

ODYSSEUS THE PHILOSOPHER: PLATO'S REHABILITATION OF AN ABUSED HERO¹

Fifth-century authors as diverse as Pindar, the tragedians, and the Sophists condemned Odysseus, mainly because of his slippery methods and ruthless ambition. Does Plato agree with Odysseus' accusers²?

Important aspects of Plato's thought might encourage us to answer positively. Plato is no friend of ambition or duplicity. He thinks that nothing is more akin to wisdom than truth (R. 485c). And yet, his most extensive treatment of Odysseus – and of Odysseus the “versatile” hero – looks like a defense of him. In the *Lesser Hippias*, Socrates, arguing with Hippias, states that πολύτροπος Odysseus is morally better than ἀπλοῦς Achilles: both lie, but Odysseus voluntarily, whereas Achilles unwittingly. While Achilles says different things at different times (what Socrates equates with lying) because he is unstable, Odysseus' manipulation of truth and lies goes together with a stable character. Is Plato then promoting Odysseus for his intelligent way of lying?

The French scholar David LévyStone³ has indeed taken Socrates' defense of Odysseus' ability to lie to reflect Socrates' and Plato's own high regard for this characteristic of Odysseus. LévyStone draws a parallel with Antisthenes' rehabilitation of Odysseus' πολυτροπία: not shiftness of character but adaptability in speech (Porph. schol. on Hom. Od. 1,1). In both cases Odysseus' eloquence does not affect his moral integrity. LévyStone points out that in the second half of the dialogue, when the topic changes

¹ I wish to thank Professor Udo Scholz, who gave me the opportunity to present a draft of this paper before a very knowledgeable audience at the Institut für Klassische Philologie at the University of Würzburg, and Professor Michael Erler, for his generosity in welcoming the reworked version in WJ.

² Scholars are divided: Stanford 1968, 100 and Blundell 1992 view Plato's judgment as essentially negative, though both scholars also recognize its ambivalence. Eisner 1982 settles for Plato's ambivalence. Others have given a more positive evaluation of the Platonic Odysseus, among them Howland 1993; Klonoski 1993; Gilead 1994, and especially LévyStone 2005. My discussion will not take every Platonic reference to Odysseus into account, for not all are equally significant: La. 201b and Lg. 706d–e, though positive, do not provide meaningful evaluations of the hero. Socrates' introduction to the myth of Er at R. 614b (“It is not ... the tale of Alcinous told that I shall unfold, but the tale of a warrior bold, Er”) does not imply that Socrates seriously compares himself to Odysseus, for ἄλκινου seems to be chosen mainly to allow a pun on ἀλκίμου, and in any case “tale of Alcinous” was a proverbial expression to describe a lengthy story: cf. Shorey 1994 *ad loc.* I also disregard the *Letters* because of their doubtful authenticity.

³ Cf. LévyStone 2005, *passim*.

from ‘lying’ to ‘doing wrong’, Odysseus is no longer named: the master manipulator of the truth is not a wrongdoer.

This reading, though attractive, raises a question. Since the overall meaning of the *Lesser Hippias* is disputed, we cannot straightaway take Socrates’ eulogy of Odysseus’ way of lying at face value. W.B. Stanford⁴ dismisses it outright as not serious. Others have read the dialogue as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Socratic questioning (the final ‘conclusion’ being the utterly un-Socratic statement that ‘the good man does injustice voluntarily’). Alternatively, it could be argued that Plato is showing how Socrates can beat the Sophists at their own game, by ‘making the weaker argument stronger’. On any of these readings, the rehabilitation of Odysseus’ *πολυτροπία* cannot be taken to express Socrates’ or Plato’s own thought.

Even if we grant that the *Lesser Hippias* is philosophically serious, as I think it is⁵, we should be wary of taking Socrates’ thesis as reflecting his belief in the moral superiority of Odysseus. As Mary W. Blundell⁶ has shown, in this dialogue (as in others) Socrates is ready to challenge received opinion, in this case the received opinion that Achilles is nobler than Odysseus⁷. While Hippias uncritically embraces that view, Socrates is willing to examine it. Nonetheless, Socrates does not enter the discussion holding the opposite view (cf. 370d8–e1: *σε ἠρόμην ἀπορῶν ὁπότερος τοῦτοιν τοῖν ἀνδροῖν ἀμείνων πεποιήται τῷ ποιητῆι*). Socrates aims at questioning Hippias’ ‘wisdom’ rather than at defending a position he does not hold because, as he claims again in this dialogue, he knows nothing (372b; d–e).

One might, however, object that Socrates’ claims of ignorance are insincere, or at least that in the course of this dialogue he does come to the conclusion that Odysseus is better than Achilles, for he says as much: ‘*Ἀμείνων ἄρ’ ἐστίν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὁ Ὀδυσσεὺς Ἀχιλλέως*’ (371e5). But even so, Socrates states his opinion only tentatively (“as it seems”)⁸, and subsequently cannot rest from wavering. He suffers from aporetic wandering more seriously than in any other dialogue (372d–e; 376c: “wandering” is the very last word of the *Lesser Hippias*). Socrates is bewildered by the outcome of his own reasoning and does not give it his assent, except “as an argument” (376b–c). He is caught between the force of the argument and his refusal to endorse a thesis that strikes him as counter-intuitive⁹.

⁴ Cf. Stanford 1968, 261 and n. 30.

⁵ For persuasive arguments, cf. Blundell 1992.

⁶ Cf. Blundell 1992.

⁷ Cf. also Bruell 1999, 94; Worman 2002, 189. Worman argues that the dialogue provides a portrait “of conventional thought about the liar’s type and specifically about Odysseus’ connection to the sophist”. Aristotle (*Topics* 117b10–18) confirms that the belief in the moral superiority of Achilles over Odysseus was commonplace.

⁸ Cf. Bruell 1999, 95.

⁹ Cf. Blundell 1992, 164: “Common sense, as represented by Hippias and Socrates’ own uncertainty, still resists”. For further interpretations, cf. Buffière 1956, 366–367, who thinks that Socrates’ position is consistent with the Socratic principle that virtue is knowledge; Irwin

Socrates' hesitant advancement of Odysseus as the better hero in the *Lesser Hippias* is countered by the outright indictment of him in the *Apology*. This contrast alone should make us wary of reading the *Lesser Hippias* as an endorsement of Odysseus' methods, for the *Lesser Hippias* and the *Apology* are very likely to be close in date. In the *Apology*, then, Socrates adopts Achilles as a model for his commitment to philosophy: just as Achilles scorned death to avenge Patroclus, Socrates will die for the cause of philosophy (28c–d)¹⁰. In addition Socrates sympathizes with Palamedes and Ajax, two victims of Odysseus' polytropic maneuvers, especially his oratorical skills (41b). Ajax lost the contest for the armor of Achilles because Odysseus' speech swayed the jury; Palamedes was unjustly put to death by Odysseus' schemes. While Socrates identifies himself with Odysseus' victims – which amounts to charging his accusers with Odysseus-like impudence – he looks forward to examining Odysseus in Hades, along with Agamemnon and Sisyphus (41b–c). In light of the negative results of his past examinations – every so-called wise man turned out to know nothing – Socrates must anticipate that his post mortem examination of Odysseus' wisdom will reveal that it is no wisdom at all. The coupling of Odysseus with Sisyphus casts additional blame on the cunning hero¹¹. Whereas in the *Lesser Hippias* Socrates seems to dissociate Odysseus' lies from unjust deeds, in the *Apology* he conflates Odysseus' supposed 'wisdom' with its immoral applications.

To go back to our question: does Plato then agree with Odysseus' accusers? The *Apology* suggests a positive answer, the *Lesser Hippias* leaves the issue open. I cannot entirely agree with Blundell¹², who reads Odysseus in the *Lesser Hippias* as a figure for

1988, 56–57 and 77, for whom Socrates' endorsement of Odysseus, though serious, concerns, not his deliberate lying, but his deliberative capacities; King 1987, 71, who argues that the dialogue expresses Hippias' opinion (cf. also Buffière 1956, 366), without taking Socrates' criticism of it into account. Brancacci's reading (1990, 45–60) stands in exact opposition to LévyStone's. According to him, Plato's treatment of Odysseus' πολυτροπία contrasts with Antisthenes'. It is "one of the first manifestations of the polemics between the two Socratics".

¹⁰ For good discussion of the passage, cf. King 1987, 104–109.

¹¹ Socrates' sympathy for Ajax as the fellow-victim of an unfair trial contrasts with Antisthenes' preference for Odysseus in his version of the contest for the armor of Achilles (SSR V A 53 and 54). Blundell 1992, n. 142, recognizes that Odysseus in the *Apology* is presented in a negative light. On the other hand LévyStone (2005, 208–209 and n. 85), adducing Bernadete, argues that Socrates wears an Odyssean persona by manipulating a Homeric citation. Socrates openly adopts the model of Achilles, but in quoting Il. 18,104, he changes ἐτώσιον to κορωνίσιν, which is taken to suggest a reference to Odysseus at Il. 2,297. The phrase νηυσὶ κορωνίσιν, however, is formulaic. Another Homeric quotation does associate Socrates with Odysseus: at 34d, Socrates claims that he is not "born of an oak or of a rock", citing Penelope's protest to Odysseus (Od. 19,163: "tell me your stock ... for you are not born of an oak..."; though cf. also Il. 22,126; Hes. Th. 35). But Socrates' disclaimer is hardly appreciative of Odysseus, whom he deems an inhuman dissembler, while artfully parting company with him. Socrates' deviousness in associating himself with Odysseus is undoubtedly Odysseus-like (cf. also below), but also betrays the problematic nature of the association.

¹² Cf. Blundell 1992.

the Sophist with his shallow versatility and more generally for the Athenian character as depicted by Thucydides, which she calls Odyssean because of its adaptability, taste for novelty, and intellectual curiosity. Blundell argues that Plato is criticizing the proliferation of ‘Odysseus types’ in the late 5th century democratic city. In my view, Plato’s position is more ambivalent¹³.

The Sophist Hippias is πολύτροπος indeed, but not in the positive sense in which Socrates reads the term, for Hippias does not manipulate the truth from a knowledgeable perspective. When Socrates in jest charges him with imitating Odysseus and deceiving him (370e7–8), he targets his defensive intellectual dishonesty and impermeability to dialectic. Hippias is unable to sustain Socrates’ examination¹⁴. He rather resembles Thrasymachus in the *Republic* (345b9), who also “deceives” Socrates for lack of intellectual depth and honesty. By bringing out Hippias’ intellectual failure, Socrates dissociates πολύτροπος Odysseus, who lies knowledgeably, from the ignorant Sophist. Hippias’ intellectual simplicity is rather Achilles-like. The un-confessed Odysseus of the dialogue is Socrates, whose irony or ‘voluntary lying’ recalls Odysseus’ dissembling disguises. Socrates’ argumentative style is as πολύτροπος as Odysseus’: it is an “entwining”, to stay within the *Lesser Hippias* (369b7)¹⁵.

The indirect association of πολύτροπος Odysseus with Socrates invites us to qualify Plato’s criticism of Odysseus’ methods: he cannot condemn them outright if he attributes them to Socrates¹⁶. But the attribution remains implicit. Plato does not compare Socrates’ methods with Odysseus’. The only time he explicitly identifies Socrates with Odysseus, it is to describe not Socrates’ dissembling and shifty way of arguing but, as we shall see, his endurance as a thinker (Smp. 220c–d). Plato possibly saw in

¹³ Blundell’s thesis is accepted by Morgan (2000, 112–113), and criticized by LévyStone (2005).

¹⁴ Hippias’ superficiality comes out in the *Greater Hippias* (288a), where he insists that those who say what everyone thinks cannot be refuted. In the *Lesser Hippias*, as we have seen, Socrates sets out to refute precisely Hippias’ uncritical endorsement of ‘what everyone thinks’.

¹⁵ The verb is πλέκειν, which resonates with Odysseus’ πολυτροπία (Hesychius glosses πολύπλοκος as πολύτροπος). Blundell (1992, 169) recognizes in Socrates an Odysseus type, but the recognition does not push her to qualify her negative evaluation of Odysseus in the *Lesser Hippias*. On Socrates’ Odysseus-like πολυτροπία, cf. LévyStone 2005; Howland 1993, 54 (on the *Republic*). On his irony as an Odyssean mask, cf. Eisner 1982, 116. The analogy, however, covers more than just the employ of disguises: Socrates shares with Odysseus a uniqueness which defies comparison. No hero of the past is matched with Odysseus, and no one can be matched with Socrates (as Alcibiades says in the *Symposium*): cf. Benardete 1997, 38. A major Odyssean feature of Socrates, then, is that he cannot be fully compared to any hero, including Odysseus. The comparison drawn by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* touches upon only one aspect of Socrates’ character, his endurance: cf. below.

¹⁶ Cf., however, Socrates’ claim at Ap. 34d that he is not as inhuman as Odysseus, which suggests that Plato sees in this Odysseus-like quality of Socrates a deficiency as well as a strength: cf. Eisner 1982, 116.

Socrates a wily Odysseus who employed his tricks for a good cause, the cause of philosophy, but apparently he felt uneasy with calling his teacher a wily Odysseus. In the *Symposium* Socrates is the embodiment of Eros, the grandson of μήτις (203b); nonetheless, in the same dialogue he is celebrated as πολύτλας, not πολύμητις.

A similar uneasiness with Odysseus' methods seems to be at work in Plato's elaboration of the 'philosophical rhetoric' in the *Phaedrus*. Readers who take Socrates' defense of Odysseus in the *Lesser Hippias* to mirror Plato's views argue that Plato's ideal of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* is Odyssean¹⁷. This is true: Plato states that the main characteristic of the ideal speaker is an Odysseus-like adaptability to a variety of audiences (271d ff.). Nevertheless, Odysseus is present only in a distant background. Plato mentions him earlier, along with Nestor, as the author of a treatise dealing with the use of eloquence in the assembly (as opposed to its private uses). This vaguely flattering mention, however, is tainted by the association of Odysseus with the sophists. Phaedrus confesses that he does not know about the rhetorical treatises written by Homeric heroes, "unless", he says, "you disguise Gorgias under one named Nestor and Thrasymachus or Theodorus under one named Odysseus (εἰ μὴ Γοργίαν Νέστορά τινα κατασκευάζεις, ἢ τινα Θρασύμαχόν τε καὶ Θεόδωρον Ὀδυσσεά)" (261c4–5)¹⁸. Odysseus is a penname for the ruthless Thrasymachus who in the *Republic* argues that "might makes right", a statement which indeed suits Odysseus' behavior in several 5th-century tragedies. It is true that the disparaging identification is proposed by the ignorant Phaedrus, who misunderstands Socrates¹⁹. Nonetheless, Socrates' response is non-committal either way. He neither endorses the identification nor disavows it but just drops it: "Perhaps I do", he says, "but let us forget about them"²⁰. And forgotten they are. When Socrates speaks of the right kind of eloquence, Odysseus, who seems to lie behind it as a model, is no longer mentioned²¹.

To sum up, Plato quite likely admired one of Odysseus' most criticized talents, his eloquence. The eloquent hero is not a wrongdoer (as according to several post-Homeric authors). On the contrary, Socrates is shown to employ Odyssean techniques to advance the cause of philosophy. Achilles-like Hippias is unable to face the examination of Odysseus-like Socrates. And yet, Socrates' way of arguing does not earn him an appre-

¹⁷ Cf. especially LévyStone 2005, 193–194.

¹⁸ This passage suggests that Homeric heroes had come to be associated with rhetorical styles, as is documented by later sources: Dio Chrysostom claims that Diomedes, Odysseus and Nestor devoted themselves to rhetoric (Or. 2,20 and 57,8), and Quintilian (12,10,64–65) identifies in Menelaus, Nestor and Odysseus representatives of the three rhetorical styles: Odysseus' grand, or "florid" style is also Pericles'. On these associations, cf. Worman 2002, 183.

¹⁹ Cf. LévyStone 2005, 193.

²⁰ Socrates' non-committal response partially justifies Morgan's disregard for who speaks (2000, 112–113).

²¹ LévyStone (2005, 193) thinks that Odysseus embodies the right kind of ψυχαγωγία at 261a.

ciative comparison with Odysseus. Plato's uncertainty in promoting Odysseus in the *Phaedrus* and the *Lesser Hippias*, coupled with his unequivocal indictment of the Homeric hero in the *Apology*, might indicate that he is grappling with mainstream tradition, which condemned Odysseus' eloquence and inventiveness for their immoral applications. Socrates' wandering at the end of the *Lesser Hippias* shows him unable to settle on a positive evaluation of Odysseus against that tradition.

Plato's rehabilitation of Odysseus takes a different road: instead of justifying qualities of the hero traditionally subjected to criticism (such as his cunning, his pragmatism, or his alleged impiety), Plato invents a non-traditional life for him; instead of interpreting existing myths in a new light, he creates his own myth.

I am referring to the passage from the myth of Er (R. 619b–620d) that narrates how the disembodied souls, including that of Odysseus, choose new incarnations. The first to choose is one of the souls coming from the sky, “inexperienced of toils (πόνων ἀγυμνάστους)”, which belonged to a man who had lived in a well-ordered community and participated of virtue “by habit, not by philosophy (ἔθει ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας)”. It rushes into the life of a tyrant and soon afterwards regrets its choice. By contrast most of the souls coming from the earth take their time to choose “because they had themselves toiled and seen the toiling of others (ἄτε αὐτούς τε πεπονηκότας ἄλλους τε ἐωρακότας)”. We would expect these souls to have learnt from their experience and to choose accordingly. Instead, “(the spectacle) was pitiful to see, ridiculous and strange, for the choice was made for the most part in accordance to the habits of their previous lives (ἐλεεινήν τε γὰρ ἰδεῖν εἶναι καὶ γελοῖαν καὶ θαυμασίαν· κατὰ συνήθειαν γὰρ τοῦ προτέρου βίου τὰ πολλὰ αἰρεῖσθαι)”. In particular, the soul of Orpheus chose a swan because, from hatred for the race of women, it did not want to be born of a woman; that of Ajax picked a lion because it remembered the contest for Achilles' armor and was unwilling to live in a human again; the soul of Agamemnon likewise chose the life of an eagle out of hatred for the human race, on account of its sufferings. Far off, the soul of Thersites wore the body of an ape, and finally, that of Odysseus came to make its choice, “and from memory of its former toils having tossed away ambition, it went around for a long time searching for the life of a private citizen who minded his own business, and with difficulty found it lying somewhere and disregarded by the others, and upon seeing it, said that it would have done the same if it had drawn the first lot, and chose it gladly (μνήμη δὲ τῶν προτέρων πόνων φιλοτιμίας λελωφηκυῖαν ζητεῖν περιουῶσαν χρόνον πολὺν βίον ἀνδρὸς ἰδιώτου ἀπράγμονος, καὶ μόγις εὐρεῖν κείμενόν που καὶ παρημελημένον ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ εἰπεῖν ἰδοῦσαν, ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἂν ἔπραξε καὶ πρώτη λαχοῦσα, καὶ ἀσμένην ἐλέσθαι)”.

This narrative shows Plato fully aware of the main charges leveled against Odysseus in 5th-century literature, but warmly sympathetic to him. Plato alludes to Odysseus' encounter in Hades with the shades of Agamemnon, Achilles, and Ajax. The ab-

sense of Achilles from his account suggests that Odysseus has gained a higher status²². Moreover the soul of Odysseus, as if schooled in the Aeschylean maxim τῷ πάθει μάθος, is the only one to make an informed choice, based not on habit but on the lesson it has learnt from its experience on earth. Odysseus' soul, the last to choose, is the exact counterpart to the soul "inexperienced of toils", which chooses first: of all the souls, these two alone pick a life opposite to the previous one, but the untrained soul chooses the worst life, Odysseus' the best one. That soul's rushed choice shows that good habits, without philosophy, are not enough to choose well²³. For the souls that tasted suffering, habit is a blinding force, which prevents them from walking out of their former lives and forces them into degrading incarnations: the souls of Orpheus, Ajax, and Agamemnon choose to cultivate their hatred rather than to incarnate in humans again. Take for instance Ajax's soul, which picks the life of a lion because it shuns mankind, "remembering still the judgment for the arms". The choice is due to the soul's stubborn perseverance in its habit of thought, caused by a myopic memory: Ajax's soul does not remember how it went through life but only the offense it suffered. Odysseus' soul behaves in exactly the opposite way: characteristically, it does not bear grudges but blames itself for "its former toils" and disavows the life that caused them. Its unique ability to remember and criticize how it lived draws it out of its previous habits and allows it to make the good choice. Loyal to his Homeric ancestor, who could not live as a beast, Plato's Odysseus chooses humanity once again²⁴ – and the best kind of humanity. Thus, rather than defending Odysseus' involvement in the community from the traditional charges of ambition, Plato invents an Odysseus with no political ambition at all: an Odysseus ἀπράγμων²⁵.

Plato's fantasy of a 'tranquil Odysseus' has roots in dramatic literature²⁶. The closest reference is likely to be Euripides' lost *Philoctetes* (produced with *Medea* in 431 BC), of which we have three fragments, a synopsis, and a partial paraphrase by Dio Chrysostom (Or. 52 and 59)²⁷. Content and vocabulary show the proximity of this text to Plato's. The play opened with Odysseus "at a loss on his own account (δι'απορῶν ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ)", inwardly debating whether he really was the wise man he seemed to

²² This observation is Allen Bloom's, quoted by Klonoski (1993, 269).

²³ Plato is more positive at Phd. 82b, where good habits in life allow happiness after death and prepare for a reincarnation into "gentle and social species".

²⁴ Segal (1978, 333) notes that Odysseus' rejection of bestiality recalls his resistance against Circe's metamorphosis.

²⁵ Plato's re-creation of Odysseus fits within his general approach to myths, which he either accepts or rejects, without allowing for explanations (allegorical or otherwise) that justify immoral behavior.

²⁶ Cf. Hirst 1940; Stanford 1949 I, 43 and 50; Barigazzi 1955; Demont 1990, 148.

²⁷ Another antecedent might be Epicharmus' *Odysseus automolos* in which Odysseus, according to the most probable reconstruction, tried to make the Greeks believe that he had spied into Troy whereas he had not. This Odysseus is an anti-hero: he aspires to a quiet life, away from dangers. But, contrary to Plato's character, Epicharmus' comic Odysseus appeared in a negative light, as a coward: cf. Barigazzi 1955.

many, since he could live ἀπραγμόνως (as Plato's ἀνδρὸς ἀπράγμονος) and instead took up willingly all kinds of πόνους (which Plato's hero remembers) for the sake of φιλοτιμία (which Plato's hero foregoes) and εὐκλεία (Or. 52,11–12; cf. also 59,1–2). To pursue honors and glory he is forced to involve himself in πράγματα and “to live a life of toil (ζῆν ἐπιπόνως)” beyond all men (Or. 59,2), “for it is the eminent and those who dare take up more labors, I dare say, whom we all admire and deem truly men (τοὺς γὰρ φανεροὺς καὶ πλειόνων ἄπτεσθαι τολμῶντας σχεδὸν τούτους ἅπαντες θαυμάζομεν καὶ τῷ ὄντι ἄνδρας ἡγούμεθα, Or. 59,1)”.

This monologue pays homage to Odysseus' intelligence, which allows him to see farther than most. Euripides is more sympathetic to Odysseus than in several of his later plays, in which Odysseus uncritically pursues φιλοτιμία²⁸. In *Philoctetes* he shows himself ill at ease with his role and bitterly aware of the selfish reasons why men undertake un-welcomed missions²⁹. Odysseus had a reputation for φρόνησις in the traditional sense of ‘prudence’ or ‘practical intelligence’, especially at the service of military and political action³⁰. Euripides' character wonders whether he possesses φρόνησις (Or. 59,1) and whether φρόνησις consists in practical intelligence, as according to tradition, or in pursuing a quiet life. Odysseus re-orientes the meaning of φρόνησις towards ἀπραγμοσύνη because he has a cynical vision of the motives underlying political action. Though he begins by claiming that he toils “for the salvation and victory of the group” (Or. 59,1), he knows that his apparent devotion to a common cause is far from disinterested: nothing is more φιλότιμον than man, and daring is necessary to preserve reputation (ibid.). His merciless assessment of the nature of politics,

²⁸ Cf., e.g., IA. 527 and passim.

²⁹ We might, however, wonder how truly sympathetic to Odysseus Euripides is in *Philoctetes*. Carter (1986, 28–30) deems Odysseus' meditation to mirror the thoughts of an existing group of upper-class Athenians alienated from politics, but in 431, when the Peloponnesian War was just beginning, it is unlikely that the majority shared that sentiment. Nor can we be sure that Euripides endorsed Odysseus' position, for, as Demont (1990, 147–180) has shown, his criticism of Athenian activism sharpens later, in the plays produced after Nicias' peace in 421. In addition Odysseus' analysis in the end is self-serving: he knows that the motives behind his actions have been selfish and unwise, but argues that this is the way men are required to act in order to be real men, in other words, that there is no honorable escape from φιλοτιμία. Moreover he apparently trembled when he faced Philoctetes, so that his “Hamlet-like” hesitation (to quote Stanford 1949 I, 43) in retrospect could sound like a prelude to cowardly behavior. As Demont (1990, 148–149) notes, the monologue builds on the tradition of Odysseus' attempt to dodge the draft. To top it off, Odysseus ended up being more ruthless than his untroubled namesake in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. According to Dio Chrysostom, the character of Odysseus in Sophocles was πολὺ πρότερον καὶ ἀπλούστερον than in Euripides (Or. 52,16). For Dio even to attribute such adjectives as “gentle” and “straightforward” to Sophocles' Odysseus, Euripides' hero must have come out as a true rascal.

³⁰ Themistocles apparently was called ‘Odysseus’ by his contemporaries because of his φρόνησις (Plut. Mor. 869 f.). Cf. Aubenque 1963, 25 and n. 1; Detienne/Vernant 1991, 299–300.

however, does not cause him to give up his mission. He is stuck in a quandary (δι-απορῶν), and cannot walk out of his role because he feels trapped in the prevailing Greek conception of manhood, which values public recognition as a *sine qua non*³¹.

Plato's Odysseus is ready to choose the lifestyle which Euripides' hero deems an impossible option. His disavowal of φιλοτιμία prepares him to embrace its opposite, φιλοσοφία, for the philosopher, as Plato says for instance in the *Phaedo* (68b11–c2), is not φιλότιμος³². Plato makes a similar specification in the *Republic*, a few pages before presenting us with the choice of Odysseus (581b). While the spirited part of the soul (θυμοειδής) is ambitious and a lover of honors (φιλόνηκον, φιλότιμον), the “part with which we learn” is φιλόσοφον. Odysseus shares ἀπραγμοσύνη with the philosopher as described at R. 496d, who similarly renounces politics for tranquility (ἡσυχίαν ἔχων) and “minds his own business (τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττων)”³³.

Plato attributes to Odysseus another eminently philosophical faculty, νοῦς. In explaining the lottery of lives, the prophet in the myth of Er reassures the least fortunate soul, the last to choose, that its choice will be good if made ξὺν νοῦ (R. 619b4). Odysseus' soul, which chooses last, is precisely that soul. It is endowed with the faculty which enables one to emerge completely from the Cave of Ignorance (R. 508d6: νοῦν ἔχειν)³⁴. Indeed, an episode from the *Odyssey* provides a subtext to describe the inclinations of the prisoner freed from the Cave, who has reached above the realm of political striving and competition and does not want to return there: should he be asked whether he will care for the τιμαί and other marks of appreciation valued in the Cave, the freed prisoner would respond as Achilles did to Odysseus in Hades: that he would rather be a serf on earth than live such a life (516d–e; the reference is to Od. 11,489–90). The enlightened man speaks the words of Achilles but is an avatar of Odysseus,

³¹ A striking parallel to Odysseus' admission that only those who dare are deemed truly men is in Plato's *Republic* (549d), where the wife of the ἀπράγμων complains that he is unmanly, ἄνανδρος. On this passage as evidence for the popularity of the notion, cf. Carter 1986, 19. A further possible parallel is a fragment from another lost play by Euripides, *Lycymnius* (474 Nauck): πόνοσ γάρ, ὡς λέγουσιν, εὐκλείας πατήρ. The Athenians apparently were more φιλότιμοι than other people: cf. Xen. Mem. 3,3,13 and 3,5,3. Xenophon, however, approves of this characteristic.

³² For the parallel, cf. Blundell 1992, 168.

³³ On τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν as an expansion of ἀπραγμοσύνη, cf. Carter 1986, 73. Another parallel, recognized by Blundell (1992, 168), is Grg. 526c. On the opposition goodness/φιλοτιμία, cf. also R. 347b–c. To the identification of Odysseus ἀπράγμων with a philosopher it might be objected that minding one's own business is not enough to be a philosopher. Nevertheless, we have seen that Odysseus' soul, the last to choose, stands in opposition to the soul which chooses tyranny, that is, the most un-philosophical soul. In the *Phaedrus*, where the tyrant's soul is the last to be mentioned, the first one is the philosopher's (248d–e). This parallel strongly suggests that Odysseus' soul reincarnates in a philosopher.

³⁴ Howland (1993, 51–52) connects νοῦς in this passage with Odysseus, but in a different way: as Odysseus' νοῦς allows his νόστος, philosophy is a journey home.

the temporary visitor to the underworld³⁵. Odysseus with νοῦς disavows the customary honors and pursuits of life in a political community, equated with shadowy Homeric Hades³⁶.

Does Plato's Odysseus put his higher vision to the service of this shadowy world? His image in the *Republic* suggests a negative answer, and not because Odysseus in the myth of Er is too 'philosophical' and not spirited enough to offer a model for the city's guardians³⁷. Like Odysseus, the philosopher who is summoned to descend into the Cave is no spirited man, and yet, precisely for this reason, he is summoned to share in the πόννοι and τιμαί of the un-enlightened (cf. R. 519d)³⁸. Odysseus, then, would be perfectly entitled to go down to the Cave again. But Plato does not develop this possibility, in my opinion because he does not approve of Odysseus as a politician. While Odysseus is behind the philosopher who, with νοῦς, walks out of the Cave, the image of the philosopher descending there again to lead the prisoners out seems inspired not to Odysseus' visit to Hades but to Orphic lore (520c)³⁹. The identification of Odysseus with the philosopher shielded from politics comes to light also in the manner of his association with Socrates, for Odysseus provides a model primarily for Socrates' internal labor, not public service.

The figure of Socrates engrossed in thought has appeared Odysseus-like to Plato. At the beginning of the *Symposium*, on his way to Agathon's house, Socrates starts lagging behind and finally "stands apart" to solve a philosophical problem, as is his habit: "sometimes he stands apart where he happens to be and there he stands (ἐνίστε ἀποστάς ὅποι ἂν τύχη ἕστηκεν)" (175b2). Towards the end of the dialogue Alcibiades tells us that during the siege of Potidaea Socrates again stood thinking for a whole day and night, and he begins his story with a line from the *Odyssey*: " 'but in turn, what the strong man did and endured (οἶον δ' αὖ τόδ' ἔρεξε καὶ ἔτλη καρτερὸς ἀνὴρ), ' there one day, during the campaign, is worth hearing" (220c2–3).

The line "but in turn, what the strong man did and endured" introduces two major feats of Odysseus: his spying expedition into Troy in beggarly disguise (Od. 4,242) and

³⁵ Cf. Howland, 1993, 49.

³⁶ At R. 386c, Achilles' words are censured for drawing a gloomy picture of Hades. They are more apt to describe our pointless striving on earth.

³⁷ The guardians combine high-spirited and philosophic qualities (R. 375e), whereas Odysseus, by renouncing all kinds of ambitious pursuits, denies the θυμός. In this respect Plato's interpretation of Odysseus might match Antisthenes', if this passage in Heracl. Homer. Probl. 70. 4 goes back to him (cf. Caizzi 1966, 84): τὸν δ' ἄγριον ἐκάστου θυμὸν ὡσπερ εἰ καυτηρίῳ τῇ παρανέσει τῶν λόγων ἐπόρησε. As we shall see, however, in other instances Plato's Odysseus does not suppress the θυμός but rather controls it.

³⁸ A good discussion of this obligation is in Palmer 1995.

³⁹ Cf. Shorey 1994 *ad loc.* Shorey criticizes this reading, but does not suggest Odysseus' κατάβασις as a possible alternative. Contra: Klonoski (1993), who thinks that Odysseus in the *Republic* provides a model for the Platonic philosopher in the fuller sense, as the founder of the orderly city.

his ability to resist Helen's call and to hold back his comrades hidden in the Wooden Horse (Od. 4,271). A cultivated reader could not miss the allusion to Odysseus because the Homeric line is referred only to him. In addition the association of Odysseus with Socrates καρτερός (cf. also Smp. 220a1: πρὸς τὸ καρτερεῖν; 220a6: καρτερήσεις) is reinforced by Plato's emphasis on Odysseus' spiritual καρτερία elsewhere in his dialogues. In the *Phaedo*, Plato extols Odysseus as a paragon of self-control. Has Homer not shown the separateness of the soul from the body when he said of Odysseus, "he smote his chest and thus rebuked his heart: 'endure, my heart, you once endured worse than this' (στῆθος δὲ πλήξας κραδίην ἠνίπαπε μύθῳ / τέτλαθι δὴ, κραδίη· καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο ποτ' ἔτλης)"? (94d8–e1).

Plato is citing Od. 20,17–18, where Odysseus, outraged by the maidservants' shameless behavior, restrains his "barking heart". Plato's exploitation of this Homeric scene inaugurates a long history of re-writings⁴⁰. He himself appeals to the scene another time, again in the context of a discussion about the nature of the soul: at R. 441b–c, the line "he smote his chest and thus rebuked his heart" is brought in to illustrate the superiority of the reasoning faculty over the spirited one. In the *Republic* the soul consists of three parts, not of one as in the *Phaedo*. Accordingly Odysseus rebuking his heart no longer stands for the entire soul rebuking bodily appetites and passions, as in the *Phaedo*, but for its rational part arguing with the θυμός. In both cases, however, Odysseus personifies the ruling spiritual principle. He is entitled to this role because of his καρτερία, which Plato sees manifested in that scene (cf. R. 390d)⁴¹.

Twice in the *Phaedo* Socrates falls silent, absorbed in thought, each time after a major development on the nature and destination of the soul (84c1–3; 95e6–7). Perhaps he is imitating Odysseus rebuking his heart. Amihud Gilead⁴² has pointed out that Socrates' silent pauses indicate his engagement in an internal dialogue in which his free, philosophical self subjects the fearful prisoner in him, the "child within us" (77e5). Socrates rebukes his heart for behaving irrationally (for being afraid of death? Fear is mentioned right before he falls silent at 84c). This suggestion is attractive because, as we have seen, it is in the *Phaedo* that Plato for the first time takes the lines from *Odyssey* 20 to illustrate the soul's ruling function. Socrates dramatizes, so to speak, Plato's notion about the role of the soul: like Odysseus, he summons his ruling principle to put order into his body.

The picture of Socrates in the *Phaedo* as a self-reproaching Odysseus, caught in the act of silencing un-Socratic impulses, in the *Symposium* is changed to the even more heroic image of the philosopher as an unshakeable Odysseus, one who has reached absolute self-mastery in the face of adversity. Whereas in the *Phaedo* the possible allusion is to a Homeric scene of internal debate, in the *Symposium* Socrates' behavior is inspired to Homeric episodes in which Odysseus has triumphed over his emo-

⁴⁰ Cf. Létoublon 2003.

⁴¹ Odysseus' self-mastery is another aspect of his ἀπραγμοσύνη; cf. R. 441e.

⁴² Cf. Gilead 1994, 62.

tions and impulses so as to be able to mar his body with blows and abase himself (at Od. 4,244–45) or to restrain his companions in the Horse (at Od. 4,282–88). Odysseus' unbendable *καρτερία* is called upon to illustrate Socrates' relentless thinking effort. It signifies Socrates' intellectual endurance made possible by his indifference to hardships.

Plato's unconditional admiration for Odysseus' endurance and self-control could explain a curious silence: contrary to later philosophers, including his student Aristotle, Plato does not stigmatize Odysseus' weeping. He simply ignores it, so as not to taint the image of the *καρτερός* hero. But one might ask: what about Plato's vocal disapproval of Odysseus' praise of feasting (at Od. 9,8–10), charged with discouraging *ἐγκράτεια* in the young (R. 390a–b)? Is Plato not blaming Odysseus' lack of restraint here? I do not think so, for in the same passage Plato calls Odysseus "the wisest of all men", as if Odysseus existed independently of Homer and only Homer were responsible for the shameful words⁴³. Plato is accusing Homer of having blemished Odysseus' wisdom by attributing to him a statement incompatible with self-restraint⁴⁴.

Plato's Odysseus puts his *καρτερία* to the service of Socrates' soul, not his fellow-citizens, as Antisthenes' Odysseus does. True, the Odysseus-like portrait of Socrates in the *Symposium* can be compared with Antisthenes' picture of Odysseus pleading his case against Ajax⁴⁵. Beneath the comparison is Socrates' association in the *Symposium* with the Odysseus of Od. 4,242 ff., who dared spy into Troy, dressed in rags like Antisthenes' hero (SSR V A 54, par. 9). The Odysseus of Od. 4,242 ff., invoked by Plato to describe Socrates, shares with Antisthenes' hero an uncompromising willingness to serve the community⁴⁶. By associating Socrates with Odysseus unabashedly toiling for others, Plato possibly points to the civic utility of Socrates' thinking – as might also be suggested by the military setting of the scene, which brings out the continuity between the soldier Socrates, firm at his post and more courageous than his comrades-in-arms, and the thinker⁴⁷. Nonetheless, Plato's emphasis in the association of Odysseus with Socrates concerns the latter's power of concentration, his soldier-like thinking. The Odysseus image highlights Socrates' individual effort to connect with truths, and with truths that he does not seem to care to communicate. When he walks

⁴³ Cf. LévyStone 2005, 192.

⁴⁴ In dissociating Odysseus from Homer, Plato goes counter-current, since Odysseus was often identified with Homer. At R. 393b, however, Plato seems to make no distinction between the two, for he says that the entire *Odyssey* is diegetic, even though books 9 to 12 are in Odysseus' voice.

⁴⁵ Cf. Höistad 1948, 99–100.

⁴⁶ For Antisthenes, cf. especially par. 8, where Odysseus poses as the savior of all the Greeks right before boasting that he avoids no danger: "there is no danger from which I fled, considering it shameful"; likewise, Odysseus at Od. 4,288 is credited with saving all the Greeks and at Od. 4,244 ff. with considering no service shameful.

⁴⁷ On the continuity between Socrates the steadfast philosopher and Socrates the steadfast soldier, cf. Loraux 1995, 158.

away from his mental (and physical) tour de force, the other Athenians at the camp do not know what he has discovered⁴⁸.

As this passage suggests, thirst for knowledge is another quality that Socrates shares with Odysseus. When he found out that the oracle declared him the wisest man, Socrates became a wanderer: “I must relate to you my wandering, as I performed labors, so to speak, in order that the oracle might prove irrefutable (δεῖ δὴ ὑμῖν τὴν ἐμὴν πλάνην ἐπιδειξάσαι ὥσπερ πόνους τινὰς πονοῦντος, ἵνα μοι καὶ ἀν-ἐλεγκτος ἢ μαντεία γένοιτο)” (Ap. 22a6–8). It is true that Socrates’ main reference is likely to be Heracles, not Odysseus⁴⁹. The hero who cleared the earth of monsters lent himself to informing the Socratic search, with its equally cleansing effects: like Heracles, Socrates kills monsters by dislodging his citizens’ false pretensions of knowledge. But Socrates plans to follow Odysseus’ lead in continuing his search even in Hades. Like Odysseus, he wishes to interrogate the dead heroes, Odysseus in the first place. The projected encounter in Hades between Odysseus-like Socrates and the ‘wise’ Odysseus whom Socrates intends to examine epitomizes Plato’s treatment of the hero: Odysseus the Philosopher questions the alleged wisdom of Odysseus the un-Socratic Politician, who put Socrates/Palamedes to death.

At the same time, this picture of Socrates invites us to revise our assessment of the Platonic Odysseus as a purely contemplative philosopher, aloof from the community, for the inquisitive wanderer of the *Odyssey* inspires Socrates’ paradoxical πολυπραγμονεῖν (Ap. 31c5), his moral activism. Elsewhere, the Odysseus-like philosopher appears even as a statesman: “These men – not the counterfeit but the true philosophers – appearing in ‘all sorts of shapes’ because of the ignorance of the others, ‘turn in and out from city to city’ looking down from the heights on the lives of those below. To some they seem worthy of nothing, to others of everything. At times they appear as statesmen, at times as sophists, and at times they may give some people the impression of being totally mad (ἄνδρες οὗτοι ‘παντοῖοι’ φανταζόμενοι διὰ τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἄγνοιαν ‘ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόλιν, οἱ μὴ πλαστῶς ἄλλ’ ὄντως φιλόσοφοι, καθ-ορῶντες ὑπόθεν τὸν τῶν κάτω βίον, καὶ τοῖς μὲν δοκοῦσιν εἶναι τοῦ μη-δενὸς τίμοι, τοῖς δ’ ἄξιοι τοῦ παντός· καὶ τοτὲ μὲν πολιτικοὶ φαντάζον-ται, τοτὲ δὲ σοφισταί, τοτὲ δ’ ἔστιν οἷς δόξαν παράσχοινο ἂν ὡς παντά-σασιν ἔχοντες μαρκεῖς)” (Sph. 216c4–d2).

⁴⁸ A comparison with Antisthenes has been invoked also for the figure of Odysseus in the myth of Er. Barigazzi (1955, 135) has suggested that the character of Odysseus ἵσυχος, with his individualism, would fit into the world of this philosopher, for whom “family, country, honor, riches, all of society and civilization are vain errors, for σωφροσύνη resides in moral autonomy, in τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν”. This assessment, however, is only partially true of Antisthenes’ conception of Odysseus. The individualism of Antisthenes’ hero is in his methods, not his goals. He towers above the other Greeks owing to his unconventional wisdom, but puts his wisdom to the service of a political cause. He does not give up his missions in the community.

⁴⁹ Cf. Höistad 1948, 34; Demont 1990, 302; Rappe 2000, 288.

The words “in all sorts of shapes turn in and out from city to city” come from Od. 17,486, where they are referred to Odysseus in disguise⁵⁰. A young man warns the suitors to behave, for the unknown beggar could be a god. But the implication that the god-like beggar could intervene on the scene, for instance by chastising or punishing the evil-doers, is absent from Plato’s text, which rather portrays the philosopher as a wandering god to stress his superior marginality and the gap between the knowledgeable few and the ignorant many. The philosopher may be taken for other things, including a statesman, but he is none of them.

The evidence, then, does not allow us to draw clear-cut conclusions on whether Plato saw in Odysseus a model for the politician in the Socratic-Platonic sense of the word (as an ἀπράγμων who πολυπραγμονεῖ to reform the souls of his fellow citizens), or whether his remake of the hero ended with a celebration of his spiritual qualities as a contemplative philosopher. Plato pursued the second direction more openly, probably because he found it less problematic: after all, does the murderer of Palamedes deserve to become a moral reformer⁵¹? The feature of Socrates that most explicitly calls for a comparison with Odysseus is his inward-directed καρτερία, which allows him to ignore the distracting calls of the body and to remain focused within, on his search.

Socrates combines self-mastery and eagerness to learn also in a well-known episode from the *Phaedrus*, with which I would like to conclude. It is high noon, and the cicadas are “singing and talking to each other (ᾄδοντες καὶ ἀλλήλοις διαλεγόμενοι)” in the trees. Socrates stops the conversation and warns Phaedrus that they should not fall asleep, lulled by the cicadas, but “discuss and sail by them as if by the Sirens, without being charmed (διαλεγόμενους καὶ παραπλέοντάς σφας ὡσπερ Σειρήνας ἀκηλήτους)”. The cicadas will then grant them the divine gift they bestow on the philosophically minded: a recommendation to Calliope and Urania, the Muses of philosophy (258e–259d).

The Platonic cicadas are more generous than the Homeric Sirens. In spite of their announcement, the Sirens do not dispense the knowledge of “all things that come to pass upon the fruitful earth (ὅσσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ)” (Od. 12,191). They lure the sailor to the shore by charming his ears and by appealing to his inclinations – in Odysseus’ case, his longing for recognition and his love for knowledge⁵². Odysseus hears only an inviting prelude, sung by their “most beautiful voice (ὄπα κάλλιμον)” (12,192). He does learn, but not what the Sirens promise. If he “has

⁵⁰ As in the case of Achilles’ words to Odysseus in Hades, this Homeric line is acceptable only if used for a different order of reality than in the original: cf. R. 381d.

⁵¹ Even in the *Apology*, where Socrates plans to follow Odysseus in interrogating the dead, he identifies with Palamedes as a moral reformer: like Palamedes, who goaded Odysseus to push him back to his duties, Socrates goads the horse-city: cf. Eisner 1982, 108.

⁵² Circe is silent about the content of the Sirens’ song. On the Sirens’ ability to entice each individual sailor according to his proclivities, cf. Xen. Mem. 2,6,11–12 (though Xenophon thinks that Odysseus is enticed by “the fame that virtue gives”).

delight and goes his way a wiser man (τερψάμενος νεῖται καὶ πλείονα εἰδώς)" (12,188), it is because he has been able not to yield to the Sirens' call, thanks to the precautions he has taken.

Conversely the Platonic cicadas provide philosophical guidance. Socrates' comment indeed marks a halt in a discussion that has been vitiated, and still risks being vitiated, by Phaedrus' un-philosophical love for speeches. The cicadas warn them that they have to discriminate "among the breeds of intellectual discourse", as Giovanni Ferrari aptly puts it⁵³. But their guidance comes at a price: as in the Homeric episode, the listeners cannot yield to the cicadas' voice. They have to oppose an even stronger resistance against it than Odysseus against the Sirens' song. By securing himself to the mast, Odysseus allows himself to listen to the beautiful voice, to drink in pleasure, whereas Socrates and Phaedrus ultimately are not allowed to listen: they must "sail by the cicadas' voice" with their philosophic activity, by tirelessly producing audible reasoning, διαλέγεσθαι. They must become as deaf to that voice as Odysseus' companions are to the Sirens' song, but by means of their own philosophic efforts⁵⁴.

Compared to Homer, Plato enhances Odysseus' self-mastery in the Sirens' episode, for in Homer Odysseus hardly restrains himself when he hears the song (Od. 12,192–194). Plato's Odysseus, bound to the unmovable mast of his mind, opposes his productive reasoning to the charm of the Sirens' voice⁵⁵. Plato again puts a premium on spiritual καρτερία as both intellectual endurance (such as Socrates/Odysseus displays in the *Symposium*) and the mastery of temptations that is connected to it. By resisting the pleasure of the song, Odysseus-like Socrates will please the Muses of philosophy. Odysseus is on his way to renouncing the allurements of the senses in the name of knowledge, which later Platonists will understand as a flight from the world back home, to the Ithaca of our soul.

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⁵³ Cf. Ferrari 1987, 27.

⁵⁴ Gilead (1994, 94) indeed thinks that Plato is alluding to Odysseus' companions, who did not hear the song of the Sirens at all. But in my view the point of the passage is that Phaedrus and Socrates must resist the drugging power of the song, which cannot happen if they are not at all exposed to it. The model is rather a combination of Odysseus and his companions.

⁵⁵ A precedent to Plato's interpretation is that of the Pythagoreans, who read the Sirens' song as both the allurement of sensual pleasures and celestial music. Plato is reminiscent of this twofold reading of the song, for at R. 617b the Sirens produce the music of the spheres. As scholars have long seen, Plato here ultimately follows the old belief that the Sirens were demons leading the souls: cf. Buffière 1956, 473–76; Detienne 1962, 56–59. At R. 617b, however, Plato does not seem to have Odysseus in mind, and not only because he draws from the popular belief about the Sirens as demons rather than from the Homeric episode. His mention of the Sirens precedes of only two pages his portrait of Odysseus' soul about to be reincarnated (instead of following the Sirens upwards).

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