convention, wildness and politicality, monadic individualism and community, savagery and gentleness, sobriety and intoxication, peace and war, reverence and irreverence, the noble and the useful, and ignorance and wisdom. It has furthermore been argued that satyric drama is meant precisely to explore the oppositions identified above, for it is only through such an exploration that one can delimit the space within

which a distinctively human life—a life attuned to the necessary and inevitably ambiguous mixture of the sacred with the useful, nobility with self-interest—may be preserved.<sup>25</sup> If this is correct, the wisdom satyr plays have to offer becomes accessible only by way of the wildness and apoliticality of the satyrs themselves. The otherness of the satyr, like that of Dionysus in tragedy and Socrates in the Platonic dialogue, brings to light as a matter for critical exploration the matrix of orienting opinions and customs that lies at the foundation of political community. Satyr plays are *ou politikon*, yet have everything to do with the *polis*.<sup>26</sup>

Like tragedy, satyric drama is fundamentally concerned with self-knowledge. The dramatic genres of satyr play, tragedy, and the Platonic dialogue are arguably superior to Aristophanean comedy insofar as they more fully articulate the mystery and implicit divinity of human life as well as the daimonic character of *erôs*. But satyr plays are above all playful. How can one write a tragedy at play, and why would one do so? Is there a certain kind of playfulness that is compatible with seriousness and at the same time integral to self-knowledge? And does this playfulness also have something to do with Dionysus? In what follows I can only sketch the outlines of an affirmative answer to these questions.

When in the *Cyclops* Odysseus grandiloquently announces that he is “Odysseus of Ithaca, lord of the land of the Cephallenians,” Silenus replies: “I know a man [by that name], a glib sharper, Sisyphus’s bastard” (103–4). This exchange nicely illustrates one aspect of the playfulness of satyric drama, namely, its humorous deflation of epic and tragic pretensions. A similar playfulness is manifested in the parody of epic and tragic language and themes that one finds, for example, at the very beginning of the *Cyclops*. After relating with heroic eloquence the way in which he and his sons supposedly “strained at the oars, churning white the green sea” in pursuit of the pirates who kidnapped their beloved god Dionysus, Silenus complains that he has fallen, as royalty sometimes does, into slavery (11–35). In Euripides’ *Hecuba*, Polyxena, erstwhile princess of Troy, rejects the prospect of a slavish life of scouring the floors of an alien palace (363). In the *Cyclops*, Silenus accepts the laughable equivalent of tidying up a palace—namely, raking the foul droppings of Polyphemus from his cave.<sup>27</sup> This kind of joke is self-conscious on several levels. Silenus plays at being a tragic protagonist, which is to say that he both assumes a tragic posture and pokes fun at it. If this is correct, then Euripides, just insofar as he fashions the absurd speech of Silenus, is also playing at being a tragic dramatist. The same kind of complex, self-conscious play is evident later in Odysseus’s report that he has seen in the cave of Polyphemus “terrible and unbelievable things, like those in myths” (375–6).

Moments when dramatic characters call attention to the stage as such occur frequently in comedy, but almost never in tragedy.<sup>28</sup> In particular, tragic protagonists never show any awareness of being characters in a play. This fact is perhaps not irrelevant to their fate. If only they could see themselves as the audience is

able to see them, they just might be able to appreciate the limitations of their own modes of self-understanding; moreover, this self-knowledge just might help them to avoid suffering.<sup>29</sup> Of course, there is something ridiculous about saying that a tragic protagonist lacks self-knowledge because he does not know that he is a character in a play. The tragic protagonist is not *supposed* to know this. While tragic seriousness depends upon the willingness of the spectator to forget about the stage and to view the characters before his eyes as if they were real people, comedy regularly punctures this veil of dramatic illusion in order to call attention to the underlying playfulness of the whole dramatic enterprise. Viewed in this light, the concept of a tragedy at play seems oxymoronic. "Laughter," Demetrius observes, "is an enemy of tragedy" (*On Style* 3.169). At the very least, the existence of satyr play requires us to ask what kind of seriousness can be bound up with a recognition of the essential playfulness of drama.

Let us reconsider the moment of playful self-consciousness in drama. When in the parabasis of the *Clouds* the leading Cloud turns to the audience and says "Spectators! I will speak the truth to you" (518–9), he calls attention to his being a dramatic character that is played by a real person. A similarly self-conscious moment occurs in the *Republic* when Socrates suggests to Glaucon and Adeimantus that they educate the Guardians in speech "just like men mythologizing in a myth" (376d9). In recommending that he and his companions behave like literary characters, Socrates reminds us that he himself is a literary character. He also provides us with an example that we can follow. If it is ridiculous to imagine a tragic protagonist who is able to avoid suffering because he knows that he is not a real person, it is less ridiculous to contemplate the possibility of a real person who views himself as though he were self-consciously playing the role of a dramatic character. To live with this double consciousness of oneself as actor and character would be to play at being oneself, as Odysseus plays at being an epic hero when he rescues his men from the mythical horrors of Polyphemus's cave. It is important to understand that to play at being oneself in this way need not imply living unseriously. If a satyr play is a playful tragedy, Odysseus is a tragic character who can laugh at himself. Laughing at oneself implies being in two places at once, or standing back and seeing oneself more clearly and completely than tragic protagonists are able to see themselves. Yet Odysseus is nonetheless serious about acting nobly. If anything, his ability to do so is enhanced by his playful detachment from the heroic ideal that he strives to realize. Such engaged detachment—to give it an appropriately paradoxical name—allows for a broad perspective that might help one to see and steer clear of the tragic extreme of overzealousness in the pursuit of virtuous ends as well as the comic extreme of cynicism about human affairs.<sup>30</sup> The latter extremes are nicely represented, respectively, by Pentheus in the *Bacchae* and Polyphemus in the *Cyclops*. Odysseus's engaged detachment involves a kind of double vision that is symbolically

expressed in the contrast between his two eyes and the single eye of the Cyclops. His stereoptic vision allows him to move with balance and so to avoid the fall into suffering that both Pentheus and Polyphemus undergo. The essentially Dionysian character of Odysseus's balanced insight, in turn, is brought home by the fact that both Pentheus and Polyphemus come to experience double vision as Dionysus brings them under his mysterious influence.<sup>31</sup>

The Dionysian wisdom that is mimetically enacted in the satyr play has an emotional dimension that complements its distinctive condition of intellectual balance. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche wonders about the fact that the dramatic experience of the radical otherness of Dionysus, whereby the audience witnessed the dissolution of the self-images of civilized existence, did not lead to world-weariness and nausea. On the contrary, their encounters with Dionysus seemed to energize the Greeks for public and political pursuits. Nietzsche observes that the Greeks exhausted themselves neither in "ecstatic brooding" nor in "a consuming chase after worldly power and worldly honor" but rather "attain[ed] that splendid mixture which resembles a noble wine in making one feel fiery and contemplative at the same time" (Nietzsche 1967: 125). In this description of a condition of exhilarating wholeness that involves the invigoration of action by contemplation and of contemplation by action, Nietzsche aptly expresses perhaps the most significant emotional component of Dionysian wisdom.

In the passage quoted above, Nietzsche is speaking of the exhilaration of the tragic audience, not the tragic protagonist. This observation may help to sharpen the distinction between satyr play and tragedy that I am attempting to draw here. I do not maintain that satyr plays are more beautiful or philosophically profound than tragedies, for they clearly are not. My point is that only in satyr plays do we encounter dramatic characters who exemplify the emotional and intellectual wholeness and balance that is the fullest fruit of the wisdom of Dionysus. Put succinctly, it is better to be Odysseus in the *Cyclops* than Odysseus in the *Philoctetes*; the former displays directly and positively the condition toward which tragedy tries to lead the souls of the audience by negative and indirect means.

So far, I have argued that satyr plays give direct expression to a primordial Dionysian wisdom that involves a wholeness of feeling as well as insight, and that the satyric posture of playful seriousness—the posture of Odysseus and the satyr chorus of the *Cyclops*—is essential to this wisdom. If these suggestions are on the mark, then the wisdom of Dionysus is incompletely embodied and only indirectly reflected in the protagonists of tragedy and comedy just to the extent that these characters lack the fundamental ambiguity, the complete interpenetration of playfulness and seriousness, of their satyric counterparts. Paradoxically, it may be that playfulness and seriousness must be combined in order for the intrinsic character of each to stand forth fully. In partial support of this point, one might

consider that the comic laughter of Aristophanes arguably proves hollow insofar as it ultimately collapses into the gravest kind of sobriety.

At all events, we are now in a position to appreciate the deepest level of resemblance between Socrates and satyrs. Socrates is every bit as paradoxical and ambiguous a creature as a satyr. He is simultaneously knowing and ignorant, familiar and strange, Athenian and foreign, pious and impious, moderate and extreme, erotic and frigid, healthy and sick, a blessing and a plague, a hero and a criminal.<sup>32</sup> He seems to be nowhere, to be *atopos* or placeless, because he shows up everywhere. It is this paradoxical ambiguity that gives the complex phenomenon of Socratic irony its distinctive character. When Socrates speaks ironically he is not to be taken at his word, but he is not just joking either. He means and does not mean what he says. It is not that Socrates is trying to deceive anyone, much less that he is playing a hybristic game of one-upsmanship, for irony, as has often been observed, is meant to be detected.<sup>33</sup> Rather, ironic speech is the kind of speech appropriate to the attitude of engaged detachment. Socrates never seems fully at home in any context because he is detached from every context. To political men he seems too contemplative; to theoretical men, too political (*Gorgias* 484c–486d, *Parmenides* 130e). Yet Socrates' quality of always having one foot in some other world somehow makes him more fully able to experience the world at hand. One reason why this might be so is suggested by the contrast between Socrates and Alcibiades. Because Socrates comes to everything with a playful spirit, because he always holds part of himself back from any role that he assumes, he is never tempted to expend much energy in defending or protecting his psychic investment. For Socrates, unlike Alcibiades, *thumos* does not get in the way of the erotic pursuit of wisdom; as a result, thumotic energy can be channeled toward the exploration of things that provoke wonder.

Irony and *atopia* are the names we give to Socrates' playful seriousness.<sup>34</sup> While these qualities are spurs to the philosophical interpretation of Plato's dialogues, it would be a gross error to suppose that the truth about Socrates' meaning, the truth at which interpretation aims, is itself unambiguous. To try to disambiguate Socrates would be as ludicrous as trying to disambiguate a satyr. Consider, for example, what seems to be Socrates' least ironic claim, namely that "the unexamined life is not livable for a human being." Socrates insists that this is the reason he will not cease philosophizing (*Apology* 37e–38a), and at first glance it might seem that he is conferring the worth of the examined or philosophical life. Socrates speaks of the unexamined life presumably because all unexamined lives are essentially the same. But nothing whatsoever about the *examined* life follows from his claim: it is conceivable that there are many examined lives, and that none of them are worth living. Even with regard to the worth of philosophy itself, Socrates' attitude is one of playful detachment. His life is a grand experiment, the results of which are always pending.



## V. NIETZSCHE

To maintain that Socrates is like a satyr and that a Platonic dialogue is like a satyr play is also to admit that there are differences between these things. This observation leads naturally to the question of what these differences are and why Plato did not write satyr plays. While I do not propose to tackle these issues here, it seems to me that *The Birth of Tragedy* helps to pose them in the sharpest possible way.

Nietzsche asserts in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Socrates is the opponent of Dionysus. Because the Socratic conception of intelligibility rules out tragic ambiguity and paradox, Socrates is able to look upon tragedy only “with one great Cyclops eye” that is incapable of “gazing into the Dionysian abyss,” an eye “in which the fair frenzy of artistic enthusiasm had never glowed” (Nietzsche 1967: 89).<sup>35</sup> In the present essay I have argued against the latter view: Plato's Socrates embodies and embraces as an essential feature of wisdom just the sort of paradox and ambiguity that one finds at the heart of tragedy and satyr play and that is associated above all with Dionysus. Nietzsche nonetheless sets forth an extraordinarily compelling account of the birth of tragic music from the enchanted and inspired mood of the throng of Dionysian revelers. If he is correct, the deepest meaning of the satyr is inevitably lost in translation from the dramatic festival of Dionysus, with its irreproducibly unique mixture of sacred grounds and rituals, music, wine, dance, masks, costumes, and chanted verse.

Nietzsche's account presents a direct challenge to Plato. Platonic dialogues are unable directly to generate strong emotional excitation, nor do they aim to do so; it therefore seems most unlikely that they arise, in the soul of Plato, from the sort of primordial Dionysian experience that Nietzsche describes. Is it, then, possible for the dialogues adequately to communicate the wisdom of Dionysus? And given that philosophical insight is arguably but a small part of the fullest experience of Dionysus—an experience, Nietzsche maintains, that is fundamentally emotional and musical rather than intellectual and logical, and that underscores the radically limited and metaphysically derivative character of *logos*—what is the worth of even this distinctively paradoxical wisdom when it is dislodged from its original Dionysian context? These are some of the most basic questions that Nietzsche forces us to confront in thinking further about Plato's Dionysian music.<sup>36</sup>

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, I mean by “philosophy” Socratic philosophizing, that is, the activity of the character of Socrates in Plato's dialogues.
2. An important link between Socrates and Euripides is forged at *Frogs* 890–4, where we learn that Euripides worships private gods of “a new and strange [*kainon*] coin-

age.” Euripides calls upon Aether, Pivot of Tongue, Intelligence, and Sharp-Smelling Nostrils to “grant that I may refute correctly [*elenchein*] whatever speeches I lay hold of.” This passage calls to mind Socrates’ practice of *elenchus* as well as the private gods coined and credited by him in his *phrontistêrion* or Thinkery: Air, Aether, Clouds, Vortex, Chaos, Tongue, and Respiration (*Clouds* 264–5, 380–1, 424, 627). It is also noteworthy that Pheidippides’ association with Socrates leads him to prefer Euripides to Aeschylus (*Clouds* 1363–72), and that Strepsiades’ first encounter with Socrates at the Thinkery (*Clouds* 132–274) is clearly intended to echo Dikaiopolis’s visit to Euripides’ house in the *Acharnians* (393–488).

3. On Dionysus’s criterion of tragic superiority, cf. *Acharnians* 497–500, where Dikaiopolis defends comedy (not *kômôidia* in this context, but *trugôidia*) by comparing it with the acknowledged political contribution of tragedy (*tragôidia*): “Don’t bear ill-will toward me, spectators, if I, although I am a beggar, go on to speak before the Athenians about the city while doing comedy. For comedy also knows the just.”
4. Heinrich Meier comments succinctly on the significance of this encounter for Plato: “He [Plato] has Aristophanes himself appear only in the *Symposium*, only there does it come to a direct conversation between the two most important figures of his life, and it is only with the *Symposium* that he enters into an immediate contest with both tragedy and comedy.” Meier 1994: 22.
5. Cf. Strauss 1980: 22, 34.
6. In spite of Alcibiades’ precautions against allowing the uninitiated to hear his words, his speech has evidently been repeated many times since the symposium at Agathon’s, and so must have reached the ears of some who have not shared in “the madness and Bacchic frenzy of philosophy” (218b3–4). Allan Bloom notes: “The symposium [at Agathon’s] seems to have taken place at just the moment when Alcibiades is supposed to have committed his impious deeds [of profaning the Mysteries of the cult of Eleusis and mutilating the Hermæ]. . . . Maybe Plato wishes to indicate that this private and fabled gathering, where the god Eros is unconventionally praised and a drunken Alcibiades enters to praise Socrates, was inflated by rumor into mutilation and profanation” (Bloom 1993: 447). I suspect that there is more to it than this. The charged historical moment when Agathon’s party takes place calls attention to the profound ambiguity of Alcibiades’ speech, which simultaneously confirms and desecrates the sacred core of philosophy. Bloom, incidentally, notes that Apollodorus must have narrated the *Symposium* sometime between Agathon’s departure from Athens around 408 B.C. and Socrates’ death in 399 (Bloom 1993: 561 n. 18 and context). The dialogue is therefore roughly contemporaneous (in its dramatic date) with the *Frogs*, which was performed in 405.
7. The interpenetration of sexual desire and upward ambition is also expressed in the image emblazoned on Alcibiades’ shield: Eros wielding a thunderbolt (Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 16.1–2). Aristophanes apparently intended specifically to imitate Alcibiades’ nature in crafting the character of Peisthetaerus. See Vickers 1989.
8. As Stanley Rosen notes, “The quarter-men, whom Aristophanes compares to profiles on tombstones, would indeed symbolize the end for gods and men alike” (Rosen 1987: 157–8).

9. Aristophanes seems to make a point of using the adjective *koinon*, "common," in referring to the androgynous circle-people from which heterosexuals originate. At one point he uses the adjective as a substantive noun: "as many of the men as are sections of the common [*tou koinou*], the one that at that time was called man-woman [*androgunon*]." (191d6–7; cf. the occurrences of *koinon* at 189e1, e3). In this way Aristophanes subtly reminds us that heterosexuality is the natural foundation of the biological community (*koinônia*) of the family as well as the political community of the city.
10. This epigram is related by Olympiodorus. See Westerink 1956: 2.71–2.
11. Aristophanes appreciates something Alcibiades overlooks, or pretends to overlook: that what is said during this evening at Agathon's will be repeated later. "I will attempt to introduce you to its power [that is, the power of *erôs*]," he tells the assembled company, "and you go and teach the others" (189d3–4).
12. It is striking that the four virtues Agathon attributes to *erôs* at 196d4–5—justice (*dikaiousunê*), moderation (*sôphrosunê*), courage (*andreia*), and wisdom (*sophia*)—are the four cardinal virtues of the *Republic*.
13. It is noteworthy that while Socrates claims to be an expert in "the erotic things" (*ta erôtika*: *Symposium* 177d7–8; cf. *Theag.* 128b1–6), he later borrows a famous phrase from the singularly anerotic protagonist of Euripides' *Hippolytus* (*Symposium* 199a5–6; cf. *Hippolytus* 612).
14. While Aristophanes fashions for us a vivid image of Socrates thinking alone in his basket, Plato's Socrates is always engaged in conversation with others. This difference has to do with the Aristophanean Socrates' lack of interest in the things that are human in scale and place, the things that dwell in between the heavens and the low domain of animals and insects.
15. Alcibiades' reputation for outrageous and insolent actions was legendary. Plutarch, writing more than four centuries after the death of Alcibiades, preserves the recollection of two instances in which the young Alcibiades struck older men, one a teacher, the other his future father-in-law (*Alcibiades* 7.1, 8.1). Plutarch's *Alcibiades* is an illustrative study of what the author considers to be his subject's strongest passions, including *to philoneikon*, *to philoprôton*, *philotimia*, *philodoxia*: love of contention, love of preeminence, love of honor, love of renown (*Alcibiades* 2.1, 6.3). All of these qualities are much in evidence in Plato's *Alcibiades I* and *II*. "Most of all don't rear a lion in the city," Aeschylus famously advises Dionysus on the matter of Alcibiades, "but if one has been reared, submit to his ways" (*Frogs* 1431–2). True to form, Alcibiades arrogates to himself authority over the proceedings shortly after arriving at Agathon's: he appoints himself leader (*archon*) of the evening's drinking "until you have drunk sufficiently" (213e9–10).
16. The Athenians followed Aristophanes in assimilating Socrates' philosophic *erôs* to Alcibiades' tyrannical ambition. The adequacy of this understanding of Socrates is also explored in Platonic dialogues other than the *Symposium*. One neglected dialogue, *Alcibiades II*, focuses almost exclusively on the relationship between Alcibiades' ambition and Socrates' *erôs*, and pays special attention to the implications of each of these forms of desire in regard to the Olympian gods of the *polis* and the distinctive kind of political life these gods protect. See Howland 1990.

17. The *Cyclops* presents Euripides' version of the encounter related in *Odyssey* 9. Odysseus and his men, having been blown off course on their way home from Troy, land at the cave of Polyphemus near Mount Etna. Silenus—who, with his children, has previously been enslaved by Polyphemus—agrees to trade his master's goods for Odysseus's wine. At the approach of Polyphemus he urges the Greeks to hide in the cave and then denounces them as robbers. His mocking encouragement of Polyphemus is both cruel and humorous: "Don't leave behind any of his flesh; if you chew his tongue you will become clever and most glib, Cyclops" (*Cyclops* 313–5). Silenus in fact speaks insolently toward Odysseus from the moment he meets him, and takes sadistic pleasure in casually revealing the horrible truth about his predicament: cf. 103–4 and esp. 125–8. One should also note that Alcibiades' lisp, whereby he pronounced *lambda* as *rho* (cf. Aristophanes, *Wasps* 44–8, Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 1.6–7), would have caused him to pronounce *silēnos* as *sirēnos*—thereby underscoring the cruel, Siren-like dimension of the characters of both Silenus and Socrates. It is perhaps worth pointing out in this connection that Vickers 1989 uses this famous lisp to unlock the Alcibiadean subtext of the *Birds*.
18. The word *eirôn* first occurs in Greek literature at *Clouds* 449, and is formed on an Indo-European root meaning "to speak." See Amory 1982: 49 with the studies cited in 79, n. 2. Amory concludes his discussion of Aristophanes' usage of *eirôn* and *eirōneia* by asserting that "on stage as in the agora irony was a catchword for any trickiness or slipperiness of character, and particularly for any sophisticated and flattering evasiveness of speech" (52). Cf. Markantonatos 1973, who maintains that in the *Clouds* the word *eirôn* "is used of a character skilled in many kinds of unscrupulous trickery" (16).
19. Of course, one could hardly expect a highly spirited, deeply unfulfilled soul to refrain from angrily expressing its frustration. Especially in the light of Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates to the statues of Silenus, it is tempting to interpret Alcibiades' alleged desecration of the statues of Hermes, the messenger who daimonically links humans with gods, as displaced rage against Socrates. One should consider in this connection the displaced rage of the protagonist of Sophocles' *Ajax*; cf. Howland 1990, esp. pp. 76–7.
20. On satyrs and satyric drama in general see also Seaford 1984: 1–48.
21. Cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253a27–9: "He who is not able to share in community or does not need to do so on account of his self-sufficiency is no part of a polis, so that he is either a wild animal [*thērion*] or a god."
22. "In the theatre and in myth, he [the satyr] is associated with marvellous inventions and entrusted with the education of divine or heroic infants" (Seaford 1976: 212–3).
23. Socrates discusses his service to Apollo, albeit in somewhat contradictory terms, at *Apology* 23a–b and 29d–30b; cf. *Phaedo* 85b. So prominent is Apollo in Socrates' self-presentation at his trial that it is tempting to hear in the title "*Apologia Sôkratous*" the pun "Apollo-logia," or "*logos* of Apollo." The *Symposium* would then stand to the *Apology* as the *logos* of Dionysus.
24. See Seaford 1976 and especially Seaford 1981. In the latter article Seaford explores the original tragic themes that structure both the *Bacchae* and the *Cyclops*. A full catalogue of satyric themes and subjects is provided in Sutton 1974.

25. See Konstan 1990, and cf. Hamilton 1979. For a thorough introduction to the "structuralist" approach employed by Konstan, see Segal 1986.
26. Nietzsche's interpretation of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy* helped to lay the groundwork for later structuralist accounts of Greek tragedy in terms of the encounter between the Same and the Other. For a discussion of the significance for the Greeks of the concept of otherness or "alterity" see Vernant 1991. Vernant connects Dionysus with Artemis and the Gorgon Medusa as three "Powers of the world beyond" that "are all involved in the experience the Greeks constructed of the Other" (195). He argues that the Other comes to have a sustaining and invigorating power when it is enfolded within the circle of the Same, that is, the familiar, identity-conferring sphere of "the human being (*anthrôpos*), the civilized person, the male adult (*anêr*), the Greek, and the citizen" (196). In this connection Vernant remarks: "If the Same remains enclosed on itself, thought is not possible—and let us add, neither is civilization. In making the goddess of the margins [Artemis] into a power of integration and assimilation, as when they take Dionysos, who incarnates the figure of the Other in the Greek pantheon, and install him at the center of the social system, right out front in the theater, the Greeks pass on an important lesson" (205–6). As a philosophical midwife Socrates has a special connection with Artemis, the patron goddess of midwives (cf. *Theaetetus* 149b9–c3); Vernant's insights into the functions of the Other provide a potentially fruitful avenue of inquiry into the significance of this connection. For further discussion see Howland 1998: 82–6.
27. On the tragic topos of the reduction of royalty to sweeping see Seaford 1984: 101. This theme is present in epic as well; see esp. *Iliad* 6.456–8.
28. In the *Clouds*, for example, the Unjust Speech clinches his argument with the Just Speech by calling attention to the corrupt character of the spectators (1096–1104). Cf. *Frogs* 954, where Euripides states that "I have taught these [spectators] to babble." An exception to the general absence of such moments in tragedy is *Oedipus* 1093, where the chorus refers to its own dancing.
29. My doubts about these propositions have to do with whether the tragic protagonist has the kind of character that would allow him to learn from tragic drama. Cf. Howland 1995, esp. 396–7.
30. For a good account of the relationship between *hamartia* or tragic error and the tragic protagonist's excessive zeal, see Rorty 1992, who notes that "sometimes, it is the very energy and vigor of our purposiveness—the fact that we act in a focused arc of attention—that blinds or at least blurs what appears at the periphery of our intentions. . . . The successful enactment of the strongest, most intelligent desires . . . requires a certain kind of energy which is, at its best, confident, often indignant, and sometimes courageous; at its worst, it is presumptuous and disordering" (7). Rorty touches here upon the role of *thumos* in tragic *hamartia*, concerning which one should consult Lord 1982, esp. 159–74.
31. Pentheus sees two suns and two Thebes (*Bacchae* 918–9), while the intoxicated Polyphemus for the first time sees his earthly surroundings take on a heavenly guise (576–80).

32. These dimensions of Socrates' radically paradoxical nature are explored in Howland 1994.
33. Consider in this connection the reflections of Schaerer 1941. Schaerer observes that ironic dissimulation is distinguished by "un paradoxe fondamental," namely, that it exists only to be unmasked: "L'ironiste ne trompe pas pour tromper, mais pour qu'on devine qu'il trompe." Schaerer goes on to suggest that this kind of deception is logically conceivable only if one admits a duality at the heart of the real: "Le terrain de l'ironie est celui de l'antithèse être-non-être, vrai-faux, bien-mal, humain-divin, idéal-phénoménal, mien-tien, implicite-explicite, . . . etc." (185).
34. Socrates' satyric, playful seriousness occupies center stage in the *Cratylus*. See Howland 1998: 131–63.
35. These remarks underscore the deeply paradoxical character of Nietzsche's conception of a "Socrates who practices music" (Nietzsche 1967: 98).
36. An earlier version of this essay was presented to the Department of Philosophy at Tulane University. The essay was improved by the helpful criticisms of Ronna Burger, Paul Rahe, and the anonymous referee for *Epoché*; none of these bear responsibility for its shortcomings.

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