

The Digression in the *Theaetetus* and Pindar's *Nemean* 10

At *Theaetetus* 173e, Socrates embellishes his account of the philosopher's aloofness from human affairs with a quotation from Pindar: "it is really only his body that remains and resides in the city, while his mind, having deemed all this to be worth little or nothing, disdains it and flies off in every direction, like Pindar says, geometrizing the things 'beneath the earth' and on its surface, astronomizing 'above heaven' [ἀτιμάσασα πανταχῆ πέτεται κατὰ Πίνδαρον τὰ τε "γᾶς ὑπένερθε" καὶ τὰ ἐπίπεδα γεωμετροῦσα, "οὐρανοῦ θ' ὕπερ" ἀστρονομοῦσα], and tracking down in every way the complete nature of each whole among the things there are, lowering itself to none of the things that are near at hand" (173e3–174a2). The standard view is that Socrates is quoting from a lost poem; the Teubner edition of Pindar's fragments groups the phrases together as fr. 292 (Snell/Maehler, accepting Clement of Alexandria's reading, prints: τᾶ<ς> τε γᾶς ὑπένερθε...οὐρανοῦ θ' ὕπερ). In his 1921 Loeb edition of the *Theaetetus*, however, Fowler notes that Socrates may be referring to the final epode of Pindar's *Nemean* 10, where Zeus grants Polydeuces the choice whether to "escape death and hateful old age, and come by yourself to live on Olympus" (83–84), or to share an equal fate with his brother Castor: "then you may live half the time beneath the earth and half in the golden homes of heaven [ἥμισυ μὲν κε πνέοις γαίης ὑπένερθεν ἐών, | ἥμισυ δ' οὐρανοῦ ἐν χρυσεῖς δόμοισιν]" (87–88; trans. Race). To my knowledge the possibility that Socrates is loosely quoting these verses has never been explored in any depth. In this talk I offer a defense of Fowler's hypothesis and consider the implications for interpreting Socrates' "digression" and in particular his description of the philosophical life.

In the first part of the talk I discuss textual problems and argue that recent editors of the *Theaetetus* have erred in rejecting the manuscripts' reading of 173e5 (τὰ τε γᾶς ὑπένερθε) in favor of Clement's version (τᾶς τε γᾶς ὑπένερθε). If Snell was mistaken to include τᾶ<ς> τε in fr.

292, and Socrates intends only γᾶς ὑπένερθε to be Pindaric, there is greater resemblance between the *Theaetetus* and *Nemean* 10 passages than has been supposed. The second half of the quotation (οὐρανοῦ θ' ὑπερ) poses an additional challenge but is not decisive against Fowler's attribution. In the latter part of the talk I turn to the recent debate over how seriously Socrates (or Plato) intends his praise of the philosopher and the ideal of becoming like God (see Rue 1993, Sedley 2004, Peterson 2011, Giannapoulou 2013). If the *Nemean* 10 hypothesis is correct, I argue, this lends support to the view that Socrates' portrait of the philosopher should not be read as a straightforward endorsement. In short, Polydeuces' unhesitating choice not to “escape” (φυγῶν: 83) mortality to live forever among the gods, but to share his brother's fate, sets in relief Socrates' exhortation to “escape” (φεύγειν) from the mortal to the godly realm “as fast as possible” (ὅτι τάχιστα)—where “escape” (φυγή) means achieving “likeness to God to the extent one can” (176a8–b1). I conclude by asking whether the myth of *Nemean* 10 points to an alternative ideal to the one Socrates describes.

Bibliography

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