Portraying the Philosophers as Chorus Members and Leaders Thereof in Plato's *Theaetetus* 172c-177c

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ABSTRACT

One of the most puzzling aspects of the portrait of the philosopher in the Theaetetus is that the depiction of this disengaged and aloof character is at odds with the depiction of Socrates himself both in this dialogue and in others. In this paper I follow thinkers like Dorter, Sedley, and Blondell, who argue that the philosopher-leader is an abstract that is not meant to be understood as a character in flesh and blood, but I aim to go beyond what they have done so far by enlarging the scope of the question and elaborating on it. More specifically, I want to explore the significance of this double-tiered assessment of the philosopher in terms of the philosopher in flesh and blood as philosopher of the chorus (οἳ ἐν τῷ τοιῶδε χορεθύοντες, 173c1-2) and this abstract image of the philosopher-leader of the chorus (οἳ κορμφαίοι, 173c6-7). I ask specifically why we need such a figure especially in a context in which Plato's Socrates is offering us God as ultimate model to follow ("becoming as like God as possible" 176a-b). Whom is a philosopher like Socrates supposed to be taking as model: the idealized figure of the philosopher-leader, the God, or both? And, if both, then isn't the figure of the philosopher redundant? Do we need the image of the philosopher at all?

Keywords: philosopher, Godlikeness, digression, chorus, leader of the chorus, model

https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-4105_25_9

At the heart of the *Theaetetus*, we come upon the famous "digression" (πάρεργα 177b8) that centers on distinguishing the philosopher from the orator (172c-176c). One of the most puzzling aspects of the portrait of the philosopher in the *Theaetetus* is that the depiction of this disengaged and aloof character is much at odds with the depiction of Socrates himself both in this dialogue and in others. While Socrates certainly shares several features with the philosopher here described, such as, for instance, recognizing the importance of leisure, interest in the *ti esti* questions, interest in the whole, little regard for reputation, nevertheless, Socrates is not as clumsy, as lost, and as detached when it comes to practical affairs as that philosopher-leader here described. Unlike him, Socrates knows well his way to the marketplace, just as he knows how to get to the law-court of King Archon (210d), he even attends parties with flute girls, as he famously did in celebration of Agathon's success in a tragedy contest (*Symposium*), he is aware of the ancestry of many fellow citizens, Theaetetus included (144c), and is even interested in it sometimes, though of course not as a matter of gossip and vain curiosity, but rather insofar as it might help him discern how best to engage his interlocutors in conversation. Moreover, Socrates has been actively involved in the public life of Athens when needed (*Apology* 17c) and constantly engaged in trying to make its citizens more virtuous (*Apology* 30a2-b2, 36c2-8, 36d9-e1). All this is so because Socrates understands himself as a midwife obedient to the god who has tasked him with assisting men who are pregnant in soul to give birth (*Theaetetus* 149a-151c).[1] Socrates both engages in solitary contemplation (*Symposium* 175a-b, 220c-d) and understands himself as a midwife whose main role is to bring forth wisdom in others (*Theaetetus* 150b-151d), whereas the philosopher-leader of the chorus here described is engaged only in solitary contemplation for its own sake. How are we to make sense of these discrepancies?

Traditionally, scholars have opted for one or another of the following avenues to answer this question: (a) assume that Plato regards Socrates as one of these philosopher-leaders, but in this context he has Socrates purposefully comically exaggerate some of the features of the philosopher (German, 2017, Larsen, 2019, 13-19); (b) argue that Plato means this description of the philosopher-leader as an idealized abstraction, not as a description of a real life individual in flesh and blood (Dorter, 1994, 88, Blondell, 2002, 289-293, Sedley, 2004, 65-74); (c) argue that Plato considers the historical Socrates to belong to the philosopher-leader group of the wise, yet he "would never allow his character to regard himself so, and thus his Socrates could not possibly include himself in the class of the first rate philosopher-leaders" (Bossi, 2022, 182); (d) take the image of the philosopher leader to characterize a disengaged Theodorus, and thus to be meant ironically, while for Socrates we reserve good engagement with the important political issues of the day (Tschemplik, 2008, 142-7, Howland, 1998, Minz, 2011, Rue, 1993); (e) argue that the purpose of the digression is not only to show that the practical man needs to be dragged upwards, but also that the philosopher needs to be 'dragged downwards' (Rue, 1993, 199). Note that the avenues here listed are not mutually exclusive, but rather allow some overlap between them.

The view I am developing in this paper comes closest to option (b) above, taking the philosopher-leader as an abstract ideal, not as a character in flesh and blood. I aim to go beyond what has been done so far in

defending this view by enlarging the scope of the question and elaborating on it. More specifically, unlike Blondell, Sedley and others embracing this view, I want to explore *the significance of* this double-tiered assessment of the philosopher in terms of the philosopher in flesh and blood as philosopher of the chorus (οἳ ἐν τῶ τοιῶδε χορεθύοντες, 173c1-2) and this abstract image of a philosopher-leader of the chorus (οἳ κορυφαίοι, 173c6-7). I want to explore why we need especially in a context in which Plato's Socrates is also offering us God as ultimate model to follow ("becoming as like God as possible" 176a-b). To state the issue more pointedly: Whom is a philosopher like Socrates supposed to be taking as model: the idealized figure of the philosopher-leader, the God, or both? And, if both, then isn't the figure of the idealized philosopher redundant? Do we need the image of the idealized philosopher at all? What kind of philosophical work does this image do here?

The view I am going to defend comprises two broad claims. To begin with, I argue that the portrayal of the philosopher-leader is to be taken seriously, not ironically, despite its exaggerated features bordering on something comical. That portrayal is meant to depict in more concrete ways what a philosopher's becoming as like God as possible looks like. Becoming like God as much as possible is a task for *all people*, not only for philosophers (176b-d), while the portrayal of the philosopher-leader imagines what it is specifically for philosophers to become as godlike as possible. Secondly, I argue that proposing the idealized figure of the philosopher-leader of the chorus does not mean at all that Plato advocates the philosopher's disengagement from all the social and political responsibilities in the city. On the contrary, in line with what he advocates also in the *Republic* about the philosopher's duty to return to the cave to educate others, here too, in the *Theaetetus*, Plato remains committed to the importance of the philosopher's active engagement with the life of the community he belongs to. Plato's philosopher has a central role to play in discussing and elucidating the important issues of social and political governance precisely because he, more than anyone else, is in touch with the Good and the Just (175d) while being also genuinely humble and aware at every step that the practical implementation of these values will inevitably fall short of the ideal that he contemplates.

1. SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

The portrait of the philosopher (172c-176c) comes in two parts, a first one in which Socrates describes philosophers generally (οἳ ἐν τῶ τοιῶδε χορεθύοντες, 172c-173c), and a second one, in which he restricts his comments to the depiction of the philosopher-leaders of the chorus (οἳ κορυφαίοι, 173c-176c). While both parts depict philosophers in clear contrast with the orator or the practical type of man, it will be important to figure out why Plato chooses to have Socrates give this two-tiered assessment of the philosopher.

We begin with the initial impression of philosophers generally (172c-173c). Unlike the practical man, who is always running out of time for everything, always in a hurry when he talks, and therefore must speak with one eye on the clock, the man brought up in philosophy has plenty of time, appreciates leisure, talks in peace and quiet. True, the man brought up in philosophy will make a fool of himself when he appears as a public speaker in the law-courts (172c), but he is no less free because of that, for the laughter of the many

about his own clumsiness in daily affairs leaves him undisturbed. The philosopher is a free man in every way, whereas the man of the law-courts is a slave with respect to time, to the subject on which he speaks, to the person that he converses with (172e). The main aim of the philosopher is to "hit upon that which is" (172d)[2], and to get there he cannot be rushed or constrained. The practical man, on the other hand, "is constantly being bent and distorted, and in the end grows up to manhood with a mind that has no health in it, having now become – *in his own eyes* - a man of ability and wisdom" (emphasis is mine, 173b).

Up to this point Socrates has been referring to the group of philosophers as one to which he, along with Theodorus (173b3-4), belong as well, and Theodorus has been consenting to that all along. Socrates does not protest to Theodorus' likening himself and Socrates to these free men who have no jury or audience sitting in control of them and determining what they are to discuss, how, and for how long (173c):

> Theod: Well, we have plenty of time, haven't we, Socrates?
> Soc: We appear to…Because the one man always has what you mentioned just now, - plenty of time. When he talks, he talks in peace and quiet, and his time is his own. It is so with us now: here we are beginning on our third new discussion, and he can do the same, if he is like us, and prefers the newcomer to the question in hand. It does not matter to such men whether they talk for a day or a year, if only they may hit upon that which is (172c1-173d)[3]

The beginning of the second part of the portrayal of the philosopher is marked by a clear break with what Socrates and Theodorus have done up till now. Socrates explicitly declares that from now on they should confine their account to the philosopher-leaders of the chorus (οἳ κορυφαίοι 173c7), for "why bother with the second-rate (the common sort, οἳ φαύλοι 173c7) specimens" of those preoccupying themselves with philosophy?

The portrait of the philosopher-leaders is quite unique, and for a moment it makes us wonder if we even want to be part of their group: (a) they grow up "without knowing the way to the market-place, or the whereabouts of the low courts, or the council-chambers, or any place of public assembly" (173d); (b) completely unaware of laws and decrees (173d); (c) uninterested in social functions, dinners, parties with flute girls (173d); (d) completely ignorant of and uninterested in the pedigree of their fellow citizens (174b); (e) unaware even of their own ignorance in these matters, for it is only their body that lives in the city, while their mind flies freely "throughout the universe, 'in the deeps beneath the earth' studying the geometry of planes, 'and in the heights above the heaven', studying astronomy, and tracking down by every path the entire nature of each whole among the things that are, never condescending to what lies near at hand" (173e);[4] (f) compared to stargazers (174a4), like Thales; (g) totally unaware of their next-door neighbor, yet constantly preoccupied to find out, what is a Human Being, what is Justice, what is the Good (174b, 175d), always eager to explore reality as a whole, while totally unaware of what lies at their feet and before their eyes, their clumsiness and lack of interest for trivial matters makes them an object of mockery for the many; (h) while good for nothing when confronted with menial tasks, they are neither discouraged by the judgment and derision of the many, nor do they envy their fellows anchored in contingent matters;

instead, they think of them as practicing "a dim and limited vision, an inability, through lack of education to take a steady view of the whole" (174e).[5]

By contrast to both philosophers of the chorus and to philosopher-leaders, the practical man of the law-courts has no leisure (172e); is not free (172e); knows lots about practical affairs, but is completely ignorant about the gods as well as about discourses that befit the life of gods and of happy men (175e-176a); thinks himself wise, but in reality is not (173a-b) and is ridiculous in any attempt to address truly philosophical questions (175d).

The interlocutors agree that, if the view here presented could convince everyone as it has convinced Theodorus, there would be more peace and less evil on earth, for even though evil cannot be fully eradicated from our world, it would nonetheless be reduced. This is why, Socrates concludes, "a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as much like God as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just and pious, with understanding." (176a-b)

2. WHY DOES PLATO CHOOSE TO INTRODUCE THE IMAGE OF THE PHILOSOPHER IN THIS DOUBLE-TIERED FASHION AS CHORUS AND LEADER THEREOF?

With this succinct summary of the text in front of our eyes, we now turn our attention to why Plato chooses to introduce the image of the philosopher in this double-tiered fashion and why do we need the philosopher-leader model at all when we also have God as ultimate ideal to follow. To answer these questions, we need to first look more closely at the general characterization of the activity of the philosopher, his object of investigation, who is part of the chorus and why, and what qualifies a philosopher-leader as such. Only after that will we be able to figure out the relation between the philosopher-leader of the chorus and God himself.

Plato's Socrates stresses the philosopher's preoccupation with questions regarding the essence of things: What is a Human Being? (174b), What is Justice? What is human happiness? (175c), and the holistic nature of his approach: the philosopher looks at the whole earth (174e4-5), looks always at the whole (εἰς τὸ πᾶν αεὶ βλέπειν 175a1-2), disdains the business of the city because he concentrates instead on seeking "in every way, the entire nature of each whole among the beings" (πάσαν πάντη φύσιν ερευνώμενη τῶν οντῶν ἑκάστου όλου, 174a1, an expression that reminds us of the dialectician's preoccupation with the whole in the *Phaedrus* 270c-d.). The investigation of these profound and difficult matters goes hand in hand with the pursuit of a life of justice and piety with understanding (δίκαιον και ὅσιον μετά φρονήσεως γενέσθαι 176b2). In fact, these two, pursuit of virtue and investigating the essence of things, are two sides of the same coin, two aspects of a truly philosophical life. To know the Good is for Plato's Socrates to do the Good, and, therefore, intellectual access to the Good and the divine sphere is a guarantee that this insight will be translated into practice and will transform one's daily life. Insight into the Good shapes our lives accordingly.[6]

In what sense do Socrates and Theodorus count as philosophers of the chorus? The initial portrait of the leisurely philosopher characterizes their joint approach in this

conversation (173b-d). Judging by his behavior in their earlier part of the conversation, Theodorus doesn't seem to be a philosopher in the true and heavy sense of the word, at least not according to Plato's standards: he is unable to realize that Protagoras' relativism would annihilate geometry as a universal science (169a1-5) and is conspicuously lazy about engaging in dialogue (146b3, 165a1-3). Nevertheless, Theodorus is a skilled geometer, with interests branching out into astronomy, arithmetic, and music (145d). In their exchange, Theodorus demonstrates that he can listen carefully to arguments and can be reflective on philosophical matters (179b6-9), is aware of philosophical directions (179d6-9) and able to criticize philosophical positions of the Heracliteans (180a3-6) and is even confident enough to correct Socrates on occasion (180b8-c1).[7] Moreover, in his current exchange with Socrates, Theodorus behaves like a freeman unconstrained by external masters or temporal boundaries, eager and genuinely interested in the distinction between the philosopher and the orator. At the end of this exchange, he says that he likes this kind of *logos* much more than arguments: "As a matter of fact, Socrates, I like listening to this kind of talk; it is easier for a man of my years to follow. Still, if you like, let us go back to the argument." (177c). Even so, Theodorus is only semi-philosophical here: for one thing, because he prefers *to listen* to Socrates talking, rather than himself making much of a positive contribution to the topic, and for another, because he misunderstands the philosophical way to relate to arguments. On his view "our arguments are our own, like slaves; each one must wait about for us, to be finished whenever we see fit" (173c). Socrates, on the other hand, is ready to follow the argument wherever it goes, and freely places himself in the service of *logos*, without thinking that this makes him any less free ("wherever the argument, like a wind, tends, there we must go" (*Rep.* 394d; Cf. *Phaedo* 107b); moreover, to keep himself safe from ever falling into misology, Socrates questions what is wrong with himself rather than distrusting valid arguments that he might have a hard time following (*Phaedo* 90e-91a).

Socrates is philosophical throughout the *Theaetetus*, as he is in every other Platonic dialogue, so there is no mystery as to why he is recognized as such in the digression. If anything, in his case we may wonder why he regards himself a mere philosopher of the chorus and not a leader thereof. Socrates' account of himself as midwife (149a-151b) as well as his active search for the nature of knowledge throughout the *Theaetetus* clearly display his philosophical nature: the leisure he has, the desire to hit upon the things that are, the constant preoccupation with τί ἔστί questions, the interest in the whole and not in small contingent matters.

What does it mean to say that Socrates along with Theaetetus belong to a chorus of philosophers? What are we to make of the fact that Plato envisions a multitude of philosophical minds, in fact, some quite unlike others, like Socrates' and Theodorus'? And how to conceive of a chorus of philosophers that is so vast that it includes, at one end people like Theodorus, who is only occasionally philosophical, and, at the other, thinkers like Socrates, whose exemplary life seems to propel him into a category beyond the chorus? How can they all pertain to one and the same chorus and perform in harmony, despite their divergent orientations? Besides, Socrates and Theodorus seem to be in a relatively large and valuable company in that chorus. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates discusses explicitly views

of thinkers like Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Melissus, and their respective followers on issues concerning rest and motion, Being and becoming (183b-184b). They too seem to belong to the philosophical chorus.

The idea of the possibility of a chorus of philosophers is not unique to the *Theaetetus*. In the *Sophist*, this idea is implicit in the Eleatic Stranger's talk about the earthborn Giants and the Friends of the Forms, each of these being internally harmonized groupings of thinkers, the former dragging everything down to the earth and to what can be grasped with the hands (246a-247e), the latter risking to go to the extreme of recognizing only what is, at the expense of becoming (248a-249d). In his imagined dialogue with each group, the Eleatic Stranger manages to harmonize each of them internally around the notion of Being as power (δυναμις) to act or to be acted upon, and thus succeeds to create the space for a possible dialogue between the two camps. In such dialogue, while both schools would adhere to a conception of Being as power to act or be acted upon, they would each understand the weight of this claim in different ways: materialists, true to their orientation, would continue to privilege becoming over Being, while Friends of the Forms would do the opposite, privileging Being over becoming. The Eleatic Stranger's contribution through casting their respective position in terms of δυναμις, whereby both schools recognize that we need both Being and becoming, stability and change, is to make it possible for them *to freely converse with one another*, to bring arguments in favor of their respective positions and defend their side as more potent than the alternative. The Stranger thus makes possible the emergence of choral harmony that does not annihilate the respective differences between the two orientations.[8]

In the *Phaedrus* we get glimpses of what the psychological and ontological reasons for a chorus of philosophers might be and why Plato welcomes this idea. Even though the *Phaedrus* remains vague on whether there is an intelligible Form of the soul, the dialogue suggests ways in which we can comprehensively analyze various types of soul by means of collections and divisions of Forms, given that each soul is knowable by reference to distinct character-types in imitation of one of the twelve gods, and to the objects that it takes as nourishment. Thus, when Socrates talks about the dialectical rhetorician's need to list all the possible kinds of souls (273d–e) we understand him to mean that the rhetorician will have to know how to determine the type of soul he is addressing while assessing it simultaneously in terms of (a) the cluster of intelligible Forms determining each temperamental character of the gods that are followed (one of twelve), (b) the type of life that the person has chosen to reflect their vocation (one of nine types), (c) the types of objects this soul desires, whether sensible or intelligible, and finally (d) the extent to which the soul is prone to recollect them. We can envision, for instance, an appetitive person whose soul is in complete turmoil for having chosen a contemplative life for which that soul is not equipped, or an Ares type misguidedly dedicating his life to philosophy instead of a military career, a rational type in full harmony for having chosen to pursue philosophy, and everything else in between. Along these lines, we can understand that among those choosing the vocation of philosophers some souls are followers of Zeus, others of Apollo, and others yet of Ares, and even those among philosophers following in the footsteps of the same god, say Zeus, succeed in varying degrees. The very possibility of there being a chorus

of philosophers seems to rely on the intrinsic diversity of the talents and inclinations of the various souls that embrace preoccupation with questions regarding the essence of things.

The instances mentioned above are only some of the numerous occasions when Plato explicitly has his characters allude to philosophical trends, or schools, groups of thinkers investigating Being. Philosophers belong to a chorus because the practice of philosophy is fundamentally dialogical and therefore communal. On several of these occasions Plato signals the internal diversity of the philosophical community comprising thinkers at opposite ends of the spectrum, like Parmenides and Heraclitus, and philosophical characters as distinct in their approaches as Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger, respectively. Thus, it makes sense that in the *Theaetetus* Plato would allow even Theodorus' inclusion in the chorus of philosophers, not so much as a committed philosopher, but more as a mathematician and astronomer who appreciates the leisure and the freedom that it brings its way, and who sometimes lingers thoughtfully while listening to philosophical discussions, even if not contributing much of his own original thought.[9] After all, the philosopher-leader after whom Theaetetus also takes is someone skilled at geometry and astronomy, yet someone who studies these in the most holistic and profound way:

> his mind […] pursues its winged way, as Pindar says, throughout the universe, 'in the depths beneath the earth', doing the geometry of planes', and in the heights above the heaven', doing astronomy, and tracking down by every path the entire nature of each whole among the things that are, never condescending to what lies near at hand. (173e)

It is a sign of inclusiveness on Plato's part to make room for such a vast array of individuals among the philosophers of the chorus. It will be the respective differences in the extents to which each of them resembles (becomes like) God that will make all the difference in terms of how the various thinkers in the chorus fare.

Turning now to the philosopher-leader of the chorus, first we need to try to clarify what type of character we are looking at. Here is the opening characterization of his outlandish nature:

> To begin with (πρῶτον μὲν) the philosopher grows up without knowing the way to the marketplace, or the whereabouts of the law courts or the council-chambers or any other place of public assembly. [Furthermore, δέ d3] laws and decrees, published orally or in writing, are things he never sees or hears. [Also, δέ d4] the scrambling of political cliques for office, social functions, dinners, parties with flute-girls – such doings never enter his head even in a dream. [Moreover, δὲ d6] so with questions of birth – he has no more idea whether a fellow citizen is highborn or humble, or whether he has inherited some taint from his forbears, male or female, than he has of the number of pints in the sea as they say (additions in square backets are mine, 173c-e)

It is hard to find all these four ways of detachment, clumsiness and aloofness taken literally present in any real flesh and blood living being, however profound a thinker this person might be. I suggest that the figure of the philosopher-leader here described is an archetype with no corresponding match in reality, an abstraction, a regulative idea of what a philosopher that has become as like God

as possible would be like, and not a concrete fellow human being.[10] In other words, while the members of the chorus are flesh and blood individual thinkers, as divergent as Socrates and Theodorus, Parmenides and Heraclitus, Pythagoras and thinkers like Anaxagoras or Empedocles, the philosopher-leader is an abstraction that illustrates what a philosopher's life looks like once he has become as godlike as humanly possible. The philosopher leader's excessive clumsiness and aloofness as well as his absolute detachment from the concrete landscape of politics show that we are not talking about a real person, but rather an abstraction in a philosopher's mind. As a blueprint or archetype for philosophers, he is naturally depicted in most abstract terms. He cannot be partisan of one philosophical orientation or another, and he transcends all spatial and temporal connotations.[11]

If this interpretation is correct, we can make sense of the numerous discrepancies between the Socrates we encounter in Plato's dialogues and the purely aloof philosopher-leader. The purely aloof philosopher-leader is the abstract idea that Socrates, along with every other philosopher of the chorus, have in mind as they aspire to become as godlike as possible. As lover of wisdom, the philosopher has an erotic intellect, in constant aspiration to become as like God as possible.[12] What it would be like to fulfill this aspiration can be imagined in the abstract image of the philosopher-leader of the chorus.

Plato's choice to have this two-tiered introduction of the philosopher is motivated at once by (a) the dramatic context of the conversation, (b) the analogy with the chorus and leader of Greek tragedies, and (c) metaphysical reasons.

To begin with, the chorus and leader image fits the dramatic context of the *Theaetetus*. Socrates is thereby exhorting and encouraging Theodorus to keep aspiring towards a loftier way of doing geometry, astronomy, and music – for there is, on the one hand, the geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music of the many and, on the other, the geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and harmony of the philosophers (*Republic* 525a-531c, *Philebus* 56d-57e). With this he hopes to win over at once Theodorus and his student, Theaetetus, helping their conversion towards a real philosophical mindset in dealing with mathematics.

There is however, even more to the significance of this double-tiered description of the philosopher, first, insofar as Plato chooses specifically the relation between chorus members and leader thereof, as opposed to any other sort of leadership relation, such as for instance that between an army and its general, a *polis* and its statesman, etc.; and secondly, insofar as this double tiered portrayal of the philosopher must be also situated in relation to the ultimate ideal of the God. In what follows I develop my thoughts on these two aspects.

It is not at all accidental that Plato chooses to talk about a "chorus" of philosophers and its leader rather than any random idea of a community, *polis*, or army and its statesman or general. The dynamic at play between leader and lead in the respective cases is very different. On the one hand, as long as we take this to be representative of a dramatic Greek chorus staging a play, we have in the leader a voice that speaks for the whole chorus expressing the chorus' own judgment and interpretation of the action unfolding on stage, on the other, we have a ruler who keeps the people he governs accountable to following clearly set rules, laws, and instructions.[13]

As we lean more closely into the image of the dramatic chorus, we see how close and intertwined the involvement of the chorus is in the action unfolding on stage – a most

suitable image for how Plato's Socrates would understand his own involvement as a philosopher in the city. As Bacon writes:

> In the same way that members of a real-life chorus were part of the event in Greek society, the members of a stage chorus are not just spectators or witnesses but actors, part of the onstage event. Although to us a chorus may seem an artificial stage convention, they represent the social reality I have been describing, that concerned group that comes together to respond to an event of critical importance. When the event is of paramount concern to the chorus members they become principal actors, as in Aeschylus' Suppliants and Eumenides and Euripides' Suppliants. Their role depends on their identity and the nature of the event. They have as many and as varied functions on stage as choruses had in real life. Choral participation in dramatic action ranges from mere observation and sympathetic comment to necessary ritual gesture and direct involvement as important or principal actors. Ritual gestures, which are attempts to influence the action by involving the gods, are one of the most frequent forms of choral action. But whatever the nature of their participation, all dramatic choruses are deeply involved, in the sense that their attitudes or lives will be permanently affected by the outcome of the action. They are present, as they would be in daily life, because they are involved. A choral performance is an action, a response to a significant event, and in some way integral to that event. (Bacon, 1994, 17-18).

In addition to commenting on the moral or immoral character of the situation at hand, the Greek dramatic chorus is also charged with expressing to the audience what the main characters could not say, their hidden fears and secrets, which looks remarkably similar to the role ascribed to a philosopher like Socrates in the city:

> [T]hrough choral dance and song, the transitory anguish of individuals is placed in a larger context and achieves the coherence that unites the Athenian audience, and all subsequent audiences, in assimilating the many-sided implications of the event and integrating them into their experience (Bacon, 1994, 20).

Furthermore, since partaking of the chorus was a civic duty for Athenian citizens, by choosing this image Plato may want to suggest that joining the philosophers' chorus is itself a civic duty for those who can partake of it. Even the fact that in dramatic staging, members of the chorus enter during the first choral song from two entrance ramps (παροδοι) on the opposite sides of the orchestra and remain for the entire performance, matches what I described above as internal diversity and divergence of views pertaining to members of the philosophical chorus.

In the *Laws* Plato has the Athenian Stranger talk extensively about the dramatic chorus as a principal means of education as well as medium through which mortals can relate to the gods and share with each other the values of their society (*Laws* 653c-654b, and 672e). Hence, it is not surprising that in the *Theaetetus* Plato chooses to depict philosophers as members of a chorus. Plato's philosopher has a central civic role to play insofar as his mission is to explore and discuss moral virtue and its place in the social and political community, just as Socrates has been doing throughout

his life. In so doing, the philosopher secures the community's connection to the divine. A philosopher is best equipped for this role precisely because he explores the essences of things and is genuinely humble about his knowledge. The dual aspect of *phronesis,* at once theoretical and practical, justifies the philosopher's active role in the city. Growing in likeness to the divine does not mean running away from responsibilities here and now, but rather encourages us to live with full responsibility a life of justice and piety with understanding (176b2).[14]

Metaphysically speaking, the image of a chorus gathered around its leader trying to emulate God as much as possible reminds us of the way in which in the *Timaeus* the planets and the starts dance around the body of the universe and are thus engaged in motions regulated by the World Soul (*Timaeus* 36d-39d). The 'choir' resembles the planets and stars (the 'lesser gods' in the *Timaeus*) circling around in a movement that organizes the physical world.[15] Plato hints at this cosmic reading when saying that the philosopher studies "in every way, the entire nature of each whole among the beings" (πάσαν πάντη φύσιν ερευνώμενη τῶν οντῶν ἑκάστου όλου, 173e6-174a1 " and " his mind […] pursues its winged way, as Pindar says, throughout the universe, 'in the depths beneath the earth', doing the geometry of planes', and in the heights above the heaven', doing astronomy, and tracking down by every path the entire nature of each whole among the things that are, never condescending to what lies near at hand." (173e). Accordingly, philosophers are called to both follow the divine (i.e. the World Soul, the lower deities, the Demiurge) and to help organize the world around them. Philosophers are like divine planets wandering in their circuits both in the world of men and in the cosmos at large, becoming as Godlike as possible. They should, if permitted, apply laws as universals that structure society, just as the planets apply physical laws that structure the world around us. However, unlike the planets, actual philosophers also wobble and are subject to possible corruption. Correspondingly then, becoming like God is for us an imperative for a whole lifetime, and not some sort of milestone achievable once and for all. As long as our soul is embodied, there remains a certain distance between us and the truth we seek, and even the best among philosophers can only come most near to it (*Phaedo* 65e4, 67a3).

3. DOES THE IDEAL OF GODLIKENESS RENDER THE ABSTRACT IMAGE OF THE PHILOSOPHER-LEADER REDUNDANT?

If the ultimate model to imitate is God, do we still need the figure of the philosopher-leader? The concern here is that the abstract idealized figure of the philosopher leader might be redundant. Here is why I believe it is not: The image of God is meant as ultimate aspiration for us all insofar as we are human beings, while the abstract version of the philosopher leader helps specifically philosophers to envision what becoming as like God as possible means for them as philosophers.

Note that becoming like God is introduced as task and desirable aim for any and all human beings, not only for philosophers.[16] For it is on account of (διό) the inevitability of evil haunting our earthly abode, that Socrates claims that one "should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven and escape means becoming as like God as possible; and a man

becomes like God when he becomes just and pious with understanding." (ὅμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον και ὅσιον μετά φρονήσεως γενέσθαι 176b2-3). Hence, it is human beings at large that are summoned to embark on this journey; being human just is to be response-able to the call to enlighten ourselves and become as godlike as we can. Socrates continues by acknowledging the difficulty of persuading men generally (οὐ πάνυ τι ῥάδιον πεῖσαι 176b3) that we are called to this high a task, and that the reason why we ought to become godlike by practicing virtue should not be the usually supposed reasons of escaping bad reputation and gaining a good one instead (176b4-7). This call to godlikeness concerns us all, philosophers and non-philosophers alike insofar as we are human. This does not mean that Plato would want all people to become philosophers, but rather that, in whatever station of life they are, given their distinctive natures, talents, and education, they ought to practice virtue to the highest extent they are capable of. *Theaetetus* 176c-d clearly indicates that Plato envisions a large array and various levels of accomplishment and lack thereof, everything between "genuine wisdom and goodness" (σοφία και ἀρετή ἀλετηινή 176c4-5) and complete "folly and wickedness" (ἄγνοία ἄμαθία και κακία έναργής 176c5). It is in the degree to which one can become as just as it is possible for a human being to be that we can determine whether one is a truly capable man (ἄλεθῶς δεινότης ἄνδρὸς 176c3) or a man of nothing and a nonentity (οὐδενία τε καὶ ἄνανδρία 176c4). Socrates is clearly alluding to the vast range of common, popular understanding of wisdom and justice, as he mentions explicitly the decayed versions thereof that we encounter in those eager for political power or in those whose lives are fully absorbed by manual work. What they practice becomes its own punishment, as the ignorance they express ends up fixing them firmly in the state whereby their entire life manifests deepest unhappiness (176d-177a). These considerations are about a whole life lived a certain way or another, not about moments of glory achieved here and there (177a-b). In other words, Socrates' concern here is not with scoring high on occasion, but rather with cultivating a life of virtue, whereby one practices what he preaches day in day out, as best as he can, even while knowing that their practice will always fall short of the ideal. Socrates offers this image to Theodorus in the hope of winning him over to philosophy. The image drawn illustrates how, in its ultimate consequences, Protagoras' teaching cripples his followers' souls, while philosophy frees souls and leads them to a life of virtue and happiness.[17]

4. WHY DOES PLATO THINK IT WELCOME OR INDEED NECESSARY TO PROVIDE THIS SKETCH OF WHAT BECOMING LIKE GOD MEANS FOR PHILOSOPHERS?

I argued so far that, since godlikeness is called for from us all, the image of the philosopher-leader depicts what becoming godlike looks like specifically for the philosopher. Why does Plato think it welcome or indeed necessary to provide this sketch of what becoming like God means for philosophers? This question invites a good amount of speculation, but I think we can keep the speculative character of a response in check from randomness, if we look around at other dialogues connected with the *Theaetetus* or at least belonging to the same relatively late

period as it does. It is quite plausible that this move to offering some sort of midway between God and the real life philosopher is rooted in Plato's realization that his middle dialogues' generic injunction that we should imitate the Forms or partake of the Good remains vague and uninformative as long as it is not anchored in some clearer guidelines for how this can be done or at least in some descriptive images of what that might look like. The group of dialogues typically accepted as late modulate this and specify in more concrete terms and images what such emulation of the Forms might look like. I believe that the presence of the philosopher-leader of the chorus abstraction is part and parcel with such attempts throughout Plato's late dialogues to convey some of these intermediary steps meant to guide our practice of virtue as purification. In what follows I'll reflect on just one of the most obvious examples that occurs in the *Statesman*.[18]

The *Statesman* is the third installment in the trilogy that has the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* as its prequels. Early on in that dialogue, the Stranger offers the myth of cosmic reversal.[19] According to this story, a Demiurge is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the universe, during the two ages, of Cronus and of Zeus, respectively. The universe is said to be a living being, having a soul and a body harmoniously conjoined in a display of organic order and beauty (269c). This constitution of the universe reflects its composition from wisdom (269d1) and necessity (269d3). Having a body, the universe cannot display the constancy of the most divine things that have served as its model, yet being as close as possible to the divine, it deviates from the perfect circular motion by the smallest possible variation, which consists of rotating at times in reverse direction (269d-270a). The opposition of the two directions of motion results from the two forces at play: wisdom and necessity. The universe oscillates between the direct governance of God and being left on its own. The age guided by the Demiurge is the age of Cronus, the other one is the age of Zeus. The Demiurge, responsible for fashioning the universe and for protecting it from complete destruction, is a third god, identifiable neither with Cronus, nor with Zeus, who is interweaving the opposite threads of motion that correspond to these two ages.[20]

The myth does not explicitly mention intelligible Forms (εἰδη), but it alludes to something like intelligible Forms under the designation 'the most divine things of all' (τοίς παντοίς θειωτατοις), described as 'remaining permanently in the same state and condition' (269d5-6). They serve as the model that the Demiurge imitates in fashioning our world. Due to its share in body, the universe must partake of some change, yet on account of its likeness to its model, the smallest variation of movement, that of reverse rotation (269e). The imperfections and limitations of the universe and of all the particulars inhabiting it are due to the preexistent innate desires (272e) associated with the matter that the Demiurge used in fashioning a world of many fine things and occasional evils (273c). The Cronus-Zeus alternating cycles illustrate the presence both of order and of the inherent tendency towards disintegration.

We don't need to get into any more detail about the story or the rest of the *Statesman* to realize that here too, we are faced with a similar question as in the *Theaetetus:* which one is the model that the statesman ought to follow? Is it the Demiurge? Or is it the Forms? Of course, the ultimate model to follow are and remain the Forms, but to grasp what it means for a flesh and blood statesman to imi-

tate the Forms, we need some intermediary paradigms. The Demiurge serves that function here, as he is successively characterized as a steersman (273c), a father (273b), a master-builder delivering instructions to lower deities (274a), a shepherd (271d-e, 273c), a doctor, and a moral reformer dealing with cosmic maladies and imbalance (273d-e). And notice that there are lower deities too, and they too serve as stepping-stone model for us and for the statesman, insofar as they are obedient to instructions received from the Demiurge. The multiplicity of images united in the persona of the Demiurge suggests their possible coexistence in the true statesman as well. Indeed, the statesman in due course is likened to a teacher of music or harmony (304a-d), a doctor or a gymnastic trainer (295c-d, 297e 298e), a shepherd (294e, 295e), a steersman (297a, 297e-298e), a weaver (305e-311c), and a moral reformer in the name of justice and happiness (306a-311c).

While neither the Age of Cronos, nor that of Zeus is ideal, their juxtaposition encourages us to conceive of the ideal statesman as borrowing elements from each and weaving them together: order and leisure from the age of Cronus and responsibility and autonomy from the age of Zeus. It would also combine some of the softness and passivity of the former with the boldness and autonomy of the latter. Not surprisingly, then, at the dialogue's end, the statesman emerges as someone who weaves together courage and self-control in the souls of the citizens that he governs. The myth prefigures a problem in the later scenario, the difficulty of combining elements that seem opposed to each other. The statesman can reconcile these through understanding a series of factors: the difference between virtue proper and civic virtue, the importance of education and the need to eliminate the incorrigible elements (308c-e), the priority of the divine bond of true opinion over the human bond of marriage (310a, e). The statesman thus realizes that courage and moderation are opposed only in their excessive or deficient manifestations rather than in their measured articulations. The human bond of marriage is not external coercion of opposites since it comes into play *only after* the souls of citizens have been educated and bound by shared opinions about the fine, the just, and good, that is, after the divine bond has been secured (309c, 310a, e). The marriage of the moderate with the courageous is the natural consequence of what individuals seek for their own flourishing.

Once we see the care for detail that Plato places on offering in the persona of the Demiurge a blueprint for the statesman to follow for him to be actually imitating "the most divine things of all' (269d), we might think that this is enough. But wait, the story of these interposed mediating models is far from over. Between the Demiurge and the statesman in flesh and blood Plato's Stranger interpolates yet another model: the true statesman who rules on account of *episteme,* and whose wisdom exceeds the governance by laws.

The argument of *Statesman* 292b-301e takes the following trajectory: (a) the Stranger argues for the absolute superiority of rule by knowledge (ἔπιστέμη) (b) he then explains why and how rule by law comes about; (c) the Stranger and Young Socrates realize that, though it is, absolutely speaking, only a second best (δεύτερος πλους) falling short of rule by episteme, *rule of* law is for us the very best that we can count on; (d) however, it is important not to confuse the law with the absolutely best, but rather realize humbly that, even maintaining over time a just regime ruled by laws requires that the lawmakers keep

their gaze constantly on the absolutely best rule by episteme, and never give up aspiring towards that.

Knowledge of statesmanship is the ultimate criterion, while all other considerations, whether he rules with laws or lawlessly, whether the rule is by one, or few, or many, even whether the ruler is accepted willingly or by force by the people – all these are secondary or irrelevant by comparison (292b-d). To make his case, the Stranger draws an analogy with the physician: when he cures by art, it does not matter whether he does so with or without the consent of his patients, causing his patients pain, or by using written rules or not, as long as he preserves his patients and improves their condition (293b-c). Similarly, he argues, the right form of government is that in which rulers are discovered to be truly possessed of knowledge, whether they rule with laws or without them, over willing or unwilling subjects, rich or poor. As long as the statesman acts on the basis of knowledge and of what is just, preserving the state and making it better, his rule is the correct form of government (293d-e).

Knowledge of statesmanship presupposes sensitivity to due measure regarding everything from the rightful content and length of speeches (mythical and dialectical ones), to discerning the characters of the citizens (306a-311c), the proper ways of interweaving complementary aspects of character, sensitivity to the right time/opportunity (καιρός) for action in rhetoric, generalship, and the art of the judge, and penetrating insight into the Good which allows the statesman to imitate the Demiurgic harmonization of a κόσμος that is good and beautiful (269c-274e). It is by virtue of such knowledge that the statesman makes the community better than it was so far as he can and understands temperance and courage both in themselves and in their manifestation in the souls of the citizens (306a-311c). The statesman can discriminate between the true statesman and the charlatans, and between the true philosopher and the sophists; is inquisitive, non-dogmatic, and invites questioning from others, always ready to respond the various challenges and to give an account of himself. He is flexible and ready to accommodate changes in the circumstances, sensitive to the distinction between perceptible likenesses and verbal imitations (277a-c, 285d-286b) knows the difference between opinion and knowledge; often misunderstood or simply not understood by the masses, being too subtle for them, his actions end up easily confused with complete anarchy or charlatan imitation.

Compared with this, the rule of law is far from ideal because the law speaks only to the general/class, not to individuals, ignoring differences between individuals and shifting circumstances (294b-295b). The greatest danger occurs when the many believe that a set of laws can be equal in value to a statesman's knowledge, i.e. that they can fully and exhaustively codify a statesman's wisdom into a set of laws that could not be misused. It is then because they misunderstand the true status of the laws and their relative value that they would oppose any inquiry into them. In other words, as long as lawmakers understand the rule of law as a second-best they keep attention focused on an absolutely best. When, on the contrary, they delude themselves into thinking that the laws can fully capture the wisdom of a statesman, they become dogmatic and closed off.

The epistemic statesman here envisioned is not so much a real person in flesh and blood, as more of a regulative ideal: he is supposed to be wise and good (ὅ σοφός και αγαστός άνερ 296e, 297a7-b1, cf. Marquez, 2012, 360). Even

philosophers are not yet wise, but merely lovers of wisdom. In the here and now real world that we live in, the statesman is at best some sort of philosopher with deep love of wisdom, not someone already wise. Similar to the image of the philosopher-leader of the chorus in the *Theaetetus*, the blueprint of a statesman who rules on account of *episteme* is equally a regulative idea, and not an identifiable flesh and blood character, for a couple of reasons. For one, only someone who is already of that stature could recognize an epistemic statesman, while others could be easily deceived; and since *episteme* is so rare, even if a handful would have it and would even recognize one another as possessing it, it would be impossible to convince the mass of citizens to subject themselves to him. For another, even if the citizens could somehow be convinced to subject to the wise rule of an epistemic statesman on one occasion, it would not be desirable, for the next time around, someone who merely pretends to have *episteme* while lacking it could promote himself as such a leader and would take the city to its ruins.

The epistemic statesman remains however the immediate model that a good government by laws is tasked to follow. Just as in the *Theaetetus*, Plato does not rule out in principle the possibility that someday a real-life philosopher leader of the chorus looking just like the idealization here portrayed might come about, he doesn't rule out that an *epistemic* statesman in flesh and blood exactly like this model could or will ever come about. What he is mainly interested in though is to articulate some intermediary steps between the here and now and the ultimate ideals of Justice and Goodness, such as to offer us some sort of roadmap or scaffolding to help us navigate our calling to become as like the God and like the Forms as possible for human beings.

CONCLUSION

To conclude then, the *Theaetetus*' depiction of the philosopher in this double tiered fashion as chorus member and philosopher leader gives Plato the opportunity to reflect on several aspects, such as the internal diversity and richness of the philosophical tribe, the need to model what becoming as godlike as possible looks like for a philosopher specifically, the need to modulate the ideal and to provide intermediary paradigms that can somehow concretize the task for us. Furthermore, this stratified and diverse image of the chorus of philosophers, gives Plato himself the opportunity to reflect on how he communes with and how he takes distance from his own teacher, Socrates.

If the above interpretation is correct, far from recanting his high-flown metaphysic of the middle dialogues, Plato's late dialogues provide further grounding and concretization for those high-flown metaphysical ideals. Yet this all is not done at the price of advocating the philosopher's flight away from responsibilities in the city, but rather by virtue of indicating in ever more concrete steps and images how the philosopher instantiates the Good and the Just in this life here and now.

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ENDNOTES

1 For a complete list of discrepancies between Socrates and the philosopher-leader here depicted see Sandra Peterson, 2011, 61-62. Peterson also offers a good survey of textual evidence from Plato's early dialogues' portrayals of Socrates that clearly clash with the image of the detached philosopher-leader (62-66). The solution I offer to understanding these discrepancies in this paper differs from the one she proposes.

2 For a strong defense of the view that the referents of these objects are typical Platonic Forms, see Maffi, 2019, 147-60.

3 Unless otherwise specified, translations from the Theaetetus are M. Levett's.

4 It is worth noting that geometry and astronomy are the very subjects taught by Theodorus, yet in the philosopher-leader's approach these subjects are studied more holistically than Theodorus has been

approaching them: searching in every way for every nature of each whole of the things that are (πάσαν πάντη φύσιν ερευνώμενη τῶν οντῶν ἑκάστου όλου, 173e6-174a1).

5 As Bossi notes, some of these features are clearly echoed also in the portrait of the philosopher voiced in the opening of the *Sophist* (216c2-d2), where philosophers too "visit the cities" like gods do, behold from above the life of these below, while the ignorant judge them as of no worth (Bossi, 2022, 186).

6 For more on this view see Polanski, 1992, 145, Bossi, 2022. As Larsen rightly puts it, the important contrast here is between the philosophical and the political life as typically understood, and not simply between the life of contemplation and that of action, if only because, for Plato, theory always translates into practice, for to him to know the Good is to do the Good (Larsen, 2019, 17).

7 I am grateful to George Rudebusch for drawing to my attention these instances as evidence for Theodorus' openness to philosophical thinking. For more on Theodorus' character see Blondel, 2002, 278-283.

8 This characterization raises the question of whether the Stranger himself is member of the chorus or is rather a philosopher-leader of the chorus. Rudebusch adopts the latter view, arguing that that philosopher leaders are themselves flesh and blood characters, and figures like the Eleatic Stranger, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Thales etc. belong to that class. For reasons that will become clear later, I take a different route, by situating the Stranger, Heraclitus, Parmenides etc., along with the rest of flesh and blood thinkers within the vast chorus and reserving the position of philosopher-leader of the chorus to a generic idealized abstract figure.

9 I take the insistence on the "wholeness" of the philosophical chorus indicative especially of its vastness and diversity. "What about our own set, τοὺς δὲ τοῦ ἥμετέρου χοροῦ 173b4)?; "we who move in such circles", or better, we who belong to our sort of chorus, οἳ ἐν τῷ τοιῶδε χορεθύοντες 173c1-2) meaning the whole philosophical tribe, and not just one sect of philosophy to which both Socrates and Theodorus belong. As such, it certainly allows a hierarchical composition, some philosophers like Parmenides, Heraclitus, Pythagoras are much better than their followers, and certainly better than Theodorus. Just as among the "chorus" or network of Forms some are greater kinds than others, and the Good is greatest of them all, so too, this comprehensive chorus of philosophers includes all thinkers who recognize the value of leisure and dedicate their lives to the pursuit of wisdom and justice.

10 This view has been defended also by Dorter, 1994, 88, Sedley, 2004, 65-74, Blondel, 2002, 289-293. That Thales is explicitly named in this context insofar as, being so absorbed in abstract reflections of astronomy he fell into a well (174a4-5), and therefore has some share of the detachment characteristic of the philosopher leader, is not sufficient argument for saying that Plato intends us to take Thales to be a/the philosopher-leader of the chorus. Any given real flesh and blood philosopher of the chorus might well be so detached from particularities that he'd be a fair illustration of a philosopher leader in one or two or three respects, but to argue that one embodies the philosopher leader of the chorus literally would require evidence of aloofness in all the respects that this character has.

11 The philosopher-leader here described in relation to the philosophers of the chorus does not seem to be someone who relates to the chorus the way a conductor relates to the orchestra. For a particular conductor is always assigned to one chorus/orchestra and cannot lead several orchestral groups at the same time. The philosopher-leader here envisioned, on the other hand, is not leader of one chorus of philosophers, say followers of Heraclitus or followers of Parmenides, but rather leader of an all-encompassing chorus of philosophers. There is, nevertheless, one difficulty for the interpretation I propose here, namely the fact that the philosopher-leaders are referred to in the plural, as οἳ κορμφαίοι, 173c6-7, and not in the singular, and I admit I don't have a fully satisfactory solution to it.

12 For an insightful account of the *Theaetetus* Digression that links the image of the philosopher here portrayed with the onto-epistemological background of the middle dialogues and argues convincingly about the inherent limitations of the knowledge achievable by the real-life philosopher, see Maffi, 2019,147-60. It is along these lines that I understand German's comments: "Socrates can be aware that there is a god's eye perspective, one that is complete and synoptic where the human perspective is partial and fractured, and this awareness is a kind of liberation achieved this side of the grave. However, it is not achieved by escaping or erasing the limits of our mortal nature. Throughout the dialogues, Socrates' consistent recourse to dream, image, myth, and hearsay in conveying his thinking about the highest topics is evidence that the philosopher cannot completely jettison his partial perspective and encompass or assimilate himself to the whole in thought. The truth does not set Socrates free in that sense. Nevertheless, we have seen that Socrates' dream-like knowledge involves some comprehension of the reasons why this is so and must always remain so. It can do this only if it is expressing, in the distorted medium of human perspective, at least something of what would be visible from a vantage point that is free of those distortions. The Digression is a deliberate exaggeration, then, but not a lie." (German, 2017, 639).

13 The discrepancy between the two types of dynamics at play tells against the attempt to identify the Eleatic Stranger with the philosopher-leader,

and more in favor of reserving the image of the philosopher leader as intended abstract ideal. For the Stranger behaves in relation to his interlocutors less like a leader of the chorus in relation to the members of the chorus, and more like a general that guides his battalion on a road he's travelled before and instructs his battalion what to do when.

14 For more on this view see Annas, 1999, Sedley, 1999, Larsen, 2019 24-25, Armstrong, 2004, German, 2017.

15 I am grateful to Dana Miller for orienting my reading of the image of the chorus in the direction of the *Timaeus*.

16 For an insightful account of the ideal of godlikeness across various Platonic dialogues, see Armstrong, 2004.

17 Socrates' protreptic speeches intended to attract Socrates' interlocutors towards the philosophical life. As Larsen suggests, such speeches use images, arguments and analogies tailored each time to appeal to the specific interlocutors. "as we have seen, the picture of philosophy emerging from the digression, focused as it is on contemplation, seems partly tailored to Theodorus. But such a strategy is not unique to the Theaetetus. In the *Phaedrus*, philosophy is presented as the ultimate foundation of rhetoric (see 259e4-6, 260e5-261a5, 262c1-3, 269e4-270c2) to the rhetorically oriented *Phaedrus* (228a5-c5), in the *Republic* the philosopher is presented as the ultimate ruler to the politically oriented Glaucon and Adeimantus." Larsen, 2019, 21.

18 A similar case could be made about the *Timaeus*, where, while the ultimate object to imitate remains the Good and with it the eternal model of the Animal, we are offered in turn the Demiurge, the secondary gods, the World Soul as models to follow. See for instance, Armstrong, 2004, Druart, 1999.

19 I offer a detailed account of the metaphysical model hidden behind the vail of myth and metaphor in Ionescu, 2014, Ancient Philosophy 34, 29-46.

20 Though scholars have taken the Demiurge to be identical with Cronus, several factors suggest otherwise. First, the craftsman that puts the universe together and preserves it from complete destruction cannot be either Cronus or Zeus, for while the events in the reigns of the two Olympian gods repeat themselves cyclically, the fashioning of the universe is a unique non-repeatable act. Second, at 272e-273e we are told that the steersman of the universe retreats to his post when the universe is left on its own. The steersman cannot be Cronus, for Cronus has no role whatsoever during the age of Zeus, while the steersman from his retreat readily intervenes during the age of Zeus to prevent the threatened dis- integration of the universe. Thus, the Demiurge never actually leaves the scene (cf. Dorter, 1994, 193-194, Brisson, 2000, 181-182, Márquez, 2012, 159). Third, if Cronus were identical with the Demiurge, we would expect Zeus to be just as much in charge of the universe in his age as Cronus is during his age. But this undermines the idea of a cycle during which the universe is left to rotate on its own without much divine intervention. The Demiurge as a third god allows the universe left on its own in the reign of Zeus, for we then regard Cronus and Zeus not so much as steersmen, but rather as symbols of the kind of life available in each age.