

CHAPTER 5

Reproducing Sokrates: Theaetetus

Theaetetus stands out among Plato's dialogues for its blurring of the boundaries between various proposed groupings of his works. It is self-consciously "Socratic" in the elenctic manner,¹ uses the rich scene-setting and characterization, substantial argumentation, and eloquent Socratic speech-making associated with the constructive Sokrates,² and overlaps with the "late" dialogues in important aspects of both style and content.³ In a more methodologically innocent age, its aporetic structure was taken by some as evidence of an early date; more recently, *Theaetetus* has been seen as anomalous among the later dialogues, prompted perhaps by a desire to pay homage to the eponymous interlocutor after his death.⁴ But whatever other reasons there may be for its unusual combination of

¹ Elenctic features include: the "what is x?" question; the offering of several definitions by the interlocutor; Sokrates' rejection of a list of examples (146cde); his use of mundane illustrations like clay (147abc), archery (194a), medicine (178c), and pigs (161c); his emphasis on consistency (154de, 200d); the sincerity requirement (e.g. 145c, 155a, 157cd, 171d, 181c, 182c, 182e, 184e); his profession of ignorance (150c, 157cd, 161b, 189d, 210c); his alleged dislike of long-windedness (195bc; cf. 151b, 163d); his claim that one should not discuss what knowledge is like without first discovering what it is (196de, 200cd; cf. Burnyeat 1990: 105–6); the emphasis on *aporia* (cf. 145d6, e8, 151a7, 158c3, 168a3, c1, 174c5, d1, 175b6, d4, 187d2, 190e9, 191a4, 196c9, 200a12); the impasse of self-contradiction (e.g. 154cd, 162d, 164b, 165d); the final demolition of all proposed definitions (210ab); the idea that elenchus is also a form of self-scrutiny (155a, 181c, 182e, 187c, 203a); Sokrates' welcoming of criticism, as indicated by his ventriloquism of the complaints of "Protogoras" (165e–168c) and his demolition of his own suggestions; the production in the interlocutor of an awareness of his own ignorance, which clears the ground for further inquiry (210bc; cf. also 155cd).

² Sokrates is vividly portrayed, and Theaitetos is exceptionally fully characterized for a Platonic youth (Bruns 1896: 245–7). Sokrates also displays a powerful philosophical imagination, both in the representation and critique of complex ideas and in the use of extended and richly-imagined discourse (esp. the midwife image, the defence of Protogoras, and the digression).

³ The argumentation is sustained and complex; there is a strong concern with method; the discursive content is not overtly ethical (though it has ethical implications), and deals with such problems as false opinion and non-being (cf. esp. 188c–190e).

⁴ For instances of the former see Thesleff 1982: 152 n. 128; for the latter see e.g. Guthrie 1978: 61. The diverse features of the dialogue have also been explained in terms of Plato's intellectual development from the self-confidence of the "middle" dialogues to a renewed scepticism (Bostock 1988: 13–14), and by the hypothesis of revision, which is based in part on the existence of an alternative opening to the dialogue (above, p. 12).

elements, it displays a richness of characterization that serves to mark Plato's continuing preoccupation with the relations between personality, literary form, philosophical method and Socratic pedagogy. Through Sokrates, Theaitetos, Theodoros, and their interactions, Plato explores yet again the conditions under which Socratic pedagogy may successfully take place. *Republic* Book 1 asked, in dramatic terms, who could hope to learn from the elenctic Sokrates, while Books 2–10 showed what kind of interlocutor could enable Sokrates to move towards positive discourse. *Theaetetus* addresses similar issues but in a slightly different way, examining what kind of interlocutor can not only benefit personally from Socratic testing, but enable Sokrates to be productive without formally departing from an elenctic structure.

In the course of exploring these matters, *Theaetetus* also examines several interrelated characterological themes, including the paradoxical way Sokrates combines uniqueness and transcendence of the individual, and his capacity for pedagogical self-reproduction. The temporal setting, on the verge of Sokrates' death, gives a special urgency to this latter question.⁵ And the deployment of his character gains an additional dimension from the discursive material of this particular work – epistemology. As with other dialogues, this central subject is explored on a dramatic as well as a discursive level. Through the characters and their interactions, abstract epistemological issues are shown to play themselves out in the world of specific, particularized human beings, with their varied abilities to learn from the world, themselves, and each other. It is this personal dimension of epistemology – the fact that we are particular, embodied individuals – that generates most of the problems explored in the dialogue (especially the reliability and subjectivity of sense-perception). This makes *Theaetetus* peculiarly self-referential in a dramatic sense, in so far as its subject is the very process in which the participants are engaged. For example, the significance of memory for learning links the capacities of the dramatis personae with both epistemology and issues surrounding personal identity.⁶

SOKRATES AND THE PHILOSOPHER PRINCE

Theaetetus is quite defensive concerning the elenctic Sokrates' procedures and demeanor. The allusions to his trial and death that frame the dialogue invite us to assess the charge of corrupting the youth of Athens by

⁵ The dialogue is framed by references to Sokrates' death (142c, 210d), which is also alluded to at 172c.

⁶ Cf. 163c–164b, 166a–d, 191d, 192a2, b6, 194d, 196a, 209c.

the standard of his interaction with young Theaitetos.⁷ Sokrates himself insists strongly on the progress the young can make in his company (150d–151a). Indeed, he claims a degree of success for his methods unparalleled elsewhere in Plato, since the benefits he offers extend to the discovery within oneself of “fine” (and presumably positive) ideas. He blames those who leave him too soon for their own deterioration (cf. *Symp.* 216ab), and, in an echo of *Apology*, attributes the hostility of others to their failure to appreciate his benevolence (151cd; cf. *Ap.* 21e). His agonism is hinted at, however, when Theodoros represents him as a fighter of monstrous legendary proportions (169ab; cf. below, p. 280). Sokrates himself takes care to distinguish himself from the eristic arguer (*antilogikos*), but this person, who would scold them for talking about what knowledge is like when they do not yet know what it is, sounds much like the elenctic Sokrates himself (196d–197a). Indeed, Sokrates has already admitted to crossing, albeit inadvertently, the fine line between dialectic and “antilogic” (164cd).⁸ His interlocutors may therefore perhaps be forgiven for failing to appreciate at times which side of the line he is on.

There is also a confrontational tone in the digression at the center of the dialogue, where Sokrates eloquently compares his ideal of the philosopher to its antitype, the orator.⁹ When the philosopher “drags” the orator up to his own level, the latter becomes dizzy and dismayed, an object of mockery to others and “no better than a child” – much like the elenctic Sokrates’ victims (175cd, 177b; cf. above, p. 122). This passage suggests that “dragging” is not the most promising way to win a benign partner for discussion and philosophical progress. It is scarcely surprising, then, if Sokrates’ interlocutors find themselves, like the orator of the digression, to be pressed for time (172cd), or refuse, like Theodoros, to be “dragged” into the ring (162b; cf. 181a), for fear they may also be “dragged” towards unpalatable conclusions. According to Sokrates, when the orator of the digression does gain the courage to sustain the argument, he becomes dissatisfied with his own previous concerns (177b). But Plato never chooses to dramatize such a conversion. The evidence of the dialogues – including this one – is that reducing politicians to a state of childish absurdity leads not to their philosophical conversion, but to the death of the philosopher in question.

⁷ Polansky 1992: 35–6; cf. also Long 1998: 122. ⁸ Cf. 154de, 184c, 197a.

⁹ The digression is tailored towards Theodoros in important ways (cf. 173c7, 173e5–6, 175e1, 177c). But it is clear both that its philosophical ideal extends beyond Theodoros (cf. 174b), and that Sokrates shares it to a significant extent (cf. 172c, 173b3–4; Long 1998: 127–8).

These reproaches are voiced within *Theaetetus* by Protagoras, as ventriloquated by Sokrates. In his eponymous dialogue, Protagoras patiently endures a good deal of provocation.¹⁰ Here, however, he scolds Sokrates for his abrasive and counterproductive dialectical manner, telling him that in order to win people over to philosophy he should not be hostile and confrontational, but benevolent, and investigate the issues genuinely, rather than producing *aporia* by exploiting verbal quibbles and “dragging” arguments around (167d–168c).¹¹ “Protagoras” speaks, of course, from a non-Socratic, even an anti-Socratic position. His complaint therefore arguably places him in the ranks of those who fail to understand the true nature of Socratic dialectic.¹² But the fact that Sokrates himself is ventriloquating these complaints, and supposedly giving Protagoras his strongest possible case, suggests that this is not just a hostile attack but a form of Socratic self-criticism, or at least an acknowledgement of the problematic effect he produces on others. If Sokrates is really giving Protagoras the best defense he can muster, there is no reason why this should not include potentially justified criticisms of Sokrates himself and his methods.¹³ He is careful to obtain the company’s endorsement in principle of the methodological points “Protagoras” makes, and uses them to lure Theodoros into participation.¹⁴

Plato himself obliquely acknowledges the possible merit of such complaints against Sokrates’ elenctic persona by eliminating the more problematic aspects of that persona within this dialogue. Sokrates bends over backwards in *Theaetetus* to show that the reproaches of “Protagoras” are not applicable to the case in hand. He avoids any of the behaviors that make his applications of the elenchus counterproductive in other dialogues, becoming, in Gregory Vlastos’ words, “a new, much improved, Sokrates, who has laid to rest the demon of contentiousness within

¹⁰ Cf. *Prot.* 350c–51a, 360e, 361de.

¹¹ For the “dragging” of arguments (as opposed to people) cf. 195c3, 199a5.

¹² He also reproaches Sokrates with indulging in rhetorical rabble-rousing (*dēmēgoria*) and “plausibility” instead of mathematical rigor (162de), and cheap and unfair rhetoric rather than question and answer (166c–167d) – precisely the kinds of complaint that Sokrates makes elsewhere against the sophists. In Protagoras’ mouth these criticisms are self-defeating, since plausibility is notoriously the foundation of the kind of rhetoric that Protagoras himself taught, as Sokrates has reminded us a moment before (162d; see further Lee 1973: 228–8, 234–41). Rather than undermining their general value, this reinforces it, in so far as they form part of Plato’s strategy for discrediting the sophist.

¹³ Cf. Blank 1993: 430–31. He even implies that Theaitetos’ impressionable youth has made him susceptible to his own rhetoric, as well as that of Protagoras (162d; cf. 157d).

¹⁴ 146a, 162d–163a, 168cde.

him.”¹⁵ Intellectual midwifery, we are assured, is not an antagonistic but a joint project, calling for friendliness, cooperation and mutual respect, gentleness, good temper, honesty and true self-examination alongside the examination of others.¹⁶ This of course is nothing new. Nevertheless, Sokrates’ tone here towards his interlocutors is very different from the ironic “friendliness” with which he addresses a Thrasymachos, bearing a closer resemblance to the constructive Sokrates of *Republic* 2–10. Above all, it lacks the mocking irony that enrages so many interlocutors.¹⁷ His most characteristically ironic moments are aimed at inferior students (who are not present) and sophists, including the absent Protagoras and the “wise” generally (151b, 152c, 210c). He is only mildly ironic towards the recalcitrant Theodoros.¹⁸ Though Theodoros’ skills and deficiencies overlap substantially with those of Hippias, the former is not mocked or trivialized for his polymathy. Rather the value of his studies as a foundation for dialectic is implicitly acknowledged through his role as the teacher of Theaitetos. Sokrates is even serious and courteous in his imaginary exchanges with “Protagoras,” despite the considerable narrative mockery with which he colors them.¹⁹

Sokrates’ treatment of Theaitetos in particular is consistently encouraging. He is rarely ironic at the boy’s expense, except in partnership with himself (cf. 181b, 197a), and clarifies at least one more generally ironic moment for his benefit.²⁰ He applauds his courage, warmly praises his intellectual alertness, and takes his bewilderment as evidence of philosophical talent.²¹ He even refrains from challenging him at times, in order to promote his intellectual growth (163c, 189d). When he does correct him, it is always in a gentle, encouraging and complimentary fashion (184c, 199e). This attitude bears fruit, for Theaitetos himself declares that it would be shameful (*aischron*) not to do his best with the encouragement Sokrates has given him (151d). We may contrast the counterproductive shame induced by Sokrates’ methods in such respondents as Thrasymachos. It is true, of course, that cooperative young men are usually well-treated by Sokrates (above, p. 119). In *Theaitetos*, however, the combination of such treatment with a defensive tone about the hostility Sokrates arouses elsewhere suggests that the kind of irony

¹⁵ 1991: 155. Long calls him Plato’s “most compelling and attractive image of Socrates” (1998: 116).

¹⁶ E.g. 146c, 154d–155a, 162b10–c1, 181bc, 197b.

¹⁷ Compare 146d with *Meno* 72a; 162c2 with 151b5–6 and e.g. *Euth.* 12a.

¹⁸ 145b, d, 161a, 168e–169a. In fact it is questionable how ironic any of these passages really is.

¹⁹ See Lee 1973: 255–9. ²⁰ 145d, 148c; cf. above, p. 203. ²¹ 148b, 154d, 155d, 185e.

Sokrates directs towards more recalcitrant characters, such as Hippias and Thrasymachos, serves no useful purpose.

Even the most benign and irony-deficient Sokrates cannot succeed without the right kind of interlocutor. But in *Theaitetos* he has found a worthy respondent. The negative way in which Plato so often presents Sokrates' elenctic interlocutors is offset in this dialogue by a more optimistic picture of the potential of an individual *phusis*, when nurtured by the proper education and environment, to benefit from Socratic scrutiny. *Theaitetos* is much like Glaukon and Adeimantos in character and background: he is an Athenian citizen from a propertied family, who will subsequently distinguish himself in war. But he is a good deal younger than Plato's brothers,²² and has been less obviously exposed to the hazardous aspects of Athenian culture. He is also much more similar to a youthful member of *Republic's* guardian class.²³ Theodoros' emphasis on the boy's extraordinary combination of gentleness and manly courage (144ab) recalls not only the guardians' necessary qualifications, but also the difficulty, so heavily emphasized in *Republic*, of finding a nature equally well equipped in both. Plato invites this comparison when Sokrates opens his inquiry by suggesting that whoever succeeds in argument will rule them as a "king" (146a). The direct reference is to a children's game, but the image suggests a more profound agenda: whoever excels in the argument will be entitled to dialectical kingship, like *Republic's* philosopher-rulers.²⁴

Theaitetos will vindicate Theodoros' praise by combining both sets of qualities. We meet him in a palaestra after physical exercise (144c); he will grow up to be a fine warrior (142b); he is eager to learn (148d, 191d), and wins praise for fighting intellectually "in a manly fashion" (205a; cf. 144a5); one of his most salient qualities is philosophical endurance. At the same time, he is exceptionally "gentle" and modest. He is docile and obedient to his elders (161a, 183d), compliantly accepting his teacher's prompting (165b), and welcoming correction (146c). He awaits Sokrates' seal of approval on his mathematical idea (147e), and is modest about his ability to extend it to a more challenging problem (148bc). He admits it when he does not understand (e.g. 192cd), does not blame his

²² *Theaitetos* is a "child" (*pais/paidion*, 162d3, 166a3, 168d8, 184d1, 209e7) or "stripling" (*meirakion*, 142c6, 143e5, 144c8, 146b2, 168e3; cf. 173b). This makes him about fifteen at the dramatic date of his conversation with Sokrates in 399 BCE.

²³ Note that this point does not require *Tht.* to have been composed after *Rep.*, simply a cross-fertilization of ideas within the two works. For other evocations of *Rep.* in *Tht.* cf. Harrison 1978: 116; Ford 1994: 209 n.; Sayre 1995: 211–14.

²⁴ The verb is βασιλεύσει. For the way this evokes *Rep.* see below, p. 335.

aporia on Sokrates, and responds to the experience of bemusement not with hostility, but with renewed enthusiasm – a sign, in Sokrates' view, of a truly philosophical nature (155cd). Sokrates fosters both sides of his character, simultaneously encouraging his boldness in argument,²⁵ and submitting him to a process designed to increase his intellectual gentleness and *sōphrosunē* (210c).

Besides this emphasis on the rare complementarity of courage and gentleness, Theaitetos recalls the young guardians in many more specific details. Like them he loves learning and truth, is quick to learn, has a good memory, comes from a sound lineage, is generous, unconcerned with material possessions, and “noble” in character (*gennaios*, 144d; cf. *Rep.* 535b). But what links him most closely with the young guardians, in contrast to such successful elenctic interlocutors as Polemarchos, is his intellectual substance and promise of future achievement. One way this is indicated is through his prior education. His training for philosophy receives heavy emphasis, in contrast to other Socratic interlocutors, whose education has usually been of a dubious, mostly literary character.²⁶ He has already started studying all the areas specified in *Republic* as necessary preliminaries to dialectic, including calculation (*logismoi*), geometry, astronomy and harmonics (145cd).²⁷ Among these various studies, his special talent is for geometry. This field of inquiry is held in *Republic* to be earth-bound in so far as it relies on physical diagrams (510c–511b). But although Theaitetos casually mentions the use of diagrams by his teacher (147d; cf. 169a), it seems that he himself (in collaboration with his friend, young Sokrates) has managed to make further progress by means of abstract thought alone.²⁸ The case in point displays his quick intellect (cf. 144a), and marks an exceptionally substantial intellectual contribution for any Socratic interlocutor. Though the originality and significance of this youthful “discovery” have been debated, on almost any interpretation it is a dramatic harbinger of his future as a great mathematician.²⁹ His expertise in solid geometry (148b) is especially significant. This subject forms one of the most advanced stages of the guardians' curriculum in *Republic*, where it is marked as something exceptionally difficult and as yet undeveloped because generally undervalued (528abc). This means

²⁵ 141e, 151e, 157d, 204b, 205a. ²⁶ Plochmann 1954: 226.

²⁷ Cf. *Rep.* 522a–531e, 533a, *Th.* 173e–174a. Note that the guardians are to study mathematics in their childhood (*Rep.* 536de), as Theaitetos has apparently been doing. Cf. also *Laws* 747b with Burnyeat 1978: 491.

²⁸ Cf. Miller 1980: 124n. 8.

²⁹ See e.g. Sachs 1914; M. Brown 1969; Burnyeat 1978; Desjardins 1990: 77–9; Polansky 1992: 54–7. For a more skeptical view see Thesleff 1990.

he may qualify as someone who combines the best nature with the best education (cf. above, pp. 218–19).

In addition to paying so much attention to his prior training, the dialogue contains dramatic indications of Theaitetos' intellectual substance and promise of future creativity. In conversing with Sokrates he displays an active intelligence that far outstrips that of other young and compliant Socratic interlocutors.³⁰ Like other elenctic interlocutors he generates the ideas to be discussed, but unlike most of them he does so with increasing sophistication. Though he evokes a Meno or Euthyphro by first answering the “what is x?” question with a list of examples (146cd), unlike them he is extraordinarily quick to understand Sokrates' objection to this answer. Moreover he is the only Platonic interlocutor to provide a complex example demonstrating such understanding.³¹ Not content with merely agreeing to each point that Sokrates makes, he explains that he has already considered an analogous problem and produced a solution of the right general kind (146d–148b). As the dialogue proceeds, we are periodically reminded of this intellectual strength. When Sokrates introduces his first objection to Protagoras, Theaitetos deals with it easily (163abc). Later, his spontaneous understanding of a Socratic point obviates the need for lengthy argument and wins him special praise (185e).³² He is always quick on the uptake,³³ proves capable of positive contributions (199e, 207de), and is able to remember and summarize the argument (208c; cf. *Rep.* 511cd). He also shows considerable initiative in producing the third suggested definition of knowledge (201cd). Nor does he allow Sokrates to lead him by the nose: he observes when he is being painted into a corner, and avoids self-contradiction, thereby earning Sokrates' warm approval (154cd).

In *Republic* Book 7, mathematicians are said to grasp “what is” to a certain extent, but to remain in a dreamlike state as long as they fail to give an account of the foundations of their own discipline (533bc). As an accomplished young mathematician, Theaitetos seems to be on the threshold of waking from that dream. This is suggested imagistically when he volunteers an obscure, dream-like idea, which evokes the constructive Sokrates through its imagery and the style in which it is introduced, and whose meaning will be explained to him by Sokrates (201cd; below, p. 264). In *Republic's* terms, he is on the verge of that synoptic view of the propaedeutic studies which is the final step towards dialectic, the “coping stone”

³⁰ “Outstrip” is Sokrates' own metaphor (148c). ³¹ Cf. Sayre 1969: 57–8.

³² Cf. the compliment to Kleinias at *Euthyd.* 282c; but Kleinias' point is both slighter and more obvious.

³³ E.g. 185cde, 190d, 191b; cf. 144a3.

of all previous education (*Rep.* 534e).³⁴ He is facing the question, “What is knowledge?” That is, he is asking what all the different branches of knowledge (such as those pursued in the propaedeutic studies) have in common (cf. *Symp.* 210c). As a mere boy, however, Theaitetos is not yet old enough to answer that question. In *Republic*, Sokrates heavily emphasizes the danger of approaching dialectic too young.³⁵ And in *Theaitetos* he says a long and arduous education is needed in order to learn to deal properly with sense impressions (186c). Theaitetos has taken the first essential step, by going beyond Theodoros’ diagrams in pursuit of dialectic, but he still has further to go.

Even in *Republic*, however, youth is essential for the studies preliminary to dialectic, since it is accompanied by greater facility in learning (536cd). A youthful pliability is obviously necessary for the young guardians, if they are to be open to the systematic conditioning of their early education (cf. *Rep.* 377ab). Similarly in *Theaitetos*, the flexibility of youth is Theodoros’ reason for proposing one of the boys as Sokrates’ respondent.³⁶ Theaitetos’ youth thus gives him the intellectual suppleness essential for argument, and a pliant openness to Socratic influence (cf. 155e, 187ab). But this same pliancy also leaves the impressionable young susceptible to dangerous outside influences. As the author of the Seventh Letter puts it, their desires are changeable and often self-contradictory (328b; cf. 338bc). In Sokrates’ diatribe against the orator, the tender souls of the young fall easy victim to intimidation and corruption (173ab; cf. 168ab). Theaitetos himself tells Sokrates that he was initially very impressed by Protagoras’ arguments, and Sokrates attributes this to his youth (162cd). Yet in contrast to Glaukon and Adeimantos, with their sturdy – if uncommitted – defence of Thrasymacheanism, Theaitetos has not yet been “dyed” deeply enough with sophistic views or rhetorical methods to make use of them or defend them for himself. “Protagoras” dismisses this “child” as an adequate spokesman for his ideas (166a), and Sokrates has no trouble in directing him away from such views. Moreover, unlike Glaukon and Adeimantos, Theaitetos never appeals to the authority of poetry or other traditional cultural influences. In contrast to the orator, whose mind has become “bitter and twisted” under the influence of Athenian democratic institutions (172e–173b), he has not been warped by circumstance. Not

³⁴ On the relationship between mathematics and dialectic cf. also *Euthyd.* 290bc.

³⁵ *Rep.* 537d–539d; cf. 487bcd, 497e–498c, *Phileb.* 15d–16a. For the limitations of youth cf. also *Alc.* 1. 105e–106a, *Euthyd.* 275b, *Prot.* 314b, *Gorg.* 502d, *Laws* 663b, 658cd, *Parm.* 130e; cf. also Szlezák 1997: 90–91.

³⁶ 146b; cf. e.g. 162b, 168e, *Alc.* 1.127de, *Parm.* 137b, *Rep.* 377ab.

only is he no expert in the ideas he generates, but the pattern of his adult life is as yet unformed.

All this makes Theaitetos the perfect interlocutor to complement the benign elenctic Sokrates of this dialogue. In dramatizing their relationship, *Theaetetus* offers us an idealized (not to say sanitized) representation of the elenctic Sokrates at work, and an implicit justification for his methods. Like other Platonic representations of this process, however, the dialogue fails to achieve any positive results, despite Theaitetos' superiority as an interlocutor. This implies that the interlocutor cannot be blamed for Sokrates' failure, as they so often are elsewhere, if only implicitly.³⁷ At the same time, Sokrates' newly benign nature suggests that the quirks of *his* personality are not to blame either. There are no impediments of character in either participant to interfere with the elenctic process. The value of the elenctic approach under ideal conditions is thus under scrutiny – and the results are mixed. It proves successful in the aporetic work of clearing away dead undergrowth and preparing the mind to discover new truths (210bc). But that success seems contingent on there being little such undergrowth to remove. Moreover it remains unclear just how, if at all, this mode of inquiry can go on to furnish new truths to Sokrates or his companions.

LIKENESS

As a paradigm of the promising young philosophical nature, Theaitetos is closely assimilated to Sokrates. One of the most striking dramatic features of this dialogue is their remarkable physical resemblance. Theaitetos is an ugly boy, Theodoros tells us, with the same snub nose and bulging eyes for which Sokrates was notorious (143e). Sokrates says he wants to look at Theaitetos in order to examine his own appearance,³⁸ and makes their facial likeness the subject of his first teasing introduction to the question of knowledge (144d–145b). When the resemblance reappears, it is to illustrate the difficulty of differentiating named individuals (209bc; cf. 210d). This philosophical use of their physical likeness at beginning and end of their conversation both signals the interrelationship between the dialogue's form and content, and exemplifies an intellectual movement away from the material / sensible / somatic world towards the abstract world of Socratic philosophy.

³⁷ Cf. Sayre 1995: 200.

³⁸ The image of the mirror, implied here, also occurs twice on the discursive level (193c, 206d; cf. *Soph.* 239d–240a and below, pp. 285–6).

Physical appearance is, of course, strictly irrelevant to philosophical ability, but this very fact gives Sokrates' notoriously peculiar appearance totemic importance for Plato (above, pp. 70–74). As every reader of *Symposium* knows, his comical outward appearance conceals an extraordinary interior that makes him truly beautiful, and thus an object of desire (*Symp.* 210b). In *Theaetetus*, Plato hints at this by making Sokrates tacitly liken himself to Helen, the type and paragon of erotic beauty (183e).³⁹ The inner beauty of Theaitetos is marked more explicitly (185e; cf. 194bc). As with Sokrates himself, the boy's intellectual and moral quality, his beauty and nobility of soul, shine forth from a body whose ugliness symbolically guarantees their authenticity (cf. 144e). If Sokrates can learn about himself by scrutinizing Theaitetos (144d), the reverse is presumably also true.

The physical resemblance between Sokrates and Theaitetos betokens many other similarities of character and circumstances. Several of these are indicated in the dramatic frame in which Terpsion and Eukleides exchange news of him as an adult. Theaitetos' courage in battle on behalf of Athens (142b; cf. 144a) evokes Sokrates' military courage, so often emphasized by Plato. And the ailing Theaitetos' eagerness to return to Athens – presumably in order to die there – recalls Sokrates' devotion to his native city (cf. 143d). The suggestion that there is some kind of parallel between their deaths is reinforced by the way Eukleides, when speaking of Theaitetos' death, links it with that of Sokrates (142c).⁴⁰ Theaitetos' straitened material circumstances provide a further Socratic touch (144cd; cf. 184c).

Theaitetos is also marked in various ways as a kind of alter Sokrates intellectually. The fact that Theodoros recommends him to Sokrates in the first place suggests a pre-existing intellectual affinity (cf. 144d–45b).⁴¹ This is corroborated by what we hear of his past. Theaitetos has already achieved marked mathematical success in collaboration with a young friend, who is also present at this conversation, and whose name just happens to be Sokrates (147d1).⁴² *Prima facie*, we should expect this homonymy to be significant. Greek culture attached great significance

³⁹ Cf. Benardete 1984: 1.142. The distinction between beauty and ugliness, both physical and moral, is also thematic on the discursive level (cf. 186a, 189c, 190bc, 194c, 195c, 209e; Burnyeat 1990: 80–83).

⁴⁰ Note that Eukleides and Terpsion are among those present at Sokrates' death (*Phd.* 59c).

⁴¹ Theodoros is wrong about Theaitetos' ugliness (185e), but his assessment of the boy's intellectual capacity will be tested and affirmed by Sokrates (e.g. 148bcd, 155d), and borne out by Theaitetos' own behavior.

⁴² On this character, a member of the Academy who may still have been alive when Plato wrote *Tht.*, see Skemp 1952: 25–6; Guthrie 1975: 63–4; Miller 1980: 5; Jatakari 1990.

to verbal similarities, which were often presented as imaging a more profound resemblance (cf. e.g. *Tht.* 194c9). Boys were often given the name of their father, or more often a grandfather, “to cause the grandfather’s virtues to be reborn in the grandson.”⁴³ And in *Statesman*, Sokrates observes that he and young Sokrates share a kinship (*oikeiotēs*) on account of their names. This passage, which alludes clearly to *Theaetetus* (257c), and another from *Sophist*, where young Sokrates takes over Theaitetos’ role (218b), draw attention to the kinship linking all three characters. It therefore seems plausible to view young Sokrates in *Theaetetus* as some kind of stand-in for *the* Sokrates. I suggest that he signifies Theaitetos’ natural capacity for Socratic dialectic.⁴⁴ His dramatic role thus resembles that of Pylades in Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*, Orestes’ silent companion who speaks only once and represents a vital strand of the hero’s own motivation. In addition, young Sokrates’ silent presence at Theaitetos’ conversation with *the* Sokrates signifies continuity between the present conversation and Theaitetos’ previous efforts – a continuity to which Theaitetos himself draws attention (147cd). Theaitetos has brought his Socratic tendencies along with him to the next stage of his education.

Before ever encountering Sokrates, then, Theaitetos has successfully been practising a form of cooperative inquiry with a kind of personal Sokrates-substitute, showing that such inquiry may produce valuable results even in the hands of two young and inexperienced people. Given the strong resemblance between Theaitetos and the adult Sokrates, his relationship to young Sokrates becomes not only, as Friedländer calls it “a kind of youthful, natural prefiguration of the true Socratic dialogue,”⁴⁵ but also a kind of embryonic self-dialogue of two embryonic Sokrateses. We are challenged to believe that Sokrates is not after all unique, that two non-Sokrateses may eventually turn out to be Sokrates replicants and assist each other’s philosophical progress on an equal footing. A native talent for Socratic behavior, plus a like-minded companion, may perhaps render Sokrates himself redundant. Paradoxically, this is a hopeful

⁴³ Sulzberger 1926: 419–20; cf. Alford 1987: 74–8. For Greek examples of homonymy showing kinship and solidarity see Hirzel 1918: 30–35.

⁴⁴ Jatakari 1990 argues that young Sokrates is a fictional character to be identified with Plato himself. Dorter sees young Sokrates and Theaitetos as representing Sokrates’ name and his appearance respectively, and thus standing for constancy and change (1994: 95–6). According to Lee, young Sokrates and Theaitetos are both projections of Sokrates himself: young Sokrates represents Sokrates’ body, as opposed to both his mind (represented by Sokrates) and his perceptive self or “mind-in-body” (represented by Theaitetos) (unpublished: 26–31).

⁴⁵ 1964–9: III.153.

message, since it challenges the uniqueness of Sokrates with its tragic implications for the future of philosophy after his death.

No sooner is Sokrates' uniqueness so challenged, however, than it is reasserted by Theaitetos' failure to progress with his personal inquiries into knowledge (as opposed to mathematics) until he makes direct contact with the adult Sokrates (148e). These earlier attempts were apparently conducted on his own, spurred by reports of Sokrates' discourse (*logoi*, 148e). Such hearsay is evidently no substitute for personal contact. But it does prompt Theaitetos to try to do as Sokrates does on his own initiative, thus "imitating" him in an active, structural fashion (above, pp. 102–3). Nor were Theaitetos' solo efforts entirely futile, since they induced the "labor pains" that Sokrates equates with healthy *aporia*.⁴⁶ Moreover the fact that the dialogue as a whole fails to produce positive results suggests that the difference between this Socratic conversation and Theaitetos' previous efforts is one of degree, rather than kind. *Theaitetus* thus conveys a certain ambivalence regarding the necessity for the adult Sokrates to be physically present if Socratic inquiry is to take place. This exemplifies a larger tension in Plato's works generally: can the absent Sokrates be an effective presence in Plato's texts, and if so, how? Theaitetos' predicament is also that of Plato's readers, who can only make contact with Sokrates through reports of his *logoi*, including, of course, *Theaitetus* itself.

The pre-existing intellectual kinship with Sokrates suggested by Theaitetos' prior history is confirmed by the way his character is presented within the dialogue. Like Sokrates, he is friendly and cooperative from the outset, starts with no pretensions to knowledge and admits his own ignorance (148b). He shares Sokrates' superior memory (144a, 208c), his sense of *aporia* (above, n. 1), and his concern with intellectual consistency (154cde; cf. 186d). He allies himself with Sokrates' call for arguments based on more than plausibility (162e–163a), does not fear embarrassment at being refuted (146c; cf. 151d), and introduces, unprompted, the typically Socratic example of the craft of cobbling (146cd). His mathematical example employs a model of reasoning to which Plato and his Sokrates attach great importance.⁴⁷ He is alert to Sokrates' elenctic techniques, and even turns the tables by asking him whether he is saying what he really thinks (157c). His "well-bred" neglect of quibbling distinctions wins Sokrates' approval (184c). And he prompts Sokrates to recall his own principle of philosophical leisure (187d). Even his failure to produce viable offspring gives him a certain likeness to Sokrates, the "barren"

⁴⁶ 148e–149a, 151a; cf. Burnyeat 1977a: 11.

⁴⁷ Cf. 143d, 163a, 173e.

midwife (contrast 150d) – an image that feminizes both of them (below, p. 294). On the other hand, Sokrates' expectation that Theaitetos' growing confidence will produce valuable results of one of two kinds, either positive or aporetic (187bc), tacitly aligns him with the constructive Sokrates as well, despite the latter's "official" absence from this particular text.

A basic harmony also underlies their substantive contributions to the discussion. In general, Sokrates wants, expects and receives Theaitetos' agreement. The boy's vaunted flexibility takes the form of sympathy with a typically Socratic perspective (155e). When Theaitetos suggests the important point that the soul can examine certain topics without the aid of the physical senses, Sokrates says he has done him a favor: this was already his own opinion, but he wanted to win Theaitetos' agreement independently (185e). In another remarkable passage, Theaitetos introduces the idea that knowledge is true belief plus an account (*logos*) as something he once heard from an unnamed person, which is just now coming back to him (201cd). His non-specific attribution of the idea to "someone" recalls the style in which Sokrates elsewhere in Plato often introduces novel or creative ideas.⁴⁸ With its mysterious external source, the idea in question betokens an embryonic Socratic imagination. When Sokrates rephrases the idea, he too says he heard it from certain unknown persons, calling his own version "a dream in exchange for a dream" (201d). This striking phrase suggests some kind of mysterious connection or psychological unity between the two co-dreamers.⁴⁹ Sure enough, Sokrates' "dream" turns out to be, in Theaitetos' own opinion, "just like" the one he heard himself, and is in fact an elaboration of it.⁵⁰

This unanimity is reinforced by Sokrates' habitual use of the first person plural for the conclusions that he and Theaitetos have reached, even when the arguments have come from Sokrates himself and Theaitetos has simply agreed to them. This is, of course, standard Socratic technique in Plato, but the close identification between these two particular characters makes the device seem less coercive than it often does. Sokrates even holds Theaitetos responsible for wording that he himself has just introduced (184bc). Then, after putting words into Theaitetos' mouth

⁴⁸ E.g. *Euthyd.* 290d–91a, *Gorg.* 493a, 524a, *Meno* 81ab, *Phd.* 61d, 108c, *Phileb.* 16c, 20b, *Phdr.* 235bcd, *Symp.* 201d.

⁴⁹ Dreams have a mysterious or prophetic air, and as such are linked with the use of "mantic" language at pivotal moments in the dialogues (cf. Miller 1980: 130 n. 47). For other dream images in Plato cf. *Charm.* 173a, *Crat.* 439c, *Phileb.* 20b, *Symp.* 175e, and see further Gallop 1971; Rorty 1973: 229–30; Desjardins 1990: 146–8.

⁵⁰ 202c; cf. 164a, 191b, and see Burnyeat 1970: 103, 105–6.

in this fashion, he checks himself, as if to emphasize that his ideas must be understood as belonging equally to Theaitetos: “Perhaps it would be better if you stated the answers yourself, rather than that I should busy myself on your behalf.”⁵¹ The moment succeeds in emphasizing their like-mindedness, while simultaneously drawing attention to the fact that it is actually Sokrates who is producing the ideas. Sokrates also repeatedly employs imaginary objectors, which helps to maintain intellectual harmony by projecting any possible disagreements onto absent outsiders.⁵² A similar effect is produced by the use of fighting imagery, which serves not to pit the interlocutors against each other but to represent them as united in their confrontation with absent opponents or the recalcitrant *logos*.⁵³ Sokrates even includes Theaitetos in his customary expressions of ironic self-deprecation, in striking contrast to the usual polarization between Socratic ignorance and the “wisdom” of the elenctic interlocutor (cf. 181b, 197a). The inadequacy of Theodoros, the only other speaker, further cements this special bond of like-mindedness between the two principal characters (cf. 202d and below, pp. 278–80).

Theaitetos is thus represented as significantly similar to Sokrates from many different points of view: physical, circumstantial, intellectual, moral and methodological. Their remarkable resemblance resonates strongly with the notion that like is attracted to like. This idea is an ancient and pervasive one in Greek thought, both popular and philosophical, and appears in a wide range of contexts (e.g. ethical, political, epistemological, scientific).⁵⁴ In *Theaitetos* it underlies the peculiar theory of vision articulated by Sokrates (156bc), and also has important pedagogical implications. Sokrates reflects common Greek educational views when he takes it for granted that the Heracliteans desire to make their students “like themselves” (180b). One is attracted to what resembles oneself, and as a result one becomes correspondingly more like it – for better or worse (cf. above, pp. 82–3). On a dramatic level, Plato characterizes the adherents of various philosophical positions in ways that echo their outlooks, suggesting that people are drawn to philosophies that in some

⁵¹ 184e (trans. Levett 1990).

⁵² The most striking example is Protagoras redivivus (171cd), but see also 165de, 188d, 195cde, 200abc, 202e, 205e–206b.

⁵³ E.g. 163c, 164c, 165de, 180e–181a, 191a; cf. 167e–168a, 179d, 180ab, 191bc, 195c, 200c.

⁵⁴ See e.g. *Laws* 716cd, 837a, 904e–905a, *Lys.* 214a–d, *Gorg.* 510b, *Rep.* 490b, *Symp.* 195b, *Stat.* 310bcd, *Tim.* 45d, 53a, 80b, 81a–d, 88e, Hom. *Od.* 17.218, Arist. *EE* 1235a5–29, [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 3.10; Plut. *Mor.* 51a–52a; further examples in Rankin 1964: 59–60; Lloyd 1966: 270–71, 340, 347, 351; Blundell 1989: 42 n. 82, 1990: 228–9; Price 1989: 9. Cf. also the significance attached to verbal similarities (above, pp. 261–2). “Opposites attract” is also traditional wisdom (cf. Arist. *EN* 1155a32–b8), but receives vastly less emphasis in our sources.

way resemble themselves: “The Heraclitean portrait is . . . a witty matching of the men to their philosophy. So too the materialists at 155e–156a are tough, hard fellows like the bodies they believe in, and the ‘One’ who is Parmenides has the unruffled composure of his one unchanging reality (183e–184a).”⁵⁵ And the Heracliteans are in perpetual motion (179e–180a).

The attraction and assimilation of like to like also underpin the “likeness to god” (ὁμοίωσις θεῶν) towards which the ideal philosopher strives,⁵⁶ which depends in turn on keeping the right kind of human company (177a7; cf. 167e–168a). “Likeness to god” is an idealized state of epistemic, ethical and personal self-consistency and stability.⁵⁷ Since the aspect of a person that already bears some resemblance to god is the soul, it is this that both strives for and is capable of such assimilation.⁵⁸ This is, of course, a form of structural imitation, since a human being cannot take on the superficial attributes of god, or to put it another way, the superficial attributes of humanity (such as whether or not one wears shoes) are inapplicable to divinity as such (unless it is anthropomorphic).⁵⁹ Philosophically, this state recalls the One of Parmenides, whose characterization in this dialogue as static and revered suggests an affinity with the philosopher of the digression (177a).⁶⁰ The ideal is voiced by Sokrates, who himself shows striking similarities to that philosopher (below, pp. 298–9), and may therefore be envisaged as striving personally towards the abstraction of “likeness to god.”

That Sokrates is approaching this condition is suggested playfully through the famous image of the midwife. In this capacity he is said to resemble the goddess Artemis, who “honors” those who are like her.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Burnyeat 1990: 47. For the Heracliteans cf. Branham 1989: 72. Cf. also the characterizations of different philosophical types at *Soph.* 242e–243a, 246a–d, and the assimilation of writing style to character at *Ar. Thesm.* 146–71.

⁵⁶ 176b; cf. *Rep.* 613ab, *Laws* 716cd, 904d–905a, *Phdr.* 248a, 252d–253c, *Tim.* 29e–30c.

⁵⁷ For the association of self-sufficiency, simplicity, stability, and consistency with virtue and divinity cf. *Laws* 821b, *Phdr.* 230a, 250bc, *Phileb.* 33b, 59c–60c, *Rep.* 380c–383c, 431bc, 500bcd, 590d, *Stat.* 269de, *Tim.* 34ab, 40ab, 42c, 47c, 62e, 68e–69c, 92c, *Phd.* 79d. The combination of self-consistency and the principle of like-to-like also generates self-love (cf. *Tim.* 34b), which is in turn a manifestation of self-sufficiency (see further below, pp. 287–8).

⁵⁸ For the soul’s kinship with the divine cf. e.g. *Laws* 899b, *Phd.* 79d, 84ab, *Phdr.* 246de, 247d, *Rep.* 589e, 611e, *Stat.* 309c, *Tim.* 41c.

⁵⁹ Contrast the declaration of Empedocles, that he has, while still alive as a human being, become a god (DK 31 B112.4).

⁶⁰ The Homeric phrase “reverend (*aidios*) and awe-inspiring (*deinos*),” used for Parmenides at 183e, may also evoke divinity (cf. *Il.* 18.394, 18.425, *Od.* 8.22).

⁶¹ τιμῶσα τὴν αὐτῆς ὁμοιότητα (149bc; cf. *Rep.* 613b). On the appropriateness of Artemis, as a goddess of maturation, for the Socratic enterprise see Howland 1998: 84–6; cf. also Wengert 1988: 6; Polansky 1992: 63.

His work as midwife is carried out at her command and with her help (150cd). In these passages she is not named but referred to simply as “the god,” recalling the way in which Sokrates refers to Apollo in *Apology*.⁶² But used of Artemis, the masculine gender generalizes her role into that of a non-specific divinity. Later he refers to her just as “god.”⁶³ Rather than identifying this divinity with either Apollo or Artemis, it seems most plausible to view it as an indeterminate divine force,⁶⁴ which sanctions the association of like with like through gender symbolism: Sokrates takes care of pregnant boys, his mother of the girls. As such it echoes the indeterminate “god” to whom the philosopher of the digression assimilates himself (176b1). If it seems far-fetched to perceive such a link between the digression, with its elevated, aristocratic rhetoric, and the bizarre image of a seventy-year-old man working as a midwife, we need only think of Alkibiades’ assimilation of Sokrates to the vulgarly comic yet divine figure of a satyr (*Symp.* 215a–e).⁶⁵

On the dialogue’s discursive level, likeness and identity (especially self-identity), the differences between one person and another and between various embodiments of one person at different times, internal and external agreement and disagreement, are constant preoccupations.⁶⁶ Human beings, specifically the dialogue’s participants, are often used as examples, raising metaphysical and epistemological issues of self-consistency and identity that complement the methods and goals of Socratic argument.⁶⁷ While the dramatis personae concern themselves with ethical and argumentative self-consistency (e.g. 154de, 186d), the reader is invited, through the use of them as examples, to reflect on the interconnections between these kinds of self-consistency and the problems of attributing a stable identity to each speaker. At one end of the spectrum lies the epistemic and argumentative chaos of the Heracliteans, who are said to be utterly incapable of internal consistency (180abc; cf. 157b). At the other lies “likeness to god.” The transition from one state to the other can only take place through dialectic.⁶⁸ When the orators of the digression submit to such argument they discover that they are at odds

⁶² ὁ θεός, 150c8, d4, d8.; cf. e.g. *Ap.* 21e–22a, 23b, 33c. ⁶³ θεός without the article (210c7).

⁶⁴ Cf. Campbell 1883: 51 n. 12; Burnyeat 1977a: 16 n. 19; Howland 1998: 82.

⁶⁵ In *Symp.* Sokrates is also implicitly (and humorously) likened to the divinity Eros (above, p. 74).

⁶⁶ E.g. 154a, 155a, 159a–160b, 166bc, 168a, 178de, 181c–183b, 185abc, 186ab, 188b, 189d–191b, 192d–193e, 209abc. By “internal” and “external” I mean agreement with oneself and others, both of which are fundamental to the operations of the elenctic Sokrates (above, p. 117).

⁶⁷ E.g. 159b–160b, 188b, 191b, 192d–193e, 203a–d, 207a–208b, 209abc.

⁶⁸ Note that likeness and difference are among the fundamental elements judged by the soul (185b–186b), and the primary material of the true philosopher’s dialectic in *Soph.* (253de). Cf. also *Phdr.* 273d, *Tim.* 37ab, 44ab, Desjardins 1990: 72–4.

with themselves in what they are saying.⁶⁹ This new self-awareness is a necessary preliminary to self-consistency, a first step on the path towards “likeness to god.”

The Heracliteans are not only internally inconsistent but literally incapable of reaching consistent agreement with other people, even those supposedly of their own philosophical persuasion (180a). This follows directly from their lack of epistemic stability and internal consistency. Both these forms of inconsistency have ethical implications, in so far as internal and external harmony are associated with virtue in Plato (and elsewhere), and both are rooted in the same fundamental difficulty. It is human particularity and difference that lead both to failures of like-mindedness or agreement with others (*homologeîn*), and to the relativism of Sokrates’ Protagoras or the epistemic chaos of his Heracliteans. The famous argument that Protagoras’ epistemology is self-defeating hinges precisely on failure to reach such agreement (*homologeîn*).⁷⁰ This word and its cognates are frequent in the dialogue, and the thematizing of “likeness” (*homoiotēs*) activates their etymological meaning: to speak, reason, or calculate something alike.⁷¹ This in turn feeds back into the principle that like is attracted to like, with its pedagogical implications. Those who are similar will be attracted to each other (as like to like) and, through the process of discussion/differentiation (*dialegesthai* / *dialegeîn*),⁷² will reach verbal and intellectual agreement (*homologeîn*), thus mirroring the internal consistency of the soul that has fostered its divinity to become like god.

The relationship between external and internal consistency may be clarified by looking at a place in the text that clearly links the argumentative and dramatic presentation of these issues. This is the famous passage where Sokrates defines thinking as a dialectical conversation of the mind with itself, in which an opinion is formed when two internal voices agree (189d–190a).⁷³ The idea that cognitive processes may be understood as an internal dialogue is very ancient and widespread in

⁶⁹ οὐκ ἀρέσκουσιν αὐτοὶ αὐτοῖς περὶ ὧν λέγουσι (177b). ⁷⁰ Cf. 171a9, b2, b7, b11.

⁷¹ Brandwood 1976 lists forty occurrences. For the calculative aspect of the *log-* root cf. 186a11, c3. Sokrates emphasizes that philosophical agreement should be more than merely verbal (164c).

⁷² The two senses of the verb (active and middle) are explicitly linked by Xenophon’s Sokrates (*Mem.* 4.5.12).

⁷³ Cf. also *Soph.* 263e–264a, *Phileb.* 38c–39a. Multiple viewpoints within the soul are emphasized at 189e, which leads into this definition of thinking. The soul can also calculate and compare things within itself (186abc). Its self-sufficiency for this activity is emphasized (185de, 187a). One may also count abstract items within oneself (198c), and this may be a way of “learning from oneself” (198e). Later Sokrates will define speech itself (*logos*) in terms of thought (206d) (see Polansky 1992: 223–4).

Greek, prominent from Homer onwards, and commonplace in the idioms of ordinary language.⁷⁴ At 187d7, for example, Sokrates says he is “in two minds” (διστάζων) – a verb that also appears in the definition of thinking as a dialogue in the soul (190a4).⁷⁵ This conception of internal processes may plausibly be seen as manifesting a model of the self which sees it as constituted through dialogue with others.⁷⁶ It also underlies Aristotle’s conception of self-love, which he says is possible only in so far as a person consists of two or more parts.⁷⁷

The close identification between Theaitetos and Sokrates suggests that their conversation may be read as an external representation of this conception of thought as an internal dialogue. A general homology between the internal conversation that is thought and the conversations of Socratic dialectic is suggested by the vocabulary of question and answer used for the soul’s internal dialogue, which is also standard language for dialectical exchange (190a).⁷⁸ The structural equivalence is also highlighted in other ways. Thus a cluster of words for agreement, referring to the interlocutors themselves, follows immediately after the definition of thinking as an internal dialogue.⁷⁹ Sokrates also observes that agreement within the soul may be reached either swiftly or slowly (190a), and this too is exemplified in his conversation with Theaitetos. Both of them are slow at times (cf. 195c), but elsewhere, in a passage where their agreement is strongly marked, Sokrates says the young man’s spontaneous understanding obviates the need for a lengthy argument (185e).⁸⁰ (It may be significant that this latter passage concerns the nature of the soul.) In a harmonious person, then, the dialogue within the soul will presumably resemble that between Sokrates and Theaitetos: a friendly conversation aiming at a self-consistent set of conclusions. We may contrast the inability of the Heracliteans to reach secure conclusions either in their souls or with each other (180ab) – they cannot participate in dialectic (cf. 161e), or even succeed in thinking.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Cf. e.g. *Ion* 534e2, *Stat.* 278a2, *Laws* 897b4, *Ep.* VII 328b7; numerous literary examples in Pelliccia 1995; Gill 1996a.

⁷⁵ Cf. also e.g. *Soph.* 235a2, 236c, *Stat.* 291b8.

⁷⁶ Gill 1996a; cf. also Tejera 1997: 72–3. ⁷⁷ *EN* 1166a33–1166b1; see further below, pp. 287–8.

⁷⁸ Many have pointed out that dialogue form generally may be seen as a representation of the dialogue within the soul. But the likeness between the two dialectical partners gives it special pertinence here.

⁷⁹ *homolog-* words appear at 190e6, 191a1, a8, a9, e8, e9.

⁸⁰ Contrast the passage where Sokrates imagines a person talking to himself and asking himself questions, and coming up with an answer that differs from that of someone else who has presumably been through the same internal process (196a).

⁸¹ On the impossibility of language and/or rational thought for the Heracliteans see e.g. Desjardins 1990: 95–7.

In this representation of an idealized philosophical relationship, then, Plato ends up suggesting not only that the self is constructed by internalizing our relationship to others, but the converse: that a philosophical conversation with someone outside the self is homologous with the inner processes of the mind. Indeed, it is sometimes unclear from Sokrates' language whether internal or external agreement is at issue – or both. This confusion is exemplified near the beginning of the dialogue, when Sokrates declares that their mutual goal is to look at “our thoughts themselves in relation to themselves, and see what they are – whether, in our opinion, they agree with one another or are entirely at variance.”⁸² The process for pursuing this aim is one of self-scrutiny, an examination of “what these apparitions (*phasmata*) within us are” (155a). Such scrutiny in this case reveals that three “agreements” are “fighting one other within our soul.”⁸³ Throughout this passage the Greek obscures the distinction between internal and external intellectual agreement.⁸⁴

Ultimately, however, whether agreement is internal or external is irrelevant. In so far as the harmonious internally consistent conclusion is the most rationally viable, such a conclusion will be agreed on both by the parts of one's soul and by the effective philosophical partnership. These two results are mutually reinforcing. The effect is to collapse the interpersonal dimension of dialectic into a conversation with the self. One consequence of this is an erasure of the truly personal in its particularity. Theaitetos' extraordinary resemblance to Sokrates, together with his enthusiasm for Sokrates' methods, suggests that if he proceeds with dialectic he will become more and more closely identified with Sokrates. As a natural Socratic, he is attracted to Sokrates, which will lead to even greater resemblance and eventually to the “likeness to god” that lies just over the horizon for Sokrates himself.⁸⁵ If both participants were to attain this goal of “likeness to god,” they would become so abstract as to be qualitatively indistinguishable.

DIFFERENCE

In attempting to dramatize a successful and harmonious philosophical interaction, Plato comes close to suggesting that personal difference must

⁸² αὐτὰ πρὸς αὐτὰ τί ποτ' ἐστὶν ἃ διανοούμεθα, πότερον ἡμῖν ἀλλήλοις συμφωνεῖ ἢ οὐδ' ὀπωστίοῦν (154e, trans. Levett 1990).

⁸³ ὁμολογήματα τρία μάχεται αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς ἐν ἡμετέρῃ ψυχῇ (155b).

⁸⁴ Note especially the singular ἡμετέρῃ ψυχῇ. Although this is standard Greek for “each of our souls” (cf. e.g. *Stat.* 258c7, 278c9), it is grammatically indistinguishable from “our (single) soul.”

⁸⁵ At one point Sokrates praises Theaitetos' response as “godlike” (154d; cf. also above, pp. 218–19).

be eliminated altogether.⁸⁶ To do this, however, would be to remove the dialectical model on offer from the realm of the ordinary human experience of difference, which the dialogue form purports to represent, and in which it is inescapably grounded. As dramatic characters, Theaitetos and Sokrates are not abstractions but concretely imagined persons, necessarily located within, and defined by, specific socio-cultural parameters. In as much as they are not numerically identical, we are obliged to confront them as two distinct individuals, whose particular relationship is defined by the cultural coordinates governing relations between men in classical Athens. Such models of relationship, and Plato's use of them, will inevitably color our reading of the two characters' likeness. As we shall see, they will also feed back into the interpretation of that likeness suggested earlier in this chapter.

The individuation of human beings is a discursive theme of this dialogue, and Theaitetos himself serves as the prime exemplar.⁸⁷ How then is he differentiated from Sokrates, whom he so closely resembles? Most obviously, and most importantly, Sokrates is an old man on the verge of death, whereas Theaitetos' youth is emphasized repeatedly. Their other differences – in experience, confidence, philosophical sophistication, and so on – may plausibly be seen as stemming from this age gap. Since a normative homoerotic relationship takes place between an older man and an adolescent,⁸⁸ this disparity suggests an obvious model for their intellectual and pedagogical partnership: the philosophical “pederasty” (*paiderastia*) of *Symposium* and elsewhere. Plato leads us to expect this by making Sokrates praise Theaitetos' intellectual “beauty” (185e; cf. 210d). This beauty, along with his youth, identifies Theaitetos as a potential philosophical “beloved” (*erōmenos*) to Sokrates' indefatigable “lover” (*erastēs*).⁸⁹ We might therefore expect them to be represented as philosophical lovers and even co-parents of shared intellectual offspring in the manner of *Symposium*,⁹⁰ especially considering the recurrence of erotic and reproductive images within the fabric of the argument.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Cf. Dyer 1901: 178–9.

⁸⁷ See e.g. Burnyeat 1990: 218–34; Miller 1992: 100–102; and cf. above, p. 267.

⁸⁸ See Arist. *EN* 1157a3–8; Dover 1989; Halperin 1990: ch. 1.

⁸⁹ Cf. esp. *Charm.* 154de. The mirror image employed by Sokrates (144d) also has erotic overtones (below, pp. 285–6).

⁹⁰ In both works the ideas come directly from the mysteriously pregnant male. The main difference is that in *Symp.* the pregnant male is the *erastēs* (tacitly equated with Sokrates, with his interior “marvels” [*agalmata*]), who reproduces in the beloved as medium, whereas in *Tht.* it is the junior partner, who discovers beautiful things within himself (150d), and whose offspring is brought to birth with the help of a third party. See further Burnyeat 1977a: 8–9.

⁹¹ See Desjardins 1990: 37–42, 52–4; Dorter 1994: 76–9, 94–6.

This avenue is foreclosed, however, by the midwife analogy, which Sokrates, notoriously, uses to deny that he is involved with Theaitetos' intellectual "children" in any procreative fashion.⁹² He insists on his own infertility, confining his role in the processes of intellectual intercourse and reproduction to that of midwifery. Those who are not already pregnant have no need of his services, so he sends them to wise people like Prodikos for "intercourse" (151b4).⁹³ The implication is that intellectual "intercourse" with a sophist can lead to pregnancy, and the subsequent argument will suggest that Protagoras, if anyone, is the father of Theaitetos' first child (cf. 152a). This does not exclude others from playing a similarly paternal role: the seed of Theaitetos' mathematical discovery was planted by Theodoros (147d), and later we hear how another conception was initiated by an unnamed person (201c). All these figures stand in evident contrast to the infertile midwife.⁹⁴

Yet the dialogue's linguistic texture suggests that this is not quite the whole story. As we have seen, Theaitetos' previous attempts at inquiry were spurred by reports of Socratic questioning (148e). Sokrates is thus assigned a role in his intellectual development prior to the "midwifery" of the present dialogue – a role that clearly serves as *some* kind of fertilizing stimulus. Within the work itself, the "dream" theory strongly evokes ideas found elsewhere in Plato, especially *Meno*, thus hinting that the mysterious person from whom Theaitetos heard it (201c) may have been Sokrates himself.⁹⁵ And though Sokrates qua midwife sometimes serves as matchmaker (149d–150a), in this case it is Theodoros who has identified the mutual compatibility of Sokrates and Theaitetos and brought them together as intellectual partners – a role he will play again in both *Sophist* and *Statesman* (*Soph.* 216a, *Stat.* 257a). This leaves the role of "father" of at least some of Theaitetos' ideas quietly available for Sokrates himself. Furthermore the job of "testing" the "baby" and deciding whether or not to expose it (160e–161a), which has been called

⁹² His own *erōs*, so he says, is for the process of argument itself (169c; cf. 146a6 and above, p. 107).

⁹³ His term is *συγγίγνομαι*, which, along with related words (esp. *σύνειμι*, *συνουσία*) can have both social and/or sexual meanings in ordinary Greek (see Robb 1993), an ambiguity often exploited by Plato (cf. 149d7, 182b5, *Ep. VII* 341c; Halperin 1986: 78 n. 59). Compare also Sokrates' use of *μίγνυμι* ("mingle"), which is often sexual in meaning (cf. e.g. *Laws* 930d, *Rep.* 490b, *Stat.* 265e, *Symp.* 207b9), for his encounters with both Parmenides (183e7) and Theaitetos (*Stat.* 258a4).

⁹⁴ At the end of the dialogue Sokrates mentions that Theaitetos may "*try* to become pregnant" again (210bc). This leaves open the mechanism for such an occurrence, suggesting that it is to some extent up to the boy himself, but without excluding the possibility that he might consort with others in order to reconceive.

⁹⁵ So e.g. Koyré 1945: 44. For links between *Tht.* and *Meno* see Burnyeat 1977a: 9–10, 1990: 235–6; Desjardins 1990: passim; Dorter 1994: 70–72.

“Sokrates’ most important task, and one that has no analogue in ordinary midwifery,”⁹⁶ is one that in Athenian life belonged not to the midwife or the child’s mother, but to the father.⁹⁷ Sokrates even suggests that after delivery the “mother” of the idea should remain in his company in order to make sure that the child is properly brought up. This tacitly assigns a continuing quasi-parental role to himself, in contrast to the sophists, whose neglect causes the “mother” to miscarry or the “baby” to perish (150e; cf. 149e). By the end of the dialogue, he has shifted his talk of pregnancy into the first person plural: “Are *we* still pregnant and in labor, my friend, concerning knowledge, or have *we* given birth to everything?” (210b). And Theaitetos replies that he has given birth to *more than was within him*, on account of Sokrates (210b).

The distinction between co-parent and midwife is further blurred by Sokrates’ use of the language of “intercourse” for his maieutic activities (150d–151a). According to Eukleides’ account in the prologue, his praise for Theaitetos’ *phusis* was voiced after spending time with him in dialectical intercourse.⁹⁸ This is the “intercourse” dramatized in the central portion of the work, which enables Theaitetos to “give birth” to various concepts. When “Protagoras” alludes to the dangers of the wrong kind of intellectual “intercourse,” it is unclear whether this refers to the role of a co-parent or a midwife.⁹⁹ But when he ties his remarks explicitly to Sokrates, his language becomes transparently erotic: the proper kind of “intercourse” with the young will lead them to “pursue and love” Sokrates (διώξονται καὶ φιλήσουσιν), and at the same time flee from themselves towards philosophy (168ab). In this passage Sokrates is implicitly equated with philosophy itself, and in the process becomes the dialectical object of desire. The equivalence is reinforced by a verbal echo in the digression, where “likeness to god” is defined as “fleeing” from the mortal world towards wisdom and virtue (176a). This strengthens the equation of Sokrates both with philosophy and with divinity itself. Such passages blur the lines between Sokrates and philosophy as objects of desire, and between Sokrates and others (particularly the sophists) as both impregnators and midwives for the young. The effect is to equate Sokrates with philosophy, and to credit him as a seminal producer of ideas, while simultaneously denying all this through the evasive metaphor of the midwife.

⁹⁶ Burnyeat 1977a: 8.

⁹⁷ At 160e–161a Sokrates collapses this stage in the birth process with the ceremony of the Amphidromia, which also involves paternal acceptance of the child into the family; note, however, that the midwife was often the *agent* of exposure (see further Garland 1990: 89–90, 93–4; Golden 1990: 23, 94).

⁹⁸ συγγενόμενός τε καὶ διαλεχθείς (142c; cf. 143d8). ⁹⁹ 168a1; cf. 150e5, 177a7.

These repeated hints at a more productive role for Sokrates chime with the inescapable fact that, despite his own disclaimers, he is in fact the source of most of the substantive ideas in the dialogue, whether in *propria persona* or by ventriloquating others. Like the constructive Sokrates of *Republic* Books 2–10, he often speaks in a didactic or expository manner,¹⁰⁰ and both he and Theaitetos accept that the latter’s role is to follow wherever he leads.¹⁰¹ The derivation of Protagoras’ views from Theaitetos seems like an elenctic figleaf to disguise the fact that Sokrates is in fact critiquing a widespread and influential point of view on its own merits in a manner that parallels *Republic* 2–10.¹⁰² He even, in the digression, provides a positive account of wisdom and virtue (176c),¹⁰³ in striking contrast to the midwife analogy, with its denial of his own intellectual productivity. The reader may therefore sympathize with Theaitetos’ inability to tell whether Sokrates is actually voicing his own opinions, and need to be reminded of the “midwife’s” purported barrenness (157c). We may also sympathize with Theodoros’ view of Sokrates as a “bag of arguments” (161a), given his ability to pick out the views of Protagoras, the Heracliteans, and others one by one for refutation.

Why, then, is Plato at such pains to deny Sokrates’ evident intellectual fertility? No doubt this is one way of attempting to negotiate the tension between the elenctic Sokrates, who claims not to know anything, and his constructive counterpart who is bursting with substantive theories – two avatars of Sokrates represented here in a slightly uneasy alliance. It also enables Plato to avoid attributing to Sokrates an authoritarian, or sophistic, mode of pedagogy. And it clearly serves to eschew Socratic responsibility for Alkibiades and his ilk. The midwife metaphor enables Sokrates to acknowledge some kind of educational involvement with the young of Athens, while denying responsibility for both their ideas and their behavior. The emphasis on Theaitetos’ ideal character is also important in this regard. Plato uses it to make clear that Sokrates cannot control the raw nature that fits a young person for philosophy: such a *phusis* must pre-exist before effective Socratic pedagogy can even begin (cf. 143de).

¹⁰⁰ E.g. 152d, 156a, c, 158b, e, 164a, d, 191a5–6, 192d3, e2, 198a4–5.

¹⁰¹ E.g. 185d4, 192c8, d2.

¹⁰² Burnyeat thinks “the discussion in Parts II and III makes no pretence to exemplify Sokrates’ art of midwifery” (1977a: 8). If so, Sokrates’ “fertile” role is all the more obvious. But continuing reminders of the midwife metaphor (157cd, 160c–161a, 184ab, 187ab, 210bcd) suggest that the whole conversation should be construed as the delivery and testing of Theaitetos’ ideas.

¹⁰³ This important point is noted by Friedländer 1964–9: III.188–9; Rue 1993: 81.

So there are several possible reasons for Plato to elide Sokrates' potentially erotic relationship with Theaitetos in favor of the model of the infertile midwife. To these I would add one more, which may perhaps be less obvious, but helps to make sense of the distinctive likeness to Sokrates that Theaitetos shares with no other Platonic character.¹⁰⁴ The kind of relationship most strongly suggested by their physical resemblance, combined with the large age difference between them, is, of course, parenthood. Even the fact that Theaitetos has Sokrates' distinctive features to a lesser degree (143e) suggests that he is an immature version of Sokrates. In ancient Greece it was routinely expected, or at least hoped, that children would resemble their parents, and in particular that a son would resemble his father.¹⁰⁵ This is connected with the commonplace in Greek ethics (both popular and philosophical) that a child is not just a product, but a part or extension of the parental self. This means that a child simultaneously is and is not identical with its parent.¹⁰⁶ In *Theaitetos*, the expectation and implications of father-son resemblance are activated by Sokrates at the outset, when he observes that Theaitetos resembles his (biological) father Euphronios in character (144cd). This invites us to speculate on the symbolic meaning of his resemblance to Sokrates, which, as we have seen, extends not only to moral and intellectual character, but to the physical appearance that would normally be expected to link him to his biological father. We may compare Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, where Achilles' son Neoptolemos is described as indistinguishable from his father in appearance – a resemblance that focuses the larger issue of whether he will live up to him in character, and if so how.¹⁰⁷ I suggest, then, that Sokrates is presented as the symbolic father not of the ideas under scrutiny, but of Theaitetos himself.

More than one of Plato's characters refers to the founder of his own special expertise as a "forefather" (above, p. 134 n. 119). By tracing his own lineage to his mother, with no mention of a father (149a), Sokrates posits himself similarly as the founding "forefather" of philosophy. In order to fill this role, however, he must function successfully as a "father" of future philosophers, of whom Theaitetos might possibly

¹⁰⁴ At *Symp.* 192a5 Aristophanes uses "like to like" in a homoerotic context, but the point here is simply that male is attracted to male.

¹⁰⁵ Such resemblance was seen as a sign of a stable social and familial order (see Theophr. *Char.* 5.5, Hesiod *WD* 235 [with West 1978 ad loc.]; Loraux 1993: 209). Cf. also *Lach.* 181a, *Laws* 775de, *Euthyd.* 298e, *Meno* 93b–95e, *Prot.* 319eb, *Parm.* 126c, *Stat.* 307e, Hom. *Il.* 5.800–813, *Od.* 1.206–9, 4.141–50, 14.175–7, Soph. *OT* 740–43, *Aj.* 462–5, Eur. *Helen* 940–3.

¹⁰⁶ See further Blundell 1990. ¹⁰⁷ *Phil.* 356–8; see further Blundell 1988.

be one. Only thus can the philosophical enterprise produce results extending beyond its founder's death. In *Theaetetus*, this kind of concern about the future is signalled not only by the frame conversation – which takes place many years later – and the allusions to the death of Sokrates, but also by Sokrates' concern with Theaitetos' intellectual growth (below, p. 281), which may be construed as a search for his own philosophical heir. A procreative model for philosophical pedagogy in general is implied during the discussion of the Heracliteans. Sokrates suggests that these people save their teaching for their followers, whom they wish to make in their own likeness, and Theodoros dismisses the idea by saying they are not each other's students, but “spring up” randomly of their own accord, i.e. without intellectual parentage.¹⁰⁸ The implication is that self-reproduction in one's followers is the “natural” educational norm, violated by the fantastically anti-philosophical Heracliteans. This model is used explicitly in the dramatically linked dialogue *Sophist*, when the Eleatic visitor refers to Parmenides as his “father” (below, p. 320).

As Sokrates' younger self and philosophical offspring, Theaitetos is also his heir, and thus a potential link in a chain connecting him to future generations. This is suggested by the way Sokrates meets Theaitetos just before his own death, and “prophesies” the youth's future success, as if passing on the philosophical torch (142c).¹⁰⁹ As we have seen, Plato plays briefly with this kind of idea in *Republic*, where Sokrates “adopts” Polemarchos from Kephalos, and enlists him in the traditional son's role of fighting his father's battles (above, p. 177). Similarly, the present dialogue suggests that in Theaitetos we have a potential Sokrates for the future, who may carry on his struggle on behalf of philosophy. In this case, however, the process of Socratic “adoption” is aligned with “natural” inheritance by the emphasis on Theaitetos' pre-existing Socratic nature and physique. In his “paternal” role, Sokrates is taking a “naturally” Socratic child, who has already shown a tendency towards actively Socratic behavior, and educating him to resemble his adoptive “father” in occupation, as well as looks and character, just as Athenian fathers regularly passed on their own trade to their sons.¹¹⁰ Nature, training, and practice are thus brought to bear on his formation as a future Sokrates (cf. *Meno* 70a). This has optimistic implications for the future of Socratic philosophy. If others besides Sokrates have the potential to

¹⁰⁸ αὐτόματοι ἀναφύονται ὁπόθεν ἂν τύχη ἕκαστος αὐτῶν (180c).

¹⁰⁹ For the prophetic powers of those on the verge of death see above, p. 170 n. 24. For Sokrates as prophet cf. *Phdr.* 242c, 278e–279a; see also Howland 1998: 45, and above, n. 49.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Prot.* 328a; Burford 1972: 82–7; and above, p. 95 n. 209.

philosophize, a potential that may perhaps be realized through interaction with other offspring or avatars of *the* Sokrates, then the Socratic legacy may be transmitted indefinitely to equally extraordinary natures in future generations.

Plato thus uses Theaitetos to assert dramatically that though Sokrates is dead, Sokrates lives. At one point, Sokrates even hints that Theaitetos might one day surpass him. As a mere boy, Theaitetos is currently shorter than Sokrates, but he may grow “bigger” than him, without any loss to Sokrates himself (155b). This image suggests that the dialogue may be read, like Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, as a kind of coming-of-age drama. Like Neoptolemos in Sophocles’ tragedy, Theaitetos has an admirable nature (*phusis*) derived from superior ancestry, but his biological father has died, he has fallen into the hands of dubious guardians, and he has reached an educational crossroads. Both young men have an absent (dead) biological father, of whose material inheritance they have been deprived – Neoptolemos of his father’s weapons, and Theaitetos of his father’s wealth or “substance” (144d).¹¹¹ And for both of them this symbolizes a threat to their moral inheritance as adult men. Both are exposed in the course of the drama to a pair of competing father-substitutes, who may or may not succeed in helping them to develop the potential inherent in their superior *phusis*. And both meet one of these potential father figures when they have already started to be shaped by the other, at a moment when they require a new influence to usher them into adult independence. In the case of Neoptolemos, these competing father-figures are Philoktetes and Odysseus. In Plato’s drama, they are Sokrates and Theodoros.

Unlike Sokrates, Theodoros is not an Athenian but a Greek from Cyrene in North Africa (143d). Like the sophists, and the metics of *Republic* Book 1, he is a foreigner, unengaged with the political life of Athens. He is one of many intellectuals attracted to Athens from elsewhere, embedded in Athenian culture not through citizenship, but through his popularity as an educator. Like the sophists and Sokrates himself, he is one of those adult men around whom Athenian youths are eager to gather for intellectual “intercourse” (143de). He is praised not only as a mathematician, but as multi-talented. His skills include geometry, astronomy, calculation, harmony, music and literature (*mousikē*), and “everything

¹¹¹ As critics have noticed, the word “substance” (*ousia*) suggests that Theaitetos’ psychological as well as his material inheritance may be at stake (see esp. Benitez and Guimaraes 1993: 308–9). On Soph. *Phil.* see Blundell 1988, 1989: ch. 6.

to do with education” (*paideia*).¹¹² He is also familiar with the teaching of Protagoras (162e), with Homer (170e), and with myth (169ab). Though his exact age is uncertain, he is probably a few years younger than Sokrates. For the purposes of the dialogue, however, he and Sokrates are both presented as old men, and thus equivalent in authority and status. And in relation to Theaitetos they start out on an equal footing: Sokrates assures the boy that both will do their best to correct him (146c).

In the event, however, this role belongs exclusively to Sokrates. Theodoros is able to serve as matchmaker, and perhaps even impreg-nator, but takes no part in the birth or testing of Theaitetos’ ideas. His inadequacy as an adoptive intellectual parent or guardian for the orphaned Theaitetos is indicated through his relationship to the intellectual “orphan” of Protagoras, which he is both unwilling and unable to defend (164e–165a). Pleading that he turned too soon from “pure argument” (*psiloi logoi*) to the study of geometry, he proposes Theaitetos as a respondent in his place (165ab). This marks the boy’s conversation with Sokrates as a step beyond Theodoros and his teachings, and specifically beyond mathematics. Theodoros covers the range of pro-paedeutic studies prescribed for the young guardians of *Republic*, but has not reached the synoptic vision essential for dialectic.

In contrast to Theaitetos’ precocious promise, Theodoros is marked in numerous ways as a Socratic failure.¹¹³ Fighting imagery is used to mark his relationship to Sokrates as a confrontational one (169abc, 183d), as opposed to the latter’s close alliance with Theaitetos (above, p. 265). He also expects Sokrates to be annoyed at an insinuation of ugliness (143e), apparently unaware of the philosophical irrelevance of physical appearance. Immediately after praising Theaitetos’ powers of memory, he shows the weakness of his own, in contrast to that of Sokrates (144ab).¹¹⁴ And in contrast to Theaitetos’ docility, he declines, initially, to serve as an interlocutor (146b). Sokrates does make a certain amount of headway with him, eventually getting him into the role of respondent, and engaging his interest through the digression (cf. 181 b8).¹¹⁵ But when he grudgingly agrees to participate, it is only to a limited extent (169c), and he quits as soon as possible (183c). He is weak in defensive argument, and in attack is nothing but a yes-man. He prefers the digression to the cut and thrust

¹¹² 143de, 145a, cd, 169a. On the historical Theodoros see Skemp 1952: 23–4; Vlastos 1991: 274.

¹¹³ Cf. Miller 1986: 22–3. On the tension between Sokrates and Theodoros see Benitez 1996: 29–31; Miller 1980: 3–5, 8–10 (though it should not be exaggerated). For a more positive view of his role see Friedländer 1964–9: III.151, 161, 164.

¹¹⁴ McPherran 1993a: 321–2. ¹¹⁵ Cf. Klein 1965: 28–9, 1977: 107–8, 113.

of real argument (177c; cf. 176a), without seeming to understand that dialectic is the path to the life it eulogizes.

Sokrates purports to view Theodoros as a potential source of learning for himself, positioning him as an “expert” in the way that so often precedes a Socratic debunking (145d), and praises him as a lover of *logoi* (161ab). But the larger context undercuts both compliments.¹¹⁶ In another apparent compliment, Sokrates says that Theodoros does not have the character (*tropos*) of someone “childish” or “playful” (145bc). But this seriousness is not necessarily to his credit, since an element of play is essential to the Socratic philosopher.¹¹⁷ In the digression, the brave man who undertakes dialectic will come to seem no different from a child (177b). To be sure, Theodoros is also childlike, but not in an appropriately Socratic fashion (cf. 169cd). He is further infantilized by his reduction in the course of the dialogue from respected teacher to inadequate student, in counterpoint to the maturation of Theaitetos. He tries to avoid answering Sokrates, substituting Theaitetos in his place and deferring to the boy’s responses.¹¹⁸ He shirks the responsibility of his age and promotes Theaitetos to the role of intellectual “elder” by declaring that the latter can do better at argument than numerous long-bearded adults (168cde). He even seems inferior to his students in mathematical skill (above, p. 257).

This emphasis on age, and age-appropriate behavior, is reinforced by the imagery of physical exertion, especially wrestling, that runs through the dialogue.¹¹⁹ Theodoros likens Sokrates’ dialectical “wrestling” to that of the monstrous villains Skiron and Antaios (169ab), and uses the metaphor of a wrestling-match to excuse himself from participation. He argues that he is too old and stiff to be “dragged” into the ring (162b), resisting dialectical compulsion in language that anticipates the orator of the digression (above, p. 253). He is embarrassed to take a “fall” (165ab; cf. 151d), treating dialectic as an eristic struggle in which his personal vanity is at stake. Neither Theaitetos nor Sokrates, by contrast, suffers from such embarrassment (146c, 151d). Sokrates, in particular, has a passionate appetite for bouts of argument, no matter how often he is defeated.¹²⁰ Plato does not, of course, choose to dramatize any such defeats. But Sokrates claims he has often endured them, at the hands

¹¹⁶ In the latter passage, Theodoros has misunderstood Sokrates’ account of his own dialectical role (cf. 165a, 177c, and above, pp. 169–71).

¹¹⁷ Cf. e.g. 146a, 168cde, 181a; see further Polansky 1992: 44–5 and above, p. 70.

¹¹⁸ 165ab; cf. 146b, 162bc. ¹¹⁹ See Hermann 1995.

¹²⁰ 169bc; cf. 180e–181a, 183d, 190e–191a.

of a dialectical Theseus or Herakles – the heroes who conquered the monsters to which Theodoros has just likened him (169ab). He thus reinstates dialectical wrestling as the noble art of heroes, but one in which “defeat” and even monstrosity are, paradoxically, no disgrace. Despite his advanced age, Sokrates approaches such “wrestling” like the young and vigorous Theaitetos, rather than the stiff old Theodoros, presenting, as usual, a living illustration that age per se is no disqualification for dialectic. In complementary fashion, Theaitetos – like the precocious youthful Sokrates of *Parmenides* – displays a wisdom beyond his years. When Theodoros yields to the young Theaitetos, Sokrates returns to the latter, calling him “wise” – a condition that is supposed to belong to the old.¹²¹ Philosophical maturity, with the proper admixture of “childishness” or play, transcends age and its limitations at both ends of the spectrum.

After serving his time as interlocutor, Theodoros is only too eager to bow out. Like Kephalos abdicating to his younger “heir,” he orders Theaitetos to return to the role of respondent (183cd; cf. *Rep.* 331d). When Theaitetos reminds him that they have not completed this part of the inquiry, Theodoros mockingly exerts the authority of age, chastising the youth for “teaching” his elders to violate their agreements (183d). But this is precisely the charge that Theaitetos is bringing against Theodoros himself – that he has violated his own agreement – and the latter does nothing to answer this challenge to his integrity. His appeal to the authority of age is thus vitiated by his failure to live up to its responsibilities. (Theaitetos, by contrast, abides by his initial agreement made at 145c.) Unlike Kephalos, Theodoros does not actually leave the gathering, but he does depart from the conversation. We shall not hear from him again. Just as Odysseus successfully influences Neoptolemos early in *Philoctetes*, but is ignominiously dismissed before its end, so Theodoros exerts an important early influence on Theaitetos, but is silenced two thirds of the way through the dialogue, defeated by his rival for the position of surrogate father.

The parallels between Theodoros and both Kephalos and Odysseus should not be pressed, however. Kephalos’ positive qualities as a paternal figure were confined to the limited benefits derived from absorbing traditional attitudes towards justice. He displayed no intellectual potential whatsoever. Theodoros is several steps ahead of him philosophically. He stays in the conversation much longer, as both participant and listener,

¹²¹ 162c; cf. 168e, 202d.

and is an expert in the propaedeutic studies. As for Odysseus, he is presented by Sophocles only as a bad influence on Neoptolemos, which threatens to derail the latter from the fulfilment of the heroic potential signified by his Achillean inheritance. Theodoros, by contrast, represents a valuable and indeed necessary stage in the education of the truly philosophical nature. Nevertheless, it is a stage that must be left behind if that nature is to reach its full potential.

This reading of *Theaetetus* as a coming-of-age drama is reinforced by its concern with the transition to adult manhood, as expressed both by “Protagoras” and by Sokrates himself (168b1–2, 173ab). The same kind of concern underlies the emphasis, noted earlier, on the ability of the young to progress under Sokrates’ influence. Such progress is not easy: the ability to reason about abstractions is something developed with difficulty, over time and through education (186bc). It even requires divine favor (150d). But it is not impossible. Early in the discussion, when Theaitetos is discouraged by his inability to discover by himself what knowledge is, Sokrates heartens him by suggesting that he already has a potential setting him apart from the other boys, which will be fully realized only in his prime (148c). As the conversation proceeds, Sokrates attributes Theaitetos’ present uncertainty to his youth, and explicitly concerns himself with the boy’s growth.¹²² The opening conversation gives us further reason for optimism about Theaitetos’ future, for he is eulogized at the time of his death, when he is well past the age of “youth.”¹²³ And we are reassured that Sokrates’ “prophecy” of his future excellence was not misplaced (142d).

This optimism about Theaitetos’ potential for intellectual growth is not merely asserted, but dramatized. His conversation with Sokrates takes him on an educational journey requiring a progressively more sophisticated level of understanding and intellectual engagement.¹²⁴ His memory also improves as he goes along.¹²⁵ And like Neoptolemos in Sophocles’ play, he becomes progressively more assertive as his youthful

¹²² 162d, 163c, 187b, 189d.

¹²³ He probably died in 369 BCE, i.e. at about the age of forty-five (see Guthrie 1978: 63 and cf. below, p. 304). He thus attains the age of an “elder” (*presbutēs*) but not that of an “old man” (*gerōn*). On these age categories see above, p. 213 n. 163.

¹²⁴ Burnyeat instructs the reader, “Your task in Part I is to *find* the meaning in the text and follow the argument to a satisfactory conclusion. In Part II you are challenged to *respond* to the meaning in the text by overcoming the problems and paradoxes that it leaves unresolved. In Part III the task is nothing less than to *create* from the text a meaning which will solve the problem of knowledge” (1990: xii–xiii). He further suggests that Part I of his own discussion is aimed at undergraduates, Part II to graduate students, and Part III to colleagues (1990: xii).

¹²⁵ Cf. 144a7, 157c7, 197a8, 201c, 205c, 207de, 208c, 209e.

hesitation is overcome. This increasing boldness is encouraged and applauded by Sokrates.¹²⁶ Shortly after Theodoros has been silenced, Sokrates praises the boy's increasing confidence, as boding well for the future (187bc). During the progress of this argument Theaitetos takes an active role, in particular by producing a characteristically Platonic supporting example to reinforce his agreement with Sokrates. At this, Sokrates comments on Theaitetos' lack of awe for him (189cd). Although he speaks here in a teasing vein, drawing attention to an oxymoron in Theaitetos' language, the comment suggests that the boy is progressing towards argument on an equal footing with Sokrates himself (who stands in awe, of course, of no-one). This impression is confirmed when Sokrates refrains from challenging his paradoxical language, so as not to undermine his confidence (189d). Part of Sokrates' role, it seems, is to overcome Theaitetos' youthful bashfulness and shape his development as a good father might be expected to do.¹²⁷ He ends the dialogue by commenting on the boy's progress and planning to resume the following day (210bc).

Theaitetos' specially intimate relationship with Sokrates, together with these signs of growth under his influence, help to position him as Sokrates' rightful heir, his hope for the future of dialectic. The nature and significance of this relationship may be further clarified by looking at both Sokrates and Theodoros in relation to their own intellectual forebears. Theodoros' "teacher" from the previous generation was Protagoras, to whom he shows a strong personal allegiance (179a; cf. 171c11).¹²⁸ But it was Parmenides who influenced the youthful Sokrates (183e–184a). Sokrates implies a quasi-filial relationship towards the aged Parmenides, together with a suitably filial respect, by describing him in the words used by Helen in the *Iliad* to her father-in-law Priam, king of Troy. Like Priam, Parmenides is "reverend and awe-inspiring" (183e; cf. 181b).¹²⁹

¹²⁶ 141e, 145c5, 151e, 157d, 200c, 203e, 204b, 205a.

¹²⁷ In Athenian culture education was generally viewed as the province of the father, in complement to the nurturing role of the mother (Golden 1990: 103; cf. *Soph.* 229e–230a).

¹²⁸ See further below, pp. 286–7. Protagoras was some twenty years older than Sokrates. One might expect Theodoros' outlook, qua mathematician, to be very different from that of Protagoras. But he is unable to see anything wrong with the Protagorean definition of knowledge (161a), and his outlook can be linked with Protagoreanism in various ways, such as his taste for long speeches (cf. 177c) and incapacity for disinterested argument. In a strikingly Protagorean touch, Theodoros claims to rely on persuasion to get out of both wrestling contests and dialectical arguments (162b). Like Theodoros, "Protagoras" is not a playful character (168cd; cf. Lee 1973: 257–8 and above, p. 279), and is sensitive to the embarrassment of being refuted (166a). See further e.g. Miller 1980: 5; Polansky 1992: 72, 110–11, 117–18; Howland 1998: 50–51, 65–75.

¹²⁹ At *Parm.* 130e Parmenides addresses Sokrates in a paternalistic tone similar to Sokrates' own manner towards Theaitetos (cf. *Tht.* 162d).

Theaitetos is thus poised not only between two father-figures, but between two intellectual “grandfathers.” He has already been influenced by Protagoras, whose works he has read (152a), and whose “orphan” is also his own first “child,” as “delivered” by Sokrates. But now he is eager to hear about Parmenides (183cd). We are thus offered two alternative lines of intellectual reproduction: Parmenides–Sokrates–Theaitetos versus Protagoras–Theodoros–Theaitetos.

These two lines of descent are marked by sharply different attitudes towards pedagogy. Theaitetos’ description of Theodoros’ teaching suggests straightforward demonstration, and within the dialogue, Theodoros seems to endorse an unthinking acceptance of authority.¹³⁰ Qua learner, he prefers listening passively to the extended speech of the digression over active participation in argument. Similarly, though familiar with the ideas of his teacher, Protagoras, he is neither willing nor able to engage with them, and for this reason loses his own pedagogical authority over Theaitetos. As for Sokrates, he seems to endorse Theodoros’ authoritarianism (146bc), suggesting, perhaps, that this is appropriate to an earlier, more passive stage of the boy’s development. But he treats the teachings of his own father-figure as something to be not passively accepted, but examined when they have due leisure (183e–184a). Despite the fact that he declines to undertake this project in the present dialogue, it is clear that Sokrates does not view Parmenides as immune to scrutiny.¹³¹ And he does teach Theaitetos to engage in an active fashion with his other potential “grandfather,” Protagoras. He thus intervenes in the passive conveyance of “knowledge” from sophist to impressionable youth, counteracting the paternal authoritarianism of Theodoros’ pedagogy. He fosters critical thinking in the young Theaitetos, and explicitly discourages the boy from holding himself in awe (189cd). And though he blames those associates who leave his company too soon, he does so in terms implying that there is a proper time for such independence (150e). So despite his appropriation of the paternal role, Sokrates is not paternalistic in a conventional, authoritarian sense. Rather, he becomes Theaitetos’ “father” by eschewing any such role. Paradoxically, it is only by encouraging a *lack* of passive reverence for a father-figure that the irreverent Sokrates can hope to reproduce himself in Theaitetos.

As we have seen, there are risks in encouraging this kind of imitation of Sokrates. Intellectual independence may lead to rejection of the deeper

¹³⁰ 147d; cf. 146bc, 162a, 165b.

¹³¹ He will receive such scrutiny at the hands of the Eleatic visitor in *Sophist*, without any hint of Socratic disapproval.

values that Sokrates stands for (above, pp. 104–5). But this danger is short-circuited by the pre-existing likeness between Sokrates and Theaitetos. The independence that Sokrates encourages will develop within a matrix of fundamentally Socratic values. Their likeness also circumvents another kind of risk, which we saw adumbrated in the case of Polemarchos. The power of Sokrates' personality and argumentative skills is such that it may induce over-eager acquiescence in his methods and arguments as opposed to real intellectual independence – a loss as opposed to a development of self. But the fact that Theaitetos already resembles Sokrates in fundamental respects, coupled with his youthful potential for growth, makes his adoption of Socratic values into a form of self-construction. For Theaitetos to become more like Sokrates is to become, paradoxically, more like his “true” self.

The “parental” relationship between Sokrates and Theaitetos is a species of *philia*, a word that is usually translated “friendship,” but embraces all kinds of reciprocally beneficial relationships, including family ties and political alliances.¹³² Like the erotic model, the parental model of *philia* is normally construed as asymmetrical, and as such accords with the evident differences in age, experience and authority between Sokrates and Theaitetos.¹³³ But *philia* may also obtain between equals; indeed, this is its most highly idealized form.¹³⁴ In contrast to asymmetrical forms of *philia*, the friendship of equals is modelled on the relationship of brothers.¹³⁵ It reaches its mythical apotheosis in Castor and Pollux, twin brothers and patrons of aristocratic friendship, each of whom was willing to die for the other, and who ended up eternally united as a pair of stars (the constellation Gemini).¹³⁶ The principle that like is attracted to like is often posited as the foundation for such friendship (above, p. 265). Aristotle even says “equality and likeness” are friendship (*EN* 1159b2–3). Aristotle's own view of *philia* is distinctive, but it is grounded in the traditional views expressed by the proverbs he cites: a friend is a “second self,” and friends share a single soul.¹³⁷ These expressions capture the shared identity of

¹³² See Connor 1971; Blundell 1989: ch. 2.

¹³³ The benefits given by the parent – life and nurture – are deemed so great that they can never be fully repaid (cf. Blundell 1989: 40–42).

¹³⁴ For the proverb “equality is friendship” see *Arist. EN* 1168b8, *EE* 1240b2, and cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 535–40; Cooper 1980: 307.

¹³⁵ Cf. *Rep.* 362d and see Blundell 1989: 42 n. 81. Note that the absence of primogeniture placed brothers on an equal footing in Athenian law.

¹³⁶ Burnett 1983: 129; Golden 1990: 115–8.

¹³⁷ *Arist. EN* 1166a31–2, 1168b7, 1169b6–7, 1170b6–7, *EE* 1240b1–7, 1245a29–35. For further examples see Blundell 1989: 40 n. 66; Price 1989: 110.

two friends, just as the idiom of the divided soul (discussed above) conveys the possibility of internal divisions that should be resolved in harmony. In an ideal friendship, both these criteria will be met.

Aristotle grounds fraternal *philia* in the many sources of likeness between brothers: likeness of origin, blood, age, character, upbringing and education; this makes it an extreme case of the *philia* of “comrades” (*hetairoi*).¹³⁸ This word is often used for groups of “friends” (*philoï*) outside the family, whether social, political or philosophical. Thus in *Theaetetus* the followers of Heraclitus are called his “comrades,”¹³⁹ as are Theaitetos’ age-mates.¹⁴⁰ Protagoras is a “comrade” of Theodoros,¹⁴¹ and Theodoros of Sokrates.¹⁴² The word is not confined to age-mates, but it does suggest a relationship of peers – brotherhood or comradeship – rather than a hierarchical dyad.¹⁴³ It may therefore be significant that with one exception (149a7), Sokrates addresses Theaitetos as “comrade” only in the final pages of the dialogue, and then does so repeatedly.¹⁴⁴ Such a shift in usage may give further credence to the notion that Theaitetos is growing towards a relationship of greater equality with Sokrates.

This offers us a third paradigm onto which to map the resemblance between Theaitetos and Sokrates. Their physical and philosophical likeness not only posits Theaitetos as Sokrates’ “son,” but reinforces a sense of reciprocal identity between them. He is Sokrates’ alter ego, not simply as a child is an extension or “part” of the father, but as a friend is “another self.” In so far as conversing with Theaitetos is like conversing with Sokrates (and vice versa), they are partners in an ideal friendship of equals. This equation of self with other is reinforced by Sokrates’ implication that Theaitetos is a mirror in which he may learn about himself (144d). In *Alcibiades I*, the image of the mirror is used to explore the concept of self-knowledge, specifically the self-understanding achieved by a soul regarding another soul.¹⁴⁵ The same metaphor appears in an

¹³⁸ *EN* 1161b30–36, 1162a9–15. Aristotle even denies that “brotherly” friendship exists if brothers are far apart in age (*EN* 1161a4–6). Cf. also *Phdr.* 240c.

¹³⁹ 179d8; cf. 180b6, *Soph.* 216a3. ¹⁴⁰ 144c2; cf. *Soph.* 218a8.

¹⁴¹ 161b8, 168c3, 168e7, 171c8, 183b7. The historical Protagoras was considerably older than Sokrates and Theodoros, but he is envisaged in the dialogue at the age he was at death, i.e. around seventy. His resurrection thus produces a kind of spurious equality of age between all three older men.

¹⁴² 161d8, 168c8, 177b1, 180e5, 181e5.

¹⁴³ Members of the aristocratic political clubs known as *hetaireiai* (i.e. groups of “comrades”) were “usually of roughly the same age and social standing” (Connor 1971: 26).

¹⁴⁴ 203b9, 207c6, 208b8. Note also that references to Theaitetos’ youthfulness, though they persist, are reduced in the latter part of the dialogue (above, n. 22 and p. 259).

¹⁴⁵ 132d–133b; see Halperin 1986: 69–70. Eades suggests that the likeness between Sokrates and Theaitetos points to the importance of self-knowledge in this dialogue too (1996: 250).

erotic context in *Phaedrus* (255d), where it underwrites the perfect identity and reciprocity of the ideal lovers.¹⁴⁶ It is also used in the Aristotelian *Magna Moralia* in an exploration of the idea of a friend as a second self.¹⁴⁷ Its philosophical significance for our dialogue is enhanced by Sokrates' repeated emphasis on the fact that his "testing" of others is also a form of self-scrutiny (above, n. 1). With inferior interlocutors, as we have seen, this use of the other to examine the self imposes limitations on the elenctic Sokrates' ability to test, improve, or learn about himself. Only if he can explore the ideas of someone who is in some sense equal to himself can these limitations be overcome.

There is an obvious tension between the idea that Theaitetos is Sokrates' alter ego and the parental model, which posits him as Sokrates' junior and inferior partner. But this is mitigated, at least to some extent, by the suggestion that Theaitetos is growing up. We should also recall Theaitetos' relationship to young Sokrates, who represents his potential to participate in a Socratic relationship on an equal footing (above, pp. 261–2). We may suppose that Theaitetos, besides being drawn to Sokrates because of their likeness, is growing towards increasing assimilation to the Socratic paradigm. This will be a loss of self, as it is for the orator of the digression (177b), and in general for those who flee from their former selves towards philosophy (168a). But for one who so closely resembles Sokrates, the loss of self is only superficial. On a more profound level, it is a kind of self-discovery and self-formation. To put it another way, Theaitetos, like Sokrates and the guardians of *Republic*, willingly cooperates in being "dragged" towards the truth (cf. 181a). This process takes place through dialectic, for which Theaitetos has a pre-existing talent precisely because he is already like Sokrates. Continuing practice will lead him to internal and external consistency of thinking (*homologein*), enabling him to move away from the quagmire of subjectivity towards the abstract philosophical ideal of "likeness to god." By becoming more and more like his philosophical friend, he will become more and more like the god that Sokrates already resembles.¹⁴⁸

The nature of philosophical friendship between equals, like the parental model, is further explored through the contrasting figure of Theodoros. Theodoros refuses to be implicated in the refutation of Protagoras, his friend and "comrade," despite the fact that he apparently

¹⁴⁶ For later uses of the mirror image in erotic contexts see Halperin 1986: 62–3.

¹⁴⁷ 1213a10–26; see further Cooper 1980: 320–24.

¹⁴⁸ Similarly the lover of *Phdr.* is attracted to a beloved who resembles himself and his patron god, then strives to make the boy still more like himself and that god (252d–253c).

does not share his views (162a).¹⁴⁹ Yet he cannot defend this “friend,” since he agrees with the Socratic principle that one should not answer contrary to one’s real opinion (162a). When Sokrates goes on to assault Protagoras relentlessly, Theodoros can only say that his “comrade” is being pushed too hard, to which Sokrates replies that the question is how far to push towards the truth (171c).¹⁵⁰ The only time Theodoros perks up and has plenty to say is in his enthusiastic disparagement of the Heracliteans (179d–180c). According to Sokrates, their incoherent views are intimately linked with Protagorean relativism. Yet Theodoros is eager to undertake the “danger” of critiquing them (181b), now that the direct object of scrutiny is no longer his own friend (180b). His philosophical *philia* is deficient, not because he lacks the general friendliness necessary for dialectic, but because he allows personal ties to stand in the way of the honest rational scrutiny of ideas. He exemplifies, from an intellectual perspective, one of the deficiencies of the morality of helping friends and harming enemies, as critiqued in *Republic* Book 1, namely uncritical loyalty to a personal friend (cf. *Rep.* 334b–e). He thus provides us with a negative exemplar through which to understand the nature of authentic philosophical *philia*, which should combine personal loyalty, friendliness, and respect with an intellectual detachment that allows one to criticize the ideas of a friend, whether in the guise of “comrade” or “father.”

All three models for the relationship between Theaitetos and Sokrates considered so far – philosophical pederasty, fatherhood and *philia* between equals – provide ways of configuring the relationship of the self with others. To these a further, paradoxical, model may be added, namely that of self-love, or *philia* with the self. For Sokrates, conversing with Theaitetos is like conversing with (a part of) himself, in so far as Theaitetos is his “son” and alter ego. Their relationship thus dramatically enacts a form of self-love, as well as the internal dialectical relationship that just is thinking. As a form of *philia*, self-love approaches the ideal of friendship between equals. But this is obviously problematic. In as much as *philia* is an intrinsically relational concept, the very notion of self-love, as it appears in Greek thought, expresses the fundamental tension between self and other. Self-love is generally assumed to be natural and valuable, but also (at least potentially) selfish, and thus destructive of *philia* towards

¹⁴⁹ Cf. 164e–165a. Sokrates, however, views him as implicated in Theaitetos’ answers (162e–163a).

¹⁵⁰ This parallels Aristotle’s famous remark about friendship and philosophy (“though both are dear, piety demands that we give greater respect to the truth”) (*EN* 1096a16).

others, which depends on valuing another person as oneself and even giving them precedence at times.¹⁵¹

This difficulty emerges sharply from Aristotle's discussion of *philia* towards the self. On the one hand, he derives the fundamentals of *philia* from one's relationship to oneself (*EN* 1166a1–b2). On the other hand, he is well aware of the common association of self-love with selfishness, and the resulting tension between *philia* towards self and other.¹⁵² He must therefore wrestle with such paradoxes as whether a virtuous person will "selfishly" seize for himself all opportunities for virtuous action, or generously offer some of them to his friend, who is, after all his "second self" (*EN* 1169a16–b1). A similar tension is apparent in his "deduction" of all kinds of familial *philia* from the basic parental model, whereby the child is an extension or "part" of the self (*EN* 1161b16–1162a4). In *Theaetetus* Plato engages with the same set of paradoxes in a rather different way, both through the dialogue's epistemological concern with individuation, and on the level of dramatic form, where it has implications for the ethics of dialogue. In both authors these paradoxes arise from an attempt to view the other as self and the self as other. Just as Aristotle, along with traditional wisdom, defines the friend as another self, to be treated as such and valued for his or her own sake, so Plato represents Sokrates' conversation with a friend as a conversation with a mirror of his self. And just as Aristotle worries about the right way to treat both one's self (viewed as other), and another (viewed as oneself) in an ideal philosophical friendship, so Plato worries about how to converse dialectically with that self-as-other and other-as-self.

These anxieties take on further significance in the context of Plato's more general concern to individuate Sokrates as unique. This concern is memorably and forcefully expressed in this particular work through the image of the midwife (cf. 149a). Theaitetos too is unique, at least in Theodoros' experience (144ab; cf. 145b). But as we have seen, he is represented as significantly similar to Sokrates in many different ways (above, pp. 260–65). Most strikingly, only he, of all Plato's characters, shares in the strangely ugly features that betoken Socratic uniqueness. But, of course, the closer Theaitetos approaches to Sokrates in these various ways, the less unambiguously unique Sokrates becomes. The resemblance between them thus works against the overall Platonic picture of an incomparable Sokrates. This tension is mitigated (or evaded), however, by Theaitetos' extreme youth. Although he has the same features as Sokrates, he has

¹⁵¹ See Blundell 1989: 35, 39–40, 50.

¹⁵² *EN* 1168a28–1169b2, *EE* 1240a9–b38. See further Annas 1977; Blundell 1990.

them to a lesser degree (143e), thus reinstating Sokrates' uniqueness and cautioning us not to identify Theaitetos with him too closely. If he is, in a sense, Sokrates, he is a future Sokrates, who at the moment cannot compete with *the* Sokrates in either skill or imagination. Plato thus manages to present us, as usual, with a unique Sokrates, while simultaneously suggesting that Theaitetos will one day end up as his equal. His employment of dramatic rather than argumentative techniques for this purpose, together with the absence of authorial assertion entailed by the dialogue form, enables him to have his cake and eat it, to evade – but not to resolve – the tension between Sokrates' uniqueness and his capacity for self-(re)production.

CUTTING THE CORD

The larger philosophical significance of these tensions emerges from the digression that lies at the heart of the dialogue. Factors that confer a particular human identity are here associated not with the philosopher, but with his antitype, the orator. This person is a “slave” operating on the level of the personal, his performance circumscribed by temporal constraints, the institutional procedures of the lawcourts, and the personal agendas of specific individuals: his opponent, his audience and himself (172d–173b). The philosopher, by contrast, is incompetent and ridiculous in court, knowing of no personal abuse or praise to use as ammunition (174cd).¹⁵³ He also eschews the other cultural institutions that defined the identity of an adult male Athenian citizen: the *agora*, the city council, laws and decrees, political clubs (*hetaireiai*) with their struggles for office, and social events such as parties, dinners and revelry with flute-girls (173cd). He has no respect for birth, wealth, status or ancestry (whether male or female), seeing no significant difference between a king and a slave or a foreigner and a Greek (173d, 174d–175b). He is incompetent in social “intercourse” with individuals (συγγιγνόμενος . . . ἐκόστω), in private as well as in public, and cannot even recognize his neighbor as a human

¹⁵³ He evokes in many ways the philosopher of *Rep.*, who has no time to “look down” from eternal realities to quarrelsome human affairs (500bc), endures mockery on returning to the cave, especially in the courtroom (517d; cf. also *Gorg.* 484cde), has no personal interest in public life (519c–521b), and studies astronomy and geometry (526c–530c). Most of the features of Athenian life eschewed by the philosopher of the digression have also been banished from the guardians' lives (cf. Nightingale 1995: 59). It is sometimes claimed that the ideal philosopher of the digression lacks the societal involvement of the guardians, but the latter are notoriously reluctant to participate in governing the *polis*. In any case, the philosopher of the digression does not live in an ideal state. He is more like the philosopher who sits out the storm under a wall (*Rep.* 496d).

being (174abc). Temporal, physical and numerical assessments of worth are trivial to him (174e–175b). In short, his values are utterly at odds with those of his community, as his aberrant sense of humor signifies.¹⁵⁴ Moreover he spurns all the features that make a person individual: body, gender, class, material possessions, community values, birth, social hierarchy and human interaction, practical occupations and pastimes, political and civic identity, Greekness and even humanness itself. All these are “particulars . . . lying at one’s feet,” which must be abandoned as obstructions to the philosophic life.¹⁵⁵ Oblivious to the physical world, he pursues such abstract and universal studies as geometry and astronomy (173e–174a). He is actually said to leave behind his body – and the particularity it entails – in the *polis*, while his mind (*dianoia*) flies off to seek out the universal and distant (173e). In Thomas Nagel’s famous phrase, he seeks a “view from nowhere.”¹⁵⁶

Though posited as human, then, the ideal philosopher is explicitly deprived of the traits composing a recognizable human being. He therefore remains off-stage in the Platonic drama, not simply out of artistic choice, but from necessity. His absence clarifies the way in which Plato’s dramatic – as opposed to discursive – explorations of better and worse philosophical types are circumscribed by the need to attribute individuating qualities to his dramatis personae. Like the abstract divinity to whom he is assimilated, the philosopher who cannot recognize his neighbor as a human being is literally unrepresentable as a dialectical partner, since it is impossible to envisage him participating in rational discourse.¹⁵⁷ This emerges vividly from the fact that on a literal interpretation of the digression, the ideal philosopher can only be understood as dead, since his mind has left his body and winged its way under the earth or into the sky (173e).¹⁵⁸ Or perhaps he is merely blind and deaf, since he cannot read or hear written or spoken laws (173d). By normative human

¹⁵⁴ 174d, 175b, 175d.

¹⁵⁵ τὰ δ’ ἐν ποσίν . . . καὶ ἐν ἐκάστοις (175b). On the interplay between particularity and rational abstraction on the discursive level of this dialogue see esp. Desjardins 1990: 164–7.

¹⁵⁶ Nagel 1986; cf. also Nightingale 1995: 51–2. All this helps to account for the comic aspects of the description, since comedy often explores fantastical ideal (or surreal) worlds (cf. above, p. 72). But these elements do not disqualify the philosopher of the digression from serious consideration as an ideal, any more than do the comic touches in Plato’s various portrayals of Sokrates. Indeed Sokrates often emphasizes that the philosopher will seem comic by conventional standards – a point stressed in the digression itself (172c, 174a–175b).

¹⁵⁷ Contrast the ideal philosophers of *Rep.*, who are kept off-stage, but are not in principle unrepresentable as sane and rational human beings.

¹⁵⁸ This aspect of the digression may have originated with the Pythagoreans (R. July 1994). It evokes ideas about the separate existence of the mind or soul to be found both in Plato (e.g. *Phd.* 67c–68c, *Phdr.* 249d–250c) and elsewhere (e.g. Eur. *Helen* 1014–16). Cf. also the comic view of Socratic philosophers as “half-dead” (Ar. *Clouds* 504).

standards he is also, if not dead, clearly insane: he hears people talking, but he cannot understand them, and thinks that kings are goatherds (174de).¹⁵⁹ We may recall Theaitetos' examples of obviously false opinions: the insane believe that they are gods, and dreamers that they are flying.¹⁶⁰ To become "like god" is to depart from lived humanity as such. From Socrates' idiosyncratic perspective, to become more like god is apparently to become more fully human.¹⁶¹ We may therefore be more truly "ourselves" after death, when the soul has indeed been separated from the body.¹⁶² But by normal Greek standards a living person who does not need human society is, in Aristotle's words, either sub-human or superhuman, "a beast or a god."¹⁶³ By seeking to evade the groundedness of knowledge and identity in specific human experience, Plato seems to strive to break the boundaries of the framework he has set himself through his choice of dramatic form. Yet he never does abandon that framework, choosing instead to extol through Sokrates an ideal that cannot be dramatically represented, and thus implicitly acknowledging the inadequacy of the ideal in question as a model for actual human life. As always, Plato's employment of dramatic form obliges us to acknowledge the specific circumstances that condition every human attempt to transcend humanity.

The price of detachment thus seems to be the philosopher's very humanity. High though this price undoubtedly is, the call for such detachment can be better understood in light of the dialogue's critique of the views of Protagoras and the Heracliteans. For it is specificity and variation, especially as related to embodiment, that generate disagreements among human beings, which in turn lead to a chaotic and unstable epistemic outlook (cf. especially 170a–172b). It is to escape this quagmire that the philosopher must "flee" human particularity (176a–177a). Moreover the fact that the philosopher of the digression is incoherent as an actual human being does not necessarily disqualify him from serving as some kind of abstract ideal or *paradeigma* for living, embodied persons (cf. 176e). Nor does it make him into an anti-model or a proof of the impossibility of philosophy. Like the ideal state of *Republic*, this *paradeigma* may be inaccessible to embodied human beings in any literal sense, yet still valuable as a source of inspiration lying beyond what it is in our embodied

¹⁵⁹ For the inference from "mindlessness" to "insanity" see e.g. *Ion* 534cd, 536d. For philosophical "madness" cf. *Phdr.* 249de, *Symp.* 218b.

¹⁶⁰ 158b; cf. 162c, *Soph.* 263ab.

¹⁶¹ Lovibond 1991: 55; see further Annas 1999: ch. 3; Hobbs 2000: 158–62, 249; above, p. 124.

¹⁶² Cf. *Gorg.* 524d, *Phd.* 523c, *Rep.* 611bcd. ¹⁶³ *Pol.* 1253a27–9; cf. 1253a4, *Rep.* 329a8.

nature to become.¹⁶⁴ Through structural as opposed to slavish mimesis, it is possible to emulate it without seeking to become precisely what it is.

Sokrates himself, in the digression, acknowledges the impossibility of his own ideal of complete philosophical detachment for embodied human beings. At the exact center of the dialogue, he observes that evil (τὸ κακόν) is ineluctible, and intrinsically bound up with the material world, the particularity of human life within it, and the possibility of goodness.¹⁶⁵ Such particularity, together with the multiplicity it engenders and the evil it bears with it, is intrinsic to the human condition. The ultimate goal of “likeness to god” is only to be attained “as far as is possible” under these circumstances.¹⁶⁶ How is this to be achieved, or fostered in others? Within the dialogue, Sokrates enacts the latter by leading Theaitetos away from the misapprehensions introduced by the embodied nature that unites him with, but also divides him from, other human beings. The dialogue dramatizes this difficult but crucial first step away from the particular by exploring the inadequacies of a view of knowledge based directly on sense-impressions. The problem of transcending human individuality, explored on a dramatic level through Theaitetos’ resemblance to Sokrates, is played out on a discursive level through his struggle to reach a concept of knowledge that acknowledges the evidence of the senses while transcending them.

For this process to be effective, however, one must be endowed with certain qualities of character, which enable one to negotiate between human commitments and the disembodied ideal. Just as the ideal philosopher lacks personal attachments to the *polis* or its members, so the Socratic interlocutor must lack any such attachment to ideas that have been shaped by his particular human perspective. The digression suggests that such a person will be radically abstracted from the specifics of human life that constitute the individual self, in direct contrast to Protagoras’ radical subjectivism.¹⁶⁷ Just as Theaitetos’ beauty or ugliness should play no part in an impartial judgment of his philosophical potential, so we should rid ourselves as far as possible of the other biases to which we are prone simply as a result of inhabiting human bodies. These two forms of detachment, from embodied human life and from our own ideas, are

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Rep.* 472b–473a; Polansky 1992: 144–5.

¹⁶⁵ 176a; cf. also *Stat.* 273bc. The location of the passage is pointed out by Polansky 1992: 141. On the significance of mid-points in Plato’s dialogues cf. Thesleff 1993: 19–36.

¹⁶⁶ 176b; for the qualification cf. *Ep. VII* 344bc, *Laws* 697b1, 713e8, *Phd.* 66a, *Rep.* 383c, 613b1, *Symp.* 212a, *Stat.* 273b2–3, 274a6, 311c5, *Tim.* 90c.

¹⁶⁷ On the digression as a response to Protagoreanism see Lee 1973; Barker 1976; Niehues-Pröbsting 1982.

related, since embeddedness in human community, with its hostilities and loyalties to particular people and institutions, is what generates an inappropriate emotional attachment to one's own point of view. This is exemplified in Theodoros, with his fear of being thought biased by physical beauty (143e), and the distorting attachment to Protagoras that prevents him from critiquing the latter's ideas in a disinterested fashion.

Yet just as true philosophical friendship requires loyalty along with detachment, so too emotional detachment from one's individual point of view must be accompanied by a sincere commitment to the argument as such. Personal attachments must be subordinated to a new kind of loyalty, to philosophy or the *logos* in its own right. Yet personal attachments are not completely eliminated. Rather they are subsumed, as a necessary prerequisite for philosophical progress, into a community of like-minded lovers of argument and truth, like the community portrayed both dramatically and discursively in *Republic*. Just as it is hard to distinguish *erōs* for philosophy from *erōs* for Sokrates (above, p. 107), so too Sokrates' own love of argument (*philologia*) is implicated in his desire for everyone present to become "friends" by sharing in dialectic (146a). Theodoros, by contrast, represents the participants' *logoi* as their slaves, suggesting that he lacks not only a proper detachment from personal ties, but also the right kind of intellectual commitment, which involves not enslaving the argument but submitting to its authority and following where it leads (173c; cf. 191a).

The twofold demand for commitment and detachment is implicit in Sokrates' image of the midwife. In Greek cultural terms, biological motherhood is the most powerful of all natural bonds of *philia*.¹⁶⁸ By positing the interlocutor in this role, the midwife image establishes an exceptionally close personal involvement between the idea under scrutiny and the person from whom it is elicited. Even if the argument is derived from, or "fathered" by, someone else (such as a sophist), and "delivered" by a third party (such as Sokrates), it remains the interlocutor's *own* offspring. Yet once a child is born, it becomes an individual distinct from its mother. Similarly, after the interlocutor's offspring has been "delivered" for public scrutiny, it exists in detachment from him. Despite his "pregnancy" and "motherhood," he must have the (manly) courage to sever his personal involvement once the umbilical cord is cut, exposing even his own most cherished beliefs to impartial examination

¹⁶⁸ See Blundell 1989: 40–51; 1990: 224, 226–7; Golden 1990: 97–9. Sokrates gives motherhood further symbolic significance in his account of his own genealogy (149a).

(160e–161a).¹⁶⁹ The midwife image helps Sokrates to clarify the notion that it is the idea rather than its bearer that is under scrutiny, while retaining the close relationship between “offspring” and “parent.”

The midwife analogy is one of a series of Platonic images that feminizes Sokrates, conveying thereby one aspect of his paradoxical, socially transgressive character. But it also feminizes the interlocutor, to whom it ascribes the quintessentially female processes of pregnancy and birth. This analogy is potentially highly demeaning for a free Athenian male. “Labor pains” (151b), in particular, are strongly evocative of the female body’s association with weakness and suffering.¹⁷⁰ This places the Socratic interlocutor in a delicate position, reminiscent of that of the stereotypical boy “beloved” (*erōmenos*) in classical Athens. As an object of male desire, presumed to be erotically passive, the *erōmenos* has a quasi-feminine role; but as a citizen boy, he will grow up to be a “real” man, and must therefore not be physically penetrated, since this would “feminize” him beyond redemption.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Theaitetos’ extreme youth makes it appropriate – rather than demeaning – for him to be dominated intellectually by Sokrates. In contrast to more adult interlocutors, he has no reason to feel his manhood challenged and grow angry. But just as Plato ultimately insists on Sokrates’ manly prowess, so too the interlocutor must not be excessively “feminized” by the implications of the midwife analogy.

Sokrates circumvents this risk by several means. To begin with, by taking on himself the role of midwife, instead of father, he saves his interlocutor from the humiliation of an erotically “passive” or “feminine” sexual role – the role that enables real women to reach the state of pregnancy.¹⁷² He also acknowledges the delicacy of his interlocutors’ position by emphasizing the peculiarity of his own role as a male midwife of men, assigning the female (physical) realm to his mother (210cd). Finally, the successful interlocutor is remasculinized through his participation in the “testing” of the “baby.” The interlocutor who behaves like a biological mother misunderstands the true nature of dialectic by acting as if a

¹⁶⁹ The cutting of the cord was a function of the midwife, and a crucial moment in the rituals of birth (Garland 1990: 63). Philosophically, it is the moment at which one person becomes two, when the infant moves from being a “part” to “another self” (cf. above, p. 288). Compare Theodoros’ desire to “seize” an argument (*logos*) from the Heracliteans – who will not give it up of their own accord – and objectify it by treating it like a mathematical problem (180c).

¹⁷⁰ For the “femininity” of the suffering body see Zeitlin 1996: 349–52.

¹⁷¹ He would lose his civic rights for adopting such a “feminine” sexual role (Dover 1989: 103–5; Halperin 1990: 94–9).

¹⁷² Plato performs a similar maneuver in *Symp.* by having the lover be pregnant before he meets his object of desire (206c).

real part of himself were under assault. But the ideal interlocutor remains unperturbed at the prospect of critically examining and even repudiating his own “offspring.” He thus moves from the role of the mother to that of the (putatively more rational and detached) father, whose decision it was, in Athenian practice, to expose unwanted children after birth. He collaborates in this “paternal” role with Sokrates himself. But the denial of an *overtly* “paternal” role to Sokrates leaves the role of “father” of his own “offspring” tacitly available for the interlocutor as well. Characteristically, Plato’s use of sexual and reproductive models transcends gender roles in a way that simultaneously appropriates and displaces the female.¹⁷³ Women’s generative power is appropriated for men, while the procreative function of the female is elided, and the “feminine” is repudiated as an irrational subjective attachment to one’s “own.”

As we have seen, Theodoros violates the criterion of detachment by refusing to critique the ideas of his personal friend Protagoras. It is violated in a different way by “Protagoras” himself, with his “personal, proprietary concern for the well-being of his own offspring.”¹⁷⁴ He thus resembles the many Socratic interlocutors who grow angry when their offspring is disposed of, “like women after their first birth” (151 cd). As we saw earlier, this kind of reaction is neither surprising nor unreasonable (above, pp. 124–5). Since one’s ideas form part of a self constituted by such factors as birth, social status, and various public and private roles (the very factors spurned by the philosopher of the digression), the interlocutor is often quite right to feel himself to be under assault. Similarly, there is no reason why the orator of the digression, who occupies a position diametrically opposed to that of the philosopher, should acquiesce in the latter’s “dragging.”¹⁷⁵ In so far as this undermining of the unreconstructed self is intrinsic to the functioning of the elenctic method, the interlocutor’s resentment is perfectly justified. Why *should* a Theodoros let himself be “dragged” into the ring?

How, then, can any interlocutor respond other than with “maternal” emotion to a method that assaults himself and his whole way of life? How can he cut the cord and graduate from a maternal to a paternal role? The shift will be possible only for a character in whom these roles are not intrinsically opposed; one, that is, whose central values are *not* radically challenged by Socratic questioning. Such a person’s commitment to himself will also be a commitment to the Socratic pursuit of “objective” truth through dialectic. The freer he already is of non-Socratic attachments,

¹⁷³ See esp. Halperin 1986, 1990, and below, pp. 362–4.

¹⁷⁴ Lee 1973: 231; see further *ibid.* 233–39, 253–4. ¹⁷⁵ Cf. Rue 1993: 84–6.

the less his identity will come under attack at Sokrates' hands, and the less his "maternal" emotions will be activated in self-defense and the defense of his "offspring." Like Sokrates he will welcome elenctic refutation, since this will contribute to the construction, rather than the destruction, of his self-concept. His character is therefore less a target for elenctic criticism than a necessary precondition for its successful practice. This means that Sokrates is no longer attacking the individual in his *ad hominem* elenctic fashion. In fact, he is arguably no longer employing his familiar method at all. Socratic questioning has become a mode of self-affirmation for the interlocutor as well as for Sokrates himself, in so far as the interlocutor's particular self is also constituted through commitment to Socratic principles (including the principle of detachment). Instead of destroying the self, Socratic testing becomes constructive of such a person's authentic identity.

Since Theaitetos manifests the necessary traits to enable the elenctic Sokrates to work this way, he is not challenged to transform his view of the world (and hence his way of life), but only to strive more successfully towards the ideal he already shares with other Socratic natures. This is borne out by his behavior within the dialogue as a "parent" of ideas. He is properly committed to his own responses (cf. 157d), but when his "offspring" is finally brought to birth he shows no "maternal" partiality, and is willing to subject the wretched babe to scrutiny (161a). After this first-born has been found wanting, he quickly produces a new suggestion (187a), without needing to have it dragged out of him by Sokrates (as more hostile interlocutors often do). He is ready to treat this idea as provisional from the start (187b). The third idea – the "dream" theory – is initiated by Theaitetos and developed by Sokrates. But it is explicitly attributed to an outside source, and neither of the participants is personally committed to it (as opposed to the argument). The three definitions thus move progressively in the direction of detachment from the interlocutor or "mother," in step with the increasing level of abstraction from the senses involved in the definitions themselves.

The rhetoric of the digression implies that the Socratic values under discussion – especially commitment to reason and detachment from personal biases – are impersonal absolutes, unconstrained by particular experiences or points of view. This in turn suggests that the ideal interlocutor, in becoming like Sokrates, is approaching as close as anyone can to an abstraction transcending the particularities of human nature. Theaitetos' progress in philosophy, in detachment, and in Socratic growth should therefore coincide. Because we are inescapably embodied

arguers, however, we must retain some identifiable human characteristics. Only the right *kind* of person can follow this path. And in fact, the digression's ideal of detachment is itself informed by specific cultural parameters. Despite the alleged insignificance of such factors as class and birth, it is solidly based on a set of aristocratic, elitist, masculinist, Greek assumptions. Rather than becoming progressively more detached from specific human circumstances, views, feelings and prejudices, the "ideal" Socratic interlocutor must come to share the specific circumstances, views, feelings and prejudices of one very particular person: Plato's Sokrates.

Despite Sokrates' appropriation of the female through the midwife image, the activities by which the (presumptively male) philosopher is defined are those of a particular wealthy, high-class, masculine milieu. Thus the philosopher places a high value on leisure, as necessary to the unfettered pursuit of philosophy.¹⁷⁶ In doing so he appropriates the aristocratic connotations of leisured wealth, while relegating the free Athenian politician to symbolic "slavery."¹⁷⁷ The philosopher does, of course, choose to employ his leisure rather differently from the typical aristocrat. Nevertheless, his way of life is just as dependent on freedom from earning his keep or caring for his bodily needs. Accordingly, the philosopher does not know how to cook or make a bed (175e) – tasks performed for wealthy Athenians by their slaves. The most extreme and bizarre of these appropriations of the rhetoric of aristocracy for the philosopher is implicit in Sokrates' claim that the orator does not know how to play and sing at a symposium (175e), an upper-class social institution that was an important locus for political power-mongering and intrigue.¹⁷⁸ Orators and politicians, at least those of aristocratic family, would be very much at home at such events.¹⁷⁹ By excluding the orator from the symposium, Sokrates implicitly dismisses all democratic politicians as vulgar and uneducated.

This whole set of cultural parameters, which underwrites the supposedly detached, abstract, philosophical ideal of the digression, is succinctly conveyed through the story contrasting the unworldly philosopher

¹⁷⁶ 154e, 175de, 176c, 187d.

¹⁷⁷ 172c–173b; cf. *Soph.* 253c; Nightingale 1995: 55–9. As commentators have noted, the praise of leisure has ironic implications in light of Sokrates' impending death (cf. e.g. Burnyeat 1990: 34; Rue 1993: 93).

¹⁷⁸ See e.g. Connor 1971: 25–9.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Alkibiades' arrival at *Symp.* 212c. The guests at Xenophon's rather more conventional symposium include Kallias, a wealthy and prominent public figure, and Nikeratos, son of Nikias (on whom see above, p. 167).

Thales with a witty Thracian serving-girl (174a). The philosopher, so oblivious to material life that he falls down a well, is mocked by the servant whose job is to fetch water from that well (thus serving the practical purposes of material life).¹⁸⁰ As a foreign female slave who laughs at philosophy, this anecdotal serving-woman defines the philosopher's values by inverting them. Sokrates' ideal philosopher is as culture-bound as his anti-type, the orator.

On the discursive level, Sokrates endorses this picture of the ideal philosopher. From a dramatic perspective, however, his relationship to his own ideal is a complex one. As we have already seen, the figure of Sokrates is Plato's primary site for dramatic exploration of the tensions between the particular and the universal, the material and the abstract, which pervade his work as a whole. In *Theaetetus* too, he literally embodies the tension between the unattainable ideal of disembodied abstraction and the inescapable influence of our embodied nature: the aspiration of human particularity to transcend itself without denying its own embodiment. As a result, there are both marked differences and important similarities between the Sokrates of this dialogue and the ideal philosopher of the digression.

The differences, which have often been pointed out, are in some ways more obvious than the similarities.¹⁸¹ To begin with, this Sokrates is, as usual, very interested in his human neighbors and what lies close at hand, including the most mundane everyday activities (contrast 173c–174a). He cares more about Athens than anywhere else (143d; cf. 144b), and knows Theaitetos' father's name (144c). He tailors his conversation to the particular characters of others – not only the compliant Theaitetos but the recalcitrant Theodoros as well. And of course, he claims to know nothing (contrast 173e). He even resembles the philosopher's antithesis in certain respects. He is pressed for time because he must go to court (172e), and is a skilled orator, as the the eloquence of the digression itself attests. In other ways, however, the Sokrates of *Theaetetus* differs markedly from the orator, and resembles rather the philosopher. Unlike the orator, he does not view himself as “clever and wise” (173b), is not embarrassed by his own (alleged) rhetorical ineptitude (174c, 175e), and

¹⁸⁰ See Cavarero 1995: ch. 2. The woman is not so precisely identified in other versions of this tale (cf. Niehues-Pröbsting 1982: 18): e.g. she is simply an old woman at Diog. Laert. 1.34. But her namelessness and pluralization (175d) make her exemplary of all “uneducated” persons. For Plato's symbolic exclusion of the female cf. also *Symp.* 176e *Phd.* 60a, and see duBois 1995: ch. 4.

¹⁸¹ For a thorough and balanced treatment of this question see Rue 1993.

takes as much time as he wants for discussion (172d). Like the philosopher, he is a figure of fun to undiscerning mortals (cf. 153a, 161e, 181b); he is indifferent to physical concerns (as opposed to beauty of soul); he is interested in general questions (174b); he is very much concerned with the nature of justice and human happiness (175c); and he thinks one should strive to resemble god (176ab). His intellectual methods also reflect the philosopher's values, in as much as he repeatedly moves from particular instances towards abstraction (146e).

If we widen the lens to include portrayals of Sokrates in other Platonic dialogues, an equally ambiguous relationship emerges. Unlike the philosopher of the digression, Plato's Sokrates spends time in the *agora* (*Ap.* 17c; cf. *Gorg* 447a), participates in politics (*Ap.* 32ab), has often attended trials (*Ap.* 35a), and participates in symposia (*Symp.*). But he also converges with the philosopher of the digression, often in the self-same dialogues. For example, his own trial is the first at which he has spoken (*Ap.* 17d, cf. *Euth.* 2ab); he repeatedly likens human education and government to animal training (cf. *Tht.* 174de); and he is notoriously indifferent to material possessions (cf. *Tht.* 174e). Many of his conversations take place not in the agora or another public place, but in private houses. He and his fellow symposiasts are entertained by philosophy, rather than flute-girls;¹⁸² his participation in Athenian political life is minimal; and he speaks with all comers regardless of high or low birth, noble ancestry, gender, wealth or poverty – even with slaves – provided they may further the search for wisdom.¹⁸³ He is interested in mathematics and astronomy (cf. *Tht.* 173e),¹⁸⁴ and at times his mind absents itself from immediate circumstances, leaving his body standing still, oblivious of physical conditions.¹⁸⁵ He knows very well how to praise the true happiness of gods and mortals,¹⁸⁶ and can even “strike up a song like a free man;”¹⁸⁷ yet his understanding of a proper encomium, like that of the philosopher, differs radically from the symposiastic norm.¹⁸⁸ And like the philosopher, his sense of humor is often unconventional (cf. *Tht.* 174d, 175d).

This peculiar relationship between Sokrates and his own ideal may be attributed to the fact that, in contrast to the philosopher of the digression, he serves as an embodied exemplar for other embodied persons.

¹⁸² *Symp.* 176e; cf. *Prot.* 347d. ¹⁸³ Cf. *Tht.* 173d, 174e–175b.

¹⁸⁴ This is largely untrue of the elenctic Sokrates (cf. *Ap.* 18abc, 19bcd, *Phd.* 96a–99e), but the Sokrates of *Tht.* itself, as well as dialogues like *Meno* and *Rep.*, is very interested in these subjects.

¹⁸⁵ *Symp.* 175ab, 220cd; cf. *Tht.* 173e. ¹⁸⁶ E.g. in *Symp.* and *Rep.*; cf. *Tht.* 175e–176a.

¹⁸⁷ *Tht.* 175e; cf. *Euthyd.* 272bc, *Phd.* 60b–61b.

¹⁸⁸ *Symp.* 198c–199a, *Prot.* 347c–348a; cf. *Tht.* 174d.

His ideal is unattainable precisely because it is detached from the circumstances of human life as actually lived. Sokrates therefore resembles his own *paradeigma* not through superficial slavish imitation (which would be impossible for any embodied human being), but by pursuing the same central values in a manner that is both possible and appropriate for a person whose concrete situation diverges radically, and fundamentally, from that of the ideal in question – that is, by means of structural imitation. Unlike the philosopher, he can speak about the material and social world; yet unlike the Heracliteans (with whom the orator is associated), he can speak coherently. He and Theaitetos stand on the problematic ground between the concerns of oratory and disembodied philosophy, the ground where both goodness and discourse are inevitably contaminated by evil (176a, 196de). This liminality is captured in the ironically self-deprecating term *phaulos* (“inferior”) which he applies to himself and Theaitetos in contrast not only to the monists and pluralists (181b), and the cleverly disputatious (197a), but also to the philosopher of the digression (173c7–9).

The maximal Platonic Sokrates, qua embodied philosopher, indicates ostensibly how this inescapable embeddedness in material life must be *used* if one is to move in the direction of an abstract ideal. Even the dialectician, qua human being, must make use of the body.¹⁸⁹ But he approaches as far as a particular human being can to becoming an abstract model for our emulation, not by flying away from the city, but by the use he makes of his place within it. This negotiation between particularity and abstraction can be seen in the specifics of his relationship to both philosopher and orator. Unlike the philosopher, he spends time in the *agora*; yet he does so not for political, legal or commercial purposes (cf. 173c8–d2), but to pursue philosophy in his own distinctive idiom (*Ap.* 17c–18a). Like the orator, he goes to court on a matter of life and death (cf. 172e); but he eschews the constraints of conventional courtroom behavior (e.g. *Ap.* 34b–35b), and uses the opportunity to extol and justify the philosophic life, heedless of the consequences for his own survival. Unlike the philosopher, he participates in politics; but he does so only as far as he is called upon to do so by civic duty, and in a way that upholds abstract values of justice and law even against the will of the majority to whom the orator panders (*Ap.* 32bcd). Unlike the philosopher, he attends symposia; but he uses the occasion not to become drunk or lecherous, but to explore a theory that moves away from the particularity of embodied desire.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Gellrich 1994: 302; Gilead 1994: 83.

This kind of philosophically appropriate use of the body is also dramatized within *Theaetetus* itself. Unlike the philosopher, Sokrates is skilled at oratory, as displayed in the digression; but he employs it to condemn ordinary uses of rhetoric and promote an ideal of philosophical abstraction. Unlike the philosopher, he is specially interested in his own fellow-citizens; but his concerns transcend any particular location in time and space (cf. 173e), including the constraints imposed by local political feuding. (This is implied by the dialogue's setting many years later at Megara, a neighboring city hostile to Athens.) Unlike the philosopher, he knows and cares who his neighbors are; but unlike the orator, he uses these personal details for philosophic ends, both to discover worthwhile partners for dialectic and to explore the meaning of human life and happiness. Thus he is interested in Theaitetos' personal circumstances not for purposes of malicious gossip or social ranking, but as a factor in assessing his philosophical promise (cf. 145b). He is also interested in ancestry, both male and female (Theaitetos' father and his own mother), but primarily for its symbolic value as an indicator of intellectual promise on the one hand, and functioning on the other.

Sokrates also exemplifies the proper philosophical use of the material world in a different way, through the content of his creative imagination. Unlike the philosopher of the digression, he is interested in many features of ordinary embodied life – mud, wax, birds, midwifery – through which he creates pictures expressing a particular, not to say unique, intellectual outlook and world-view. Unlike the vivid images of *Republic*, the most famous of which strive to transcend the limitations of embodied human life, Sokrates' images in *Theaetetus* are primarily devoted to explaining that life, as part of the immediate subject of their discourse. The midwife image is obviously central here. Like Achilles comparing himself to a mother bird (*Il.* 9.323–7), Sokrates uses cross-gendered imagery to express something remarkable about himself, qua philosophic “hero.” But most of his images characterize him less directly, simply as forms of self-expression. We may compare the use of imagery as a vehicle for characterization in Athenian tragedy. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, both Antigone and Kreon are characterized, among other ways, by the systems of imagery that they favor.¹⁹⁰ And the richness of Klytemnestra's language in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* conveys a character of enormous psychological and dramatic power, embedded in a particular mental, moral and emotional universe.

¹⁹⁰ See Goheen 1951 and cf. Gould 1978: 48.

Similarly, the rich range of imagery used by Sokrates in *Theaetetus* embeds him in a specific universe, one in which the complex interplay between material particularity and intellectual abstraction is always at issue, as an essential, indeed *the* essential, defining feature of humanity. Sokrates' imagination not only situates him as an inhabitant of the material world, but uses the particularity of that same world in an effort to transcend it intellectually. His elenctic self elsewhere likewise uses sensory phenomena as raw material for abstract thought. But in *Theaetetus* his imagery is extraordinary in its range and variety – even by Platonic standards – and performs much more complex philosophical work.¹⁹¹ Collectively, his far-reaching and creative images imply an extensive picture of the world we live in as material for philosophy – material extending from particular components of the most mundane sort (such as mud or wax) to the heavenly bodies and the cosmos itself, with a wide variety of lesser creatures lying somewhere in between. Within this tapestry there is a special emphasis on the specific, and especially problematic, nature of human beings – the soul, the body, and the operation of the mind and senses through which we perceive and understand our world. Numerous images of human crafts, products and activities link us in multifarious ways to animals, gods and other aspects of the world in which we live, from the many varieties of mud to the cosmos as a whole.

The overall effect is a vivid expression of the fact that human epistemology cannot be explored in abstraction from who we are as complex beings at the juncture of the material and the divine. Some of Sokrates' more unusual images explicitly link the worlds of mind and body, abstract and concrete, particular and universal in this way, providing “poetic” (as well as philosophical) accounts of the complex tensions between specificity and abstraction that we have seen at work on many levels in this dialogue. The midwife image, for example, provides a powerful way of expressing the dilemmas of human embodiment and our ability to explore abstract ideas in detachment from personal circumstances, as we have seen. To gauge the full meaning of these images would be the task of a different study.¹⁹² Collectively, however, they perform a function analogous to that of the Homeric simile. Like epic similes, they provide

¹⁹¹ For the continuum between exempla and imagery in Plato see R. Robinson 1953: 41–2. The images that are used most extensively in *Tht.*, and work the hardest, are the midwife and reproductive group, the reading/writing group, the aviary and the block of wax.

¹⁹² It would be necessary e.g. to see which images are used by Sokrates in the mouth of Protagoras, rather than his own; to look at differences between simile, metaphor, and philosophical exemplum; and to examine the specific uses of each system of imagery (e.g. the predominance of animal images is clearly linked with the discussion of Protagoras' “man-measure” dictum).

glimpses through the fabric of the dramatic foreground – the world of warfare at Troy, a specific conversation at Athens (or Megara) – to remind us of what lies in the background, and hence what is at stake: the larger world of human experience in which these particular events are situated.

This is most obviously true of the most sustained image of *Theaetetus*, namely the digression, which works more like the central imagery of *Republic* in its attempt to convey the possibility of transcendence. Here Sokrates provides an inspiring synoptic vision of the place of human beings in an intellectual and moral cosmos, which underlines the insoluble paradox of our place at the crossroads of particularity and abstraction. In this respect, the digression is comparable to an image that lies at the heart – if not exactly the center – of the *Iliad*: the shield of Achilles in Book 18. In this book, the gods create a shield covered with depictions of human life and the cosmos that surrounds it. It is a unique armament and an emblem of supreme heroic status, which Achilles will carry as he goes to face his destiny. But it is also “Western man’s first microcosmic model of a unified and coherent world order.”¹⁹³ As such it provides a comprehensive picture of the world in which the events of the epic unfold, locating this particular struggle in a series of larger contexts: human life at peace and at war, the natural world, and the cosmos as a whole. Just as Sokrates’ digression complements its ideal with an image of his world as it really is, so Achilles’ shield includes a city at war as well as a city at peace. In each case, the “real” world carries an inevitable burden of evil, yet this necessity of evil is inescapably bound up with the possibility of heroism, whether military or philosophical (cf. 170ab). The analogy should not be pressed too far – the world of the ideal philosopher, for example, is unattainable in a rather different sense from the world of the shield’s city at peace. Yet each excursus frames the work’s central action within a larger picture of the world, and in so doing shows us what is at stake in that action. In both cases – each in its own way – this is a matter of life and death.

BECOMING SOKRATES

The extraordinary richness of Sokrates’ philosophical imagination brings us back to the problematic question of his capacity for self-reproduction – and hence immortality – by obliging us to confront the irreducible

¹⁹³ Segal 1978: 317.

differences between him and Theaitetos. In light of the enormous intellectual gulf that divides them, how can we be confident that Theaitetos, however strong his youthful resemblance to Sokrates, can bear the heavy burden of functioning as the hope for the future of Socratic philosophy? As we have seen, Plato evades these issues dramatically, both by presenting Theaitetos as a mere boy, who may grow to future greatness, and by assuring us, through Terpsion, that Theaitetos did indeed live up to his potential before dying (142d). But the possibility of a new generation of Sokrateses is never actually demonstrated. As long as Plato refuses to represent anyone quite like Sokrates, he can have his cake and eat it too: he can proclaim the uniqueness of Sokrates, and at the same time represent him as a type of which there just happens to be only one example. This evasive strategy enables Plato to immortalize Sokrates both as an unforgettable, uniquely characterized individual and as an idealized philosophical model for our emulation. Only thus can he satisfy, however fleetingly, his evident desire to represent the absolute and ideal embedded in the very particularity that his Sokrates seems to be trying to escape.

But such a strategy also leaves certain questions unanswered – questions rendered more pressing, and more complex, by the fact that Theaitetos as well as Sokrates is dead by the time of the dialogue’s recitation at Megara. What does the death of Theaitetos signify? There are places in Plato where Sokrates implies that death is a homecoming for the philosopher (above, p. 79). This notion fits in well with the ideal of philosophical abstraction in the digression, which, on one reading, can be achieved only in death. And independent evidence suggests that the historical Theaitetos died not far from the age of fifty, when the philosopher of *Republic* finally gazes upon the Form of the Good, before dying and proceeding to the Isles of the Blessed.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, those guardians who die as Theaitetos does in defense of the *polis*, and other members of the “Golden Race,” are to be revered after death as “divinities” (*daimones*).¹⁹⁵ In light of the close links between Theaitetos and the philosopher-rulers, this could be taken to suggest that the dead Theaitetos is now in the Isles of the Blessed, which in Plato serve not only as the home of dead philosophers, but as an analogy for the contemplation of the Forms (*Rep.* 519c). There is also a note of transcendence in Sokrates’ “prophecy” of Theaitetos’

¹⁹⁴ *Rep.* 540ab. These mythical islands were the traditional destination of dead heroes such as Achilles. For their use in Plato as the home of dead philosophers cf. 498c, *Gorg.* 523ab, 526c, *Phd.* 111abc, 114bc, 115d, *Crat.* 398bc.

¹⁹⁵ *Rep.* 468e–469a; cf. 414a, 540bc.

greatness, with its mantic and epic overtones. It is therefore possible to read his death, along with that of Sokrates, as signifying transcendence of the mortal body by the immortal, rational soul.

But this suggestion does not provide a useful answer to the question of whether Theaitetos really can, or will, live up to his Socratic potential in life, and if so, whether direct contact with Sokrates is necessary for this purpose. Such a dramatic demonstration would require the portrayal of a Theaitetos who actually *becomes* Sokrates' philosophical equal. But Plato never actually shows Theaitetos – or anyone else – becoming a second Sokrates under Socratic tuition. It is even arguable that, despite Sokrates' "prophecy," Theaitetos' subsequent career showed him failing as a Socratic, since as far as we can tell his subsequent achievements were exclusively mathematical.¹⁹⁶ By the time he died he should at least, by *Republic's* standards, have become an expert in dialectic. But unless our evidence is deficient on this point, the possibility of a new generation of Sokrateses remains dramatically asserted, rather than demonstrated, whether explicitly (through the dialogue itself), or implicitly, through the audience's presumed knowledge of Theaitetos' future.

Yet the possibility remains open that Plato may succeed in reproducing Sokrates in future generations through the medium of his writings. This strategy depends, of course, on the problematic idea that a written discourse can somehow transmit a living reality to its readers in the absence of its originating "parent." This possibility is foregrounded in the present dialogue by the opening scene between Eukleides and Terpsion at Megara.¹⁹⁷ This dramatic opening emphasizes not only the death of the central participants, but the fact that the events described took place long ago, and have been written down with considerable care. Eukleides needed notes to remember the details, and checked these with (the now dead) Sokrates in order to ensure an accurate record. Uniquely among Plato's dialogues, the substance of the conversation is portrayed as read aloud from a written script. The reader is Eukleides' slave, a completely uncharacterized functionary, who serves solely as a mouthpiece or passive conduit of the discourse to his audience.¹⁹⁸ The frame thus raises questions about how far a transcriber, reader or auditor can profit from

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *Phdr.* 278e–279b where Sokrates prophesies greatness for his "beloved" Isokrates. In this case, our knowledge of the orator's life and writings inevitably colors our understanding of the "prophecy."

¹⁹⁷ These Megarians are also present in *Phd.* (59c). Eukleides wrote Socratic dialogues, and Plato is said to have stayed with him in Megara after Sokrates' death (Diog. Laert. 2.106, 2.108, 3.6). See further Guthrie 1969: 499–507; Rankin 1983: 190–95; Kahn 1996: 12–15.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Howland 1998: 44–5. He is even less characterized than Meno's slave (above, pp. 223–4).

ideas and arguments presented in isolation from those who gave them birth, and more generally, how successfully an idea can be defended or criticized in the absence of its progenitor.¹⁹⁹

The immediate audience for this reading consists of Eukleides, who wrote it, and his companion Terpsion, who has never heard it before. Like Aristodemos and Apollodoros in *Symposium*, both these characters are keenly interested in Sokrates and his doings, but neither shows any sign of dialectical promise by the internal standards of the dialogue. Neither of them evinces the active enthusiasm, quick wit, memory, dialectical initiative, or “courage” required for Socratic philosophizing. They do display “wonder” at Sokrates’ prescience regarding Theaitetos,²⁰⁰ but this is a far cry from Theaitetos’ own philosophical “wonder” (155cd), since it is directed at the doings and sayings of persons, as opposed to abstract problems. In contrast to Sokrates himself, who reported the whole conversation to him from memory, Eukleides is utterly incapable of producing an oral account, focusing rather on obtaining an accurate verbatim transcription (142c–143a).²⁰¹ And in contrast to Theaitetos, he expresses his enthusiasm for Sokrates by repeating his words, rather than attempting to answer his questions (cf. 148e). He and Terpsion treat the reported conversation neither as a vehicle for ideas, nor as a stimulus to thought, but as a glorified specimen of philosophical gossip. As auditors, they remain completely passive, showing no interest whatsoever in actually participating in such discussions. For example, they show no engagement in any of the epistemological issues that Sokrates raises. After the prologue they drop out of sight with no indication that they learn from the experience of writing or listening.

The passivity of Terpsion and Eukleides foreshadows that of Theodoros, who prefers listening to a lengthy elevated discourse, in sharp contrast to the active intellectual engagement of Sokrates and Theaitetos.²⁰² And like Theodoros, they are tired and eager to rest (143ab). This might seem innocent enough, since it provides them with a plausible context for listening to the dialogue. Sokrates himself lies down to listen to Lysias’ speech (*Phdr.* 230e). But when Sokrates sits still in Plato, it is for thought or conversation.²⁰³ After hearing

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Ford 1994: 205–14. ²⁰⁰ 142c4; cf. 142a3, 142b9.

²⁰¹ Cf. Dorter 1994: 69–70; Polansky 1992: 36–7; Tschemplik 1993: 173–4; for more positive views see Koyré 1945: 34–5; Polansky 1992: 35. On rote memorization, as opposed to productive memory, see above, p. 101.

²⁰² The parallel with Theodoros may be enhanced by the fact that, by the dramatic date of the reading, Terpsion and Eukleides are old men, though this is not marked within the dialogue (cf. Thesleff 1990: 149).

²⁰³ Above, p. 80; cf. also *Laws* 625bc.

Lysias' speech, he engages in extensive analysis. The sedentary behavior of Terpsion and Eukleides hints rather at intellectual laziness and passivity, especially in light of the homology between mental and physical attributes so strongly emphasized in this dialogue (above, pp. 279–80). This hint is corroborated by other details of their behavior. Terpsion has let as many as thirty years pass before asking about this conversation that he is supposedly so keen to hear (143a). And Eukleides has left out the narrative portions of the discourse in order to avoid “trouble” (*pragmata*, 143c) – a concern never expressed by Sokrates qua narrator.²⁰⁴ They thus seem to exemplify *Phaedrus*' notorious claims that books impair the memory, cannot teach or answer questions, and are liable to fall into the wrong hands.²⁰⁵

The idea that a script detached from its author can transmit methods and ideas to future generations thus receives a pessimistic coloration from the outset of this dialogue. The theme recurs in the treatment of various absent philosophers, such as Parmenides and Heraclitus. But Protagoras is the figure who raises these questions most insistently. Much of *Theaetetus* is preoccupied with the fact that this particular dead philosopher cannot be present to make his own case or reply to criticism – preoccupied, that is, with the status of his intellectual “orphan.”²⁰⁶ The starting point of the discussion is the sophist's own words, as recorded in his writings (which seem to have been a treatise written in the author's own voice) (152a, 162a). But if Protagoras' ideas are to live on, it must be in the minds and words of other thinkers, who can only express their own understanding of his arguments (171 d). And in a living dialectical conversation, all such thoughts must be voiced by a speaker. Anyone who can answer Sokrates' questions (unlike a book) brings to the discussion his or her own set of experiences, commitments and prejudices. Protagoras' death therefore places him at a distinct dialectical disadvantage (cf. 166a). This is acknowledged by Sokrates, who both assumes that an idea's “parent” is best equipped to defend it, and professes to believe that Protagoras could refute them both, were he present in person (164e, 171 d; cf. above, p. 136).

Yet Plato conspicuously avoids introducing either Protagoras himself or even a committed Protagorean for this purpose. He draws attention to the absence of Kallias, the well known patron of the sophists, who is (according to Theodoros) the proper “guardian” of Protagoras' offspring

²⁰⁴ Eukleides seems oblivious to the possible narrative impact of his preference for direct discourse (cf. Benardete 1984: 1.86–7; Polansky 1992: 37; Tschemplik 1993: 171, 177; Howland 1998: 44).

²⁰⁵ 275a–e; cf. *Ep. VII* 341abc, 344ab, *Prot.* 329a; *Xen. Mem.* 4.2.1.

²⁰⁶ 162d–163a, 164e, 169de, 171 d.

(164e). Instead, he introduces a succession of spokesmen for the sophist, all of whom who fail to speak for him adequately: Theaitetos, Theodoros, and Sokrates himself. This forms a sharp contrast with *Republic*, where Glaukon and Adeimantos defend Thrasymachos' ideas more powerfully than he does himself. Plato is well aware of the game he is playing with the absent sophist here. "Protagoras" complains that the young, inexperienced Theaitetos is inadequate to defend his ideas (166a). And when Sokrates insists on addressing Theodoros *as* "Protagoras" (170a, c; 178b), this makes us acutely conscious of who he is not. To place Protagoras' ideas in the mouth of their "parent," or even of another equally competent and committed speaker, would be to deny the death of the author, and thus to evade the problem at issue: how does an intellectual infant fare on its own in the harsh world of "disinterested" inquiry? Plato thereby challenges us to consider how any dead writer (such as himself) may succeed in transmitting ideas to future generations (such as ourselves).

Eukleides and Terpsion offer us one model of how to use an absent author's writings: passive, uncritical respect. Sokrates himself offers us another, by using Protagoras' book as raw material for analysis, discussion, and eventual intellectual destruction. Like any Greek, he uses Protagoras' text for his own purposes, in a fragmentary and arbitrary fashion, showing no interest in the integrity of the text. This kind of use is predicated on acknowledging the radical absence, or death, of the author, which denies us access to his living thoughts and his own ways of defending them, and consequently denies him control of the uses we may choose to make of his words. Sokrates claims, however, that he actually *is* heeding Protagoras' complaints, by attempting to refute his ideas at their strongest rather than simply discrediting their author.²⁰⁷ And the equation of Sokrates with philosophy itself suggests that his view is privileged as transcending others in reason and objectivity (above, p. 273). This is reinforced by the "midwife"'s denial of productivity, which presents Sokrates as a *tabula rasa* against which all views may fairly and "objectively" be tested. By placing the defense of Protagoras into Sokrates' mouth, then, Plato seems to endow it with the maximum independent weight and detachment.

As we have seen, however, Sokrates has his own pre-established personal perspective, which of course is shared by his look-alike, Theaitetos. In the absence of its "parent," Protagoras' "orphan" does not stand a chance against discussants whose outlook has already been shaped

²⁰⁷ 165a, e, 168de, 179cd.

by their investment in Socratic dialectic, since this is fundamentally opposed to the outlook that gave it birth. Accordingly, Sokrates represents Protagoras' views in ways that are subtly self-defeating precisely because they are not dispassionate in a Socratic sense. Sokrates' role as the ventriloquist of this farce enables him to defeat "Protagoras" in a way that he could never have defeated Protagoras (except in the unlikely event of the latter making the same concessions as the former). To attain real objectivity, it might be argued, *no* embodied person should be present at the conversation. Like the philosopher of the digression, the participants should lack all recognizable human features, and scrutinize Protagoras' ideas from "nowhere." But the ideal of the view from nowhere is itself Socratic, and as such the antithesis of Protagorean relativism.

"Protagoras" complains at not being allowed to speak for himself (166abc), but in fact this is true of all the characters. One effect of the dramatic prologue is to remind us that all of them are ventriloquations of Eukleides, and hence of Plato who stands behind him. Within the central conversation, Plato's repeated references to the dead Protagoras' absence,²⁰⁸ and thus to his fictionality as a ventriloquation of Sokrates, draws attention more obliquely to the death of those characters who are "present," including Sokrates, and hence to Plato's creative presence behind them as well. This is especially true of the moment when Sokrates introduces the extraordinary image of Protagoras poking his head up from the earth (171cd) – presumably from the underworld to which death has consigned him.²⁰⁹ This forcefully reminds us that it is the power of Plato's imagination that is conjuring and controlling all the characters, including Sokrates, and hence that his representations too are inescapably colored by a personal perspective and agenda. If no one is adequate to defend Protagoras, in his absence, on the basis of his written words, how much less is anyone adequate to defend Sokrates, in his absence, on the basis of the written words placed into his mouth by Plato. The dialogue thus bears out the misgivings voiced by Sokrates and "Protagoras" about the possibility of speaking for another. In doing so, it also casts doubt on the usefulness of committing Plato's own works to writing – unless he too is willing to expose his offspring to the depredation of unsympathetic "defenders." The dialogue as a whole seems pessimistic, then, about the possibility of transmitting Sokrates through the medium of the written word. To use such writings passively is un-Socratic, whereas to use them creatively is, it seems, to expose the

²⁰⁸ 162d, 165e, 171cd.

²⁰⁹ On this image see esp. Lee 1973: 242–61; Ford 1994.

author and his characters to intellectual assault in such a way that they risk a second death.

Yet Plato's use of dramatic form leaves open another possible avenue towards Socratic reproduction, through the mechanisms of mimetic pedagogy. Unlike the dialogues we have looked at so far, *Theaetetus* does not concern itself with mimesis as such. But it strongly thematizes questions of likeness, with special emphasis on the role of likeness in learning, which underlies both mimetic pedagogy and this dialogue's concern with intellectual self-reproduction. In particular, *Theaetetus* implies that to learn from Sokrates one must already be like Sokrates. It does this by dramatizing a potential Sokrates learning from his actualized self. In addition, the dialogue activates the traditional view of thinking as a dialectical process involving more than one internal voice. In combination with the unique resemblance between the two main characters, this suggests a different way for Plato's readers to approach the problem of Socratic reproduction.

To the extent that Sokrates and Theaitetos share the same qualities of character, the properly Socratic reader – who also shares those qualities – will be able to identify with both these Socratic figures. As a result, she may end up with a genuine dialogue “written” in her soul, not just by mechanically accepting Sokrates' arguments, but by participating in and continuing the discussion. Since more than one such figure is represented, this internal dialogue can be open and productive rather than fixed or mechanical. This both reduces the risks of passive identification and helps to compensate for Sokrates' continuing intellectual dominance. At the same time, the age difference between Sokrates and Theaitetos – with their consequent differences in experience, creativity, and argumentative skill – leaves open a range of possibilities for the path such a dialogue might take, depending on the age and experience of the Socratic reader. The fact that the dialogue's own discussion is inconclusive is also important here. Since thought is defined as reaching agreement between two conversational parts or partners, and since Sokrates and Theaitetos never do agree on the nature of knowledge, a person who absorbs both of them as models is obliged to continue the dialogue independently in her own mind. Such a person will end up with a truly Socratic, yet at the same time truly independent, internal dialogue. She will thus imitate Sokrates not in a superficial or passive fashion, but in the active way that Theaitetos does, reproducing central Socratic principles (structural imitation) in a way that parallels Sokrates' own imitation of god.

Just as Theaitetos can learn from Sokrates only because he is already like him, so too, the dialogue suggests, reading this text may result in the reproduction of Sokrates in the reader, but only if that reader is *already* of the right character. Here we return to the paradox that like is attracted to like, and thus becomes more like it. One must already be Socratic (as Theaitetos is) if one is to internalize the character of Sokrates and thus become progressively more Socratic, in accordance with the pedagogical implications of likeness. It follows that we will only be attracted to Sokrates, and further assimilated to him, if we are already sufficiently like him, and like him in the right ways.²¹⁰ And only if we are the right kind of people will we succeed in internalizing his dialogue with Theaitetos. Again, Theaitetos' resemblance to Sokrates is crucial here. For in order to internalize a properly dialectical argument, i.e. one involving exchanges between two voices, one must be able to identify with *both* the characters involved. And a corollary of Theaitetos' ideal intellectual character is that all and only those readers or listeners with the right philosophical credentials can identify with him. Specifically, we must share his resemblance to Sokrates in order to internalize both him and Sokrates as aspects of ourselves. Theaitetos' presence and his particular character thus enable the sufficiently Socratic reader to identify with two Socratic figures in discussion, with the result that he or she can internalize two dialogic voices as authentic parts of the self without straying from the Socratic ideal. A range of individuality among different readers is possible, but it must be on the scale of potentiality and actuality that links Theaitetos to Sokrates. A fundamental likeness between Sokrates, ourselves, and Theaitetos is therefore necessary if we are to attempt to reach beyond personal and even human limitations towards the ideal philosopher's "likeness to god."

But what of the non-Socratic reader? The unusual prologue of this work, together with its treatment of Protagoras and his book, suggests in Plato a certain resignation about exposing his Sokrates to the various forms of abuse to which written texts are open. The passive reader will remain passive, and fail to learn how to become Sokrates in any way other than the superficial. The active but hostile reader will use him, as he uses Protagoras, for his or her own ends. This is part of the price to be paid for creating a text to which the active, Socratic reader may respond in an active, Socratic fashion. By consigning Sokrates to writing, then,

²¹⁰ Alkibiades, for example, is attracted to Sokrates and resembles him in certain non-superficial ways, but it is hard to imagine him getting very far with *Theaitetus*.

Plato is also offering him up for re-execution by the unsocratic reader. Such readers do, of course, participate in a dialogue with Plato in their own way, as they have been doing for thousands of years. In this sense the written word remains out of the control of the author, who, along with his characters, is destined to be re-killed and reconstituted innumerable times. As history makes plain, dialogue form as such cannot prevent this, and indeed may plausibly be seen as encouraging it (cf. above, p. 44). But Plato's decision to *write* his dialogues implies that this is a price worth paying, if the dialogue is to find truly Socratic readers in the future. The right kind of reader will learn from the dialogue how to do *Socratic* dialectic, thus allowing Sokrates to be reborn through the agency of Plato's text. In view of Plato's portrayal of the uniqueness of Sokrates, this prospect must remain dim. But if such a person were to arise in a different time and place, she could be unique on her own terms: there would be no danger of any unheroic doubling of Sokrates in his own cultural moment. The imitation in question would be structural, rather than slavish.

This brings us back to Terpsion and Eukleides. Like Apollodoros and Aristodemos in *Symposium*, these enthusiasts lack the proper qualities to benefit from their own taste for Socratic tales. But both dialogues exemplify by means of their dramatic structure the value of such Socratic wannabes for transmitting these tales to others. Perhaps there is a positive role after all for the mindless memorizer, the rhapsode or the book, for Eukleides and even for his slave.²¹¹ Such quasi-automatic recording devices may transmit the conversations of Sokrates from those who were there at the time down to a new generation of readers, just as iron rings transmit "magnetic" inspiration from the Muses, who were "there" at Troy, to the rhapsode and his audience.²¹² Plato, a member of the rhapsode's audience, was evidently inspired by such transmissions to emulate and transform Homer in an active, critical fashion. So too the text of Sokrates' conversations, even when transmitted by a slave or a book, may once again light the spark of philosophy in appropriate minds, perhaps even in a mind equal to Sokrates' or Plato's own. Given the scarcity of genuinely Socratic readers – a scarcity presumed by the intellectual elitism of Plato/Sokrates – the passive transmission of the text may even be an essential stage in permitting Sokrates to be reborn in future generations.

²¹¹ Cf. also Antiphon in *Parm.*, who acts as a kind of reluctant philosophical parrot, and so gives us the substance of that dialogue (126c–127a; cf. Miller 1986: 17–18).

²¹² *Ion* 533d–536d; cf. Hom. *Il.* 2. 484–93.

The importance of such transmission, as well as the personal insignificance of its agents, is indicated by the structure of the prologue. On the one hand, Terpsion, Eukleides, and the slave control the whole of the ensuing conversation. On the other, they are entirely forgotten as the work proceeds, while we, the readers, are drawn into the philosophical argument as if it lacked any such intermediaries. This results in part from Eukleides' preference for direct dramatic form, which utterly erases him from his own account. Plato never takes us back to these passive characters, or closes the dramatic frame in such a way as to suggest a final ending to the Socratic conversation. The participants are to reconvene the next day (210d), and in Plato's fictional world they will do so for the conversations portrayed in *Sophist* and *Statesman*. These techniques also indicate that the discourse transmitted by such a means is one that we are invited to continue in our own fashion. The argument can only live on if it is granted independence from the original living human beings who gave it birth.

But we, its readers, are likewise inescapably embodied arguers, whose practice of dialectic is unavoidably colored by our personal and cultural circumstances. This will prevent most of us from responding Socratically to Sokrates, as Plato's Socratic works en masse make very clear. If we are to be among the few exceptions, we must already share the qualities that inform Sokrates' outlook in this dialogue. His true heir will be the reader who embraces the essential features of the Socratic character, and continues the conversation of *Theaetetus* within herself. This interior conversation must display the intellectual independence that is essential to Sokrates' persona, but without repudiating the other Socratic values expressed, discursively and dramatically, within this work. In order to philosophize Socratically, we must, it seems, first *become* Sokrates, then look into the mirror of our own minds.