

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Summer 2004

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Chaucer's Dialectic: How the Establishment Theology is Subjected to Scrutiny in Five *Canterbury Tales*

BARBARA TOVEY

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

My sone, ful ofte, for to muche speche
Hath many a man been spilt, as clerkes teche;
But for litel speche avysely
Is no man shent, to speke generally.

My sone, be war, and be noon auctour newe
Of tidynges, wheither they been false or trewe.

The Manciple's Tale, 325–28, 359–60

Many of us are inclined to think of the Middle Ages as an epoch characterized by an overwhelming uniformity of thought and belief, a time when independence of inquiry was utterly stifled. That the vast majority of people accepted unquestioningly and on faith the teachings of a single and as yet undivided Christian Church is, of course, not to be doubted, and in this respect the age contrasts markedly with our own. But among scholars there has been a growing recognition that a spirit of critical independence was not lacking among the educated minority (Gilson 1938; Thomas 1950). Skepticism, and even unbelief, were by no means unknown phenomena at the universities. The schools of Padua and Paris had a particularly bad reputation in this respect since it was here that the Arabist influence was at its strongest.

And among the non-learned aristocracy, the heresy of courtly love, in certain of its forms at least, is evidence of a tension with the teachings of the Church. The existence of medieval views in conflict with orthodoxy has, in general, been insufficiently recognized because of the very fact that these views could not be stated openly, and because most of us today lack the qualifications that would enable us to penetrate the veil with which they were necessarily covered. Nevertheless, there are very few who would today contest that the fourteenth century was a period of intense intellectual activity among the educated minority at least.

It seems unlikely that a man of Chaucer's gifts, contacts, and interests could have been unacquainted with the ideas and with the questioning attitude that were clearly apparent in the intellectual circles of his day (Thomas 1950, 84–91). In fact, his work demonstrates a full knowledge of many of the problems under debate. This in itself is by no means a revolutionary view. An awareness of the intellectual problems under discussion at his time is by no means tantamount to the holding of unorthodox views, nor does it even imply an overriding concern with those problems. It will surely be objected that Chaucer, as a poet, an artist, an observer of human affairs, was not primarily interested in speculations of a theological and philosophical nature. Certainly no one can deny that Chaucer was, before all else, a poet. But the greatest poetry is more than a matter of the perfection of form, the beauty of the surface, important as these may be. Ultimately its greatness must be at least partly attributable to its insights concerning the conditions of human existence. And it is impossible to understand human existence without a comprehension of the cosmic framework within which man lives and moves. It was doubtless with this consideration in mind that Boccaccio, Chaucer's great contemporary and model, declared in the most emphatic terms that the greatest poetry invariably presents, although in veiled and secretive form, a teaching concerning the central philosophic questions (for Boccaccio's statements, see Osgood 1930, 52–54, 58–62, 78–80, especially 62). Whether or not Chaucer was familiar with the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* in which Boccaccio presents this view of the nature of poetry, it cannot be denied that he lived and wrote in the poetic tradition of Virgil, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio himself, which the *Genealogia* describes.

Chaucer's chief concern was undoubtedly with human beings and their problems. Certainly one of the prime purposes of the *Canterbury Tales* is to display "all kinds of natures, that labor on the bosom of this sphere" (Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, 1.1.65–66). But it is equally apparent that

Chaucer was not content with description alone. In nearly all of his writings we come face to face with the eternal question: how shall we live? What is the good for man? In modern terms we would say that Chaucer was unceasingly concerned with "values." And Chaucer was sufficiently wise to know that the answers to these questions depend greatly upon the solution that is given to certain crucial theological and metaphysical problems. If, for example, there is an afterlife compared with which the duration of this life is no more than a moment, our attitude toward this world and its attractions will be vastly different from the view that we should hold if we believed this life to be our all in all. If an all-wise, all-good Providence rules the universe, our interpretation of the events of human life will not be the same as that which would ensue from the contrary opinion. And even granting the existence of such a Providence, it still remains to be determined whether God expects from us primarily an attitude of unquestioning submission, such as is typified by the character of Griselda in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, or whether the appropriate role for human beings is one of independent intellectual inquiry. It is the thesis of this paper that Chaucer believed these problems to be of the utmost importance. Whatever his ultimate conclusions about them may have been, he was not content to adopt without questioning the ready-made answers provided by the official teachings of the Church. I am not here primarily interested in the attempt to decide the nature of Chaucer's ultimate solutions to the problems that I have adumbrated. Any such attempt would certainly be subject to the gravest difficulties. But I am concerned to show that Chaucer approached these questions with a spirit of independent, critical inquiry; that like the Wife of Bath he made "experience" and "noon auctoritee" the standard by which they should be judged. He was, in other words, a non-conformist in the highest and best sense of the word, a free spirit who took the sublime liberty of subjecting the assumptions of his age to critical scrutiny. In the body of the paper I hope to show how in at least five of the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer sets in motion a dialectical discussion of certain key philosophical problems, in which orthodox and unorthodox views are made to confront and answer each other.

The advantages of approaching this daring undertaking in the role of a poet, a dramatic artist, rather than in the role of a philosopher or scholar are readily apparent. By the device of putting his heterodox questionings into the mouths of his characters, the poet or dramatist is able to protect himself from the hostile criticism that would certainly have been the consequence of uttering them in his own name. Further protection may be afforded by attributing the most far-reaching and hence most dangerous criticism of orthodoxy to characters he has labeled disreputable (that

Shakespeare followed a procedure of this nature with his fools and madmen is not quite generally recognized; for a general statement of this point, see Strauss 1952, 36; for specific application to Chaucer, see Lounsbury 1892, 2:521–22). That the Wife of Bath serves, in part, a function of this kind for Chaucer will, it is hoped, be subsequently shown. Bernard Jefferson has pointed out “(1) that Chaucer never expresses a complete acceptance of the Boethian doctrine of the reasons for the existence of evil or of his doctrine for free will, although he frequently discusses the problems through his characters, (2) that he invariably leaves, sometimes humorously, these questions to the clerks, and (3) that he always bases these discussions on the *Consolation of Philosophy*, although he does not accept its conclusions. That Chaucer should have his characters persistently assume this attitude perhaps bespeaks his own point of view” (Jefferson 1917, 79–80). In discussing the question of Chaucer’s attitude toward the Boethian argument for the perfect goodness and justice of God, Jefferson says: “Of course too much must not be inferred about Chaucer’s belief from what his characters say, but it is significant that nowhere in his poetry is he concerned with the parts of the answer most elaborated upon by Dame Philosophy, although he presents so frequently the question which brought forth this answer” (Jefferson 1917, 70–71). Jefferson’s reaction is highly illuminating to the student of Chaucer’s techniques. On the one hand, Jefferson is struck by the strange use Chaucer makes of a book that he obviously knew with extraordinary thoroughness. That is, Chaucer speaking through his characters borrows from the *Consolation of Philosophy* the questions that constitute a challenge to the orthodox faith, but he consistently omits the answers with which the faith is in that same book reestablished and defended. Philosophy’s answer to Boethius’ query regarding foreordination and free will is indicated in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, but it is significant that the narrator refrains from accepting that answer, as he also refrains from accepting the answers put forward by Augustine and Brawardine. The question of God’s justice in permitting evil is explicitly raised in (1) the *Complaint of Mars* (218–71), (2) the *Knight’s Tale* (1303–33), (3) the *Franklin’s Tale* (865–93), (4) the *Legend of Good Women* (2228–35), and (5) *Troilus* (3:1016–22). Although in all these cases the critique of God’s goodness is expressed in Boethian terms, the Boethian answer is not even hinted at. The passage in the *Complaint of Mars* is remarkable for the force and virulence of its attack, for the suggestion that God commits as well as permits evil, and for the direct blaming of God that it contains. The foreknowledge of God in relation to man’s free will is discussed in *Troilus*, 4:958–1078 and the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, 4420–40. I do not suppose that Jefferson means to say that Chaucer nowhere presents the orthodox posi-

tion. Certainly that would be very far from the truth. Chaucer was the author of several tales, the piety of which is beyond dispute. One of the main contentions of this paper is that Chaucer puts forward the orthodox position in the *Canterbury Tales* in such a way as to bring it into dynamic and dialectical opposition with the heterodox questioning. Jefferson's point is, rather, that when Chaucer makes use of those arguments in the *Consolation of Philosophy* that tend to challenge the established faith, he does not directly oppose to them the Boethian reasoning that was intended as their counterpart and refutation.

After having made a careful study of this peculiar circumstance, Jefferson cannot help but wonder whether this persistent attitude on the part of Chaucer's characters "perhaps bespeaks his own point of view." We may be sure that a similar wonder was aroused in the minds of the alert, educated, philosophically trained minority among Chaucer's contemporary readers, who were no doubt far better acquainted with the *Consolation of Philosophy* than most of Chaucer's present day audience. To these readers the failure to reply to the attacks on the orthodox view must have seemed even more striking and surprising than it does to us, accustomed as we are to an intellectual atmosphere in which every kind of skeptical assault on religion is freely aired. But the second part of Jefferson's reaction is equally important. "Of course too much must not be inferred about Chaucer's beliefs from what his characters say." Of course not. This would have been precisely Chaucer's own reply had the charge of unorthodoxy or heresy been raised against him. This was the fortification behind which he could always retreat if the need arose. And that such a fortification was necessary to him a brief review of the treatment meted out to heretics and unbelievers will quickly confirm. As a matter of fact, Jefferson seems to forget that there is one instance, although one only, where Chaucer dared to raise in his own name the question of God's goodness in permitting the existence of evil. The voicing of personal bewilderment occurs at the beginning of the *Legend of Philomela* in the *Legend of Good Women*. Naturally this piece of audacity could not be repeated. But the fact that we have even a single example of Chaucer's directly associating himself with the critique in question is an indirect indication that the doubts voiced by his characters are not unrelated to his own thinking. Just once he has shown us that he shares their skeptical querying. Once should be enough.

In any case the usual precaution of attributing the most dangerous speeches to his characters rather than to himself would not prevent the reader from observing the pattern that emerges in connection with Chaucer's use of the Boethian arguments concerning God's justice. It is the

repetition of these instances that provides the foundation for suspicion. If an isolated occurrence merely, Chaucer's technique—the elaborate presentation of the argument against the established view followed by silence concerning the answer—would not, perhaps, be particularly significant. It could be explained in terms of the dramatic and artistic necessities of the particular narrative, the peculiarities of the character who happens to be speaking, and so on. But when we see this pattern emerging again and again, we cannot avoid considering the possibility that Chaucer, insofar as these particular theological problems were concerned, intended us to see that his silence concerning the accepted Christian solution was tantamount to a statement of the inadequacy of this solution. Let us assume for one moment that Chaucer's personal attitude was one of extreme doubt and denial in religious matters. Even if this were the case (and I am not attempting to argue that it was the case), it is difficult to see how he could have expressed himself more directly than in fact he did, considering the nature of the society in which he lived. Anyone who demands an unambiguous statement of disbelief as the only convincing evidence of a skeptical, critical attitude on Chaucer's part is requiring evidence that, in the nature of the case, will never be forthcoming.

There is one mark that typically distinguishes the author who is compelled to present his true views by indirect means. He is likely, at some point in his writings, to give us a hint concerning his method of procedure as well as the reasons that have necessitated it. I believe that the closing section of the *Canon Yeoman's Tale* and the whole of the *Manciple's Tale* constitute just such a hint to the reader on Chaucer's part. Let us examine the evidence. It has been generally noted that the final passages of the *Canon Yeoman's Tale* seem to be out of harmony with the main body of the poem. In the first place the character of the narrator undergoes an inexplicable transformation; he ceases to be the "lewd" [ignorant] man that he was at the beginning and becomes a learned scholar acquainted with abstruse philosophical writings. In the second place, it seems that the subject matter under discussion may have undergone a change. Although alchemy in the narrow sense has plainly been the topic of the tale as a whole, it is not wholly clear whether the secret referred to in the final anecdote about Plato is meant to be merely the secret of transmuting baser metals into gold. It is spoken of with such reverence

For unto Crist it is so lief and deere

That he wol nat that it discovered bee,

(1467–68)

as to leave us with the impression that something more comprehensive, more awe-inspiring is being pointed at. Even if we grant that in the Middle Ages there was no clear distinction between alchemy and philosophy, it seems apparent that Chaucer has widened his discussion of the art of transmuting metals to include more profound secrets of philosophy. The third discrepancy between the body of the narrative and its closing section is of particular importance. Up until the epilogue the theme of both Prologue and Tale had seemed to be the non-existence of the alchemical secret, and hence the vanity and hopelessness of the quest for it. In the concluding passages the mood changes. The assumption now seems to be that such a secret does indeed exist, and is known to the most eminent of the philosophers, although it is inaccessible to the "lewd" many who are driven to seek it in the hope of gain. We have even the implication, in direct contradiction with the body of the tale, that the narrator himself is in possession of the secret (1472–75), although he is prohibited by divine command from making it known to us.

Now we have to raise the question why an artist of Chaucer's consummate skill would deliberately disturb the unity of his tale by appending to it an epilogue that is so conspicuously in disagreement with what has gone before. We must assume, I think, that he had a conscious purpose in acting as he did. If that assumption is correct, we may be justified in surmising that the epilogue contains information of such importance that Chaucer's desire to present it to us overrode his concern with considerations of dramatic unity. The epilogue, then, may well be worth a careful study.

The explicit teaching of the epilogue is concerned with the injunction of silence laid upon the philosophers in connection with their most profound truths. As we shall shortly see, this theme of the necessity for keeping silence about the truth is taken up and amplified in the immediately succeeding tale, although the subject matter there is not, ostensibly at least, that of philosophic truth. A more detailed study of the concluding passages of the *Canon Yeoman's Tale*, however, indicates that the prohibition against revealing the ultimate philosophic or alchemical truth may not be as absolute as at first sight it looks. It is true that Plato, in replying to his importunate disciple, is made to say:

The philosophres sworn were everychoon
 That they sholden discovere it unto noon,
 Ne in no book it write in no manere.

(1464–66)

(Curiously enough, Plato does say something fairly close to this in his *Seventh Letter*, 341c–e and 344c–e, but I am not suggesting that Chaucer was familiar with this writing.) But the passage immediately preceding (1428–47) seems to show that the truth may be safely set down in books if it is written “mystily,” or in such a way as not to be accessible to the majority of the readers. Chaucer takes the trouble to supply us with an example of the kind of writing that is required (1435–40). Its chief characteristic seems to be that the author, while ostensibly talking of one thing, is in reality speaking about something quite different. The appearance of the work belies its reality. Only those who are able to penetrate beyond the veil of its appearance can hope to understand its real meaning. Chaucer continues by quoting the following words from Arnold:

Lat no man bisye hym this art for to seche,

But if that he th’entencioun and speche

Of philosophres understonde kan;

(1442–44)

In the epilogue to the *Canon Yeoman’s Tale* Chaucer has shown us that he is aware, first of the need for silence in regard to the most profound philosophic truths; and second, of the possibility of communicating this forbidden knowledge in a manner sufficiently veiled to conceal it from the gaze of the many, while nevertheless permitting it to be glimpsed by those few persons who are capable of understanding “th’entencioun and speche.” We have to bear in mind the possibility, then, that Chaucer himself may have made use of the method of writing that he has here been at such pains to call to our attention. Perhaps the epilogue itself may be an example of the technique employed by Hermes Trismegistus. Although seemingly dealing with the hidden teaching contained in the works of the alchemists, it may in reality be intended to suggest to us the proper way to read some of Chaucer’s own writings.

In order to have a clear conception of Chaucer’s intention in the *Manciple’s Tale*, it is helpful to contrast his version of the story of the crow with the account that is presented in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and in the French vulgarizations of Ovid with which Chaucer may also have been familiar (my comparison of Chaucer’s version with his sources owes a heavy debt to Severs 1952, 1–6). The first important point to note is that Chaucer’s treatment of Phebus’ unfaithful wife is far less favorable and much less sympathetic than that accorded to her by Ovid and by the authors of the French analogues. Ovid and his French followers stress her beauty, whereas Chaucer is silent on this point. Instead he likens her to a caged bird, a cat, and a she-wolf, comparisons

that are entirely original with him. In all of the source stories the dying wife is presented as pregnant; Apollo is obliged to rip the infant from the dead mother's womb. This, of course, is a circumstance which tends to create sympathy for the woman and which provides Phebus with a reasonable motive for desiring vengeance upon the informing bird. It is notable that Chaucer omits it altogether. Similarly, Chaucer acting on his own initiative stresses the viciousness and inferiority of the wife's paramour, and opposes to him a lavish praise of the virtues of the god. Equally important is the change Chaucer makes in the character of the bird. In the analogues the bird is portrayed as a treacherous informer motivated by the hope of a reward. In addition, he is warned by another bird of the dire consequences likely to flow from his act, a warning that in his recklessness he chooses to disregard. Thus the original story is one of crime and punishment as far as the bird is concerned. The moral of the tale is that anyone so stupid and mean as to play the role of informer will certainly suffer retribution. But the meaning of the *Manciple's Tale* is entirely different. Chaucer presents the bird as loyal, just, discerning, and free from all mercenary motivation. The plot is constructed in such a way that we, like the bird, desire the faithless wife to receive her punishment. When Apollo turns on the crow after having killed his wife we see him as acting in blind rage and self-delusion. The story is a tragedy, not because of the death of the wife, but because the bird, with whom we thoroughly sympathize, is made to suffer a terrible and wholly undeserved fate. It is significant that Chaucer has elaborated upon and greatly intensified the cruelty of Apollo's revenge. Ovid merely states that the raven's color was changed from white to black and that he was ordered to keep away from all white birds forever. Chaucer makes the god curse the crow, bereave him of his beautiful voice, and, most graphic of all, pull out all of his white feathers one by one. At the end he casts the bird to the devil. Once again, these actions which so increase our sense of horror are original with Chaucer. The meaning of Chaucer's story, then, is far darker and much more complex than the simple warning against playing the informer which constitutes the moral of the source and of the analogues. Chaucer has presented to us a noble and beautiful creature who out of wholly moral motives has taken upon himself the difficult task of telling a painful truth, of stripping away the pleasant illusions with which his master is blinded. Surely Chaucer meant us to see that Apollo's response typifies the reaction of most persons when they are shown that the beautiful-seeming things they have most cherished are in reality worthless. The story becomes a terrible object lesson, not of the risks attendant on "informing" in the baser sense, but of the punishment that will surely be imposed upon those who undertake to utter a truth disagreeable to

the hearers. Not only will the truth-teller be made to pay for his candor; he will not even succeed in permanently undeluding those to whom he speaks. Apollo, it is true, at first believes the crow's account of his wife's behavior, supported as it is by "sadde tokenes." But after the killing he slips back immediately into his old mistaken opinion, entirely forgetting the proofs the bird has so convincingly brought forth.

O deere wyf! o gemme of lustiheed!

That were to me so sad and eek so trewe,

Now listow deed, with face pale of hewe,

Ful giltelees,that dorste I swere, ywys!

(274–77)

This circumstance, which reminds us of January's similar relapse into self-delusion after he sees May with Damyan in the tree in the *Merchant's Tale*, is again Chaucer's own addition to the narrative.

Some critics have attacked the plan of Chaucer's tale on the ground that the story itself arouses our sympathy for the bird, but the moral preaching is directed *against* him. It has therefore been maintained that the tale is not an imaginatively unified whole. But if properly understood the tale displays a perfect unity of design, although its meaning is less cheerful than some of the critics seem to have suspected. What was Chaucer's purpose in thus deliberately altering and darkening the significance of the original story? It requires only a small amount of reflection to see the applicability of this tale's moral to the thinker who does not share the opinions and beliefs of his society. If he undertakes to "enlighten" his fellow men by revealing to them the falsity of their most cherished beliefs, he can expect to suffer the fate of the crow. Moreover, his personal sacrifice will probably be in vain. He may succeed in causing some people to waver temporarily in their opinions, but they will almost certainly sink back again into their former delusions. It may even be that his attempt to show them the truth will result in serious evil-doing. It would have been better for Apollo if his illusions concerning his wife had never been shattered, for he lacked the wisdom and restraint that would have enabled him to continue to act well in the face of the truth. Just so, a weakening of faith may very well produce harmful consequences for the majority of people. The advice against appearing in the role of an innovator is summed up in the lines:

My sone, be war, and be noon auctour newe

Of tidynges, wheither they been false or trewe.

(359–60)

When an author of the first rank takes the trouble to compose a work of art in which he expresses, with great dramatic force and with the utmost clarity, the necessity of keeping silent about dangerous and unpopular truths, is it inappropriate to inquire whether he does not intend this lesson to be applied to himself? Should not the reader consider the possibility that there may be an analogy between the protagonist of the story and its author? At the risk of being charged with indulgence in wild fancies, I should like to make the tentative suggestion that even the description of the crow contains certain details which remind us of Chaucer, the author and artist:

And countrefete the speche of every man
 He koude, whan he sholde telle a tale.
 (134–35)

The notion contained in the last two lines is not in any of the sources, nor does it seem to have any bearing on the development of the story. But could there be a more apt description of the skill that was responsible for the *Canterbury Tales*?

It might be argued that if Chaucer did indeed hold heterodox opinions, and if he took seriously the teaching contained in the *Manciple's Tale* he would have been precluded from giving any expression whatsoever to his real views. But this would ignore the possibility of voicing them in a manner sufficiently laconic to protect them from general notice.

But for litel speche avysely
 Is no man shent, to speke generally.
 (327–28)

In the Prologue to the *Manciple's Tale*, which is an integral part of the whole, Chaucer gives us a practical lesson in the possibilities of speaking an unpleasant truth and yet avoiding the dangerous consequences that would normally follow. It should be noted first of all that the Manciple, according to his description in the *General Prologue*, is an unscrupulous but extraordinarily clever rogue. He must have been a past master in the art of deception since he was employed by the distinguished lawyer members of the Inn of Court and yet was able to “sette hir aller cappe” (*General Prologue*, 586). In view of the emergence of the Man of Law as a defender of religious orthodoxy, which I hope subsequently to show, the opposition between the lawyers and the Manciple is not without significance. In the Prologue to his own tale, however, the crafty Manciple is represented as rashly committing the very action that his story warns against. He tells the Cook some very harsh and unpalatable truths

concerning the state to which he has been reduced by wine. The Cook's reaction is just what we would expect and not unlike Apollo's behavior to the bird. It is only the Cook's drunkenness that prevents him from inflicting actual bodily harm on the Manciple. The Host warns the Manciple that the Cook's means of retaliation may not yet be exhausted and the Manciple quickly perceives the need to placate his angry foe. He achieves his end by means that are as effective as they are what we should ordinarily consider immoral.

His action, the offering of the wine, is inconsistent with the offending, but true, speech in which he had reproved the Cook for his drunkenness. The speech implied that the Cook should be denied further access to wine; the deed provided him with that access. The speech was moral although fraught with danger to the Manciple; the action was immoral, but highly conducive to his safety. The Cook not only forgives but also seems literally to forget the original critical onslaught. Furthermore the end result of the action was socially beneficial to the little community of pilgrims. As the Host remarks, its effect was to "... turne rancour and disese / T'acord and love..." (97–98). Most important is the Host's concluding apostrophe:

O thou Bacus, yblessed be thy name,
That so kanst turnen ernest into game!
 (99–100; italics mine)

Some Chaucerian scholars, of which F. N. Robinson is one, have warned us against the error of over-interpreting Chaucer's writings, of attempting to derive a serious intention where the purpose was merely to entertain. They have taken as their text the final line of the *Miller's Prologue*. There Chaucer, after apologizing for the ribald material which, against his will, he will be obliged to present in the next two tales, cautions us:

And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game.
 (3186)

It surprises me that these scholars have not considered the light that is thrown on this statement by the lines just quoted from the *Manciple's Prologue*. For the latter passage indicates that Chaucer was fully aware of the possibility, as well as the great utility, of presenting a serious but possibly explosive teaching as a jest. The function of the wine in the Prologue is to smooth over the utterance of an exceedingly unpleasant truth. Another expression of the same thought is found in the Prologue to the *Monk's Tale*:

Ful ofte in game a sooth I have herd seye!
 (1964)

We have to consider the possibility that Chaucer, for protective purposes, deliberately and frequently employed the technique of turning “earnest into game.” Chaucer’s first biographer, John Fox, however mistaken he may have been on many points, apparently had something of this sort in mind when he wrote in his *Acts and Monuments of the Church* (1583; as quoted in Lounsbury 1892, 2:464):

And therefore the bishops belike taking his work but for jests and toys, in condemning other books, yet permitted his books to be read.

It may be, then, that in the *Manciple's Prologue* Chaucer has given us a hint concerning his methods of presenting unpopular truths. It is not impossible that he in his writings imitates the procedure followed by the Manciple. It may be objected that the low character of the Manciple precludes us from any comparison between his rascally self and the author of the *Canterbury Tales*. But it has already been indicated that the use of disreputable personages is a stock device for safely introducing dangerous opinions. It is well known that Chaucer delighted in belittling himself. It is entirely possible, then, that he may have actually enjoyed setting up as a model for himself the mercenary Manciple, who so skillfully blinded the upholders of the established law in regard to his illicit financial transactions. We have to ask ourselves, what would be the written or poetic equivalent of the Manciple's behavior? That behavior, as we have seen, consisted of a verbal statement of the truth followed by an action that negated the statement, thus rendering the speech innocuous. Immediately we are faced with the difficulty that the Manciple's behavior took place on two planes: speech and action. But we know Chaucer only through his speech, his writings. He seems to be confined to one level of expression only. Nevertheless, if a poet writes a dramatic composition in which heretical views are expressed or implied, and then appends to that composition an epilogue in which he, speaking in his own person, rejects and repents of the contents of his work, can we not say that he has imitated in his writings the two planes of speech and action between which the Manciple's behavior alternated? It is important to remember here not only the Retraction found at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, but also the epilogue to *Troilus and Criseyde* (think, for example, of the contradiction between *Troilus*, 3:1317–20—these lines occurring in the very center of the poem, when the narrator is “in” the story—and lines 5:1835–41 from the epilogue). But the imitation of the Manciple's way of proceeding can be even subtler than this. Dispensing with the device of the personal epilogue, it is possible for the poet to express a daring criticism of the established point of view, only to rob this attack of its sting by following it

within one and the same poem with a statement fully conforming to orthodox requirements.

It will be the thesis of the remainder of this paper that Chaucer follows precisely such a procedure within the framework of the *Canterbury Tales*. This is done in two ways. The first is to balance a tale, in which a questioning of the established view is clearly apparent, with another tale that upholds that view in its most orthodox form. Thus, I hope to show that the skeptical queries embodied in the *Knight's Tale* are answered by the forthright assertion of the accepted faith contained in the *Man of Law's Tale*. The latter story is immediately followed by the open challenge to the orthodox creed offered by the Wife of Bath, a challenge made possible because she is an allegedly "disreputable" character. And she in turn is counterbalanced by the Clerk, who restates the religious position in a more subtle and critical form. The final synthesis is provided by the *Franklin's Tale*, a narrative that combines skeptical and orthodox elements in a manner so extraordinarily complex that it is impossible to label it as belonging to either camp. The order and arrangement of the tales thus imitates the procedure of a dialectical debate. The established faith is questioned; then reasserted. The reassertion is followed by a challenge more open and direct than was permitted in the original questioning, and this challenge is succeeded by a defense of orthodoxy on a higher and subtler level than the first reassertion. The twice repeated exposition of thesis and antithesis is ultimately resolved by a synthesis which sums up the elements of the antecedent debate. But it is not merely the opposition of the tales that lends the *Canterbury Tales* its dialectical character. Every tale that has been mentioned is itself a microcosm of the larger whole. For it is relatively easy to show that each of the tales contains within itself in differing degrees both an assertion and a criticism of the tenets of orthodox belief.

Let us begin with a detailed consideration of the relevant passages in the *Knight's Tale*. A number of commentators have shown that the tale develops a pointed contrast between life as a pattern of order and the forces of chaos and destruction that seek to overthrow that order (Frost 1949, 289–304; Muscatine 1957, 181–90). Order is represented, not only by the person of Theseus himself, but also by the formal design that is exemplified in the beautiful and dignified life that is lived within his court. The agencies of disorder, on the other hand, manifest themselves in the sphere of "international relations," which is outside of Theseus' direct control. Thus the sacking of Thebes by Athens, the battle casualties in the Theban war, and the harsh treatment accorded to the prisoners are in vivid contrast to the beautifully ordered

tournament at Theseus' court, in which not one man loses his life. In even greater tension with the picture of life under Theseus' rule is the view of human existence contained in the paintings that line the walls of the three temples erected at the site of the lists. In each of these, although most of all in the temple of Mars, violence, cruelty, lust, treachery, and suffering dominate this human world. The gods themselves are depicted as irrational beings, in conflict with one another, creators of disorder and senseless suffering in the human sphere. Similarly, the speeches of the characters in the tale represent two sharply opposed views of the cosmic schema within which human life is framed. It is important to note that none of them contests the principle that terrestrial affairs are ruled by divine powers. The argument is confined to the crucial issue of whether or not this rule is beneficent. On this all-important point the *Knights' Tale* establishes a kind of dialectic that mirrors in microcosm the larger debate of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole.

Our first sight of Palamon reveals to us the restless complainer who cries out against the providential ordering of human affairs. He roams feverishly up and down his prison cell, lamenting the fortune that has reduced him to his present circumstances (1070–73). When upon catching sight of Emelye he cries out, Arcite responds with a brief speech in which he offers the Boethian counsel of resignation and patience in the face of the vicissitudes of fortune. Even after the quarrel between the two men, in which Arcite denies both the civil law and the law of comradeship for the sake of love, he still expresses an awareness of and a submission to the dictates of Providence that is lacking on Palamon's part (1172–86). After he has been freed and exiled, Arcite continues to give voice to the same sentiment (1251–74). Providence, he says, guides us better than we know. We wrongly desire the very things that destroy our ultimate felicity. In imposing upon us apparent sufferings, Fortune works for our ultimate good. In this speech Arcite puts forward the Boethian solution of the problem of evil that had been a center of concern for Christian theologians from the very beginning. In reality there is no evil. The appearance of evil is due merely to our lack of comprehension of the complicated, but ultimately beneficent, workings of Providence. For our misfortunes we have only our own misguided desires to blame. Arcite emerges as the spokesman for the orthodox Christian position.

Palamon, on the other hand, although he never questions the existence of an all-powerful Providence, is willing to challenge the goodness and justice of the divine rule (1303–33). The gods, he says, are indifferent to human needs; they do not take care of men. They permit, if indeed they do not

actively incite, the meaningless suffering of the innocent and the triumph of the evil. Although they demand of men a degree of abstinence and self-control that is altogether out of the question in regard to animals, they do not reward this effort. Indeed, Palamon says, the sufferings of this world are succeeded by sufferings in the next. After having suggested to us this dark view of the life to come, Palamon goes on to utter two most significant lines:

The answe of this lete I to dyvynys,
But wel I woot that in this world greet pyne ys.
(1323–24)

The conflict between experience and authority, which is to become such an important theme later in this tale and in the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, is thus briefly intimated. Our knowledge of the afterlife is due exclusively to the pronouncement of the divines, the “authorities.” But we know the painful character of this life directly and feelingly from our own experience. The skeptical attitude toward pronouncements concerning the life after death will receive subsequent reinforcement.

Arcite and Palamon, then, represent two entirely different views of the universe: Arcite tends to adopt the optimistic view that Providence directs all for the best; Palamon denies the justice of the divine plan. It is, therefore, peculiarly ironic that Arcite should be the victim of the machinations of the gods. The upholder of the goodness of the deity is subjected to defeat and punishment; the unsubmitive rebel wins the ultimate victory. The slow and painful nature of Arcite’s death, which seems to receive much more emphasis in Chaucer’s version than in his source, Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, is important in this context. Had he died gloriously in battle we might have thought that his death was not in vain. But the ignominious circumstances of his fall from the horse and his gradual sickening after the forces of nature have deserted him prevent us from regarding his death as anything but a terrible and undeserved *catas-trophe*, at least insofar as it is judged by the standards of this world.

Had Chaucer desired to do so, it would have been perfectly possible for him to indicate that Arcite’s death, however tragic in appearance, was ultimately for the best, that in terms of the real values he had gained more than he had lost. This might have been accomplished in two different ways. The first possibility would have been to depict Arcite as sacrificing his earthly joys, but as acquiring in their place a wisdom and understanding which he did not previously possess. Chaucer, however, does no such thing. There is no indication whatsoever that Arcite ever attains to the insight that Emelye’s

beauty is not the highest good the world can offer. Nor is there any sign that he comes to look upon all this-worldly ends as essentially hollow, in the manner of Boethius or of Troilus in the final stanzas of that poem. On the contrary his desire for Emelye and his grief at yielding her up are at least equal in intensity to the passion that he has displayed at any point in the poem. If Emelye represents the attractions of this life, Arcite, at the point of dying, is more wedded to worldly goals than ever before. An even more striking circumstance is that his former faith in the ultimately benign workings of Providence through the agencies of Fortune and Destiny is now replaced by an attitude of bewilderment and lack of comprehension of the divine plan.

What is this world? what asketh men to have?

Now with his love, now in his colde grave

Allone, withouten any compaignye.

(2777–79)

The resignation and patience that had characterized his earlier speeches have given way to a bitter lamenting over the injustice of his lot, which is reminiscent of the complaints previously uttered by Palamon.

Allas, the wo! allas, the peynes stronge,

That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!

Allas, the deeth! allas, myn Emelye!

Allas, departynge of oure compaignye!

Allas, myn hertes queene! allas, my wyf!

(2771–75)

Arcite's intellectual development is the exact reverse of Boethius' in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. At the same time, Chaucer's portrayal of his grief and bewilderment is so poignant that the reader's sympathies are wholly engaged on his behalf. Arcite's faith in the ultimate goodness of the universe may have been shaken, but his nobility as a person is unimpaired.

The second alternative that would have been open to Chaucer, had he desired to convince us that Arcite's death was not an unmitigated evil, was to follow the example of Boccaccio in depicting to us Arcite's life beyond the grave. If we were shown that Arcite's sufferings were redeemed and recompensed in the next world, we would be in a position to accept his misfortunes in this one as part of an ultimately beneficent divine scheme. The narrative really cries out for such an interpolation at this point in order to be

consonant with the Boethian worldview that so many commentators believe it exemplifies. It is therefore of crucial significance that Chaucer chose to omit the account of Arcite's soul that was ready at hand in his source. It might be objected that Chaucer had already made use of this material in *Troilus and Criseyde* and for that reason was precluded from employing it here. Even granting the assumption that the *Troilus* preceded the *Knight's Tale* in date of composition, and that Chaucer therefore could not have repeated the episode in the precise form in which it appears in the *Teseida*, it seems obvious that he possessed sufficient literary ingenuity to have devised a substitute which would have served the same emotional and philosophic function, had he cared to do so. Indeed, had Chaucer simply elected to remain silent concerning Arcite's fate after death, we might have assumed that we were intended to think of him as enjoying his celestial reward. But Chaucer has gone out of his way to debar us from such an interpretation.

His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,
 As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.
 Therefore I stynte, I nam no divinistre;
 Of soules fynde I nat in this registre,
 Ne me ne list thilke opinions to telle
 Of hem, though that they writen wher they dwelle.
 (2809–14)

For a number of reasons this is a most remarkable passage. In the first place it contains a statement of radical doubt concerning the destination of the soul after death. To be sure the words, while not attributed to any character in the tale, are those of the Knight-narrator rather than Chaucer's own. This much protection was surely necessary. But any doubts as to whether this statement reflects the author's own view tend to be dispelled when we consider that the Knight's dry comments not only echo Palamon's earlier saying (1322–23), but also directly parallel the personal pronouncement with which Chaucer opens the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*.

A thousand tymes have I herd men telle
 That ther ys joy in hevne and peyne in helle,
 And I acorde wel that it ys so;
 But, natheles, yet wot I wel also
 That ther nis noon dwellyng in this contree,
 That eyther hath in hevne or helle ybe,

Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen,
 But as he hath herd seyde, or founde it writen;
 For by assay ther may no man it preve.
 But God forbede but men shulde leve
 Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!
 Men shal not wenen every thing a lye
 But yf himself yt seeth, or elles dooth;
 For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth,
 Thogh every wight ne may it nat ysee.
 Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all, pardee!

(Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Text F, 1–16)

It is immediately apparent that, although the thoughts expressed in the two passages are very similar, the lines just quoted from the *Legend of Good Women* are considerably more ambiguous in meaning. Since they are spoken in Chaucer's own name, and moreover occupy an exceedingly conspicuous position at the very beginning of the poem, Chaucer could not afford to be as candid as in the briefer selection from the *Knight's Tale*, placed as it is in the middle of a very long tale, and spoken by a pilgrim other than the author himself. Therefore the technique employed in the *Legend of Good Women* quotation is the alternation of statements of belief with skeptical statements. The first three lines announce Chaucer's personal acceptance of the Church's teaching regarding heaven and hell, although this acceptance is perhaps not worded exactly as we would expect to find it in the mouth of a believing Christian. "A thousand tymes have I herd *men telle*" (italics mine) may imply some belittling of the sacred status of Scriptural teaching and Church doctrine. After all, Chaucer seems to say, these authorities that inform us concerning the life after death are only men like ourselves. Be this as it may, the assertion of belief is followed by a passage (4–8) which clearly says that there is no evidence for the belief. It is based upon hearsay alone. What effect this has upon the immediately preceding profession of faith, each reader must decide for himself. Having launched this boldly critical assertion, Chaucer now retreats into an apparently orthodox position. Many things, he says, for which we have no direct ocular evidence are nevertheless to be believed. He thus creates the impression that he is not, after all, disturbed by the lack of evidence for the Christian teaching concerning immortality. But if we think a bit, we can

easily see that this argument is tricky. The most radical skeptic would not deny that we accept, and must accept, much of what we know on the basis of authority. Were this not the case, many of us would be obliged to profess doubt regarding the existence, let us say, of the Pacific Ocean! But it certainly does not follow from this that we must accept everything that we are told or that we should believe every source that claims for itself authoritative status. The crucial question is whether or not there is evidence for the soundness of the authority. This is ultimately reducible to the question of whether or not the authority can produce authentic proof of the assertion it makes. In practice I accept “on faith” the statement of physicists regarding the laws of matter. But I do so on the assumption that if I had sufficient training and the necessary equipment I could reproduce in my own laboratory the evidence that led them to their views. Chaucer, however, has already told us that in the case of doctrines concerning the life after death the authorities themselves have no access to the evidence, and their statements consequently can never be checked: “For by assay ther may no man it preve.” What at first sight appears to be a retraction of the critical assertion thus turns out to be no retraction at all. The question of the soundness of the authorities, of the authenticity of their claim to be believed, is still unsettled, if indeed a negative conclusion is not implied. No Christian, of course, would contend that everything that is spoken or written should be believed. He would solve the problem in question by identifying his authority with the revealed word of God. It is noteworthy that Chaucer maintains a total silence regarding this solution. In fact, he goes on to pretend in the succeeding section (17–28) that the obligation to believe authorities without demanding ocular proof compels us to give credence to all “olde bokes.” It need hardly be mentioned that such a view would be anathema to devout believers. This is an absurd conclusion, a burlesque. But behind it I believe that there is a most serious meaning. The generalized reference to “olde bokes” and “olde apprevyd stories” reminds us that there are other faiths beside the Christian one that claim to be based on divine revelation (for the impact of the contact with Islam upon thinking Christians, see, for example, Thomas 1950, chapter 2). Can such conflicts be solved on the basis of revelation itself? If we are willing to accept on faith one book as the word of God, how are we to dispute the claims of an alternative scripture that similarly presents itself as divinely inspired? (For another literary treatment of this theme, and one that may very well have been known to Chaucer, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, First Day, Story Three). Chaucer’s seemingly naive conclusion that the necessity of accepting authority compels us to reverence all authorities touches on the central problem of religion. He has expressed in a nutshell the

argument between reason and revelation. This, indeed, is consummate literary skill.

The selection that I have quoted from the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* closes with one of Chaucer's most amusingly ambiguous lines: "Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all, pardee!" This is apparently a reference to the vision literature "taken by churchmen and all good Catholics as evidence not perhaps of actual existence in heaven but at least of an authentic glimpse into the beyond" (Thomas 1950, 123). The ostensible purpose of the statement is to provide an example of the immediately preceding assertion that the truth can be known without being seen. The surface meaning can probably be paraphrased as follows: Bernard was able to describe many aspects of the life after death concerning which he had only a partial visual glimpse, if indeed he had any glimpse at all. Thus we see that knowledge is possible without ocular evidence. But when we consider this line in the context of the entire passage its ironic undersense swims delightfully into our ken. Bernard, like many others, has undertaken to inform us about subjects concerning which he has no real knowledge whatsoever!

It is interesting to note that the opening of the *Prologue* to the *Legend* is modeled upon a passage from *Joli Buisson de jonece* of Jean Froissart (trans. in Thomas 1950, 123):

I have heard talk
 Of the Fountain of Youth,
 Also of invisible stones;
 But these are impossible things,
 For never have I seen that one
 (By the faith I owe St. Marcelli)
 Who has said: "I have actually been there."

For the Fountain of Youth and the invisible stones Chaucer has substituted the Christian conceptions of heaven and hell. But does not the close resemblance between the passages suggest that Chaucer has retained the notion that "these are impossible things"? Since the theological discussion with which Chaucer commences the *Legend* is conspicuously less appropriate to the subject matter which follows than a more literal rendering of Froissart's lines would have been, I think we are obliged to conclude that Chaucer's transformation of the original material can be explained only by his desire to present, in a suitably

veiled form, his own views concerning the difficulties and inadequacies of Christian doctrine.

I have been prompted to make this long digression on the *Legend* passage for two reasons. The first is that I believe it is an excellent small-scale example of Chaucer's "one stop forward, one step back" technique when dealing with dangerous topics. This is the technique that I believe is in evidence throughout much of the *Canterbury Tales*, as well as in other poems. In the second place, I wanted to show that we cannot brush aside the passage in the *Knight's Tale*, which similarly deals with the destination of the soul after death, as an artistic irrelevancy or as merely the view of the narrator of the tale. It is rather the case that the less exposed position of the latter passage enabled Chaucer to state his view more bluntly than was possible for him in the *Legend*. Consequently in the *Knight's Tale* Chaucer makes no profession of belief in the Christian doctrine and does not in any way qualify his agnostic assertion. It might be objected that the line, "Therefore I stynte, I nam no divinistre," implies a qualification. Chaucer may intend merely to state his own inability to deal with questions of this theological nature, without casting doubt on the received doctrine. But a moment's reflection teaches us that the matter being discussed is no abstruse point under dispute by the theologians, but a fundamental tenet of faith that every Christian was obliged to accept without reservation. The deeply skeptical character of Chaucer's profession of ignorance on this salient point remains unaffected. This impression is reinforced by the almost contemptuous tone of the last two lines:

Ne me ne list thilke opinions to telle

Of hem, though that they writen wher they dwelle.

(2813–14)

The use of the word "opinion" is particularly significant, since in philosophical discussion this word was always used in opposition to knowledge. Chaucer thus implies that those who undertake to present a teaching on the fate of the soul after death do so without any reliable knowledge of the subject. The use of the plural form, "opinions," may possibly be intended to hint that there are other views beside the Christian one regarding this matter and that there is little basis for choosing between these conflicting doctrines (for a view even more emphatic than I have advanced that this passage constitutes a direct statement of unbelief, see Lounsbury 1892, 2:514–15).

One of the most important functions of this passage is to reinforce the distinction between experience and authority that had already

been introduced in a previous speech attributed to Palamon (1323–24). Since the narrator has no experience concerning the life after death, he must profess ignorance. The opinions of alleged authorities are tacitly rejected. We have already seen how, by implication, the theme of experience versus authority was treated in the *Legend* passage. We have yet to see the development that this motif will undergo both in this tale and in the remainder of the *Canterbury Tales*.

The passage we have been discussing has, then, independent significance in indicating to us Chaucer's view of the immortality of the soul and of the relative weight to be accorded to experience and authority. But within the context of the *Knight's Tale* its chief dramatic function is to clarify the problem of evil that has been a theme of the tale, both in speech and in deed, from the very beginning. Arcite's tragic death is not recompensed by any insight achieved during his own life, nor by the promise of reward in the life beyond the grave. His faith in the beneficence of the guiding Providence is thus shown to be without foundation. An understanding of the passage under discussion prepares us to appreciate the true significance of certain key statements that occur toward the close of the *Knight's Tale*. Egeus, consoling Theseus, says:

This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,
 And we been pilgrimes, passynge to and fro.
 (2847–48)

These lines are full of dramatic excitement and they suggest to us many ideas. Foremost among them is the connection here implied with the Canterbury pilgrims themselves. The pilgrimage to Canterbury is human life; the characters represented are indeed "all kinds of natures that labour on the bosom of this sphere." But we cannot stop here. The view that this world is a vale of tears, a kind of purgatory, finds expression once more in Theseus' reference to "this foule prisoun of this lyf" (3061) from which Arcite is happily liberated. If we take these statements as they stand, they seem to represent the orthodox medieval view of the temporal world. This world is, indeed, no more than a purgatorial passage to the life everlasting that awaits us. But when we consider these statements in the light of the passage that specifically deals with life after death, we come to understand them in an entirely different fashion. It is one thing to say that the life we know is no more than a preparation for the life eternal. On that basis, we are entirely justified in calling our world "a thurghfare ful of wo," "this foule prisoun of this lyf." An optimistic view of the whole is still possible. But if radical doubt is expressed concerning the destination of the soul after death, these statements take on an entirely different color. To say that

human life is darkly pervaded by injustice, and that there is no assurance of any future compensation is to assert a tragic view of the whole in which no benign, caring Providence tends the needs of man. It is to affirm the sentiments previously uttered by Palamon.

The final section of the *Knight's Tale*, Theseus' Boethian speech, is taken by most commentators as a revelation of the ultimate orthodoxy of Chaucer's views. It is certainly true that the speech creates a general impression of conformity to the established doctrine. But our previous analysis of the Chaucerian technique in dealing with central theological problems should be sufficient warning against a naive acceptance of the surface teaching. The speech has two main parts. The first is a general philosophical statement concerning the nature of the universe; the second is an ethical counsel. The essence of the philosophical statement is that everything that has come into being must necessarily pass out of being. This view, although perfectly compatible with Christianity, is not in itself a specifically Christian doctrine, occupying as it did an important place in the teaching of the classical philosophers. To be sure, Chaucer joins to this statement the Boethian conception that God in wisely ordering the universe through the restraining power of love has appointed to all living things a specific term of duration. But the ethical counsel that constitutes the second division of the speech would have followed just as certainly even had the Christian doctrine concerning Providence been omitted. It was, in fact, one of the central ethical teachings of the pagan philosophers. An attitude of serene resignation both toward the inevitability of death and toward the vicissitudes of fortune is just as necessary for the worldview which admits the real possibility of accident and evil, as for the Boethian type of philosophy which denies their ultimate existence.

Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,

To maken vertu of necessitee,

And take it weel that we may nat eschue,

And namely that to us alle is due.

(3041–44)

These lines sum up a theme that occurs again and again in Chaucer's poetry and I think there can be no doubt that they embody one of his most central thoughts. But they seem to imply an attitude of acceptance and resignation rather than the optimistic view that would assert that in this divinely ordered world all ultimately works out for the best.

Two points of salient importance emerge, then, in connection with the speech of Theseus. The first is that, despite the surface impression of orthodoxy it creates, its central philosophic and moral teaching is just as much pagan as it is Christian. It is a teaching available to us on the basis of reason and experience; it does not require a divine revelation. This, I think, is the significance of the following lines:

Ther nedeth noght noon auctoritee t'allegge,

For it is preeved by experience.

(3000–3001)

We have seen how important is the implied distinction between experience and authority in all the passages dealing with the immortality of the soul. In those instances Chaucer tacitly rejected the claims of authority and set up experience, by which he meant to include both perception and reason, as his standard. Since perception and reason cannot inform us about the life after death, he treated the received doctrines concerning the fate of the soul as opinions merely. Now he presents to us a teaching that is not based on authority, but on the solid ground of experience.

This maystow understonde and seen at ye.

(3016)

Thanne may ye se that al this thyng hath ende.

(3026)

Unaided human reason is sufficient to establish the truth that all living beings must sometime die. And from the perception of this fundamental necessity follows the counsel of acceptance and resignation, the advice to “take it weel that we may nat eschue.”

The second point of which we must take cognizance concerns the question of whether Theseus' answer to the critique of Providence contained in Palamon's earlier speech constitutes a wholly satisfactory solution of the problem. Insofar as Theseus' statement reflects a specifically Christian view, the point that is stressed is the totality of God's rule over the universe and the folly of attempting to rebel against it. Now it is noteworthy that Palamon never challenged this conception.

Thanne seyde he, “O crueel goddes that governe

This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,

And writen in the table of athhamaunt

Your parlement and youre eterne graunt,⁹
(1303–6)

None of Chaucer's characters, even in their most critical moods, ever query the existence and omnipotence of God. The question that they tend over and over again to raise concerns the problem posed by the facts of evil and injustice. Thus Palamon asks:

What governance is in this prescience,
That giltelees tormenteth innocence?
(1313–14)

It is certainly true that to this view of Providence as cruel, or at best indifferent, Theseus opposes the Christian conception of the supreme goodness and wisdom of God.

Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love,
Greet was th'effect, and heigh was his entente.
Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente;
(2988–90)

And therefore, of his wise purveiaunce,
He hath so wel biset his ordinaunce,
That speses of thynges and progressiouns
Shullen enduren by successiouns,
(3011–14)

The ending of the *Knight's Tale* thus creates the impression of a return to orthodoxy, an ultimate acceptance of the Boethian and Christian view of the universe. It fulfills the same function as was served by the "retraction" in the opening passage of the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*. That is to say, it provides a cloak of respectability for the daring questions that were previously raised in the main body of the tale. It is another example of the "one step forward, one step back" technique. But just as the "retraction" in the *Legend* passage proved, upon examination, to be no true retraction, just so does the Boethian speech that winds up the *Knight's Tale* fail to give a satisfactory answer to the problem posed by the narrative itself. That problem concerns the reconciliation of the existence of evil with a Providence that is at once omnipotent and of perfect goodness. In the tale we have been presented with a living example of injustice: Arcite's undeserved misfortune is not counter-balanced by the promise of a celestial reward. Theseus does make one attempt

to deal with the difficulty this situation creates (3047–56). He suggests that death may have saved Arcite from even worse suffering and degradation. There are advantages to dying young and thus avoiding the inevitable decline brought on by old age. Theseus thus seems to argue that Arcite experienced the best of all possible fates, that he was a recipient of providential bounty rather than a victim of divine injustice. Even if we are willing to overlook the circumstance that Arcite himself was totally unable to accept this explanation, we can hardly think that this constitutes a happy view of human existence. On this basis we should almost be compelled to join the German poet, Heinrich Heine, in his assertion that the best fate of all is not to be born. We have already noted Theseus' reference to "this foule prisoun of this lyf" and what it implies when combined with the expression of doubt concerning the soul's destination after death. It seems that the attempt to prove Arcite's death part of a benign providential scheme necessitates an even darker portrayal of human life than would have been required by the admission of the injustice of his fate. And this darkness is unrelieved by any light emanating from an existence beyond the grave. We seem to have circled back to the tragic view of Providence that had been the basis of Palamon's speech.

It is perhaps no accident that in the *General Prologue* Chaucer describes the Knight as a man who has traveled in far places, a man who has observed many different customs and even different religions. At Granada, Belmarye, and Tramysse he would have been in contact with the Islamic faith. In Lithuania, which was not converted to Christianity until 1386, he no doubt encountered a pagan religion. Although he had fought in the Crusades, he had also been

Somtyme with the lord of Palatyē

Agayn another hethen in Turkye.

(*General Prologue*, 65–66)

The lord of Palatyē was evidently a heathen himself, although bound in friendly treaty to the Christian King Peter of Cyprus. The Knight had had, in other words, the widest possible opportunity to become acquainted with conflicting opinions regarding matters of religious faith. It is a well-known historical fact that the birth of a skeptical attitude toward one's own faith is frequently associated with just such experience. The natural tendency to accept without question the views of one's society is sometimes shaken by the discovery of alternative creeds. This discovery may lead persons of a certain type to scrutinize the basis of faith itself. It is therefore particularly appropriate that the *Knight's Tale*, which contains such a profound questioning of the orthodox

Christian position, should have been assigned to a person with his particular background.

It is equally appropriate that the *Man of Law's Tale*, which may be viewed as a reply to the Knight and a reassertion of orthodoxy, should have been given to its particular narrator. His very title, the Man of Law, suggests to us that he is a defender of the *status quo* and consequently of the received faith. In classical philosophical discussion, well known to the Middle Ages through the writings of Aristotle, the laws of a country tend always to be closely associated with its opinions, its religious beliefs. The laws embody these beliefs and opinions. The laws also require unquestioning obedience. Therefore we find that law, legality, opinion, faith are terms frequently opposed to philosophy, which is the attempt to transcend opinion and to replace it with knowledge. Philosophy is the effort to gain understanding through the exercise of unaided human reason; law and legality stand for an acceptance on faith of the views of one's own society. Assuming that Chaucer was not wholly unacquainted with this tradition—for his identification of law with religious faith, see the *Man of Law's Tale*, 218–24—we can see that the profession and title of his narrator are most suggestive. Whereas the Knight had become familiar with the manners and mores of many different peoples, the Man of Law is an expert in the law of his own country.

And every statut koude he pleyn by rote.
(*General Prologue*, 327)

Chaucer has suggested yet another contrast between the two men. Of the Knight he says:

And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
(68–69)

In other words he combines genuine wisdom with a modest bearing. But it is implied that the opposite is true of the Man of Law.

Discreet he was and of greet reverence –
He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise.
(312–13)

The Man of Law has the appearance, the superficial show of wisdom. He creates a magnificent impression. But Chaucer has unmistakably hinted to us that the reality within does not measure up to the splendid façade. The remainder of the passage goes on to suggest that his morality may be

as questionable as his wisdom. Although he knows how to make all his transactions legally watertight, he seems to be using his high office at least in part for purposes of personal enrichment. He possesses the title of a justice, but we cannot be sure that he is truly a just man.

The impression of hypocrisy that permeates the description of the Man of Law in the *General Prologue* is further reinforced by the contrast between the tale that he tells and the prologue that precedes it—assuming for the moment that the prologue was intended to occupy its present place in the *Canterbury* scheme. The tale is pious in the extreme and constitutes a praise of otherworldly Christian virtue. But the prologue states that the greatest of human evils is not lack of virtue, but lack of money. The fact that this statement is dressed up with Biblical and other ecclesiastical citations cannot conceal from us the extent to which it is a violation of the spirit and teaching of Christianity. It may be that the tension between the tale and the prologue reflects the discrepancy between the Man of Law's apparent virtue and his actual behavior. The tale may be the result of his desire to show himself as a man of utmost piety and probity. But in the prologue he perhaps betrays his true sentiments and reveals himself to us as in fact thoroughly worldly and materialistic.

Whatever the status of the prologue, the most striking characteristic of the tale itself is the direct answer it affords to the question concerning the goodness of Providence that had been raised in the *Knight's Tale*. It is of course true that in the latter tale the deities that are directly represented as shaping human destiny are the pagan gods. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, on the other hand, the theology is exclusively Christian. Nevertheless, the speeches of the characters in the *Knight's Tale* make it clear that the pagan deities are ultimately to be regarded as agents of a supreme Providence that is definitely Christian in conception. Yet this Providence permits Arcite to suffer and die in spite of the fact that he is wholly innocent of wrongdoing. The attempt made by Theseus at the close of the tale to regard the tragedy as part of an ultimately beneficent divine plan is not wholly satisfactory. Chaucer appears to have gone out of his way to indicate to us that the theme of the *Man of Law's Tale* is identical with that of the *Knight's Tale*. He has interpolated into the source story a speech that directly raises the problem of evil in its relation to the goodness of God. Upon being commanded to set Constance and her son adrift in a rudderless ship, the constable asks:

O myghty God, if that it be thy wille,
Sith thou art rightful juge, how may it be

That thou wolt suffren innocentz to spille,
 And wikked folk regne in prosperitee?
 (813–16)

This, of course, is precisely the question posed by Palamon. But the answers implied by the two tales could hardly be more different. Toward Arcite the gods are at best indifferent; at worst they are cruel. But in the *Man of Law's Tale* the virtuous are saved and the wicked punished with something approaching a monotonous regularity. Although Constance is indeed compelled to undergo horrendous ordeals, she is depicted as continually under the protecting aegis either of God Himself, of Christ, or of the Virgin Mary. Providence intervenes directly and frequently in the events of her life, and these interventions are usually of a miraculous character. We are confronted with one astounding *deus ex machina* after another (my private tally stands at six). Now it is noteworthy that Chaucer has added to the source story in such a way as greatly to increase its religiosity. He has not, it is true, made any important change in the actual occurrences that take place. But in at least three instances he has put into his heroine's mouth extended prayers and expressions of devotion that are not to be found in the original. Thus he describes her as beseeching the cross of Christ to be her protection against drowning (449–62), as requesting God to prove her innocence of the murder charge in the same way that He had once defended Susanna (637–44), as accepting without complaint the will of Christ (824–26), and finally as praying to the Virgin to save her child (841–54). All of these passages are original with Chaucer. Their dramatic effect is to portray the corresponding divine interventions as responses on the part of God to the needs of His creature. Not only do they exemplify the efficacy of virtuous prayer, but they also emphasize the loving care with which Providence watches over the innocent. Chaucer has further reinforced this teaching by inserting into the narrative two long, rhetorical passages (470–504 and 932–45) that stress the miraculous nature of Constance's salvation and point to the limitless power and love of God.

The function of the *Man of Law's Tale*, then, is the emphatic reassertion of the goodness and mercy of Providence. But this reassertion is made on an exceedingly crude and naive level. We are in a realm far removed from the subtle arguments of Boethian philosophy. For Boethius had never attempted to maintain that God always extends assistance to the innocent, nor that He necessarily inflicts direct punishment on the wicked. The personal situation in which Boethius, the man, found himself was sufficient disproof of that. Instead, Boethius followed in part the Platonic argument that true

happiness is identical with virtue, rather than with external prosperity, and that therefore in the ultimate sense only the good can be happy. Thus virtue is its own reward; vice its own punishment. But this view is compatible with a great deal of actual injustice and suffering in the world as we know it, although in the last analysis Boethius would maintain that the apparent evils are explainable as means to the good. Whatever we may think of this argument, its infinite superiority over the view of Providence contained in the *Man of Law's Tale* need hardly be emphasized. The notion of a God who is obliged constantly to violate and upset His own natural order by miraculous interventions is wholly alien to the Boethian conception. Chaucer has deliberately assigned this rather childish view of the workings of Providence to a man concerning whose wisdom and justice he has already given us certain negative hints. The questions embodied in the *Knight's Tale* have been answered indeed, but not in a way that would satisfy any thoughtful person.

There is one further point in connection with the *Man of Law's Tale* that I think is worthy of notice because of the light it may perhaps shed on Chaucer's ideas concerning religious persecution. "The mooder of the Sowdan, welle of vices" is naturally presented as a personification of evil. But if we examine her speech (330–43) we cannot help but be struck by its sincere religiosity. It is not wickedness of heart, but fanatic religious devotion that motivates the Sultanness to perform her bloody deed. If we substitute the New Testament for the Koran, Christ for Mohammed, there is nothing in her declaration of fidelity to her own belief that might not have been uttered in similar circumstances by a Christian. And her willingness to persecute those who have deserted the Mohammedan faith is perhaps not so very different from the attitude that Christians sometimes displayed towards heathens and heretics. It was perfectly safe for Chaucer to condemn the religious persecution inflicted by a Mohammedan upon Christians. But it is possible that he intended, by this example, to reveal to us the horror of all such persecution.

The vigorous defense of orthodoxy contained in the *Man of Law's Tale* is immediately answered by the equally vigorous attack made by the Wife of Bath. Because Chaucer has depicted the Wife as coarse, low, and disreputable, he can safely permit her to make an onslaught upon a wide variety of accepted beliefs without fearing that he would be held personally responsible for advocating heterodox views. It is perfectly true that the Wife of Bath does not discuss those profound questions concerning the goodness and justice of a God that had been the theme of the more elevated narratives of the Knight and the Man of Law. It would be entirely out of character for her to take

an interest in such matters. She is only concerned to overturn those doctrines that interfere in actual practice with her own life. But the arguments that she employs in the course of this operation do in fact imply a heterodoxy far more profound than the simple rejection of the Church teaching concerning the superiority of virginity over marriage, or the right of the husband to rule the wife. I do not for one moment suggest that Chaucer is to be associated with all the views to which she gives expression. It is clear that nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed Chaucer plainly uses much of her uninhibited defense of women as a means of satirizing the female sex through the very one who appears as its spokesman. Her glorification of sensuality and of unrestrained appetite he holds up to ridicule not only by implication in her own account, but also in many of his subsequent tales. But this does not rule out the possibility that he is in secret sympathy with some aspects of her freethinking, critical attitude.

The Wife of Bath begins her speech by announcing a theme that is to run through all of her subsequent argumentation.

Experience, though noon auctoritee

Were in this world, is right ynogh for me

To speke of wo that is in mariage;

(1-3)

These lines not only give us a clue as to the independence and fearlessness of the Wife's character, but also suggest the intellectual basis that will underlie her later attacks upon orthodox beliefs. The Wife is not the sort of person who will submissively accept on faith the dictates of any authority whatsoever. She is prepared to believe only what she can confirm in terms of her own experience. And her experience leads her to suspect the falsity of many well-established teachings. We have already seen that in the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women* and in the *Knight's Tale* Chaucer attributes crucial importance to the distinction between experience and authority as sources of knowledge. His discussions of this question always carry the unmistakable implication that, of the two, experience is the more reliable guide. What this preference means in terms of his attitude toward revealed truth has already received adequate discussion. Here it is sufficient to note that the Wife of Bath is continuing the dialectical discussion which runs through many of the *Canterbury Tales* by picking up once more the experience-authority theme which had first been introduced in the *Knight's Tale*. This time it is openly asserted that experience, unsupported by the teachings of authorities, is a sufficient guide in the conduct

of human affairs. The radical nature of this assertion in the intellectual milieu of the fourteenth century and the extent to which it contradicted the official position of the Church cannot be too much emphasized. For what the Wife is implying is that we can adequately orient ourselves in this world by means of our own reason and perception; and that we can consequently dispense with ecclesiastical instruction. It is her rejection of authority that is symbolized by the wonderful scene in which she rips the pages out of her husband's book. We can understand the importance of this issue by recalling that it constitutes the dividing line between reason and revelation, between philosophy and theology. It is the contention of philosophy that every assertion, no matter how authoritative its source is alleged to be, must be subjected to proof, unless it is self-evidently true to natural reason. Theology maintains that the most important truths are revealed to us by the word of God. These must be accepted on faith; for without such a starting point human reason would be unable to function. Philosophy, on the other hand, assumes that the most important truths are accessible to reason as such. Hence the argument for the superiority of experience over authority may be said to favor philosophy over theology.

The discussion of experience and authority is continued in the Wife's great defense of the lawfulness of marriage that constitutes the first section of her speech. Here it is demonstrated that she is by no means ignorant of the authoritative texts; in fact her knowledge and her comprehension of them are quite extraordinary. It is clear that she is not the sort of person who despises the claims of learning out of ignorance and stupidity, as had been the case with the carpenter in the *Miller's Tale* and the miller in the *Reeve's Tale*. On the contrary she exhibits a skill in "scole-matere" and in scholastic argument that later calls forth admiring comments from the Friar. Her method of dealing with Scriptural texts that might be quoted against her position is first of all to point out the obscurity and uncertainty of their meaning. Thus when she cites the remarks of Jesus to the Samaritan woman she says, it must be admitted, with some justification:

What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn;
(20)

Her habit of demanding reasons for the statements of authorities is displayed in the two lines that immediately follow:

But that I axe, *why* that the fifthe man
Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?
(21–22; italics mine)

She also knows how to oppose one Scriptural text with another. By pointing out contradictions in the authoritative text she tends to weaken the force of its teaching. Thus she counters the remark to the Samaritan woman by citing several Old Testament patriarchs who were not celebrated for their devotion to monogamy, let alone celibacy. And she has armed herself in advance against St. Paul's exaltation of virginity by quoting the injunction found in Genesis to be fruitful and multiply. Her cleverness in argumentation is revealed in the passage in which she grants, somewhat scornfully indeed, the superiority of the celibate life, but maintains that marriage also serves the purposes of God. There can be little doubt left in the mind of the reader as to her real opinion concerning the relative advantages of matrimony and virginity. But it is in her attack upon St. Jerome that her skill as a debater is displayed at its peak. After having summed up—somewhat contemptuously—Jerome's statements concerning the functions of the organs of generation, she says tersely:

The experience woot wel it is noight so.
(124)

Thus experience is once more opposed to the dictate of an authority, and we can hardly doubt that in this case the authority is put to shame.

The notion of experience as the best and the sufficient teacher is expressed again in the lines that Chaucer certainly wrote but apparently cancelled:

Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes,
And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes
Maketh the werkman parfyt sekirly;
Of fyve husbondes scoleiying am I.
(44c–44f)

It is the contention of Lounsbury that Chaucer presents through the medium of the disreputable Wife of Bath his own opposition to the Christian view that would depreciate marriage in favor of celibacy (Lounsbury 1892, 2:522–30). He points out that the same criticism of a celibate clergy is contained in the Host's remarks to the Monk in the latter's prologue to his tale (1943–64). Although I consider Lounsbury's argument in the main convincing, it does not lie within the scope of this paper to give it further consideration.

The next thesis put forward by the Wife of Bath, the rightful

claim of the woman to have the sovereignty over her husband, constitutes her second great attack upon orthodox belief. Whatever Chaucer may have thought concerning the merits of her literal contention, we cannot forget that the relation of wife to husband is subsequently to assume an allegorical meaning. There can be little question that the behavior of Griselda in the *Clerk's Tale* is meant to symbolize the appropriate attitude of the Christian toward God. Therefore the rebellious stance of the wife toward the authority of the husband may also have a symbolic significance. In this connection it may be helpful to note the contrast between the attitude toward authority displayed by Constance in the *Man of Law's Tale* and by the Wife herself. Constance is submissive toward all authorities, temporal or divine. When her parents send her away to a barbarous nation she mildly says:

I, wrecche womman, no fors though I spille!
 Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,
 And to been under mannes governance.
 (285–87)

When she and her newborn child are exiled her response is described as follows:

But nathelees she taketh in good entente
 The wyl of Crist, and knelynge on the stronde,
 She seyde, "Lord, ay welcome be thy sonde!"
 (824–26)

Not only does the Wife refuse to accept the subordinate position of women decreed by the Church; she also displays an attitude of self-reliance and resourceful independence in all the actions of her life that contrasts markedly with the passive acceptance of the divine will that was Constance's chief trait. When Constance is in difficulties she invariably turns for succour to God, to Christ, or to the Virgin. But Alisoun of Bath is clearly a believer in self-help. She relies upon her own "purveiance" rather than upon the Providence of heaven. This could be illustrated by reference to nearly any aspect of her autobiography, but the most beautiful and precise expression of her attitude is contained in the following lines:

I seye that in the feeldes walked we,
 Til trewely we hadde swiche daliance,
 This clerk and I, that of my purveiance
 I spak to him and seyde hym how that he,

If I were wydwe, sholde wedde me.
 For certainly, I sey for no bobance,
 Yet was I nevere withouten purveiance
 Of mariage, n'of othere thynges eek.
 I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek
 That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
 And if that faille, thanne is al ydo.
 (564–74)

The Wife's independence of authority goes far deeper than a mere rejection of specific ecclesiastical doctrines pertaining to the marriage relation.

Her third great rebellion against orthodoxy is revealed in her frankly expressed opinion that the best things in life are in the main the pleasures of the body. It is true, of course, that she tells us her supreme goal is possession of "maistrie" and that is not precisely a source of sensual pleasure. The Wife is too intelligent a person to be able to live entirely on the physical level. But "maistrie" is important to her at least in part because it provides her with the means to gratify her nearly insatiable appetites. And this gratification she regards as the end and purpose of human existence. Money, possessions, clothes, the delights of wine, and above all the pleasures of sex—these are the things that make up her constellation of goods. Her emancipation of appetite from the rule of reason as well as from the divine law is pungently expressed in the following passage:

For God so wys be my savacioun,
 I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,
 But evere folwede myn appetit,
 Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;
 I took no kep, so that he liked me,
 How poore he was, ne eek of what degree.
 (621–26)

Incidentally, these lines cast an amusing light upon the edifying passage in the Wife's Tale that states the doctrine that "gentillesse" depends on virtue rather than upon rank or riches or bodily beauty. Since the Wife does in fact ignore these very qualifications in choosing her lovers, she may be said, in a perverse sort of way, to practice what she preaches.

The Wife, then, identifies happiness with sensual gratification. But there is one point on which she is obliged to assent to the orthodox view. She has learned the tragic lesson that worldly joys are fleeting. "To lytel while our blysse lasteth" is a line that might well have come from her mouth. But her full recognition of the brevity of bodily pleasures does not cause her to reject them in favor of any more durable felicity. It is at this point that she makes a crucial break both with Christian doctrine and with the teaching of philosophers. The Church taught that the duration of this life is but a moment when compared to eternal existence. But the Wife seems to regard the happiness of this world as the only happiness worth having. The philosophers pointed to a way of life that held out the promise of a more lasting felicity than could be obtained through the quest for bodily pleasure. The Wife seems to think that there is no happiness that can equal the delights of the senses. Therefore she in no way repents of her past life, nor does she seem either to fear or to look forward to any other existence. At the same time she does not whine or complain about the inevitable fading of her youth and beauty. She is prepared to accept the bitter along with the sweet. Her courage and her resignation are summed up in an utterance which contains one of her deepest insights:

But, Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me
 Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
 It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.
 Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
 That I have had my world as in my tyme.
 But age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
 Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
 Lat go, farewell! the devel go therwith!
 The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;
 The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
 But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.

(469–79)

There is something in the tone of this speech that, oddly enough, calls to mind the advice given by Theseus at the close of the *Knight's Tale*. The Wife of Bath has also learned

To maken vertu of necessitee,
 And take it weel that we may nat eschue,
 (3042–43)

It falls to the Clerk to reassert the Christian virtues of duty, humility, and temperance that had been so blatantly attacked by the Wife. Whatever sympathy the Clerk, as a philosopher and a student of Aristotle, may possibly have felt with the Wife's display of intellectual independence and with her elevation of experience over authority, he was almost certain to disapprove of the open airing of such dangerous views before as large and as mixed an assembly as the Canterbury pilgrims. Most important of all, he must have been profoundly opposed to the Wife's attempt to undermine the foundation of moral virtue through a liberation of the sensual appetites from the restraints imposed both by human reason and by divine command. As a responsible person, he would have undoubtedly felt himself obligated to combat any opinion so likely to corrupt its hearers as this. There were all too many members of the *Canterbury* group who had a natural inclination to act according to the Wife's precepts, although in most cases they lacked the courage to give them direct expression. In the *General Prologue* Chaucer says of the Clerk:

Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche,
 And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.
 (307–8)

And it is precisely as a defender of moral virtue against the Wife of Bath that he appears before us. His tale is contrived in such a way as to answer each of the Wife's chief attacks upon orthodoxy. Griselda exhibits an attitude of unquestioning submission to authority. She is also the perfect example of wifely obedience. And in the third place, she is a living exemplification of restraint and temperance. It is part of the art of the *Clerk's Tale* that Griselda, the embodiment of Christian virtue, is made to appear supremely beautiful. Without uttering any direct criticism of the Wife, the Clerk, simply by juxtaposing to her account of herself the portrait of Griselda, has constructed a devastating commentary on the former's shortcomings. The effectiveness of this commentary is reinforced by the delightfully satiric praise of the Wife at the conclusion of his narrative and the admonition to all women to follow her example in the Envoy. By revealing her for what she is, he has in fact greatly weakened the force of her teaching. At the same time he has defended the clerky profession from the charges of priggishness, spitefulness, and anti-feminism that had been brought by the Wife. Particularly important in this connection are the lines:

Men speke of Job, and moost for his humblesse,
 As clerkes, whan hem list, konne wel endite,
 Namely of men, but as in soothfastnesse,
 Though clerkes preise wommen but a lite,
 Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite
 As womman kan, ne kan been half so trewe
 As wommen been, but it be falle of newe.
 (932–38)

As an answer to the Wife's speech, the *Clerk's Tale* is truly a *tour de force*.

But there is yet another aspect to his narrative which connects it with the earlier discussions concerning the goodness of Providence. There can be little doubt that the story of Griselda is meant to instruct the reader, not primarily in the duty of wifely obedience, but in the total submissiveness to the will of God which is demanded of every devout Christian. A biblical undertone pervades the entire tale and there is an abundance of references to Scripture, some of them explicit, such as the comparison between Griselda and Job, others merely suggestive. Thus the description of the life of the villagers calls to our mind the condition of Adam and Eve.

There stood a throop, of site delitable,
 In which that povre folk of that village
 Hadden hir beestes and hir herbergage,
 And of hire labour tooke hir sustenance,
 After that the erthe yaf hem habundance.
 (199–203)

The next stanza reminds us of the circumstances of the Nativity.

Amonges thise povre folk ther dwelte a man
 Which that was holden povrest of hem alle;
 But hye God somtyme senden kan
 His grace into a litel oxes stalle;
 (204–7)

Similarly, the account of Griselda fetching water at a well suggests a Biblical tone. More important, the promise of total obedience that Walter extracts from Griselda prior to their marriage is reminiscent of the Covenant between

the Lord and Israel (Exod. 24:7). And the nature of the trials inflicted on Griselda brings to our mind the sacrifice which God demanded of Abraham. The very names of the characters may possibly have symbolic significance. Walter means ruler (literally, ruling over the host). This could, of course, simply refer to his temporal power, but it would not be surprising if his name were intended to have a theological overtone. It is not wholly beyond the bounds of possibility that the name of Griselda's father is also important. Janiculum is the name of a hill in Rome immediately adjacent to the site of the Church of St. Peter. Perhaps it is intended that we should think of Griselda as a true daughter of the Church. Although Chaucer merely borrowed these names from his sources, it may well be that the symbolic significance was already present in his originals. Certainly this does seem to be the case with Petrarch's rendition of the tale.

All of these circumstances suggest that the *Clerk's Tale* is to be taken as an allegory of the relation between God and man. Indeed, the Clerk virtually compels us to accept this interpretation when he says:

This storie is seyed, nat for that wyves sholde
 Folwen Griselde as in humylitee,
 For it were inportable, though they wolde;
 But for that every wight, in his degree,
 Sholde be constant in adversitee
 As was Griselde; therefore Petrak writeth
 This storie, which with heigh stile he enditeth.

For, sith a womman was so pacient
 Unto a mortal man, wel moore us oghte
 Receyven al in gree that God us sent;
 For greet skile is, he preeve that he wroghte.
 But he ne tempteth no man that he boghte,
 As seith Seint Jame, if ye his pistel rede;
 He preeveth folk al day, it is no drede,

And suffreth us, as for oure excercise,
 With sharpe scourges of adversitee

Ful ofte to be bete in sondry wise;
 Nat for to knowe oure wyl, for certes he,
 Er we were born,knew al oure freletee;
 And for oure beste is al his governaunce.
 Lat us thanne lyve in vertuous suffraunce.
 (1142–62)

The significance of this passage goes far beyond a simple answer to the defiance of authority exhibited by the Wife of Bath. It reminds us of the problem which originally had been raised in the *Knight's Tale*. If God is both good and all-powerful, why does he inflict suffering upon the innocent? A rough and ready answer had been provided by the Man of Law. It was his thesis that God always takes care of His own, even though the caring may necessitate violent reversals of the natural order. The suffering which the virtuous undergo is attributable, not to God, but to the wickedness of men. They are saved from this wickedness by the continual intervention of divine power, which simultaneously metes out appropriate punishment to the vicious. This crude defense of orthodoxy was followed by the blunt attack on a number of established beliefs delivered by the Wife. It now falls to the Clerk to continue the debate by offering a subtler and more philosophical explanation of the ways of God to man, and one which at the same time will accord better with the facts of experience than did the argument of the Man of Law. Unlike the latter, the Clerk makes no attempt to exempt God from responsibility for the suffering of the innocent. Instead he follows the pattern laid down by Boethius in maintaining that God uses adversity as an instrument with which to chasten the human soul and develop its virtue. Although suffering is real enough, it is ultimately explainable as part of a divine plan for the best of all possible worlds. In fact the Clerk tacitly assumes, as Boethius did before him, that God's power is not unlimited. He cannot construct a universe from which evil is totally lacking. Some evil must be permitted as a condition for maximizing good. A qualification of the omnipotence of God seems to be the only basis on which the problem of evil can be solved. Catholic doctrine, however, would not and does not permit this qualification, presumably because it contradicts the belief in creation *ex nihilo*. It follows that the appropriate human attitude is one of acquiescence in the will of God.

And for oure beste is al his governaunce.
 Lat us thanne lyve in vertuous suffraunce.

The theodicy offered by the Clerk constitutes a far more satisfying defense of the orthodox position than had been offered by the Man of Law. The *Canterbury* dialectic has been enriched by a reassertion of the Christian viewpoint, this time on the highest possible level.

But the *Clerk's Tale* contains complexities even subtler than those that have received discussion up to this point. Certain comments that the narrator makes in the course of telling his story seem to contradict the conclusion. For at several points in the tale the Clerk interjects a biting criticism of Walter's behavior. Since the Clerk must have been aware from the very beginning of the allegorical significance of his own tale, a significance which he eventually makes explicit, it seems surprising that he goes out of his way to adopt a critical attitude toward the personage in his story whom we are later to associate with God. In this connection it is noteworthy that the disparaging remarks about Walter are not present in either the Latin or French sources upon which the *Clerk's Tale* was presumably modeled. The speeches in which Griselda gently reproaches her husband for his cruelty are similarly unique to Chaucer's version. In fact Chaucer has changed the whole characterization of Walter in such a way as to make of him a more wicked man than had been his counterpart in the original materials (Bryan and Dempster 1941, 290). A critical view of Walter's behavior is expressed in Boccaccio's *Decameron* story, but there it has no particular disturbing effect, since Boccaccio does not draw the allegorical conclusion that is appended to the tale both by Petrarch and by the author of *Le Livre Griseldis*. Chaucer stands alone in combining the critical comments in the body of the narrative with the conclusion that informs us concerning the religious meaning of the tale. It is easy to see why both Petrarch and his French counterpart omitted the criticism, and difficult to understand why Chaucer reinserted it, unless we assume that he had an important purpose in so doing. For the hostile attitude displayed toward Walter during the tale interferes with our subsequent willingness to accept him as a symbol of the divine will. The story awakens in us intense feelings of pity for Griselda and of resentment, if not actual hatred, toward her tormentor. The epilogue requires us to perform an emotional *volte face*. The actions of Walter, which heretofore had been stigmatized as needless cruelty, must now be regarded as manifestations of the highest wisdom and beneficence. The moral stands in the same relation of emotional *non sequitur* to the preceding material as had been noted in the case of the *Manciple's Tale*, where the crow, for whom we had sympathized, is blamed rather than praised.

When an artist as great as Chaucer deliberately introduces an

incongruity of this nature into his work, it would be wise for us to consider very carefully the motives that might have prompted him. Let us examine in some detail the longest of the passages written in condemnation of Walter.

This markys in his herte longeth so
 To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe,
 That he ne myghte out of his herte throwe
 This merveillous desir his wyf t'assaye;
 Nedelees, God woot, he thoghte hire for t'affraye.

He hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore,
 And foond hire evere good; what neded it
 Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,
 Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?
 But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit
 To assaye a wyf whan that it is no nede,
 And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede.
 (451–62)

Walter's purpose was to test his wife's virtue, to discover the limits of her endurance. The narrator does not contend that all such probing is necessarily wrong; he seems to admit that within certain bounds it may be perfectly legitimate. Walter's action is criticized because it imposed an unnecessary ordeal. Griselda's virtue had already been sufficiently proved. Her spirit was in need of no further chastening. Nothing, therefore, could be achieved by a prolongation of trials except superfluous suffering. When we remember the allegorical context of this passage, it is easy to see that the Clerk is here raising the identical problem which had been posed in the *Knight's Tale*.

What governance is in this prescience,
 That giltelees tormenteth innocence?
 (1313–14)

In the epilogue to his tale the Clerk gives an answer to this question. He maintains that God imposes trials upon the innocent for the double purpose of testing their virtue and of disciplining their souls. Thus their ordeals are not in vain. But in the body of the tale the Clerk contradicts that conclusion. According to his own words the story of Griselda is an example of needless,

purposeless suffering. The motives that inspire Walter are both cruel and irrational.

O nedeles was she tempted in assay!
 But wedded men ne knowe no mesure,
 Whan that they fynde a pacient creature.
 (621–23)

But ther been folk of swich condicion
 That whan they have a certein purpos take,
 They kan nat stynte of hire entencion,
 But, right as they were bounden to a stake,
 They wol nat of that firste purpos slake.
 Right so this markys fulliche hath purposed
 To tempte his wyf as he was first disposed.
 (701–7)

The Clerk points to a weakness in the Boethian argument that he himself will shortly put forward. Some of the suffering that we see about us can indeed be justified as a necessary means to the attainment of goodness. But not all of the pain and evil in the world can be explained in these terms. So long as we make our own experience, our own reason, the standard, we cannot fail to see that there is a great deal of suffering which serves no discernable purpose. This is what the Clerk expresses in his critique of Walter's behavior: "O nedeles was she tempted in assay!" Only by recourse to faith can this difficulty be disposed of. The problem concerning the goodness of Providence remains unsolved.

The second stanza of the first long critical passage contains certain lines that are most important for an understanding of the relation between the tale and its epilogue.

He hadde assayed hire ynough bifore,
 And foond hire evere good; what neded it
 Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,
Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?
But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit
To assaye a wif whan that it is no nede,

And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede.
(456–62; italics mine)

Here the Clerk seems actually to look forward to the argument that he himself will subsequently make in justification of the trials God imposes upon men—and to disavow that argument in advance. The line, “Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?,” apparently refers to the attempts of orthodox theologians to interpret those trials as a part of the ultimate wisdom and beneficence of God. The Clerk then clearly states in his own person that he cannot share their interpretation.

There is one serious objection that might be advanced against the interpretation I have been suggesting. When speaking of Walter's motives in tormenting Griselda, the Clerk regularly states that he wished to “tempt” or to “assaye” her (452, 454, 455, 457, 461, 621, 707, 785, 1075). But in the epilogue he explicitly rejects the notion that God tempts man.

1152 For greet skile is, he preeve that he wroghte.

1153 But he ne tempteth no man that he boghte,

1154 As seith Saint Jame, if ye his pistel rede;

1155 He preeveth folk al day, it is no drede,

1156 And suffreth us, as for oure excercise,

1157 With sharpe scourges of adversitee

1158 Ful ofte to be bete in sondry wise;

1159 Nat for to knowe oure wyl, for certes he,

1160 Er we were born, knew al oure freletee.

In the last stanza he denies that God has any need to test his human subjects since He already possesses a full knowledge of their hearts and minds. The same thought is contained in lines 1153–54. The conclusion seems to be that God inflicts adversity upon us, not as a trial of our steadfastness, but as a form of “exercise” in virtue. If this were all that were said, God's motives would be clearly distinguished from those of Walter. It might then be argued that the story of Griselda is meant to illustrate an unjust, wickedly contrived ordeal, designed exclusively to satisfy the curiosity of the persecutor. To this kind of senseless torment is opposed the purposeful, beneficent chastisement of God. This interpretation would not be wholly free of difficulties. The story would lose its allegorical status. And in that case it would be difficult to explain the

many Biblical references, and in particular those which connect Walter with God. If Walter does not stand as a symbol for the divine will, if on the contrary he is an embodiment of wickedness, then these references, besides being pointless, would seem to border upon the blasphemous. Similarly, Griselda's virtue of submissiveness transforms itself into foolish weakness. Furthermore, if the story is concerned exclusively with the irrational cruelty of a perverted human being, and if this human being is in no way to be connected with the divine will, the tale seems only flimsily connected with its crowning moral.

But these are not the most formidable objections to the view that would deny that Walter symbolizes the divine will. For the fact is that the passage from the epilogue contains two separate lines which are in headlong collision with its other statements, because they directly say that God does indeed inflict suffering for the purpose of testing.

For greet skile is, he preeve that he wroghte.
(1152)

This line is translated as follows by Robinson: "For it is very reasonable that He should test that which He created" (Robinson 1957, 712). And, indeed, it seems difficult to see what meaning "preeve" could have in this context if it is not to mean "test." There then follows:

1153 But he ne tempteth no man that he boghte,
1154 As seith Seint Jame, if ye his pistel rede;
1155 *He preeveth folk al day, it is no drede,*

In the course of the narrative "tempte" has been regularly used in the sense of "test." Walter has not been primarily interested in seducing Griselda to sin. He has been trying to ascertain the extent of her obedience. Thus the synonym for "tempte" that Chaucer employs in the description of his behavior has been "assaye," which surely has the meaning of "test." Thus it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that lines 1153–54 are in contradiction both with line 1152 and line 1155. James says that it is not God, but merely a man's own lust, that tempts him (James 1:13–14). But if God does in fact test men "al day," does it not follow that He implants the lust within them? But even if we waive the contradiction between 1152 and 1155, on the one hand, and 1153–54 on the other, we can hardly avoid the direct clash in meaning between the two assertions of God's testing and lines 1159–60, which say with equal firmness that God does not test and has no need to test, since He already knows our strengths and weaknesses and has foreknown them even prior to our birth. It is noteworthy that this contradiction, while perhaps suggested by the Latin and French

originals, is greatly sharpened and emphasized in Chaucer's version (Bryan and Dempster 1941, 330). We are forced to conclude, it seems to me, that the Clerk's solution of the problem of evil, which had at first sight seemed so beautiful and so satisfying, is in fact riven down the center by an evident and palpable self-contradiction. I find it very difficult to believe that Chaucer was not aware of this.

It would seem that the statements that assert God's testing of man have a better Scriptural foundation than those that deny it. In Genesis we are told:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did *tempt*
Abraham.

(22:1; italics mine)

I don't know what St. James thought of this sentence, but it would certainly seem to weaken the force of his assertion that God tempts no man. It is surely worth noting that the Biblical story in which God pretends to ask of Abraham the sacrifice of his only son bears an extraordinarily close resemblance to the demands made upon Griselda by Walter. Later on in the Scriptural narrative, when Abraham takes the knife to slay his son, the Angel of the Lord bids him cease, saying:

... for *now I know* that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not
withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.

(22:12; italics mine)

This surely implies that the Lord previously did *not* know, or at least that He could not be certain. The same thought is expressed in the following passage from Scripture, which combines the notions of testing and chastisement:

And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God
led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and
to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou
wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

(Deut.8:2)

It seems likely that the same conception of a test or trial is, in part at least, the theme of the story of Job.

What are we to do with these conflicting statements of the epilogue to the *Clerk's Tale*? On the one hand we are told that God tests us, and this assertion seems to have a solid basis in Scripture. On the other hand, it is stated that God has no need to test us. To deny the latter pronouncement would require a doubt concerning divine omniscience. If we combine the con-

traditions, we seem to be left with the strange assertion that God tests us in spite of the fact that the testing is needless. And then we remember a most peculiar circumstance. This was precisely the criticism that the narrator had again and again leveled against Walter.

O nedeles was she tempted in assay!
(621)

He hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore,

And foond hire evere good; what neded it

Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,

Though som men preise it for a subtil wit?
(456–59)

So it seems that the story of Griselda may indeed be an allegory of the relation between God and man. The critical remarks of the Clerk concerning Walter's actions no longer seem incongruous; they fit very nicely in place. But the allegory is considerably darker in meaning than a hasty reading of the epilogue would have led us to suspect.

The structure of this tale provides us with a beautiful example of the “one step forward, one step back” technique that we had previously examined in connection with the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, as well as in other contexts. The body of the tale contains harsh criticism of the very character who, we are subsequently informed, stands in a symbolic relation to God. But before we have time to grasp the significance of the criticism in the context of its allegorical meaning, our suspicions are smothered by the statements in the epilogue that reaffirm the orthodox conception of the perfect wisdom and goodness of God. A hasty reading of the epilogue causes us to think that Walter is to be contrasted with God, rather than identified with Him. Thus the criticism in the body of the tale seems to have been stripped of its dangerous theological significance. But if we read carefully we discover that the epilogue itself is rent by an insoluble contradiction. An examination of its conflicting statements leads us to see that it confirms, rather than contradicts, the criticisms that had been expressed through the medium of the story. The message of the tale has been reinforced, not retracted. The seemingly orthodox conclusion is laden with explosive possibilities. The tensions operating within the *Clerk's Tale* reflect on a smaller scale the function of the tale itself within the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. It is the ostensible purpose of the narrative to reassert and to defend the orthodox conceptions both against the assault on virtue launched by the Wife and against the skeptical queries of the Knight regarding the goodness of Providence. But the apparent defense of the

established faith that it conspicuously features proves on close scrutiny to be merely a façade for a yet more radical questioning of the fundamental tenets of Christian belief. Chaucer was, in a sense, skating on very thin ice when he assigned this tale to the Clerk. The Clerk is portrayed as a highly respectable and intelligent character. Consequently any openly heretical statements on his part could conceivably have implicated the author. It was a superlative triumph of literary art to permit him to express the most extreme doubts concerning the established faith and yet maintain for the majority of readers the impression that the faith had been nobly championed.

If further confirmation is required for the thesis that the *Clerk's Tale* does not provide a final and satisfactory solution to the problem of evil, that confirmation would seem to be supplied by the fact that the identical problem is not only explicitly raised once more in the *Franklin's Tale*, but also actually constitutes the guiding theme of that story. The key to the meaning of the *Franklin's Tale* is contained in Dorigen's seashore address to the Deity. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the rocks which line the coast of Brittany are meant to represent the presence of evil, pain, and injustice which to so many Chaucerian characters has seemed inexplicable in a universe ruled by an all-good, all-powerful Providence. In many respects Dorigen's apostrophe to "Eterne God" calls to mind the very similar outcry to the gods made by Palamon in the *Knight's Tale*. The complaint against divine injustice that had opened the *Canterbury* discussion of the goodness of Providence is repeated again in the last tale explicitly devoted to this problem. Not only does Dorigen's speech parallel that of Palamon, it also reawakens many echoes still reverberating from the *Clerk's Tale*. Just as the Clerk had stressed the needlessness of Griselda's torments, so Dorigen repeats again and again the notion of the utter futility and purposelessness of the rocks.

Why han ye wrought this werk unresonable?

For by this werk, south, north, ne west, ne eest,

Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest;

It dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth.

(872–75)

Whiche meenes do no good, but evere anoyen?

(884)

A clear reference to the Clerk's final utterance

And for oure beste is all his governaunce.

(*Clerk's Tale*, 1161)

is contained in Dorigen's statement

I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
 By argumentz, that al is for the beste
 Though I ne kan the causes nat yknowe.
 (885–87)

But it seems evident that Dorigen cannot accept the Clerk's conclusion. Insofar as she employs her own reason she is unable to reconcile the existence of evil with the rule of a God whose goodness and power are limitless. The *Franklin's Tale* begins, then, with a rejection of the orthodox solution contained in the conclusion to the *Clerk's Tale*.

But Dorigen's interest in the problem of evil is not primarily theoretical. She is less concerned with the philosophical implications of the rocks than with the effect they may have upon her own life and happiness. In her anxiety over the safety of her husband, she ardently longs for a rockless world, for a universe free of all evil.

To clerkes lete I al disputison.
 But wolde God that alle thise rokkes blake
 Were sonken into helle for his sake!
 Thise rokkes sleen myn herte for the feere.
 (890–93)

At the same time she knows that she is asking for the impossible. Her actions and speeches later in the narrative indicate plainly that she had always thought the rocks an irremovable part of nature. When the magic has finally done its work, she exclaims in astonishment:

For wende I nevere by possibilitee
 That swich a monstre or merveille myghte be!
 It is agayns the proces of nature.
 (1343–45)

She cannot prevent herself, however, from longing for that which she well knows is not and can never be. Her central weakness is an inability to face up to the darker aspects of the world. She has not learned the lesson of Theseus' speech:

Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,
 To maken vertu of necessitee,

And take it weel that we may nat eschue.
 (*Knight's Tale*, 3041–42)

It is this weakness that is the cause of her subsequent difficulties. In the course of the story she will learn, to her sorrow, that the attempt to deceive oneself concerning the nature of reality is likely to be very costly.

Finding the contemplation of nature unbearable, Dorigen turns away from the starkness of the seashore and enters the artificial world of the May-garden, arrayed by “craft of mannes hand.” This in itself may be taken to indicate an attempt on Dorigen’s part to retreat from reality, and to substitute for the harshness of the actual natural world the “verray paradys” of pleasant illusion. It is within this framework of pleasing artifice that she encounters Aurelius, the conventional lover of the courtly tradition. The condition that she sets him, the removal of the rocks even though she believes its fulfillment to be beyond the reach of possibility, reflects the same craving for anesthesia which motivated her prayers and her departure from the coast.

Aurelius’ first recourse is to beg Apollo for a miracle. His prayer thus reflects the entreaty to the Supreme Deity that Dorigen had made when she stood on the shore. In the *Franklin's Tale*, however, the divine powers seem to have adopted a policy of non-intervention. In this respect the story contrasts very markedly with the tale told by the Man of Law. God does not here assist the puzzled mortals in their endeavors to cope with the problem posed by the existence of evil. It is Aurelius’ university-trained brother who recognizes that the solution to the dilemma must lie in the exercise of human ingenuity. He perceives, more clearly than have any of the other characters up to this point, that there is no hope of any real dissolution of the rocks. If Aurelius is to win his lady, the condition that she had imposed must be fulfilled by means of a delusion. An education at the brother’s Alma Mater seems to be the *sine qua non* for performing the necessary trick.

We must now inquire carefully into the possible symbolic meaning of the magic by means of which the rocks are made apparently to vanish. In Dorigen’s seaside speech the allegorical significance of the rocks themselves was made plain. No one doubts that they are intended to stand for evil and the problem concerning the nature of Providence that the existence of evil implies. It seems unlikely that Chaucer would have taken the trouble to inform us concerning the symbolic value of one element in his story, a symbolism not present in the original source, if he had not intended other aspects of the tale to possess a related significance. If the story is an artistic whole, the symbolic meaning attributed to the rocks may be expected to

permeate its entire structure. Only at one point in the narrative does the author directly provide us with an allegorical equivalent of the literal meaning. But it is surely the task of the careful reader to discover for himself the hidden significance of the story's other elements. On the literal level then, the rocks are made to disappear temporarily through the instrumentality of pagan astrological magic. But we know that the rocks are intended to stand for the evil that exists in the Christian universe. By what means, more specifically by what human means, can this evil be made to seem to disappear? The answer is not very difficult to find. Evil is made to disappear in the subtle arguments of those Christian theologians and philosophers who maintain that "all is for the beste." Boethius, for example, contends that those things which appear evil to human eyes become ultimately good when their role in the divine scheme is understood. Evil is merely an illusion that arises out of the feebleness of human apprehension in relation to the complexity of the Providential ordering. Since God is all-powerful, and yet can do no evil, it follows that evil is nothing. Similarly evildoers are nothing, for insofar as they leave the common end of all creatures and their own nature they must cease to be (Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III, Prosa 12 and Book IV, Prosa 2). Thus there is a direct parallel between the magic that causes the rocks to vanish and the Christian theodicy that solves the problem of evil by denying the reality of its existence. But the magic is ultimately false, according to the story. The disappearance of the rocks is merely an illusion and they will come to sight again in "a wyke or tweye." This is Chaucer's way of indicating that he rejects as unsound the orthodox theological solution.

Chaucer has given us another hint concerning the connection between the magical disappearance of the rocks and the arguments of Christian theologians through the changes he has introduced in the character of the magician. Boccaccio presented the latter as an eastern necromancer. Chaucer, on the other hand, somewhat anachronistically transforms him into a university man who is referred to as a clerk and as a philosopher more often than as a magician. The pains that Chaucer has taken to depict the university background indicates that he thought the magician's professional status of no small importance. The purpose of these alterations, which would otherwise be obscure, becomes brilliantly clear if we assume that Chaucer wished to identify the magic with scholastic disputation on theological questions. A further clue as to his intention in this matter is contained in the passage describing the meditations of Aurelius' brother:

For with an apparence a clerk may make,

To mannes sighte, that alle the rokkes blake
 Of Britaigne weren yvoyded everichon,
 And shippes by the brynke comen and gon,
 And in swich forme enduren a wowke or two.
 (1157–61)

In reading this we cannot fail to recall the words of Dorigen on the seashore.

I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
 By argumentz, that al is for the beste,
 Though I ne kan the causes nat yknowe.
 (885–87)

Dorigen tells us that “clerkes” attempt to explain away evil as a necessary means to the good. But in this story evil is symbolized by the rocks of Brittany. And the brother of Aurelius says that a clerk, and only a clerk, would know how to cause the magical disappearance of those very rocks. Surely Chaucer has contrived the close resemblance between these two passages as a means of informing the reader concerning the hidden significance of the narrative.

There is one further point that should not escape our notice. Orleans is geographically close to Paris, whose university was world-famous as a center of theological debate. It was with this university that St. Thomas had been connected. But in the fourteenth century Orleans itself was apparently known primarily as a law university. This conjecture is borne out by the fact that the friend of Aurelius’ brother had been a student of law. At first sight, then, Orleans seems an unlikely place of origin for a magician-theologian. But if we recall that the Man of Law had been presented as a defender of orthodox faith, and the connection thus implied between law and religious belief, we can see that it would not be inappropriate for the magician of the tale to be associated with a university that specializes in legal studies.

If the interpretation thus far offered is correct, the *Franklin’s Tale* is to be understood in part as a large and magnificent satire on the sophistries of the schools. Under the cover of regarding the magic in question as heathen sorcery, Chaucer is able, for example, to make a humorous comparison between scholastic theological disputation and the art of legerdemain.

For I am siker that ther be sciences
 By whiche men make diverse apparences,

Swiche as thise subtile tregetoures pleye.
(1139–41)

... to maken illusioun,

By swich an apparence or jogelrye –
(1264–65)

The hostility of the Church toward the practice of this kind of enchantment permitted Chaucer to wear an air of ultra-respectability when indulging in excoriations of the allegedly pagan witchcraft:

So atte laste he hath his tyme yfounde
To maken his japes and his wrecchednesse
Of swich a supersticious cursednesse.
(1270–72)

But the joke, of course, turns upon the hidden identification of “supersticious cursednesse” with the official doctrine. The same basis underlies what is certainly one of Chaucer’s wittiest, although perhaps one of his most malicious jests. Referring to the magic, he calls it:

...swich folye

As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye, –
For hooly chirches feith in oure bileve
Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve.
(1131–34)

It is never easy to prove a contention regarding the tone of a poetic statement. But in my judgment, those last two lines have an ironic bite that cuts to the bone. In this respect they are related to the ironic under-commentary concerning Dorigen’s wifely behavior that runs through the poem. One thing, at least, it is possible to establish. Whatever the ultimate status of Chaucer’s religious belief, it is virtually a certainty that there were certain articles of “hooly chirches feith” he found himself unable to accept. Even Robinson, whose natural inclination is to reject any and all efforts at interpretation, admits that in the *General Prologue’s* description of the Summoner the passage concerning canonical or sacramental absolution “implies an unmistakable doubt of its efficacy” (Robinson 1957, 667).

“Purs is the ercedekenes helle,” seyde he,
But wel I woot he lyed right in dede;

Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede,
 For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,
 (General Prologue, 658–61)

A beautiful analysis of the use in these lines of a combined assertion and retraction, the technique that I have labeled “one step forward, one step back,” is to be found in Lounsbury's *Studies* (Lounsbury 1892, 2:517–18). If Chaucer could thus bring himself to doubt the efficacy of ecclesiastical absolution and excommunication, it seems unlikely that he subscribed literally to the statement:

For hooly chirches feith in oure bileve
 Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve.

And his disbelief even in this limited matter provides some support for the view that the passage cited above from the *Franklin's Tale* is thoroughly satirical in intention.

It will be objected, I am sure, that this interpretation attributes to Chaucer a deliberate employment of esotericism on such a scale as to strain the limits of credulity. For this reason I should like at this point to remind the reader of Chaucer's own comments concerning the necessity of concealing the truth that were found in both the *Manciple's Tale* and the *Canon Yeoman's*. The former story featured a warning against the utterance of dangerous truths. But in the *Manciple's Prologue* it was hinted that statements that would ordinarily be unacceptable can nevertheless be safely uttered if they are made in jest, or if they are followed by a retraction. In the *Canon Yeoman's Tale* we were provided with a specimen of esoteric writing in which the truth was simultaneously revealed and concealed. This was accomplished by the device of substituting an innocuous subject for the real topic under discussion. While ostensibly talking of one thing, the author in reality was speaking about something quite different. The appearance of the work belied its reality. It is precisely this technique that in my belief constitutes the central mechanism of the *Franklin's Tale*. I find it particularly interesting, therefore, that within the tale itself Chaucer gives a hint concerning the method that he is employing. It is said of Aurelius that he had loved Dorigen for more than two years without daring to tell her of his feelings. Nevertheless he was not altogether prevented from an expression of his sentiments.

He was despeyred; no thyng dorste he seye,
 Save in his songes somewhat wolde he wreye

His wo, as in a general compleynyng;
 He seyde he lovede, and was biloved no thyng.
 Of swich matere made he manye layes,
 Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes,
 How that he dorste nat his sorwe telle,
 But langwissheth as a furye dooth in helle:
 And dye he moste, he seyde, as dide Ekko
 For Narcisus, that dorste nat telle hir wo.
 (943–52)

The meaning of this passage seems to be that it is possible to give voice to prohibited thoughts “as in a general compleynyng,” that is, by refraining from naming the object toward which they are in truth directed. Aurelius can say that he loves, and is not beloved in return, so long as he conceals Dorigen’s name. It may be that Chaucer’s poetic technique in the *Franklin’s Tale* resembles the one which he ascribed to Aurelius. Assuming that he wished to criticize the established theology, it would be as true of him as of Aurelius that “no thyng dorste he seye.” He would have to keep silence unless, like Aurelius, he chose to express his thoughts in such a fashion as to conceal the object toward which they were directed. It is to be noted that Aurelius at several points accompanies his veiled utterance with a statement that he is unable to speak frankly. This in itself would be sufficient to alert the auditor to the necessity of discovering for himself the true subject of the songs. Just so, Chaucer has provided us at several points in his writings with statements concerning the necessity for concealing the truth. These should serve as an indication to the reader that he must exercise his ingenuity if he is to arrive at a full understanding of Chaucer’s poetry. The discussion of Aurelius’ poetic methods thus fulfils the function of displaying in microcosm a technique very similar to the one that animates the tale as a whole.

To return to the main theme of the narrative, we must now raise the question of the significance of Dorigen’s marriage to Arveragus and investigate the relation between that marriage and the magic which causes the rocks temporarily to vanish. We have seen that Dorigen’s central flaw is her inability to resign herself to the presence of evil in the world. It is this weakness that underlies her promise to be untrue to her husband, to become Aurelius’ mistress, if he can bring about the removal of the rocks. She thus offers to desert her husband for the man who can produce a solution to the problem of

evil. Aurelius does produce such a solution, but by means of a trick, an illusion. The effect of his deception is to threaten the integrity of Dorigen's marriage. Dorigen, then, is in the situation of a person beguiled into accepting at least temporarily a false view, through the use of clever, but ultimately deceitful arguments. Of such a person we are likely to say that he has been seduced from the truth, or from the path of truth. Is it possible, therefore, that Dorigen's marriage to Arveragus symbolizes her devotion to the truth? This tentative identification receives support from statements made by Arveragus himself. His most important pronouncement is made upon learning the news of Dorigen's predicament.

Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!
 For God so wisly have mercy upon me,
 I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be
 For verray love which that I to yow have,
 But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.
 Trouthe is the hyste thyng that man may kepe –
 (1474–79)

Now it is undeniable that “trouthe” in this context has the primary significance of truth, promise-keeping, good faith, rather than the meaning of propositional truth. It can be demonstrated, however, that Chaucer does not distinguish between these two senses of “trouthe” in nearly as sharp a fashion as do most moderns. Bernard Jefferson has pointed out that the two applications of the word are so closely associated for Chaucer as to be nearly indistinguishable, and he explains this association as deriving ultimately from the *Consolation of Philosophy* (Jefferson 1917, 104–19). It seems, therefore, that Arveragus' elevation of truth as “the hyste thyng that man may kepe” may be indicative of his symbolic status in the *Franklin's Tale*. In this connection the nature of the marriage relationship between Arveragus and Dorigen is of particular interest. It has often been stated that the *Franklin's Tale* contains the solution to the marriage debate that had been commenced by the Wife of Bath. Whether or not this is the chief purpose of the tale, it is true that the marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen is presented as infinitely superior both to the kind of relationship proposed by the Wife and to that which is exemplified by the domination of Walter over Griselda. Criticism of the latter two marriages is certainly implied in the passage praising Arveragus and Dorigen:

Love wol nat been constreynd by maistrye.

Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
 Beteth his wynges, and farewell, he is gon!
 Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
 Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,
 And nat to been constreyned as a thral;
 And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal
 (764–70)

And there can be little doubt that the following lines are intended as a rebuke to Walter because of his intemperate demand for perfection in his wife:

For every word men may nat chide or pleyne.

 For in this world, certein, ther no wight is
 The he ne dooth or seith somtyme amys.
 Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun
 Wyn, wo, or chaungynge of complexioun
 Causeth ful ofte to doon amys or speken,
 On every wrong a man may nat be wreken
 After the tyme moste be temperaunce
 To every wight that kan on governaunce.
 (776, 779–86)

We have seen that the exaltation of appetite over reason and duty was one of the prime theses of the Wife of Bath. It is likely, therefore, that the “maistrye” of wife over husband that she advocates has a significance beyond the merely marital one. Woman is traditionally conceived of as a lower being than man. According to medieval interpretations of the story of the Fall, the tempting of Adam by Eve represents the seduction of the reason, the higher faculty, through the motions of the passions and senses. For the Wife of Bath the rule of wife over husband may thus very well signify the domination of appetite over reason. But Chaucer seems to vary the metaphor as he proceeds. The husband-wife relationship does not appear always to symbolize the relative roles of reason and passion. The Clerk made it clear that the marriage between Walter and Griselda was an allegory of the relation between God and man. Now the relation between Arveragus and Dorigen is very well suited to serve as an allegory of the relationship between truth and

the seeker of truth. The philosophic quest for understanding is motivated, not by compulsion, nor by duty, but by love and desire. The pursuit of philosophy must be undertaken freely, or not at all. Similarly, rational understanding is not acquired by an act of faith, nor by submission to any authority whatsoever. In some respects it may be said to stand at the pole opposite to faith. The seeker of truth must be free to question, and must permit himself to be convinced only by reasons. Thus it is possible to say that the relation between truth and those dedicated to its discovery is a far more equal relationship, and one which allows a greater scope of freedom, than the medieval conception of the proper relation between God and man. This may in part explain the difference between the marriages of the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Franklin's Tale*.

If we are willing to assume that the wedding between Dorigen and Arveragus is meant to stand for man's devotion to the truth, it becomes possible to grasp the deeper import of the magic which injures that union. A sophisticated solution of the problem of evil has the effect of drawing man away from the truth. Dorigen, however, does not appear to be converted. When she learns that the rocks have been made to vanish she does not, as we might have expected, transfer her love from Arveragus to Aurelius. The story contains a hint that she recognizes the deceptive nature of the disappearance of the rocks. When told of the "miracle," she cries out:

It is agayns the proces of nature.
(1345)

Perhaps even more important is the account of her statements given by Aurelius to the philosopher:

And that hir trouthe she swoor thurgh innocence,
She nevere erst hadde herd speke of apparence.
(1601–2)

The last line would seem to indicate her awareness that what had been produced was merely an illusion. However this may be, it is clear that the situation in which she finds herself is one which compels her to choose between breaking her promise to Aurelius and committing an act of infidelity toward her husband, an infidelity which she wholly abhors. Promisebreaking and adultery both involve a sacrifice of truth and of truth, the sanctity of which are symbolized in the person of Arveragus. Dorigen sees her real choice, then, as lying between the two alternatives of martyrdom and infidelity:

Fro which t'escape woot I no socour,
Save oonly deeth or elles dishonour;

Oon of thise two bihoveth me to chese.

(1357–59)

I have no wish to push the symbolism of the tale further than the facts warrant. But I think that we must at least ask ourselves if a more than literal significance may be attached to the second alternative. If it is correct to assume that Arveragus represents the truth, and that the magic through which Aurelius attempts to seduce Dorigen from her husband stands for sophisticated solutions of the problem of evil, what meaning is suggested by the unwilling commission of an act of unchastity on Dorigen's part? We have to remember that the solution to the problem of evil, although caricatured as false magic in the context of the story, was nevertheless an integral part of the Catholic faith. To deny it was to commit the gravest of heresies and thereby to subject oneself to the most extreme punishment. I suggest, therefore, although in the most tentative spirit, that Dorigen's choice between martyrdom and infidelity to the truth may signify the choice faced by every holder of heterodox views in an age of religious persecution. The commission of adultery with Aurelius might thus be tantamount to a profession of orthodoxy made for the sake of preserving one's safety, when that profession conflicts with one's innermost convictions regarding the truth. The alternative of martyrdom may represent the consequences of a refusal to deny the truth in word or in deed. Startling as this view of Dorigen's predicament may at first appear, it not only fits the interpretation that has thus far been advanced, but also has the advantage of rescuing her long recital concerning chaste women from the charges of irrelevance and tedium to which that speech is usually subjected. For if the hidden meaning of Dorigen's lament is to portray the fate that has always awaited those who in the face of religious persecution refuse to betray, even by an external act of conformity, the truth as they see it—then, I submit, the speech becomes as tensely dramatic as any passage Chaucer ever composed. His purpose in setting forth such a large number of *exempla* could be explained, first, by his desire to call attention to the peculiarity of the passage, and second, by his wish to stress the fact that the tragedy of persecution is coeval with human history.

Dorigen, however, is not obliged to face the rigors of martyrdom. Indeed, the whole depiction of her character indicates that she lacked the temperament for a sacrifice of this kind. But her escape is not due merely to cowardice. Arveragus, it is clear, does not desire her to die a martyr's death. Although he is grieved at the necessity for her adultery, he holds out to her the promise that this purely physical act of infidelity on her part need not destroy the marriage between them. It would seem at first

sight that Dorigen's keeping troth with Aurelius involves trothbreaking with her husband. If "trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe," why is not Arveragus concerned with Dorigen's violation of her faith toward him? Arveragus implies that their marriage has a deeper foundation, that a technical breach of troth will not disturb its true basis. And in so doing he may be indicating a solution to the seeker after truth who finds himself in conflict with the views of his society. His union with truth will not necessarily be severed by outward conformity, by an external obeisance to the demands of authority. It is permissible for him to save himself from persecution by such means and yet to continue in his heart to be faithful to the truth alone. It is perhaps no coincidence that this is precisely the path which Chaucer appears to have chosen for himself. He, too, protected himself from condemnation by veiling his true thoughts with an appearance of orthodoxy. But his devotion to truth was not thereby diminished.

The final problem that confronts us centers about Chaucer's reasons for attributing this particular tale to the Franklin. According to the presentation in the *General Prologue*, the Franklin is not a good character.

Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn;
 To lyven in delit was evere his wone,
 For he was Epicurus owene sone,
 That heeld opinioun that pleyn delit
 Was verray felicitee parfit.

(334–38)

In the *Consolation of Philosophy* "delit" is identified with the pleasures of the body, which are regarded by Boethius as the lowest and most illusory of the worldly goods (Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III, Prosa and Metrum 7). Although the Franklin may not be entirely devoid of good qualities, his definition of "felicitee" in terms of "delit" clearly brands him as a sensualist. It was no doubt necessary for Chaucer to employ a more or less disreputable personage as mouthpiece for the story that contains, although in disguised form, his most devastating attack upon the established creed. The tale has altogether too dangerous a character to be ascribed to a respectable narrator who might be regarded as a representative of the author's own views. Even if we disregard the story's hidden symbolic significance, the fact remains that Dorigen's seashore speech contains an explicit doubt concerning the official solution to the problem of evil that is not counterbalanced by any expression of orthodoxy later in the tale. This in itself is a circumstance that

would have made it advisable for Chaucer to erect between himself and the story a kind of buffer in the form of a narrator whose character was open to question. Although the Knight and the Clerk both raise serious questions concerning orthodox belief in the body of their tales, it is noteworthy that their concluding statements have at least the superficial appearance of conformity to the established view. But the description of the Franklin as a sensual gourmet has yet another function. In the link between the tales of the Squire and the Franklin, the latter is depicted as displaying a deep concern with virtue and with “gentillesse.” It seems difficult to believe that this concern could be sincere on the part of a man who thinks that the pleasures of eating and drinking constitute the highest human good. To be an Epicurean, at least in the vulgar sense that is here intended, certainly implies indifference toward considerations of honor and nobility. We are forced to conclude, I believe, that the Franklin’s interest in “gentillesse” is a pretense, a cover-up for his real nature, affected for the purpose of impressing the assembled company. However, at least one member of that company appears to penetrate the Franklin’s façade.

“Straw for youre gentillesse!” quod oure Hoost.
(695)

The rudeness of this remark may very well indicate the Host’s realization of the insincerity pervading the Franklin’s little speech.

The Franklin, then, puts on airs of respectability. He feigns to be a devotee of virtue and “gentillesse” in order to cloak the unpleasant truth about his real nature. It is possible that the story that he tells may directly parallel his own behavior. The tale of Arveragus and Dorigen is ostensibly concerned with a problem of “gentillesse.” The emphasis on “gentillesse” and on courtliness is particularly strong at both the beginning and the end of the story. But just as the Franklin’s real interests lie elsewhere than with virtue and “gentillesse,” so the central significance of the tale is utterly removed from the topic with which it superficially deals. In both cases an attractive and acceptable exterior masks the disreputable or unorthodox character of the reality within. The tale is, indeed, well suited to its teller.

The *Franklin’s Tale* climaxes the dialectical debate concerning the problem of evil that had been initiated by the Knight. Of all the tales that have dealt with this issue, it contains the most emphatic and most cutting rejection of the official Christian solution. For that very reason it presents its teaching more deviously than had been the case in any previous narrative. At the same time the story contains within itself a series of signposts that are capable of guiding the reader to its inner meaning. An application of the

explicit symbolism in Dorigen's seashore speech to the other elements of the narrative provides the central clue. But a profound skepticism concerning the Christian conception of Providence is not the only teaching that the tale puts forward. It is unique among the *Canterbury Tales* that have been here discussed in offering a positive alternative to faith. "Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe" says Arveragus and his statement points to the quest for rational understanding as the highest human possibility. The *Canterbury* dialectic terminates on a note of affirmation.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Although I came to Thomas R. Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer* late in my study, after having already formulated my own conclusions, I nevertheless feel toward him a great debt of gratitude. Prior to reading his book I had felt myself to be in a minority of one among students of Chaucer. Although Lounsbury does not present the analysis that forms the substance of this paper, his methods of approach, as well as his conclusions, are very close to mine. Needless to say, I cannot hope to emulate the depth of his scholarship or the skill of his exposition.

EDITORIAL NOTE

This essay was left by Professor Tovey at the time of her death in virtually finished form, with instructions that it should be published. At the request of her literary executor, Professor Warren Brown of the University of New Hampshire, it was edited with his supervision by Professor Paul A. Cantor of the University of Virginia. Cantor confined himself to correcting typographical, bibliographical, and other minor errors, and adapting the essay to the format of this journal. Although Tovey nowhere states the fact, Cantor was able to determine that the Chaucer text she used is the authoritative Riverside edition of F. N. Robinson and all quotations in the body of the essay are taken from it. The only important question about the essay left unanswered is why Tovey chose to discuss these five particular stories from the *Canterbury Tales*. They do not constitute one of the groups traditionally recognized in Chaucer criticism (such as the "Marriage Group"). Tovey does discuss the tales in the

order in which they appear in Robinson's edition, but they do not appear consecutively there—that is, they are interspersed among other tales. Given the many varying manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* that have come down to us, the exact order of the tales is in fact uncertain and modern editions have presented them in different sequences. Thus, even though Tovey does not present an argument for grouping together precisely these five tales, her procedure seems justified on the ground that we will never know the “proper” order of the *Canterbury Tales*, and it is an established principle of Chaucer criticism that the tales do respond to and comment on each other in just the way Tovey argues in this essay.

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Humanity and Happiness: Philosophic Treatment of Happiness in a Non-Teleological World

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Concern about the nature of happiness is the central pre-occupation for ancient thinkers. Unless happiness exists solely in reference to one's own passions, there must be an order within human nature or in the nature of things to which happiness properly understood corresponds (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a17–22). Early modern thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke thought this ancient concern with the *summum bonum* led to disorienting ambitions and moralistic repression. In order to protect politics, Hobbes and Locke debunked ancient arguments about the nature of the greatest good as signifying only matters of taste, thus expunging order and ranking from philosophic debate. Two of the greatest critics of early modern thought, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume, revived questions about happiness and virtue against what they viewed as early modern moral obtuseness.

Rousseau and Hume addressed questions about human happiness by radicalizing the incipient critique of transcendence and teleology begun by early modern thinkers. Rousseau diagnosed the early modern thinkers as secret teleologists because they smuggled social assumptions about the naturalness of human rationality and possessive desires into the state of nature. While Hobbes and Locke sought natural man, only Rousseau found him lying under a tree, un-self-conscious, necessitous, and harmless (unless provoked). Like Rousseau, Hume subjected pretentious early modern doctrines to rigorous, skeptical investigation, though Hume did so on a directly philosophic plane arguing against modern philosophy's fanciful doctrines. The more radically non-teleological perspective inherent in the position of each raises a fundamental question: how can the questions about the nature of

human happiness and virtue constitute the centerpiece of teachings that reject teleology?

This question is nothing less than asking whether moral philosophy as traditionally understood survives the modern critique of teleology. Many contemporary thinkers have seen the nihilistic self-destruction of the Enlightenment as predicated on a misbegotten rejection of ancient and scholastic philosophic traditions. As a remedy, they seek a return to those traditions emphasizing the intimate relationship between happiness, citizenship, and virtue. This effort faces two challenges. First, it is difficult, if not impossible, to justify modern institutions emphasizing individual freedom and technological progress on the basis of ancient or scholastic philosophy emphasizing virtue and citizenship. Second, pre-modern occupation with excellence of soul seems connected to teleological views of human nature typical of ancient and scholastic metaphysics. Those advocating a return to the Tradition face two opposing problems. Either they accept more modernity than is justified on ancient grounds and are philosophically suspect or they impracticably accept less modernity than is acceptable to our post-metaphysical, pluralistic age and are politically suspect (Griswold 1999, 4–7).

Hume attempts to get us off of this see-saw by concerning himself with the ancient issues that arise in common life. This is the ground for the claim that Hume's science resembles Aristotle's (Danford 1990, 61; Salkever 1980, 72). Typical of this project is the concern for happiness found in his neglected essays named for ancient sects—"The Epicurean," "The Stoic," "The Platonist," and "The Sceptic." These essays do not try "to explain the sentiments of the ancient sects," but rather "to deliver the sentiments of sects, that naturally form themselves in the world, and entertain different ideas of human life and happiness" (138). (Unless otherwise noted, references are to page numbers in Hume 1987.) Grounded in common life, philosophy cannot help but take its bearings from the human concern for happiness. Like Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Hume corrects incomplete conceptions of happiness as he delivers the thoughts of various sects—he engages in the philosophic task of evaluation and ranking. But Hume's method, while emphasizing the superior realism in ancient thought, evaluates and ranks within the modern critique of teleology.

This article follows Hume's treatment of happiness with the aim of evaluating it and illustrating its political importance. It begins by analyzing why Hume did not take Rousseau's path of reconciling the concerns of ancient thought with modern scientific commitments. The second and

third sections discuss Hume's treatment of happiness in the four essays named for ancient sects. The first three essays reflect simplistic, unified accounts of happiness; the last essay provides a humane assessment of the other conceptions of happiness and it puts forth Hume's vision for the management of passions.

PROBLEMS IN ROUSSEAU'S TURN TO
HAPPINESS AND VIRTUE

Hume's opposition to state of nature theories is well known. Less well known is the import of his comparative analysis of ancient and modern times in orienting his political perspective and his use of that comparative analysis to criticize Rousseau, his erstwhile friend. Orienting Hume's critique of Rousseau requires that we see how Rousseau hoped to construct a non-teleological theory that nevertheless takes virtue and happiness seriously. Rousseau foregoes a substantive discussion of happiness for a purely formal account of unity of soul; he believes this unity is approximated on the level of politics in a community modeled on the ancient polis. All societies, and civilized commercial societies in particular, divide the soul between selfishness and sociality, leading to the contradictions and dependence that define vice for Rousseau. In submission to general laws—established by a sovereign “general will”—citizens enjoy a unified, healthy soul, which is the closest approximation of asocial savage's original unity. Consistent with his non-teleological intentions, Rousseau is unconcerned with a law's substance, but only with the generality and formality of law.

Ancient cities, which Hume interprets as reflecting Rousseau's re-interpretation, were “violent, and contrary to the more natural and usual course of things.” “The less natural any set of principles are,” Hume argues, “the more difficulty will a legislator meet with in raising and cultivating them.” Ancient cities were founded on principles “too disinterested and too difficult to support” (259–62). For Hume, the general will that informed ancient practice is too general and insufficiently general. It is too general in its attempt to eviscerate meaningful differences among and within human beings with the rigorous application of general laws. Virtue is, for Rousseau, defined negatively as the denial of individual interests and attachments, which, as Pierre Manent (1998, 31) observes, amounts to “the denial of nature inasmuch as nature is individual.” It is insufficiently general in that it confines sympathy and humanity to one set of citizens instead of cultivating a sense of common humanity; its generality stops at the border's edge. Rousseau's ancient politics would be defined by violence and wars characteristic of non-generalized

political principles.

Underlying the problems related to the general will is Rousseau's contention that human happiness and virtue are defined in reference to unity of soul. Rousseau strips the contradictions that he deems to be the unnatural accretions of history in order to reveal man's original simplicity. Such simplicity and unity is rather an inhumane fiction than a philosophically justifiable observation. Human nature, for Hume, is defined by its searchable complexity and insurmountable contradictions: "Good and evil are universally intermingled and confounded; happiness and misery, wisdom and folly, virtue and vice. Nothing is pure and entirely of a piece" (Hume 1956, 74). As Hume writes in the introduction to the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, nature has "pointed out a mixed kind of life as most suitable to the human race" (1975a, 9). This mixture is the theme of Hume's philosophy. Not only are human beings constituted by body (which is particular and selfish) and by mind (which allows us to sympathize with others), but their minds are also divided between reason (which can skeptically destroy the harmony and unity to which we aspire) and imagination (which aspires to harmony and unity). Hume's philosophy advocates relaxed submission and easy-going reconciliation to these contradictions.

The most political manifestation of Hume's attempt to outline our mixed condition is his claim that modern commercial arrangements best acknowledge individual nature and the "generalized" nature of humanity. Against Rousseau's condemnation of modern mores, Hume argues that ages "of refinement are both the happiest and most virtuous." Hume's only extensive discussion of happiness in his own name appears in his defense of modern commercial society. Happiness "according to the most received notions, seems to consist in three ingredients; action, pleasure, and indolence" (269). The proportions in which these ingredients are mixed differ "according to the particular disposition of the person; yet no one ingredient can be entirely wanting." Action, which "takes a man from himself, and chiefly gives satisfaction," leads him to rewarding occupations, lends vigor to life, and leads to improved faculties (270). The importance of action is consistent with Hume's observation that there is "no craving or demand of the human mind more constant and insatiable than that for exercise and employment," a desire that is "the foundation of most of our passions and pursuit" (300; "Man is. . .an active being; and from that disposition, as well as from the various necessities of human life, must submit to business and occupation" [Hume 1975a, 8]). Indolence is important because we are "exhausted by too much application

and fatigue.” Leisure is not a time of contemplation for Hume, but an opportunity of recreation akin to sleep; it reflects a “weakness of human nature” that we need such indolence, and if it is carried on too long, it begets a debilitating “languor and lethargy” (270; “The mind requires some relaxation, and cannot always support its bend to care and industry” [Hume 1975a, 9]). Hume never speaks of what should occupy one’s actions or what shape exercise and employment should take, nor does he suggest what should fill one’s recreation time. This reflects his refusal to discuss human ends or rank different ways of life. The “received notions” of happiness to which Hume attaches importance are purely formal—there is no substantive conflict, as in Aristotle, between the hedonist, the active and honorable gentleman and the diffident philosopher. Hume drains the tradition of substantive content in order to maintain the tradition’s continuity formally.

Commercial societies offer the environment where exercise and employment have the most diverse variety of outlets. “Mechanical arts” flourish along with “the liberal” arts: “The same age, which produces the great philosophers and politicians, renowned generals and poets, usually abounds with skilful weavers, and ship-carpenters” (270). Refined societies banish ignorance and rouse human beings from pre-modern lethargy and superstition, while also making them more sociable and humane. People have much to discuss in conversation as genius spreads—parochialism wanes, human difference narrows to a civil level, religious devotion truncates, and relations become “easy and sociable.” In a word, “*industry, knowledge, and humanity*, are linked in an indissoluble chain” in commercial societies (271). Rousseau’s biggest mistake, on Hume’s account, lies in failing to notice that modern commercial societies are the best expression of the generality that Rousseau had sought as a remedy to society’s contradictions. Artificial ethnic and religious conflicts wither with modern commerce, and the moral equivalent to Rousseau’s natural savage—the distracted commercial man who is taken from himself (270)—emerges. Tocqueville (2000, 588 [Vol. 2, part 3, chap.17]), that great admirer of Rousseau, formulates the issue in the same fashion: “Variety is disappearing from within the human species; the same manner of acting, thinking, and feeling is found in all corners of the world. That comes not only from the fact that all peoples deal with each other more and copy each other more faithfully, but from the fact that in each country, men diverge further and further from the particular ideas and sentiments of a caste, a profession, or a family and simultaneously arrive at what depends more nearly on the constitution of man, which is everywhere the same. . .”

Distracting immersion in action and sociability marks the proper reaction to our condition as fundamentally mixed, contradictory beings. Humane distraction from the depths of our ignorance prevents anti-social, inhumane systematizing or radical attempts to remake the world from arising in the human mind; distraction prevents human beings from trying to resolve or dissolve their contradictions; the distracted life, while not a life of wisdom, is a life consistent with knowledge of our situation. Against Rousseau and others, Hume contends that the advantages of humane, commercial ages are not “attended with disadvantages, that bear any proportion to them” (271). Hume’s attempt to reconcile anti-teleological philosophy with a study of happiness is framed by this account of humanity, a peaceful generalized virtue that does not emphasize human difference. Where Rousseau lends unity to souls plagued by the contradictions on the horizontal plane, Hume’s is a project of making people easily submit to contradictions by embracing the virtues of humanity on that same plane.

One might go further. The virtue of humanity tends to tranquilize contradictory passions by encouraging a proper management of the passions. Though people in humane ages naturally manage their passions better than those in agitated ancient cities or superstitious feudal communities (94, 274), Hume does not describe the process whereby the passions are managed in his treatment of happiness. It is not clear what role philosophy plays in passion management. How can a creature defined by such contradictory passions and faculties be reconciled to them? What roles do reason and nature play in passion management?

Hume’s most comprehensive treatment of these questions is found in the four essays named for ancient philosophic sects. These essays are uniquely literary and dramatic, and it is necessary to present a close interpretation of them if we are to understand the significance of their dramatic development. They investigate the character of happiness beginning with beliefs about happiness that “naturally” arise in common life, and they correct one another to arrive at the proper account of happiness. Happiness as understood in common life implies a peaceful contentment, tranquil completion, and wholeness. The first three essays debunk such pretensions to completion, unity, or purity of soul as inconsistent with our mixed kind of life, but they do not question the common sense equation of happiness and tranquility. The last essay—“The Sceptic”—corrects the common sense views of happiness found in the earlier essays by offering a more humane, complex view of tranquility. Tranquility is not superhuman, complete, connected to human

ends, or elevated; nor is it sub-human sensuality. It is a relaxed, humane submission to the complex, contradictory human nature brought about by internalizing the contradictory passions.

RESTLESSNESS AND INHUMANITY IN
INCOMPLETE CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS

The subtitles to the essays make clear that they are concerned with conceptions of happiness found in Aristotle. The Epicurean represents “the man of elegance and pleasure”; the Stoic, “the man of action and virtue”; the Platonist, “the man of contemplation, and philosophical devotion.” The question remains, How can one investigate happiness without following Aristotle’s approach? Hume follows the ancient dialectical form while accepting modern non-teleological premises; the essays build on one another, follow one from the other, and culminate in the most proper perspective, but they do not imply the superiority of one way of life over others. The key lies in the final essay, no direct analogue of which is found in Aristotle. There is no subtitle to “The Sceptic” to indicate which way of life, if any, it represents. This last essay is a humane correction and appraisal of other views from the proper perspective.

The Epicurean. The Epicurean finds happiness in nature or pleasure and rejects art or reason as contributing little to our happiness. The case for self-forgetting pleasure and against refinement is based on an assessment of our “original frame and structure” (139). “It is a great mortification to the vanity of man, that his utmost art and industry can never equal the meanest of nature’s productions, either for beauty or value” (138). Beauty, nobility, and artistic inspiration are products of “native enthusiasm,” not training. “Severe philosophers” would introduce “an *artificial happiness*” by “making us be pleased by rules of reason, and by reflection.” If you would “make me happy by reason, and by rules of art,” contends the Epicurean, “you must, then, create me anew by rules of art.” Consistent with Hume’s account of human ignorance, the Epicurean supposes we have neither the knowledge, skill, nor power to improve such complex beings in a more perfected image. Since we do not know the ends of human endeavor, “happiness implies ease, contentment, repose, and pleasure; not watchfulness, care, and fatigue.” Thinking about our ignorance and impotence leads to “the deepest sorrow and dejection” (139–40). By tracing the Epicurean’s restless pursuit of satisfying pleasures, the first essay shows that this conception of happiness is not satisfactory.

The Epicurean’s encounter with PLEASURE sets the essay’s

action in motion. The first experience of pleasure finds “every sense and every faculty” being “dissolved in joy.” Every sense is aroused—hearing with a melody; taste with “delicious fruits”; smell with “fragrant oils” and so on. This initial stage in the Epicurean’s natural history of pleasure mirrors Rousseau’s account of the natural savage, who is happy “satisfying his hunger under an oak, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that furnished his meal” in *The Second Discourse* (1964, 105). This pleasure is asocial and impotent before fortune. Scarcely does PLEASURE arrive when “cruel chance” rips her away (141). Without someone to share the pleasures with, roses lose their hue and fruits their flavor. The Epicurean’s restless mind experiences “languour” until PLEASURE summons her sister “*Virtue*,” who brings with her a “whole troop of . . . friends.” With the help of fellow voluptuaries he experiences pleasure again. This is the first instance of the Epicurean’s indolent satisfaction giving way to a restless desire for something else. Such fluctuations are central to his character, and they follow from his rejection of stabilizing art and industry.

Their “friendly endearments” encourage them to “enjoy the present.” DAMON, a muse, defends the “happy debauch” with a song that warns against looking beyond present pleasure. The lure of glory—connected with a statesman’s severity and permanent, stable commitments—distracts from the wisdom of nature, which enjoins people to seek pleasure. “Glory” tempts “proud hearts, and seduces” with the praise of the many, but it is in reality “an echo, a dream, nay the shadow of a dream, dissipated by every wind, and lost by every contrary breath of the ignorant and ill-judging multitude.” If glory is seen as an attempt to escape death, Damon warns that such attempts are so perilous they should not be tried. Worries about glory prompt people to accuse others of “calumny” or “ignorance.” Concern with glory undermines the “soft joy” and “peace, harmony and concord” experienced with easy-going friends (142–43).

Damon delivers the song because easy revelry, like asocial sensual delighting, is unstable. “Turbulent and clamorous pleasures” hover around, though they are now drowned out by song. Damon’s song counsels simple pleasures that can be enjoyed while the revelers “yet possess a being” (142). The revelers supply company to one another, but do not constitute a meaningful community of sentiment; Damon’s poetic critique of self-consciousness does not suggest that this party could satisfy desires of human sociality. It is not surprising that, when darkness falls, the restless Epicurean leaves the party. Its shallowness is pleasant but unfulfilling. The friends object,

but he replies that he seeks a pleasure that “admits not of [their] participation.” Only in this unnamed pleasure can he “find a sufficient compensation for the loss of [their] society” (143–4). His movement from sensual delighting to convivial revelry, from sensuous solitude to easy-going sociality, has not satisfied the full range of human passions.

Looking for love, the Epicurean meets CELIA in the woods. “With what words,” he pleads, “shall I express my tenderness, or describe my emotions which now warm my transported bosom!” Celia may be able to satisfy longings that could not be satisfied in solitary sensual delights or in revelry, the Epicurean hopes. The prospect of “mutual happiness” makes the previous pursuits appear as the vain concerns of “deluded mortals” (144). Does the Epicurean hope to forget the past and the future more completely with this love?

Celia resists him because she worries that his love will prove fleeting. She asks, “*how long [his] love shall yet endure?*” (145). Her question suggests she was not at the party because immersion in the present does not satisfy her; she worries about the future. She may be worried about lasting-love because she wants a family and a father for her children. Her question bespeaks a capacity to look backward (at his previous acts) and forward (to an uncertain future). Celia is the first politician in the essays. Her concern points to the need for permanent relationships. She controls through art and reason what the Epicurean sees as mere natural instinct. Her presence illustrates the Epicurean’s incomplete assessment of our faculties; the Epicurean does not provide grounds for distinguishing the animal from the human.

The Epicurean changes Celia’s question to “*do I know how long my life shall yet endure?*” in order to avoid commitment. He answers his question by offering his view of where human things fit into the cosmic order. “Consider,” he counsels, “that if life be frail, if youth be transitory, we should well employ the present moment, and lose no part of so perishable an existence. . . .Our fruitless anxieties, our vain projects, our uncertain speculations shall all be swallowed up and lost.” Endorsement of this view gives “unbounded loose to love and jollity” (145). Only after he meets Celia’s resistance does he embrace the critique of art and reason, a critique that holds that foresight and self-improvement have no cosmic support and do not contribute to happiness. Individuals are paltry when we see that life is short and all earthly things are perishable.

The thrust of his courting consists of an attempt to convince

Celia that giving in is insignificant; on the same score, her resistance would have to be insignificant as well. Belying this conclusion, the Epicurean's previous movements show that immersion in sensual delights and the pleasures of revelry is not satisfying. After tempting Celia with this reasoning, the Epicurean enjoins her to continue her "amorous caresses" (145). We are not told if his efforts are successful because the essay ends before Celia responds. The Epicurean's philosophic argument would make Celia skeptical about the prospect of his enduring love; I infer Celia would not be reassured by the Epicurean's tempting argument. What effect would her rejection have on him? Would the spurned lover be satisfied that "our fruitless anxieties, our vain projects, our uncertain speculations shall be swallowed up and lost" after he has been spurned? Or would he see the need to make himself into a stable character worthy of Celia? Philosophical equanimity is not the normal reaction to spurned sexual advances. Celia's rejection would prompt the Epicurean to improve himself. If he wants her love, he must seek a virtuous character. This transformation demands overcoming the philosophical argument put forth by Damon and endorsed by the Epicurean. The Epicurean finds his happiness connected to Celia; winning Celia requires some "watchfulness, care, and fatigue" (140). This insight points beyond the Epicurean's critique of art and reason toward an understanding that elevates art and reason—it points "The Epicurean" beyond itself to "The Stoic."

The Stoic. "The Stoic" also begins with an account of how nature relates to art. Criticizing the Epicurean perspective, the Stoic argues that the distinction between human beings and animals is based on our capacity for art and industry (146). These faculties are roused from a dormant, almost animalistic state by experiences like the Epicurean's. The Stoic puts forth a Lockean understanding of the relation between labor and nature. Nature furnishes man with materials and man must employ "talents" to refine "rude and unfinished" materials into something. The Stoic's initial assertion is problematic because the desire for self-improvement culminates in an inhumane philosophical perspective. Human industry aims at "happiness." The "wildest savage" and the "citizen" claim to be happy. Their accounts are "inferior" to the understanding put forth by "the man of virtue, and the true philosopher, who governs his appetites, subdues his passions, and has learned from reason, to set a just value on every pursuit and enjoyment." This perspective presupposes a ranking of human activities akin to one Aristotle postulates in the *Ethics* (1094a1–b9). "Is there an art and apprenticeship," the Stoic asks, "necessary to every other attainment? And is there no art of life, no rule, no precepts to direct us in this principal concern?"

In the chaos of human events, there is a perspective from which human activity presents itself as a coherent whole, perhaps where all inferior activities are ranked in relation to the best activities. The universe is governed according to a plan, with human virtues, vices, wisdom and folly equally participating in the working of that plan. Even insignificant parts of the universe contribute to its health. There is a “master workman who puts those several parts together; moves them according to just harmony and proportion; and produces true felicity as the result of their conspiring order.” It is an “alluring object,” impressing us if our labor seems “burdensome and intolerable” (149). This perspective is also problematic. Though rigorous, the perspective of the whole blurs the distinction between virtue and vice, extinguishes the desire for industry, and undermines human happiness. Nobody manages passions better than the master workman, but he manages them by extinguishing them and simplifying human nature.

The perspective from the whole is at odds with the complexities of human nature. Its philosophic apathy eradicates partial attachments to friends, lovers, country, and self. It places too great an emphasis on tranquility and indolence, while ignoring the importance of activity to human nature. “Labor itself is the chief ingredient of the felicity to which thou aspirest, and that every enjoyment soon becomes insipid and distasteful, when not acquired by fatigue and industry” (149). The importance of industry tells against the Epicurean. “In vain,” the Stoic argues, “do you seek repose from beds of roses. . . . Your indolence itself becomes a fatigue: Your pleasure itself creates disgust. The mind, unexercised, finds every delight insipid and loathsome” (150). (Hume similarly writes as follows: “That quick march of the spirits, which takes a man from himself, and chiefly gives satisfaction, does in the end exhaust the mind, and requires some intervals of repose, which, though agreeable for a moment, yet, if prolonged, beget a languour and lethargy, that destroys all enjoyment” [269].) The Epicurean seems to have learned this lesson when he left the revelry and saw the need for steadfastness after being rejected. The Epicurean’s simple pursuit of pleasure exposes the pleasure seeker to the vicissitudes of fortune too. “Happiness cannot possibly exist where there is no security; and security can have no place, where fortune has any dominion” (150). The Stoic’s perspective points toward politics as a means of securing against fortune and away from politics as viewing the world from the perspective of the master workman.

If happiness depends on eliminating chance, the question of happiness turns on the question of human power. Can people create the

security necessary for the enjoyment of happiness? The Stoic finds a “temple of wisdom,” “seated on a rock, above the rage of the fighting elements, and inaccessible to all the malice of man.” Beneath the rock “rolling thunder breaks,” but “those terrible instruments of human fury reach not to so sublime a height.” (This description is drawn from the Hume’s second *Enquiry* [1975b, 256].) The perspective of the master workman returns in the sage looking “down with pleasure, mixed with compassion, on the errors of mistaken mortals, who blindly seek for the true path of life, and pursue riches, nobility, honour, or power, for genuine felicity.” Chance appears to rule, and attempts to achieve happiness fail, but the system thrives. The Stoic secures a philosophic view of the whole, where chance is subsumed in a system of order, and where virtue and vice promote order and stability. The Stoic conquers chance not by exerting of power over nature, but by gaining a detached, synoptic perspective. Noticing this, the sage entertains “philosophical indifference” to human affairs while indulging in a “severe wisdom” (150–51).

Both Epicurean sensuality and a Stoic sage’s speculation tempt people with delusions of self-sufficiency, permanent repose, and the eradication of psychological turmoil. “The Stoic” develops a tension between being a philosopher and being a human being. The Stoic realizes that this elevated setting on a rock is a pretense that renders “him careless of the interests of mankind and society.” The sage gains an austere simulacrum of happiness by forfeiting *human* sentiments. “Neither true wisdom nor true happiness can be found” in the sage’s “sullen *Apathy*” (151). It is significant that the sage’s elevated point of view is inconsistent with both wisdom and happiness. The synoptic perspective is a lurch at objective wisdom, a pretension to be detached from distorting partial influences; however, its objectivity ignores the attached, particular view from which human beings must apprehend the world and must feel human sentiments. Hume’s other discussions of the Stoics (1975a, 40 and 101–2) elaborate on this point.

The sage argues for the meaninglessness of human things when viewed from a synoptic whole. The Epicurean’s pitch to Celia was based on a perspective emphasizing the transience of all things human and the lack of order in the cosmos. The Stoic sage’s perch shows that all things in the cosmic engine work together despite the actions or choices of individual cogs. Both perspectives promote a tranquil apathy and emphasize the limits of human power, though they imply different things about the intelligibility of the cosmos. The Epicurean derived a defense of giving “an unbounded loose to love and jollity” (145) from the transience of things and our ignorance. This

conclusion makes the Epicurean a fun fellow, but it builds walls between the self-indulgent Epicurean and others. The Stoic overcomes “sullen Apathy” because he senses “the charm of the social affections.” Though industry does not make sense from the perspective of the whole, the “sentiments of humanity” operate within him more than “philosophical indifference.” (This philosophic indifference is one of the themes of the second *Enquiry* [1975b, 224–29, 231, 271–73].) The Stoic’s deepest criticism of the Epicurean perspective lies here. The Epicurean’s turn to pleasure does not do justice to our complex nature. Besides loving pleasure, human beings find pleasure in durable relationships and in meaningful action, things that point to the importance of society and virtue. The Stoic beholds a “sprightly debauchee, who professes a contempt of all other pleasures but those of wine and jollity.” If we “separate him from his companions, like a spark from a fire, where before it contributed to the general blaze: His alacrity suddenly extinguishes” (151–52). Williams (1998, 61–91) equates “The Sceptic” and “The Epicurean” by saying that these are the only two essays that contain dialogues, but this exchange appears as much a dialogue as anything in “The Sceptic.” “The Stoic” corrects the common sense equation of happiness with pleasures sensual, companionable, and sexual by recourse to other, deep human needs for society and virtue. Epicurean happiness reflects an incomplete understanding of the ingredients that constitute human happiness. The Stoic does not fluctuate between different kinds of sensuality, like the Epicurean; he instead fluctuates between reason and nature, imagination and sentiment, and philosophic moderation and humane attachment. The Stoic’s more mature, tension-laden account of happiness better reflects the obscurities, mixtures, and contradictions of human nature, though his position is still not satisfactory.

Wisdom and nature are separated in “The Stoic”: wisdom demands tranquil solitude while nature demands society. “The Stoic” presents wild fluctuations between these poles instead of a stable accommodation where wisdom and nature infuse, stabilize and tranquilize each other; the Stoic’s passion management consists in extinguishing nature and indulging it in turn. The essay takes seriously a common understanding of happiness—the equation of happiness and a deep, long-lasting contentment. The common sense notion, while true in some way, finds its limit in the Stoic sage, whose deep contentment is purchased at the price of happiness and humanity.

A discussion of fame leads to a third, obviously political discussion of “a being who presides over the universe; and who, with infinite wisdom and power, has reduced the jarring elements into just order and

proportion.” The glory earned by “true sage and patriot” points beyond itself to a perfect glory of “the supreme disposer.” This “disposer” may or may not extend “existence beyond the grave.” The Stoic’s view from the rock points to a natural theology that emphasizes character and action. The Stoic’s religion harmonizes the discordant elements seen in “The Stoic.” The “man of morals” sees his place in a created world that reinforces meaningful action. He acknowledges “the bounty of his creator” by acquiring the valuable possession of virtue (154). What is not clear, however, is how this understanding of virtue maintains focus on the particular and human while looking heavenward. The instability characteristic of the Epicurean and Stoic searches for happiness highlights the need for an integrated, unified, stable enjoyment of pleasure, tranquility, and the sentiments of humanity. Perhaps philosophy promises to integrate these aspects in a comprehensive, pure, continuous, certain, self-sufficient life, as Aristotle suggests in the *Ethics* (1177a17–b25). We find such an integrative effort in “The Platonist,” whose name suggests the height of philosophy.

The Platonist. “The Platonist” begins by asking how creatures of the “same nature” and “faculties” could love a diversity of objects. Diversity results from the persistent human error of seeking happiness in “sensual pleasure or popular applause.” The Stoic prepares the ground for the Platonist’s insight by emphasizing natural religion and by suggesting that mortal man has “a resemblance with the divinity”(153). The Platonist builds on these insights to show that the Stoic’s natural theology is flawed; the Platonist follows the perspective of the whole and the possibility of an apolitical philosophic tranquility to its conclusion. Instead of understanding natural theology stoically as deriving from morals or glory, the Platonist develops a natural theology with an analogy between divine and human intelligence. This reflects the Platonist’s attempt to integrate wisdom into his understanding of happiness, thus overcoming the separation of wisdom from nature characteristic of the Stoic.

“The Platonist” supersedes “The Stoic” by exposing its tensions and by debunking the Stoic’s earthward movements. A Stoic, “a philosopher and man of morals,” presents himself to the Platonist. While this Stoic pretends to be free from concern with transitory pleasures, closer inspection reveals a problem. The Platonist hesitates in praising the Stoic, which makes the Stoic impatient. The Platonist discovers that the Stoic seeks “the ignorant applauses of men, not the solid reflections of [his] own conscience, or the more solid approbation of that being, who, with one regard of his all-

seeing eye, penetrates the universe.” The Platonist and the Epicurean form a common front against what both regard as Stoic pride (140, 157), but they do so on different bases. The Epicurean denies the possibility of self-improvement, but the Platonist thinks self-improvement can be accomplished only by participation in the divine. The Stoic calls himself “a citizen, a son, a friend,” but he forgets his “higher sovereign, [his] true father, [his] greatest benefactor.” He acknowledges the “superior beauty of thought and intelligence” found in the sage, but he concentrates on his own conduct (157). The Stoic manifests the problem of honor. He knows his “*real* imperfections” but is willing to substitute applause of “ignorant admirers” for what is “most excellent in the universe.” Concern for glory makes the Stoic blind to that “exquisite and most stupendous contrivance of the universe,” to the “intelligent being, so infinitely good and wise” (158). Human art strives, but fails, to imitate the whole or nature; therefore, art does not merit attention. Contemplation of the master workman’s system and worship of the master workman should be our only concern; other partial attachments must be extinguished.

The Stoic’s view, the Platonist suggests, misunderstands what points us toward the divine. The Stoic knows divinity through moral virtue; the Stoic assumes that the workman’s plan is beneficial for all the parts; he does not profess to know whether this benefit extends beyond the grave (154). The Platonist takes a path to God, asserting the existence of an afterlife. The divine is suggested to us by our capacity to contemplate, and our “most perfect happiness” arises from “the contemplation of the most perfect object.” This divine object is “MIND,” the wisdom, beauty, virtue, and justice of God. Our narrow faculties cannot comprehend the beauty and perfection of God, “but it is our comfort, that, if we employ worthily the faculties here assigned us, they will be enlarged in another state of existence, so as to render us more suitable worshippers of our maker” (158).

But is a life of contemplation suitable to human beings? Only the Platonist is without the dramatic fluctuations and restlessness seen in the others because he is convinced that there is simple, unified best way of life and all other ways of life are but errors. The Platonist has left the cave—with its shadowy errors and human sentiments—and he transcends the inferior conceptions of happiness to one that is apparently self-contained, distant from the vicissitudes of chance, and inured to the normal limits of human life (i.e., mortality). While the essays could continue with a criticism of *this* understanding of human purpose, “The Sceptic,” which follows, argues against the principles underlying the Platonist’s effort to transcend common accounts of happiness.

HAPPINESS AND HUMANE PASSION
MANAGEMENT

Where “The Platonist” treats tensions in common conceptions of happiness by transcending common conceptions, “The Sceptic” moderates and mediates tensions by outlining a multi-faceted method of passion management. It explores happiness by investigating the nature and limits of philosophy; it defends our capacity to understand the nature of happiness by defending a certain distance from human affairs without careening to the perspective of the whole. Unlike the Stoic and the Platonist, the Sceptic seeks to stabilize passions within the purview of common life.

Previous essays held that philosophic reasoning had profound implications for how one should live one’s life. They justified a single principle (pleasure, action, and contemplation) by virtue of their respective views of the whole. The Sceptic is skeptical first and foremost of such “decisions of philosophers.” Philosophers “confine” their principles too much “and make no account” of nature’s vast variety (159). Attempts to account for the whole are limited by our inability to know and articulate nature’s variety. The problem is yet more complicated when dealing with the question of human happiness. In moral philosophy, reductionism is the tendency to privilege a “predominant inclination” over another. Such reasoning ignores the “variety of inclinations and pursuits” and the different “general preferences of town or country life, of a life of action or one of pleasure, of retirement or society.” The Sceptic concludes that just reasoning assimilates a “judicious mixture” of elements that contribute to human happiness (160); he reduces high human purpose to human inclination and defends human diversity against the implicit dogmatism apparent especially in “The Platonist.”

Such reasoning raises the central difficulty. “Must a man consult only his humour and inclination, in order to determine his course of life, without employing his reason to inform him what road is preferable?” The Sceptic encounters an unnamed interrogator who demands that philosophers relate more than mere “maxims of common prudence” in response to questions about how one ought to live. This interrogator comes, in the Sceptic’s words, “as to a *cunning man*, to learn something by magic or witchcraft, beyond what can be known by common prudence.” The interrogator agrees. “We come to the philosopher to be instructed, how we shall chuse our ends.” The question creates the following problem to the Sceptic: He will seem a “pedant and scholastic” if he is too “rigid or severe” or a “preacher of vice and immorality” if he is “too easy and free” (160–61). This question, asked in

the central paragraph of the four essays, is the central philosophic challenge to Hume's treatment of happiness. Neither teleological nor deontological, Hume seeks a substantive and a formal account of happiness. Is such an account possible?

The Sceptic refuses to address the question of ends. He nevertheless contends that the most careless thinker sees that "all dispositions of mind are not alike favorable to happiness." Philosophy can discuss dispositions, not ways of life or purposes or a human *telos*. He claims the happiest disposition is the "*virtuous*," which "leads to action and employment, renders us sensible to the social passions, steels the heart against the assaults of fortune, reduces the affections to a just moderation, makes our own thoughts an entertainment to us, and inclines us rather to the pleasures of society and conversation, than to those of the senses" (168). Happiness consists in a mixture of pleasure, rest, and application, a mean between violent and remiss passions (167). These are "dispositions of the mind," and, the Sceptic reminds us, that were we capable of altering our feelings "PROTEUS-like" we would elude the assaults of fortune. (This attempt to conquer chance internally—by having the proper disposition to chance events—contrasts with the Stoic's, who tried to conquer chance by leaving human affairs altogether.) That there is a disposition favorable to happiness points to man's ability to conquer his nature. While the Sceptic calls attention to a properly constructed disposition toward happiness, nature prevents man from altering his nature overmuch. The Sceptic compares man's nature to "a stream" following "the several inclinations of the ground, on which it runs" (168–69). Happy people recognize the dominion of chance. The problem is that happiness requires an adaptable disposition of mind, but nature denies "the generality of men" the capacity for adaptation. Philosophers boast of their "*medicine of the mind*," but nature has "prodigious influence" even on them (169). The triumph of nature seems complete, and the acquisition of the easy, happy, virtuous character seems beyond our grasp.

Upon closer review, however, the understanding of philosophy that has little or no influence to guide the temper is philosophy in the form of "general maxims" (169) or "system" (170); attempts to improve people by philosophical doctrine fail. In the same sentence where the Sceptic denies the capacity of philosophy to transform even the most perverse case, he "venture[s] to affirm, that, perhaps, the chief benefit, which results from philosophy, arises from its indirect manner." The Sceptic soon ceases being hesitant about the indirect effects of philosophy on the mind. "It is certain" that "a serious attention to the sciences and liberal arts softens and humanizes

the temper, and cherishes those fine emotions, in which true virtue and honour consists.” “Speculative studies” mortify “passions of interest and ambition,” while giving people “greater sensibility of all the decencies and duties of life.” People can sense “more fully a moral distinction in the characters and manners” by study (170). What begins as the “benefit” of philosophy is the “triumph of art and philosophy” in changing the “*bent* of mind” (171). This is not the abstraction of the Stoic’s rock or the Platonist’s contemplation, nor is it an Epicurean immersion in pleasure. Speculative studies cultivate detachment from attachments of life without losing the sensibilities necessary to study human life; they are suited to the in-between character of our mixed kind of life.

The Sceptic’s studies contrast to those of the previous essays. The Epicurean, Stoic, and Platonist called the value of human happiness into question by looking at human things from outside common life. They found that human happiness was trifling in light of the whole (however understood). The Epicurean thought that human action was paltry once we grant that “not a memory of us will be left on earth” upon our death (145). The Stoic sage’s view from the “temple of wisdom” fostered philosophic indifference where happiness and misery were just elements in a great system of nature (149–51). The Platonist thought people contemptible in the light of the perfect deity (158). All sought tranquility; each purchased it at the cost of humanity—the first was subhuman, and the latter two by inhumane transcendence. The Sceptic’s observations correct these accounts of philosophy. His account of happiness culminates in a program of philosophic passion management. Let us treat the Sceptic’s criticisms of the previous essays in reverse order.

The Sceptic concedes the Platonist draws the proper implication from his premise concerning the whole. “It is certain,” he writes, “were a superior being thrust into a human body, that the whole of life would to him appear so mean, contemptible, and puerile, that he never could be induced to take part in any thing, and would scarcely give attention to what passes around him” (175). The Platonist conflates the view of the deity with the view of the philosopher and forgets that he draws a portrait “disproportioned to human capacity” (170). The Platonist’s aspirations contradict the complexities of human nature in reducing it to one element—the Platonist abstracts completely from the body in his effort to define happiness as pure, self-sufficient contemplation.

The Stoic view is perhaps the most attractive to the Sceptic because it sees nature as a meaningful system in which all parts have a place.

Livingston (1998, 138) suggests that Hume himself endorses the “view of human excellence” as “expressed in ‘The Stoic,’” while extirpating false philosophy from the Stoic’s presentation. “The Stoic” is the second longest of the four essays, and most of Hume’s seemingly random philosophic observations aim at correcting Stoic errors in reasoning. The seriousness of the Stoic challenge focuses the Sceptic on problems in Stoic thinking. In a rejoinder to the sage’s desire to breathe “serene air” on the rock (150), the Sceptic contends that the “*artificial* arguments of a SENECA or an EPICETUS” originate where “air is too fine to breathe in” (172; also 173–76). The Sceptic compares the Stoic’s attempt to promote indifference with an attempt to cure oneself of love by viewing one’s beloved through a microscope. The Sceptic offers Stoical arguments in his survey of “philosophical reflections.” For example, one Stoic argument against correcting an injustice is this: “*All ills arise from the order of the universe, which is absolutely perfect. Would you wish to disturb so divine an order for the sake of your own particular interest? . . . The vices and imperfections of men are also comprehended in the order of the universe*” (173). The Sceptic reacts to this by showing that it undermines our ability to judge about things such as virtue, vice, and patriotism. The Stoic pushes philosophy’s moral teaching to an amoral conclusion. The Stoical and Platonic perspectives call into question the value of human happiness and politics. They deprecate the difference between political communities by deprecating our capacity to make judgments about the superiority of one community to another. They loosen the springs of action and judgment. Trying to do justice to the unique facets of human nature, they distort and do violence to the complexity of human nature.

The Sceptic’s view of speculative studies becomes apparent from the criticisms of the Platonist and the Stoic. The Sceptic insists that the whole can be seen only from potentially blinding locales. The Platonist and Stoic cannot understand human things because they view human things from the whole. Unlike the others, the Sceptic does not call into question the value of happiness—such a question cannot in the final analysis be asked or answered. The Sceptic’s feet are planted in common life where the air is thick.

The Sceptic’s studies yield two true observations directly from “human affairs” (176). The observations from common life allow us to understand how philosophy can mediate, stabilize, moderate, and tranquilize the partly true portraits of happiness seen in the previous essays. The first observation points to deficiencies in the Epicurean. In sympathy with the Epicurean’s attempted seduction of Celia, the Sceptic argues, “when we reflect on the shortness and uncertainty of life, how despicable seem all our pursuits

of happiness?” (176). Study does not consistently have the effect of encouraging human action. A consideration of the revolutions in human affairs, the temporary character of laws and the diverse fashions of learning—in sum, the primacy of motion in human affairs—prompts us to see many concerns as frivolous. This observation “tends to mortify all our passions.” The view from common life promotes serene indifference too. Reason encourages people into a sub-human sensuousness, a surrender to present pleasure and instinct. What prevents this accurate philosophical reflection from promoting dissolute mirth and “free and easy” (176) immorality? Does the Sceptic rehabilitate the Epicurean perspective?

The Epicurean’s perspective is only partly true to human nature. These Epicurean observations are countered by an “artifice of nature, who has happily deceived us into an opinion, that human life is of some importance.” Nature’s artifice suggests “paths of action and virtue.” The defining characteristics of the Stoic sage—the man of action and virtue—are natural, in part, as well; action and virtue are constituent parts of human happiness. This situation resembles the situation where the Stoic finds himself returning to human affairs from the rock. In neither Stoical “severe wisdom” (151) nor Epicurean “voluptuous reason[ing]” (176) are true happiness or wisdom found. The Epicurean conclusion is especially self-defeating, in that it discovers by reason the meaninglessness of reason; it finds in life the meaninglessness of life; it provides an argument for sub-human behavior, thereby both affirming and denying human distinctiveness.

Where the first observation from common life is modified by an “artifice of nature,” the second observation sees reason correcting a “natural infirmity.” Nature corrects conclusions of reason and must be corrected by conclusions of reason. The conflict between reason and nature is, in the final analysis, insoluble and irreducible; one without the other renders passion management impossible. As social creatures, we compare ourselves to others, and are more “apt to compare our situation with that of our superiors” than our inferiors. Nature calls things to our attention that incite envy, highlight deficiencies, and render us dissatisfied. The Sceptic’s second observation calls our attention to our inferiors in fortune and talent. This observation makes the philosopher “easy in the situation, to which fortune has confined him.” The two examples put forth by the Sceptic point in opposite directions on the question of the ease of human happiness. The first observation is problematic because it makes us too easy and free; the second makes us “easy” in our situation. In a “very good-natured man” this observation produces in a Stoic

more “sorrow than comfort” and “a deep compassion for [misfortunes] of others” (177). The political Stoic “laments the miseries” of people and tries to “relieve them by compassion” (151). The Stoic is good-natured, but tranquil; he is too passionate in his concern for humanity to be “easy” in his situation. The Stoic’s sensitivity points toward political life and glory, while the philosophic observation points away from political life.

Hume then appears in a footnote to support the Sceptic’s purposes. Hume worries that the Sceptic has limited “all philosophical topics and reflections to these two.” He continues, “There seem to be other [reflections], whose truth is undeniable, and whose natural tendency is to tranquilize and soften all the passions.” Hume offers twelve reflections calling attention to imperfections and contradictions in our condition. Such reflections derive from a “general and calm survey” of common life. Envy is irrational if we consider that every condition has concealed ills (#1); we should be content with the present since everyone knows ills and there is compensation throughout our lives (#2). Humane habits and study “tranquilize[] the mind” and render “a great part of. . .happiness independent” of disorderly passions. These observations bring the tranquility sought by the Stoic sage and the easy contentment sought by the Epicurean, but they do so by drawing on resources within common life. They cultivate a “philosophic temper” while maintaining engagement with and moderating human passions such as the love of fame (#12), the desire for wealth (#11), and the love of labor (#7).

Teleologists impute to the human condition a purity inconsistent with human nature and happiness. Whether it is the Epicurean’s sensuousness, the Stoic’s inhumane tranquility, or the Platonist’s divine pretensions, passing all passion through a channel outside the purview of common life leads to sterile disappointment. The Sceptic shows how transcendent aspirations cannot escape the earthy mixture of human nature. At a fundamental level, the Sceptic shows that a proper understanding of tranquility is accomplished by an internal checks and balances mechanism, whereby reason and the passions counterbalance false, abstracting reason and disorderly passions. The truest tranquility does not require a retreat to the Stoic sage’s rock so distant from common life. It does not sink below the level of humanity by denying the place of art and industry. Hume defends the common sense equation of happiness and tranquility while exposing philosophic errors in previous conceptions of tranquility.

NATURAL AND PHILOSOPHIC PASSION
MANAGEMENT

Hume seems to rehabilitate the view that the philosophic life is best. Philosophy mediates disputes between contradictory passions by illustrating to our passions the wisdom or humanity in counterbalancing passions. The philosopher internalizes these counterbalancing passions as he achieves the ease and tranquility to which human beings are suited. The Sceptic preserves a vestige of ranking from the Tradition. Happiness both is and is not comparable to our taste in relish. It is comparable, in that philosophy cannot reach questions of ends. It is not comparable, in that philosophy emphasizes the cultivation of a liberal disposition of moderation, tranquility, and qualified attachment or attached detachment as necessary to the happiest life.

Both nature and philosophy are inadequate for the purposes of managing the passions. Philosophers illustrate the virtues of the liberal disposition that conduce to happiness; these essays see Hume, the philosopher, illustrating the superiority of the humane, tranquil life as against restless, inhumane alternatives. One-sided, simplistic Epicurean, Stoic, and Platonic philosophic systems do not reflect an adequate awareness of how nature herself manages the passions. Natural passions are easily distorted by philosophic constructs and religious beliefs (by teleology combined with superstition and enthusiasm or by Whig political theory); the Humean philosophy grounded in common life comes to the rescue of nature by clearing away distortions of ideology and superstition. Humean philosophy even points to the liberal education that promotes moderation and tranquility, but it alone does not lead to this tranquil disposition. The Sceptic deprecates philosophy by showing that excessively abstracted or systematizing philosophy prevents the proper management of the passions. Happiness must be understood “relative to human sentiment and affection” (168); aspirations for tranquility understood as a god-like purity and perfection are vain and counter-productive. Natural sentiments also conspire against philosophic conclusions in order to promote happiness. Epicurean sensuousness is cured through a natural deception of human pride; nature cures the Stoic’s remoteness by making him feel and need human company. “The Sceptic” implements Hume’s project of reconciliation among competing principles of human nature: natural passion management accompanies philosophic management of passions, and vice versa.

What is perhaps most striking about the character most conducive to happiness in these dramatic essays (168) is how it closely tracks the humane character cultivated by the modern commercial republic (269–72)

or how the philosophic temper resembles the commercial temper characteristic of the “middling rank of men” (277). Both are tranquil, even-tempered, composed, happy, active, humane, sociable, conversational, moderate, curious, and able to withstand the assaults of fortune. In contrast to repressive ancient and feudal societies, modern commercial republics liberate passions for action and sociability within the confines of common sense, while creating conditions where people assert more control over nature. Modern politics embody diversity in the way that the Sceptic embodies diversity. Natural passions and diverse reflections in common life are within the grasp of most people, and passions in the humane commercial republic reach the rough equilibrium sought in the Sceptic’s passion management because commerce conjures diversity of sentiments. The philosopher does not help people choose their ends, and the Sceptic is content to leave people to their own preferred version of the pursuit of happiness, however benighted their version may be. Only with the humane revolution is the Sceptic’s non-teleological indulgence of diversity endorsed in politics. Tranquil, humane people are disposed to be indulgent, either from a dedication to civility and humanity or because they are too busy to engage in moral censoriousness.

Hume recommends the liberal, humane disposition not because he claims special insights into human nature, but because he is aware of human ignorance. The humane, tranquil disposition is, for Hume, reasonable in its effects. Our inability to know the proper ends of human striving is the reason that we should be humane and indulgent with others and tranquil within ourselves. Our inability to know what features of human nature best conduce to happiness is the reason Hume recommends that we indulge all such passions in moderation. Even the passions for a life dedicated to philosophy must be moderate: “Be a philosopher,” nature enjoins, “but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man” (Hume 1975a, 9).

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Ascending with Socrates: Plato's Use of Homeric Imagery in the *Symposium*

Z D R A V K O P L A N I N C

M C M A S T E R U N I V E R S I T Y

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The framing story of the *Symposium* suggests that, were it not for the ardor of Aristodemus and Apollodorus, we would know nothing of Socrates' understanding of erotics. What professor would not wish for such zealous students? They memorize their teacher's lectures, and even check with him to assure themselves that they can repeat them word-perfectly. All the same, Aristodemus and Apollodorus are not Socrates' favorites. How could they be? They imitate his appearance and manner, they pester him by following him about and asking trivial questions, and they put on curmudgeonly airs in public—remaining silent or ranting cynically—to affect wisdom. Neither of them could speak as eloquently and as truthfully as Alcibiades does about Socrates in the *Symposium*; and neither could honor Socrates by writing a dialogue as beautiful and as revealing as the *Symposium*. In the framing story of the dialogue, the two of them are given a part to play in the dissemination of Socrates' teachings. However, the words they take such pains to recite are their measure. For Plato, those who best love Socrates show their love by attempting to follow him toward the end of his erotic ascents. The *Symposium* is a catalogue of erotic deficiencies and excesses; and although they are not the worst of the lot, Aristodemus and Apollodorus are far from being Socrates' most constant lovers.

Sean Steel's work on the *Symposium* recently published in this Journal attempts to explain Plato's critique of the erotic deficiencies of Socrates' drinking companions by way of a study of Plato's use of Homeric imagery in composing the dialogue. The problem with the majority of the symposiasts, he claims, is their pederasty. For Steel, pederasty is a decadent

sexual practice, the consequence of a lack of self-restraint (Steel 2004, 61). Steel also argues that pederasty in the *Symposium* is “an image of pamphyism” (76), or a symbol for “a decadent sort of equality” in society (61), but it is difficult to see anything symbolic about it: the only social or political content he gives to the notion of “pamphyism” is the predominance of pederasty as a sexual practice. Steel claims that Plato gives shape to his critique of pederasty by basing many of the literary features of the dialogue on the story of Odysseus’ descent to Hades in Homer’s *Odyssey*, though he does not address the question of why Plato would bother to present so straightforward a critique in such “veiled” terms. The pederasts at the symposium are the erotically dead; Socrates is Odysseus among them; and the only “riddle” remaining to be solved, for Steel, is the “corresponding identity of each of the characters in the banquet with those found in the Odyssean Hades” (64). Steel justifies his methodological approach by conjuring with the names of eminent scholars: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and a host of their students, several of whom were his teachers (59). The extent to which any of the scholars he mentions might agree with his findings is difficult to determine, in large part because he does not discuss their works. Steel relies primarily on Voegelin, a notoriously opaque writer; and since there is neither an exegesis of the *Symposium* nor a discussion of Plato’s systematic use of Homeric imagery in Voegelin’s writings (Rhodes 2003), Steel derives his argument from Voegelin’s reading of the “directional ambiguity” in the opening scene of the *Republic* (59–63, 74).

Voegelin’s brief discussions of the *Symposium* always focus on the erotics of Socrates’ ascent toward the transcendent ground of being (Voegelin 1990a; Voegelin 1990b). Insofar as he deals with Plato’s accounts of psychic deformations, he does not concern himself with aberrant sexual practices, either in themselves or as literary symbols. Indeed, the consideration Voegelin gives to the homoeroticism of the epitaph Plato wrote for Dion—“Dion, thou, who made rage with Eros my heart!”—suggests that he would likely be reluctant to support Steel’s bellicose campaign (Voegelin 1957, 18). Be that as it may, my main concern is not Steel’s use and abuse of secondary sources. It is his understanding of the character and significance of Plato’s use of Homer’s *Odyssey* in the *Symposium*. For all that Steel claims to be engaging in a literary-critical exercise, he discusses Plato’s use of the Homeric text very little. Instead of sustained, careful exegesis and inference, his article presents the reader with an assortment of impressionistic textual parallels and the belaboring of the arguments he finds on them. The poetic beauty that the *Odyssey* and the *Symposium* share is entirely lost in the process. In what follows, I do not intend to dispute this or that point in Steel’s account.

Refutations are tedious. I will simply give a different reading of the relation of the two texts, a reading that will emphasize Plato's aesthetically consistent and purposeful adaptations of Homeric imagery of ascent. Steel's fascination with images of *katabasis* or descent prevents him from seeing the obvious: it is by means of the imagery of ascent in the *Symposium* that "we are made aware of the full amplitude of Socrates' eroticism" (Steel 2004, 63). And what is more, only an understanding of the ascending character of Socratic erotics might enable Steel to avoid the embarrassing "complexity" that undoes his argument completely: "Alcibiades, who engages in pederasty, is not portrayed as one of the erotically dead" in the *Symposium* (76). Steel must admit that Plato's sympathetic depiction of Alcibiades, Socrates' best lover among the symposiasts, "suggests that the possibility of erotic ascent remains open even to pederasts" (77).

My study of the extent and significance of Plato's uses of the *Odyssey* in his composition of the *Symposium* is part of a larger project examining Plato's presentation of Socrates as the new Odysseus. I have argued elsewhere that Plato takes many of the most important features of his major dialogues from the *Odyssey*. I have analyzed the *Republic*, the *Timaeus/Critias*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* in this manner, showing how Plato derives much of the literary form and the content of the dialogues by refiguring tropes from the *Odyssey*, and I have read the relation of the dialogues by way of Plato's uses of their common source-text (Planinc 1991, 269–85; Planinc 2003). In the present study, I will show how the literary structure of the *Symposium* is taken from books 10–12 of the *Odyssey*, that is, from the *nekyia* (book 11), the story of Odysseus' journey to Hades, and its framing context (books 10 and 12), the story of Odysseus' relation to Circe. Now, it is well known that Plato uses the imagery of the *nekyia* in several of the dialogues. Before discussing how he works with it in the *Symposium*, therefore, a few introductory remarks about the *nekyia* and the range and consistency of Plato's reworkings of it are necessary.

First, the story of Odysseus' descent, briefly told: When he travels to Hades, Odysseus encounters several different sorts of dead souls. (1) Initially, an odd group: Elpenor, one of his men whom he had not known to be dead; his own mother; and Teiresias, the only shade said to have "intelligence" (*noon*, 10.494) after death. (2) There follows a series of heroines. (3) Then several Greek heroes from the Trojan War—Agamemnon, Achilles, Patroclus—with whom Odysseus speaks. (4) Odysseus next sees, but does not speak with Minos, the judge of the dead, and several whom Minos has rewarded or punished—particularly the notorious group of Tityos, Tantalus and

Sisyphus. (5) Heracles suddenly appears—but only his “image” (*eidōlon*, 11.602), for he himself is with the gods. And finally (6) Odysseus would like to stay to meet Peirithoos and Theseus, but fear overcomes him and he leaves Hades.

Plato refigures this story across several dialogues, using the main features of its literary structure and its most important tropes in a variety of complementary ways. Leaving aside Odysseus’ encounter with Achilles, which Plato uses differently in the *Hippias Minor*; and leaving aside the principal trope of a journey to a shady place in which an oddly accompanied traveler might learn something from a man reputed to be wise—a trope used frequently in the dialogues, and even used several times within the *nekylia* itself; leaving these aside, Plato’s main uses of the *nekylia* are found in the *Republic*, the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras* and the *Symposium*.

At the conclusion of the *Republic*, Socrates’ recounting of the tale told by Er makes the tale of Odysseus’ descent and return into a reincarnation story. The *nekylia*’s categorical distinction between heroines and heroes is overcome in several exchanges of gender in rebirth, a change consistent with the main argument of the *Republic*. The trope of judgment and the judged that concludes the *nekylia* is expanded to cover the whole range of souls, though the judgment tale is similarly the concluding part of the entire dialogue. The serial order of the souls encountered is preserved—Ajax is again the twentieth (Plutarch, *Moralia* IX.5.3 [740e–f]). The first soul to choose a new life—the habitually virtuous but unphilosophic one—is like Odysseus’ mother, a good woman who does not recognize her son until she drinks the sacrificial blood offering. And the last soul, Odysseus’ own, chooses the life that Socrates himself lives. Er is the figure of Odysseus returning from Hades; Socrates is the figure of Odysseus who has learned from all his experiences and tells “the tale of Alcinoos” (*Republic* 614b).

The *Gorgias* is less playful. Gorgias, the sophist, is no Teiresias; and the somber concluding tale of the afterlife is formulated especially to capture the imagination of his friend Callicles. Plato abstracts the section of the *nekylia* depicting the judgment of the dead from its context and uses its structure almost without change. Minos judges who goes to Tartarus and who to the Isles of the Blessed (*Gorgias* 524a, 526d = *Odyssey* 11.569). The incurable souls forever in Tartarus are again Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityos (given in a different order, *Gorgias* 525e). And the finger-wagging, we might say “religious,” moral of the story is made explicit for Callicles by having its range determined by contemporary political figures—Archelaus, first among the

incurable, and Aristides in the role of Heracles (*Gorgias* 525d, 526d).

The *Protagoras* continues the assault on the clamor and babble of the sophists. Among them, Protagoras has first claim to the place of Teiresias. However, Plato's explicit identification of Prodicus with Tantalus (*Protagoras* 315d = *Odyssey* 11.582), his blankets up to his chin as the waters were said to rise to Tantalus' chin, eternally enticing him, demotes Protagoras somewhat. Is he perhaps more like Agamemnon, the leader of the heroes? And is Hippias truly like Heracles, as a parallel quotation from the *Odyssey* suggests (*Protagoras* 315b = *Odyssey* 11.601)? If only a proper judge of these matters could be found (*Protagoras* 338bc). There is no tale of judgment given in the *Protagoras*, but the doom of Hades is everywhere. In his composition of the beginning of the dialogue, Plato mixes tropes from the *nekyia* with tropes from the "second *nekyia*" of book 24. The image of Protagoras and his entourage, the two groups of which follow him about in perfect formation on his left and right (314e–315b), is taken from the *Odyssey's* image of the souls of the dead suitors being herded along the route to Hades, gibbering like bats and constantly forming and reforming their positions as they flutter about (24.1–10). Protagoras might imagine himself Hermes, and a young Socrates might be too polite to disagree openly, but all the sophists assembled at Callias' house are dead souls, their arguments always already defeated.

In neither the *Protagoras* nor the *Symposium* does Socrates discuss the afterlife; however, his account of the teachings of Diotima in the *Symposium* is closer to his teachings in the *Republic*, including Er's tale, than it is to anything said in the *Protagoras*. The *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* belong together; the presence or absence of an afterlife story is a secondary matter. The *Symposium* does have many similarities to the *Protagoras*, the most important of which is its use of the same passages of the *nekyia* as the literary foundation for the dialogue's setting and the ordering of the eulogists; however, it is what Plato adds to the shared basic structure of the dialogues that makes them so different. In the *Protagoras*, the initiates and the novices of sophistry appear together; in the *Symposium*, students appear without their teachers and face Socrates. Phaedrus and Eryximachus no longer have Hippias to help them; Pausanias and Agathon no longer have Prodicus; even Alcibiades appears without Critias, his companion in the *Protagoras*, with whom Plato deals in the *Timaeus/Critias*. In this aspect of the setting alone, there is more hope. And although Plato presents Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus and Agathon by means of the same tropes from the *nekyia* he used to present their teachers, the *Symposium* lacks the *Protagoras's* mood, established with the intensifying force

of the tropes from the “second *nekyia*.” In the *Symposium* there is a way out: Plato composes the dialogue by combining the *nekyia* with its literary context, the story of Odysseus’ relation to Circe.

A brief account of the Circe story is now in order: She is a goddess, one of the lesser divinities, with a full range of magical powers. She is a “black” shaman and a “white” shaman—in other words, someone capable of sending souls to Hades and back as well as through the cosmic spheres and back, someone aware of the relation between the way down and the way up, someone who explores things beneath the earth and things in the heavens (Cooper 2001, 93–98). When a party of Odysseus’ men discovers her house, Polites persuades them to call on her. She puts drugs (*pharmaka*, 10.236) in their wine and uses magic to turn them into swine. Odysseus sets out alone the next day to find them. On his way, he meets a young man—Hermes in disguise—who aids him in avoiding their fate. He gives Odysseus a rare drug (*pharmakon*, 10.287), called “moly” (10.305) by the gods, to counteract hers, and advice about how he should behave: challenge her when she attempts to charm you, he says, accept her bed when she offers it, but make her swear an oath before lying with her. These things he does. Circe invites him in, and is amazed by his resistance to her drugged wine and her enchantments—he has an “unassuageable [or unsexable] mind” (*akēlētos noos*, 10.329). She recalls that Hermes told her the resourceful Odysseus was coming, offers him her bed, and then swears the necessary oath before mounting it with him. Odysseus is bathed, anointed, and newly dressed; however, he will neither eat nor drink until Circe frees his companions from her spell. This she does. When they are all reunited, the feasting and celebration begins; and it continues until they are satisfied and the longing to return home overcomes them.

Circe eventually gives Odysseus his leave; however, she tells him that he must first travel to Hades to speak with Teiresias. She instructs him in the way there, the technique for summoning and managing the hordes of the dead, and even the substance of Teiresias’ prophecy: the “steps” (*metra*, 10.539) of his journey. Evidently, Odysseus requires the experience of the trip, and not only the knowledge of what Teiresias will say—something Circe could tell him. Odysseus sets out the next day, again freshly clothed. However, the youngest of his companions, Elpenor, beats him to Hades. He had fallen asleep, drunk, on the roof of Circe’s house, and when he awoke, forgot to “go down” (*katabēnai*) by way of the “ladder” (*klimaka*, 10.558). He broke his neck and his soul “went down” (*katēlthen*, 10.560) directly.

The *nekyia* has already been summarized. Let us pick up the

story from Odysseus' return from Hades. Circe greets him with the news that, although he is now one of the "twice dying" (*disthanees*, 12.22), he has not yet mastered the art. She instructs him on the details of the further "way" (*hodon*, 12.25) he has yet to travel, knowledge that "the god himself" (*theos autos*, 12.38) will make him remember when he confronts the things she describes and is pondering what to do. The further way is upward, the "white" shamanic route along the axis mundi, past the *Planktas* (12.61), the "wandering rocks" or "planets," and through the cosmic spheres. Circe tells him about the Sirens and how he can resist the deadly consequence of hearing their singing. She tells him about the dangers of Skylla and Charybdis and how best to sail between them. His way will not be as effortless as Jason's, but if he resists fighting Skylla and invokes her mother instead, he will do best. And finally, Circe warns Odysseus about the herds of the god Helios on Thrinakia, as Teiresias had done. These things are encountered as she describes them, though Odysseus must learn the truth of her words through his own and his men's misjudgments. And there are one or two other surprises in store for him, the full meaning of which he learns afterwards from Kalypso (12.389–90), the goddess who takes over Circe's role as his erotic guide once he reaches her island.

In composing the *Symposium*, Plato takes several series of tropes from Homer's rich and intricate text, overlapping and rearranging them to construct a literary framework suited to his purpose of presenting Socrates as the new Odysseus and giving his critique of the other eulogists, from Phaedrus to Alcibiades, through Socrates' dramatic encounter with them that night. There is much added to this framework—the characterizations of the eulogists, the sophistic content of several of their eulogies, the comic imagery of Aristophanes' story, many significant references to myth and poetry, the historical circumstances in which the night's events occur, these things and more—but the framework itself, the literary context within which all this material is presented and meant to be understood, is taken entirely from the *Odyssey*.

If the framing story of the dialogue is put aside—the episode in which Apollodorus recounts the events, as best he remembers Aristodemus' narrative, for several interested people many years afterwards—the basic structure of the *Symposium* is straightforward. (1) Socrates goes to Agathon's party, meeting Aristodemus on the way, and once he has arrived and been welcomed, the topic of the evening's discussions is decided. (2) The largest part of the text is a series of eulogies of Eros given by Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes and Agathon; and then (3) Socrates himself recounts what he

learned from Diotima. (4) Alcibiades disrupts the proceedings with a dramatic entrance and a eulogy of Socrates. And finally (5), the arrival of more drunken revelers brings chaos. One by one, the symposiasts fall asleep, and Socrates leaves at dawn, still accompanied by Aristodemus.

Plato builds this structure from episodes in the *Odyssey* in the following manner. (1) The events of Socrates' arrival at Agathon's party are based on two series of tropes. Plato overlaps the tropes of Odysseus' arrival on Circe's island and their initial encounter with the tropes of Odysseus' arrival at Hades following Circe's direction to consult Teiresias. (2) The series of eulogies given by Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes and Agathon is based on the concluding series of dead souls encountered by Odysseus in Hades. Plato is quite inventive in composing these eulogies, but nowhere more than in the comic masterpiece of Aristophanes' speech. (3) Socrates' account of Diotima's instruction in erotics is based generally on the trope of Odysseus' erotic relation with Circe, and more specifically on the tropes of her account of the further way he has yet to travel before his homecoming. In Homer's poem, Odysseus is always learning; he learns when down in Hades and he learns when traveling along the upward route. In the *Symposium*, Socrates, the reborn Odysseus, knows the art of dying already—anamnetically, as Voegelin would say. (4) Alcibiades' dramatic entrance and his account of his relations with Socrates are based on the concluding tropes of the *nekylia*: Odysseus' desire to see Peirithoos and Theseus just when the clamoring of the dead weakens his resolve to stay fast. Alcibiades is much like Peirithoos, and Socrates like both Theseus and a resolute Odysseus. (5) Finally, the dialogue ends in an anticlimactic dawning woven from loose strands of several of the episodes Plato takes from Homer.

Socrates is Odysseus throughout, although he also plays other compatible roles. The other symposiasts are not necessarily so constant. Plato's overlapping and rearranging of the tropes of Homer's text occasionally makes them ambiguous, and none more so than Agathon. Perhaps his various roles show that he is a better actor than a tragedian. Agathon is first Circe welcoming Odysseus; then Teiresias, whom Odysseus should seek out; then Persephone, the queen of the dead; and then Heracles—but only an "image" without substance, less than a shade. Plato's fun with Agathon in the *Symposium* might have been prompted by his hapless name. If the end of Socrates' philosophic ascent is the vision of the "good beyond being" (*agathon ... epekeina tēs ousias, Republic 509b*), how better to symbolize the antithetical emptiness of sophistry than by making Agathon a cipher, a name without

substance? And if the political consequences of Socrates' philosophic life are to be illustrated, how better than by contrasting Socrates' account of the erotic ascent toward the *agathon* with the corrupt erotics of the celebrations of Agathon's tragedy, chosen as the best play at the Lenaea by the Athenian public, a decision in which all the symposiasts took part?

Let us turn our attention to the dialogue's account of Agathon's party and trace its correspondence to its Homeric source-text. (1) The celebrations take place over two nights: the first, a crowded gathering after the *polis* had given Agathon the victory prize, at which the symposiasts get quite drunk; and the second, the more intimate and restrained party that Socrates attends, during which he shames Agathon's rhetorical excesses and betters his enthusiastically received eulogy. This description recalls the sequence of events in which Odysseus and his crew encounter Circe: on the first day, the majority of the crew, persuaded by Polites, call on Circe, allow their wine to be drugged, and are turned into swine by their hostess; on the second, Odysseus himself appears, and Circe's spells and charms are bettered by his perseverance, his "unseducible mind," and his superior drugs and magic. (2) On his way to Circe's house, Odysseus meets a young man—Hermes in disguise—who gives him the powerful *pharmakon* and good advice that assist him in dealing with Circe. Socrates has a similar encounter on his way to Agathon's house, but Plato differentiates the two aspects of the Homeric trope: Socrates meets a young man; and he receives daimonic advice in preparation for the evening's encounter, but not from Aristodemus. How might an encounter with Hermes look? Something like Socrates standing in a doorway, unmoving and unmovable, entirely unresponsive to others, effectively one of the Athenian roadside herms. More is said to explain such odd behavior in Socrates' own speech and in Alcibiades' eulogy. (3) When Odysseus arrives at Circe's house, she receives him well, offering him a seat and wine, but thinking all the while that he can be charmed as easily as any other man. She does not recognize Odysseus, even though his reputation had preceded him. His surprising resistance to her magic compels her to offer him her bed, but this too is refused. Similarly, Socrates is well received by Agathon and made to sit beside him. Given Agathon's pederasty, his couch is both a seat and a bed. Agathon plays the charming host, quipping about Socrates' wisdom, but despite his mannerly teasing he does not recognize Socrates for who he is, and the gibe is turned against him. He protests that Socrates is "outrageous" (*hubristēs*, 175e).

Agathon's house might have the trappings of Circe's idyllic

island, but beneath the surface Socrates' arrival at the party is more like Odysseus' descent to Hades. (1) When Circe becomes Odysseus' teacher in erotics, she takes on Hermes' daimonic role. She dresses him in new clothes and sends him on a necessary trip to Hades to consult Teiresias, the only one of the dead with "intelligence." In the *Symposium*, Socrates is similarly on his way to speak with the only person in Athens thought to be wise on this day; and he is surprisingly well dressed for the occasion too. (2) Socrates does not arrive first. His sycophantic companion, Aristodemus, does. Similarly, Odysseus does not arrive in Hades first. His youngest crewman, Elpenor, does. Elpenor breaks his neck falling off Circe's roof—he forgot to use the ladder—and his soul travels directly. Aristodemus, who perhaps resembles the "bat-like" Chaerephon in this, also does not remember to use the "ladder"—the one described as the path of philosophic ascent in Diotima's revelations of the highest mysteries. (3) Odysseus does prescribed rites as soon as he arrives in Hades; and when he offers the blood sacrifice, the dead swarm around it to drink, making an inhuman clamor, until he uses his sword to order them. At Agathon's party there are similar observances of customary rites; and then the drinking begins, the prospect of which sets all the symposiasts to chattering about how it will be done. (4) In the *nekylia*, the spirits of women are present and honored in their turn. At Agathon's party, however, the flute-girl is dismissed, following Eryximachus' suggestion, to consort with the other women elsewhere. He would have the topic of their discussions be pederastic eros. (5) The first shade Odysseus allows to drink the blood is Teiresias, who says he will speak "unerring" words (*nēmerteia*, 11.96; 11.148) in exchange for it. The first person with whom Socrates speaks is the celebrated host. Socrates often claims to know nothing and Agathon's words have just been awarded the city's highest prize, but Agathon decides to be coy. He addresses Socrates as if things were just the reverse: he would have Socrates sit beside him in order that their physical proximity might enable Socrates' newly discovered bit of wisdom to pass to him. Agathon's words are disingenuous, but Socrates will soon enough show that they are true despite his intentions: he is the only one present capable of playing the role of Teiresias; all Agathon has to offer is good wine.

It is at this point in the *Symposium* that talk turns to the nature of eros and Socrates makes the stunning announcement that he has knowledge of nothing but erotics (177e). Is this Teiresias' sort of wisdom? The trope of Teiresias' prophecy has greater significance for Plato's other dialogues than its uses in the *Symposium*; nonetheless, there is a sense in which it might be associated with Socrates' erotics: Teiresias' dry and cryptic words tell

Odysseus of the “steps” of the way home and to bed again with Penelope. Socrates’ erotic wisdom is still something more: as the new Odysseus, he has learned not only from Teiresias, but also from all the women who guide him: Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, even Penelope herself.

When Agathon cannot live up to the roles of Circe or Teiresias, he steps into the background for a time and assumes the role of Persephone, the queen of the dead, and, in the *nekyia*, the perfect hostess who neither speaks nor appears though she is much discussed. The eulogies of the symposiasts follow.

Plato’s reworkings of the *nekyia* in other dialogues are generally intended to describe the antithesis between the philosophic life of Socrates and the dire psychic and political consequences of the teachings of the sophists. In the *Republic*, Er’s tale mitigates the bleakness of Homer’s Hades in an account of the recurrent judgment of all souls with only the few worst confined in Tartarus. In the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras*, however, the section of the *nekyia* describing the eternal punishments is made central in direct confrontations with, and condemnations of sophistry. Protagoras and Gorgias might think themselves as wise as Teiresias, but they and their followers are no better than Tityos, Tantalus and Sisyphus. Sophistry is grim business but its consequences are escapable in this life, and that is why the judgment of those who refuse to leave it behind when the way to escape it is made plain to them is so harsh. In the *Symposium*, Plato deals with Phaedrus, Pausanias and Eryximachus as he deals with their teachers in the *Protagoras*, casting them in the role of the sorry shades of Tartarus. And the cutting edge of the critique is made sharper: the antithesis between sophistry and philosophy is not just an intellectual matter, but rather a conflict between the corruption of pederasty and the “correct pederasty” of Socratic erotics, between the “dead” who cannot generate and the “living” who can—in other words, between those whose souls are closed to the transcendent and thus cannot conceive and bring to birth in the beautiful and those whose souls are open and can.

When Phaedrus stands in for Agathon as host of the evening’s festivities, one beautiful beloved for another, Eryximachus calls him the “father of the speeches” (*patēr tou logou*, 177d). Phaedrus eulogies Eros by describing the power of the unloving pederastic beloved to compel his lovers to be virtuous, an account he would somehow make good with the example of Achilles and his lover Patroclus (179e–180b). There is then an explicit break in the recounting of the eulogies—Aristodemus could not recall some number of intervening speeches (180c)—after which Pausanias’ eulogy is given.

Pausanias describes the authority of the pederastic lover, and his ability to make his beloved virtuous. Phaedrus' and Pausanias' accounts of pederastic eros generalize the claim implicit in Agathon's earlier charming banter with Socrates: it is possible to instill a virtue through physical proximity, an exchange between the lover and the beloved of a quality of the soul or mind for a bodily excellence, just as wine or water or any such fluid can be transferred from a full to an empty cup with a suitable wick and the right technique. Eryximachus speaks next. His eulogy universalizes the understanding of pederastic eros given in the two preceding speeches to a determining aspect of all bodily relations—not only the functions of all human bodies, but more, a fundamental aspect of the order of the cosmos itself. Then it is Aristophanes' turn to speak.

We are among the shades, no doubt, but which is which? Plato's play with the tropes of the *nekylia* in this section of the *Symposium* is as crafty as it is in the *Protagoras*. Eryximachus' initial praise of Phaedrus suggests a rather elevated rank, and the break in the recounting of the eulogies leaves its determination to one's imagination. For Eryximachus, Phaedrus, his beloved, is all—a man whose singular qualities cast all others into darkness. However, the similarity of the aging Pausanias' erotic longings—so many young boys everywhere—to the plight of Tantalus—a resemblance he likely inherited from Prodicus, his teacher—is a rather explicit identification that tends to demote Phaedrus somewhat. As “father of the speeches,” he might be more like the shade of Agamemnon, the leader of the heroes: his eulogy concludes with mention of Achilles and Patroclus, the two shades whose appearance follows Agamemnon's in the *nekylia*; and it expresses a similar suspicion of all women, although not for Agamemnon's reasons. But when it comes time for Aristophanes to speak, Phaedrus is demoted once again. Plato casts Aristophanes as Minos, judge of the dead. Phaedrus, Pausanias and Eryximachus are thus the three shades forever confined to Tartarus: Tityos, Tantalus and Sisyphus, in Homer's tale; or Tantalus, Ixion and Sisyphus, as the trope of the damned in Hades came to be presented in later tradition.

Plato uses the tropes of the *nekylia* to establish a literary context for his critique of the corrupt erotics of sophistry; the speeches given by Phaedrus, Pausanias and Eryximachus are set within this framework, but their substance is derived independently. The same is true of Aristophanes' judgment of their eulogies. He plays the role of a comic, not an epic Minos; and his judgment might be all the more effective for its equanimity. The three damned souls of later iconography—Tantalus, Ixion and Sisyphus—have

several features in common: each of them violated *xenia*, the sanctity of hospitality, or worse, in his relations with other mortals; and each of them was outrageously impious in his relations with the gods. Tantalus is said to have killed and dismembered his own son and served him up to the gods at a banquet. Ixion was the first homicide, killing his father-in-law; and he later also attempted to violate Hera. Sisyphus waylaid and murdered travelers, betrayed the secrets of the gods, and even attempted to confine Thanatos in order to prevent the dead from reaching Hades. Except for the erotic tantalization evident throughout Pausanias' eulogy, Plato makes no direct use of the trope of their various deserved punishments in composing Aristophanes' speech. The general character of a warning suffices, with no mention of the afterlife: the human condition, as we now experience it, originates in an impious, Titanic assault on the gods, a hybristic attempt to become immortal in impossible ways, the odd consequence of which is the development of erotic longing for the one beloved; to overcome the constant possibility of the ascendancy of hybris over eros, we must become friends and reconciled with the god; and we must attain this end if we are ever to find our beloveds and experience the fulfillment of which we are capable, the immortality possible for mortals (193b). Pederasty is a vile corruption for Aristophanes—serving up the young in impious sacrifices—but it is the corruption of a human condition in which many male and female homosexuals can be understood to suffer more than heterosexuals from the labor pains of the longing to conceive and bring to birth.

There is a great deal at stake in Plato's composition of Aristophanes' eulogy. Plato uses him to lampoon, not to damn the pederasty of the symposiasts. The episode of Aristophanes' hiccoughs, for example—a comic gem. Imagine: Eryximachus indulges himself in a profound and subtle cosmological justification of pederastic eros—we might call it a claim to "science" or the highest sort of wisdom—because Aristophanes, whose turn it was to speak, has the hiccoughs, the remedy for which, we learn from Eryximachus the physician, is sneezing. Eryximachus waxes eloquent about the erotics of repletion and evacuation, and all the while Aristophanes is hiccoughing, hiccoughing and trying to sneeze. The two of them share a couch, so Aristophanes' cacophony has an lewd quality to it as well. Eryximachus tries to speak, and from behind him comes a rhythmic series of panting or gasping sounds that climaxes in a few very noisy explosions. So much for the beauties of pederasty: Aristophanes is showing the effective truth of Eryximachus' words.

There is still more at stake. Plato's Aristophanes is much less hostile to Socrates than Athenian public opinion might suppose him to be. His eulogy and Socrates' account of Diotima's teachings are not entirely in agreement, of course, but they share an antipathy toward the other symposiasts, a reflective opposition that neither he nor Socrates allows to overcome his liberality. In the *Apology*, Socrates mentions that Aristophanes' *Clouds* is a likely source of his jurists' misunderstanding of him as a sophist. The *Clouds* was first performed in 423 BC, and then again in 419. The events of the *Symposium* take place a few years later, in 416, and there is no animosity or rancor between them. The only other time Socrates is mentioned explicitly in one of Aristophanes' plays is in the *Birds*, performed in 414. Had Socrates and Aristophanes been at odds that night at Agathon's house, one might suppose that it would manifest itself in the *Birds*, and yet all Aristophanes does in this play is mention Socrates and the "bat-like" Chaerephon in a passage that might be a satire of some part of Aeschylus' dramatization of the *nekylia* in his (lost) *Psychagogoi*: the object of Aristophanes' ridicule is Peisander, one of the commissioners who investigated the mutilation of the herms; and the scene recalls Circe's sending of Odysseus to Hades (*Birds* 1553–64). Apparently, Plato intends to amuse his readers with a suggestion that the association of Socrates and Odysseus in the *Birds* is a plagiarism of the *Symposium*.

In composing the eulogies of Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus and Aristophanes, Plato refigures the tropes of the *Odyssey* with a free hand; the rest of the dialogue has an order that follows Homer's poem much more closely. In the *nekylia*, the description of the three damned in Tartarus is followed by the appearance of Heracles. (1) Unlike the shades in Hades, Heracles is uniquely an "image" (11.602) whose substance is elsewhere. (2) His sudden appearance causes the dead to scatter in every direction, clamoring loudly (11.605–6). (3) Of the several fearful things about him, the most awesome is the wide belt for Heracles' quiver on which are fashioned bloody scenes of hunting, battle, and murder. Odysseus hopes that the craftsman who made such a belt might never again make such another (11.609–14). (4) Heracles then speaks with Odysseus, wondering which of them is the unhappiest (11.615–26). It need only be mentioned that Odysseus is still alive, and that according to the dead Achilles it is better to be alive in the meanest capacity than to be king of all the dead (11.488–91 and 11.620–22). (5) Heracles returns to the depths of Hades, but Odysseus says he himself "stayed fast in place" (11.627–28). (6) He hopes to meet Peirithoos and Theseus (11.631). (7) However, the hordes of the dead gather around him, making an "inhuman clamor" (*ēchēi thespesiēi*, 11.633). (8) A "green fear" then

overcomes him that Persephone might send the head of the Gorgon to turn him to stone, and he quickly leaves Hades with his companions (11.633–40).

Plato uses the tropes of this scene as the literary foundation for his composition of Agathon's eulogy, his dialogue with Socrates, Socrates' recounting of Diotima's teachings, and Alcibiades' appearance. With one critical change: Socrates has no fear. Plato has Socrates mention Odysseus' fear explicitly in conversation with Eryximachus, using the trope out of sequence to emphasize the difference. After the enthusiastic applause received by Agathon's eulogy, Socrates says, with more than his usual irony: "I was afraid that Agathon in his speech would at last send the head of the dread speaker Gorgias against my speeches and turn me to very stone in speechlessness" (198c = *Odyssey* 11.632)—an amusing dig at Gorgias as the Gorgon and at the rhetorical trick that gives sophistry its main force, a dig that also explicitly identifies Agathon with Persephone. In the *nekylia*, Persephone makes no appearance. In the Hades of the *Symposium*, she does: Agathon's eulogy for Eros is so empty, barren and sterile, that Demeter, Persephone's mother, must be in mourning again, for there is no fertility to be found anywhere on earth.

Despite the implications of Socrates' remark, in the main part of the *Symposium* Agathon drops the role of Persephone to play Heracles to Socrates' Odysseus. (1) Agathon is a cipher, a man whose words are entirely without substance, as Heracles is only an image without substance, something less than a shade in Hades. His mastery of the sophistic techniques of manipulating emptiness is antithetical to philosophy, just as his celebrity in Athens—he is the Agathon of the day—is antithetical to the *agathon* "beyond being," the end of philosophy's ascent. (2) Agathon's eulogy receives vigorous applause, as Heracles' appearance causes the dead to clamor loudly. (3) The shades are most terrified by the awesome scenes fashioned on the belt of Heracles' quiver. Similarly, those who hear Agathon's speech are "thunderstruck" by the "beauty of its words and phrases," image piling upon image to awesome effect (198b). Odysseus hopes that the craftsman who made such a belt might never again make another. Socrates might say the same of Gorgias, the man who taught Agathon rhetoric; and he might also say the same of Agathon's writing of tragedies. (4) Heracles speaks with Odysseus, disputing which of the two of them (both of whom have been to Hades while alive) is the greatest hero; or rather, Heracles makes a pronouncement and Odysseus listens in silence without an opportunity to reply. Similarly, Agathon and Socrates are the two most important of the symposiasts. Agathon speaks in the sophistic manner, attempting to reduce others to silence; Socrates insists that he be allowed to

engage Agathon in dialogue. When they do have a discussion, Agathon is refuted effortlessly: he admits he knew nothing of what he was saying (201b). It has been claimed that Socrates himself uses sophistic tricks in refuting Agathon. Perhaps so; but Perseus only managed to behead the Gorgon by watching her reflection on his shield, and was very judicious in his use of her bagged head against his enemies afterwards. (5) Odysseus says he “stayed fast in place,” but he fled. Socrates does stay fast in place: this trope is the basis for his recounting of Diotima’s teachings. (6) Peirithoos and Theseus do not appear in the *nekylia*, though Odysseus longs to see them. A comparable friendship is presented in the *Symposium*: Alcibiades enters, and gives a moving eulogy for the daimonic Socrates. (7) The *nekylia* ends in the “inhuman clamor” of the dead crowding around Odysseus. Plato uses this trope twice—once for the noise of the revelers accompanying Alcibiades (212c–d), and again for the greater din of later revelers who burst in and throw the party into chaos (223b)—a literary ambiguity that reflects the ambiguity in Alcibiades’ friendship with Socrates.

Socrates is the Odysseus who always stands fast. In the *Symposium*, he is not only the Odysseus returned from Hades, one of the “twice dying” (*disthanees*, *Odyssey* 12.22), he has mastered the art. He has already traveled all the “steps” (*metra*, 10.539) of the journey described by Teiresias, the journey that starts along the route described by Circe, the upward route through the cosmic spheres, past the Sirens, Skylla and Charybdis, and Thrinakia, past these dangers and more, toward a homecoming. He has already traveled the way down and the way up in his explorations of things beneath the earth and things in the heavens, and he knows their relation. He even knows how to use the “ladder” (*klimaka*, 10.558) to Circe’s roof without breaking his neck. And he knows all these things not only from being told about them, but more so from experiencing them and learning from his own and his companions’ misjudgments. Socrates, the reborn Odysseus, the man who has overcome Odysseus’ last failing (*Republic* 620c–d), is a complete man, a man of theoretical and practical wisdom—a philosopher.

Odysseus completed his journey alone, without any companions. Socrates is always willing to assist his companions toward their homecoming, but it seems he always ends the journey alone as well. The particular difficulties his companions face determine the nature of his assistance. For each fresh hell, its own way out. In the *Symposium*, the imagery of the *nekylia* is used to illustrate the corrupt erotics of the symposiasts; and similarly, the story of Odysseus and Circe is used as the literary basis for an account of the

way out: the instruction in erotics that Diotima gives Socrates is partly the direction that Circe gives Odysseus, partly their erotic relationship. Diotima teaches Socrates, Socrates teaches Agathon and the other symposiasts, and Plato teaches anyone who reads the *Symposium*; similarly, Circe teaches Odysseus, Odysseus instructs his men, and Homer teaches anyone who reads the *Odyssey*. There is a great deal given in Socrates' speech. Nevertheless, it is all given within the literary framework of Plato's refiguring of the tropes of Odysseus' relation to Circe as an elaboration of the trope of how Odysseus "stayed fast in place."

In her description of the route Odysseus has yet to travel, Circe says that "the god himself" (*theos autos*, 12.38) will make him remember her words when he confronts these things and is pondering what to do. Words are not things or experiences; what a thing is, the aspect of it that can be expressed in words adequately, is not the thing's existence or its activities. Circe's instruction about the three dangers Odysseus will face—the Sirens, Skylla and Charybdis, and the herds on Thrinakia—is given in a continuous speech (12.37–141), once interrupted by Odysseus (12.111–14) for a clarification of how best to confront Skylla. The first part of her instructions thus deals with the Sirens and with Skylla and Charybdis; and the second, again with Skylla and Charybdis and with the herds on Thrinakia.

Now, some of the details: (1) The Sirens' song is much like Circe's instructions: they sing for Odysseus to tell him of everything he did and suffered at Troy and of everything that happens throughout the world (12.189–91)—a promise of self-knowledge that is a deadly enchantment if it is accepted in words alone. To avoid becoming another boneheap or shriveled skin on the shore of their island, Odysseus ties himself to the mast to listen while his crewmen row past, their ears filled with wax.

(2) The straits between Skylla and Charybdis are too narrow to avoid both, it would seem; and although Skylla is terrifying, Charybdis is deadlier: Odysseus must pass between them quickly, without resistance, in order to minimize Skylla's carnage. When Odysseus interrupts, asking how best to fight her, Circe forbids it and counsels him to invoke Skylla's mother instead—advice he forgets when he arms to battle the monster (12.225–31).

(3) The herds of the god Helios that pasture on Thrinakia, tended by nymphs, are exceptional: "There is no giving birth among them, / nor do they ever die away" (12.130–31). If any of Odysseus' companions were to harm them, treating them as common livestock, food for mortals, then cer-

tain destruction is the consequence, and for Odysseus a difficult homecoming. In trying circumstances, Odysseus remembers Circe's warnings, but his men cannot persevere. When Odysseus falls asleep, they butcher the animals, following Eurylochos' direction, and cover their impiety with deceitful sacrifices. Zeus destroys Odysseus' ship and his companions. Odysseus eventually makes his way home alone.

Diotima's instruction in erotics is formally comparable to Circe's instruction. It is given to Socrates in two parts: the first, a series of lessons on two topics, what eros is and what its activities are; and the second, following a break in time, a set of initiations in the mysteries of erotics, itself divided into the lesser and the greater initiations. The discussion of the activity of eros given in the first part overlaps substantively with the account of the lesser initiations given in the second, just as Circe's description of Skylla and Charybdis preceded and followed Odysseus' interruption.

Now, some of the details: (1) The resemblance between Circe and the Sirens is in the enchantment of the sort of self-knowledge offered in words alone. Diotima's teachings also can be a Siren's song. Plato has her take on the role entirely, without explicit use of any of the tropes of the *Odyssey's* description of the Sirens for the first part of Diotima's lessons; but he has her lessons in erotics begin with instruction in the proper use of words. Socrates learns that there are traps buried in the simplest linguistic usages—false dichotomies, shifting negative terms, phantoms called up by synecdoches, the misplaced concreteness of words themselves—traps that lead to profound and consequential misunderstandings. He learns these things in dialogue with Diotima, as part of his preparations to receive the highest initiations, given by Diotima in poetic or mantic speech, a song she sings alone. His ascent begins in logic and the dry discussion of what eros is, which, though it has its truth and usefulness, leads only to the propositional form of a definition, a sterile result that neither captures the activity of eros nor the quality of living a properly erotic life, to say nothing of the highest point of erotic ascent.

(2) Most of Circe's instruction is given to describing the route past Skylla and Charybdis. Similarly, most of Diotima's instruction is given to describing the route of the ascent in the "in-between," as Voegelin would translate *metaxy*, or, more simply, "in the middle" (*en mesōi*). The first step, again, is to avoid false dichotomy, the illusion of comprehensiveness that arises from an antithetical pair of terms, the Skylla and Charybdis of language and reason. The categorical opposition of "mortal" and "immortal" is such an illusion, all the more so when it is compounded with the categorical opposition of

“human” and “god.” The middle way past these dangers is the daimonic route, the recognition of the daimonic character of all things: the daimonic is “in the middle, making each supplement the other, so that the all itself is bound together in one” (*en mesōi de on amphoterōn sumplēroi, hōste to pan auto hautōi sundedesthai*, 202e). The route has its pitfalls, but with divine assistance the daimonic man can reach its end. After many misjudgments, Odysseus, with the help of his erotic guides, eventually has his homecoming; Jason, with the great love of Hera, had a far easier time of it, managing to avoid many dangers altogether; but, for Plato, Socrates, the philosopher, is the properly daimonic man. Perhaps it is better to say “daimonic human being”: the categorical opposition of male and female is another trap. Indeed, as Diotima’s lessons proceed, surprising compensations are made for the symposiasts’ pederastic accounts of eros. She says the activity of eros—what it is, in action—is conceiving and bringing to birth in beauty, both in body and in soul. The best image for its activity is not the pederastic relation of a lover and his young male beloved, but rather the maieutic relation of a pregnant woman and her midwife.

The second part of Diotima’s instruction, her account of the lesser initiations, overlaps substantively with this discussion of the activity of eros. It begins with Diotima’s admonition that Socrates will never learn erotics if he fails to understand the simplest thing: the erotic disposition that causes all animals to reproduce and defend their offspring (207c). Similarly, Odysseus is reproached when he thinks it best to battle Skylla: invoke her mother instead, Circe says. Odysseus is moved by the love of victory and honor, the erotic drive for recognition that flourishes in the *polis*, not in nature. Although Socrates does not have this failing (*Republic* 620c–d), Diotima’s instruction follows the order of Circe’s: the love of honor is “irrational” (*alogias*)—Socrates should “know it well” (208c). Odysseus allowed such irrationality to cloud his judgment and consequently he did not take proper care of his men: several lost their lives to Skylla unnecessarily. Comparably, Diotima instructs Socrates in the proper manner to beget and raise “children of the soul.” The erotics of soul-care requires that he assist in the bringing-to-birth of virtues in others who are in labor. And in order to do this well, he must understand how “mortal” and “immortal” may be said to be in all things. All aspects of living things—body, soul, mind—are both mortal and participate in immortality. The proper exercise of erotics is taking them as far as possible along the daimonic route and making them “more immortal” (*athanatōterōn*, 209c).

(3) “There is no giving birth among [the herds of the god on

Thrinakia], / nor do they ever die away”—an arresting poetic image of the participation of the mortal in the immortal. Odysseus’ initiation into such mysteries begins in earnest when Zeus destroys his ship with a thunderbolt and leaves him alone and vulnerable on the vast open sea, his homecoming again in doubt. Socrates’ ability to reach the end of his journey is similarly in doubt when Diotima first tells him of the higher initiations (*telea kai epoptika*, 210a) in erotics. He remains silent as she speaks of them. The final part of the ascent is something that must be done alone, it would seem. Diotima gives two versions of the ascent: the first is the more detailed, a recapitulation of everything she has discussed and a glimpse of the end toward which the discussion has been moving; and the second, a recapitulation of the first. In composing the first ascent, Plato has Diotima play all of Odysseus’ guides: Circe, who gives way to Kalypso, who gives way to Hermes, the messenger of Zeus (*Odyssey* 12.389–90). In composing the second, the voice of Socrates presenting Diotima’s teachings—the voice of an experienced Odysseus addressing his companions—is made predominant.

The first ascent begins in the beauty of bodies, moves to the beauty of souls, then to the beauty of the pursuits or activities of the soul; and then there is the soul’s “turn to the vast open sea of the beautiful” and its stunning glimpse of the “always being” (*aei on*) in which all things participate and from which they derive such beauty as they have (210d–211b). Socrates learns these things well: his accounts of the ascent to the good itself in the *Republic* and the ascent through the cosmic spheres to the hyperouranian region in the *Phaedrus* are equivalent symbolizations of the same culminating and engendering erotic experience (Voegelin 1990a). It is the same accomplished Socrates who recounts Diotima’s teachings for the audience at Agathon’s house. He has mastered not only her words, but also the ability to shape those and similar words to guide his interlocutors to experience their meaning for themselves. His recounting of Diotima’s second version of the ascent is just such an exercise in rhetoric for philosophic ends.

In recapitulating the first ascent, he now makes it “the correct practice of pederasty,” and he describes how it “goes up” certain “steps”: from the beauty of one body to the beauty of two, from two to all, from all bodies to beautiful pursuits, from pursuits to beautiful lessons, and from lessons to the one lesson—beholding the beautiful itself (211b–d). Socrates is offering the symposiasts a ladder built just for them, and he hopes they use it with more cleverness than Elpenor demonstrated at Circe’s house. The “steps” of the ladder follow the sequence in which the symposiasts spoke and summarize the

substance of their eulogies: one beautiful body, Phaedrus the pederastic beloved; two bodies, Pausanias the pederastic lover; all bodies, Eryximachus the physician and cosmologist; beautiful pursuits, Aristophanes the comedian and Agathon the tragedian; beautiful lessons, Socrates teaching Agathon and Diotima teaching Socrates; and the one lesson, the highest revelations. There had seemed to be no exit from the Hades of Agathon's party. Now the symposiasts have a ladder and instructions on how to use it to get out. If they aspire to "become dear to the god and as immortal as possible" (212a) and break their necks doing it, it is their own fault.

There is a knock at the door, and everyone is firmly rooted in his seat again. Alcibiades makes his entrance. The marvelous scene that follows is one of Plato's greatest literary successes, a riveting composition that develops initially from the *nekyia's* trope of the friendship of Theseus and Peirithoos. Plato has Alcibiades play Peirithoos opposite Socrates, expanding Socrates' role as the new Odysseus to incorporate parallels with the story of Theseus, thus broadening the basis of his portrayal of Socrates as the greatest Greek hero. Theseus became king of Athens after overcoming many difficulties in establishing his legitimacy and entitlement; but the glory of his accomplishments during his reign did nothing to prevent his eventual exile and murder. Socrates was never recognized by his city as the only living Athenian able to "practice politics," the only one with "the true political art" (*Gorgias* 521d), but there were people who saw the signs. His sandals, for instance: Theseus' legitimacy was confirmed when the king recognized his sandals. Similarly, in the *Symposium*, and only in this dialogue, Socrates is discovered to be wearing exceptional sandals (174a). However, the people who recognized him as a philosopher-king were few in number. The story of how Socrates shared the fate of Theseus is told in the *Phaedo*.

Alcibiades knew who he was, as Peirithoos knew Theseus. By rights, they should have been enemies, the king of Athens and the prince of the Lapiths, but Peirithoos contrived an armed confrontation between them, placing himself in the wrong, in order that they might meet and become friends. When they stood measuring each other, both in full armor, they put their differences aside and declared their love for one another instead. Similarly, one might expect Socrates and Alcibiades to be enemies. However, out of love, Alcibiades admits the audacity of his attempts to make Socrates his lover, a seduction that Socrates describes as Alcibiades' desire to exchange "gold for bronze" armor (219a); and despite these indiscretions, Socrates claims to have only two loves—Alcibiades and philosophy (*Gorgias* 481d).

Theseus and Peirithoos had many escapades together, the two most famous of which involve getting a wife for Peirithoos. When he wed Hippodameia, Peirithoos invited his relatives, the Centaurs, to the celebrations; and when the Centaurs got drunk, their attempt to abduct the bride and other Lapith women led to a battle in which Theseus helped Peirithoos defeat them. The scene is famous. It bears on Alcibiades' relation to Socrates insofar as Alcibiades, like Peirithoos, has a bit of the Centaur in him, and is torn between a baser quality—a love of the *demos*, perhaps (*Gorgias* 481e)—and a philosophic temperament that only manifests itself in Socrates' company. Now, Peirithoos also wanted another wife. In fact, he preferred Persephone. So he and Theseus set off for the underworld. Hades himself welcomed them, but when they sat down they were trapped in their chairs. Heracles came across them when he was passing through to fetch Cerberus, and he took pity on them. He managed to free Theseus, with some effort, but Peirithoos could not be moved: he remains bound to his seat in Hades still. Plato's use of this tale in the composition of the *Symposium* is quite inventive. Alcibiades has come for Agathon, the dialogue's Persephone. When he sits down beside him, he discovers that he is also sitting beside Socrates. The iconography of the seating arrangement has Alcibiades profoundly torn between powerful antithetical loves. When he first sees Socrates sitting beside him, he leaps up and shouts, "Heracles!" (213b) Recognizing his friend and lover is enough to free him from the trap of Agathon's couch. However, such recognition seems to have effect only when Socrates is by his side, a companion-in-arms in his internal battles. Alcibiades sits down again. He attempts to honor Agathon and Socrates equally. And when the dialogue ends, his fate is uncertain.

The other symposiasts tolerate and are amused by Socrates; Alcibiades is the only one who recognizes and understands him. He arrives late at the party, ostensibly drunk already, and does not hear a word of any of the eulogies; and yet, when the arrangements are explained to him and he is urged to take part, he immediately goes to the heart of the matter. Socrates *is* Eros. For if Eros is not a god, but a daimon; and if the daimonic manifests itself in the erotics of human experience; and if the most fully erotic or daimonic human being is Socrates; then there is no difference between eulogizing Eros and eulogizing Socrates; indeed, Eros cannot be eulogized without eulogizing Socrates, the most perfect mediator of the highest revelations for others and midwife of their efforts to attain them. Alcibiades is the only one present who knows these mysteries. And when the others permit him to praise Socrates, for he can do nothing else in Socrates' presence (214d), Alcibiades gives a personal account of Socrates and his influence that reflects every salient aspect of

Socrates' report of Diotima's teachings. He intends to speak only the truth, and he insists that Socrates check him "in the middle [*metaxy*]" (214d) if anything he says is false. Socrates thus takes the role of the daimon for Alcibiades, the daimon that checks his own words and deeds; and he does not interrupt him.

Socrates' recounting of Diotima's teachings is given in three parts: (1) what eros is and what its activities are; (2) the lesser initiations, beginning with a discussion of the care of parents for their offspring and concluding with a discussion of the ways in which the love of honor can corrupt the proper care of "children of the soul"; and (3) the higher initiations, two accounts of the ascent to a vision of the beautiful itself, a vision that gives birth "in bountiful [or ungrudging, *aphthonōi*] philosophy" to many beautiful thoughts and speeches (210d), the second account of which is tailored for the audience. Alcibiades' praise of Socrates is also given in three parts, separated by temporal breaks, each of which is concluded by an expression of bewilderment and frustration about Socrates: (1) an explanation of who Socrates is and what his activities are; (2) a revelation of how the conflict between the love of honor and the love of Socrates battled in the young Alcibiades' soul until he attempted to reconcile them by seducing Socrates, an offer that Socrates, concerned for the care of Alcibiades' soul, had no difficulty in refusing; and (3) a better revelation of Socrates' character and influence—his "correct pederasty"—that ascends from the simplest things to the heights Alcibiades attained in Socrates' presence, a narrative ascent that follows a route almost identical to the one described by Diotima.

(1) Alcibiades begins by speaking in images (*eikonōn*, 215a). Socrates is like a wooden figurine of a silenus, perhaps the satyr who was the son of Hermes (or Pan) and had the responsibility of raising Dionysos. He is a wooden silenus which, when opened, is discovered to have "images of the god" within. Alcibiades "once saw them"; they were "so divine, golden, altogether beautiful, and amazing that one had to do just about whatever Socrates commanded" (216e–217a). Socrates' main activity is speaking. In this, Alcibiades claims, he resembles the satyr Marsyas whose music could charm anyone; but Socrates is "far more marvelous," to say nothing of also being less hybriatic, in that he charms human beings without an instrument, using words alone. Anyone who hears him—"woman, man or lad"—is thunderstruck and possessed (215b–d). Alcibiades admits that Socrates' words move him still, sometimes to tears; they move him more than the words of Pericles, his own guardian; they make him incapable of contradicting Socrates (215d–216b). And they drive him to despair: "I do not know what to do

with this human being” (216c).

(2) The story of the youthful Alcibiades’ attempt to profane Socrates’ mystery is well known. In the end, it is not the scandalous surprise Alcibiades suggests it will be.

(3) The account of his relations with Socrates in his maturity is another matter. It is truly surprising. It seems a collection of odd episodes, strung together in rambling fashion by a charming drunk. And yet there is an order to it. First the Potidaea stories: Socrates’ ability to endure physical hardships and resist temptations; his ability to drink without becoming drunk; his odd behavior in standing, unmoving and unmovable, for a day; his courage in battle; and his declining of any honors for his courage. The Delium stories: his courage again, now better observed because Alcibiades is on horseback, looking somewhat like a Centaur, but also with better opportunity to reflect on what he sees; and he sees the qualities in which Socrates is superior to others reputed to have them. Then Alcibiades goes further: he cites Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, but without the sense of a criticism of Socrates that the many find in the comedy; he wonders at Socrates, and how he is like no one else; and, in a seeming afterthought, he opens up the silenic quality of Socrates’ speeches, as full of images of the god as the man himself.

Consider the order. First, Socrates’ body: its resistance to pains and pleasures. Then his soul by way of the body: its ability to withstand the test of drugging with wine and the constancy of its rational capacity, albeit externally observed. Then, the first virtue that results from a victory over oneself—courage—and the refusal to succumb to the love of honor. Then, more reflectively, courage as a quality independent of the reputation for it. Then the ways in which Socrates has greater virtues: he is more “reasonable” (*emphrōn*, 221a) than others. He might even have feathers, like Eros, if Aristophanes’ identification of him as a bird is fitting. Of his many wonderful qualities and activities, the most amazing is the way in which he is like no other human being, ancient or modern. He is most like the silenus and satyr. And his words, when opened up, are “images of virtue”; they have “reason” (*noun*), are “most divine” (*theiotatous*), and apply to all things that are proper to examine if one would become a *kalos kagathos* (222a). The body, the soul, the qualities of the soul, wonderful pursuits and activities, the ascent up the daimonic path to a vision of overwhelming beauty that gives birth to many beautiful thoughts and speeches. Socrates’ ascent of Diotima’s ladder to the highest initiations in erotics and Alcibiades’ ascent of the ladder that appeared for him in Socrates’ company are experientially equivalent. But Alcibiades is

torn by other loves.

Alcibiades knows well who Socrates is. He recognized him immediately. And he recognized him because he was seeking him. In his description of the Potidaea campaign, Alcibiades says: “What sort of thing the strong man did and dared’ there ... is worth hearing.” A quote from the *Odyssey* (220c = *Odyssey* 4.242, 271), from a scene in which Telemachus seeks word of his father at the house of Menelaus and Helen. The first words Telemachus receives in reply from them also could have been cited by Alcibiades in his eulogy for Socrates. Helen says: “I could not tell you all the number nor could I name them, / all that make up the exploits of enduring Odysseus” (*Odyssey* 4.240–41). And Menelaus says: “nowhere have I seen with mine own eyes anyone like him, / nor known an inward heart like the heart of the enduring Odysseus” (*Odyssey* 4.269–70).

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