Religious Figures as Philosophers

Kathryn Elizabeth Cook[1]
Pierre Varache[2]

Abstract: This article looks at narratives of major religious figures to draw similarities with the philosophical way of dialogue, modeled on the maieutic example set by Socrates, and makes a case that these religious figures ought to be considered and appreciated as philosophers. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis in order to understand the interactions between religious figures, protagonists, other characters, and the reader. Conclusions address philosophical attitudes and techniques that match the Socratic Method in order to build the case that the religious figure provokes thinking and challenges paradigm as a philosopher does. The examples include being agile in interpretation, using absurdity and paradox, playing with irony, teaching with allegory, to develop meaning in dialogue with the other. The origins of philosophy begin with a way of life, a method of provoking thinking, an interest in examining and questioning what it is to be human. Systemic philosophy and its closely related sister religion have developed into formal disciplines of distinguished paradigms, where dogmatic beliefs are prioritized over freedom of inquiry. Yet this study makes the case that important figures of major religions were working with their interlocutors on how to think, not what to think.

Key-words: philosophers; philosophical practice; philosophical methods; dialogue; religious figures; Jesus; allegory; irony; paradox;

[1]Lynn University & West University of Timisoara, E-mail: kathryn.cook10@e-uvt.ro
[2] Institut de Pratiques Philosophique, Paris

Introduction

Socrates set the tone for the field of philosophy, with his student Plato taking account of his interactions with students, his method of provoking, and his inquisitive way of life as well as death. Philosophy has developed from the model of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Ancient Athens. Their practice was less the work of building paradigms or defending particular worldviews, more about the exercise of thinking, questioning, examining, building arguments, and critiquing. They went to the streets, in the market or the parks, engaging with anyone who would speak with them. Under their provocation, the work of thinking was not reserved for students, the educated, or politicians; not confined to libraries or classrooms; not isolated to wise people who had life figured out. The common individual, in a public place, proposed and played with ideas (Diogenes Laërtius, c.230AD). Philosophy can therefore be thought of as thinking, questioning, and examining ideas more than claiming a framework. Socrates considered himself as doing the work of a midwife, aiding in forming and articulating ideas as a laborious task and guiding his interlocutor to create. He describes:

> All that is true of their art of midwifery is true also of mine, but mine differs from theirs in being practiced upon men, not women, and in tending their souls in labor, not their bodies. But the greatest thing about my art is this that it can test in every way whether the mind of the young man is bringing forth a mere image, an imposture, or a real and genuine offspring. For I have this in common with the midwives: I am sterile in point of wisdom, and the reproach which has often been brought against me, that I question others but make no reply myself about anything, because I have no wisdom in me, is a true reproach; and the reason of it is this: the god compels me to act as midwife, but has never allowed me to bring forth. I am, then, not at all a wise person myself, nor have I any wise invention, the offspring born of my own soul; but those who associate with me, although at first some of them seem very ignorant, yet, as our acquaintance advances, all of them to whom the god is gracious make wonderful progress, not only in their own opinion, but in that of others as well. And it is clear that they do this, not because they

> have ever learned anything from me, but because they have found in themselves many fair things and have brought them forth. But the delivery is due to the god and me. (*Theaetetus* 150b-150d)

Aptly referred to as maieutics, his method leads the thinking, with no pretensions of teaching, conveying ideas, or being wise himself, only to serve in the midwifery work of giving birth to ideas.

The role of the philosophical protagonist is to model this provoking of ideas. Philosophers think about ideas and provoke others to think about ideas. The discipline is modeled after the activities and techniques of Socrates, who spent his time in the city markets and parks interacting with Athenians, asking those questions, playing with ideas, and dialoguing with anyone and everyone. Dialogue was his main mode of provocation. Socrates criticized the work of the Sophists as transferring dogma to their students, like a teacher who has truths of mathematics, science, and grammar the students must learn correctly. Instead his student Plato gives an account of Socrates' exchanges with his students and interlocutors where history can see the moves he employed. He uses methods of irony, opposition, reformulation, asking for argument, looking for assumptions, problematizing, and questioning (Vlastos, 1994). Many of these moves are particular to philosophical work, in that they are methods perhaps used for various reasons by others, yet are specifically employed intentionally with the clear objective of deepening ideas, challenging assumptions, inviting different perspectives, exploring positions, and developing the ability to think. The Socratic Method, which attempts to emulate these moves, for the same purposes, is studied and practiced to this day in the classroom, in therapy, in business, and in life.

While major religions are built around or concerning the various individuals this research focuses on, there are a few characteristics they exhibit in the scripture itself that support not that they intended to found a major systematic and strict religious paradigm and an even more structured and hierarchical institution of dogmatic belief (Harnack, 1894). Indeed, there are examples indicating the contrary, where the protagonists reject challenges from established authority figures. Instead, they seem to provoke. Many of their interactions even reflect the methods of Socrates and other philosophers. So similar are their methods, it is a wonder that formal religions have developed from their teachings an attitude of

following principles rather than examining life by critiques and reflection via dialogue. They challenge, ask questions, do not accept dogmatic thinking, and reject arguments of authority. They dialogue individually, taking the time and effort to speak to the person or people in front of them. They ask questions, looking for arguments or rejecting commonly accepted positions, they care to hear what their interlocutor has to say, how they think, what preoccupies them. This discrepancy leads to the hypothesis of this article to explore perceiving religious figures as philosophers distinct from their role in the traditions that historically resulted from their ministry: Religious figures and philosophical provokers fulfill a role similar between themselves that is distinct from other narrative characters.

Methodology

This article employs a few theories of qualitative research in building towards the hypothesis. First, the authors use the method of ethnomethodology from Sacks (1992) to examine the texts and identify themes as phenomena between the religious dialogues. Next, grounded formal theory from Silverman (2011) allows priority of how the phenomena are employed over frequency, with the interest of understanding the holistic perspective in potential replicable application. Next, using Foucault's (1972) critical discourse analysis, the authors look at the dynamic between the religious figure, the interlocutor characters, and the reader. Since the texts rather call for synthetic rather than analytical reading, using abstraction and provoking thinking, critical discourse analysis is appropriate for the level of interpretation demanded. The examination of themes is informed by the theory of Goffman's (1956) symbolic interactionism, in that the roles of religious leader, interlocutors, and bystanders are social constructs, but significant in the text and recognized by the reader. The religious leader has authority, provokes, and does not follow the expected social norms; while the interlocutor rather represents the generic rational thinker. Since the reader can easily identify with the interlocutors, and the meaning of the interaction is rather open to interpretation, the thinking and discussion resulting from reading the text is in line with reader response theory from Fish (1982). That is, the reader is an active participant in the interpretation and critical thinking process along with the characters in the text, undergoing an evolution and

understanding of their own. The religious leader is the provoker, the interlocutor represents the reader, and thinking is demanded to understand the meaning of the narrative.

Employing these methods of qualitative research, a few themes emerged of moves that can be directly related to methods of philosophers. The authors explore these moves: describing the phenomenon, explaining why a philosopher uses it, addressing a few examples of how it is used by the religious leaders in the narrative texts, and why it matters that the religious leaders are employing the philosophical moves. After the examination of the philosophical moves, the authors make conclusions regarding the ways religious leaders echo and mirror philosophical provokers in their interactions, building towards the hypothesis. This study explores strategies that major religious figures and philosophical provokers employ as similar moves to each other, distinct from other narrative actions or teaching methods, in their interactions with the result of provoking thinking, challenging assumptions, and affecting the individual's mode of being.

Philosophical Narrative Examples

Nathan - Nathan Rebukes David

Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said,
"There were two men in a city, the one wealthy and the other poor.
The wealthy man had a great many flocks and herds.
But the poor man had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb
Which he bought and nurtured;
And it grew up together with him and his children.
It would eat scraps from him and drink from his cup and lie in his lap, And was like a daughter to him.
Now a visitor came to the wealthy man,
And he could not bring himself to take any animal from his own flock or his own herd,
To prepare for the traveler who had come to him;
So he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."
Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this certainly

deserves to die! So he must make restitution for the lamb four times over, since he did this thing and had no compassion."
Nathan then said to David, "You yourself are the man!" (Samuel 12)

Hillel - On One Foot

One day a gentile who wanted to convert to Judaism approached the learned rabbis in the temple. This individual stated that he would accept Judaism, but only if a rabbi would teach him the entire Torah while he, the prospective convert, stood on one foot. First he went to Shammai, who, insulted by this ridiculous request, threw him out of the temple. The man did not give up and came back and put his request to Hillel. This gentle sage accepted the challenge. The convert stood on one foot and waited for the Torah. Hillel said to him:"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation of this—go and study it!" (b.Shabbat 31a)

Jesus - The Samaritan Woman

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away to the city to buy food. So the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How *is it that* You, *though* You are a Jew, are asking me for a drink, *though* I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus replied to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." She said to Him, "Sir, You have no bucket and the well is deep; where then do You get *this* living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well and drank of it himself, and his sons and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life." (John 4:7-26)

Zaccheus the Tax Collector

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. *Zaccheus* was trying to see who Jesus was, and he was unable due to the crowd, because he was short in stature. So he ran

on ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree in order to see Him, because He was about to pass through that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." And he hurried and came down, and received Him joyfully. When the *people* saw this, they all began to complain, saying, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" But Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I am giving to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I am giving back four times as much." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:1-10).

Nasruddin - The Turban

One morning a man enters Nasreddin's house in a hurry, without even knocking, holding a letter in his hand. "Nasreddin, I need you. I just received this letter written in Persian, I need you to translate it for me right away."

"In Persian!" exclaimed Nasreddin. "But, my poor friend, I do not know a single word of that language!"

"What do you mean!" replied the intruder, visibly scandalized. "We give you the title of master everywhere, you dare to wear a turban as big as a dome, and you don't even know Persian!"

At these words, Nasreddin tears off his turban and presses it onto the head of his interlocutor.

"Here you are," he shouts, "here's the turban! Read your letter yourself, idiot!" (Brenifier & Millon, 2012)

The Cunning

There was a man who thought he was very cunning. Having heard about Nasreddin's cunning, the man decided to go and challenge Nasreddin to see who was the more cunning of the two.

When he arrived in the village, he saw a villager standing against a wall. He asked him if he knew where Nasreddin lived.

"What do you want with him?" the villager asked.

"I would like to meet him to compare myself with him, because he is said to be very cunning, but I am also cunning."

The villager looked at him for a moment, without moving. Then answered him:

“Stay there, I'll go get him. But lean on this wall, it might fall down. The men of the village take turns holding it in place before repairing it. Hold it until I come back.”

And so it was done, and the visitor sat against the wall.

But time passed and the villager did not return. Eventually, more men who were returning from the fields arrived. They asked the stranger what he was doing there against the wall, and the stranger explained the situation to them. When he had finished telling them, they laughed loudly.

Then one of them said to the poor man, who was disconcerted: ”Poor fool! You don't even realize that you have already met Nasreddin!” (Brenifier & Millon, 2012)

Zhuangzi - The Pleasure of Fish

Zhuangzi and Huizi were wandering on a bridge above a moat when Zhuangzi said: "See how the minnows come out and dart around where they please! That's what fishes really enjoy!"

Huizi said, "You're not a fish. How do you know what fish enjoy?"

Zhuangzi said, "You're not me, so how do you know I don't know what fish enjoy?"

Huizi said, "I'm not you, so I certainly don't know what you know. On the other hand, you're certainly not a fish. So that still proves you don't know what fish enjoy!"

Zhuangzi said, "Let's go back to your original question, please. You asked me how I know what fish enjoy–so you already knew I knew it when you asked the question. I know it because I'm standing above the moat.” (Brenifier & Chernenko, 2015)

Buddha - The Three Mustard Seeds

A long time ago a poor woman lost her son when he was just one year old. The young woman was so unhappy that she would not admit the death of her baby, concluding he must have been merely weakened by his fever. She asked everyone she knew if they had a cure, showing them her dead child, and soon she was considered insane. “Ask the Buddha: he is wise and generous!” the doctor recommended.

"How can I help you, my friend?" the Buddha calmly asked when she came running.
"My child is seriously ill. All he needs is a medicine to cure him."
"If you want a remedy for your son, you need three mustard seeds. But the three mustard seeds must come only from a house where no one has ever died."
"I'm going right now!" she exclaimed.
At the first house, she knocked at the door. "Do you have three mustard seeds to make a remedy for my child?"
The young woman returned with the three seeds, smiling. But the mother remembered: "I almost forgot, did someone die in this home?" the mother asked.
"Ah, yes! A few months ago, my grandmother, she was very old."
The mother's face saddened and she left.
In front of the next house sat an old man.
"Do you have three mustard seeds to make a medicine for my sick child?" Slowly, the old man got up, walked into the house, then returned with the seeds.
Again she remembered to ask: "Did someone die in this house?"
"Alas, my daughter left us last year, leaving behind two orphaned children." She continued to go door to door, but all had lost a loved one. She began to understand.
She returned to the Buddha, not carrying the little bundle anymore.
"Do you have the mustard seeds?" asked the Buddha.
"No. But I understand now that everyone loses someone they love. I laid my baby down to rest. My heart is in peace." (Brenifier & Millon, 2014).

Hakuin - Is That So?

Hakuin was known in his land as a wise Zen Master who lived a pure life. One day a beautiful young girl from a neighboring town was found to be pregnant. When her parents insisted on knowing the identity of the father, she named Hakuin.
The parents in anger confronted Hakuin. In reply he said only: "Is that so?"Months passed and the child was born. The parents brought the baby to Hakuin, demanding he take care of it. He responded: "Is that so?"

> Hakuin tended to the child, sharing his food, stitching her clothing, and teaching her lessons. Meanwhile his reputation was tarnished and students stopped coming to learn under his wisdom.
> More months passed and the girl confessed in shame that the father was in truth a young fishmonger. The girl's parents went to Hakuin to ask for his forgiveness and praise his generosity. As he yielded the child back to them he said again: "Is that so?" (Reps & Senzaki, 1957)
> *Hell and Paradise*
> One day a samurai came to Hakuin and asked: "Is there really such a thing as hell and paradise?"
> "Who are you?" inquired Hakuin.
> "I am a samurai," the warrior replied.
> "You? A soldier?!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What kind of lord would have you as in his service? Your face looks like that of a beggar!"
> The samurai became angry and drew his sword.
> Hakuin continued: "So you have a sword! But you must be too clumsy to cut off my head."
> As the samurai raised his sword in rage, Hakuin spoke calmly: "Here open the gates of hell."
> At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's wisdom, sheathed his sword and bowed. "Here open the gates of paradise," said Hakuin. (Reps & Senzaki, 1957)

Themes

Agile. The religious figures play at being agile, unconstrained by dogma, truth, consistency, morality, law, common sense, or demands. Even reason becomes their inferior, as they play with meaning and the rules of society, law, and logic. They are flexible in their communication of ideas, which requires the other to meet them in plasticity in order to understand. They are flexible in their interpretation of their environment and interactions, denying the expected, open to interpretation of the other in turn. God sends Nathan to rebuke David, but he does it as gently as possible: through David's own condemnation. Hillel plays the game to fulfill the impossible challenge, making the Torah even shorter than what was requested with a simple sentence of summary. Jesus is expected

according to law, tradition, and social standing to avoid the imperfect woman and the agent of the state, yet befriends and offers his grace to each. Nasruddin is happy to remove his turban and crown his interlocutor with it when the other attributes some meaning to its placement. Zhuangzi disregards reason and creates his own logic of association to understand the fish to the confusion of his interlocutor. Zhuangzi doesn't take in account the content of the speech of Huizi, what leads him is Huizi himself. Buddha has the answer for the mother, but leaves space with a task for the mother to discover the conclusion for herself. Hakuin knows his innocence, but takes the position of learned ignorance at each step, open to the fate his destiny offers him. The aim of the religious figure is to destabilize, not to follow, even if the other is logical. To address the person's thinking makes the dialogue personal, about the thinking process, and not about the content. This move destabilizes the interlocutor and also the reader along with him. The philosophers are each free of constraints and open to play, destabilizing the expected and disregarding the rules of existence. The resulting mystery allows much interpretation work, putting the interlocutor in communion with the divine, the infinite, the mastery of reason.

Philosophers are open to different interpretations, playing with meaning and challenging the expected. There is resistant space for creativity, ellipsis, some important content is able to be assumed or invented. To be agile in thinking, in paradigm, in ideas creates a freedom for the philosopher and the thinker—to discover, to be provoked, to grow. The philosopher provides a little speech, but leaves space for the interlocutors to process. The interlocutors are free to interpret, like the actor on the stage who can be lit by various colors of spotlights, can be accompanied by the orchestra with various genres, and can be decorated with extras, costumes, and choreography. The essence of the text or speech is immovable, but the treatment and interpretation has the possibility of various voices of explanation, reinvented each time, with an element of infinity in its universal access. Each act of interpretation, identifying between meanings, takes something of the interpreter in itself, since the act of making meaning is creation. So the reader is involved in the meaning making. As an interpreter the reader lends their subjectivity to the piece of art; in a way reading the narrative is an act of appropriation because it makes the piece of art their possession.

This is what is observed when a book is still in mind after decades, the link between the art and the person makes them so close that they possess each other. Academics are ready to defend their interpretation to the point that they do not bear that others have a different perspective. Each interpretation is intimately the reader's own, possible to share or keep for themselves. Here the idea is demonstrated by the adaptability of religious figures such as Jesus as a prophet, guru, or deity in other religious schools.

The philosopher does not accept to reinforce dogma; they in fact fight against dogma. They use images and allegory to be accessible to all; they are abstract in order to be unconstrained. Histories can be interpreted as the reader wishes, while normative texts have fewer possible interpretations, leaving less space in their practicality, intending to be straightforward and useful. The dishwasher manual is not dangerous in its rules, but humans enjoy dangerous texts. The non-philosopher takes the hubris position of dogma, challenging the gods that he speaks truth, while the philosopher would not dare to speak *ex cathedra*. The philosopher feels no expectation to meet societal or practical expectations as others do; to do the wrong thing, the unexpected thing, the third option in a false dilemma. The disregard for the proper order of reason, etiquette, and respect is shocking and scandalous to the other characters but done with a nonchalant attitude as if it is normal, routine business.

The philosopher leaves some mystery to create a taste of something, suspense, magic with no name, mystical, supernatural, abstract. Ambiguous language or actions when something concrete is awaited destroys the expectations in a violent way, leaving the interlocutor to deal with his frustration as the reader alike. Nothing is explicit. Everything is available. The philosopher does not immediately present the meaning in a straightforward way to a simple question of yes or no, right or wrong. The reader undergoes the process of understanding along with the interlocutor when the philosopher fails to fulfill his role as the proprietor of wisdom. The words or actions create an architecture, where there is a framework that provides a bit of constraint and rules, but within the framework there is freedom to play with different perspectives.

The words are flexible in interpretation, with some perfection of universality, while being appropriate for provoking thinking in the particular situation. The idea they convey is profoundly human, touching

something in the essence of what it is to be human, able to be cited in response to various other situations and questions. Interpretation is the work of unpacking the meaning from the package of the words to make it available to others, while the interpreter discovers that there are multiple ways of unpacking in order to reach different meanings. The meaning is universal, while another possible meaning is universal from another perspective, and so on. From the paradigm of this, from the worldview of that, from the logic of this attitude, from the reasoning of that viewpoint. The translation is not between languages, but modes of being and interacting with the world. When the reader practices transitioning with agility with the text as fodder for thinking, he moves from the interlocutor position to the philosopher role.

Allegorical. In the religious narratives, allegory is a mode to transfer the thinking work to the interlocutor, where the religious figure provokes and directs the thinking process, but leaves the interlocutors and therefore the reader to assume the exercise of reason and emotions, and only then draws the connection. The tool is powerful, in that the interlocutors are not told what to think, but experiences the ideas themselves, effectively making them the author and master of their own conclusions. The first level of comprehension is the language of mortals, the subjective, the tangible and straightforward, almost childlike in simplicity. When the religious figure and reader connects the allegory to the message, the particular becomes the universal, the subjective becomes objective, the concrete becomes abstract. The most straightforward example of allegory is Nathan's story of the two men and the sheep to King David. Nathan makes a thinly veiled comparison, allowing David objectivity because the story is about two unnamed men; it is not until the end that Nathan reveals the connection. In this objectivity, David is enabled to make a clear judgment. David reacts with strong emotions to condemn the man who has committed the wrong, as the narrative form of the allegory takes his reasoning through the processing of the strength of the violation and the imbalance of justice. In the end, only four words are needed to reveal the anger is toward David himself with "you are that man" (2 Samuel 12). Jesus employs allegory in first asking the Samaritan Woman for a drink of water, then introducing the "living water" he offers by mirroring the language and concepts of ask, thirst, water, and life. This mirroring of concepts helps to make the abstract, eternal life, understandable in mortal terms. Hakuin

makes a similar move with the samurai, who asks to understand the abstract. Hakuin gives him a demonstration of hell and paradise in the samurai's reaction with just a little provocation. The warrior's answer is in his action, as Hakuin's delivery is in the language of his training and instinct. The words to describe hell and paradise are not needed, since the warrior demonstrates and knows through this warrior style demonstration better than any spoken explanation could convey.

Allegory softens, makes the thinking process gentle, protects the thinker from becoming defensive so they are open to receiving the idea when it arrives. The message is approached in a roundabout manner, so the interlocutor does not see the responsibility directly, it is revealed through drama. The childlike wonder is grasped and then the meaning is revealed. Animals are often employed, as with the Nathan and David example, using some archetype of real characters in social life. The method is indirect but still the reference is clear, the characters and the reader know to whom the message of the text is addressed when the philosopher reveals the meaning. There is a mask of protection, so the problem is not addressed directly—the allegory is the mediator. Criticisms can be harsher than usual because the blow of their effects are softened by the mode of the message. Receivers of the criticism hesitate from defending themselves because they would identify themself, they would reveal their guilt, and they would accept the allegory as a direct condemnation. The allegory does this work on the illustrative level without needing to engage on the rhetorical level.

Allegories are more efficient than abstractions because images are easy to catch the attention; the effect is natural, automatic, direct, tangible. Commercial publicities know that a good picture is better than many words. The brain is enraptured with images, it is the first level of knowing according to Spinoza (1677; Part IV). In religion, allegories are the ways to instruct the mass of people, literate and illiterate alike, via oral tradition, the sculptures, and stained glass windows throughout the cathedral for instance, while being available to convey meaning and at the same time being available to the interpretation of the reader (Elbom 2022). The symbol invokes narrative. Allegory and symbols can be very effective in invoking abstract concepts. For example, during the revolution a myth was born in France of the Marianne, the figure of liberty. This creation has the power of unification of the country. Marketing also purposefully employs

allegories. Especially for perfume brands, allegories, especially Greek allegories, sell their products as a promise to emulate the lifestyle of divine goddesses of immortal beauty and desirability, with the audience sensitive to the image and the emotions sympathetically shared. The allegory in a concept or image demands less effort to interpret than an explanation in words. In general, allegories explain everything and anything, from the birth of the world, usually with some moveable moral to the story that convicts its audience.

The content of what the religious leaders convey can be serious, profound, abstract, and heavy, which can overwhelm the listener who also wants some incentive in order to care to listen. Allegory is an easy way to make the abstract concrete, to make the concrete abstract, and to move between the two perspectives. The king is guilty, the woman is offered salvation, the monk is asked to explain immortality beyond death. Allegory makes these serious ideas digestible. The mode is approachable, despite addressing themes of the absolute, the infinite, or the divine. What is said has implications for eternity from a religious perspective, but how it is said is in terms of practical and tangible matters for quick and efficient understanding.

Challenging. The religious figures challenge values, paradigms, assumptions, social norms, and even reason. Ironically, nothing is sacred. They antagonize: the tacit consensus that is desired in dialogue is denied. They confront: the form and content of their words mock the expected moves, with exclamation, evidence as conclusion, and acceptance of what is wrong by any other standard. They amplify: they echo the rational moves of the interlocutor to the next level, showing the absurdity of certainty. This idea follows Dumas' idea: "Learning does not make one learned: there are those who have knowledge and those who have understanding. The first requires memory and the second philosophy" (Dumas, 1844).

Jesus dares Zaccheus, a rich tax collector of the Roman Empire, to think of himself, a sinner, as worthy of Jesus' attention. The bystanders are challenged even more in their consideration of Zaccheus' social position and how he gained his wealth. They complain. Jesus declares him a son of Abraham and upends the standard of worthiness by his words, that those who are lost are the ones in need of being saved. This action sets the example of how Jesus wants others to treat sinners. The case of Nasruddin and the turban is lighter, but still a similar idea—if the turban symbolizes

the mastery of Persian, then wearing it should transfer the ability. Putting the large turban on the interlocutor's head, Nasruddin defies the academic honors and social expectations by challenging the one who carries the assumptions to do the work. Zhuangzi plays with paradigm because Huizi demands a rational explanation for an unserious comment, and Zhuangzi does not go with the rational, he plays with the attitude, the desire to know, and in the end Zhuangzi responds with common sense and absurdity. To know the fish enjoy because of proximity is absurd because fish do not enjoy or feel pain, they are fish. Buddha proposes to the anguished woman who has lost her child to engage socially with others in search of grains of mustard from someone not affected by death. This way, Buddha invites her to see death not as something terrible in her own personal drama, but as a normal phenomenon that is banal. Mourning is naturally met with sympathy, and many would not dare violate this state; but Buddha normalizes a natural part of life. Hakuin as well uses time and acceptance, first approaching the reasoning of the interlocutors to let the challenge unfold naturally. He is a great Zen Master, but accepts the challenge to be humbled to the position of a monk with a tarnished reputation and care for a dependent instead of defending his honor. By doing so, the challenge to the daughter to confess to the lie and correct the injustice is not directly addressed, but the tension is present and moves the narrative and reader to desire rectification. He embraces each step of what is told to him as truth, modeling non-reactivity to others.

Philosophers take distance with the values others hold in order to limit their power and examine them critically. The cultural, moral, and historical dogma can be seen with some objective attitude as social constructs, not absolutes which must be followed without question. There are common reactions to certain situations that reveal social norms. For example, when a close family member dies, everyone manifests, emphasizes, and favors the primitive reaction of mourning and pain. It is not only culturally observant, but morally good to express sadness and refrain from distractions or happiness until the appropriate amount of time has passed. Philosophers can challenge this feature of social norms via different strategies. Buddha does not directly address the mother's irrationality, but gives her a task to confront the fact that the experience of death is part of life, making her realize the excess of her bad faith. The mourning is allowed, but the limit creates a constraint on her extreme view

of reality. The philosopher uses proportionality, such as comparison, to challenge ideas treated as truth. Buddha proposes initiation in order to challenge social norms. He creates an effect through the experience he proposes. The interlocutor is more aware, able to compare their cultural way of thinking in regard to another one. The move becomes a geometrical perspective because there are at the same time two looks which create some proportion of one to the other. This way, the protagonist can experience two different approaches which can lead to a delegitimation of social perception of the reality, or at least to reconsider their original position, in a gesture towards universalizing thinking. Proportionality can also be used with amplification of reasoning. The philosopher repeats the same thinking process but adds another separation. For instance, the separation of nature for Huizi is fish versus human, while Zhuangzi adds the separation of individuals from one to other. Then by upending the idea of separation with proximity as its opposite, the challenge is to make sense of any distinction standard.

Another way the philosopher challenges social norms is to play the mirror. As a mime who uses the same gesture of the spectator to create some awareness of his body, the philosopher can mirror attitude or language to show some problematic positions of the interlocutor or society generally. Often this kind of move is visible in extreme situations such as forms of protests like self-immolation and hunger strikes, which mirror the violence and inhumanity of the injustice being committed by the oppressor of the protesting groups. By being extreme and violent in protest, the monks show the extreme and violence of the alterity. The mirroring can also appear in a lighter way by simply echoing the same words or the same reasoning of the interlocutor in another context or reproducing the same gesture. Comedians, who understand culture in a philosophical way in order to mimic the gestures and accents that are identifiable to the peoples' mode of being, bring some humorous critique to the unique qualities of that culture.

Philosophers create dissonance. Those who work with ideas ritually tend to stand out by attracting rigid people who have certitudes because of their association with thinking. An idea comes from a certain paradigm and, while this paradigm is not conscious, this idea becomes, as a mantra, an indisputable truth, and when it is shared with the majority it is transformed into a social norm. But philosophers play with that kind of

rigidity by questioning evidence, assumptions, and conclusions in order to create cognitive dissonance where the social logic fights with the logic itself. Philosophers present paradox, questions of mythos that can not be addressed with scientific answers, and unsolvable problems. The dissonance tears the character out of their social confinement, from their foundation of stability, away from their justified true beliefs. The ideas that leave space for not knowing are far more interesting.

The power of example, empirically living the message they teach, is another challenge the philosopher presents. The stoic mentors gave their students tasks of carrying barrels of rotten fish through the center of the city, wearing rags for clothes, and eating simple diets to exercise their willpower and teach them humility. A way to challenge social norms is to take the extreme opposite position for practical living, such as using vulnerability as power or giving away one's fortune to live in the community of thinkers. In this way, philosophers transcend social paradigms. Common in philosophical narratives is a test the philosopher is presented, whether to adhere to this rule or that rule. They tend to respond by following the spirit of the law instead of the letter of the law, as Jesus does with the Samaritan woman. The challenge they present with their example is to not think of life as full of false dilemmas, not follow the rules, not conform to expectations.

Ironical. Ancient Greece, and Socrates in particular, solidified the essential position of irony in thinking work. Irony is when the attitude of a statement conveys to the listener or reader the opposite meaning of its content (Colebrook, 2004), and philosophers employ the move often. It can signal to the others that more critical thinking is required, to go beyond the literal, pushing into the abstract or theoretical. The same form of argumentation is used to build and to deconstruct it, as a *mise en abîme*. This tension between two ways of thinking is not intended to create pain but life, active engagement of the mind to connect meaning between the interlocutors. The way that art and poetry are ways to create different colors by applying different interpretations to the same reality, irony is putting on different colored glasses to understand with different complexity.

The philosopher provokes the one who is stuck in dogmatic thinking to be flexible, such as the cunning man who comes to challenge Nasruddin with a formal test, and assumes Nasruddin will play fair by the

unspoken rules his expectations create. Nasruddin is not present when his victory is declared, and yet the reader imagines his smile as he walks away from the challenger, left to lean against the wall until he realizes the victory has taken place. The reverse works, such as in the case of the one who is flippant to the seriousness of the matter, such as the Prophet Nathan condemning David with his analogy. The task of the gentile seems impossible, yet he requests reciting the Torah while he stands on one foot. The work is reversed with "the rest is the explanation of this—go and study it!" where the burden of making sense of the entire Torah reduced to one sentence, even shorter than the test required, is now on the convert. Zhuangzi transposes the paradigm of relativism which is objected to by Huizi who has claims about the judgment on the thinking of the fish. This transposition goes with the difference of view between Zhuangzi and Huizi who are two different humans. The discrepancy demonstrates the limits of the paradigm of relativism which becomes absurd when Zhuangzi pushes it. If no one can have any judgment of any one, judgment becomes forbidden which is absurd because it is impossible for the human mind to function without judgment. Hakuin expresses some irony by employing the mode of the question "is that so?" He knows the opposite is true, from his own empirical experience, but accepts with an open yet inquisitive attitude. He neither confirms or denies, and intends the ambiguity the question creates. There is the private logic of the parents who naively accept their daughter's explanation, and then the correction at the resolution, which he adopts at each stage as a surprise, as if he is being taught, only to teach via the applicability of his question, repeated verbatim throughout the narrative. It is his only line, and the meaning evolves for the parents with each saying, while remaining constant for him.

Irony can be cognitive, transposing meaning. Irony can be at the same time applied to the content and the form. This coherence makes the irony particularly effective because it shows to the interlocutor the limits of their paradigm, of their speech with the same tool that they use precedently. The form and vocabulary is mirrored, but the meaning is on a different level. In this way, an effect of *mise en abîme* is structured as a kind of irony that mirrors the way of functioning of the other who becomes shocked when the meaning of his own idea is problematized. Irony invites the interlocutor to think, but to think critically, since some interpretation work is required to understand the meaning. What is said is rather the

opposite of what is meant; what is meant is rather the opposite of what is said. The philosopher does not lay out what they intend to be communicated like a lecture, where the interlocutor can be passive consumer. The interlocutor must engage in critical thinking, which is active, present with the other, building the dialogue at the very least via the feedback that they react to the attitude instead of the content. A similar move happens when the philosopher exaggerates, playing with the quantity or transposition to an absurd level. A dose of doubt is healthy. Shifting from meaning to opposition, or meaning to exaggeration, or meaning to alleviating, or meaning to testing takes the dogma out of the original position. With the idea that a man can know what fish think by proximity, the devotion to the belief in how serious dialogue must be in order to share ideas is no longer important.

Irony can be sensitive, bringing the unexpected when it is needed to provoke thinking. Irony can shift from one attitude of paradigm to another, especially the serious to the trivial or the trivial to the serious. The tool of irony works like a joke, where the set up, or in the case of irony the content, functions on one level to explain the environment and set the expectation, while the punchline, or in the case of irony the attitude, violates the expectation with something else functioning at a contrasting, relatively absurd level (Raskin, 1985). This direct method of irony is performative, where the philosopher takes control in a way not of the ideas, but the way of approaching thinking about the ideas, in a very effective manner, since humor works with sensitivity. Safran-Naveh (1999) refers to the move as a "tactical glissment", causing the reader to shift paradigms to follow the narrative, using the David and Nathan example that first seduces and then abruptly confronts with the social and moral context. The philosopher easily manages to unstick an interlocutor with the light application of irony, with humor opening up other options when the interlocutor seems locked into one path. They can choose to take distance. Irony also de-dramatizes, such as with the case in *The Apology* where Socrates explains that in his old age, nature would have soon made the death penalty redundant if the jury had just waited a bit (The Apology 38c). He is sentenced to death, but able to joke in a way that does not take the conviction as a condemnation the jury members might intend it to be, when his original offense is corrupting the youth and dishonoring the

gods—further demonstrating that he lacks the proper respect for what is supposed to be taken seriously by social standards.

Paradoxical. Paradox looks to break the rules of common sense, such as providing a contradiction as a cohesive idea (Cantini & Bruni, 2021). A paradoxical statement seems absurd at the analytical level, but can be defended logically with different synthetic interpretations (Quine, 1962). Religious figures play with paradox as finite beings who try to connect their interlocutors with some ideas that are divine, infinite, and abstract. Paradox allows some to make sense of what is not under constraints of the laws of physics, the rules of what is tangible, even understandable via the human capacity of reason.

Hillel takes the challenge to recite the Torah while the gentile stands on one foot, an impossible task when there are 613 laws, an entire cosmology, and a history of a culture contained in the text. The summary is simple, and according to Hillel, contains the Torah in a few words. In the *Pleasure of Fish* the way to see knowledge is different for the two characters. Huizi says knowledge is conditional on human nature but also by the individual's singularity. One cannot know what a fish feels. One can not know what another knows. Zhuangzi problematizes knowledge as something which is purely sensitive and speculative. He does not care about logic, knowledge is common sharing and has no conditions. The nature of knowledge is not certainty but just hypothesis. In a way, he follows the idea of Kant who says that knowing an object is impossible, one can just approach it (Kant, 1781). Hakuin creates paradox with absence of a defense, which appears to the others as guilt via acceptance of the consequences. By accepting the truth of the parents, he is both innocent and guilty, as time reveals in contradiction. Social logic and reason are at odds, yet Hakuin remains silent. As a result, he experiences a part of being human which would otherwise be inaccessible to a monk, unconcerned for his reputation, living in humility as a monk desires instead of the fame his name had carried. In each of these examples, the religious master is calm and comfortable in contradiction while the protest of reason and contradiction exist in their social context and in the mind of the reader. They are agile in the demands of the interlocutor, frustratingly so according to Huizi and challenging according to the parents. Reason is important, but not deified in itself. They are beyond the need to defend themselves at the personal level, and as a result are considered wise at the

paradoxical level. Paradox creates some tension, energy, interaction, confrontation, destability, faintness, challenge, danger, flexibility, or alterity. It disrupts the foundation of ideas, foundations that are normally assumed and offer some peace and stability of thinking, of humanity's place, of what is rationally and scientifically known, creating the possibility of meaninglessness, pain, nothingness. Paradox forces one to confront limitlessness, impotency, and the fact that there are people who are comfortable with paradox, who understand and do not understand, capable of resolving the two contradictory positions. Like a Chinese brain teaser constructed in a piece of wood, there are steps to appreciate the frustration of paradox. One takes the challenge, puts trust in themself, accepts the challenge and enjoys it because they see the beauty in the functioning of their brain. Next they realize it is not possible to resolve the puzzle. At this moment a choice appears: they give up and stay with their own thinking, comfortable but blind, or they have the courage of facing their impotency and transvaluate it as something enjoyable, reconciled with their finiteness. Paradox reveals the capability to enjoy being lost. In another way, there is a shift between resolving a paradox as a problem and seeing it aesthetically without emotionally investing in its resolution. A sort of apathy is necessary because the desire to confront a problem in the normal methods do not work. The solution is counterintuitive to normal means, so a peaceful surrender leads to the next step of approaching the problem with different eyes.

There are two types of intuition that lead to resolving paradox. One is a religious attitude where the idea comes from the outside. The one sees themself as a container. The believer attitude has faith in something that is above them and stronger. The second is a researcher type, working to find intuition, they produce ideas in order to grab the solution. They are active as scientists believing in the virtue of work. One must change their functioning of thinking and employment of intuition in order to understand. The religious attitude is to be open as a container, but once there is an idea treated dogmatically there is the possibility of being concrete, determined, stuck, and rigid. The container is open to potential, difference, even contradiction. Containers can have different forms: physical, energetically, emotional, mental. As Zhuangzi with the idea of "leisurely walking," he uses himself as a receiver, available in different manners to life in general (Zhuangzi c.286 BC). Containers can be flexible

even if they are forms. Intuition can also be invoked by active procedure. Because one brainstorms strategies, there is some movement created that can lead to something substantial even where there was nothing. For example, when one makes three answers to one question, generally the third is sharper, reveals a deeper origin, is more precise, is more provoked. It is the same with intuition, which looks like thinking work has been done, but it is rough; the real thinking work is a process of refining, requiring some elegance, sharpness, and attention.

Paradox has a few final goals used by philosophical and religious masters. The first one is to reveal the unassailable complexity of the world that needs more than finite logic to understand it, especially when addressing abstract and absolute concepts. The second is about the self, to be confronted with human finiteness, vulnerability, limitations, to force one to be humble. The third one is to train intuition, to challenge thinking, creating an aspiration towards something unknown. The fourth is to create active living, to awaken the thinking, to disrupt the stability of knowing, to annoy or bring pleasure depending on the rigidity or agility. The fifth is sadism. Socrates plays with his interlocutor as a cat plays with a mouse. He likes to create some dissonance in the head of his interlocutor. Whatever the consequences, paradox can be used as a game for pleasure. Seeing the other in trouble is joyful, an egoistic pleasure. Even if sadism has a bad connotation, the philosopher can differentiate two kinds. One is moral judgment, using sadism in order to create shame on the other. The other is playful, even tender; there is no moral judgment, just a friendly judgment on the ignorance or stubbornness of the other. There is a fascination with the functioning of the other.

Thinking hurts. There is work, effort, challenge, and process. There is as well result, growth, and the beauty of ideas. Thinkers see these two outcomes and because of their love of challenge or understanding of the net benefits, they engage in the exercise of thinking, while others focus on the pain and avoid the thinking work. Therefore, paradox can be used as a diagnosis. How does the other respond, what does he do with the surprise, does he step back, paralyzed, or go further? The answers indicate the temperament, state, agility of the interlocutor. One who refuses to be playful with paradox is not up for the challenge of thinking. They accept to be stuck in their own thinking, they reject the opportunity to grow or find beauty in difference, they want to stay in the comfort of their own

construction of how the world works and how they relate to the world. Paradox cannot be merely consumed, otherwise it is just a contradiction, reducing paradox from something dynamic to something static. In order to recognize paradox as paradox, one acknowledges that it is a contradiction that works as an idea somehow. Paradox demands the interlocutor to move themself and make an effort. Paradox interpreted as knowledge, taken as an end, denatures the idea of paradox itself. Paradox is not an impasse, it is an access, an intermediate chamber to something else, to alterity.

Seductive. In several of the religious narrative examples, the religious figure allows time and space to arrive at their own thinking process, the mode of thinking work instead of emotional reaction or enjoyment of self-value, and a conscious amount of alterity and guidance to make another option able to be contemplated. The other is considered an agent in their own right, worthy of the thinking work, of interest for the philosopher to care to want their perspective. The philosopher models the life of the mind, which is also attractive and inspiring. Hillel allows the others to give the expected response before meeting the challenge of the gentile. Jesus honors the Samaritan woman by asking for water despite her social position before acknowledging her deviance and sharing his message anyway, showing her that she is worthy as a sinner. Nasruddin allows the challenger the day of holding the wall and is not even present when the challenger discovers that he has been outsmarted. Zhuangzi puts Huizi in a consensus without asking him. By using "see", he uses mutual sensitive experience in order to present his conclusion that sounds like the conclusion of both speakers. This way to present the idea forces Huizi to intervene in order to reestablish his own thinking which is different. Zhuangzi plays cleverly, as politicians do, by using the voice of Huizi without asking or hearing him on the subject. He presents his idea as a tacit consensus. Zhuangzi echoes the words of the interlocutor to turn the question back to him, answering a question with a question. Hakuin easily demonstrates to the samurai how much value he puts into his image and how emotionally reactive he is by not engaging in his own fear and defense to answer the samurai's question. They demonstrate an interest in the other, an awareness of the other's understanding and way of perceiving the situation in order to introduce some alterity in response, and a desire to share in interest, amazement, and the learning process together. Each

possess some connection to objectivity that was not accessible to the interlocutor, making them the bringer of a way to escape the normal, natural moves. The mode is dialogue, through words or silence, that builds an understanding together. Each of the instances involve aesthetics, inviting the interlocutor to share in the beauty of thinking instead of their trained reaction. The religious figure's connection and work of connecting the other to the absolute echoes in the interlocutor's and readers' humanity: the others can touch the divine because of the work in the dialogue.

The philosopher can use void in order to create an aspiration of his interlocutor to fulfill this void. For instance, the philosopher embraces comfortable silence, allowing the interlocutor time and space to think, react, or speak to reveal himself. In other words, the phenomenon of creating a void can be a form of seduction because without saying it, he attracts the other into his path of thinking. As a physical principle, nature looks for balance, so if the philosopher, as an empty volume, does not speak, the other is led to act in order to balance the process of thinking like the equilibrium found with osmosis; the monologue becomes a dialogue. Allowing time and space for the interlocutor to think demonstrates the philosopher's interest in the other and how he thinks, where the interlocutor sees that his ideas are of interest, the philosopher wants to hear what he thinks, he is worthy of the thinking work. The philosopher exercises curiosity in the other as a representative of humanity and in their own right, as a rational individual, while the other enjoys the exploration of themselves as an object of mystery worth exploring. The interlocutor, seeing his value, is attracted to the one who brings his value to light.

Seduction can take the form of playfulness. The philosopher uses irony for instance in order to detach ideas from the moral paradigm, creating some lightness in the process which is pleasant for the interlocutor who does not feel attacked or in emotional difficulty. Nevertheless there is a judgment and stake in the ideas, but the judgment is about the strength of the ideas, the beauty of the thinking, the judgment refrains from being moral, and it remains on the idea level instead of the personal. The playful attitude created with irony allows each participant in the dialogue to partake in the social construct of joking, to feel that one belongs in the inner circle. The group laughs at something, present to the idea and moment, with cohesion in the self and between the thinkers.

Because of the feeling of freedom when the interlocutors authentically laugh, the thinking becomes free as well. The resulting lightness of being creates joy in the process of thinking with the other.

The philosopher contemplates absolute concepts in his work, which are attractive by themselves. They are self-contained, they have a power of attraction in themselves and represent freedom, perfection, untouchableness, permanence, and other subjects of love. There is a kind of fascination with the absolute. Human beings want to touch the infinite, and so there is an ontological seduction as if absolute concepts are statues of marble forbidden from being touched in a museum and beyond the skill of anyone but a master to compose. This seduction goes with the beauty of architecture, stones of absolute concepts, systems that are as diamonds: rigid but brilliant. This type of seduction does not need any interaction, just contemplation of the clarity and metaphysical level. Yet the philosopher ritually engages with these forbidden concepts with a lack of respect for their sacred forbiddenness, so he becomes attractive by association. The ideas allow the thinker to touch the absolute for a moment, to observe, appreciate, and take part in constructing, so the ideas themselves are seductive. Then as well, the philosopher is the one who invites the contemplation of the ideas, in lightness and joy like a dance, and so as the enabler and the associate he can become as well an object of appreciation. The thinker does not need the philosopher, but nevertheless, the philosopher is the one to reveal the thinker's power to enjoy ideas, and this revelation is pleasant for both. The love of wisdom is contagious. Engaging in dialogue, the philosopher shares the practice of thinking, the process he loves so much, showing the interlocutor that they can as well take part in the beauty of wisdom as an independent thinker and participant in the dialogue. The dialogue is an enthusiastic dance, creating something beautiful, bringing fulfillment to life.

One of the roots of *wisdom* contains the idea of transportation or direction. As well, the etymology of education is "to bring out" with the idea of movement, growth, and provocation from the other. In *Cratylus*, Socrates talks about this link between wisdom and the act of discovering different ideas, to be open to the novel in general (Cratylus 411d). A way the philosopher seduces is to introduce some alterity that leads to something new for the other. Even in a romantic relationship, a way to seduce is to show how one exposes the world with new perspectives to the other. As if

one is a door that opens to new outlooks towards existence. The philosopher does the same by introducing some new ways of thinking, new paradigms which are unimagined worlds for the interlocutor. This expanded horizon in adventure attracts the novice but thirsty mind of the interlocutor.

Human beings enjoy having someone to guide them. They are attracted by the philosopher who has power because he seems to have figured out life via his experience and perspective, who leads by example of living his truth, demonstrating the path to take. The philosopher is confident in life. The interlocutor would like the father figure to follow because it is easier to be passive as a child who is told how to live, what to do, how to determine right and wrong. The emulation can be very effective. This normally gives some power to the philosopher figure, but in turn makes the interlocutor confident by association, as someone who plays tennis with a better player becomes better with the exposure and experience. Power attracts power. This kind of seduction is passive. It is because the interlocutor has a need to be recognized or to be secure that the philosopher becomes attractive even if he does not want. Just because the interlocutor is enabled to have more clarity and thinking in his functioning than normal, he is seduced because he attributes this ability to his association.

Discussion

This study looks at examples of sacred narratives specifically where religious figures interact with interlocutors. The practical reason for these selections is to see how the philosopher, the interlocutors, the witnesses, and the reader interact in the work of provoking through symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1956) and reader response theory (Fish, 1982). Yet the role of dialogue is notable in how prevalent and effective it proves to be in sacred texts as well as philosophical narrative. While there are sacred texts written in a more abstract way, the dialogue narrative appears in many major religious traditions, from Confucius interacting with his students, gods providing revelations to their chosen, and Nasruddin representing the clever fool. The dialogue narrative echoes the structure of the textual representation that survives of Socrates: not relying directly on preaching their dogma, but revealing themselves predominantly

through dialogues with particular individuals. The reader can take a role of being actively engaged since the reader has a representative of a typical rational thinker who says and does what the average individual would say and do. Rationally, emotionally, and pragmatically, the reader can empathize with this main interlocutor. The philosopher tends to do the unexpected, a third option of a false dilemma, or something that initially defies logic, demanding interpretation work of the interlocutor and therefore the reader in the thinking work to make sense of what is said and done. To understand the narrative, the reader must be present to it, actively engaged in the reading process with the characters. What is presented is at first a sort of façade, where the premise can be taken literally in the first step, but when put to the task, the reader can find various interpretations that work and play with ideas. This move requires an engagement of interpretation skills, where the narrative is no longer in the same realm of the literal, there is transformation.

Role of Dialogue

Connection. Dialogue is an important activity for human beings, the social animal, to make connections with interest in the subject, build ideas together, share ideas through communication, and employ reason. It is when one is exercising reason that one is being one's best self, according to Aristotle's ideas that man is a rational animal and things are at their best when acting in accordance to their essence (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.13). Dialogue is the form where individuals can engage together, fulfilling their best selves, and find the joy in thinking. Coming together, they can recognize mutual interest, desire to collaborate, joy in the thinking process, the perspective of otherness, and inspiration and aspiration in the beauty of each other's thinking, drive, and character.

Development. Through dialogue, ideas develop.

Most of philosophical history involves opposing schools creating thesis, antithesis, and ultimately synthesis as they describe and contribute to the functioning of human beings and society. This exchange of ideas happens between individuals, friends, classmates, colleagues, and diplomats daily—it is the foundation of collaboration, construction, and creation. Thinkers develop and compare ideas through dialogue about how to live, what is the good, what are rights, how to get along, what to do, if meaning is a worthwhile pursuit: it is a tool for discovery (Ackerman

1989). Regardless of power dynamics, beauty of articulation, or barriers of language, the other brings alterity to check if the idea makes sense, why it was said, what can be done with it, what meaning it brings to the world. Feedback contributes the next step, and so on. Thinkers give birth to ideas that take breath and gain meaning when they are written down to be read or spoken to be heard by another.

Emulation. There is as well benefit from alterity because the other brings inspiration, perspective, opportunity, and emulation. Via dialogue, each participant brings their experience and excitement for thinking work. One might tell a story that reminds the other of a book, and the sharing of this association likely inspires the first to either read the book or share their insight from the relation. One could offer a story, a problem, or an idea that invokes the other to bring some new consideration. Through questioning, answering, and building, the dialogue unfolds various perspectives that would not otherwise be considered. One could have many ideas unarticulated, while dialogue with the other provides the environment and listening ear to present the articulation of the ideas. The opportunity manifests itself in dialogue. One may be inspired by the life, joy, interests, energy, and experience of the other to bring some challenge of reaching for achievements, imitating good habits like reading and writing each day, looking for the positive. Dialogue invites the individual to leave their subjectivity by association and visualize the potential of life through the other.

Role of Protagonist

Already some early philosophers are religious figures and early religious figures are thought to be philosophers, such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, Zhuangzi, and Buddha. This is true as well for the treatment of Nasruddin and Hakuin, so perhaps it is easier to blur the line between philosophy and religion from the eastern perspective. Hillel and other wise rabbis in Midrash are approached rather philosophically by the scholars in Judaism. Jesus tends to be sacredly valued as the Messiah in the west, of interest for what he says in terms of salvation and living a Christian life, even though other traditions are able to transpose his lessons for universal application (Evans, 1996). Yet the moves these religious figures employ match the methods of philosophers to provoke thinking, as seen here in the

results, so there can be some value in studying each of these provocateurs as philosophers beyond their role within their religious context.

Leitmotif. These names come with reputations that are invoked with their mention, with the mythology they carry, identifiable with particular essences. Like the characters in Peter and the Wolf, they come with some expectations of moves and challenges they might offer to the interlocutor. Just as Hermes will likely trick someone, Athena will choose the path of strategic wisdom, and Dionysius will prioritize pleasure, the reader knows or quickly learns that the Prophet Nathan will convey the message, Zhuangzi is comfortable in paradox, Jesus will meet the challenge of law with compassion, and Hakuin is willing to be humbled. The philosopher character and the reader are familiar friends. So familiar, the reader can internalize the character, like having a conscience living and dialoguing in the mind, imagining what he might say and do as the reader goes about their day.

Model. The philosopher is a guide to life: one accepts they are above them, then they accept to follow the example. There is recognition that the figure is more experienced, wise, in touch with their own meaning and purpose in some exceptional way. They are cohesive between their speech and their way of life, creating legitimacy as a guru, and worthiness of emulating. Even the presence of their existence is enough, their gestures become transmissions of messages of how to live. There is authority already based on the others who follow. The authority leads to faith. The messages from the authority are taken for granted as wise. It puts the reader in the attitude of humility, listener, follower, one who contemplates, not the critic. The projection already creates the condition to be open and ready to transform oneself. There is emulation by association, since the philosopher's life is beautiful, so it is desirable to try to replicate.

Provocateur. The philosopher enjoys being provocateur over teacher. Via dialogue, they are interested in building ideas together, developing the arguments and testing the ideas. In narrative, the ideas of the philosopher and the interlocutor are present, but the meaning still requires interpretation work from the reader in order to bring understanding. This invites philosophical engagement. Philosophers have the ability to be agile, and they enjoy making the interlocutor or reader dissonant or at least to make him unstabilized in a surprising way. When the reader turns their mind to this kind of protagonist, they are excited and

fearful at the same time because they know that something will happen, the philosopher will likely provoke them and create some life. The philosopher's moves and creation of unpredictable situations creates destabilization, thinking, freedom, and recognition. The goal is not to arrive at some beautiful conclusion, but to provoke thinking.

Confrontation. People bullshit all the time because of the necessity to protect their image. But philosophers do not care about their images, there is no defending, no fighting. Philosophers confront the other with the truth because they do not care about the emotions or sincerity. They are incorruptible. They look for truth, and play with words. Philosophers, as mirrors, confront the interlocutors with judgment and naming, brutally, leading the interlocutors to confront themselves.

Destiny. The philosophical protagonist provokes the other out of the random paradigm, where everything is left to chance. There are no coincidences anymore, the interlocutor is attracted by something of fate, something outside the pre-conceptualization that is already built. For something to exist, it must have a reason or cause according to the principle of sufficient reason expressed by many notable philosophers (Leibniz 1714; Schopenhauer 1813). The philosopher speaks to something in the reader that is the right message at the right time, leaving the reader to contemplate the idea and the perfect circumstances for receiving the message for it to resonate. This reflects an appetite for thinking. The role of the protagonist is to be at the service of the reader who opens the book. He has to exist with the message, there is no other way. It is destiny. The reader needs to grow; that is the reason for the existence of the philosopher.

Hierarchy. There is a hierarchy between the interlocutor and the philosopher with a high level of awareness. This tension creates life and also reflects the hierarchy between every human being, that there is a proper order to life, respect in society, and experience with living. The tension between empirical subject and transcendental subject or between circumstantial subject and ontological subject is represented by the two main characters. There is the disciple, who is below but has a desire for elevation, and the philosopher, who is necessary to create the scale of this elevation.

Inspiration. The philosopher has many perspectives, many substances, many voices to invoke, many methods of reasoning. This

capacity brings inspiration to the reader. As an old sailor who has plenty of memories, the fishing tales are a little more extravagant to be believed to have been experienced in one lifetime, but the reader is along for the ride. The quantity and quality trigger admiration and the reader wants to be better, to progress, from this inspiration. The philosopher's life represents a horizon of possibilities. The reader recognizes their freedom to choose from all of life because of the presence of the philosopher who reveals the reader's narrowness of thinking. In freedom, the reader becomes an active player in the mind of the philosopher, opening even more the reader's desire to discover more paths to explore, to see what can come.

De-Dramatization. Often the situations of lives are taken with dramatic connotations. The philosopher sees the situation with distance and clarity without adding useless emotions that affect judgment. They dedramatize what is seen as significant or overwhelming, offering a more moderate perspective to make life peaceful. Suddenly deadlines, obligations, and judgments no longer hold the same power. The philosopher's attitude has the ability to transmute tragedy into comedy, and then laughing, the expression of the reader's being, can take the lead of their life.

Role of Narrative

Accessibility. Narrative is a way to make ideas accessible to any reader, not just the present interlocutors, connecting with the other. The form is an intentional and effective device for Socrates (Kahn, 1997). The reader is represented by the interlocutors, and the reader identifies with them; they make the moves the reader would make, share the same common sense, and take part in the same imperfect approach to life, reason, and emotions. Because of this echo, the philosophers and their methods are applied to the reader as the narrative process unfolds to the interlocutors. The message of the philosopher is able to provoke thinking, invoke emotions, or invite the reader to consider a more objective approach to life. The philosopher addresses some essence of humanity, so the ideas resonate with everyone. The universal character of these texts give them the power to go beyond millenia and defeat geographical borders. Narrative has no regard for boundaries, it is free and evocative. If there are no boundaries, the narrative is accessible to all.

Echo. The imagination is an important difference between humans and animals. The first sign of humanity is when there is an imagination of what happens after death, making present the absent. A narrative does the same, making present something that is hidden in the soul of the reader by using images that resonate, an echo as a mystical and holistic approach. The narrative touches something essential to humanity, identified by each individual. The mythology of the ancient world is still told today because of the way the stories reflect the human desire to be seen and to understand, while the text is rich with availability to interpretation. Images give birth to humanity, from narrative for the child to make landmarks in their existence. Everyone has an appetite for stories because they address what it is to be human and the place of humanity in the world. Narrative offers more than an individual can acquire alone.

Aesthetic. There is an aesthetic dimension in narrative. As a beautiful landscape, stories do not have to make sense to be pleasant. Colors, varieties, purity, details, and other forms make the concept behind the painting aesthetic. The joy of being within the world of the narrative makes the stories approachable, allowing the reader to desire to engage with them, because the work does not look like a mathematical word problem with a correct answer, but a text open to many possibilities of interpretation. The narrative offers freedom, adventure, and aspirations to live in and experience a different time and space. The text is short and digestible, but at the same time full of provocations to unpack. The joy of beauty evolves into the joy of contemplating the new considerations the narrative brings.

Engagement. Narrative is a way to engage universality in the thinking process in a way that feels effortless. This engagement is different from direct abstract theory that a small elite can access in university halls. If there is no abstraction demonstrated, there are still concepts and challenges which are transmitted. The taste is better for the majority—it is desirable to consume it. Like the Roman bread and circuses, the medicine is given in a form the people want, and they easily appreciate the medicine. The effortlessness results in a general effect on humanity, more universal. At the same time, the narrative is intimate, a sense of belonging and sharing with the other when narratives are transmitted. The confidence creates relationships, while the alterity is not a problem because each individual identifies the same with the narrative, there is nothing for them to defend.

The reader can identify with the sins of the Samaritan woman, the instinctual reaction of the samurai, the desire to be recognized of the cunning man, and the mourning of the mother.

Magic. As a shaman who uses song, the religious figures use magic words that are fascinating and create some effect on the reader. In the old ages, the priest referred to gods by telling stories that are the magic of purification and creating miracles with sick people. As an invocation, the words are used not just to fascinate and attract attention but also to have a performative effect on the person. The beginning of the *Brothers Karamazov* has this power of magic by saying the good words in the good moment, creating rehabilitation of the interlocutor. There is magical tension between the divine and the reader through the words of the mediator, as a canal to the service of magical spirits. Human beings can easily fall into their lazy, mundane patterns of supporting their life passively. In this mode, they have the perception that they need some alterity to provoke them to critically think and actively live. The narrative provides the magical element to get them out of this modality, to examine their life, to recognize their choices, and to stop being a victim.

Conclusion

In the exploration of how religious figures and philosophical provokers fulfill a similar role, this study identifies and explains philosophical methods as well as roles of the philosopher as protagonist in narrative with dialogue. The hypothesis, that: Religious figures and philosophical provokers fulfill a role similar between themselves that is distinct from other narrative characters, is confirmed by six themes that are explored, including how they are used in the narrative samples and why philosophers employ them. The value of considering religious figures for their merit beyond their role within religious context, as philosophical provocateurs and models of how to live, is demonstrated.

References

Ackerman, B. (1989). Why Dialogue? *The Journal of Philosophy. 86*(1): 5-22. doi: 10.2307/2027173

Aristotle. (c.350 BC). *Nicomachean Ethics*.
Babylonian Talmud, *Tractate Shabbat*, p. 31a
Brenifier, O. & Chernenko, V. (2015). *Philosophizing with Zhuangzi Part II*. Editions Alcofribas.
Brenifier, O., & Millon, I. (2014). *Wisdom of Buddhist Tales.* Editions Eyrolles.
Brenifier, O., & Millon, I. (2012). *Learning to Philosophize with Nasreddin Hodja*. Tudem.
Cantini, A. & Bruni, R. (2021). "Paradoxes and Contemporary Logic", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/paradoxes-contemporary-logic/.
Colebrook, C. (2004). *Irony*. Routledge.
Diogenes Laërtius. (c.230AD). *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*.
Dumas, A. (1844). *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*. Journal des Débats.
Elbom, G. (2022). *Textual Rivalries: Jesus, Midrash, and Kabbalah*. Fortress Press.
Evans, C. S. (1996). *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History*. Oxford University Press.
Fish, S. (1982). *Is there a text in this class?: The authority of interpretive communities*. Harvard University Press.
Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* (Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith). Pantheon Books.
Freud, S. (1930). *Civilization and its Discontents.*
Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday.
Harnack, C. G. A. (1894). *History of Dogma*.
Kahn, C. H. (1997). *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form*. Cambridge University Press.
Kant, I. (1781). *Critique of Pure Reason*.
Leibniz, G. W. (1714). *Monadology*.
Plato. (c.350 BCE). *Cratylus*.
Plato. (c.350 BCE). *The Apology*.
Plato. (c.350 BCE). *Theaetetus*.
Quine, W. V. (1962). Paradox. *Scientific American, 206*(4): 84-99.
Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. SpringerLink.
Reps, P. & Senzaki, N. (1957). *Zen Flesh Zen Bones.* Tuttle Publishing.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures in conversation*. Basil Blackwell.
Safran-Naveh, G. (1999). *Biblical Parables and Their Modern Re-Creations: From "Apples of Gold in Silver Settings" to "Imperial Messages".* SUNY Press.
Schopenhauer, A. (1813). *On The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*.
Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting qualitative data: A guide to the principles of qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
Spinoza. (1677). *Ethics*.
Vlastos, G. (1994). *Socratic Studies*. Cambridge University Press.
Zhuangzi. (c.286 BC). *Zhuangzi*.