

## ONE

# WEAVING AND UNWEAVING THE FABRIC OF SACRIFICE

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What if the death of Socrates was a sacrifice? How, then, should we take it? A thick fabric with many other questions already interwoven is given. To whom and to what end is this sacrifice made? Is it offered to Apollo? Or to his son Asclepius? Is this sacrifice offered to any god at all, or does it instead reveal something about the fabric of a sacrificial culture in the Athenian *polis* or the proper relationship of the philosopher to its religious practices? Or perhaps we might take it as the offering of some favor or sign for the companions of Socrates?

Furthermore, if it is a sacrifice, then who is it who makes this offering? Is it the servant of the Eleven who prepares and presides as the *pharmakon* is brought forth for Socrates to drink? Is it the city of Athens that engages in self-purification by this sacrifice? Or perhaps it is Socrates himself who receives the *pharmakon* already concocted in the cup and takes it himself “without the least tremor” and putting the cup to his lips “downed it with great readiness and relish” (117b–c).<sup>1</sup>

Yet, if it is self-sacrifice, then why does Socrates consent to it? Is it merely from a desire to earn a place in someplace after here? Is it from a desire for release from his earthly state—imprisonment in a body as Nietzsche and others would have us take it? Or is it perhaps for some further purpose, a desire to leave a lasting glimpse of philosophy as a means of purification for philosophers yet to come? One might even begin to wonder what it does for those to whom it is given and who receive it as a gift.

Finally, does Socrates give his consent to his own death merely out of obedience to and respect for those who have convicted him and

required his execution (the Laws of the *polis*, as we learn at *Crito* 51d), from a desire to set an example for those companions who are present at his death, or perhaps even for Plato, who, even though he wrote the dialogue, was apparently unable to witness this sacrifice because, as Phaedo cautiously reports, he was ill that day (59b)? Or perhaps is it possible to discern a deeper cause in the structure of sacrifice itself? Were we to lay hold of any one of these questions about the significance of sacrifice in the *Phaedo* in isolation from the others we might risk placing undue stress on a single thread of fabric that is already tightly interwoven with many others. We would thus run the risk of tearing the fabric and delivering it as pieces with frayed edges. We must take care, then, how we respond to these questions lest we, who are far less skillful at weaving than the practiced Penelope, unwittingly unravel a beautiful whole cloth.<sup>2</sup>

More than twenty years ago, Jean-Luc Nancy laid hold of sacrifice as whole cloth when he called both the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus by the name “sacrifice.” Nancy pointed out that, because of the way in which they died, their deaths brought into question this very term and initiated the ongoing fascination of the West with sacrifice.

Both of these figures—the double figure of ontotheology—deviate decidedly, and quite deliberately, from sacrifice; in doing so, they propose a metamorphosis or a transfiguration of sacrifice. What is involved, therefore, is above all a *mimesis*: the ancient sacrifice is reproduced—up to a certain point—in its form or its scheme; but it is reproduced so as to reveal an entirely new content, a truth hitherto hidden or misunderstood, if not perverted.<sup>3</sup>

For Nancy this “new sacrifice” in no way merely continues the old; instead, he asks whether this inauguration might require a “mimetic rupture?” If we follow the thread that holds the death of Socrates to be a sacrifice, then further questions arise in the wake of Nancy’s pronouncement. Are there particular aspects of a sacrificial ritual that Socrates’s death reproduces? How does this *mimesis* appear at the death of Socrates? Then again, how might it deviate “decidedly and quite deliberately” from ancient sacrifice, as Nancy proposes? What, after all, is this transfiguration, this metamorphosis, this *rupture*? Finally, what more might be said about this “entirely new content” that is thereby revealed, the truth “hitherto hidden or misunderstood, if not perverted?” Although Nancy offers us characteristics that “are clearly required and presented by the ontotheology of sacrifice,” his reading of the death of Socrates does not

carry out a thorough exploration of this *mimesis* or *mimetic rupture* that is in question.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the reader of Nancy is left to ponder: How does this happen in the *Phaedo*? One wonders in what way the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* is both *similar to* and *markedly different than* a Greek sacrificial ritual. What does it mean that the death of Socrates appears as both a sacrifice and *otherwise than* a sacrifice? Might one pick a stray thread from Nancy's reading of sacrifice and intentionally weave, unweave, and weave again the fabric of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*? In this way we might be brought to more carefully discern the elements of sameness and difference in this particular fabric. To discern in this way requires that we mindfully exercise the care, by which we mean vigilance, of the readers of the *Phaedo* who have come before us.

I propose, then, that we take Nancy's reading of the death of Socrates as just such a thread. There are moments in the death scene of the *Phaedo* that are remarkable in their similarity to a Greek sacrificial ritual of an animal. Such similarities stand forth in certain moments in the death scene such as the bath, the appearance of Socrates's body, the description of his "bull's look," the bringing forth of the *pharmakon* in ritual procession, the offering of a libation, and in Socrates's final words when he provides for a sacrifice of a cock to offer to Asclepius. Yet, as Nancy himself observed, crucial differences with and deviations from Greek sacrificial ritual also appear at Socrates's death. The most notable is that Socrates drinks "without the least tremor" (117b) and thereby offers his own consent, which would not have been possible for an animal that was part of a Greek sacrificial ritual. By means of a key difference that is carefully woven into the fabric, the sacrifice of Socrates becomes a self-sacrifice. This difference allows the death of Socrates to transform the purpose of sacrifice. A standard sacrifice is performed so that the principle of reciprocity can be upheld between gods and mortals. We give to the gods so that we might receive from them. Nevertheless, Socrates, "the ruler of life" (which his name means), gives (his life) so that others might receive. As such, his death is decisively otherwise than sacrifice. This way of receiving the death scene beholds it as a careful mixing, a careful weaving, of sameness and difference—of ritual sacrifice and its other. This is what I will suggest is the significance of the sacrifice of Socrates offered in the *Phaedo*.

Merely gazing unreflectively on the tapestry before us will not do. Care and vigilance are required to look at this scene as we also engage in unweaving the tapestry. We must look, as it were, at the reverse side of the tapestry and see the threads themselves laid bare. This will require watch-keeping as Penelope once did when she was weaving a shroud, as we learn in the *Odyssey* 2.100–118.<sup>5</sup> One focus of the epic poem is

Penelope's stratagem of weaving and secretly unweaving her work by means of which she delays the announcement of a decision about her marriage to one of the fourteen suitors. She thereby observes a ten-year vigil as she keeps watch for the return of Odysseus, her husband. We should recall Penelope's stated use for this shroud: the garment that she is weaving is for Laertes, her father-in-law, "to cover him for that day when the deadly fate that lays us out will take him down."<sup>6</sup> Yet by means of this very action, the ritual of late night unweaving, Penelope unworks, apparently quite uselessly, her stated goal. The futile labors of Penelope seemingly render useless that death shroud for Laertes. We might wonder then whether our work and unwork on sacrifice in the *Phaedo* will have the same result—rendering death useless, and thereby powerless, after all. It is noteworthy that this uselessness of death runs counter to the prevailing interpretation of the phenomenon in the *Phaedo*. Socrates asks Simmias at 64c, is death not "the freeing of the soul from the body?" Death, it would certainly seem, is not useless at all, at least not any more useless than philosophy. Simmias points out to Socrates, "The people back home [in Thebes] would entirely agree with them that those who philosophize are genuinely ripe for death, and indeed that they're not unaware that they deserve this plight" (64b). Can it really be the case that philosophy would have this purpose? Or are we to suspect something else behind this claim of Simmias, which he makes, after all, while laughing? Should we not follow the example of Penelope and keep careful watch over a *logos* that proclaims death to be nothing but the separation of the soul from the body? This inquiry into the theme of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*, then, has deep affinity with the work of the vigilant and careful Penelope. Yet, what more might we observe?

Even as Penelope sets herself the task of weaving and unweaving a death shroud, so must we who wish to take up the thread of sacrifice in the *Phaedo* attend both to *how* and *how not* the fabric of sacrifice covers and uncovers the embodied Socrates at his death. Our work, then, begins by becoming attentive and carefully noticing such details as Plato himself discerned when, although not present at the historical event, he could nonetheless see the death of the philosopher itself. By seeing this death and reflecting on it he could then reveal how the fabric of sacrifice both covers and uncovers the death of the philosopher. In this way, *Phaedo* was able to astoundingly remember an apparently pointless and useless detail of Socrates's final moments—that Socrates had already covered himself before he uncovered. "And the parts about his lower belly had already nearly grown cold when he uncovered himself (for he had covered himself) and said what was to be the final thing he uttered . . ." (118). *Phaedo*'s vivid memory of this act of uncovering and then covering again

suggests a futile and useless movement. Yet perhaps this final gesture offers us a clue? Perhaps we might take the death of Socrates as a sacrifice but also as decisively *otherwise* than one. Taking it in this way renders us receptive to the work of philosophy and safeguards us from the fear of death and of the seeming futility of this *logos*.

Such weaving and unweaving will require some clarity concerning the fabric at hand. It is impossible to know the degree to which Plato's depiction of the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* accurately reflects the historical event that occurred in the prison in Athens in 399 BCE. It is instructive to compare the case of the *Phaedo* with the *Apology*. The *Phaedo* differs from the *Apology* at least in one respect: in the case of Plato's *Apology*, we have other accounts of the events that are described. One of these is Xenophon's. Moreover, we are in no position to know whether or not Plato even tried to give a historically accurate account in the case of the *Phaedo*. Even with the *Apology* we are far from certain about its accuracy. The most well-known defense of this accuracy is offered by Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith,<sup>7</sup> who defend the accuracy of the *Apology* as an avenue to the thought of the historical Socrates. Their approach has a long tradition in Plato scholarship reaching back to such scholars as John Burnet.<sup>8</sup> Regarding the trial of Socrates, Plato underscores his own attendance at 34a and 38b (where he is one of those who stand surety for the thirty minae fine). Wm. Blake Tyrrell emphasized that it is a misreading to see Plato's mention of his own presence as evidence of a historical detail. He writes, "Plato's use of himself as a character [in the *Apology*] has no import on the accuracy of his text in a modern historical sense."<sup>9</sup> This issue is even more pronounced in the case of the *Phaedo*. There, as we have seen, Phaedo states flatly that "Plato was sick I think" (59b) and therefore not present in the prison. Phaedo, whose prodigious power of recall is on display in the rest of the dialogue, is surprisingly uncertain on this detail. This provides a further challenge to any claim about the historical accuracy of the *Phaedo*. Tyrrell has offered a different approach when he explains that "Scholars have interpreted these notices autobiographically, wondering in the case of 59b whether Plato was actually sick. John Burnet responds in the same vein: '[Plato] must have known whether he was ill or not. True, but it does not follow that Phaedo was equally well informed, and he, not Plato, is the speaker of 59b.'" Tyrrell continues along these lines, emphasizing the role of license inherent in Plato's position as narrator of the event.

Plato is the narrator, and as narrator he is not restrained by historical fact. For the purpose of the story, Plato the narrator can have Phaedo say whatever he likes. Phaedo's "I think"

and Plato's illness add detail to each figure qua character. The function and contribution of the characters may be analyzed in literary terms for literary effects but not historically because of the lack of corroborating or disconfirming evidence. The fact or nature of Plato's illness lies outside the text, does not bear on it beyond its inferable function to explain the character Plato's absence, and is of no matter for it.<sup>10</sup>

Tyrrell's point here helps to clarify that when it comes to the *Phaedo* we are presented with two elements: the event that occurred in 399 BCE when Socrates died (the details of which we have no extra-textual access) and the report about that event in the text in a dramatic dialogue form in the *Phaedo*. One way to take Phaedo's odd speculation about Plato's absence at 59b is to see it as a reference to a historical fact that cannot be verified. This is heightened when Phaedo emphatically attests to his own presence at the event. Echecrates asks, "You yourself Phaedo [αὐτός, ὦ Φαίδων] Phaedo—were you present with Socrates on that day when he drank the potion in the prison, or did you hear it from somebody else?" "I myself, Echecrates," [αὐτός, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες] Phaedo responds. Echecrates reports that no stranger has arrived from Athens in Phlius in a long time "who could report anything for sure to us about it—except, of course, that he drank the potion and died" (57a). One wonders how the event itself relates to the report that Phaedo gives about it. Is it plausible, then, to believe that the *Phaedo* presents a replication of an event in the way that an artist might attempt to fashion an exact copy of the person he is sketching? Should the death scene be taken as a replica of a historical moment? If we cannot, for the reasons identified, take it as such, then how might we take it? The best suggestion seems to be as a likeness. An important term that is translated commonly as "likeness" is εἰκών, which might also be rendered as "fitting image." But what sort of εἰκών is it and what is it a likeness of? As we will see, this question sets us once again on a search for the very significance of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*.

Let us take it, then, that the *Phaedo* is a likeness (an εἰκών) of an event and not an attempt to fashion a copy of one. Is it possible to be even more specific about this likeness? *Logoi* concerning likenesses, and likenesses themselves, abound in the dialogues of Plato. Sara Brill has noted that describing the soul, as is done in *Phaedo*, involves considering Plato's critique of images, and this critique

. . . must take into account his efforts to render evident the limits of his images, to make their potentially distorting character explicit. What is distinctive about Plato's rich image-making faculty, I submit, is that his very critique of images

occurs by way of the frictive interaction between images; that is, he constructs his images in such a way as to make their limits visible and to invite their critique, a critique which itself often proceeds by way of images. The result is a critical iconography of remarkable subtlety and depth.<sup>11</sup>

We might, therefore, gather up some of their occurrences and dwell for a moment on them. In his discourse with Socrates in the *Meno*, Meno reaches a moment of perplexity in the attempt to define virtue. He likens Socrates to a broad stingray because he has numbed him. “Indeed, if a joke is in order, you seem, in appearance and in every other way to be like the broad torpedo fish . . .” (80b). At 80c, Socrates replies by deflecting what he perceives to be Meno’s attempt to get him to engage in an exchange of flattery. He says, “I know why you drew this image of me.” Socrates continues saying that Meno, and all other handsome people, wish only to have drawn an image of themselves in return since “it is to their advantage, for I think that the images (αἱ εἰκόνες) of beautiful people are also beautiful, but I draw no image of you in turn” (80c).<sup>12</sup> We might notice here that Plato uses the term εἰκόνες, the plural of εἰκών. One might well translate it as “image” as is done here; yet, we know that Greek also offers the word φάντασμα (*phantasm*), which is not used here. *Phantasm* typically means an appearance or an image presented to the mind.<sup>13</sup> Because this is not what Socrates is concerned with here we might consider other possibilities more closely related to the phenomenon he is contemplating drawing. Such a possibility can best be captured by the term “likeness” for several reasons. In the *Phaedo* as well, the word εἰκών and its variants appear in a number of places including 87b, 87d, 99e, and 100a. At 87b, Cebes attempts to put into words his own worries about the arguments that have been given for the soul’s undyingness. Yet, even if the soul does outlast the body, he too falls into perplexity wondering what will keep it from wearing out. Cebes continues, “And it seems I too need some sort of likeness (εἰκόνας), just as Simmias did.” Cebes continues with the comparison of the soul to a weaver who outlives many, but not all, of his cloaks. He concludes, “Now, I think soul in relation to body would admit of the same likeness (εἰκόνα) . . .” (87d). Here too Cebes has made use of a “likeness” or a “figure,” and we shall see in chapter 4 how this term plays an important role in passages related to the autobiography of Socrates (99e and 100a). *Cratylus* 432b2–c6 offers a well-known treatment of εἰκών.

SOCRATES: On the contrary, it absolutely must not completely replicate that of which it is an image, if it is to be a likeness. Think on this. Would there be two things, Cratylus and the likeness of Cratylus (οἷον Κρατύλος καὶ Κρατύλου εἰκών),

if some god represented, as a painter would, not only your complexion and shape, but also made everything within like your innards and reproduced the same softness and warmth and endowed them with the same motion and soul and intelligence as are in you and, basically, replicated every quality that you have and plonked the replica down next to you? Would there be Cratylus and a likeness of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses? (πότερον Κρατύλος ἄνκαί εἰκῶν Κρατύλου τὸτ' εἶη τὸ τοιοῦτον, ἢ δύο Κρατύλοι;).

CRATYLUS: I think there would be two Cratyluses, Socrates (432b2–c6).<sup>14</sup>

If the god had wished to duplicate Cratylus both in his inner and outer aspects, then the result would be two Cratyluses. But the artist, on the other hand, wishes to provide an εἰκῶν, a “likeness” or a “fitting image.” Whereas the god only uses similarity in his work, the artist provides a mixture of both similarity and difference. By mixing similarity and difference it is possible to provide a portrait of Cratylus. This mixing of similarity and difference is in play in the *Phaedo* as well. Just before 74a, Socrates discusses the interplay between similarity and difference in the art of sketching. Whereas a sketch of a boy’s cloak might cause one to recollect the boy, it is also the case that a sketch of Simmias might cause one to recollect Cebes. On the basis of this, Socrates asks Simmias “Then doesn’t it follow from all this that recollection stems from similar things and also from dissimilar?” (74a). Socrates continues, “But at least whenever somebody’s recollecting something from similar things, isn’t it necessary for him to undergo this as well: to note whether or not, with respect to similarity, this thing somehow falls short of what he’s recollected.” This, of course, leads Socrates to his first articulation of the undying things like the Equal Itself. Yet, what is noteworthy here is that in the *Phaedo* there is mixing of sameness and difference that lead to the establishment of εἰκόνες. As is well known, the means of Socrates’s death was a potent mixture known as the *pharmakon*.

Let us then see how such a mixture might be taken and given at the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo*. It seems that Plato is not merely using the dialogue to provide a replica of the event that happened in the prison cell in 399 BCE. On the other hand, it does seem that the *Phaedo* offers a likeness (εἰκῶν) of something. Moreover, as we are beginning to notice, the likeness will have both similarities to and key differences from the thing it is a likeness of. In her excellent book *Likeness and Likelihood in the Presocratics and Plato*, Jenny Bryan draws on Xenophanes and Parmenides to set the stage for a reading of Plato’s *Timaeus*. In that



dialogue, *Timaeus* converses with Socrates, Hermogenes, and Critias and voices a depiction of the cosmos. Bryan explains that this depiction can be likened to a portrait and the work of its painter. She writes, “A portrait is not deficient because it fails to replicate its sitter, for, if it succeeded, it would no longer be a portrait. This cosmic εἰκόν is like a very good portrait, insofar as it can represent its model, but is never intended as an exact reproduction.”<sup>15</sup> As we saw in the case of the *Cratylus* 432b2–c6 and *Phaedo* 74a, an artist makes a likeness of his subject in the sense that he mixes both similarities to and differences from the subject and in this way makes a fitting image. As Bryan puts it, “For a portrait to be like its sitter is not for it to fall short, but rather to represent them whilst being different from them.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, if *Timaeus*’s depiction of the cosmos is to be fitting then it is fitting to the cosmos itself (the thing that the demiurge created) by mixing together sameness and difference. If it did not do this it would be another cosmos. In a similar way, might not the *Phaedo*’s depiction of Socrates at his death not provide a simple replication of Socrates’s death, an exact reproduction? Rather, perhaps it is an εἰκόν of something other than itself—a third thing that it sets the conditions for the manifestation of—just as the depiction of *Timaeus* sets the stage for the manifestation of the cosmos itself. If this is true, then I would suggest that the portrait of Socrates that Plato paints in the *Phaedo* creates the conditions for the manifestation of the death of the philosopher. By “philosopher” here I do not mean just Socrates, although he is important, but also any philosopher at all. Thus, in the case of Plato’s *Phaedo*, the depiction of Socrates’s death is more than a replica of an event that happened in 399 BCE. Instead, it draws on the elements of that event and mixes those elements with different elements to offer an εἰκόν of the death of the philosopher.

How then should we receive this εἰκόν? If the *Phaedo* is to be received as being like a portrait, then is it possible for interpreters of the *Phaedo* to provide better or worse descriptions of it. Bryan draws on Christopher Rowe’s reading of the *Timaeus* to explain this. Rowe writes, “If I make a drawing of a person, then it seems just as possible to give an accurate and truthful account of the drawing, as it does of the subject of the drawing.”<sup>17</sup> Returning to the analogy of drawing (or painting) a portrait, the artist does not provide a replica of what he sees when he looks at the person. Instead, the artist mixes elements of sameness and difference to provide a likeness of the person himself or herself. Just as we can describe a portrait’s coloring, we too can accurately name certain elements of sameness and difference in the portrait of the death of the philosopher. Thus, Plato’s *Phaedo*, seen as a portrait of Socrates at his death, offers the conditions for the possibility of the manifestation of the death of the philosopher. Certain receptions of this manifestation will

be more fitting than others insofar as they receive these conditions of sameness and difference. As I have been suggesting, those conditions are most obvious in the similarities and differences from a Greek sacrificial ritual. It is by means of this εἰκῶν that the beholder of the death scene is offered the gift of the undyingness of the soul of the philosopher.

In this book, I will pass the distaff through the *Phaedo* five different times as it weaves and unweaves the fabric of sacrifice. The first pass marks the similarities between the death of Socrates as it appears in the *Phaedo* and a Greek sacrificial ritual. A Greek sacrificial ritual enacts and sets forth a fitting relationship between gods and men. This relationship obtains in the life of the *polis* and is part of its formation. However, the proper relationship between gods and men that governs their lives together is assumed by all sacrificial exchanges that are based on reciprocity. Thus, in chapter 2 I provide a description of a Greek sacrificial ritual. Drawing on recent scholarship concerning Greek sacrificial practice, I conclude that the most significant feature of animal sacrifice was that it maintained a fitting relationship between gods and men. Whereas men made sacrifice to the gods to sustain them in their place of honor, the gods provided days of leisure and rest for men. These days were dedicated to making sacrifices. Interaction between gods and men would have been deeply interwoven with the day-to-day life of the *polis*.

In the second pass, I suggest that we watch vigilantly and look on at Socrates in the *Phaedo* to see how it enacts and sets forth a relationship between gods and men in the death scene that obtains in the life of the *polis*. This scene is a form of philosophic *mimesis* indebted to actual practices of ancient Greek sacrifice. In the death scene, Socrates appears throughout as an ideal sacrificial animal going to his death, and this provides many of the similarities between his death and a traditional sacrifice. Yet, there are subtle ways in which Socrates's death deviates decisively from a traditional sacrifice. This deviation provides a difference that, I suggest, when mixed together with the sameness provides an εἰκῶν, a fitting likeness, of the death of the philosopher. It is by means of this εἰκῶν that the beholder of the death scene is offered the gift of the undyingness of the soul of the philosopher. Thus, chapter 3 demonstrates that the entire *mise-en-scène* of the death scene of the *Phaedo* has "the look" of a Greek sacrificial ritual. This look shows forth an εἰκῶν that is a mixture of sameness and difference such that it manifests the conditions for the possibility of the death of the philosopher.

The third pass concerns the significance of this εἰκῶν in other moments of the *Phaedo*. As Socrates relates his philosophical autobiography beginning at 95e, he both draws attention to his own existential situation and seeks to explain a cause for its proper fit. In this way, the *Phaedo* shows itself to be a search for causes of a fitting relationship

between the life and death of the philosopher. Here, Socrates describes a method for searching for causes of generation and destruction as a whole. This search proceeds in a way that is appropriate for human beings who are aware of their limitations and their place with respect to the gods. Socrates demonstrates how this occurs most fruitfully through a method of *logoi* that he describes in the passage 99d–100a. In chapter 4 I contrast Socrates’s method of *logoi*, insofar as it is an approach to Greek knowledge, to the approach that is taken by Greek tragedy, in particular that of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. Aeschylean tragedy is well known for incorporating themes of sacrifice into its plot, and I argue that the use made of sacrifice in *Agamemnon* functions to show “suffering into knowledge” as an alternative to the archaic ratio of “seeing as knowing.” I conclude that although the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* unfolds according to sacrificial themes it is not a tragedy, for its goal is to restore a version of the archaic ratio that is now appropriate for mortals who, after Socrates’s self-sacrifice, are aware of their limitations. In other words, in witnessing the death of the philosopher in the *Phaedo* one is offered an εἰκὼν of a fitting relationship between gods and men that appears as one that might have been witnessed at a Greek sacrificial ritual. Because of the self-sacrifice, humans receive back a gift from the gods, the gift of embodiment that can best be taken as vigil. Such a search allows a mortal to see the possibility of the whole while maintaining his or her proper and limited position with respect to the gods. From this perspective it is possible to reflect critically on the claim that the death of Socrates is most fittingly described as an execution and that Socrates is a tragic figure. Although I do not deny that certain elements of the *Phaedo* are similar to an execution or a tragedy, these are only some of the elements of this mixture.

The fourth pass begins by allowing the Greek terms translated as “fitting” to drift toward a suggestion of “proportion.” After examining how the figure of Socrates enacts a proportionate likeness of the philosopher going to death, we turn to the earlier sections of the *Phaedo*, specifically those in which Socrates speaks in the name of and with the voice of so-called “genuine philosophers” (61d–70b). Rather than unveiling a *logos* of death and the soul that takes account of the fitting relationship between gods and men, this speech expresses a *disproportion between body and soul*. Such a way of proceeding leads to a “sacrifice of the body” that, when compared with the embodied Socrates, appears disproportionate. Moreover, this disproportion is seen in the discussion of suicide in the *Phaedo*. These genuine philosophers who are given voice by Socrates himself appear comic. Such a description of life and death is similar to what one might find in a comedy like Aristophanes’s *Clouds*. The comic spectacle, however, causes those who are serious about inquiring into the

relationship between life and death to deepen their own understanding of ultimate matters and to search for a *logos* of the soul that acts as if the soul can know itself as a fitting whole. Thus, chapter 5 explores the discussion of the soul and its relationship to the body in the *Phaedo*. An examination of the section in which Socrates calls death “nothing but a separation of the soul from the body” reveals that such a *logos* is really disproportionate and comic. Against this view, I argue that Socrates presents, in his response to Simmias’s counter-example of the lyre, a *logos* of the soul that can act “as if” it is other than itself. In this way, the soul engages in a kind of self-sorting that enables it to reconstitute itself as proportional. This yearning for and enacting of proportionality is also disclosed in Socrates’s consideration of *anamnesis* (recollection) and is borne witness to by the depiction of the embodied Socrates in this dialogue.

The final pass will unweave a well-known interpretation of the death of Socrates by Friedrich Nietzsche in his *The Gay Science* and *The Twilight of the Idols*. Nietzsche interprets the *Phaedo* as setting forth Socrates as a pessimist, one who sees death as a healing from the disease of life and the tyranny of reason. Although my interpretation of the death of Socrates as sacrifice also sees his death as a kind of healing, it differs from Nietzsche’s understanding since the *Phaedo*’s concern is with fittingness proper to man, not an escape from human suffering. As such, the death of Socrates provides an εἰκὼν through which philosophical aspirants can behold the gift of the self-sacrifice of Socrates. This gift is a proper mixture, a portrait that manifests the fitting way in which a philosopher goes to his death. In beholding this εἰκὼν, a way is opened for living that can be expressed as vigilance. I suggest that vigilance is the appropriate way to understand the undyingness (immortality) of the soul in Plato’s *Phaedo* and is the responsibility of those who behold it as a gift. Thus, in chapter 6 I point out the differences between my interpretation of the *Phaedo* and Nietzsche’s. Although Nietzsche sees the death of Socrates as enacting a pessimistic view of embodiment, I contend that Socrates’s death—seen as a sacrifice—serves to highlight the way in which philosophers are to witness the death of Socrates as an εἰκὼν of the death of the philosopher. Such an εἰκὼν makes visible liminal experiences like life and death, that is, of generation and destruction as a whole. The embodied Socrates himself offers a gift of an εἰκὼν, and in beholding it the aspiring philosopher receives the gift of the undyingness of this *logos*. This *logos* may in turn be linked to a notion of *triage*, a medical practice that proposes “sorting” as a way of vigilance without reserve. Drawing on Derrida’s text entitled “The Night Watch,”<sup>18</sup> I suggest that this experience of triage would seem to call for the giver of the *pharmakōn* to act with great vigilance and care because

any action or course of treatment undertaken will never be sufficient because of limitations on resources. Here, under the watchful care of the giver of the *pharmakon*, living bodies are inescapable and cannot be culled from the rest. This calls for constant vigilance and watchful care.

The scholarship on Plato's *Phaedo* and the subject of the death of Socrates is vast, and no brief treatment of it can do it justice. Here I simply provide a short survey of scholarship as it relates directly to the topic of sacrifice in the *Phaedo*. I first offer examples of contemporary Plato scholars from Continental and Anglo-American perspectives who emphasize the importance of a religious dimension in Plato studies. I then offer a short overview of the interpretation of the death scene in three recent book-length studies of the *Phaedo*. These studies are by Kenneth Dorter, Ronna Burger, and Peter J. Ahrens-dorf.<sup>19</sup> Although their treatments mention some of the religious aspects of the dialogue, particularly those relating to Orphism and Pythagoreanism, they do not emphasize sacrificial ritual. I conclude with a brief discussion of the work of Catherine Pickstock, a scholar who takes sacrifice most fully into account in her interpretation of the *Phaedo*.

Scholars from both Continental and Anglo-American perspectives have called for greater attention to the role that Greek religion, especially ritual, can play in scholarship on Plato's dialogues. From an Anglo-American perspective, scholars such as Michael Morgan, Michael McPherran, Thomas Brickhouse, and Nicholas Smith have carefully treated Greek religion in relationship to Socrates,<sup>20</sup> whereas a Continental approach to the topic has been offered by Adriaan Pepperzak, among others.

In his approach to the dialogues, Pepperzak writes that "Although enough learned studies on 'Plato's religion' have been published, it is still uncommon to state that the religious dimension is fundamental for an adequate interpretation of the Platonic corpus."<sup>21</sup> Pepperzak suggests that although there has been interest in treating what some scholars call Plato's "religion" or "theology" in the dialogues, it has been far less common to attend to how elements of Greek religious practices actually shape the dialogues themselves. Pepperzak draws attention to issues like purification in the *Phaedo* and advocates for such an approach in contemporary scholarship.

A renewal of Platonic studies cannot be complete—it cannot even be fundamental—if it avoids or neglects the religious dimension of the dialogues or treats it with the well-known arrogance of modern and post-modern believers in autonomy and autarky. . . . The studies in this book may be read as preparations for an unsecularized and nonautonomous but

more radical and existential transformation of the Platonic heritage than the modern ones.<sup>22</sup>

My study, then, can be understood as an attempt to engage and develop Pepperzak's claim that a religious dimension is fundamental for an adequate interpretation of the Platonic corpus. I do this by limiting my scope to one aspect of the religious dimension—sacrificial ritual—and one dialogue from the corpus—the *Phaedo*.

I should mention three book-length studies of the *Phaedo* here. First, Kenneth Dorter attends to both the arguments and the dramatic setting of the *Phaedo*. Dorter does not draw attention to any references to sacrificial ritual at the death scene, a dimension of the death scene that I shall argue is essential to appreciate. Nevertheless, he does attend to many of the connections between Orphism and purification at the moment in the death scene when Socrates turns to take his bath (115a). "There is no need to review here this Orphic-Pythagorean conception in its many recurrences through the dialogue but its multiple presences in this final scene is worth noting."<sup>23</sup> Ronna Burger's *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth* carefully analyzes the connection between *logos* (word) and *ergon* (deed) in the dialogue, and this is an approach that I will follow here. She also makes excellent use of references to the *mythos*, collected in Plutarch, of Theseus and the Minotaur. She carefully shows how this *mythos* underlies and in many ways shapes the *logos* of the dialogue. Like Dorter, Burger draws attention to the multiple presences in the *Phaedo* to Orphic and Pythagorean purification rites. Even her commentary on Socrates's final words makes this connection. Burger explains Socrates's proposal to offer a cock to Asclepius in terms of purification. "Socrates marks his success in the practice of dying by remembering the god of healing; he believes it necessary, apparently, to supplement the hymn to Apollo he claims to have produced as a rite of purification."<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, I would emphasize that although purification was a part of a sacrificial ritual (and in some cases may have been the purpose of it) there were other significant elements to the ritual itself that should be considered. I expand on Burger's reading by drawing attention to the significance of animal sacrifice at the death of Socrates.

Burger notices the simultaneous concealing and revealing character of Socrates's act of drinking the *pharmakon*.

Despite Socrates's will to maintain control over the act of dying, his transformation from an agent carrying out his own intentions to a motionless corpse will be fittingly accomplished as a mechanical result of the self-acting poison. Socrates's painful recognition of this fact is both concealed

and revealed by Phaedo's account of his response when handed the cup of poison. Interrupting his narrative to address himself to Echecrates—as if to relive as closely as possible the intense pathē of that moment—Phaedo describes how Socrates took the cup gently, without trembling or changing color or expression.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Burger's description carefully reveals the way in which Socrates's deed is simultaneously congruent with a ritual action and disruptive of it. In addition, Burger offers an interpretation of Socrates's look. At the moment that Socrates drank the *pharmakon* Phaedo reports that Socrates looked at the man who had brought him the cup “with that bull's look that was so usual with him” (117b). Burger interprets this as follows: “For this brief moment, perhaps, Socrates succumbs to the fear of death, or at least he presents that appearance to his audience.”<sup>26</sup> As I will suggest in chapter 3, I do not think that this “look” indicates that Socrates has succumbed to the fear of death. Rather, I will suggest that this “look” conveys the significance of sacrifice to those who behold that look. It may even bestow the gift of an εἰκὼν upon those who are open to its reception.

A third detailed study of the *Phaedo* is Peter J. Ahrens Dorf's *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy*. Ahrens Dorf quite helpfully approaches the *Phaedo* from the perspective of the emotional concerns of Socrates's interlocutors in the dialogue, particularly Simmias and Cebes. This approach allows Ahrens Dorf to see that many of Socrates's comments about death and the afterlife are meant “ironically.” By this term, Ahrens Dorf means that at times Socrates “deliberately conceals the truth from his interlocutors.”<sup>27</sup> Ahrens Dorf explains that this is not a surprising strategy for Socrates and finds evidence for it in other parts of the Platonic corpus. Why would Socrates say what he did not mean in the *Phaedo*? It seems now to be a common belief among Plato scholars that the so-called arguments (*logoi*) for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* fail to establish that the individual soul is immortal. This would suggest that this was not Socrates's goal.<sup>28</sup>

Ahrens Dorf emphasizes that an important theme in the *Phaedo* is the goodness of the philosophical life. An *apologia* for such a life must be understood in relationship to the charge of impiety for which Socrates is on trial. Since philosophy was not common as a profession at the time of Socrates it was quite likely that philosophers were suspicious in the eyes of the *polis*. In addition, philosophical figures such as Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and their associates were either persecuted or killed.

Although it is true, then, that the *Phaedo*'s dramatic presentation of Socrates's death invites us to admire the philosopher,

its presentation of both the impiety charge against Socrates and his defense against that charge encourages us to challenge, to doubt, and to question for ourselves the goodness of the philosophic life. It encourages us to take seriously the possibility that the human being who devotes his life to the pursuit of wisdom through reason alone is, in truth, an unwise, unjust, and impious human being. It encourages us to wonder whether Socrates was not justly condemned by the Athenians and even whether he will not be justly condemned by the gods or God in an afterlife. Yet, by doing this, the *Phaedo* may not diminish but rather enhance our admiration for the philosophic way of life.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, Socrates's treatment of the question of the soul's immortality was a way of engaging the value of the philosophical life from within the existential concerns of his friends who were already beginning to mourn his passing and to fear what their lives as philosophers might come to in his absence. Ahrens Dorf points out that they present themselves as being in interstices, "a kind of twilight state," since they were devoted to finding truth in this life wherever it led but also "secretly longing for everlasting happiness in the afterlife."<sup>30</sup> Socrates's goal, then, was to draw out their presuppositions about death, through the *logos*, and to lead them to recognize in him a pious man. For Ahrens Dorf, this would gainsay any charges of impiety while simultaneously portraying a worthy exemplar.

I am in agreement with much of Ahrens Dorf's approach and find his evidence convincing. In particular his insight that the emotional life of the interlocutors is important for understanding the dialogue is quite valuable. Moreover, his attentive observation that the interlocutors find themselves in the dialogue in "a kind of twilight state" is suggestive of the setting of the death scene, which occurs at twilight. In the final chapter of this book I will turn once again to this moment of twilight, suggesting that twilight calls for vigilance that ultimately is found in the practice of triage and self-sorting. It is this stance in the interstices that provides for hope of immortality.

As I have indicated, one aim of this book is to provide a more thorough reading of what Pepperzak has called "the religious dimension" of the dialogue. Therefore, I will explore the deeper roots of Ahrens Dorf's concern with "piety" in the *Phaedo* by emphasizing orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, ethnology rather than theology. That is, my focus will be on what the Greeks and Socrates *did* rather than on what they *believed*. Thus, rather than focusing on the outwardly pious attitudes of Socrates in the *Phaedo* I focus more closely on the specific display of acts that express an exchange of gifts between gods and men. In short, my reading expands on the three treatments I have examined—Dorter, Burger, and



Ahrensdorf. Although they treat many of the religious aspects of the dialogue, particularly those relating to Orphism and Pythagoreanism, they do not emphasize sacrificial ritual as I do in this book.

In closing this introductory chapter, I briefly consider Catherine Pickstock's reading of the *Phaedo*. Her article "The Soul in Plato" explicitly engages sacrifice in interpreting the *Phaedo*.<sup>31</sup> Pickstock does not see the *Phaedo*'s discussion of soul and body as a dualism between the psychic and physical life. Instead, she thinks that the way in which Socrates is depicted in the dialogue as a philosopher "appears to suggest an order of sacrifice whereby *life itself*—the living of one's life—*becomes* the sacrifice one offers, which one *receives back* non-identically as the soul's immortality, or release from metempsychotic bondage."<sup>32</sup> She also notes that there are many references to "the protocols of antique sacrifice," which suggests that "Socrates is proposing a new order of non-bloody sacrifice which itself forms a *critique* of the model it displaces."<sup>33</sup> For Pickstock, then, Plato draws on the Pythagoreans by suggesting a new model of sacrifice that must be seen as a journey or transition or passage on the way to new insight. "Socrates is seen as dying on behalf of the vision of the Good which he is not prepared to relinquish, or, on behalf of the life which he has refused to live as anything but a sacrifice-with-return."<sup>34</sup> In this way, Pickstock also emphasizes the importance of viewing Socrates's statements about the body in the *Phaedo* as part of an economy of sacrifice in what I will call in chapter 5 "the sacrifice of the body."

In the end, my analysis of the significance of the sacrifice of Socrates in the *Phaedo* will in large part be in agreement with Pickstock's and an expansion of her thesis. One of my contributions will be to provide a thorough analysis of sacrificial ritual in relation to the death scene. However, I will expand on Pickstock's reading by considering the sense in which, by relating the *logoi* and *mythoi* of the *Phaedo* to the deed (*ergon*) of Socrates, an εἰκὼν is made visible. This fitting image manifests the conditions for the possibility of the death of the philosopher. As we will see in the next chapter, one of these conditions is similarity to a ritual sacrifice, and it is that thread that we now take up.