

A dialogue by Noel Wilkie

*Endless Brunch*

Automatic Moving

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## **Characters**

PLATO  
SOCRATES  
NUMEROUS UNBAPTIZED INFANTS  
A WAITRESS  
A FERAL GIRL

## **Setting**

*Interior of a hip, urban eatery famous for its “fair trade” bill of fare.*

## **Time**

*Unknown. Late Morning? Sunday?*

## **Scene**

*A long communal table made from a thick slab of reclaimed wood runs parallel to the stage. Behind it, an equally long bench. In front, a few Scandinavian high chairs made from sustainably harvested beech wood. Above, two vintage barn lamps hanging from very long cords.*

*On the table is brunch. For each empty plate of bacon, there is a full plate. For each empty glass of orange juice, there is a full glass. This pattern continues as needed: coffee cups, individually portioned French press, a bottle of Sriracha, and so on.*

*The high angled lighting from the left suggests late morning sun, yet no window or background is seen, only blackness. The effect is a space of unknown proportion. While the characters refer to other people in the room, it could just as easily be populated by ghosts.*

*In each high chair is a gurgling INFANT. SOCRATES and PLATO sit on the bench, dressed in white robes and blue jeans, looking bored. Ambient sounds of silverware and dishes and much sighing from unseen patrons set the tone, gradually fading away over a full minute while the characters sit without speaking. Then PLATO stretches his neck and loudly sighs.*

SOCRATES      How's your neck?  
PLATO          Same as before. (*massages neck.*) This bench isn't very comfortable.  
SOCRATES      Perhaps you should try a new position.  
PLATO          I've tried all the positions.  
SOCRATES      But you've tried none of them now.  
PLATO          So? What difference is now from then?  
SOCRATES      Surely now is different than then.  
PLATO          But my neck feels the same. So as far as I'm concerned: now is as bad as then.  
SOCRATES      As far you feel. But you can't be sure.  
PLATO          I know myself. I know how I feel, Socrates.  
SOCRATES      Are you embarrassed to lie down? No one cares.  
PLATO          I already tried it!  
SOCRATES      You tried it *then*. Maybe it will help *now*.  
PLATO          Then or now, who cares? The position itself hasn't changed.  
SOCRATES      Perhaps the position-now is not the position-then? Perhaps they are entirely different...  
PLATO          Absurd. The position is the position. It is itself. It is less than ideal. In fact: it's terrible.  
SOCRATES      Fair enough. We accept the position is the position. Forgive me, then, I must ask:  
                    So you highly value feelings?  
PLATO          I value how I feel right now, absolutely.  
SOCRATES      So you admit you value feelings over appearances?  
PLATO          Huh? Of course. (*cracks neck.*) You of all people know I don't care for appearances.  
SOCRATES      (*smiles.*) So why don't you lie down?  
                    I won't judge.

PLATO Are you mocking me? Are you suggesting my feelings are driven by a concern... for appearances?

SOCRATES Not exactly. (*pause, waits a moment.*) Tell me: how do you feel now?

PLATO The same!

SOCRATES As then? And as before-then?

PLATO (*cracks neck, irritated.*) Yes!

SOCRATES So now is the same as then. And then is the same now? In terms of your feelings.

PLATO We've already been over this.

SOCRATES Yes. Regarding the positions. But not feelings. I'm checking that your feelings also remain unchanged... by time.

PLATO It seems that way.

SOCRATES So, later... we can expect you'll feel the same later? That is: the same as now?

PLATO I hope to feel better, my neck is friggin' killing me!

SOCRATES Why hope if reason proves otherwise?

PLATO What else am I supposed to do!

SOCRATES Well, is hope a feeling or an appearance?

PLATO You're losing me.

SOCRATES I'm asking you. Is hope... something you *feel*? Or something that comes into view? You insist you know your feelings. Yet we've determined there's no reason to hope. So what is this hope?

PLATO Are you suggesting I hope without hope?

SOCRATES Perhaps. Or perhaps you hope against hope. Either way, hope must not be what it appears to be.

PLATO OK. Fine.

SOCRATES So if hope is not what it appears to be, then hope appears to be an appearance, no?

PLATO *is silent.*

SOCRATES        (*continuing.*) Is hope merely the appearance of  
a feeling?  
PLATO            If so, that changes nothing.  
SOCRATES        If so, then you must have a concern for  
appearances!  
PLATO            (*suddenly rising, then grabbing neck and  
sitting.*) You twist my words!  
SOCRATES        Me? To what end? I'm simply suggesting you  
try lying down! I'd do it myself if it weren't  
for my scoliosis!  
PLATO            God! That's what children do! Fall asleep in  
crowded restaurants while the adults fritter  
away, dammit!  
SOCRATES        Well. Hmm. It's your neck.  
PLATO            (*very annoyed.*) You imply my neck is not  
connected to my head.  
SOCRATES        (*ignoring him and reaching across the table.*)  
All this talk is making me thirsty.

SOCRATES *drinks a glass of water. Immediately, WAITRESS  
appears and fills the first empty glass (of SOCRATES'S two  
glasses) from a pitcher. Exit WAITRESS.*

SOCRATES        The service is excellent.

PLATO *sighs.* SOCRATES *eats a strip of bacon.*

SOCRATES        If I ordered a side of hash browns, would you  
share it?  
PLATO            Don't worry about me.  
SOCRATES        I'm worried about me. I'm not that hungry.  
PLATO            Me neither.  
SOCRATES        So you're a little hungry?  
PLATO            I don't know. Just order a half portion.  
SOCRATES        Can you do that?  
PLATO            Why not?  
SOCRATES        I don't think a half portion exists...  
PLATO            Now you're one for following rules!



SOCRATES No, what I mean is: I don't think it can exist. Perhaps it is *impossible!*

PLATO That's ridiculous. You call the waitress and whisper in her ear: I'm not that hungry. Only a little. Can you make me a smaller portion? A half portion, please. Tell the chef. He'll understand. Who cares if it's not on the menu!

SOCRATES And then what does she bring?

PLATO She brings a half portion. About five minutes later.

SOCRATES No. She brings a portion. How can it be a half when it is a whole? When it's... to use your word... *itself?*

PLATO It *becomes* half. But it began as whole.

SOCRATES How can we be sure?

PLATO Well, we trust her...

SOCRATES Hmm. I trust the only way to be sure a portion is a half portion... is to split it ourselves. Are you hungry? I could go either way.

PLATO (*sighing.*) I'm not that hungry!

SOCRATES So you must have *some* hunger. So let's just...

*Suddenly, an INFANT starts crying.*

SOCRATES Oh no.

PLATO It'll pass.

SOCRATES Will it?

PLATO It always passes. Every time.

SOCRATES Should we hold it? I have a hard time with these creatures.

PLATO I thought you loved babies.

SOCRATES What? No! I'm a midwife to knowledge, not babies. Instead of engaging in dialectic, they merely engage in debate.

PLATO That's a bit harsh.

SOCRATES Where's the Philosopher?

PLATO Still in the bathroom, I think.

SOCRATES Still?

PLATO He's been chugging orange juice and coffee for eternity.

SOCRATES A shame. He's good with kids.

PLATO He's certainly made me proud.

SOCRATES I may have to join him soon.

PLATO One cannot forestall a visit to the stalls.

SOCRATES That's very witty, Plato. Did you make that one up?

PLATO Always mocking me.

SOCRATES No, I'm seriously interested. So quick to take offense! Perhaps you prefer if I stay in the bathroom, my hands full, awaiting the inevitable and not bothering you with my constant questioning?

PLATO I didn't mean it that way.

*The INFANT stops crying.*

SOCRATES There we go! Thank goodness. (*adjusts robe.*) How testy we were all becoming, no?

PLATO We? Well.

PLATO *sighs, cracks his neck.* SOCRATES *picks at the remaining bacon, finishes it.* WAITRESS *appears with a full plate, sets it in front of him and takes the first empty plate (of SOCRATES'S two plates).* Exit WAITRESS.

SOCRATES (*chewing.*) It's not that I don't love babies...

PLATO Your influence on the young has always been a point of debate.

SOCRATES I'm simply equanimous. Is that allowed?

PLATO Well, babies are the future. You know, the father of man and all that.

SOCRATES So they should be held to the highest standards, no? As equals, perhaps.

PLATO I don't agree. We're the ones being held to a standard. Entrusted to take care of them. For the sake of the future.

SOCRATES Yet if there is no future, how can there be a standard?

PLATO There's always a future.

SOCRATES Plato! We've already determined there's no reason to hope!

PLATO Are we starting again?

SOCRATES No, no. (*sniffs air, looks at the INFANT.*)  
I think someone made a poo poo.

PLATO Let the Philosopher take care of it.

SOCRATES (*tickles INFANT'S chin.*) He doesn't seem to mind.

PLATO Well, he doesn't complain. Of course, he's rarely here.

SOCRATES I mean the little one. Sitting in his own waste. It's probably quite warm and comfortable.

PLATO Disgusting.

SOCRATES Is it our right to judge?

PLATO Someone will have to change his diaper... sooner than later.

SOCRATES Yet poo poo will happen again. Sooner than later.

PLATO So this baby makes unreasonable demands upon all of us. Is that what you're saying?

SOCRATES Demands? What is he demanding? I didn't say that. Did he say anything?

PLATO He was crying.

SOCRATES Do people not also cry for joy?

PLATO Socrates...

SOCRATES Or simply cry out loud to see what happens?

PLATO You have no understanding of children.

SOCRATES That may be true. It's not my area of expertise. May I ask a question?

PLATO It's all you do.

SOCRATES (*smiles.*) I'll take that as a yes. Is it true what goes in must come out?

PLATO I don't know. In terms of food?

SOCRATES In terms of anything.

PLATO Well, I suppose we must define what is in and what is out.

SOCRATES           Precisely. Assuming all is equal, if that which was out becomes in, must what was in come out?

PLATO                I concede there must be a switch.

SOCRATES            We accept a switch. Which means out is now in, and in is now out.

PLATO                Yes.

SOCRATES            So if we begin again, the cycle continues?

PLATO                Yes.

SOCRATES            In is out, out is in, in is out, out is in ... ?

PLATO                Yes.

SOCRATES            The cycle is infinite?

PLATO                Yes. In a frustrating sort of way.

SOCRATES            And our baby-friend participates in this infinite cycle, at least concerning his gastrointestinal system?

PLATO                Naturally.

SOCRATES            So why do you interpret his crying as a demand?

PLATO                Because it *is* one.

SOCRATES            Could it not be a cry of understanding?

PLATO                It's a baby!

SOCRATES            Perhaps he understands the infinite. Better than you or me. We've already determined you hope without hope. Is it possible that this baby... these babies... are not so deluded as we?

PLATO                A baby... without any hope at all?

SOCRATES            Precisely.

PLATO                How depressing.

SOCRATES            Maybe.

*A pause. PLATO sighs.*

PLATO                (*glancing around.*) Jesus, I hate brunch.

SOCRATES            Why brunch exists.

PLATO                What?

SOCRATES            Jesus.

PLATO                Who is this man? I swear. I didn't know!

We didn't know!  
 SOCRATES An accident of our births. There's nothing to be done about it.  
 PLATO And where's Virgil? Boy, he drew the lucky straw! Always out on tour. And Abraham and Sarah and... Dammit! A harrowing deal!  
*(sighs, rubs neck, shifts awkwardly on the bench.)* It's the timing. All wrong. Neither here nor there. Not a thing, unto itself... *brunch...* it's just... too late, too early! It ruins your day! The day... just disappears! As if it never existed... never mattered... all this brunch! For chrissakes!!  
 SOCRATES Plato. Relax. Don't put the cart before the...  
 PLATO I'm so frustrated.  
 SOCRATES Don't bring the farm to the...  
 PLATO My neck is killing me!  
 SOCRATES Yet you're still alive.  
 PLATO *(spiteful.)* Am I?  
 SOCRATES What I mean is: it could be worse. Right?  
*(pauses.)* Many people love brunch. They look forward to it. It's the cornerstone of their week. A little monument to all that's been accomplished. I trust we can agree that brunch is popularly considered a great pleasure?  
 PLATO I don't care for what's popular. And I know you don't either!  
 SOCRATES Yet you derive no pleasure from our time here? Our conversation? This delicious food?  
 PLATO I'm just not that hungry!  
 SOCRATES But a little hungry. In the same way you might experience a little pleasure.  
 PLATO I experience no pleasure here.  
 SOCRATES So you experience all pain?  
 PLATO Yes!  
 SOCRATES More than your sore neck? I don't believe you.  
 PLATO I mean...  
 SOCRATES Perhaps you are experiencing some pain... and some pleasure?

PLATO I don't know. I can't tell. I'm not sure. I'm very frustrated!

SOCRATES If you're neither in pleasure nor in pain, or a little of both, is it possible there is a third state... a zone of feeling... a zone unto itself... which you occupy?

PLATO *is quiet.*

SOCRATES What I'm asking is: is there some region between pleasure and pain? Between the divine and the cursed? Is it possible this is where we find ourselves now? Together, enjoined, in this endless brunch?

PLATO *is quiet. Suddenly, the FERAL GIRL tears from the wings, growling and barking. She dashes onto the table and bites PLATO'S forearm before disappearing into the dark.*

PLATO (*leaping to his feet.*) Ahh! This is pain!!  
*This is pain!*

SOCRATES (*bursts into laughter.*) Ah ha ha ha!

PLATO (*flailing, clutching arm.*) Damn bitch!  
*Wild child! Raised by wolves! Who let her in!*  
(*to SOCRATES.*) How can you laugh!!

SOCRATES This is pleasure! *This is pleasure!* Ha ha!  
*She gets you every time!*

PLATO My arm is bleeding!

SOCRATES (*laughing.*) Every time, Plato, *every time!*

SOCRATES *smacks the table and wipes away tears. PLATO snivels. He dips a napkin in water and dabs at his wound. They return to their seats. SOCRATES drinks a glass of water, chuckling. PLATO nurses his wound. WAITRESS appears and fills the first empty glass (of SOCRATES'S two glasses) from a pitcher. Exit WAITRESS. Lights fade.*

*End?*