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INTRODUCTION

Tragedy in the Philosophical Age of the Greeks

“WISE IS Sophocles, wiser Euripides, of all men Socrates is wisest” (σοφὸς Σοφοκλῆς, σοφώτερος δ’ Εὐριπίδης, ἀνδρῶν δὲ πάντων Σωκράτης σοφώτατος). According to one report, this is the reply of the Delphic oracle to a question concerning the wisdom of Socrates.[1] Though almost certainly apocryphal, the oracle’s identification of the three men as distinguished—and competing—in wisdom is not wholly implausible. As the leading tragedians of the time, Sophocles and Euripides were among the most prominent public intellectual figures in Athens, celebrated throughout the Greek-speaking world for their dramas. Socrates, though probably not yet so widely known, must have had a significant reputation for such an oracular consultation to be undertaken. The response indicates that poets and philosophers could be thought to possess the same quality of wisdom (*sophia*). This may not be intuitive today: poetic skill appears different in kind from philosophical intelligence, and a comparison of the two would seem to lack any criterion for judgment.

Poetic and philosophical thinkers were felt to be much closer in the fifth century BCE. The strong differentiation of poetry from philosophy with which we are familiar largely postdates the notional date of the oracle (around 420), and has little purchase for understanding this period. The late fifth century in Athens witnessed a productive and often competitive interaction of poetic and philosophical thinking and writing, which would have made a comparison of Socrates and the tragedians possible and even natural. All three figures were looked to as intellectual authorities, able to help Athenians fulfill the Delphic injunction to know themselves. The oracular response, though probably not historical fact, speaks to the historical situation of the late fifth century.

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[1] The anecdote is reported in the scholia to Aristophanes, *Clouds* 144 and to Plato, *Apology* 21a. Chaerephon’s question and the oracular response are reported in Plato, *Apology* 20e–21a and Xenophon, *Apology* 14 in slightly different forms, neither of them mentioning the tragedians.

This book is an attempt to reanimate the intimate and multiform relation of philosophical and poetic thought that obtained before philosophy defined itself in contradistinction to other discourses.[2] It suggests that drama can be recognized as significantly philosophical, and read alongside the canonical texts of early Greek philosophical writing. Drama's awareness of developments in philosophical thought has already been the subject of much research. A selection of the evidence is collected in the appendix, "Philosophy and Philosophers in Greek Comedy and Tragedy," to the recent edition of *Early Greek Philosophy* by André Laks and Glenn Most, which gathers allusions and references in Attic drama, organizing them by philosophical topic and philosopher.[3] The collection (and substantial previous research it draws on) demonstrates that drama frequently integrates developments in philosophical thought, and that this integration is significant and widespread. My contention here is stronger: that dramatic texts are *themselves* developments in philosophical thought, and should be recognized as part of the canon of early Greek philosophical writing. By attending to the thinking of drama, we recover important dimensions of fifth-century intellectual culture, and bring into view a wider, more dynamic, and more vibrant philosophical field.

The idea that Greek drama is importantly philosophical is famously in evidence in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, in which Euripides touts himself for introducing Athens to new ways of thinking. Plato's *Symposium* suggests a different, but just as intimate relation between drama and philosophy, portraying in the dialogue's final pages Socrates deep in conversation with Agathon and Aristophanes, tragedian and comedian, respectively. The ancient scholarly tradition frequently emphasizes Euripides' reputation as the "philosopher of the stage," and the widely circulated *Life of Euripides* connects him biographically to Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Prodicus, and Socrates.[4] There is much less ancient discussion of the philosophical interests of Aeschylus, whose death in 458 puts him well before the heyday of philosophy in Athens, or of Sophocles, who, though he lived until 406, would have been well into adulthood by the time that Anaxagoras famously brought philosophy to Athens (probably around 455). Modern scholars have recognized ways that both dramatists are in dialogue with contemporary philosophical thought—and this study extends these arguments—but the conventional story of fifth-century thought sees Euripides' philosophical interests as distinctive within tragic tradition.[5]

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[2] On philosophy's demarcation from other discourses, see Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Edward Schiappa, *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Håkan Tell, *Plato's Counterfeit Sophists* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2011).

[3] André Laks and Glenn W. Most, "Appendix: Philosophy and Philosophers in Greek Comedy and Tragedy," in *Early Greek Philosophy,* Vol. IX: *The Sophists,* Part 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 256–365.

Among modern variations on this story, none has been so influential as Nietzsche's in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Although the outlines of Nietzsche's discussion of the association of Euripides and Socrates were familiar and even cliché at the time, his telling of tragedy's decline under the influence of rationalism gave the familiar story a polemical spin.[6] It importantly cemented a modern idea—though one with ancient precedents in Plato—of tragedy as the genre of the unreason, and of Greek culture as a whole as fascinated by the irrational.[7] Socratic philosophy appeared to Nietzsche as an alien imposition on tragedy and Greek culture in general, which brought about tragedy's "suicide," the end of the truly productive age of philosophical thought, and a catastrophic cultural shift that persisted to his own day.[8]

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[4] T 1.IA.2 *TrGF*; further reports are T 35–48 *TrGF*, adding (on very thin traditions) Archelaus and Heraclitus. Descriptions of Euripides as the "philosopher of the stage" (σκηνικὸς φιλόσοφος) are collected in T 166–69 *TrGF*, and seem to be familiar by the imperial period.

[5] This may be changing for Aeschylus; full-length studies of his relation to early Greek thought are Wolfgang Rösler, *Reflexe vorsokratischen Denkens bei Aischylos* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1970); Richard Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis: The Social Construction of Space and Time in the Tragedies of Aeschylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Nuria Scapin, *The Flower of Suffering: Theology, Justice, and the Cosmos in Aeschylus' "Oresteia" and Presocratic Thought* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020). There is much less written on Sophocles and philosophical thought: Meggan Jennell Arp, "Pre-Socratic Thought in Sophoclean Tragedy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006). See further the essays in Douglas Cairns, ed., *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013). I cite more targeted studies as they arise.

[6] The background to Nietzsche's account is discussed in Ernst Behler, "A. W. Schlegel and the Nineteenth-Century *Damnatio* of Euripides," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986): 335–67; Albert Henrichs, "The Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986): 369–97.

[7] For Plato's view of tragedy as antirational, see Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 98–117. Classic on the irrational is E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

The historical narrative of this study is quite distinct from Nietzsche's, suggesting that Greek drama was, for all of its history that we can trace, profoundly philosophical.[9] Yet Nietzsche's account of the "rational" qualities of (Euripidean) tragedy is valuable for pointing to the way that Attic tragedy was significantly engaged in its own philosophical project, involving consideration of the way that intellectual novelty bears on traditional stories. To Nietzsche, this appeared a wholly destructive project, which led Euripides to reject the unreason that had conditioned Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy. I will propose, by contrast, to understand all the canonical dramatists as thoroughly engaged with philosophical thought. Nietzsche, though, points to a crucial—and too often neglected—facet of drama's place in the wider intellectual culture: its self-consciousness concerning its own relation to the emerging discourse of philosophy. Drama is not just thinking philosophically, but thinking about philosophical thinking.

Reversing the title of one of Nietzsche's early lecture courses, I investigate here "tragedy (and comedy) in the philosophical age of the Greeks." Posing the relationship of drama and philosophy in this manner, in terms of a historical period rather than discrete interactions, brings into focus a wider and more dynamic field than has typically been considered relevant. The late fifth century brought with it a profusion of novel questions and ideas, as well as an expansion of the range of professional profiles and discursive forms. These developments are often associated with those we call "sophists," but their origins and significance were much broader. They reach back at least as far as the decisive Greek victory over the Persians at Plataea in 479, and had much to do with the increasing wealth and prominence of Athens as a cultural center. Individuals who came to Athens from outside (among them Anaxagoras and, slightly later, the canonical sophists) took part in an atmosphere of thought, exchange, and debate sometimes described as an "Attic Enlightenment."[10] This enlightenment encompassed not just conventional philosophical figures like the sophists and the circle of Socrates, but historians, musicians, rhetoricians, doctors, and politicians, to indicate only a few of the important exponents of late fifth-century intellectual culture. Though there may have been incipient divisions between these areas of inquiry, they were all significantly predisciplinary, without strictly defined methods or discursive forms.[11] Fifth-century modes of writing and thinking were substantially open and engaged with one another, while, at the same time, they sought to establish their own claims to authority. Late fifth-century culture as a whole can be described as "sophistic"—not in the sense of being influenced predominantly by the sophists but, rather, as being preoccupied with questions of wisdom, *sophia*. For this culture, the nature and location of intellectual authority are central concerns, continually subject to negotiation and debate.

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[8] The narrative of tragedy's "suicide" is concentrated in *Birth of Tragedy* §11–14: Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 54–71.

[9] The young Nietzsche has great sympathy with early Greek philosophy—or really, early Greek philosophers, including Socrates, whom he sees as exemplifying "archetypes of philosophical thought:" Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Regnery, 1962), 31.

Drama, my readings will suggest, stakes its claim within this wider cultural negotiation of authority. It shows a consciousness of new modes of thinking, and addresses them with its own distinctive perspective and approach. Drama's relation to other discourses can be cooperative or antagonistic, but it is more than a mere receptacle or reflection. Rather, I argue that drama takes part in philosophical discussions as directly and forcefully as the texts we designate as "philosophy." It presents philosophical questions and ideas in ways that differ from and sometimes conflict with other discourses. Ultimately, it asserts the importance of its own perspective, and of its position within the discursive landscape of the fifth century. This would have been unsurprising to a contemporary audience: mythological poetry was at the center of Greek learning and erudition, and drama a vital and massively popular form. As much as any discourse, it had a claim to be at the center of fifth-century intellectual culture, broadly understood. By contrast, the texts that we identify as philosophical appear to have been relatively marginal, and to lack the authority that they would gain after the institution of philosophy as a discipline. This is reflected in the transmission of material: the extant texts of tragedy and comedy, though a shadow of what was staged and performed in antiquity, represent an extraordinary wealth and diversity of material—orders of magnitude greater than what survives of early Greek philosophical writing. If we want to understand the intellectual history of the fifth century, we have no better source than drama.

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[10] The term "Enlightenment" seems to gain wide currency through the standard work of nineteenth-century history of philosophy: Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Fues, 1856), 1, 793–98. Volume III of Guthrie's *History of Greek Philosophy* (1969), encompassing Socrates and the sophists, is entitled *The Fifth-Century Enlightenment*, though the term has not been in wide use since.

[11] Edward Schiappa describes early rhetoric as predisciplinary: Edward Schiappa, "'Rhêtorikê': What's in a Name? Toward a Revised History of Early Greek Rhetorical Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 1–15.

Philosophical thought before the discipline of philosophy had no normative discursive form. What we call “early Greek philosophy” could be written (or, probably just as frequently, performed) in prose or poetry of various meters; could take the form of argument, narration, or enactment; could be spoken in the first, second, or third person; and could employ contemporary or mythological figures (or none at all). It could, moreover, take in a wide range of concerns: relatively familiar are natural science, cosmology, ontology, epistemology, and ethics, but more surprising may be biology, zoology, theology, literary criticism, anthropology, grammar, and medicine. Whether it makes sense to classify such a heterogeneous field of material—which I have drawn only from authors and works included in the Laks-Most *Early Greek Philosophy* edition—as “philosophy” at all, and what the consequences of such a classification are, are questions I cannot enter into here.[12] At the very least, we should be wary of assuming continuity in the practice of what we now call philosophy either synchronically, at any given time in early Greek culture, or diachronically, from philosophy’s beginnings through its establishment as a discipline to the present day. In 400 BCE, what constituted a philosophical text or claim (much less an authoritative one) was a significantly open question.

Even the vocabulary of description is difficult: Christopher Moore has recently argued that the term “philosopher” is likely first used as a derisive appellation (roughly, “sage-wannabe”), directed against the Pythagoreans, and is appropriated by those pursuing related activities in response.[13] To be called a “philosopher” for much of the fifth century was probably not a very flattering designation, and, though the word comes to acquire a more neutral valence, it does not name anything like a discipline until the end of the century, or more probably, the beginning of the following. What language the canonical early Greek philosophers used for their writing and thinking is largely lost to us, making it difficult or impossible to classify such a heterogeneous group of figures and works.[14] It is therefore tempting—and probably preferable, from a strictly historical standpoint—to do away with "philosophy" and its cognates for the predisciplinary context, except in the very limited circumstances when we can be confident of its use and meaning. But beyond the practical difficulty of there not being an obviously more adequate English term to describe such practice ("thought" and "thinker" seem the closest, though they are frustratingly vague), the word "philosophy" has a totemic value that is worth holding on to, if only for the purposes of appropriating it. In what follows, I use the term "philosophy" narrowly to describe the discipline, while using the adjective "philosophical" to characterize a much wider range of predisciplinary thinking and writing. The boundaries of philosophy in this predisciplinary phase cannot be clearly fixed, and scholars have drawn them primarily based on contributions to what are taken, retrospectively, to be philosophical discussions. This study insists that drama contributes to these same discussions and thus has significant philosophical importance; it uses the terminology of philosophy in the service of redefining it.

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[12] A profound consideration of these issues is in André Laks, *The Concept of Presocratic Philosophy: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*, trans. Glenn Most (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 35–52.

[13] Christopher Moore, *Calling Philosophers Names: On the Origin of a Discipline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

The claim that drama is itself philosophical would be a weak one if it only amounted to the idea that drama deals with issues of conceptual substance and import. This could be said of most early Greek poetry, which is often ethical and occasionally metaphysical in its concerns (and is certainly an important background for early Greek philosophical writing). "Philosophical" has to describe something about the kind of exploration, and not just the subject matter—about method, the way that an investigation is structured. Yet philosophical method, like the form of philosophical writing, is exceptionally fluid in the fifth century and earlier. Though there may be an emergent understanding of method, it would have to be quite a capacious one, able to encompass a range of different modes of thinking and writing. I propose here that dramatic staging can be understood as one of these philosophical modes, and that the persistence of certain scenic forms demonstrates a commitment—though not necessarily a conscious one—to structured investigation of conceptual questions. Particular types of scenes are used recurrently across dramatic works and dramatists to explore philosophical issues, and can thus be understood as guided by a kind of method. These scenic forms, moreover, are not limited to drama, but have important contemporary presence in other discourses, where they often do related work. These continuities of form across works and discourses can be recognized as philosophical structures for inquiry, which have a role in soliciting and shaping thought. They constitute a kind of scenic grammar through which fifth-century intellectual culture investigates philosophical questions within and across discourses.

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[14] The *Phaedo* refers to "inquiry into nature" (96a: περὶ φύσεως ἱστορία) as a name for some fifth-century inquiries, and it seems to be current in the later fifth century, but the scope and origin of the term are obscure: Laks, *The Concept of Presocratic Philosophy*, 2–4.

At the core of my approach is the idea that form shapes thinking. Though at some level this is uncontroversial, I intend to press its consequences here with the argument that scenic form in drama constitutes a kind of philosophical method. The scenic forms I identify are not bare containers, forms that could be filled with anything, but are rather constituted by a nexus of a discursive structure (catalogs, prologues, debates) with a particular topic (human culture, deception, wisdom). This sense of form is defined by emergence rather than stability, and seeks to capture the way that certain scene types recur in different contexts and shapes, while retaining a basic similarity. The dramatic forms I discuss are found across works and authors, enabling them to be read as a structured conversation. Though the forms are developed differently in each drama, and can extend beyond the bounds of a single scene, they are importantly unified in the way that they pose and investigate a central question or problem. It is because of this linkage of topic and form that they can be read as guided by an implicit method. The argument of each chapter involves, first, identifying the form and describing its use across dramas, and then elaborating the philosophical inquiry that the form pursues.

Enactment is essential to drama's method of investigating philosophical topics. Dramatic thinking takes place not just through assertions and counter-assertions, but through staging situations and characters across time. The philosophical work of this thinking has to be understood as a process, in which questions recur and answers are reshaped in response to events. Such a staging of the process of thought is familiar from Platonic dialogue, in which form and setting shape the way we understand the utterances of the characters, and thus, the philosophical work of the whole. Drama, in the same way, presents positions, ideas, and possibilities in the words of its characters, but refracts these through character, story, setting, and development. As I discuss below, I see this processual character as a distinctive aspect of (especially later) fifth-century philosophical writing in general. Drama, philosophical dialogue, and a host of other, related philosophical forms all stage thinking as a process, and attention to this staging illuminates not only the way that drama thinks through enactment, but the way that philosophical writing can as well.

This study proposes a new way of understanding Greek drama as philosophical. There are, broadly speaking, two ways the relation of ancient drama and philosophy has been discussed in the past: the first, which emerges around 1800 in the thought of German Idealism and has been pursued more or less continuously since, reads Greek tragedy for its contribution to modern philosophical questions.[15] From Schelling's reading of *Oedipus the King* to Martha Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness*, philosophers have found in Greek tragedy a vital perspective on the philosophical issues with which they are grappling, and elaborated readings that seek to actualize those perspectives for their own time. This is a profoundly important approach, which has enriched both literary and philosophical study, but it tends to do greater justice to the philosophical issues at stake for a modern reader than for an ancient audience. My interest here, by contrast, is on how ancient tragedy (and comedy) addresses the philosophical questions of its own time. I attempt to develop a historicized mode of reading drama philosophically, which takes account of the form and substance of philosophical and dramatic thought in classical Athens.

The other, more historically oriented method of understanding the relation of Attic drama and contemporary philosophical thought has been to seek out lines of influence or allusion. This is a valuable project, which has shown that there are important historical and interpretive gains in recognizing drama's philosophical interests.[16] There are, to be sure, still gaps in our knowledge, but these gaps—at least the ones that the extant evidence allows us to fill in—are increasingly small ones. At the same time, the interpretation of philosophical allusions in Attic drama, working with a relatively small corpus of material, has grown substantially in complexity, forcing new contributions to be dialectically (and usually polemically) related to what has gone before. There is surely more to say about dramatic allusions to philosophical thought, but the terrain of this approach has broadly been mapped; there has, however, been relatively little effort to interrogate its method.

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[15] I trace the emergence of modern philosophical readings of Greek tragedy in Joshua Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). See further (among important recent contributions) Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Vassilis Lambropoulos, *The Tragic Idea* (London: Duckworth, 2006); Pierre Judet de la Combe, *Les tragédies grecques sont-elles tragiques? Théâtre et théorie* (Montrouge: Bayard, 2010); Miriam Leonard, *Tragic Modernities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Joshua Billings and Miriam Leonard, eds., *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Approaches to the relation of modern drama and philosophy, often taking classical texts as a starting point, are pursued in modern language and theater studies: Freddie Rokem, *Philosophers and Thespians: Thinking Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

The primary argument of this study is its method. It fills no gaps, but seeks rather to open one. It does not contest an established story, but tells it in a different way. There is very little raw material here that would be novel or unexpected to a reader interested in the relationship of drama and fifth-century intellectual culture, but I believe that the configuration of material and the way of investigating it tell a substantially new story of this relation, and indeed, of Greek intellectual history and the origins of philosophy. The method is oriented by the aim of reading drama as intellectual history, rather than as a source for the history of philosophy or, conversely, reading the history of philosophy as a source for drama. This entails a different approach to the philosophical nature of drama than has been employed by previous studies.

There are two main tenets of this study's method. The first is synchrony, treatment of the primary material of each chapter as coincident in time, and therefore, independent. I understand the late fifth century as a constellation of sources, whose most important relations are conceptual rather than chronological.[17] I elicit theoretical connections between the texts studied—notional lines between different points in space—that render an image of the thinking surrounding a given topic. This does not preclude tracing the background to each chapter's primary material (which is often necessary to make sense of the philosophical concerns in historical perspective), or noting development where it is plain in the sources, but the weight of the argument is never on diachronic connections or allusions, but rather on the synchronic constellation of thinking. The organization of material is governed by a conceptual logic developed in each chapter, which occasionally results in anachrony. Still, I want to insist that this is a historical project: most of the dramatic texts studied are dated to between 425 and 405 BCE (though there are, especially in the first chapter, some earlier sources), and our evidence for philosophical thought is largely nonspecific and homogeneous across this period. There must have been more local intellectual developments, but these are effectively lost to us. Treating this period as broadly unified in its conceptual concerns allows these concerns to emerge more fully than would an analytic approach that tries, on scanty evidence, to trace development. We gain a more holistic picture, which does greater justice to the richness of the period's thinking. The book thus proposes an intellectual history without chronology.

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[16] Important recent contributions on connections between Greek drama and philosophy are D. J. Conacher, *Euripides and the Sophists: Some Dramatic Treatments of Philosophical Ideas* (London: Duckworth, 1998); Franziska Egli, *Euripides im Kontext zeitgenössischer intellektueller Strömungen: Analyse der Funktion philosophischer Themen in den Tragödien und Fragmenten* (Munich: Saur, 2003); Matthew Wright, *Euripides' Escape Tragedies: A Study of "Helen," "Andromeda," and "Iphigenia among the Taurians"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ashley Clements, *Aristophanes' "Thesmophoriazusae": Philosophizing Theatre and the Politics of Perception in Late Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis* is more complex methodologically.

[17] The figure of the constellation is borrowed, loosely, from Walter Benjamin's *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* and from the work of Dieter Henrich on German Idealism: Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

The synchronic approach has two primary consequences: negatively, it entails the avoidance of arguments concerning influence or dependence, which have been the primary methods for investigating the relation of drama and philosophy. Arguments for direct dependence, I believe, are only rarely able to withstand critical examination, both because of the inherent difficulty of demonstrating one source's similarity to another and because of our lacunose evidence for fifth-century intellectual culture. The state of our knowledge means that it is nearly impossible ever to be sure that a similarity is a facet of direct (as opposed to indirect or more diffuse) influence, and often makes establishing relative chronology—and thereby the directionality of influence—difficult. Such direct influence is therefore a very uncertain basis for constructing the relation of drama and philosophy, and inevitably, the more ambitious the argument, the more speculative and open to doubt. A synchronic mode of investigation, on the contrary, because it does not make claims of dependence, is able to make robust and securely founded historical arguments.

The arguments enabled by a synchronic method are, moreover, more consequential than those constructed around dependence. This constitutes a

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University Press, 2019), 10–11; Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991).

positive consequence of a synchronic investigation, and is best demonstrated by the study as a whole. But to anticipate these results: synchronic investigation allows for a consideration of parallels between different areas of culture that recognizes distinctive concerns and modes of investigation, while also being open to their connection. Rather than defining the concerns of philosophy in the terms of drama or vice versa, synchronic consideration allows for each area to emerge as independent, while still related by common questions or problems. Drama, I argue, is most philosophical not when it reflects existing philosophical doctrines, but when it assumes philosophical questions as its own, investigating them in ways that are distinctive to dramatic form. While a diachronic method presumes that philosophy is the primary discourse and drama the receptive one (or, in very rare instances, the reverse), a synchronic method assumes that drama thinks in parallel with philosophy, and seeks to show the significance of this thinking.

The other major tenet of this study's method is dialectic, a term I use in a broad sense to describe juxtaposition of different views on a subject (without the teleology implicit in the post-Hegelian or Marxian senses of the term). Kant's dismissive description of ancient dialectic as a "logic of illusion" actually captures my use of the term well, provided one understands "illusion" in a more generous fashion than Kant: dialectic is a process of accounting for potential realities or outlooks.[18] Dialectic postulates an image of reality, and enacts the conditions and consequences of such an understanding over the course of a narrative. When Aristotle claims that drama is akin to philosophy in that it stages "what kinds of things might happen" (οἷα ἂν γένοιτο) and thereby gives insight into "the universal" (1451b: τὰ καθόλου), I understand him to be drawing attention to such dialectic. It is the process of thinking through a viewpoint, following an idea as it is realized in action and thought.

I read dramatic texts as enacting the process of thinking, a process that is ongoing and open-ended, and which inevitably brings alternatives into implicit or explicit conflict. The dialectical approach adopted here is distinct from two tendencies that are prevalent in philosophical and literary readings of drama, respectively. Where my approach differs from most philosophical readings of drama is that I do not believe that drama issues in discrete positions on philosophical topics, but rather, that it makes a plurality of viewpoints available without hierarchy or conclusion. I do not take drama as having a doctrine or message that is deciphered over the course of a work, but rather, as presenting multiple possibilities for meaning that are available directly to an audience member or reader. As I discuss in the next section, I believe on historical grounds that a dialectical method is the best way of approaching fifth-century philosophical writing, and this is even more true of literature. Drama, because of its dialogic form, conduces to the presentation of thinking without conclusion, and readings should recognize this open-endedness.

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[18] *Critique of Pure Reason* A61/B85–86: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 198–99.

As a literary intervention, this may appear an unobjectionable, if not banal, claim. Studies of Greek drama today consistently find it to problematize dominant discourses or render its themes ambiguous, and my study is certainly shaped by these tendencies. I take it as a hermeneutic principle that drama's multiple voices make it impossible to isolate one as authoritative, or to extract a unified "message" from a work. But the dialectical method pursued here differs also from the modes of dialectical critique that animate approaches to tragic ambiguity, whether inflected historically or formally.[19] Though I am interested in forms in history, I do not engage in immanent critique, which would entail reading the formal dialectic of a work in terms of its social world and ideology.[20] This is not because of any hostility to dialectical critique in its consequential, Marxian forms, but because I adopt here an approach to the literary object different from the one that is presupposed by critical aesthetics.

The primary difference lies in an understanding of form. Immanent critique, though its aims are historical and political, rests on a conception of the literary object as the bounded space within which dialectic takes place. In this sense, it has a strong conception of form similar to the ahistorical, "formalist" approaches that it often opposes. Both take the singular work as the elementary unit of analysis, and the critical task lies in understanding the way that different formal elements within the work are resolved or held in suspension by the whole (and then, in the Marxian version, elucidating the ideology of this form). My approach understands form in a somewhat weaker sense: I am not interested in the

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19. On the possibilities of immanent critique for the interpretation of Greek tragedy, see Victoria Wohl, *Euripides and the Politics of Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), esp. 3–8. Wohl argues, drawing on Adorno and Jameson, that a meaningfully political reading in the Marxian tradition has to be a formal one.

20. I understand immanent critique here along Jamesonian lines (though this is not, to be sure, the only version of dialectical reading): Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), esp. 306–416; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), esp. 17–102.

form of a single work, but in forms across works, scenic types and possibilities that are realized in different dramatic contexts.[21] This reflects a conception of the Greek dramatists as craftsmen more than artists, who frequently worked by repurposing, combining, and borrowing elements from their own and others' works in order to produce as many as four new plays in the course of a year. Because our post-Romantic notion of artistic creation entails a strong sense of authorship and of intentional form, we tend, I believe, to focus too much on the unit of the work in our studies of Greek literature, and too little on connections across works and discourses (and, for the same reason, often ignore relevant fragmentary material). My approach assumes that dialectic across works is just as important as dialectic within a work. A weaker sense of form thus enables a stronger understanding of drama within the totality of Greek culture.

* * *

The primary questions for early Greek intellectual culture, this study will argue, concern authority: who is able to speak about major questions of human existence, and what are the sources of this ability?[22] This is a binding thread between figures conventionally termed "Presocratics" and those conventionally termed "sophists" and "Socratics." For all these thinkers, whose inquiries were conducted before philosophy had established a relatively unified method of investigation, prior to any questions of content were questions of form: what medium to write in, what kinds of evidence or demonstration to employ, how to construct speech so as to be persuasive. These questions reach well beyond those thinkers we conventionally describe as "philosophical"; they are preoccupations of what we can glean of early Greek prose in general.[23] As Maria

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[21] My approach to form draws inspiration from that of Caroline Levine, who employs a relatively weak sense of form to connect forms in literature to the social world: Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Anna Uhlig has recently offered an important study in form across genres in classical Greece: Anna Uhlig, *Theatrical Reenactment in Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[22] I understand authority, following Bruce Lincoln, primarily as an effect, which is produced by the conjunction of speaker, speech, and situation within culturally established parameters: Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10–11. That is, authority is primarily a matter of whose voice counts within a society.

[23] For notions of authority in early Greek prose, see Rosalind Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. 249–69.

Michela Sassi has shown, the emergent discourse of philosophical writing had to grapple with the challenge of establishing itself in relation to the existing authorities of Greek intellectual culture, claiming a space for its own forms of thought as authoritative.[24] In consequence, early Greek philosophical thought, to a degree largely alien to the development of philosophy as a discipline, is concerned with the speaker rather than the speech.

The most distinctive aspect of the late fifth-century context for intellectual culture was its proliferation of authorities: the public intellectual sphere came to include not just the traditional authorities who combined political, religious, and often poetic roles, but those who defined their contribution in novel ways—by the ability to argue both sides of a question, to give an account of the origins of the Persian War, to write a persuasive speech for the assembly or a defense for the law courts, to explain the connection of music and character, to conduct an inquiry into the validity of conventional beliefs. All of these might have been facets of the authority of earlier thinkers, but the later fifth century saw intellectuals increasingly differentiating themselves into distinct social roles. The public intellectual sphere of Greece, which had always been highly agonistic, increasingly became a space for contestation between forms of authority. Poet did not only strive with poet, but with politician, historian, and philosopher.

Democratic Athens was an important stage for this contestation of authority. Particularly in the latter half of the fifth century, the city's wealth, power, and relative openness to outsiders made it an intellectual center that attracted thinkers from across the Greek world. Athens' democratic constitution, which involved the entire male citizenry in regular deliberation and adjudication, fueled an interest in skills of analysis, debate, and persuasion, and a demand for those who could demonstrate or teach these skills. The importance of contestation in public life is hardly unique to Athens, which was not the only Greek democracy or intellectual center of the period, but our evidence for other cities is simply too scanty to permit us to draw any secure comparisons.[25] We know that in Athens important intellectuals performed and circulated their writings for entertainment and education, and found ready audiences and pupils. Relations between philosophical and political contexts must have been multidirectional: developments in philosophical and rhetorical training influenced the ways that citizens expressed themselves in political situations, and the demands of public expression shaped the ways that intellectuals wrote, thought, and taught. Similarly, drama both offered its audience models of speech and took on contemporary modes of argumentation, in a relationship of reciprocity with political and philosophical debate.

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[24] Maria Michela Sassi, *The Beginnings of Philosophy in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[25] On intellectual culture and debate outside of Athens, see Eric W. Robinson, "The Sophists and Democracy beyond Athens," *Rhetorica* 25 (2007): 109–22.

Late fifth-century philosophical thought is characterized above all by the relative absence of authoritative statements, a tendency to see all conceptual positions as open to question and debate. While earlier Greek philosophical writing had tended to construct its own authority in more or less monologic fashion, usually invoking modes of divine sanction, the late fifth century sees an explosion of different forms for thinking, many of them characterized by multiple voices, mythical figures and settings, and conceptual experimentation. While earlier Greek philosophers tended to create relatively few, unified works expounding their views, the thinkers of the later fifth century seem not to have held (or at least not to have expounded) doctrines in the same way. More characteristic were discursive forms that were, in one way or another, dialectical, that assumed a position and sought to defend it, encompassed different voices, or interrogated the views of another. This dialectical character may appear an aberration in the history of philosophy as we now understand it, but it would hardly have seemed exceptional at the time, since it placed philosophical writing in close proximity to other modes of contemporary expression.

Two discursive modes are particularly distinctive to late fifth-century philosophical thought: antilogy, the assumption of opposing viewpoints, and prosopopoeia, speaking through the voice of another. A number of texts testify to the importance of antilogical writing: Antiphon's *Tetralogies* and the *Dissoi Logoi* are extant examples of a mode that included writings by Thrasymachus and some of Protagoras' most important works, known as the *Antilogies* or *Overthrowing Arguments*.[26] The idea that an argument exists for both sides of a question is associated with Protagoras by later sources, as is the claim to be able to make the weaker argument the stronger, parodied in Aristophanes'

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[26] Two books of *Antilogies* are attested for Protagoras: Diogenes Laertius 9.55 (A1 DK/D1 LM). This is probably the same as his *Overthrowing Arguments* (Καταβάλλοντες), mentioned in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.60 (B1 DK/D3 LM) and alluded to in Plato, *Sophist* 232d–e (B8 DK/D2 LM). Thrasymachus' similarly titled *Overpowerings* (Ὑπερβάλλοντες: B7 DK/D5 LM) is probably antilogistic as well.

Clouds.[27] The importance of antilogy probably has to do in part with the growth of rhetorical training, which would have sought to enable students to speak on both sides of a question as preparation for forensic and deliberative contexts. The philosophical dialogue as it is known from Plato and Xenophon (whose works represent only the tip of the iceberg of the Socratic dialogues that circulated contemporaneously), though not formally structured by antilogy, likewise manifests the centrality of dialectical modes to late fifth-century philosophical thought. The widespread adoption of antilogical and dialectical forms testifies to the provisional nature of much argumentation in the sophistic era.

The philosophical dialogue involves, almost by definition, prosopopoeia, the other characteristic mode of late fifth-century thought. Much philosophical writing involves the taking on of character, which can be mythological (Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes*) or real (the Socratic dialogue). Even a work like Gorgias' *Helen*, which does not impersonate a defined figure, is assuming a kind of role by taking on the defense of Helen; the same goes for the opposing speakers in Antiphon's *Tetralogies*. Antilogical forms are often combined with mythological or allegorical prosopopoeia, as in Antisthenes' paired speeches of Ajax and Odysseus or Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles* (which Xenophon recounts in a Socratic dialogue, still another layer of prosopopoeia). Indeed, the two modes broadly entail one another: to argue opposing sides of a question requires voices to do it in, and thinking through characters inevitably involves the assumption of different viewpoints. Together, antilogy and prosopopoeia (and other modes, to be sure) contribute to making the philosophical discourse of the late fifth century notably open-ended. To think philosophically was not (or not only) to argue a position, but to explore possible views on a subject.

Antilogy and prosopopoeia, are, of course, characteristic of drama. Dramatic thinking is enacted in characters and situations that inevitably present difference or disagreement. Drama thus constantly negotiates authority among the viewpoints presented, and no single figure, with the possible exception of the parabatic chorus of comedy (which addresses the audience in the persona of the author), has a claim to speak for the piece as a whole. Dramatic discourse is thus quite closely analogous to much of the discourse of fifth-century philosophy, and the thinking of both can be understood dialectically, as a staging of possibilities.[28] Not all fifth-century philosophical writing exhibits this tendency to nonauthoritative presentation, but where it does, we can often recognize the proximity to drama. The most salient difference between dramatic and nondramatic forms of thought lies not in their formal possibilities but in their occasion: drama was performed at a few public festivals, while the occasions of philosophical thought seem to have been quite varied, including both written and oral transmission, in public and private contexts. This categorical difference in occasion, however, should not obscure substantial similarities in the ways that dramatic and philosophical thought explore topics of shared concern. Whether or not there is a genetic connection between the discourses—a question I leave open—philosophical writing in the late fifth century shares the dialectical mode of drama, thinking through characters, situations, and opposing positions.

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[27] Diogenes Laertius 9.51 reports that Protagoras was the first to claim that there are opposed arguments for any question (A1 DK/D26 LM; compare A20 DK/B27 LM). The claim to make the weaker argument the stronger is attested by Stephanus of Byzantium quoting Eudoxus (A21 DK/D28 LM), but this may simply be a projection of Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

This recognition constitutes grounds for reformulating the thesis of Marcel Detienne in his crucial study *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*. Detienne argues that over the course of the fifth century, the concept of truth (*alētheia*) became secularized and politicized.[29] This brings with it a shift from an archaic "logic of ambiguity" that sees truth as a property of speech and a speaker (and is thus always potentially deceptive) to the classical "logic of contradiction" that understands truth as a property of statements (and is thus open to debate). Though Detienne's language is at times troublingly beholden to a teleological opposition of *muthos* and *logos*, I believe the shift he points to is real—provided one understands the poles of his discussion not as absolute possibilities, but as regimes of intellectual authority.[30] "Mythical" and "rational" would name ways of understanding what it is that makes a statement true—its proceeding from an authoritative source, or its emerging from a persuasive argument.[31] The fifth century becomes increasingly self-conscious concerning the sources of truth, and comes to see intellectual authority as something that can be demonstrated, questioned, and debated.[32] Detienne describes the emergent form of speech as "dialogue," and though he only glancingly discusses drama, his argument has implications for understanding dramatic as well as philosophical dialogue.[33] Most significant, it suggests that drama and philosophy alike are governed by the same shifting regimes of truth and manifest, in their dialogic form, a developing relation to intellectual authority.

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[28] An alternative account of the philosophical dialogue's generic affiliations is found in Leslie Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations: Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 241–64.

[29] The shift in concepts of truth is traced in Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1996), esp. 89–106.

[30] The classic statement of the transition from myth to reason is Wilhelm Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos: Die Selbstentfaltung des griechischen Denkens von Homer bis auf die Sophistik und Sokrates* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1940). Much philosophical thought of the second half of the twentieth century offered a critique of this opposition: see Martin Jay, *Reason after Its Eclipse: On Late Critical Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

Central to all the dramatic scenes of thought discussed in this study, I argue, is a negotiation of authority. This negotiation can be more or less direct, but it has the philosophical function of subjecting implicit or explicit claims to dialectical examination. My approach, then, explores not just the making of philosophical claims in drama, but the working out of these claims through the construction of a work as a whole. There is a necessary connection between scenic thinking and questions of authority: any philosophical claim made in drama is necessarily refracted through the speaker and situation, and examining this claim involves an examination of the speaker's authority in making it. All of drama's utterances have to be understood as provisional or hypothetical, subject to interrogation over the course of the work. The dialectical approach of this study entails such attention to authority, since considering different positions or viewpoints within a play inevitably means considering the characters who hold them. Before philosophical authority was defined in disciplinary terms, its source was never a given, but always subject to negotiation and contestation. Drama confronts this issue directly by staging authority as a continual question.

The centrality of questions of authority to intellectual culture goes along with a persistent theological concern. To negotiate authority, in the fifth century at least, was inevitably to consider the role of the gods as authorities themselves or as guarantors for human authority. Each of the following chapters thus traces a theological dimension to its inquiry. A teleological viewpoint would see this theological dimension as residual, a way that drama has not yet left behind the thinking of *muthos* for *logos*, but I argue, to the contrary, that the relevant concerns are essentially theological, that the role of the gods in human culture, knowledge, and cognition is a central preoccupation of philosophical thought. One dimension of this preoccupation is obvious enough when one surveys the major thinkers and controversies of the later fifth century—atheism, agnosticism, and unconventional views of divinity are all attested, even if our evidence makes it difficult to work out just what these amounted to in practice—but I find theological questions and anxieties operative in drama well beyond issues of human belief or normative practice (though these are addressed directly in chapter 3). More fundamental, I argue, are attempts to figure the relation of divinity to human existence—as a source of culture, of knowledge, of intellectual authority. Each of the chapters addresses one dimension of this relation, while, collectively, they demonstrate the way that philosophical and theological concerns are inextricable for fifth-century intellectual culture as a whole.

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[31] A different view of the "rational" quality of Greek thought is found in G.E.R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), esp. 1–49.

[32] Maria Michaela Sassi has importantly emphasized that the shift in authority is not absolute, and most fifth-century thought (including Detienne's favored example of Parmenides) in fact witnesses a "cohabitation" of different forms of authority: Sassi, *The Beginnings of Philosophy in Greece*, 170.

[33] Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, 105–6.

Throughout the book, I discuss comedy (and possibly satyr play, depending on the status of the Sisyphus fragment) in relation to forms that develop primarily in tragedy. This is possible because of comedy's marked and self-conscious positioning of itself in relation to other discourses, its openness to the contemporary world, which makes a strong contrast to tragedy's apparent closure.[34] Old Comedy frequently picks up and elaborates ideas, plot elements, and scenic forms from tragedy and philosophical writing, as well as bringing major figures of contemporary intellectual life on stage. My readings will suggest, though, that its mode of openness is primarily receptive, and that, in comparison to tragedy, Old Comedy does somewhat less productive philosophical work on the scenic forms and questions it engages. Its relation to philosophical thought takes place primarily through parody and critique, and while these tactics often illuminate important dimensions of the ideas and forms they address, I do not find the same degree of independent philosophical work that I do in tragedy. This may be due simply to the limits of the method employed here, and a different approach might better bring out comedy's philosophical contribution. For the present purposes, though, we find in Aristophanic comedy a deep engagement with the questions raised by tragedy and philosophy, and a penetrating response.

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[34] The contrast between the genres is discussed in Oliver Taplin, "Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: A Synkrisis," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986): 163–74. For comedy's openness to other genres see Charles Platter, *Aristophanes and the Carnival of Genres* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Emmanuela Bakola, Lucia Prauscello, and Mario Telò, eds., *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Tragedy's (more covert and subtle) receptiveness to comedy is treated in Craig Jendza, *Paracomedy: Appropriations of Comedy in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

While the three parts of the study can be read independently, they can also be understood to chart, in exemplary form, the changing notions of intellectual authority that Detienne points to, from the monologic form of the catalog discussed in the first chapter through the second chapter's dialogic but imbalanced intrigue scene to the balanced debates of the third. The catalog, though formally premised on the speaker's authority to give a complete (in some sense) account, through its dramatic form becomes open to question and doubt, as the utterances of the catalog come into implicit or explicit conflict with the speaker's situation and other statements. The next form, the intrigue scene, begins with a hierarchy of power between an instructor and pupil, but this hierarchy, as the plays go on, comes to reflect doubts concerning the authority of the instructor, or even breaks down entirely. Finally, the debate form is premised on a relatively balanced confrontation between two figures, and uses their confrontation to explore consequential and opposed notions of intellectual authority. Over the course of the three forms, we see, in exemplary fashion, a democratizing of authority, as monologue gives way to dialogue and debate.

Whether this accurately charts a historical development over the course of the fifth century is hard to say, but the chapters do proceed in a roughly chronological order, and each of the forms discussed is associated with one of the three canonical tragedians. The form of the cultural catalog is notably Aeschylean, and is used to survey the inventions or capacities that make human beings civilized. The form extends well beyond Aeschylus (of whose catalogs we only have a few fragments), but some of its central instances in Sophocles and Euripides are notably Aeschylean. The next form discussed, the intrigue prologue, shows parallels to philosophical scenes of instruction such as those in the poems of Parmenides and Empedocles, and treats issues related to their inquiries into reality, knowledge, and the evidence of the senses. The intrigue prologue, in the particular form I discuss, is associated with later Sophocles (though related forms are found in Euripides), who uses it, as Aristophanes does as well, to explore the ethics and politics of deception in the tense years surrounding the oligarchic coup of 411. The final form, debate, is recognized as a broadly Euripidean specialty, and I identify an important subform that stages questions of intellectual authority through confronting opposed claims to wisdom (*sophia*). These debates take place against a philosophical background that, as discussed above, frequently thinks by opposing speakers and speeches, and the dramatic form of the contest, witnessed also in the Aristophanic *agōn* of Euripides and Aeschylus, should be understood as continuous with a wider inquiry into the meaning and location of wisdom.

The three parts of the study unfold in a roughly logical and historical development, though (in accordance with the synchronic method discussed above) none of my central claims relies on accepting such a development, or the associations I propose between forms and dramatists. The developments are, though, helpful in providing a heuristic scaffolding for understanding the disparate material of the study as a whole. Other configurations of the material are surely possible, and the constellations traced here are not in any sense complete or exhaustive. I begin to suggest some possible extensions of the study's approach in the Conclusion, and hope others will critique and refine my methods. This work takes part in a much wider attempt, already well underway, to understand the history of early Greek thought without disciplinary divisions or teleological assumptions. Drama is only one part of this project, and my approach here is ultimately more an experiment than a conclusion. There is much more to be done. The history of philosophical thought before philosophy substantially remains to be written.

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