Plato’s Appeal Through Socrates’ *Antitimesis*

Thomas G. West expresses the feelings of many jurors and readers of Plato’s *Apology* over Socrates’ proposed counter-penalty of *sitesis* at the Prytaneum: “In order to appreciate the impious arrogance of this claim, it must be understood that the prytaneum was the ancient common hearth of the city, the vital symbol of its sacred center. . . . Socrates treats the sanctified hearth of the city as a kind of free eating place for the deserving poor” (1979.212). I contend that far from arrogance, Plato appeals in the *antitimȇsis* through the ideology of the Prytaneum for Athenians to recognize Socrates as the god’s gift to them. What must be realized is that the Olympic hero outside the Prytaneum is tantamount to Socrates the miasma, and Socrates the miasma is the hero inside the Prytaneum as the same clod of earth is dirt inside the house and soil outside. It begins by taking the hero out of the Prytaneum, for which I turn to Leslie Kurke’s *The Traffic in Praise*.

In her study of the social functions of the victory ode, Kurke regards “epinikian *kudos* as the civic adaptation of its Homeric precursor” (1991.206). Long mistranslated as “glory,” Emile Benveniste restored the meaning of *kûdos* to “a magic power that is irresistible” (Benveniste 1973.346). Conferred by the gods at their will, *kûdos* renders success secure for its recipient. “It acts like a *talisman* of supremacy . . . or the bestowal of *kûdos* by the god procures an instantaneous and irresistible advantage, rather like a magic power” (348). The god’s *kûdos* marginalizes the victor. His fellow citizens not only envy his success but, ever suspicious of their aristocrats, they await with trepidation. The Olympic victor outside the Prytaneum is a dangerous threat to the constitution of the *polis*. He is marked by excessive wealth that sets him above most citizens, by the ever-dangerous talisman of Zeus, and by the specter that, like Kylon, he aspire to tyranny. A man became a tyrant by overthrowing governmental structures and establishing himself as an autocrat. The tyrant drew nothing from the center of the community; he returned nothing. A loner, he remained outside the hierarchy that defined the human condition, simultaneously above and below others because of his dominance. That his house could be razed upon his death or expulsion implies that he is infected with pollution.

Socrates outside the Prytaneum is *miarȏtatos* (Pl. *Ap*. 23d), “most tainted” by his conviction for impiety and corrupting the youth. His poverty, like the victor’s wealth, removes him from the rest. He himself admits that he is “too good” to participate in their political life and as such remains an outsider. He has been given the *kûdos* of the god Apollo in the form of his service to Athenians who reject it as burdensome and hateful. Although strange at first to imagine, Socrates sets himself up as a tyrant, that is, the single man with the power of the god, like Peisistratos with Athena, to instruct and show the Athenians what is good for them. It is the autocracy of his mission, that he alone knows the way to the good, that casts him in the mold, not the sandals, of a tyrant.

Athenians do not invite the victor to the hearth of their city primarily to reward him. They invite him to civilize him through shared rites of *xenia* in order to forestall his using god’s *kûdos* for himself. Thus all Athenians benefit from the gift of magical talisman from the god, and by securing its recipient at the hearth of their city, they install him as a member of the family of the city. Socrates possesses *kûdos* in the form of the god’s conference upon him of his mission. He is given by the god as the *paradeigma* of the human just as the victor is an model of the consummate man. He benefits Athenians more with his care for their souls, bought at the cost of his own affluence, than the victor with his wealth. Socrates’ poverty complements the hero’s feasts and games. Yet his benefits, short-lasting, seem to make Athenians *eudaimones*, but it is the happiness of a satisfied stomach and a moment’s entertainment. Socrates’ gift of *eudaimonia* creates a *daimon*, a spirit in a man, that is good and directs him toward knowledge of self and an inner prosperity that lasts a lifetime.

In the ideology of the Prytaneum, acceptance of Socrates’ *antitimȇsis* would have signaled the Athenians’ reception of Socrates’ care for them. It culminates Plato’s defense, not Socrates’ arrogance.

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