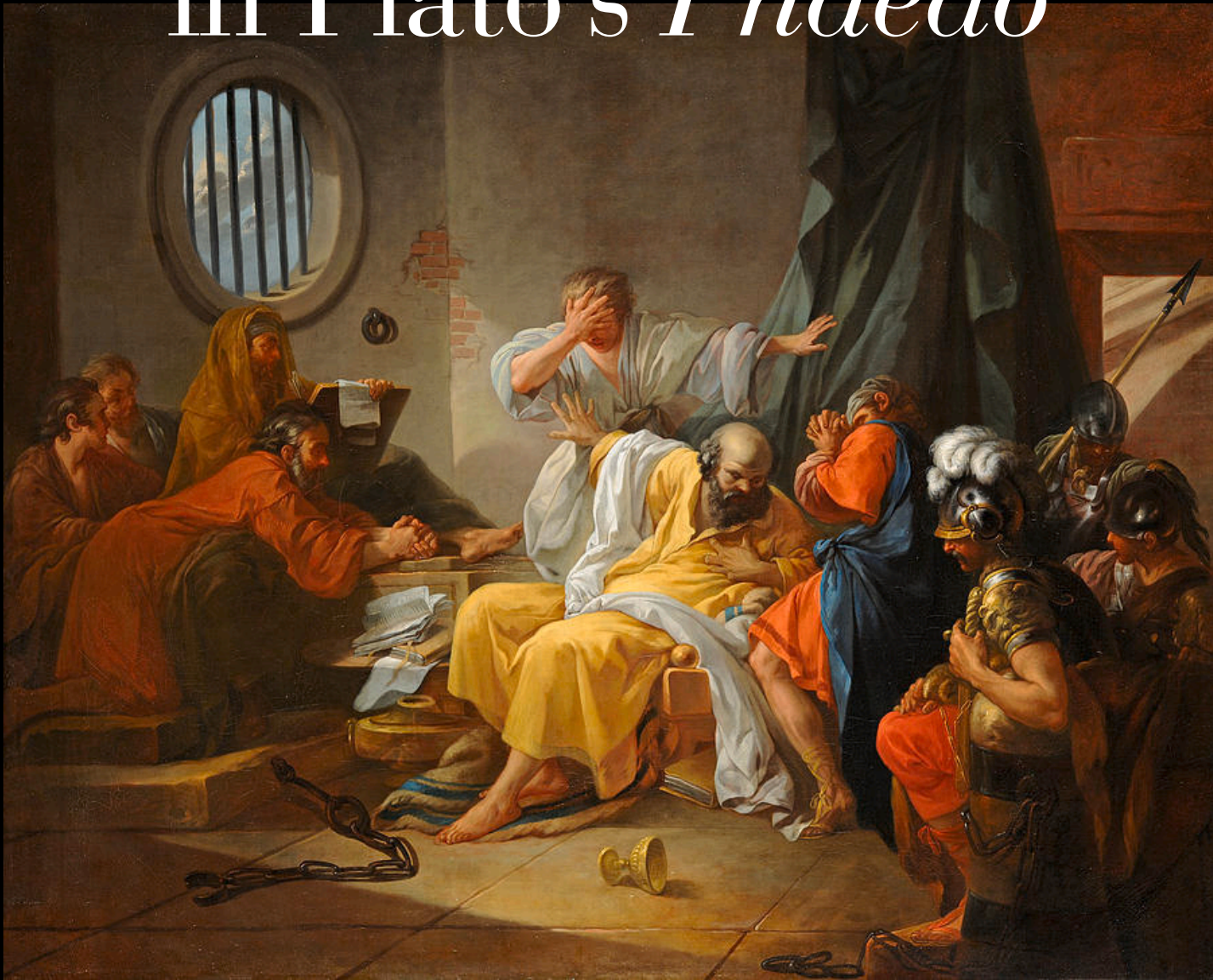




PHILOSOPHER'S HOLIDAY LECTURE SERIES
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, VASSAR COLLEGE

Tragedy Reborn in Plato's *Phaedo*



Plato's *Phaedo* has some of the marks of a traditional tragedy: Socrates, the drama's hero, has suffered a great injustice and is awaiting his death; his friends and supporters weep and lament his fate; but he himself is steadfast and noble in the face of death. In rough outline, one might compare the plot to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. Yet, there are many reasons for resisting this way of reading the dialogue, not least of which is the fact that Socrates repeatedly tells his interlocutors not to lament his death and gives a series of arguments showing death not to be an evil at all. If death is not an evil, it is hard to see how it could be the central dramatic action in a tragedy. Seen this way, the dialogue seems rather to be anti-tragic, in precisely offering up and then rejecting the tragic model. In this paper, I explore this question against the background of the claim in Plato's *Laws* that 'true tragedy' is an imitation of "the best and most beautiful life." I argue that, in presenting Socrates as "doing well" and "happy" in engaging in philosophical discussion with his friends, the *Phaedo* itself seems to satisfy the conditions of a 'true tragedy.' The 'dispute' between actual and true tragedy is made to hang on a particular philosophical question, that of the nature and badness of death. Actual tragedy generally presumes the badness of death, whereas the argument of the *Phaedo* defends the conditional goodness of death—death is at least good for those who have lived their lives practicing philosophy.



Professor, Franco V. Trivigno,
University of Oslo

Wednesday October 6, 2021
5:30pm | Rockefeller Hall 200



Individuals with disabilities requiring accommodations or information on accessibility should contact the Campus Activities Office, 845 437 5370.