

Article

# Anamnesis and the Silent Narrator in Plato and John

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**Abstract:** The Gospel of John is often compared to the dialogues of Plato by those who connect Johannine theology and Platonic philosophy. The comparison operates on the level of ideas. The present paper does not ignore issues of theology and philosophy but grounds a comparison of John and Plato first and foremost on the literary level. In several key places in John 1, 3, and 14, the Johannine narrator recedes from view and is unexpectedly silent where one would expect a narrator's comment to organize the conversations and interactions between characters in John. Plato also renders the voice of the narrator silent in a dialogue like the *Theaetetus*. This paper argues that John and Plato both suppress the narrator's voice in order to further their anamnestic efforts and to make later generations not only readers but participants in their original conversations.

**Keywords:** narrator; Anamnesis; mimesis; Diegesis; Theaetetus; genre

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The Gospel of John is not quite like the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John was seen to be distinct from the other canonical Gospels in various ways, even in the earliest Christian centuries. Clement of Alexandria, for example, distinguished John from the others by labeling John as the "Spiritual Gospel" ([1], 6.14.17) His sentiment is echoed by several other ancient commentators, as when Gregory of Nazianzus describes the special status of John by saying,

Matthew wrote the marvels of Christ for the Hebrews,  
Mark for Italy, Luke for Achaia,  
But John, the great herald, the heaven-wanderer  
Wrote for all.

(*Carmina dogmatica*, 1.12.6–9, trans. in [2])

This ancient assessment is echoed by modern students of John. Even among scholars who try to coordinate John closely with the Synoptic Gospels, there is a general consensus among interpreters that we must "let John be John" [3]. The canonical Gospels share more in common with each other than any of them does with non-canonical Gospels, but within this common Gospel family, the Gospel of John is not quite like the other Gospels.

In a volume such as the present one, it would be convenient to argue that the special character of the Fourth Gospel results from the influence of Platonic ideas. One is rightly tempted to see John as a "platonic" Gospel. In Book 7 of the *Confessions*, no less an authority than Augustine of Hippo lists several points of contact between the books of the Platonists and the Johannine Prologue. Modern scholars follow the lead of Augustine. Over 50 years ago, C. H. Dodd explored several connections between the Gospel of John and the traditions of Platonic philosophy. He argued that the Fourth Gospel should be read not only in concert with Plato himself, but also with Middle Platonists such as Philo and Plutarch, and the religious Platonism that animates the Hermetic corpus [4]. More recent scholars such as Harold Attridge [5] and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold [6] have seen further affinities between the theological artistry of John and the works of Philo and Plutarch. Such work is of great value

and provides much insight into the form and content of the Fourth Gospel. All of this work, ancient and modern, suggests that we might identify John's unique character as being especially Platonic. This identification would be wrong, though. Augustine himself explains the error of this position. After cataloging a long and detailed list of similarities between John and Plato, Augustine dramatically announces an irreconcilable difference between the two. He says of the writings of Plato, "But that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, I did not read there" (*Confessions*, 7.9; trans. in [4]). If John is not quite like the other canonical Gospels, neither is John easily assimilated to Plato. Comparison also involves contrast, and any comparison of John with other literature must begin by recognizing that John borrows from many places to fill out the portrait of Jesus that he presents, but he imitates and reproduces nothing exactly. Every item of raw material, no matter its point of origin, is put to the service of John's particular description of Jesus as the Word made flesh [7].

However, if Augustine is correct in claiming that John's unique theological vision distances him from Plato and the Platonists, he is also correct in seeing the points of similarity between John and Plato in the first place. The present paper will explore similarities between John and the Platonic tradition as well—but in a quite different fashion. This paper will focus not on theological but on literary issues. A few different matters will receive attention, but the first, and primary, concern is the surprising role of the narrator in both Plato and John. This may seem like a surprisingly minor point of comparison, but I will argue that no small insight can be gained from comparing John and Plato in their respective uses of the narrator's voice.

Like Plato in the case of Socrates, John presents a written portrait of Jesus for later generations. However, in presenting these portraits, John and Plato both problematize the role of the narrator. Put more clearly, the narrator's voice in several key places falls silent. Both Plato and John silence their narrators and seem to do so for similar reasons. For example, Plato's *Theaetetus* informs its readers at the outset that no narrator's voice will be heard in this dialogue. Euclid opens the text by explaining that he will relate a conversation with Socrates, but that he will remove the conversational markers. He will suppress the voice of the narrator. Euclid says,

Now in order that the explanatory words between the speeches might not be annoying...such as "and I said," or "and I remarked," ...I omitted all that sort of thing and represented Socrates himself as talking with them" (143C; trans. in [8]).

In several key places in the Fourth Gospel the narrator's voice is also suddenly and surprisingly silent, giving the Gospel a "dramatic" effect. The circumstances cited most often occur at John 3:13–21 and 3:31–36. In these verses, the narrator disappears, and the Gospel fails to make it clear who is speaking, or whether the speaker has changed when a new block of speech begins. Does Jesus continue speaking? Or, is it now John the Baptist? The matter is not plain because no statement such as "Jesus said" accompanies the dialogue. The same silence is heard in John 1:19–22 and John 14:31. I have studied this phenomenon in another publication in order to determine how much the Johannine treatment of the narrator is similar to the procedures of ancient historiography and drama [9]. The present paper is designed to extend that previous research by bringing evidence from Plato to bear on the discussion. By reading John in conversation with texts such as the *Theaetetus* of Plato, I believe that we can shed new light on the relationship between theological content and narrative form in the Gospel of John.

The best place to begin discussing the role of the narrator in John and Plato is found in a passage in Plato's *Republic* where Socrates famously defines three different forms of literature. Each is distinguished by the presence or absence of a narrator's voice. The well-known passage reads as follows:

So don't they achieve this either by a simple narrative (ἀπλῆ διηγήσει), or by means of imitation (μιμήσεως), or a combination of both (δ' ἀμφοτέρων)?...Of poetry and storytelling: the one is done entirely by means of imitation, i.e., tragedy and comedy...the other is the recital of the poet himself, and you would find it in particular...in the dithyramb. Where it is a combination of the two, you would find it in the composition of epic poetry..." (Plato, *Republic* 392d, 394b–c; trans. in [10]).

Thus, a text that is the product entirely of the description and narration of a narrator's voice would be found in a dithyramb and functions as a simple narrative (ἀπλῆ διηγήσει). Dramatic texts such as tragedy and comedy represent the opposite end of the spectrum and involve no narrator's voice at all, but present the characters speaking to one another without interruption or explanation. These are mimetic texts (μιμησιεωσ), while the final category blends the narrator's narration and the direct speech of characters. It is a mixed form (δι' ἀμφοτέρων). According to this scheme, the Gospel of John would fall under the "mixed" category (δι' ἀμφοτέρων), since it includes both the direct speech of its characters as well as a narrator's voice. However, this assignment is not complete. There are a few key places where the Fourth Gospel lapses into something closer to what Plato would call "mimetic," and where the suppression or absence of the narrator's voice gives the text a dramatic quality. The narrator's voice in these places does not frame direct speech. Instead, direct speech is presented in a way that is uninterrupted and unmediated by a narrator. The first of three relevant examples of this device is the one most easily missed, and the one that receives no comment from interpreters. It occurs in John 1, where representatives sent from Jerusalem question John the Baptist. The passage is presented here with the introductory comments of the Evangelist in italics, in order to emphasize the brief moment when the narrator temporarily recedes. The passage reads as follows:

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the prophet?"

He answered, "No."

Then they said to him, "Who are you?" (1:19–22)

Every question asked, and every answer given, is introduced by a narrator's framing comment such as: "He confessed and did not deny it," or "and they asked him," or "he said." No such introductory comment introduces the question, "Are you the prophet." As soon as John answers, "I am not" to the previous line, the question "Are you the prophet?" comes so rapidly that the narrator disappears. For a brief moment, John and his interrogators are speaking directly to one another as though in a drama, with no intervention from the narrator. To be sure, this silence lasts only for a moment. It is brief. However, this momentary silence, I suggest, tells us something about the dramatic character of the scene.

External evidence encourages us to take this development seriously as an intentional literary move. In two key places in Thucydides' *History*, the narrator's voice recedes into silence in the very same way that we see in John 1. This silence in Thucydides is noted by both ancient and modern commentators. The two relevant passages are the Melian dialogue in Book 5 and the report of the Ambraciote herald in Book 3. The famous Melian dialogue (5.85–113) contains a series of dueling arguments delivered back and forth between the Athenians and the people of the island of Melos. The opening speeches of both sides, that of the Athenians in 5.86 and that of the Melians at 5.87, are introduced by a narrator's comment such as "They said," or "They replied." However, these only introduce the first speeches. Every speech thereafter is spoken with no narrator's introduction. As with John 1, the disappearance of the narrator underscores the urgency and immediacy of the debate. On the other hand, the Melian dialogue is massive in scale and extends over several pages of text (Chapters 5.85 to 5.111). If the basic device is similar to the conversation in John 1, in terms of length, this debate is very different from the interrogation in John.

However, this is not the only time that Thucydides writes in this manner. It is the most famous example, but there is another example that resembles even more closely to what we find in John in terms of scale. This other episode appears in Book 3. After the Athenian general Demosthenes defeats a force consisting of both Spartans and Ambraciots in 426 BCE near the city of Olpae, the Ambraciots

send a herald to request that they might recover their dead. The herald sees many times more dead Ambraciots than he expects, because he does not know that a relief force has been sent to his comrades from their home, and has been utterly annihilated. Not only does Ambracia lose the soldiers killed in the first battle, but, unknown to the herald, they also lose an entire army of soldiers sent in relief. Thucydides tells us that, owing to this disaster, no other city in the entire war suffers so great a loss in proportion to its size in so short a time (3.113). The reported number of dead seems too large even to be believed. The ensuing conversation takes the form of a Melian Dialogue. The first several lines of the conversation are introduced with narrator's comments, but then suddenly and briefly, the text shifts to direct conversation. The text reads as follows:

And someone asked him why he was amazed, and how many of his comrades had been slain, the questioner on his part supposing that the herald had come from the forces which had fought at Idomene.

The herald answered, "About two hundred."

The questioner said in reply, "These arms, though, are clearly not those of two hundred men, but of more than a thousand."

And again the herald said, "Then they are not the arms of our comrades in the battle."

The other answered, "They are, if it was you who fought yesterday at Idomene."

"But we did not fight with anyone yesterday; it was the day before yesterday, on the retreat."

"It is certain that we fought yesterday with these men, who were coming to your aid from the city of the Ambraciots."

When the herald heard this and realized that the force which was coming to their relief from the city had perished, he lifted up his voice in lamentation and, stunned by the magnitude of the calamity before him, departed at once, forgetting his errand... (3.113.1–6; trans. modified from [11]).

This passage seems to be a shorter version of precisely what we find in the Melian dialogue. Regardless of how it relates to the debate in Melos, it seems to resemble the debate in John 1. At the very point where the narrator disappears in the Ambraciot dialogue, the herald exclaims with great urgency and speed: "But we did not fight with anyone yesterday..." The response to his comment is also stated directly, with no narrator, and this exchange has the same rapid fire quality as the question, "Are you the prophet?" in John 1. No less than the Melian dialogue, this passage from Thucydides demonstrates a lapse into a dramatic discourse in the midst of a text that is not otherwise a poetic drama. A prose text becomes temporarily dramatic. Hornblower underscores the dramatic character of the scene of the Ambraciot herald by saying,

This [chapter], exceptionally, contains some rapid dialogue (the Melian dialogue is the only other example of this in [Thucydides]). This is a tragic feature... ([12], p. 533).

Modern scholars such as Hornblower are not alone in seeing here a dramatic device. Making precisely to this point in regard to the Melian Dialogue, Dionysius of Halicarnassus writes:

Thucydides begins by stating in his own person what each side said, but after maintaining this form of reported speech (δηγηματικόν) for only one exchange of argument, he dramatizes (δραματίζει) the rest of the dialogue and makes the characters speak for themselves (*On the Character of Thucydides* 37; trans. in [13]).

In case there is any doubt about exactly what Dionysius means here by the term "dramatizes," he tells us later. At precisely the point where the narrator falls out of the dialogue, Dionysius writes:

After this, [Thucydides] changes the style of the dialogue from narrative (δηγηματισμοῦ) to dramatic (τὸ δραματικόν)... (*On the Character of Thucydides* 38; trans. in [13]).

As long as the narrator is introducing the speeches, Dionysius refers to the text as “diegetic.” As soon as the narrator falls away and the characters speak directly to one another, he defines it as “dramatic.” The term “dramatic” used here by Dionysius corresponds to Plato’s “mimetic,” and so the absence of the narrator here in Thucydides has, according to Dionysius, changed the text from diegetic to mimetic.

In addition to this example from John 1, other passages in the Fourth Gospel have a silent narrator and so transition from a diegetic to a mimetic text. In John 14, the voice of the Evangelist drops out of view in the midst of the Farewell Discourses. The situation is somewhat different, but the same silence appears. As Chapter 14 draws to its conclusion, Jesus says (14:30–31),

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

The important phrase is the last one: “Rise, let us be on our way.” The passage is important because Jesus is describing his own movements. This is a place where a narrator would generally say, “He got up and left.” However, not only does Jesus give his own stage directions, but these directions also have no accompanying comment from the narrator. A defining quality of this dramatic technique is that a character must give his or her own stage directions. A scholion passed down as a comment on Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* makes this clear. At Line 29 of the *Eumenides*, the priestess says, “I take my seat upon my throne.” A scholion for this verse teaches us something about the difference between a prose text and a drama. The scholion says,

[The priestess] says this herself, since the work is a dramatic one (*dramatikê*). If, on the other hand, it had been a narrative one (*diêgêmatikê*), the poet would have said, “Saying these things, she sat upon the throne” ([14], p. 44).

The priestess has to explain her own stage directions, since, in a dramatic mode, there is no narrator to explain them for her. If the character does not state the stage directions, then there are no stage directions. A distinctive characteristic of the dramatic mode, therefore, is the absence of a narrator. In John 14, Jesus announces his own stage direction when he says, “Rise, let us be on our way.” The narrator says nothing, until several chapters later when he announces that Jesus departs from the Supper (18:1). The silence of the narrator here has puzzled interpreters from antiquity to the present, and has given rise to numerous explanatory theories. We may have in John 14 an example of sloppy editing, or a subtle *relecture*; nevertheless, however the passage took its shape, the text is permitted to lapse into a more dramatic mode. Jesus explains his own stage directions, just like the priestess in the *Eumenides*—and just like every other character in a dramatic performance.

A final example of the silent narrator appears in the contested and confusing case of John 3, mentioned at the start of this paper. The reader struggles to understand who speaks in John 3:31–36. The last mentioned speaker is John the Baptist, who is identified at 3:27, and his words clearly extend to 3:30, where he says, “He must increase, while I must decrease.” Some interpreters believe, therefore, that the Baptist continues speaking in verses 3:31–36, as follows:

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath.

Other commentators believe that the content of the discourse accords more closely with the words of Jesus himself earlier in the dialogue with Nicodemus, and assume that these are the words of Jesus ([15], p. 1.159–62). Still others argue that we have here the words of the Evangelist in the role

of narrator. It is not our purpose here to resolve this confusion, but only to recognize the fact of the confusion and the cause of the confusion: the absence of a clear comment from the narrator identifying the speaker of these lines.

In summary, these examples from John 1, John 3, and John 14 represent places in the Fourth Gospel where the voice of the narrator falls suddenly silent. The evidence above has argued that the narrator's silence is a dramatic move on the part of the Fourth Gospel, similar to the dramatic turns in Thucydides. However, if John is lapsing into a more dramatic mode at several points in the text, why does he do so? What is the purpose of such a move? We can begin to answer this question if we turn our attention to the way in which the Platonic dialogues, especially the *Theaetetus*, reflect on and clarify what it means for a narrator's voice to fall silent.

A point of caution is in order before we open the works of Plato, however. Turning to Plato in order to find clarity with John suggests that literary questions are simple and clear in the dialogues of Plato. That is not true. Even more debates rage in Platonic scholarship than in Johannine about the relationship between the form of the dialogues and their content, with the last several decades seeing sustained efforts to connect the literary form of the dialogues to their philosophical content [16–20]. The debate over the form of the dialogues is, of course, not only a modern one. Already in antiquity people wondered how Plato's three categories of literature in the *Republic* applied to Plato's own dialogues. Should they be seen as "narrative," "dramatic," or "mixed"? These questions were answered differently depending on how one understood the role of the narrative voice in the dialogues. Diogenes Laertius records the traditions of people with whom he disagrees as follows (3.50):

I am not unaware that there are other ways in which certain writers classify the dialogues. For some dialogues they call dramatic (*dramatikous*), others narrative (*diegematikous*), and others again a mixture of the two (*meiktous*). But the terms they employ in their classification of the dialogues are better suited to the stage than to philosophy (trans. in [21]).

Plato's *Theaetetus* is a particularly rich place to focus our discussion of the relevant issues, since it opens with a conversation where Euclid is explaining to Terpsion how he came to record the conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus, even though he had not been present. Euclid had the conversation described to him by Socrates, wrote it down, and then corrected his text later by further conversation with Socrates. The interesting fact is that he does not merely transcribe what Socrates tells him. Rather, he says (143C, trans. in [8]),

Now this is the way I wrote the conversation: I did not represent Socrates relating it to me as he did, but conversing with those with whom he told me he conversed. And he told me they were the geometrician Theodoras and Theaetetus. Now in order that the explanatory words between the speeches might not be annoying in the written account, such as "and I said" or "and I remarked," whenever Socrates spoke, or "he agreed" or "he did not agree," in the case of the interlocutor, I omitted all that sort of thing and represented Socrates himself as talking with them.

Commenting on this reality, Diskin Clay writes, "In the *Theaetetus*, the editorial suppression of narrative links creates the illusion of dramatic immediacy" ([17], p. 26). Further, this suppression of narrative links is not merely a literary move. According to Clay, Plato develops this dramatic immediacy for a very clear purpose, or rather two closely related purposes, and both are suggestive for interpreting John.

First, the conversation between Euclid and Terpsion is a frame dialogue set in the present day that introduces the older conversation with Socrates from the past. By presenting the past conversation with Socrates within the frame of the new conversation between Terpsion and Euclid, Plato creates a memorial of the speaking Socrates. The two contemporary conversation partners (in this case, Euclid and Terpsion) are creating a memorial to the conversation that Socrates had in the past. Euclid makes this commemorative purpose plain when he describes his work as follows (143A; trans. in [8]):

I made notes (*hypomnemata*) at the time as soon as I reached home, then afterwards at my leisure, as I recalled things (*anamimnesokmenos*), I wrote them down, and whenever I went

to Athens I used to ask Socrates about what I could not remember (*ememnemen*), and then I came here and made corrections; so that I have pretty much the whole talk written down.

His purpose is to remember the dialogue correctly.

Furthermore, the concern for producing an accurate memorial as it is expressed in the opening lines of the dialogue is not unconnected to the content of the dialogue that follows. Not long after the conversation begins, Socrates insists that a central aspect of knowledge is memory (163D; [17], p. 26), and the discussion here in the *Theaetetus* evokes the relationship between recollection and knowledge in the *Phaedo* (72e–78b). Thus, the literary frame conversation between Euclid and Terpsion emphasizes the central importance of recollection in a dialogue that will soon explain why recollection is important for acquiring true knowledge. The concern for memory in the opening conversation is, thus, not a random or a meaningless concern. The mimetic move is a mnemonic move.

The Gospel of John shares this mnemonic purpose. Jesus urges his followers, for instance, to remember and to keep his words. Moreover, he does so in the midst of his Farewell Discourses. He twice commands them to remember what he says to them:

15:20 Remember (μνημονεύετε) the word that I said to you...

16:4a But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember (μνημονεύητε) that I told you about them.

Because Jesus' words are so valuable, the disciples must not only remember them, but must also "keep" them. However, what does it mean to "keep" the word(s) of Jesus? In the most obvious sense, one keeps the word of Jesus by performing the acts that he prescribes. At another level, the disciples must keep Jesus' word by transmitting his message (15:20) and by testifying on his behalf (15:26). However, even more basically, the disciples "keep" the word of Jesus by enshrining it in the Gospel of John ([22], p. 474). Ashton writes:

He asks only that they should "keep his word". To do this they must literally keep a record of his *words*, which means in practice keeping a copy of the Gospel. The actual composition of the Gospel is part, and an essential part at that, of the carrying-out of Jesus' last commission to his disciples ([22], p. 459).

The very production of the Gospel, then, is a response to Jesus' injunction to "keep" his words. I would suggest that John's turn to mimesis and the silence of the narrator in John 1, 3, and 14 is similarly designed to render the later reader a participant in the conversations of Jesus and an original hearer of his discourses. This is a form of remembering Jesus' words and provides access for later believers to the life and ministry of Jesus. The mimetic form is mnemonic inasmuch as it bridges the divide between past and present. This is the first way in which the literary turn to mimesis in both John and Plato can be seen as being connected to their respective theological and philosophical goals. Literary form is motivated by theological and philosophical purposes.

However, in the cases of both John and Plato, there is more at work than a mere memorial to the past. This is the second point that Clay stresses. The purpose of writing dialogues as Plato does is not only to commemorate the past, but to view the past from a particular perspective, and to understand the past through recent events. According to Clay, Euclid and Terpsion are speaking in the town of Megara long after Socrates' death, and they describe a conversation that Socrates had had years before in Athens. In the dialogue, that conversation is enacted again, as though onstage. However, this time it plays out not in Athens, but in Megara ([17], pp. 26–27).

Clay adds,

If Plato produces the illusion that his intellectual life remained fixed with Socrates in the fifth century, he also reminds us that his dialogues speak to another age—his own. The other Socratics evoked the memory of Socrates by bringing him into contact with the large and varied cast of his contemporaries. Plato did more. He not only provided his dialogues

with recognizable historical settings, he also fashioned frame dialogues for the canvas of his dialogues that belong to another age ([17], p. 23).

The past is read in such a way that it has a purchase on the present, and can only be understood in light of present concerns. The conversation with Socrates does not play out now in Athens, but is taking place in Megara. The sense of dramatic immediacy that is created by the absence of a narrator makes it appear as though the conversation with Socrates is not confined to Athens, but is taking place in Megara, miles away and years later. The life of Socrates is read from a later perspective, from the perspective of his followers, who, after his death, remember him through the prism of his death.

The Gospel of John, of course, does the same, especially in places such as the comments of the Evangelist in Chapter 2, where we read that the memory of Jesus' earthly life is filtered through later experience, most particularly the Resurrection on the third day. After the cleansing of the Temple, we read, "But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered (*emnesthesan*) that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:20–22). The same sentiment is repeated at 12:16. The power of the Resurrection has a profound hermeneutical value that is connected to the gift of the Spirit (7:39), according to Frey ([23], pp. 247–52) and Thompson [24]. If the *Theaetetus* is read within the context of a different and later place, the Gospel of John is read in light of a different and later time. However, in both, we are reminded that the past discourses are directed to a later audience, and specifically so.

There is nothing exactly like the Johannine post-Resurrection perspective in the case of Plato, but there is a related device. As was just said, John tells the earthly life of Jesus from the later perspective of the Resurrection. Even before Jesus rises from the dead, John speaks of him as such, as in Chapters 2 and 12. The post-Resurrection perspective intrudes on the pre-Resurrection life of Jesus. The same is true of Socrates only if we recognize that it is his mortality, his death, that hangs over several dialogues and that colors how they are read. In other words, if John has a post-Resurrection perspective, many of Plato's dialogues operate with a post-Execution perspective. If the life of Jesus is told from behind the glow of the Resurrection, the dialogues of Socrates often take place under the shadow of his impending death. For example, as Socrates finishes telling his allegory of the cave in Book 7 of the *Republic*, he describes the anguish of people chained to a false reality within their cave, where they have grown comfortable and accustomed to their falsehood, and do not want to leave it. After describing the effort required to be released from this fate, Socrates asks Glaukon how people would respond to the person who had forced them to leave the darkness and stretch toward the light, "And if they were somehow able to get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead them up, wouldn't they kill him?" Glaukon responds, "No question, they would." (*Republic*, 7.517A; trans. modified from [25]), and we know that the Athenians responded precisely in this way to Socrates when he endeavored to lead them from falsehood to truth. Socrates' own career is in view. Likewise, in the *Meno*, the figure Anytos warns Socrates to be careful with his teaching by saying, "Socrates, it seems to me you slander men lightly. If you will be persuaded by me, I would advise you to beware..." (94D; trans. from [26]). Socrates responds by saying, "Anytus seems angry, Meno. I'm not surprised" (95A; trans. from [26]). This warning from Anytos is not in vain, and the anger of Anytos does not abate. Anytos will be one of the three chief accusers who prosecute Socrates in the trial that leads to his death. The *Gorgias*, in the same vein, includes a conversation about the failure of the philosopher to be able to defend himself in court (486A–B). Finally, this same theme appears in the dialogue most of interest for the present paper, the *Theaetetus* (173 C–E). The *Theaetetus* ends with Socrates referring to the charges that will lead to his execution. He says, "Now I have an appointment at the King's Porch to face the indictment which Meletus has brought against me. But let's meet here again tomorrow morning, Theodorus" (210D; trans. in [27]). If they ever do meet again, their meeting takes place under the shadow of trial and death. To explain the significance of the shadow of death that hangs over the Socratic dialogues, Clay is again instructive. He writes,

In Plato the historical settings of his Socratic dialogues and the words and actions of the actors in them have a deeper meaning. They must be understood not only as they seem to



be captured in the dramatic moment of a recorded conversation, they must be understood in retrospect ([17], p. 34).

However, the dialogues are not read in retrospect in a merely general way, but specifically in the light of a particular event. Clay adds,

The courtroom drama of the Apology helps us understand the moments in the Platonic dialogues where the shadow of Socrates' death passes over the scene. This is the moment to which they all lead and from which they all radiate ([17], p. 38).

Therefore, the trial of Socrates intrudes into the dialogues in various ways, and if these dialogues are memorials of past conversations, they are memorials filtered through the trial and execution of Socrates. This perspective colors how the dialogues are read by putting in sharp relief the issues at stake in following Socrates. The same is true of Jesus, except that it is not his death but his Resurrection that is the point to which all things lead and the point from which all things radiate. The life of Jesus prior to the cross is narrated in the Gospel as something filtered through the later lens of the Resurrection. The same mechanism drives both John and Plato. Furthermore, it is a mechanism that only works because they are both concerned with historical recollection, even as this recollection is filtered through a particular hermeneutical moment. The device that starts the whole process of recollection and the creation of a memorial to past conversations is the turn to mimesis and the silence of the narrator.

Various points of contact connect several of the dialogues of Plato and the Gospel of John. The connections, for the purposes of the present paper, are especially strong between the Fourth Gospel and the *Theaetetus*. Both of these texts are memorials designed to preserve the words of Jesus and of Socrates, respectively, for another age. Connected to this mnemonic effort is the desire to filter the careers of Jesus and Socrates through their trials and executions (and, in the case of Jesus, the Resurrection). The dramatic effect created by the silence of the narrator is connected to both of these efforts. In the same way that this dramatic device gives readers unmediated access to conversations that took place in the past, as though the conversations were not transmitted through a written text, so, too, this dramatic device allows Jesus and Socrates to speak to later times. Socrates of Athens speaks to his devotees in Megara decades after his death, and Jesus of Nazareth speaks directly to those followers of every generation who believe in him, in every city and land, even though they have not seen him (John 20:29). The shift to a more mimetic form of discourse is designed to break through the wall of history that separates Jesus and Socrates from those who read about them in later days. John and Plato wanted not only themselves to appear to be eyewitnesses, but also to bring their readers along and to make their readers eyewitnesses as well. They created memorials of past conversations in order to allow their readers to hear the original conversations as though they were originally present.

At this point, a point of correction is in order, of course. To say only this much is to say too little, and to misrepresent both John and Plato. The present paper must be followed by further inquiry into this topic, since the present paper makes it appear as though both Plato and John saw the memorialization of the past in a written record as an uncomplicated and uncontroversial matter. This is not true. A concluding thought at this point can signal the path in which my work will take me in the future, with an example drawn from the *Symposium*. David Halperin has recognized that the *Symposium* has both an official philosophical perspective as well as an unofficial one regarding the preservation of the words of Socrates [28]. On the one hand, in its official position, the dialogue reinforces the value of recalling and remembering the words of Socrates. The dialogue famously opens with Apollodorus explaining the circuitous path by which the words of Socrates passed down to him from the original conversation in the house of Agathon (172b–174a). Apollodorus hears the words of Socrates as passed down through many generations of transmitters. This shows the importance of remembering Socrates' words, even if only dimly and as reported imperfectly over a long period of time. Halperin writes,

Socrates' sayings, even when they reach us by second- or third-hand accounts, impress themselves in our memory by their beauty or excellence and thereby arouse in us a desire

to retain the wisdom encapsulated in them; the *eros* they awaken sets in motion the mental faculty called *melete*, our capacity for attentiveness, care, or alertness, and we exercise that capacity in order to hold Socrates' discourses in our minds and memories... This highly charged erotic process is what gives rise to the elaborate and labyrinthine tradition of oral narrative which Plato portrays at the beginning of the *Symposium* ([28], p. 106).

However, the very complexity of the process of transmitting Socrates' original speech to Apollodorus, as the original discourse passes from person to person also shows the impossibility of accurate recollection. This gives rise to what Halperin calls the unofficial position of the dialogue, which privileges inscription over recollection. The Gospel of John has a similar tension. The Gospel draws to a close in Chapter 20 with the famous comment on the insistence of seeing and remembering and preserving Jesus' deeds when it says (20:30–31), "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. However, these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." This statement emphasizes the need to preserve the words of Jesus in a written Gospel and to read them and to see his signs in the way that his original audiences saw them. This, to borrow a phrase from Halperin, is the book's official position. However, the emphasis in this comment on the importance of seeing and remembering Jesus' earthly ministry and the signs that populated it is undercut by an unofficial position in the words of Jesus to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe (20:29)." As C. K. Barrett writes,

The Fourth Gospel could only have been written by one who regarded the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the indispensable turning-point in God's dealing with mankind; but the evangelist does not look upon this complex event in a historicist way... [Believers] live under the necessity of that same decision of faith which was once evoked by sight and is now demanded by the apostolic testimony and the witness of the Spirit ([29], pp. 66–67).

Plato and John are motivated by very different purposes, but their respective theological and philosophical concerns find expression in the literary decisions they make and in the ways that they problematize the recollection of Socrates and Jesus, respectively. Unraveling this problem will be the concern of my continuing work. However, if the work is not quite done, the present essay must nevertheless draw to a close.

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