PART SIX

PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

PLATO

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Plato's dialogues present a definitional challenge for narratologists. While some dialogues open with what one may call 'framing elements', where a narrator declares or shows that he will narrate a past philosophical conversation, others present such conversation as a dramatic dialogue (without a frame). As I have argued in *SAGN* 1, however, it is preferable to proceed on the hypothesis that even those dramatic dialogues may be treated as narratives, told by an invisible and suppressed narrator. This is made clear in the opening of the *Theaetetus*, where a framing conversation between two Socratic disciples makes it explicit that the omission of framing elements is a matter of stylistic effect (though not without philosophical resonance).¹

As might be expected in an author of Plato's subtlety, narratological features have philosophic implications. This is the certainly the case with time. Both as an element of the sensible world and as an aspect of dialogue, time is frequently thematized. Philosophic discourse is characterized by leisure and by measured progression through the topic at hand. Unlike the orator, the philosopher need not speak under the constraints of the water clock. His only responsibility is to the integrity of the argument. As a human being, the philosopher must inhabit the world of time, but his true allegiance is to the realm of the intellect, timeless and unchanging. He must exercise his memory accurately and remember the arguments that have passed and the intellectual commitments and admissions he has made (philosophical analepsis). He must be able to forecast the implications of such commitments and admissions, as well as foresee objections and what he will do to meet these objections (philosophical prolepsis). While keeping an eye on the 'big picture' he must also assess what is relevant to the topic at

¹ For the distinction between framed and dramatic dialogues see *SAGN* 1:357–358. For the function of these framing elements see further 361–368.

hand, controlling the pace and digressiveness of the discussion. These considerations apply also to the narrators in the framed dialogues.

Temporal settings

All Platonic dialogues present themselves as reports or representations of philosophical conversations held in the past, and are thus instances of subsequent narration. The central action of the dialogues (as opposed to that of the frames) takes place mostly in the Athens of the last third of the fifth century and the very beginning of the fourth century BCE.² The *Laws* (which floats in time and is localized in Crete) is an obvious exception, while the main action of the *Parmenides*, although it takes place in Athens, is set when Socrates was a young man. Plato does not consistently provide a precise temporal framework for the conversations he composes. While the central action of, for example, the *Symposium* is fixed in 416, and that of the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* in 399, many of Socrates' conversations are not given a precise chronological specification. Moreover, Plato does not seem to have been concerned to avoid anachronism.³ Socrates' conversation with Phaedrus in the *Phaedrus* is set at a time when both Phaedrus and Lysias (also portrayed as present in Athens) were not in the city.⁴ In three dialogues where the main action is narrated by a disciple of Socrates after the master's death (*Phaedo*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*), the framing element transports the reader into a world of reception where stories of Socrates are told repeatedly in the first forty or so years after his death.

Precision in temporal setting is not, then, in itself of paramount importance to Plato. Precise indications create particular effects. Thus

² For the temporal settings of the dialogues see D.S. Clay 2000: 17–19; Blondell 2002: 65–66.

³ The date of composition of the *Menexenus* is fixed post-386 by an anachronism, and the same goes for the *Symposium* (dated post-385 because of a reference to Spartan activities in Arcadia at 193a): Rutherford 1995: 4.

⁴ Rutherford 1995: 4; for a spirited attempt to read philosophical significance into this anachronism see Nussbaum 1986: 212–213, 228–233. Blondell 2002: 32–34 plausibly develops a notion of 'historical irony' in the dialogues, where the events of the late fifth and early fourth century form an important background against which we are meant to read the dialogues. By 'basing his characters primarily' on historical persons, Plato can intimate 'the results and outcomes of their attitudes and lives' (33). Good examples of this kind of irony are, of course, the character of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* and Nicias in the *Laches*.

the specification that the action of the *Symposium* took place when Agathon won his first tragic victory (416) serves to explain the reason for the party, but also to set the action in the run up to the disastrous Sicilian expedition that left Athens in 415. The expedition was the particular project of the same Alcibiades whose boisterous intervention changes the course of the conversation in the dialogue. The conversations of the *Euthyphro* and *Theaetetus* gain particular resonance given that they take place immediately before Socrates' trial.

Dialogues can also be grouped thematically and methodologically by cross-references. Thus the opening of the *Sophist*, a 'dramatic' dialogue, presents the same cast of characters as that of the *Theaetetus* (itself a framed dialogue), albeit with the addition of an important new figure, the Eleatic Stranger. The first words in the dialogue refer to an appointment made the day before to meet again (216a), and correspond to the close of the *Theaetetus*, where the appointment is made (210d, with no return to the frame). The beginning of the *Statesman* is staged as an immediate continuation of the conversation of the *Sophist* (257a–c). The conversations are set, therefore, on two consecutive days. The *Timaeus* (17a–19b) and *Critias* likewise look back to a *Republic*-like discussion on the previous day. Such cross-references help to group these dialogues, but neither the grouping nor the setting (the time of Socrates trial and the Panathenaic festival) serve the interests of historical verisimilitude. Rather, the *Theaetetus*-group elaborates a picture of philosophical life and methodology that gains poignancy from the imminence of Socrates' death. The setting of the *Timaeus* and *Critias* in the context of the Panathenaic festival helps to foreground issues of Athenian history and then to place them in the wider context of cosmic development.⁵ It is noteworthy also that indications of relative chronology between individual dialogues at the dramatic level need not correspond with any reconstructed order of composition. Thus the *Parmenides* presents Socrates as a young man, but the dialogue is usually considered 'late', and it also contains an incisive critique of the very theory of Forms for which Socrates will argue in dialogues where his character is older.⁶

⁵ On the setting of the *Theaetetus* group see now Blondell 2002: 387–389 (who argues against the widely accepted notion that the trial of Socrates is an important background for the *Sophist* and *Statesman*). For the Panathenaic context of the *Timaeus* and *Critias* see K. Morgan 1998.

⁶ For a suggestive consideration of the implications here see Griswold 2002: 138–139.

The iterative/repetitive world of Socratic dialectic

Plato's Socrates is an exemplar of the philosophical life and his depiction is carefully calculated to underline the most important aspects of this lifestyle. Each dialogue is, as C. Gill points out, an encounter with 'its own integrity and significance'.⁷ Specific interlocutors make claims and mistakes that arise from their personality and intellect. Yet Socrates is a constant. Reading the dialogues makes one aware that Socrates asks the same kind of questions in the same kind of way, over and over again. Individual dialogues are samplings of his constant activity. The practice of Socratic dialectic in the dialogues is thus exemplary and, broadly speaking, iterative, in that each dialogue (and indeed all the dialogues as a group) presents once a practice that was continual. What is more, this aspect of Socrates is explicitly thematized. In the *Apology*, Socrates tells the story of how his efforts to understand the oracle that nobody was wiser than he led him to spend his life questioning others (21b–23b). Even when threatened with death he cannot promise to refrain (29c–d).⁸ Moreover, followers of his adopt the same practice, which creates great irritation among the Athenians (23c). Socrates is *always* making fun of orators (*Mx.* 234–235); Hippias accuses Socrates of *always* splitting hairs and not grappling with the whole topic (*Hp.Mi.* 369b–c).⁹ His single-minded lifestyle also makes Socrates the object of repeated conversations by others. The young Charmides remarks that his companions speak frequently about Socrates (*Chrm.* 156a), and in the *Laches*, Lysimachus asks his sons whether this is the Socrates of whom they have often spoken (181a).

The counterpart to this iterative presentation is repetition. Iterativity and repetition might seem to exclude each other, in that the former represents one action as a sample of many, and the latter tells an action more than once. The two features complement each other, however, since each emphasizes the essential consistency of the Socratic life and philosophical interaction. It is, moreover, difficult to distinguish conceptually what might be called rhetorical uses of repetition (where

⁷ Gill 2002: 153.

⁸ Moreover, he continues his usual discursive practice in the days before his execution in the days before his execution (*Phd.* 59d).

⁹ At *La.* 187e–188b Nicias comments that any one who converses with Socrates is drawn into a defense of his whole life and warns that the present conversation is an example. For further examples of Socrates' activity presented as repetitive by himself or others see *Hp.Mi.* 372b; *Men.* 89e; *R.* 487b.

the interlocutors talk about repeating material external to the present conversation) from narratological ones (where the interlocutors actually repeat what has previously been said in the narrative text). This is no accident. The reader is encouraged to extrapolate from the text at hand to create a mental construction of the philosophical life; iterative presentation and references to repetition (as well as actual repetition) ensure that the boundaries between text and fabula (broadly conceived) seem permeable.

Repetition and assessment of prior material is an important aspect of philosophic progress. Interlocutors must keep in mind what they have said previously, so that their argument may be consistent and productive.¹⁰ This applies both to prior agreements in the present conversation and to those in prior conversations. When Crito tries to persuade Socrates to escape from prison, Socrates demurs. He cannot now abandon the principles by which he has lived:

This is not a new development. I have always been the sort of person who is not persuaded by any of my friends more than by the argument that appears the best to me as I reason it out. I cannot, indeed, throw out the arguments that I spoke before, now that this fortune has come upon me, but they appear to me to be pretty much the same ... Was it said well on each occasion, or not, that we should pay attention to some opinions and not others? Or was it well spoken before I had to die, but now after all it has become perfectly obvious that it was spoken to no purpose, just for the sake of argument, and it was really a nonsensical and childish game? (C*ri.* 46b–d)

Socrates' task in the *Crito* is to convince his friend that the conclusions they reached in the past still apply in the present.

Socrates, then, prizes consistency, both in word and action: we must discover the best arguments and then live by them. In the *Gorgias* Socrates extracts from the sophist a definition of rhetoric as public persuasion, and then comments that he has done this so that Gorgias will not be surprised if he asks the same kind of question later, a kind of proleptic repetition (454b–c). Yet Socratic consistency can irritate. Callicles complains that Socrates 'keeps talking nonsense' (*Grg.* 490e) when he diverts discussion of political power to talk about food and drink and doctors, and that 'on each occasion you twist the arguments up and down' (511a)—a comment that applies equally to the present conversation and many past ones. Socrates, however, is unabashed:

¹⁰ Cf. *Grg.* 457d–e.

his own view (that doing wrong is more shameful than suffering it) ‘has been spoken many times already’ but can be repeated once again (508d). His arguments are secure and he insists ‘I always say the same thing’ (509a). Thus he ironically praises Callicles for saying the same things to him as he does to his friends (487c–d), but also does not hesitate to charge him with inconsistency: ‘you declare that I always say the same things and blame me for this, but I say the opposite of you, that you never say the same things about the same topics’ (491b; cf. 518a–b).¹¹

Iterative narration and repetition show Socrates and his interlocutors living in a world where both intellectuals and ordinary citizens are concerned with a recurring set of problems about how to live their lives. The *Laches* opens with Lysimachus’ iterative narrative of how he and Melesias educate their children (179c–d). They often talk to their sons about the noble deeds of their forefathers, but are ashamed that they have no deeds of their own to point to. They blame their own fathers for spoiling them. They urge noble actions on their sons, their sons promise to comply, and the fathers thus try to discover what activities will be beneficial to them. Laches responds that this question is applicable not only to them but to those who are occupied with public affairs, who take their private affairs lightly and manage them carelessly (180b). This exchange occurs before the entry of Socrates into the conversation. It therefore sets up dialogue with Socrates as a response to a recurrent problem, and as Nicias will shortly remark, all conversation with Socrates follows the same pattern.¹² The beginning of the *Menexenus* addresses a similar and recurrent ‘(pseudo-)’ problem that faces the composer of the state funeral oration: what shall a speaker say on short notice when he must improvise? Socrates asserts that most speakers have speeches prepared long before. Nor is it difficult to improvise, given that the content is so predictable. In the body of the dialogue Socrates gives an oration which he has purportedly heard from Aspasia, but which she herself has partly improvised and partly sourced from an oration she wrote for Pericles (236b). Socrates’ speech, then, has a strong iterative feel: he presents once a speech which we are to think is delivered in similar terms on many occasions.

¹¹ The refusal of the sophists in the *Euthydemus* to argue consistently causes the conversation to break down (287a–b).

¹² Above, n. 9.

Similarly, various philosophical theories are presented in the dialogue as recurrent within Socrates' intellectual milieu, and interlocutors often use or reject them. For example, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus give a demonstration of the familiar argument that it is impossible to tell a lie. Socrates says that he has heard the argument from many, 'and however often I hear it, I am always amazed; indeed, Protagoras' circle made much use of it, as did those who came before them. To me it always seems amazing, since it overturns both others and itself' (*Euthd.* 286c). Iteration and repetition again blur: the argument is rehearsed in the present situation, but is a sample of a pattern that has often been used before, and Socrates points out that the sophists are repeating, in effect, a piece of common intellectual property. Likewise in the *Philebus*, Socrates remarks that paradoxes concerning the one and the many are commonplace, and casts his comment in an iterative fashion: 'almost everyone has now agreed that we should not engage in such things, that they are childish and too easy and great impediments for those who take up arguments' (14d). It is also clear, moreover, that certain arguments are familiar within the Socratic circle. At *Phaedo* 100b, Socrates tries to explain his theory of causation: 'This is what I mean. There is nothing new about it; in no way have I stopped saying what I always said on other occasions in my past argument ... I am going to return to those much-discussed entities and begin from them [i.e. the Forms]'.¹³ The difference between Socratic arguments and sophistic ones seems to be that sophistic ones are used to score what Socrates regards as cheap points, whereas Socrates' theories are open to analysis and contribute towards an intellectual 'big picture'.¹⁴

Repetition of arguments may thus be positive or negative. Past agreements can pave the way for future progress while repeated reconsideration is necessary to ensure that they still hold good (since argumentative results are always provisional).¹⁵ Repetition of argument can also, how-

¹³ Cf. Cebes' earlier reference to the theory of recollection 'which you have frequently been accustomed to speak of' (72e).

¹⁴ Thus the 'impossibility of contradiction' argument is self-refuting, equivocation between the one and the many is an impediment to argument, but the Forms are a workable starting point for further discussion.

¹⁵ Need for continued analysis: *Phd.* 107b ('even if our first assumptions are persuasive to you, nevertheless they must be examined more clearly. I think that if you analyze them sufficiently, you will follow the argument, to the extent that it is possible for a human to follow it'); *Grg.* 513c.

ever, mark argumentative or rhetorical breakdown. Lysias' reported oration in the *Phaedrus* is criticized for pointless repetition of the same things twice (*Phdr.* 235a). With a recalcitrant opponent, Socrates must repeat his questions several times over (*Hp.Mi.* 364c).¹⁶ At its worst, this sort of repetition leads to vicious circularity. At *Lysis* 213b–c, Socrates remarks that 'It's necessarily going to happen that we come to the same agreement we did in our former discussion', that a man is an enemy to his friend, while the discussion at *Philebus* 13c stalls because the interlocutors are drifting back to old positions (necessitating a new start).¹⁷ Repetition is not only a narrative liability, but an intellectual danger. When argument after argument seems false, the experience can lead to 'misology', the belief that 'there is nothing sound or stable either in facts or in arguments'. The victim ends up loathing argument and missing the chance of knowing the truth (*Phd.* 90b–d). The aspiring philosopher must, therefore, exercise persistence and methodological self-awareness to ensure that repetition is productive rather than vicious.

Considerable patience is required, therefore, fully to embrace the philosophical life. The topics considered are complex and demand thorough analysis. So it is that the motif of starting the analysis again is not infrequent in the Platonic corpus.¹⁸ A few examples will suffice. Repeated efforts to define self-control within the *Charmides* are frustrated, and thus at *Charmides* 167a–b, Socrates tries again, with the remark 'Third time lucky: let us examine it again, as if from the beginning' (the result will prove unsuccessful, and further consideration is left for the future). This is not, strictly speaking, repetition in the narratological sense of the word; the same speech act is not presented more than once. Yet the same topic is covered repeatedly. The need to start again is (unsurprisingly) pronounced in aporetic dialogues, which can end with the assertion that the question needs to be considered from the beginning (*Euthphr.* 15c–d; *Prt.* 361a–d; cf. 349a). In larger dialogues, the need to start afresh can be used to articulate the argument. At *Republic* 348b Socrates urges Thrasymachus to 'go back to the beginning and answer'.¹⁹ The need to discuss a fresh topic for the sake of

¹⁶ Socrates too can be accused of coming back uselessly to the same point (*Chrm.* 166b–c).

¹⁷ Other examples of vicious argumentative circularity occur at *Euthphr.* 15b; *Grg.* 517c; *Prt.* 361; *Men.* 79b–e.

¹⁸ Grenet 1956.

¹⁹ Similar references to fresh starts at *Prm.* 142b, 155e, 165e; *Plt.* 268d (another

completeness may also be seen in terms of starting again.²⁰ The articulation of a discussion in such terms is connected with the need for a leisurely intellectual pace. When examining the theory of flux in *Theaetetus* Socrates declares that they must look over the account again in a leisurely way (154e–155a). Socrates' digression on the philosophical life in the dialogue makes a similar point:

Free men always have what you are talking about: leisure, and they conduct their discussion in peace and at leisure. Just as we are now for the third time changing one argument for another, so do they, if a topic comes up that, as in our case, pleases them more than the one that lies before them. It is no concern to them whether they speak briefly or at length as long as they achieve the truth. The others [orators] always speak without leisure, for the flowing of the water clock urges them on.
(172d–e)

Philosophical conversation and its image, the philosophical dialogue, do not, then, operate according to the rules that govern more formal speech. As long as the interlocutors keep in mind the connection of their conversation with their larger goals, digression is encouraged, and closure is provisional.

Let us consider a more extended example of iterative presentation in the *Symposium*. Socrates' repetitive behaviour is stressed. Aristodemus speaks of his habitual fits of abstraction (174d–175b), and Alcibiades declares that Socrates' bewitching words conquer always, not just once (213e). The centerpiece of the dialogue is Socrates' remarkable narrative of his conversations with Diotima, through which she initiated him into the mysteries of love. His narrative is motivated by Agathon's prior speech on love, whose contents he has demolished through elenchus (199c–201c). Then, however, Socrates claims he had begun his talks with Diotima by repeating the sort of things Agathon had been saying about love and she used the arguments Socrates had used on Agathon to refute him (201e). Agathon's speech, then, and Socrates' response are cast as a repetition of a previous exchange where Socrates played the part of Agathon. As Socrates begins his narrative, the discussion between Diotima and Socrates (in the past) continues precisely from the point where that between Agathon and Socrates stopped, thus map-

starting point); *Phlb.* 34e, 51a (matters still outstanding); *Tht.* 187b, d; *Ti.* 48a–b, 48d, 69a.

²⁰ At *Republic* 450a–b Socrates asserts that they must start a fresh debate on the status of women, and at 497d Socrates starts his exposition on philosopher kings in the cause of completeness.

ping past and present conversations onto each other. At 202e, Diotima moves into exposition. The argument from then until 207a is continuous, but at that point we learn that the conversation was conducted not on one occasion but in a series of conversations ‘whenever she talked about erotics’. We learn in retrospect that the presentation has been iterative. From 207a to the end of Socrates’ Diotima narrative at 212a, the argument is presented once again as a smooth progression. The break at 207a articulates the argument into two parts and throws the conclusion of the speech (which deals with the drive for immortality) into high relief. But what is the overall effect of iterative presentation? Since Socrates is convinced that what Diotima says is true, he repeats the argument at the dinner party, and feels no qualms about consolidating many conversations into one (present) argument. Why should he? For he shares Diotima’s belief that we should move from the particular to the universal, from many arguments delivered on many occasions to one stable truth. Correspondingly, the Platonic dialogues are conversations repeated both within the world of the narrators and by subsequent readers of the text, fragments of a larger picture that the philosophical reader must integrate.

Living and speaking consistently and with an eye to this integration helps to bring us into contact with a timeless, changeless, and non-sensible world.²¹ The physical universe in Plato is sometimes characterized as subject to cycles of creation and destruction (*Ti.* 22c; *Pl.* 269b–270a), and human souls, themselves immortal, undergo a cycle of birth and death (*Phd.* 72a; *Phdr.* 248c–249c; *R.* 617d–621b). What is important for present purposes is the relationship between language (and thus narrative) and these realms of existence. As Timaeus remarks at *Timaeus* 29b–c, words relating to the intelligible world are lasting and irrefutable (to the extent that they can be), while words relating to the sensible world can at most be ‘likely’. Time itself is once said to be a moving image of eternity (*Ti.* 37d–e), but to the extent that our speech can be stable, it approaches more closely eternal verity. The problem seems to be that the sensible world demands narrative (cf. *Ti.* 19b–c). Thus the narrative of the Platonic dialogue occupies an uneasy middle ground between the progression that humans demand in a successful narrative and the philosophical urge towards stability: the movement towards consistency and stability is itself the story, and is expressed by

²¹ Cf. *Phd.* 78d (on the Forms); *Prm.* 141, 151e (on the One).

cycles of repeated argumentation. This tension is present also in the eschatological narratives in the corpus (in *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*), which are iterative in that they describe once a sequence of events that is conceived as repeating itself almost infinitely.²² They tell the story of afterlife rewards and punishments and the narratives have the satisfactory closure of good rewarded and evil punished, but there is every indication that the cycle of birth and death will (in most cases) repeat. Yet they also provide an accessible image of the non-sensible world.

Analepsis

All Platonic dialogues are instances of subsequent narration. The presence of Socrates in every dialogue but one (the *Laws*) ensures that we receive the dialogue as a report about or representation of the past, albeit an idealized past that in Plato's case is a forum for thought experiment. The dialogues are set in a world where there is an intense interest about what Socrates did and said. In the case of framed dialogues a narrator recounts a dialogue from the past. This dialogue therefore is one huge analepsis. In the case of dramatic dialogues the invisibility of the primary narrator creates an *effect* of simultaneity. But here too narrating characters may embed analepses.

Dramatic dialogues sometimes start with reference to philosophical conversations that took place before the dialogue opened (external analepsis). In the *Timaeus* Socrates starts by summarizing the conclusions that were reached in a discussion on the previous day. In the *Philebus*, the narratee enters the conversation when the argument is already in progress and thus a recapitulation of prior argumentation is needed (111a). In these instances, analepsis allows Plato to focus on a particular segment or aspect of a larger problem. In other dialogues, external analepsis may be used as a springboard for discussion. In the *Charmides* (161b), Charmides tries to use someone else's definition of self-control when he has difficulty coming up with his own definition. At *Theaetetus* 152a (cf. 201c–d) Socrates reports Protagoras' man-measure doctrine in his exploration of the problem of knowledge. Such attempts to use other people's theories to solve problems or to quote them as illustra-

²² Cf. also Nightingale's (2002) important discussion of the myth of the *Phaedo* in terms of a (quasi-)Bakhtinian chronotope, the 'eschatology of the present'.

tions or authorities are rarely successful.²³ Socrates' own references to what he has heard from others in the past are usually vague or confined to myth and myth-like material (Diotima's doctrine of love is an exception).

Internal analepsis is an essential aspect of philosophical discussion. It secures commitment to past argument and helps to articulate the discussion by summarizing results or pointing out where the interlocutors made a mistake. Past experience can help to guide future action, and here analepsis is a didactic tool. It can also be used as a weapon; an interlocutor may be accused of not remembering what he has said earlier, or a simple restatement of a prior position may disguise itself as progress.²⁴ Examples of recapitulation of past argument for the sake of clarity are *Phaedo* 73a–74a (recapitulation of the proofs for recollection, which Socrates will subsequently expand),²⁵ and *Republic* 543a–544b, where Socrates summarizes the digression on the community of women, children, and possessions, and takes the conversation back to where they left off before the digression: 'Like a wrestler, then, give me the same hold again, and when I ask the same question, try to make the same reply as you were going to at that point'.²⁶ *Politicus* 275c–d provides an example of backtracking when the argument has proved unsatisfactory. The Eleatic Stranger states that they must go back to a prior division where they started to lose track of the statesman, and he repeats the mistaken definition: 'at that point we called [statesmanship] simply "the science of the rearing of herds". Do you remember?'²⁷ Conversely, *Theaetetus* 205c–e uses a past agreement ('Do you remember then, my friend, that a little while ago in our previous discussion we accepted—and thought that it had been well said—that there was no

²³ Socrates encourages Meno not to cite what Gorgias said on the teachability of virtue but to answer for himself (*Men.* 71c–d), and he makes a similar move at *Protagoras* 347e–348a.

²⁴ For the latter see *Euthphr.* 14a–c, where Euthyphro simplistically summarizes his past position and Socrates caustically comments, 'Surely, Euthyphro, if you had wished you could have summed up what I asked for much more briefly. But the fact is that you are not eager to instruct me.'

²⁵ Cf. 91c–d, 95b–e.

²⁶ Other examples: *Plt.* 297c–d (reminder of an earlier agreement that it was not possible for a large mass of people to achieve political wisdom); and *Phlb.* 19c–d (summary of the recent argument as a prelude to demanding that Socrates clear up the difficulties they have encountered).

²⁷ Cf. *Chrm.* 172d: 'I don't think, Critias, our agreement on what we were talking about just now—that self-control would be a great good if it were like this—was well made ...'.

account of the first things of which the rest are composed ...') to show that their more recent analysis is unsatisfactory.

Internal analepsis often takes the form of evoking a past argument so that it may be reconsidered or refuted. At *Protagoras* 359a–c, Socrates prepares to attack Protagoras' conception of the parts of virtue:

On the basis of these assumptions, I said, ... let Protagoras here defend himself and show how the things that he said in the first instance are right—not what he said at the absolute beginning ... but what he said later ... At that point, immediately, I was very surprised at his answer, and still more so now that I have gone through these issues with you. So, I asked him whether he asserted the courageous were confident, and he said, 'Yes, and eager'. Do you remember, Protagoras, making these answers?

He agreed he had.

Come then, I said, tell us ... (359a–c)

And of course, Socrates goes on to show that Protagoras' position is incoherent. A similar use of analepsis to close the jaws of a dialectic trap can be seen in the *Gorgias*:

Socrates: In the first part of our discussion, Gorgias, it was stated that rhetoric is concerned with the words that are about ... what is just and unjust. Yes?

Gorgias: Yes.

Socrates: Now, when you said those things at that point, I supposed that rhetoric could never be an unjust thing, since it always crafts discourses about justice. But when you were saying a little later that the orator could even use rhetoric unjustly, I spoke those words I did because I was so surprised and considered that what was being said was inconsistent. I said that if, like me, you thought it worthwhile to be refuted, it was worth having a discussion, but if not, we should let it go. And later, now that we have made the examination, you yourself see that it has been agreed that it is impossible for the orator to use rhetoric unjustly. (460e–461a)

In these instances, analeptic review shows that Socrates' interlocutor has mistaken intellectual commitments and that his arguments have been inconsistent.²⁸ Memory of and commitment to a line of argument is, therefore, risky, although essential. No progress can be made unless

²⁸ Cf. *Grg.* 491b–c and 518a–b (Calicles accused of inconsistency); *Hp.Mi.* 369a (Hippias is not using his art of memory and has forgotten what the consequences of his position are).

one holds opinions and is prepared to argue for them and be refuted.²⁹ Arguments are, however, repeatedly reviewed and must always be seen as provisional.

The deployment of memory is important even at the metaphysical level. Whatever one thinks of the seriousness with which Plato may have entertained ‘recollection’ (the activation of prenatal knowledge) as an explanation of the problem of knowledge, it is striking that the ability to ‘recollect’ parallels the need for philosophical interlocutors to remember and activate their arguments. At *Phaedo* 72e–73a external analepsis merges with metaphysical recollection:

‘Besides, Socrates’, Cebes replied, ‘[what you say] is also in agreement with that argument (if it is true), which you have frequently been accustomed to present to us, that learning really happens to be nothing other than recollection ...’

‘But Cebes’, said Simmias in response, ‘what sort of proofs are these? Remind me—since at the present moment I don’t precisely remember’.

‘One very fine argument’, said Cebes, ‘is that ...’. (72e–73a)

As so often in Plato, narrative form and philosophical content play off each other.

Narrative of the past can be didactic. In the *Apology*, Socrates engages in autobiography to try to convince the jury that he is innocent of the charges brought against him and shows himself learning the appropriate lessons from his experiences. After hearing the report of the Delphic oracle that he is the wisest of men, Socrates questions various Athenians and discovers that their pretensions to knowledge are false. His conclusion, which he regards as an imperative to philosophize, is that human wisdom is of little value. Similarly, Socrates’ intellectual biography at *Phaedo* 96a–100a tells how he dabbled with natural science in his youth, attempted (unsuccessfully) to find satisfaction in the philosophy of Anaxagoras, and finally settled on a method of hypothesis. The motive for telling the story is the following: ‘If you wish, I will narrate to you my experiences. Then, if any of the things I say appears useful to you, you will use it for persuasion on the matters about which you speak’ (96a). Nor is it only Socratic autobiography that can prove didactic. Nicias in the *Laches* states that Socrates draws his interlocutors into giving an ‘account about himself, how he lives now and how he has lived his past life ... I think it is no bad thing to be reminded that

²⁹ Commitment to past argument, *Cri.* 46–49; *Plt.* 292b–d, 304e.

we have acted or are acting not well. The one who does not escape these critiques must surely take greater thought for the rest of his life' (188a–b).

Finally, we must consider cases where analeptic comment causes us to look at prior action in a new light. At *Charmides* 162c–d Socrates narrates that during the course of the conversation he had just reported, Critias had been growing agitated, and that this convinced him of something he had suspected for a while, that Charmides had taken his definition of self-control from Critias. So too, at *Republic* 336b–d, Socrates reports that Thrasymachus had long been trying to break into the discussion and that he himself had avoided looking at him, and subsequently (350c–d) that Thrasymachus made a series of damaging admissions *not* as Socrates had just narrated them, but with much baulking, sweating, and reluctance. These episodes show Socrates explicitly as a master narrator.³⁰ We may compare also the passages cited above where Socrates tells an interlocutor that he was surprised *at the time* a statement was originally made, clearly foreseeing that this would lead to contradiction. Apart from Socratic mastery of the argument, these passages show, perhaps, that a philosophical narrator will concentrate on presenting the essentials of the argument rather than on peripheral issues of personal embarrassment or triumph. These 'human interest' issues are presented after the action has been narrated for the first time, and emphasize that the argument must be allowed to run its full course.³¹ They also invite us to speculate about what else may have been going on in the 'background'. In the most extreme case, *Euthydemus* 290e–291a, analeptic comment may even make the reader suspicious about the accuracy of the narrative. Here, Socrates reports a stretch of argument as belonging to Clinias. Crito demurs, 'That young boy said such things?' Socrates responds, 'Perhaps it was Ctesippus after all who said these things, and I don't remember? ... Perhaps some higher being was present and said them? For I know well that I did hear them'. Crito comments, 'Yes, Socrates. I also think that a higher being said them—very much so'. Socrates has revealed himself as an unreliable narrator—both Crito and the narratee are convinced it must have been Socrates who made the argument. The episode, however, is in line with the ironic mask of incompetence Socrates adopts in this dialogue.

³⁰ For further discussion see *SAGN* 1:361–364.

³¹ Cf. *Phd.* 63d, 84c–d.

Prolepsis

Just as the philosopher must have an effective memory of what he and others have said, so he must be able to foresee the likely course of the argument. We have already seen how Socrates reveals that he has an almost uncanny ability to predict when a line of argument will lead to trouble. These predictive abilities also lead to the portrayal of Socrates as a *mantis*, or seer.³² We must also examine a representative sampling of instances where Socrates engages in a narrative form of prophecy, prolepsis, in which he attempts to project what he or hypothetical interlocutors might say in response to questions. If Socrates attempts to run away from prison and the laws of the city accuse him of trying to destroy them, what will he respond? (*Cri.* 50a–c)—a question that is followed by substantial quotation of this hypothetical conversation. At *Protagoras* 330c–e Socrates imagines a series of questions put to him and Protagoras by a hypothetical questioner and at 330e–331a, this questioner reviews the prior argument and finds an inconsistency. Later in the same dialogue, Socrates asks Protagoras to help him convince the many what is really going on when they speak of being overcome by pleasure:

Perhaps if we say ‘You are not right, men, but wrong’... they would ask us ‘If it is not being defeated by pleasure, Protagoras and Socrates, what in the world is it? What do you say it is? Tell us’... If they should ask us ‘What do you say it is, what we were calling being defeated by pleasures?’ I would speak to them this way, ‘Listen. Protagoras and I will try to explain it to you’... They would agree. Then you and I would ask them again ... Now what if we asked them the opposite? ...

(353a–354a)

This hypothetical conversation goes on until 357e and ends by establishing that the pleasant is good and the painful bad, an essential point for the final refutation of Protagoras. Examples could be multiplied, but enough has been said to show that this kind of hypothetical narrative is an important feature of the dialogues. Not only does it serve to impress upon the reader the need to be able to forecast the implications of one’s argument, but it helps to distance Socrates from the argument, to make it less a matter of personal eristic victory.³³ In the *Crito*, Socrates at first

³² For an analysis of Socrates as a seer see K. Morgan forthcoming.

³³ An interesting comparandum here is the narratorial intervention of the Homeric narrator in certain ‘if not’ situations (‘Odysseus would have perished, if Athena had

aligns himself with Crito as the object of the laws' critique; in the *Protagoras* he aligns himself with the sophist, even though the end result will be the latter's refutation. In the *Theaetetus* he even makes himself the object of a stinging critique by a Protagoras brought back from the grave (165e–168c). The point must partly be that it does not matter who makes the argument, nor does it matter when (the futurity of these prolepses is dubious). What does matter is the *logos*.

Rhythm

Reports of philosophical conversation are eagerly received within the Platonic corpus, and requests for such reports may be accompanied by the plea that the narrator give a really detailed account.³⁴ Socrates himself is a great lover of discourses.³⁵ It is Socrates' disciples, however, who are particularly concerned with the accurate reproduction of Socratic conversation. The *Phaedo* opens with a conversation between Phaedo and Echecrates in which (58c–d) Phaedo confesses that nothing gives him more pleasure than talking or hearing about Socrates, and Echecrates asks Phaedo to try to recall the last day of Socrates as carefully as he can (a request repeated at 88d–e).³⁶ Socrates is sometimes portrayed as having been a helpful source in the commission of these conversations to memory (*Smp.* 173b; *Tht.* 143a). As with entire conversations, so with individual arguments. At *Lysis* 211a–b, Lysis is much taken with a stretch of argument that he wants Socrates to repeat to his friend Menexenus.

Lysis ... said to me quietly, without Menexenus noticing, 'Socrates, say to Menexenus what you have been saying to me'. And I said, 'you will say these things to him, Lysis, for you were certainly paying attention'. 'Absolutely', he said. 'Try then', I said, 'to recall them as best you can, so you can say them to him clearly, and if you forget any of them, ask me again the first time you meet me'. (211a–b)

not given him forethought'). As was remarked in *SAGN* 1:16–17, this different kind of hypothetical narrative in Homer creates tension or pathos.

³⁴ The desire for an exact and full account seems to be a mark of a curious intellect, and characterizes also Solon's request to the Egyptian priests at *Timaeus* 23d.

³⁵ *Phdr.* 227b (Socrates asks Phaedrus for an account of how he and Lysias have been spending their time); *Euthd.* 272d (Socrates tells Crito that he remembers well the conversation he had with the sophists and will try to tell the whole story from the beginning).

³⁶ Cf. *Prm.* 126b–127a; *Smp.* 172a–173b.

Here Plato presents a basic impulse behind the reproduction of Socratic conversation, although we must acknowledge that his own strategies need not coincide with such constructions. Note the stress on accuracy, Socrates' offer to coach the student on details, and, importantly, the pedagogical strategy that lies behind. The student must internalize the argument, so that it can become his own as he repeats it.

The narratee might, then, expect that story-time will match fabula-time, and as a general description of the pace of the conversations portrayed, this is accurate enough: the illusion is that the dialogue takes the same time to read as the conversation did to conduct. This scenic pace strengthens the effect of simultaneity, as we seem to overhear the conversations and thus become pupils ourselves. We have already seen, however, that things are not always so simple—witness Socrates' admission in *Republic* 350c–d that his refutation of Thrasymachus actually took place more slowly than his narration of it. I shall consider these variations of pace under the headings of slow-down and acceleration.

Slow-down

The narratological phenomenon of slow-down is relatively rare in the Platonic corpus, although we have seen that philosophical leisure is an important theme. Particularly in longer dialogues a speaker sometimes appeals for patience if he senses that the discussion is rushed. At *Theaetetus* 172c (cf. 183d, 154e–155a), the digression upon the philosophical life is introduced by the observation that although theories are rushing upon them fast and furious, this is no cause for concern, since they have time to consider them. Both Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger stress that subjects must be dealt with in the proper order and unhurriedly (*R.* 528d; *Plt.* 264a–b, 277a–c; *Phlb.* 17a). A long stretch of the *Statesman* (283b–286c) is devoted to a 'prophylactic' argument on the topic of excess and deficiency in argument and introduction of the criterion of due measure. One must not, says the Stranger, get impatient with the length of a discussion—the criterion is how well the discussion helps the inquirer, not whether it is long or short.³⁷ These methodological discussions are not, of course, examples of slow-down, but they do

³⁷ Compare also Prodicus' comments on long and short discourses as reported at *Phaedrus* 267b.

show how aware Plato was of the pace of his narrative and mean that interpreters should pay special attention to these issues.

Slow-down is most noticeable when a Platonic narrator describes an emotional state or sets a scene. In the first category we may place passages such as *Phaedo* 59a, where Phaedo the narrator describes how ‘an absolutely strange emotion came over me, an unaccustomed mingling of pleasure mixed together with pain, as I realized that soon he was going to die’, or 88c, where Phaedo describes the depression that seized the company at the objections of Simmias and Cebes. Sometimes the emotions are those of Socrates: his spellbound reaction to Protagoras’ Great Speech (*Prt.* 328d), his terror in the face of Thrasymachus’ violent objections to his line of argument (*R.* 336d), his overwhelming arousal at his glimpse of what lay underneath Charmides’ cloak (*Chrm.* 155d–e). In all three instances, Socrates is the narrator of his own emotions, and indeed, our familiarity with his irony makes us unlikely to take his enchantment, his terror, or his helpless arousal at face value. In each case, he soon rallies to take up his argumentative task, and his exaggerated description of his emotions acts as narrative punctuation, marks the magnitude of the task he faces, and casts him as a philosophical hero whose devotion to argument conquers any emotional weakness.

The infrequent examples of scene setting are never casual. In the *Protagoras* Socrates paints a detailed picture of the collection of sophists he sees when he enters the house of Callias, lingering over the relationships between the sophists and their respective audiences and throwing in resonant allusions to the *Odyssey* for good measure (314c–316a). The verb of entry in this passage is repeated three times. The first time is at 314b, ‘When we went in we came upon Protagoras ...’, after which Socrates describes the scene for a page and a half. The second is at 316a3, ‘And we had just gone in, and Alcibiades came in behind us’, and finally we are given a summary sentence, ‘When we entered, then, we spent a few moments examining the scene thoroughly’ (316a6–7). The repeated entry creates suspense (when will they actually speak to Protagoras?), but the summary also draws attention to Socrates’ act of narration (as do the Homeric allusions), marking the scenic descriptions a construct. It may thus be compared with the passages treated above in my discussion of analeptic comment on previous action, where we are made to reassess what has been put into, or left out of, the narrative.

Acceleration

Just as the concept of slow-down exists at the levels both of content and of form, so too does acceleration, or passing more rapidly than normal through material. We have seen already that important philosophical topics deserve a leisurely treatment, but another aspect of the staging of philosophical conversation is the pressure of time, which makes it necessary to move quickly past inessentials. There is a tension between the limited time we may dedicate to philosophy and the nature of the world of eternal truth that is the object of the philosophical quest. Similarly, there is a tension between the vastness of any given subject and the narrative time/space that may be devoted to it. Such tensions are especially marked when the world of the philosopher comes into contact with the everyday. In his defence speech, Socrates is keenly aware that he has only a short time to dispel a long-standing prejudice against him (*Ap.* 18e–19a; cf. 37a), while in the *Phaedo* the pressure of time is caused by the imminence of Socrates' execution (61e, 108d).³⁸ Mythological vistas also seem to generate an inability to tell the tale in full.³⁹

Present concerns pale when compared with the big cosmic picture that is the business of philosophy. The immortality of the soul makes this picture even more crucial. The *Republic* is particularly aware of such timeframes.⁴⁰ When Socrates is dismayed at the swarm of arguments called by the discussion, Glaucon responds, 'for those who have sense, the measure for listening to such discussions is one's whole life' (450b). Socrates will not stop his arguments until he has given Thrasymachus something useful

'for that life when they have been born again and come upon such arguments'. 'You speak with reference to a small period of time!' he said. 'Nothing at all', I said, 'in comparison to all of time'. (498d)

In the introduction to the myth of Er at the end of the dialogue, we learn that the magnitude of the rewards for justice must be measured

³⁸ Note the deliberate ambiguity at *Phaedo* 108d: Socrates says that his life is too short for a long explanation, and this could refer both to his death, and to the immensity of the subject (the nature of the true earth).

³⁹ *Phd.* 108d; *R.* 615a; *Plt.* 277b.

⁴⁰ Cf. also *Ap.* 40e (the whole of time could be regarded as a single night if death is oblivion); *Phd.* 107c ('If indeed the soul is immortal, it needs our care not only for that period of time which we call life, but for all time').

not within the compass of a single lifetime, but on the scale of eternity: “‘What great thing’, I [Socrates] said, ‘could there be in a short period of time? For that whole period of time from childhood to old age would, I suppose, be trivial in comparison with all of time’” (608c). Human life may seem long to us, but is dwarfed by eternity.

If the whole of life is but a moment, one cannot afford to lose any time in inappropriate or unproductive argumentation. When argument is inductive, generalizing from many examples, the participants may decide to cut short the citation of multiple instances (*Phlb.* 50d). Accepting a hypothesis can also prevent excessive repetition or the laborious task of addressing multiple objections (*R.* 437a; *Phlb.* 24d–25a). Sometimes a subject cannot be fully treated because of current constraints, such as mortal nature (*Phdr.* 245b, 246a; *R.* 435c–d, 506d–e, 509c; *Ti.* 48c). Sometimes worthy subjects are rejected because of the need for focus. Thus Timaeus refuses to digress on self-existent forms (*Ti.* 51c–d) or multiple worlds (*Ti.* 55c–d), while in the *Theaetetus* (184a) Socrates will not be drawn into a discussion of the side issue of monism. Occasionally, however, such subjects are merely deferred, to be revisited later (whether this is within the confines of the dialogue or not).⁴¹ The Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* resists the temptation to digress on true subdivisions, but promises to come back to it some other time (263a–b; cf. 284d). He never returns to the topic within the dialogue, but in the *Republic* Socrates does return to deferred topics: to the question of the feasibility of the ideal city (471c–502c, deferred from 458a–b), and the education of the philosopher kings at 502e–503a. The narrative reinforces the notion that the dialogues are snatches of a much larger conversation, whose measure is not one, but many lives.

On the narratological level we may note several types of acceleration, manifested as ellipsis, where we pass over parts of the action deemed to have only marginal philosophical interest for present purposes. Plato often accelerates over transitions, particularly at the beginning of a dialogue. In the beginning of the *Laches* the original four interlocutors decide to take their problem to Socrates, who is addressed by Lysimachus at 180d. The reader must imagine that the interlocutors have walked over to Socrates to engage him in conversation, but no indication of this action appears in the text. At the beginning of the *Gorgias* the initial exchanges are between Callicles, Chaerephon, and

⁴¹ Cf. also *Ti.* 38d–e (discussion of the places of the stars is deferred to another occasion) and 38b (discussion of the effects of time on language is also deferred).

Socrates, and Chaerephon is encouraged to speak directly to Gorgias at 447c–d. We must imagine either that they have all been talking quietly on the fringes of the larger group, or that they have been standing to one side and now approach. Again none of this appears in the text.⁴² *Protagoras* 314c combines this speedy movement towards the main conversation with the ellipsis of a conversation not relevant to the present topic:

When we had agreed on this we walked on. When we were in the porch we stood and conversed on a topic that had occurred to us when we were on the road. So that it would not be incomplete, but so that we could enter once we had brought it to a conclusion, we stood in the doorway and conversed until we came to an agreement with each other. (314c)

This little vignette also illustrates the principle I have discussed earlier, that philosophers should take a leisurely attitude to conversation and allow it to run its natural course.

Omission of ‘unimportant’ detail is frequent. In my discussion of analepsis, I referred to the passage in the *Republic* where Socrates confesses that his narration did not do justice to the hesitations of Thrasy-machus. Socrates’ analeptic comment makes it clear that his account of the conversation was, in fact, accelerated. We find similar acceleration over the baulking by an opponent at *Protagoras* 333d: ‘At first Protagoras was coy—for he alleged that the argument [on Socrates’ terms] was hard to manage—but then he agreed to answer’ (cf. 338e, 348b). Plato also passes relatively quickly over the response of listeners, as one example of many will show. In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras makes a spirited counterattack against Socrates, who comments, ‘When he had made this speech he produced applause and praise from the audience. At first I was like someone who has been struck a blow by a good boxer: I went blind and became dizzy’ (339d–e).⁴³ Like the primary narrator, secondary narrators may omit details they feel to be irrelevant. When Socrates tells the myth of Thamus and Theuth in the *Phaedrus*, he passes over Thamus’ comments on all the arts except writing, which is the issue at hand. Aristodemus in the *Symposium* leaves out

⁴² At *Phaedrus* 242b we are to envisage Socrates getting up, starting to cross the stream and then stopping. At *Theaetetus* 143b Euclides suggests that he and Terpsion go inside and have a slave read the text of a Socratic conversation to them. One line later, Euclides can state, ‘This is the book’.

⁴³ *Ap.* 35e; *Prt.* 334c, 337c, 338b, 348c, 358 passim; *Euthd.* 276c, 303b; *Smp.* 176e–177a, 198a; *R.* 338a, 344d, 368c.

details of the dinner party before the serious conversation starts (175a–176a). Even once the diners have made the decision to talk about love, not all speeches are reported, and not verbatim (178a, 180c). The pace quickens even further at the end of dialogue, when the drinking party degenerates into a drunken brawl (223b), and even the final exchange between Socrates, Agathon and Aristophanes is merely sketched.

One last instance of acceleration is interesting because it shows that such ellipsis may be a mistake. At *Euthydemus* 291b, in the frame conversation, Socrates reports to Crito the discussion he had with the sophists and Clinias. Crito asks whether their intellectual search was successful and Socrates wryly admits that it was not. ‘Why should I tell you the long version?’ he asks. They ended up back where they had started. Socrates’ account here is accelerated, but Crito is not satisfied. ‘How did this happen to you?’ he asks. Socrates and Crito now reconstruct in detail in the frame conversation the same material that Socrates passed over (291c–293a). Crito is not a quick enough thinker to be able to supply the argument for himself. The narrative is compressed, but then must be expanded in the frame.

Conclusion

The issue of time in Platonic narrative is linked to the issue of the operation of time in mortal life. The immortal human soul is encased in a time-bound shell and subject to the laws of the physical world, yet its best destiny is to free itself from these constraints. How to represent the eternal, and the attempt to find it, in narrative? As the Socratic narrator sometimes points out, it is impossible to represent the (timeless) eternal realm in a narrative, which is defined by the progression of time. The sensible world, however, demands some kind of narrative. It is fitting, therefore, to conclude by noting that Plato occasionally plays on this tension. Even in the case of narration about the sensible realm, a true narrative seems impossible. I am speaking, of course, of the disorderly narrative motion in the *Timaeus*, where we are told that narrative order does not correspond to the order of creation and that the narrative is ‘random’ because human beings are under the dominion of chance (34b–c; cf. 44c, 61c–d). It has long been recognized that in certain Platonic narratives fictive genesis may replace conceptual analysis, and present as separated in time things that, in reality, co-exist. Examples of such myths are the cosmogony of

the *Timaeus* just mentioned and the origin of the state in *Republic* 2 and *Laws* 3.⁴⁴ Moreover, the comparison of different constitutions in *Republic* 8 is presented as a narrative of decline, a diachronic treatment of a synchronic reality. As the *Timaeus* tells us, there is an interrelationship between time and language (38b). In that dialogue Timaeus states that this subject is best discussed on another occasion. But perhaps all the dialogues meditate upon this.

⁴⁴ Frutiger 1930: 190–191.