

Performance and Philosophy Now

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate the potential of performance and philosophy as interconnected disciplines. Performance and philosophy can collaborate in effectively communicating the ideas and concepts used in philosophy to a wide range of audiences, with the aim of providing ethical training. This practice can be seen in both the Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought, including the Stoics, the Sceptics and the Epicureans.

Performance practices and philosophy can influence individuals in understanding the importance of practising philosophy. The dramatisation of philosophical figures through performance could potentially bring to life and make relevant philosophical ideas in contemporary times, as well as initiate an awareness of the importance of living a good (moral) life. The theatre practitioner can deliver a performance with the intent of representing a specific type of a character, using both their physique and emotions. Similarly, a philosopher may also deliver a kind of performance. This can be seen if we consider the example of Socrates, who used dramatic storytelling in his search for truth.

There is a contemporary literary shift, which relates philosophy to performance practices and literary disciplines. Examples of such works include *How to Live: A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* by Sarah Bakewell,¹ *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* by Alexander Nehamas,² *How Proust Can Change Your Life* by Alain De Botton³ and Martin Puchner's *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theatre and Philosophy*.⁴ I shall examine both contemporary theories and performance practices in relation to philosophy. I will look at how this relationship is understood by contemporary philosophers and theatre practitioners such as Edward Spence, Freddie Rokem and Martin Puchner.

Plato uses an innovative dramatic formula in specific philosophical writings such as *The Symposium*,⁵ the *Phaedo*⁶ and the *Apology*.⁷ This formula can be seen as the precursor of the modern collaboration between performance and philosophy. Through the character of Socrates, Plato incorporates both characterisation and dramatisation in his writings; writings which were intended to communicate philosophical ideas about how to practise philosophy in everyday life. Socrates tactfully presents philosophy through dramatic storytelling, thereby implementing a creative and interactive process by making his audience think.

¹ Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live: A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (UK: Random House, 2010).

² Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (California: University of California Press, 1998).

³ Alain De Botton, *How Proust Can Change your Life* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1998).

⁴ Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵ Plato, *The Symposium* (London: Penguin UK, 2005).

⁶ Christopher J. Rowe, *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁷ Plato, *APOLOGY, CRITO*, 2005, 1 September 2015 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13726/13726-h/13726-h.htm>>.

The dramatic concept developed by Plato in his writings is that of performing philosophy. Socrates, as a character in Plato's writings, wandered the streets of Athens, provoking the people he met to question what they knew about love, morals, the arts and the importance of living in a good city. Plato introduces various abstract and philosophical ideas through the use of dramatic personas. Specific examples can be seen not only in his *Symposium*,⁸ where Diotima is the dramatic embodiment of divine love, but also in his *Phaedo*,⁹ where Socrates is the dramatic embodiment (again) of the immortal soul.

Plato can be seen as a philosophical dramatist who is experimenting with the idea of dramatising philosophy through characterisation. It can be argued that, in Plato's writings, Socrates is giving a kind of philosophical performance with the aim of effectively communicating philosophical ideas to audiences. Plato's writings are, in this sense, a pioneering attempt at dramatising philosophy through a philosophical character, triggering and challenging responses from secondary characters – i.e. supposed experts in the topic being examined. Furthermore, other dramatic devices, such as myths (*Myth of Er*) and allegories (*Allegory of the Cave*), are also employed in the *Republic*.¹⁰

Socrates, as he appears in the *Republic*, *Ion*¹¹ and the *Phaedrus*,¹² targets the power of performance and its effect on the spectator. However, he considers Athenian theatre and performers as negative contributors to the ideal state, precisely because they use dramatic performance to manipulate and misrepresent moral ideals to the public.

The Greek word 'thea' (θέα) is the derivative for the word 'theatre', which is a place of seeing, and for the word 'theory' (θεωρία), which is the codification of an idea.¹³ Arguably, Socrates presents philosophy through philosophical contemplation and 'seeing', through theory and practice. Consequently, he communicates philosophy to his audience through dramatic storytelling and performance.

The Socratic performance can be seen as a device that dramatically examines various ideas through a plurality of characters in order to facilitate an understanding of moral actions and life. Plato embodies abstract philosophical ideas through a dramatic character, whereas classical Athenian theatre presents dramatic characters with philosophical overtones. The audience did not always understand this distinction, and this explains why Socrates was critical of the moral and philosophical teachings of Athenian theatre.

Plato's philosophical intent is to enlighten people on how to live a moral life, an idea that is appropriated in classical Athenian theatre. Plato opposes the Attic dramatist's ideas, where living a good life involves the praising of mythical gods and accepting fate. By contrast, Plato proposes a dramatic alternative that could assist in acquiring ethical understanding.

Plato acknowledges the effective and communicative power of theatre. In *Ion*, Plato evaluates the Homeric poetic tradition and the power that performance possesses, by differentiating true

⁸ Robert Gregg Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1909).

⁹ Henry Cary, *Plato's Apology, Crito and Phaedo of Socrates* (Philadelphia: D. McKay, 1897).

¹⁰ Plato, *Republic*, Plato in Twelve Volumes translated by W. R. M. Lamb, Volume 9 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925) Book X, 514a-621.

¹¹ Plato, *Ion*, section 530a. 2010, 1 September 2015

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=plat.+ion+530a>>.

¹² Plato, *Phaedrus*, section 245a. 2010, 1 September 2015

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DPhaedrus%3Asect%3D245a>>.

¹³ Puchner 6.

knowledge and wisdom from emotional persuasion.¹⁴ He finds the ethical and religious manifestations of Attic theatre problematic. Attic dramatists and performers had an immense influence on the public and more specifically on youth. Plato creates a philosophical dramatic structure, a hybrid of performance and philosophy, which comprises the following: the dramatic embodiment of Socrates, the testing of ideas and beliefs, and ethical awareness.

According to Carroll and Banes, philosophy assists in clarifying significant concepts that define all disciplines.¹⁵ Not only does philosophy clarify concepts, but it can also communicate abstract concepts through performance and characterisation, thus delivering an experience that is both logical and emotional. Plato's influence can be seen in contemporary theatre which incorporates philosophy with performance.

The Target Margin Theatre in 2007 presented *The Dinner Party*, as an adaptation of Plato's *Symposium*. It was directed by David Herskovits and featured an African American actress, Stephanie Weeks, as Socrates. The performance took place at The Kitchen, a performance venue in Chelsea, New York, which supports experimental art and theatre. The play's dramaturge Kathleen Kennedy Tobin and director David Herskovits encouraged the actors to study several modern translations of the *Symposium* in order to have a clear understanding of the core ideas of love, beyond erotic human relationship.¹⁶

Elaborating on Carroll, Banes and Puchner, I argue that Plato's writings could be seen as influential works for performance theorists and practitioners. Plato was the first to record the importance of practising/performing and dramatising philosophy. Performance and philosophy could work together to effectively communicate philosophical ideas and to portray moral exemplars. This idea did not, however, survive in the intervening centuries.

Plato's Socrates is an acknowledged influential figure for western philosophy. However, it is only recently that contemporary philosophers and theatre practitioners such as Spence,¹⁷ Blondell,¹⁸ Tarrant,¹⁹ Kaiser²⁰ and Rokem²¹ have acknowledged him as a visionary, and perhaps, a silent pioneer who poses a conceptual challenge to the performing arts. I aim to show that Socrates was at the frontier of incorporating performance and philosophy. My research will highlight the importance of establishing a model relying on both performance and philosophy as a means to effectively communicate philosophical concepts.

2. How can we understand performance and philosophy now?

In this section, I will investigate the polarity of performance and philosophy. Both disciplines are on a quest to explore and present aspects of everyday life. It is popular appeal and truth in delivery, rather than truth in ideas, which bind performance, whereas Hellenistic and Roman philosophy is bound by the discovery of truth in living a good life. Conceived as '*biou techne*', the art of living, philosophy was seen by the Greek and Roman philosophers as a way to live the

¹⁴ Plato, *Ion*, section 533d.

¹⁵ Noël Carroll and Sally Banes, 'Theatre: Philosophy, Theory, and Criticism,' *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 1 (2001): 155-66.

¹⁶ Alexis Soloski, 'Socrates as a Woman, and Other Twists on the Ancients,' *New York Times*, 12 June 2007.

¹⁷ Edward Spence, 'Philosophy Plays: A Neo-Socratic Model for Teaching Ethics,' *Teaching Ethics: The Journal of the Society for Ethics across the Curriculum* 5.1 (2004) 1-11

¹⁸ Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Dorothy Tarrant, 'Plato as Dramatist,' *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 75 (1955) 82-9.

²⁰ Georg Kaiser and Bayard Q. Morgan, 'Plato as Dramatist,' *The Tulane Drama Review* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1962) 188-90

²¹ Freddie Rokem, *Philosophers and Thespians: Thinking Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

good life (in other words, a life worth living) and pursue its practical realisation for the attainment of ‘*eudaimonia*’, human flourishing. This was particularly the case for the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Sceptics.

Philosophy and theatre are often considered to be polar disciplines. Although both theatre and philosophy come in textual form, we normally associate theatre with performance. Why perform theatre when it can be read? We often perform theatre to portray life and characters with the purpose of connecting with, and impacting on, our audience. Correspondingly, why perform philosophy when it can be read? Philosophy is closer to its purpose when it is practised and performed as part of our daily routine. It can be transformative, as seen in the practices of the Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought, and in turn it can provide the foundations for actively pursuing a good life.

It could be argued that some elements of performance and philosophy emerged with the Hellenistic and Roman philosophers as well as with the Attic dramatists. Plato’s Socrates may have pioneered a form of performed philosophy to communicate philosophical ideas effectively and show what practicing philosophy amounts to. This later flourished in the Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools. The emergence of performance and philosophy as two collaborative fields in the twenty-first century can be seen as a continuation of Socrates’s investigation of performance and philosophy. The following sections: ‘Philosophy in a theatrical performance’, ‘Philosophy as a dramatic Socratic performance’, and ‘Philosophy as a life performance’, will investigate the ways in which performance and philosophy have engaged thinkers and audiences in the past as well as in the present.

2.1 Philosophy in a theatrical performance

This section on philosophy in a theatrical performance will examine specifically theatrical performance that embeds philosophical themes on the stage. The focus will be on the Attic dramatists tackled by Socrates as to how they presented philosophical themes within the context of their tragedies. I will look at how dramatic characters were presented as wise in theatrical performances, with a particular reference to tragedy and how those characters differ from the wisdom as seen through Socrates and philosophy. In *Oedipus the King*,²² there is a particular reference to the mythical gods as wise because they understand human actions and Oedipus as a wise man able to solve the Sphinx’s riddle:

Apollo and Zeus are truly wise –
they understand what humans do.
But there is no sure way to ascertain
if human prophets grasp things any more
than I do, although in wisdom one man
may leave another far behind.
But until I see the words confirmed,
I will not approve of any man
who censures Oedipus, for it was clear
when that winged Sphinx went after him
he was a wise man then. (508-608)

²² Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, Vancouver Island University. 2010. 11 September 2015
<<https://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/oedipustheking.htm>>.

Further examination will be undertaken in order to address how philosophers as well as dramatists examined human behaviour, based on moral conflicts, individual choices and consequences of actions. Philosophers aimed to present character virtues, whereas Attic dramatists aimed to present character flaws and weaknesses.

2.1.1 Historical overview

Athenian theatrical performance began as a cultural activity that was associated with the worship of the god Dionysus. According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, theatre evolved through the human need to play, to explore, to imitate and to interpret life.²³ Tragedy evolved from dithyrambic ritualistic presentations in Dionysian festivities and required the involvement of Athenian citizens to create performances. Lyrical, orchestral and spoken sections with mimetic attributes were incorporated into performances in order to reflect the dramatic events of life on stage.²⁴

This complex and refined form of performance developed from ritualistic celebrations to become representative of the artistic Athenian life. It was a sign of the creative reformation of Greek culture that it was able to simulate real-life drama as well as deliver this drama artistically through the medium of theatre, while incorporating the experimentation of an innate need to perform theatre with an innate need to explore philosophical ideas. The Greeks aimed to deliver the best possible theatre, which imitated the Athenian city and its citizens. Greek theatre explored themes related to the externally derived anxieties and moral dilemmas of some of the important figures of Athenian life. Tragedy was considered to be a powerful and impactful form of educating citizens.²⁵ This is evidenced in Aristophanes's *Frogs*²⁶ in the dialogue between Aeschylus and Euripides:

Aeschylus: I am indignant at this encounter, and it gripes my guts, if I have to argue against this fellow – but so that he can't say I was helpless, – Answer me, why should one admire a poet?

Euripides: For cleverness, and giving good advice, since we improve the people in the cities. (1009-1014)

According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, tragedy is an imitative art form that requires action. Therefore the spectator could learn and understand human life through mimesis, as presented on stage.

And then there is the enjoyment people always get from representations. What happens in actual experience proves this, for we enjoy looking at accurate likenesses of things which are themselves painful to see, obscene beasts, for instance, and corpses. The reason is this: Learning things gives great pleasure not only to philosophers but also in the same way to all other men, though they share this pleasure only to a small degree. The reason why we enjoy seeing likenesses is that, as we look, we learn and infer what each is, for instance, 'that is so and so.' (1448b)

Plato, on the contrary, was concerned about the pedagogical aspect of tragedy as gods and characters were presented with ethical flaws and emotional weaknesses. Because of this, he does

²³ Samuel Henry Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (London: Macmillan, 1907) ch. vi.

²⁴ Marianne McDonald, *The Living Art of Greek Tragedy* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003) 8-9.

²⁵ Geoffrey W. Bakewell, 'Tragedy as Democratic Education,' *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 33.2 (2011) 258-67.

²⁶ Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 2009. 11 September 2015

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0031>>.

not consider the contribution of theatre to be beneficial for the city. An example can be seen in the *Republic*, Book X:

I think you know that the very best of us, when we hear Homer or some other of the makers of tragedy imitating one of the heroes who is in grief, and is delivering a long tirade in his lamentations or chanting and beating his breast, feel pleasure, and abandon ourselves and accompany the representation with sympathy and eagerness, and we praise as an excellent poet the one who most strongly affects us in this way. (605)

In the *Republic*, Book X, Plato states that this kind of poetry encourages ignorance and infects the spectator's soul, evoking harmful emotions, and preventing pure reasoning. Scäfer, a German dramatist, argues these myths were developed in order to facilitate the understanding of the world through art. Scäfer raises the idea that both philosophers and thespians are embarked on a journey of understanding of and communicating with the world.²⁷

Contemporary performance scholars such as Rokem²⁸ and Allan²⁹ also support the claim that reference to mythology was a storytelling mechanism employed by both Athenian dramatists and philosophers. The difference lies in the fact that the dramatists employed myths to portray complex characters, whereas philosophers employed myths to portray complex ideas.

In the following section, I will focus my attention on specific examples such as *Oedipus*,³⁰ *Iphigenia*³¹ and *Antiope*.³² The Attic dramatist's understanding of philosophy in theatrical performance can be shown using examples from Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. The mythical character is presented as having the qualities of moral goodness and philosophical insight, which are necessary to solve the Sphinx's riddle. The answer to the riddle reflects the transformation of human life, the physicality of the body as a metaphor to communicate the individual's universal identity and transformative nature. The riddle's philosophical subtext is what structures the narrative of the tragedy, intensifying Oedipus's inability to recognise his identity. The driving force of the tragedy is in the riddle that provokes the character to seek constant transformation.³³

Sophocles's *Oedipus* is the stereotypical 'good' character represented with philosophical aspirations by solving the riddle, but he does not have the necessary insight to do what is right; hence he kills his father and sleeps with his mother. In essence, he is driven by emotions instead of rationality. In other words, this is an example of the tragedian's dramatisation of character weaknesses instead of character virtues. This is in contrast to Plato's own philosophical dramatisation, where Socrates is incapable of such uncontrollable emotions and acts always as a moral exemplar.

Euripides's *Iphigenia* represents the sacrifice of a young and pure soul for the sake of the state and its people. Iphigenia acquiesces to her death, because she accepts that it is the god's wish. Plato's *Apology* presents a different kind of willing sacrifice to that of Iphigenia. Socrates does not want to break the laws of the city, but also he does not accept the rationality of the

²⁷ Herman Altena, 'The Theater of Innumerable Faces,' *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 472-89.

²⁸ Rokem 52-3.

²⁹ William Allan, 'Tragedy and the Early Greek Philosophical Tradition,' *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 71-82.

³⁰ Ian C. Johnston, *Oedipus the King* (Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2007).

³¹ Euripides and Edward Philip Coleridge, *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Library, 2008).

³² Andrea Wilson Nightingale, 'Plato's Gorgias and Euripides's Antiope: A Study in Generic Transformation,' *Classical Antiquity* (1992) 121-41.

³³ Rokem 52-3.

judgment either. The difference between the Attic character and the philosopher's is that the first is based on irrational thought and the latter on rational thought. Moreover, the Attic dramatist portrays the irrational act, the sacrifice of a young girl, as a justified act because the sacrifice is needed for the good of the city and its people. The presentation of the moral act in Greek tragedy conflicts with the idea of the moral act as investigated in philosophy.

Euripides's *Antiope* is the dramatist's attempt to be considered both as a thespian and as a philosopher. *Antiope* represents an intellectual 'agona' (competition) between two brothers, Amphion and Zethus. The tragedy deals with their personal life choices, prior to their attempt to find their lost mother. Amphion supports the life of the contemplative artist and philosopher.³⁴ However, it is through Amphion that Euripides combines creative practices and philosophy, and possibly gets to use theatre as a medium to communicate the collaborative importance of creative practices with philosophy for a prosperous life.

The thematic references of philosophy in the Attic tradition are pioneering attempts from dramatists to combine philosophy with theatrical performance. Nonetheless, I contend that the majority of Athenian tragedians understanding and dramatisation of wise character does not reflect wisdom as seen by philosophical characters such as Socrates. This led to the creation of a conceptual dichotomy between the two disciplines. Tragedies portray human weaknesses and errors in judgment, which are followed by godly punishment. Characters, who are presented with moral conflicts, act maliciously and uncontrollably. Hence Socrates's critique of tragedians: 'The tragic poets being wise men will forgive us ... if we do not receive them into our State, because they are the eulogists of Tyranny'.³⁵

2.2 Philosophy as a dramatic Socratic performance

This section will present Socrates as the embodiment of performance philosophy. It is through the dramatic Socratic performance that Plato presents philosophy. Plato's dramatic writings depict how ideas were communicated and tested by the philosophical character of Socrates and his interlocutors. Plato's dramatic model is about investigating complex philosophical ideas. It presents philosophy as it was taught and practised by Socrates, and this way of teaching and practising philosophy later influenced and shaped both the Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought.

2.2.1 Historical overview

Plato's writings present philosophy through character and drama. Socrates as a character embodies the current ethical flaws of the Attic drama, but by using such drama, he also acknowledges its communicative power. The difference between Plato and the Athenian dramatists lay in how they presented life. In Attic drama, Athenian life was driven by godly forces and fate. This marked the character's inability to deal with personal issues. In Plato's writings, specifically in *Phaedo* and *Apology*, the philosopher is confronted with a moral conflict. The difference is that Socrates is able to maintain control of his emotions and desires and does what is best for him and for others, as well as for the city.

Could it then be argued that Plato attempted to enhance the Athenian theatre scene with his concept of dramatic writing? I will refer to this model as 'Philosophy as a dramatic Socratic performance'. Plato's dramatic interests are evidenced in the writings of Diogenes Laertius.

³⁴ Nightingale 126.

³⁵ Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 8.

Plato wrote dithyrambs, poetry and tragedies. He was the first to introduce in Athens the mimes of the writer Sophron of Syracuse, which later evolved into the dramatic process of characterisation.³⁶

Plato's Attic theatre career was transformed and influenced by Socrates's philosophical teachings. He dramatically expressed his new position towards theatre by burning his tragedy at the steps of the great Dionysian theatre in Athens.³⁷ This action can be seen as Plato's dramatic statement regarding classical theatre performance.

In Plato's writings, philosophy is presented through public performances, and is predominantly driven by the philosophical character of Socrates and his dialectic method of investigating ideas. This encourages the practice of philosophy as a means of attaining knowledge. Socrates acknowledged tragedy's rhetorical powers and was distressed by its didactic outcomes. These dramatic works evoked vengeful thoughts and actions, poisoning youth's rationality and purpose.³⁸ Athenian education relied predominantly on oral performances when presenting poetical, political and philosophical ideas. Greek myths, which incorporate historical references, were appropriated for theatre and they were also included in philosophical dialogues as a means to make ideas accessible and understandable.³⁹

The '*polis*' (city) and the people are reflected through dramatic performance, both in philosophy and theatre. According to Meiers, 'the city's appropriation of universal Greek myth, through its home-grown literary vehicle, allowed its citizens to think through how to run their democracy and how to control their empire'.⁴⁰ However, the way, in which the city was reflected in theatre was based on incorrect moral foundations, according to Socrates: he was quite vocal about social and political truths as they were presented through the medium of theatre.

In *Phaedrus* and *Ion*, we can find an investigation of the Athenian dramatists' power relating to performance, interpretation and rhetoric persuasion. Socrates criticises the power of rhetoric in *Phaedrus*, stating that the truth in rhetoric can only be possible when dialectic devices are implemented. Similar ideas are also discussed in *Ion*, challenging specifically the actor's performance, the dramatist's intent and the audience's interpretation of moral character.

There was intellectual competition among the Attic dramatists and the philosophers and this can be clearly seen in the *Symposium*.⁴¹ In the *Symposium*, Aristophanes's and Agathon's speeches are disregarded because it is claimed that their artistic voices are incapable of communicating knowledge.⁴²

Plato's dramatic writings capture the Socratic process of thinking, which consists in interweaving knowledge and opinion. Socrates's dialectic system requires conversational engagement, which provides different points of view on a single subject. Socrates uses a philosophical as well as a dramatic method to cross-examine the views of his interlocutors. Plato's dialectic method is also part of his storytelling technique. His philosophical ideas are evoked through rational argumentation and are driven by Socrates's search for truth. A given hypothesis is presented, discussions about it lead to a contradiction, while the characters

³⁶ Tarrant 82-89.

³⁷ Puchner 3.

³⁸ Kaufmann 6.

³⁹ Naoko Yamagata, 'Plato, Memory, and Performance,' *Oral Tradition* 20.1 (2005) 111-29.

⁴⁰ Bakewell, *Tragedy* 258-67.

⁴¹ Kaufmann 2-6.

⁴² Sofie Kluge, 'Calderón's Anti-Tragic Theater: The Resonance of Plato's Critique of Tragedy in La Vida es sueño,' *Hispanic Review* 76.1 (2008) 19-52.

involved are forced to investigate and provide a synthesis of the various accounts, thereby gaining knowledge.⁴³ Socrates's dialectic method evokes a dramatic presentation of his ideas.

Socrates was targeting specific artistic and social groups in order to emphasise the level of ignorance in what they perceived as their area of expertise. He encouraged and provoked conversation to collect ideas, which thus came from public examination. Plato's writings present Socrates, a dramatic character, who is able to tactfully challenge his interlocutors' false beliefs.⁴⁴

The philosophical character of Socrates has an insignificant social status. He is described as an old, weathered individual, poorly dressed, barefooted, with an ugly physique, wandering the streets of Athens. This reflects the fact that he is detached from the bodily needs and social conventions of his time. Socrates is actually a razor-sharp critic who challenges the socio-political and religious beliefs of Athenian society.⁴⁵

2.3 Philosophy as a dramatic Socratic performance: *Phaedo*, Republic VII

In my opinion, Plato presents a new kind of dramatic performance that is based on philosophy and the philosophical biographical character. Blondell similarly defines Plato's work as a hybridisation of philosophical content and poetry, aiming to investigate philosophical concerns through a moral character.⁴⁶

The *Phaedo* can be referred to as the perfect philosophical drama. In a philosophical context, the *Phaedo* presents the immortality of the soul, and, in a dramatic context, the death of the moral exemplar that is Socrates. In it, Plato depicts Socrates's final hours after being sentenced to death. There is a deliberately slow pace in the scene, emphasising the detail of Socrates's final thoughts. Socrates's followers, Plato's secondary characters, are trying to reason with his decision to terminate his life. Suspense culminates when Socrates insists that his death-sentence is also his personal liberation. There is a better life ready to be explored, detached from any material needs and physical pain. The guard representing the city is the antagonist delivering the lethal hemlock.

The suspense intensifies and Plato adds to this intensification by depicting Socrates drinking the poison earlier than the scheduled time, disregarding any objections from his visitors. The temporal pace of the piece is slow, addressing in detail the physical numbness of the body as it reacts to the poison and death itself. The tone is tragi-comic, as the secondary characters are portrayed as both upset and liberated, sad as well as happy, which is exactly the emotional response that Socrates had discussed.

Plato attempts to deliver philosophical drama by diminishing the value of physical suffering and by trying to convince the audience that death is just a natural process, which is not to be feared. In Socrates's final moments, we can notice a theatrical reference to tragedy. Socrates is 'being called', as a tragedian would put it, by 'fate'.⁴⁷ However, the purpose of the dialogue is to instruct the audience that the events taking place are to the results of Socrates's choices, and not of fate, as often seen in tragedies. This creates an anti-tragic response with regards to the immortality of the soul. Socrates embarks again on philosophical conversations, trying to

⁴³ Noburu Notomi, 'Socratic Dialogue and Platonic Dialectic. How the Soul Knows in the Republic,' *Plato – The Internet Journal of the International Plato Society* (2004) 2-3.

⁴⁴ Yamagata 111-29.

⁴⁵ Puchner 3-15.

⁴⁶ Blondell 3-11.

⁴⁷ Puchner 11.

communicate the light that he sees to his followers, who unfortunately have a restricted vision and are unable to comprehend his world of Ideas/Forms.

According to Blondell, 'Plato viewed his dialogues ... as a kind of literary cosmos held together by a variety of dramatic and thematic devices'.⁴⁸ Plato's philosophical creativity is also evident in other works such as the *Republic VII*.⁴⁹ The parable of the cave is an allegory. It tends to be conceived as Plato's attempt to communicate that life is nothing more than an elaborate spectacle of a false world.⁵⁰ The parable of the cave can be seen as presenting a world of illusions, similar to that of theatre, where theatrical devices are employed to deliver dramatic visuals, guiding the audience's perceptions. Here, the prisoners are the spectators, secluded in the cave. They have no understanding of the dramatist's power of influencing their judgment. The audience's reality is based on shadows: a spectacle created through fire and light. The low ceilings in the cave assist in concealing the assistants, which in the theatre world are plausibly the actors. In this case, the actors are the ones creating the shadows by holding different objects. The prisoner's head is restricted as well as his vision. The prisoners can be thought of as the theatre spectators, who lack knowledge and are incapable of identifying the truth when it is presented.

The dramatic climax commences when the prisoner escapes and realises that he was part of a perceptual experiment controlled by a creative individual or dramatist and his assistants and actors. While bound, he is unable to distinguish the world of illusion from reality. His exit from the cave is transformational. He experiences the sun, for example, as a much stronger source of heat and vibrancy than the perception of the average human. When returning to the cave, he is confronted with the challenge to communicate his new perspective to his fellow inmates. He no longer shares the same views as the inmates who have never left the cave, as he has experienced a different world, which the inmates are unable to comprehend. Finally, Plato's parable of the cave could be seen as an example of his philosophical creativity: he is trying to explain his world of Forms by creating a theatrical setting and dramatic storytelling.

It may not be inappropriate to call Plato a 'philosophical dramatist'. The embodiment and investigation of complex ideas through philosophy and dramatic storytelling signifies the importance of practising philosophy in living a good life. Plato's philosophical and biographical dramatisation of Socrates is very helpful when presenting philosophy as a practice. Plato was able to present Socrates as a dramatic moral exemplar, who later shaped Hellenistic and Roman thought. He saw philosophy as the Socratic life and used dramatisation as a vehicle to communicate philosophy to his audience.

2.4 Philosophy as a life performance

This section examines how philosophers have investigated Plato's recollections of Socratic thought and how these philosophers were then motivated to practise philosophy as a way of living. The thread begins with the Attic dramatists' understanding of the moral exemplar and it continues through to Plato's Socrates, also manifesting itself in the Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought.

⁴⁸ Blondell 6.

⁴⁹ Plato, *Republic*, Book 7, section 514a. 2009, 2 September 2015

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D7%3Asection%3D514a>>

⁵⁰ Puchner 49.

Philosophy as a life performance could be the primary example of performing philosophy as manifested in the Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought. Socrates understood the performance of philosophy as investigating ideas, seeking knowledge and understanding the concept of a virtuous life.

Plato's dramatic work was seminal to the Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought. The Socratic life is the philosophical prototype for practising and performing philosophy in everyday life for the attainment of 'eudaimonia'. The philosophical and biographical dramatisation of Socrates by Plato, however, marked a turning point in seeing philosophy as a way of thinking (contemplative) as well as a way of living (practical). I refer to this as 'philosophy as a life performance'.

People show an interest in philosophy partly because they value what it offers (i.e. a guide to living well, a guide to reaching full human potential and to finding truthful answers).⁵¹ The Stoics, the Epicureans and the Sceptics elaborated on these principles. They refer to philosophy as an act of living (i.e. practising philosophy in real life settings through intellectual, emotional and physical exercises in order to live a good life). The philosophical way of life as seen by these philosophers is not a theoretical, but a practical endeavour, which involves practising logic (thinking and speaking well), physics (contemplating the cosmos) and ethics (acting correctly and justly).⁵²

Hellenistic philosophers recommended certain practical exercises for overcoming character weakness, for controlling harmful emotions, and for promoting self-esteem through critical thinking and correct judgment.⁵³ According to Epicurus, you can be happy when:

- a) You have love and respect from your friends;
- b) you are economically self-sufficient and non-reliant on the commercial world;
- c) you are uninterested in economic and political life;
- d) you are able to analyse personal anxieties such as death, money, illness and the supernatural;
- e) you are able to identify the natural necessary, natural unnecessary and the unnatural unnecessary desires in order to be happy.⁵⁴

The Stoics, as seen in Epictetus's *Discourses*,⁵⁵ represent a fusion of philosophy and pedagogy. This is achieved through satire, exhortation and dialogue. According to Epictetus, what exists can 'act' or 'be acted upon'. He believes that the individual is born with all the capacities necessary to understand the world. In order to live a good life, one has to be self-disciplined and continuously apply the Stoic principles in everyday living.⁵⁶

The Stoics developed thought-experiments, which transposed real life dilemmas and arguments into dramatic scenes acted out with props and characters in real settings. This sort of activity helps to develop emotional perseverance in order to overcome mild and extreme situations. For instance, Seneca wrote about a wealthy individual named Pacuvius, who, in order

⁵¹ Nehamas 1-4.

⁵² Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden: Blackwell, 1995) 266.

⁵³ Nehamas 1.

⁵⁴ Alain De Botton, *The Consolations of Philosophy* (Vintage, 2001) 114-21.

⁵⁵ Epictetus, *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual and Fragments* (London: Harvard University Press, 1926).

⁵⁶ Anthony Arthur Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford University Press, 2002) 20.

to come to terms with his death, rehearsed, directed and performed his funeral. Pacuvius wanted to be remembered celebrating life, so, at his funeral, in the final scene, he decides to have a feast with servants and guests chanting, 'he has lived his life'.⁵⁷

Ancient Scepticism was concerned with correct judgment, focusing on the problem that the nature of things cannot be known. Pyrrho and the philosophical Sceptics argued that nothing can be known.⁵⁸ The Sceptics encouraged suspension of belief when doubt was in place, which made the idea of a happy life possible.⁵⁹ Scepticism equipped the individual with intellectual caution. It can be said that the purpose of philosophy for Hellenistic philosophers was to overcome personal anxieties through the attainment of 'ataraxia' (peace of mind), 'autarkeia' (contentment) and cosmic consciousness.⁶⁰

3. Conclusion

Both Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought succeeded where dramatists failed in addressing the pursuit of truth and the importance of living a good life. Plato accused the dramatists of developing characters who were affected by *external* influences such as irrational forces (gods), or chance, as well as *internal* influences such as character weaknesses and emotions. Plato then introduced the philosophical drama, which can be helpful when informing the individual of how to live a good life (based on Socrates's philosophical model of rational thought and the pursuit of truth).

Plato makes use of the philosophical character, a moral exemplar, which is recognised as such by his practice of philosophy. It was Plato's dramatic writings that supported the flourishing of the Hellenistic and Roman schools of thought. These schools of thought were the prototypical examples of 'Philosophy as life performance' (as defined in section 2.4), where philosophy becomes an integral part of the nature of day-to-day life.

Philosophy is gradually becoming a theoretical discipline in the twenty-first century. What is the power of philosophy when it is not practised? Why perform philosophy? It is the creative collaboration of performance practitioners with those philosophers who attempt to bring philosophy back to its practical mode. I believe there is a need for performing philosophy. Its purpose is to transform philosophy from a theoretical discipline to a practical one, and performance from a creative discipline to a therapeutic one. Contemporary performance and philosophy hybrids are emerging in various ways. These include: 'Socrates Cafés', which encourage philosophical conversations, Spence's 'Philosophy Plays', which experiment with philosophical dramatic texts,⁶¹ and 'Performance Philosophy' conferences, which incorporate a philosophical analysis of performance pieces.

These hybrids are implemented to encourage collaborative and creative responses with regards to philosophical ideas, by moving away from the literary form of philosophy to a publicly *performed* philosophy. Undoubtedly, we have a long way to go before we achieve the level of performance philosophy as practised by the Hellenistic and Roman schools. This is the focal point of my research. It aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses in *Performance Philosophy* applications and to contemplate a new model, namely *Philosophy as Performance*, which encompasses both the dynamics of performance and philosophy as practised by Socrates

⁵⁷ Bakewell 110-11.

⁵⁸ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (Psychology Press, 1946) 232-3.

⁵⁹ Bakewell 125-7.

⁶⁰ Hadot 265.

⁶¹ Edward Spence, 'Philosophy Plays,' *Teaching Ethics* 5.1 (2004) 41-57.

and the Hellenistic and Roman schools. This model will effectively communicate the practical aspects of philosophy through the use of moral exemplars, and encourage individuals to seek personal transformation through incorporating philosophy into their daily life.

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