

Rising Above the Risible: Laughter in Plato



John Blackler

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Classics.**

**University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
July, 2019**

Abstract

Laughter is a neglected topic in Plato studies. And yet laughter proves to be a constant and recurring feature, appearing in various forms throughout the majority of Plato's works. While efforts have certainly been made to rectify this lack of attention, they stop short of delineating a Platonic position on laughter. This thesis therefore attempts to do so. Through close readings of select dialogues from Plato's early, middle, and late periods, this thesis proposes that such a position does emerge. Beginning with the late period dialogues *Philebus* and *Laws*, where laughter receives its most systematic treatment, the reader encounters a focus on what it means to be the subject of laughter, i.e. the one who laughs or views the comic spectacle. In these dialogues it is possible to discern a mature position which identifies two distinct forms of laughter, appropriate and inappropriate, themselves reflective of the common Platonic division of knowledge and ignorance. With these late period dialogues in hand, this thesis then reverts back to Plato's early and middle period works, where his position on laughter is much more embryonic and evolving. Whereas the late dialogues focus on the subject, the early are much more concerned with being or becoming the object of laughter. Indeed, in the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito* Plato conveys this dramatically through the trial, condemnation, and philosophical method of Socrates. As one moves into the middle period, Plato's most famous dialogue, the *Republic*, carries over much of the early period worries, while at the same time anticipating those of the late. At every step of the way, this thesis argues that, throughout Plato's dialogues, laughter is not simply a side issue or concern, it is in fact philosophically relevant.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Dr Sean McConnell for all your perceptive and constructive feedback throughout the entirety of this project, I owe you a beer or three. A further thank you applies to all the great people in the Department of Classics at Otago.

Another big thank you to all my friends and family who supported me over the last year and beyond. You fed and housed me and I am forever in your debt.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter One: Laughter in the Late Period Dialogues.....	19
<i>Philebus</i>	19
<i>Laws</i>	25
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	29
Chapter Two: Inappropriate Laughter and Philosophical Practice in <i>Euthyphro</i>	32
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	43
Chapter Three.....	45
<i>Part One: Apology – Socrates as καταγέλαστος</i>	45
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	53
<i>Part Two: Crito – But Really, Why Should the Philosopher Care?</i>	54
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	61
Chapter Four: Moving into the Middle Period: Laughter, Comedy, and Philosophical Practice and Life in the <i>Republic</i>	63
<i>Socrates and the Absence of Malice in Philosophical Discussion</i>	63
<i>Laughter and the Loss of Self-Control</i>	67
<i>The Risible and Resounding Laughter of the Cave</i>	75
<i>Laughter and Comedy in the Ideal State</i>	81
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	85
Conclusion	87
Bibliography.....	90

Introduction

The philosopher has always been a laughable figure. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato relates the story of Thales of Miletus (*floruit* c. 585 BC), the first philosopher, who found himself being mocked by a Thracian servant girl at the bottom of a well he had fallen into while gazing at the stars (*Tht.* 173c-6a). Her well-known retort is one that Plato deems true of all those who spend their lives in philosophy: “that he should be eager to know the things in the sky, but that the things before his face and his feet should go unnoticed” (*Tht.* 174a).¹ Thales’ preoccupation with the stars points to a common objection to the activities of the philosophic life, that the philosopher is more concerned with the things out there (be they physical or abstract), the universal and eternal, rather than the here and now. Indeed, the ridicule of philosophers and philosophy is a recurring phenomenon in the ancient world. One can point to Aristophanes’ famous caricature of Socrates in *Clouds*.² Plato too, as Diogenes Laertius records, was not exempt from such characterisation on the comedic stage.³ Timon of Phlius (c. 320 – 230 BC) reportedly wrote *Silloi* (satirical poems), in which he abused and lampooned dogmatic philosophers from a sceptic point of view.⁴ Comical depictions continue well into the second century AD with Lucian composing a number of satirical dialogues exposing the foibles and falsities of the philosophers of his day. In his *Sale of Lives*, he humorously auctions off caricatured philosophies to willing buyers, often bringing in some

¹ Cf. Diog. Laert. 1.34 where Thales is instead mocked by an old woman. See O’Grady 2002, 175, n. 164 for a rationalisation of the event. Note that all translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

² Socrates is portrayed as an ignoble sophist or natural scientist who professes not to believe in the traditional gods, seeks to investigate the things in the sky and below the earth, and teaches others to make the weaker argument the stronger. These, Plato has Socrates say, were stock accusations available against all philosophers; Pl. *Ap.* 23d. Socrates was also ridiculed on stage by other Comic poets such as Eupolis (fr. 386, 395). In the former fragment he is portrayed as a garrulous beggar, who would contemplate anything except his next meal. In the latter, he is accused of stealing a serving bottle, while singing to lyre accompaniment. Other fragments concerning Socrates include Ameipsias fr. 8; Callias Comicus fr. 15; Teleclides fr. 41. Rusten 2011, 142-3, 271, 357.

³ Diog. Laert. 3.26-8. Diogenes lists several instances from both Old and Middle Comedy, touching on things such as the confusion at *Phd.* 96a-7b regarding the subtleties of adding and subtracting one thing to another. There are also puns on his name, jokes relating to the seeming unintelligibility of his conception of the Good, how he appeared to frown a lot, and his conception of the soul. For a catalogue of examples and full commentary see Olsen 2007, 228-9, 238-43. See also Morrow 1960, 372, n. 257; Brock 1990, 41-2.

⁴ Diog. Laert. 9. 111.

interesting prices.⁵ Another notable example is the *Dialogues of the Dead*, where, in a dialogue between Menippus and Cerberus, Lucian cynically exploits the story of Socrates' death in the *Phaedo* and his subsequent entrance into the Underworld (*Dial. Mort.* 4). Following Lucian, Diogenes Laertius records an immense number of humorous anecdotes in his series of biographies of philosophers from the Classical and Hellenistic periods.⁶

Whether it be esoteric knowledge, seemingly incomprehensible language, or simply asking too many questions, in leading their chosen life philosophers of the ancient world were in various ways seen as removing themselves from their community. As such, philosophy, the practice of the philosopher, has often aroused suspicion for being some kind of subversive or dangerous activity. Socrates, as Plato's *Apology* depicts, was ultimately condemned for practicing the discipline, but he was not alone. A great many sources and traditions recount both the prosecution and persecution of philosophers and intellectuals. At least eight different persons of this ilk are either accused, indicted, or prosecuted by the Athenians (in most cases for impiety), relative to the lifetime of Socrates. These include: Diagoras of Melos, Aspasia, Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Damon, Diogenes of Apollonia, Euripides, and Prodicus of Keos.⁷ In the century following Socrates' death Athens continued to exhibit anti-intellectual tendencies, most notably against those of the Peripatetic school (in particular, Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Demetrius of Phalerum), fuelled largely by an unsettled political climate.⁸ Philosophy and politics are so closely linked at this time that a certain Sophocles of Sunium forwarded legislation that would bring philosophical schools within state control.⁹ Later, as the Greek and Roman worlds began to experience a greater synthesis, philosophy certainly enjoyed a place in the larger exchange of ideas. The Romans,

⁵ For example: Cynic, 2 obols; Cyrenaic, unsold; Academic, 2 talents; Stoic, 12 minas; Peripatetic, 20 minas.

⁶ See the essay on corporeal humour in the latest translation of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*, which reveals how the author "ironizes his philosophic subjects by focusing attention on the physical frailties that limit, or distract from, their mental and spiritual pursuits... [which] shows us how the body, the vessel that experiences pain and pleasure, sexual desire, illness, and death, challenges the higher aspirations of the mind;" Romm 2018, 567.

⁷ This list and the necessary sources (all of which are of much later date but argued to be consonant with the Athenians' action against Socrates) are reproduced in Dover 1988, 135-6. Dover is challenged by O'Sullivan 2008.

⁸ O'Sullivan 2008, 395-6. Cf. O'Sullivan 2009, 7 where association with intellectuals in Athens of the fourth century BC is said to be a "politically-charged issue...because of the personal links of individual philosophers with the Macedonian elite." For more see O'Sullivan 2009, 204-40.

⁹ C. 307/6 BC, though the legislation was ultimately unpopular and thus short-lived; O'Sullivan 2009, 204, 213-4.

however, at first regarded it with a wary eye, for no philosophical doctrine could be argued to supersede the authority, tradition, or experience of Rome, nor would the intellectual activities of a subject people be allowed to insinuate itself deeply into her affairs.¹⁰ Plutarch relates Cato the Elder's reaction to the embassy of Greek philosophers to Rome in 155 BC. Rome's youth, taken in by the power of their eloquence and erudition, apparently became fired with a zeal for philosophy. Cato, however, being averse to Greek learning, sought to deal with their demands as quickly as possible so that Rome would not be infected by Greek letters and her supremacy lost (*Cat. Mai.* 22-3). Cicero would also address such concerns, albeit in a different manner. For instance, at the outset of *De Finibus*, he feels the need to address those who would deter him from philosophy, arguing against the objection that the field of study is "beneath the dignity of my character and position" (*Fin.* 1.1-2). Indeed, concerns were both political and practical, the general argument being that philosophy may either draw the practitioner away from public life (that it is in fact useless in preparation for such activity) or make him less agreeable to authority.¹¹ This is but a brief overview of ancient attitudes to the practice of philosophy, yet one can see ridicule as well as anxiety or scepticism about its place in political and social life.

Within many of Plato's dialogues there is also a sense of unease or uncertainty about the philosopher as somehow being comic or laughable. Indeed, a plethora of references to laughter and ridicule may be found as one reads their way through the early, middle, and late period dialogues.¹² Not all references are derisive or directed towards the philosopher *per se*

¹⁰ Griffin 1989, 12-3.

¹¹ Griffin 1989, 20-2. McConnell 2014 demonstrates that throughout Cicero's letters (at least those written between 63-45 BC) there is constant reflection on what constitutes the best life: one filled with *otium* and philosophical reflection or one that actively engages in politics. It is therefore of particular interest that Cicero and Seneca write of themselves as pursuing *philosophia*, but do not freely use the label of *philosophus*; see further Hine 2016, 13-21.

¹² The chronology of Plato's dialogues is an unresolved issue. Scholars are divided and largely fall into one of two camps: developmentalists and unitarians. For an overview of these positions, the major scholars who have attempted to tackle this issue, and the nuances within them see Lane 2000, 155-63. For the purposes of this thesis, the dialogues discussed will be placed within a developmental approach with the proviso that the choice is not a dogmatic one. That said, Lynch and Ostwald 1994, 605-10 present a reasonable case regarding the chronology of the dialogues with respect to Plato's establishment and time spent at the Academy and abroad. Against the developmentalist position see Osborne 2006, 18-20. See also Altman 2010, who offers a radically revised reading order of the dialogues that gives preference to both dramatic chronology and theoretical or metaphysical order.

but the range is wide and it is worthwhile introducing some of the most prominent terms. A particularly good example for exhibiting the range of laughter vocabulary is the *Gorgias*. γελάω (“to laugh, smile”) is commonly used to denote a benign form of laughter and, despite its good nature, it is at times linked to ridiculing the philosopher.¹³ At *Grg.* 469b Socrates makes the unconventional claim that he would rather suffer what is unjust than do it. As Socrates begins to develop his argument, however, his interlocutor Polus merely laughs (γελάει) at him for then attempting to maintain that the man who does unjust things and avoids capture will be unhappy, a claim Polus believes no human being could entertain (*Grg.* 473e). In response, Socrates asks if this is some new form of refutation, one that laughs down (καταγελάει) a statement rather than disproves it. καταγελάω (“to laugh at, mock, deride”), the above verb’s derisive counterpart, is much more commonly employed to ridicule the philosopher. The dialogue’s other prominent interlocutor, Callicles, uses it when declaring his view of Socrates and the philosopher in general.¹⁴ Callicles believes Polus was right to ridicule (καταγελάει) Socrates for his unconventional stance (*Grg.* 482d). Such ridicule, he explains, is applicable to the kind of person a philosopher becomes if they spend too long engaged in the discipline. While Callicles admits that philosophy is beneficial in moderation and at the appropriate age, if one exceeds said criteria, such a person will be useless and inexperienced in the laws and speech needed for supporting their city, nor will they understand the way of human beings altogether. If they should then attempt to venture into any activity, be it private or political, they become καταγέλαστοι (*Grg.* 484c-e). Callicles

¹³ For uses of γελάω in Plato see *Euthypr.* 3e; *Chrm.* 156a; *Lys.* 207c, 208d; *Ion* 535e; *Euthyd.* 273d, 276b, 276d, 278c, 298e, 300d, 300e, 303b; *Prt.* 310d, 355c, 358b; *Grg.* 473e; *Hp. Mai.* 289c, 291e; *Meno* 71e; *Phd.* 59a, 64a, 64b (x2), 84d, 101b, 115c; *Resp.* 331d, 366c, 451b, 457a, 457b, 518a, 518b; *Symp.* 189b, 202b, 213a; *Phdr.* 252b, 267b; *Tht.* 174d, 175b, 200a; *Prm.* 136d; *Phlb.* 49e, 50a; *Leg.* 816d, 857d; *Ep.* 319c. For the use of its noun form see *Chrm.* 155b; *Lach.* 184a (x2); *Grg.* 474a; *Hp. Mai.* 291e; *Resp.* 388e, 389a (x2), 473c, 517a, 518b, 536b; *Symp.* 222c; *Tht.* 166a, 174c, 175d; *Plt.* 266b, 295e; *Leg.* 669d, 732c, 751b, 789e, 810e, 816d, 816e, 830b. See also the pairing of γέλως and ὀφλισκάνω, which carries the force of incurring laughter: *Alc. Mai.* 121b; *Hp. Mai.* 281d, 286e; *Phd.* 117a; *Resp.* 451a, 506d; *Symp.* 199b; *Leg.* 778e, 790a. Other cognates include: φιλογέλως: *Resp.* 388e. ἀγελαστί: *Euthyd.* 278e. γελοτοποιέω: *Resp.* 452d, 606c (x2), 620c; *Symp.* 189a.

¹⁴ For uses of καταγελάω see *Euthypr.* 3c (x2), 3d; *Ap.* 26e; *Alc. Mai.* 116d; *Chrm.* 175d; *Lach.* 178a, 194a, 200b, 201a; *Euthyd.* 272c, 278d; *Prt.* 319c, 323a, 357d, 361a; *Grg.* 473e, 482d; *Hp. Mai.* 291e (x2), 292a, 299a; *Hp. Mi.* 364c; *Meno* 95c; *Menex.* 236c; *Resp.* 330e, 388d, 499c, 525e; *Symp.* 181d, 212e, 219c, 222a; *Phdr.* 259a, 268d; *Cra.* 413b, 413c; *Tht.* 175b; *Soph.* 239e; *Phlb.* 14e, 49b, 54d, 54e; *Leg.* 686d, 831d, 908c; *Ep.* 335b. Other cognates include: προσγελάω: *Resp.* 566d. ὑπογελάω: *Chrm.* 162b.

thus provides a further term of interest, *καταγέλαστος*, usually rendered “laughing-stock.”¹⁵ Callicles reiterates that when a youth practises philosophy it is not a shameful thing. However, when a grown man continues to do so he is seen as both unmanly and a *καταγέλαστος* (*Grg.* 485a-c).¹⁶ Appearing frequently in the dialogues, *καταγέλαστος* represents a particularly strong image of ridicule, one deemed by Plato to be most undesirable. As such, it has a wide range of application and Plato uses it in situations when a person’s pretensions to knowledge are exposed (*Lach.* 184c), or in relation to those who only pretend to cultivate virtue (*Resp.* 613c).

Plato’s concerns are no less obvious when it comes to depicting Socrates practicing his philosophy. At the beginning of the *Apology* Socrates registers surprise at the notion that he could be thought an accomplished speaker (*Ap.* 17b). His accusers, of course, had warned those present not to be deceived by the philosophical style of discussion Socrates was known for. Such warnings prompt Socrates to remind the court throughout his speech not to be surprised if he should defend himself in the kind of language to which he is accustomed (*Ap.* 17c-d; 21a; 27b; 30c). It is a reminder Socrates regularly returns to in Plato’s dialogues. Socrates’ worries largely concern his interlocutors laughing at him for his distinctive method of question and answer. For example, in the *Hippias Minor* Socrates asks Hippias not to laugh at him (*μή μου καταγελᾶν*) if he has trouble understanding Hippias’ answers and for seeking clarity in his usual manner (*Hip. Min.* 364c). In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades relates how when the ignorant or unknowing hear Socrates’ style of argumentation they cannot help but laugh it to scorn (*καταγελάσειεν*) (*Symp.* 222a). And in the *Philebus*, which largely leaves the Socratic method behind in order to demonstrate the Platonic method of collection and division, Socrates makes a self-referential comment, exclaiming that he must seem ridiculous (*γελοῖος*) with his distinctions into different kinds and enumerations (*Phlb.* 23d).¹⁷ Moreover,

¹⁵ For all uses of *καταγέλαστος* see *Ap.* 28d, 35b; *Cri.* 53a; *Lach.* 184c; *Lys.* 205b, 205c, 205d, 206a, 211c, 223b; *Euthyd.* 278e, 279c, 279d, 305a, 307b; *Grg.* 484e (x2), 485a, 485c, 509a, 509b, 512d, 514e; *Hp. Mai.* 282a, 288b (x2), 290a (x2); *Clit.* 410d; *Resp.* 432d, 455d, 467a, 493d, 518b, 613c, 613d; *Symp.* 189b, 198c; *Tht.* 149a, 153a; *Soph.* 241e, 244c, 252b; *Plt.* 296d; *Leg.* 800b, 859a, 892d, 906d; *Ep.* 314a, 343c. For *καταγελάστος* see also: *Theag.* 130b; *Meno* 96e; *Leg.* 781c; *Ep.* 347b. Other translations include “ridiculous” and “absurd.”

¹⁶ The same worry crops up at *Resp.* 487b-d. Indeed, those who spend too long in philosophy are said to become not only strange, but utterly depraved (*παμπονήρους*) and of no use to their state.

¹⁷ *γελοῖος* appears in Plato with great regularity. See *Euthypr.* 4b; *Lys.* 221a; *Euthyd.* 291b, 304d; *Prt.* 340e, 346d, 355a, 355b, 355d; *Grg.* 517c; *Hp. Mai.* 294a; *Theag.* 122c; *Phd.* 67d, 67e; *Resp.* 382d, 392d, 403e, 429e, 430e, 435e, 445a, 445b, 452a, 452b, 452c, 452d, 452d, 454c (x2), 456d, 457b, 463e, 504d, 517d, 529e, 530a, 536b, 606c, 620a; *Symp.* 174e, 189b, 199d, 213c, 215a, 221e; *Phdr.* 229e, 236d, 257c, 260b, 260c, 262c, 274c;

in several conversations there are further fears that if the argument is abandoned, personifications of virtue (i.e. courage; *Lach.* 194a), or even the argument itself (*Prt.* 361a), will laugh at them. The significance of Plato's concern with this issue cannot be stressed enough. The point is strengthened by considering three dialogues as short case studies: *Euthydemus*, *Hippias Major*, and *Theaetetus*.

The *Euthydemus* is a lively dialogue, full of laughter, but not without the misgivings related above. Plato's general concern in this dialogue is how philosophy is being perceived by a wider audience, once again made apparent via a spectrum of terms from the vocabulary of laughter. The dialogue creates a contrast between the semi-philosophical eristic wordplay of the sophist brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and the constructive, truth-seeking, and philosophical method of Socrates. The dialogue begins with the sophists claiming to be able to persuade a man to devote himself to virtue and with Socrates eagerly enlisting their help in convincing the young Clinias. The brothers take on the challenge but instead demonstrate their eristic prowess, merely taking turns at appropriating what the boy says in response to their questions and turning his words against him. After each contradictory confutation the followers and students of the sophists erupt into laughter (ἐγέλασαν; πάνυ ἐγέλασάν) (*Euthyd.* 276b-d). Note, however, that γελᾶω, the good-natured kind, is being used to denote the character of the laughter, a formula used consistently throughout the dialogue when referring to the sophists' eristic displays. Socrates likens such laughter to that produced (using γελῶσιν) by those who play pranks on others by pulling a stool out from under a person who is about to sit down. He then buttresses the image by adding that their treatment of Clinias so far should be regarded as mere play (παιδίαν) (*Euthyd.* 278c). There is thus a light-heartedness inherent in their methods and it is not until Socrates enters the argument proper that the κατα- prefix is observed.

When the sophists fail to demonstrate the kind of method Socrates feels is needed to exhort Clinias to virtue he inserts himself into the argument. Socrates explains their methods to the boy, asks them to quit their jesting, and even offers a way in which it is proper to conceive of such an undertaking. Before doing so he urges those present not to laugh at him

Cra. 400b, 402a, 425d, 426b, 432d; *Tht.* 147a, 147b, 154b, 158e, 172c, 174d, 178c, 181b, 191a, 200b, 205b, 207b, 209d; *Prm.* 128d, 130c; *Soph.* 224b, 227a; *Plt.* 296a; *Phlb.* 19a, 23d, 49b, 49c, 49e (x2), 50a, 62b; *Leg.* 670b, 773c, 801b, 816d, 816e, 819d, 822c (x2), 830d, 838c, 858a, 887b, 918d, 935b, 935d (x3), 960e; *Epin.* 990d; *Ep.* 321a, 347d. See also: τό γελοῖον: *Phlb.* 48c, 65e. γελοῖότερος: *Ap.* 30e; *Hp. Mai.* 297d; *Resp.* 600b; *Symp.* 214e, 215a; *Prm.* 128d; *Soph.* 227b; *Plt.* 266c; *Phlb.* 19a, 40c. γελοῖότατος: *Resp.* 452a. παγγέλοιον: *Phdr.* 260c.

(μή μου καταγελάτε) if his method of question and answer seems crude and ridiculous (γελοίως) (*Euthyd.* 278d). It is at this point that Plato begins to contrast Socrates with the sophists. Indeed, Socrates accompanies his request with the following:

It is through a desire of hearing your wisdom that I will dare to improvise in front of you. So you and your students should restrain yourselves and listen without laughing (ἀγελαστί). (*Euthyd.* 278d-e)

Whereas the sophists merely produce laughter, Socrates hopes to achieve the opposite. Jest and play has its place but if one is seeking wisdom and virtue Socrates makes it clear that a much more suitable method is needed. Socrates' concern is evident following his first question to Clinias (i.e. do all human beings wish to prosper?) as he promptly reprehends himself, wondering if he too has fallen into asking the boy the same kind of absurdities (καταγελάστων) the sophists are wont to ask (*Euthyd.* 278e). By *Euthyd.* 281e, however, Socrates' method of questioning has produced the conclusion that wisdom is good, ignorance bad, without demeaning Clinias or producing laughter in the process. After his demonstration, Socrates expects the sophists to continue in a similar vein but the rest of the dialogue largely plays out in exactly the same way as before Socrates made his interjection. Yet Socrates is not entirely at odds with the sophists' eristics for he builds on the sentiments above by noting how their methods contain a popular and kindly air, a further indication they are not meant to be contemptuous or ridiculing (*Euthyd.* 303d).¹⁸ He also adds, however, that such talk would not be suitable in a public setting – better to use such argumentation in private where a spirit of play or good faith may be established (*Euthyd.* 303c-4a).

The contrast between the two, as well as Plato's concerns about the perception of philosophy, is later confirmed in the dialogue's concluding remarks. Crito relates to Socrates his experience of meeting an unnamed man after the argumentation ended and the crowd had dispersed.¹⁹ Crito notes how he was unable to hear the proceedings and asks the stranger if anything of worth had been said. In reply, the man tells him that he had seen the wisest men of the present day whiling away their time, chattering and coming to worthless conclusions

¹⁸ In agreement with de Vries 1985, 380.

¹⁹ The unnamed man is likely Isocrates. Cf. Isoc. *C. soph.* 291.1-2 “who can fail to abhor, yes to condemn, those teachers, in the first place, who devote themselves to disputation, since they pretend to search for truth, but straightway at the beginning of their professions attempt to deceive us with lies?” Translation taken from Norlin 1929, 163.

about nothing. The stranger concludes that if this is the kind of thing philosophy consists of, then it must be of no value whatsoever; indeed, those who engage in the activity must themselves be worthless and ridiculous laughing-stocks (καταγέλαστοι) (*Euthyd.* 304d-e). This kind of thinking, Socrates counters, enjoys a certain plausibility but does not contain truth. It is an impression gained solely via eristic display, passing over the short dialectical exchange he had with Clinias, which did produce a positive result (*Euthyd.* 306a). The dialogue thus ends with Plato attempting to paint philosophy in a positive light, despite the negative connotations it might otherwise appear to have if one believes the practice to be nothing but childish wordplay. The *Euthydemus* is a dialogue filled with laughter but which also reveals a lingering concern about the perception and practicality of engaging in the discipline, one transmitted by the vocabulary of laughter, and, as the current project hopes to show, a frequent anxiety of the Platonic corpus.²⁰

The *Hippias Major* is another dialogue full of laughter. Unlike the *Euthydemus*, however, which contains the worry of how philosophy is being perceived from the outside, the *Hippias Major* presents an interesting case of internalising laughter and ridicule directed towards philosophical method. Via a literary device dubbed the Socratic alter-ego,²¹ Plato creates an abstract entity within the dialogue whom Socrates consistently cites as ready to laugh whenever an answer should be found unsatisfactory. This allows Plato to provide not only a meta-critique of the Socratic method and search for definitions, but also the possibility of becoming laughable in one's own eyes. Indeed, this very same worry prompts the dialogue's τί ἐστὶ question, what is τὸ καλόν ("the fine, beautiful"). Socrates relates how he has already been refuted in some previous argument and therefore enlists the help of the sophist Hippias, citing the apprehension of being refuted again and thereafter becoming laughable or incurring laughter a second time (μὴ ἐξελεγχθεὶς τὸ δεύτερον αὐθις γέλωτα ὄφλω) (*Hip. Maj.* 286e). Hippias is more than happy to help but, as the dialogue progresses, his answers continually run up against the laughter of Socrates' alter-ego.

Socrates repeatedly returns to said laughter whenever Hippias attempts to produce answers which point to particular examples of fine things, but do not capture the fine's universal essence or nature. Hippias' first answer, a fine girl is a fine thing, is met with

²⁰ Halliwell 2008, 287-90 provides a full overview and much more detailed account of laughter in the *Euthydemus* than can be given here.

²¹ For more on the problems this device has caused for several commentators and how its humour works see Woodruff 1982, 43-4, 97-8, 107-9. Halliwell 2008, 293-5 stresses how the alter-ego adheres to his broader thesis regarding Socrates' ambiguous relationship with ridicule.

scepticism. Socrates counters by replying for his alter-ego, asking how it is all fine things should be made fine by a fine girl. Hippias, however, is concerned with how the imaginary figure would appear a *καταγέλαστος* if he attempts to refute it (*Hip. Maj.* 288a-b). Indeed, Hippias begins to wonder who such a man might be, only to receive the reply that he is a man who cares for the truth above all else (*Hip. Maj.* 288d). Of course, Socrates is well aware of the intention of the initial question, and when Hippias once again attempts to give further examples of fine things, qualified by stating their relative degree of fineness, Socrates replies that his alter-ego will simply laugh (*γελάσεται*) at them once again (*Hip. Maj.* 288d-9c). When all definitions fail to meet the *τί ἐστι* requirements, Hippias moves to defining the fine life itself, that is, to be rich, healthy, honoured by the Greeks, and buried by one's children. But now, Socrates replies, the man will laugh at them (*καταγελάσεται*) more than ever. Hippias remarks it will be a wretched laugh (*πονηρόν...γέλωτα*), for if he simply laughs (*γελάῃ*), but does not attempt to give a constructive answer, he will merely be laughing at himself (*αὐτοῦ καταγελάσεται*) and become a laughing-stock (*καταγέλαστος*) to those present (*Hip. Maj.* 291d-2a). Hippias' frustration points to a problem that several of Socrates' interlocutors have in other dialogues, namely his famous profession of ignorance, and there are a number of situations in which they even give up answering his questions (e.g. Callicles, *Grg.* 482, 505c-6b; Meno, *Meno* 80a; Thrasymachus, *Resp.* 336b-d, 337a, 337d-e). The frustration stems from the fact that Socrates seems quite literally to fail to produce any positive form of answer to a given question. Such an epistemic stance, at least in his interlocutors' eyes, should therefore make Socrates and his methods worthy of laughter and ridicule. There is, however, more to Socrates' profession of ignorance than first appears from an initial reading of the dialogues. It has important associations with receiving laughter and ridicule, the value of one's reputation, emotional and moral psychology, as well as philosophical method, associations which the current project seeks to demonstrate in much greater detail than can be provided in this short introductory case study.

The anxieties and sentiments of these earlier dialogues are certainly carried over into the middle period. The *Theaetetus*' digression on the philosopher cited previously is a perfect example (highly caricatured though it may be). Throughout the digression Plato depicts various situations in which the philosopher (now generalised) is seen as laughable. Not only is he unaware of the whereabouts of the market, he has no desire for social functions, nor does he give thought to those who pride themselves on their distinguished lineage. If the philosopher does happen to find himself in such places and situations, he is said to be derided by the many (*ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν καταγελάται*) (*Tht.* 173d-5b). The digression also explains

how whenever the philosopher is for some reason obligated to speak in the courts about matters that pertain to the here and now, he is said to provoke the laughter (γέλως) of both Thracian servant girls and the crowd (*Tht.* 174c). Moreover, the philosopher appears as a comic (γελοῖος) figure in other social situations due to the fact that he is unable to join in everyday conversations with his fellow man, especially those involving personal scandals (*Tht.* 174c). As one can see, the frequency and range is quite exceptional, revealing not only Plato's concern with laughter and ridicule in general, but also as directed towards the philosopher and his methods in particular.

With all of the above in hand, one is drawn to the question: what is motivating this anxiety? Why is it that Plato, a philosopher who in his dialogues largely dismisses the opinions and actions of the many as unreasonable, should communicate such a worry about laughter and ridicule? And indeed, does he develop any kind of response or counter-position? One obvious answer is to postulate that all such anxieties are being motivated by some cultural or non-philosophical element. The cultural norms of shame, guilt, and honour were highly prevalent in Athenian life (and indeed in Greek culture more generally).²² To take but one manifestation, respect for public opinion and sanction was commonly held to be of great import, with the terms καλός and αἰσχρός being indicative of how one's actions are perceived and evaluated by one's peers.²³ These terms encase one especially deep aspect of Greek life: the fear and disgrace of humiliation. Many examples can be found in the surviving literature. A famous one is Euripides' *Medea*, which cites the fear of mockery at three significant moments in the play. Having been formally exiled, Medea continues to scheme against those she believes have wronged her, telling herself that she must not suffer mockery from her ill-fated marriage to Jason (*Med.* 404). Next, she declares her intentions to leave Corinth, but not before she kills her own children and thereafter destroys the house of Jason, for she declares "the laughter of one's enemies is unendurable" (*Med.* 797). And later in the play, when Medea begins to question the motivations for her ruthless act, the fear of mockery and humiliation bring her back to her original plan (*Med.* 1049). *Medea* reflects this deeply ingrained fear and demonstrates how it can be a constant motivating factor in shaping behaviour. Halliwell observes how in Greek culture, "insouciance about being the target of ridicule actually constitutes a recognisable aberrancy, a symptom of a deficient sense of self-

²² Dodds 1951, 17-8, 28-50; Adkins 1960, 154; Dover 1974, 226-42; Halliwell 2008, 22. Cf. Cairns 1993, 43-7; Williams 1993, 5-6, 75-102, 219-23.

²³ Dodds 1951, 26, n. 109; Adkins 1960, 154-68; Dover 1974, 69-73; Urmson 1990, 13, 82-3.

worth.”²⁴ And yet, Plato’s Socrates is able to say: let them laugh.²⁵ Cultural issues are no doubt important and colour the context within which Plato composed his works. But the dialogues draw attention to the fact that cultural norms at this time are being subjected to philosophical scrutiny. One outcome of the dialogues’ philosophical reflection is the indication that “true” shame may be quite different to the cultural norm and that feelings of shame for indulging in philosophy may be misplaced. To be sure, Plato’s dialogues attempt to show that if it is done in a certain way, neither the philosopher nor philosophy should be considered shameful or worthy of ridicule. Cultural analysis is therefore informative but ultimately offers an unsatisfactory answer as it does not address the philosophical element of Plato’s anxieties and concerns.

If such worries are only peripherally cultural, should the philosopher simply be uncaring and go about his philosophical business? The prospect certainly coheres with the ongoing critique of social norms in the dialogues, bringing the reader closer to a Cynical attitude towards the potency of laughter and ridicule, as well as the value of reputation. The Cynic is one who shows a complete indifference to societal norms and will necessarily disregard both the evaluative and corrective force of laughter.²⁶ These considerations are important as the Cynic tradition is one in which Socrates is argued to have played a developmental role.²⁷ Antisthenes (c. 445 – 366 BC), arguably the first Cynic and a close companion of Socrates, is recorded as holding the belief that virtue is sufficient for happiness, since nothing else is needed except the strength of a Socrates.²⁸ Under these circumstances one should seek to achieve self-mastery without the use or reliance on any good external to oneself, least of all the acceptance of one’s fellow citizens. Diogenes (c. 412/403 – 324/321 BC), the most well-known of the ancient Cynics, exemplified this stance via his repudiation and defacement of existing social norms and authorities (for example, in his meeting with the Macedonian king in Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander*).²⁹ Shamelessness was

²⁴ Halliwell 2008, 41. See also Ar. *Nub.* 992, where the Better Argument says that if Phidippides chooses him he will learn “to feel shame at what is shameful and flare at anyone who mocks you.”

²⁵ ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν καταγελασθῆναι ἴσως οὐδὲν πρᾶγμα; Pl. *Euthypr.* 3c. The above is therefore not an accurate translation but words to that effect.

²⁶ Buckley 2003, 171.

²⁷ The Stoics would also seek to trace their lineage back to Socrates through Zeno’s Cynic teacher Crates. See Long 1988, 160-4. See also Long 1996 on the Socratic tradition within Cynicism.

²⁸ Diog. Laert. 6.11.

²⁹ Plut. *Alex.* 9.1-3.

therefore a privileged virtue for the Cynics. Socrates too, as will be elaborated below, shows disregard for conventional shame, but he does not abandon concerns about shame altogether. The Cynics may have derived much from Socrates but this does not help to explain away the lingering anxieties in Plato's dialogues. Unlike Cynic antinomianism, Plato does not present the philosopher as a figure who attempts to distance himself from society or reject it outright. Rather, he is one who constructively criticises it and so attempts to be a force for good. Indeed, Plato himself is recorded as showing opposition to a Socratic-Cynic heritage, famously deeming Diogenes a "Socrates gone mad."³⁰ As will become apparent, despite the fact social norms are being questioned in the dialogues, things such as shame and reputation are still seen as important. Both answers are therefore unsatisfactory and prompt one to look elsewhere.

Although it is a somewhat neglected element of Plato, laughter within the dialogues has been the subject of a number of studies. de Vries very briefly examines the character of laughter in Plato, drawing attention to both the malicious and good-natured laughter extant in the dialogues, but does not come to any definite conclusion.³¹ The scholar who has given laughter in Greek culture its most systematic assessment is Halliwell, his greatest contribution being the widely applicable theory of playful versus consequential laughter. The dichotomy instantiates a hypothesis where on the one side sits the playful, characterised generally as "a cooperative, reciprocally pleasurable form of behaviour,"³² and on the other the consequential, synonymous with mockery and maliciousness, and considered an aggressive and hostile act in its own right.³³ With respect to Plato and Socrates, Halliwell presents a double-sided Socrates which mirrors his theory. He aptly observes how the Platonic Socrates "oscillates somewhat between disregard for and anxiety about the possibility of such derision,"³⁴ and he points out that Plato's Socrates is not averse to self-mockery, his famous irony being itself a "form of tacit ridicule."³⁵ Halliwell's "double-sided" Socrates is useful for studying the character of laughter in Plato and the positive part it can

³⁰ Diog. Laert. 6.43.

³¹ de Vries 1985, 378-81.

³² Halliwell 2008, 21.

³³ Halliwell 2008, 25. For a full explication of this theory see Halliwell 1991, 280-7; 2008, 25-38. For further comments on this theory see Tanner 2017, xxi-xxii. Cf. Moore 1999, 316 who instead refers to this division of laughter as "philic" and "phthonic."

³⁴ Halliwell 2008, 284.

³⁵ Halliwell 2008, 287-95.

play in philosophical discussion.³⁶ While his work goes some way to addressing the anxieties which form the subject of this study, the focus on the characterisation of Socrates does not settle the problem, though his work will provide insights throughout. Naas takes the issue much further. Addressing what he refers to as the spectacle of laughter, his work is most relevant for the idea that Plato's Socrates is conscious of the ridiculous figure he must seem to the non-philosopher,³⁷ but also that such laughter may be tolerated because the greater worry is becoming laughable to oneself.³⁸ These observations recur in this study, but emerge within a different framework to the one presented by Naas, who is concerned to outline Plato's warnings with regard to comedy. A further (and the most recently published) work on the subject is Tanner's *Plato's Laughter: Socrates as Satyr and Comical Hero*, a monograph which defends the conviction that Plato is funny. Drawing on the laughter-inducing paradigm of Attic Old Comedy and later references to comical aspects of Plato's dialogues in commentators such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, Tanner seeks to revise earlier interpretations of laughter in Plato that focus too heavily on the malicious forms and so miss the exuberance and non-mutually exclusive relationship between comedy and philosophy.³⁹ Tanner therefore argues for a reading of Plato which pays much greater attention to the dialogues' dramatic form, enabling jokes, puns, humorous incidents, situations, and characterisations to come to the fore.⁴⁰ As such, Tanner attempts to (1) show that Plato uses laughter for philosophical purposes, and (2) "[tell] a story of Socrates as a type of comic hero."⁴¹ Such claims do not (at least to any great extent) affect the present study, largely because she discusses dialogues outside of this study's scope. Thus, while the role and importance of laughter in Plato figures in a number of studies that certainly go some way to addressing his apparent anxieties, the problem is not yet settled. The literature on this issue shows that a number of precedents have been set but there is still room for further interpretive work to be done.⁴²

³⁶ Halliwell 2008, 299.

³⁷ Naas 2016, 22-3.

³⁸ Naas 2016, 23.

³⁹ Tanner 2017, xiii-xvii.

⁴⁰ Tanner 2017, xix-xx.

⁴¹ Tanner 2017, xxv.

⁴² This literature review considers only the work most relevant to the current study but further work exists on the subject of laughter in Plato: Jazdzewska 2018 discusses and compares the laughter in Plato's and Xenophon's

This thesis cannot claim to be an exhaustive overview of the issue of laughter in the dialogues of Plato. It seeks instead to demonstrate that Plato develops a response to the worry of the philosopher and philosophy being viewed as worthy targets of laughter and ridicule. What transpires is that Plato develops a systematic position on laughter, mature by the late period dialogues, but embryonic in the early and middle. This thesis will therefore look to the dialogues themselves for an answer to the questions posed above, beginning with two later dialogues, *Philebus* and *Laws*. These works allow us to relate Plato's evolving position on laughter and ridicule and from there we can trace the nature of Plato's position in the early and middle periods. The chosen method of organisation will be close readings of individual dialogues. The method permits a double-reading, (1) a focus on dynamics within the dialogue itself and (2) comparison between dialogues. Moreover, it allows a clearer view of how the issue of laughter develops and is treated differently across the dialogues. Each dialogue approaches the issue separately and in variegated ways but, as we shall see, when taken together they can be seen to form a comprehensive examination. After the initial readings of *Philebus* and *Laws*, further readings will be arranged in a developmental framework, starting with the *Euthyphro*. The *Apology* and *Crito* will then form a two-part chapter, followed by a chapter on the *Republic*.

Symposia. Young 1991 examines humour in ancient Greek culture more generally. Further (exhaustive) lists appear with some overlap in Halliwell 2008, 278, n. 31; Tanner 2017, 160, n. 17.

Chapter One
Laughter in the Late Period Dialogues

Philebus

Any positive answer to the questions about laughter raised above must address the problem philosophically, as Plato himself appears to be doing in his dialogues. But why start in the late period and with *Philebus* in particular? The reasons are several and when taken together present a strong case for selecting this dialogue as a starting point for assessing the themes of laughter and ridicule in the Platonic corpus. First, the dialogue is constructed by way of a formalised τί ἐστὶ question, along with Socrates as lead interlocutor, thus prompting the reader to look back to earlier dialogues. Secondly, it is in the *Philebus* that Plato gives the reader his most systematic treatment of laughter. And thirdly, it holds the potential for intertextuality as key terms and ideas surrounding both the nature and ethics of laughter are found in the *Philebus* which resonate with Plato's early and middle periods.

The τί ἐστὶ question of the *Philebus* consists of the following: what is the human good, or how will a human being live the best life possible? Is it a life that seeks or possesses pleasure or knowledge? It is necessary to note that before the interlocutors (Socrates; Protarchus) begin their search, each agrees they will be attempting to prove that it is some condition or state of soul which makes the good life possible (*Phlb.* 11e). They quickly find, however, that neither pleasure nor knowledge equates to the good but that a mixture of the two promises to be the best life for a human (*Phlb.* 22b-c). The ensuing argumentation makes it apparent that an important part of what it means to live this mixed life is the ability to use and apply reason to any such pleasure one should experience. With respect to laughter, one must be capable of making a true judgement that one is taking pleasure in it by an appropriate measure. If one is taking pleasure in it through ignorance, that is, by an inappropriate measure, then any pleasure derived from laughter is undermined by the falsity of the judgement. Socrates and Protarchus, however, do not arrive at this position until much later in the dialogue and it is worthwhile recounting their preceding argument in brief.

As each has agreed that a mixed life is best, the discussion turns to finding what should constitute the right mixture, or which of pleasure and knowledge is most responsible for its goodness. To do so, Socrates proposes a method whereby everything that exists in the universe is divided and classified into four kinds: the unlimited (τὸ ἄπειρον), the limit (τὸ

πέρας), their resulting mixture, and the cause of their mixture (*Phlb.* 23c-d).⁴³ The unlimited are said to be the kind of things such as hot and cold existing on a relativistic continuum, as well as their corresponding relatives hotter and colder (*Phlb.* 24a-25a).⁴⁴ Limit refers to their relative degrees, including the concepts of equal and number, which impose a definite measure or harmoniousness upon them, thereby making relative things intelligible in some observable quantity (*Phlb.* 25a-e); this also incidentally accounts for their mixture.⁴⁵ Before explaining the nature of the cause, they first establish that pleasure belongs to the unlimited kind (*Phlb.* 28a). Pleasure is classified as something which comes to be through some cause and cannot be that which is the cause of anything, nor can it be what creates the necessary mixture for the good life. This privilege is given to reason, which, insofar as it arranges the cosmos, also arranges the soul, itself a mirror of the ordered cosmos within the individual (*Phlb.* 28a-31a). Indeed, reason places a limit on pleasure due to what Socrates says is the need for law and order to stem the universal excess and wickedness (πονηρίαν) of mankind (*Phlb.* 26b).⁴⁶ Reason thus imposes limit on all unlimited things and makes them intelligible; it is stated as the cause of all things, and thus it creates the necessary conditions for the good life.

The next step in the argument is a closer examination of pleasure, together with its opposite, pain. Each is said to arise in common as the third kind (i.e. a mixture) and occurs when the harmony within a living creature is either disrupted or restored, corresponding to pain and pleasure respectively (*Phlb.* 31a-32b). It is then established that there should be no barrier on the person who chooses a life of reason to live in a state which experiences a constant harmonious balance of these opposites (*Phlb.* 32e-33a). Such a life depends on the ability to perceive correctly how one's soul and body are being affected at a given time. This

⁴³ Carone 2005, 85 takes the fourfold classification as cosmological and concerned with the sensible universe and is therefore directly related to our understanding of the sensible phenomena of the physical realm.

⁴⁴ Frede 1993, xxxiv prefers to describe unlimited things as those which possess no definite degree in themselves.

⁴⁵ Frede 1993, xxxiv-xxxv observes, however, that this kind is only apparently made up of good mixtures such as fine weather, beauty, strength, and the soul's virtues. She suggests as a solution to the problem of the exclusion of bad mixtures that Plato is presupposing a Heraclitean flux of the sensible world so that imperfect or bad states merely never achieve a definite degree. Carone 2005, 92 refines these good mixtures as the "right combination" (or that which exhibits the nature of measure and proportion) of unlimited and limit.

⁴⁶ Urmson 1990, 139 interprets πονηρία as having a similar usage to κακός and suggests that a refinement on "bad" or "vice" may be "ill-condition(ed)." The implication being that in a state of πονηρία an individual is in some way unsound or deficient with respect to either body or mind.

could be any such phenomena as hunger and thirst that create a desire for restoration of harmony. When the body experiences physical sensations like the above, the soul (i.e. one's reasoning faculty) strives for the opposite. And so, such desires are said to be perceived and regulated via the soul, not the body (*Phlb.* 33a-c). In striving for said harmony, the soul (and therefore reason) can be seen as the cause of all pleasure in a human being. The correlation between pleasure and reason is made explicit at *Phlb.* 36c-50d, for just as one makes true and false judgements, so too might they be mistaken about certain pleasures. For example, people may at times falsely perceive an overemphasised or inflated pleasure or pain, when in reality it is merely being generated from some vicious or ill-conditioned state of soul and body (τινι πονηρία ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος; for example, ignorance) and not by virtue of reason and the truth (*Phlb.* 45e). There is then the further case of mixed pleasures and pains created by the result of mistaken reasoning and the subsequent experience of two opposing conditions (i.e. disruption and restoration) at once.⁴⁷ These may be experienced by the body, body and soul together, and the soul alone by itself (*Phlb.* 47c-d). One such mixed pleasure of the soul by itself is derived from laughing at the misfortunes or ignorance of others. The discussion of these mixed pleasures concludes by addressing the notion of τὸ γελοῖον, “the comic, ridiculous, or laughable,” and it is here that Plato provides the closest approximation in his corpus to a theory of why people laugh at others and the associated emotional and moral psychology (*Phlb.* 47c-50d).⁴⁸

It is posited that the state of one's soul in seeing tragedy or comedy (both on stage and in “all the tragedy and comedy of life;” *Phlb.* 50b) involves a mixture of pleasure and pain, corresponding to laughter and malice (φθόνος) respectively (*Phlb.* 47d-48a).⁴⁹ Protarchus

⁴⁷ Carone 2005, 105 notes that Plato views mixed pleasures as false if they are not restrained by reason.

⁴⁸ The above is but a brief summary of the *Philebus*' account of pleasure as it pertains to the current thesis. For a detailed account and commentary see Frede 1993, xvi-liii; Wolfsdorf 2013, 76-92.

⁴⁹ There is some ambiguity as to whether φθόνος should be translated “malice” or “envy.” Fowler 1925 gives envy, while Hackforth 1972, Frede 1997, Wood 2007, Jansen (forthcoming), 30, n. 22 give malice. I follow them in accepting malice; noting, however, that there are several ambiguities and that malice will not be an acceptable translation in every case. Mills 1985, 2, n. 2 elaborates on the subtleties of translating φθόνος, explaining how “malice can exist without envy...but envy is invariably accompanied by malice.” Wood 2007, 78, n. 3 suggests that an even better translation may be *schadenfreude*, as “envy signifies principally pain at another's pleasure; malice, pleasure at another's pain,” but ultimately settles on “malice.” Cf. Wolfsdorf 2013, 93-4 who translates it as “diminishing desire,” for the reason that “[φθόνος] is a desire...that another person be diminished...[it thus] shares with envy pain at another's possession of a good [but] differs from envy in that it is

finds this pronouncement understandable with respect to tragedy but not comedy. Socrates attempts to clarify his position by selecting malice for greater scrutiny:

Socrates: Since we just mentioned the word “malice”: Do you treat malice as a pain of the soul, or what?

Protarchus: I do.

Socrates: On the other hand, will not the malicious person display pleasure at his neighbour’s misfortunes (τοῖς κακοῖς).

Protarchus: Very much so.

Socrates: Now, ignorance is a vice (κακόν), and so is what we call stupidity?

Protarchus: Decidedly!

Socrates: What conclusions do you draw from this about the nature of the ridiculous (τὸ γελοῖον)?

Protarchus: You tell me.

Socrates: It is, in sum, a kind of vice (πονηρία) that derives its name from a special disposition; it is, among all the vices, the one with a character that stands in direct opposition to the one recommended by the famous inscription in Delphi.

Protarchus: You mean the one that says “Know Thyself,” Socrates?

Socrates: I do. The opposite recommendation would obviously be that we do not know ourselves at all. (*Phlb.* 48b-d)⁵⁰

The framing of φθόνος is such that it is the pleasure in the misfortune or ignorance of another, but which actually reflects the ignorance of the one who laughs. Laughter is itself a pleasure and need not be considered bad *per se* but when mixed with φθόνος it becomes a κακός.⁵¹ The example Plato gives is one of taking pleasure or laughing at the κακοί of others. However, such laughter is inspired by ignorance and stupidity, themselves κακοί. And, when a person is seen as being or doing something γελοῖον they are said to be in possession of a πονηρία that stands in direct opposition to knowledge. Therefore, through a closer

not conjoined with a desire to possess the same good. Rather, it is conjoined with the desire to see the other lose that good...[it also] shares with malice a desire, which may be unreasonable, to see another suffer.”

⁵⁰ Translation taken from Frede 1997, 437-8.

⁵¹ Urmson 1990, 81-2 explains Plato’s use of κακός as having a range similar to that of the English “bad,” which covers moral badness, stands in opposition to the Greek ἀγαθός, and suggests a defect or fault that hinders the pursuit of ἀρετή.

examination of φθόνοϛ Plato connects ignorance (via the maxim of the Delphic oracle) to what is laughable (τὸ γελοῖον).

Socrates takes the examination a step further by naming three ways in which a person may be found ignorant. Those who do not know themselves may think they are richer, more physically gifted, or more virtuous (especially in the virtue of wisdom) than they really are (*Phlb.* 48d-9a). The third kind is said to be the most common affliction and the worst because it is particular to the soul (*Phlb.* 49a). It is a false or caricatured form of virtue and thus a κακός. Socrates' argument suggests that to laugh at another's pain, ignorance, or misfortune (real or staged), is to do so from a place of ignorance, for in their pleasure one is ignorant of the κακός they are themselves in possession of. Moreover, the presence of malice indicates that the laughter comes from a place of contempt and a pretension of moral superiority. It is tantamount to someone saying: *I*, of course, would never find myself in such a position, *I* could never be seen to be so ridiculous.⁵² Indeed, nobody is perfect and under Socrates' interpretation the one who laughs at another for some misfortune or failing is therefore ignorant of their own ignorance, a reversal of the very same profession Socrates makes of his wisdom (again via the Delphic oracle) in the *Apology* (*Ap.* 20d-3b; 29b).

Socrates then divides those who fall into the category of conceited wisdom into two further classes of people. These consist of those whose delusion is accompanied by weakness or by strength. Ignorance in the former category is to be considered truly ridiculous because those people lack the power to retaliate when laughed at, whereas the latter are to be considered hateful and dangerous because they can do bad things to you (*Phlb.* 49b-c). Laughter and ridicule, therefore, befit only the powerless. This distinction allows Socrates to generate a category of people that one may be justified in laughing at, yet it is not to be the powerless without qualification. Malice is said to involve an unjust mixture of pleasure and pain, for whereas he allows one to take pleasure in the misfortunes of one's enemies (τῶν ἐχθρῶν; i.e. those who are not one's φίλοι, which suggests that pleasure of this kind does not involve malice), if one were to take pleasure in the misfortunes (i.e. ignorance) of one's friends (τῶν φίλων), such a case would be truly wrong, as one is now committing an unjust

⁵² Miller 2008, 264 suggests that the joy one takes in seeing the comic figure exposed "seems to fit the basic scene presented in many of the Socratic dialogues." See also Wood 2007, 81 who suggests that Plato means for the reader to think of such people as the largely silent Philebus of the eponymous dialogue, erisitical debaters, and malicious comedians.

action through ignorance (*Phlb.* 49d-50a).⁵³ Frede observes how “Plato regards the very fact that we laugh when our neighbours or friends make fools of themselves as a sign that we bear them some secret ill-will...[and that we therefore have] a *need* to see them [do so].”⁵⁴ Therein lies the tainted edge to such pleasure.⁵⁵ Thus, even if those without power (and especially if they are one’s friends or those one has a personal connection to) are truly ridiculous, one should avoid any sense of overbearing moral superiority. Rather than take malicious pleasure in their plight, one should attempt to expose their ignorance or shortcomings through non-malicious means. Socrates, via his profession of ignorance, appears to achieve this feat.⁵⁶ His approach, however, does not bypass the threat of being laughed at but rather of being malicious towards those who are truly laughable but do not have the power to see why.⁵⁷

⁵³ Hackforth 1972, 92, n. 1 suggests that the use of terms φίλοι and ἐχθροί should here be considered more generally to correspond to emotions felt towards good and bad men respectively. Cf. Wood 2007, 86 who notes that taking pleasure in defeating one’s enemies in battle would be acceptable so long as one does not then go on to gloat maliciously and humiliate them. See also Miller 2008, 282 who offers the possible explanation that because we see Socrates so forcefully argue against ever doing wrong even to one’s enemies, we may be inclined to see dialectical irony in this presumption; and Austin, 2012, 137, n. 5.

⁵⁴ Frede 1993, lii. Cf. Wood 2007, 83 who notes that at the heart of φθόνος is the fear of inferiority and so “envious resentment of the good of others is driven by fear that one is *not* good.” Indeed, it is through φθόνος that the malicious person experiences pain when they see other people thriving or having the things they lack. When the same people are brought down or exposed the malicious person experiences pleasure, which Plato sees as causing an admixture of pleasure and pain.

⁵⁵ The current project is not concerned to link Plato’s discussion of the comic with the wider account of pleasure in the *Philebus per se* and so has only given it enough coverage to establish its contextual relationship to laughter. For others who have interpreted *Phlb.* 47c-50d with respect to this aspect of the dialogue much more penetratingly see Wood 2007; Ionescu 2008; Miller 2008; Austin 2012; Jansen (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ See the statement at Vlastos 1991, 135 “to cheat his partners in this search would be to sabotage the process by which he hopes to discover moral truth himself; to cheat his interlocutors would be to cheat himself.” Miller 2008, 283 agrees, for “whereas...the man driven by φθόνος takes pleasure in the exposure of his neighbor’s limitations and in concealment of his own, Socrates declares his own ignorance and challenges his interlocutor to join him in inquiry.” For the flipside of dialectical encounter where those who cannot defeat Socrates in argument choose silence over surrender, see Wood 2007, 83.

⁵⁷ Such a claim is supported by Carone 2005, 118 who notes how the Socrates of the *Philebus* “appears...as defending an outlook inherited from the early dialogues. This is shown in his encouragement of Protarchus...to pursue the *elenchos* for the sake of truth rather than victory (14b), to the point that Protarchus is made to exclaim: “It is a fine thing for the sound-minded person to know all things, but the second best is for a person not to be ignorant of himself” (19c2-3).” Jansen (forthcoming), 20-6 provides a reading of the *Philebus* adhering

The nature of laughter as it appears in the *Philebus* is such that it may be enjoyed appropriately with due measure of reason or inappropriately in the excess of ignorance. The dialogue's fourfold classification of existing things shows how if laughter is itself a pleasure, it belongs to the unlimited kind and must therefore necessarily be caused, and thereafter given limit, by reason (as will its opposite, pain). If no such limit is given, the pleasure is merely the result of ignorance and cannot be considered a part of the best human life. Later in the dialogue Socrates affirms the most valuable ingredients for the best kind of life to be nothing less than measure (μέτρον) and proportion (τῆς συμμετρῶν), stated to be as close to the good as a human might achieve, for in every way they manifest themselves as beauty, virtue, and truth (*Phlb.* 64d-5a). Although one may never fully attain ultimate truths about existence, the exercise of reason is what Socrates refers to as "at least a road that leads towards the good" (*Phlb.* 61a). Setting his interlocutors on this road is therefore of the utmost importance and lies at the heart of Socrates' (and through him Plato's) philosophy. Socrates' profession of ignorance conveys this ability to give appropriate measure and proportion to what is laughable in that he appears to make himself γελοῖος. In other words, despite any superior knowledge he may have, he reduces it to the level of his interlocutor. Socrates, who in the *Philebus* and in many other dialogues is keenly aware of his own ignorance, shows that laughing at the ignorance of another will be of no assistance in exposing it nor for setting them on the path to the good. By making himself γελοῖος and laughing with them in an appropriate fashion, he attempts to at the very least set them on the path towards realising that in their ignorance they do not know what they claim to know, nor do they know themselves.

Laws

The *Laws* is another good starting place to assess Plato's anxieties about laughter. There are several reasons for this choice. First, as it is thought to be Plato's final work, it is also his final ruminations on laughter. A second reason is his discussion on the effects of comedy. The lead interlocutor of the dialogue, the Athenian, drafts legislation to restrict comedy's freedom, strongly indicating that the anxiety about laughter and ridicule is no less apparent in

to such an interpretation of Socrates' methods, concurrently arguing that it represents a spirit of inquiry and a good-natured form of laughter whereby "the *Philebus* is a dramatic comedy about discourse."

the *Laws* than in *Philebus*.⁵⁸ The focus on due measure and proportion, found to be necessary for the best human life in *Philebus*, is very much a persistent element of the *Laws* and is applied to legislation regarding comedic performance. There is a general worry that if comedies are given too great a licence, they will threaten the spread of wisdom and self-control which the dialogue's laws aim to achieve in each citizen.⁵⁹ Indeed, excessive laughter and all extremes of joy are to be consciously avoided (*Leg.* 732c). The anxiety manifests an educational and methodological concern that the Athenian elaborates in the following passage:

If anyone intends to be sensible, they will not be able to understand serious things without their ridiculous aspects, nor indeed the opposing aspects of all contrary things, and if anyone intends to enjoy even a small portion of virtue, then they cannot both be produced together, so it is for these very reasons that they should be understood, since it is necessary not to do or say anything ridiculous (*γελοῖα*) because of ignorance, and to command slaves and hired foreigners to imitate such things, and they are never to be taken as serious. (*Leg.* 816d-e)

As in the *Philebus*, ignorance is once again connected to what is laughable and ridiculous. There is a real worry discernible in this passage that the pleasure gained from comedic performance interferes with the individual's assessment of the right course of action in a given situation, thus trapping them in a vicious cycle of ignorance. If comedy is given free rein to create scenes containing ridicule and invective, standard features of comedy,⁶⁰ then, via the pleasure of seeing these ridiculous aspects of the performance, it will stifle one's ability to make true judgements. Therefore, due to the need to recognise and distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate forms of behaviour, comedy must be limited to having strictly educational purposes.⁶¹ Moreover, it must only be performed by those who are

⁵⁸ And so Folch 2015, 188 can state that for Plato, "genres [such as tragedy and comedy] are not only forms of thought and statements of value...they are also psychological states and models of social organisation." Folch's observation is particularly relevant when one considers the *Laws* alongside the *Philebus*, as both dialogues combine the tragedy and comedy of the stage with the tragedy and comedy of life.

⁵⁹ See *Leg.* 636d-e where the Cretan interlocutor explains that just as each person competes with their fellow man, so too do they fight a private war within themselves. Indeed, there is said to be a continual struggle between pleasure and pain and whoever chooses to indulge them with wisdom lives a happy life.

⁶⁰ Morrow 1960, 372.

⁶¹ See Folch 2015, 195-8; Naas 2016, 21 for more detail on the educational aspect.

without any power in society (i.e. because they pose no threat and so are fit to be called truly ridiculous).⁶² The focus on ignorance is paramount and coheres with its description and division in *Philebus*; it is later named as the cause of wrongdoing and split into two kinds. The first is merely a simple kind, producing trivial faults which the laws will quickly rectify. The second kind, however, doubles down, with the ignorant person being convinced of their own wisdom (*Leg.* 863c). Wrongdoing is causally linked to the second form of ignorance in that the unjust person is said to have their soul mastered by feelings of anger, fear, persuasion, pleasure, pain, malice, and desire; juxtaposed is the just person who only needs a working conception of the Good to master themselves (*Leg.* 863a-4a).

To save one from the pains of ignorance, the Athenian describes the mandatory method of argument needed to redress any imbalance in the soul. The importance of the ability to converse with wisdom and self-control is evident in the following passage:

There are some people with an unfortunate natural irritability, made worse by poor discipline, who in any trivial quarrel will shout their heads off in mutual abuse. Such a thing is highly improper in a well-run state. So this single law should apply to all cases of defamation: no one is to defame anybody. If you are having an argument you should listen to your opponent's case, and put your own to him and the audience, without making any defamatory remarks at all. When men take to damning and cursing each other and to calling one another rude names in the shrill tones of women, these mere words, empty though they are, soon lead to real hatreds and quarrels of the most serious kind...on such occasions all men are usually quick to resort to ridicule (τὸ γελοῖον) of their opponents, and no one who has indulged that habit has ever acquired the slightest sense of responsibility or remained faithful to many of his principles. That is why no one must ever breathe a word of ridicule in a temple or at a public sacrifice or at the games or in the marketplace or in court or in any public gathering...the view we are putting forward now is that when a man is embroiled in a slanging-match he is incapable of carrying on the dispute without trying to make funny remarks (γελοῖα), and when such conduct is motivated by anger we censure it. (*Leg.* 934d-5d)⁶³

Here the Athenian describes the kind of argumentation which quickly devolves into pettiness and enmity when no set boundaries are placed upon it. Because some people fall into the

⁶² Folch 2015, 196-202 elaborates on the ethical and political importance of alienation in comedic performances, noting how Plato builds upon and intensifies contemporary Athenian and foreign practices.

⁶³ Translation taken from Saunders 1997, 1587.

category of being unable to converse without a communication breakdown, defamation is ruled out completely. The Athenian argues that without this requisite legislation a great many discussions will merely descend into some kind of comic farce whereby the Good disappears from view and merely attempting to win the argument by brute force or ridicule becomes one's sole means of dispute. No positive outcomes are stated to derive from such arguments and many even end in personal feuds. Therefore, at all times one must exhibit self-control and present one's views with equanimity.⁶⁴ The characterisation of civilised argument in this passage is remarkably similar to the Socratic method of question and answer as depicted in most of the exchanges found in the Platonic dialogues.⁶⁵ Indeed, in all cases Socrates shows the right kind of attitude and spirit of inquiry needed to engage in meaningful discussion. Even when he is met with cynicism and hostility (e.g. from a Callicles or Thrasymachus type), he does not resort to ridiculing his dialectical interlocutors in order to make a point or win the argument. While Socrates does employ his famous irony to jab playfully at a conceited interlocutor, he is never portrayed as harbouring malicious intent.⁶⁶ Socrates' comments in the *Gorgias* are particularly telling of this positive attitude, for he declares that he is "one of those people who in a discussion with someone else really wants to have knowledge of the subject the discussion's about" (*Grg.* 453b), as well as being "one of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say anything untrue; one who, however, wouldn't be any less pleased to be refuted than to refute" (*Grg.* 458a).⁶⁷

The preceding passage not only reflects the necessary parameters for appropriate discussion, it also has further implications for the production of comedy. Its continuation is directly relevant to both the division of laughter presented in the *Philebus*, as well as Plato's wider anxieties about receiving laughter and ridicule (and worthwhile reproducing at length):

Well then, what does this [the preceding passage] imply? That we are prepared to tolerate a comedian's eagerness to raise a laugh (γελοῖα) against people, provided that when he sets about ridiculing our citizens in his comedies, he is not inspired by anger? Or shall we divide comedy into two kinds, according to whether it is good-natured or not (παίξειν καὶ μὴ)? Then we could allow the playful comedian to joke about something, without anger

⁶⁴ Cf. *Resp.* 465a.

⁶⁵ "Most" is used here because in the *Parmenides*, *Timaeus*, *Statesman*, and *Sophist* Socrates plays a minimal role, and disappears from the *Laws* altogether.

⁶⁶ Ionescu 2008, 446.

⁶⁷ Translations taken from Zeyl 1997, 798; 802.

(γελοῖον ἄνευ θυμοῦ), but forbid, as we've indicated, anyone whatsoever to do so if he is in deadly earnest and shows animosity. We must certainly insist on this stipulation about anger; but we still have to lay down by law who ought to receive permission for ridicule and who not. No composer of comedies, or of songs or iambic verse, must ever be allowed to ridicule either by description or by impersonation any citizen whatever, with or without rancour... Those who have earlier been licensed to compose verse against each other should be allowed to poke fun at people, not in savage earnest, but in a playful spirit and without rancour. The distinction between the two kinds must be left to the minister with overall responsibility for the education of the young; an author may put before the public anything the minister approves of, but if it is censored, the author must not perform it to anyone personally nor be found to have trained someone else to do so, whether a free man or slave. If he does, he must get the reputation of being a scoundrel (κακός) and an enemy of the laws. (*Leg.* 935d-6b)⁶⁸

As before, the Athenian's now elongated legislation on comedy shows that it is not to be ruled out completely. Rather, it is the malicious ridiculing of personages which constitutes its primary point of contention. Plato's apprehensions towards comedic productions are reiterated here as ridicule guided by anger. He is worried that comedy provokes a reactionary measure whereby the soul is governed by passion and ignorance, befitting only of the unjust individual. Therefore, in a very similar vein to the *Philebus*, comedy, as well as the laughter it induces, is once again divided into its appropriate and inappropriate forms. The appropriate form, showing similarities with Socrates' methods and approach to argumentation related above, allows the comedian to produce works, good-natured in kind, that also have an educational purpose. The inappropriate form shall be censored and its producer labelled a κακός individual. Just as the *Philebus* combines the comedic stage with the comedy of life itself, so too do these passages.

Concluding Remarks

In the attempt to provide some tentative answers to the questions generated in the Introduction, the current chapter proposed to look to two late period dialogues, the *Philebus* and *Laws*, which exhibit Plato's most systematic treatment of the issue. Through a close reading of selected passages, both dialogues can be seen to emphasise the fact that in his late

⁶⁸ Translation taken from Saunders 1997, 1588.

period Plato focusses most intently on how laughter is connected to the epistemic binary of reason and ignorance, as well as what this means for a just and ordered society. As such, they pivot heavily on the emotional and moral psychology of the person either doing the laughing or viewing the comic spectacle. What comes through to the reader is a conception of appropriate and inappropriate laughter,⁶⁹ that laughter itself is not a bad or disruptive force *per se*; but when it comes from a place of ignorance, or is combined with some pain of the soul such as malice or anger, reason has now been mastered by emotion and pleasure and laughter can no longer be considered a force for good. Both dialogues share this common attitude towards laughter in its appropriate and inappropriate forms.

Plato's concerns identified in the Introduction centre on both the philosopher and philosophical practice as comic or ridiculous. However, by connecting laughter and what is laughable to ignorance Plato develops a position whereby the philosopher, with his systematic reflection on the nature of things, may be distinguished from the unreflective citizen or interlocutor who largely accepts the current conventions of his society without question. Thus, when the non-philosopher laughs at or ridicules the philosopher and his discipline for seeming ignorant of and questioning any conventions thought to be inherently good or beneficial, Plato is able to conclude that his laughter is not accompanied by reason, that it displays his ignorance as to what the philosopher attempts to do, and that furthermore he is ignorant of the fact that the philosopher seeks the good life, not only for himself but for others also. And yet, the philosopher does not then turn around and laugh maliciously at the unknowing non-philosopher upon exposing his ignorance. This is because Plato makes ignorance itself a moral failing, a *κακός* or *πονηρία* of the soul, standing in direct opposition to knowledge. If the philosopher were then to engage in any such laughter tainted with malice or anger, he could be convicted of betraying himself, would therefore be ignorant of his own ignorance, and would thereafter be considered truly laughable. Plato thus allows for an appropriate, good-natured, and malice-free form of laughter to provide a pleasurable outlet for the philosopher, which, as argued above, is exemplified in Socrates' approach to philosophical argumentation and play.

If the cornerstone of late period dialogues' treatment of laughter is the subject, that is, the laugher or the spectator of the comic, then the early and middle period dialogues can be

⁶⁹ Following others such as Wood 2007, Miller 2008, Ionescu 2008, and Jansen (forthcoming), who have set the precedent by which this conception has been able to be developed. Jansen gets an especial mention, due to her thoughts on laughter and its normative function. One such norm is "fittingness."

said to focus on what it means to be the object.⁷⁰ The above readings have therefore set a foundation for exploring how Plato moves from object to subject in arriving at his late period position.

⁷⁰ Although the *Republic*, via the cave allegory and its assessment of comedy, contains aspects of both.

Chapter Two

Inappropriate Laughter and Philosophical Practice in Euthyphro

The *Euthyphro*, traditionally thought to be one of Plato's earliest dialogues,⁷¹ is a good starting point for assessing Plato's preoccupation with questions of laughter and ridicule in the early period dialogues. The dialogue has seen a lot of scholarly attention, much of it centred on the famous paradox at 10a-11b (is something pious because it is god-loved or god-loved because it is pious?).⁷² Others have sought to study it for its presentation of Socrates' *elenchos* method or for the dialogue's legal and religious aspects.⁷³ It is not the intention of this reading to reduce the importance of such issues. Rather, it merely pushes them to one side in order to deal with other less studied aspects of the dialogue, namely the roles of laughter, ridicule, and, by association, reputation. To date, no one has offered a close analytical reading with respect to these themes.

There are four key passages to consider: (1) the introductory prologue, which sets up wider concerns regarding Euthyphro's claims to expert knowledge in religious matters and Socrates' impending indictment and death (*Euthyphr.* 3b-e), where laughter, be it good-natured, derisive, or hostile, is an attendant worry; (2) a discussion concerning the nature of fear, shame, and reputation (*Euthyphr.* 12a-c); (3) an inquiry into the things people commonly have disagreements about and the potential for philosophy to provide a positive way forward (*Euthyphr.* 7b-d); (4) a semi-comical exchange regarding the way Socrates conducts a philosophical discussion where a comparison is drawn to Daedalos and we also see Euthyphro's reaction to Socrates' methods (*Euthyphr.* 11c-12a). By analysing these four passages it becomes clear that concerns about laughter and ridicule are evident within the text, and that positive solutions are put forward in which the philosopher and philosophical practice play key roles.

⁷¹ Diogenes Laertius discusses the Thrasyllan tetralogical system at 3.56-61 where the *Euthyphro* takes pride of place in the first tetralogy. It is further noted at Diog. Laert. 3.62 that others also begin with this dialogue. The use of tetralogical ordering of the dialogues is not limited to Thrasyllus. See Tarrant 1993, 67 for more on the *Euthyphro* as first in the tetralogies of Theon and that the first tetralogy consisting of *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo* was common to Thrasyllus, Dercyllides, as well as Theon.

⁷² See Geach 1966; Cohen 1971; Irwin 2006, 58-71.

⁷³ For a study of the religious phenomena of pollution see McPherran 2002.

Laughter is situated within the opening sequence of the dialogue. As the two characters discuss the nature of Socrates' upcoming indictment, Euthyphro likens himself to Socrates insofar as each is the victim of slander and misrepresentation - one as an expert on the divine, the other as a philosopher. Such misrepresentation, Euthyphro complains, has led to him receiving laughter from the Athenians whenever he speaks in the assembly, leading the reader to believe their laughter is an inappropriate response. Euthyphro's misrepresentation mirrors Socrates' but, whereas Euthyphro shows concern for their laughter, Socrates is largely unperturbed. The following passage captures these sentiments:

Euthyphro: It is no doubt because you say your divine sign happens to come to you on occasion. Therefore, since you make innovations regarding divine matters, he has indicted you on this legal charge, and using this slander as a pretext, comes to the court of justice, knowing that such matters are easily misrepresented to the multitude. And it's the same in my case too, whenever I say anything about the gods in the assembly or foretell the future, they laugh at me (καταγελῶσιν) as if I am crazy. And yet, not one of the things which I have foretold was untrue, but they nevertheless envy (φθονοῦσιν) all of us who are like this. However, we must not give them much thought, but rather meet them at close quarters.

Socrates: But surely, my dear Euthyphro, to be laughed at (καταγελασθῆναι) is perhaps of little consequence. The Athenians, it seems to me, do not overly mind if they should think someone clever, unless they impart knowledge by teaching their own wisdom; if they think he makes others to be like himself, they get angry, whether from envy (φθόνῳ), as you say, or because of some other reason.

Euthyphro: Well now, I have no desire whatsoever to test their opinions regarding myself.

Socrates: It may not matter, for perhaps you seem to rarely present yourself in Athens and are not entirely willing to teach your own wisdom; but I fear that I, due to my love of people seem to them to say just whatever I have to all men without reserve, not only without payment, but also gladly giving besides, to anyone willing to listen. So if, as I was saying just now, they intend to laugh at (καταγελᾶν) me, as you say they laugh at you, there would be nothing unpleasant in passing the time in court laughing (γελῶντας) and jesting (παίζοντας), but if they are going to be serious, the result at this time is unclear except for you seers. (*Euthypr.* 3b-e)

Euthyphro's complaints and Socrates' response allow the reader to observe Plato's interest in becoming the object of laughter. A division of laughter into two kinds may be identified: one benign and good-natured; the other, derisive and, at extremes, carrying the threat of either

hostility or violence.⁷⁴ Whenever Socrates or Euthyphro mention laughter in this passage, their use of two cognate verbs is indicative of such a division. In referring to the good-natured kind of laughter they simply use γελάω.⁷⁵ Socrates specifically designates a certain pleasantness to the act, and, due to the absence of the prefix κατα-, it suggests that the person experiencing the laughter may receive it lightly or even join in. Laughter of this kind is inclusive, produces no ill-effects, and Socrates is able to acknowledge the congenial expectations associated with it. Moreover, in the above instance it is accompanied by παίζω, “to play, jest, joke,” suggesting further that a benign form of laughter is meant.⁷⁶

In referring to the second kind the two characters use καταγελάω. A derisive aspect is attached to this kind of laughter to demarcate it from the type contained in γελάω. But Socrates also suggests that it need not necessarily be bad for the receiver. Due to the fact that derisive laughter implies a particular judgement (i.e. one that seeks to influence the attitude or behaviour of another), what may be thought suitable in one instance may be unsuitable for another.⁷⁷ It is therefore the intentions of those doing the laughing that change the laughter’s general character. This is visible when considering how the two characters respond to laughter directed towards their own public persona. On the one hand, Euthyphro is viewed by the many as a relatively harmless individual. He does not appear in Athens regularly, nor are his pronouncements regarding the divine taken seriously. He is something of an oddity and merely thought to be mad. For these reasons, whenever he speaks in the assembly he receives the derisive form of laughter (καταγελῶσιν) but the threat of hostility or violence towards him is not immediately apparent. Indeed, when Socrates tells Euthyphro that if those in court were to laugh at him, as Euthyphro says they laugh at himself, he uses γελῶντας to denote the character of the laughter (*Euthypr.* 3e). In doing so he effectively strips the derisory impact of the laughter and further reinforces the benignity of Euthyphro’s character.

⁷⁴ Such a distinction adheres to Halliwell’s theory of playful vs consequential laughter, see n. 33 above. See also de Vries 1985, 379; Naas 2016, 14; Tanner 2017, xvi; Jansen (forthcoming), 2.

⁷⁵ However, if the verb γελάω is used with ἐπί τινα or another demonstrative, or the accusative, it can take on the meaning “to mock, make fun.” Used passively it can mean “to be an object of laughter, be mocked, be an object of scorn,” Montanari 2015, 420. Plato does not make use of this construction in the *Euthyphro*. Nor does it appear in any other dialogue. At times he does use an ἐπί + dative construction, which takes on the meaning of “laughing at (someone or something),” Liddell and Scott 1977, 341. For examples see *Euthyd.* 300e; *Resp.* 457a-b, 518b; *Phlb.* 49e, 50a. Note also that the ἐπί + dative construction appears to be commonly used in Homeric Greek; Cunliffe 1963, 76. Cf. Stewart 1994, 29; Jazdzewska 2018, 192, n. 16.

⁷⁶ On the role and importance of play in Plato see Ardley 1967; Plass 1967; D’Angour 2013.

⁷⁷ Dover 1974, 4.

Yet, due to the conviction of his claims to knowledge Euthyphro still feels that their laughter is unjustified. He claims the Athenians laugh at him because they are envious (φθονοῦσιν) of his self-proclaimed wisdom. Socrates, however, proposes that the possibility their laughter comes from a place of envy is unlikely. It is more likely, he proffers, because Euthyphro is brazen enough to give his religious announcements in the assembly. As Socrates demonstrates a number of times throughout the course of the dialogue, Euthyphro does not in fact have the entirely adequate knowledge of piety he so eagerly claims. If Euthyphro then attempts to impart his wisdom without actually having the knowledge to support his pretence, this, not the supposed φθόνος, is the reason for their laughter.⁷⁸ Plato depicts Euthyphro as willing to challenge the mainstream of popular morality and belief. His outward show, however, does not match his professed capacity for moral responsibility and throughout the dialogue Socrates exposes the fact that Euthyphro is not a systematic or reflective thinker. Indeed, Euthyphro is certainly going against the grain of popular thinking but he is limited by the fact that he only believes he is right, without the necessary cognitive capacity to show why.⁷⁹

Socrates, on the other hand, being the well-known resident of Athens and seasoned philosopher that he is, presents a much more formidable figure. As part of his defence in Plato's *Apology*, he explains to the court how both the depiction of himself in Aristophanes' *Clouds* and his philosophical mission drew much attention, multiple enemies, and an (unwarranted in his view) reputation for wisdom.⁸⁰ A corresponding thought appears in the passage above. Euthyphro notes how easily the many are misled and draws a parallel between Socrates and himself (*Euthypr.* 3b). But whereas Euthyphro is simply laughed down in the assembly for being thought crazy, in Socrates' case there is the underlying threat of their laughter descending into something sinister.⁸¹ The reader finds that what Socrates views as philanthropy (encased in the term φιλανθρωπίας; *Euthypr.* 3d) seems to others a perversion of ethical norms. This creates a misrepresentation in the eyes of the many about what the philosopher does and what he aims at. Unlike Euthyphro, however, Plato depicts Socrates as a systematic thinker, confident in a methodology capable of exposing both his own ignorance and that of another. Both characters therefore show similar tendencies towards the reception

⁷⁸ Very similar situations are described at *Prt.* 319c-d and *Alc. Mai.* 116d.

⁷⁹ Cf. McPherran 2002 who argues for a morally and theologically progressive Euthyphro, on the basis that the prosecution of his father for murder has an appeal to pollution and impartial justice that is non-traditional.

⁸⁰ Pl. *Ap.* 21b-23a.

⁸¹ A commonplace of Greek literature; Halliwell 1991, 284.

of laughter in that each feels they are being misrepresented. In their eyes, it amounts to a false judgement, which in turn indicates a misguided or false form of laughter inspired by ignorance. The difference between the two is located within the intentions of those doing the laughing, the degree to which each is seen as a threat to the body politic, as well as the extent of each character's ability to reflect on the motivations and eventual outcomes of a given course of action.

The worry about misrepresentation is a serious one and later extended to account for the idea that it can lead to someone unjustly gaining a reputation for *πονηρία*. Framed by the question of whether piety is of necessity just and a poetic quotation citing reverence for the acts of Zeus, this worry is discussed in the following passage:

Socrates: I am indeed saying the opposite to what the poet said when he composed the following lines: "Zeus the creator, and all such things that he produced, you are not willing to speak of; for where there is fear, there is also shame." I am at variance with the poet on this point. Shall I tell you why?

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: It does not seem to me to be the case that where there is fear, there is also shame. For it seems that there are many who fear illnesses and poverty, amongst the many other such things there are to be feared, but do not feel shame at the things which they fear. Do you not think so?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: But it is the case that wherever there is shame, there is also fear; is there anyone who, feeling shame over some deed and being ashamed is not afraid, and at the same time fears gaining a reputation for wickedness (*πονηρίας*)?

Euthyphro: He fears such things.

Socrates: Then it is not correct to say that wherever there is fear, there is also shame; but rather that wherever there is shame, there is also fear. However, it is not the case that wherever there is fear, there is always shame. Fear, I think, is superior to shame; for shame is a part of fear, just as odd is a part of number, yet it is not the case that wherever there is number, there is also odd, but that wherever there is odd, there is also number. (*Euthypr.* 12a-c)

As Socrates affirmed earlier in the dialogue, receiving laughter need not be of great concern (*Euthypr.* 3c). Socrates' reassuring statement is now expanded to cover the two feelings a Greek most readily associated with being laughed at, namely fear and shame. Socrates

buttresses his claim as he explains that what is truly fearful is gaining the reputation for *πονηρία*, which, as Plato will later show in the *Philebus*, has connections to ignorance and self-knowledge. Socrates touches on this aspect of fear at *Euthypr.* 3d, where in relation to the perception of his own philosophical mission, he worries that others merely see him as some kind of teacher who senselessly dishes out wisdom to anyone who will listen. Now, however, his fear of misrepresentation strikes a more serious tone and a tension in the Platonic Socrates' attitude towards laughter and ridicule is made explicit. In the *Euthyphro* (and in other dialogues such as the *Apology* and *Crito*) Socrates shows no sign of shame for being a philosopher. And yet, he can still fear the reputation for *πονηρία*, despite it being an unjustified and inappropriate response to the practice of his craft. By questioning his fellow citizens' implicitly held assumptions regarding correct and incorrect behaviour, Socrates' philosophical mission appears to others to be a form of particularly deep-seated ignorance. If he should then attempt to make others like himself, as his indictment for corrupting the young suggests, he would be found an enemy of the *polis*. If such a claim were then found to be accurate, Socrates would be truly *γελοῖος* and it would bring the whole discipline into disrepute. And, moreover, as an enemy of the *polis*, any laughter or ridicule directed towards him would be considered an appropriate reaction.

Euthyphro poses no such threat. His problem is the intended prosecution of his father, an almost unconscionable act to the Athenian mind.⁸² But, in the face of familial criticism, not to mention that of the wider community, he appears to remain stalwart. Indeed, he even tells Socrates that one should be solely concerned with the justness or unjustness of an action above all else,⁸³ adding that it would be ridiculous (*γελοῖον*) to think otherwise (*Euthypr.* 4b-c). Euthyphro's actions are here bound up with the Greek value of honour and the need to reassert oneself in the face of derision.⁸⁴ He claims not to fear the accusation of impiety for his actions because his family members are said to hold erroneous opinions about what constitutes piety and impiety (*Euthypr.* 4e). At this point in the dialogue, however, the reader is not yet privy to the conceited nature of his knowledge. Euthyphro may not overtly exhibit a sense of shame, even going so far as to say that the Athenians should be challenged (*Euthypr.*

⁸² Socrates' reaction is indicative of the fact and Euthyphro himself says he is thought crazy to prosecute such a person; *Euthypr.* 4a, 4e. See also *Cri.* 51c; *Resp.* 465a-b; Dover 1974, 273-6; McPherran 2002, 107.

⁸³ A claim mirrored by Socrates at *Pl. Ap.* 18a, 28b-c.

⁸⁴ See Cairns 1993, 13 who explains that study of *αἰδώς* is always a "study in Greek values of honour, for the notion of honour is never far away from the evaluation that is constitutive of *αἰδώς*." See also Halliwell 2008, 26.

3c), but his unwillingness to test their opinions of himself belies his self-belief (*Euthypr.* 3d).⁸⁵ Indeed, despite the firm belief in his own knowledge that he seems to portray, the prospect of derision and the loss of face creates enough fear to stultify his own self-image, so that Euthyphro embodies the very thing Socrates takes issue with in the above passage. Both characters manifest uncertainty and fear but Socrates alone shows no sign of shame. Laughter may therefore stifle the behaviour of Euthyphro but it does not create the same intended effect on Socrates. For him, there are greater things at stake, namely the fear of unjustly gaining a reputation for *πονηρία*, which overrides what he views as the lesser fear of being laughed at. It seems that being judged for *πονηρία* does not harm his reputation for supposed wisdom (which he at any rate denies), but rather the strong belief he has of himself as a morally good person, which will limit his capacity to act and speak with good intentions in the future. If he is not allowed to perform what he believes are his duties as a philosopher he will no longer be able to expose the ignorance of others. In contrast to Euthyphro he is someone who embodies his own belief that “it is not the case that wherever there is fear, there is always shame” (*Euthypr.* 12c). Indeed, Socrates shows that laughter which intentionally attempts to elicit shame in the philosopher is not an effective correctional response.

Shame does not play a large role due to what Socrates views as an unjust misrepresentation of himself as philosopher on the part of the many. At an earlier stage in the dialogue, notions such as the just and the unjust are noted to be some of the many things people commonly have disputes about. Following Euthyphro’s second attempt at defining piety,⁸⁶ the next passage details the nature of disagreements between two parties and the possibility of resolving them through philosophical reasoning:

Socrates: Well then, Euthyphro, have we inquired into whether the gods quarrel and disagree and are at enmity with one another?

Euthyphro: We have.

Socrates: But what things are the disagreements about, my good man, to create such enmity and anger? Let us consider the problem in the following way. If you and I were to disagree about number, say, which of two numbers is greater, would the disagreement about these things create enmities between us and cause us to grow angry with one another, or would we, proceeding by way of reasoning about such things, wish to be rid of them quickly?

⁸⁵ Cf. *Euthypr.* 5b-c where Euthyphro boasts that he could easily defend himself against Meletus in court.

⁸⁶ i.e. what is dear to the gods is pious and vice versa, *Euthypr.* 7a.

Euthyphro: Of course.

Socrates: And indeed, if we were to disagree about whether something is bigger or smaller, proceeding by way of measuring would we quickly settle the dispute?

Euthyphro: We would.

Socrates: And again, proceeding by weighing, we could, I think, come to a decision about whether one of two things is heavier or lighter?

Euthyphro: Certainly.

Socrates: But what would a disagreement be about that would cause us to be enemies and grow angry with one another, as a result of our inability to reach a settlement? Perhaps you have no ready-made answer. But consider my following suggestion, whether these things are the just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad. Are these not the things which you and I and all other people disagree about, and, being unable to reach a sufficient conclusion about them, cause us to become enemies, whenever this occurs?

Euthyphro: Yes, Socrates, there is a disagreement about those things. (*Euthypr.* 7b-d)

Socrates points out how disputes involving objective issues, such as measurement, are easily resolved by methodically reasoning or by appealing to a certain agreed upon standard. However, an individual's or a group's subjective interpretation of abstract concepts such as justice or beauty is forwarded as a great impediment to resolving differences; and Euthyphro's prosecution of his father is a perfect example. He and his family are at odds as to who is in the right, with each party believing themselves to hold the morally superior position: Euthyphro that the justness of the act be one's sole consideration; his family that it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder (*Euthypr.* 4b-e). Neither party appears willing to relent their position or to seek to find agreement on the matter. Both parties are nevertheless appealing to a standard of either justice or piety that each believes to be true, but they possess no real method of resolving their differences.⁸⁷

The nature of Socrates' indictment is not altogether different from Euthyphro's family quarrel. Having been formally charged with impiety and corrupting the young, Socrates (rather ironically) floats the idea that Meletus must have a great knowledge of the subject (*Euthypr.* 2c; of course, implying that he himself is ignorant), which leads him willingly to enlist the help of his interlocutor. As he continues to question Euthyphro, however, actively encouraging him to produce the one characteristic form or appearance to cover all instances

⁸⁷ Cf. *Cri.* 49d where Socrates speaks of those who cannot come to any kind of common ground in matters of right and wrong and so despise one another.

of piety itself, he finds Euthyphro's answers continually lacking.⁸⁸ Socrates' search for definitions highlights just how difficult it is to find agreement on subjective issues of value. As will be discussed below, Socrates' methods are at times seen as silly or laughable but they also present a positive way forward. Extended argumentation in question and answer form can make disagreements seem trivial when confronted with the possibility that one, or even both sides, might be wrong. However, the two parties must also be willing to allow such an outcome, for the alternative is derision, conflict, or some kind of arbitrary mediator like the democratic process of majority vote. Indeed, such thinking provides the rationale behind Socrates' fear of whether or not the Athenians will spend the upcoming time in court laughing good-naturedly and jesting (*Euthyphr.* 3e). When two parties cannot reach a satisfactory conclusion the risk of misrepresentation and the creation of enmity is continually present. When these differences involve an attachment to a particular community or set of people they are intensified further. The lessening and eventual diminution of this risk is therefore the most salient feature of Socratic questioning. It is part of what drives the search for definitions and constitutes the most positive aspect of Socrates' methodology. It must also be noted that Socrates' method contains the presupposition that his interlocutors are operating as logical, rational beings (i.e. that they are prepared to recognise their own ignorance). The final passage below depicts the potential shortcomings of his assumption.

Plato may present Socrates' philosophising as constructive and forward-looking but the *Euthyphro* also gives its reader an impression of the suspicion many Athenians were likely to have had towards his methods. The following passage depicts the chagrin, cluelessness, and comedy that speaking with Socrates could engender:⁸⁹

Euthyphro: But, Socrates, I am not able to tell you what I mean. Somehow, any of the answers we propose are always walking around and are unwilling to remain where we put them.

Socrates: It appears, Euthyphro, that your answers belong to my ancestor Daedalos. And if I was the one saying them and putting them forward, perhaps you would laugh at me (*ἐπέσκωπτεις*), saying that, in keeping with that kinship of mine, my works in argument form run away and are unwilling to stay where anyone puts them; but regarding the present

⁸⁸ Such is the case when questioning Meletus at *Pl. Ap.* 24b-28a.

⁸⁹ Wood 2007, 91 very aptly observes that "since Socratic philosophy is necessarily dialogical, it is also necessarily comedic since philosophical engagement with non-philosophers cannot help but be somewhat ridiculous."

situation – for the assumptions are yours; some other jest is necessary. For they are unwilling to stay put for you, as you can see for yourself.

Euthyphro: But I think the same jest will come near enough for the purpose of our argument, Socrates; for I am not the one who is putting into them this ability to walk around and not stay in the place where I put them, but rather the Daedalos is you; as for myself, I would simply have them stay where they were.

Socrates: Then I am running the risk, my friend, of having become more skilled in this art than he was, to such an extent that, whereas he was only able to make the things he made himself move, in addition to my own creations, it seems, I am able to make those of others move too. And yet, the thing is, this art of mine is most ingenious, because I am wise involuntarily. For I would wish to have my words remain motionless where they are put rather than Daedalos' wisdom and Tantalus' wealth put together. But now, enough of this talk; since you seem to be indolent, I will eagerly join myself to you in helping to teach me about what the pious is. And do not give up. See now whether or not you think all that is pious is of necessity just.

Euthyphro: As far as I'm concerned it is.

Socrates: So then is all that is just also pious? Or is all that is pious just, and not all that is just pious, but that one part is pious, and another part of it something else?

Euthyphro: I can't follow what you're saying, Socrates. (*Euthypr.* 11c-12a)

Euthyphro's discouragement with the current conversation is plain to see as more than once he expresses his inability to give a successful answer. In the first instance he is clearly frustrated by his failed attempts at producing a catch-all definition of piety (*Euthypr.* 11c). On the second occasion he openly admits the unintelligibility of Socrates' questions (*Euthypr.* 12a).⁹⁰ The first draws out the comical comparison between Socrates and Daedalos. As Euthyphro is the one who has claimed knowledge of piety, Socrates keeps the focus on his interlocutor's assumptions, while at the same time noting how if he were in the same position, he would be the laughable one (*Euthypr.* 11c). For this kind of laughter Socrates uses ἐπισκώπτω ("to laugh at, make fun of") but with no apparent contemptuous force.⁹¹ Euthyphro, however, accuses Socrates of being disingenuous, believing that his notions of piety could stand on their own, that is, he is still unwilling to register the contingent nature of his knowledge (*Euthypr.* 11c-d). Socrates is undeterred by this for if it is him who makes

⁹⁰ Cf. *Euthypr.* 10a and *Cri.* 50a for similar responses. See also *Phlb.* 20a for a very similar take on Socratic questioning which does not lead to confusion.

⁹¹ Halliwell 1991, 284. See also Halliwell 2008, 284.

Euthyphro's answers inadequate, via his method of question and answer, it is through no fault of his own, for if he is wise, he claims it is only involuntarily (*Euthypr.* 11e).⁹² By not claiming any knowledge of piety himself, Socrates makes it known that he (and therefore philosophy) primarily aims at truth, which he values more highly than Daedalus' wisdom or Tantalus' wealth (*Euthypr.* 11e). He necessarily believes that truth is possible through this kind of argumentation and willingly undertakes to help Euthyphro reach their desired end.

Euthyphro's second response points to a common objection raised against philosophy from the outside, namely the unconventional use of language. It reappears in a number of Plato's dialogues, most notably in *Euthydemus* with respect to the use of eristic arguments,⁹³ as well as Calicles' arguments against philosophy in the *Gorgias*.⁹⁴ In the above passage it is the result of the style of questioning. Socrates seems to think that if Euthyphro knows what piety is, and, it is true that piety is necessarily just, then he should have no problem answering the questions that follow of whether or not this is true *vice versa* or if each forms some part of the other (*Euthypr.* 12a). Such rigour is a commonplace of Socrates' search for definitions but to the non-philosopher his assistance in gaining clarity falls flat. Given his reaction to Socrates' methods and his inability to follow Socrates on several occasions, Euthyphro is depicted as someone quite unversed in the give and take of this kind of inquiry. As someone who is experienced, Socrates willingly undertakes to help Euthyphro reach their desired end, notably from a position of ignorance himself.⁹⁵ The aporetic conclusion to the dialogue, however, indicates that the much sought-after truth appears to be nothing more than Euthyphro's self-realisation of his own ignorance (and perhaps as readers, our own). Indeed, such an end-result would save Euthyphro the pain of being truly γελοῖος by not committing to his intended prosecution.⁹⁶

⁹² Cf. Schofield 2008, 37 "when Plato's Socrates has ideas of his own to propound, they are expressly put forward for others to consider – for acceptance, qualification, or rejection – not as teaching imparted to those in need of instruction by someone secure in the knowledge of truth."

⁹³ *Euthyd.* 304d-5b.

⁹⁴ *Grg.* 481b-6d.

⁹⁵ See Klein 1965, 22-3 on the role of Socrates' profession of ignorance: "this assertion is the lever which Socrates constantly uses to compel other people to examine with him, in common and from the level of common ignorance, the understanding which underlies his and their lives...It is this assertion of ignorance which charms, annoys, and captivates everyone he approaches."

⁹⁶ Cf. Beversluis 2000, 184.

The dialogue's close certainly raises the question of whether Euthyphro has actually benefitted from his time with Socrates. The flaws in Euthyphro's answers have been continually exposed and he has shown frustration at his inability to cash in on his self-proclaimed expertise. But there is still a chance that Euthyphro may not proceed with his intended course of action after all. Just before Euthyphro departs, Socrates says that even if his answers have been unsatisfactory up to this point, Euthyphro must still have an adequate knowledge of piety and impiety.⁹⁷ If the case were otherwise he would not put himself in a position whereby he would not only risk the anger of the gods, but also be ashamed to be in the sight of other men for committing a wrong (*Euthyphr.* 15d). This aporetic conclusion reflects the point Socrates makes earlier in the dialogue, where in reaction to Euthyphro's intended prosecution he says that Euthyphro must have expert knowledge for "it is not known by the many where the right lies" (*Euthyphr.* 4a). The culmination of the dialogue therefore reinforces the positive message of Socrates' philosophising. One may receive laughter and ridicule, which attempts to expose ignorance and correct behaviour through the imposition of shame, but conversation with Socrates shows that it will not bring about a beneficial result. Rather, it is only through the experience of willingly having one's potential ignorance exposed that one may in fact realise one's true lack of knowledge.⁹⁸

Concluding Remarks

When the *Euthyphro* is read with the *Philebus* and *Laws* in mind, one gains a much greater insight into the appropriateness of certain forms of laughter and the positive practice of philosophical method. Through both Euthyphro's and Socrates' responses Plato shows that laughter can be misguided. If one follows Socrates' lead, safe in the knowledge of one's own ignorance, then one may tolerate being laughed at. If one holds onto one's ignorance despite evidence to the contrary, then one will have greater trouble dealing with it and be more like Euthyphro. Socrates shows that to receive laughter, even in a derisory way, need not override

⁹⁷ Indeed, see Woodruff 1982, 107 who notes how Euthyphro shows he has benefitted from Socrates' search for a definition of piety as he has been able to give progressively more satisfactory answers.

⁹⁸ But see Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 18 where they argue "it is unlikely that a single conversation with Socrates will offer so much [i.e. self-knowledge] to an interlocutor...unless one lives the examined life – that is, unless one receives the benefits of elenctic examination on a regular basis – one may never be in a position really to know oneself." Despite this observation, it is the presentation of a non-malicious means of exposing one's ignorance that is of chief concern here.

one's rationality, for he knows he is striving to do good. Socrates "knows" because of the development of a non-malicious method for testing the validity of overtly subjective responses such as laughter and opinion-based pretensions to knowledge. As such, he not only tests the validity of Euthyphro's claims but also the Athenians' misrepresentation of himself, concluding that contrary to popular opinion, shame need not accompany the fear of ridicule and laughter is no real harm. However, the acquisition of a reputation for *πονηρία* is presented as a harm, for it blocks the future practice of philosophy. Indeed, Socrates acknowledges it as damaging to his reputation as a morally good individual and one who seeks to promote the good; this is an essential point which is built upon and developed throughout the Platonic corpus.

Plato therefore shows the reader the kind of attitude needed to undertake the project of exposing another's ignorance and so bringing them closer to the good, namely a spirit of play or free inquiry. This is most evident when Socrates speaks of the intentions of those who laugh at others. He notes the necessity of both the good-natured kind of laughter and play for his time in court to have any kind of positive outcome. The alternative is derision, which does not have to be bad *per se*, but in the absence of a free spirit of inquiry and an accompanying philosophical method it can lead to disagreements and misrepresentation. Within the parameters of the *Philebus*' characterisation of laughter and ignorance, the reader finds the Athenians' reaction to Euthyphro's conceited wisdom an irrational and inappropriate response. Socrates, however, provides the correct, non-malicious response by willingly conversing with Euthyphro in order to gain a deeper knowledge of piety. The dialogue may be aporetic but only because Euthyphro is unwilling to continue, though there are intimations that he may not pursue his prosecution via Socrates' final words before his interlocutor hurries away. Despite Euthyphro's trouble with understanding the unconventional questioning of Socrates, philosophy is rendered as not only an attempt to gain clarity and pursue the truth, but also a method of reasserting one's honour and good reputation in the face of an unjust misrepresentation. Through his willingness to put himself in the weaker position, Socrates acknowledges that philosophical argumentation must itself seem unconventional and irrational to the non-philosopher. Yet it also demonstrates an appropriate reaction to the conceited wisdom of another and so provides a solution to the problem it causes.

Chapter Three

Part One: Apology – Socrates as καταγέλαστος

The *Philebus* and the *Euthyphro* inform the reader that to be laughed at is perhaps of little consequence, due to the fact that it comes from a place of ignorance. This conception of laughter, however, is complicated by Plato's use of the term καταγέλαστος, placed within the mouth of Socrates in both *Apology* and *Crito*. If the *Euthyphro* leads the reader to believe that the assault on Socrates' reputation as a philosopher is both unjust and unjustifiable, then the *Apology* attempts to prove that Socrates is not a figure worthy of ridicule but rather one who should be admired for his steadfast conviction in the face of an unjust misrepresentation. Plato is at pains to (1) separate Socrates from other so-called teachers of virtue (i.e. sophists) and philosophers (e.g. Anaxagoras); (2) stress the limitations of Socrates' knowledge through his relationship to the Delphic oracle; (3) demonstrate Socrates' willingness to die rather than violate his principles, which he does via a comparison with the Homeric hero Achilles; and (4) offer proofs of the philosopher's usefulness to society. The following reading will make it apparent that at every step of the way Socrates (and therefore the philosopher) is concerned with not becoming a laughing-stock to those in his community, but also (and indeed most importantly) to himself.

Separating himself from other teachers and philosophers is a recurring theme of Socrates' defence. Several references to φθόνος set up a contrast between Socrates as a philosopher and philanthropist and the sophists who offer their teachings for a fee. Through *Ap.* 17a-20c Socrates distances himself from the character in Aristophanes' *Clouds* and other unnamed comedies,⁹⁹ as well as sophists such as Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, and Evenus. This kind of misrepresentation is of great concern as the comedians are those, he says, who by means of malicious (φθόνῳ) slander persuaded their audiences of untruths about himself and his teachings (*Ap.* 18d). The potency of such persuasion is reiterated later in the dialogue. At *Ap.* 28a, having exposed the inconsistencies of Meletus' indictment, he tells the court that the current charges will not be his undoing but rather the slander and malice (φθόνοϛ) of the many. Socrates refers here to the Athenians' supposed mistrust towards intellectuals and philosophers in general, a problem Plato works into several dialogues. The *Euthyphro* relates

⁹⁹ See n. 2 above.

how the Athenians tend to be wary of those who impart their own knowledge and so make others to be like them (*Euthypr.* 3c-d). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates points out the distrust people have towards those who advise others to become as good as possible but do not charge a fee, which is considered to be shameful (*Grg.* 520d-e). It is not that the professed wisdom of the sophists should be discounted or dishonoured, Socrates tells the court (*Ap.* 19c), but rather that they do not define his philosophical mission. This raises the question of what this mission actually is and what it entails.

The question is answered (at least in part) by one of his own. Socrates puts a question to himself from some imagined inquirer about why it is he has come before the court: was he doing something out of the ordinary, some activity which set him apart from the many? (*Ap.* 20c-d). The reader is here alerted to a tension between the philosopher as a member of the community, with all the necessary actions one must perform in order to not be seen as deviating from the status quo, and the philosopher as a self-reflective moral agent. This tension, which Socrates is able to engender via his *elenchos* method,¹⁰⁰ and which aims to make his interlocutor more self-reflective,¹⁰¹ is what sets him apart from other teachers and philosophers. The contrast is fortified and secured at *Ap.* 33a where Socrates says that contrary to what has been said about him, he has never begrudged (ἐφθόνησα) anyone who wishes to hear him speak and has never charged a fee. Thus, whereas other teachers profess a claim to actually teach something, Socrates, in a good-natured spirit of inquiry together with a profession of ignorance, reduces himself to the level of his interlocutor in order that they might learn for themselves the inconsistencies in their thinking.

The above misrepresentation is taken a step further during Socrates' questioning of Meletus, where καταγελᾶω is used in connection with the teachings of Socrates. By purportedly denying the existence of the gods *per* the current indictment and their short exchange, Socrates is seen to represent the views of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (*Ap.* 26c-e).

¹⁰⁰ Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 3-10 deny that Socrates' *elenchos* can be rightly called a method. Cf. Johnson 2005, 20-4; 32, n. 18 who characterises it as a political craft; and Benson 2011, 179-98 who sees no problem designating it a coherent method.

¹⁰¹ One might object that this outcome relies too heavily on Socrates' profession of ignorance and is therefore disingenuous, an example of Socrates' famous irony. My claim, however, is supported by Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 132 who note that "when an *elenchos* is completed and an interlocutor abandons his initial moral claim, the interlocutor shows that, upon reflection, he, the interlocutor, finds the claim unworthy of belief." And Vlastos 1991, 32 "[Socrates'] dialogue with his fellows is meant to have, and does have, the effect of evoking and assisting their own effort at moral self-improvement."

Socrates makes it clear that the assertion is patently absurd. Here, as is the case elsewhere in Plato, Socrates is shown to be familiar with Anaxagoras' work (the latter's time in Athens overlapped with the life of the former), but to have rejected it at an early stage of his philosophical development when he found that it did not satisfactorily explain the causes and motivations of moral action.¹⁰² Anaxagoras appears to have written only one book entitled *Physics*, or *On Nature*,¹⁰³ and the fragments that survive give no real indication of an interest in ethics.¹⁰⁴ What is more, Socrates notes, is the fact Anaxagoras' doctrines may be purchased in the orchestra. If Anaxagoras' work is so easily consumed, he argues, the youths he consorts with would laugh at (καταγελάειν) him if he pretended it was his own (*Ap.* 26d-e); and indeed, the reductionism at play here shows that laughter of this kind would be appropriate.

Despite the attempts to set himself apart from other teachers, Socrates admits that the assimilation does reveal a truth about his philosophical activities. It concerns Socrates' reputation for wisdom, which is nothing more than the conscious limitations of his own knowledge. Moreover, it allows Socrates to relate the origin of his profession of ignorance and his relationship to the Delphic oracle, which proclaimed him to be the wisest of all men (*Ap.* 20d-4b).¹⁰⁵ The account is of great importance for understanding Socrates' whole approach to philosophy, as well as the slander he subsequently accrued:

I went to a certain man with a reputation for wisdom, for there, if indeed anywhere, the oracle would be refuted and its response be made clear, because this man is wiser than I, yet it said I was the wisest. So, by examining...and conversing with him, it seemed to me that he seemed wise to a great many people and most of all to himself, but in fact he was not; and thereafter I attempted to show him that he merely thinks he is wise, when really, he is not. So then I became hated by this man and many of those present, and having gone away I reckoned to myself that I am wiser than this man; for it is likely that neither of us knows anything about what is fine and good, but this man thinks he knows what he does not, whereas I, insofar as I

¹⁰² Pl. *Phd.* 97b-9d.

¹⁰³ Barnes 1987, 226-31.

¹⁰⁴ Although see Curd 2008, 243 for the claim that fr. B12 may "suggest that our experience of our own understanding and decision making is a glimpse of the activities of pure cosmic *Nous*."

¹⁰⁵ Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 87-90 argue that the oracle can be seen as *the* seminal event for understanding Socrates' mission, against the view that the story is merely an example of Socratic irony or that it is intended to explain the rationale behind his mission but fails.

do not know, do not think I know; it seems that this, at least by this small difference, is the reason I am wiser than he, that what I do not know I do not think I know. (*Ap.* 21b-d)

Such are the reasons, Socrates says, he came to be disliked and why he is thought wise: for attempting to expose the conceited wisdom of his fellow man and because he is not ignorant of his own ignorance. The story Socrates tells of his relationship to the Delphic oracle thus provides not only a further counter-argument to separate him from other teachers and philosophers, it also separates him from those who are ignorant of their ignorance and so are truly γελοῖος. By this account, any laughter or ridicule (or at extremes, hatred) directed towards Socrates' philosophical mission would be inappropriate. Yet Socrates notes that his methods do not always have their desired effect despite the lack of malice on his part. In support, Socrates explains his mission as merely assisting the god at Delphi, a source he believes carries a substantial and trustworthy weight (*Ap.* 20e).¹⁰⁶ As will be discussed below, citing the god as a direct impetus for his philosophising is of further relevance for incurring laughter. It will be made apparent that if Socrates were to go against his service of the god, in his mind he would be giving others an incontestable reason to laugh at him. More importantly, he would also become laughable to himself. Socrates' connection to the Delphic oracle is therefore important for reiterating why laughing at the philosopher, especially one who, like Socrates, professes ignorance, is an inappropriate response.

Not giving others a reason to be thought laughable is echoed at *Ap.* 28b where a direct correlation is made between laughter, shame, and the philosophical life. The reader now finds Socrates posing a further question to himself, this time pertaining to whether he should be ashamed to have practiced philosophy to the point of indictment and death. The following passage contains the first mention of καταγέλαστος in the *Apology*, with Plato using it to draw a comparison between the personae of Socrates and Achilles:¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Tanner 2017, 3 notes the ambiguity of which god is meant here and suggests that while Apollo seems the obvious choice, Dionysus was also worshipped three months of the year at Delphi.

¹⁰⁷ West 1979, 151-60 argues that at first the comparison seems ill-chosen due to the changes Socrates makes to the story, but when the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is compared to Socrates and philosophy it is made understandable. Yamagata 2012, 133 notes how when the comparison is combined with Socrates' account of his own martial deeds, the analogy is much more effective and helps to present Socrates as a heroic figure. Cf. Hobbs 2000, 178-86 who argues that at first sight the aspect of friendship does seem to make the comparison more understandable, but after a closer look, the comparison appears to raise problems of whether or not Socrates' portrayal of Achilles as an unremitting agent of justice, which relies on considerable alteration

But perhaps someone should ask; are you not ashamed, Socrates, having practiced the kind of pursuit by which you are now at risk of being put to death? To this man I would give a just answer in reply: you are wrong, my good man, if you think that a man, who is worth anything at all, deems it necessary to consider the danger of living or dying, but pays no regard to this alone, that whenever he acts, whether he acts justly or unjustly, and whether his deeds are those of a good man or bad. For your question suggests that the many heroes who died at Troy are of no account and in particular the son of Thetis, who so despised danger as opposed to enduring anything shameful, that when his mother, a goddess herself, spoke to him in his eagerness to slay Hector, said something like this, I believe; “my son, if you avenge the murder of your friend Patroclus and slay Hector, you shall die too; for immediately after Hector, it is said, your fate is prepared,”¹⁰⁸ and he, hearing these things thought little of death and danger, fearing much more to live as a coward and not avenge his friends, saying, “may I die at once having imposed justice on the wrongdoer, lest I remain here, a laughing-stock (καταγέλαστος) beside the curved ships, a weight upon the earth.”¹⁰⁹ Do you think he reflected upon death and danger? (*Ap.* 28b-d)

Most interestingly, what appears at first to be a Homeric quotation is actually an adaptation on the part of Plato, the addition of καταγέλαστος being an insertion of a word that did not exist in the Homeric dialect. In addition to the worry of becoming a laughing-stock, the adaptation suggests that Plato himself is actively worried about how the philosopher is being perceived.¹¹⁰ Indeed, adapting poetic quotations to fit the theme of laughter appears elsewhere in Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato chooses to adapt a line from Pindar. Preserved by Stobaeus, in the quote’s original context Pindar is reported to have said that natural philosophers “cull the unripe fruit of wisdom” (fr. 209). The context of the quotation as it appears in the *Republic* concerns whether guardian women should exercise naked alongside the guardian men. The answer given is that the most beneficial course of action should always be taken, which involves giving the women the exact same education and training as

of the Homeric original, is consistent with Socrates’ ethical teachings (e.g. the exchange of wrongs is never allowable for a just man).

¹⁰⁸ Hom. *Il.* 18.94-7.

¹⁰⁹ Hom. *Il.* 18.98-104.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Benardete 1963, 173 where proving deliberateness on the part of Plato is said to be not strictly possible and that any proof will depend on an *argumentum ex silentio*; though there is also no mention of the insertion of καταγέλαστος. But see also Hobbs 2000, 185.

the men, therefore allowing them to exercise nakedly alongside their male counterparts (*Resp.* 456b-7a). If a man were then to laugh at such practice, he who laughs is said to be “plucking the unripe fruit of laughter (τοῦ γελοίου),” for he is ignorant of why he is laughing and what he is laughing at, namely the best and most beneficial course of action (*Resp.* 457b).¹¹¹ Once again, Plato connects ignorance to laughter. As will be discussed below, Socrates will also choose the most beneficial course of action. However, saving himself from becoming a καταγέλαστος will also entail a willingness to die for his philosophical beliefs.

The *Euthyphro* promotes the idea that unjustly gaining a reputation for πονηρία is a superior fear to being laughed at (*Euthypr.* 12a-c). The present analogy between Socrates and Achilles illustrates that this same idea is now a prime motivation for action, that is, the reassertion of one’s honour and good name. Here the alternative is to become a καταγέλαστος. The comparison between Socrates and Achilles emphasises the need to prove that one is not a wrongdoer by either exposing the wrongdoing of another or righting a wrong done to oneself, or both. For Achilles, it is avenging Patroclus’ death by killing Hector. For Socrates, feeling no shame at and continuing to do philosophy. In pursuing each course of action each man’s fate is predetermined in that each will die as a result of protecting his reputation. And yet each shows a willingness to die for what they believe is right.

The comparison is elucidated further with a consideration of the options open to either man in defending his reputation. Plato presents each man’s dilemma with a view to whether or not their chosen course of action is just or unjust, a proposition stressed by Euthyphro (*Euthypr.* 4b-c) and mirrored by Socrates in the present dialogue (*Ap.* 18a; 28b). In the first book of Homer’s *Iliad*, the affront to Achilles’ honour comes in the form of Agamemnon’s seizing of his war-prize, Briseis, an action he considers unjust and unbecoming for a man of his worth (*Il.* 1.119). The action causes Achilles’ withdrawal from the fighting with devastating consequences for Agamemnon and the Greek army. Achilles, however, is unperturbed by the army’s plight, for, as he makes Agamemnon fully aware, in yielding to the Greek leader he would be a coward and a nobody (*Il.* 1.292). It is not until the death of Patroclus that Achilles’ anger abates and he re-joins the fighting. Plato therefore chooses a pivotal moment to draw upon the epic. Achilles essentially has two options: stay by the ships and not avenge his friend or re-join the fighting and kill Hector with the knowledge that he

¹¹¹ Naas 2016, 19-20 rightly observes that things which at first appear laughable, can, through argument or education, lose their laughability, and that the person who laughs, laughs out of ignorance; which also sounds remarkably similar to the intended results of Socrates’ *elenchos* method.

will die soon after. Socrates, on the other hand, can either succumb to social pressure and be shamed into abandoning the philosophical life, remain silent and offer no defence at all, go into exile, or continue to do philosophy even though it will ultimately cause his death. Both Socrates and Achilles opt for the latter.

There is a further problem, however, not immediately expressed in the passage above. Indeed, the analogy between Socrates and Achilles creates a further ambivalence: to whom does one become a laughing-stock? Is it in the eyes of one's community or one's own? The above passage indicates the possibility of it being both. One of the essential questions of the *Euthyphro* is therefore raised again in the *Apology*: which or whose standard of justice and piety is being appealed to? Socrates is now confronted with a further dilemma. By citing his philosophical mission as divinely ordained, to dispense with the philosophical life would be to dishonour the god. But to continue philosophising would be to transgress the socially accepted practices of Athens. He finds himself trapped between a rock and a hard place.

Socrates' solution to the problem comes at *Ap.* 29b where for once he does claim knowledge: he knows that it is disgraceful to do wrong and to disobey one better than himself, be he man or god.¹¹² His claim creates a distinction between two different standards of justice: one held by the members of his community, the other intrinsic to himself. The former is dependent upon the judgements of others, while the latter depends upon the higher authority of the god of Delphi. Socrates' claim suggests that while the people may make true or false judgements about the nature of justice and impiety, the nature of god is such that he will never be wrong (cf. *Ap.* 21b). With this, the Achilles analogy may now be considered again. On the one hand, Achilles realises that if he does not re-join the war and avenge the death of Patroclus he would commit a further wrong and become a disgrace to himself. On the other, Socrates understands that if he gives up philosophy he will be confirming the unjust judgement of the people, and, what is worse, in dispensing with his principles so lightly, he will become a true *καταγέλαστος*. If he continues to do philosophy, he may still be condemned but it will be without the added confirmation of the aforementioned judgement. Moreover, like Achilles, he will evade transgressing his own self-imposed standard of just behaviour, which he believes to be rooted in the unshakeable wisdom of a god. And so, for both Achilles and the philosopher, the truth, Socrates explains, is as follows:

¹¹² On the apparent contradiction in Socrates' profession of ignorance see Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 128-37 who argue that via his divinely ordained mission and his many elenctic examinations in accordance with said mission, Socrates has come to the conclusion that a coherent view of the good life must entail such a belief. See also Vlastos 1991, 236-42.

Wherever a man stations himself, having taken a position he believes to be best or has been stationed there by his commander, he must, I believe, run the risk of remaining there, giving no thought to death nor anything else in preference to shame. (*Ap.* 28d)

In other words, a good man cannot disobey his superior, in this case the god, without making himself a *καταγέλαστος*. Socrates cannot now renege his decision to do philosophy and, if he is to be seen as he really wishes himself to be, he must accept death over disgrace. As Plato presents it, Socrates' death is just, for the decision to die circumvents any possibility of becoming a laughing-stock to the many, the god, or himself. Plato therefore gives the reader a strong image of the necessity of enduring laughter and ridicule in the place of committing a disgrace in the eyes of others and oneself.¹¹³

As Socrates continues his defence he attempts to offer further proofs (*μεγάλα τεκμήρια*, "strong proofs," as he refers to them; *Ap.* 32a) that the philosophical life should not be ridiculed or put to shame. It leads one to consider always the justness of a given course of action, and to give preference to death over committing an injustice. Socrates notes how the Athenians themselves honour actions (*ἔργα*) more than words (*λόγους*) (*Ap.* 32a). In doing so, he assimilates the Athenians' own value criteria for the purposes of defending philosophically-informed actions. Socrates relates two instances when he was ordered to transgress the laws with public approval but refrained. The first was as a member of the Council, where despite the threat of imprisonment or death, Socrates says that he alone opposed the wish to try as a body rather than individually the ten generals who failed to pick up survivors after the battle of Arginusae (*Ap.* 32b-c). The second involves rejecting the directive given him and four others by the Thirty Tyrants to arrest Leon of Salamis for execution - an order designed, he explains, to implicate as many as possible in their own crimes. The others obeyed, whereas Socrates says he simply went home, once again disregarding the threat to his life (*Ap.* 32c-d). Both instances, he argues, demonstrate the philosopher's ability to put theory into practice in accordance with Athenian values.

The above proofs communicate that the philosopher must be willing not to put only his theories to the test, but also his reputation. If the philosopher will not entertain the thought of performing an unjust action, then he cannot be seen to waver when confronted with death. For the sake of his good name Socrates argues further that he will not attempt to be like those

¹¹³ Naas 2016, 23-4 discusses the Achilles comparison, observing that Socrates preferred to die rather than become ridiculous, but does not follow up on the further argument of disobeying one's superior.

who pride themselves on their reputation for goodness and are accorded all sorts of honours in Athens, but who bring their family members into court and beg for mercy (*Ap.* 34e). Building upon the import of the previous reference to καταγέλαστος, Plato makes use of it a second time. This part of Socrates' argument rests on the above proofs in that if it truly is the case that the Athenians honour actions over words, then why is it, he asks, that so many at the last seek to invalidate the lawful proceedings of the court. Such people are said to tarnish their reputations by using "pitiful dramatics," and, even more egregiously, to make the city itself a καταγέλαστος (*Ap.* 35b). *In toto*, each proof contrives the conclusion that the philosopher is not at odds with society. He may question and critique its values and norms but not with injurious intent, the readiness to die rather than commit an injustice being the argument's greatest proof.

Concluding Remarks

The unflinching nature of Socrates' resolve in not making either himself or the city a laughing-stock stresses that the philosopher's reputation does in fact have significance. Indeed, Socrates' readiness to die reveals that the good man must accept the consequences of an unjust slander. He certainly had options, but in attempting to dodge a guilty verdict he makes it clear that he would only do injury to himself and the city which has conferred so many benefits to him, not least of all the ability to do philosophy and examine life. Death is actually seen as preferable, for he says, "it is not difficult to avoid death, there is far greater difficulty in avoiding wickedness (πονηρίαν), for it runs faster than death" (*Ap.* 39a). Although Socrates never claims knowledge of what happens to a person at death, he pitches it as a win-win situation. Not only is he able to defend and keep his reputation intact, death for him is but one of two alternatives. Either it is nothing or it is relocation from one place to another, both credited as a boon (*Ap.* 40c-e). The former is merely a dreamless sleep, but the latter carries the chance to continue philosophising. Socrates speaks of meeting and speaking to men such as Palamedes or Ajax,¹¹⁴ who he explains met unjust fates themselves and with whom he can discuss and compare his own experience (*Ap.* 41b). As he brings his defense to a close, one last remark on the matter of reputation is given. It is said that no evil may befall a

¹¹⁴ Yamagata 2012, 134 notes the play of humour and irony in referring to these Homeric heroes as Socrates compares his own injustice with legendary ones. Cf. Tanner 2017, 10 for the possibility that Socrates means to spend his time refuting Palamedes, who may in fact be one of the ignorant and a pretender to wisdom.

good man in life or death, nor do the gods neglect him (*Ap.* 41d). With this, part of the Platonic Socrates' ambiguous attitude towards laughter, ridicule, and reputation is resolved, for the only way a good man may be harmed is to relent at the last, accept a misrepresentation of what it is to be a philosopher, and confirm himself as a wrongdoer and a *καταγέλαστος*.

Part Two: Crito – But Really, Why Should the Philosopher Care?

The above reading of the *Apology* attempts to show why laughter and ridicule directed towards the philosopher is an inappropriate response. The *Crito*, however, raises the question of why the philosopher should even care. Reading Cynicism into Plato's anxieties about the philosopher as laughable has already been rejected. However, such sentiments seem to re-emerge in the *Crito* as Socrates, against the arguments of Crito, dismisses the opinions of the many as ignorant and unreasonable. But the dialogue can also be seen to once again negate the Cynic reading. As we shall see, Socrates builds on the arguments in the *Apology*, stating that a good man cannot transgress the law without becoming laughable. Following *Euthyphro* and *Apology*, the *Crito* also contains the vocabulary of laughter, once again with respect to the issue of becoming laughable to others. The *Apology* shows how the threat of becoming a laughing-stock is placed above the threat of death due to the idea that the philosopher would have to accept a lie. *Crito* involves a similar concern, with Plato using *καταγέλαστος* in relation to the question of whether or not Socrates should escape from prison to circumvent his death. It performs this task by taking up two significant strands of thought: whose opinion(s) should one take heed of and follow, and is civil disobedience allowable? The former is conveyed primarily against the arguments of Crito, who reflects many of the cultural (i.e. non-philosophically tested) concerns Socrates largely rejects in the *Apology*. The latter is framed by a consideration of the just or unjust nature of the act, echoing the very same sentiment of the two early period dialogues discussed above. Taken together, the philosopher's relationship to society is presented as a positive one, for the *Crito* shows that a good man cannot transgress the law without making himself a *καταγέλαστος*.

In attempting to persuade Socrates to rethink his position on the just death and escape his sentence, Crito offers arguments reflecting some of the cultural concerns tacitly assumed by the non-philosophical members of society. Indeed, as much as Crito's arguments are genuinely concerned with the unjust fate of his friend, they are also connected to the matter

of his own reputation. His arguments concentrate on public censure and he makes the appeal that he will not only lose his greatest friend but also that it will:

Appear to the many, who do not know you and I plainly, that I had the means to save you, if I was willing to spend my money, but neglected to do so. And yet what is more shameful than a reputation of someone who considers money to be of more importance than his friends? For the many will not believe that you yourself were unwilling to go away from here when we were eager to help. (*Cri.* 44b-c)

Perceiving that the many will not grasp the true reasoning behind Socrates' decision to die, Crito implores him to take stock of their opinions. But whereas in the *Apology* Socrates attempted to assimilate Athenian values in defence of himself and philosophy, in the present dialogue he appears to take a position that diminishes their importance to a bare minimum. Socrates produces a counter which insists on the necessity of regarding only what certain people think, those who are said to be οἱ ἐπιεικέστατοι, "the most reasonable men," whose opinion is said to be ἄξιον φροντίζειν, "worth considering" (*Cri.* 44c). Such men, he continues, "will believe that things have happened, just as they happened" (*Cri.* 44c). Socrates' remarks adumbrate the dialogue's later arguments. He is not entirely rejecting the need to keep his reputation unblemished, but rather that death will be the logical outcome of his unwavering commitment to the philosophical life. Socrates therefore continues to exhibit some regard for his reputation, but only insofar as it displays a consistency of reasoned and principled action.

Socrates' counter strongly implies that what truly matters is the opinion one holds of oneself. There are certainly intimations of this in the *Euthyphro* in the form of the statement that to be laughed at is perhaps of little consequence (*Euthyphr.* 3c). The *Apology* too shows signs of this given Socrates' readiness to die, the fact that he almost never participated in political affairs unless his tribe was called to do so (*Ap.* 31c-e), and the notion that a man who truly fights for what is right must be a private citizen (*Ap.* 32a). In the *Crito*, however, there is an even greater emphasis placed upon the individual as a self-reflective moral agent. Nevertheless, Crito presses the issue, attempting once again to reiterate the necessity of caring what others think. He states:

But you see it is in fact necessary, Socrates, to care for the opinion of the many. For clearly the things happening at this present moment are evidence that the many are not able to

accomplish the smallest of evils, but nearly the greatest, if one has been falsely accused amongst them. (*Cri.* 44d)

Once more, Crito's concerns are culturally-minded in that they draw attention to Socrates' present circumstances and the belief that they constitute an evil. He highlights the unjust misrepresentation of Socrates and places a great deal of power in society's ability to cause harm to the individual. Unsurprisingly, Socrates is rather lackadaisical, replying:

If only the many, Crito, could in some way accomplish the greatest of evils, they could likewise accomplish the greatest good, and all would be fine; but now they can do neither; for they are unable to make a man wise nor foolish, but do whatever occurs to them by chance. (*Cri.* 44d)

Socrates can still be said to show concern for the many but for a much different reason. His worry is that they are not capable of making a reasoned decision, that they are not reflective about what is motivating the choices they make. With respect to Socrates' counter, it is pertinent to relate his sentiments to the rhetoric of those who spoke against him at his trial (as far as may be gleaned from Plato's account). His accusers made a rhetorically engaging case for why Socrates is a wrongdoer, which may or may not have contained untruths, but was designed to be as persuasive as possible.¹¹⁵ Socrates refused to play the game and spoke in the language of a philosopher, only showing guilt and shame when there was a chance his actions may be in conflict with his principles, and always with a view for the truth.¹¹⁶ It is likely the many as Socrates describes them found the former more effectual. His accusers displayed an overt and conformist regard for the city and its values, whereas Socrates presented himself as a private citizen openly critiquing them. While the *Euthyphro* disclosed Socrates' fear of being misrepresented by the many, in the wake of his condemnation, as well as the fact that he is now awaiting his death in prison, it appears one should not fear this at all. The cultural implications of a bad reputation, which Crito so eagerly claims, are now

¹¹⁵ As Dover 1988, 155 observes, a major manifestation of the Athenians' hostility to intellectuals during Socrates' lifetime was the idea that "the key to success at Athens appeared increasingly to many people to be persuasiveness in public utterance." See also *Resp.* 492b-d for a description of the praise and blame of assembly crowds.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Xen. Ap.* 1.1-2 where Socrates' *μεγαληγορία* ("cockiness") is said to have been a defining feature of his speech.

inert. In rejecting Crito's plea, Socrates indicates that any laughter or ridicule now directed towards his person is of no concern. The remainder of the *Crito*, however, shows that any deviation from his chosen course of action will make Socrates a laughing-stock and bring philosophy into further disrepute.

Crito is still not convinced and offers one final argument in the hope Socrates will relent his position. His final argument attempts to convey the idea that Socrates, not himself, is the one who is ignorant about the most beneficial course of action. At *Cri.* 45c-d he outright questions whether Socrates' decision to give up his life because of a misrepresentation is itself just, and if he will not actually be betraying himself by following through with it. Moreover, he argues that Socrates is taking the easy way out, for if one is as good as one claims, he would choose the opposite path and preserve his life. However, as Crito makes apparent at *Cri.* 45e, he undermines his own convictions. Indeed, he returns to how the present situation will reflect on himself, saying he feels shame on behalf of Socrates and his friends. He then confesses the worry that the many will think they failed to save their friend through cowardice and unmanliness, which will be thought "the crowning absurdity (κατάγελας) of the whole affair" (*Cri.* 45e).¹¹⁷ The cultural implications of a bad reputation dictate Crito's entire line of argument. He does not want to be seen as laughable and nor should Socrates. With respect to convention, Socrates should see disgrace in the eyes of others as a sign that he is deviating from the norm and is in fact a wrongdoer. Crito is therefore operating under a culturally-informed fear of being laughed at, which Socrates rejects as inappropriate in both *Euthyphro* and *Apology*. Socrates' counters indicate that "true" shame may be quite different to the expected norm. As he will show, the only actions which may be considered shameful are those which are not philosophically-informed.

The counterargument Socrates produces next is designed to explain away Crito's conventional stance on the issue of reputation. The question posited here takes up the crux of Crito's previous arguments: whose opinion ought one to esteem? At *Cri.* 47a it is agreed that one ought to follow good opinions, not bad; the good make a man wise, the bad foolish. There follows an analogical argument wherein it is implied that just as an athlete would likely come to harm if he followed the opinion of the many over that of a knowledgeable physician or trainer, so too would that part of us be damaged if one were to follow the opinions of those unable to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, disgraceful and noble (*Cri.* 47b-e). Although the soul is not directly mentioned in the text, the intention of the analogy is

¹¹⁷ Translation taken from Fowler 1914, 161.

clear.¹¹⁸ As such, it is of great importance for establishing the harm that may befall an individual if they follow the opinion of the ignorant. With respect to the censure of laughter, to be laughed at may only be a real harm if the reason for their laughter is true. For the purposes of Socrates' counterargument, even if the many have falsely slandered him and voted for his death, because they are said to be neither wise nor foolish, they cannot change the way he considers and cares for what he argues is a person's greatest possession, the soul. In accepting death, Socrates' soul will remain untouched. With the athlete analogy in place the dialogue shifts ever closer to acknowledging that arbitrary standards of justice or disgrace imposed by others without critical analysis have no real bearing on the philosophical life. Bringing his argument to a close Socrates concludes:

Therefore, my good man, we must not give thought to what the many say about us at all, but rather to whoever understands justice and injustice, the one man, and truth herself...[and] that it is not living that we should reckon of more worth, but living well. (*Cri.* 48a-b)

The only real harm is for one's soul to be in a vicious state. For Socrates, one's reputation within the community, traditionally seen as a preferred good, may limit his ability to philosophise but it does not outweigh the potential harm to his soul.

Having denied Crito the significance of culturally-derived opinions, Socrates can now move on to giving a rationale for caring and protecting the soul above all else. This involves dealing with the *Crito's* second great question: would it be just for Socrates to escape from prison? In accordance with both *Euthyphro* and *Apology*, Socrates applies the necessity of valuing only the justness of the act. Crito attempted to argue that shame and disgrace are imposed on the individual from outside, by either a single entity or some greater one such as society itself. In Socrates' case, however, the outside imposition meant accepting an untruth about how he conceives of himself and his own sense of moral responsibility (i.e. his philosophical mission). Through *Cri.* 49a-c he then questions whether they should dispense with another commonly held belief, the legitimacy of exchanging wrong for wrong if one has suffered ridicule or disgrace at the hands of another. Crito agrees that they should. Thus, despite popular opinion, at *Cri.* 49b wrongdoing is deemed to be a disgrace (αἰσχρόν) and an

¹¹⁸ On the absence of any mention of ψυχή or "soul" see Liebersohn 2015.

evil (κακόν) to the wrongdoer. A full reversal of αἰσχρός is being realised so as to make it congruent with the philosophical claims of *Euthyphro* and *Apology*.¹¹⁹

Socrates' reinterpretation of αἰσχρός performs a multi-layered function. At one level it shows that an unjust action reflects the inner state of the doer, and is not imposed by judgements from the outside.¹²⁰ Socrates makes it clear that culturally-derived or opinion-based sanctions on behaviour are not enough. Indeed, the correct judgement of one's actions requires philosophical analysis. It also explains Socrates' readiness to die. If he was not willing to face judgement and death, but was instead willing to use dramatics and disgrace himself in court or escape from prison, then the moral integrity of the philosopher is called into question.¹²¹ At a further level, it implies that the opinion one should really be concerned with is the one we hold of ourselves and whether or not one's actions are in accord with one's principles. If it were otherwise, Socrates' decision to die would be truly laughable.

Rather than reputation and shame imposed from the outside, then, Socrates' arguments indicate that one's inner sense of moral responsibility is the determining factor of value in the decision-making process. Indeed, such a conclusion is borne out by Socrates' refusal to escape prison. *Cri.* 50a-4d imagines the Laws of Athens personified, arguing for why Socrates should not escape his fate. The Laws appeal to the benefits Socrates has accrued from living in his chosen city (birth, nurturing parents, education, offspring, the ability to do philosophy), all of which he will be turning his back on. If Socrates cannot now abide by the agreements he had seventy years to alter or reject, then he will make himself a καταγέλαστος (*Cri.* 50a-3a).¹²² Although the Laws' arguments appear to impose a sense of

¹¹⁹ However, one might now raise an objection to the use of the Achilles comparison in the *Apology*. On this apparent discrepancy of ethical teaching see Hobbs 2000 in n. 107 above. Allowing one to take pleasure in the misfortunes of one's enemies at *Phlb.* 49d is also reminiscent of this discrepancy.

¹²⁰ Cf. Cairns 1993, 380 who notes that Plato is "aware of the possibility of a commitment to personal ideals rather than mere conformity on the basis of external sanctions," but "does not actually go so far as explicitly to acknowledge the possibility of self-directed shame in the absence of any external catalyst." The reply would be to say that the catalyst is itself participating in philosophical analysis of the very concept of shame and through that process, to arrive at a revised form in which it may certainly be self-directed if one's actions then conflict with it; otherwise, there would be no worry about becoming a καταγέλαστος in one's own eyes.

¹²¹ Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 104 note that if Socrates did not hold his philosophical mission to be of the highest moral value, then its resulting courses of action (e.g. the kind of defence speech he makes and deciding to remain in prison) should also be considered uncertain by Socrates.

¹²² Halliwell 2008, 292, n. 67 observes that the Laws' are here implicitly answering Crito's concern with being thought ridiculous by others back at *Cri.* 45e.

shame from the outside, true shame, appearing here in the form of becoming a *καταγέλαστος*, occurs from a disconnect between virtue and expediency. As the Laws deduce at *Cri.* 53c, if Socrates turns his back on them now he will actually confirm the unjust judgement conferred upon him. More than this, however, his entire self-image as a philosopher would be unsustainable. In transgressing the laws, which by his own account are believed to be just, he will no longer be able to philosophise with others as he has done in the past (i.e. exhorting them to justice and virtue and to care for their soul) because he himself will not embody the principles of which he speaks.¹²³ Indeed, he will be exchanging wrong for wrong, which not only has consequences for the here and now, the Laws conclude, but also for the life hereafter (*Cri.* 54b-c). Such is the real reason for someone becoming a *καταγέλαστος*.¹²⁴

The arguments in the *Crito* convey two important ideas about the philosophical life. One, the true reason why someone becomes a laughing-stock is the acceptance of an untruth (i.e. wilful ignorance). Socrates had two chances to do so. Either he could have chosen to accept the lie and possibly be acquitted, or, he could have opted to escape from prison and confirm the Athenians' misrepresentation. In each case he would continue to live, but the continuation of life would be one filled with ignorance and conceit, limiting his future philosophical activities. Therefore, in addition to building a defence of Socrates and philosophy, Plato also communicates that the laughter one receives need not be a bad thing, indicative of some flaw or shortcoming, so long as one has not performed a self-deception as to why they have become laughable to others. The second is the reinterpretation of *αἰσχρὸς*. In doing so, the *Euthyphro*'s statement about the benignity of being laughed at is brought to fruition. Through the consistency of principled action and the willingness to die in the name of justice and truth, Plato is able to present the philosopher as someone who attempts to better society. To be sure, Plato's Socrates is no Cynic. His actions demonstrate how even if the many have unjustly voted to put him to death, the philosopher must show to the last that the

¹²³ On the apparent contradiction between the *Apology* and the *Crito* about transgressing the law see Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 137-53 who argue that the two dialogues do not generate a conflict as is generally assumed, but rather that once the context of Socrates' commitment to his divine mission is fully understood, any apparent contradiction is found to be a non-issue. This study's view rests on the argument of what Plato is doing with his reinterpretation of what is shameful. If Socrates were to transgress either his divine command to do philosophy or transgress the law by escaping from prison, in each instance, Socrates is not considering how this reflects on himself *per se*, but rather that it transcends the character of Socrates to reflect badly on philosophy itself.

¹²⁴ Naas 2016, 23 comes to the same conclusion, albeit through different means.

attachment and affinity he has for the city and its laws are such that he cannot do wrong against them without becoming truly ridiculous.¹²⁵

Concluding Remarks

To conclude the present chapter, a final example from the life of Socrates reiterates the importance of the decisions he makes in the *Apology* and *Crito*. It is drawn from the last moments of Socrates' life as depicted in the *Phaedo*, where a most striking example of incurring laughter occurs directly before Socrates is due to drink the hemlock brew. The reader finds Crito attempting to persuade Socrates to wait a little before taking the poison, as others are said to, enjoying one last meal or intimate moment with a lover (*Phd.* 116e).¹²⁶ Socrates coolly replies that:

Those men of whom you speak think it reasonable to do these things, for in doing them they think they derive a profit, whereas I will just as reasonably not; for I think I shall derive no profit by drinking the poison a little later, other than becoming a laughing-stock to myself (γέλωτα ὀφλήσειν παρ' ἑμαυτῷ), clinging to and being sparing of life when it is no longer possible. (*Phd.* 116e-17a)

The attitudes towards pleasure here can be compared to that of the later *Philebus*. The pleasures which Crito cites may seem reasonable to the non-philosopher, whereas Socrates avoids them precisely because they are in his eyes unreasonable. The unwillingness to heed Crito's plea therefore illustrates Socrates' commitment to his philosophical ideals. In registering the possibility of becoming laughable to himself as undesirable,¹²⁷ Socrates reinforces the attitude towards laughter and ridicule which has been dramatically building ever since the *Euthyphro*. It is exactly what makes the scene all the more remarkable. If Socrates were to prolong his drinking of the poison, it would be tantamount to refuting the entire purpose and account of the philosophical life Plato has built up throughout his early

¹²⁵ Cf. *Resp.* 361b-d for Glaucon's description of the truly just man, unduly misrepresented throughout his life, so as to be thoroughly tested for his justice and not weakening in the face of the ill-repute it brings.

¹²⁶ An interestingly similar line of argument when one considers the arguments of Crito in the dialogue which takes his name.

¹²⁷ Halliwell 2008, 281 observes that this is the first form of laughter in the dialogue which expresses contempt or belittlement. It is very telling that Socrates reserves it for himself.

period dialogues. Indeed, throughout these dialogues one perceives a discernible shift to a more pronounced internalisation of laughter and ridicule, presented in contrast to the externally driven criticism latent within Meletus' indictment, the arguments of Crito, and Athenian culture more generally. Socrates' choice to not prolong the poison due to the possibility of becoming a laughing-stock to himself therefore acts as a climactic example of why the philosopher should not be seen as a target worthy of laughter and ridicule. As such, it constitutes a point of transition from the early to middle period dialogues.

Chapter Four

Moving into the Middle Period: Laughter, Comedy, and Philosophical Practice and Life in the Republic

The focus of this chapter is to demonstrate how Plato directs his attention to both the object of laughter, so prevalent a theme in his early dialogues, and the subject, a focal point of his late period dialogues. It is arranged in four sections: (1) the episode in Book One where Socrates conducts his discussion in non-malicious form, even when confronted by Thrasymachus' hostile reproach; (2) a selection of examples in which the Socrates character incurs laughter, as well as how this relates to the just individual and their soul; (3) the laughter directed towards the philosopher in the allegory of the cave; (4) the acceptability of comedy in the ideal state.¹²⁸ When considered together, each section allows us to appreciate the coherence and development of Plato's treatment of laughter from the early to the late period dialogues.

Socrates and the Absence of Malice in Philosophical Discussion

In the *Republic* Plato begins to shift the focus from the life of Socrates and his particular methods to the philosopher and philosophical methods more generally.¹²⁹ However, despite a

¹²⁸ As the acceptability of the arts in Plato's *Republic* is potentially a huge topic, the focus will be narrowed to instances which anticipate the issues developed in the *Philebus* and *Laws*.

¹²⁹ For an outline of the problems for reading historicity into Plato's Socrates see Osborne 2006, 5-12. This study does not take the function of the Socrates character to always represent the man and his views, but rather that the character functions as a guide for (1) how philosophical discussion should be conducted, and (2) an example of adhering to one's philosophical way of life in the face of overt and derisive criticism. Osborne goes on to explain that the main conventions or aims of *Sokratikoi logoi* appear to be the creation of a "plausible and vivid representation of a character that is convincingly Socratic, and an original engagement with the classic topics that Socrates was supposed to have discussed." The Socrates of the *Republic* seems to detract from this description insofar as developed philosophical positions are put forward with much more certainty than in the early period dialogues, possibly because Plato is now building upon the classic topics of his teacher. Yet this Socrates can still show some continuity in that he is reluctant to speak on provocative or controversial matters and those which he has no sure knowledge of. For Socrates as narrator see Schofield 2013, 88 who argues that "narrated dialogues are the preferred mode of Plato's middle period," as opposed to scripted. At 95, Schofield

reduced prominence, those features are not altogether overshadowed. Indeed, the first book of the *Republic* closely resembles an early period encounter insofar as Socrates is confronted with an interlocutor who claims to have knowledge of a definite subject. Socrates and Polemarchus have been discussing conventional views of justice until Thrasymachus rather threateningly proposes an alternative, namely that justice is nothing but the advantage of the stronger (*Resp.* 338c).¹³⁰ Hostile towards the way the argument has been conducted thus far, he makes his presence known, resembling, as Socrates describes, a wild beast ready to tear their polite discussion apart (*Resp.* 336b). Feigning fear, Socrates attempts to assuage the beast, suggesting that rather than attack he should feel sorry for them, complimenting Thrasymachus for being much wiser than they and disclaiming any wisdom or ability of his own (*Resp.* 336e-7a). But the wily sophist will not be taken in by Socrates' philosophical ploys and instead bursts into sarcastic laughter (ἀνεκάκχασε μάλα σαρδάνιον), believing Socrates' niceties to be a disingenuous example of his famously ironical profession of ignorance (*Resp.* 337a). There follows an exchange in which Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of further trickery. He charges Socrates with merely playing the innocent when he claims it is right for one who does not know to learn from one who does, and if he were then to give his view of what justice is, Socrates will do what he always does, take someone else's definition and refute it while never offering one of his own (*Resp.* 337d). Socrates, however, calmly replies as follows:

Firstly, how could anyone, my good man, make a reply if they do not know, nor are claiming they know...but it is in fact more reasonable for you to speak; for you are the one who claims to know and has something to say. (*Resp.* 337e-8a)

The challenge of Thrasymachus strikes at the very heart of the Socratic method. The attempt to expose another's ignorance, such a commonplace feature of the early period and aporetic

briefly discusses the *Republic*, suggesting it makes Socrates narrator due to the fact that it contains, explores, and develops core Socratic ethical theses (i.e. it is better to suffer injustice than to do it).

¹³⁰ Cross and Woolzley 1966, 25-6 argue that Thrasymachus is here not giving a verbal definition in true τί ἐστὶ style, but rather, due to the appearance of ἀπόκρισις, that he is offering an apparently straightforward answer. Cf. Beversluis 2000, 224-5 for a Thrasymachus who is able to distinguish between the two senses of "is": predication and identity.

dialogues, is here met with a frankness rivalled only by Hippias, or better yet Callicles.¹³¹ However, as many of his early period discussions also demonstrate, Socrates always meets his interlocutor's frustration or hostility with equanimity. Socrates provides the appropriate, and indeed reasonable, response to Thrasymachus' criticism and ridicule by not engaging with any malicious feedback of his own.¹³² As is usual with his profession of ignorance, he even willingly undertakes to learn from Thrasymachus, asking him to answer and not begrudge (μὴ φθονήσης) his teaching to those present (*Resp.* 338a), echoing the same contrasting language established in the *Apology* between Socrates and the sophists.¹³³

Socrates' response is therefore in line with earlier ones. A great example is the enthusiasm he shows in seeking to clarify what Thrasymachus means by justice as the advantage of the stronger.¹³⁴ Despite Thrasymachus' sarcastic and pessimistic attitude, Socrates parallels the approach to argument which he states in the *Gorgias*, as related in Chapter One.¹³⁵ Indeed, through *Resp.* 338c-9b he attempts to figure out just what the sophist means. For all his efforts, however, Thrasymachus once again accuses Socrates of trickery, labelling him a σκολοφάντης (“cheat, slanderer”), a name given to those in the Athenian courts who make a living out of malicious prosecutions (*Resp.* 340d).¹³⁶ Moreover, when Socrates then inquires into whether Thrasymachus thinks he has been deliberately deceiving and asking unfair questions, the sophist confirms he has but that he will not be able to use his evil ways (κακουργῶν) and argument to take him by force (τῷ λόγῳ δύναιτο) (*Resp.* 340d-1b). The language of Thrasymachus therefore runs counter to the very image of Socrates and his

¹³¹ Comparisons have been drawn between Callicles and Thrasymachus as immoralists, that is, as believing that the answer to how one should live is, immorally or unjustly; though the two can be said to differ in their concepts of natural justice. See Johnson 2005, 93-156; Zuckert 2010, 170-81.

¹³² Cf. *Resp.* 426a-b.

¹³³ See p. 42-3 above. See also *Resp.* 476e for a further example remarkably similar in tone to the Socratic method. Here it connects to how a discussion should be conducted so as to listen to their interlocutor's claim to knowledge so as not to begrudge (φθόνος) them any knowledge they may have. Further examples are located at *Euthyd.* 297b-d.

¹³⁴ For a variety of interpretations see Cross and Woosley 1966, 28-41. For a response see Lucas and Mitchell 2003, 6-14.

¹³⁵ See p. 25 above.

¹³⁶ Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 58-9, n. 45. Emlyn-Jones 2007, 154 explains further that the meaning of the Greek word differs from its modern usage and implies “bullying and sharp practice.” The implication of Thrasymachus' use is that Socrates is attempting to deliberately deceive and force his interlocutor into submission.

method that we have seen Plato develop in this study, in that it attempts to put all the malice onto the philosopher. Even though Thrasymachus is earlier characterised as a wild beast, he is now presented as the one under attack. As such, the sophist ventures to goad and taunt Socrates further but the latter quickly deflates the situation saying “enough of that sort of talk” (*Resp.* 341c), indicating that Socrates will not go that far; he may playfully jab at Thrasymachus, but he will not sink to the level of petty insults.¹³⁷

Following Thrasymachus’ secondary argument which concludes that the unjust man will also be the happiest, Socrates provides a counter, once again reiterating the kind of dialectical process needed to come to any kind of mutual understanding (*Resp.* 347e-8b). Through this process Socrates secures Thrasymachus’ agreement to his counter-arguments, until they come to the conclusion that the just person is wise and good, the unjust ignorant and bad (although Socrates says the agreement had to be drawn out of his interlocutor with difficulty). Indeed, Thrasymachus, unhappy with the result, withdraws, and for the rest of Book One he remains largely a passive participant in the discussion, merely affirming Socrates’ conclusions as they are deduced (*Resp.* 350c-e). As the book draws to a close, Thrasymachus has allowed a conclusion opposite to the one he initially stated, but only on the grounds that it is via Socrates’ argument, not his own. Despite this, Socrates speaks of him as having given up his anger and now being gentler because of it; yet the book also ends with Socrates claiming the sophist has not yet improved his knowledge of justice and injustice (*Resp.* 354a-c).

The end of the first book therefore purports to end in a classic example of the impasse or *aporia* of the early dialogues. At the beginning of Book Two, however, Glaucon steps in for Thrasymachus, claiming the sophist had given in too soon (*Resp.* 358b). While Socrates continues to profess ignorance (*Resp.* 358a), Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus issue the philosopher the challenge of proving to them that justice is superior to injustice (*Resp.* 357a-b). With this, the reader encounters something fundamental to both the middle period dialogues and the character of Socrates: an interlocutor who will not only challenge him but also willingly register their ignorance. To be sure, many of Socrates’ interlocutors in Plato’s middle period act according to these norms; one is reminded of Simmias and Cebes of the *Phaedo* or Theaetetus of the eponymous dialogue. Thus, Glaucon and Adeimantus, in

¹³⁷ He does, however, after Thrasymachus’ long speech on the happiness of the unjust man, refer to him as a bath attendant, or bath man (βαλανεύς), an apparently “low” comic image (*Resp.* 344d); Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 74-5, n. 54. It is conveyed by Socrates the narrator and not part of the conversation itself. Furthermore, like the comical situation of the *Euthyphro*, it is not meant to have malicious intent.

contrast with Thrasymachus, who is not willing to continue the discussion or register his possible ignorance, show at the beginning of Book Two they are more than willing to do so.¹³⁸ The brothers also make it apparent that *aporia* does not have to and should not be thought of as some kind of philosophical dead-end. Rather, their challenge to Socrates displays how it may constitute a launching point for further discussion.

Although this initial section has not featured laughter to any great extent, it does highlight and reiterate something important about the Socratic method, namely the necessity of an anger or malice-free form of argumentation, which is carried over from earlier dialogues, and will become central to Plato's treatment of laughter in his late period dialogues. The result of the argument between Socrates and Thrasymachus is not even itself a total loss, evidenced by the fact that later in the *Republic* Thrasymachus, now much more friendly towards the philosopher, actively encourages him to continue when Socrates is reluctant to discuss provocative matters (*Resp.* 450a-b; 498c-d).¹³⁹ By not engaging in the under-handed tactics of a frustrated or angry interlocutor, Socrates displays the appropriate response befitting a philosopher,¹⁴⁰ which is later built upon in the analogy of the tripartite division of soul and state, and will also be of further importance when considering the laughter of the cave.

Laughter and the Loss of Self-Control

It was stated above that Plato's late period dialogues focus very much on the subject of laughter, while his earlier dialogues concentrate on the object. In the *Republic* one is able to discern features of both, and the object of laughter is treated in a more developed form (see below for comedy and the subject).¹⁴¹ The *Republic* deepens one's understanding of what it means to be or become the object of laughter in two ways: (1) through the character of Socrates in the dialogue, and (2) through the perception of the philosopher as a laughable figure, a core feature of his famous cave allegory (see next section below). Taken together,

¹³⁸ Cf. *Resp.* 474a-b where Glaucon even tells Socrates he will not abandon him and indeed defend him with any means at his disposal for raising controversial arguments.

¹³⁹ See *Resp.* 498c-d where Socrates asks Adeimantus not to set Thrasymachus and himself at odds now that they have become friends, adding that they were never really enemies before. See also Zuckert 2010, 181-2.

¹⁴⁰ But cf. Beversluis 2000, 220-44 for a controversialist reading of Socrates' argument with Thrasymachus in which he is more concerned with winning than discovering the moral truth of what justice really is.

¹⁴¹ See pp. 78-82 below.

one can see Plato extending his treatment of the object of laughter from Socrates as character to the philosopher in general, making the *Republic* the perfect dialogue for bridging the gap between his treatment of laughter in the early and late period works.

Before it is possible to assess some specific examples of laughter, it is necessary to build a framework for observing the subtle shift of attitude towards the reception of laughter and ridicule this dialogue contains. This involves delineating the *Republic's* argument for the definition of justice and its relationship to the soul. In Book One two ideas are put forward which prove important for bridging the aforementioned gap. As part of Socrates' reply to Thrasymachus' attempts to frame the unjust individual as happy, he offers an account of the possession of justice and injustice. Anyone possessing injustice, Socrates objects, will be far from happy for it involves a disharmony within the individual. Displaying similarities with the malicious person of the *Philebus*, who finds pleasure in the misfortunes of others due to a lack of harmony or inferiority within his soul, as well as with the unjust man of the *Laws*, this individual, Socrates counters, will be unable to act reasonably due to a lack of agreement within himself (*Resp.* 352a). The resulting disharmony makes him hostile not only to himself, but also to others. In opposition, those who possess justice experience no said lack and will permit harmony within themselves and their community. Socrates then translates these descriptions of justice and injustice into how they affect the proper function of one's soul, characterised as an amalgamation of taking care of things, ruling, deliberating, and in effect, the entire mental apparatus of moral decision-making (*Resp.* 353d). Socrates' argument proposes that if each thing has a proper function, it must necessarily have a corresponding virtue (or excellence; ἀρετή) and vice (or defect; κακία) assigned to it whereby it performs its function either well or badly (*Resp.* 353b).¹⁴² Therefore, if living well or badly corresponds to the proper functioning of the soul, and these correspond to virtue and vice respectively, the just person will be happy and the unjust unhappy (*Resp.* 353e).¹⁴³ Despite this conclusion, Socrates declares that he still does not know what justice is, though he has made an important step towards it. Indeed, the step is vital for reading the rest of the dialogue. Adeimantus notes at the beginning of Book Two how no layman or poet has ever sufficiently inquired into the

¹⁴² Urmson 1990, 81 explains κακία as the contrary to ἀρετή. It is often translated as “vice” but “defect, fault, or badness” is seen as preferable as they convey the opposite aspect of well-being the soul ideally needs to flourish.

¹⁴³ Cross and Woosley 1966, 58 label this a fallacious argument. Indeed, Thrasymachus could just have easily maintained, using Socrates' own form of argument, that “if the soul were carrying out its function [i.e. living well or badly] by living in a bad way...then it would be performing its function well by living badly.”

effects of justice and injustice on the soul, and that if each man learns this he will know himself and be his own best protector, saving himself any lasting injury to his soul (*Resp.* 366d-7a).¹⁴⁴ Plato, as philosopher, will therefore fill this role.

In order to do so, Plato must have Socrates address the challenge of Glaucon and Adeimantus by seeking a suitable definition of justice. One such definition is offered in Book Four. As far as justice writ large is concerned, its definition is established as each individual doing the one role within the one class they are naturally most suited for (*Resp.* 433a). Thus, for the community to operate as one harmonious whole, each person must reasonably keep within their assigned role and not stray into another's. The definition is then transferred to the individual, building upon the harmony, function, and virtue of the soul *per* Socrates' argument in Book One. Just as the ideal community has its three classes (craftsmen, auxiliaries, guardians), so too does the soul. In brief, the soul is said to contain the divisions (respectively analogous to the community's three classes) of appetitive, spirited, and reasoning parts (*Resp.* 435c-41c).¹⁴⁵ Appetites arise in the individual as pleasures and desires but should be governed by reason with the aid of the spirited part, which is subject to reason and allied with it (*Resp.* 441c). Such is the individual experience of harmony and proper functioning of soul.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, this harmonic experience is stated to be what makes a person just (*Resp.* 442d); harmony and justice being provided by reason, knowledge, and wisdom, disharmony and injustice by unfettered desire and ignorance (*Resp.* 443c-4a).

The framework is now in place for considering Plato's concern with being the object of laughter in the *Republic*. As this section considers how the above applies to Socrates as both philosopher and character in the dialogue, it will highlight three pertinent examples, each containing the worry of incurring laughter for a perceived loss of self-control (i.e. an improper functioning and disharmony of the soul).¹⁴⁷ The first occurs in Book Five. Socrates

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Grg.* 509a-e where Socrates argues that those who are unable to provide protection for their greatest possession, the soul, are the most shameful and truly ridiculous (καταγέλαστος).

¹⁴⁵ Ortiz de Landazuri 2015, 135, n. 32 confirms that these three parts reveal a conflict of motives within the soul itself and not between soul and body. This brings us closer to the *Philebus*' idea that pleasure and pain may be experienced within the soul alone by itself, see p. 18 above.

¹⁴⁶ It is not within the purview of this study to continue to elaborate further on the *Republic*'s conception of the soul or the validity of Plato's arguments. For more detailed coverage of these issues see Miller 2006, 286-9; Ferrari 2007; Lorenz 2008, 254-65; Ortiz de Landazuri 2015, 134-8; Jorgenson 2018, 6-87.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Moore 1999 who prefers to connect laughter in the dialogue to courage or a lack thereof, especially in the characters of Glaucon, Cephalus, and Thrasymachus.

has concerns about discussing controversial matters, namely the common ownership of women and children amongst the guardian class, as well as how the children should be cared for in the period between their birth and education. He is reluctant to speak and when the others encourage him to press on he replies:

Well, you are doing the total opposite. For when I myself know the things I am discussing, encouragement is fine; for among those of good sense and friends it is possible to tell the truth about the greatest and dearest of matters, knowing one is safe and devoid of danger, but if one is unsure and expected to produce arguments, as I am doing now, it is frightening and risky, not in fear of incurring laughter (οὐ τι γέλωτα ὀφλεῖν) – for that is childish indeed – but for misleading not only myself, but also my friends with respect to the truth, so that having drawn them in I will discourse on matters one must least of all be mistaken. (*Resp.* 450d-1a)

In this instance, the fear surrounding laughter is stated to be simply childish. Socrates expresses the greater fear of attempting to provide an argument whereby he will be presuming knowledge he does not have. Doing so means acting against his better judgement, making him wilfully ignorant, and signify that he is not in control of the reasoning part of his soul. Moreover, as a philosopher, the resulting disharmony will also show that he does not in fact know himself, certifying him as an unjust, and ultimately γελοῖος, individual. Socrates' reply carries over the early period idea of what makes one laughable, insofar as it consists of being seen as or doing something unjust, especially if it conflicts with one's internally held philosophical principles. The *Republic* therefore provides a more detailed account of justice and the soul (only hinted at in earlier dialogues) to show why. As the above suggests, the just individual cannot be seen to lose control of his reasoning faculty without damaging his (and possibly another's) soul in the process. On the other hand, if one does have the knowledge they claim, then they can be confident and realise that to be laughed at or thought ridiculous is no matter. The current example therefore indicates that earlier reasons for incurring laughter are being expanded to include and build upon the dichotomies of knowledge and ignorance, justice and injustice, as they take shape in the *Republic*.

The passage is of further interest due to the fear of misleading others. As it continues, Socrates is still very cautious, saying that he will:

Seek to placate Adrasteia...regarding what I intend to say; for I presume it to be a lesser error if one happens to murder someone involuntarily than to be deceptive about the

things that are customarily fine, good, and just. Thus, since it is better to run this risk with enemies than with friends, you encourage me rightly. (*Resp.* 451a-b)

The preceding passage highlights how the fear of becoming the object of laughter is expanded to include not only oneself, an integral part of Socrates' relationship to laughter in earlier dialogues, but also one's friends. Here the worry about misleading others is now emphasised by setting up a contrast between involuntary killing and deliberate deception, echoing the dichotomies mentioned a moment ago. Indeed, deception about things of the greatest import such as what is fine, just, and good is situated above involuntary murder, placing further emphasis on the potential harm done to one's own or another's soul. To mislead out of pure ignorance is one thing, but to do so intentionally is another, especially if one first disclaims sure knowledge as Socrates does, and still more so if one is in the company of friends or associates. The inclusion of one's friends therefore appears to prefigure laughter's relationship to the comic in the *Philebus*. Whereas in the late period dialogue the worry is maliciously laughing at the ignorance of one's friends,¹⁴⁸ cited as an unjust act in itself, the present passage is concerned with misleading due to one's own ignorance and thereafter transferring said ignorance to them. The fact that Socrates places misleading others over involuntary murder indicates the gravity of the act,¹⁴⁹ as is the nod to *Adrasteia*, commonly a form of *Nemesis* and punisher of pride.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the idea that deceiving one's enemies is not on an equal footing suggests that like the pleasure taken in their misfortunes *per* the *Philebus*, dealing with one's enemies should be considered as being of secondary moral concern. It may therefore be argued that in showing hesitation to speak without the requisite knowledge, Socrates displays the correct and appropriate behaviour befitting both a philosopher and a just individual, exhibiting continuity with his profession of ignorance and his sentiments towards laughter, justice, and the soul in earlier dialogues.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ See pp. 20-1 above.

¹⁴⁹ Moore 1999, 329 suggests that Socrates' warnings mean he "is aware that he leads them into all the dangers of the conflict between philosophy and city, including exile and death," though he also notes the more important fault of being found in error.

¹⁵⁰ Halliwell 1993, 137; Cooper 1997, 1079, n. 4; Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 450, n. 6.

¹⁵¹ Halliwell 1993, 136 indicates that the "residue, in Plato's middle-period dialogues, of an authentically Socratic combination of indefatigable commitment to enquiry, with a personal disavowal of knowledge or wisdom" is inadequate. Rather, it should be seen as Plato's own dramatic indication of the exploratory nature of his own work. The present study does not disagree with this comment, as it merely notes the continuity the

Interestingly enough, in reply, Glaucon laughs good-naturedly (*γελάσας*) (*Resp.* 451b), displaying an appropriate response of his own.¹⁵²

The second example occurs in Book Six. It is found within a discussion pertaining to the nature and content of the prospective guardian's education, with knowledge of the Form of the Good posited as the most important. There are some, however, who are said to claim this knowledge yet cannot adequately give a definition without appealing to certain examples relating to the Good. These people are labelled ridiculous (*γελοῖως*), and many serious disputes have arisen as a result of their shortcomings (*Resp.* 505b-d). On the contrary, a guardian, if he or she is to rule, will be able to do so without becoming laughable or causing a disagreement (*Resp.* 505e). Glaucon finds this all very agreeable but wants to know what Socrates himself thinks about the Good, for he does not think it is right for him to relate what others think without giving his own thoughts on the matter. Socrates asks if it is right for one to speak on matters of which they have no knowledge, noting that "opinions formed without knowledge are all a disgrace (*αἰσχραῖ*)" (*Resp.* 506b-c).¹⁵³ But Glaucon presses on, satisfied to hear Socrates discuss the Good as he has done justice and the other virtues. Socrates replies:

I too shall be well and truly satisfied, my friend, although I'm afraid I won't be up to it: in my eagerness I'll be a laughing-stock for my disgraceful behaviour (*προθυμούμενος δὲ ἀσχημονῶν γέλωτα ὀφλήσω*)...let's give up trying to find out for the moment what the Good is in itself. You see, to get even as far as my present state of thinking seems more than our present approach can manage. I'm willing to say what I think is the offspring of the Good and what resembles it most closely...But take care that I don't unintentionally mislead you in any way by giving you a false account of the offspring. (*Resp.* 506d-7a)¹⁵⁴

As in the previous example, Socrates once again discloses the worry of incurring laughter for forming an opinion without the requisite knowledge, this time about the Good itself. Unlike those he describes above, he acknowledges the limitations of his own knowledge but is

Socrates of the *Republic* shares with the character of Socrates in the early dialogues and his relationship with laughter, which is being developed in this middle period dialogue.

¹⁵² Indeed, Long 2007, 185-6 aptly notes that "of those present, only Glaucon is capable of laughing with, as opposed to at, Socrates...[and] it is with Glaucon that Socrates introduces the most radical and ridiculous suggestions of the *Republic*, suggestions that he is willing to present only to one who is capable of laughing."

¹⁵³ Translation taken from Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 83.

¹⁵⁴ Translation taken from Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 85.

willing to continue the conversation with regard to what he thinks may be the case with lesser objects of knowledge, what he calls “the offspring of the Good.” Thus, he mirrors the Socrates of earlier dialogues and the *Phaedo* too, regarding the worry about becoming a laughing-stock in one’s own eyes. The worry is also transferred to those present, for, as Socrates adds, he is still wary about misleading them and giving them a false account. At least now, having well and truly prefaced what will follow, Socrates can be sure that he has removed any intentionality on his part, which was the concern in the example from Book Five.

The final example occurs in Book Seven. It appears in relation to further discussion regarding the education of the guardians and the suitability of someone who would become one via the study of philosophy. Socrates explains that there are some who, in claiming to practise the discipline, are currently giving philosophy a bad name. He says:

The reason that philosophy has fallen into such ill-repute, is, as I said before, because it is unworthy people who take it up. It should not have been bastards who took it up, but people of genuine pedigree...(*Resp.* 535c)

And therefore:

We ourselves must take great care in all these instances since, if we bring those who are sound in body and mind to study and train on such a scale and educate them, justice itself will not reproach us and we shall preserve our state and constitution. But if we introduce other types to all this, we shall achieve the complete opposite and we shall inundate philosophy with even greater ridicule (*πλείω γέλωτα*).

That would be a disgrace (*αἰσχρὸν*), he said.

It certainly would, I said. I think I’m the object of ridicule even now (*γελοῖον δ’ ἔγωγε καὶ ἐν τῷ παρόντι τι ἔοικα παθεῖν*).

In what way, he asked.

I forgot we were just having fun (*ἐπαίζομεν*), I said, and I spoke with too much intensity. While I caught sight of philosophy and seeing her so unworthily being dragged through the mire I think I was irritated and, being angry with the perpetrators, as it were, said what I said too seriously.

Oh no, by Zeus, he said, not to my ears, anyway.

Well, that’s how it sounded to me as the speaker. (*Resp.* 536a-c)¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Both translations taken from Emllyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 183-5.

In contrast to the examples cited above, the worry about becoming laughable does not stem from the possibility of misleading oneself or others due to unsound or opinion-based knowledge, but rather for speaking out of irritation and anger. Socrates remonstrates himself for what appears to be the only example in the Platonic dialogues in which the philosopher seriously confesses to a loss of self-control. In terms of the tripartite soul, Socrates would be admitting that the spirited part has joined forces with the appetitive in order to supersede his reason. Socrates therefore believes himself to be worthy of ridicule. Once again, Socrates reiterates the worry of becoming a laughing-stock in one's own eyes, this time for the uncharacteristic failure to provide a good-natured and reasonable response to the current ill-repute of philosophy. Indeed, like Socrates' claim about his upcoming trial in the *Euthyphro* and whether or not the time spent in court will produce a positive outcome,¹⁵⁶ the presence of *παίζω* contrasts with the seriousness of the passage. By exceeding the bounds of play, Socrates concludes that any such laughter directed towards his person would be appropriate. Glaucon, however, is unwilling to assent. Socrates' concern indicates that the internalisation of laughter and ridicule is still significant as one moves into Plato's middle period.

The example is relevant in one further way: it looks past the Socrates character to give the reader an insight into the perceived state of philosophy from the perspective of a philosopher. As this study has been attempting to demonstrate, Plato develops a response in his dialogues to the supposed shame of being a philosopher, which has been imposed from the outside. Indeed, one can see that Plato goes to great lengths to show that it need not be a shameful thing. But as the above passage communicates, the discipline is being inundated with laughter and ridicule because it is not being approached in the right way. Thus, just as Socrates was misrepresented and unjustly condemned in the early period dialogues, so too is philosophy in the middle period *Republic*. Something is therefore needed to rectify the problem, stated here as the proper selection process and education of potential guardians. With those most naturally-suited to the discipline taking up philosophy, it would no longer receive inappropriate laughter and condemnation.

In developing his conception of justice and the soul, Plato is able to continue to show that neither the philosopher nor philosophy (if done correctly) should be comic or worthy of laughter. Each of these examples support the claim that Plato continues to develop the worry of being or becoming the object of laughter in his middle period.

¹⁵⁶ See pp. 30-1 above.

The Risible and Resounding Laughter of the Cave

The aim of this section is to demonstrate how Plato expands his treatment of the object of laughter via his cave allegory. In the first place, I seek to relate why the other citizens will react with laughter and contempt (in varying degrees) to the idea of the philosopher-guardian. Such a figure is abstracted in the allegory, shifting the spotlight from the centralised Socrates character to the philosopher in general. Secondly, I show that the philosopher's reaction is held in check by, and is in keeping with, the dialogue's definition of justice and explication of the soul. And thirdly, I illustrate that it is also congruent with the non-malicious approach to philosophical discussion we have seen Plato's Socrates demonstrate in Book One of the *Republic*, *Euthyphro*, and elsewhere.

At *Resp.* 474b the dialogue is given over to defining and establishing what is meant by a philosopher-guardian. The stated purpose is to defend the view that those most naturally-suited to become philosophers will just as naturally be most suited to rule. A true philosopher is defined as one who ardently pursues wisdom in its entirety and loves to observe truth (*Resp.* 475b-e). Such truths are, of course, the Forms (e.g. Justice or Beauty itself). Only a select few, however, will reach these epistemic heights, for, without philosophical training, the majority of people will only ever apprehend justice or beauty in certain acts or representations. This allows Socrates to generate a distinction between knowledge and belief (i.e. opinion; δόξα), corresponding respectively to that which exists and that which constitutes a middle ground between what may or may not exist (*Resp.* 476d-8b). Those who truly pursue philosophy in order to gain knowledge of the Forms therefore fall into the former category and are labelled as such. Those who do not have the requisite nature and merely claim they pursue it, and thereafter bring philosophy into disrepute, fall into the latter and are labelled lovers of opinion. But when given this label they are said to be prone to anger. Glaucon remarks, however, that such anger would not be appropriate, for one should not get upset by the truth (*Resp.* 480a).¹⁵⁷ Because the majority of people cannot be led to consider and accept the Forms as the true measures of reality, most people cannot be philosophers, and

¹⁵⁷ While Plato places emphasis on the proclivity of the non-philosopher to be quick to anger when challenged, Halliwell 1993, 201 also draws attention to the fact that although the philosopher will be ruled and governed by reason and the intellect, he or she will still show a strong appetite or passion towards their education and learning. The difference between the two is constantly portrayed as an ability to combine appetites, passions, and reason to good, not ill, effect, both within oneself and the wider community.

because of this, Socrates argues, they will disparage those who correctly and appropriately pursue the discipline (*Resp.* 493e-4a).¹⁵⁸

The discussion concerning the contrasting natures of the all too few true philosophers and the many lovers of opinion foreshadows its dramatic illustration in the allegory of the cave. Via the image of a set of chained prisoners (i.e. the non-philosophers) viewing shadows cast upon the cave's wall, which they believe to be true instantiations of reality, Socrates contrasts the philosopher's experience of ascending from the cave to view reality in its truest form. The process mirrors both the philosopher's education and the soul's journey upward to the intelligible realm and final object of contemplation, the Form of the Good. Through various stages of representation and understanding, the philosopher will finally attain knowledge of the Good, allowing him to know that which ultimately gives existence and truth to all things, therefore making him the best and just ruler (*Resp.* 514a-17c). The one caveat is that the former cave-dweller, if he is to be most-suited to philosophise and rule concurrently, must, as a result of his knowledge of the Good, and in conjunction with the *Republic's* harmonic definition of justice, return to the darkness of the cave (*Resp.* 519d-20b).¹⁵⁹ Returning, however, means enduring laughter and hostility from the many who have not made the upward journey.

Laughter is at the core of the philosopher's return. It is a reaction to his inability to recognise the shadowy images of the cave. Indeed, while those who have never left the cave will discern them with ease, in returning to the cave from the light above the philosopher's sight is now impaired. Due to the time it takes for his eyes to readjust, Socrates asks: "would he not set the others laughing?" (ἄρ' οὐ γέλωτ' ἄν παράσχοι) (*Resp.* 517a).¹⁶⁰ If the philosopher then attempts to share with them the knowledge he has acquired on his journey, Socrates explains that the prisoners would think that:

In going up to the top he had come back with his eyesight ruined and that it wasn't worth even attempting to go up there? And, if they could somehow get their hands on him and kill

¹⁵⁸ For further discussion on the distinction Plato makes between the philosopher and the non-philosopher see Cross and Woosley 1966, 138-65; Lucas and Mitchell 2003, 45-55.

¹⁵⁹ For a discussion concerning whether the philosopher's return undermines the dialogue's attempt to show that justice is always in one's best interests see Kraut 1999.

¹⁶⁰ Translation taken from Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 115.

him, wouldn't they put the man to death who had tried to free them and lead them upward?
(*Resp.* 517a)¹⁶¹

As this study has shown, misrepresentation can have unfortunate consequences, although the Socrates of the early period dismisses them, preferring to be seen as making just and beneficial decisions which do not betray his philosophical principles. The newly enlightened philosopher finds himself in a similar position. At first, the prisoners' laughter is good-natured (use of γέλως) and is directed at the philosopher's seemingly comical efforts to readjust to the darkness of the cave. However, in attempting to convey what he has seen in the light above, whether out of their own ignorance or fear, they quickly descend into anger and call for his death. The scene therefore displays a further similarity with the *Euthyphro* insofar as Socrates remarks on what can happen if laughter exceeds the bounds of good-naturedness and play. While the philosopher's claims to knowledge make him seem a laughable figure and even a threat, their laughter is characterised as an inappropriate reaction, for, in their ignorance and anger, the prisoners cannot be said to apply reason to why they laugh.

But Socrates is also conscious that the philosopher will actually seem truly laughable. Indeed, the philosopher who has contemplated true reality and is then brought back to human affairs will behave and act in an unseemly fashion and he really does appear utterly ridiculous (σφόδρα γελοῖος) (*Resp.* 517d-e). But again the reaction is cited as irrational. Socrates explains that:

If one had any sense...one would remember that there are two ways in which the eyes become confused, and from two causes: when you move from light into darkness and from darkness into light. Bearing in mind that the very same thing happens in the soul, when you see it bewildered and unable to see something clearly, you would not laugh irrationally (οὐκ ἂν ἀλογίστως γελῶ), but would inquire whether in coming in from a brighter life it is plunged into darkness because it's not used to this, or when moving out of greater ignorance into a clearer life it is overwhelmed by a more dazzling glare; and so one would consider the former happy as a result of his experience and life, and one would feel sorry for the latter, even if he wanted to laugh at him (καὶ εἰ γελᾶν ἐπ' αὐτῇ βούλοιο), his laughter (ὁ γέλως αὐτῶ) would

¹⁶¹ Translation taken from Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 115.

be less absurd (ἥττον ἂν καταγέλαστος) than at the one which has moved from above out of the light. (*Resp.* 518a-b)¹⁶²

Instead of laughing at the philosopher who has just returned, Socrates explains that the prisoners should actually take his apparent ignorance, which admittedly appears comic, as but a temporary state of confusion. Whereas the one who has already contemplated the Good merely needs time to readjust,¹⁶³ another, who is only just beginning their ascent would seem even more ridiculous.¹⁶⁴ Socrates therefore relates the degree to which any such laughter would be appropriate or inappropriate. Both may inspire laughter, but when it comes from a place of ignorance it should be considered an irrational response. In contrast, nowhere in the allegory is the philosopher depicted as retaliating in kind. Safe in the knowledge and experience of the true images of reality, the philosopher no longer has to rely on opinion and belief, nor will he feel any need to respond in anger and laugh maliciously at those with lesser knowledge.¹⁶⁵

The case for the philosopher's non-malicious response is strengthened by a consideration of two further instances in the *Republic* prior to the cave allegory. They will be useful for demonstrating the affinity the philosopher of the cave has with Socrates' approach to philosophical discourse, as well as the discussion regarding φθόνος and the comic in the later *Philebus*. The first appears in Book One, where an argument put forward by Socrates seeks to undermine Thrasymachus' claim that immorality or injustice is a human excellence (i.e. ἀρετή). Lucas and Mitchell point out that it does so by introducing the idea of virtue as a μέτριον or mean, whereby the just man will do no more than what is necessary to complete a right action, while the unjust man, if his goal is to do what is in his best interests, will try to

¹⁶² Translation taken from Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 119.

¹⁶³ Indeed, once the philosopher has acclimatised to the darkness they will see infinitely better than everyone else for they have knowledge of what the images are of; *Resp.* 520c.

¹⁶⁴ Such a person is like the prisoner who has just been released and forced to look, firstly into the light of the fire in the cave, and thereafter the light of the sun (*Resp.* 515c-6a). Indeed, it is easy to make a comparison with Socrates' interlocutors in the early period dialogues who have been reduced to *aporia*. The pleasure and pain of the prisoner's ascent is covered by Warren 2014, 29-32.

¹⁶⁵ Naas 2016, 17-8 is therefore able to note that for Plato the crucial difference between the philosopher and non-philosopher is the ability to recognise "what may *seem* funny to the uninstructed or the multitude and what the one who knows knows *to be* funny." And, moreover, that "if the multitude laughs, as Socrates says, "unthinkingly," then there remains, it seems, the possibility of another laughter, a "thinking" laughter, one that would be accompanied not by scorn but, perhaps, by a kind of understanding if not pity."

outdo or overreach (πλέον ἔχειν) his just counterpart (*Resp.* 349b-50c).¹⁶⁶ By introducing this idea, Lucas and Mitchell suggest, Socrates is able to demonstrate that the unjust individual adheres to no referential standard by which an action may be judged right or wrong and so competes with others without the regulation of reason.¹⁶⁷ It is possible to see the same idea at work in the cave allegory. Socrates relates how the philosopher, when in the intelligible realm above, will recall his former life in the cave, where the prisoners are said to distribute honours and rewards amongst themselves to whoever is able to discern best or predict the order of the shadowy images (*Resp.* 516c-d). However, because the prisoners' knowledge is limited to representations, their referential standard of any one thing must be arrived at by mere opinion, whereas the philosopher, having contemplated the Good, now has no reason to compete with or outdo his fellows and will shun any such honours or rewards (*Resp.* 516d).¹⁶⁸

The second appears at *Resp.* 499b-500c and conveys the likelihood of philosophers becoming rulers with respect to the public perception of philosophy. No state or individual, Socrates explains, will ever become good unless those few who are most-suited to philosophy become rulers by some chance event or compulsion, or those who are already in power are taken over by a true love of philosophy. Socrates maintains that such an occurrence is not unreasonable, though if it were, then any laughter directed towards them would be appropriate (δικαίως καταγελώμεθα) (*Resp.* 499b-c). But the majority of people are characterised by Adeimantus as unlikely to share these sentiments (*Resp.* 499d). Socrates replies they should not be so quick to condemn the many, for he says that:

They'll no doubt come to a different opinion, if instead of indulging your love of victory at their expense, you soothe them and try to remove their slanderous prejudice against the love of learning, by pointing out what you mean by a philosopher and by defining the philosophic nature and way of life...so that they'll realise that you don't mean the same people as they do...or do you think that anyone who is gentle and without malice is harsh with someone who is neither irritable nor malicious (ἢ οἶει τινὰ χαλεπαίνειν τῷ μὴ χαλεπῷ ἢ φθονεῖν τῷ

¹⁶⁶ Lucas and Mitchell 2003, 11.

¹⁶⁷ Lucas and Mitchell 2003, 12.

¹⁶⁸ Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 114-5, n. 6 explain that Plato likens the philosopher's thoughts to those of the shade of Achilles in Homer's *Odyssey*, who tells Odysseus he would rather "be a slave tending a field for someone else, a person of no renown" (*Od.* 11.489-90), to reinforce his non-competitive nature. Interestingly enough, they had excised this passage earlier as untrue and unhelpful; *Resp.* 386c.

φθονερῶ ἄφθονόν τε καὶ πρᾶον ὄντα;)?...Then don't you also agree that the harshness the majority exhibit towards philosophy is caused by those outsiders who don't belong and who've burst in like a band of revellers, always abusing one another, indulging their love of quarrels, and arguing about human beings in a way that is wholly inappropriate to philosophy?...No one whose thoughts are truly directed towards the things that are, Adeimantus, has the leisure to look down at human affairs or be filled with envy (φθόνου) and hatred by competing with people. (*Resp.* 499a-500b)¹⁶⁹

The true philosopher is reiterated as one who will not attempt to outdo or compete with his fellow man. The problem is that the majority of people have not seen a true philosopher. Socrates points out how the many's perception of philosophy is at present limited to the kind of eristic wordplay and argumentation Plato transmits in his *Euthydemus*. If instead of attempting to merely win an argument or confuse an interlocutor, the true philosopher acts more like the Platonic Socrates of the early period dialogues, who via his profession of ignorance reduces himself to the level of his interlocutor (analogous to returning to the cave), a joint spirit of inquiry may be allowed to flourish. Indeed, because the true philosopher will have contemplated the Form of the Good, he will be without malice and gentle with those who have lesser knowledge, thus establishing a reciprocal relationship between ruler and ruled. Moreover, as a result of their education and training, the philosopher will simply have no need to show any sign of φθόνοϛ towards their affairs. The philosopher's return to the cave shall therefore be congruent with both Socrates' non-malicious approach to philosophy, and the conception of laughter in the later *Philebus* and *Laws*. Even though the threat of laughter, hostility, and death is present in his return, the philosopher knows that the non-philosopher laughs without reason or understanding.

The distinction made between the laughter and reactions of the non-philosopher and the philosopher in the cave allegory displays many similarities with earlier and later dialogues. In terms of the early dialogues, the allegory discusses what it means to be the object of laughter, continuing to build upon Socrates' statement in the *Euthyphro* that it may perhaps be of little consequence. But it also starts to shift one's focus to what it means to be the subject, insofar as one gains an insight into why the prisoners laugh at the seemingly comic philosopher. When the laughter of the cave allegory is applied to the wider arguments of the *Republic*, as well as the early and late period dialogues this study considers, similarities emerge with respect to the Socratic method, the nature of malice and the comic, and, as will

¹⁶⁹ Translation taken from Grube, revised by Reeve 1997, 1121.

become apparent in the final section below, the appropriateness of comedy for a just and ordered society.

Laughter and Comedy in the Ideal State

This final section will give further attention to what it means to be the subject of laughter. An assessment of select passages from Books Two, Three, Nine, and Ten, in which laughter, or the pleasure derived from viewing imitative performance (including comedy), reveals how Plato continues to develop his middle period position on laughter. This section therefore specifically seeks to link the arguments regarding laughter, pleasure, and comedy in the *Republic* forward to the late period dialogues *Philebus* and *Laws*.

Plato's treatment of the one who laughs or views the comic spectacle is most evident in Books Nine and Ten of the *Republic*. Book Nine begins by purporting to discuss the tyrannical man's state of soul and how it is affected by pleasure and desire (*Resp.* 571a-b). The inquiry stands to further the contrast between the just and the unjust man (and by analogy, the state), as well as the importance of why those most suited to rule should be philosophers. Moreover, it encapsulates the question of what constitutes the best kind of life (*Resp.* 578c). The just are said to keep their pleasures in check through the law, along with the reasoning and spirited part of their soul, while the unjust experience the opposite (*Resp.* 571b-c). The tyrannical man therefore lives in a constant state of slavery and flux. Unable to satiate his desire nor slake his thirst for pleasure, he lives without any sense of harmony within his soul. By analogy, then, the disharmony and bad governance within himself reflects that of the state, made worse still if such a man is by chance compelled to rule (*Resp.* 576b-80a). Book Nine establishes more explicitly the idea that if pleasure is to be considered a good for man, it cannot be enjoyed in excess nor sought after and regulated without the aid of reason.

This notion of pleasure is then broadened by applying it more explicitly to the tripartite model of state and soul, with each part given its own kind of pleasure. The appetitive is designated the pleasure derived from money and profit, the spirited that of success and honour, and reason that of wisdom and learning (*Resp.* 580d-1c). One's pleasure is therefore derived from whichever part one is governed by. Because, however, reason is given pride of place in the *Republic*, the pleasure the philosopher derives from the contemplation of the Forms is judged most true, while the pleasure of the others is judged

according to their respective place in the tripartite scheme (*Resp.* 582a-d). Pain is then introduced and placed in opposition to pleasure, and, most importantly, a point between the two is also agreed upon in which the individual feels neither pleasure nor pain, a point whereby the soul experiences harmony (*Resp.* 583c). Yet only the philosopher, having contemplated the Good, will ever experience this harmonic state, all others will only believe they are either moving away from or towards that which they judge to be painful or pleasant (*Resp.* 584e-5a).¹⁷⁰ Socrates pronounces that:

If it's a pleasure, then, to be filled with the things that are appropriate to one's nature, satisfying those things which are in actual fact more real would make us rejoice with true pleasure in greater reality and more truly. But that which has a smaller share of reality would be less truly and assuredly filled and would have a less trustworthy and less true pleasure. (*Resp.* 585d-e)

In other words, the philosophers, through their experience and knowledge of true reality, will experience an appropriate dose of pleasure, whereas those who lack this knowledge will, in their ignorance, be mistaken regarding the magnitude and truth of the pleasure or pain they feel. The majority of people (i.e. those who are governed by the appetitive part of their soul), then, never apply reason to what they experience and live with a continually fluctuating mixture of pleasure and pain. Thus, the one who follows and is governed by reason will capitalise on the amount of pleasure most appropriate to him.¹⁷¹ Indeed, unlike the tyrannical man, whose soul remains constantly at the whim of its appetitive part and so is at furthest remove from law and order, the reasoning, just, and self-controlled man, will be closest (*Resp.* 586d-7b). In Book Ten, Plato applies such thinking to the spectator of a comic performance.

In the final book of the *Republic* Plato turns to the issue of laughter in relation to both the comic (τὸ γελοῖον) and the moral psychology related above. Having described each part

¹⁷⁰ On the validity of Plato's argument see Cross and Woosley 1966, 264-9.

¹⁷¹ For a detailed (and compelling) discussion of Plato's arguments on pleasure in Book Nine, see Russell 2005, 106-37. Russell argues for a conception of pleasure and the good life that is directive (i.e. happiness rests on one's ability to use intelligence or wisdom to make one's whole life good) rather than additive (i.e. happiness rests on one's ability to use intelligence and wisdom to make certain dimensions of one's life good). For Russell (and by extension Plato), pleasure is an integral part of the good life and must be sought after in an appropriately reasonable and holistic fashion.

of the soul with respect to justice, pleasure, and order, Socrates now moves for the dismissal of all imitative poetry from the ideal state.¹⁷² The reason given is that it will corrupt the minds of its audience who will be unable to distinguish between the images on stage and the reality they represent (*Resp.* 595a-b).¹⁷³ Indeed, like the unjust and tyrannical man, imitative poetry is as far removed from reality as his soul is from law and order (*Resp.* 597e). The problem is therefore that the imitative poet appeals to the lowest part of the soul (*Resp.* 603a).¹⁷⁴ Socrates applies this firstly to tragedy. He expresses the concern that only a very few people are reasonable enough to “calculate that enjoyment from the sufferings of others is bound to strike nearer home” (*Resp.* 606b).¹⁷⁵ Socrates then applies this to comedic performance:

Doesn't the same thing apply to the comical (τοῦ γελοίου)? Because, if there are jokes that you would be ashamed to tell yourself (ἂν αὐτὸς αἰσχύνοιο γελωτοποιῶν), but which you would enjoy very much if you heard them in a comic imitation or even in private, and you would enjoy them and not revile them as worthless, aren't you doing the same thing as you would where pity is invoked? You see again that part of you that wants to play the fool (γελωποιοεῖν) and which you repressed through reason for fear of being thought a buffoon, you now let out freely and making it strong you don't often realise you have been betrayed into creating the comedy yourself. (*Resp.* 606c)

By virtue of comedy existing at such a remove from reality, the pleasure, that is, the laughter, of viewing the comic is enjoyed without the governance of reason. As we have seen, in order for an individual's soul to be well-functioning and harmonic, the highest part of the soul must be appealed to. The argument here is that comedy undermines this process. In taking pleasure at the comic spectacle, the individual is not only laughing at a mere representation of τὸ

¹⁷² The present study is not concerned to cover or engage with the much-studied problem of mimesis in Plato further. For a sampling of those who do see Cross and Woosley 1966, 270-87; Golden 1975; Halliwell 1988, 110, 116; Halliwell 2002, 1-148; Janaway 2006, 390-6; Moss 2007; Marusic 2011.

¹⁷³ Halliwell 1988, 107 notes how Plato makes use of terminology here which carry a physical sense of maiming or mutilating to create an analogy for mental deformity and psychological damage.

¹⁷⁴ Plato includes in his argument against mimetic poetry the possibility that those who are governed by reason, i.e. philosophers, may still be affected by the highly emotional and dramatic representations of the tragedians, comedians, or Homer; Halliwell 1988, 143-53; Janaway 2006, 394-6; Destree 2012, 128-32.

¹⁷⁵ Naas 2016, 21.

γελοῖον, they are also betraying themselves into letting their appetitive part take control.¹⁷⁶ While something may seem laughable (for example, the philosopher's return to the cave), without the aid of reason the comic image is merely a misrepresentation and so generates a disproportional response. The pleasure is therefore a false one, generated by the unfettered desire to laugh at obscene or risqué jokes or figures previously thought shameful and suppressed by reason. Comic laughter disrupts harmony of soul, thereafter inducing ignorance; in this instance, ignorance regarding the reason why they themselves have been deceived into becoming laughable.¹⁷⁷

The *Republic* also contains conceptual links with the *Laws*. As detailed above,¹⁷⁸ the *Laws*' treatment of comedy focusses largely on its potential for education. In short, comedy must adhere strictly to its usefulness as a teaching device and be limited to inducing playful and appropriate laughter. While the spotlight in the *Republic* is placed more heavily upon the arts in general, laughter still generates similar concerns, located in Books Two and Three. However, whereas the *Laws* concerns the education of the whole community, the *Republic* is much more interested in the educational programme of the prospective philosopher-guardians.¹⁷⁹ At a young age, the arts, and stories (μύθοι) in particular, are said to help secure the intended character of an individual (*Resp.* 377a). They must therefore be as accurate as possible when portraying gods and heroes, who cannot be seen at war or conflicting with one another. Rather, at the earliest stage possible, the potential guardians must hear stories which spur them towards virtue (*Resp.* 378c-e). Indeed, by the end of Book Two, the importance of the philosopher's ability to distinguish between falsehood and reality is already becoming apparent. Thus, as in the *Laws*, the avoidance of ignorance is held up as an essential ingredient of one's education.

¹⁷⁶ Halliwell 2008, 300 speaks of Plato's concern with comedy as an ability to "lure" one into casting off their normal standards of behaviour and allowing their appetitive part to "gratify itself vicariously in the indecent gelotopoeic antics of the stage figures." See also Halliwell 1988, 149-50 where he notes that Plato means for us to see how "comedy induces us to become *makers*, not just enjoyers, of humour [and therefore] it is assumed that the impulse behind laughter is one which naturally channels itself into positive indulgence in comedy." In this sense, Plato seems to think that comedy has the power to psychologically degrade us.

¹⁷⁷ But see Brock 1990, 42-9 for a study of Plato's own use of comedic techniques.

¹⁷⁸ See pp. 22-6 above.

¹⁷⁹ It is not until Book Ten that the effects of the arts (i.e. epic and drama) appear to be extended to the wider population. Cf. Kamtekar 2008, 347-8 who points out that although this aspect of Plato's educational programme is unclear, it "would seem difficult (and pointless) to exclude them. To know their place in society, they would need to hear the Noble Lie (414b-415d), and some of them might turn out to be guardian material."

Laughter comes under greater scrutiny in Book Three. It is stated that the potential philosopher-guardians should not be overly fond of laughter (οὐδὲ φιλογέλωτας) (*Resp.* 388e). Socrates gives the reason that:

Generally, when anyone gives way to violent laughter (ἰσχυρῶ γέλωτι), then such behaviour is likely to lead to a violent reaction...nor must we accept it when someone portrays men who deserve respect being overcome by laughter (κρατουμένους ὑπὸ γέλωτος), and even less so if they are gods. (*Resp.* 388e-9a)¹⁸⁰

The concern is with providing an inappropriate model of behaviour for the prospective guardians. Socrates draws attention to the idea that laughter, if enjoyed in excess, leads to a loss of self-control, a “violent reaction.” If potential guardians were then to witness a figure (be he man or god) whom they are supposedly being taught to respect, indulging in laughter without the necessary limitations, then the above concern regarding the ability to discern falsehood and truth will be rendered ineffectual. Passages from Homer will therefore have to be excised so as not to deceive the young with respect to the proper and just conduct of oneself (*Resp.* 389a). Moreover, as in the *Laws*, where slaves and hired foreigners shall be given the most ridiculous parts of comedy to imitate, the parts of drama thought undesirable for the young guardians to imitate shall be given to women or men of bad character, so that the young guardians would be ashamed if they were to follow them (*Resp.* 387e-8a).¹⁸¹

Concluding Remarks

This chapter set out to demonstrate how the *Republic* allows us to appreciate the coherence and development of Plato’s treatment of laughter in the early and late period dialogues. As such, it attempted to trace the development of a middle period position on laughter. Via developments regarding the character of Socrates, the issue of justice, the characterisation of the philosopher, and the model of the soul, it is possible to observe such a position. With reference to the object, the idea of becoming laughable to oneself is still very much apparent, but is now expanded to include others. In several examples the character of Socrates conveys

¹⁸⁰ Translation taken from Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, 233.

¹⁸¹ For further discussion on the continuities and discontinuities between the *Republic*’s and the *Laws* treatment of these passages see Folch 2015, 197-202.

how the harm done to one's own or another's soul, due to the inability to use one's reason, outweighs any potential laughter one may incur. Being or becoming the object is given further treatment in the famous cave allegory, which serves to entrench what is meant by the philosopher and the non-philosopher, as well as the dichotomy of knowledge and ignorance. Through the allegory Plato illustrates the philosopher's return to the affairs of man from the intelligible realm of the Forms, where he will incur laughter, ridicule, and hostility. At the same time, however, it also demonstrates why such abuse is tolerable. The cave allegory therefore serves a dual purpose in that it begins to pivot towards the psychology of the one who laughs, a main focus of the late period dialogues.

The subject is given further treatment in the critique of the arts. Indeed, when the *Republic's* evolved notions of reason and the soul are placed alongside the criticism of imitative poetry, it is possible to see how Plato arrives at his late period position on laughter. Just as laughter inspired by ignorance in the *Philebus* is reflective of a disharmony in one's soul, so too is the *Republic's* critique of comedic performance; the main likeness is that one is incapable of applying reason to pleasure. Because comedy serves to undermine one's reasoning about what is laughable, it must be outlawed. As for parity with the *Laws*, the critique of comedy in Book Ten, unlike what is found in Books Two and Three, involves its effect on the wider community and not simply the education of the guardians. However, whereas the *Laws* can see the potential benefits of comedy if regulated by reasonable legislation, the *Republic* cannot. The *Republic* therefore carries over important ideas surrounding the reception of laughter and ridicule from the early period dialogues and anticipates those which appear in the late.

Conclusion

The dialogues considered in this thesis suggest that Plato takes the phenomenon of laughter seriously. Save for the *Philebus*' discussion of the comic, laughter is never subjected to a formal inquiry as such (i.e. in the shape of a τί ἐστὶ question), but it nevertheless proves to be a constant and recurring feature of the dialogues. Indeed, close readings of select dialogues from Plato's early, middle, and late periods, reveal a nuanced and systematic Platonic position on laughter.

When placed within a developmental framework, the above sampling of dialogues has made it abundantly clear that, for Plato, laughter is not just some culturally-generated anxiety, something which proves to be opaque to reason, nor is it merely a naturally-occurring human emotion or response. It is in fact philosophically relevant. The late period dialogues give us a conception of appropriate and inappropriate laughter, which in turn reflects the common Platonic dichotomy of reason and ignorance. The *Philebus* certainly indicates that laughter should not be simply labelled some kind of unruly pleasure in and of itself. Plato is evidently keen to show that, when combined with reason, laughter can be a very pleasant experience and may even prove fruitful within the context of philosophical discussion. It is a position we have seen the Platonic Socrates intimate as early as the *Euthyphro*. But appropriate laughter also has a problematic counterpart. While Socrates can state that derisive laughter may perhaps be of little consequence (for there are greater things at stake), such laughter contains inherently dangerous consequences when combined with ignorance. For the simple reason, then, that Plato equates inappropriate laughter with ignorance, the laughter and ridicule directed towards Socrates, and later towards the philosopher and philosophy more generally, is largely designated as being of this kind. These references indicate Plato is most certainly aware that the multitude really has no idea about what philosophy is or what the role of the philosopher in society may be, nor that he attempts to be a force for good, despite the rigorous critiques he makes. In their ignorance, they view philosophy as something childish or shameful, useless for preparing the citizen for public and private life. To them, it is the philosopher who is ignorant and so he becomes a comic figure.

But Plato does not let the philosopher retaliate in kind. Throughout the dialogues considered in this thesis, he consistently places the malice, envy, or φθόνος of the non-philosopher, the multitude, and the sophist, against the non-malicious methods of Socrates and the enlightened philosopher who returns to the cave. The former are like those described

in the *Philebus* whose ignorance is combined with power or strength: such people can do bad things to you (Socrates says as much when he tells Meletus that his death will not be the end-result of his indictment, but rather the φθόνος of the many). Inappropriate laughter can be deadly serious. And yet, in order to show that the philosopher seeks to do good, that he does not harbour ill-will against his fellow citizens, he must never allow him to engage in malicious conduct. Such behaviour will only make the philosopher a καταγέλαστος and bring the discipline into further disrepute. Plato is very clear on this, so clear that his Socrates is willing to make himself γελοῖος, to incur laughter without reprisal, for the sake of bettering the individual. Socrates' profession of ignorance is therefore of vital importance for promoting the benevolence of the discipline.

The ability to willingly make oneself γελοῖος is necessary to show that one is able to laugh appropriately. In the dialogues surveyed in this thesis Socrates is never seen to outright laugh at his interlocutor. He may engage in irony and play but nowhere is he presented as doing so with malicious intent. Indeed, Socrates is always conscious of when such behaviour is beginning to exceed the bounds of good-naturedness and play (see his description of the sophist brothers' eristics in the *Euthydemus* or the speed with which he checks himself for his uncharacteristic loss of self-control in the *Republic*). Socrates' methods show that laughing at an ignorant interlocutor will get him nowhere while playfully laughing with them or incurring laughter at his own expense may at the very least elicit a reasonable response. Safe in the knowledge of his own ignorance, Socrates, who stands in for the philosopher *par excellence*, shows that ignorance need not be a bad thing, as long as one is willing to recognise it. Like the one who returns to the cave, the philosopher must endure laughter and ridicule to show that he is benevolent in nature, that he attempts to place others on the path to virtue, and that he is nothing less than a benefit to both the individual and society. Plato is therefore aware of the problem philosophy poses for the non-philosopher and is actively attempting to provide a positive solution.

The final part of his solution is to develop an internalised form of laughter. Such laughter is generated whenever a certain standard of behaviour intrinsic to the philosopher is transgressed. This internalised form of laughter is therefore presented by Plato as worse than receiving laughter from the ignorant. Not only does it confirm the unjust and unjustified judgements placed upon the philosopher, it shows that he is unable to live up to the virtuous life he so eagerly attempts to usher others toward.

The ability to apply reason to pleasure is therefore necessary to enjoy laughter appropriately. Plato presents this as true for the individual, for society, and for philosophical

discussion. Reason, he believes, dissolves any malice on the part of the philosopher and allows him to endure laughter for the sake of both higher knowledge and a just and ordered society. Plato argues further that the presence of comedy makes this problematic, and so he attempts to either remove it, as we see in the *Republic*, or legislate with an educational purpose in mind, as in the *Laws*. Plato, however, is not above using comedic techniques himself, the greatest piece of evidence being his Socrates, but his comedy purports to reproduce something useful, beneficial, and true, reflective of the strictly playful and educational guidelines he places upon it in the *Laws*.

In sum, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that as Plato continues to enlarge and refine ideas pertaining to the most important philosophical questions, so too does he enlarge and refine a position on laughter.

Bibliography

Ancient

- Aristophanes 1998 *Clouds*. J. Henderson (Trans). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Cicero 1914 *De Finibus*. H. Rackham (Trans). London: Heinemann.
- Diogenes Laertius 1975 *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Vol. 1-2*. R. D. Hicks (Trans). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Euripides 1994 *Medea*. D. Kovacs (Trans). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Homer 1999 *Iliad, Vol. 1-2*. A. T. Murray (Trans). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Isocrates 1929 *Against the Sophists*. G. Norlin (Trans). London: Heinemann.
- Lucian 1961 *Dialogues of the Dead*. M. Macleod (Trans). London: Heinemann.
- 1913 *Sale of Lives*. A. M. Harmon (Trans). London: Heinemann.
- Pindar 1997 *Fragments*. W. H. Race (Trans). Suffolk: St Edmundsbury Press.
- Plato 1997 *Complete Works*. J. M. Cooper (ed.) Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company.
- 1979 *Apology of Socrates*. T. G. West (Trans). Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
 - 1914 *Crito*. H. N. Fowler (Trans). London: Heinemann.
 - 1997 *Gorgias*. D. J. Zeyl (Trans). In *Plato: Complete Works*. J. M. Cooper (ed.) Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company: 791-869.
 - 1982 *Hippias Major*. P. Woodruff (Trans). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
 - 1997 *Laws*. T. J. Saunders (Trans). In *Plato: Complete Works*. J. M. Cooper (ed.) Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company: 1318-616.
 - 1925 *Philebus*. H. N. Fowler (Trans). London: Heinemann.
 - 1972 *Philebus*. R. Hackforth (Trans). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - 1993 *Philebus*. D. Frede (Trans). Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company.
 - 1997 *Philebus*. D. Frede (Trans). In *Plato: Complete Works*. J. M. Cooper (ed.) Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company: 398-456.

- 1997 *Republic*. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Trans). In *Plato: Complete Works*. J. M. Cooper (ed.) Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company: 971-1223.
- 2013 *Republic*. C. Emlyn-Jones and W. Preddy (Trans). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Plutarch 1914 *Cato Major*. B. Perrin (Trans). London: Heinemann.

- 1919 *Alexander*. B. Perrin (Trans). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Xenophon 2103 *Apology*. O. J. Todd (Trans). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Modern

Adkins, A. W. H. 1960 *Merit and Responsibility*. London: Oxford University Press.

Altman, W. H. F. 2010 "The Reading Order of Plato's Dialogues." *Phoenix*, 64: 18-51.

Ardley, G. 1967 "The Role of Play in the Philosophy of Plato." *Philosophy*, 42: 226-44.

Austin, E. A. 2012 "Fools and Malicious Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*." *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 29: 125-39.

Barnes, J. 1987 *Early Greek Philosophy*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.

Benardete, S. 1963 "Some Misquotations of Homer in Plato." *Phronesis*, 8:173-8.

Benson, H. H. 2011 "Socratic Method." In *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*. D. R. Morrison (ed.) New York: Cambridge University Press: 179-200.

Beverlysluis, J. 2000 *Cross-Examining Socrates: A Defense of the Interlocutors in Plato's Early Dialogues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brickhouse, T. C. and Smith, N. D. 1989 *Socrates on Trial*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- 1994 *Plato's Socrates*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brock, R. 1990 "Plato and Comedy." In *Owls to Athens: Essays on Classical Subjects for Sir Kenneth Dover*. E. Craik (ed.) New York: Oxford University Press: 39-50.

Buckley, F. H. 2003 *The Morality of Laughter*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Cairns, D. L. 1993 *Αἰδώς: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Carone, G. R. 2005 *Plato's Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Cohen, S. M. 1971 "Socrates on the Definition of Piety: *Euthyphro* 10A-11B." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 9: 1-13.
- Cross, R. C. and Woosley, A. D. 1966 *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*. London: MacMillan.
- Cunliffe, R. J. 1963 *A Lexicon of Homeric Greek*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Curd, P. "Anaxagoras and the Theory of Everything." In *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*. P. Curd and D. Graham (eds.) New York: Oxford University Press: 230-49.
- D'Angour, A. 2013 "Plato and Play: Taking Education Seriously in Ancient Greece." *American Journal of Play*, 5: 293-307.
- de Vries, G. J. 1985 "Laughter in Plato's Writings." *Mnemosyne*, 38: 378-81.
- Destree, P. 2012 "Plato on Tragic and Comic Pleasures." In *Plato on Art and Beauty*. A. E. Denham (ed.) Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan: 125-41.
- Dodds, E. R. 1951 *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Dover, K. J. 1974 *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*. Bristol: Basil Blackwell.
- 1988 "The Freedom of the Intellectual in Greek Society." In *The Greeks and Their Legacy*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell: 135-58.
- Ferrari, G. R. F. 2007 "The Three-Part Soul." In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. G. R. F. Ferrari (ed.) New York: Cambridge University Press: 165-201.
- Emlyn-Jones, C. 2007 *Plato: Republic 1-2.368c4*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.
- Folch, M. 2015 *The City and the Stage*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Geach, P.T. 1966 "Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary." *The Monist*, 50: 369-82.
- Golden, L. 1975 "Plato's Concept of Mimesis." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 15: 118-31.
- Griffin, M. 1989 "Philosophy, Politics, and Politicians at Rome." In *Philosophia Togata*. J. Barnes and M. Griffin (eds.) New York: Oxford University Press: 1-37.
- Halliwel, S. 1988 *Plato: Republic 10*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
- 1991 "The Uses of Laughter in Greek Culture." *The Classical Quarterly*, 41: 279-96.
 - 1993 *Plato: Republic 5*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
 - 2002 *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.

- 2008 *Greek Laughter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hine, H. 2016 "Philosophy and *philosophi*: From Cicero to Apuleius." In *Roman Reflections: Studies in Latin Philosophy*. G. D. Williams and K. Volk (eds.) New York: Oxford University Press: 13-32.
- Hobbs, A. 2000 *Plato and the Hero*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ionescu, C. 2008 "Hybrid Varieties of Pleasure and the Complex Case of the Pleasures of Learning in Plato's *Philebus*." *Dialogue*, XLVII: 439-61.
- Irwin, T. 2006 "Socrates and Euthyphro: The Argument and its Revival." In *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays*. L. Judson and V. Karasmanis (eds.) New York: Oxford University Press: 58-71.
- Janaway, C. 2006 "Plato and the Arts." In *A Companion to Plato*. H. H. Benson (ed.) Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing: 388-400.
- Jansen, S. R. (Publication Forthcoming) "Plato on Laughing at People." *Ancient Philosophy*: 1-32.
- Jazdzewska, K. 2018 "Laughter in Plato's and Xenophon's *Symposia*." In *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies*. G. Danzig, D. Johnson, and D. Morrison (eds.) Leiden: Brill: 187-207.
- Johnson, C. N. 2005 *Socrates and the Immoralists*. Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Jorgenson, C. 2018 *The Embodied Soul in Plato's Later Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kamtekar, R. 2008 "Plato on Education and Art." In *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*. G. Fine (ed.) New York: Oxford University Press: 336-59.
- Klein, J. 1965 *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Kraut, R. 1999 "Return to the Cave: *Republic* 519-21." In *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*. G. Fine (ed.) New York: Oxford University Press: 235-54.
- Lane, M. 2000 "Socrates and Plato: An Introduction." In *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*. C. Rowe and M. Schofield (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 155-63.
- Liddell, H. G. and Scott, R. 1977 *Greek-English Lexicon*. H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie (eds.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liebersohn, Y. Z. 2015 "The Place of $\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ in Plato's *Crito*." *Illinois Classical Studies*, 40: 1-20.
- Long, A. A. 1988 "Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy." *Classical Quarterly*, 38: 150-71.

- 1996 “The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics.” In *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*. R. B. Branham and M. Goulet-Caze (eds.) Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press: 28-46.
- Long, C. P. 2007 “Is There Method in This Madness? Context, Play, and Laughter in Plato’s *Symposium* and *Republic*.” In *Philosophy in Dialogue: Plato’s Many Devices*. G. A. Scott (ed.) Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press: 174-92.
- Lorenz, H. 2008 “Plato on the Soul.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*. G. Fine (ed.) New York: Oxford University Press: 243-66.
- Lucas, J. R. and Mitchell, B. 2003 *An Engagement with Plato’s Republic*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate.
- Lynch, J. P. and Ostwald, M. 1994 “The Growth of Schools and the Advance of Knowledge.” In *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 4: The Fourth Century B.C.* J. Boardman, S. Hornblower, D. M. Lewis, and M. Ostwald (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 605-10.
- Marusic, J. 2011 “Poets and Mimesis in the *Republic*.” In *Plato and the Poets*. P. Destree and F. Herrmann (eds.) Leiden; Boston: Brill: 217-40.
- McConnell, S. 2014 *Philosophical Life in Cicero’s Letters*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McPherran, M. L. 2002 “Justice and Pollution in the *Euthyphro*.” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, 35: 105-27.
- Miller, F. D. 2006 “The Platonic Soul.” In *A Companion to Plato*. H. H. Benson (ed.) Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing: 278-93.
- Miller, M. 2008 “The Pleasures of the Comic and of Socratic Inquiry: Aporetic Reflections on *Philebus* 48A-50B.” *Arethusa*, 41: 263-89.
- Mills, M. J. 1985 “ $\Phi\theta\omicron\nu\omicron\sigma$ and Its Related $\Pi\alpha\theta\eta$ in Plato and Aristotle.” *Phronesis*, 30: 1-12.
- Montanari, F. 2015 *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. M. Goh and C. Schroeder (eds.) Leiden: Brill.
- Moore, L. 1999 “Laughing at *Logoi*: Laughter, Persuasion, and Glaucon’s Courage.” *Interpretation*, 26: 315-32.
- Morrow, G. R. 1960 *Plato’s Cretan City*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Moss, J. 2007 “What is Imitative Poetry and Why is It Bad?” In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*. G. R. F. Ferrari (ed.) New York: Cambridge University Press: 415-44.

- Naas, M. 2016 "Plato and the Spectacle of Laughter." *Angelaki*, 21: 13-26.
- O'Grady, P. F. 2002 *Thales of Miletus*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- O'Sullivan, L. 2008 "Athens, Intellectuals, and Demetrius of Phalerum's "Socrates"." *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-2014)*, 138: 393-410.
- 2009 *The Regime of Demetrius of Phalerum in Athens, 317-307 BCE*. Leiden: Brill.
- Olsen, S. D. (ed.) 2007 *Broken Laughter: Select Fragments from Greek Comedy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ortiz de Landazuri, M. C. 2015 "The Development of Self-Knowledge in Plato's Philosophy." *Logos*, 48: 123-40.
- Osborne, C. 2006 "Socrates in the Platonic Dialogues." *Philosophical Investigations*, 29: 1-21.
- Plass, P. 1967 "'Play' and Philosophic Detachment in Plato." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 98: 343-64.
- Romm, J. 2018 "Corporeal Humor in Diogenes Laertius." In *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. P. Mensch (Trans). J. Miller (ed.) New York: Oxford University Press: 567-70.
- Russell, D. 2005 *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rusten, J. (ed.) 2011 *The Birth of Comedy*. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press.
- Schofield, M. 2008 "Plato in his Time and Place." In *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*. G. Fine (ed.) New York: Oxford University Press: 36-62.
- 2013 "When and Why Did Plato Write Narrated Dialogues?" In *Plato, Poet and Philosopher: in Memory of Ioannis N. Theodoropoulos: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference of Philosophy, Magoula-Sparta, 26-29 May 2011*. E. E. Moutsopoulos, M. Protopapas-Marnelli, and C. Sinou (eds.) Athens: Academy of Athens, Research Centre of Greek Philosophy: 87-96.
- Stewart, Z. 1994 "Laughter and the Greek Philosophers: A Sketch." In *Laughter Down the Centuries, Vol. 1*. S. Jäkel and A. Timonen (eds.) Turku: Turun Yliopisto: 29-37.
- Tanner, S. 2017 *Plato's Laughter: Socrates as Satyr and Comical Hero*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Tarrant, H. 1993 *Thrasyllan Platonism*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Urmson, J. O. 1990 *The Greek Philosophical Vocabulary*. London: Duckworth.
- Vlastos, G. 1991 *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Warren, J. 2014 *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, B. 1993 *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Wolfsdorf, D. 2013 *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wood, J. L. 2007 "Comedy, Malice, and Philosophy in Plato's *Philebus*." *Ancient Philosophy*, 27: 77-94.
- Yamagata, N. 2012 "Use of Homeric References in Plato and Xenophon." *The Classical Quarterly*, 62: 130-44.
- Young, P. H. 1991 "Fighting in the Shade: What the Ancient Greeks Knew About Humour." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 74: 289-307.
- Zuckert, C. 2010 "Why Socrates and Thrasymachus Become Friends." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 2: 163-85.