

## *The Feasts of the Gods in Homeric Epic and Socrates' Apology*

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### ***Introduction***

I first heard Professor Bernd Jager speak in 1984, at Duquesne University's Second Annual Symposium of the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center. His presentation, "Language and Game in Psychoanalysis,"<sup>1</sup> introduced the themes that he would develop brilliantly in his later writings: language, the birth of civilization, festivals, the work of art, the obstacle, the threshold, and the miracle of a human order reemerging from chaos and barbarity.

In this oral presentation (although not in the final written paper), Professor Jager discussed the etymology of the word *therapy*, elaborating on the history and the connotations of the Greek *therapeia* (θεραπεία), including the loving, ritual care of statues of the gods. I would like to explore further the precursors of psychotherapy as found in the epics of Homer, and the implications of the etymology of the word *therapy*, examining the use of the term in ancient Greek literature. I will further examine Socratic dialogue, especially the proposal of a counterpenalty by Socrates in the *Apology*, in the light of Jager's writings. I suggest that the Homeric precursors to psychotherapy and the practice of philosophy as exemplified by Socratic dialogue represent the phenomena Jager described as the "Feasts of the Gods," festive occasions structured by a host-guest relationship linking the world belonging to mortals to the world belonging to immortals.

### ***Therapy in Homeric Epic***<sup>2</sup>

The epics of Homer, among the oldest surviving written works of Western civilization, demonstrate definite precursors to psychotherapy. The opening words, "Sing, Goddess, the anger of Achilles," refer specifically to emotional problems, citing μῆνιν (*menin*; *anger* or *wrath*) as the very first word and identifying it as the main subject of the epic. This placement emphasizes that the *Iliad* will be more than an action-filled, unthinking blood-and-guts war story. Guy Davenport,<sup>3</sup> in his introduction to the translation by Burton Raffels of short Greek poems and epigrams, comments that not only is the first word of the *Iliad* μῆνιν, the destructive anger of Achilles, but the last three syllables are δάμοιο (*damoio*; *tamer*), as in the term *hippodamoio* (*tamer of horses*), referring to Hector. The *Iliad* can be seen as emblematic of Greek civilization in its going from anger to control, seeking to tame wild and destructive forces.<sup>4</sup> This itself is a clue that we are in the presence, in the terms of Professor Jager, of the obstacle, the threshold, and the miracle of a human order reemerging from chaos and barbarity.

The *Iliad* is filled with injuries, battle wounds, and episodes of madness. The historian of ancient medicine, Henry E. Sigerist,<sup>5</sup> comments that the *Iliad* is an epic account of a bloody war, not a medical textbook. Nevertheless, in the spirit of Jager, it provides hints about the social and psychological aspects of healing in archaic Greek culture.

Homer cites several physicians and healers as esteemed members of the Greek army; he writes: ἱητροὺς γὰρ ἀνὴρ πολλῶν ἀντάξιος ἄλλων.<sup>6</sup> For this quotation, for example, Fagles gives: “A good healer is worth a troop of other men,”<sup>7</sup> and Paul Mazon translates the passage in the Budé edition as: “Un médecin vaut beaucoup d’autres hommes.”<sup>8</sup>

While the role of the physician was primarily the treatment of battle wounds and the use of verbal charms, Pedro Laín Entralgo<sup>9</sup> examines instances in which Homer describes verbal methods as part of the overall therapeutic regiment. Homer depicts, in the *Iliad* (Book XI), the aged but wise advisor Nestor, who bears to his tent the wounded physician Machaon, son of Asclepias, the god of healing. The wise Nestor strengthens Machaon with food and drink, and, as part of the overall treatment of the wound, skillfully uses words:

τῷ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν πίνοντ' ἀφέτην πολυκαγκέα δίψαν,  
μύθοισιν τέρποντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐνέποντες<sup>10</sup>

Fagles writes:

The two men drank their parching thirst away  
and had just begun to please themselves with talk,  
confiding back and forth.<sup>11</sup>

Mazon translates this passage as: “Une fois qu’ils ont bu et chassé la soif desséchante, ils se plaisent à échanger quelques propos.”<sup>12</sup>

Please note the context of eating and drinking, as well as the dialogue between the healer and the patient. The Greek word used, ἀλλήλους, is a reciprocal pronoun, indicating that the talking was not primarily by one person or by two persons talking in turn but independently, but was a true mutual dialogue, with the healer and the patient going back and forth and influencing each other. In this instance, the English translation by Fagles captures this nuance better than the French translation by Mazon.

In Book XV of the *Iliad*, while the battle is being waged elsewhere, the warrior Patroclus treats his wounded friend Eurypylus:

Πάτροκλος δ' ἦος μὲν Ἀχαιοὶ τε Τρῳεὺς τε  
τείχεος ἀμφεμάχοντο θοάων ἔκτοθι νηῶν,  
τόφρ' ὃ γ' ἐνὶ κλισίῃ ἀγαπήνορος Εὐρυπύλοιο

ἦστό τε καὶ τὸν ἔτερπε λόγοις, ἐπὶ δ' ἔλκεϊ λυγρῶ  
 φάρμακ' ἀκέσματ' ἔπασσε μελαινάων ὀδυνάων<sup>13</sup>

In the translation by Robert Fagles:

Now,  
 as long as the armies fought to take the rampart,  
 far from the fast ships, Patroclus sat it out . . .  
 in his friend Eurypylus' shelter . . .  
 trying to lift the soldier's heart with stories,  
 applying soothing drugs to his dreadful wound  
 as he sought to calm the black waves of pain.<sup>14</sup>

Mazon translates:

Patrocle cependant, tant que les Troyens et les Achéens luttent pour le mur, en dehors des fines neufs, demeure assis dans la baraque du courtois Eurypyle et le distrait de ses propos, en même temps que, sur sa plaie amère, il répand des poudres aptes à apaiser les noires souffrances.<sup>15</sup>

Please note that the verbal exchange occurs as a counterpoint to the initial stage of the fighting by the armies, and also note the association of soothing words and stories with soothing drugs. The Greek phrase τὸν ἔτερπε λόγοις literally means *delighted him with words* or *diverted him with talk*.

Láin Entralgo classifies the use of therapeutic words in Homeric epics into *magic charms, prayers to the gods, and persuasive and strengthening conversations with the patient*.<sup>16</sup> The two passages cited above are examples of persuasive and strengthening conversations, and can be identified as Homeric precursors of psychotherapy. Láin Entralgo further comments that Nestor and Patroclus “speak to their patients so that the diverting effects of the words they then utter may contribute in some way to the proper execution and the success of their therapeutic procedure,”<sup>17</sup> and, in contrast to verbal charms and prayers to the gods, their speech “exercises its particular therapeutic action by means of the natural efficacy possessed by what they say, not because of some presumed magic power.”<sup>18</sup>

Let us then attempt to summarize the essential points of these early attempts at psychotherapy by the wise man Nestor (Book XI) and the warrior Patroclus (Book XV): (a) the use of words, (b) in combination with other treatments, (c) in a supportive, caring setting, (d) with mutual dialogue, and (e), (in Book XI), with the provision of food and drink.

With this background, let us explore the etymology of the word *therapy*. Van der Eijk,<sup>19</sup> in his examination of the Hippocratic Corpus, summarizes the numerous Greek terms that

refer to healing, such as *iesthai* (to cure), *boethein* (to benefit), *ophelein* (to help), *apallassein* (to set free), *hugiazein* (to make healthy), and *therapeuein* (to treat). Very few of these terms refer to a complete cure; most have to do with helping or treating in a more limited way. Van der Eijk views these terms as good illustrations of how fundamental medical principles are interpreted in practice.<sup>20</sup> Let us then examine, as Professor Jager did in 1984, the term *therapeia* (θεραπεία).

For etymology of English words, Jager consistently and admiringly uses Ernest Klein's *Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*.<sup>21</sup> In this encyclopedic work, Klein traces the activity noun *therapy* (θεραπεία) to the Greek agent noun *therapōn* (θεράπων), which means *attendant*, *servant*, even at times *slave*. Klein further traces *therapōn* to *theraps* (θέραψ), a word of uncertain origin, which may derive from the Indo-European base *\*dher(ē)* (to hold, to support), which appears in the Greek *θρόνος* (*seat, throne*), as well as the Latin *firmus* (*strong*).

Nadia van Brock<sup>22</sup> explores in great detail the ancient Greek medical vocabulary and devotes a major section of her work to the study of words belonging to the family of *therapeuein*, *therapōn*. Most examples of this family of words do not occur in a medical setting. The early poets, such as Archilochus, Sappho, and Alcman, use *therapōn* to refer to an *attendant* or *servant*, even when speaking of themselves. The words do not occur in Sophocles or Euripides, but Aristophanes uses *therapōn* to refer to a *slave*. The noun *theraps* is less common, first used by Ion of Chios (fifth century BCE), then by Euripides, also to mean a *servant*. The verb *therapeuein* primarily means *to serve*, and is found in Herodotus, Hesiod, and other classic authors. As the language develops, *therapeuein* and *therapōn* expand their meaning from *serving a god* or *serving a master*, to *serving or caring for elderly persons and invalids* (Lysias), *animals* (Aristotle), *plants* (Herodotus), *clothing* (Plato), *temples and statues of the gods* (ancient inscriptions). Eventually, this family of words came to be one of the many words representing *medical care* (Apollonius of Miletus, the Hippocratic Corpus, and Galen).

Keeping in mind the early attempts at psychotherapy by Nestor and Patroclus, let us examine the use of *therapōn* in Homer. The word occurs frequently in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but often in reference to a human being an attendant of a god. The *Iliad* refers to the Greek warriors, as a whole, as *therapontes* of Ares, the god of war, emphasizing their duty of feudal service to the Greek lords in wartime. The noun is also used specifically in reference to the two Ajaxes, Diomedes, and Ulysses, as being servants or attendants of Ares.

There is an expression that occurs once in the *Odyssey*: *θεράποντε Διὸς* (*therapontes of Zeus*).<sup>23</sup> This line describes two children of Poseidon, Pelias and Neleus, as companions of Zeus. Pelias and Neleus are companions of Zeus, banqueting and sharing with him, just as the Greek warriors are attendants (or *companions*, in van Brock's preferred translation) of

the god Ares.<sup>24</sup>

We can expand the meaning of *therapōn* and apply it to Nestor and Patroclus. They are true companions to Machaon and Eurypylus, they are attendants upon them, they provide persuasive and strengthening conversations with their patients in the context of providing medical care, in a supportive, caring setting, and with mutual dialogue. They are similar to the therapontes of Zeus in being companions and in the provision of food and drink. They are also therapontes of Ares, since they treat their patients so that these patients can return to the war, and Patroclus even leaves Eurypylus, a few lines later, to join the Greek army fighting to take the rampart. For a period of time, even if limited, Nestor and Patroclus utilize food and conversation in the midst of a battle, providing the miracle of a human order reemerging from chaos and barbarity. Such an effort can “leave behind the quest for food and the struggle for survival, and involve itself in a festive encounter that seeks the mutual revelation of self and other.”<sup>25</sup>

Although Homer does not use the word *therapōn* to refer to Nestor and Patroclus in these two examples of treatment, both Nestor and Patroclus exemplify the multiple meanings of *therapōn*, from its Homeric usage to hints of the later poetic and medical uses of the term. We can call Nestor and Patroclus the first exemplars of *therapōn* as *therapist*, and we can see their efforts as Homeric examples of the Feasts of the Gods, festive occasions structured by a host-guest relationship linking the world belonging to mortals to the world belonging to immortals.

### ***The Apology of Socrates***<sup>26</sup>

One of the most puzzling episodes in the history of ancient philosophy is the behaviour of Socrates when on trial in an Athenian law court, in 399 BCE, for impiety (not believing in the gods of the city) and corrupting the youth. Not only does Socrates appear boastful and arrogant, he seems to be especially so when proposing a counterpenalty after being found guilty. Athenian jury trials occurred in two stages. The first was the finding of guilt or innocence by majority vote of the 500 or 501 jurors. If the defendant was found guilty, the prosecuting party proposed a penalty, the *timesis* (τίμησις), and the defendant proposed a counterpenalty, the *antitimesis* (ἀντιτίμησις). The jury could not propose a penalty of its own or change the proposed penalties but, like the professional arbitrator in the modern process of binding arbitration, had to select either the prosecutor's proposal or the defendant's counterpenalty.

Socrates was convicted by a smaller margin than he expected, believed to be of approximately 280 to 220, since Socrates says that a change of 30 votes would have acquitted him (a 50-50 tie was an acquittal in Athenian law). The prosecutors proposed the death penalty. According to the account given in the *Apology* by Plato, for his antitimesis

Socrates first proposed that his penalty be free meals for life, at public expense, at the Prytaneion (or Prytaneum), the seat of the executive government of Athens. He later amended this counterpenalty to a fine of one mina of silver, and finally, urged by his friends, he increased the proposed fine to thirty minas, to be guaranteed by his friends. This counterproposal of free lunch for life was considered so antagonistic and inflammatory that the vote for the death penalty was more lopsided than the original vote for conviction. Diogenes Laertius states that 80 more jurors voted for the death penalty, giving a total vote of approximately 360-140 for execution.

Xenophon, in his *Apology*,<sup>27</sup> gives a different account, based not on his being an eyewitness as Plato indicated that he himself was, but on the testimony of an informant. According to Xenophon, Socrates refused to propose a counterpenalty and forbade his friends from proposing one, leaving the jurors only one choice—the death penalty proposed by the prosecutors. In any case, the actions of Socrates have often been regarded as antagonistic and arrogant, precipitating the decision for the death penalty.

I. F. Stone<sup>28</sup> has argued that Socrates, throughout his trial, did his best to antagonize the jurors and, through his first two proposals for the counterpenalty, deliberately provoked and guaranteed the vote for condemnation to death. In a chapter entitled “How Socrates Easily Might Have Won Acquittal,” Stone develops this theme to the extent of suggesting what he believes would be a successful defense strategy, e.g., not speaking disdainfully of the craftsmen and traders who made up a large part of the Athenian population, and through emphasizing the traditional Athenian principle of free speech.<sup>29</sup> Even if convicted, Stone argued, Socrates could have avoided the death penalty if he had offered a more reasonable counterpenalty.

In his book, I. F. Stone called for a fresh look at the trial of Socrates. Perhaps it is also time for a fresh look at the counterpenalty proposed by Socrates, in the light of the themes developed by Professor Jager, especially that of festive occasions structured by a host-guest relationship, linking the world belonging to mortals to the world belonging to immortals.

While many distinguished philosophers have discussed the *Apology*, they have not usually examined in any detail the counterpenalty Socrates proposed. Cicero, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, treats Socrates' counterproposal as a problem in public speaking, viewing Socrates as “condemned solely for the offense of inexperience in oratory.”<sup>30</sup>

Søren Kierkegaard, in his 1841 master's thesis, *The Concept of Irony, with Constant Reference to Socrates*,<sup>31</sup> devotes numerous pages to the *Apology*, but refers to the proposed counterpenalty in just a few sentences, as if Socrates' words were just an afterthought: “But as Socrates feels his life can in no wise be comprehended by the state, it would appear that he might just as well merit a reward. He proposes therefore meals in the Prytaneum at public expense,” and adds in a footnote:

As his life as such is incommensurable with its conception by the state, and as he is no more deserving of a reward than a punishment from the state, so he therefore provides a second reason for this: he is a poor man in need of peace and quiet.<sup>32</sup>

Kierkegaard summarizes the entire section of the speech containing the counterproposal:

His discourse is not the mighty pathos of enthusiasm, his appearance not the absolute authority of personality, his indifference not a blissful reposing in his own fullness. We find none of these things. Instead, we have an irony carried through to its utmost limit.<sup>33</sup>

In his magisterial examination of the Platonic dialogues, *Being and Logos*, John Sallis devotes the first chapter to the *Apology*.<sup>34</sup> Sallis develops important insights and makes significant connections between the *Apology* and other Platonic dialogues, but does not directly address the counterpenalty proposed by Socrates.

However, this proposed counterpenalty may be more meaningful than Kierkegaard claims it to be in his statement that Socrates “might just as well” propose a reward. To examine the counterproposal more closely, let us look at the entire context of the *Apology*.

Certainly, many things stand out in reading Plato's *Apology*. I would like to start with a grammatical point, based on declensions of nouns. This work has one of the most frequent uses of the vocative case in ancient Greek literature. Throughout his speeches, Socrates addresses the jurors. He does not call them *gentlemen of the jury* or *judges* (ἄνδρες δικασταί), as was the usual practice, but consistently calls them *men* or *citizens of Athens* (ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι), or simply *gentlemen* (ὦ ἄνδρες), except at the conclusion, when he addresses those who voted to acquit, calling these *jurors* or *judges* (ἄνδρες δικασταί).<sup>35</sup> The naming of the jurors as *men* or *citizens of Athens*, rather than as *jurors* or *judges*, was itself considered inflammatory. An often overlooked fact, however, is how often Socrates directly addresses the jurors. There are over 110 instances of the use of the vocative case in the *Apology*, over 70% of these referring to the members of the jury, the rest to individuals, such as the chief accuser, Meletus. Certainly, Socrates' address to his chief accuser shows irony, sarcasm, and even a sense of superiority.<sup>36</sup> Through his frequent use of the vocative case, however, especially in his use of the term *men* or *citizens of Athens*, Socrates is trying to engage the jurors in some way—trying to prepare the way for Socratic dialogue. The use of the vocative is consistent with Socrates' practice of coming to each one of the citizens and addressing them through questioning and dialogue.

Throughout Plato's *Apology*, Socrates emphasizes that he is speaking the truth to the members of the jury and has always spoken the truth, no matter what the consequences. Speaking the truth for Socrates includes a respect for the other party, even if he subjects that party to questioning, cross-examination and refutation, and to the possibility of it

making a fool of itself. Socrates devotes much of his defense to his contact with religious matters. He talks about a *divine thing* or *divine guide* or *daimonion*,<sup>37</sup> a kind of *divine voice*,<sup>38</sup> or a *divine sign*<sup>39</sup> that directs his behaviour, and tells him what not to do or say.

Separate from this personal daimonion or divine sign is Socrates' "service to the god." While the daimonion never urges him to act and only tells him what not to do or not to say, Socrates' service to the god results in positive activity.

Socrates specifically mentions Apollo, the god of Delphi. Socrates' friend, Chaerephon, had asked the oracle at Delphi if there was anyone wiser than Socrates. The oracle replied that there was not.<sup>40</sup> The career of Socrates in questioning other men begins in his attempt to prove the oracle wrong, by finding someone who is indeed wiser than he is. Socrates is unable to find anyone wiser, but this pattern of questioning and refuting other men leads to hatred and prejudice against him personally, although Socrates emphasizes that he is doing his questioning at the god's behest. Eventually, Socrates comes to the conclusion that only the god is really wise, and that Apollo really means that:

"Human wisdom is of little or no value." And it appears that he [Apollo] does not really say this of Socrates, but merely uses my name, and makes me an example, as if he were to say: "This one of you, O human beings, is wisest, who, like Socrates, recognises that he is truth of no account in respect to wisdom."<sup>41</sup>

In the classic French translation by Victor Cousin:

La vérité est qu' Apollon seul est sage, et qu'il a voulu dire seulement, par son oracle, que toute la sagesse humaine n'est pas grand' chose, ou même qu'elle n'est rien; et il est évident que l'oracle ne parle pas ici de moi, mais qu'il s'est servi de mon nom comme d'un exemple, et comme s'il eût dit à tous les hommes : Le plus sage d'entre vous, c'est celui qui, comme Socrate, reconnaît que sa sagesse n'est rien.<sup>42</sup>

According to Sallis, it is only after Socrates achieves the above insight, that "human wisdom is of little or no value," that his philosophical practice changes from attempting to question or refute Apollo's oracle to a renewal of his own sense of ignorance, and a focus on the proper limit to his own wisdom or knowledge, and to then becoming a spokesman for Apollo to other men.<sup>43</sup> Socrates now goes about the city and questions other men, whether citizens or foreigners, at the god's command<sup>44</sup> ["pour obéir au dieu"]. As W. K. C. Guthrie summarizes the situation, Socrates' dependence on the oracle and his belief that he has been singled out for a special mission does not seem like a playful conceit, a pious fiction, or a rationalization, but a true belief motivating his behaviour.<sup>45</sup>

Socrates later adds: "I have been commanded to this by the God through oracles and

dreams and in every way in which any man was ever commanded by divine power to do anything whatsoever.”<sup>46</sup> In French translation:

Et je n’agis ainsi, je vous le répète, que pour accomplir l’ordre que le dieu m’a donné par la voix des oracles, par celle des songes et par tous les moyens qu’aucune autre puissance céleste a jamais employés pour communiquer sa volonté à un mortel.<sup>47</sup>

He describes himself as a kind of gift from the god (οἶος ὑπο τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ πόλει δεδόςθαι)<sup>48</sup> to the city of Athens. In a famous metaphor, he compares himself to a gadfly (μύωψ). In Harold North Fowler’s translation, Socrates says that he

attaches himself to the city as a gadfly to a horse, which, though large and well bred, is sluggish on account of his size and needs to be aroused by stinging. I think the god fastened me upon the city in some such capacity, and I go about arousing, and urging and reproaching each one of you, constantly alighting upon you everywhere the whole day long. Such another is not likely to come to you, gentlemen... And that I am, as I say, a kind of gift from the god, you might understand from this; for I have neglected all my own affairs and have been enduring the neglect of my concerns all these years, but I am always busy in your interest, coming to each one of you individually like a father or an elder brother and urging you to care for virtue; now that is not like human conduct.<sup>49</sup>

In the French translation of Cousin, Socrates is someone

qui semble avoir été attaché à cette ville . . . comme à un coursier puissant et généreux, mais que sa grandeur même appesantit, et qui a besoin d’un éperon qui l’excite et l’aiguillonne. C’est ainsi que le dieu semble m’avoir choisi pour vous exciter et vous aiguillonner, pour gourmander chacun de vous, partout et toujours sans vous laisser aucun relâche. Un tel homme, Athéniens, sera difficile à retrouver... Or, que ce soit lui-même qui m’ait donné à cette ville, c’est ce que vous pouvez aisément reconnaître à cette marque, qu’il y a quelque chose de plus qu’humain à avoir négligé pendant tant d’années mes propres affaires, pour m’attacher aux vôtres, en vous prenant chacun en particulier, comme un père ou un frère aîné pourrait faire, et en vous exhortant sans cesse à vous appliquer à la vertu.<sup>50</sup>

While it might sound insulting for the citizens to be compared to a sluggish horse, even if a noble one, this speech also indicates that Socrates cared for the citizens individually, and wished to engage them in dialogue. Furthermore, he does not do this solely on his own initiative, but is inspired, if not directly urged to do so, by the god.

As cited above, Socrates even calls himself “a kind of gift”<sup>51</sup> to the city of

Athens. He further states: "For know that the god commands me to do this, and I believe that no greater good ever came to pass in the city than my service to the god."<sup>52</sup> ["Et sachez que c'est là ce que le dieu m'ordonne, et je suis persuadé qu'il ne peut y avoir rien de plus avantageux à la république que mon zèle à remplir l'ordre du dieu."]<sup>53</sup>

From the standpoint of philosophy, Socrates' proposal of the antitimesis, the counterpenalty, as inflammatory as it may be, is similar to what he has been doing his entire life, and similar to what he has been doing in the earlier sections of the *Apology*. As Sallis comments on the practice of Socrates in questioning the citizens, "Despite his awareness of the hatred being provoked by his questioning, it was necessary, nevertheless, for him to continue his practice because of his relation to the god."<sup>54</sup>

The counterpenalty proposed by Socrates is in full accordance with his previous actions, is not a side issue, is not a failure of oratory, and is an essential part of the defense of his lifelong conduct. Through the counterpenalty of free meals at the Prytaneion, he becomes even more available to the citizens of Athens—the citizens he is addressing throughout his defense as ὁ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, and also to the other citizens of the city—to question them, to be available for their questioning him, to engage them in dialogue, and to help lead them, on behalf of the god, to virtue and to whatever wisdom is appropriate to humans.

In other works, Plato compares engaging in philosophic dialogue to a banquet or a meal in common. In the *Sophist*,<sup>55</sup> he directly calls philosophical dialogue a feast: τοῖς τε νέοις καὶ τῶν γερόντων τοῖς ὀψιμαθέσι θοῖνῃν παρεσκευάκαμεν ["We have provided a feast for the young and for some of the old men who have taken to learning late in life."]<sup>56</sup> ["Et c'est, je pense, servir, aux jeunes ou bien à quelques vieux, tard venus sur les bancs, un beau régal."]<sup>57</sup>.

Let us now look again at the counterpenalty proposed by Socrates in the light of comparison of philosophic dialogue to a feast. Socrates argues:

Now what is fitting for a poor man who is your benefactor, and who needs leisure to exhort you? There is nothing, men of Athens, so fitting as that such a man be given his meals in the Prytaneum. That is much more appropriate for me than for any of you who has won a race at the Olympic games with a pair of horses or a four-in-hand. For he makes you seem to be happy, whereas I make you happy in reality; and he is not at all in need of sustenance, but I am needy. So if I must propose a penalty in accordance with my deserts, I propose maintenance in the Prytaneum.<sup>58</sup>

In French translation:

Or, qu'est-ce qui peut convenir à un homme pauvre, votre bienfaiteur, qui a besoin de loisir pour ne s'occuper qu'à vous donner des conseils utiles ?

Il n'y a rien qui lui convienne plus, Athéniens, que d'être nourri dans le Prytanée; et il le mérite bien plus que celui qui, aux jeux olympiques, a remporté le prix de la course à cheval, ou de la course des chars à deux ou à quatre chevaux; car celui-ci ne vous rend heureux qu'en apparence : moi, je vous enseigne à l'être véritablement : celui-ci a de quoi vivre, et moi je n'ai rien. Si donc il me faut déclarer ce que je mérite, en bonne justice, je le déclare, c'est d'être nourri au Prytanée.<sup>59</sup>

Traditionally, free meals at the Prytaneum in Athens were awarded to Olympic victors, as Socrates mentions. Free meals were also given to the 50 members of the Council when on duty, to foreign ambassadors, and to other distinguished citizens who had brought benefit or honor to the city, such as the descendants of the heroes Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who helped restore democracy to Athens in the sixth century BCE. Perhaps Socrates is suggesting a comparison with all these groups: he is as valuable, or more valuable, to Athens as an Olympic victor, he would benefit the city by advising the members of the Council, he is an ambassador not from a foreign city but from the god, and he is restoring not democracy, but truth and virtue to the city.

Above all, he is suggesting that he be as available as possible to all the citizens of Athens, for their ultimate benefit, in fulfillment of the god's command. He wishes to hold dialogue with them, to advise and admonish them, to bring greater good to the citizens, and to provide a philosophical feast for them. When he is with them, the daimonion that inspires him is also with them. So, in a sense, is the god Apollo, whose commands Socrates is following.

The city is not the host for the free meals, the city merely is providing the occasion. Socrates, and ultimately Apollo, the divine presence, can be seen as the true hosts for a festive occasion, and the Athenian citizen body as the guests. The Prytaneion can be seen as an example of what Jager calls the threshold,<sup>60</sup> but only if the Athenian citizens freely agree to have Socrates as a presence among them, instead of having him executed. Entering the Prytaneion to meet with Socrates, who is acting in service to the god, is to enter a sacred space, to meet

the threshold, understood as the productive and sacred limit between self and other, between host and guest, man and god. . . . This threshold is the place of origin of the *primordial conversation*, which poses the question concerning the identity of the other in such a way that it cannot be separated from a revelation of the self.<sup>61</sup>

The antitimesis proposal by Socrates is not an insult, a provocation, or an afterthought, something proposed in passing because he "might just as well" merit a reward. The counterpenalty offered by Socrates is analogous to what he has practiced throughout his life, but now made potentially available to the entire city in fulfillment of his desire to make the citizens virtuous and happy in reality. It is an invitation to create festive occasions

structured by a host-guest relationship, linking the world belonging to mortals to the world belonging to immortals. Socrates offers dialogue leading to truth and virtue, and the presence, in some sense, of the god. Through his offer of a counterpenalty, Socrates summons the citizens of Athens to co-create with him a threshold into a sacred place where, on behalf of the god, dialogue can lead to a revelation of the self. Socrates has proposed a Feast of the Gods.

We have examined Homeric precursors to psychotherapy, whereby the wise Nestor strengthens the wounded physician Machaon with food and drink and treats him with words, and the warrior Patroclus treats his wounded friend Eurypylus by applying soothing drugs while trying to lift the soldier's heart with stories. We have also examined in detail the counterpenalty proposed by Socrates in the *Apology*—free meals for life at the Prytaneion and at public expense, rather than the death penalty demanded by the prosecutors. Both the Homeric precursors to psychotherapy and Socrates' proposal of a counterpenalty are seen to be examples of the phenomena Jager described as the Feasts of the Gods, festive occasions linking the world belonging to mortals to the world belonging to immortals.

These early examples from Homer and Plato show the potential for psychotherapy at its best, and for the practice of philosophy as exemplified by the life of dialogue, to be creative host-guest relationships leading to a revelation of the self, and giving rise to wisdom and true humanity. Professor Bernd Jager challenges us, as Socrates challenged the citizens of Athens, to make our practice of psychotherapy and philosophy authentic encounters between the self and others, to be open and welcoming to the threshold and the Feasts of the Gods.

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### **Endnotes**

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<sup>13</sup> Homer. *Iliad* (Murray, Ed., revised by Wyatt), book XV, 390-394.

<sup>14</sup> Homer. *The Iliad* (Fagles, Trans.), p. 400.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 31D1.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 20E6-21A7.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 30A5-7.

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