

Papers

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Francisco J. Gonzalez,
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Marina McCoy,
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EDITORIAL

Michael Eler

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We are glad to announce this special issue of the Plato Journal (6/2016) which consists of the proceeding papers of a workshop with the title 'Ways of Interpreting Plato' organized by Lloyd Gerson at the University of Toronto in March 11-12, 2016. The volume opens with an introduction by Lloyd Gerson and includes five papers, along with the comments of the corresponding respondents. We would like to thank Lloyd Gerson and the contributors for choosing the Plato Journal as the venue for their work.

The Plato Journal accepts submissions on Plato and the Platonic tradition and responses to Platonic scholarship, in the form of single papers, notes, or proceedings. All submissions are refereed (through a double-blind peer-review process) by expert readers, including a native or fluent speaker of the language of the article.

INTRODUCTION

Lloyd P. Gerson

University of Toronto

On March 11-12 of this year, the department of philosophy at the University of Toronto hosted a workshop with the title 'Ways of Interpreting Plato'. As coordinator for this workshop I gave the participants the following guideline: 'What is the correct way to interpret the dialogues of Plato and what are some concrete results of following that method?' Of course, many would abjure the notion of a 'correct way' of interpreting Plato, preferring to take what we might term the Augustinian approach: 'tolle lege'. As all serious students of Plato know, however, in order to move beyond the enjoyment of individual dialogues, and even beyond their 'edifying' portrayals of Socrates, one must employ—whether explicitly or implicitly—some set of principles for relating the results of reading one dialogue to those of the others. This is true even if one takes the extreme position of maintaining that the philosophy in each dialogue is tracked exactly by the literary structure such that one cannot licitly go beyond one dialogue to another to elucidate its philosophical claims.

The idea that literary unity corresponds exactly to philosophical unity is itself a hermeneutical principle, one which is neither obvious nor, in fact, followed by virtually any interpreters of Plato. Among other questions, all the participants in the workshop were asked to address such questions as: 'is developmentalism or unitarianism the correct principle for reading the dialogues?'; is Aristotle's testimony and the testimony of the indirect tradition necessary or even relevant for understanding Plato's philosophy?'; 'are the dialogues distinguishable according to whether they represent the philosophy of Socrates or the philosophy of Plato?' These and many other questions were discussed intensely over the two-day workshop which, apart from the participants, included faculty from Toronto and elsewhere, and graduate students.

The participants included main presentations and a principal interlocutor for each. These were:

1. Michael Erler, Würzburg (Rachel Singpurwalla, U. Maryland)
2. Constance Meinwald, U. Illinois, at Chicago (Allan Silverman, Ohio State U.)
3. Frank Gonzalez, U. Ottawa (Marina McCoy, Boston College)
4. Melissa Lane, Princeton (David Ebrey, Northwestern)
5. Kenneth Sayre, U. of Wisconsin-Madison (Mark Johnstone, McMaster U.)
6. François Renaud, U. Moncton (Debra Nails, Michigan State U.)

The papers included here in revised versions include 2-6. Michael Erler's paper was previously promised to another publication. As a result, neither that paper nor the response by Rachel Singpurwalla are included.

What Do We Think We're Doing?

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ABSTRACT

I suggest that there are no universally applicable principles (in the strong sense) for the study of Plato's philosophy. Different students of Plato have different objects of interest (e.g. what the individual Plato ultimately thought vs what emerges from thinking about his texts) that can make different ways of proceeding appropriate. For me the dialogues are the main object of study; I think they are best approached by interpreting literary elements and obviously philosophical content as working together. The paper includes illustrations of how parts of my picture of the developing theory of forms emerge from this type of engagement.

Keywords: testimony, literary elements, dialogue form, theory of forms.

My title question brings out two points that are key for my observations. One is that how we proceed in our interpretative activity depends largely on what we take the purpose of that activity to be. And I've used plural forms in my question not because I think I can speak for everybody but precisely because I expect people will immediately react by thinking that I cannot – and no more can anyone else. 'We' can legitimately have diverse aims and methods and so different ways of interpreting Plato, and in this way different projects can sometimes be compatible with or even complementary to each other.

The umbrella theme question set by Prof. Gerson for our workshop was: 'What in your opinion are the appropriate or correct principles for the study of Plato's philosophy?' One reading of 'principles' yields a very strong sense, in which we come by principles in some special way (different from that whereby we obtain our other results in the domain they govern), the principles are inviolate, and everything else must proceed from them. Principles in this strong sense would be things one *must* start from or bring to the rest of one's work; not to do so – violating the principles – would be incorrect or misguided. So to read our question with 'principles' understood this way suggests that, while we may have different views about what they are, at most one view of the matter can be correct.

My title—'What Do We Think We're Doing?'—opens the way for me to mention that I at least don't think of myself as working from principles in this very strong sense. This is, I think, ultimately connected with the circumstance that I think we—or at least the total class of people who work on Plato—have different goals that make different ways of proceeding reasonable. This makes the present assemblage very collegial for me—it's interesting to compare

notes without having it built in that where our practices diverge some of us have to be wrong and one's purpose must be to prove that one is oneself the correct one.

In fact, the final element in our umbrella theme question seems to me to be open to different readings in a way that corresponds to variation in our goals and so turns out to be closely connected with why I don't think there are principles in the strong sense that apply to everyone. How exactly do we understand 'the study of Plato's philosophy'? For me, though I know this will not be the case for everybody, the primary object of study is actually Plato's *dialogues*. Thus while someone might have as a goal to determine what the human being, Plato, thought was true (over the course of his life or at some privileged stretch of it) with the dialogues only one kind — perhaps not very good — of evidence for that, for me it's the other way around. It's not so much that the dialogues are (more or less good) evidence for Plato's philosophy. For me, engaging with the dialogues is what is really interesting. 'Plato' is pretty much tantamount to the author of those works, and 'Plato's philosophy' is what that author is suggesting or offering for our consideration.

Here again one can have a variety of expectations. Some may build in from the start the expectation that Plato's philosophy should be a unified and completed system, which it is our job to reconstruct or maybe even axiomatize. For me, this matter is open at the start: Plato's philosophy could but need not turn out to be a matter of holding dogmatically certain doctrines. It could just as well be to proceed in a certain way, or to try to carry out a certain program, or to think through certain problems. For me this is one among many issues I find it natural to form a view about on the basis of interacting with the works — rather than bringing a view about this *to* reading.

Why is the object of study for me Plato's works? For one thing, we have them, and they are an enormous and rich treasury of material. And just as important, I find reanimating and engaging with the philosophical discussions they contain of great interest philosophically — and of course, it has been and continues to be so for many others.¹ At the risk of violating a ban by Michael Frede who always used to say to me, 'Look, Constance, no one is interested in *your autobiography*' (though he used this for the odd purpose of discouraging footnotes on the secondary literature), it is relevant to my title today to offer something a bit autobiographical. I note that what I am doing now in working on Plato feels continuous with what I remember doing as a freshman in college. While I now bring much more professional apparatus to bear, the *goal* remains the same. Indeed, the justification for using that apparatus is simply that it makes the reanimation of and engagement with the philosophical content of the dialogues even more interesting — certainly for me, and potentially more widely since other people sometimes make use of one's scholarship.

So for me, what study of Plato is ultimately for is that it leads to valuable philosophical activity, centrally to the activity involved in finding the best reanimations of the discussions he depicted. As is widely recognized, this is of philosophical value for a variety of detailed reasons. It typically leads to a better understanding of the positions in play and the resources developed to handle them. It can be interesting to make case studies of how some problems can be solved, and how at other times people deal with the fact that something hasn't quite been. Moreover, in sometimes unpredictable ways, one may be able to apply some resources one gets from engaging with Plato to a new argumentative context salient in one's

own time. Sometimes as well, one may be able to apply some resources so acquired to the living of one's own life. After all Plato, like other ancient philosophers, thought a great part of the value of the discipline resided in the way wisdom could and should be manifested in living.² Very generally, the study of Plato, like that of all of ancient philosophy, is a useful corrective to the parochiality of our own philosophical context: at least if done in a certain way, it leads to a broader sense of philosophical *options*.

So while I now bring to bear some knowledge of Greek and of elements of Plato's context – both philosophical and more broadly intellectual, cultural, and historical — and of course of secondary literature as well, I continue to do this because I think the dialectical activity so reanimated is an even more interesting version of the sort of thing one came up with as a freshman. Thus, given what I take my project to be, evidence about various views other historical figures attributed to Plato can have a role in it: such evidence can confirm in some respects what we get from reading the works themselves, or give us some hints to help us in reading them. But for me the role of such evidence is secondary.

It can be salutary in this connection to reflect on situations contemporary with ourselves. For example, I once attended a wedding where many of the guests were philosophy PhDs from Harvard – this was a cohort in which many knew and had studied with Quine. But some were also scholars of Quine's work. I remember an interesting discussion between Miriam Solomon and Peter Hylton about how wrong-headed people were who assumed that the circumstance that Quine was around and they knew him left no significant role for interpretative activity.³ As Professor Solomon put it, if she asked Quine a question and he

replied and she wrote down the answer, 'That would just be *another text!*' And this further text would of course itself need to be analyzed.

How, generally, do I go about reading Plato's dialogues? I think the individual dialogue is the basic unit of interpretation. Each one seems manifestly to be finished and crafted as an artistic product that sets and pursues its own particular philosophical agenda. The famous simile in the *Phaedrus* likening a good speech to a living creature, with each part having a fitting relation to the others and to the whole tends to confirm this (*Phaidr.* 264 c 2-5). For the point there seems to me (as to many others going back to Greek antiquity) to extend naturally to written compositions and indeed to Plato's own works: each dialogue, being well-crafted, has this quasi-organismic unity. As Proclus writes in his commentary on the *Parmenides*:

[Iamblichus and his followers] demand that the interpreter bring the matter of the prologue into relation with the nature of the dialogue's subject. We agree [...] in studying any Platonic dialogue we must look especially at the matters that are its subject and see how the details of the prologue prefigure them. In this way we should show that each of them is perfectly worked out, a living being harmonious in all its parts, as Plato says in the *Phaedrus*. (Procl., *in Parm.*, 659.6-24, tr. Morrow - Dillon 1987)

The *Phaedrus* text also has another implication: because the parts of a given composition are designed to relate to each other and to the whole, to cherry-pick a few lines here and a few lines there and then relocate them in a new context one supplies will be at least questionable — that is, at least *open to* question. Even if

we are forced by the scope of a particular paper or a particular talk or class to focus on such an extract, we should be thinking about its role in the dialogue in which it appears – and ideally should complete our reading by showing how that works. (So do I hold *this* as a principle? I suppose maybe yes in a less stringent sense than the one I disclaimed at the start – this ‘principle’ if it is one derives from experience with the texts and is subject to finegraining or modification depending on what emerges as we continue to read.)

It’s not necessarily easy to tell who does and does not proceed this way, since I am aware that sometimes one has considered many details in one’s own thinking or in contexts like seminar meetings that cannot appear in a particular publication. Because of this it may not immediately be obvious just by reading something in print whether the author diverges from the practice I just described or is simply like the proverbial swans that seem to glide along in stately fashion, all the while paddling furiously underwater where we don’t see it.

But just as I acknowledge that we sometimes have to focus on part of a work at least for a time, so I also believe that sometimes it is good to look beyond its boundaries – and this is why I put it that the individual dialogue is the *basic* unit. For one thing, on some occasions there can be particular reasons within a text itself that make something from another work of Plato’s or something else he was aware of and could have expected his readers to know relevant. (I do believe, Proclus-like, that Plato often uses what I call ‘literary elements’ to make such references, and I’ll give some examples later.) And of course once one has read a lot of different works, it will be natural for some picture of how they relate to each other to emerge. After all, even in terms of the case to which the *Phaedrus* likened a good composition

— the case of an animal whose parts must function properly in relation to each other and in relation to the whole — it is also sometimes relevant to think about our chosen animal’s interactions with other animals! So without our bringing from the start an idea that all the dialogues are offering the same view, or that some are working towards a view perfected in others, or that some stake out a position that others reject and improve on, any of these pictures among others *could* emerge from the pointillist picture that readings of individual texts will form.

This has implications for my relation to the hoary battle of Unitarians vs Developmentalists. It sounds odd to say I’m not sure which I am – probably a better way of putting it is that I’m not really happy locating myself at either extreme. On my picture, Plato’s dialogues are the vehicle of continuing pursuit of a characteristic program, but the work each dialogue is doing to contribute to that varies a lot. Different ones may work on different parts of the project. And some of course may motivate or even try out in detail ways of doing things that others rethink and propose improvements on.

I find the opinion of Bernard Williams in his minute gem *Plato* highly salutary, and a useful insight as being from someone who was after all himself primarily a working philosopher:

It is a weakness of scholars who study philosophers to think that philosophers are just like scholars, and it is particularly a mistake in the case of Plato. [...] Above all, it is a mistake to suppose that Plato spends his time in the various dialogues adding to or subtracting from his system. Each dialogue is about whatever it is about, and Plato pursues what seems interesting and fruitful in that connection. [...] We may think of him as driven

forward by his ideas, curious at any given point to see what will happen if some striking conjunction of them is given its head. We should not think of him as constantly keeping his accounts, anxious of how his system will look in the history of philosophy. (Williams 1999, 3, 9-10)

Charles Griswold has provided a historian's bookend to this idea: he makes the valuable observation that it is anachronistic to assume that 'philosophy is *Wissenschaft*' and that for this reason Plato must have 'a complete, architectonic theory purporting to offer definitive answers to the key philosophical questions it addresses' (Griswold 2002, 137). The core assertions of both Williams and Griswold here are certainly compatible with there being no connections between Plato's various works. But I'd also like to note that neither actually provides considerations that rule out our coming to discover that there *are* connections between Plato's works or even a system that emerges from them. What I take from their warnings is that we must be careful not to build in as an assumption that there *must* be.

How then do I go about reading an individual dialogue? I think it is manifest that the main issue for each of them is its philosophical agenda, and relatedly that the way the arguments in a text work is at the heart of this. But that doesn't mean I think we can easily separate out a few lines of text that convey 'the argument' on each major point on their own – let alone that what we should do is quite quickly write out a few prose or formalized lines of *our own* that convey 'the argument' and then think in terms of that, moving on to assess validity and soundness. In my view, a great deal of the action of the interpretative project has taken place on the way to writing up any such compact formulation; much of the work a

dialogue is designed to promote is work *along the way* to any such exposition.

The more I work in detail on individual dialogues the more convinced I am that, as the *Phaedrus* extract suggests, all the parts of each really do work together. Thus, since the main agenda is to do philosophy, it follows that the parts that are not *obviously* philosophical are there to do something that bears on the dialectical activity the text is designed to promote in us. I call these 'literary elements' — I find this catch-all phrase useful though I do not mean to suggest that these elements are *merely* literary and have no philosophical role. So I would like to make clear that I disclaim any such pejorative or dismissive connotation.

Ultimately, the best way to make this clear is in one's interpretative practice as one proceeds passage by passage. But perhaps now I should at least list in the abstract some of the kinds of thing I have in mind. As I mentioned above, personal or place names or striking vocabulary can put us in mind of real figures or of other texts, whether by Plato or others; we then need to identify the point of referencing these.⁴ Action within the plot can have relevance. Indeed, even whether and how the drama is framed can affect how we readers relate to the play of ideas in a work. (I'll be going into some examples in a bit.)

So we now confront the question: if literary elements and the parts that are more obviously philosophical are *all* important, how should we (pl.) approach studying them? One possibility is that different people from different disciplines should deal with different aspects of the text; this might seem the best way to get expert interpretations of each. On this view, someone like me should confine myself to the arguments, while classicists would weigh in on literary elements and textual problems – and perhaps our results (or the best of each type???)

would be combinable at some indefinite horizon – but by whom?

Obviously, I do not think this is the way to go. Because of the way Plato has designed the different kinds of elements to work together, an ‘expert’ reading of just one kind in isolation doesn’t have enough to go on. Notice how the *Phaedrus* simile already supports this thought: given that the heart e.g. functions to support the overall function of the animal whose heart it is, you can’t understand the heart in isolation from the rest of the organism.

Or again, I find it useful to think a little about the metaphor of a frame, so pervasive in secondary discussion of Plato’s works. In the case of a painting, the job of a frame is (in part) to set off the inner work in a certain way: such things as the color, texture, size and shape of the frame affect how the painting looks to us. So when the original artist has herself or himself selected the frame, its effect on how the painting looks to us shows something about how the artist wanted us to see the inner work: after all, the artist was guiding our perceptions in the way this particular choice of frame does.

Here I’d like to point out two things. First, in the case of a painting, it would be bizarre (or at least appropriate only in very special circumstances) to interpret the ‘significance’ of the frame in isolation, to so to speak read off its meaning when it is empty. And second, when one undertakes to consider the effect of the frame on our perception of the inner work, this won’t be something one can simply read off mechanically. For such descriptions as the following could all be *equally* available: ‘it brings out as especially bright a certain patch of color’, ‘it directs our attention to the face of a certain figure’, ‘it emphasizes the face shining with the innocent joy of childhood’, ‘it highlights the face, crucial as displaying the family resemblance this figure bears to important

ancestors’, or even ‘it emphasizes the face, now rendered in a style departing radically from the work of [salient artistic predecessors]’. Any choice among these seems to me best made in close connection with study of the inner work including relevant facts about the context of its production; and *that* study would in turn only reach completion with the development of a complementary study of the frame.

Of course, one can read around a bit in the enormous secondary literature on Plato and sometimes someone will have made some suggestion on one of the literary details that one can magpie up and adopt as part of one’s overall reading. But obviously one can’t expect enough of other peoples’ activity to be either fortuitously useful or actually motivated by the wish to help out one’s own interpretation in this way! Still, one can sometimes adopt the suggestions of others. Moreover, experience with the kind of thing other people have offered helps one to go on doing that.

As I’ve already indicated, I believe that literary elements often provide a way for Plato to refer to passages in his own work or to the work of other authors; in effect they function as footnotes do for us. Thus literary elements are often important when we are in what Professor Lane called the ‘retrospective’ mode.⁵ Or perhaps I could reapply her term to mark that I think Plato’s own compositional practice is ‘retrospective’ in this sense: he often uses literary elements to refer to things that he was already aware of and that he could reasonably have expected readers to know about. Thus I believe that having Cephalus the narrator of the *Parmenides* be from Clazomenae is a touch that prepares us for and confirms the relevance to the dialogue of the work of Anaxagoras (cf. Procl., *in Parm.*, 625, 629-30).

Yet it should be obvious with very small literary touches such as this that each of them

on its own is quite slender. Thus it seems to me clearly misguided to just dogmatically subscribe to a reading of each on its own and have that ‘wag the dog’ of one’s reading of the text. (This seems to me a problem that followers of Leo Strauss often fall into.) Indeed, each such idea we have I think needs to be confirmed by relating usefully to something in the philosophical substance of the arguments at hand. To resume the Clazomenae example, the physical theory of Anaxagoras had of course already received attention in the *Phaedo*: it is of particular interest as a theory that is isomorphic to Plato’s own theory of Forms. The *Phaedo* (as I read it) drew our attention to the straightforward way having a share/participation works in the physical theory of Anaxagoras and showed problems with it. In a famous declaration, Socrates proclaimed allegiance to a type of explanation that in fact is isomorphic to that of Anaxagoras, but made a point of declining to specify any particular interpretation of what participation amounts to.⁶ Looked at this way, the touch in the frame of the *Parmenides* that reactivates our recollection of Anaxagoras does help our understanding of 131 c 12-e 5: it helps us to see that Socrates, lacking a clear view of what he takes participation to be, is himself lapsing back into the old Anaxagorean notion, and suffering from the familiar problems with that. This indicates the ongoing need to make progress on this matter and in turn prepares us to look for that in the second part of the dialogue.

Sometimes literary elements can condition how we relate to different parts of the text. One way this can work is through Plato’s handling of narration.⁷ So for example in the first part of the *Parmenides*, Cephalus tells us what his source, Antiphon, told him that *his* source, Pythodorus, told him that Socrates, Parmenides and the others present at a long-ago

discussion said. This is completely explicit when Cephalus says:

ἔφη δὲ δὴ ὁ Ἀντιφῶν λέγειν τὸν Πυθόδωρον
[...] Antiphon said that Pythodorus said
[...] (127 a 7-8).

Because of the way Plato handles the chain of narrators, even though the innermost speech of Socrates, Zeno, and Parmenides is typically quoted, this direct discourse is typically introduced by *phanai* or *eipein*. That is, the original ‘he said’ of an inner narrator is transformed to an infinitive of indirect discourse when reported by a further narrator. Thus, the quoted words of the famous speakers are typically near a reminder of the multiple mediation: we register that the words of the inner narrator have been transformed by further reporting. These frequent reminders systematically distance us from the original occasion, however interesting and amusing it is.

By contrast in the second part of the dialogue, after a single introductory *phanai* in 137c4 all this apparatus falls away and for almost thirty Stephanus pages the presentation is like that in a play: simply the words of Parmenides, then those of his interlocutor Aristotle, then more words of Parmenides etc. This technique makes *us* the real audience for the demonstration (though it had been fictively offered to help *Socrates* realize the exercise he needed to do to reach the truth in philosophy). In fact, we are being presented directly with the thinking offered here because this is the part of the text designed for our primary philosophical engagement; the parts of the text from which we are distanced serve as background for this project.

Though there isn’t time to go into this now, I have recently explored Plato’s use of a similar technique in the *Symposium*, so offering

an answer to the puzzling question of why the *Symposium* — or really, my point is, *most of it* — is composed with so many tell-tale infinitives of mediation. I suggest that this is all in aid of a contrast whereby Plato privileges the part *not* so presented.⁸

The reactions of the characters can also give us a cue about how we should respond to various portions of a text. Here the second part of the *Parmenides* is perhaps the most extreme example. Just to summarize briefly, the most obvious and immediately puzzling fact about the demonstration we get there is that it consists wholly of massive sections of arguments paired so that the results of the first section seem to be systematically contradicted by those of the second, and so on with subsequent pairs. The reaction of most in the twentieth century was to take the thing as a giant *reductio ad absurdum*/indirect proof.⁹ For me this interpretation is not the way to go because the text does not confirm this reading strategy. In part this is because the text does not systematically target for destruction mistakes by rejecting which we can avoid the mass of paradoxical results.

But to focus on the present point about the characters: I also find it significant that neither venerable father Parmenides nor his respondent expresses consternation of the sort we are familiar with in depictions of Socratic elenchus when even a single contradiction threatens.¹⁰ Consider what happens when the interlocutor is presented with the maximally paradoxical summary of the overall results:

Εἰρήσθω τοίνυν τοῦτό τε καὶ ὅτι, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐν εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μὴ ἔστιν, αὐτό τε καὶ τᾶλλα καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα πάντα πάντως ἐστὶ τε καὶ οὐκ ἔστι καὶ φαίνεται τε καὶ οὐ φαίνεται. — Ἀληθέστατα.

Let this be said therefore, and that, as it appears, if The One is or is not, it and the others in relation to themselves and in relation to each other are all things in all ways and are not, and seem and seem not. —Most true. (166 c 2-5)

Notice that the interlocutor goes to an extreme of acceptance with the superlative. *Alêthestata* is literally the last word of the dialogue!

I take this to be a significant indication from within the text about how we should react to its contents. I have followed up on the indication by exploring the thought that, if this summarized conjunction of all the results is really 'most true', then the results must not be really contradictory after all.¹¹ This is perfectly possible if they are only *apparently* contradictory: if the appearance is only at the surface level of the verbal expression. But this thought so far is only a promissory note, which one needs to cash out by giving an interpretation of the apparently contradictory results.¹²

Alêthestata as the last word and as the response to a summary which is superficially maximally paradoxical amounts to a suggestion from Plato that we try to figure out how to understand these results such that they are all fine and they don't contradict each other. In fact, another extended passage helps us in carrying this out. For the demonstration has been preceded by a methodological discussion. After Socrates had repeatedly failed elenctic examination offered by the venerable Eleatic, Parmenides offered admiration and encouragement, and counseled Socrates about the need for a certain exercise.

He prescribed the exercise by specifying it both in general terms and in the case of several examples, resulting in a tediously long and detailed passage. Yet that labored and lengthy methodological advice – whose key terms all

appear as well in the compressed summary quoted above, with which the exercise concludes – was completely opaque.¹³ Not only were we at a loss to see the point or procedure of the recommended exercise, but within the drama of the discussion Socrates said that he couldn't understand it – and indeed this is what led to Parmenides' being prevailed on to demonstrate what he was talking about. I regard this as a vitally important interpretative constraint from within the text. Since the demonstration of the exercise is given to illustrate the methodological advice, we must read the two in such a way that they match each other.¹⁴ In effect, our homework is to figure out how to interpret the conclusions of each section in such a way that they are appropriately characterized by the phrases used in the methodological advice and summaries to describe them, and appropriately supported by the arguments given for them.

The *Philebus* provides another case in which Plato indicates the way parts of his text fit together. Socrates introduces the passage known as the 'Fourfold Division' by referring to his previous discussion (called the 'Promethean Method' among other tags); he says he will need new apparatus but some will be the same (23 b 9). The fact that the terms *peras* and *apeiron* figure clearly in both passages suggests that they mark the shared apparatus. And the Fourfold Division passage straightforwardly confirms this. Socrates says:

Τὸν θεὸν ἐλέγομέν που τὸ μὲν ἄπειρον
 δεῖξαι τῶν ὄντων, τὸ δὲ πέρασ; [...]
 Τούτω δὴ τῶν εἰδῶν τὰ δύο τιθώμεθα [...].

We said I suppose that the god revealed the *apeiron* in things, and the *peras*. [...] Let us set these down as two of our kinds [...]. (23 c 9-12).

Yet on perhaps the most obvious readings of each passage in isolation, what *peras* and *apeiron* each refers to changes from the first passage to the second. Thus, I believe that the remark of Socrates about some apparatus being the same is setting us the homework of developing an understanding on which *peras* and *apeiron* each truly does remain the same in both passages. To do this, we need as it were to jiggle our understanding of both the Promethean Method and of the Fourfold Division until we can see how the two fit satisfyingly together.

I'd also like to mention here that there is an analogue of the 'wag-the-dog' problem I mentioned above that can plague people who take themselves to be focusing on the arguments. This is when one takes such terminology as *pros allo* or *chôris* to have built into it automatically some technical meaning not developed from the text one is reading but rather that one already takes oneself to know it has — based sometimes in some other text of Plato's, and sometimes really in Aristotle.¹⁵ For me rather, no terms in Plato have magical force such that all by themselves they can do such work.

While I am aware of course that some philosophers (such as Aristotle, the Epicureans, the Stoics as well as many closer in time to us) do introduce and use technical terminology, Plato seems rather to be the kind of philosopher who is able to use ordinary language in such a way as to achieve even his most technical ends. Of course, he does often use the same phrases for parallel purposes in different passages and even different works. But he also can use superficially parallel phrases for different purposes, or superficially distinct phrases for parallel purposes.

Finally, what are some of the results I get from my approach to reading Plato? The present occasion does not provide scope for me to give anything like a comprehensive catalogue.¹⁶

But, especially since I do not give special status *as starting points* to testimony about Plato's mathematizing the Forms and having The One and the indefinite dyad as principles, I'd like to mention that I in a way do end up reading the *Parmenides* and the *Philebus* as engaged in a project that this testimony could be getting at. For me, the *Parmenides* represents the official debut of The One as a principle. After all, it shows among other things how participation in The One is necessary to everything that is: the other Forms run together and lose their definition without their relation to The One.

And what results from my homework on the *Philebus* is that Forms turn out to be members of the 'mixed class', that is, mixtures of *peras* and *apeiron* (*pace* Silverman). My interpretative strategy of figuring out how the Four-fold Division and Promethean Method passages work together results in interpreting each case of the *apeiron* as a pair of opposites that left to themselves blur together. This is something that testimony about the 'indefinite dyad' could be getting at. And the *peras* component of each mixture is a desirable ratio that can govern a pair of opposites and so marks off the kind in question from the blurred continuum of other combinations of the underlying *apeiron*.

Vocabulary in this passage (25 d 11-e 2, 25 a 6-b 2) connects fruitfully with the idea developed by some Greek mathematicians according to which some ratios were better than others for mathematical reasons; the preferred ones were associated with concord – in turn thought to be a matter of unification – and had a special, explanatory role.¹⁷ So in the *Philebus* as I read it, we have Plato systematically mathematizing the Forms, and in a way that recalls discussion in the *Republic* about the need to discover which numbers are concordant and why (531 b 4-c 4). So on my readings, we find ideas emerging from Plato's texts themselves

that could fit under both slogans about The One and the indefinite dyad and those about mathematizing the Forms.

As I've said, for me the main action is in reading the texts themselves to get our interpretations, with noting the testimony a kind of confirmation. And this is both because of the fact that my main object of interest is the dialogues, and because of the Quine point: each piece of testimony is itself just 'another text' – in fact a much briefer and more cryptic one – that itself is in need of interpretation. Note that because of this, interpretations of Plato as different as Professor Sayre's and mine can *both* fit under the banners of making The One and the indefinite dyad principles and mathematizing the Forms.¹⁸

This last observation of course shows not only that the banner slogans from testimony underdetermine the detailed view to be attributed to Plato, but also that not even focusing on Plato's texts lets us automatically read off some view as his dogmatic contribution. But this is not at all surprising. Given Plato's famous – and perfectly reasonable – warnings about the naïveté of thinking one can transmit wisdom by writing it down for people to assimilate by reading, the most we can expect from his texts is material to help us make philosophical progress by putting in our own work. Indeed, I agree with those who hold that drawing us into doing this philosophical activity ourselves is the main purpose of the dialogues.¹⁹ So while not even the dialogues themselves let us read off a philosophy as a simple act, nevertheless the fact that they have survived in their entirety, and with such richness of literary and philosophical nuance, means that they provide a wealth of evidence for competing interpretations to test themselves against.

For me, the way to do this is the very thing I've been talking about in this paper.

In fact, even determining what problem a dialogue has in view and what positions it is developing or criticizing seems to me something we should do in the way I've been discussing today: by reading and rereading the dialogue in question so as to be guided by both its overt philosophical content and the role of the literary elements. Sometimes the questions and positions we need to think about may be explicitly laid out within the work itself. And sometimes it is reasonable to think that Plato is responding to or making use of thinking already existent in his surrounding culture or his own corpus of written works.

I'm not against invoking things that are outside a dialogue in its interpretation, but just saying that for me these become relevant just in case something within the dialogue we are reading makes them so. Otherwise we can fall immediately into such extreme anachronism as to make the supposed study of Plato's text redundant: we assume we know 'the problems of philosophy' such that he must be dealing with one of them; we know the possible positions that can be taken on each, maybe we even already know his supposed answer. All this seems to me to reduce quite counter-productively the interest of what one can get from actually reading and thinking about Plato's works in all their richness, nuance, and complexity.²⁰

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NOTAS

- 1 I agree with the remarks of Alan Silverman at the workshop in thinking that often what we do in working on Plato is philosophy. But I don't go as far as his suggestion that 'Plato' can drop out of the umbrella theme question. For me, working on Plato is doing philosophy in a way that is guided by or in response to Plato's text(s) — and not all parts of one's philosophical life need to be so guided!
- 2 A prominent recent example of application of a selected strand from Plato's works to environmental issues is Lane 2012.
- 3 Thanks to Prof. Solomon for confirming and supplementing my recollections, and allowing me to quote her.
- 4 I liked some of the specific things Professor McCoy offered in her contribution to the conference. See also Sedley 1995 and Rutherford 1995.
- 5 Session 4 at the Workshop.
- 6 See Meinwald 2016, ch. 8.
- 7 McCabe 1996 pointed this out in the case of the first as compared with the second part of the *Parmenides*; I developed a variant on her view in Meinwald 2005.
- 8 Meinwald 2016, ch. 4 goes into detail about how different parts of the text are composed, and how they have their disparate effects.
- 9 Professor Gonzalez and I are alike in not wanting to go this route.
- 10 To quote Gilbert and Sullivan, "What, never? — Hardy ever." While my critics make a great deal of *Parm.* 141 e ff, to me (see Meinwald 2014a) as to Peterson 1996, these lines are an atypical case admitting of special explanation. Besides, even if we consider these rejections to stand, they are not nearly enough to get rid of half of the total results, which is what this style of interpretation requires.
- 11 For development and defense of the interpretation that follows, see Meinwald 1991, 2014a.
- 12 If one accepts such an interpretation then the first and

second hypotheses of the *Parmenides* will not after all lend themselves to the characterization of Professor Gonzalez (Workshop Session 1) that in them Plato is arguing 'both sides of the question' in a way whose results are not reconcilable as parts of a single view.

- 13 Sayre 1978 and 1983 pioneered the approach of taking seriously all three pairs of phrases that figure prominently in the description of the exercise to characterize sections of argument one must produce.
- 14 Gill 2012 and Rickless 2007 are unable to read the methodological advice as correctly describing the exercise. See Meinwald 2014a and 2014b.
- 15 As often in Gill 2012. Cf. the criticism expressed by Gerson 2013.
- 16 I can now direct those who are interested to Meinwald 2016, intended as a discussion of issues of wide interest.
- 17 On this intriguing and technical theme in Plato, see Barker 1994; Burnyeat 1987, 2000; Meinwald 1998, 2002.
- 18 Sayre 1983; Meinwald 1991, 1998, 2002, 2008, 2014a.
- 19 Such as Professor McCoy at our workshop.
- 20 Thanks to the organizer and hosts of the Workshop on Ways of Interpreting Plato, and indeed to all the participants: I found the interactions most enjoyable and useful.

Plato, Platonists, Platonism

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines different approaches to key metaphysical and conceptual claims in Plato's dialogues. It explores how different readers of Plato, beginning with Aristotle, make sense of the status of and the relations between some of the key Forms developed in different dialogues, to include the Form of the Good.

Keywords: Platonism, greatest kinds, The Good, ontology, Cherniss

I want to begin my contribution from consideration of the title of Professor Meinwald's paper: *What do we think we are doing?* 'We' here are participants in an inquiry into Plato's philosophy, however we conceive his philosophical contribution.

I think what we are doing is: Philosophy.

Let me tweak this way of putting my answer: what the study of Plato is ultimately for is philosophical activity. And while I am cautious in averring that Plato strongly believes (*diisxurizesthai*) anything, I think he strongly believes that philosophizing is the best thing one can do.

Like Meinwald, I want to offer some reflections on the prompt that brings us together for this workshop—What in your opinion *are the appropriate or correct principles for the study of Plato's philosophy?* In thinking about how to respond to this question I wonder whether different principles apply to the study of other historical figures. Maybe different principles apply to the study of the philosophy of Socrates, who wrote nothing, or the philosophy of Chrysippus, no complete work of whose is transmitted to us. At another extreme, as it were, different principles might apply to the study of a philosopher who leaves behind, in addition to a large corpus of published professional writing, volumes of letters, unpublished works of varying degrees of completeness, notes, drafts and so on. We could lay her esoteric against her exoteric works; see how works evolved from notes, to drafts, to treatise, etc. Add to all the above a doxographical tradition, understood here to include reports from others about what a figure wrote or said or meant. Contrast these cases with the study of a (fictional?) philosopher whose single treatise we might find in a monastery about whom no one else comments in the historical record. And then we might wonder whether it makes any difference whether the philosopher we are studying is dead. Truth is,

I do not see that different principles apply to the study of great versus obscure philosophers, or those who leave behind much or little in the way of work or doxography (Socrates and others who write nothing may be special), or ultimately that different principles apply to the study of dead versus living philosophers. Indeed I am suspicious of the difference between the History of Philosophy and Philosophy, so I'm going to ignore the presence of 'Plato' and ask the question: *What in your opinion are the appropriate or correct principles for the study of philosophy?* In my opinion, there are no correct or appropriate principles for the study, that is, the doing, of philosophy beyond, say, basic principles of charity—try to make a philosopher, oneself included, say something sensible and true if one can, and do it—philosophy— as well as one can. Check that; for I also believe, with Plato, that one should try to be as synoptic as one can be, to include not just trying to unite the various so-called fields of philosophy, but trying to avoid falling into the trap of thinking that there is only one way to do philosophy, or to write philosophy.

'No one expects to write, or be, like Plato'.¹
But we can try.

With Meinwald, and many others, I am happy to say that our primary object of study is the dialogues, that engaging with the dialogues in their individual settings is really interesting, that reanimating and engaging with the philosophical discussions they contain is of great interest philosophically, and that each seems manifestly to be finished and crafted as an artistic product that sets and pursues its own particular philosophical agenda. But if an individual dialogue is a starting point, my engagement with the philosophy contained therein soon takes me beyond the dialogue itself. Embracing Plato's advice to be synoptic, I look across dialogues, and over the centuries

at other philosophers. And here is where the prompt provided to the workshop has bite.

Let us consider the question about the correct principles that guide one's study of Plato's philosophy first in light of the different emphases just mentioned. Here there is no disagreement about whether it is Plato's dialogues that guide the two approaches. Both look primarily to Plato's writing. The difference rather is that on perhaps an extreme version of one approach, we might say that we should investigate the argument or position developed in an individual work without consideration of whatever is said about the same topic or roughly the same topic in another. Analysis of the *Philebus*' account of pleasure should disregard what Plato writes about pleasure in the *Gorgias* or *Republic*. On a perhaps extreme version of the second approach one might claim that it is necessary to consider what is said in the different dialogues about roughly the same topic, that, for instance, one cannot understand the first so-called part of the *Parmenides* (126-136a) without introducing the account of Forms, Being and Participation provided in the so-called Final Argument of the *Phaedo* (99c-107a).

Contrast these approaches, where the dialogue or dialogues of Plato are all that matter, with an approach that looks to the testimony of others, especially other Platonists, starting with Aristotle, and treats their remarks as providing reasons not to think that what is written in the dialogues is the ultimate authority for Plato's meaning.² Perhaps most notoriously we would consider Aristotle's remarks about unwritten doctrines, the One and the Indefinite Dyad as Plato's foundational principles, the reports of the lecture on the Good, and so on, as at least guides to what Plato thinks. Of course different figures within the long tradition disagree with one another about what Plato meant or said, which is one reason why appeals to the

tradition are made by interpreters of various persuasions, from Straussians to the Tubingen School, from G.E.L. Owen to Harold Cherniss. Cherniss is perhaps best known for favoring Plato's dialogues over the reports of the tradition, and in particular for his rejection of Aristotle's account of crucial aspects of Plato's metaphysics, e.g., that the separation of Forms and that the One and the Indefinite Dyad are Plato's metaphysical first principles. He discounts the former because he thinks Aristotle misreads Plato's texts on separation (deliberately to support his own metaphysical account of first principles). He rejects the latter because he thinks that there is no textual support for them as first principles. On the other hand, like most interpreters, Cherniss is selective in his appeal to the tradition, sometimes even to support his own interpretation when the Platonic text seems clearly to point in a different direction. Most famously he accepts the majority of the tradition, which maintains that the *Timaeus*' creation account of the cosmos should not be read literally but rather was meant for the sake of instruction, despite *Timaeus*' clear declaration that the Demiurge creates the cosmos.

Weighing the tradition or elements of the tradition against the texts, or using one dialogue to help with reading another are tricky matters. I suspect that almost all interpreters turn out to be selective in the manner just discussed with Cherniss: when it supports their view of what is said in a given passage of a dialogue appeals are made to sources external to the text. But perhaps we can all agree that a good principle to adopt when confronting the text of a dialogue is that attributions of content and meaning to Plato's dialogues and passages therein are often dicey. Sometimes it is unclear what Plato is even saying in a given passage. I am teaching the *Philebus* this semester. Consider the first element in the Gift passage

(16a9-10): 'whatever is said to be consists of one and many, having in its nature limit and unlimitedness', along with the opening lines of the four-fold ontology (23c1-5):

Socrates. 'Let us be very careful about the starting point we take'. Protarchus. 'What kind of starting point?' Soc. 'Let us make a division of everything that actually exists now in the universe into two kinds, or if this seems preferable, into three.' (Frede translation) In the first example, the force of the participle -having--and the *men/de* construction are unclear. In the second, the role of *nun* is unclear. Nothing in another dialogue or author can clarify their roles.

More often I am far from sure about what Plato means by what he says. The same two passages are examples. Is whatever is said to be the same as everything that exists now in the universe: are we talking about Forms, or monads, if they differ from Forms, and so-called particulars in both passages? And, ignoring the force of the participle, what is it to have in one's nature limit and unlimitedness? Additionally, as I read the text at 23c, when Plato writes that we should be very careful about a starting point and then delivers an obscurely expressed starting point, this is deliberate. Whether one appeals to the context of a passage, its dialectical or argumentative force, or other pragmatic considerations, the point Plato is trying to make in a given passage is often up for grabs.

When we try to determine what the Greek says, we look for help in Greek authors, LSJ, Smyth, Denniston, etc. And when we try to determine what Plato means, we look for help in all sorts of directions, from other Greek authors such as Xenophon or Isocrates, from other ancient philosophers, perhaps starting with Aristotle, and from other non-Ancient sources, especially philosophers. Looking for help is one thing. Deciding what use to make

of what someone else says about the same passage you are studying is another. After all, at least some of the same issues arise when we read another—what does her text say, what does her text mean, and why is the author saying it? You need a reason to think that your help has a better grip on the contested matter than you do—she’s smarter than you, has a privileged position, say by dint of temporal or physical proximity, does not suffer from competitive or other biases that you do.

There are, of course, different ways to approach the dialogues, three of which we might label historical, literary, and philosophical. I am concerned today with the latter. It should go without saying that within each approach there are differences: disagreement is the life-blood of the academy. Indeed it is clear that there was disagreement in the Academy and in the Academic and Platonistic traditions. Platonists too come in many stripes. More importantly, there are disagreements among philosophers about the basic questions of philosophy and the answers to the questions. I see no advantage to segmenting those who worry about the problems initiated by Plato into a privileged tradition and the rest. I remember saying to my undergraduate teacher, Robert Turnbull, that his Plato sounded a lot like Wilfred Sellars. He responded by wondering why that should matter and pressing me on why one couldn’t one learn as much about Plato by reading a nominalist as by reading a Platonist?

It seems to me that our need for help increases as we press deeper into any of the so-called fields within philosophy—ethics, epistemology and metaphysics is my preferred cleavage. I am a Platonist with respect to each of these subject matters. My inchoate attraction to Plato and Platonism began with my reading of the *Republic* in both my last year of high school and first year of college. But it was

reinforced, if not cemented, by reading Cherniss’ *The Philosophical Economy of Plato’s Theory of Ideas*,³ which I still regard as the best eleven pages I’ve read on the subject. It made me think about what a philosophical theory attempts to do and how one should think about the structure of a philosophical theory. At about the same time I read D.C. Williams’ *The Elements of Being*,⁴ which introduced to me the difference between general and special metaphysics. It thus provided a way to view Aristotle and Plato as worrying in a similar manner about how to think about primitive notions or principles of a (general) metaphysical theory while disagreeing about the special objects or beings that play the specific roles allowed for or demanded by those principles.

Some might consider this approach to Plato anachronistic or too much about Platonism and not enough about Plato. Maybe so. But, to repeat, if there is anything I take away from reading the dialogues, if there is ultimate meaning in them, it is: philosophize; keep working on the problems with others, yourself, and whatever else that can be pressed into service. And if there is anything that seems clear about Plato’s school, or lectures, or manner of teaching, it is that subscribing to a point of view, let alone his point of view, whatever it may be, is not a requirement of membership. Disagreement is the lifeblood of The Academy.⁵

These are general methodological remarks. So let me now turn to a more specific topic that separates those who look first and perhaps last to Plato’s texts from those who look to the tradition, namely what are Plato’s metaphysical first principles.

Let us take Cherniss as a reader who not only thinks that the dialogues are the master authority, but as a unitarian in so far as he thinks that there is little change of doctrine over time.⁶ (While I agree that the dialogues

are the master authorities, I think that the distinction between unitarian and developmentalist readings has grown rather stale and of little use.) Since time is limited, I want to concentrate on what I think is significant about Cherniss' account of the greatest kinds and the general issue of whether there is, like Tolkien's One Ring that rules them all, a master Form. Since many think that The Good is the master Form, I will conclude with some remarks about it. But there are other candidates, especially The One, a position held perhaps by Aristotle in his account of the One and the Indefinite Dyad and by Plotinus and the Neoplatonic Tradition.⁷

Precisely what to make of the so-called Greatest Kinds in *Sophist* (254d-255e) is a matter of no little controversy.⁸ One difficulty is that three of the five Greatest Kinds, namely Being, Same and Different, seem to many readers different from the two others, Motion and Rest: the three commune with all Forms and each other whereas Motion and Rest do not. A second difficulty is that some Forms that seem to qualify as greatest kinds, e.g., One or Unity Itself, are not included. On this difficulty, see below. According to Ryle, Being, Sameness and Difference turn out not to be Forms but ways of making statements, i.e., identity, non identity, and predicational statements. Ryle argued that Plato, as he came to appreciate the nature of the statement (*logos*), abandoned his earlier view, based on names and naming, of a substantive theory of Forms. All Forms, for Ryle, might then be treated as conceptual or linguistic entities of some sort.⁹ Some have argued that Cherniss shared the view that the greatest kinds are not Forms, but rather are concepts.¹⁰

I am certain that Cherniss did not hold that these kinds were anything other than Forms.¹¹ On the other hand, there is something to the charge about Cherniss' account of the communion of Forms, both in the *Sophist* and

elsewhere, which might give one reason to think that something conceptual or linguistic is at stake in thinking through how Forms are related to one another. Cherniss' longest discussion of these matters is found in the first and shortest chapter of *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Early Academy (ACPA)*, 'Diaeresis, Definition, and Demonstration'. There, in talking about the priority of genus or species, or any idea, to one another, he writes: "The example by which he explains the "intercommunication" of ideas in the *Sophist* (254b-257a) precludes the possibility of such a notion of those five ideas, and what is true of them is presumably true of all (254c). The relation of ideas to one another is that of implication or compatibility and its opposite, not that of principle and derivative or of whole and part."¹² Cherniss maintained that 'there are two things in which Plato is more interested than in the theory of ideas itself, for that theory, is, after all, only his way of satisfying these two requirements: first, that there is such a thing as mind which can apprehend reality, and second, that this reality which is the object of knowledge has absolute and unqualified existence.'¹³

In thinking through what Cherniss, Ryle, and others are worrying here it behooves us to keep track of at least two distinct, though related, concerns. One is how our thought and language, or better our way of theorizing about Forms, reflects the relations that obtain or fail to obtain among the *onta* we are talking about. The second is what are the relations between Forms—do Forms stand in relations to one another and if so what are those relations and between what Forms do they obtain?¹⁴

Cherniss, as I read *ACPA's* discussion, was focused on the issue of how we are to regard the relation of the Forms mentioned in a definition to the Form that is being defined. In a nutshell, he is focused on the unity of the definition. His

claim is that *no* ‘ontological relation’ holds between the so-called parts of the definition and the definiendum. One might well wonder what the available ontological relations are besides whole and part, principle and derivative. What I refer to as participation and being are other candidates.¹⁵ Frede/Meinwald offer additional candidates.¹⁶ Now no discussion of the unity of the definition in Plato, or the relation of the linguistic definition to its ontological counterpart can afford to ignore Aristotle’s treatment of the issues in *Metaphysics Zeta*.¹⁷ And none of the aforementioned does: neither Cherniss nor Meinwald nor I dismiss Aristotle. Even if one does not accept his view of what Plato meant, we all take very seriously the concerns that unite and divide Plato and Aristotle over these incredibly knotty metaphysical issues. Moreover, I do not think Frede, Code, Cherniss, Meinwald or myself are trying to appeal to the tastes of our colleagues.¹⁸ (Indeed, I suspect that the reverse is more likely to be the case, that excellent metaphysicians like Kit Fine and Jonathan Schaffer are trying to ground (sic) their accounts in Aristotle and Plato.¹⁹) Of course there is no reason to refuse help from modern academics on these deep problems in metaphysics and language. Ryle’s insightful, influential, and probably mistaken account was deeply indebted to Russell and the Neo-Kantian Marburg School’s emphasis on the priority of judgment. When Verity Harte opens her excellent book with a discussion of Lewisian mereology she at once illuminates a set of problems shared by Lewis and Plato, distinguishes Plato’s response from Lewis’, and helps students and scholars who are less familiar with one or the other appreciate that philosophy is continuous with its history.²⁰

I said earlier that I find it useful to move beyond an individual dialogue in reflecting on the problems generated in our engagement with

a theme broached in a given work. With respect to how forms ‘combine’ and the relations on display in a division-- Cherniss’ notions of implication and compatibility--, it seems to me useful, for instance, and to reflect on what the late dialogues say about particulars and their properties, about how the Porphyrean trees that might be said to result from their collection are constructed. One issue is the status of mixtures. The argument at *Philebus* 23 -27 is less than pellucid. But it is not unreasonable to conclude that all mixtures are particulars. If so, one might think that whatever we make of Limit and Unlimited, no Form is a mixture of them. If combining is mixing, then no Forms combine with one another. What might look like a Form combining with another, e.g., Man with Animal, might then be viewed as a reflection of these Forms combining, or not, in the particular humans. In a perhaps different sense of combining, we might think of the relations between the *Timaeus*’ Geometrical Forms and the traditional Forms: in addition to the relation of Fire Itself to The Hot Itself, we would worry about the relation of Fire Itself to Triangle Itself, or to the Pyramid Itself.

To be sure, each of the claims in the paragraph above is controversial. Many, perhaps relying on the claim at *Philebus* 16a9-10, might argue that not all mixtures are particulars since Forms have Limit and Unlimited in them.²¹ Yet if they are mixtures of the same sort as those discussed in the four-fold ontology of 23-27, then somehow we need to find a way for there to be a (rational) cause of them. Others, myself included, would resist the claim that the sort of combining discussed in *Sophist* is the same as mixing in the *Philebus*, or that the relation of the traditional to the geometrical Forms in the *Timaeus* is the same as combining or mixing. My point, rather, is that the investigation of Plato’s metaphysical first principles with

respect to the relations between Forms must come to grips with each of these relations and the discussions of them in each of these dialogues.

When we turn to the *megista gene*, their interrelations, and the relation of other Forms to them, we face a different set of worries. First, there is the worry that at least some of these Forms do in fact seem to be predicable of all Forms, themselves included, in an ontological and characterizing manner, as opposed to the ‘merely’ conceptual manner in which the Forms in a tree are related to one another. Each Form is different from everything else, the same as itself, and so on. This is a non-trivial ‘and so on’. Of special concern, perhaps, is the Form of Being Itself. Broadly speaking, there are three related issues: 1) what to make of *Sophist* 255c14-15, the difference between being said *auta kath auta* and *pros alla*; 2) whether there is an existential reading of being in the *Sophist* or elsewhere in Plato; 3) what is the relation between Sameness and Being? I think it is fair to say that the Greek does not settle the matter. I also think it is fair to say that neither the *Sophist* nor any of the dialogues settles the matter. And therefore, I would conclude, none of the tradition, from Aristotle to Cherniss, Owen, Frede, Code, Gerson, Meinwald or me could settle the matter. All are trying to rationally reconstruct an account of principles that answers to our understanding of what Plato might be after in discussing these Forms and the special status they enjoy in both the linguistic and ontological realms.²²

A second worry concerns the possible difference between the more logical Forms such as Being, Sameness, Difference, and Unity, and Forms such as Motion, Rest, Beauty and especially the Good. For the remainder of my space I want to focus on the Good. What are we to say about this Form and Plato’s conception of it? If it is a *megiston genos*, and if, as I believe,

it is ontologically predicated of all Forms, then it follows that all Forms are good. Compare if Beauty is a *megiston genos*, and it is ontologically predicated of all Forms, then it follows that all Forms are beautiful. While some might balk at these conclusions, including, I think, Cherniss, I find them compelling. As I read the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, and other dialogues, Plato’s depiction of these Forms makes it perfectly reasonable to think that Forms are beautiful and good. Their beauty is what draws us, or some aspect of our souls, to them and their goodness makes our possession or knowledge of them a good thing, which in turn makes us, or our souls, good.

Plato writes disappointingly little about the Form of the Good, and what he writes is both hard to understand and embedded in a context that is fertile ground for a host of interpretative stances. Let’s consider the passage. Those who would be rulers must know the Form of the Good by taking a longer path than what has been traversed in prior discussion, since without it they will not know about justice, moderation and the other virtues, or anything else, at least to the extent that these are useful and beneficial. Socrates himself does not know what the good is and thus they ‘dismiss for the time being the nature of the good in itself.’ In its stead, Socrates says he can provide an offspring, an image, namely the Sun and its relation to the realm of becoming, to include its being the source of light, thereby the cause of vision by which the realm of becoming is seen, as well as the Sun itself, and the cause of the genesis and growth of the objects in the realm of becoming. It is not genesis, or light. The Good stands to the intelligible realm in an analogous manner. Instead of light it furnishes truth to the objects of the intelligible realm and instead of vision it provides knowledge to the soul. Knowledge and truth are ‘boniform’ in

virtue of their relation to the Good, but neither is the Good, ‘to the possession of which still higher honor belongs.’ Finally, instead of generation and growth, ‘the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence [*to einai te kai ten ousian*] is derived to them from it, though the Good Itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power’.

And Glaucon very ludicrously said ‘Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go.’ (from *Republic* 506d-509d, Shorey 1930)

What are we to make of this passage and Form? First, it seems to me that there is no reason to think that Plato is being disingenuous in claiming that he does not know what the Good is. Hence, we should be reticent to stake too much of a claim on any of the inferences drawn from the analogy. Of course, others do view Socrates’ claim as disingenuous, Michael Erler at the workshop, for instance. If one thinks that Plato is holding back, then, as they recognize, a reason for the reticence is needed. Among the many possibilities would be dialogical considerations having to do with the state of mind of the interlocutors or what/whom they represent, or Plato’s general reluctance to commit to writing his most important thoughts. Second, the key claims are part of an analogy, the slipperiest of beasts. The sun is not genesis though it is the cause of genesis in the visible realm. Though unstated whether the sun is generated it seems to be a *gignomenon* for which the Good is responsible. The Good is not being and is the cause of being in the intelligible realm. But it too seems to be a being. Third, in the recapitulation at 517 the hyperbole about *ousia* is not found. The Good is the source of *aletheia* and *nous* and ‘anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this.’ Fourth, we should

reflect on the fact that The Good is discussed in no other dialogue. On the *Philebus*’ threshold of the good we find measure, beauty and truth. (64c) In other dialogues other Forms or notions seem to play some of the roles the Good plays in the *Republic*, especially Being Itself, the One Itself, and God (the Demiurge) or *Nous* Itself.

Speaking summarily, some, like Cherniss, in allegiance I think with Shorey, emphasizes the ethical or the domain of practical reason. The stated purpose for introducing the Good is the education of the rulers. They need to understand how the various virtues and everything else that pertain to the rule of the *kallipolis* for the good of the whole and each of its parts hangs together so as to be useful and beneficial.²³ With some effort one might connect the norms of practical thinking with epistemic norms in general to forge a link between Knowledge and the Good. Others might emphasize the metaphysical and the domain of theoretical reason. The link between Goodness and Unity and Being plays itself out at the level of Forms—the unity of the definition—at the level of particulars—the stable, unified structure of Phileban and Timaeian mixtures—and at the level of the cosmos, whose structure is a function of the goodness of the Demiurge. Now I am not sanguine about the distinction between Practical and Theoretical Reason, nor do I think it is found in Plato. With Cherniss, I think that the distinct Forms of Being, Sameness, Goodness and the One, forms all on a par with one another, each play a unique, if sometimes overlapping role in saving the ethical, epistemological and metaphysical phenomena. If, as Connie Meinwald eloquently put it, The One is ‘debuted’ in the *Parmenides*, we can think of Plato as debuting different greatest kinds in different dialogues, Beauty in the *Symposium*, Being in the *Sophist*, The Good in the *Republic*, and *Nous* (as Demiurge) in the

Timaeus. Along with whatever other Forms there are, they make our knowledge of an objective world possible and they make this world and our knowledge of it good. I do not think Plato had a finished picture of how this all plays out. But I do think that each dialogue and the dialogues as a whole offer the same instruction to all of us: Keep striving to figure it out; keep philosophizing. If you do that, it will be good.

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NOTES

- 1 Williams 1993, 111.
- 2 See Gerson 2005 and especially his 2014.
- 3 Cherniss 1977, 121-32
- 4 Williams 1953, 171-92
- 5 See Dillon 2003 and Gerson 2005.
- 6 My long-standing interest in Cherniss' interpretation of Plato has been brought to the fore in recent years first by Sarah Broadie's engagement with his reading of the *Timaeus* in her 2012, and then by Gerson's 2014 article. As a fan and follower of Cherniss I welcome the attention Gerson turns on him. I am somewhat skeptical of his assessment of Cherniss' impact on recent generations of scholars. Cherniss produced only a handful of Ph.D.'s. And in my experience, and for a variety of reasons, his books have been and seldom are assigned or read in most graduate programs.
- 7 Of Cherniss' view Gerson says: '[It] is committed to arguing that anything in the text of the dialogues that tends to support Aristotle's testimony about Form-Numbers and about the ultimate principles has to be explained away. Thus, the positing of the superordinate Idea of the Good in *Republic* is dismissed as hyperbole, and therefore

having no significance for metaphysics or even for ethics.’ Gerson 2014, 401; Cf. 402: [Cherniss] ‘took the bold yet exceedingly implausible step of dismissing the idea of the Good as something of a hyperbolic joke.’ Cherniss, at least in his published works, never says anything like this about the Good. I believe that Gerson is misled by Cherniss’ oft-repeated thesis that no Form, and a fortiori the Form of the Good, is on a metaphysically higher plane than any other Form. But this is compatible with treating some forms as having a different and greater role to play in one’s metaphysical or ethical theory than other Forms. It is perhaps worth remarking that despite the exhaustive footnoting in Cherniss 1944, Cherniss provided no *index locorum*. An enterprising graduate student, I was told, produced a samizdat index for the ancient authors.

8 See most recently Gill 2012, 149-76. My take on them can be found in Silverman 2001, 162-181. I think Ryle 1939 has exerted the greatest influence on generations of analytically oriented readers, especially Anglo-American readers.

9 Ryle, *ibid.*

10 Gerson 2014, 401 and 402. Gerson’s complaint, made at the workshop, that Cherniss confuses metaphysical and linguistic predication is plausible.

11 See below on Cherniss 1944, and, e.g., 1932, 275, or 1947, 142-55.

12 Cherniss 1944, 46.

13 Cherniss 1945, 83.

14 *Philebus* 14b-20a assures us that Plato was cognizant of the former.

15 See Silverman 2001, esp. Chapter Three.

16 See Meinwald 1992.

17 See especially Code 1986.

18 Cf. Gerson 2014, 402.

19 Fine 2012 and Schaffer 2009.

20 Harte 2002.

21 At the workshop Meinwald suggested that she thinks that Forms are mixtures of Limit and Unlimited.

22 In my case, I started from the striking similarity between Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Zeta 6 thesis that every primary substance is strictly speaking identical with its essence and Cherniss’ thesis that the Platonic conception of the Idea (Form) involves the identification of essence and existence.

23 See Cherniss 1932. Shorey 1930, 104 says: ‘We really understand and know anything only when we apprehend its purpose, the aspect of the good it reveals.’

Plato's Perspectivism

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ABSTRACT

This paper defends a 'perspectivist' reading of Plato's dialogues. According to this reading, each dialogue presents a particular and limited perspective on the truth, conditioned by the specific context, aim and characters, where this perspective, not claiming to represent the whole truth on a topic, is not incompatible with the possibly very different perspectives found in other dialogues nor, on the other hand, can be subordinated or assimilated to one of these other perspectives. This model is contrasted to the other models that have been proposed, i.e., Unitarianism, Developmentalism, and 'Prolepticism', and is shown to address and overcome the limitations of each. One major advantage of 'perspectivism' against the other interpretative models is that, unlike them, it can do full justice to the literary and dramatic character of the dialogues without falling into the opposite

extreme of turning them into literary games with no positive philosophical content. To say that Plato's dialogues are 'perspectivist' is not to say that they contain no 'doctrines' on the soul, for example, but, on the contrary, to stress the plurality of doctrines, with the observation that each is true within the limits of the argumentative function it is introduced to serve and of the specific dialogical context.

Keywords: perspectivism, developmentalism, soul, Forms, truth, division, phantasma, eikôn, Neoplatonism.

In this paper I will defend a 'perspectivist' reading of Plato's dialogues, though with some trepidation. The first cause of trepidation is my skepticism regarding the value of general debates about how to read Plato's dialogues. The problem with such debates is precisely their generality: they tend to degenerate into endless quarrels about whether or not Plato had doctrines or whether or not the philosophical arguments can be understood independently of the dramatic context, where these questions mean little or nothing addressed in the abstract. Interpreting a particular dialogue and having the aptness of one's methodology assessed by its specific results is probably a much more fruitful way of contributing to the debate on how to read Plato than publishing books proclaiming a 'new paradigm' or a 'third way' in Platonic studies. This paper will, like other papers of its type, suffer from the defects of being schematic and of discussing passages from several dialogues in isolation from their context. On the other hand, it will be seen that an advantage of the 'perspectivist' model is precisely its emphasis on the irreducible diversity of the dialogues and its refusal to assimilate them to one narrative, whether it be a developmentalist or unitarian one. The other cause of trepidation is the misunderstanding to which the term 'perspectivism' is subject. So it is necessary to clarify right away how this term is to be understood in relation to Plato.

WHAT IS 'PERSPECTIVISM'?

The term 'perspectivism' is today so closely associated with the name of Nietzsche that to speak of Plato's perspectivism cannot help but seem guilty of an absurd anachronism. Yet what is not often enough, or perhaps not at all, noted is that Nietzsche arrived at his 'perspectivism'

through his reading of Plato. In a text on the *Symposium* written when he was only nineteen years old (August 1864),¹ Nietzsche rejects categorically the interpretation according to which the first five discourses are false accounts of love to be corrected by Socrates' discourse as the only true account; instead, he insists that all the speeches are true, presenting different perspectives that are not rejected, but rather incorporated by Socrates into a broader perspective (420). This reading is one he continues to defend in the notes for lectures on Plato dating approximately a decade later. There he maintains that the *Symposium* presupposes the *Phaedrus* in that *all* of its speeches put into practice the philosophical rhetoric defended in that dialogue; he furthermore sees as evidence of the fecundity of such rhetoric that the *Symposium* offers *seven* instead of only three speeches on eros.² He concludes that 'It is completely false to believe that Plato had wanted in this way to present different misdirected approaches: they are all philosophical λόγοι and all true, presenting always new sides of the one truth' (106).³ This perspectivism is nonetheless, of course, quite different from the one Nietzsche himself will defend once he develops the notion of 'will to power': according to that view, and counter to the Platonic view, there is no one truth onto which all the perspectives are perspectives. The perspectivism attributed here to Plato is the one the early Nietzsche attributes to him: not the view that there exists no Truth, but rather the view that we can obtain no more than multiple and partial perspectives onto that Truth.

THE 'PERSPECTIVIST' MODEL VERSUS OTHER INTERPRETATIVE MODELS

The 'perspectivist' model for interpreting Plato's dialogues is the thesis that what the

young Nietzsche claims about the speeches in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* is true of the dialogues as a whole. Each dialogue presents a particular and limited perspective on the truth, conditioned by the specific context, aim and characters, where this perspective, not claiming to represent the whole truth on a topic, is not incompatible with the possibly very different perspectives found in other dialogues nor, on the other hand, can be subordinated or assimilated to one of these other perspectives. We can get a better idea of this model by contrasting it to the other models that have been proposed, i.e., Unitarianism, Developmentalism, and ‘Prolepticism’, and seeing how it addresses the limitations of each. In suggesting that the dialogues are all different perspectives on one truth and that they do not offer any evidence of fundamental changes in Plato’s philosophy, the ‘perspectivist’ reading is Unitarian. On the other hand, in speaking of irreducibly different perspectives, it can embrace the fact that represents an objection to Unitarianism, i.e., that the dialogues simply do not offer a unified and systematic body of doctrines. Perspectivism has an affinity to Developmentalism in that the latter also recognizes different perspectives on a topic or issue in different dialogues; the difference is that for Developmentalism each perspective is exclusive of the others and thus the different perspectives are to be interpreted as *different views Plato took on a topic at different times*. Only Developmentalism therefore requires the establishment of an objective, non-question-begging chronological order to the dialogues and the failure to meet this requirement is its principal weakness. Perspectivism might appear to have some affinity to Charles Kahn’s Prolepticism, to the extent that the latter too sees the perspectives of at least some dialogues as limited and as pointing beyond themselves. However, there is a major difference. While Kahn has claimed that his ‘proleptic’

reading of the dialogues does not make chronological assumptions,⁴ it still sees the so-called ‘Socratic’ dialogues as partial expressions of a vision that comes to be expressed more fully in other (later?) dialogues, most specifically, the *Republic*. Therefore, this reading is committed to the assumption that Plato had only one perspective on an issue, though he chose to express it gradually, hinting at it in the Socratic dialogues and waiting until the *Republic* to express it fully. The problem with such a reading, apart from the lack of clarity regarding the kind of order it wants to attribute to the dialogues, is the evident arbitrariness of privileging one dialogue such as the *Republic* by making it the one that all the others are merely ‘anticipating’. Indeed, when Kahn turns to the *Republic* itself, he must grant that it too does not offer the complete picture but points beyond itself,⁵ something he would presumably say even of the ‘late’ dialogues since he describes even the ‘unwritten teachings’ as provisional (386-388). But if *all* the dialogues are ‘proleptic’, then Prolepticism becomes indistinguishable from Perspectivism.

This is presumably why Kahn’s Prolepticism has quietly been superseded by a form of Perspectivism. Already in his 1996 book, Kahn referred to ‘Plato’s view of the perspectival condition of human discourse and cognition’ and claimed that ‘it is surely a mistake to interpret these frequent shifts in dialectical perspective as if they reflected fundamental changes in Plato’s philosophical position’ (386). In a later article (2005), however, Kahn develops and defends this perspectivism independently of the proleptic reading defended in the book. While there is for Plato only one reality, Kahn affirms that the principle of perspectivism entails that this unity cannot be captured by any unique, definitive formulation. Each formulation will be conditioned by the circumstances and specific concerns of a particular dialogue (15-16).

While he considers it the task of the interpreter to uncover the profound structure of Plato's thought that underlies the different perspectives, at the end of his essay he makes this crucial clarification: 'What I am calling the underlying unity for a set of schemata is not itself a definitive doctrine but only a deeper perspective for seeing things together' (2005, 28). This is to say that for Plato there are only perspectives, as Kahn makes explicit when he speaks in conclusion of 'this irreducible multiplicity of perspectives' (28). There are therefore no final doctrines, but only doctrines relative to the context of a specific dialogue (14). Though unacknowledged as such, this represents a radical shift from the 'proleptic' reading to the extent that the latter interprets some dialogues as only anticipating the same doctrines finally presented in other dialogues. In any case, the thesis Kahn ends up defending in the later essay is the one I want to pursue and defend here.

As implied by Kahn, a major advantage of 'perspectivism' against the other interpretative models mentioned is that, unlike them, it can do full justice to the literary and dramatic character of the dialogues without falling into the opposite extreme of turning them into mere literary games with no positive philosophical content. The problem is not that there are no 'doctrines' in Plato's dialogues, but that there are too many doctrines. To say that Plato's dialogues are 'perspectivist' is not to say that they contain no 'doctrines' on the soul, for example, but, on the contrary, to stress the plurality of doctrines, with the observation that each is true *within the limits of the argumentative function it is introduced to serve and of the specific dialogical context*. Thus, within a certain context it makes perfect sense to treat the soul as tripartite and doing so can be productive in revealing certain things about the soul. In another context, however, this must appear a

gross simplification, because it cannot fully account for the complexity of human behavior (even in the *Republic* Socrates at one point nonchalantly allows that there may be many other parts between the three: *καὶ εἰ ἄλλα ἄττα μεταξὺ τυγχάνει ὄντα*, 443d7). In yet another context tripartition might appear an unnecessary and artificial complication that misses the essential unity of the soul.

But, one will insist, the soul is either tripartite or not! And if we cannot know which it is, then none of the assertions we make about its unity or multiplicity can be claimed to be true in any sense. This view, however, that of different ways of depicting the world only one can be true or none are true rests on an impoverished conception of truth. Even if it does not claim to be the final account of the essence of the soul, tripartition is *true* in the sense that it *reveals* something important about the soul, for example, the possibility of self-conflict. A unitarian account of the soul as lacking parts, as long as it too does not pretend to be the final account of the essence of the soul, can be *at the same time considered true* in that it *reveals* something else important about the soul, for example, its distinction from the body. The notion of perspectivism clearly has some association with the art of painting. It would obviously be absurd to claim that a painting that depicts an object's front is the true depiction while one that depicts its back is false. The ideal, of course, would be a depiction that not only depicts all angles of a thing simultaneously (as perhaps Cubism strives to do), but that would somehow depict what *the thing is in itself* such that it can show all these different sides. If the latter is impossible, then the 'truest' depiction would be one that shows us a thing from as many perspectives as possible while also indicating that the thing itself transcends even the totality of these perspectives. The claim here is

that a particular Platonic logos, itself only an image, shows us a thing, whether it be the soul or love or even being itself, from a perspective that, while true in revealing something important and essential about the thing in question, pretends to be no more than one perspective among others, even if it may be better than others in the sense of *more encompassing*. The goal of the dialogues, accordingly, is not to provide the one true account, either systematically or developmentally, but to multiply perspectives.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOUL

That we can attribute to Plato the conception of truth and of logos assumed above will be defended below. First, however, in order to give a concrete illustration of the perspectivist reading and start to make the case for it, let us pursue further the topic of the soul. In acknowledging that the account of the soul as tripartite is only a partial truth and far from a final or fully adequate account of the soul, we are only taking seriously Socrates' own words: after first raising the question of whether or not the soul is tripartite, Socrates warns that they will never arrive at an accurate answer (ικανῶς) through the methods they are currently employing (435c9-d1). What they settle for is an account that is 'sufficient' (ικανῶς 435d6, ἐξαρκέσει 435d7) in the present moment (ἔν γε τῷ παρόντι, 435d5) and that is how we must understand what follows. Socrates does refer to a 'longer way' that would presumably provide a more accurate account (435d2-3), but the difficult question of what this longer way is does not have to be answered here to make the point that what we get in the dialogue is an account that is only adequate for this particular context. If we remain within the *Republic*, some

have seen the psychology of Books 8-9 as being at odds with the simply tripartite division of Book 4.⁶ In Book 10 we get an indication of what the 'longer way' is when Socrates asserts that we could know the true nature of the soul only if we considered it in complete separation from the body (611b-612a). The question, of course, is whether we could do so while embodied. Socrates here must leave open the question of what the soul's true nature is and whether it has many parts or just one (εἴτε πολυειδής εἴτε μονοειδής, 612a3-4). All he claims to have provided in the *Republic* is an account that is ἐπιεικῶς (612a5).

If we turn to the *Phaedrus*, there we get a description of the disembodied soul as tripartite, but Socrates treats this as only an image and not a full account of the soul's nature. Here again Socrates suggests that such an account would need to be a very long one, but now he qualifies it as also being *divine*; the shorter account, which alone is the *human* one, is to describe *what the soul is similar to* (ὃ δὲ ἔοικεν, 246a5). The resulting image of the soul, furthermore, is clearly the one indispensable to the myth Socrates proceeds to recount. If we turn to the *Phaedo*, there it is the simplicity of the soul that is emphasized, with conflicting and changing desires apparently assigned to the body. Emphasizing the soul's simplicity in opposition to the body of course suits the theme of purification in the dialogue. But we need to note again the language. Even in the failed affinity argument for the soul's immortality Socrates does not claim that the soul is simple and unchanging, but rather that it is 'most like' (ὁμοιότατον) what is divine, intelligible, uniform (μονοειδεῖ), indissoluble and always in the same state (80b1-3). Finally, before we draw conclusions about Plato's 'development' from the differences between the accounts of the soul in these dialogues and that found in the *Timaeus*,

we should note not only the radically different context (different main speaker, different aim), not only the famous qualification that the discussion of the *Timaeus* can offer only an *eikōs muthos* as a result of dealing with things that are themselves only images, but Timaeus' explicit warning, receiving Socrates' enthusiastic endorsement, that we should not be surprised if we should not be able, in many respects and on many questions, such as the nature of the gods and the coming to be of everything, to produce accounts that fully and in every way agree with each other or are exact (πάντη πάντως αὐτοῦς ἑαυτοῖς ὁμολογουμένους λόγους καὶ ἀπηκριβωμένους, 29c5-6).

The point is that these doctrines about the soul, understood as 'perspectival', are all partial and contextual truths, revealing *within their clearly defined limits*, and as such perfectly compatible, so that we do not need to speculate about which one is earlier or later.⁷

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE FORMS

The same point could be made with regard to Plato's presentation of the Forms, the other topic so central to the 'developmentalist' interpretation. If I have argued elsewhere that there is no 'theory of Forms' in Plato (Gonzalez 2003), this is not to deny that there are many things said about the Forms in the dialogues and in this sense many 'theories': the point is rather that these different accounts all leave open fundamental questions about the Forms that any one final theory or doctrine would need to answer and that the differences between them are all fully explained by context.⁸ When the context is a myth about the creation of the kosmos by a demiurge, it is the paradigm/copy model that is dominant. When the context

is an account of the causes of generation and destruction, with no reference to a demiurge, it is the 'participation' model that is dominant. Why should this surprise anyone or lead anyone to groundless speculations about a 'change' in Plato's theory of Forms? And why would anyone think that Plato has abandoned his theory of Forms when in the *Parmenides* both models are shown to be inadequate? Perspectivism in a sense simply acknowledges and accepts what we find in the dialogues: different theories of Forms, each suited to a different context and none providing, *nor even pretending to provide* a final or adequate explanation of the relation between Forms and particulars.

PERSPECTIVIST TRUTH IN THE DIALOGUES

But what evidence is there for ascribing to Plato a 'perspectivist' conception of truth? What strikes me when faced with this question is not the difficulty of finding such evidence in the dialogues but the difficulty of finding evidence on the other side, that is, the difficulty of finding any claim in the dialogues presented as unqualifiedly true. Consider the case of the Forms just discussed. How does Socrates express the relation between Forms and particulars in the *Phaedo*? As follows: "that nothing else makes it beautiful than the presence of beauty itself or the sharing in it or in whatever way it comes about: about this I will not defend a position, but only that it is through the beautiful that all beautiful things become beautiful" (100d).

What Socrates declines to do here is not something that is done elsewhere: nowhere do we have one of these accounts of the relation between Forms and sensible particulars defended *to the exclusion* of the others. What we find

instead is sometimes one account assumed, sometimes another, depending on the context. The Sceptics of the New Academy were right in claiming that nothing in Plato's dialogues is affirmed as being absolutely and unqualifiedly true, but they were wrong in claiming that nothing is affirmed as being true. We find many truth claims in the dialogues, but they are presented as being true *for now in this context or with qualification*. This also excludes a possible variation on the Sceptical reading that is attractive not because it finds any basis in the texts but because it sounds so appealingly 'modern': what one could call the 'Thought Experiment' reading. Why can we not imagine Plato simply 'trying out' different theories of the Forms in different dialogues to see how they work out? This reading would be incompatible with the 'Perspectivist' reading defended here because it implies that Plato would eventually reject some of the theories he tries out on the way towards at least trying to come up with the one that works best (so that this reading can also count as a version of Developmentalism). It is easy for us to imagine Plato proceeding in this way because this is how a modern scientist works. Unfortunately, this is not what we find in the dialogues and for the reasons already given. We do not find different accounts of the Forms and of their relations to sensibles being *tested*; on the contrary, we find them simply being *assumed*, and with the necessary qualifications, for the particular purpose at hand. (The exception that proves the rule, of course, is the *Parmenides*, in which, however, *all* the accounts found in other dialogues are tested in order to be *all* refuted.) Could anything be further from the aim of testing different accounts of the Forms than the passage from the *Phaedo* cited above?

Let us further consider what might appear an obvious counter-example to the 'perspectivism'

defended here: is not Socrates in the *Republic* presenting his definition of justice as unqualifiedly true and rejecting that of Thrasymachus as unqualifiedly false? The answer is No. First, what Socrates initially objects to in Thrasymachus' definition is not its falsity but its lack of clarity and ambiguity (338c). What is not often enough noted is that Socrates' own account of justice ends up showing that Thrasymachus' definition is true, once the words 'stronger' and 'advantage' are properly understood.⁹ As for Socrates' definition in Book 4, he presents it as itself ambiguous and nowhere pretends that it can be the last word on the topic. He does not say that 'justice is doing one's own work', as careless paraphrases might suggest, but rather: 'it may well be the case that justice is, when it comes about in a certain way, doing one's own work' (κινδυνεύει τρόπον τινα γιγνόμενον ἢ δικαιοσύνη εἶναι, τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν, 433b3-4). Even after Socrates describes how justice thus defined functions in the city and the individual, he concludes only that in describing the just city, the just man, and justice in this way '*we might not appear, I think, to be telling a complete falsehood*' (οὐκ ἂν πάνυ τι, οἶμαι, δόξαμεν ψεύδεσθαι, 444a6). This must be the weakest conclusion in all philosophical literature and it comes after a long and complex argument. Justice can be said to be 'doing your own job' as long as we fully understand what is meant by 'doing your own job'. But can we fully understand that? Can we do so without fully understanding the Good? What we see here in the *Republic* is something we see everywhere in the dialogues. Definitions, such as those of courage in the *Laches*, are not rejected as simply false, but as partial and limited. Seeing these limitations can lead us to a broader perspective and in this way a 'truer' definition, though we never arrive at the Truth. Those who think that Socrates's definition of courage in

the *Republic* is that Truth must again simply ignore the serious qualifications with which Socrates presents that definition there (Καὶ γὰρ ἀποδέχου, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, πολιτικὴν [ἀνδρείαν] γε, καὶ ὀρθῶς ἀποδέξῃ. Αὐθις δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ, ἐὰν βούλη, ἔτι κάλλιον δίμεν, 430c3-4).¹⁰

Matters are no different if we turn to those supposedly 'late' dialogues that are considered more systematic and doctrinal. Who would be willing to maintain that of the six or seven definitions of the sophist we get in the dialogue of that name, the last one captures the whole truth about the sophist, even though it does not describe most of the sophists we encounter in Plato's own dialogues, and that the preceding definitions are all simply false? As for the ontological digression in the same dialogue, if we are tempted to proclaim the account of not-being as 'difference' to be the whole truth on the matter, does not Plato remind us that this account requires simply 'dismissing' (i.e., not explaining) not-being understood as the contrary of being (258e-259a)? Yes, in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, in the *Timaeus*, we get one dominant voice rather than a plurality of voices. But does not Plato use his dramatic art to prevent us from taking this one voice to be authoritative, to be presenting the final word on the topic? What the Visitor has to say about not-being and the sophist is not false, but neither is it the full truth, as the other truth embodied in the silent but present Socrates should remind us.¹¹ Diogenes Laertius, in defending a dogmatic Plato, claims that the characters in the dialogues can be divided into those who present true doctrines and those who present false doctrines (III.52). Such a claim is simply indefensible.

The clearest evidence against Diogenes Laertius' claim are the two dialogues that we saw to have inspired Nietzsche's perspectivism by explicitly presenting multiple perspectives

on the topic of eros: the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, in pointing to limitations in the preceding speeches, does not simply refute them nor require us to dismiss them: it is a culmination, but only in the sense of offering a broader perspective that includes, to a greater or lesser degree, the more partial perspectives of the earlier speeches. Furthermore, Plato appears to go out of his way to counter the illusion that Socrates' speech is the Truth about love that can include and *aufheben* (in the Hegelian sense) all other true perspectives on love. The entrance of Alcibiades at the very least prevents Socrates from having the last word. We have the other significant detail that Socrates does not present his account of love as his own perspective, but rather as that of a female priest, a perspective he has only tried to make his own as much as possible.¹² Furthermore, Aristophanes is ready to answer the critique of his own view in Socrates' speech but is prevented from doing so by the commotion of Alcibiades' entrance (212c). Finally, there were other speeches on love given that evening that have simply been forgotten by Aristodemus (180c). In short, Plato appears to use all his formidable literary skill in this dialogue to multiply perspectives and emphasize their incompleteness.¹³ An interpretation guided by the principle of Diogenes Laertius would be absurdly impoverished and even perverse.

In the case of the *Phaedrus*, while Socrates initially rejects his first speech on love as a blasphemy, his later reflection on his two speeches as an illustration of division arrives at a very different conclusion. Both speeches, he claims, begin with madness as one form, but while the second speech pursues the 'right side', i.e., that of divine madness, and thereby arrives through further divisions at the kind of love that is the source of the greatest goods,

the first speech pursues the ‘left side’, that of a purely human perturbation, and thereby arrives through further divisions at a kind of love that it *rightly* (μαλ’ ἐν δίκῃ, 266a5) censured (265e-266b). Note that on this account the first speech is no less true than the second, despite Socrates’ earlier claim that his first speech like that of Lysias had nothing sound or true in it (μηδὲν ὑγιὲς λέγοντε μηδὲ ἀληθές, 243a1): each speech is a half-truth. If we were previously under the impression that Socrates had changed his mind in moving from the first to the second speech, we are now told that the two speeches, though saying opposite things about the same form, are perfectly compatible when understood as pursuing different sides of a division and thus as half-truths. Even of his second speech, Socrates says that ‘perhaps we touched upon some truth, whereas on the other hand it is likely we were swept in another direction’ (265b6-c1); he therefore calls it ‘a not altogether improbable speech’. Even Socrates’ great speech on love in the *Phaedrus*, therefore, presents us with only another one of those qualified truths.

DEGREES OF TRUTH

The above assumes that it makes sense to talk about ‘partial truth’, of views or statements being more or less true. Is there evidence in Plato for the idea that there exist ‘degrees of truth’? Indeed there is. The locus classicus is the Cave Analogy from the *Republic* in which we find used the comparative ἀληθέστερα (515d6) in the context of the claim that the prisoners after being turned around will at first consider the shadows ‘truer’ than the objects they are currently seeing, though of course, as they will come

to see, the opposite is the case. Each order of objects seen in the ascent out of the Cave represents a higher degree of truth, which implies that even the lowest order of objects, i.e., the shadows on the wall, are ‘true’ to a degree, but not *as true* as the objects that cast these shadows, which in turn are not *as true* as the objects of which they themselves are images. As we see, the idea of degrees of truth is tied to the metaphysics of image and original: the shadows on the wall can be considered somewhat true to the extent that they are shadows of things that are images of things that are ultimately real.

It will be objected, however, that the Cave Analogy in its entirety is incompatible with attributing perspectivism to Plato. While there may be perspectivism within the Cave and even in the initial stages outside the Cave when things are contemplated in reflections and at night, the analogy ultimately describes the transcendence of this play of images in a direct and full vision of the truth: ‘In the end, I believe, he will be able to see the sun itself in its own place, not images of it in water or some other place, and to contemplate how it is’ (τελευταῖον δὴ οἶμαι τὸν ἥλιον, οὐκ ἐν ὕδασι οὐδ’ ἐν ἀλλοτρίᾳ ἔδρα φαντάσματα αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρᾳ δύναται ἄν κατιδεῖν καὶ θεάσασθαι οἷός ἐστιν, 516b4-6). Two points need to be made here. First, note that this direct vision of the truth is itself described in an image and indeed an image in tension with other images given in the dialogues. In the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo* this direct vision of the Good and the other Forms appears reserved for our disembodied souls, which is why knowledge in this life is there described as taking the indirect form of *recollection*. Here in the *Republic*, in contrast, we apparently emerge from the Cave with our bodies and there is no talk of recollection. Thus even when it comes

to an account of how we know and what kind of knowledge we achieve, we are confronted with perspectivism: indeed, it is mainly this conflict between different models of human knowledge that led Charles Kahn to defend perspectivism in the reading of Plato's dialogues.¹⁴

The second point to be made, however, is that this difficult question of whether and to what extent human beings can achieve a direct vision of the Forms (a question also raised by Diotima's description of an ascent to a vision Beauty Itself [210e ff.] while at the same time insisting on the corruptibility and incompleteness of human knowledge [208a-b]) is ultimately not relevant to the defense of a perspectival reading of the dialogues. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Plato achieved a full and direct vision of the nature of the Good and that he even lectured on what he saw, as the notorious reports on Plato's lecture on the Good suggest. The point is that neither the vision nor the lecture are to be found in the dialogues.¹⁵ For whatever reason (and determining the reason would require a discussion of what Plato says in critique of writing and on the limitations of language), what we find in the dialogues are only different, partial accounts of the Good and the other Forms, always in different contexts and in relation to different interlocutors. Perhaps by engaging these different perspectives and, in the words of the *Seventh Letter*, 'rubbing them together' (344b), a vision like that described in the *Republic* will be sparked within us. But then that possibility depends precisely on a perspectival reading of the dialogues. If we read the dialogues as containing doctrines meant to express the whole truth on a topic, they will inspire only complacency and, like the perception of a finger in the example from the *Republic* (523c-525a), will spark no thought.

PHANTASMA VERSUS EIKÔN

There is another text, however, that appears to present the biggest obstacle to attributing to Plato a 'perspectivist' conception of truth. Is not the critique of the *phantastikê* art in distinction to the *eikastikê* art in the *Sophist* a clear rejection of perspectivism? Recall that according to the distinction the Visitor makes there, the difference between an *eikôn* and a *phantasma*, both being images (*mimêma*), is that the former copies the true proportions of the original whereas the latter distorts the true proportions in favor of those that will appear beautiful (οὐ τὰς οὐσας συμμετρίας ἀλλὰ τὰς δοξούσας εἶναι καλὰς, 236a5-6) to someone seeing the copy from an unbeautiful perspective (τὸ φαινόμενον μὲν διὰ τὴν οὐκ ἐκ καλοῦ θεᾶν εἰκέναι τῷ καλῷ, 236b4-5). We can think here of a sculptor distorting the true proportions of the human body in producing a statue to be placed in the pediment of a temple and therefore to be seen from far below. Because the Visitor will later class the sophist under this *phantastikê technê*, it is assumed that Plato would reject as deceptive a presentation of the truth that would take into account the perspective of the spectator.

A number of points need to be made here. First, this distinction between an *eikôn* and a *phantasma*, which significantly is not made in the extensive discussion and critique of imitation in the *Republic*, is by no means clear and unproblematic when transferred from things like temple sculptures to discourse (what the sophist is said to produce are εἶδωλα λεγόμενα περὶ πάντων, 234c5-6). What would be an 'eikastic' discourse as opposed to a 'phantastic' discourse?¹⁶ This question receives no answer in the *Sophist* since the Visitor, despite his initial hesitation about whether to class the sophist under the one or the other, gives no explanation

or justification when he finally classes the sophist under the *phantastikê technê* (266d-267a, long after recalling both the distinction and the hesitation at 264c) and gives no indication of who the sophist is being contrasted to, i.e., who is to be classed under the *eikastikê technê*. We might be tempted to answer these questions ourselves by maintaining that it is the philosopher who produces an *eikôn* rather than a *phantasma* of the truth by disregarding entirely the perspective of the audience or interlocutor. The problem is that this suggestion flatly contradicts the account of true, dialectical rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* as requiring different kinds of speech in relation to different kinds of souls (271b), an account that clearly reflects Socrates' practice in the dialogues. Furthermore, in the *Sophist* the *phantastikê technê* is eventually divided into the art that produces *phantasmata* on the basis of knowledge and that which does so on the basis of *doxa* (267d-e). Since the sophist is classified under the latter, one might, as some have suggested,¹⁷ classify the philosopher under the former. In this case the philosopher would be someone who makes *phantasmata* of the truth, adjusted to the perspective of the addressee, but does so on the basis of knowledge of the truth, in agreement with the characterization of true rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*. One problem with this suggestion is that the Socrates of the *Republic* who claims to produce his images of the Good based on *doxa* and not knowledge (506b-e) would become indistinguishable from the sophist.

Even if we insist, however, that the philosopher's art is 'eikastic' rather than simply 'phantastic',¹⁸ there is still a way of explaining this without rejecting perspectivism as such. The negative point made about the *phantastikê technê* is that it completely disregards the truth (*χαίρειν τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔασαντες*, 236a4) in seeking only to produce an image that is pleasing to

the audience. If Socrates speaks differently to different interlocutors and presents the truth from a different perspective in different contexts, this does not require that he dismiss the truth and seek only to gratify his hearers. In a recent book on the *Republic* I have critiqued elsewhere,¹⁹ Roslyn Weiss (2012) argues that Socrates in Book IV is presenting a distorted account of justice. If we ask why, her answer is that this is the only account that Socrates' interlocutors, Glaucon and Adeimantus, would find agreeable. This is to attribute to Socrates only the *phantastikê technê* in the negative sense, thereby turning him into a sophist. In contrast, according to the perspectivist reading, Socrates' definition of justice in Book IV is not a distortion of justice but a true copy that faithfully reproduces true characteristics of the original. But it is only a copy that fails to capture the whole truth about justice (Socrates characterizes the idea of doing your own work, identified earlier with justice in the city, as a 'τύπον τινὰ τῆς δικαιοσύνης' [443c1] and an 'εἶδωλόν τι τῆς δικαιοσύνης' [443c4-5], i.e., of justice as it exists in the soul, the truth of which 'is something like this, as it appears' [Τὸ δὲ γε ἀληθές, τοιοῦτον μὲν τι ἦν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡ δικαιοσύνη, 443c9-10]), that presents only one truth about justice, and that presents this one truth rather than others on account of the goal of the specific discussion and the characters of the interlocutors.

Here we should recall Socrates' claim in the *Cratylus* that 'it is not at all necessary in order for something to be an image that it reproduce in all respects what the thing of which it is an image is like' (*οὐδὲ τὸ παράπαν δέη πάντα ἀποδοῦναι οἷον ἔστιν ᾧ εἰκάζει, εἰ μέλλει εἰκῶν εἶναι*, 432b3-4); indeed, if it did so, it would not be an image at all, but a duplicate of the thing itself. The reason for maintaining that Socrates' account of justice in book IV is an *eikôn* rather

than a *phantasma* is that, far from being the crowd-pleaser that Thrasymachus' definition in Book I is meant to be, it is an account that appears, at least initially, odd and even perverse (even to modern readers like Weiss!). Recall that the ironic feature of an *eikôn* is that it will appear all wrong to those standing some distance from the truth precisely because it faithfully reproduces true characteristics of the original. So if Socrates adjusts what he says to suit the soul of the particular interlocutor, what he judges to be 'suitable' is not producing contentment in the interlocutor with what is said, but rather provoking the interlocutor and leaving him unsatisfied. If we question the rigidity of the distinction in the *Sophist* while still acknowledging its central point, we can say that Socratic discourse, and indeed the Platonic discourse of the dialogues, is a *phantasma* to the extent that it takes perspective into account, but is an *eikôn* to the extent that it challenges this perspective in remaining faithful to the truth.²⁰ In short, the discussion in the *Sophist* is not a rejection of perspectivism if we understand the latter rightly as the tension between a commitment to the truth and a sensitivity to the multiple ways in which this truth is reflected and in which it therefore can be approached.

PERSPECTIVISM AS A PRINCIPLE OF DIALECTIC IN THE PARMENIDES

This discussion cannot be complete without at least a brief mention of the most obvious and radical case of perspectivism in Plato's dialogues: the hypotheses of the second half of the *Parmenides*. Here we see defended argumentatively opposite perspectives on the most fundamental questions. This of course is what

has led some to see here nothing but sophistry: a kind of extreme display, and therefore *reductio ad absurdum*, of the sophistic technique of *Dissoi Logoi*. The perspectivism I am defending here might indeed appear to be attributing to Plato nothing but this ability to argue on every side of an issue that characterized the sophistic *Dissoi Logoi*. But I would suggest that here, as in other cases, Plato, rather than simply rejecting a sophistic or rhetorical technique, appropriates it and transforms it for his own purpose. The ability to argue on different sides of an issue becomes for him, not a means of persuading an audience of anything for the sake of achieving power, but rather a means of getting at a truth that cannot be captured in one logos. It seems clear to me, for example, that the first two hypotheses in the second half of the *Parmenides* must both be true: the One as One must exclude multiplicity (137c4-5) and therefore any attribute, including 'being'; at the same time, the One must *be* and as participating in being must be *multiple*, in which case it ends up including along with being *all* attributes, even contradictory ones. If both of these hypotheses are true, there seems to be no way of overcoming their contradiction in one logos: the transition from one to the other is simply that of starting again from the beginning, allowing the One to appear differently (πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς read: ἐπανέλθωμεν, ἐάν τι ἡμῖν ἐπανιοῦσιν ἄλλοῖον φανῆ, 142b1-2). Dialectic, the learning of which is supposed to be the point of the exercise of the second half of the *Parmenides* (135b-d), is being able to see and argue both sides of the question. When we recall that this exercise is said to be applicable not only to the One, but to anything we might set forth as being and not being and suffering anything else (136b8-9), we see that the perspectivism of the hypotheses has universal applicability. If the 'One' is chosen as the

subject, it is because it brings out most clearly what lies behind the whole exercise, which is the fundamental Platonic problem of the One and the Many: how the Many must be seen as One while remaining Many and the One must be seen as Many while remaining One. As Proclus expresses the point in his commentary on the *Parmenides*: 'It is necessary for being to be both one and many. For every unity implies a multiplicity correlated to itself, while every multiplicity must be comprehended by a unity appropriate to it' (*In Parm.* 620, 4-6). Perspectivism is the response precisely to this problem. If reality itself is structured as a series of perspectives and images that point to a higher unity that both is and is not this multiplicity, what better way of expressing this in writing than by writing dialogues in which each is its own world, completely different from and in some ways even contradicting the others, but in which all together point to a Truth that transcends them? Indeed, Plato's principle for composing dialogues could be the words cited from the *Parmenides* above: 'Let us start again from the beginning'. A perspectival reading of the dialogues is thus much more in keeping with Plato's metaphysics than are the rival readings that covertly assume worldviews radically different from Plato's. The model for Unitarianism is Hegel's notion of a closed system that fully describes reality. The model for Developmentalism is modern Empiricism and Positivism: we continually modify our hypotheses in the attempt to explain the given facts.²¹

NEOPLATONIST PERSPECTIVISM

It is not the suggestion of reading Plato perspectivally that is anachronistic. To counter therefore the false impression that may have been created by beginning with Nietzsche,

let us conclude with the Neoplatonists.²² The perspectival reading defended here has real affinities with what we find in some Neoplatonist commentators on Plato. The Neoplatonists were, at least in many cases, Unitarians not because they ignored dramatic and argumentative context but, on the contrary, because they used this context to explain seeming disparities in what is asserted in different dialogues.²³ Long before Nietzsche argued that both of Socrates's speeches in the *Phaedrus* are considered partially true, for example, the same thesis was defended by the Neoplatonist Hermeias (or Syrianus through Hermeias).²⁴ The most important figure here, however, is arguably Proclus. His commentary on the *Parmenides* recognizes that the first two hypotheses must be both true. In his commentary on the *Republic* he sees no problem with the tripartite soul not including parts of the soul recognized as distinct in other dialogues, i.e., sensation and imagination: the description of the soul in the *Republic*, he explains, is concerned only with those parts relevant to political virtue (*In Rep.* 233.25).²⁵ Commenting on the passage 443d7 cited above where Socrates appears to refer to other parts of the soul between the three parts, Proclus, while defending the thesis that there are only three parts relevant to political virtue, sees the reference as possibly being to sub-branches of the three parts (such as love of wealth and love of honor) distinct from those on which Socrates focuses here for the purpose of showing the conflict between the parts (232.10). We find a similar move when Proclus addresses the question of why at the end of Book 1 the function of the soul is not identified with its highest function: theoretical contemplation. The answer is that the only activities here attributed to the soul are those that are relevant to the topic of the conversation:

political justice (27.5). In this way and many others Proclus constantly demonstrates sensitivity to context and awareness that what is said is not the whole truth but the aspect of the truth relevant to the particular context.

This approach is also evident in Proclus' extraordinary commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, with the attention it gives to the context-setting prologue (*In Alc.* 18.13-19.10) and its constant demonstration of how Socrates adapts his discourse to the character of the interlocutor, an approach followed by the later commentary on the same dialogue by Olympiodorus.²⁶ As for Proclus' commentary on the *Cratylus*, the study by R. M. Van den Berg (2008) has noted that no character in Plato's dialogues is for Proclus Plato's mouthpiece and that, in the case of the *Cratylus*, the positions of Hermogenes and Cratylus are both taken to be true and compatible (99). On the basis of this Proclus commentary as well as the others Layne, in a recent study of Neoplatonic hermeneutics, reaches a conclusion worth citing here in full for the affinity it shows between the Neoplatonic approach to Plato and the 'perspectivist' reading defended here:

Notably, the importance of the connection between the materials of the dialogue and the Soul or arguments of the dialogue already explains why Socrates' views and arguments can change from one dialogue to another. This, for Proclus, is not a sign of his inconsistency but rather a sign of Plato's mindfulness of the unity and cohesiveness of characters and contexts in each dialogue. Who Socrates' interlocutors are and where they currently stand in their philosophical development dramatically alters the 'materials' of the text and accordingly alters the dialogue and its intent as a whole. Moreover, these materials also modify the Form or style of the methods utilized by the characters in the dialogue itself (Layne, 2014, 86).

Where the modern 'developmentalist', in short, sees inconsistency, Proclus saw only a plurality of contexts.

As Harold Tarrant has pointed out in his *Plato's First Interpreters*, these interpreters had no problem with finding truth in what is said by characters such as Calicles and Pausanias (2000, 31, 130). He also notes how later Platonists found at least as much truth in the words of Protagoras as in those of Socrates in the *Protagoras* (113). He furthermore documents their efforts to reconcile seemingly contradictory claims in the dialogues, e.g., the different accounts of virtue (137). The Neoplatonist interpreters, in short, in line with their metaphysics that at least bears a strong kinship to that of Plato, found truth reflected everywhere in the dialogues. This is not to deny that there are certain elements of the Neoplatonist reading that are at odds with the 'perspectivist' reading defended here: their restrictive selection of dialogues to focus on, their tendency to read doctrinal content into the slightest dramatic detail, and their aim of incorporating all the disparate perspectives of the dialogues into one univocal and final metaphysical theory. Yet apart from the general sensitivity to context and to multiple partial truths, the feature of the Neoplatonist reading that most opposes it to contemporary 'developmentalist' readings and that most makes it an inspiration for the 'perspectivist' reading defended here is its insistence, already alluded to in the quotation from Layne above, on the uniqueness of each dialogue. For a good description of this feature we can again turn to Tarrant:

The internal literary and philosophic unity of each dialogue was forcefully affirmed by the later Neoplatonists, for whom a dialogue was a miniature cosmos, containing within itself matter, form,

nature that combines them, soul, intellect, and good (41).

Specifically, the form was identified with style; the matter with the characters, settings, and preludes; the soul with the arguments; the intellect with the overall aim or *skopos* served by the preceding; the good with the realization of this *skopos* in the reader.²⁷ Since all of these were different for each dialogue, each dialogue had to be understood on its own terms. The similarity of each dialogue to a cosmos is the first reason given in the anonymous *Prolegomena* for Plato's choice of the dialogue form. While the *Prolegomena* defends a 'dogmatist' rather than a 'sceptical' reading of Plato, it also shows how attention to the dialogue form brings with it a certain perspectivism to the reading of Plato:

For in the same way as a dialogue has different personages each speaking in character, so does the universe comprise existences of various nature expressing themselves in various ways; for the utterance of each is according to its nature [ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ διαλόγῳ πρόσωπά εἰσιν φθεγγόμενα καθὼς ἐκάστῳ πρέπει, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ ὄλῳ κόσμῳ διάφοροί εἰσιν φύσεις φθογγῆν διάφορον ἀφειῖσαι. φθέγγεται γὰρ ἕκαστος κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν] (*Anon. Proleg.* 15.2-7).

It would be as absurd to reject anything said in the dialogues as simply false as it would be to reject any nature in the cosmos as non-existent. In the broader context of the dialogues as a whole, each dialogue, like each character within a dialogue, expresses the truth according to its unique nature, each dialogue reflects the cosmos from the perspective of its own unique world. When the anonymous commentary turns to the question of how to order the dialogues, the order that is preferred, after chronological orderings are dropped without even being taken seriously, is a pedagogical one in which each dialogue makes its unique

contribution by providing a distinct angle on the truth: some dialogues, for example, are classified according to whether they approach virtue from a natural, social, ethical, purificatory or contemplative perspective.²⁸

I conclude with an ancient principle that, while of uncertain origin,²⁹ has come down to us as a principle of the Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato: 'Plato is a man of many voices (*polyphōnos*), not of many views (*polydoxos*)' (Stobaeus 2.55.5-7).³⁰ This principle is of course somewhat ambiguous. It could mean that Plato had only one doctrine on an issue and simply expressed it in different ways; this could furthermore be how the principle was understood by some Neoplatonists. Yet for reasons given above, the principle as thus interpreted would capture neither what we find in Plato's dialogues nor even what we find at least sometimes in Neoplatonist readings.³¹ As a principle of the 'perspectivist' reading defended here, it would need to be understood as claiming that there is *one truth* (for example, about the soul), a truth that is as such inaccessible to us, but many perspectives on this truth, each true within its limits and its particular context. In the end, to read the dialogues according to such a principle is simply to introduce into Plato's strategy of writing the perspectivism that has from the very beginning characterized the interpretation of Plato. In reporting the famous dream in which Plato *saw himself* as a swan that no one could catch, the anonymous commentator reports that each person will interpret the dialogues according to what appears to him (ἀλλ' ἕκαστον πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτῷ τὴν ἐξήγησιν ποιεῖσθαι, 1.34-35). If we cannot pin down Plato's view on love in the *Symposium*, for example, it is because he does everything in his power as a great writer to prevent us from doing so. The 'perspectivist' reading is simply an acknowledgement of this fact. Plato's

approach to the truth to which he aspired was to multiply our perspectives on it by writing only dialogues of extraordinary diversity. He chose to fly and never to stop flying. Our only hope of catching him is to join him in this flight, that is, to show in our interpretations of Plato the same sensitivity to the multiplicity of perspectives that his dialogues show.

NOTAS

- 1 'Über das Verhältniss der Rede des Alcibiades zu den übrigen Reden des platonischen Symposions.' In Nietzsche 1994, 420-424.
- 2 Nietzsche 1995, 105-6.
- 3 'Es ist ganz falsch zu glauben, daß Pl. damit verschiedene verkehrte Richtungen habe darstellen wollen: es sind alles philosoph. λόγοι u. all wahr, mit immer neuen Seiten der einen Wahrheit.'
- 4 Kahn 1996, 48.
- 5 See Kahn 1996, 157, 222, 378-9. Of the *Symposium*, *Phaedo* and *Republic* taken together, he concludes that they offer not a systematic theory but rather 'a suggestive sketch' (368).
- 6 The argument of Roochnik is that 'the conception of the soul which Socrates articulates in his famous 'tripartite psychology' in book 4 is both partial and provisional and how, commencing with the interruption that opens book 5, it is progressively revised. The subsequent sections of the dialogue, books 5-7 and then 8-10, each contain an increasingly more complex, richer, and more truthful psychology than what Socrates presents in book 4. Despite such revision, the book 4 account is not simply negated or junked as the *Republic* unfolds' (2003, 2-3).
- 7 'For instance, the difference between the incomposite soul of the *Phaedo* and the tripartite soul of the *Republic* is not necessarily explicable in terms of Plato's abandoning an earlier, Socratic doctrine of a single, rational soul in favour of his own belief in a composite soul with an irrational, lower part that accommodates our desires and passions. It may not even be clear why this 'inconsistency' should matter. . . . Arguments are always contextualized. They are apparently the most important element in the Platonic textual edifice but not the only one; the means not the end' (Charalabopoulos 2012, pp. 8-9).
- 8 Rowe has challenged developmentalism by defending a perspectivism in relation to the Forms (2007, 39-48). He claims, for example, that the so-called 'two-worlds' view 'is just one of several Platonic perspectives on things' (44). Rowe, however, abandons such perspectivism and embraces developmentalism when it comes to Plato's supposed 'theory of action' (49). Against this latter thesis of an opposition between the Socratic 'intellectualism' of

the 'early' dialogues and a different theory of action in the 'middle' dialogues, see Gerson 2014, 419-428.

9 Already by the end of Book 1 Socrates has argued that the just are stronger than the unjust and that justice is to their advantage (351a ff.)

10 On Kahn's earlier 'proleptic' reading, a whole group of dialogues, including the *Laches*, is to be interpreted from one perspective, i.e., that of the *Republic* (see Kahn 1996, p. 41). The 'perspectival' reading I am defending insists that the *Laches* and the *Republic*, for example, are approaching the question of courage from very different perspectives and that one perspective is not to be subordinated to, or assimilated to, the other.

11 See Gonzalez 2000.

12 For reasons for not identifying the perspective of Socrates with that of Diotima, see Gonzalez 2012.

13 For further detail on how Plato does this, see Gonzalez 2013.

14 'In the area of epistemology we find two fundamentally different theories of human cognition: recollection, in a series of dialogues beginning with the *Meno*; and the intellectual vision of Forms, in the central books of the *Republic*. [. . .] I want to suggest that such variation is deliberate and systematic, and that it obliges us to rethink the status of philosophical doctrines for Plato' (2005, 15).

15 It will have been noted that I do not discuss the 'esotericist' or 'Tübingen' interpretation of Plato above when I contrast the 'perspectivist' model to other models. The reason is that the Tübingen interpretation is perfectly *compatible* with the 'perspectivist' reading of the dialogues. Where the Tübingen reading goes beyond the 'perspectivist' reading is in seeing all the perspectives of the dialogues as pointing to unwritten teachings *that are themselves no longer perspectival or provisional but rather constitute a univocal and final philosophical system expressible more geometrico*. My disagreement with the Tübingen reading has always been with this dogmatic interpretation of the unwritten teachings. That there were unwritten teachings and that we should pay attention to them is indisputable, but I see no reason for thinking that these teachings were any less provisional or any less of a 'sketch' than what we find in the dialogues, agreeing in this regard with Kahn as cited above (1996, 386-388). This, however, is a debate that takes us outside the dialogues and cannot be pursued here. For my critique of the Tübingen interpretation, see Gonzalez 1998, 10-13.

16 See Collobert 2012, p. 93, for the suggestion that "Plato seemingly collapses the distinction set forth in *Sophist* between an *eikôn* and a *phantasma*."

17 Such as Collobert 2012, p. 93.

18 Collobert asks, 'Yet how is it possible that the philosopher deludes his audience by making mere illusions even though they are grounded in knowledge? Plato would have made our life easier had he maintained in the *Sophist* that the *eikon*-maker is the knowledgeable imitator' (2012, 94).

19 The longer version of my review can be found in *Études Platoniciennes* [en ligne] 11 (2014), with a shorter version in *Philosophical Review* 124/4 (2015): 571-575.

20 A question that must remain open here is whether this faithfulness to the truth requires on the part of the philosopher *knowledge* of the truth in the strictest sense. Those for whom the philosopher produces his images might stand far away from the truth (in the language the Visitor uses to describe those who are fooled by the sophist, language used again to describe those who experience *phantasmata* from a distance: πόρρω τῶν πραγμάτων τῆς ἀληθείας ἀφροσύνας, 234c4), but the philosopher himself would presumably need to be characterized by what the Visitor contrasts to this distance: ἐναργῶς ἐφάπτεσθαι τῶν ὄντων (234d5-6). The Visitor oddly describes this closeness to the beings themselves as the necessary result of the experiences (παθημάτων) that come with age (234d5). But when Theaetetus suggests that this is why he himself is still so far from the truth, the Visitor replies that they will all attempt to lead him as close to the truth as possible (ὡς ἐγγύτατα) without these experiences (234e5-6). The suggestion of degrees here is important: the philosopher clearly needs to be much closer to the truth than are those fooled by the sophist, but this closeness admits of degrees that fall short of full knowledge.

21 As Charalabopoulos notes, the division of the dialogues into three chronological groups 'is clearly a product of the evolutionism and scientific optimism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a firm belief in linear progress and the model of the natural sciences as the ultimate road to knowledge' (7). He even goes on to suggest that this division 'derives mainly from a barely admitted anxiety on the part of the humanities to get prestige by appropriating the methods of the sciences' (11).

22 I use the term 'Neoplatonist' here simply as the commonly used designation and with no pejorative sense, recognizing that it would be more accurate to refer to these philosophers simply as 'Platonists'.

23 As Renaud and Tarrant rightly note: 'This is why it is incorrect to say the dialogue form and its close relation to the content were 'discovered' by nineteenth century German scholarship, in particular by Friedrich Schleiermacher. This unity was rather re-discovered at that time, after the ancients, such as Albinus, Proclus and Olympiodorus' (2015, 196).

24 The commentary of Hermeias is thought to be based on the lectures of Syrianus. See Layne - Tarrant 2014, p. 184, n. 25 & p. 202, n.1, for the debate and the bibliography. See Syrianus' argument about the principle of non-contradiction not applying to what transcends speech and knowledge: *In Met.* ii. fol. 13, b. Hermias rightly insists that Socrates' first speech has some truth within it (ἀληθειάν τινα εἶχεν ὁ Σωκράτους λόγος, in *Phdr.* 77: 9-15). For more on his reading, see Gonzalez 2015.

25 On how Olympiodorus in his commentary on the *Alcibiades* also reconciled unitary and tripartite conceptions of the soul, see Renaud - Tarrant 2015, 232-234. Renaud and Tarrant recognize in this context, in support of Olympiodorus' reading, that both conceptions are to be found in the *Republic* itself, but they reveal their modern bias in describing this as 'wavering' on Plato's part (233). In referring again to this feature of Olympiodorus' reading,

Renaud and Tarrant contrast it with Vlastos' developmental thesis of a distinction between an 'early' Socrates who does not divide the soul and a 'later' Platonic Socrates who defends tripartition (252).

26 Proclus asserts that Socrates' discourse is always adapted to the character of the interlocutor (πανταχοῦ γὰρ ὁ Σωκράτης τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις προσώποις οἰκείως προάγει τοὺς λόγους, *In Alc.* 28.10-11). Socrates has three forms of knowledge, i.e., dialectical, maieutic and erotic; while he always employs all three, which one is given emphasis will depend on the character of the interlocutor (27.13-30.4). Renaud and Tarrant claim that Proclus is nevertheless not interested in the individual character of the interlocutor but tends to see the interlocutor instead as only a universal type (2015, 179-181). They therefore appear to regard the commentary of Olympiodorus as better following the principle articulated here: 'It is important for him that what Plato has his characters say depends on who speaks and to whom they speak, and sometimes on why or where they do so—that is, it depends on the personally relevant reasons why what is said is said' (192).

27 See Layne, 82-85.

28 26.23-35. For an interpretation and correction of the confused text here with a reconstruction of the reading order, see Westerink 2011, pp. xxxvii-xl.

29 Tarrant suggests it may have been introduced by the Middle Platonist Eudorus of Alexandria (2000, 73); Annas 1999, p. 9, attributes it to Arius Didymus.

30 See also Cicero *Academica* 1.17 in which Plato's auctoritas is described as 'varius et multiplex et copiosus'.

31 Tarrant explains this principle as follows: 'The limitation of disagreement between dialogues to Plato's differing voices entails that, when he divides goods into two at one point, into three at another, and into five at another, it does not signify *vacillation* about their correct division, but one division is into their kinds, another into their locations, and another into their species' (2000, 74). But even this is not so much a matter of different forms of expression, as it is of different aspects of a doctrine. See p. 212 for the flexibility such a principle could produce in an interpreter such as Alcinous.

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Perspectivism and the Philosophical Rhetoric of the Dialogue Form

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I support the perspectivist reading of the Platonic dialogues. The dialogues assert an objective truth toward which we are meant to strive, and yet acknowledge that we as seekers of this truth are always partial in what we grasp of its nature. They are written in a way to encourage the development of philosophical practice in their readers, where “philosophical” means not only having an epistemic state in between the total possession of truth and its absence, but also growing in self-knowledge as being that kind of a being. I take up three particular qualities of the dialogue: they are multilayered, multivocal, and mimetic. Devices such as Platonic irony, multiple characters’ voices, and a reformulated notion of mimesis that encourages the development of rationality and autonomy are central to Platonic rhetoric and philosophy.

Keywords: Plato, dialogue, rhetoric, mimesis, irony, self-knowledge, perspectivism, image.

In reading a Platonic dialogue, we know the old saying: *quot lectores, tot Platonēs*.

There are probably as many Platos as there are readers of him. Perhaps it will be a surprise, then, for a commentator to begin by saying that I share a basic agreement with Gonzalez’s perspectivist approach to the Platonic dialogues. This kind of an approach to the dialogues has guided much of my own teaching and writing about them. The dialogues presuppose an objective truth toward which we are meant to strive, and yet acknowledge that we as seekers of this truth are always partial in what we grasp of its nature. I find this perspectivist approach warranted by the sorts of examples that Gonzalez offers on how topics such as the soul or the forms are treated across dialogues. To this, I would add that perspectivism fits well with the way that the dialogues often treat the human person as “in between”. The *Symposium* presents a vision of the human being as “in between” poverty and plenty (*Symp.* 203 b-204 a). In the *Apology*, Socrates claims a deep commitment to seeking the truth, coupled with an equally strong belief that his wisdom is a human wisdom, one that is better than other claims to wisdom insofar as he knows that he does not know (*Apol.* 20 d; 21 d). The *Meno* and *Phaedrus* alike claim that we are both beings of forgetting and of learning, of ascent and descent (*Men.* 81 b-e; *Phaedr.* 246 c-e). The *Phaedrus* describes souls on the philosophical path, the best of all possible paths that can be taken, as those who can have only a faint recollection of the forms that they pursue, but who nonetheless are in a state of ascent towards those same objects of our deepest desires (*Phaedr.* 247 b-248 d). Perspectivism captures the multiple ways in which Plato describes the human soul, as that which is neither divine nor animal, but always *en route*, in a state of becoming. Moreover, a perspectivist approach

to how to read the dialogues in relationship to one another also fits well with what I understand to be the relationship between language and Platonic ontology. If the forms of justice, beauty, and so on are not reducible to verbal definitions of justice, beauty, and the like, then all statements that we make about them will be limited. Although I cannot argue this point here, I would argue that Platonic argument frequently proceeds by way of images, and that such imagery is appropriate when there is a gap between the nature of being itself and language as a tool for talking about being. If the forms exceed what we can say about them, then various images of the forms both capture something of that which they describe and are limited in their vision.¹

In my response today, I will take up the topic of the rhetoric and poetic form of the Platonic dialogue as a development of perspectivism. The dialogues do not simply *present* a view, or even many views, to their readers. Instead, they are written in a way to encourage the development of philosophical practice in their readers. Although others have argued for a pedagogical value of one dialogue for another (as is the case with Kahn's proleptic reading),² I want to argue that the very construction of each *single* dialogue as a dramatic work encourages the development of the notion of philosophy *as* an ascent, as erotic, as perspectival, through its very dialogical construction. The reader's philosophical development is not merely accomplished through the development of specific *content* that Plato hopes for the reader to hold as his own belief by the time that the dialogue is read. Rather, the dialogue form engages in a form of poetics that leads its readers on the perspectival journey. Plato as author asks his reader to undertake particular practices in the course of reading or listening to a dialogue that form her into a lover of wisdom who, like

Socrates, recognizes the partial and perspectival nature of her own knowledge.

In contrast with many other forms of rhetoric and poetry among his contemporaries, Plato's dialogues engage in a rhetoric of activity rather than passivity.³ It is not a form of philosophy that simply transmits knowledge to an otherwise passive audience but rather one that asks its audience to become seekers along with Socrates and other seekers of truth in the dialogues. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that education is not a process of pouring true knowledge into an empty soul, or putting sight into blind eyes, but rather a turning around of the soul in order to make an ascent (*Rep.* 518 c). In the *Symposium*, Socrates says that it would be a wonderful thing if wisdom could flow between two people the way that water can flow from one cup to another, through a piece of yarn, but (alas for poor Agathon) this is not the case (*Symp.* 175 d). Socrates never claims to teach anyone through the direct transmission of knowledge. It would be surprising, then, if Plato as author of these words understood his own practice differently, as a process of writing that he undertook in order simply to transmit his ideas to us, the readers. Instead, I want to argue, that the perspectivism of the dialogues is accompanied by a dialogical, rhetorical practice that actively encourages us as readers to become philosophical— where "philosophical" is understood to be not only having an epistemic state in between the total possession of truth and its absence, but also becoming increasingly self-consciously aware of oneself as being that kind of a being. The forms exceed what can be fully grasped through language; beauty itself is always more than anything that we can say about the beautiful or about beautiful things.⁴ To practice philosophy, then, always requires that I seek with the virtues of courage and humility: where humility is an awareness of

both what I know and what I do not know, and where courage leads me to continue the pursuit without fear despite my own limits of knowledge. How does the construction of the dialogues encourage this to take place?

If Socrates is a torpedo fish that numbs (*Men.* 80 a-b), or a midwife who tests our ideas to see if they are only wind eggs (*Theaet.* 149 a-151 d), then the Platonic dialogue can be understood as a text that invites us into our own process of philosophical midwifery, whereby the dialogue and reader engage in a mutual process of exploring its central philosophical questions. The Platonic dialogues are read most fruitfully when we read them not as texts that report a Platonic truth to us, for us to absorb, accept, or reject, but rather as texts that take us through an ongoing dialectical movement between making claims and then *problematizing* the claims made. Within each dialogue, we frequently find that Socrates makes a claim and then shows why the claim that he is made is problematic. For example, the *Protagoras* features Socrates and Protagoras who begin with certain views as to whether virtue can be taught, and find at the end of their conversation that their positions seem to have been reversed (*Prot.* 361 a-d). The *Theaetetus* takes up multiple definitions and models of knowledge, ones that are increasingly better insofar as they are more inclusive in what they capture, but does not end with an adequately comprehensive view of what it means to know. A dialogue such as the *Sophist* includes the unfinished nature of its definitions by making divisions and cuts in multiple ways, where each genealogical sorting captures something importantly different than was found in a previous cut.⁵ We could understand each one of these dialogues to be aporetic, but surely no one would claim that in the course of reading them, we have learned nothing at all. In a dialogue such as the

Protagoras, where the question of whether virtue can be taught is not resolved, we as readers still have learned a great deal about what the relevant issues are; for example, we might leave the dialogue with a sense that knowledge is central to the practice of virtue, but that the *kind* of knowledge that is requisite to virtue is not taught in the same way that either traditional poets or sophists taught their students. In the *Theaetetus*, the role of judgment in relation to knowledge ought to be clearer than before we read the dialogue. The dialogues problematize philosophical problems in a way that emphasizes the lack of finality and comprehensiveness to the problem at hand, whether in an aporetic or non-aporetic dialogue. There is no finality because the process of inquiry always continues, both in other Platonic works, and in our conversations as communities of readers.⁶

I propose that three elements of a dialogue ought especially to be attended to as we seek fruitful approaches to interpret them: the dialogues are *multilayered, multivocal, and mimetic*. Let me take up each of these qualities in turn.

On the multi-layered nature of the dialogue: in reading any Platonic dialogue, there are potentially as many as four layers to each dialogue that we need to bring to our own interpretation of the text. First, there are the ideas and arguments that each character in the dialogue speaks. Second, there is dramatic information about the characters or action known at least some of the characters. At times, there is also a third layer, where we as readers have some information about the drama not available to the characters themselves (what Charles Griswold long ago named as dramatic irony).⁷ Sometimes, there is a fourth layer at work, when the Platonic text engages intertextually with other works by Plato's predecessors and contemporaries. Each of these layers does not function independently, but rather requires

that we use one layer to fully enhance our understanding of what is happening at another level of the dialogue, or to see where one level is as of yet incomplete in its analysis.

Let me give an example of how these dialogical layers might work in a dialogue such as the *Meno*. Socrates and Meno engage in argument about the nature of virtue and how it can be acquired. Simply at the textual level, we learn a great deal about the problem, for example, what it means to ask the question philosophically in seeking a single form of virtue; difficulties with understanding the possibility of the process of learning or coming to know; and the myth of recollection as one way to restore the possibility of learning in light of Meno's paradox. This level is fundamental to our philosophical exploration of the question of whether virtue can be taught. (I take this claim to be uncontroversial and so will not spend much time defending it.)

At the same time, we get a glimpse into Meno's character. Meno's very manner of asking the initial question at the opening of the dialogue is telling: "Can you tell me?" (ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν) (70 a) Where Socrates prefers to ask his interlocutors to inquire into such subjects by delving more deeply into their own beliefs and to serve as "midwife" to the giving birth of their ideas, Meno wants to be told. Socrates even describes this in terms of a habit: he says that Gorgias created in his students an *ethos* of promising to answer any question that might be posed to them. Meno's searching is oriented to someone outside of himself. He has a kind of passivity in terms of how he wishes to learn. He seems to equate learning with being taught or even simply told something by someone else. For example, he seems most to like philosophy when Socrates offers him stable answers to abstract questions, as when Socrates offers a definition of color as "an emanation from shapes commensurate with sight and so subject

to perception" (*Men.* 76 d),⁸ and Meno says that if Socrates could give more answers along *these* lines, Meno would stay to study with him (*Men.* 77 a). Meno does not much care for lines of philosophical inquiry that destabilize his own views, however. Socrates eventually criticizes Meno and calls him "hubristic" (76 a). Passivity and hubris are two sides of the same coin, for both assume the possibility of a totalizing knowledge in a way that the myth of recollection disavows. We can see through the dialogue's drama that Meno is even less willing to have his own ideas questioned than is the slave whom Socrates shows to lack mathematical knowledge, before being led to see what he *can* know. Meno demonstrates to us something about the nature of the acquisition of virtue that is not explicitly verbally articulated by any one of the dialogue's characters: namely, that if virtue is to be learned, we must first have a willingness to allow our pre-conceived concepts about virtue to be questioned. It is already a moral as well as epistemic virtue to know *when* one does not know, *that* one does not know. Meno lacks such epistemic humility. Socrates, however, openly professes his own ignorance in the *Meno* (*Men.* 71 b).

At the dramatic level, we as interpreters also know something about Meno's future that neither Socrates nor Meno as characters can know at the time of the dialogue's drama, namely, that he goes on as a military leader to lead Thessalian troops into enemy territory on false premises. His real goal is to assist Cyrus to overthrow his older brother, King Artaxerxes from the Persian throne. When Meno's men refuse to go ahead with his plan, Meno tries to promise favors and benefits to his troops, if they will only proceed. They do, but later Cyrus dies in battle, so Meno again plots, this time with a different friend, Ariaeus, to persuade his friend to take the crown. Meno was discovered

and tortured for a full year before being put to death (Xen. *Anabasis* 2.629).⁹ His subsequent history would have been well known to Plato's contemporary readers. Although some might say that it is speculative to incorporate such a fact into our reading of the dialogue itself, Jacob Klein suggests a direct allusion to these events is made in a play on words in the *Meno*.¹⁰ The Greek reads: "Οὐ πᾶν εἰμί μνήμων, ὃ Μένων" (*Men.* 71 c). One natural translation into English is "I don't have a very good memory, Meno."¹¹ But Klein suggests an alternative: "Mnemon" was a nickname given to King Artaxerxes, who arranged for Meno to be tortured and put to death. So another translation could be, "I am not at all Mnemon, Meno." However difficult the experience Meno has with Socrates, the experience is not meant to be punitive but rather an exercise in care. This kind of dramatic irony also contributes to our understanding of the philosophy of the dialogue. As readers, we are invited to explore the interconnection between Meno's beliefs about virtue and his passive approach to philosophical questions, and his willingness to go on and to commit acts that were nearly universally understood to lack virtue.¹² Plato presents us with a contrast between the topic of excellence and who Meno becomes, but he does not connect all the dots for us.

Jill Gordon in her book *Turning Toward Philosophy* suggests that irony has a philosophical meaning: "...the instability of meaning characteristic of irony in the dialogues is emblematic of the limitations of human knowledge. There are some things we just should not feel settled and comfortable about knowing once and for all. To do so is to stop dialectic and philosophical enterprise....Irony must remain as something to be puzzled about in the text, to be questioned, to be engaged by the active reader. The ambiguity of the irony stimulates

us to philosophic activity."¹³ Like Gordon, I understand the purpose of such irony to be to deepen our exploration of the question at hand. In the case of the *Meno*, the dramatic irony about Meno's personal history problematizes the final view of the dialogue that virtue is a "gift from the gods" which Meno possesses. Meno has no such gift, and moreover, his belief that he does possess that which he does not, may be precisely what leads him to take vicious and hubristic political and military action.

A fourth significant level by which we interpret the dialogues is that of intertextual analysis, that is, noticing ways in which the Platonic dialogues are either actively responsive to other texts, including those in non-philosophical genres. Such intertextuality is not always present, but occurs with surprising frequency. For example, we know that Aristophanes's *Assemblywomen* takes up many of the same proposals as is found in *Republic* Book V's proposal that men and women ought to be treated as equals and children held in common, but the two texts have significantly different approaches, to say the least! Socrates's tone in his proposal is so deadly serious one might wish to think that the *Republic* came first and the *Assemblywomen* as a parody only later, but we know that the *Assemblywomen* was performed in 391. If we share the general assumption that Plato did not undertake significant philosophical writing until after the death of Socrates, we would have to imagine the *Republic* to be among Plato's very first written works for it to predate the *Assemblywomen*. Thus, we as interpreters face a different task: namely, how to understand Plato's engagement with this other, comedic text which emphasizes the irrational, the bodily, and the contingent nature of love, over the rational. Might not Plato as author be working with a topic that is meant to ask us, as readers, to consider what the Socratic

approach excludes from its view and to hold that rationalistic approach to family and state in contrast? Such intertextual interplays invite us as readers to critique the adequacy and finality of the Socratic account with which we are presented. If Socrates in the *Sophist* sits silently at the feet of the Eleatic Stranger, perhaps Plato is willing to offer Socrates as both philosophical hero and implicit subject of criticism for the reader in dialogues such as the *Republic*, too.

We see many other instances of a Platonic dialogue's engagement with other texts and poetic genres. Socrates provides a critique of Homeric education in Book II of *Republic*, but as Patrick Lake has recently argued, Plato as author alludes to the *Republic* more than 90 times in the course of writing it.¹⁴ The *Phaedrus*'s discussion of writing in contrast to speech is clearly engaging with Alcidas' and Isocrates' similar treatment of the same topic.¹⁵ As I have argued elsewhere, dialogues such as the *Apology* often take up the rhetorical devices of previous forensic and even sophistic works.¹⁶

A second significant feature of the dialogues is their *multivocality*. Plato does not speak in the singular voice of his own person, nor only through the voice of his primary character, Socrates. Rather, all the voices of the dialogue enter into the horizon of our own consideration as readers. We know from teaching first time readers of Plato in our classes that Socrates is not always the most appealing character to them, either for his views or his actions. It takes time for Socrates to grow on us, and for us to see the larger arc of his concerns and the motivations behind his relentless questioning of others. The voices of those whom Socrates questions often present genuine challenges to the Socratic view, or raise significant points not always fully addressed by the end of the dialogue. In the *Gorgias*, Polus and Callicles raise the thorny issue of whether Socrates' approach

to questioning others endangers himself politically, and Callicles' silence at the end also leaves open the question as to whether Socrates' questioning is at all effective. A dialogue's many voices function to make problematic elements of the view presented by Socrates or the main character, such that the *incompleteness* of the view at hand is highlighted. Not only explicitly aporetic endings to the dialogues, but also questions raised by characters that are left aside in the course of some other turn in argument, remind us that we are, indeed, creatures of *eros* who are a mixture of poverty and plenty, and that incompleteness characterizes our inquiry even when we make progress in the course of answering our questions.

Third, the dialogues work in part to shape their readers through *mimesis*. That is, the dialogues are psychagogic not only for the characters within them, as Socrates tries to lead his interlocutors onto the path of philosophy, self-knowledge, and love and knowledge of the forms, but also they lead us. We are familiar with Socrates' criticisms of mimesis in the *Republic*, in which he argues that performing the views of bad characters in tragedies and other dramatic works is harmful to the soul (*Rep.* 395c-d). However, the dialogues do include many characters who hold immoral beliefs, or whose characters go on to undertake bad actions: Thrasymachus, Charmides, Critias, Meno, and Alcibiades, to name just a few. A reader who reads the parts of these characters takes on the work of mimesis; whether the words are spoken aloud or performed only in one's own soul, the soul of the reader takes on the viewpoint of the character's words. Such mimesis of different characters, however, allows for the deeper engagement of the Platonic dialogue in a way that encourages its questions to matter to us. Multiple kinds of readers will encounter a Platonic dialogue: those who are more like Thrasymachus, those more like Glaucon, those

who find Polemarchus intuitive, and perhaps the rare soul that comes to the dialogue already in love with the way of Socrates. The presence of these opponents allows for the reader to engage both intellectually and affectively in the dialogue. But a significant difference between Platonic dialogue and traditional pre-Platonic poetry is that the reader is led also to *imitate* a process of rational inquiry and assessment of these alternative standpoints. Most often, this takes place through taking on the voice of Socrates, whom we also imitate as we move through the course of the dialogue. For example, a student might initially find himself sympathetic to the view that Thrasymachus holds, that those who are unjust everywhere seem to have “more” of worldly things than the just do, but through the course of the dialogue, discover that his desire to have a harmonious soul is even deeper than the desire to have Thrasymachean goods.

Importantly, a Platonic dialogue does *more* than simply allowing us to “try on” different viewpoints, which might be true of many, if not most, dramatic works. Rather, the dialogue engages the rational part of the soul, and continually asks us to reason along with Socrates (and often also other characters) about the matters at hand. For example, if Thrasymachus appeals to the novice student who reads and sympathizes with the desire for power, wealth, and freedom from rules, Socrates’ words that we are more than our appetites, and his presentation of the notion that even our reason itself is a kind of a desire to be freed from our chains and see reality for what it is argues for a different view of desire and a different view of freedom that is based on a richer and more accurate conception of the human soul. Mimesis thus serves to *awaken* the rational part of the soul and to strengthen our rational capacities through their being mimetically exercised through the imitation of argument. The mimetic imitation of

these arguments also takes us through various affective and emotional responses—the fear, appeal, or disgust we might feel when we listen to Thrasymachus speak, or the excitement one might feel at the prospect of intellectual freedom as one listens to Socrates’ image of the cave. We are also invited to see where our affective responses “match up” to those of the speakers, especially in parts of the dialogues that offer more mythological language than straight argument. For example, when a reader takes on the voice of Socrates describing the imagery of the cave analogy, we might *feel* along with Socrates the great appeal of seeking intellectual freedom and being freed from our enslavement to popular opinion. Thus, the dialogues not only give us practice in engaging in dialectical interchange between multiple thinkers, and so strengthen our rational capacity to take on different intellectual perspectives that deepen our understanding of a philosophical problem. They also engage our affectivity in the issues at hand.

This kind of mimesis makes Platonic dialogue distinct from both earlier Greek poetic works and from later philosophical works that set forth a single viewpoint, that of a sole author. On the one hand, the Platonic dialogue engages the rational part of the soul and continually asks us to subject the various thoughts, feelings, and experiences we may take on, in taking on the views of its characters, to rational assessment. Earlier Greek dramatic works do not explicitly take this to be their task. On the other hand, because the mimetic nature is performative in what it borrows from earlier poetic genres, and includes the exchange of ideas between two or more voices, Platonic dialogue also draws our souls into the dialogue. We do not simply passively accept the voice of the single author, Plato, but rather are asked to take on the different voices of its characters and then to step back and to assess where we

are persuaded, where we are not, what more might need to be said, and where we find our own voices after engagement with these others. In this way, Platonic dialogue encourages an autonomy and responsibility in its readers through its rhetoric. Thus the very weakness of *mimesis* as presented in the *Republic*, that we become like those we imitate, becomes its strength when philosophers are among those whom we imitate. Socrates becomes a hero worthy of imitation not because he ever escapes his human state as one who seeks and grows in knowledge without fully comprehending it, but because he lives out this “human” way of knowing with courage and utter devotion.

A good commentator probably ought to be less agreeable than I have been with Gonzalez’s paper, to which I can only reply with Aristotle’s remarks that the truth is dearer than friends. But in the spirit of our shared enterprise that all truth is perspectival, including one’s hermeneutics, let me end with a question: must perspectivism always necessarily exclude all possibility of developmentalism? In fact, they might be compatible in certain cases. While here I do not want to argue positively in favor of what is *usually* understood to be a developmentalist position, it seems epistemologically more responsible to say that we must be *neutral* with respect to whether any two dialogues present us with both perspectivism *and* some kind of development, or only a new perspective on a similar idea. In other words, perspectivism does not automatically entail unitarianism.¹⁷ If one wants to say that there is progress or “ascent” in understanding over time, as I have tried to argue is evidently the case even *within* a dialogue, why not assume that there is the possibility of development *between* dialogues? I do not wish to argue for a fully developed, “final Platonic vision” towards which the dialogues are all heading; I agree with Gonzalez that is not the case. But I want to say that

we could still, on a case-by-case basis, take two particular dialogues, like the *Gorgias*’ picture of rhetoric and the *Phaedrus*’ picture of rhetoric, and argue that one does have a more fully fleshed out vision of a particular philosophical problem, like whether rhetoric is philosophical. We need not attribute this to a system of “early, middle, and late dialogues.” But we could at times simply pair two dialogues and argue that one has a fuller vision, in which “fuller” means that more questions are answered regarding a particular problem—a more inclusive vision. “Development” here would refer not to chronology, but rather to the idea that a richer account is given, one that answers more questions relevant to the problem at hand. For example, an account of rhetoric that can distinguish good rhetoric from bad rhetoric would be richer than one that simply argues that all rhetoric is bad. This does not exclude the possibility that the views are *also* perspectivist, in other words, that the way that the problem is presented also has to do with the interlocutors or the topic at hand. Here, I simply want to soften the idea of perspectivism and argue that we can still at times make comparisons between different dialogues and then discuss which has a more developed notion of a problem that we wish to understand better. In other words, one might be a perspectivist and still make some normative judgments about more or less developed views across dialogues.

In conclusion, I want to thank Frank for his insightful and thorough paper. Perspectivism opens up the dialogues to greater depth of analysis through understanding each one as further enrichment of our vision. Mimesis, multivocality, and the multilayered construction of the Platonic dialogue allow us to engage dialogically and responsibly with the text. The dialogue form engages in a form of rhetoric that educates and forms us as readers in accepting and growing in our perspectival understanding of the truth.

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NOTES

- 1 Here my language of vision follows in a general way Nightingale's work on philosophy as theoretical "spectacle." See Nightingale 2004.
- 2 Kahn 1996.
- 3 For a helpful contrast between the passivity of Homeric poetry and the more active Platonic approach, see Ledbetter 2002.
- 4 Here I agree with Roochnik's assertion that the philosopher's state remains in between a state of total knowledge and total ignorance, such that his or her stance remains always "interrogative." See Roochnik 1987. However, I take Socrates' claim that there is an ascent to indicate the possibility of philosophical progress, and his description of contemplation as an alternative, non-discursive form of knowledge, both to be characteristic of philosophy. *Logoi* are insufficient to describe the forms, but our words about them can reflectively them in better or worse ways, and contemplation introduces the element of seeing, as well as speaking about, what is.
- 5 For an excellent account of how division in the *Sophist* is complementary to Socratic elenchus, see Ionescu forthcoming.
- 6 As Christopher Long argues, the dialogues lead to not only a relationship between reader and text, but also between communities of readers, in which readers' imaginations are at play in the acts of interpretation. See Long 2014, 166-186.
- 7 Griswold 2002.
- 8 Trans. Bartlett 2004.
- 9 Nails 2002, 204-205.
- 10 Klein 1989, 44. Klein cites both Plutarch and Cornelius Nepos as sources.
- 11 Bartlett's translation.
- 12 Drew Hyland long ago laid out clearly the argument for the interconnection between philosophy and life, such that philosophical practice is not reducible to argument. See Hyland 1968.
- 13 Gordon 1999, 130.
- 14 Lake 2011.
- 15 McCoy 2009.
- 16 McCoy 2007, 23-55.
- 17 Schleiermacher, for example, argued for a unified system that Plato possessed but then presented only in part through different dialogues. Schleiermacher 1973.

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Antianarchia: interpreting political thought in Plato

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a defense of the project of seeking to interpret Plato's political thought as a valid method of interpreting Plato. It does so in two stages: in the first part, by rebutting denials of the possibility of interpreting Plato's thought at all; in the second part, by identifying one set of ideas arguably central to Plato's political thought, namely, his profound rejection of political anarchy, understood in terms of the absence of the authority of officeholders and posited both as characteristic of democracy and as the origin of tyranny. This approach to anarchy and its relationship to tyranny is, I contend, a Platonic innovation (so far as we can judge from surviving texts), and must be understood against the background of Greek writings that straightforwardly opposed the two. I aim here to show, on the one hand, that denying tout court the project of seeking to interpret Plato's political

thought is an implausibly extreme position, and, on the other, that pursuing that project can bear valuable fruit.

Keywords: Plato, Socrates, mouthpiece, politics, political theory, political philosophy, anarchy, tyranny, rule, office.

This paper outlines a defense of the project of seeking to interpret Plato's political thought as a valid method of interpreting Plato. It does so in two stages: in the first part, by rebutting denials of the possibility of interpreting *Plato's thought* at all; in the second part, by identifying one set of ideas arguably central to *Plato's political thought*, namely, his profound rejection of political anarchy, understood in terms of the absence of the authority of officeholders and posited both as characteristic of democracy and as the origin of tyranny. This approach to anarchy and its relationship to tyranny is, I contend, a Platonic innovation (so far as we can judge from surviving texts), and must be understood against the background of Greek writings that straightforwardly opposed the two. The paper is an outline in the sense that a full defense of all the issues raised in articulating both the method of interpreting Plato's political thought, and the substance of such thought, must lie beyond its limited scope.¹ I aim here to show, on the one hand, that denying *tout court* the project of seeking to interpret Plato's political thought is an implausibly extreme position, and, on the other hand, that pursuing that project can bear valuable fruit.

I. METHODS OF INTERPRETATION OF 'PLATO'S THOUGHT' – OR HIS THINKING

Prolegomenon to any project of 'interpreting Plato's political thought' is replying to those scholars who deny that we have any basis for attributing views, or even any intellectual moves that may not crystallize into dogmatic views, to 'Plato' at all. Here I do not mean those who would insist on the death, absence, or incoherence of the idea of an author (any

author) as such, but rather those who contend that Plato is an especial, even unique, case of a philosophical author to whom no philosophical views can be attributed.² I will call these the No-Attribution family of views. Proponents of such views have tended rather to term them 'authorial anonymity'³ or 'silence'. But both of these terms are I think unhelpful. As to anonymity: Plato's *authorship* of the dialogues was universally credited in antiquity (indeed, the problem for scholars is sorting out whether it was too widely credited in respect of what we now consider the *dubia* and *spuria* dialogues, as well as the letters, or epistles, transmitted with the corpus).⁴ As to silence: again in antiquity, his acts of writing were also widely credited as acts of speaking, so that he was hardly believed to have been *silent*. The real issue at stake in the debate over so-called authorial anonymity and silence, is rather the question of whether anything said or implied in the dialogues can be attributed to Plato *in propria persona*.

No-Attributionists assert that the impossibility of attributing anything in, or implied in, the dialogues to Plato, is rooted in the nature of the form in which Plato chose to write. This form is generally labeled by all parties the Platonic 'dialogues' — for most No-Attributionists focus only on the dialogues, leaving aside the question of the epistles, and their doubtful authenticity⁵ — albeit that this label requires more comments than it usually receives (I will continue to use it nevertheless). For as David Halperin observes, 'One of the most curious and seldom remarked facts about Plato's Dialogues [sic] is that many of them are not, in fact, dialogues' (1992: 93). His point may be elaborated thus: that while twenty-four of the thirty-five 'dialogues' in the Thrasyllan canon use the purely mimetic form of presenting characters' speeches directly,⁶ the other eleven are

‘mixed’ in that they are presented as narratives within which some characters’ dialogues are recounted.⁷ For present purposes, we may observe that while these variations in the dialogue form are intriguing, still, if any of the dialogues were read aloud in a group, or read aloud or silently by an individual reader, then even the purely mimetic dialogues would be subsumed in the voice of the narrating reader.⁸ In this sense, the holistic representation of each ‘dialogue’ through a single narrating voice is always a structural possibility, and may mirror the holistic authorial voice of Plato.

So the problem of attribution to Plato is really a problem of the relationship between Plato and the characters within the ‘dialogues’, including the distinctive group of characters who act as narrators. The present strategy is to rebut No-Attribution as an absolute position, in order to vindicate the possibility in principle of making attributions to Plato. Once that space is opened, any particular attribution will always be a matter of debate and contestation, as with any other interpretative move. My aim is to cast doubt on the cogency or value of denying that we can *ever* make attributions to Plato such that we can have meaningful discussions of topics like ‘Plato’s political thought’. The precise content of those attributions is a matter for further debate; the second half of this paper offers one proposal only.

A first step in rebutting No-Attributionism is to explore the nature of just what it is that might be a candidate for attribution at all. The most common candidate is ‘views’, as in Jill Gordon’s representative assertion:

He [Plato] purposely removes his own voice as a philosophical authority through devices that destabilize univocal

readings of the texts. The dialogues thus thwart claims about Plato’s philosophical *views*, thwart claims that the character, Socrates, is a mouthpiece for Plato, and even thwart claims about the historical person, Socrates. More in the manner of great poets, playwrights, and writers of fiction, Plato creates texts that, although meaningful, are not necessarily intended to contain his unmediated philosophical *view*. (Gordon 1999, 8, emphases added)

Against such a focus on ‘views’ as the only possible candidate for attribution, once we widen our consideration of the field of possible attributions, we see that it is in fact much less plausible to think that *no* attribution to Plato of any kind might justifiably be made.⁹ For attribution could potentially have many diverse kinds of content. What if instead of ‘views’ with their dogmatic overtone, one were to consider attributing ‘ideas’, or associations of ideas that one might call ‘patterns of argument’? Indeed, what if one were to give up seeking a substantive noun to attribute (views, ideas) and instead associate a verb – as in David Sedley’s lapidary characterization of the dialogues as ‘Plato thinking aloud’ (2003, 1)? If the attributions in question were patterns of thought, or even characteristic questionings or moves, rather than conclusions or dogmatic positions or ‘views’, this would surely make No-Attribution a less plausible position.

Broadening the field of candidates for attribution to Plato can also encourage us to broaden our consideration of the basis for making such. That is, a standard move of No-Attributionists is to deny any one-to-one correspondence between the views (in their parlance) expressed by a particular character within the dialogues, and the views of Plato – summed up as rejection of

treating any character as a ‘mouthpiece’ for Plato (as seen in Gordon, above; Wolfsdorf 2008, 19; and many others.) (Compare the terms of the ancient debate over whether Plato ‘dogmatized’; even those like Diogenes Laertius who identified Plato with some of his characters did not do so *simpliciter*, nor claim that the author dogmatized at all times.)¹⁰ To be sure, the idea of any character serving *in toto* and *simpliciter*, as it were, as a ‘mouthpiece for Plato’ is indeed an implausibly absolutist conception. ‘Mouthpiece’ suggests a rigid transparency giving a simple one-to-one correlation of a character’s ascribed utterance to author’s view. But such a simple and transparent correspondence to the author’s views hardly fits with the questioner role of the ‘mouthpiece’ candidate characters – Socrates, above all.

A better metaphor might consider a character like Socrates as an ‘avatar’ of the author. An avatar is generally used by a single player in a virtual reality game or world, to go on journeys that the player experiences along with the character. The avatar ‘represents’ the player and traverses pathways of exploration that the player chooses, without corresponding to the player in all attributes (being typically better looking, whereas of course Socrates was notoriously ugly) or always doing what the player would do in everyday reality. Yet it is still clear that an avatar is an avatar ‘of’ someone in particular rather than of anyone else. To be sure, the avatar conception is only one alternative to the ‘mouthpiece’ theory and would need further elaboration to explore the full dimension of its usefulness, and limits, as a conception of character-author relations in Plato. For present purposes, it serves to illustrate simply that the amply scorned ‘mouthpiece’ conception of that relationship can be rejected without thereby undercutting any possibility of attribution to Plato at all.¹¹

To continue fleshing out a rival to No-Attribution, we might begin from the questioner-respondent relationship that by and large structures the dialogues. While both parties clearly bear some responsibility for the direction that a question-answer examination takes, and the result it reaches, I would dissent from Michael Frede’s view that that there is more reason overall to attribute the argument that emerges to the respondent.¹² (Indeed, especially when an argument ends in *aporia*, it is difficult to know what argument one would be attributing to the respondent in such a case.) On the contrary, what I will call characteristic and recurrent ‘patterns of argumentative questioning’ are good mid-level candidates for potential attribution to Plato — as elements of his thought in his sense of his thinking, if not of settled dogma. For the most part, these are Socratic in the sense of being articulated as questions by him recurrently, across a wide number of dialogues, but there are importantly similar patterns of argumentative questioning to be found in dialogues not featuring Socrates as their principal questioner or speaker as well. (Of course, long stretches of a number of dialogues consist of speech acts that are not questionings, and a full theory would take account of these passages also.)¹³

I have in mind cases such as the pattern of argumentative questioning suggesting that virtue, or a specific virtue, must be a form of knowledge, or that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it. And once again, I would challenge any absolutist denial that there is any more reason to attribute to Plato such patterns than their opposites. Is it really plausible to suggest that Plato could have been less likely to think that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it, than the other way round? As my phrasing suggests, the attributions in question need not be

cast-iron or dogmatic; they are simply attributions of patterns of argumentative questioning that exhibit, or reveal, certain characteristic patterns of thinking or trains of thought. That such patterns are recurrently expressed need not imply that they are held dogmatically, fully worked out, fully non-contradictory with other trains of thinking expressed in the dialogues, and so on.¹⁴

One helpful way of characterizing distinctive patterns of thinking in Plato is to identify them in the negative. That is, however firm or conversely exploratory and open-ended were Plato's positive intellectual commitments, there are certain patterns of argument that one would never find reason in reading the dialogues to attribute to him. Lloyd Gerson makes a proposal along these lines by identifying as 'Platonism' (and, more important for our more limited purposes of focusing on the dialogues, authentically Platonic) 'the philosophical position arrived at by embracing the claims that contradict those claims explicitly rejected by Plato in the dialogues' (2005, 17). In a more recent work, he spells out these negative inferences as follows: 'The elements of UP [Ur Platonism] according to my hypothesis are antimaterialism, antimechanism, antinomialism, antirelativism, and antiskepticism' (2013, 10). While Gerson himself is committed to the view that we can find and recover these key tenets of Platonism not only from Plato's dialogues but also from later testimony and philosophical reflection in a sustained tradition, the negative approach to attribution that he outlines can be useful to our more limited project as well. Negative attributions — positions that we would never have reason to attribute to Plato, and that the dialogues through their principal speakers and through their overall course alike provide reason to challenge — can give content

to the idea of an overall authorial voice while leaving ample room for the provisional exploration of diverse positive theses or approaches within the multiplicity of the dialogues.¹⁵

Now Gerson himself observes that his summary of the central elements of Platonism includes 'no mention of politics' (2005, 36). Nor does any political dimension appear in his further account of those themes in subsequent work (Gerson 2013). My case here is again a minimal one: that we find significantly developed *political thought* in the dialogues (whether or not that amounts to a central element, though my own view is that it does). As a test case, in the second part of this paper I will argue that we have reason to attribute to Plato the pattern of thinking, characterized in the negative, that I will call *antianarchia*: a pattern of thinking about the profound dangers of anarchy in the sense of an absence of *archē* or rule within the *polis* and, insofar as the embodied soul is depicted as having parallel structural divisions as the *polis*, within the embodied soul as well.

Let me stress that this is asserted as a commitment of Plato's *political* thought, by which I mean the political relationships among, and within, embodied individuals in an era devoid of direct divine rule. This is not necessarily to postulate that *antianarchia* is a fundamental principle of the cosmos as such. There may be other ways of achieving the goodness of order — which I take to animate the value of *antianarchia* — in which rule and indeed the partition that rule presupposes are not involved. Indeed, Allan Silverman has argued that 'Plato...is committed to philosophical anarchy, the condition in which each soul rules itself. Philosophical anarchy is the ideal *nonpolitical* condition sought by reason' (2007, 63, emphasis

added). Evaluating that contention is beyond the scope of this paper. The claim here is that whether or not *antianarchia* is attributable to Plato at the most fundamental level of Platonic thought, it is nevertheless an important pattern of thinking in Platonic *political* thought.

I focus on the related terms *anarchia* (the noun) and *anarchos* (the adjective), beginning with the context of Greek texts prior and contemporaneous to Plato, on the basis of which we can seek to identify both his debts to, and his innovation in relation to, the discourse they formulate. I first identify the central role of officeholding in holding together a variety of meanings of *anarchia* and *anarchos*, and then lay out fifth- and fourth-century views in which anarchy and tyranny are typically opposed (though the classing of the ‘Thirty Tyrants’ as a year of *anarchia* in Athenian political history will require special consideration). Then, against this backdrop, we will explore the significance of Plato’s positing of *anarchia* and *anarchos* as characteristic of democracy and as the origin of tyranny in the *Republic*, with its central sense involving officeholding again proving central to his uses of these terms. The centrality of this discussion in the political thought of the *Republic* is promissory here for its exploration in other dialogues.¹⁶

II. INTERPRETING ANARCHIA IN CONTEXT AND IN PLATO’S POLITICAL THINKING

Anarchia and *anarchos* are formed as negative compounds of the noun *hē archē*, among the meanings of which, according to the Liddell, Scott, and Jones dictionary (LSJ) are ‘beginning, origin’; ‘first place or power, sovereignty’; and ‘magistracy, office’ – ideas

connected by a focus on the head or leader of a community or group who can originate its action. While the concomitant absence of such leadership can be described in general terms (LSJ begin their definition of *anarchia* with ‘lack of a leader, commander’), it is most often tied to a specific and identifiable role, the Homeric *basilees* or the military *archon* who commands a cavalry or hoplite troop – as is the case in the texts that the dictionary cites.¹⁷ However, with the evolution of specific annually elected offices in the ‘isonomic’ regimes of the seventh and sixth centuries (Farenga 2015: 102-103; Raaflaub 2015: 33), most classical usages of *archē* are better glossed by ‘official’ or ‘officeholder’ in a relatively institutionally specific framework rather than by the vaguer notion of leader.

If we take our bearings from the literal meaning of *anarchia* as an absence of office, we will find that this can be posited as brought about in one of at least four ways. *Anarchia* can in principle result from: (i) an absence of someone, or anyone, *filling* an office; (ii) an absence of any *properly constituted* office; or, (iii) an absence of *obedience* to someone, or anyone, filling an office, or specifically a properly constituted one — equating to a presence of disobedience. There is also (iv) sometimes a meaning of a more generalized sense of lawlessness and disorder — but this, I shall argue, is normally mediated through the specific mechanism of some kind of disordered relationship to office on the spectrum of (i) — (iii) above.

i) on an absence of anyone filling an office: LSJ give among their definitions of *anarchia* one simple meaning of ‘not holding office’, as well as a more specific meaning ‘at Athens, a year during which there was no archon’. The reference in the latter is to the period of the Thirty. But when we investigate that Athenian

usage, we find that it is actually a version of (ii), an absence of any *properly constituted* office. For while, as Peter Krentz notes (1982: 58), ‘we can draw up at least a partial list of the magistracies that were filled under the Thirty’, including that of the eponymous archon, who was one Pythodorus, nevertheless in the lists of archons drawn up after the restoration of the democracy, the year 404 is given thus: ‘404 ἀναρχία (Πυθόδωρος)’ (Meiggs and Lewis 1988: 291).¹⁸ Given that Pythodorus had actually been installed in office, this reflects a normative later judgment by the Athenians that that act of installation in office was not valid because the regime of the Thirty was not properly constituted or governed – a point to which we shall return in our conclusion.

ii) on an absence of any *properly constituted* office. We have already given the example of the later (implicit) denial of the status of properly constituted office to the eponymous archonship filled under the Thirty. There is a more speculative, but intriguing, example of a similar use in the fifth century, by Aeschylus in the *Seven Against Thebes*. Antigone is speaking, perhaps being made by Aeschylus to respond to Sophocles’ Creon (in *Antigone*) condemning an attitude of *anarchia* that implicitly includes Antigone.¹⁹ Here in contrast Aeschylus’ Antigone seems to claim *anarchia* as her own attitude, though in a complex move that we must unpack. The Greek is οὐδ’ αἰσχύνομαι, ἔχουσ’ ἄπιστον τήνδ’ ἀναρχίαν πόλει (ll.1029-30 according to some editions, though numbering of this section of the play is not standardized owing to doubts about its authenticity). What does this mean?

Christopher Dawson observes in the notes to his translation and commentary (1970, ad loc.) that these lines are:

Perhaps ambiguous: (a) I am not ashamed to regard this unconstitutional civic

group as unworthy of obedience; or (b) I am not ashamed to show such disobedient lawlessness toward the city.

Dawson’s (a) is intriguing, though most editors take the line of (b), e.g. the more literal Tucker (1908) ‘Nor have I any shame to shew this stubborn disobedience to the state’ (lines he numbers as 1020-21), who comments ad loc. that *exousan...anarchian* here should be understood as “‘showing disobedience” (= οὐ πειθαρχοῦσα)’ and *apiston* as ‘= οὐ πειθομένην’, with the dative of πόλει depending on the whole line. This may be the best rendering of the Greek based on parallel constructions elsewhere, notwithstanding that it is rather hard to understand why Antigone would be describing herself in such pejorative terms, at the very moment when she is endeavoring to defend her actions. But even if we accept Tucker’s reading, which is close to Dawson’s (b), we still need to make sense of Antigone’s self-description of disobedience. It may not be too farfetched to suggest that her disobedience responds to the lack of properly constituted (and utilized) office in the state. By describing her attitude as one of *anarchia*, she may be imputing it to Creon’s regime as well: where there is no (properly constituted) officeholder, here in the general sense of ruler, there can be no such thing as (meaningful) obedience.

iii) the third meaning of *anarchia*, that of disobedience – as I shall argue, normally to an officeholder in sense (i) or (ii) above – may be found in the passage of Sophocles’ *Antigone* where Creon asserts ‘that there is no evil worse than *anarchia*’ (ἀναρχίας δὲ μείζον οὐκ ἔστιν κακόν, l. 672). The Theban ruler begins these reflections by stating the crucial importance of obedience (*kluein*, l. 666, literally ‘to hear’ in the sense of ‘comply with, obey’) to anyone whom the city should ‘set up’ (l. 666) as

ruler. This is echoed at the end of his speech in ‘obedience’ in the specific sense of ‘obedience to command’ (*peitharchia*, l. 676).²⁰ As these ideas of obedience to rulers and commanders, or more broadly in this quasi-archaic context officeholders, surround his general assertion of the evil of *anarchia*, it makes sense to interpret *anarchia* once again in the specific sense of disobedience to an officeholder here.²¹

iv) on ‘lawlessness, anarchy’: while LSJ give this as a distinct meaning of *anarchia*, I will argue that in context the passages they cite (Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (l. 883) and Thucydides (6.72)), together with others that bear this meaning, show a significant connection to the same senses involving office and officeholding (i-iii) that we have already discussed. More precisely, any sense of lawlessness attaching to *anarchia* is normally mediated through the specific mechanism of disobedience to officials.

Here is the *Agamemnon* passage (ll. 883-4), with Clytemnestra reflecting on ‘the chance that the people in clamorous revolt (*anarchia*) might overturn the Council’ (trans. Smyth 1926). What *anarchia* threatens to motivate here is that the people might disobey, indeed overturn, the Council — who are paradigmatic officeholders. Notice that the Greek makes no mention of laws or of lawlessness. Rather, what is specifically in view is disobedience to those holding office (*archē*), even if the implication is that this gives rise to a generalized disorder that one might label lawlessness.

Compare the Thucydides passage (6.72) that LSJ also cite for the ‘lawlessness’ meaning. There, Hermocrates, advising the Syracusan assembly on their response to the Athenian invasion launched in 415 BCE, observes the ironic way that a multiplicity of generals results in fomenting disobedience to command (*anarchian*) among the many. Here, the role

of military commander or general is what is specifically in question, and the fact that that role is an *office* constituted by election (*helesthai*) is stressed later in the same passage. Thus there is no specific reference to lawlessness here. Rather, once again, it is disobedience to properly constituted officials (senses ii and iii from earlier) that is in question, even if once again the implication is that this gives rise to a generalized disorder that one might label lawlessness.

A similar account can be given for the adjective *anarchos*, which is often translated ‘lawless’, for example in Euripides’ *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, where Clytemnestra is pleading with Achilles: ‘I, a woman, have come, as you see, to a camp of lawless (ἄναρχον) sailor-folk’ (ll. 913-14, trans. Coleridge 1891).²² LSJ suggest a comparison for *anarchon* here with Euripides’ *Hecuba* (l. 607), where Coleridge translated ναυτική τ’ ἀναρχία more generally as the ‘unruliness of sailors’.²³ In neither passage is the context fleshed out enough for us to have strong cause to challenge the translation ‘lawless’ in favor of what might be a more precise ‘disobedient to authority’. Yet in both passages, the specific reference is to sailors, who are precisely a group who should have, and be obedient to, commanding officers. Thus I think we have reason to suggest that in Euripides too, while the result may be generalized disorder that we tend to describe in English as ‘lawlessness’, the specific mechanism at work is most likely to be disobedience to commanding officers. In this light, LSJ’s definitions of both *anarchia* and *anarchos* as involving ‘lawlessness’ are best given more specific interpretations as ‘disobedience to officeholders / leaders / commanders’, where the meaning of *archē* as office – as in our senses (i), (ii), and (iii) – is very much in play.

Let us now turn to the relationship between anarchy and tyranny before Plato. This is a

relationship of opposition: anarchy being an absence of (properly constituted, whether in the sense of legitimate or of effective or both) leaders or officials, whereas tyranny was a condition characterized by an all too present and powerful leader or official. We find this manifested in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* at line 696, in the course of Athena's establishment of the Athenian tribunal to try Orestes:

‘Neither anarchy nor tyranny (τὸ μήτ' ἄναρχον μήτε δεσποτούμενον) — this I counsel my citizenWens to support and respect, and not to drive fear wholly out of the city.’ (trans. Smyth 1926)²⁴

Notice here the positioning of anarchy and tyranny as two extremes, both of which Athens' citizens should seek to avoid in their city. We find the same clear opposition being drawn between anarchy and tyranny in Isocrates' *Panegyricus* (4.39): ‘For, finding the Hellenes living without laws and in scattered abodes, some oppressed by tyrannies, others perishing through anarchy (καὶ τοὺς μὲν ὑπὸ δυναστειῶν ὑβριζομένους τοὺς δὲ δι' ἀναρχίαν ἀπολλυμένους) [...]’ (trans. Norlin 1928). Indeed, the idea of anarchy as an absence of obedience to ruling officials, while tyranny is a kind of excrescence of ruling authority (or at least power), makes intuitive sense. Yet as we shall now see, Plato's intervention in the *Republic* serves to align anarchy and tyranny rather than to oppose them. This occurs insofar as Socrates posits anarchy – in the degenerating democratic city – as the ‘origin’ (*archē*, in its other, though related, sense) from which tyranny in the city seems to him to ‘evolve’ (563d3-4, trans. Grube / Reeve).

Following an account of each of the constitutions treated so far that is oriented around

archē and *archein*, Socrates sums up the democratic constitution thus (trans. Grube / Reeve, modified where noted):

[Soc.]: ... καὶ εἴη, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡδεῖα πολιτεία καὶ ἄναρχος καὶ ποικίλη, ἰσότητά τινα ὁμοίως ἴσοις τε καὶ ἀνίσοις διανέμουσα.

[...] it would seem to be a pleasant constitution, one in which there is no such thing as office (*anarchos*) but there is great variety, and which distributes a sort of equality to both equals and unequals alike’ (558c2-4, modifying Grube/Reeve translation of the *anarchos* clause and what follows)²⁵

Plato here is not implying the democratic regime that he has described would lack office or officeholders. For there are manifestly (positions that look like) offices in the democratic constitution presented in *Republic VIII* (and indeed in real-life Greek democracies such as Syracuse, as we saw in Thucydides 6.72 above, as well as Athens and elsewhere): people are chosen by election or lot to fill those offices, lists of officeholders are drawn up, and so on. What there is not, however, is a widespread and ingrained attitude of obedience to rule that sustains the authority of those offices. On the contrary, in the democratic constitution, the relationship between rule and office is unstable; in the famous account that Socrates gives there to flesh out the democratic city, he says that no one is made to serve in office if they would prefer not to, while conversely, those who have been barred from office will nevertheless serve in it if they choose. And of course, this analysis of the democratic city is paralleled in the account of the democratic man, in whose genesis as a young man the lotus-eater desires call ‘insolence good breeding, anarchy freedom,

extravagance magnificence, and shamelessness courage' (560e).²⁶ An intolerance of rule characterizes democracy as a constitutional form both in the city and in the life of the representative democratic man.²⁷ The meaning of *anarchos* here must therefore be understood not as our earlier simple sense (i), a simple absence of office or officeholders, but in a combination of (ii) and (iii): to wit, disobedience which is so great as to be tantamount to a destruction of the proper constitution of office.

The characteristic of being *anarchos* already applies, in this sense, to the mature democracy. *Anarchia* then sets in full-blown in the account of the evolution of the tyrannical city out of the democratic one, which begins at 562a7-8. The democratic constitution undergoes 'change' (562c6) because of its 'insatiable desire for freedom', which makes the city as a whole (562c8 – no longer simply individuals within it) one that 'praises and honors, both in public and in private, rulers who behave like subjects and subjects who behave like rulers' (562d7-9, part of a larger passage discussed more fully in Lane, unpublished (a)). That is, the city as a whole loses its grip on the distinction between rulers and subjects (*archontas and archomenous*), which is tantamount to undermining the existence of ruling officials at all.

The result is that the spirit of freedom spreads into private households, breeding *anarchia* among the animals there (562e3-4), and more generally in the household relationships, in which fathers behave like sons and sons like fathers, resident aliens and foreign visitors are equated to citizens, and hierarchical relationships of obedience break down similarly between teachers and students, young and old, slave and free, men and women.²⁸ In each of these spheres, the established relationships of

obedience give way to disobedience, reaching the point that the recognized hierarchies and positions of authority break down altogether. While these are not 'offices' strictly speaking – a point that Plato marks by highlighting the turn to the household here – we see here the same dynamic of disobedience that is so widespread as to amount to the destruction of the very roles and positions to which expectations of obedience had previously attached.

The absence of obedience to properly constituted officials allows for the evolution of an improper one, as it were, or more precisely, for the destruction of proper positions of office altogether, supplanted by the entirely personal and arbitrary rule of the tyrant. For it is striking that nouns for 'office', prevalent in the account of each regime in Book VIII up to this point, disappear from the description of both the tyrannical city and the tyrannical man. The tyrant is described as suspecting people of 'not favoring his rule (*archein*)' (567a6), but as according only 'positions of power (*tōn sugkatastēsantōn*)' (567b1) to his henchmen – and those soon to be purged at that; other than that one phrase, those on the tyrant's side are consistently described only as those serving as his 'bodyguard (*doruphorōn*)', e.g. at 567d6, rather than in the terms for 'office' used for all of the previous regimes in Book VIII.

Noting in the conclusion to Book VIII that he and Adeimantus have by this point 'adequately described how tyranny evolves from democracy and what it's like when it has come into being' (569a6-7), Socrates makes a new beginning at the start of Book IX 'to consider the tyrannical man himself, how he evolves from a democrat, what he is like when he has come into being, and whether he is wretched or blessedly happy' (571a1-3).²⁹ Lacking the space here to consider this account in full, we must leap to the role of *anarchia* in such a man's

character (placed in the section corresponding to ‘what he is like when he has come into being’, which stretches from 573c10 – ‘But what way does he live?’ – to 576d6 where they turn to the question of happiness).

Famously, Socrates specifies that the tyrannical man is now subjected to *doxa*, opinions or beliefs, that were formerly — when he lived under the laws and his father and had a democratic constitution within him — freed only in sleep (574d5-e2, closely following Grube/Reeve). Now these *doxa* — presumably those that value the most extreme and shameful pleasures and appetites, and disregard anything but their attainment by means however unlawful or violent — ‘rule together with’ erotic love or *erōs* (574d7-8), which ‘lives like a tyrant within him, in complete anarchy and lawlessness, as his sole ruler (ἀλλὰ τυραννικῶς ἐν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἔρως ἐν πάσῃ ἀναρχία καὶ ἀνομία ζῶν, ἅτε αὐτὸς ὦν μόναρχος)’ (575a1-2, introducing comma after ‘lawlessness’ absent from Grube and Reeve, just to clarify the English sense).

Are *anarchia* and *anomia* simply functioning exegetically here? The contextual evidence for other uses of *anarchia* both outside and within Plato that we have been considering would suggest not. Instead, the idea that *erōs* can be the sole ruler (*monarchos*) of the tyrannical man while its reign is characterized by utter *anarchia* (as well as *anomia*) — is meant to point up an oxymoron: that a ruler within the soul which rules anarchically cannot really be said to rule at all. I would suggest that in light of the absence of specifically constituted offices in the tyranny (tyrannical city), the same is true at that level as well: a ruler — the tyrannical individual — who rules anarchically cannot really be said to rule at all. Thus

tyranny grows out of anarchy both within the democracy and in the innermost relationships, in household and soul, of those individuals living under a degenerating democracy and then of the tyrannical individual himself (or himself and his henchmen, as hinted at occasionally throughout this part of the text). Once again, the interplay of senses (ii) and (iii) of *anarchia* is in play: disobedience, or the absence of obedience, can become so profound as to yield an abolition of genuine rule and office altogether.

In closing we may return to the separate meaning given by LSJ for *anarchia* as applied to the absence of properly constituted officials under the Thirty. As we have seen, the restored Athenian democracy seems rapidly to have concluded that the rule of the Thirty — notwithstanding its having been replete with seeming officeholders as it was — should instead be recorded in the city’s annals as a period of ‘anarchy’. But when did the Athenians and others come to describe that ‘anarchy’ as also a ‘tyranny’? When, that is, did the ‘Thirty’ begin to be described as the ‘Thirty Tyrants’ and their rule as a ‘tyranny’?³⁰

Our earliest explicit references are in Aristotle or his school: in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*³¹ and in [Aristotle] *Athenaiōn Politeia*.³² That is to say that the earliest ‘Thirty Tyrants’ explicit locution is post-Platonic, while Xenophon’s making play with the language of tyranny put into the mouths of players of the time (*Hell.* 2.3.16, 49) is probably post-Platonic (or at least written toward the end of Plato’s life) as well.³³ None of the orators use the name even in describing the most violent and shocking aspects of the Thirty’s domination³⁴. Perhaps it was Plato whose forging of a counterintuitively close relationship between anarchy and tyranny made possible the equation between the Athenian-denoted ‘anarchy’ of the Thirty and their posthumous condemnation as ‘tyrants’?

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NOTES

1 For general orientation to methods in the history of political thought, see the essays revised and collected in Skinner 2002: Vol. I, as contrasted with Bevir 1999; for my own views on Bevir, Skinner, and method more generally, see variously Lane 2000, 2002, 2003, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b. David Wootton insightfully remarks that the 'Cambridge School' approaches taken by Skinner, John Dunn, and J.G.A. Pocock, among others, 'represent merely the application of the methods and value of professional history to the history of ideas' (1984, 12).

2 This latter group for the most part are far from sharing the general skepticism about attributions of authorial

positions expressed by the former group, populated for its part by, say, deconstructionists. On the contrary, No-Attributionist cases often revolve around contrasting the putatively special difficulties or impossibilities of attributing views to Plato with the purportedly unproblematic case of doing so for other authors. Michael Frede, for example, claims that other philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine who wrote dialogues did so ‘in such a way as to make it clear which theses and which arguments they endorse, e.g. by introducing themselves as speakers in the dialogue’ – and they also wrote other forms of works that we take to be less opaque in setting out the positions with which they are taken to identify (1992, 203). But surely anyone reading Cicero’s *De Re Publica* will at least be puzzled by the standing of Scipio’s claim there that monarchy is the best form of rule, given Cicero’s known devotion to the mixed constitution of the Roman republic.

3 For ‘anonymity’, see the title of Press (ed.) 2000: *Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Platonic Anonymity*. For ‘silence’, see Kosman 1992, titled ‘Silence and imitation in the Platonic dialogues’. Kosman claims that such putative silence ‘in philosophical texts is of a different order, and more remarkable’ than literary authors [emphasis original]. This is a claim that needs more defense than he gives it. For example, the straightforward identification of an author with his written words is not always possible even for seemingly paradigmatic cases; Kosman’s chosen example of Aristotle as paradigmatic of an unproblematically unsilent philosophical author, for example, takes no account of the subtleties of Aristotle’s relationship to the *endoxa*. Conversely, the silence of literary authors, among the paradigms of whom for Kosman is Aristophanes, is also generative of significant debate, for example as to his putative political intentions as a dramatist (Sidwell 2009). Finally, as the epigraph to this paper should remind us, the line between ‘philosophical’ and ‘literary’ texts is far from clear; Plato has in a number of influential traditions been read as more of a literary figure than a philosophical one (Hunter 2012).

4 By contrast with the embarrassment of riches that we possess for Plato is the relative patchiness of survival of other classical Greek texts: not all the works by the ‘big three’ tragedians, no other ‘Old Comedies’ in full than those of Aristophanes, and of a large set of ancient *Sōkratikoī logoi*, only examples of those of Aeschines of Sphettos survived in any considerable bulk along with Plato’s and Xenophon’s (with fragments or reports of others). The contextualist project that I pursue in the second part of the paper, seeking to assess Plato’s debts to and transformations of patterns of thinking already extant by his time, can only attain provisional conclusions therefore.

5 Today, the authenticity of the ‘letters’ is widely doubted, although this was not the case in antiquity, it seems, before the reporting (in the *Prolegomenon to Plato’s Philosophy* ch.26) of some doubts about Letter 12 expressed by Proclus. For discussion of the Seventh Letter’s claim, perhaps the best founded, that is cautious about authenticity but positive about its value, see Brunt 1993; for outright

rejection of its authenticity, see Burnyeat - Frede 2015. James C. Klagge wisely cautions: ‘The [seventh] letter purports to represent Plato speaking in *propria persona*, but it does not follow that he is doing so’ (1992, 6).

6 The Thrasyllan canon includes thirty-five dialogues, plus the group of letters as a thirty-sixth item (I leave aside the question of the authenticity of all of the dialogues therein). This number of twenty-four is by my count, though including several dialogues the authenticity of which is either disputed or widely rejected today, and comprises *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Phaedrus*, *Alcibiades I*, *Alcibiades II*, *Hipparchus*, *Theages*, *Laches*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Clitophon*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Minos*, *Laws*, *Epinomis*. Charalabopoulos counts twenty-three but does not list them (2012, 57). *Epinomis* is the only one that consists of pure mimetic dialogue without any narration recounting other dialogue.

7 On Socrates in particular as a narrator, see Schultz 2013.

8 G.R.F. Ferrari writes in contrast that ‘The live voice that we hear is our own – the voice of the interpretive performer – not Plato’s’ (1987, 211).

9 Even Gordon prefaces her remarks above by saying, ‘In one sense, of course, it’s all Plato [...] But in another sense, he erases himself through these very devices’ (1999, 8). My point here may be put as pressing her to explain the ‘sense’ in which ‘it’s all Plato’ after all.

10 Diogenes Laertius 3.52: ‘Now where he has a firm grasp Plato expounds his own view [no Greek word corresponding to ‘view’ here] and refutes the false one, but, if the subject is obscure, he suspends judgement. His own views (τῶν αὐτῷ δοκούντων) are expounded by four persons, Socrates, Timaeus, the Athenian Stranger, the Eleatic Stranger. These strangers are not, as some hold, Plato and Parmenides, but imaginary characters without names, for, even when Socrates and Timaeus are the speakers, it is Plato’s doctrines that are laid down [‘doctrines that are laid down’ translates δογματίζει].’ While τῶν αὐτῷ δοκούντων is here, by George Hicks in the Loeb, translated as ‘his own views’, it is important to recognize that it is a broad expression, which could refer to the contents of his thinking, supposing, its seeming so to him, and so on. Later ancient authors, such as Aulus Gellius, had no qualms about attributing things written in the dialogues, including by Platonic characters, as being what Plato ‘says’ himself: see Zadorojnyi 2010, citing Gell. 14.3.4 and 13.19.2 on Plato, and comparing these locutions in 1.1.1, 17.11.6, and elsewhere).

11 Even ‘speaking for’ or ‘representing’ as a relationship is seldom as straightforward as mouthpiece absolutism would suggest. The well-known principal-agent dilemma revolves precisely around the capacity for authorized spokespersons and their principals to diverge. More generally, the problem of attributing actions from agents back to their putative (because authorizing) authors is a fundamental issue in political theory.

12 Frede 1992, albeit that he observes that an argument may be one that a respondent is trying on, or would not

have thought of or claimed to be committed to without the intervention of the questioner, and may also in the aporetic dialogues be one that he is eventually led to recognize as contradicting his original beliefs (1992, 206 and *passim*).

13 Non-question narrative structure constitutes the bulk of the *Timaeus*, *Menexenus* and *Critias*; the anomalous overall form of the *Apology*; and recurrent episodes of reported speech or other forms of short monologues, such as Socrates' report of Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*.

14 Here, my methodological concerns cut across some of the more standard divides in the literature, many of which have become so sophisticated in each competing position as almost to cease to be meaningful divides at all: such as developmentalist versus unitarian, or literary versus philosophical interpretative approaches. For the latter, one reason not to be excessively rigorist in the methodology of studying Plato is that partisans of seemingly opposed methods often agree in practice on substantive points. Compare Ruby Blondell's stance, identifying herself with the "literary" camp' of Plato interpreters who endorse 'the fundamental literary-critical axiom that every detail of a text contributes to the meaning of the whole' (2002, 4), with that of M.M. McCabe, generally viewed as belonging to the 'philosophical' camp of interpreters, who nevertheless endorses the very similar 'default position that Plato wrote nothing in vain' (2008, 99).

15 I see the question of the relationship of Plato to Platonism as a different Collingwoodian question or project from the question of the interpretation of the dialogues themselves, at least in the first instance, though I recognize that this approach will be controversial for those like Gerson who see the two as really one.

16 Pace Blondell 2002, 6, who remarks on a 'paucity of cross-references in his [Plato's] dialogues', consider McCabe 2008, 110 who details the 'extraordinarily large intertextuality of other dialogues' beyond her principal examples of the *Republic* and *Timaeus*.

17 For *anarchia*: Herodotus (9.23) clearly invokes the absence of a military commander (see also e.g. Xen. *Anab.* 3.2.29); in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* (906), it is harder to determine whether a generalized sense of 'lord, master', or a specific sense of 'king', attaches to *anax*, the predicted presence of which – as the herald ironically assures the suppliant women – means that they need not fear a condition of *anarchia* where they are being taken. For *anarchos*: the first meaning in LSJ is similarly 'without head or chief', stretching back to Homer (*Il.* 2.703, where the sense is clearly a military commander in battle whose death does not leave his men as 'the leaderless' (*hoi anarchoi*) because the dead man's younger brother immediately assumes command). Xen. *Cyr.* 3.3.11 is not mentioned in LSJ but has a similar meaning.

18 See also Xen. *HG* 2.3.1: 'the Athenians...designate the year as without an archon (*ἀναρχίαν τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν καλοῦσιν*); at 2.3.11, Xenophon refers to the Thirty themselves establishing a 'Council and the other officials as they saw fit'. Translations from Krentz 1989.

19 Hutchinson 1985, ad loc. (l.1030: *ἀναρχίαν*), for both

this as an 'attitude' and the connection with Creon (his note in full: 'an attitude, as at *Ag.* 883 (in my opinion), and elsewhere. Creon uses the word with Antigone in mind at *S. Ant.* 672, and he describes her as *ἀπιστήσασα* at 656. We are hardly compelled to infer that this author is borrowing from Sophocles. There is, of course, no reason why he should not use Sophocles as well as his primary source').

20 He also invokes both ruling and being ruled as capacities appropriate to a good ruler (*archein...archesthai*, *Il.* 668-9), a passage that should be read alongside Aristotle's more famous invocation of 'ruling and being ruled' in *Politics* Book 3.

21 Notice that lawbreaking has been mentioned a couple of lines before, at l. 663, but separately and with its own distinct wording.

22 I have taken this citation of the Coleridge translation from Perseus. Admittedly, it is a rather old-fashioned translation; compare 'camp full of unruly sailors' instead in Morwood 1999, *ad loc.*

23 I have taken this citation of the Coleridge translation from Perseus, which reports it as reprinted in Oates O'Neill 1938. Compare again Morwood's translation (2001, *ad loc.*), 'the sailors' indiscipline'.

24 As LSJ comment, here *to...anarchon* functions grammatically as the equivalent of the noun *anarchia*, so that this usage of the adjective at least can be expected to closely track uses of the substantive.

25 This focus on rule and office in *Republic* VIII is the subject of Lane unpublished (a), from which parts of this section of the paper are adapted.

26 Contrast Johnstone 2013, who reads *anarchos* as meaning 'not ruled in a stable and enduring way' (140; see also *passim*), but does not see that the very notion of rule is dissolved in Plato's use of it here.

27 Compare Aristotle's remarks on the way that the rich can come to feel 'contempt' for the 'disorder and anarchy (*τῆς ἀταξίας καὶ ἀναρχίας*)' within democracies, with examples of Thebes, Megara, and Syracuse, at *Pol.* 1302b27-33.

28 Compare Plato, *Laws* 639a ff., which gives way to a broader discussion about the need for rulers in every form of association, and more specifically, Aristotle *Pol.* 1319b28ff. on '*anarchia*' among slaves and women and children as 'democratic' characteristics of a tyranny. While one commentator glosses this as 'independence' among the slaves, I think it can also be read as lack of obedience to authorities.

29 This is consistent with the Book VIII pattern of describing each constitution, both its nature and how it comes to be, and then the corresponding individual or man, both how he comes to be and how he lives – adding to this the final judgment about happiness promised from Book II.

30 This question goes strangely unaddressed in the literature; there is no attention to it given in the account of the rule of the Thirty in Krentz 1982, nor in the discussions of Athenian memory thereof in Loraux 2002 and Wolpert 2002.

31 Mitchell 2006: 182, cites this passage, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, 1401a35-6: 'Again, one may quote what Poly-crates said of Thrasybulus, that he deposed thirty tyrants (τριάκοντα τυράννους).'

32 *Ath. Pol.* 41.2, on which that text's editor P.J. Rhodes (1981) comments *ad loc.*: 'Except in this summary, the earliest direct reference to the Thirty as tyrants is in D.S. xiv.2.i, but X. H. 2.iii.16, 49 comes close to making Critias and Theramenes describe the regime as a tyranny[...] – descriptions we may contrast, as he observes, with *Ath. Pol.* 53.1, which refers to 'the oligarchy of the Thirty'.

33 Krentz 1995: 4-5, on the dates of composition of the *Hel-lenika*: '[t]he current majority view[...] is that [...] he wrote the rest [apart from I-II.3.10, the 'continuation' of Thucydides' *History*) as a continuous whole in the 350s'.

34 Lysis, 'Against Eratosthenes' (12.35) prophesies that if the defendant, one of the Thirty, is acquitted, then he and his surviving colleagues will have become *turannoí* in the city, but this is not equivalent to naming the *Thirty* during their reign as such.

The Value of Rule in Plato's Dialogues: A Reply to Melissa Lane

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ABSTRACT

I examine Melissa Lane's claim that *antianarchia* is an element of Plato's political thought. Plato's *antianarchia*, she claims, is his profound rejection of political anarchy and corresponding general commitment to the value of rulers and office-holders. I argue that while Socrates is committed to *antianarchia* in the *Republic* and other dialogues, he is not committed to it in the Socratic dialogues. Where we might expect *antianarchia* in those dialogues we instead find Socrates simply committed to the value of being lawful and the value of being ruled by those with knowledge. I suggest that we can think of the Socratic dialogues as having a distinctive place within the structure of Plato's corpus without thinking that they were composed earlier in his life or that they served a specific pedagogical function. I end by suggesting that what is most interesting about Plato's *antianarchia* is how he develops it in the

Republic, which we miss if we are focused on Plato's general commitments, as opposed to the views he develops in specific dialogues.

Keywords: Plato, Anarchy, Rule, *Republic*, *Apology*, *Crito*, Socratic Dialogues, Developmentalism, Pedagogical reading, Chronology.

In her paper Melissa Lane defends in two-parts the claim that we can interpret Plato's political theory. First, she argues that it is possible to interpret any aspect of Plato's thought at all. Then she argues that we can interpret his political thought, in particular, by defending the more specific claim that one central element of his political thought is 'his profound rejection of political anarchy' (p. 60), which she calls his *antianarchia*. She provides an insightful philological argument that *anarchia* involves not having rulers, rather than simply lacking laws, and so his *antianarchia* is his support for having rulers and office-holders. In these comments I focus on how to think of *antianarchia* as an element of his political thought, and in doing so raise some methodological questions about how to read Plato's dialogues.

Lane says that *antianarchia* 'is asserted as a commitment of Plato's *political* thought, by which I mean the political relationships among, and within, embodied individuals in an era devoid of direct divine rule' (p. 63). At the same time, she acknowledges that *antianarchia* applies to the embodied soul as well as the *polis*, insofar as they have parallel structures (p. 63). In the *Republic*, *anarchia* is bad for the city and souls alike; in both, the different parts should follow a ruler. *Antianarchia* is, of course, merely one example of a norm in the *Republic* that applies to both the city and the soul. Justice is the most prominent example; instead of being a specifically psychic norm or a specifically political one, it applies at a broader level that encompasses both.

Does the generality of Plato's *antianarchia* pose a problem for thinking that it is distinctive of his political thought? I do not think so. Instead, let me suggest that this generality itself is a distinctive feature of Plato's political thought. It is a distinctive thesis about politics to claim that some of its central norms are not

unique to it, but are in fact more general. Of course, if Plato had no notion of politics, then he could not appreciate this as a distinctive thesis about it.¹ But one of the main ideas in the *Republic* is that at least some of the same norms apply to the city and the soul. Thus, while *antianarchia* is not a commitment of Plato's political theory *per se*, it is part of a distinctive position about politics: viewing at least some of its crucial norms as applying at a broader level. You might worry that having these broad norms downplays the importance of the *polis*. But there is no more reason to think this than there is to think that having such norms downplays the importance of the soul.

Lane's claim is not simply about the *Republic*; she claims that *antianarchia* is a distinctive commitment of Plato's political thought in general. On Lane's methodological picture we should, following Sedley, view the dialogues as a sort of Plato thinking aloud, and at the same time, following Gerson, think that there are certain basic commitments and patterns of argument that Plato has throughout the dialogues (p. 61-63). For Lane, calling these 'commitments' is compatible with thinking that they are high exploratory and non-dogmatic.² Nonetheless, she thinks that 'however firm or conversely exploratory and open-ended were Plato's positive intellectual commitments, there are certain patterns of argument that one would never find reason in reading the dialogues to attribute to him' (p. 63). She thus thinks that we can define Plato's general commitments as the denial of those things he argues against and never argues for. The question then, given this approach, is whether Plato is consistently against *anarchia*, or only in certain dialogues.

In order to answer that question, it will be useful to know why Plato is committed to *antianarchia*. He certainly seems committed across the dialogues to the value of having one's

actions guided by knowledge, and in particular to the value of being ruled by knowledge rather than ignorance. But this only supports rule by those who have knowledge; it does not provide a general reason to accept rule. The *Republic* does seem to provide reasons to accept rule in general. It seems that to the extent that things are ruled, they are harmonious and orderly, and this is good. The way that Lane puts this is that ‘the goodness of order [...] animate[s] the value of *antianarchia*’ (p. 63). This provides reason to view any rule as good, to the extent it imposes some order, not only rule by reason – although that would certainly be best. That some rule is better than none is clear in the criticism of democracy and tyranny that are found in book VIII. People are not ruled by knowledge in an oligarchy, but it is still better than the democracy and tyranny, with their attendant *anarchia*.

Is Socrates committed to the value of order across the dialogues? In the *Apology* he reports that he was ordered to round up Leon of Salamis, but refused on the grounds that doing so would be unjust and unholy (32c-d). This is, of course, compatible with a broad commitment to the value of order and rule, but Socrates’ focus is entirely on the overriding value of doing what is just, regardless of what the rulers say. In opposing the wishes of the democracy he says that ‘I thought I should run any risk on the side of law and justice rather than join you, for fear of prison or death, when you were engaged in an unjust course’ (trans. Grube in Cooper 1997, 32b-c). He does say that it is wicked and shameful to disobey one’s superior, whether god or man (32b8-c2). But this comment forces us to reflect on what it is for someone genuinely to be a superior, especially given Socrates’ refusal to obey when ordered to round up Leon of Salamis. The natural Socratic suggestion is that a genuine superior is someone who has the relevant knowledge.³

The *Crito* is a trickier case. There Socrates faces a concrete decision, which is different from the project in *Republic* VIII. Nonetheless, he bases his decision on general principles, which are broadly in line with those in the *Apology*. Socrates’ emphasis, as in the *Apology*, is on the importance of law and justice, not rulers *per se*. Given Lane’s important point that *anarchia* is about rulers in particular, not lawlessness, it would be a mistake to think of the *Crito* as animated by *antianarchia* as opposed to *antianomia*. He says in both the *Apology* and *Crito* that if you follow someone with knowledge you will be helped and if you follow someone without, you will be harmed (25b, 47a-d). The only reason to do what a ruler or office-holder tells you to is either (1) this is required to be lawful and just, or (2) this person possess knowledge, and so will guide you well. If you follow a ruler who lacks knowledge, you do not do so because their rule itself is good for the city or your soul, but because to do otherwise would be unjust and harmful to your soul.

To be clear, Socrates is not positively arguing that we should embrace *anarchia* in the *Apology*. But it is too low of a bar to say that we should attribute to Plato any idea that he argues for in one dialogue and does not actively argue against in another. The entire focus in the *Apology* and *Crito* is on doing what is lawful, just, and guided by knowledge. There is no indication of an independent value to rule or order, and there are frequent claims that these other things should entirely guide one’s actions. By contrast, consider Plato’s antimaterialism, which Gerson takes to be a central element of Platonism. It is true that in many dialogues, e.g., the *Laches*, there are no antimaterialist claims, but nor are there claims where antimaterialism would have been natural to discuss, given the context. The *Laches* is silent on materialism because it is simply not relevant,

whereas *antianarchia* would be relevant in the *Apology* and *Crito* and we are given different reasons and arguments instead.

Antianarchia seems to characterize Plato's so-called middle and late period dialogues, rather than the Socratic dialogues.⁴ In the middle and late dialogues order and structure are valued, even if they are not guided by knowledge.⁵ In the Socratic dialogues, rule is valued as long as it is rule by someone with knowledge, but the order and structure provided by non-knowledgeable rule have no particular value. If this is correct, what should we make of it? On the unitarian side, we could simply say that in different dialogues Socrates pursues different interests and arguments. Perhaps in some dialogues there is no sign of *antianarchia*, but that does not mean he ever changed his mind. On the developmentalist side, we could say that Plato's views evolved from his earlier, Socratic views to the middle period. We could then discuss how, if at all, Plato's views change in the late dialogues.

Recently there has been weariness about the whole debate between unitarians and developmentalists. But if we abandon these approaches, what should we replace them with? One tendency has been to simply focus on Plato's views in particular dialogues. This can be quite productive, since within a given dialogue we can see the unfolding of developed lines of reasoning for particular views, between a stable set of interlocutors. But it seems unnecessarily restrictive to avoid talking about views across the dialogues. Patterns of reasoning in the *Euthydemus* and *Meno* or the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, seem too closely connected to artificially refuse to draw on dialogues to tell a broader account; at the same time, the apparent differences between dialogues surely warrant consideration. The cross references Plato puts between the dialogues, both in the outer frames and within the discussions, suggest the he wants us to read them alongside each other.

One way to discuss the differences between dialogues without a developmentalist account is with a pedagogical one. The idea is, for example, that Plato intended readers to read a Socratic dialogue that asks a 'what is it?' question, like the *Laches*, before reading the *Phaedo*, and a dialogue that contrasts forms with sensible things, like the *Phaedo*, before reading the *Parmenides*. This is compatible with thinking that the *Laches* or *Phaedo* could have been written after the *Parmenides*. However, while I think it is very plausible that Plato wanted to structure the dialogues in some such way, we do not need to rely on such a hypothesis to see an important structure in the dialogues. Regardless of the order that Plato wrote the dialogues or how he intended us to read them, there is a structure to the ideas, arguments, and interactions within them. Ideas are mentioned in one dialogue and developed in others, similar arguments are presented in different ways, interlocutors respond to Socrates in different ways, and, I would argue, ideas are accepted in some dialogues and rejected in others. There is a philosophically interesting story to tell about how forms are discussed in the *Euthyphro*, described differently and further developed in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, and then discussed in a new way in the *Sophist* and *Philebus*. And there's an interesting story about why and how it is important to be ruled, and the role of law, in the *Apology* and *Crito*, which is further developed in the *Republic*, and finally the *Statesman* and *Laws*. While it is nearly impossible to discuss these things without using temporal vocabulary, and suggesting that Plato did it for this purpose, we need not be committed to this. Tracing these intellectual lines is one of the most philosophically rewarding ways we can interact with Plato's dialogues, and we can do this without committing ourselves to the order in which he wrote the dialogues or to his intentions in writing them.

If we take this approach, focusing on the web of ideas and arguments that connects the dialogues, is there something important to be gained from determining Plato's commitments in general, as opposed to his commitments in particular dialogues, or how his commitments develop across dialogues? What do we gain from a general understanding of Plato's political theory, where this is a theory compatible with what he says across the dialogues, not simply in certain ones? Perhaps such a theory provides us with the guiding undercurrent of Platonic thought: that wisdom is the key virtue, or that it is important to answer 'what is it?' questions, or that everyone seeks the good, or that our actions should be guided by knowledge. But it is not clear that this undercurrent is fundamental to Plato's thought in any given dialogue, or it contains the most important ideas in the dialogues. Arguably the most interesting and exciting ideas in the *Republic* are the ones that are only found there, and denied elsewhere. Ideas that we attribute to Plato *simpliciter* will play an important role in our overall understanding of the corpus, but we should be careful not to over emphasize them.

With this methodological picture sketched, let me return to *antianarchia* and its role in the *Republic*. I want to suggest a slightly different picture than Lane's. She claims that before Plato tyranny and anarchy were opposed, whereas Plato aligns them (p. 67). However, I do not think that that is suggested by the passage Lane quotes from Isocrates' *Panegyricus* (4.39):

For, finding the Hellenes living without laws and in scattered abodes (Παραλαβοῦσα γὰρ τοὺς Ἑλληνας ἀνόμως ζῶντας καὶ σποράδην οἰκοῦντας), some oppressed by tyrannies, others perishing through anarchy (καὶ τοὺς μὲν

ὑπὸ δυναστειῶν ὑβριζομένους τοὺς δὲ δι' ἀναρχίαν ἀπολλυμένους) (trans. Norlin 1928)

Note that both those that are oppressed by tyrannies and those perishing through anarchy are living without laws (ἀνόμως ζῶντας), and so tyranny and anarchy are aligned here. In fact, Lane's philological examination of *anarchia* helps us appreciate what Isocrates is saying. *Anarchia* is not simple lawlessness; it is the lack of a ruler or officeholder. Isocrates is here relying on the idea that there are two different ways people can live without laws: they can do so because they lack a leader, or they can have a leader but one with no regard for law – a tyrant. Thus, it is not a Platonic innovation to align anarchy and tyranny; Isocrates, and quite possibly others, see them as both involving lawlessness. Is there anything innovative, then, about Plato's connection between anarchy and tyranny in the *Republic*?

Let me suggest that the innovation is that the political anarchy of democracy leads to the psychic anarchy of the tyrant. The innovation is not only to see the same problem, *anarchia*, in the city and the soul, but to give a deeper account of what brings about tyranny, namely an underlying psychic condition of *anarchia* (574e-75a, 565d-66a), which is the result of living in the *anarchia* of a democratic city (562e-63e). Thus, what is distinctive about Plato's alignment of anarchy and tyranny in the *Republic* is how it fits both into the city-soul analogy and into the interaction between city and soul. And this, of course, is a distinctive feature of the *Republic*, not found in other dialogues. There is a danger that in looking for a commitment that we can attribute to Plato *simpliciter* we miss what is most interesting about *antianarchia* in the *Republic*.⁶

NOTES

1 By contrast, I take it that even though Plato has commitments relevant to the philosophy of mind, he does not have a notion of the mind, and so could not be aware that his commitments are about this.

2 Lane suggests that the term 'view' can sound dogmatic (in the modern English sense of 'dogmatic', p. 61), and so instead she tends to talk about Plato's 'commitments'. To my ear, 'commitment' sounds more dogmatic than 'view', but in any event, the point is that we need not think of Socrates as dogmatically committed to these positions.

3 Even if Socrates thinks it is wicked to disobey one's conventional superior, this need not mean that obeying them would be good for you. It may simply be that disobeying them is unjust and unlawful.

4 In most of the so-called Socratic dialogues Socrates does not mention the value of order and harmony – the notable exception being the *Gorgias* (503e-504d), which is frequently thought of as a transitional dialogue.

5 Although, if what is ultimately valuable is order and harmony, it might seem that this could be brought about with less of a role for rulers. Arguably, the *Laws* is engaged in precisely such a project.

6 I would like to thank Emily Fletcher and Richard Kraut for comments on an earlier draft of these comments.

Dialectic in Plato's Late Dialogues

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ABSTRACT

Plato's method of hypothesis is initiated in the *Meno*, is featured in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, and is further developed in the *Theaetetus*. His method of collection and division is mentioned in the *Republic*, is featured in the *Phaedrus*, and is elaborated with modifications in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Both methods aim at definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In the course of these developments, the former method is shown to be weak in its treatment of sufficient conditions, and the latter is shown to be comparably weak in its treatment of necessary conditions. A third method, which avoids these difficulties, is introduced in the first part of the *Parmenides* and is applied in connection with the eight hypotheses that follow. This application yields a demonstration of serious shortcomings both in historical Eleaticism and in the Eleatically-inspired theory

of Forms in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, along with a demonstration of comparative strengths in historical Pythagoreanism and in the Pythagorean-inspired theory of Forms in the *Statesman* and the *Philebus*.

Keywords: method of hypothesis, method of collection and division, early theory of Forms, late theory of Forms, eight hypotheses of the *Parmenides*, developmentalism, interpreting Plato's dialogues.

In the context of the Divided Line, dialectic is described as the ability to rise from hypotheses to a non-hypothetical first principle and thence to proceed downward to a conclusion. This description is repeated just before the sequence on the curriculum for the guardians, where dialectic is said to be the only method that advances from hypotheses to find confirmation (for its conclusions) in the first principle itself. Through reasoning (*logos*, 532A7, 533C4, 534B4) of this sort, Socrates says, dialectic enables one to perceive the essence of each thing, including the essential nature of the Good itself (*auto ho estin agathon*: 532B1). This much should be familiar to any careful reader of the *Republic*.

Interspersed within these passages, however, are hints of quite a different method that readers are more likely to overlook. This other method (*methodos*: 531D1) draws out the mutual association and kinship (*tēn allēlōn koinōnian [...] kai xuggeneian*: 531D1-2) of the subjects being studied, and shows how they are collected together (*xullogisthē*: 531D2). While discussing the curriculum for the guardians a few pages later, Socrates adds that someone who can view things in their connections (*sunoptikos*: 537C7) is a dialectician. This reads like the procedure of collection practiced in several later dialogues. The companion procedure of division, moreover, is mentioned in Book V as part of the argument that women are no less suited than men to be guardians. Avoidance of eristic arguments requires the ability to divide according to Forms (*kat' eidē diairoumenoi*: 454A6). This ability, Socrates says in effect, is a necessary ingredient of dialectic.

It is puzzling to find both the method of hypothesis and the method of collection and division presented in a single dialogue. The method of hypothesis is actively pursued in the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus*, whereas collection

and division figure prominently in the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*. But in the *Republic* they somehow come together. My purpose in this paper is to show how these two methods develop in their respective dialogues, how they interact along the way, and how they finally become a single method in the *Parmenides*. For this purpose I shall assume a general familiarity with the dialogues in question and limit textual references to specific passages that contribute directly to my argument. The argument of this paper overall represents a method of developmental analysis which I shall briefly describe by way of conclusion.

The method of hypothesis, I believe, is an outgrowth of the procedure of elenchus in the *Meno*. As practiced on both the slave boy and his master, elenchus involves leading the respondent to accept certain positions from which Socrates deduces inconsistencies or otherwise unacceptable consequences. In the *Phaedo*, the positions accepted by the respondent are replaced by hypotheses deliberately laid down by the investigator, who in this particular context is concerned with the nature of causation (*aitias*, 99D1, 100B3). The investigator's first task is to test the consequences of the hypothesis for consistency. Consistency, we are to understand, is a necessary condition for the truth of the hypothesis. If its consequences are inconsistent, the initial hypothesis is replaced by another which undergoes the consistency test in turn. This process is repeated until the hypothesis at hand (H') has been shown to be consistent and hence possibly true.

The next step is to proceed upward, as it were, to a more general hypothesis (H'') that entails H'. If H'' passes the consistency test, the process moves on to increasingly more general hypotheses each entailing the lower-level hypotheses previously shown to be consistent. The

process continues until a comprehensive hypothesis is found that is adequate (or sufficient, *hikanon*: 101E1), in the sense of its truth being unproblematic in the context of investigation. Truth of this adequate posit is sufficient for the truth of H'. The investigation is complete when H' has been shown to meet both necessary and sufficient conditions for truth. In a way far short of pellucid, this method figures in the *Phaedo*'s final proof of immortality.

The method of hypothesis laid out in the *Phaedo* is the direct antecedent of the movement from the penultimate to the ultimate level of the Divided Line in the *Republic*. Both levels here are explicitly concerned with hypotheses. The penultimate level is that of discursive thought (*dianoian*: 511E1), typified by mathematics, which lays down hypotheses and proceeds downward (*katabainē*: 511B9) to conclusions. Inquiry on this level deals with consistency, coherence, and perhaps other necessary conditions for truth. Sufficient conditions are left to the ultimate level, that of intelligence (*noēsin*: 511E1), which is the faculty of dialectic. The dialectician begins with hypotheses and proceeds upward (*anōterō*: 511A6) to the non-hypothetical first principle (*archēn anupotheton*: 510B7). This first principle is non-hypothetical both in the sense of not being posited and in the sense of being the ultimate ground of truth. As such, it is sufficient for the truth of conclusions derived from it. In the context of the *Republic*, the task of the dialectician is to capture the essence of each thing it investigates in a statement (*logou*: 532A7) satisfying both necessary and sufficient conditions of truth.

Unlike the *Phaedo*, the *Republic* provides no illustration of the method it describes. Given the illusive character of the first principle, this is no cause for surprise. A method very similar to that put forward in these dialogues, however, appears to be at work in the

Theaetetus. There is no need to speculate on whether Plato wrote the *Theaetetus* with the method of hypothesis explicitly in mind. As readers of this dialogue, nonetheless, we can profitably view its results as a demonstration of the method's peculiar limitations.

In his role of philosophic midwife, Socrates elicits from Theaetetus three provisional definitions of knowledge. Knowledge first is identified with perception (*aisthēsis*: 151E3), next with true judgment (*alēthē doxan*: 187C5), and finally with true judgment accompanied by an account (*meta logou alēthē doxan*: 201C9-D1). With a substantial amount of supporting argument, the first definition is shown incapable of simultaneously meeting two necessary conditions for truth—namely that perception, as befits knowledge, must be unerring (*apseudes*: 152C5) and must have what exists (*tou ontos*: 152C5) as its object. The second definition then is shown inadequate by the counterexample of the jurymen who arrive at true judgment in the case of an alleged crime they know nothing about. Pursuit of the third definition is stalled by a number of failed attempts to find a relevant sense of 'account', and the dialogue ends without putting that definition to a serious test. Socrates must be off to hear the indictment brought against him by Meletus, leaving both Theaetetus and reader without a viable definition of knowledge. In a word, the dialogue ends in failure.

The *Theaetetus* aims at finding a discursive definition of knowledge. In Socrates' attempts to achieve that result, the method of hypothesis amounts to coming up with a defining statement that meets both the necessary condition of consistency and the sufficient condition of being firmly grounded. The dialogue fails in being unable to meet this pair of conditions. In terms of the Divided Line, Socrates' venture with Theaetetus falls short of the level at which

ascent to the first principle could even begin. Plato may have had reasons beyond dramatic effect for ending the dialogue with Socrates leaving to face his indictment. At this point in his methodological development, I suspect, Plato's interest had already turned to another method. Be this as it may, next day's conversation between Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger follows the method of collection and division instead.

Like the method of hypothesis, the procedure of collection and division is foreshadowed in the *Meno*. Socrates' so-called theory of recollection is put forward in that dialogue in order to motivate continued inquiry on the part of a soul (*psuchē*: 81C5) cleansed of error by Socratic elenchus. Vague as the notion of recollection may be, the general idea is that the soul is immortal and, by virtue of its many births, has seen all there is to see both here and in the netherworld. Hence there is nothing it is not prepared to recollect. What Socrates emphasizes by way of background is that all nature is akin (*phuseos hapases suggenous*: 81D1) and that when the soul recalls (*anamnēsthenta*: 81D2) one thing it should be able to discover (*aneurein*: 81D4) all other things on its own. Although embedded in myth, this description of the kinship of all nature anticipates the account of collection in the *Phaedrus*.

Even though collection and division are mentioned briefly in the *Republic*, as noted previously, little is said there about their use in dialectic. The *Phaedrus*, on the other hand, contains the most specific description of these procedures in the entire Platonic corpus. Although they play major roles in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* as well, the *Phaedrus* also is the only dialogue in which these procedures are explicitly paired and identified by name. More than that, it is the only dialogue in which

collection is mentioned specifically as taking over the role of recollection in the *Meno*.

This occurs at *Phaedrus* 249B7-C3, where Socrates proclaims (1) that only souls which understand speech in terms of Forms (*eidos*, 249B8) can enter human bodies, (2) that the capacity in question involves bringing together (*xunairoumenon*, 249C1) many perceptions into a unity by reason (*eis hen logismō*, 249C1), and (3) that this process amounts to a recollection (*anamnēsis*, 249C2) of things seen by the soul during previous lives. The link with recollection is further reinforced when Socrates observes (at 249E6-250A1) that not every soul, despite its previous vision of reality (*ta onta*, 249C6), will find recollection (*anamimnēskesthai*, 250A1) of that reality an easy matter.

The process of bringing many perceptions together in a reasoned unity is redescribed several pages later as bringing a dispersed plurality together and seeing it as a single Form (*Eis mian [...] idean [...] sunorōnta*: 265D3). Its purpose is to define (*horizomenos*: 265D4) and to clarify whatever topic one studies. This is the point at which the unifying process is explicitly designated 'collection' (*sunagōgōn*, 266B4). As far as I can tell, this is the only place in the corpus (with possible exception of *Philebus* 23E5 and 25A3) where the term *sunagogē* is used to designate collection.

Division is described in the same context as the ability to cut things according to Forms (*kat' eidē [...] diatemnein*: 265E1) following their natural articulations (*kat' arthra hē pephuken*: 265E1-2) and to avoid hacking off parts like a clumsy butcher. Socrates illustrates this procedure with reference to his two previous speeches on love. Both speeches took the general class of dementia as given (*elabeten*: 266A1) and proceeded to divide it in opposite directions. The first (impious, 242D7) speech made cuts to the left until it arrived at something called

‘sinister love’. The second speech (Socrates’ palinode, 243B2) led in the rightward direction to a divine form of love which it praised as the source of the greatest human goods. Division in both directions was non-dichotomous, a matter of significance as we shall see vis-a-vis the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. It receives its ‘official’ name of *diairesis* in the same sentence (266B4) where its companion procedure is labeled *sunagōgē*.

Having identified the procedures in question, Socrates praises them for their contribution to thought and speech. He also refers to people able to apply these procedures as dialecticians (*dialektikous*: 266C1). The term *dialektikē* comes into play a second time toward the end of the dialogue when the dialectician is depicted as someone who has achieved knowledge of what is just, beautiful, and good (*dikaiōn te kai kalōn kai agathōn epistēmas*: 276C3). Eschewing words written in ink, someone versed in that art (*dialektikē technē*: 276E5-6) will sow his words in a receptive soul where they will grow and produce knowledge in that other soul in turn. A literary garden (*grammasi kēpous*: 276D1) of this sort, Socrates avows, will yield the greatest happiness (*eudaimonein*: 277A3) a human being can achieve.

Pronounced as it may be, Socrates’ portrayal of collection and division in the *Phaedrus* is overshadowed by his evocative and uncannily powerful myth of the charioteer. Use of these procedures by the Eleatic Stranger in defining the sophist, by contrast, is a predominant feature of his conversation with Theaetetus. The stated purpose of the *Sophist* is to give a clear account (*emphanizonti logō*: 218C1) of what a sophist is (*ti pot’ esti*: 218C1). By ‘clear account’ here, we are to understand a *definition* of sophistry, given in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. What is necessary for being a sophist is determined by the procedure

of collection, what is sufficient by the process of division. As with the method of hypothesis previously, attention to necessary conditions comes first, followed by a determination of sufficient conditions. First comes collection, that is to say, and then division.

Definition of sophistry is preceded by a ‘practice’ definition of angling, which serves as a paradigm (*paradeigma*: 218D9) for the main task to come. In the case of angling, collection begins with a perfunctory listing of such arts as commerce, fighting, and hunting, which yields the general class of acquisitive arts within which angling presumably is included. Subsequent division of this general class yields several sets of particular features, each set being sufficient to distinguish angling from other acquisitive arts.

Collection in the case of sophistry itself is more complicated and ultimately more satisfactory. Collection here comes in two stages. In the first instance, the two discussants simply assume that sophistry, like angling, belongs to the class of acquisitive arts. Five distinct definitions of sophistry follow from this assumption. Each specifies a specific branch of sophistry, but none expresses features that all sophists share in common. That is to say, although each definition articulates conditions sufficient for being a sophist, none expresses conditions necessary for sophistry in general. These five inadequate definitions of sophistry then are collected in a way that reveals sophistry in general to be a productive rather than an acquisitive art (233D-234D). Sophistry in general turns out to be the art that produces mere images of real things (*mimētēs [...] tōn ontōn*: 235A1-2). Division of the class of productive arts leads to a satisfactory definition of sophistry by the end of the dialogue.

It should be noted that collection in the *Sophist* exhibits a weakness that corresponds

to the vagueness of recollection as portrayed in the *Meno*. In order to identify the subject of the five faulty definitions as specific forms of sophistry, the dialectician must have some preliminary grasp of what sophistry is before collection can begin. In some elusive sense, the treatment of necessary conditions in the *Sophist* seems to beg the question. This shortcoming in Plato's treatment of necessary conditions comes back into play when we turn to the dialectical method in the second part of the *Parmenides*.

Division in the *Sophist*, on the other hand, is relatively unproblematic. Immediately preceding the final (successful) definition of sophistry, the Eleatic Stranger reminds Theaetetus that the divisions involved must be dichotomous (*dichē*: 264D11) and always to the right (*dexia aei*: 264E1). These restrictions are observed in all divisions pertaining directly to sophistry within the dialogue. The importance of well-executed division is emphasized at 253C-D when the Stranger playfully points out that they may have stumbled unawares upon (*empesontes*: 253C7) the 'free man's' knowledge (see *Theaetetus* 172D1). The task of dialectic (*dialektikēs*: 253D2), he says there, is to divide according to kinds (*kata genē diaireisthai*: 253D1), not confusing different classes as being the same as each other.

The Eleatic Stranger presents a substantially altered portrayal of dialectic in his subsequent conversation with the Young Socrates. The main purpose of this dialogue, clearly affirmed at *Statesman* 285D5-7, is to make the persons engaged in it (including its readers) better dialecticians (*dialektikōterois*: 285D7). As far as collection is concerned, little remains of the regimented procedure pursued in the *Sophist*. The purpose of collection in that dialogue was to provide an auspicious start for the ensuing division by identifying features that sophists

generally hold in common—that is, features necessary for being a sophist. In the *Statesman*, however, the task of specifying necessary conditions is managed by an agreement to treat weaving as a paradigm (*paradeigma*: 279A7, *passim*) that incorporates activities comparable to those of statesmanship. One feature of the definition of weaving that ensues is its distinction between direct and contributory (e.g., manufacture of spindles) causes of the finished product. Following this paradigm, the Stranger begins his final definition of the kingly art by distinguishing between direct and contributory causes in the domain of civic affairs.

Before moving ahead, the Stranger observes that contributory causes in this case cannot be cut dichotomously (*temein dicha*: 287B10). In this case, it turns out, there are exactly seven kinds of relevant contributions, which the Stranger then enumerates and describes in detail. Division continues with a distinction between governors and servant classes, of which latter the Stranger identifies exactly 4, proceeds with a distinction between genuine and sophistic governors, which number exactly 6 in kind, and ends with a distinction between genuine governors who rule and those who are subordinate, of which latter there are exactly 3.

Overall there are four dichotomous divisions, which it is natural to lay out along the right, accompanied by a series of non-dichotomous divisions in the leftward direction (see diagram). [diagram somewhere in this paragraph] The dichotomous divisions add up to a positive definition of the statesman as the ruling governor of a genuine polity who is directly responsible for that civic entity. This much follows the instructions of the *Sophist* requiring twofold division along the right. Contrary to the dictates of the *Sophist*, however, there is also the series of multiple divisions to the left. In the domain of civic affairs, there are 7

contributory skills, 4 kinds of servants, 6 types of sophistical rulers, and 3 classes of governing subordinates. This makes twenty classes of civic roles distinct from statesmanship itself. Assuming this classification to be exhaustive, as the Stranger apparently intended, we have a negative definition of statesmanship as well. Statesmanship is a civic role distinct from the other twenty.

This brings us to the method described and illustrated in the second part of the *Parmenides*, which also proceeds by way of negation. If you want to be thoroughly prepared to do philosophy, Parmenides says, you must consider the consequences both of the hypothesis (*hupotheseōs*: 136A1) that the thing to be examined exists and of the hypothesis that it does not exist. The hypothesis chosen by Parmenides to illustrate this method is that Unity exists (the Unity of his historical counterpart, 137B3-4). The first part of the illustration is to deduce the consequences of this hypothesis. The second part is to draw deductions from the negation of the hypothesis, which is to say from the hypothesis that Unity does not exist.

The first part duplicates the first step in the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, which lays out conditions necessary for the truth of the hypothesis in question. What distinguishes Parmenides' method from this earlier version is the way it arrives at sufficient conditions. Whereas the earlier version prescribes something vague (and probably unachievable) like moving upward to a non-hypothetical first principle, Parmenides tells the dialectician to deduce consequences from the *negation* of the original hypothesis. If the original hypothesis is H, then its negation is $\neg H$; and if $\neg H$ entails C, then $\neg C$ entails H. Falseness of the consequences of $\neg H$, that is to say, is sufficient for the truth of the original

H. As far as the practical pursuit of dialectic is concerned, Parmenides' treatment of sufficient conditions is far superior to the treatment of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.

Parmenides' method is more effective than the methods of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* in its treatment of necessary conditions as well. As observed previously, collection in the *Sophist* presupposes prior knowledge of the thing being defined, and in this sense is a carry-over from recollection in the *Meno*. The same shortcoming also undermines the Stranger's use of paradigms in the *Statesman*. Both dialogues featuring the Eleatic Stranger, that is to say, are weak in their treatment of necessary conditions. This weakness is overcome in the dialogue led by the Eleatic master himself. In upshot, Parmenides' method remedies both the faulty treatment of necessary conditions in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* and the faulty treatment of sufficient conditions in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.

Harking back to the *Republic*, furthermore, we can read the results of applying Parmenides' method in his namesake dialogue as an advance from hypotheses to non-hypothetical principles. Readers who continue past the first quarter of the *Parmenides* will probably be aware of the long-standing controversy over how the eight hypotheses of the second part relate to each other. The standard reading pairs the hypotheses in order of occurrence (H1 with H2, H3 with H4, etc.), which results in a surfeit of contradictions that intrepid commentators delight in deciphering.

There is another way of pairing the hypotheses, however, which is closer to the text and which removes these apparent contradictions. With this pairing at hand, the second part adds up to a masterful critique of metaphysical systems prominent when the dialogue was written. According to this pairing,

H1 and H6 are read as positive and negative counterparts and as entailing the same set of consequences. In similar fashion, and with similar results, H2 pairs with H5, H3 with H7, and H4 with H8.

Here is the simple logic that leads to these results. If both H and \neg H entail the same C, it follows that C is true unconditionally. Beginning with positive H1 and negative H6, Parmenides shows that the truth of their shared consequences does not depend upon the truth of the original hypotheses. The non-hypothetical upshot alluded to but never achieved in the *Republic* becomes an accomplished fact in the *Parmenides*. This strikes me as a suitable ending to Plato's long search for an optimal method of dialectical inquiry.

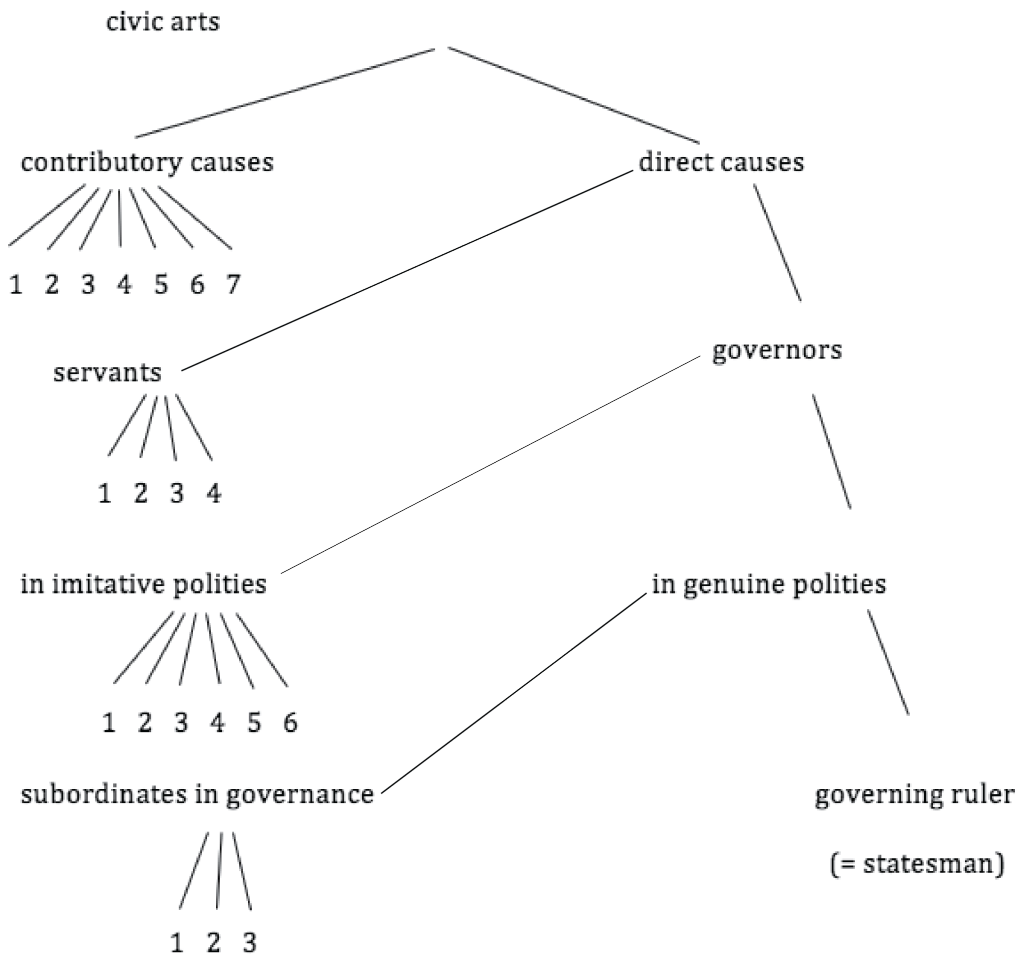
At the beginning of this talk, I promised a few remarks about ways of approaching Plato's dialogues. Any approach that denies development through successive stages of composition, I am fully convinced, has little interpretive value. In my view, so-called unitarianism is the 'climate-change-denier' of Platonic studies. My approach obviously is a version of developmentalism. In the foregoing presentation, moreover, I have attempted to expand the thesis of developmentalism into an interpretive method.

Here is a brief synopsis of how the method goes. First collect together all the dialogues that deal explicitly with the topic in which you are interested. In the present case, the topic is philosophic method. Then sift through relevant passages in these dialogues (taking context into account) with a sharp eye for differences from case to case, dividing them into groups with obvious affinities. This can (but need not) be done without concern for chronological order. Then set about constructing a coherent narrative connecting these passages in a plausible

sequence of development. In the present case, for instance, it is obvious that collection in the *Sophist* has been replaced by paradigms in the *Statesman*, and that the treatment of hypotheses in the *Theaetetus* preceded that in the *Parmenides*. One's antecedent views on chronology at some point very likely will come into play, but in a way compatible with an adjustment of these views if the narrative demands.

In the present case, the narrative begins with the *Meno*, and moves ahead with the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and the *Theaetetus*, with their respective treatments of hypotheses. It then moves directly from the *Theaetetus* to the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*, with their respective treatments of collection and division. The writing that brings the story to its climax is the second part of the *Parmenides*. To be sure, there is always the possibility that Plato altered key passages in a given dialogue after making it public. So chronology of the dialogues as we know them is never a settled matter. Having been through the present exercise, however, I am fully convinced that Plato's thoughts on methodology progressed from elenchus and recollection in the *Meno* to the exceptionally elegant and powerful method demonstrated in the *Parmenides*.

In this regard, my talk constitutes an illustration of what I have dubbed the developmental method. Other worthwhile applications of this method might treat Plato's ethics and political theory, as well as his elusive ontology. By way of conclusion, I may say that the Plato revealed by this method is far more interesting than an author whose thoughts remain static throughout his career. Whatever you may think of the method itself, it seems obvious to me that the interpretive approach behind it is a beneficial approach to Plato's dialogues.



Alternative Definitions of Statesmanship:
 Dichotomous to Right, Non-Dichotomous
 by Negation to Left

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Comments on K. Sayre, “Dialectic in Plato’s Late Dialogues”

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ABSTRACT

A brief overview of Kenneth Sayre’s paper, “Dialectic in Plato’s Late Dialogues,” followed by critical discussion. I invite Sayre to clarify his views on the nature of the method of hypothesis in Plato, and on its relationships to Socratic dialectic and to the method of collection and division. I then ask whether we should think of Plato as aware, at the time of writing his dialogues, of weaknesses in the various methods of conducting philosophical inquiry he has his characters employ. Finally, I ask whether the method of reading Plato Sayre recommends at the end of his paper, to the extent it is novel, is likely to prove fruitful.

Keywords: Plato’s Late Dialogues, Socratic dialectic, method of hypothesis, philosophical inquiry.

In his wide-ranging and interesting paper, Ken Sayre advances claims both about Plato’s views on philosophical method and about the proper method of reading Plato. In fact, his paper contains *three* distinct kinds of claims. First, it advances specific interpretive claims about several particular Platonic dialogues. Second, it offers a developmental thesis about the evolution of Plato’s views across different dialogues. Finally, it recommends a general way of reading Plato. In these comments, I will focus primarily on the latter two kinds of claims. Let me preface my remarks by saying that I greatly enjoyed this paper, and that, where I disagree with Sayre, I do so in the spirit of constructive engagement, and with gratitude to him for providing us with a paper that, I have no doubt, will provoke much discussion from this audience.

In his paper, Sayre discusses no less than eight different Platonic dialogues: the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Theaetetus*, *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Parmenides*. Although many of his claims about these particular dialogues are interesting in their own right, I want to focus here primarily on the general thesis about Plato’s philosophical development they are meant to support. This thesis, as I understand it, runs roughly as follows. Plato’s dialogues depict two distinct methods of doing philosophy, both of which are sometimes called ‘dialectic’. First, there is the method of hypothesis, which features in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Theaetetus*. Second, there is the method of collection and division, which features in the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*. Plato develops each of these methods across several different dialogues, progressively revising each method and probing its weaknesses. Finally, these two methods are combined in the second part of the *Parmenides*. There, a philosophical method is presented that is superior to any

that has appeared in Plato before, since it does a better job of specifying both necessary and sufficient conditions for an adequate discursive definition. The method presented in the second part of the *Parmenides* therefore represents 'a suitable ending to Plato's long search for an optimal method of dialectical inquiry' (p.88).

My first question concerns Sayre's understanding of the nature of the method of hypothesis, and of its relationship to the Socratic elenchus. His official position is that the method of hypothesis is an 'outgrowth' of the Socratic elenchus (p.82). The two methods are similar, on his view, because both involve testing a hypothesis for consistency by testing its consequences for consistency: if its consequences are consistent, it remains a candidate for truth. The main difference between them, so far as I can tell from the paper, is that for the Socratic elenchus the hypothesis to be tested is supplied by someone else, whereas in the method of hypothesis one can supply one's own hypotheses. Presenting these two methods as this close together allows Sayre to claim, as he does, that the *Theaetetus* contains an application of the method of hypothesis. However, this claim about the *Theaetetus* might strike us as surprising, since, at least on its face, this dialogue appears to present an instance of the Socratic elenchus, not of the method of hypothesis. Why is it important for Sayre that the *Theaetetus* contains an application of the method of hypothesis? I suspect this is actually crucial for his developmental thesis. This is so because, if the *Theaetetus* does not depict the method of hypothesis, then the latest work to do so, according to the usual chronology of Plato's dialogues, will be the *Republic*. However, in the *Republic* Socrates expresses no doubts about the method of hypothesis; indeed he appears to positively recommend it as *the way for*

the true philosopher to proceed, at least when properly applied. However, it is a crucial part of Sayre's developmental narrative that Plato came to view the method of hypothesis as flawed. If the *Theaetetus* depicts an application of the method of hypothesis, this provides a way for him to do this; for in the *Theaetetus* Socrates fails to reach a satisfactory discursive definition of knowledge (*epistêmê*), which might be thought to reflect the failure of the method of conducting a philosophical inquiry he deploys. However, if the *Theaetetus* does *not* depict the method of hypothesis, no such conclusion can be drawn on its basis. My first question, then, for Sayre is this: how does he understand the nature of the method of hypothesis, such that the *Theaetetus* (but not, say, the *Euthyphro*) counts as an application of *it*, rather than of the Socratic elenchus?

My second question concerns Sayre's views on the relationship between the method of hypothesis and the method of collection and division. Sayre often suggests that he regards the two methods as *alternative* and *competing* ways of reaching the same goal: namely, the goal of providing adequate discursive definitions. For instance, he begins his paper by arguing that the *Republic* contains subtle allusions to the method of collection and division alongside its explicit discussions of the method of hypothesis, and describes this state of affairs as 'puzzling' (p.82). Why would this be puzzling? Sayre explains by providing disjunctive lists of the dialogues in which each method appears, and by claiming that in the *Republic* alone the methods 'somehow come together' (p.82). Perhaps he is inferring from the fact that the two methods generally feature in different works that at any given time Plato always preferred one to the other. However, we might desire a stronger and more explicit argument that Plato regarded

the methods of hypothesis and of collection and division as competing alternatives. This is because there is another possibility, namely that Plato regarded the two methods as in some way complementary, perhaps because they serve subtly different goals. For example, one might argue that the method of hypothesis is introduced in response to a specific problem – the problem of how to make progress in a philosophical inquiry in the absence of certain and secure starting points – whereas collection and division is introduced to show how one might pursue adequate discursive definitions systematically. In support of this, one might observe that in those contexts where the method of hypothesis is *explicitly* introduced (e.g. in the *Meno* or *Phaedo*), the goal is generally not to arrive at a discursive definition at all. Indeed, I might add, *if* both methods *do* appear in the *Republic*, this might seem to lend support to the view that Plato actually viewed them as compatible and complementary, not as directly competing. So, my second question for Sayre is this: does he think Plato regarded hypothesis and collection and division as competing alternative methods for conducting philosophical inquiry, such that one must always prefer one to the exclusion of the other? Or does he think Plato might have viewed them as compatible and complementary methods? If he favours the former view, on which they directly compete, why does he do so?

This brings me to my third set of questions, which concern Sayre's understanding of Plato's goals in writing the dialogues in question. Sayre often speaks of a Platonic dialogue 'revealing' or 'demonstrating' the weaknesses of a particular philosophical method. However, it is not always clear whether he thinks we should envisage Plato as himself already aware of these weaknesses when writing these works. Let us grant for the sake of argument

that many dialogues clearly display flaws or weaknesses in the philosophical methods they employ or discuss. Should we imagine Plato applying the method in question to the best of his ability at the time of writing each dialogue, then, perhaps only later, noticing its limitations? I submit that this would be a strange and unlikely way to read a dialogue such as the *Theaetetus*. Or should we rather envisage Plato as fully aware of these weaknesses *before* writing the work in question, and then proceeding with the deliberate intention of *highlighting* them, perhaps for pedagogical purposes? But if this later way of understanding Plato's goals remains an open possibility, it seems we cannot straightforwardly base a narrative about the development of Plato's thought on differences in the philosophical methods depicted in different Platonic dialogues, or from any flaws in the depicted methods that appear.

I turn now from Plato's views on philosophical method to the method of reading Plato that Sayre's paper is meant to both exemplify and recommend. Sayre describes his preferred method of reading Plato as follows: 'First collect together all the dialogues that deal explicitly with the topic in which you are interested [...] then sift through relevant passages in these dialogues with a sharp eye for differences from case to case, dividing them into groups with obvious affinities. This can (but need not) be done without concern for chronological order. Then set about constructing a coherent narrative connecting these passages in a plausible sequence of development' (p.88). In the present case, he claims, it is 'obvious' that 'collection in the *Sophist* has been replaced by paradigms in the *Statesman*,' and that "the treatment of hypotheses in the *Theaetetus* preceded that in the *Parmenides*'. Finally, Sayre acknowledges that one's antecedent views on chronology will come into play, but

suggests that they will be open to adjustment if the narrative so demands (p.88).

In keeping with the general theme of this conference, I want to conclude my remarks by raising two concerns about this general method of reading Plato. The first concerns its efficacy. My basic worry here is that Sayre may be too optimistic about the degree to which his recommended method will typically (or ever) prove *sufficient* to determine a single narrative, or to dictate that the passages in question be placed in a certain order. Here, it seems to me, we should be wary of our tendency to find immediately compelling any account that ties disparate elements together into a coherent narrative. We should also surely be mindful of our tendency to favour evidence that supports what we already believe. As a check against these tendencies, we might always ask ourselves: could a different story be told to tie together these very same passages? Could other passages be brought into play to complicate the story that has just been told? Might a difference between two passages reflect a change of emphasis, context, or intent, rather than a change of mind on Plato's part? These are precisely the kinds of questions I have tried to raise here. My aim in doing so is not to deny that the textual evidence Sayre cites *can* support his particular developmental story, but rather to ask whether it supports this story *uniquely*, or could equally well be interpreted in other ways.

My second, related worry begins with Sayre's remarks about methods of reading Plato other than his own. Sayre seems to have in mind two main kinds of opponents: unitarians (whom he provocatively describes as the 'climate-change deniers' of Platonic studies, p.88) and interpreters who insist that we should regard every Platonic dialogue as strictly self-contained. Now, I am inclined to agree with Sayre that reading Plato

as someone who wrestled with hard problems throughout his life, and who sometimes revised his views in light of these reflections, is not only more plausible than regarding him as a god-like figure who fully worked out all his ideas even before he first started to write, but also makes him a more interesting philosopher. My goal is not to question developmentalism as such. However, there is more than one way to be a developmentalist. Many scholars of Plato compare thematically related passages from different works, while remaining open to the possibility that Plato may have changed his mind as his career progressed. I take this to be a familiar and relatively orthodox thing to do when reading Plato. However, as I understand him, Sayre recommends something more specific than this. That is, he recommends gathering together several thematically related passages from disparate works, and then comparing them based primarily on linguistic allusions and the like, with the expectation that they alone will determine a single narrative and relative order of composition. My worry with this approach is that, to the extent it is novel, it is so in the degree to which it recommends excerpting brief passages from different dialogues and comparing them with each other, in isolation from the full dialogues in which they originally appeared. This approach risks leaving us more open than we otherwise would be to the psychological tendencies towards narrative construction and confirmation bias I have mentioned. At the same time, it may lead us to neglect complex and important questions about what Plato (or one of his characters) is actually trying to do in a particular part of a particular dialogue.

In conclusion, I want to thank Professor Sayre once again for contributing such a bold and thought-provoking paper to this event. I look forward to the lively and interesting discussion I have no doubt it will provoke.

The Twofold Requirements of Truth and Justice in the *Gorgias*¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Plato's views about the unity of argument and drama, and asks why Plato never made his views on this unity fully explicit. Taking the *Gorgias* as a case study it is argued that unity rests on the conception of refutative dialectic as justice and on the principle of self-consistency of thought and desire. As compared to the treatise, the dialogue form has the advantage of being able to defend these substantive views in action and thus to demonstrate the performative contradictions in the ideas of one's opponents.

Keywords: dialogue form, *Gorgias*, truth, justice, disciplining, performative contradiction.

INTRODUCTION

As the title indicates I wish to discuss that classic and still partially unresolved problem about the relation between drama and argument. I would like to begin with the question our host, Lloyd Gerson, raised in 2002 in his commentary on various chapters, including mine, in *Does Socrates Have a Method?*

The larger question is, assuming that Plato did choose to set the written expression of his philosophical views in dramatic form, on what principles are we to understand how the drama contributes to understanding the philosophy? I think that many scholars assume that there is a clear answer to this question without explaining what it is.²

I have reflected on that question and think I can propose a better answer than I did at the time, although I would not be surprised if Lloyd thinks otherwise. Let me begin by conceding that he puts his finger on a real problem. If Plato deliberately chose the dialogue form, rather than simply following a fashion, he must have had reasons for doing so, he must have had some theory about the relation between drama and argument, between methods³ and content. I believe that Plato holds principles in writing and reading in dialogue form, but I do not believe that he explained these principles in full. This is one reason why Lloyd's question is so difficult, perhaps even more so than he himself believes. I think we are dealing here with a theory that is partially implicit, and I argue that the implicit character of this conception is related to the nature of the dialogue form itself. The term "implicit" could be translated into Greek by the participle ὑπονοούμενον or the substantive ὑπόνοια ("the underlying

intention” or more freely “the hidden sense of the text”),⁴ or more simply by *ἔργω* (“in practice”), the full phrase might then be *ἔργω λόγος* (“a theory in or by practice”), a phrase Plato uses once, in the *Laws*.⁵ This theory, while implicit, is nevertheless closely linked to an explicitly stated doctrine, that of virtue as knowledge. The way to interpret the dialogues as representing a unity of drama and philosophy is to see it as bound up with the Platonic conception of the relationship between theory and practice, insofar as the argument is not to be separated from self-consistency and from self-knowledge.

I propose to take the *Gorgias* as a case study. It is well-suited for my purposes as it is rich in both drama and content. My interpretation will underline the link between the “personal” dimension of the *elenchos* and the desire for the good. This reading has implications beyond the *Gorgias* and possibly beyond the so-called Socratic dialogues, and I will occasionally refer to other dialogues. My interpretation owes more to recent studies than I can acknowledge here (such as those of Charles Kahn, Michael Erler and Christopher Rowe to name only a few),⁶ but it also differs from these in many ways. It tries to incorporate and link elements that are usually ignored or downplayed, such as the overall question of the principle governing both the *logos* and the *ergon* and the role of literary or rhetorical techniques. I will also discuss the conception of dialectic as disciplining (or punishment), the performative contradiction and dialectic failure that stems from the conflict between the two opposed desires of self-preservation and self-consistency.

By “Socrates” I mean the “Platonic Socrates”, not the “historical Socrates”. I cannot discuss here the question of Plato’s spokesmen; I must limit myself to the general claim that Plato uses various voices, not the least of which is that of Socrates, to communicate his views or concerns to the reader.

1. THE DIALOGUE’S JUSTICE

1.1. TWOFOLD THESIS AND PARALLELISM BETWEEN DRAMA AND ARGUMENT

In the *Gorgias* Socrates explicitly defends the following twofold thesis: the greatest evil is committing injustice and the greatest of all evils is to commit injustice and not to be disciplined (or punished). This twofold claim rests on the Socratic view that virtue is knowledge, and vice a form of ignorance.⁷ It is also intimately linked to the interplay between theory (*λόγος*) and practice (*ἔργον*).⁸ Here is how Socrates puts the thesis in positive terms (in terms of goods) at the very end of the dialogue (527b-c):

But among so many arguments this one alone survives refutation (*ἐλεγχομένων*), and remains steady (*μόνος οὔτος ἡρεμεῖ ὁ λόγος*): that doing what’s unjust is more to be guarded against than suffering it (*τὸ ἀδικεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι*), and that it’s not seeming to be good but being good that a man should take care of more than anything, both in his public and his private life (*καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ*); and that if a person proves to be bad in some respect, he’s to be disciplined, and that the second best thing (*τοῦτο δεύτερον ἀγαθὸν*) after being just is to become just by paying one’s due, by being disciplined (*κολαζόμενον δίδοναι δίκην*); and that every form of flattery (*κολακείαν*), both the form concerned with oneself and that concerned with others, whether they’re few or many, is to be avoided, and that oratory and every other activity is always to be used in support of what’s just (*τῇ ῥητορικῇ*

οὕτω χρηστέον ἐπὶ τὸ δίκαιον αἰεὶ, καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ πάσῃ πράξει, 527b2-c4; trans. Zeyl).

Socrates' twofold thesis is part and parcel of the defense of philosophy understood as the practice of refutation (ἔλεγχος). While oratory as flattery ignores the good and is done in the service of injustice, dialectic (διαλέγεσθαι), and refutation in particular, benefits the interlocutor by being a form of justice, or disciplining (κολάζειν). Socrates attempts to have his three interlocutors, Gorgias, Polus and Callicles successively admit that they ought to submit to the requirements of justice, that is to the dialogue's justice. It is necessary and beneficial to be refuted when mistaken, just as it is necessary and beneficial to be disciplined when guilty.

1.2. DIALECTIC AS DISCIPLINING

The final myth, from which the passage quoted above is taken, is dominated by the notion of punishment. In Socrates' myth, physical punishment is appropriate and pain a legitimate disciplinary measure (cf. 524c, 527d). According to some, the appeal to punishment is incompatible with what is usually called the Socratic paradox.⁹ According to the Socratic view of virtue as knowledge, which Socrates holds in the *Gorgias*, human beings do what they believe to be best for them, and mistaken judgments are the sole cause of their erring behavior. This is why Socrates, in the "Socratic dialogues", seeks to change their ways of thinking by discussing with them rather than by punishing them. Yet he also seems to defend punishment, conventional punishment that is, such as flogging, imprisonment and the like.

The contradiction is only apparent. Socrates does not refer only to conventional punishment. He mentions another type too,

albeit in subtle ways, namely the dialectical or philosophical. For both kinds he often uses the term κολάζειν, which can be translated by "punishment" or "disciplining". While retributive punishment is sometimes clearly meant (as in 480d2 in the case of execution, and likewise in the final myth, *passim*), corrective disciplining is meant in many other places. The term "punishment" can conceivably be used to translate κολάζειν in both cases insofar as Plato's conception of "punishment", notwithstanding modern connotations, allow for therapeutic as well as retributive kinds.¹⁰ I will however use "disciplining" in most cases although not all, as does D. Zeyl.¹¹

Socrates passes back and forth from the conventional to the dialectical conception of disciplining or punishment without warning. This movement can be observed at the end of the exchange with Polus. Let us recall the context. At the beginning of the conversation with Polus Socrates claims that rhetoric is not a craft (τέχνη) but mere flattery (κολακεία) with the goal of providing pleasure at the expense of the better, and that it is therefore devoid of any value or usefulness (463a-466a). At the end of that conversation, however, he admits that rhetoric can be of some use for the opposite purpose, namely in accusing (κατηγορεῖν). Rhetoric can and must be used to accuse oneself (ἑαυτοῦ) first and foremost, and then one's family and anyone else dear who happens to behave unjustly (480c1-3). Rhetoric must not keep injustice hidden, as flattery does, but bring it out into the open, so that each one may pay his or her due and get well (ἵνα δῶ δίκην καὶ ὑγιῆς γένηται). Shortly after Socrates remarks (480c4-7):

[O]ne should compel oneself and the others not to play the coward, but to grit his teeth and present himself with grace

and courage as to a doctor for cauterization and surgery (ἀνδρείως ὥσπερ τέμνειν καὶ κάειν ἰατρῶ) (trans. Zeyl).

This phrasing recalls the medical reference first employed, in its literal sense, by *Gorgias* (456b3-4: ἢ τεμῖν ἢ καῦσαι: “surgery or cauterization”). It also takes up elements of Socrates’ earlier classification in which he opposed rhetoric, understood as pastry baking and flattery, to the true arts of medicine (ἰατρική) and justice (δικαιοσύνη).¹² Here Socrates mentions this analogy at the very moment he is refuting Polus, and will again do so later with Callicles. In both instances he refers to the effects of dialectic refutation in the very same terms he before used to speak of judiciary and medical treatment. These passages are usually either passed over by the commentators or disconnected from their larger implications. First, then, in reaction to Polus’ hesitation to recognize the refutation, Socrates exhorts him as follows (475d4-6):

Don’t shrink back from answering, Polus. You won’t get hurt in any way. Submit yourself nobly to the argument (γενναίως τῷ λόγῳ), as you would to a doctor (ὥσπερ ἰατρῶ), and answer me (trans. Zeyl).¹³

Socrates appeals here to the medical analogy, as he did in his classification of the arts, and he inserts it now into the drama. It applies to what they are talking about, to the kind of discussion they are having. This reveals a parallelism between the subject matter of the discussion (λόγος) and the drama (ἔργον). The same parallelism can be observed during the conversation with Callicles. Confronted with the latter’s refusal to recognize the refutation or even to respond, Socrates makes the following remark (505c3-4):

This fellow won’t put up with being benefited and with his undergoing the very thing the discussion’s about, with being disciplined (πάσχων περι οὗ ὁ λόγος ἐστί, κολαζόμενος). (trans. Zeyl)

Refutation is here described as a form of justice, as a disciplinary measure.¹⁴ In both passages Socrates is as explicit as he gets with regard to the interplay between action and argument. His way of discussing and refuting coincides with the subject matter of their conversation, namely justice. He thus attributes a disciplinary function to dialectic refutation as he is practicing it. This parallelism is carefully crafted and reveals Plato’s art of writing. David Sedley in his insightful study on the myth (2009) is one the few who takes note of the parallelism between dialectic and justice, but he underestimates some of its larger implications, in part no doubt because he refers to one of these three passages only (505c).¹⁵ The parallelism reveals nothing less than the fusion of argument and drama. Contrary to conventional forensic oratory that seduces through pleasure, dialectic refutation induces pain similar to medical treatment or physical disciplinary measure, as it frees from ignorance and therefore from the injustice that results from it. These three passages, in connection with others, enact the principle of the unity of argument and drama. This principle is not stated but implied in the drama (ἔργον) in forming one body with it.

But there is a difficulty. If Socrates uses κολάζειν (“disciplining” or “punishment”) to mean dialectic, why does he appeal to conventional forms of punishment such as flogging (πληγῶν), imprisonment (δεσμοῦ), exile (φυγῆς) and death (θανάτου, 480c8-d3)? Why does he formulate his argument on

punishment as if he accepted the conventional view? The most likely explanation seems to me to be the following. Socrates refers to the conventional or forensic view on punishment because it is the conception that his non-philosophical interlocutors understand and accept.¹⁶ This corresponds to his usual way of arguing. In the case of the definition of rhetoric for instance, he first lets Gorgias present and defend his occupation, rhetoric, as a craft (τέχνη), only later to express his personal view in an elaborate, well prepared classification that denies the status of a craft to rhetoric (ὁ ἐμὸς λόγος, 463b3: 462e-466a), and to admit at last the existence of a true rhetoric (ἡ ἀληθινὴ ῥητορική, 517a5; cf. 504d5-6). Likewise he first denies that he practices politics, that is conventional, institutionalized politics (473e6), and then later declares himself to be one of the very few who practice the true art of politics (τῆ ὡς ἀληθῶς πολιτικῆ τέχνῃ, 521d7). In all these cases he starts from the conventional conception of his interlocutors and then gradually proceeds to the philosophical view.¹⁷ In the *Gorgias* Socrates goes to see Gorgias, who is surrounded by friends and a crowd of admirers (458c3). As a result, the conversation takes place on what we might call enemy territory. Socrates will make some use of techniques of conventional rhetoric although for opposite purposes.¹⁸ Contrary to conventional rhetoric and punishment, dialectic aims at truth and justice, at making people better, which is the role of the true art of politics. Dialectic consists in disciplining the interlocutor whenever his opinions are confused or contradictory. The discussion in the *Gorgias* turns into an open conflict between Socrates and Callicles. The resulting dialectical impasse will lead Socrates to appeal to a myth of final judgment in which unrepentant people such as Callicles suffer punishment.¹⁹

2. THE LOGOS AND THE INTERLOCUTOR

2.1. OBJECTIONS

Some might object to this interpretation as attributing undue importance to the drama in general and to the interlocutor in particular. Here is a short list of some of the general counter-arguments that might be raised at this point. Socrates repeatedly claims that only the *logos* matters. In the *Charmides* for instance, he says that “the question at issue is not who said it, but whether what he said is true or not.”²⁰ Dialectic is fundamentally logical and impersonal in nature.²¹ The frequently used phrase “as the discussion (*logos*) points out”²² reflects the authority of reason and the best argument.²³ As he indicates in the *Gorgias*, Socrates proceeds as he does not for the sake of his interlocutor, in this case Gorgias, but for the sake of the *logos* (οὐ σοῦ ἔνεκα ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου) in order to achieve the greatest explicitness and clarity (453c2-4, 454c2-3).²⁴ If the argument is logically valid, it can convince any competent and honest interlocutor.²⁵ What the *logos* teaches no one can dismiss (cf. 527b3-4), and Socrates, like all others, must submit to it.²⁶ The Socratic paradox implies a purely intellectual conception of dialectic. This is why Socrates says in the *Gorgias* that he always says the same things about the same things (491b6-7).²⁷ Dialectic is ethically neutral, and committing a logical error is not immoral. Sincerity or frankness (παρηρησία) as a condition of dialectic²⁸ is not always required.²⁹ Socrates sometimes examines an opinion regardless of the respondent’s convictions.³⁰ In the *Gorgias* this requirement only becomes central in the Callicles exchange,³¹ and even then it is violated several times without repercussions.

Callicles admits that he is willing to continue the dialogue only to please Gorgias, against which Socrates does not raise objections (501c7-8). Socrates later complains that Callicles does not respect their previous agreements, but he pursues the discussion nonetheless (516d4-5).

2.2. RESPONSES

The importance of the impersonal dimension of dialectic is undeniable. Therein lie the logical principles of non-contradiction and of the best argument.³² It would, however, be inaccurate to claim that this dimension constitutes the whole of dialectic as practiced in the dialogues. The *logos* is not alone in guiding the dialectical exchange: the art of the questioner is not only logical in nature. Socrates questions his interlocutor with rigor and in the spirit of common quest, but always with a view to refuting or establishing a thesis,³³ with due regard to the kind of interlocutor he seeks to refute or convince. He displays an ability to play two roles at once, that of searcher and guide.³⁴ In the dialectical exchange he strives to demonstrate the inconsistency of the other participant's thesis and to that purpose starts from the latter's premises and adapts to some extent to his dispositions. This explains why he sometime varies the type of argument used, including rational argumentation and the appeal to authority or myths.³⁵ Let us also recall Aristotle's well-known remark in the *Poetics* about the *sokratikos logos*: its action is governed by two causes (αἴτια), thought (διάνοια) and character (ἦθος).³⁶ In other words, that kind of conversation offers an understanding of the participants' character in addition to confronting ideas.³⁷ When Socrates defends his rather picky way of asking questions as not being aimed at his interlocutor, Gorgias, but at the *logos* (453c, 454c), the rationale is to conduct

the discussion in a fashion as orderly as possible, although this includes the various steps that are likely to lead to the interlocutor's refutation and therefore represents some strategy on his part. The Socratic examination, it is true, does not always examine his interlocutor's way of life (βίος), as it is the case in the oft-quoted passage in the *Laches* (188c-e). It involves various methods and aims according to the context. Still the ethical dimension is never entirely absent. According to the identification of virtue with knowledge, our opinions - whether well-founded or not - are the cause of our desires and behavior. This view is closely linked with the notion of a rational desire for truth and self-consistency, that is the desire to maintain or reestablish inner harmony with oneself (ὁμολογία, ἄρμονία, συμφωνία).³⁸ To accept to answer questions means being willing to express one's opinions and to defend them, that is to be refuted and to refute. The *logos* is not, however, invariably presented as an irresistible force, but sometimes also as a difficult goal to reach. The obstacle does not lie in the *logos*, which in principle is sound, but in the interlocutors' weakness. Socrates remarks in the *Phaedo* (90d9-e3):

“This then is the first thing we should guard against [...]. We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it; much rather we (ἡμεῖς) should believe that it is we who are not yet sound (ὕγιως) and that we must take courage (ἀνδριστέον) and be eager to attain soundness (προθυμητέον ὑγιώς)” (trans. Zeyl).

As for frankness (παρρησία) it is a requirement in other dialogues too, for instance the *Crito* (49c-d), the *Protagoras* (331c), the *Laches* (193c) and the *Republic* (346a).³⁹ This rule is of course often violated, but its violation does not

undermine its relevance. These instances of violation are deliberately included in the drama in order to highlight the importance of that violation and the difficulty in respecting that rule. In order to be able to follow this rule at least two conditions must be satisfied. First we must know what we think and understand what we say. This implies possessing a degree of dialectical competence (ἐπιστήμη) in addition to a good will (εὐνοία, 487b5-6). Polus has hardly reflected on the questions Socrates asks him and as a result does not know what he really thinks. Secondly, it presupposes that the interlocutor desires to know the truth even at the cost of refutation. Callicles is unable to remain consistent, especially with regard to the radical hedonism he wishes to defend. This is because he is a proud aristocrat and an ambitious politician, who like Polus, is more concerned with winning votes than with finding the best argument.⁴⁰ Thus the violation of frankness, whenever required, underlines one of the difficulties of dialectic. In the *Gorgias* specifically, it reveals the conflict between Socrates and his non-philosophical fellow-citizens. The absence of this requirement in other dialogues, in favor of the examination of theses that are independent of the interlocutor's conviction, points to transformations in the dialectical method, but it does not call into question the ideal of self-knowledge and self-consistency.

3. PRINCIPLE OF SELF-CONSISTENCY

3.1. AMBIVALENCE IN THOUGHT AND DESIRE

The twofold thesis of the *Gorgias* (that committing injustice and committing injustice

without being punished are the two greatest evils) must be understood in connection with two other aspects of the dialogue, namely the criticism of rhetoric as flattery and Socrates' indifference to any concerns other than for virtue, including the risk of death.⁴¹

Callicles' defense of rhetoric suffers from ambivalence. He simultaneously sides with the rich and the powerful and with the Athenian people (δῆμος). As in the case of Alcibiades, the ambition of always having more than the others (τὸ πλεονεκτεῖν), makes him into a lover (ἐραστής) of the people. Hence his ambivalence between the desire for power and the desire to conform to the majority's desires. The paradigm of the tyrannical life and its pleasures is one of the popular, conventional beliefs at the time. This ambivalence between the desire for domination and the desire for mimetic conformity, found in all three of Socrates' interlocutors, leads them to contradict themselves in word and deed. Callicles is unable to defend radical hedonism to its logical conclusion, and comes to recognize the distinction, accepted by the majority,⁴² between good and bad pleasures.⁴³ Moreover he is particularly concerned about the fact that justice is weaker than injustice, and worries about a wicked man killing one who is admirable and good (καλὸν κἀγαθόν; 511b3-6). "Isn't that just the most irritating thing about it?" Callicles exclaims. To which Socrates replies:

No, not for an intelligent person, anyway, as our discussion points out. Or do you think that a man ought to make sure that his life be as long as possible (ὡς πλείστον χρόνον ζῆν) and that he practice those crafts that ever rescue us from dangers (ἐκ τῶν κινδύνων σώζουσιν), like the oratory that you tell me to practice, the kind that

preserves us in the law courts? (511b7-c2; trans. Zeyl).

This is Socrates' well-known fundamental distinction, stated in many other dialogues, between life, or mere survival, and the good life. Callicles has first praised great public deeds, and then later the life of unlimited pleasures. He finally comes to defend mere survival, that is, the all-importance of protecting himself against the danger of suffering the worst evil, for him, namely violent death.

In the end, then, the profound cause of conflict between Callicles and Socrates seems to lie in the opposition of two irreconcilable desires: the desire for self-preservation and the desire for self-consistency (511c-513c).⁴⁴ Each of these desires rests on a certain conception of the good. The desire for self-consistency, both logical and moral, implies the rejection of the view that survival is the supreme good, and death the worst evil. In other words, choosing the philosophical life, the life of self-consistency, means rejecting the life of pleasure and safety.⁴⁵

3.2. PERFORMATIVE CONTRADICTION

Socrates' fundamental intention in the *Gorgias* is to have his three interlocutors admit that power must be subjected to the requirements of reason and justice, which without them would be blind and harmful, including for the agent. This is why submitting power to justice requires the practice of dialectic, which is itself a practice of justice. In other words, to defend justice is to defend the necessity of dialogue. This is not a small task given the interlocutors' hostility. Callicles rejects the principle of frankness (παρρησία) at least twice,⁴⁶ in order to avoid refutation, and thus becomes guilty of inconsistency.

The dialogue form, by comparison to the treatise, makes a pragmatic justification of philosophy possible. By pragmatic justification, I mean a justification that occurs in and as part of the drama. A refutation that takes the form of a performative contradiction implies a contradiction in both word and deed. The logical principle of non-contradiction is the most general and basic of all dialectical rules. While Plato gives more or less direct definitions of it,⁴⁷ perhaps the clearest and most useful to our purposes is given by Aristotle, since his definition has a direct bearing on dialectic as practice. One might think of his remark in the *Protrepticus* that asking the question whether one should philosophize or not is already to philosophize.⁴⁸ But the most relevant passage is the one in *Metaphysics* Gamma. Here Aristotle formulates and defends the principle, and with it the very possibility of knowledge and truth, against Protagoras and the relativists:

But we have now posited that it is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be (ὡς ἀδυνάτου ὄντος, ἅμα εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι), and by this means have shown that this is the most indisputable of all principles (βεβαιοτάτη αὕτη τῶν ἀρχῶν πασῶν). Some indeed demand that even this shall be demonstrated, but this they do through want of education, for not to know of what things one may demand demonstration, and of what one may not, argues simply want of education. For it is impossible that there should be demonstration of absolutely everything; there would be an infinite regress, so that there would still be no demonstration. [...] We can, however, demonstrate by refutation (ἔστι δ' ἀποδείξαι ἐλεγκτικῶς) even that this view is impossible, if our

opponent will only say something (ἀν μόνον λέγει ὁ ἀμφισβητῶν). (1006a3-13, trans. Ross slightly modified)

The principle of non-contradiction, being the principle upon which all the others rest, can only be demonstrated negatively, by refutation (ἐλεγκτικῶς). The adversary must however accept to speak and discuss. Its proof is practical or performative in nature.⁴⁹ Now the dialogue form allows for that sort of confrontation with the relativist or the anti-philosopher. Indeed such is one of the basic aims of the Platonic dialogues opposing Socrates to non-philosophers or anti-philosophers, as it is the case of the *Gorgias*. I readily grant that Aristotle rejects Plato's conception of dialectic as science and that he does not mention Plato's dialogues in this passage. Still some of the Platonic dialogues offer a brilliant illustration and a concrete application of Aristotle's thesis. Aristotle provides as it were the "thematic," and Plato the "operating" concept. Philosophy's adversary in rejecting the *logos* concedes in deed (ἔργῳ) that which he is trying to deny. This elenctic method constitutes an *ad hominem* argument. The principle expounded by Aristotle states in abstract terms the individual, personal experience of self-contradiction. In other words, Socratic dialectic simultaneously operates on the objective plane (*ad rem*), with regard to the subject under discussion, and on the subjective plane (*ad hominem*), with respect to the person speaking⁵⁰.

Dialectic sometime aims at the interlocutor's conversion or transformation, as Pierre Hadot has eloquently showed. It would be, however, reductive and one-sided to exclude the subject of discussion (*logos*) and the defense of substantive views from the core of Platonic dialectic by invoking Socrates' avowal of ignorance.⁵¹ Admittedly the results of dialectic practice in Plato's dialogues are never portrayed with an air of finality. Defining terms

and the giving of account are ever renewed tasks. Yet progress is made in the cleansing of the soul⁵² and in defending certain views. The possibility of progress, and indeed of communication, ultimately rests upon the initial intelligibility, however inarticulate, that the interlocutors have of the subject matter and of the principle of self-consistency.

3.3. SELF-CONSISTENCY OF THOUGHT AND DESIRE

The good then, for us human beings, according to Socrates-Plato, might indeed be nothing other than self-consistency, that is harmony with the *logos* in us.⁵³ Good as self-consistency would be at once logical and ethical, composed of consistency among our opinions, and between our opinions and our actions respectively. If this is so, Plato's position is akin to that of the Stoics.⁵⁴

The principle of self-consistency would seem to have the following implications. The Socratic paradox presupposes an analogical relation between the desire for truth and the desire for the good. The requirements of thought would be inseparable from those of action, logic would be inseparable from morality.⁵⁵ This is illustrated by the status of Socrates in Antiquity as the paradigm of unity between life and thought.⁵⁶ Moreover, as we have seen, the link between logic and morality cannot be fully demonstrated theoretically.

The pragmatic dimension has in turn consequences for the way we should read Plato. The reader must constantly move from the argument to the drama, that is from the semantic (or explicit) dimension to the pragmatic (or implicit) dimension, and vice-versa. This hermeneutical principle is not stated by Plato in so many words, it largely remains implicit, notably

in the form of literary or rhetorical indications, which the reader must pick up and link to the explicit argumentation.

This approach finds support in some of the ancient commentators. Proclus for instance in his *Timaeus* commentary defends the superiority of examples presented in the Platonic dialogues (especially in the prologues) over the precepts conceived in treatises, such as those of the Stoics. Proclus writes (*In Tim.* 16.6-12):

Other people had written handbooks on duties (περὶ καθηκόντων τέχνας), through which they expect to improve the habits (τὰ ἤθη) of those educated by them. Plato, however, gives us an outline impression (τύπους) of our duties through dramatic depiction (δι' αὐτῆς τῆς μιμήσεως) of the best of men, an impression that has much that is more effective (πολὺ τὸ δραστηκώτερον) than what is committed to lifeless rules (ἐν κανόσι ψιλοῖς). That is because dramatic imitation informs the lives of the listeners according to its own distinctive character (κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ιδιότητα) (trans. Tarrant).

In Proclus' view then, while the Stoics produce systematic classifications of moral rules and elaborate moral theories, the Platonists think the rules of conduct have been transmitted in the best way possible by Plato through examples. This observation is based on and largely confirmed by the theory of imitation in book 3 of the *Republic* (392d–398b) according to which imitation presents character traits specific to the person portrayed and exerts in turn a decisive influence on the audience's character.⁵⁷ What about the counter-examples given by philosophy's adversaries? These might still serve as model to follow insofar as they submit to refutation. Extreme cases such

as Callicles might perhaps be regarded as instructive counter-examples to be avoided and contrasted with that of Socrates.

Overall, then, dialectic would have two dimensions, one objective, the other subjective. Both are equally indispensable albeit in tension with each other. They would correspond to two purposes in Plato's dialectic. The objective purpose is the attainment of a perfectly self-sufficient or absolute object, an entirely impersonal norm, such as the idea of the Good. The subjective dimension pertains to the individual's interest, its object is relative, always different. These two purposes must be understood in the light of the Platonic doctrine of Eros. There is a fundamental tension between the desire for individual self-realization and the desire for the beautiful that transcends all individuality. In the *Lysis* the good is conceived as the beloved (φίλον) and humans as beings of want. That very tension constitutes for us the incentive for the search (218d-220b; 220b-222a). Similarly in the *Symposium*, Diotima defines the beautiful (τὸ καλόν) as the object of the great desire, the *raison d'être* of all our strivings (210e): we desire to possess the beautiful and the good (γενέσθαι αὐτῷ, 204d-205a), that is to overcome our individual, ephemeral self.⁵⁸ This is when presumably the self, delivered from the body, can finally achieve its full, original unity.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

Let us sum up, very briefly. In the *Gorgias* the subject matter coincides with the drama. Socrates seeks to persuade his interlocutors to accept the constraints of justice by refuting them and thus disciplining them justly. The parallelism or unity of the argument and the drama is alluded to but not discussed. It

is carefully crafted and is part of Plato's art of writing. This parallelism also implies the refutation of the adversaries of philosophy through performative contradiction. This can be so because basic philosophical questions can only be answered in the first person singular as (objective) knowledge can never be acquired vicariously.⁶⁰ We must answer these questions in our name, and be answerable to our answers as we are answerable to our deeds.

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NOTES

- 1 I heartily thank Debra Nails for her first set of incisive remarks, which allowed me to clarify and rectify various aspects of my paper, and my colleague and friend Jeremy Hayhoe for kindly proofreading it.
- 2 Gerson 2002, 227; cf. 2013, 37-38, 87-88.
- 3 The plural is here important as Socrates' and Plato's "dialectical method" involves various strategies, some of which are exemplified in this paper.
- 4 While ὑπονοούμενον (in participial form) is not to be found in Plato, the substantive ὑπόνοια is used with regard to the allegorical readings of Homer (*Rep.* 378d6-7). Socrates' remark in Xenophon (*Symp.* III, 6, 24: Δῆλον γάρ, ἔφη ὁ Σωκράτης, ὅτι τὰς ὑπονοίας οὐκ ἐπίστανται) seems to confirm that he (the historical Socrates) was well aware of that kind of writing and apparently in favor of the notion of hidden meanings in Homer.
- 5 *Laws* 814d1; Saunders translates: "statements with concrete examples"; Brisson and Pradeau: "la théorie associée à la pratique."
- 6 Kahn 1983, 1996; Erler 2006, 2007; Rowe 2007.
- 7 In the *Gorgias* there is not much talk of "the greatest good" (μέγιστον ἀγαθόν: four occurrences but all in 452a-d), far more of "the greatest evil" (μέγιστον κακὸν or μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν, of which seven occurrences). In this paper, all textual references without a title are to the *Gorgias*.
- 8 Cf. Erler 2006, 13.
- 9 See for instance Brickhouse - Smith 2012, 108-131. In a recent article in which they revise their view on the matter, they attempt to accommodate the two meanings of "disciplining" in regarding it primarily as a condition of dialectic and secondarily as an occasional use of it (Brickhouse - Smith 2015, 22). They also refer to Socrates' method of "shaming" (cf. *Apol.* 29e5-30a2) as another Socratic means appealing to the "irrational" in the interlocutor. If however shaming has two distinct meanings for Socrates, one heteronomous (or conventional) and the other autonomous (or Socratic), as some claim (cf. Woodruff 2000, 134, 143-44), it might be necessary to distinguish between a rational or pre-rational dimension of the sense of shame as source and the "irrational" effect of it such as blushing.
- 10 Cf. Mackenzie 1981, 183-184; Saunders 1991, 133-136; Shaw 2015. As is often the case in Plato the terminology is not strict or tidy. In the *Apology* (25e6-26a7) for instance Socrates rejects conventional punishment (κολάζειν) as ineffective in the case of unwilling wrongdoings (which all wrongdoings are according to him), as opposed to private instruction (νοθετεῖν) that teaches (διδάσκειν). In the *Sophist* (229b7-230e3) the same distinction is drawn, however, in different and even contrary terms, between (a) admonition (νοθετητική), again considered ineffective (insofar as virtue is knowledge), and (b) refutation (ἔλεγχος), by far superior as it purges the individual of the false pretence of knowledge, which impedes learning. While the vocabulary varies and is sometimes contradictory,

the basic distinction between conventional and Socratic punishment (or disciplining) is maintained.

11 Rowe 2007 and Sedley 2009 usually prefer “punishment”, although they do refer (especially Rowe) to its corrective meaning too.

12 Cf. *Soph.* 230c8-d2 on refutation as cleansing.

13 Cf. 456b4.

14 Xenophon too employs the term κολάζειν (punishing, disciplining) to characterize the refutation that Socrates inflicted on those who thought they knew everything: *Mem.* I, 4, 1 (ed. Bandini-Dorion 2000).

15 Likewise in Cholbi 2002; see however Shaw 2015, 79 and 86.

16 Rowe 2007, 147-152.

17 This might also be the case (although I cannot argue for this here) of Socrates’ appeal to self-mastery (ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ), which appears equally incompatible with the Socratic paradox: he means by it, he says, the same as do most people (ὡσπερ οἱ πολλοί; 491d7-e1). For a detailed reading that on the contrary Socrates personally adheres to this notion, see Dorion 2014, 38-50.

18 Cf. Macé 2003, 11; Erler 2007, 504.

19 Cf. Sedley 2009, 69.

20 161c5-6: ὅστις αὐτὸ εἶπεν, ἀλλὰ πότερον ἀληθὲς λέγεται ἢ οὐ. Cf. *Phaid.* 100a4: ἐκάστοτε λόγον ὃν ἂν κρίνω ἔρωμενέστατον εἶναι; 85c8-d1: τὸν γοῦν βέλτιστον τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λόγων λαβόντα καὶ δυσεξελεγκτότατον. Cf. *Rep.* 534c1-2: ὡσπερ ἐν μάχῃ διὰ πάντων ἐλέγγων διεξιῶν (with a view to the attainment not of δόξα but οὐσία, that is the Idea of the Good, 534b-c).

21 *Gorg.* 482a1-4, 487b3-6, 491b5-8, 527d-e; cf. *Symp.* 221e5-a1. Cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* IV 4, 6.

22 Cf. *Gorg.* 511b7, 527c6, 473b10-11; *Phaid.* 66e.

23 This is also part of his role as midwife: *Theait.* 150c.

24 Cf. 457d3 (κατὰ φθόνον) and 457e5 (πρὸς σέ).

25 Cf. Irwin 1995, 125.

26 Cf. *Phil.* 59b-c; *Theait.* 164a, 200c; also *Prot.* 361a-b; *Parm.* 137a; *Laws* 701b-c.

27 491b5-8. Cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* IV 6.

28 Cf. *Gorg.* 495a; *Alc.* I 110a2-3.

29 Cf. *Prot.* 333c6-7: “It makes no difference to me, provided you give the answers, whether it is your own opinion or not (οὐδὲν μοι διαφέρει, ἂν μόνον σύ γε ἀποκρίνη, εἴτ’ οὖν δοκεῖ σοι ταῦτα εἶτε μή). I am primarily interested in testing the argument (τὸν γὰρ λόγον ἔγωγε μάλιστα ἐξετάζω)”. But Socrates goes on to say (c7-9): “although it may happen both that the questioner, myself, and my respondent wind up being tested (συμβαίνει μέντοι ἴσως καὶ ἐμὲ τὸν ἐρωτῶντα καὶ τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον ἐξετάζεσθαι).”

30 Cf. *Rep.* 349a-350e; *Men.* 83d, 86e4-5: λέγω δὲ τὸ ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ὧδε, ὡσπερ οἱ γεωμέτραι πολλὰκις σκοποῦνται.

31 487a-b; 499b-c; 500b cf. 482e.

32 509a4-b1.

33 The refutation can also coincide with the defense of the contrary these, as is the case in 474b-476a.

34 Cf. Apelt 1912, 103.

35 Cf. e.g. 493d-e. For the larger implications see Tarrant 1990.

36 Arist. *Poet.* 1447b9-13, 1449b36-1450a3.

37 The interlocutor can, no doubt, be of lesser importance in the case of a dialogue composed of long speeches such as in the *Timaeus*. The Middle Platonist commentator Albinus (*Prol.* I, 4) makes the following observation:

“while the explanatory directs its aim to things, the exploratory does so to persons” (ὁ μὲν ὑφηγητικός τῶν πραγμάτων στοχάζεται, ὁ δὲ ζητητικός τῶν προσώπων).

38 Answering questions (ἀποκρίνεσθαι τὰ ἐρωτώμενα) is according to Socrates the only thing Alcibiades ought to do if he is to take care of himself (*Alc.* 127e5-7). Cf. Renaud - Tarrant 2015, 16, 56, 213.

39 *Crit.* 49a1-2; 49c11-d1: “And Crito, see that you do not agree to this, contrary to your belief” (καὶ ὄρα, ὦ Κρίτων, ταῦτα καθομολογῶν, ὅπως μὴ παρὰ δόξαν ὁμολογῆς).

Men. 83d1-2: “Good, you answer what you think” (Καλῶς· τὸ γὰρ σοι δοκοῦν τοῦτο ἀποκρίνου).

40 Cf. Kahn 1996, 137.

41 Cf. Schofield 2010, xviii.

42 499a6-7: ὡς δὴ σὺ οἶε ἐμὲ ἢ καὶ ἄλλον ὄντιον ἀνθρώπων. Callicles even seems to feel shame (494e3-4). Cf. Olympiodorus, *in Gorg.* 30.

43 Plato’s criticism of *characters* such as Alcibiades’ and Callicles’, and more generally of the corruption of potential philosophers turned into tyrants (cf. *Rep.* 493a-495c) is, however, part of a larger, *social* critique of rhetoric as such. See on this Barney 2010, 117-119, who considers the social character of that critique as aiming at rhetoric as “a kind of socially constructed parasitism” (119) and as resting upon the objective criteria of genuine craft (τέχνη). I believe another significant component of that critique lies in the *mimetic* nature of rhetoric’s social role and alleged power (cf. 512d7-a4; 513b2-6; cf. 513c7-8), a view I cannot argue for here.

44 Let us recall Socrates’ famous remark (482b7-c3): “And yet for my part, my good man, I think it’s better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune (ἀνάρμοστόν), and dissonant (διαφωνεῖν), and have the vast majority of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself, to contradict myself, though I’m only one person (μὴ ὁμολογεῖν μοι ἄλλ’ ἐναντία λέγειν μᾶλλον ἢ ἕνα ὄντα ἐμὲ ἑμαυτῷ ἀσύμφωνον εἶναι καὶ ἐναντία λέγειν).”

45 Hence Socrates’ deliberately exaggerated and provocative story about the helmsmanship (511d-512b). Socrates, the new Achilles, prefers death to shameful behavior (*Apol.* 28b3-d10); cf. Homer, *Il.* 18, 70-137.

46 495a7-b3, 499b4-c2, cf. 505c10-e1.

47 Cf. *Rep.* 436b8-c1: “It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time (ταῦτὸν τὰναντία ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν κατὰ ταῦτόν γε καὶ πρὸς ταῦτόν οὐκ ἐθέλησει ἄμα). [...] Is it possible for the same thing to stand still and move at the same time in the same part of itself? Not at all.” (trans. Grube, rev. Reeve). In the *Sophist* (230b4-8) refutation is discussed as a form of teaching which delivers from double ignorance;

here the principle of non-contradiction is formulated as follows: “(Visitor) They cross-examine someone when he thinks he’s saying something though he’s saying nothing (ἀν οἴηται τίς τι περὶ λέγειν λέγων μηδέν). Then, since his opinions will vary inconsistently, these people will easily scrutinize them. They collect his opinions together during the discussion, put them side by side, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects (τιθέντες δὲ ἐπιδεικνύουσιν αὐτὰς αὐταῖς ἅμα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἐναντίας).”
48 τὸ ζητεῖν αὐτὸ τοῦτο εἴτε χρη φιλοσοφεῖν εἴτε μή, καὶ τὸ τὴν φιλόσοφον θεωρίαν μετεῖναι (*Protrepticus*, fr. 6, 2, ed. Düring 1961).

49 The *ontological* meaning of the principle consists in denying the possibility that reality is contradictory, or that all things are one (ἅπαντα ἔσται ἓν): “For the same thing will be a trireme, a wall, and a man, if it is equally possible to affirm and to deny anything of anything” (1007b19-20). In other words, it affirms the necessity of distinguishing. According to Cassin and Narcy 1989, 195-213 the *logical* meaning constitutes the key aspect of that principle.

50 For a comparison, on that question, between Aristotle and Aquinas, see Isaye 1954, 206-209.

51 Cf. Jeanmart 2007, 39.

52 Cf. *Soph.* 227a-b; *Theait.* 187b.

53 The principle of self-consistency, of harmony with the *logos* in us is inseparable from the requirement of adequacy, of harmony with the *logos* outside of us, that is, speaking and thinking rightly about (περὶ) things, including ourselves.

54 Seneca (*de vita beata* VIII, 6) defines the supreme good (*summum bonum*) as the harmony or agreement of the soul with itself (*animi concordiam*). Cf. Mansfeld 1994, 190-91. Kant will take up this principle, namely not to contradict oneself, that is not to contradict one’s superior, thinking self (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Werke*, Bd. III, B 884).

55 Cf. McCabe 2006, 18.

56 Cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* IV 3, 18. In the *Republic* (473a1-2) Socrates affirms the primacy of λόγος (or in this case λέξις): “Or is it in the nature of practice to grasp truth less well than theory does (φύσιν ἔχει πράξιν λέξεως ἤ ττον ἀληθείας ἐφάπτεσθαι)” (trans. Grube rev. Reeve). This would be due to the fact that virtue can only be fully realized in language (*Rep.* 472c; *Laws* 746b-c) and that virtue is knowledge. Cf. *Apol.* 23a-b; *Phaidr.* 68c-69c; *Phaidr.* 244d, 256e; *Symp.* 203a.

57 Cf. Tarrant 2006, 110, n. 93. The Stoic school seems to be the only one in Antiquity not to have produced any dialogues (those of Epicurus have been lost). Sedley 1999 explains the difference between the Platonic dialogue portraying *exempla* and treatises expounding *praecepta* in terms of the Platonic tripartite psychology by contrast to Stoic intellectualism: in the case of the compound psychology, a purely intellectual grasp is not enough. One might perhaps object that the “Socratic dialogues” are intellectualist too, and that intellectualism, on a different

reading of it, does not reject the relevance of all emotions but understands them as necessarily deriving from opinions, which are often misguided.

58 I owe much on this point to Gaiser’s insightful analysis (1969, 100-101).

59 *Rep.* 611a-e; *Phaidr.* 79d1-7.

60 This paradox overlaps with the tension referred to in the preceding paragraph, and is also directly linked to the “dialectic” of the universal and particular discussed in F. Gonzalez’s paper included in this issue.

Platonic Interpretive Strategies, and the History of Philosophy, with a Comment on Renaud

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ABSTRACT

François Renaud replies to the question of what principles one ought to employ in the study of Plato by arguing *that*, and demonstrating *how*, the argument and the drama operate together successfully in the *Gorgias*. In agreement with Renaud's approach, I expose some historical roots with a review of Platonic interpretive strategies of the modern period in the context of history of philosophy more generally. I also try to show *why* argument and drama operate together, an insight I attribute to Plato's genius in relation to music.

Keywords: Plato, strategies, history of philosophy, music.

As my title moves from species to genus, my paper proceeds in the opposite direction; thus my contribution to François Renaud's paper—when I get there—will have been set in a broad context. I begin in section I with the very general question of what we historians of philosophy take as our aims and methods, and what we take ourselves to be doing when we do the history of philosophy. In section II, I provide a derivative account of the extant strands of Platonic interpretation to minimize superficial disputes while emphasizing a handful of genuine disagreements about how we should conduct our research efforts. The review of interpretive strategies serves to show how Renaud's contemporary approach to Plato's dialogues, section III, represents a sensitive accommodation of the best features of more limited strategies. What he calls the Platonic dialectical requirement that argument and drama be appreciated as operating together provokes me to ask *why* that is so, and to look for an answer in Plato's attitude toward music.

I. DOING HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

I begin with a July, 2015, dialectical exchange—conducted without animus between two accomplished philosophers whose identities I will later reveal; the two disagree about the *right* way to do history of philosophy. I quote from near the end of their back-and-forth:

My opponent is looking for the single key to unlock Plato's philosophy; I am skeptical that you can (or should) bring all of Plato's philosophy back to something as apparently straightforward as the theory of forms. I see Plato as a tangle of

interconnected commitments that change and evolve from the *Apology* to the end, realized in different and perhaps incompatible ways in his different writings. My opponent wants to penetrate beneath the surface of that tangle and try to find what connects them together in a rigorous way; he wants a kind of doctrinal unity, a kind of single underlying argument and position that pulls things together. I want a reading of Plato that is as holistic as his, but one that preserves the complex motivations behind his philosophical program, and that does not reduce his project to a single impulse, indeed, a single impulse that is rigorously metaphysical: working out the consequences of the theory of forms in all its ramifications. This, in a way, is the point of my “superheroes” criticism: taking Plato’s complex character and flattening him out, making his position intelligible by stripping it of what I see as its depth and complexity. Though it might be characterized as holistic, my objection is to what strikes me as an oversimplified and reductive interpretation.

There may not be an answer to which is the *right* way of doing the history of philosophy. For different figures, the answer might be different; there is no reason why every philosopher has to be the same. Insofar as my opponent and I disagree in this case, the disagreement may be over whether one way or the other is the appropriate way of approaching Plato.

I start out so very far into the future from Plato—and in our recent past—because the problem of the right way to proceed as a historian of philosophy is a *living issue* that rightly

concerns us all. Why would anyone devote the better part of a philosophical lifetime to the study of *someone else’s* philosophy? For one, to satisfy a relentless intellectual curiosity. For another, to mine the author for purposes of one’s own philosophizing. For a third, to point out what others have missed or misinterpreted.

Maybe, but . . . such generic answers do not get us very far. There is a vast difference between curiosity about the nature of reality and truth, or the right way to live, on the one hand, and curiosity about what was on the mind of a dead philosopher and his associates, on the other. Dan Garber argues that Michael Della Rocca morphs Spinoza into a superhero, an ideal type, who “is not the historical Spinoza who lived and worked in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.” Garber calls his own work a “direct reading” and avers that Della Rocca “*rationaly reconstructs* Spinoza’s project”; Della Rocca replies that *all* history of philosophy involves rational reconstruction, a premise with which I agree, though I will not attempt to defend it separately here¹.

The landscape has changed over the last half century. Although I leave entirely aside the relationship between “History of Philosophy and History of Ideas,” the title of Paul Kristeller’s 1964 paper², I’ll repeat from that classic a few methodological points about doing history of philosophy that required a substantial defense in his time but are no longer controversial: The historian of philosophy must have (i) “adequate training... in philosophy and its basic problems”; (ii) the goal of *truth*, attained only in bits and pieces; and (iii) a “certain amount of philological and scholarly training.” It is necessary (iv) to read the philosophers in their original languages—not rely on secondary sources or translations. Kristeller adds a fifth that could be discussed further, though I think his intention is clear: (v) one’s “objective interpretation”

of a thinker should be kept distinct from one's "critical analysis," which relies on one's own philosophical assumptions and opinions. At least the first four points are in the background of the Garber-Della Rocca exchange, and taken for granted; part of Garber's beef, however, is that Della Rocca's Spinoza sides with Parmenides and Plato, and jousts with twenty-first century metaphysicians.

II. SCHOOLS OF PLATONIC³ INTERPRETATION

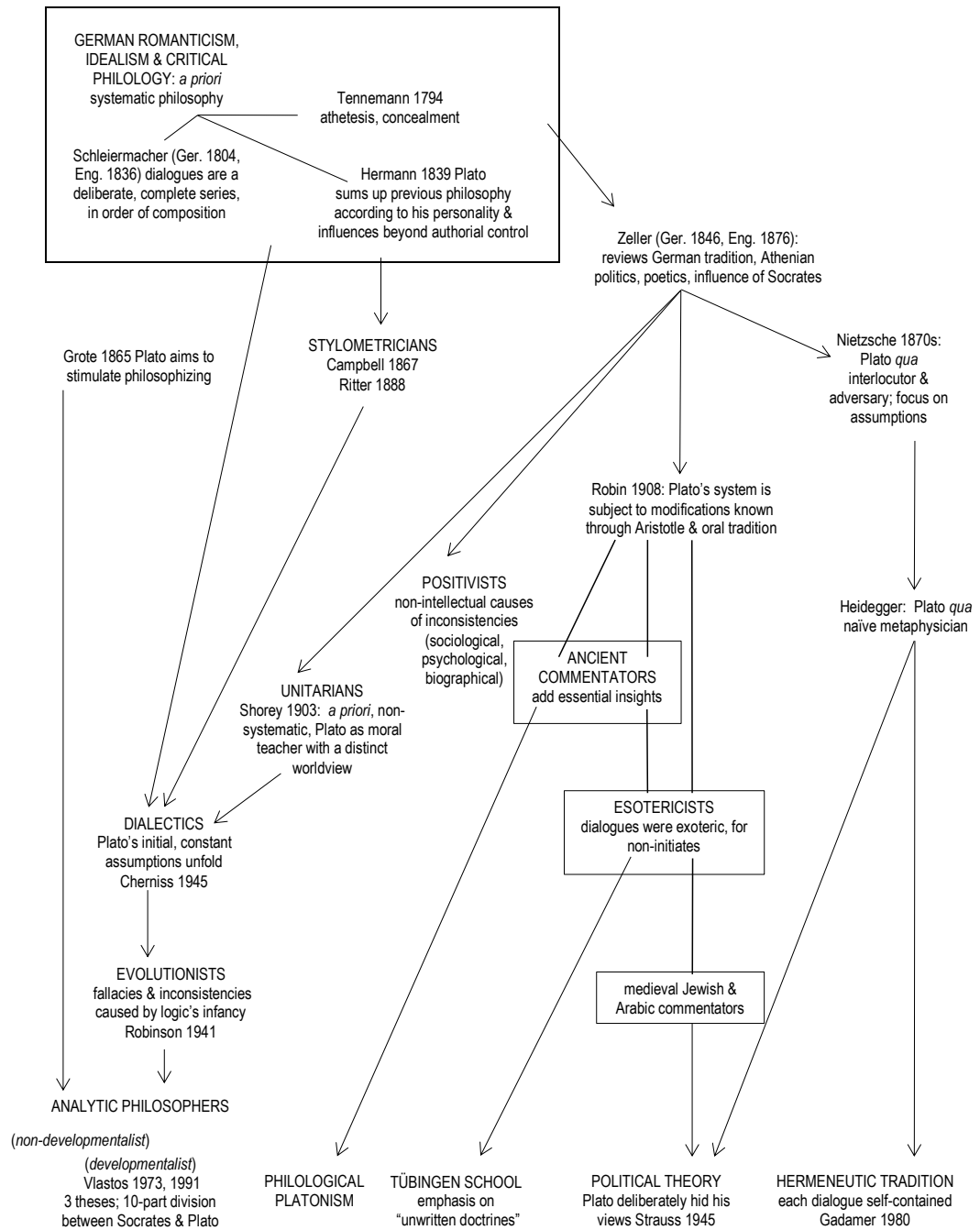
I turn now, however, to big-picture background considerations: something of a whistle-stop tour of varieties of Platonic interpretation, past to present. The reason I consider this worth doing is that different schools of interpretation can have strikingly different assumptions about Plato and — as with the branching of the evolutionary tree — can produce skin-deep resemblances or agreements that mask contrary or contradictory presuppositions that emerge in the conduct of further research. Just as often, an apparent divergence of views, when taken in context, turns out to be nothing more than a semantic squabble easily resolved. Rosamond Sprague objects to what she calls "magpie Platonists" who pick up shiny bits from here and there to make a nest that is a hodgepodge of unreflective claims. Renaud is no magpie.

Starting all the way back with the first scholars in the Academy, there was no sense that Plato needed to be *interpreted* by Speusippus and Xenocrates, just *amplified*. That did not last long. Aristotle raised the question of the relationship of mathematics to Plato's forms and to the forms of the platonists, a controversy with us still. Famously, after the death of Aristotle, all except the Epicureans among the Hellenistic Schools

claimed direct descent from Plato's Socrates. One can see in that period the origin of what has come to be thought of as a dispute over whether Plato was skeptical, as the Skeptics held, or doctrinal (with Cynics, Cyrenaics, and Stoics quarreling over what the doctrines were). Another of the contemporary preoccupations that was already a matter of ancient dispute was whether Plato reserved certain doctrines for his closest associates—that is, whether there was an esoteric doctrine, often associated with Plato's Pythagorean leanings, that was required to elaborate his exoteric dialogues.

The contemporary stage was set in the late eighteenth century in the heyday of German critical philology, idealism, and romanticism; and in the shadow of Hegel, whose grand and impenetrable system—a *priori* and unified—was considered the quintessence of greatness in philosophy. Plato was the darling of the German schoolroom, and everyone read him in Greek. The question was, How can Plato be the great and systematic philosopher we know him to be when the dialogues go this way and that, taking one position here and another there? There were—there are—answers aplenty. Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1794) achieved an elegant systematic philosophy by rejecting all but a handful of supposedly genuine dialogues; and he also held that Plato deliberately concealed the connections among his doctrines as a precaution, offering them only to intimates (Zeller 1876, 87). If the connections were not obvious, later athletes thought, then perhaps Tennemann's collection was still too large. August Krohn, by 1876, had whittled the few to one, the *Republic*.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (German 1804, English 1836) presented Plato as a deliberate and painstaking *author* whose dialogues were written in the very order that perfectly reflected his secure, basic principles. Karl Friedrich



Hermann (1839) opposed Schleiermacher directly, holding the “genetic view” that *qua* philosopher, Plato’s secure, basic principles were deployed variously throughout his lifetime, but that *qua* author, Plato was subject to external factors that accounted for inconsistencies in the dialogues. Schleiermacher’s views won the day, prompting a new and pressing question: In what order did Plato compose his dialogues? The earliest answers were two: he wrote in the order easiest-to-most complex; or he composed the dialogues in the order of Socrates’s life. Soon, however, there were scores of efforts to establish the compositional series by literary, historical, and doctrinal criteria. Eduard Zeller, in *Plato and the Older Academy* (German 1846, English 1876), made the best case he could, in 650 pages, reviewing previous scholarship. Widely influential, Zeller agreed in the main with Schleiermacher, whose clever interpretive key was the recognition of *how* Plato overcame the deficiencies of the written word: “Plato could make no advance in any dialogue unless he presumed a certain effect to have been produced by its predecessor; consequently that which formed the conclusion of one must be presupposed as the basis and commencement of another” (Zeller 1876, 99–100).

I pause to say that all three major strands of Plato interpretation are launched from the German paradigm, multifarious as it was.

Pursuing first what was to become the analytic tradition, stylometricians, hundreds of them, sought to establish the correct order of composition by measuring aspects of Plato’s style. The problem of circularity could not be overcome because the only two firm data were that the *Republic* appeared before the *Laws* and the *Laws* at the end. There was no non question-begging way to organize pre-*Republic* dialogues. Besides, there is textual evidence and testimony that Plato revised his dialogues;

and short dialogues could have been written during the composition of long ones—making any linear chronology suspect.

The English historian George Grote was a student of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham who—like Mill—swam against the German methodological tide, though Zeller often cites Grote’s *historical* observations. Mill (1887, 22) had said,

The title of Platonist belongs by far better right to those who have been nourished in, and have endeavoured to practice, Plato’s mode of investigation, than to those who are distinguished only by the adoption of certain dogmatical conclusions, drawn mostly from the least intelligible of his works, and which the character of his mind and writings makes it uncertain whether he himself regarded as anything more than poetic fancies, or philosophic conjectures.

It is not surprising then that Grote denied Plato had any doctrines and saw the dialogues as empty philosophizing—as skeptics had before him. One can sense Zeller’s frustration when he says that Grote “speaks as if Plato . . . thought nothing of contradicting himself in the most glaring manner, even in one and the same dialogue” (1876, 79–80). Grote’s view might well be associated with some later excesses of the analytic tradition: at worst, passages were ripped out of context and subjected to tests of validity and soundness, sometimes from English translations, an extreme now rare in the secondary literature⁶.

A generation later, the U.S. entered the fray: unitarians such as Paul Shorey (1903, 82–85) were dismissing the credibility of Aristotle and the augmented tradition more generally. The authority of Harold Cherniss (1944, 1945),

who saw the Platonic corpus as having an *organic* unity, mistrusting any testimony outside Plato's dialogues, was extensive.⁷ In opposition to the countercurrent of Léon Robin (see below), Cherniss held that the text always trounces the tradition. Receiving much less attention from specialists at the time was John Dewey, who had complained in 1929:

Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a 'Back to Plato' movement; but it would have to be back to the dramatic, restless, co-operatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn, and not to the artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor.

The most influential U.S. Platonist of the twentieth century was Gregory Vlastos who, to his credit, was willing to countenance an Aristotelian contribution to our understanding of Plato.⁸ Vlastos said in a nutshell that, when Plato was young, he held the philosophical views he took to be those of Socrates. As he matured, he developed views of his own, the *forms* most significantly, but he became disenchanted with forms and eschewed them in later life. That gives us three underlying assumptions: (1) Plato's views *developed*, accounting for dialogues' inconsistencies and contradictions; (2) we can reliably determine the order in which the dialogues were written—early, middle, late—and map them to the evolution of Plato's views; and (3) Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates only what Plato himself believes at the time he writes each dialogue. This third assumption was new, and it was quickly chal-

lenged by Michael Frede (1992, 214): "we have to keep in mind that, however committed the fictional questioner or respondent of the dialogue may be, *nothing follows* from this about the commitment of the author of the dialogue." Also new was Vlastos's ten-point distinction between the moral philosopher of Plato's *early* period, Socrates_E, and the metaphysically-committed philosopher Plato of the middle and late periods (1991: 47–49). The details of the system did not hold up, though some philosophers still pick out a Socratic philosophy supposedly distinct from that of Plato. We would all do better to emphasize Vlastos_E as the model for the analytic tradition, with such articles as his "The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*" (1954), "Degrees of Reality in Plato" (1965), and "Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*" (1969)—all collected in Vlastos 1973. One need not agree with his conclusions to admire the clarity. Analytic philosophy at its best makes hidden assumptions explicit and provides missing premises that charitably rehabilitate abandoned arguments.

It is necessary to return to Zeller to pick up the second major strand of interpretation. While he had used Aristotle's testimony in a quite limited way to shore up claims of authenticity for dialogues atheized by others, Léon Robin (1908) went further, arguing that the coherence of Plato's systematic philosophy requires revision by the testimony of Aristotle and the oral tradition. Robin saw himself as quelling any tendency toward esotericism by emphasizing the Platonic *unity* achieved through modifications in light of Aristotle and the Greek commentators; and he saw himself as deemphasizing biography and history, returning to philosophy. If the sociology of philosophy is of any interest, one might note that the French flag was thereby planted against Anglo-American and German positions. Robin

is largely responsible for the lasting marriage of philosophy with philology, appreciating the essential role of commentators from Aristotle on. I classify Renaud's work in this tradition.

Another development in interpretive strategies surprisingly compatible with Robin is esotericism, still very strong, maintaining that one cannot depend *solely* on Plato's dialogues because, as Plato suggests, the written word (especially when the author does not speak) is inadequate to the purposes of philosophy; hence the importance of the commentators, especially Aristotle, for saying more about Plato's intended meaning. 'Esotericism' can have an innocuous meaning: that is, simply reading dialogues will not yield a nuanced understanding of Plato; one needs to go to graduate school, to take "the longer road" and participate with others in dialectical inquiry for a deeper grasp. The ancient platonists, in this inoffensive sense, are co-participants in a rigorous Plato seminar. 'Esotericism' only begins to sound insidious when the same concrete experience of studying Plato is described in terms of 'masters', 'secret doctrines', and 'initiates' instead—with the connotation of mystery cults.

The Tübingen school, largely neglected in the U.S.,⁹ has two chief assumptions in the account of Thomas Szlezák (2012, 303): It "takes seriously, unlike the common practice since Schleiermacher, clear indications in the dialogues that they are not meant by their author to be autarchic, self-sufficient and comprehensive accounts of his philosophy. The fact that the dialogues point beyond themselves, not only casually and incidentally, but systematically and consistently, is essential for their being understood." Second, the school's adherents "reject as methodologically ill-conceived and wholly unconvincing the attempt (undertaken by Cherniss 1944) to discard the testimony of Aristotle and other sources concerning Plato's

agrapha dogmata or 'unwritten doctrines'. There are two sources of our knowledge of Plato's philosophy: the direct tradition, that is, the dialogues, and the indirect tradition, that is, the *Testimonia Platonica*. Neither of the two branches of the transmission should be ignored."¹⁰

The other important esoteric tradition—but in political theory, not philosophy—can be traced from Zeller through Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger to Leo Strauss. As Hayden Ausland (2012: 302) sees it, "The esotericism integral to Straussian readings of Plato takes as its model a prudential hermeneutics acknowledging several levels of meaning, as developed in medieval Jewish and Arabic philosophy for the sake of pursuing speculation within a society governed by religious law (Strauss 1945), for which the analogue in Plato's time will have been the Athenian political conditions under which the trial and execution of Socrates proved possible." An influential Straussian, Catherine Zuckert, explains, "In his dialogues, Plato presents exclusively the speeches and deeds of others. The dialogues must, therefore, be read like dramas in which one never identifies the views of the author with any particular character" (2012, 298–99). Each dialogue reveals a partial truth, and the parts do *not* altogether form a whole. Dramatic elements are essential because—at least in the view of some branches of Straussianism—"the action of a dialogue undermines its apparent surface teaching or 'argument.'" Plato deliberately conceals his own views.

Contemporary literary contextualists, in the wake of Hans-Georg Gadamer, have some of the same forebears after Zeller: Nietzsche and Heidegger. Again the dramatic aspects are crucial, but equally important is that each dialogue is and must be interpreted as a self-contained whole; thus attempts to interpret

Plato across the whole corpus are feckless. Hermeneutic philosophy at its best permits us to see a dialogue in a whole new way.

Still relevant is Myles Burnyeat's (1979) précis of what remains a contemporary interpretive problem:

The great difficulty in writing about Plato is to combine the depth and strength of the Platonic vision with the Socratic subtlety of the arguments by which it is conveyed. Plato's dialogues are a miraculous blend of philosophical imagination and logic. The interpreter must somehow respond to both, for if the imaginative vision is cut loose from the arguments it becomes grandiloquent posturing, and the arguments on their own are arid, the mere skeleton of a philosophy. So it is already a criticism to say of the books under review that Professor Findlay's work is all vision, without argument, and that Professor Irwin's is all argument with no vision.¹¹

The perennial problem for interpretation is that there are not many human beings who can do both well. Renaud concentrates on a single dialogue and its dramatic elements—but not without the clarity of argument expected of an analyst, and not without appreciation for Aristotle and the commentary tradition.

III. RENAUD'S INTERPRETIVE STRATEGY

Renaud and I, through an amiable dialectical process, have reached close accord about the mutual operation of argument and drama in the dialogues, a position he illustrates

persuasively with its application to Plato's *Gorgias* together with descriptions of *how* the two function together. Only a few quibbles remain.

The first (1.1) is terminological: 'evil' and 'punishment' smuggle religious views into the text of the *Gorgias* that I do not think Plato shared.¹² Instead of "the greatest of all evils is to commit injustice and not to be *punished*," I would have us say, "of all bad things, the most bad is to commit injustice, but worse if uncorrected." Punishment is retributive and backward-looking; correction or discipline *rectifies* and improves the recipient. Although Renaud has done an excellent job of explaining why Socrates has cause in the *Gorgias* to respond to Callicles's mention of such harsh punishments as flogging and execution, I remain sympathetic with Rowe 2007, who uses 'therapy' to describe the corrective use of dialectic. Conventions of punishment change over time and place. I concede that torturing the body to save the soul has been a regular religious practice, and that corporal punishment—whipping and beating—now considered abusive, has a long history of being used for disciplining children, in the belief that physical pain would promote better behavior. Plato's Socrates did not think physical pain was a good way to train horses or dogs, but I leave that aside and simply concede further that execution, explicit at *Gorgias* 480d2, could only be regarded as forward-looking and corrective in the sense that it protects others from harm. The execution remark immediately follows the passage that Renaud so rightly identifies as the proper analogy for correction, as it is used in the dialogue: one should not shrink from presenting oneself to a physician for surgery or cauterization if needed. I would add the earlier analogy from 453e2: arithmetic or the arithmetician teaches us about numbers, presumably correcting our mistakes so that

we learn what is true. Like the health analogy, arithmetic involves a standard for comparison.¹³ Correction or discipline ought to lead one closer to that standard.

Second, Renaud remarks in 3.1 that Plato criticizes the character of Alcibiades and Callicles. Leaving aside the mistake of attributing to the author, Plato, views gleaned from what other people are made to say in dialogues—which would require a considerable defense to establish—Renaud does not like Callicles and accuses him of abandoning the principle of frankness (παρρησία), for example. Plato could affect, but he could not control his audience's reaction to the persons represented in the dialogues. Another student of the *Gorgias*, E. R. Dodds (1959, 14), developed a different impression, saying that Plato's

portrait of Callicles not only has warmth and vitality but is tinged with a kind of regretful affection. True, the young man is insufferably patronizing; true, as the discussion proceeds he becomes unpleasantly rude, and at one stage turns sulky. Yet he likes Socrates, and his repeated expressions of concern for the philosopher's safety are, I think, quite sincerely meant. Socrates on his side perceives in him the true touchstone: he praises his honesty in 'saying frankly what other people think but will not say'; he also recognizes him to be by current standards a cultivated man who, unlike Polus, has acquired some tincture of philosophy παιδείας χάριν. But what is more significant is the powerful and disturbing eloquence that Plato has bestowed on Callicles—an eloquence destined to convince the young Nietzsche, while Socrates' reasonings left him cold. One is tempted to believe that Callicles stands for something which Plato had it in

him to become (and would have become, but for Socrates), an unrealized Plato.¹⁴

I am not taking sides about whose view of Callicles is more appropriate, just pointing out that two reasonable scholars can understand character differently and that we interpreters, therefore, should be careful about ἦθος.

Third, we seem to disagree about how the individual's mind works when reading a Platonic dialogue. Perhaps, as Renaud says at 3.3, "The reader must constantly move from the argument to the drama, that is, from the semantic (or explicit) dimension to the pragmatic (or implicit) dimension, and vice-versa." But perhaps that kind of shifting attentiveness characterizes someone who, like Renaud, seeks to dissect Plato's technique. Plato's art is more subtle, more successful, when the drama does *not* require the reader's conscious attention, when the drama registers in the preconscious while the argument takes the leading role. For reasons that will become clearer when I turn to music below, a unified psyche learns most readily when it concentrates, not when it is distracted from one level to another. The drama is the medium that carries the argument along, intensifying the affective dimension and thereby increasing learning.

Ultimately, the burden of Renaud's paper is to demonstrate that argument and drama, equally indispensable, work together because the objective and the subjective are, he says at the end of his paper, "in tension with each other" (3.3). I do not observe the tension, but it appears to result from whatever grounds his surprising assertion that "basic philosophical questions can only be answered in the first person singular" (conclusion). I do not understand the claim. It might mean that knowledge is itself the kind of thing that would not exist if there were no intelligent beings. That seems

right. There would still be being, reality, the physical universe and its laws, but no grasping of truth, nothing to call ‘knowledge’. Or it might mean that humans are hopelessly subjective and cannot achieve formal knowledge, mathematics being as high an achievement as is possible. Under this interpretation, for example, knowledge of the *form* of the equal—a form not limited to mathematical uses—would be impossible for a human being. That seems wrong—as if omniscience were the standard for ἐπιστήμη or νοῦς.¹⁵ Further, when Renaud says that one of Platonic dialectic’s two purposes is “the attainment of a perfectly self-sufficient or absolute object, an entirely impersonal norm” (3.3), it is the term ‘attainment’ that strikes me. I have attained knowledge (not merely true beliefs) of the form of the equal and the form of the good, even if I lack omniscience; and from that knowledge, I can deduce further true propositions. The statements, “No one does harm willingly” and “Virtue is knowledge” are not first-person singular statements.¹⁶

Quibbles aside, I agree with Renaud that, in the *Gorgias*, the drama contributes to our understanding because Plato observes two principles—διάνοια and ἦθος—that Aristotle later theorizes in the *Poetics*. However, Aristotle should have said that plot and diction are also characteristic of *sōkratikoī logoi*—recalling that plot represents action. There is action in the dialogues. Unlike tragedy and comedy, however, the most important part of a *sōkratikos logos*, its soul, is διάνοια as reasoning or argument.

I want now to plunge deeper into the related question of *why* Plato observes the particular principles that Aristotle theorizes. There is an easy answer and a more complicated one though both are dependent on the assumption that the Platonic dialogues educate us, that we learn from them. Plato, in his *sōkratikoī logoi*, deploys four of Aristotle’s six parts of the

drama: plot, characters, diction, and reasoning; he omits spectacle and song. The easy answer might be gleaned from *Republic* 5: the lovers of sights and sounds, spectacle and song, love learning; but they are so-called philosophers, distinct from the real philosophers who love not only learning but truth and wisdom.

The more complicated answer is one that Stephen Halliwell articulates in a chapter from his 2002 *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, picking up where Charlie Segal left off in 1962: the Platonic critique of the man Gorgias is justified insofar as Gorgias lacks any systematic understanding of the psyche as a whole or of the implications of his views for ethics and psychology—both crucial to genuine learning—but explaining Gorgias’s penchant for having his students memorize and display. The critique fails, however, in that it misses the historical point, which, according to Segal, is that Damon,¹⁷ Gorgias, and Plato represent three stages in the increasing awareness of the undeniable yet inscrutable connections among words, visual images, and sounds and their powerful emotional effects on the psyche.¹⁸ Because Plato understood the erotic dimension of intellectual curiosity, he could write dialogues that brought about both rational and arational effects; the dialogues are successful, in part, because they are multiply attractive.¹⁹ So why not use music as well?

Socrates mentions music (at *Gorgias* 474e4–5) in relation to identifying the standards that govern judgments of sounds as admirable or shameful. Segal and Halliwell are right to insist that Plato *realized* that music is more than the formal study of harmonics; he knew, perhaps from Damon, that music directly and profoundly affects the emotions and is thus central to human motivation—but it is especially difficult to control. As Halliwell (2002, 238) puts it, “Whatever exact ideas were held by the

now shadowy figure of Damon himself, there is no serious doubt that he started a system of theorizing that depended on the attribution of ‘character’ (*ēthos*) to musical works and to the tunings, scales, and melodic patterns (all of which can be covered by the Greek term *harmoniai*) which they employed”. Despite popular attention to the *Republic*’s artful tripartition, Plato knew better than most that the psyche is divided in words only.²⁰ It is not just that the *Republic* explodes the metaphor in a variety of ways; the *Symposium* offers an extended and multifaceted account of the unified psyche.

Plato attended seriously to writing philosophy with his insight that even words are images, including words that together form dialogues; and all images are indistinct, seeming, becoming—requiring studied attention to their likely psychological effects.²¹ We are mistaken then to imagine that we have identified rigid designators, or that propositional logic can shield us from all error. Just as music enters the psyche *directly with immediate effect*, and thus—from Plato’s perspective—needs to be harnessed and carefully used (*Republic* 2–3), so do the cadences and figural language of prose have arational effects on the psyche. So do remembrances of real persons. So do such immortal images as the cave, the chariot, and Diotima’s ladder. Plato’s own images in words weave the arational, the emotional, together with reasoning, and all are crucial to learning.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Garber-Della Rocca exchange (2015, 533) describes the hilly landscape along which historians of philosophy have planted their variety of flags: (1) the degree to which a single principle structures the author’s thought; (2) the degree to which there is a “unifying theme

across different works by the same author and across different stages of a career,” and (3) the degree to which one draws “connections and contrasts” with contemporary philosophy. Clearly this is not the road Renaud takes.

By this standard, I occupy an extreme: (1) I have argued elsewhere (2013) that Plato had a single unhypothetical principle—not the good, but something more like the principle of sufficient reason governing reality, with a derivative principle of non-contradiction governing truth. In so orderly a cosmos, *of course* no one does wrong willingly. (2) A single theme unifies Plato’s works throughout his lifetime: he held the process of philosophical education or learning paramount, and could—by writing dialogues—illustrate Socratic efforts to encourage the intellectual labors of others while compensating for the deficiencies of the Socratic oral method, among which I include the “lack of a shared background to guarantee the level of discussion; inability to introduce large and complex philosophical systems for analysis; and inability to produce contributions to philosophical content” (1995, 215). The dialogue form reinforced the view that each of us must do our own intellectual work and reach our own conclusions—also argued elsewhere (1995, chapter 12). (3) It is philosophically rewarding to work out Platonic passages in relation to contemporary claims. Perhaps it is not so obvious but, in all the historical cases I sailed through in section II, interpreters were making connections and contrasts to the contemporary philosophies of their own times. Doing history of philosophy is doing philosophy; all philosophy is contemporary philosophy. The salient difference among them is the extent to which a historian of philosophy recognizes and makes explicit those connections and contrasts. Because some famous historians of philosophy object to contemporary references, some Platonists are ashamed to mention them in public.²²

Ideally, one should choose the interpretive strategy, the method, that advances philosophy—but the ‘should’ is aspirational, and ‘choose’ is narrowly circumscribed.²³ The texts and teachers who inspire us in our ancient philosophical endeavors are mostly *not up to us* because much of our formative education is determined by our school districts. A graduate education, even university, is too late for most people to acquire the language skills, the expertise at formal reasoning, and the literary insight that a full appreciation of Plato would require. Important philosophical passages are pointed out to students, said to be worth their time—and the “settled” issues observed to be appropriate for undergraduate essays, but a waste of time in philosophical adulthood. Some of it sticks. One point about choosing an interpretive approach to Plato is that each of us has different talents, different backgrounds, and different assumptions—not to mention different educational opportunities. Our academic lives are marked by stages of choosing dissertation topics, or the subject for a gold-standard, peer-reviewed article, or a tenure book. These are not illegitimate matters, but they are artifacts of the de-natured twenty-first century Academy. I commend Renaud for his ability to combine the strengths of what, in their own time, were considered competing interpretive strategies.

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NOTES

1 For the long quotation, see Garber–Della Rocca 2015, 538 (where one must substitute ‘Spinoza’, ‘Della Rocca’, ‘PSR’, and ‘*Short Treatise*’ appropriately for Garber’s original words).

2 Kristeller 1964: (i) 4, 6 (ii) 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, (iii) 8, (iv) 6–7, (v) 11; he points out that the *Journal of the History of Ideas* was founded in 1940, the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* in 1963.

3 This soil is well tilled. In addition to the contributors I cite in subsequent notes, see especially Guthrie 1967, 1–18; Clay 1975; Berti 1989; Press 1996; and—except for the price—Smith 1998.

4 It was generally assumed at the time that Plato began writing dialogues before Socrates was executed.

5 See Nails 2012, 290–91, and additional sources cited there.

6 The analytic tradition is the one in which I was trained, and in which I continue to operate, taking some justification from Aristotle’s treatment of Plato. Fink 2012 does a fine job of showing Aristotle’s primary interest in extracting arguments from the dialogues without ignoring Plato’s interest in character: “How Did Aristotle Read a Platonic Dialogue?” Although I consider the positivists a manifestation of what has come to be seen as the wider analytic approach to Plato I elide them here with only the comment that Gilbert Ryle (1966) was an astute critic of the biography and history of his time.

7 For an assessment of the damage done by Cherniss’s anti-Aristotle view to the practice of Plato scholarship in the U.S., see Gerson, 2014.

8 Vlastos (1973, introduction) identifies Shorey and Zeller as his forebears.

9 Vlastos 1973 includes an unfavorable and lopsided review (‘On Plato’s Oral Doctrine’) of Krämer 1959, originally published in *Gnomon* in 1963.

10 He cites his 1985 and 2004; and he credits Gaiser 1963 and Richard 1986, 243–380 for collecting the *agrapha dogmata*. Both parts of the quotation are adapted to remove these citations.

11 Burnyeat 1979 on Findlay 1974, 1979 and Irwin 1977.

12 The alien intrusion of a religious sensibility occurs again at the end of Renaud’s paper: “the self, delivered from the body, can finally achieve its full, original unity”—though nothing from the *Gorgias* is cited to confirm the claim.

13 Dodds’s 1959 comment on 474d4–5 mentions the standard implicit in health and sums.

14 Numerous citations to the text of *Gorgias* are removed from the short quotation.

15 Glaucon in *Republic*, and Socrates in *Symposium* are depicted as unable to follow their guides to the highest realm of understanding — but their guides are already there, so one need not give up hope.

16 Such an interpretation also has the advantage of coincidence with certain remarks about the value of dialectic: Theaetetus, for example, will make fewer errors after

being subjected to Socrates’s efforts at midwifery.

17 Damon of Oe, son of Damonides, was a music theorist of Pericles’ generation who appears in many inscriptions and texts of the classical period, including a few Platonic dialogues and accretions of the early Academy, where he is presented in a positive light (*Laches*, *Republic*, *Alcibiades I*, and *Axiochus*). See Nails 2002, 121–22, West 1992, 246–53, and Halliwell 2002, 238–40.

18 The awareness culminates in Aristotle’s “full-blown scientific theory” (*Poetics*). Segal’s assessment of Gorgias is based primarily on the *Defense of Helen* 12–14 (1962, 105). Because, when judging Plato, Segal puts his whole emphasis on the tripartite psyche of the *Republic*, he misses Plato’s understanding of these connections, saddling Plato with a pure, rational attempt to suppress the emotions that greater attention to the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* would have cured.

19 Segal says that Damon was “acutely interested in the practical ethical and educative values of the psychological effect of music” and his “work represents another, perhaps earlier, phase of the rational systematization and control of obscure psychic processes. Gorgias continues this kind of approach in the area of rhetoric and poetry.”

20 I present an argument for the unity of the psyche, based on Plato’s *Symposium*, in Nails 2015.

21 Segal’s *logos* is an account, and an account might have many parts, words, images, and sounds.

22 Burnyeat 1985 was right to criticize the injunction to “understand the philosopher as he understood himself” as an “illusory goal.” Burnyeat was referring specifically to Strauss’s injunction, but it is not so far from Garber’s desire to know “the historical Spinoza who lived and worked in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.”

23 Perhaps the wand chooses the wizard.

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