

tral to the Eleusinian Mysteries that Plato could use as a template in his *Symposium*.

Philosophy and Salvation in Greek Religion

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## Plato's Soteriology?

Stephen Menn

"Soteriology" starts as the name of a subdiscipline of Christian dogmatic theology. It is often treated immediately after Christology, but the name does not mean "doctrine of the savior" (which would presumably be soterology or the like), but "doctrine of salvation, σωτηρία." For a Christian, it seems that salvation is the main aim of religious thought and practice, and thus soteriology should be an important part of theology. Nor is a concern with salvation exclusively Christian, or exclusively Abrahamic: it seems fair to translate Sanskrit "*mukti*" or "*mokṣa*," release from the cycle of rebirth, as "salvation." Most Indian religious practice is not aimed at *mokṣa*—far more of it is directed toward success in this life, or toward gaining a good rebirth. But given the expectation of rebirth, and thus also of redeath, the question also arises whether we can somehow be released from the cycle. We might hope to attain *mokṣa* through understanding the inner meaning of ritual practices, or through devotion to a god, but perhaps also through philosophy, through making systematic inferences from sense-perception and internalizing the conclusions by meditation. So it is reasonable to speak of, say, Buddhist or Sāṃkhya soteriology. And it is natural to ask whether the concept of salvation is also important in ancient Greek religion; and, assuming that it is, whether philosophical as well as ritual practices, in Greece as in India, can be described as paths to salvation, so that we could speak of Greek philosophical soteriology.

In this paper I will focus on the case of Plato. Plato is the first Greek philosopher from whom we have a substantial corpus of texts, which we can compare with the language of Greek religion; in particular, he uses the words σωτήρ, σωτηρία, and σώζειν often enough that we can make judgments about the range of meanings and associations that they have for him, both religious and otherwise. And Plato seems like a good candidate for a Greek philosopher who, like many Indian philosophers,

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wants philosophical argument and the internalization of philosophical doctrine to yield a salvation or release from the cycle of rebirth: he might be seen as building on religious notions of salvation as a reversal of a primal fall into the body, begun perhaps by the Orphics and introduced into the philosophical tradition perhaps by Empedocles. To anticipate my conclusions, σωτήρες and σωτηρία are indeed an important theme in Greek religion; they are also an important theme in Plato, whose variations can be pursued across several dialogues, and in a significant number of the passages where Plato speaks of a σωτήρ or σωτηρία or σώζειν we can see that he is exploiting religious connotations of these terms, and competing with more traditional religious saviors and practices of salvation, or with earlier philosophers who were also drawing on those same religious connotations. And to this extent we can describe Plato's concerns in these passages as religious.

But to say that these concerns are religious does not mean that they are eschatological. When a Greek god or hero is called a σωτήρ of some individual or collectivity, he is usually being asked to save us, or praised for having saved us, in this life rather than beyond it, just as when God is called the σωτήρ of Israel in the Septuagint; and when "σωτήρ" and its cognates are used with religious connotations in the philosophical tradition, in Plato and before him and after him, their application remains equally this-worldly. There are apparently just two passages in Plato where the terms are applied in an eschatological context, and, as we will see, even here the concept is not intrinsically eschatological. The context of Greek religion is helpful in understanding Plato's concept of salvation precisely because it forces us to critically reexamine the concept of salvation, and to question the assumption that if salvation is religious it must be a salvation beyond (or from) this life, and an individual rather than a public or political salvation.

### I. Σωτήρες and Σωτηρία in Greek Religion

Greek religion is not directed, like Christianity, to one single great σωτηρία. But it too speaks of salvation, and in particular makes frequent use of "σωτήρ" (more highly loaded than the verb σώζειν, and even than σωτηρία, whose sense often comes directly from the verb rather than from σωτήρ) as an epithet for a god or hero.<sup>1</sup> Zeus is the σωτήρ

<sup>1</sup> Much of the literature on saviors and salvation in Greek religion comes in the

*par excellence* (so in the set phrase τὸ τρίτον τῷ σωτήρι, coming from offering the third drink at a symposium to Zeus; Zeus need not even be named), but this attribute is shared by many gods. Indeed, if I am exemplary in worshipping and sacrificing to a god when times are good, it is natural to hope that he would save me, would come to my rescue, in a moment of danger, and if he does so I will gratefully commemorate his saving power in a hymn of thanksgiving or a temple-dedication. Thus Croesus blames Apollo for not saving him, but in the end Apollo does save him, by extinguishing the fire that is about to consume him, and according to Bacchylides by transporting him to the land of the Hyperboreans, in recompense for his many offerings.<sup>2</sup>

form of encyclopedia articles in classical and theological encyclopedias, and articles on the background to Christianity. Typical of the older literature, and still worth consulting despite their biases, are Paul Wendland, "Σωτήρ," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* v.5 (1904), 335–53, and Franz Dornseiff, "Soter," in *Pauly-Wissowa*, 2nd series, vol. 3.1 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1921), 1211–21. (Much of the older literature follows Hermann Usener, *Götternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* [Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1896], in thinking that ὁ σωτήρ was originally a Sondergott, i.e., not a full personality but a primitive conceptual expression of the experience of salvation, so that a phrase like Ζεὺς ὁ σωτήρ must come from identifying the originally independent Sondergott σωτήρ with the later personal god Zeus. This may well reflect a Christian privileging of the concept of salvation.) For a brief survey with references to more recent literature, see Klaus Zimmermann's article "Soter," in *Der Neue Pauly*, vol. 11, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 752–3. There is also much that is relevant in the considerable literature on Hellenistic and Roman ruler-cult, for which see references below. In being guided by Greek authors' use of "σωτήρ" and "σώζειν" and their cognates, I am taking a different approach from much (especially Italian) scholarship which consciously uses a concept of salvation taken from comparative religious typology and not, as far as I can see, corresponding to any Greek conception: see, for instance, Dario Sabbatucci, *Saggio sul misticismo Greco*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1979). It would also be possible to explore Greek religious uses of "λύειν" and related words, sometimes conflated with the "σώζειν" family in the scholarly literature (it is above all Dionysus who λύει, literally from bonds and by extension from other kinds of constraint or penalty), but in Plato this is likely to lead in a quite different direction, and probably with fewer benefits.

<sup>2</sup> Bacchylides 3.23–62 and Herodotus 1.87 and 1.90–91. In Bacchylides, strictly speaking it is Zeus who puts out the fire (by bringing a cloud and raining, 53–6), and then Apollo transports Croesus to the Hyperboreans (58–62), but it is Apollo who "protects" Croesus after Zeus brings about the Persian capture of Sardis (25–9). In Herodotus 1.87 it is not said what god, if any, brings

There are, in particular, many gods who save sailors from shipwreck and drowning, such as Poseidon "savior of ships" (*Homeric Hymn to Poseidon* 5), Leukothea and her son Palaemon (e.g., *Orphic Hymns* 74–5), and the gods of Samothrace (famously mocked by Diagoras of Melos, see Diogenes Laertius VI,59 and Cicero *De natura deorum* III,89). But it is above all the Dioscuri who save from shipwreck and drowning, and their broader function as saviors is an extension from this case.<sup>3</sup> When Simonides in a victory ode praised the Dioscuri too much and his patron Scopas too little, Scopas told him to collect half of his fee from the Dioscuri; two strangers then came to the door and asked to speak with Simonides, and after Simonides had stepped out of the banquetting-hall, the roof collapsed and all inside were killed, only Simonides having been saved.<sup>4</sup> Someone might also be saved, not from fire

the cloud, but it happens after Croesus has prayed to Apollo, and in I,91 the Pythia says that Apollo rescued (ἐτήκεσε) Croesus when he was burning.

- 3 This is clear notably from Euripides *Helen*, 1495–1511 and 1658–65, where the Dioscuri are σωτήρες of their sister Helen; so too the *Homeric Hymn to the Dioscuri* 6–7, where the Dioscuri are "saviors of men on land and of swift-traveling ships," only the latter thought being developed in detail. Likewise in the Orphic hymn to Palaemon (*Hymn* 75), he should "save the initiates both on land and on sea"—I see no reason to take this anything but literally.
- 4 There are several versions of the Simonides story, and there were others circulating in antiquity that are now lost to us: extant are Callimachus Fr. 64 Pfeiffer (a fictional epitaph for Simonides; see the information collected by Pfeiffer in his apparatus), Cicero *De oratore* II,351–3, Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* XI,2,11–16 (referring to many variants of the story told by different authors, none of which Quintilian believes), and, very briefly, Libanius at the end of *Oration* 5. Only Libanius uses σώζειν, but Callimachus has "you who put me outside [ἐκτὸς ἔθεσθε] a hall that was about to collapse, alone of all the banquetters," which is close, since transporting someone out of a threatening situation, sometimes (as with Croesus in Bacchylides) to the happy margins of the world, is a standard mode of salvation (and the Latin sources can't be blamed for not using the Greek word σώζειν, and Latin has no real equivalent). Quintilian XI,2,16 says that one reason he doesn't believe at least the part about the Dioscuri is that Simonides never mentions it, but at XI,2,14 he says that it appears from something by Simonides himself that the house was in Pharsalus: so apparently there was a poem by Simonides (or attributed to Simonides) around which the legend accreted. According to Cicero and Quintilian, the Dioscuri were in the myth of Simonides' victory ode, and Scopas felt that the myth eclipsed the accomplishments of the living which the ode was supposed to celebrate. Both Cicero and Quintilian tell the story as an actiological myth of the discovery of the art of memory: the bodies of the banquetters are damaged beyond recognition, but Simonides remembers who was sitting where, and so is able to restore each corpse to its respective family for burial; and so he discovers

or from drowning or its analogue, but from disease, and Apollo and Asclepius are often called saviors in this sense.

Just as an individual or a ship can be saved, so can a city, and if a city has been saved not by a god but by a mortal, this is a good reason to worship him as a hero. To be the founder (κτίστης or οἰκιστής) of the city is the best justification for hero cult, but a savior, someone who is responsible for the continued existence of the city, is almost a second founder, and so, for instance, at Alexandria there are continuing cults both of Alexander and of Πτολεμαῖος ὁ σωτήρ; being a savior is a stronger justification for cult than being a mere benefactor of the city (εὐεργέτης). A city can be saved, most obviously, from military defeat and conquest: thus when Brasidas defended Amphipolis against the Athenians, and was fatally wounded in the battle, the Amphipolitans gave him heroic burial and a yearly heroic festival, considering him their σωτήρ and quasi-οἰκιστής and diverting to him the honors they had previously given to their original Athenian οἰκιστής (Thucydides V,11). But someone who reconciles opposing factions and so saves a city from civil war might also be called a savior, and so might someone who saves the city from a tyrant. This was the justification of the cult at Sicyon of Aratus, whom the Sicyonians buried "as οἰκιστής and σωτήρ of the city," setting up an annual sacrifice to him, the Σωτήρια, on the anniversary of the day he overthrew the tyranny (Plutarch *Aratus* 53—Σωτήρια is the standard name for any festival commemorating a σωτηρία); likewise for the cult at Athens of the "savior gods" Antigonus Monophthalmus and De-

the system of memorization by storing visual images in "places." So perhaps not only Simonides is "saved," but also the memory-images of the other banquetters, and also their corpses. There is also an epigram attributed to Simonides, "This [man] is the savior of Simonides of Ceos, [this man] who, though dead, rendered/returned χάρις" to the living" (*Greek Anthology* VII,77): several sources explain that Simonides found an unburied corpse and gave it a proper burial; in gratitude it warned him not to set sail as he was planning, he tried to persuade the sailors not to go but they set sail without him, and so they all drown and he alone is saved. (The texts are briefly cited, with references to parallels, in D.L. Page, *Epigrammata Graeca* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975] and *Further Greek Epigrams* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], under Simonides Epigrams LXXXIV–LXXXV.) The stories are different but both illustrate the wisdom and piety of Simonides, both involve his helping to bury a corpse that would otherwise have remained without proper burial, and in both cases his piety is rewarded by a "salvation," in one case from shipwreck and drowning, in the other case from something analogous to shipwreck and by gods who typically save from shipwreck.

metrius Poliorcetes, who had saved the city from the tyranny of Demetrius of Phalerum (Plutarch *Demetrius* 9–10; what counts as tyranny, or as liberation, can naturally be contested).<sup>5</sup> The most obvious reason to assimilate “saving” a city from a tyrant to saving it from foreign conquest is that in either case the citizens are saved from enslavement, whether to a fellow-citizen or to a foreigner; with more sophistication, it might also be said that the continued existence of the city depends on the preservation of its πολιτεία, that if the πολιτεία were destroyed, whether through foreign conquest or through tyranny or civil war, the collectivity would not survive even if the individuals who constituted it continue to exist.

So far we have been speaking of saviors who secure the continued existence of persons or collectivities. But it is also possible to speak of the σωτηρία of someone’s external possessions, his health, his knowledge (so in the *Republic* courage is the “σωτηρία ... of the opinion, generated by the law by means of education, about what things and what

5 See also the Syracusan examples of Gelon and Dion, cited below. The title and sometimes the formal cult of a σωτήρ were given by various Greek cities, through gratitude or coercion in varying measures, to many Hellenistic kings and then to Roman senators, first to Titus Flamininus when he proclaimed at the Isthmian games that the Greek cities should be free and ungarrisoned and untaxed and should observe their ancestral laws (Plutarch *Titus* 10), later of course to emperors. Antiochus I and later Attalus I took the title of σωτήρ after “saving” the Greek cities and cult places by defeating the Gauls. There is a large literature on all this. There is an excellent discussion of the evidence for Greek cities’ cults of Hellenistic kings (not of Roman senators or emperors) in Christian Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und Griechische Städte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1970); for a recent overview, with references to more recent literature, see Angelos Chaniotis, “The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers,” in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 431–45. If Antigonos and Demetrius at Athens, or Ptolemy I and his queen at Alexandria (and Dion at Syracuse according to Plutarch *Dion* 46), are specifically savior *gods* rather than heroes, this is in part because they have no real or notional gravesite at which to perform hero cult. They are at least potentially in competition with more traditional divine or heroic saviors, and this becomes explicit in Hermocles’ notorious hymn to Demetrius (Athenaeus VI,63), which praises the addressee not only by likening him to the traditional gods, and making him the son of Poseidon and Aphrodite, but also by saying that “other gods either are far away, or do not have ears, or do not exist, or pay no attention to us, whereas you we see present, not a wooden or stone [representation], but real”; and, on the basis of this flattery, prays him to eliminate the Aitolian threat (the “Sphinx”) from Greece, thus in effect to save Greece, although no form of “σώζειν” is used.

kinds of things are to be feared,” IV 429c5–8); sometimes the word should just be translated “preservation,” and it does not always have religious connotations. But very often it does. It is one thing to say that Agesilaus was often responsible for rescuing his comrades from danger on military expeditions and for securing their safe return, another to say that his comrades in such ventures called him μετὰ θεοῦ σωτήρα (Xenophon *Agesilaus* 11,13). Likewise it is one thing to say that the eyelids serve to protect the power of vision in the eyes, another to speak of “the σωτηρία which the gods contrived [ἐμηχανήσαντο] for vision, the nature of the eyelids” (*Timaeus* 45d7–e1). In both cases these authors are using the religious connotations of σωτηρία, and the mention of the gods, at least to amplify the power of the description: the phrase in Xenophon comes at the climax of a series of attributes of Agesilaus, and is intended to suggest, if not seriously to imply, that Agesilaus has the status of a hero. Even in the *Republic* IV definition of courage, “σωτηρία” means more than just a tendency to persist in some bodily or psychic condition: it is a background assumption that a city’s courage is its σωτηρία, and then the distinctively Socratic contribution is that the way it saves the city is cognitive, by preserving in the military class the conviction that death and bodily suffering are not to be feared, and that vice and dishonor are.

## II. Philosophers on Σωτηρία: Background to Plato

In investigating whether Greek philosophers have a philosophical soteriology, and whether they see themselves as offering a path to salvation, the obvious first step is to look at their use of “σωτήρ” and “σωτηρία” and “σώζειν,” to examine whether they are using the religious connotations of these words to persuade the reader that philosophy, or philosophical abstractions such as λόγος or virtue, or the philosophers themselves, have better title to be called saviors than the traditional objects of worship; if so, we can also ask what implications this has for their conceptions of their philosophical project. In fact it is clear that Greek philosophers did sometimes use the language of salvation in this way, and not necessary “otherworldly” philosophers: as LSJ note s.v., “σωτήρ” is said especially of Epicurus, and it is part of the justification of his cult. Salvation is here most often from something that can be compared to shipwreck or drowning. The Stoics do not often speak of σωτηρία (except as the gods’ providential preservation of living things), but

when they compare the person who is progressing but is not yet virtuous to someone drowning just a cubit below the surface (Plutarch *On Common Notions Against the Stoics* 1063 A-B = SVF III,539), they are implicitly comparing wisdom or virtue to salvation from drowning.<sup>6</sup> Lucretius speaks of watching from shore as others toss in the waves from which we are now free (II,1–2), and he says that Epicurus, who through his art brought human life out of such great waves, must be called a god (V,6–12). But Plato has the advantage, over later as well as earlier philosophers, of having left us a large enough corpus, and enough texts talking about salvation or saviors, that we can use these texts to determine the function of the concept of salvation within his philosophical project.

Not all occurrences of these words in Plato (in particular, not all uses of the verb σώζειν) have religious connotations, but in many cases it is clear that Plato is responding to earlier religious uses of the language of σωτηρία, either uses in civic religion or uses by earlier philosophers or quasi-philosophers, including those represented by characters in Plato's dialogues, who are in turn responding to uses in civic religion. And indeed there is an easy continuity between uses in civic religion and uses by 5<sup>th</sup>-century intellectuals. Polytheism is always to some degree competitive—in praising a god I will try to show that he is as worthy of praise as the other gods, or more so—and new gods were constantly being introduced, whether into official or private cult or merely into religious discourse. Abstractions such as peace or concord or δικη or ἔπος are described as if they were gods, and there is no clear line to mark when this is mere hyperbole and when a new god has been added to the complex.<sup>7</sup> In the *Symposium*, near the climax of a Gorgianically excessive praise of ἔπος as a god, after a long series of attributes, Agathon says that ἔπος is “in toils, in fear, in passion, in speech the best steersman [κυβερνήτης] guard, defender and σωτήρ” (197c8–d2). But it is characteristic of the sophists to attribute to τέχναι, and thus to their human bearers, what had traditionally been attributed to the gods. Thus Euthyphro says that “if someone understands how in his prayers and sacrifices

6 There is explicit use of σώζειν or σωτηρία in Marcus Aurelius XII,29 and in the text of Epictetus *Discourses* IV,1 cited in a footnote below, but it is not clear whether these go back to anything in the Old Stoa.

7 On these issues see now Emma Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 2000), especially the discussion of ancient and modern theories of personification in chapter 1.

to say and to do things gratifying to the gods, then these are pious things, and such things save both individual households and the common affairs of cities” (*Euthyphro* 14b2–5): it is not the gods but the master of the art of dealing with gods, and the actions dictated by his art, that can save himself and his city. Hippias in the *Hippias Major* says that the person who can produce a good λόγος in the assemblies and law-courts is able “by persuading, to depart bearing not the smallest but the greatest of prizes, σωτηρία of oneself and of one's possessions and friends” (304b1–3): the comparison is implicit that being put on trial is like facing a shipwreck that could destroy your life and those of your companions and all possessions on board, and that acquittal is like σωτηρία from shipwreck.<sup>8</sup>

In a similar but more elaborate way, Protagoras in the mythical portion of his “Great Speech” in the *Protagoras* says that Epimetheus gave different δυνάμεις εἰς σωτηρίαν, strength and speed and defensive armor and so on, to the different animal species, or that he himself ἔσωζεν the different kinds of animals (320d8–321a1), but that he forgot to give any σωτηρία to human beings; so Prometheus intervened and tried to find some σωτηρία for humans (321c7–8). This comes in two stages: first, Prometheus stole fire and the arts that go with it from Hephaestus and Athena (321c7–322a2). But then, because humans were still weaker than the beasts and so needed to band together in cities for protection, and because they still lacked “the political art,” they were unable to live together without doing each other injustices and were scattered and destroyed, until Zeus, afraid that the race might die out, gives them αἰδώς and δικη (322a8–d5). Many translators render “σωτηρία” minimalistically, as “means of survival” or the like, but something more is going on: it is constantly emphasized that the σωτηρία is the gift of a god, a god himself “saves” (321a1, effaced by the three English translations I have checked), and the whole story serves to exhibit the origin directly from Zeus of the “political art” which Protagoras professes to teach, and which he claims to be the savior of cities.

8 As Kathryn Morgan notes (*Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 282 n. 69), “σώζειν” in some contexts seems to mean simply “acquit” (she cites Lysias XIII,36 and XIX,6; likewise Andocides *On the Mysteries* 31). Morgan also cites *Crito* 44b9–c2, where Crito uses the verb for when he could do in getting Socrates illegally out of prison and thus saving his life.

That some such claim is likely to have been made by the historical Protagoras, or at least is not Plato's invention, is confirmed by ethical fragments of Democritus. So in Democritus B43, "repentance [μεταμέλεια] of shameful [αἰσχρά] actions is βίου σωτηρία," where "repentance" is something like αἰδώς, an abhorrence of shameful actions because of their intrinsic quality (so B264 says that we should αἰδεῖσθαι before ourselves more than before others, so that we will abstain from doing wrong even if no one else would know about it, cp. B181, and B179 on αἰδεῖσθαι and virtue). Likewise B280 "they are able without spending a lot of their own [wealth] to educate [παιδεῦσαι] their children and to throw a wall and a σωτηρία around both their [sc. the children's] possessions and their bodies": the point is that genuine παιδεία is a σωτηρία, protecting people's life and health and possessions, not by building a physical wall to keep robbers out, or by defending them in court, but by working on their soul so that they will abstain from evil and will not squander their health or possessions. Thus Democritus, like Protagoras, can advertise the importance of what he himself teaches: the care of the soul is the best way to the σωτηρία of bodies and possessions (yours and your heirs') as well.

### III. Plato's Responses to the Sophists on Σωτηρία

Plato, of course, does not endorse the claims that he represents Agathon, Euthyphro, Hippias, and Protagoras as making. But he finds it necessary to respond to claims of this type. He tries out different strategies of response in different places. The most direct confrontation is in the *Gorgias*. Callicles, as Socrates states his views for him, thinks that "I [Socrates] am unable to come to my own aid or the aid of my friends or kinsmen, or to save [ἔκσωσαι] them from the greatest dangers" (508c5–7), and recommends instead that "a man should take care to live as long as possible, and should practice these arts which save [σώζουσιν] us on each occasion, like the one you bid me to practice, rhetoric, which saves [δισσώζουσιν] in the law-courts" (511b7–c2). Socrates accepts the claim that rhetoric can produce σωτηρία, but points out that the art of piloting [κυβερνητική] also "saves not only souls but also bodies and possessions from extreme dangers, just as rhetoric does" (511d1–3); but the pilot doesn't boast, and asks only a small fee, Socrates says, because he reflects that he has not made any of his passengers better in body or soul, and that he cannot know which of them he has

benefited or harmed by saving them, which of them have some grave illness of body or soul such that they can only live badly and would be better off drowning (511d3–512b2). In this speech Socrates manages to use forms of σώζω twelve times (all in 511c7–512d8), accepting from the rhetoricians the comparison between judicial condemnation and shipwreck, and the claim that rhetoric saves, but turning the comparison against the rhetoricians: we do not greatly honor the pilot (or the military engineer, who as much as the general "saves whole cities," 512b3–7), and neither should we greatly honor the rhetorician, and for the same reason, namely that their arts only secure necessary conditions for what we should mainly be valuing, happiness or living well. Since someone with a grave illness of body or soul can only live so badly that it would be better not to live, "what is noble and good is something other than saving and being saved" (512d6–8), not living for as long a time as possible but living as well as possible for whatever time one has.

In this speech Socrates says that the soul is "more valuable than the body" (512a5–6), so that virtue as the good condition of the soul is more important for our happiness than health as the good condition of the body, and *a fortiori* than wealth as the good condition of our external possessions. So we might expect him to say that piloting and so on are unimportant because they can produce only the salvation of the body, and that we should aim instead at the salvation of our souls. But he pointedly does not do this: as we have seen, he concedes that the art of piloting saves souls as well as bodies, and he advises us not to be overfond of our souls (οὐ φιλοψυχητέον, 512e2), i.e., not to aim chiefly at prolonging our lives: he is thus implicitly assuming that the soul endures only as long as the body remains alive.<sup>9</sup> This refusal to speak of a salvation of souls beyond saving our earthly lives, and the assumption that the soul dies with the body, are all the more striking, given that some dozen Stephanus pages later Socrates will tell a story on which the souls of the dead are judged naked, stripped of the bodies which had disguised their good and bad qualities (523a1–525a7). But Plato refuses to aim at a salvation of souls, saying rather

<sup>9</sup> Compare Thucydides I,136, where salvation of body and salvation of soul are apparently synonymous. For the use of φιλοψυχεῖν, and the apparent implication that the soul perishes with the body, compare the Anonymus Iamblichus (DK 4–5) at Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 125,19–28 and 126,17–27 *Des Places* (despite the threefold contrast between soul, body, and possessions, 126,4–6, also at *Gorgias* 511c9–d3).

that we should aim at something nobler than salvation, namely being as good as possible. Indeed, this aim is connected with the thesis that the soul is more important than the body: rhetoric, which teaches us how to avoid suffering injustice, can at most ensure the good condition of our bodies or our external possessions (by helping us avoid physical punishment or confiscation), whereas philosophy, by teaching us how to avoid doing injustice, ensures the good or virtuous condition of our souls; and it is the person who does no injustice, rather than the person who suffers no injustice, who lives well and happily.

However, in other dialogues Plato gives a more positive response to the sophists' claims to produce σωτηρία, by putting forth rival claims of his own.<sup>10</sup> Again, he tries out different possibilities in different places. One obvious strategy turns on the *Gorgias*' comparison between courtroom trials and the elenchus, a trial in which the respondent is the witness against himself and the judge over himself (*Gorgias* 471d3–472c4). As rhetoric teaches how to avoid conviction before a jury, dialectic teaches how to avoid conviction before ourselves, and if the rhetorician or his art can be compared to those who save from drowning, so too can the dialectician. Thus Socrates, caught in a dialectical investigation ending in an infinite loop, "since I had fallen into this aporia, let out a great cry, begging the two strangers [Euthydemus and Dionysodorus], as if calling on the Dioscuri, to save us, me and the boy [the interlocutor Cleinias] from the triple wave of argument" (*Euthydemus* 292e8–293a3; although the aporia here is dialectical, "aporia" can be any condition of inability to help oneself which forces someone to appeal to a σωτήρ). So too Socrates must escape a "triple wave" in proposing the equality of women guardians, the abolition of the family among the guardians, and rule by philosophers (*Republic* V 472a1–7); already in the first of these he compares himself to someone who has fallen into the middle of a deep sea, who must "swim and try to be saved from the argument, whether hoping that a dolphin will pick us up, or some other ἄπορος σωτηρία" (453d8–10). Here Plato takes the verb "pick up [ὑπολαμβάνειν]" from Herodotus's story of Arion's rescue

10 One option which Plato might well have chosen to take in the *Gorgias*, but which as far as I know he never pursues in this form (perhaps closest in the Digression of the *Theaetetus*), is to say that it is the person who escapes the entanglements of this life without committing injustice, rather than the person who escapes punishment, who is truly "saved." This option is taken by Epictetus, *Discourses* IV,1,159–69, where Socrates refuses to "be saved shamefully" by escaping from prison, "but rather he is saved by dying, not by fleeing."

by the dolphin (I,23–4; note that Arion is reduced to ἄπορή when the sailors will not accept his plea to take his money but spare his life, I,24,4). The story presumably arose, partly to glorify the power of Arion's song—Arion is saved because he has charmed the dolphin with his song and cithara-playing before leaping into the sea—but also partly because of the ἀνάθημα which Herodotus I,24,8 says Arion set up at Taenarum, presumably at the famous temple of Poseidon, showing a man riding a dolphin. So Arion, or whoever set up the ἀνάθημα, saw the rescue as a σωτηρία sent by Poseidon; and what Socrates does with words will be something like what Arion does with music.

#### IV. Plato on Political Σωτηρία

Elsewhere, however, the contrast is with a military σωτήρ of the city. The σωτηρία of the city, in the first instance its military σωτηρία, gives the σωτήρ a legitimacy of command going beyond, and perhaps contrary to, strictly constitutional sources of legitimacy. Thus the dubious *Eighth Letter* says that the Syracusans chose the elder Dionysius and Hipparinus as αὐτοκράτορες τύραννοι for the sake of the σωτηρία of Sicily, i.e., to prevent the island from falling under the rule of the Carthaginians, and that it was right to be grateful to these saviors (σώσαντες); if they afterward abused the city's gift of authority, then they deserve to pay the penalty (353a3–c4). Indeed it seems that σωτηρία was often used as a justification for extraconstitutional rule extending beyond the limits of wartime, perhaps especially in Sicily. Thus Diodorus Siculus says that the Syracusans proclaimed Gelon as "εὐεργέτης and σωτήρ and king" (XI,26,6), and then later that after Dion's successful defence of the city against Dionysius II the Syracusans, after sacrificing to the gods in thanks for their σωτηρία, not only "elected Dion στρατηγὸς αὐτοκράτωρ" but also "awarded him heroic honors ... honoring their εὐεργέτης as having been the only σωτήρ of the fatherland" (XVI,20,5–6, cp. Plutarch *Dion* 46,1—the point is specifically that Dion had been able to save the city from Dionysius when the pro-democratic forces under Heraclides could not). But, obviously, such authority is dangerously subject to abuse.

Plato does not mind appealing to military σωτηρία as an extra support for the authority of the philosopher (Socrates "saved" Alcibiades, both him and his armor, at Potidaea, and deserved the honors after

that battle more than Alcibiades did, *Symposium* 220d5–e7), but he argues that the σωτηρία of the laws, which saves the city from civil strife or despotic abuse, is more important for the city than military σωτηρία. In the *Symposium* Lycurgus leaves his “sons,” i. e., his laws personified, as σωτήρες of Sparta (209d4–6); it is also said there that these laws have been “so to speak the saviors of Greece,” which must mean that they were responsible for the Spartans’ successful defense of Greece at the time of Xerxes’ invasion, so Plato (or Diotima) must be connecting the laws with military σωτηρία as well, maintaining (like Xenophon in his *Constitution of the Spartans*) that Lycurgus’ laws produced the civic solidarity and courage that are responsible for the Spartans’ military successes. In the *Seventh Letter* Plato advises the victors in civil strife (in Syracuse, or anywhere), if they desire the city’s σωτηρία from continued strife, to invite virtuous neutral advisors from all of Greece to prescribe laws which will not favor the winning over the losing party: not by one party’s conquering, but by their submitting themselves to the laws, “will all things be full of σωτηρία and happiness, and will there be an escape from all evils” (337d1–2, cp. the whole text from 337b3; here, as commonly, “escape from evils [κακῶν ἀποφυγή]” is a negative synonym for σωτηρία).

Neither Lycurgus nor the pan-Hellenic legislators of the *Seventh Letter* are described as philosophers, but the *Republic* and the *Laws* argue that legislation and especially the guarding (φυλάττειν) and σωτηρία of the laws, and thus the σωτηρία of the city, require philosophers. “If the constitution is to be preserved [σώζεσθαι]” the city needs an overseer with special training (*Republic* III 412a4–10), and only such people are “complete guardians” (414b1–6), since only they are “guardians of the laws and of the city” (this phrase IV 421a5, and cf. VI 484b9–c1) and not merely military defenders of the city. As Plato gradually reveals, these people must be philosophers in the sense described in *Republic* V, people who know eternal forms (so esp. VI 484b3–d10). The point is not that such special knowledge is needed to obey or execute the laws at ordinary times, but that without knowledge of the appropriate paradigm we cannot rightly create laws (thus philosophers are needed especially for the transition to the well-governed state), or interpret or modify them as needed in hard cases or in a crisis: people without knowledge of the forms will not be able “to lay down conventions [νόμους] here about what is noble and just and good, when they need to be laid down, or, by guarding [φυλάττειν] the ones that have been laid down, to preserve [σώζειν] them” (VI 484d1–3). If some of those

with a philosophical nature can themselves be “saved” (502a9, 502b2) from corruption, “the saviors of the constitution” (502c9–d2) can arise; otherwise city and citizens will have no “end to evils [κακῶν παύσις]” (501e2–5; same phrase V 473d5, in the first introduction of the need for philosophers to rule—the phrase is equivalent to κακῶν ἀποφυγή, which as noted above is a common negative description of σωτηρία). Thus in the city we construct the people call their rulers σωτήρες (V 463b1), and “they live a life more blessed than the blessed life which Olympic victors live ... since their victory is more noble, and their support at public expense more complete: for they win the victory of the σωτηρία of the whole city, and both they and their children are supplied with food and all the other things which life requires, and they receive honors from their cities during their lives, and when they have died partake in a worthy burial” (465d2–e2).<sup>11</sup>

The last book of the *Laws*, specifically the last ten Stephanus-pages after the work of legislation is finished at *Laws* XII 960b5, develop at length the theme of σωτηρία and its conditions. Making something is never really finished until we have secured σωτηρία for what we have made (960b5–c1), and “for the city and the constitution this requires that we provide not only health and σωτηρία for the bodies, but also lawfulness in the souls, or rather σωτηρία of the laws” (960d1–4). The solution is that the nocturnal (or dawn) council of the ten senior νομοφύλακες and the younger people they co-opt, “if one casts this as an anchor of the whole city ... would save [σώζειν] everything we want” (961c4–6). The soul, when reason (νοῦς) is present in it, together with the head, in which are the senses of sight and hearing, are the σωτήρες or the σωτηρία of the animal, comparable to the captain together with his sailors who are the σωτηρία of the ship (961d1–e5), and these will be a model for the nocturnal council (so esp. 969b2–c3, almost the end of the dialogue—apparently the senior νομοφύλακες and the captain are analogous to νοῦς, while the sailors and the younger associates who bring news to the νομοφύλακες are analogous to the senses): if the personnel are selected and educated correctly and placed in the acropolis to watch over the city, they will become “guardians such as we have never seen in our previous life as regards their power [ἀρετή] of σωτηρία” (969c2–3).

<sup>11</sup> See also *Republic* III 417a5–b6, where the guardians (here not especially the philosopher-rulers) “would be saved and would save the city” if they abstain from private property, but would cause its ruin otherwise.

But how must these people be educated, to be able to save the city? Although the *Laws* is much shyer than the *Republic* about calling for rule by philosophers, Plato argues that, like the general and the doctor who aim at σωτηρία, the person who would save the city must know the σκοπός at which he aims (961e7–962c3). But, as was shown in *Laws* IV, the aim of legislation is virtue as such, encompassing the standard four cardinal virtues; and Plato uses this to argue that the saving person or group must be able both to define virtue and to grasp how it is one and how it is four, i. e., that they must have the ability to collect and divide and grasp the one in the many, as described in *Philebus* 14c1–19b4 (all this argued *Laws* XII 963a1–966b3). They must thus know dialectic; and Plato argues further that they must also know physics and astronomy in order to grasp the two scientific foundations of theology, the priority of soul to body as moving cause and the rational ordering of the heavenly motions (966b4–968a4). Only then, with the training thus prescribed, can we make the nocturnal council “a guard according to law for the sake of σωτηρία” (968a4–b2). Thus the last ten pages of the *Laws* are an extended argument that only philosophers, trained in dialectic and physics and astronomy, can be the saviors of the city.

Thus far we have seen σωτηρία mainly in a political context, where the philosophers, more than the military leaders, will be saviors of the whole city, and so deserve from the city something close to hero-cult, at any rate honors greater than those given to Olympic victors. Even when, in these contexts, Plato says that the salvation of souls is more important than the salvation of bodies, this is just a bridge to what he thinks is most needful, the salvation or preservation of the laws and the constitution and thus of the city (so esp. *Laws* XII 960d1–4, cited above). Protagoras (as Plato represents him, see above) claimed that political virtue, added by Zeus to human nature, is the σωτηρία of cities and thus of the human race; Plato replies that while all or most of the citizens must be politically virtuous for the city to be saved, this is not sufficient, and the city needs at least a small group of leaders with a precise knowledge going far beyond political virtue (and probably also beyond the αἰδώς at shameful works in which Democritus locates virtue and thus salvation).

## V. Plato on Philosophy and Individual Σωτηρία

However, less often, Plato also tries to compete with the sophists by showing that philosophy as he understands it is necessary even for the σωτηρία of the individual, in his life overall and not merely in a dialectical emergency as in the *Euthydemus*. Arguing against Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates says that people “in the greatest dangers, in warfare or in illness or in storms at sea, attend to those who rule in such things as to the gods, expecting that they will be their saviors, although they differ from themselves in nothing other than knowledge” (170a9–b1): this includes both individual and collective σωτηρία, and Protagoras himself as educator in virtue and as legislative adviser has put himself forward as such a savior, but Socrates is arguing that Protagoras' claim cannot be justified unless he has an objective knowledge which other people lack, but that his own theory of knowledge undermines this possibility. Plato is here implicitly accepting that those who have knowledge, presumably of virtue just as much as of bodily health, can be saviors, although he is unlikely to believe that Protagoras himself has such knowledge.

But Plato's clearest positive claim that some kind of knowledge can be necessary and sufficient for saving an individual comes in the *Protagoras*, again in implicit competition with Protagoras' own claims about σωτηρία. Socrates has argued we ought to act in the way that produces the greatest pleasures and the least pains, and that in order to do this we must determine the true magnitudes of the pleasures and pains that would result from different courses of action: since pleasures and pains that are closer to us in time tend to seem larger, and more remote one tends to seem smaller, just as closer objects tend to appear larger to sight, and more remote ones tend to appear smaller, we must overcome this tendency in order to act rightly. “So if doing well [τὸ εὖ πράττειν, happiness or success] consisted for us in doing and taking long lengths, and fleeing and not doing short ones, what would appear as our σωτηρία τοῦ βίου—the art of measurement, or the power of appearance? Wouldn't [the power of appearance] make us wander and make us take and reject the same things [μεταλαμβάνειν ταῦτά] many times back and forth, and change our mind [μεταμέλειν] both in actions and in choosing long and short, while the art of measurement would make this appearance powerless, and by revealing the true would make the soul, abiding in the true, to have quietude, and would save

our life?" (356c8–e2).<sup>12</sup> Likewise if our σωτηρία τοῦ βίου consisted in choosing among odd and even numbers, what would save our life would be arithmetic, which is also a kind of art of measurement (356e5–357a3). "But since it has become apparent that our σωτηρία τοῦ βίου consists in the right choice of pleasure and pain, the more and the fewer and the greater and the lesser and the further and the nearer, doesn't [our σωτηρία τοῦ βίου] seem to be an art of measurement, investigating their excess and deficiency and equality to each other?" (357a5–b3). Here, for the argument to work, σωτηρία τοῦ βίου must be identified with happiness [εὖ πράττειν] and also with quietude [ἡσυχία]. But what justifies calling this σωτηρία?

Some of the underlying thought, although without the word "σωτηρία," is developed in the *Euthyphro*, where disagreements about number or about greater and smaller or heavier and lighter do not give rise to anger or enmity because they are resolved by calculation or measurement or weighing (7b6–c8; as Socrates says, when we turn to measurement, παυσαίμεθ' ἂν τῆς διαφορᾶς, 7c4–5); where humans, and according to the stories the gods, get into conflict it is about "just and unjust and noble and base and good and bad" (7d1–2), evidently because they do not have an art for measuring these things. So an art of measuring good and bad would put an end to war, or within the city to στάσις (the *Euthyphro* uses the verb στασιάζειν in this context for what the gods allegedly do, 7b2, 7e3, 8a1). So it seems justified to say that an art of measuring good and bad (and Socrates in the *Protagoras* has argued that this reduces to measuring pleasure and pain) would "save" the city from civil strife. And apparently Plato thinks that it would have an analogous effect within an individual: without a way to assess the true size of each prospective pleasure or pain, we will be unable to resolve conflicts between our different desires or aversions, as the *Protagoras* puts it we will "wander," and, especially, we will be in conflict with ourselves in pursuing and rejecting the same thing when it is present to us in different guises or at different "distances." This is something like internal στάσις (perhaps it is also something like being lost at sea, and tossed back and forth by a storm), and it seems reasonable to say that the art of measurement, by quieting this

12 The verb μεταμέλειν suggests that Plato is responding to Democritus B43, cited above, where μεταμέλεια is βίου σωτηρία; for Plato μεταμέλεια, change of mind or repentance, is a sign of what we need to be saved from, and only an overall consistency of action and motivation is genuine σωτηρία.

conflict, "saves" individuals as well as cities.<sup>13</sup> When this passage is compared with what Protagoras has said about σωτηρία earlier in the dialogue, the implication is that political virtue is not enough to save us: to save even an individual, we need a precise knowledge going beyond what Protagoras claims to teach. And very likely, in insisting on the need for an art of measurement, Plato also intends to rebut Protagoras' claim that man is in himself a measure of all things, although Plato mentions this formula only in the *Theaetetus* and not in the *Protagoras*.<sup>14</sup>

## VI. Eschatological Σωτηρία in Plato?

In the uses we have seen so far of σωτήρ or σωτηρία or σώζειν, Plato is often drawing more or less clearly on the religious connotations of the terms in order to amplify the claims he is making for philosophy; but the σωτηρία he has spoken of has never been eschatological, that is, has never involved saving us from something that might happen to us after death. And this is entirely in accord with the general concerns of Greek religion, and more specifically with representations of σωτηρία in Greek religion. But there is one occurrence of σωτηρία in Plato, and another of σώζειν, which do refer to what happens to the soul after death; and we should consider how this use of σωτηρία is related to the range of uses we have seen.

13 The comparison between this kind of inconsistency in our beliefs and actions and being tossed at sea seems implicit in the common philosophical use of ταραχή—from ταρασσω/ταράττω, originally applied chiefly to storms at sea—for the condition of inconsistency which we escape through philosophy. In this sense see *Republic* IX 577e1–3, where the tyrannical soul is "full of ταραχή and μεταμέλεια"; likewise the "ταραχή in the soul" of *Republic* X 602c12–d1, in a passage which develops the *Protagoras* passage on the art of measurement, consists in the fact that the same things appear to us under different circumstances as having contrary attributes. Xenocrates will say that "the motive for the discovery of philosophy is to put an end to the ταραχώδες of things in life" (Fr. 253 Isnardi-Parente), and the idea will be taken up by many Hellenistic philosophers.

14 Compare also *Epinomis* 976e1–4, where the Athenian Stranger supposes that it is some god, rather than mere chance, that has "saved us" by giving us number, without which we would be the most foolish of animals, and which enables us to rule and be ruled justly and harmoniously (976c7–d8). The god turns out to be Ouranos, who has taught us number by showing us the succession of day and night, the regular waxing and waning of the moon, and so on.

The Socrates of the *Phaedo* concludes that

if indeed [as Socrates has just finished arguing] the soul is immortal, it requires care not only over that time in which we speak of "living," but over all time, and the danger would now seem to be terrible, if someone neglects to care for it. For if death were the loss [ἀπαλλογή] of everything, it would be a godsend to those who are bad, when they die, to lose their body and at the same time their vice [or badness] together with their soul; but now, since [the soul] turns out to be immortal, it would have no other escape from evils [ἀποφυγή κακῶν] or σωτηρία except to become as good and as wise as possible. For the soul arrives in Hades carrying nothing except its education and nurture—the things which are said most of all to benefit or harm the dead person right from the beginning of his journey thither. (*Phaedo* 107c2-d5)

This passage has close connections with passages in the *Gorgias* that we have discussed. In particular, it recalls the *Gorgias*' insistence that souls will be judged naked, having left behind the "beautiful bodies and families and wealth" (*Gorgias* 523c5–6) and the friendly witnesses who would testify on their behalf, so that the judges will not be misled by appearances: thus as the *Phaedo* passage says, "the soul arrives in Hades carrying nothing except its education and nurture," the soul's own qualities (formed by what it has done in the body) which the judges will inspect. But while the *Gorgias* argues that σωτηρία, of bodies or even of souls, is not of much value and that we should concern ourselves instead with living as well as possible (512d6–e5, discussed above), the *Phaedo* says that having our soul in as good a condition as possible, so that we will live as well as possible, is our only σωτηρία. This seems close to the *Theaetetus*, which although it does not speak of σωτηρία, says that we must flee (φεύγειν) from evils (cf. the ἀποφυγή κακῶν in the *Phaedo* passage, the negative equivalent of σωτηρία), and that this φυγή consists in "assimilation to god so far as is possible," which in turn consists in "becoming just and pious with wisdom" (176a5–b3).

But what does σωτηρία mean in the *Phaedo*? Clearly it cannot mean securing the continued existence of our body, since Plato is speaking of what happens after death; nor does it mean securing the continued existence of our soul, since the soul will automatically continue to exist whether we want it to or not, and it seems that for the vicious if the soul *did* perish with the body that would be a prospect of σωτηρία. So we might think that the desired σωτηρία is an escape from punishment by the judges of the afterlife, analogous to, but far more important than, the σωτηρία from an earthly court that rhetoric might bring about.

And indeed the *Phaedo* goes on to give a myth, like the *Gorgias*' but more elaborate, involving judgment in the afterlife.

However, Plato seems to be very cautious about identifying the desired σωτηρία with avoiding judicial punishment. In the *Phaedo* myth, while there will be a judgment, the souls must first get to the place where they will be judged, and despite the δαίμων guiding them, there are many ways to go wrong, and only "the wise and orderly soul follows and does not fail to recognize the surroundings," while "the one affected by desire for the body," reluctant to leave the body and the sensible world, resists being led and arrives only after much straying and confusion (108a6–b3): this was what Socrates was referring to, in the passage cited, when he said that education and nurture "benefit or harm the dead person right from the beginning of his journey thither," i.e., even before he has reached the place of judgment. All this is of course myth, but it seems that underlying Plato's choosing, in these eschatological myths, to attribute the outcome for each soul as much as possible to the soul itself and as little as possible to the judges, is the concern expressed in the *Republic*. In *Republic* II, Glaucon and Adeimantus express dissatisfaction with the usual grounds on which justice is praised, which seem to show the advantages of *appearing* just rather than of *being* just: if these are the only reasons to be just, then we will do better to conceal our injustice within conspiracies of like-minded friends, to use rhetoric when we are caught to avoid punishment by a human court (so 365d2–6), and to use the profits of our injustice to perform sacrifices to the gods and undergo initiations and purifications to avoid punishment in the afterlife (365d7–366b3, picking up 364b3–365a3 and 362c1–6). So Glaucon and Adeimantus challenge Socrates to show the advantages of justice independently of the advantages of *appearing* just either to human beings or to gods: so he should make no mention of rewards either from humans or from gods, but should show that justice in itself, apart from any rewards, is the best condition of the soul (366d5–367e4).

Already in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*, written before the *Republic*, Plato tries to avoid making the soul's welfare depend on judges who might, like human judges, be misled or corrupted, in the *Gorgias* by insisting that souls are judged naked, in the *Phaedo* likewise by insisting that the soul carries only its education and nurture. But the *Phaedo* goes a step further than the *Gorgias* by making the soul's outcome depend on the soul's own choices in the afterlife, informed by the habits that it has acquired in the body. And Plato carries this further in the myth

of Er in *Republic X*. Having scrupulously avoided mentioning the afterlife in his defense of justice in *Republic II-IX*, in *Republic X* Socrates finally allows himself to say that the just person, beyond the internal benefits of justice, is also unlikely to escape the notice of the gods, and will receive rewards from them before or after death (612b6–614a8); but then, in giving a mythical narrative (on the authority of Er) of what happens to souls after death, he makes as much as possible depend on the soul's own choices, and as little as possible on any divine judge. Various things happen to souls when separated from bodies, but eventually they return for another bodily life, and while the souls are assigned next to determine the order in which they will be able to choose their next lives, there is not much advantage in getting to choose first, or much disadvantage in having to choose last: "even for the one who comes last, there is stored up a life which is to be welcomed, a life not bad, if he chooses it with intelligence and then lives it without slack [συντόμως]. Let not the first be careless in his choice, nor let the last despair" (619b3–6). And Er reports seeing the first chooser choose the life of a tyrant, without inspecting the life carefully and not noticing that it would include eating his own children, "nor did he blame himself for the evils, but fortune and δαίμονες and everything rather than himself" (619c5–6; contrast the warning to the souls at 617e1–5, where they will choose their own δαίμονες, presumably in the sense of ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων); while the soul of Odysseus, which had to choose last, was able to find the life of an untroubled private person lying unwanted by the other souls, and "willingly chose it, saying that he would have done the same even had he drawn the first lot" (620d1–2). In both the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, the fundamental point is that the soul's happiness or misery after death depends only incidentally on δαίμονες or judges or the lottery of fortune, essentially on the soul's own choices, and that these choices depend on the soul's habituation and education in this life.

Thus when the *Phaedo* says "since [the soul] turns out to be immortal, it would have no other escape from evils or σωτηρία except to become as good and as wise as possible," the point is that neither rhetoric to persuade judges in this life, nor sacrifices and initiations to persuade judges in the next life, nor simply the fact of dying, will be sufficient to save us from evils (the art of rhetoric, or money to bribe the jailers to escape, might have "saved" Socrates for a little while, but not for long), and that, since these short cuts do not work, there is unfortunately

no alternative to trying to become as good and as wise as possible.<sup>15</sup> And Plato wants also to claim that philosophy is needed for this. In the first place, political virtue (the phrase apparently taken from Protagoras) is insufficient. In the *Phaedo*, in an earlier myth, "those who have practiced popular and political virtue, what they call temperance and justice, born of habituation and practice without philosophy or intelligence" (82a12–b3) are reincarnated in some "tame and political kind," bees or wasps or ants or humans again (b5–8), which does not sound so bad but is still contrasted with what happens to the philosophers; in *Republic X*, more sharply, the person who rashly chooses the life of the tyrant "had lived in his previous life in a well-ordered constitution, partaking by habituation without philosophical virtue" (619c7–d1). The point is that while political virtue may be sufficient for making decisions in ordinary situations, it breaks down in the extraordinary circumstances of the afterlife, and especially when given the first lot and offered a tyranny, just as it would break down when given the ring of Gyges (cf. *Republic II* 359b6–360d7).

In the *Protagoras* Plato had put forward, as a means to σωτηρία and an alternative to Protagorean political virtue, an art of measuring pleasures and pains, but in the *Phaedo* he claims that this too is insufficient: "this is not the right exchange with regard to virtue, to exchange pleasures for pleasures and pain for pain and fear for fear, greater for smaller, like coins; rather, only this is the right coin, wisdom, for which all these things should be exchanged" (69a6–10). Plato goes on to compare this wisdom to a mystery-initiation, with a grim future in the afterlife for the "uninitiated," the unphilosophically virtuous. But it would be a mistake to say that the *Protagoras* recommends living based on an art of measuring pleasure because it is concerned with salvation in this life, while the *Phaedo* rejects this as insufficient because it is concerned with salvation in the afterlife. Rather, the *Phaedo* rejects a life based on the art of measuring pleasure because it thinks that the activity of contemplating is in itself the most desirable human activity, and that wisdom should not be desired merely as a means to maximizing pleasure, or even to achieving consistency in our actions: a wisdom directed not to practical activity but to contemplation is our salvation in this life, and this is the ground for Plato's conviction that it will also be our salvation after

15 And thus the negative form of expression, not, e.g., "philosophy is our σωτηρία," but "there is no other σωτηρία": similar negative expressions are very common in Greek claims about σωτηρία.

death, when we will be free of the obstacles distracting us from contemplation. The *Phaedo* is willing to compare philosophical wisdom to the knowledge acquired in a mystery-initiation, and to cite the evidence of cult representations of forking paths where the soul must know which fork to take after death (107e5–108a6), but Plato is demythologizing these claims, and offering philosophy as a replacement for the mysteries. He is saying not that philosophical wisdom has as its content the geography of Hades, to be of practical use after death, but that the soul habituated to bodily pleasures will try to linger in the sensible world after death, while the wise soul will go spontaneously to its proper place (108a6–b3), i.e., to where it can contemplate without distraction.

So too in *Republic X*, where something reported from the afterlife can “save” us, neither the content of the knowledge, nor the actions it leads us to take, are distinctively eschatological. Socrates has tried to show in *Republic II–IX* that the just person will be the happiest, because of the state of his soul and not because of any external rewards; where the just person is not simply someone who is just by habituation, or by calculating the external rewards, for such a person’s justice will break down if offered the ring of Gyges. The truly just person will continue to act rightly even if given the ring of Gyges (or kingship in the *Callipolis*) because he understands the nature of the human soul, what states of it constitute its happiness and misery, and how its external actions affect its internal states, and so he refrains from unjust actions because he knows that they would make him psychologically unhealthy and so unhappy (so *Republic IV* 444c1–445b4, cf. *IX* 591a5–592a4). That is: the philosophically just and therefore happy person will be the person who has understood and internalized the argument of the *Republic*, or of some idealized more fully worked-out version of it. Then in *Republic X* Socrates, taking a break from recounting the story of Er in order to point out its implications, says that because of what Er has told us, namely that the souls are given a choice of lives, “for this reason we should most of all take care how each of us, neglecting all other studies, shall pursue and learn this study, if he can somehow learn and discover what will make him knowing and able, discerning the good from the miserable life, always to choose the best of those possible on any occasion, reasoning through all the things that have now been said [in the *Republic*]” and assessing what external things will have what effects on a soul in this or that condition, “so that from all these things he will be able to choose on the basis of reasoning, looking to the nature of the soul and to the worse and better lives, calling ‘worse’ what leads

to becoming more unjust, ‘better’ what leads to becoming more just; he will let everything else go, for we have seen that this is the best choice for him both when he is living and when he has died” (618b8–c6, 618d5–619a1). Someone who arrives in Hades with this firm conviction will avoid the temptations “both in this life, so far as possible, and in all the life hereafter: for in this way a man becomes most happy” (619a7–b1). And because Er witnessed all these things without having quite died, and returned to consciousness still lying on his funeral pyre without having drunk the water of forgetfulness, “the story was saved [ἔσωθη] and did not perish, and it would save [ἔν σωσειεν] us, if we believe it, and we will cross the river of Lethe well and will not be polluted in soul” (621b8–c2).<sup>16</sup> But what saves us is the conviction that the justest life is the happiest, and it will save us by guiding our choices in the next life for precisely the same reasons that it saves us by guiding our choices in this life.

## VII. Conclusion

Plato has a somewhat different attitude to philosophy and how it governs individual lives in each of the dialogues we have discussed. In the *Gorgias* he distinguishes rhetoric, which aims at σωτηρία, from philosophy, which aims not at σωτηρία but at living well, but in the *Protagoras* and *Phaedo* and *Republic* he says that philosophy, in teaching us how to live well, saves the individual (as well as, in the *Republic* and *Laos*, the city).<sup>17</sup> In the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, and also the *Gorgias*, he fills out

16 See the very interesting discussion of the meanings of the (proverbial) phrase “the story was saved” in Morgan 2000, 281–9. Exploring how stories or accounts, and not just persons or cities, are saved allows Morgan to bring out different aspects of σωτηρία in Plato, complementary to those I have described.

17 Something like σωτηρία may also come up in Plato where a god is saving, not human individuals or cities, but the cosmos. Thus *Statesman* 273d4–e4: “the god who had previously ordered [the world], seeing that it was in ἄπορία, and being concerned lest, battered by storm and broken by the tumult [ταραχή], it should sink into the endless sea of unlikeness, takes charge once again of the steering, and, turning around what had become diseased and broken in [the world’s] prior rotation under its own power, orders it and sets it right and makes it immortal and unaging.” Plato doesn’t here use any form of “σώζειν,” but the concept is surely implied by the comparison with sea and storms: salvation from shipwreck here fuses with salvation from disease. Likewise at *Timaeus* 32c5–33b1 the god makes the world “unaging and with-

the argument with a myth (in the *Protagoras* the mythmaking is left to Protagoras), which puts the life that the dialogue is recommending, and the thought-process that the dialogue is carrying out, in an eschatological and cosmological context. Keeping such eschatological and cosmological contexts in mind may help us to internalize the results of the argument and to keep from falling into temptation, but the myths are only likely stories, and the plausibility of their descriptions of the role of wisdom in the afterlife comes entirely from what we know about its role in the present life.

Although the notion of σωτηρία is put in an eschatological context in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, in neither dialogue is it a distinctively eschatological notion. It is not, for instance, *mokṣa*, liberation from the cycle of rebirth. In the *Phaedo*, where Plato does apparently imply that the philosophically virtuous person will not be reincarnated (114c2–8, and maybe 82b10–c4 contrasting with 82a10–b9), he does not say anything about that in the σωτηρία passage. The point there is, negatively, that since we want to escape our vices (and not merely to escape external punishments for our vices), and since we cannot escape them simply by dying, there is “no other escape from evils or σωτηρία except to become as good and as wise as possible.” In the *Republic* apparently everyone except the incurably bad is reincarnated; the study of the soul as sketched in the *Republic*, fortified by Er’s story, will “save” us by helping us to make the right choices, both during and between earthly lives; but here as in the *Phaedo* the emphasis is negative, that wisdom will help us to avoid the most foolish choices, such as the tyrannical life.

What is constant in all these dialogues, except the *Gorgias*, is that rhetoric and political virtue are insufficient to save either the individual or the city. So far as we can discern the history behind Plato’s dramatizations, the philosophers who first promised σωτηρία, competing with the traditional gods and heroes, were Protagoras and Gorgias or their fellows, and next perhaps Democritus. Against these earlier philosophers, Plato is saying that rhetoric and political virtue, or even Democritean moral virtue, are no more effective at producing the promised σωτηρία than are sacrifices or initiations or politicians or generals, and that only some quite different kind of philosophy can save us.

out disease,” following precepts of the art of medicine (but again with no use of “σώζειν”). The god orders all things “for the σωτηρία and virtue of the whole [i.e., of the cosmos]” at *Laus* X 903b4–7, although with no mention in the context of dangers from which the cosmos needs to be saved or preserved.

## From Politics to Salvation through Philosophy: Herodotus’ *Histories* and Plato’s *Republic*

Vishwa Adluri & John Lenz

### I. Introduction

Plato’s *Republic* culminates with Socrates relating a story that he asserts will “save us.”<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the myth of Er plays no small role in how we read the *Republic* as a whole. In this paper, we read it as concluding themes introduced by another myth earlier in the work, the myth of Gyges in Book II. We can see the central portions of the *Republic* as framed by these two Platonic myths: the myth of Gyges brings the discussion into politics,<sup>2</sup> and the myth of Er brings it out of politics and into relation with salvation. In arguing for the importance of this salvific claim for the *Republic*, we will relate it to a similar pattern discernible in the *Histories* of Herodotus.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have noted that Plato drew from Herodotus, and adapted for his own purposes, the myth of Gyges.<sup>4</sup> Further, as Davis notes,

- 1 “And so, Glaucon, a myth was saved and not destroyed and it would save us...” (καὶ οὕτως, ὦ Γλαύκων, μῦθος ἐσώθη καὶ οὐκ ἀπώλετο, καὶ ἡμᾶς ἂν σώσειεν...; *Republic* 621b5; authors’ translation).
- 2 The myth of Gyges can in many ways be considered the central political myth of the *Republic*: its introduction in Book II sets the stage for a renewed inquiry into justice as well as the conception of the ideal city. Cf. Michael Davis, “The Tragedy of Law: Gyges in Herodotus and Plato,” *RMeta* 53 (2000): 636: “The final nine books of the *Republic* are Socrates’ extended reflection on this poem invented by Glaucon [i.e. the myth of Gyges] to make visible the power and naturalness of injustice in the soul and the weakness and conventionality of justice.”
- 3 The *Republic* is unique in its relation to Herodotus. In the entire *corpus* of Platonic texts available to us, the *Republic* contains the only direct quote from Herodotus: from the *Histories*. Cf. *Republic* VIII, 566c; the reference is to *Histories* I.55c.
- 4 See Andrew Laird, “Ringling the Changes on Gyges: Philosophy and the Formation of Fiction in Plato’s *Republic*,” *JHS* 121 (2001): 12–29; K. F. Smith, “The Literary Tradition of Gyges and Candaules,” *AJP* 41.1 (1920): 1–37;