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Philosophy Plays: A Neo-Socratic Way of Performing Public Philosophy

Abstract:

This paper provides an explanatory rationale within a theoretical philosophical framework for the Philosophy Plays project as a call to public philosophy, conceived as a way of life and a form of communal therapy for the mind. The Philosophy Plays aim is to introduce philosophy to the general public through philosophical presentations by professional philosophers incorporating drama. Like Plato's dialogues, the Philosophy Plays, that combine dialectic (the philosophical talk) with rhetoric (the drama) seek to engage their public audiences in a realistic and shared lived experience, rendering philosophy a practical and meaningful applied activity for all participants, conceived as a way of life.

Keywords:

Philosophy Plays, drama, Plato, philosophy as a way of life, public philosophy, Stoic philosophy

1. Introduction

This paper provides an explanatory rationale within a theoretical philosophical framework for the Philosophy Plays project as a call to public philosophy,¹ conceived as a way of life and a form of communal therapy for the

1) For various academic groups that conduct research on public philosophy see <https://publicphilosophy.ucsc.edu/why-philosophy/> and the Centre for Practical Wisdom at the University of Chicago: Center for Practical Wisdom | The University of Chicago (uchicago.edu). For more academic information on performance philosophy see the *Journal of Performance Philosophy*: <https://www.performancephilosophy.org/journal>.

mind. The object of the Philosophy Plays is to introduce philosophy to the general public through philosophical presentations by professional philosophers incorporating drama. The Philosophy Plays project first conceived and introduced in Sydney, Australia by Edward H. Spence created a public domain for philosophy where relevant issues and topics of public interest and importance such as: love, immortality, happiness, friendship, religion, knowledge, trust, pets, morality, technology, and institutional corruption can be presented by professional philosophers and discussed in an open forum with members of the general public in a variety of public forums, such as restaurants and theaters. Philosophy Plays, like Platonic dialogues, seek to engage their audiences both intellectually (primarily through the philosophical talk) and affectively (primarily through the drama). Like Plato's dialogues, from which they draw their inspiration, the Philosophy Plays, which combine dialectic (the philosophical talk) with rhetoric (the drama) seek to engage their public audiences in a realistic and shared lived experience thus rendering philosophy a practical and meaningful applied activity for all participants, conceived as a way of life. The paper comprises three sections. Section 2, the theoretical part of the paper, sets out and explains the *Philosophical Rationale of the Philosophy Plays Project*; Section 3, the practical part of the paper, sets out and explains the practical aspect of *Public Philosophy through Performance*, and shows how it relates to the theoretical part of section (2); Section 4, is the *Conclusion* of the paper.

Historical Background

The Philosophy Plays Project was first conceived and founded in 1997 by Edward H. Spence (Department of Philosophy, University of Sydney) for the primary aim of taking philosophy out of the intellectually constraining spaces of university classrooms and professional conferences and into the liberating spaces of the public agora as Socrates did 2,500 years ago. It was a way of once again, rendering philosophy relevant and resonant to the shared and common concerns and interests of the citizenry of the modern polis.

There have been several annual series and individual performances of Philosophy Plays spanning a period of over twenty years, each series comprising six to thirteen fortnightly sessions most of which are repeated two or three times according to popular demand. Each series is organized around a generic theme. The Philosophy Plays have been performed at a Greek restaurant, in the inner-west of Sydney, in Newtown, located close to the University of Sydney. The philosophers are from various universities from around Australia that also include visiting philosophers from the USA. Examples of some of the theme series over the years have been as follows:

- 1997 *Love, the Good, Knowledge and Friendship*: six sessions on mainly Ancient Greek philosophy.
- 1998 *Visions of Immortality, God, Body and Soul*: ten sessions on the exploration of the connections and continuity between Greek and Modern philosophy.
- 1999 *Philosophy East and West* and *Zen and Zeno*: thirteen sessions on the exploration of the connections between Eastern and Western philosophy.
- 2000 *Olympics of the Mind*: nine sessions on the celebration of philosophical thought during the Sydney Olympics.
- 2001 *Philosophy as the Art of Living*: nine sessions on the exploration of how philosophy conceived as way of life of practical wisdom and virtue can guide us in living better and happier lives.
- 2002 *Philosophy as a Way of Life*: continuation of the theme for the 2001 series.
- 2003 *Thought for Food*: eight sessions on different aspects of Ethics and Food.
- 2004 *Olympians of the Mind*: five sessions on some of the prominent and influential Greek philosophers of antiquity in celebration of the Athens Olympics.

- 2005 *Faith and Reason: an exploration of the relationship between reason and faith through both Western and Eastern philosophy.*
- 2006 *A Decade of Public Philosophy: A Festival of Ten Years of Public Philosophy*

As part of the Philosophy Plays project, some of the following examples of philosophy plays were written, unless otherwise stated, by Edward H. Spence and performed by philosophers with a cast of actors, at various *Cultural and Arts Festivals* in Australia and at Conferences in the USA:

- 2021 “Ataraxia and Algorithms: Socrates Last Freedom” on the relevance of Socratic-Stoic Philosophy to the Control Problem of AI Technology for the 39th Greek Festival of Sydney, at The Hellenic Art Theatre, Marrickville, Sydney.
- 2018 “Zeno’s Secret: How to be Happy in an Unhappy World” on Stoic Philosophy for the 36th Greek Festival of Sydney, at the Factory Theatre, Marrickville, and Steki Taverna, Newtown, in Sydney.
- 2011 “Wise After the Fact” a play on the Pursuit of Wisdom in the Age of Digital Information performed for the 29th Greek Festival of Sydney at Ithaca Caffe, Potts Point, Sydney.
- 2006 “The Philosophy of Love” performed for the *Philosophers and Chefs* series for the 24th Greek Festival of Sydney.
- 2005 “The Philosophy of Freedom” for the 23rd Greek Festival of Sydney, performed at the Museum of Sydney.
- 2004 “The Philosophy of Love: Love in the Age of Terror” performed for the 22nd Greek Festival of Sydney at the *Sydney Opera House*. This event was also recorded and broadcast as a one-hour program on “Big Ideas,” *ABC Radio National*.
- 2004 “The Philosophy of Love” performed for the Adelaide Fringe Festival, at Coriole Vineyards at McLaren Vale, South Australia.
- 2003 “Plato, Power and the Ring of Corruption” performed for the 21st Greek Festival of Sydney, the Sidetrack Theatre, Marrickville, Sydney.
- 2002 “The Philosophy of Happiness” performed for the Adelaide Fringe Festival, at Coriole Vineyards, McLaren Vale, South Australia.
- 2001 “The Philosophy of Happiness” performed by MA Students from the Ethics and Public Affairs Centre, University of Montana at an Italian restaurant in Missoula and directed by Professor Deni Elliott, Director of that Centre.
- 2001 “The Philosophy of Happiness” performed for the Sydney Fringe Festival.
- 2000 “Socrates in Love” performed for the Greek Festival of Sydney, at the Cellar Theatre, the University of Sydney.
- 1999 “Zen and Zeno” co-authored by Rick Benitez and Edward H. Spence for the Carnivale Festival, at Steki Taverna, Sydney.

2. The Philosophical Rationale of the Philosophy Plays Project

*Thus, all our dignity consists in thought. It is on thought that we must depend for our recovery, not on space and time, which we can never fill. Let us then strive to think well; that is the basic principle of morality.*²

2) Pascal, *Pensées* s.200, 95.

According to the quotation from Pascal above, “all our dignity consists in thought.” Pascal also said, however, that “the heart has its own reasons.” I extend the metaphor by adding that reason has its own passion. The Philosophy Plays is an attempt to bring together reason and passion, the cognitive and the affective, and the intellect and the emotions through the combined mediums of philosophy and drama. As disciplines and practices involving conflict, in philosophy – the conflict of abstract ideas and arguments, in drama – the conflict of characters, philosophy and drama are ideal and well-suited partners in a marriage of theory and practice. The purpose for the designed fusion of reason and passion, intellect, and the emotions, is that rational choice in decision-making, including ethical decision-making, requires it.

Two overarching necessary conditions for rational choice in decision-making are (a) justification and (b) motivation. Though necessary, these may not always be sufficient conditions, as external compliance through an outside agency may also be required in cases where one is both rationally convinced that there is justification for doing something, and moreover motivated to act on his justified conviction, fails to do so because of weakness of the will or some other reason such as addiction, for example.

(a) Justification

Justification is intended to provide convincing if not conclusive rational reasons for selecting one course of action rather than another. In ethics, for example, these are conclusive or at least convincing reasons why one should act morally when one has alternative choice(s) for not acting morally or for acting immorally.

(b) Motivation

Justified reasons alone, however, are not sufficient to guide rational and moral action. That is because, rational action, and moral action specifically, requires that the rational reasons of justification must also be motivating reasons. For if justificatory reasons are not motivating reasons, they cannot be practical and if they cannot be practical, they are not action-guiding and hence cannot play a role in the decision-making process. Thus, the decision-making process requires reasons for action that are at once justificatory and motivating.

With regard to the Philosophy Plays as a method for performing public philosophy, *justification* will primarily appeal to the *intellect* aroused dialectically with learning mediated through *philosophical arguments* designed to provide justificatory reasons for action in decision-making, including ethical decision-making; *motivation*, on the other hand, will primarily appeal to *feelings* and *emotions* aroused rhetorically with learning mediated through the *dramatic plays*.

The decision-making model as described above that comprises both justification and motivation and corresponds respectively to philosophical arguments and dramatic plays consists of two main levels: the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical level comprises two sub-levels: the *meta-ethical* and the *normative*. The practical level, in turn, comprises three levels: *the meta-motivational*, *the relevant-contextual*, and *the motivational*.

The Theoretical Level

The meta-ethical level: At this initial and highest theoretical level, the philosophical inquiry seeks to determine through a critical and interactive dialogue with the audience (dialectic), what legitimate authority, if any, philosophy and specifically moral philosophy, exercises or at least ought to exercise over us. I refer to this

question as, *the authoritative question of morality*:³ the question of “why be moral?” The authoritative question of morality and philosophy generally, seeks in effect to determine if there are any rational reasons for thinking and acting morally that are justificatory and motivating, capable at least of motivating moral action through the agent’s own rational internal compliance.

This is the most crucial level in the dialectical philosophical enquiry, since the audience is invited to doubt and feel challenged in thinking for themselves if there are indeed any good *internal reasons* for thinking and acting morally. Internal reasons for ethical action are justificatory and motivational reasons for action that appeal primarily, if not exclusively, to the agent’s subjective rational perspective. That is to say, internal reasons for ethical action are reasons that appeal primarily if not exclusively to the authority that morality and philosophy generally has over a rational individual in its own right without any further reference or appeal to other external legal, social, religious, or familial edicts, rules, commandments, or other external reasons for action and in particular ethical action.

To be sure, there might indeed be instrumental reasons (means-end reasons) for acting morally even when one is not rationally convinced that there are authoritative internal reasons for doing so. Such instrumental reason may have nothing or very little to do with the authority of morality to prescribe moral conduct. Such reasons might be those of self-preservation, emanating from fear or anxiety of being caught and punished by others or the state, for one’s moral transgressions. Thus, a person might abstain from shoplifting not out of any rational conviction that shoplifting is morally wrong but out of fear of being caught and sent to prison.

What if, however, in the absence of authoritative and convincing internal reasons for moral conduct, one could act immorally at will without fear or anxiety of ever being caught and punished by others or the state? In other words, what if one could act immorally with total impunity? Would there be any reason, under these circumstances, for acting morally, especially if one were convinced, under our hypothetical scenario, that there were no internal reasons and certainly no instrumental reasons, for doing so? One could indeed be considered irrational or even mad to act morally under this scenario, especially if acting morally went against one’s self-interest. This is more or less what Glaukon tells Socrates in Plato’s dialogue the *Republic*, after relating to Socrates the “Myth of Gyges.” Myths are an effective and engaging rhetorical device used by Plato throughout his dialogues to dramatically illustrate and reinforce the dialectical arguments for and against in a given discussion or debate. This initial stage of the Socratic dialectical enquiry (*elenchus*) is designed to induce in the audience a state of Socratic *aporia* or doubt, followed by a state of anticipation for further enquiry to discover the solution, if any, to the problem of the authoritative question of morality, “why be moral?”

The normative level: It is precisely at this point when the audience’s intellectual curiosity is aroused, and their imagination fired by the question posed by the Myth of Gyges “why be moral?” Apart from functioning as a dramatic and heuristic prop for examining possible solutions to the authoritative question of morality and philosophy generally, the authoritative question of morality is also used to provide a comparative evaluative analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different philosophical solutions. In analyzing the justificatory and motivational ability of each of the philosophical solutions, the audience are offered the philosophical opportunity to determine for themselves the relative merits of each alternative philosophical theory canvassed. This dialectical stage in the Socratic *elenchus* enhances the audience’s learning experience and helps consolidate both their meta-ethical and normative understanding. The philosopher teacher as presenter, through the use of the Myth of Gyges as a pedagogical tool, functions effectively as a Socratic mid-wife, helping the audience give birth to their own knowledge and understanding.

3) Alan Gewirth refers to this question as the most fundamental question in morality in his book, see Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*.

The authoritative question of morality and philosophy generally, framed within the Myth of Gyges, also functions to reveal to the audience the importance of the virtues for ethical conduct and generally philosophy as a way of life, as conceived by Socrates and later by the Hellenistic philosophers such as the Stoics and the Epicureans.⁴ For if rules and principles within the theoretical framework of normative philosophical theories cannot adequately motivate philosophical thinking let alone conduct, even when they provide justificatory reasons for such conduct, the cultivation and inculcation of character virtues such as courage, moderation, prudence, and justice (the cardinal virtues) offer an extra motivational boost that may, with habituation, prove adequate for motivating virtuous and philosophical conduct, conceived as a way of life for the attainment of *eudaimonia*, happiness or wellbeing.

The Practical Level

The meta-motivational level: The introduction of the virtues at this point of the dialectical enquiry is crucial in showing that ethics is not merely about the acquisition of theoretical knowledge regarding certain ethical rules and principles embedded within ethical theories but is, more importantly, about ethical practice, both with regard to individual and collective action. As Aristotle points out in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we study ethics not merely to acquire knowledge about what ethics is but to learn how we can become ethical persons.⁵ Knowing what ethical conduct consists in, is not the same as engaging in ethical conduct. As argued earlier, ethical action requires not merely justification for acting ethically but also motivation for so doing. And the virtues provide the additional motivational power that can through habituation translate ethical thought based on intellectual justification and abstract, impersonal, rational motivation, into ethical action based on *personal motivation* through *excellence of character*. The inculcation of the virtues translates theoretical knowledge (knowledge that) into practical knowledge (knowledge how or know how).

The introduction of the virtues as a stage in the dialectical enquiry of the learning process is designed to *form* and not merely inform the audience about ethics and philosophy generally. Insofar as character is motivationally important for ethical conduct, and philosophical conduct generally, the encouragement offered to the audience to help them begin to form an ethical character is a crucial aspect of the Socratic *elenchus* in moral and philosophical education. I will refer to this stage of the Socratic *elenchus* as the *protreptic* (didactic) component of ethical and philosophical education. Like the sciences, ethical knowledge includes an important applied and practical component. Unlike other sciences, however, the subject of ethical education and its application is oneself and one's relations to other persons: the object of ethical education is to cultivate in oneself ethical and virtuous pre-dispositions that would enable one to act ethically in most if not all circumstances, especially under difficult conditions that may go against one's short-term self-interest. It is precisely in *exhorting* the audience through the dramatic dialogues of the philosophy plays that the protreptic component of ethical and philosophical education becomes essential: as Aristotle reminds us, we study ethics not to know what the good is, but how to become good persons.⁶ This brings us to the relevant-contextual stage of the dialectical learning process of the philosophy plays.

The relevant-contextual level: the importance of this level cannot be emphasized enough. For it is at this level of the dialectical learning process that the abstract theoretical ideas are rendered concrete and contextualized in relation to the audience's own pre-theoretical subjective and inter-subjective experiences. For unless

4) For reference to various authors on Hellenistic philosophy that inform this paper see the bibliography.

5) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 93.

6) *Ibid.*, Book II:ii, 93.

the ethical and philosophical principles, theories, rules, values, and virtues can be shown to be relevant to both the audience's own personal and cultural experiences, the ethical and philosophical pedagogy that incorporates philosophical theory both meta-theory and normative, and character virtues, will only provide a rational and theoretical motivation for ethical and philosophical conduct, which may not prove adequate by itself in motivating ethical and philosophical conduct in concrete situations; situations similar to those that the audience are likely to confront in their personal and professional lives. The relevant contextualization of philosophical education is engendered through the rhetorical devices of live performance of dramatic plays, designed to wed the theoretical philosophical pedagogy with the audiences' own personal and cultural experiences and knowledge, rendering the philosophical pedagogy thus contextualized, *a personal transformative and existential experience*, and not simply an informative abstract intellectual exercise. This is in keeping with philosophy as a way of life as conceived by Socrates and the Stoic and other Hellenistic philosophers.

The relevant-contextual level is thus primarily designed to transform the theoretical motivation discussed above into a more potent affective, visceral, and psychological motivation; capable, at least in principle if not in every practical instance, of motivating the audience to incorporate ethical conduct in their personal as well as their professional lives. Significantly note that the Philosophy Plays format that combines philosophy with drama, is *context sensitive*. That is, the content of the dramatic component of the philosophy plays can be adapted to suit the context relevant to the philosophical topics under discussion. So, for example, the content of the philosophy play *A Prefect Injustice* (see section 3) is used dramatically to illustrate the topic of corruption. This brings us to a discussion of the most crucial stage of philosophical education: the pre-theoretical stage that takes place at the meta-motivational level of the Socratic *elenchus*.

The motivational level: The examination of philosophy as described above is on the whole an entirely new and challenging experience for a public audience. The problem is not merely to effectively motivate the audience to think philosophically using the theoretical and practical elements of the pedagogical methodology described under the various levels above; the problem initially is one of establishing an efficient and effective mode of *interactive communication* between the philosopher presenter and the audience as learners; that is, getting the audience *to listen* and be *receptive* to the information that is being communicated to them.

The reception of communication of new information by the audience cannot be taken for granted, especially, when it concerns philosophy. That is because the authority of philosophy as rational discourse, especially when applied to morality, cannot be taken for granted. It has to be earned through the reception and acceptance of the rational arguments that support that authority through the rational endorsement by the audience. The final arbiter in the ethical decision-making model discussed under the Neo-Socratic method so far, are the member of the audience themselves. As final arbiters, the audience must voluntarily offer their personal internal rational endorsement to the theoretical arguments that support the authority of philosophy; by contrast, they must not be expected to assent to an involuntary endorsement of philosophy's authority simply on the basis of some arbitrary authority imposed upon the audience externally, including that of the philosopher presenter, regardless of their academic credentials. Unlike legal authority, moral and philosophical authority generally, the audience must be granted willingly and internally by each rational agent on the basis of valid and sound arguments capable of eliciting the agent's rational assent.

The *problem of reception* that I have outlined above (getting the audience to be receptive to the ethical information communicated to them), can be compared to the problem concerning the authority of morality: the question "why be moral" is now preceded by the question that can be posed by a putative member of the audience "why should I listen to what Plato or other philosophers, both ancient and modern, have to say about morality, or any other topic, especially since they don't speak my language. In any case, what does all this philosophy have to do with me?" This question I recall was once raised by one of my students in a tutorial philosophy

class at the University of Sydney: “why should we accept what philosophers say and prescribe?” From a first-year philosophy student I thought that this was an excellent question to ask.

The *reception problem* is a problem that concerns not merely philosophy but also effective communication. The philosophical information communicated to the audience must be capable of being communicated to them in a way that speaks their language: it must be relevant to their personal, cultural, and professional interests and experiences. The reception problem is also a philosophical problem for unless the audience can be assisted in becoming receptive to the philosophical education that is being communicated to them, the philosopher presenter will fail to provide effective philosophical education to the audience. So the avoidance to deal with the problem of reception at the meta-motivational level of philosophical pedagogy is not an option for any presenter or teacher of philosophy who wants to impart to their audience an appropriate and adequate philosophical education, sufficient to the audience’s cultural, social, and professional environment. In short, the philosopher presenter has a philosophical obligation and a duty to address and deal with the reception problem in his or her philosophical pedagogy, especially when the pedagogy concerns moral issues.

The reception problem confronted initially at the meta-motivational level can of course be addressed and met through the various rhetorical devices of the philosophy plays referred to above under the practical motivational and relevant-contextual levels. However, it is of the utmost importance to first recognize and acknowledge the reception problem as a meta-motivational problem that has to be addressed and solved through the utilization of effective and efficient rhetorical and protreptic devices that engender successful receptive communication by the audience, at the outset. As such, the reception problem must of necessity be addressed and solved at the very first stage in the dialectical process of the philosophical pedagogy offered by the philosopher.

Having concluded this section on the rationale and structure of the Philosophy Plays project, conceived as a way of life, let us now examine the concept of public philosophy in practice and why public philosophy conceived as a way of life is important and relevant for society, not only theoretically but practically as well.

3. Philosophy for the Public

The primary object of the Philosophy Plays is to introduce philosophy to the general public and local communities through philosophical presentations by professional philosophers incorporating drama. To this end the Philosophy Plays aim at making philosophy more accessible and relevant to the general public. As a large number of people do not have the time or the resources to study philosophy at universities and other tertiary institutions, the Philosophy Plays provide a means of rendering philosophy accessible to people who would otherwise not have access to it.

The Philosophy Plays, as aforementioned, are usually performed at restaurants and other venues accessible to the public such as theatres in the form and style of a Platonic symposium. They comprise four inter-related components:

1. A 20-minute talk by a professional philosopher.
2. A play performed by actors that dramatically illustrates the ideas in the philosophical talk.
3. Audience participation through discussion of the presentation and performance.
4. A banquet of food and wine served to the audience and the participants.

The drama component in the Philosophy Plays is either adapted from existing plays or philosophical dialogues or created and written specifically by the philosopher presenters themselves.

The Philosophy Plays, like Platonic dialogues, seek to engage their audiences both dialectically (primarily through the philosophical talk) and affectively (primarily through the drama). The restaurant setting provides a popular and relaxed forum where people from different backgrounds and different levels of philosophical sophistication and education can come together to discuss various philosophical issues. This is the setting familiar in Plato's *Symposium*, and it is the setting that inspired the structure of the philosophy play presentations. The banquet and the wine are grist to the mill of philosophical discussion. They create a convivial atmosphere where the audience and the performers come together in friendship, as in Plato's *Symposium*, to engage actively in a liberating and lively philosophical exchange. Interestingly, the word "restaurant" is derived from the word "restore." One could say that doing philosophy in a restaurant restores both the mind and the body through providing food for thought. In combination, the philosophy presentation, the banquet of food and wine as well as the dramatic performance can, when presented and performed successfully, engage the public audience both intellectually and emotionally.

The Philosophy Plays always aim to be at once entertaining and informative but most importantly, transformative. For it is only through a personal and authentic transformation that philosophy as the examined life can be conceived as practical wisdom and become a way of life, a "βίου τέχνη" or the art of life, that leads to a flourishing and fulfilling life, as conceived by Plato and Aristotle and later, the Hellenic philosophers such as the Cynics, the Stoics, and the Epicureans.⁷

In the preface of her book *Poetic Justice*, Martha Nussbaum, referring to Walt Whitman, tells us that,

Walt Whitman wrote that the literary artist is a much-needed participant. The poet is "the arbiter of the diverse ... the equalizer of his age and land." His capacious imagination "sees eternity in men and women" and "does not see men and women as dreams or dots." Whitman's call for public poetry is, I believe, as pertinent to our time as it was to his... . Very often in to-day's political life we lack the capacity to see one another as fully human, as more than "dreams and dots."⁸

Nussbaum goes on to say that the purpose of her book,

Is to describe the ingredient of public discourse that Whitman found missing from his America and to show some roles it still might play in our own. It grows out of the conviction, which I share with Whitman, that the storytelling and literary imagining are not opposed to rational argument but can provide essential ingredients in a rational argument.⁹

In what follows, I will explain and demonstrate how "storytelling and literary imagining," through the medium of philosophy plays, "can provide essential ingredients in a rational argument." But first, I want to briefly explore

7) As an illustrative example of philosophy conceived as a way of life by Socrates and later the Hellenistic philosophers, whose work inform this paper, see the works of several authors, such as Long, Nussbaum, Annas, Hadot, Striker Becker, and Epictetus, listed in the Bibliography of this paper. For details of a philosophy play on Stoic philosophy, see Appendix for an extract of a philosophy play written by Edward H. Spence and performed by a cast of three actors at the Factory Theatre for the Greek Festival of Sydney in 2018. The play explores Stoic philosophy contextualised in a present setting in Citium (present day Larnaca) the birthplace of Zeno the founder of Stoic Philosophy. The two main characters, Theo, and Venus, come to Larnaca to learn more about Stoic philosophy as an antidote and therapy for their previously unhappy and turbulent lives in Australia: Venus from a broken heart and Theo after losing everything, during his 5-year prison term for insider-trading.

8) Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, xiv.

9) Ibid.

Nussbaum's claim in *Poetic Justice*; "that academic philosophy in the United States has had relatively few links with practical choice and public life."¹⁰ Nussbaum is perhaps right about the *degree* of contact, if not the scope, and her comment could apply not only to academic philosophy in the United States but equally to academic philosophy in the Western analytic tradition generally, as the one I studied as a student at the University of Sydney.

Leaving aside the degree with which it does, there are several ways in which academic philosophy makes contact with public life. There is to begin with the contact with the *education domain* through the traditional educational model of philosophy found in universities and other tertiary institutions. Though indirect, this is the primary contact of academic philosophy with public life. Aligned to this but not directly related, is the teaching and practice of applied and professional ethics that targets particular groups of professionals such as the police, the media, medicine and health care, engineering, social work, the public sector, business, and other professional groups in the *professional domain*. This *professional* model of philosophy has by far a more direct contact with the public than the traditional educational model and one that has had expanding growth in the last few years. Philosophy also makes contact with the *political domain* that targets government both locally and globally on issues of human rights and other issues of political governance.

However extensive the degree of this contact of philosophy with public life is, in scope if not in degree, the *cultural domain* is an area of public life that philosophy has had very little contact with. This is the domain where most people spend their daily lives. Going to the cinema, to the theatre, to concerts, eating out at restaurants, visiting friends or family, lounging around cafes, socializing in bars, going to church, playing sport, or hanging out in gyms. This is primarily the domain of the affections and the sentiments. If there is anywhere where reason is the slave of the passions, it is, if Hume is right, in the cultural domain. If philosophy is going to make contact with public life in the cultural domain, then its approach has to be one that can appeal to the affections and the sentiments of the public. A public moreover who by and large is not acquainted or familiar with philosophy, and especially Western philosophy. In order to engage with public life within the *cultural domain*, philosophy has to employ rhetorical devices that can appeal to popular culture.

The Philosophy Plays as we saw earlier employ two main rhetorical devices that have popular cultural appeal. First, the restaurant setting provides through a banquet of food and wine a convivial atmosphere where people can eat, drink, and relax among friends. This is the setting familiar in Plato's *Symposium*¹¹ and it is the setting that inspired the structure of the philosophy play presentations. Secondly, the drama that accompanies each philosophy presentation provides as a form of entertainment as well as through its emotional content, a means of engaging the audience and motivating their attention and participation. In combination, the philosophy presentation, the banquet of food and wine as well as the dramatic performance can engage the public audience both intellectually and emotionally. In sum, the Philosophy Plays engages the public in the cultural domain.

In *Poetic Justice*, Nussbaum tells us that her "central subject is the ability to imagine what it is like to live the life of another person who might, given changes in circumstances, be oneself or of one's loved ones." Talking of the reading of literature as a way of animating public thinking and public debate, she goes on to say that "the reader's emotions and imagination are highly active as a result, and it is the nature of this activity, and its relevance for public thinking, that interests me."¹² In the case of the Philosophy Plays it is the audience's emotions and thoughts that are of relevance to public thinking. And the discussion that follows the Philosophy Plays is crucial in providing the public audience with a dialectical evaluative assessment. Citing Adam Smith, Nussbaum refers to this kind of evaluative assessment as one carried out by a "judicious spectator." According

10) Ibid.

11) Plato, *Symposium, and the Death of Socrates*.

12) Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 5.

to Nussbaum, Smith's judicious spectator "offers an artificial construction ... [that] supplies a filtering device for emotion of just the sort that Smith thought necessary for emotions to play the valuable role they ought to play in public life." For Nussbaum thinks, and I agree, that "the spectator's responses are not just willed attitudes of concern, they are really emotions; and Smith plainly believes that the cultivation of appropriate emotions is important for the life of the citizen."¹³

One of the central concerns of the Philosophy Plays is the cultivation of appropriate public emotions through the dialectical structure provided by them. This is achieved through the balance between the dialectical framework of the philosophical presentation and the rhetorical structure of the drama, which are then subjected to an evaluative assessment by the judicious spectators in the public audience. The audience participation through discussion helps provide a dialectical evaluative assessment of the topic presented and performed in the philosophy play. Following Wayne Booth, Nussbaum refers to this discursive process as "coduction" since as she says it is,

A nondeductive, comparative type of practical reasoning that is carried on in cooperation with others. In the process of coduction, our intuitions about a literary work will be refined by the criticisms of ethical theory and of friendly advice, and this may greatly alter the emotional experience that we are able to have as readers.¹⁴

Philosophy as Therapy

What inspires and informs the Philosophy Plays? The central inspiration of the Philosophy Plays is the Hellenistic belief that philosophy must be practical. Not just ethics, but all aspects of philosophy, including, logic, metaphysics, and epistemology. Epicurus tells us that, "Empty is the philosopher's argument by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated. For just as there is no use in a medical art that does not cast out the sickness of bodies, so too there is no use in philosophy, unless it casts out the suffering of the soul."¹⁵

The Greek Stoic Chrysippus also describes the philosophical art in therapeutic terms. He says, for example, that "It is not true that there exists an art called medicine, concerned with the diseased body, but no corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul. Nor is it true that the latter is inferior to the former, in its theoretical grasp and therapeutic treatment of individual cases."¹⁶ Cicero speaking on behalf of the Stoics expresses the same view. He contends that "there is a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavor with all our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves."¹⁷

All the Hellenistic Schools accepted Sextus Empiricus' view that "philosophy is an activity that secures the flourishing life by arguments and reasonings."¹⁸ In her book *The Therapy of Desire*, Martha Nussbaum takes up and expands on the Hellenistic arguments that support the claim that philosophy is therapy for the soul. Referring to the Hellenistic philosophers, she argues that they "Saw the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering. They practiced philosophy not as

13) Ibid., 72–74.

14) Ibid., 76.

15) Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 13.

16) Ibid.

17) Ibid., 14.

18) Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 15.

a detached intellectual technique dedicated to the display of cleverness but as an immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery.”¹⁹

According to Nussbaum, these philosophers’ focus was,

The state of desire and thought in the pupil which made them seek a newly complex understanding of human psychology, and led them to adopt complex strategies – interactive, rhetorical, literary – designed to enable them to grapple effectively with what they had understood... . In these ways Hellenistic ethics is unlike the more detached and academic moral philosophy that has sometimes been practiced in the Western tradition.²⁰

As Nussbaum reminds us, for the Hellenistic philosophers, philosophy was a “βίον τέχνη” or art of life²¹. By doing philosophy one learned how to live a good, ethical, and most importantly, *eudaimonic* or happy life.

Philosophy as Public Knowledge and Rationality

As examined earlier, the only legitimate authority is the authority of reason that is engendered through interactive dialogue that engages both the mind and the emotions. Philosophy as presented in the Philosophy Plays is primarily a dialogue in which all contributors, philosophers, actors, and the public audience, play an equal part in their shared cognition and emotions and evaluative assessment of those shared cognitions and emotions through the discussion that follows each philosophy play. This is a process in which the subjective experience of each participant becomes objectified through interactive dialogue with others and objectivity becomes authentically subjective through the discovery of shared truths and values by each individual person. It is through this process that transformation takes place, a transformation that potentially leads to enlightenment and liberation from the shackles of subjective biases and ignorance and the arrogance of an externally imposed unauthenticated and often unsubstantiated “objective knowledge” disseminated by the media in all its different guises.

Paraphrasing from Paulo Freire’s book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*²² in order to achieve this kind of philosophical transformation it is necessary to trust in the ability of people to reason. According to Freire, “whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions.”²³ This reminds me of a poignant moment in Brecht’s play *Galileo* where Galileo, responding to his friend’s advice to be careful about expressing his dangerous cosmological views, replies that if he did not have trust in people’s ability to reason he could not get out of bed in the morning. It is perhaps this conception of public reason that Nussbaum refers to as “the multi-valued conception of public rationality.”²⁴

The unreflective intellectual authority that Galileo was opposing is akin in spirit to the intellectual arrogance opposed by Socrates. Socrates’ metaphor for true knowledge was midwifery. Socrates, who saw himself as a philosophical midwife helping others give birth to knowledge, believed that true knowledge cannot be imposed by experts from without, nor generated from within through unreflective dogmatic and self-serving

19) Ibid., 3.

20) Ibid., 4.

21) Ibid., 5.

22) Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

23) Ibid.

24) Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, xv.

thoughts but rather, generated internally both individually and collectively through participation in interactive reflective dialogue. Following Socrates' metaphor, we can say that philosophy takes place, or should take place, in a "public nursery." This introduces the dual concepts of love and innocence, cognitive sentiments that I believe are essential to the pursuit of truth and wisdom.

As Paulo Freire correctly points out, "dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people."²⁵ It is for that reason that I consider Plato's dialogue on Love, the *Symposium*, to be central to his philosophy. If philosophy is the love of wisdom – *philo-sophia* – then wisdom cannot exist in the absence of love. The innocence comes through philosophy's magical ability to transform us into curious children encountering the world for the first time. Without stretching Socrates' metaphor too far, we not only give birth to knowledge through philosophy but are also born anew through philosophy. This is how death and birth come together in Plato. We die to the world of arrogance and ignorance and are reborn into the world of truth and wisdom. This intricate connection between death and birth through the transformation of love is clearly evident in the thematic continuity between Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, Plato's dialogues on Love and Death.

The Challenges of Philosophy as Public Performance

As mentioned earlier, a very important and significant aspect of the Philosophy Plays project is the performance of philosophy through drama in venues such as restaurants, vineyards, pubs, theatres, opera houses, and other venues accessible to public audiences. This is in keeping with the Socratic way of doing philosophy through interactive dialogue with the citizens of the polis in widely accessible public spaces: philosophy in the agora, the marketplace of ideas and feelings.

The problem that faces philosophers in the performance of public philosophy is how to effectively communicate philosophical ideas to members of the public who may have little or no background in philosophy. As in economics, and political science, so in philosophy, citizens are presented with theoretical abstract ideas and arguments. This is of course essential but by itself inadequate in eliciting and motivating public support and promotion for the positions that these theoretical arguments provide even if rationally justified. If the citizens are the ones who elect the government representatives that make the important decisions concerning civil rights and more generally community and human rights, then it is important that those citizens be properly apprised of the issues and arguments concerning the justification and motivation of those issues. Academic education and specifically academic philosophy by itself cannot achieve that. What is required as Nussbaum rightly put it, is appropriate emotional and civic education. I believe that such education can be provided by public philosophy in the cultural domain by various modes of presentation including philosophy cafes, communal and judicial readings of literature, as in the case of Nussbaum, and as illustrated by the Philosophy Plays project.

It is my conviction that public philosophy, as argued for in this paper, can provide the missing essential ingredients in rational argument for without them public rationality cannot adequately motivate compliance for creating a more just society. To that end, public philosophy has to become part of the very fabric of our everyday political, professional, social, and most importantly, contribute to both the health of the mind and that of the heart in our cultural lives, as a public philosophy conceived, as argued in the paper, as a way of life. A life worth living.

To conclude this section of the paper I will now illustrate this practical and applied aspect of the Philosophy Plays project, though a philosophy play, *Plato, Power, and the Ring of Corruption*, that was performed in a Greek

25) Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 70.

restaurant in Adelaide as part of the conference dinner for the Fifth Biennial Greek Studies Conference from the 11th–13th of April, 2003. The performance incorporated a philosophical talk by Edward H. Spence with a dramatic performance of an original play titled, *A Perfect Injustice*, written by Edward H. Spence and Liam Nesbit, followed by audience participation through discussion in the form of a Platonic symposium including food and wine.

The philosophy play begins with an opening scene adapted from Plato's *Apology* in which Socrates defiantly addresses the Athenian court after being found guilty, for corrupting the youth of Athens and being irreverent to the gods and is sentenced to death by hemlock. The next scene switches to a contemporary setting and the rest of the play explores contemporary issues in corruption generally and police corruption specifically through the Myth of Gyges in Plato's *Republic*. The two main characters, Constable Socrates, and Constable Shepherd, represent, respectively, the just person who though perfectly just appears unjust and the unjust person who though completely corrupt and unjust appears perfectly just. This is the phenomenon that Glaukon in Plato's *Republic* describes as a "perfect injustice."

The audience participation through open discussion that followed allowed members of the public to debate issues of contemporary corruption through the philosophical framework provided by Plato's Myth of Gyges in the *Republic* Book II, highlighting Plato's continuing relevance and resonance with our own ethically challenging times. In particular the audience was asked to consider for themselves which of the two alternatives is better: to appear just when one is not, and not only not be punished but rewarded by society for one's injustice, or alternatively to appear unjust and punished or shunned by society though one is, like Socrates, perfectly just. Plato's distinction between appearance and reality, as famously illustrated in his "Allegory of the Cave" in the *Republic*, is not only of epistemological significance but equally and perhaps more importantly, it is of ethical significance, a significance no less relevant and important today in the Digital Information Age than it was in Socrates' time. It is as important to us today as it was in Plato's time to be able to distinguish the shadows from reality, and information as knowledge from lies and misinformation. This is not merely important for discovering true knowledge but equally important for discovering the Good and the Beautiful and making it our own as Plato intended through the words of Diotima, the mysterious woman from Mantinea, in the *Symposium*, Plato's dialogue on Love.

In addition to demonstrating how the philosophy plays as illustrated above through the play, *A Perfect Injustice*, solve the reception problem at the meta-motivational level of the Neo-Socratic model of performing philosophy to public audiences through drama. I summarize in turn how the philosophy plays function at the other levels of the model discussed above in section (2).

At the Theoretical Level

The meta-ethical level: Through the play, public audiences are exposed to the authoritative question of morality "why be moral?" under conditions of perfect injustice in a way that they can understand and find relevant to them.

The normative level: The authoritative question of morality as posed through the structure, dialogues, and action of the play, allows the audience to carry out a comparative analysis and examine for themselves how adequately the various ethical arguments presented in the play by the actors involves characters with which the audience are engaged with, not merely intellectually but also affectively through their individual and collective emotions. Thus, an answer to the question why acts ethically under conditions of perfect injustice becomes more immediate and visceral for them, and no longer a mere academic question, but a question that concerns them personally.

At the Practical Level

The motivational level: As illustrated through the analysis of the play *A Perfect Injustice* above, members of the audience are encouraged to observe and examine certain virtues or vices instantiated by the characters in the play. Socrates exhibits virtues of courage, justice, prudence and integrity through thinking and acting in accordance with his sense of professional duty and moral conscience. He does not merely *believe* in doing what is right, he *does* what is right even when it goes against his personal interests. In the character of Socrates, we see an example of moral belief (theory) transform into moral action (practice). Socrates' integrity is exemplified by the conceptual and practical congruence that exists between his professional duty as a police officer and his moral actions. Shepherd, by contrast, exhibits the major vice of injustice. Insofar as he runs the risk of corrupting his own character through his corrupt activities, he also exhibits the vice of imprudence. He sacrifices his long term wellbeing for temporary and short-term gains. At least, this much can be argued for, on the basis of Platonic and Aristotelian ethics. Shepherd also lacks integrity since his corrupt actions are incongruent with his professional duty to uphold justice. Moreover, he is a hypocrite, appearing just to others, when he is not. At this level of enquiry, the audience are encouraged to think for themselves which character best suits the acceptable professional profile of a police officer whose duty is to uphold justice and serve the law. *Protrectically*, the audience are encouraged to imagine what it would be like to cultivate and inculcate in themselves the virtues of character essential for a good police officer, as illustrated by the character of Socrates in the play.

The relevant-contextual level: The play helps also contextualize the questions and issues examined at all the other levels in the ethical decision-making model described above thus rendering the whole enquiry at both the theoretical and practical levels of ethical inquiry, resonant and relevant. In addition to offering a solution to the problem of reception addressed at the meta-motivational level, the contextualizing of the whole inquiry within a philosophy play such as *A Perfect Injustice* that renders the whole ethical inquiry accessible and relevant, offers a sound pedagogical methodology for professional ethics that applies to them personally, in their own chosen professions. Thus demonstrating both conceptually and practically how the Neo-Socratic Model of Performing Public Philosophy through drama, as described and argued for in this paper, is capable of being an effective method for teaching professional ethics and ethics generally to public audiences with no background in moral philosophy or philosophy generally.

4. Conclusion

This paper provides an explanatory rationale within a theoretical and practical philosophical framework for the Philosophy Plays project as a method of performing public philosophy through drama, conceived as a way of life and a form of communal therapy for the mind. The object of the Philosophy Plays is to introduce philosophy to the general public through philosophical presentations by professional philosophers incorporating drama. Philosophy Plays, like Platonic dialogues, seek to engage their audiences both intellectually (primarily through the philosophical talk) and affectively (primarily through the drama). Like Plato's dialogues, from which they draw their inspiration, the Philosophy Plays, which combine dialectic (the philosophical talk) with rhetoric (the drama) seek to engage their public audiences in a realistic and shared lived experience thus rendering philosophy a practical and meaningful applied activity for all participants. Not only informative, but also transformative.

The Philosophy Plays project of performing public philosophy through drama, as illustrated through the case study of the discussion of the play *A Perfect Injustice* above, solves conceptually and practically the reception problem of motivation at the meta-motivational level of inquiry as members of the public are approached

in a way that they can understand and access through their own cultural language and context that renders Socrates', and Plato's words and philosophy generally, more concrete and accessible than it would otherwise be possible, if those words were merely communicated to public audiences directly through philosophical arguments without any contextualized cultural filters. Thus, the philosophy plays function as cultural and linguistic filters to render philosophical arguments more resonant and relevant to public audiences who have had little or no prior exposure or interest in philosophy.

I conclude with a recollection of a philosophy play on Platonic Love that was performed at one of the regular public philosophy performances at Steki Taverna in Sydney. During the discussion, a member of the audience, suddenly stood-up from his seat, opened his arms wide and declared to the whole audience, with great satisfaction and enthusiasm, that he was indeed immortal as he had children, one of the types of love that Plato, through the character of Diotima, refers to in her speech in the *Symposium*, as a form of immortality through procreation. This was not merely an informed response but equally and more importantly, a transformed response by that member of the audience who understood at the essential personal level what Plato meant and how it related to him.

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Appendix

Zeno's Secret

A Philosophy Play in One Act by Edward H. Spence

Characters in the Play: Venus, Theo, Zeno

Scene One

Stage is set with a "statue" downstage centre, a high table with 2 barstools stage slightly right of centre and a high table with barstool slightly left of centre.

Sitting on a stool at a high table stage left sits Edward/Zeno. Once Edward/Zeno finishes his talk, there is a blackout.

A LIGHT APPEARS ON THE STATUE AS THE MUSIC BEGINS.

A LIGHT GOES UP ON TABLE STAGE RIGHT AND VENUS ENTERS.

She sits at a table by herself writing in a notebook. She looks fully immersed in her writing, occasionally raising her head to look at the horizon in the distance as if she is thinking of something then continues to write on her tablet. Occasionally she stops to listen to the music playing on the audio system at the café as if she is in a reverie, remembering something from the past.

MUSIC CHANGES TO (TITLE: "*tin afto pou to lene agape*" (what is this thing called love).

Theo enters the café and looks around for somewhere to sit. He walks over to the table where Venus is sitting.

MUSIC FADES AND STOPS

Theo (T): Hello, sorry to trouble you but do you mind if I join you?

Venus (V): Why, am I falling apart?

T: Oh, I know that line, it's from a movie, right, with Cary Grant and the name of the actress is...is ... is... I am sorry! I can't recall.

V: If all knowledge is recollection, you should be able to remember. Perhaps what you need to help you remember is an ouzo.

T: (he sits next to V) I don't mind if I do. My name is Theo.

V: Short for Theothoros, gift from god? My name is Venus.

T: Latin for Aphrodite, goddess of love. Please to meet you.

V: Well, our meeting Theo may yet prove auspicious as we are both by name at least related to the gods somehow.

T: Perhaps we were meant to meet.

V: Just a coincidence Theo don't go looking for meaning in random chance events. I knew once someone who like you thought that things always happen for a reason (she casts her gaze in the direction of Zeno's statue in the background).

T: (T follows her gaze to the statue) Zeno of Citium, founder of Stoic Philosophy.

V: Yes, I know, that's why I am here.

T: To study stoic philosophy?

V: No, I am writing a book.

T: On Zeno?

V: Kind of... It's a novel really on Zeno and his philosophy. A dramatic interpretation. It's been my ambition since the time I met someone who first raised my awareness to Stoic philosophy. Coincidentally, his name was also Zeno.

T: That is amazing!!

V: What is amazing? It was just a chance meeting late one night on a train platform in Sydney and among other things, including Platonic Love, he introduced me to stoic philosophy.

T: Wow! And you think that is not amazing?

V: What? Just because we happen to be sitting next to Zeno of Citium's statue?

T: No, it's more than that. Coincidence is when God communicates to us anonymously. I read that on a church wall in Dublin when I was there recently.

V: Doesn't surprise me really, the Irish not unlike the Greeks, are one of the most superstitious people on the planet.

T: It's because like the Greeks, the Irish have perfected the poetic art of metaphor. If the gods communicate with us, they do so through metaphor and meter as in music and mathematics and poetry, not through food recipes. Christ turned water to wine to encourage us to drink more wine.

V: O come now Theo. Don't you know the gods or God is merely our creation, a figment of our imagination, so as to relieve our fear of dying?

T: Even if that is so, does that make it any less real? There is of course the other possibility that we are in fact a creation in god's imagination, simply an idea in god's Mind, actors on a world stage performing a play. Just as we may be doing right now.

V: I see you've been doing more than sightseeing in Dublin. You have been reading Barkley's idealist philosophy haven't you – I can tell. Didn't he say that reality is merely ideas in our own minds produced by God? Do you really believe that crap Theo?

T: Only after my fifth pint of Guinness and a few ouzos for good measure besides.

V: (laughs): I like a man with a sense of humor. So, tell me Theo what are you doing here in sunny Larnaca? You are not also writing something on Zeno, a book perhaps? That would be spooky!

T: I warned you Venus our meeting was amazing, coincidence or providence or whatever else you want to call it. Yes, I am also doing something related to our friend Zeno over there.

V: O come now. Don't beat about the olive tree and keep me in suspense. If not a play, a book, or a thesis then what exactly?

T: A Stoic Centre of Philosophical Enlightenment, exactly.

V: Wow! Now that is amazing. You are not bullshitting me, are you? Cross your heart and hope to die.

T: I cross my heart and hope to live, at least until I set-up this centre. I am not bullshitting, not anymore. I used to do a lot of that before, and it got me nowhere and into trouble. Well actually it got me to the only place I didn't want to be...

V: Which was where exactly?

T: Prison.

V: Holy shit!

T: Exactly.

V: Were you in for long...?

T: Long enough, with good behavior out in 5 years.

V: That doesn't sound too bad.

T: Are you kidding? Believe me, five years in Long Bay, a maximum-security prison then, was pretty long and bad. If it weren't for Sofia, I wouldn't have made it. She saved my life.

V: Sofia, so that was your girlfriend or wife... your paramour?

T: None of those. My wife left me soon after I was charged for insider trading and sent to prison. She also took custody of the kids. I lost everything. The full catastrophe. I almost lost my sanity too and almost lost my life. I tried, but, unlike Rene Rivkin, my suicide attempt proved unsuccessful. Sofia saved me from all that and here I am free as a bird in sunny Larnaca relating my sad tale to a beautiful young and intelligent woman. Sofia was running a philosophy program for prisoners at the time.

V: Now it's my turn to say wow! I never met anyone who went to prison before. Was it really terrible? Sorry Theo I shouldn't have asked you that... .

T: No, that's alright it's all over now and I'm happy to be out of it. The irony of it was the damn prison was right next to a golf-course at Little Bay. I used to be a member of the golf-club and play there regularly. Good for business golf. The ocean views from the green are spectacular and I used to feel sorry for the poor buggers next door who were locked inside their cells for 20 hours a day. Little did I know I would end up in that hellhole myself. Sometimes I think Aristotle was right "count no man happy until the end." For no one knows what waits for them round the corner.

V: Theo, I thought, or I assumed, you were a stoic not an Aristotelian.

T: Well spotted Venus of Cyprus, goddess of love. You are right of course. A moment of weakness in reminiscing on bad times. Aristotle did think though that some good fortune or at least absence of bad fortune was, together with virtuous conduct, necessary for a happy life; whereas we stoics... ., I take it Venus you are also a stoic, though I have an uneasy feeling you may be an Epicurean... . Anyway, the stoics believed that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness irrespective of fortune, good or bad.

V: Well spotted Theo. I was once an Epicurean both in thought and practice until I met Zeno.

T: (perplexed and slightly spooked pointing to Zeno's statue), you don't mean that Zeno... surely not Him, *theos makarisi ton* (god bless his soul), he's been dead for over two-and-a-half thousand years ago. Though looking at his statue, he doesn't look any older than a young 60.

V: O very funny Theo, of course not that Zeno, (leans over the table and whispers to Theo with some concern) you don't think he's listening-in to our conversation...?

T: Who is superstitious now!

V: Well, it may sound weird but since I have arrived in Larnaca, three weeks ago, how can I put it... . I have been feeling his presence.

T: Not at all weird. The mind has a wonderful imaginative capacity which can create alternative states of thought bordering even on the supernatural just like in vivid dreams. Now before I forget, who was the Zeno then to whom you were referring just now if not our friend the statue? The Zeno of the secret rendezvous on a train platform past midnight... ?

V: Haha haha haha (ironically). It seems you've been reading too many Le Carre novels

T: It was actually The Consolations of Philosophy if you must know.

V: I didn't know Le Carre wrote philosophy.

T: It was Boethius a 4th century AD Roman medieval philosopher who did time in prison just like me. Unlike me though he was garroted. It was essential reading recommended by Sophia.

V: Ah Sophia, your philosophy Muse.

T: Well in a strange way she was. The Consolation was written as a dialogue between Boethius and Philosophy who appears to Boethius in his cell and tries to console him after he hits rock bottom and is in deep despair. Prison can do that to you, you know. Especially when like me and Boethius before me, you lose everything, family, your properties, and I had a few, wealth, reputation, so called friends, and most of all your freedom. At least thanks to Sophia I held on to my dignity and sanity, but came close, very close, to losing that as well.

V: Sorry so sorry Theo didn't mean to remind you of all that again.

T: No, it's good you did Venus as I wanted to talk to about that; given your own interest in Stoic philosophy. I wanted to tell you how much it helped me during what was the worst period in my life, it was, if you like, a form of therapy. Got me off Zoloft and onto Zeno.

V: Ha ha ha ha. In my case it was Zeno who got me off Prozac and onto Plato.

T: See, I told you there was more to just a chance meeting between us – here of all places, next to Zeno's statue!

V: Maybe!

T: O you are such a sceptic Venus.

V: Being skeptical is healthy: and its one of the pillars of philosophy as it goes hand in hand with being rational.

T: Maybe.

(Both laugh together).

T: Anyway, back to your so-called chance meeting with Zeno, late one night on a train platform in Sydney. Where were you heading by the way?

V: Marrickville of course. Isn't that where all the Greeks in Sydney live? Well they did then, Marrickville, Newtown, Enmore, and Earlwood.

T: I was in Double Bay.

V: O Mr. Aristocrat! Double bay for double pay.

T: That was me then. I have changed a lot since that time. For me now, it's simple living and high thinking.

V: For me too Theo! Spoken like a true Epicurean, oops I meant Stoic.

T: Actually, that's not just a slip of the tongue. For the Epicureans, just as the Stoics valued a simple life with none of the trimmings and traps of consumerism that tend to make us more miserable than happy. As we both know the ultimate goal of life for all the Greek philosophers from Plato to Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans and even your friends the Sceptics, is happiness or what they called *eudaimonia* (*evdaimonia*): having within you a good guiding demon or spirit.

V: Spot on Theo! Interestingly the notion of *eudaimonia*, having within you a good spirit and a virtuous character couldn't be more different than the Greek word we use today for happiness, that of *Evtichia*, having good fortune.

T: Yes, absolutely right, skeptical goddess of love! Whereas *eudaimonia* is entirely within our control, *evtihia*, on the other hand, like winning the Lotto or picking a winner at the dog races, is entirely outside our control. I should know! Though very wealthy from manipulating the stock exchange in my favor I always lost on gambling.

V: I wouldn't know Theo the only thing I gambled on and lost spectacularly was in the domain of love.

T: Wow, and you of all people, named after the goddess of love!

V: Yes, I know it's quite ironic isn't it. And sad.

T: Ah I see now.

V: What do you see Tiresias please share.

T: It was Zeno, wasn't it? The mysterious dude you ran into on the train platform late one night and coached you on how to heal a broken heart.

V: Broken hearts don't heal that easy Theo. They endure because they have to. You lost your freedom I lost my love and both of us it seems found what we lost through Stoic philosophy. Zeno was for me, what Sophia was for you. A *Pausilipon* (direction: pronounced *pavsilipon*), an antidote that gives pause to pain and sorrow.

T: *Pavsilipon*? What is that? My Greek is not as good as yours my scholarly friend, but it sounds like a toilet cleaner or a laxative.

V: Not far off. *Pavsilipon* is a kind of panacea, a cure for all pains and sorrows.

T: I get it, like Panadol™.

V: Much stronger than that Theo. For the pain of lost love and the loss of freedom needs a very powerful analgesic. A *pausilipon*!

T: And is it too stupid to ask where one gets such a powerful pav-whatever?

For I tried some powerful drugs when I was in prison and nothing worked, no matter how much I increased the dose.

V: Now you are fishing Theo but that's alright. The *pavsilipon* for unhappiness as we both know is...

T: Sex? Only joking – that doesn't work either. You want me to say that its stoic philosophy, don't you? Well, I will humor you and admit that talking as one who tried everything else, Yes, I can confirm with some confidence that the practice of stoicism, and not just reading about it, definitely works. Not just in the short-term but in the long-term as well. And you know why Venus?

V: Because it's simple?

T: Yes, simple and it makes perfect sense. But it's hard at the same time because unlike Panadol™ that you take passively, stoic philosophy is something you have to actively work at. And it doesn't come free or cheap.

V: Like training for a marathon?

T: The analogy is apt. For the Greek philosophers always drew constant comparisons between physical and mental fitness. And especially, between philosophy and medicine, which they compared to therapy for the soul.

V: The Greek ideal: a healthy mind in a healthy body.

T: And the heart Venus, don't forget the heart.

V: I should know! Yes, the heart as well, which if you let me continue without interruptions, I will tell you since you asked how I met my Zeno.

T: Oooh "my Zeno" eh?

V: Only in a manner of speaking Theo. Now please don't interrupt until I finish what I have to say: I met Zeno by chance or providence if you like, on a train platform one late night. To cut a long story short we started talking, as we were the only two people on the platform, and, sensing my affliction, like a good medic, he provided the tonic I needed. And so he spoke of Plato's Symposium, of Socrates and Diotima, of Love. As it turns out, Love or Eros is the intermediary link between the human and the divine. And love moreover, is the deep-seated yearning for immortality. And immortality, you see, at least according to Plato, is only achievable through love. But not any kind of love. Its love of the Good and the Beautiful itself. A kind of mysterious and mystical love. A bit too mystical if you ask me, but that's Plato for you, and that's why we love him so.

T: Permission to speak Platonist goddess of love.

I thought you said you were a Stoic, now you tell me you are a Platonist – not the same you know.

V: Not incompatible Theo. In fact, as you may recall, Socrates was a Proto-Stoic who like the Stoics and unlike Aristotle, believed that all we need to be happy is virtue and nothing else. Being happy, is ultimately up to us since our virtue is entirely up to us.

T: Yes, I know, and someone can be theoretically happy even on the rack. "Torture me as much as you like but I will still be happy because I am courageous, moderate, prudent and just. I have my *ataraxia*, my tranquility!" Oh, what a feeling! Stoic-Philosophy! Yea, right!

V: (with irony) You doubt it, Theo? You an exemplar stoic?

T: Now Venus let's be sensible. I said stoicism helped me overcome the worst in prison and yes, I believe it's a very effective pav-whatever, but pain is pain. Even now I think twice about going to the dentist and embarrassed when for the laughing gas even when it's only for a filling. But the rack? Are you kidding? Now that is a different proposition altogether, a higher order of pain not worth thinking about. Even Galileo a great scientist

and a paragon of virtue flinched when shown the instruments of torture by the inquisitor and couldn't recant quickly enough in St Peter's Square!

V: O you baby! It's only a little rack. What about the pain a woman experiences at childbirth?

T: That is why Venus as much as I would have much preferred a thousand times to be a woman and not have to go through all that macho bullshit nonsense, the pain of childbirth sounds as if it's not what turns on my lights. Anyway, back to Zeno please, and without interruptions (imitating Venus).

V: Ok, ok. Well from Plato, Zeno then started talking about Zeno from Citium, founder of Stoic philosophy and someone I had not heard of before.

T: So, you moved from Prozac to Zoloft.

V: Touche! Ha ha, smart Alek. You could say that. The conversation that night on the train platform did take us in a roundabout route from Platonic Love to Stoic *Eudaimonia*.

T: Fair dinkum! You must have been stuck there for hours. Although Sydney trains being what they are, that's not surprising.

V: That's the strangest thing though. There was no sensation of time passing. It was as if time had stood still.

T: You were in the flow as they say.

V: Yes, something like that. Heraclitus after all, the pre-Socratic philosopher the Stoics revered, thought that everything is in constant flow.

T: Like a river. Well, the Stoics did believe that all things in Nature are interconnected through their affinity to the one cosmic rational spirit that permeates everything in the Universe.

V: A universal *Pneuma*, a Spirit, which they identified with Nature and God.

T: Though the difference was that they conceived God not as a personal God but as a pantheistic God immanent and ever-present in the world, permeating all things from starfish to stars and us. The all-encompassing One! That's quite cool don't you think? I quite like the idea of being related to a starfish.

V: Yes, apart from the starfish bit, that was how Zeno explained it to me. And then the train came. I got on and he stayed. His last words to me as the train pulled away were

"Goddess of the waves, I may tarry here awhile – I may see you before too long – look after yourself."

And then as I looked out the window he seemed to go into a kind of trance as if he were preparing himself for something

T: For what?

V: I don't know. Like ... *She makes a pose like a man ready to dance.*

End of Scene 1.