CHRISTOPHER ROWE

Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing

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PLATO AND THE ART OF PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING

Plato's dialogues are usually understood as simple examples of philosophy in action. In this book Professor Rowe treats them rather as literary-philosophical artefacts, shaped by Plato's desire to persuade his readers to exchange their view of life and the universe for a different view which, from their present perspective, they will barely begin to comprehend. What emerges is a radically new Plato: a Socratic throughout, who even in the late dialogues is still essentially the Plato (and the Socrates) of the *Apology* and the so-called 'Socratic' dialogues. This book aims to understand Plato both as a philosopher and as a writer, on the assumption that neither of these aspects of the dialogues can be understood without the other. The argument of the book is closely based on Plato's text, but should be accessible to any serious reader of Plato, whether professional philosopher or classicist, student or general reader.

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Contents

Preface *page* vii

Preliminaries: reading Plato 1

THE DIALOGUES

Introduction: The simile of the cave in the *Republic* 55

1 The *Apology*: Socrates' defence, Plato's manifesto 66

2 The *Phaedo*: Socrates' defence continued 96

3 'Examining myself and others', I: knowledge and soul in *Charmides*, *First Alcibiades*, *Meno*, *Republic*, *Euthyphro*, *Phaedrus* 122

4 The moral psychology of the *Gorgias* 143

5 'Examining myself and others', II: soul, the excellences and the 'longer road' in the *Republic* 164

Appendix to Chapter 5: Socrates vs Thrasymachus in *Republic* I 186

Interlude: A schedule of the genuine dialogues 198

6 Knowledge and the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*, I: knowledge and belief in Book V 200

7 Knowledge and the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*, II: the limits of knowledge 214

8 The *Theaetetus*, and the preferred Socratic–Platonic account of knowledge 229

9 The form of the good and the good: the *Republic* in conversation with other ('pre-*Republic*') dialogues 239

10 *Republic* and *Timaeus*: the status of Timaeus' account of the physical universe 255

11 Plato on the art of writing and speaking (*logoi*): the *Phaedrus* 266

Epilogue: What is Platonism? 273

Bibliography 277

Index 282

Preface

I offer in this book what is in some respects a new approach to Plato: one that attempts to take account of his strategies as a writer who writes, for the most part, in order to *persuade* his readers; an approach that attempts, in particular, to understand the way in which those strategies help to shape what he writes. In other words, my first concern is with understanding the nature of Platonic *rhetoric*. What he actually says, or has his main character – usually Socrates – say, is usually only a version of what he wants to say, designed to suit a particular audience on a particular occasion, as defined by the *dramatis personae* and the setting of the individual work; and he may well offer us different versions of the same thing, either in the same dialogue or, more usually, in others. It is one of the main claims of this book that trying to read off Plato's thinking from the surface of the dialogues is unlikely to be a reliable method for understanding him; especially when such a method is combined, as it often is, with a tendency to interpret different treatments of the same topic in chronological terms, that is, as evidence of 'developments' in his thinking. What will emerge, by the end of the book, is a Plato who will be, to most readers, and often for different reasons, unlike the Plato they have come to think they know.

At the same time, however, I am conscious of returning, in some respects, to an earlier tradition, which I identify particularly with Paul Shorey, among the Anglophones, and among French scholars with figures like Auguste Diès, Joseph Moreau, and more recently Monique Dixsaut, the sensitivity of all of whom to the complexity and sophistication of Plato's writing resists domination by any particular school of interpretation – whether one that sees Plato as a purveyor of doctrines, or one that treats him as a thinker who above all wants *us* to think, for ourselves. (These are caricatures, one of an ancient tradition of interpretation, the second of a more modern one.) This may be wishful thinking, and I may be on my own, as in some parts of the book I surely am; nor would I claim the protection of the figures just named for the outcomes of this book. It is, however, certainly true

that the book finds itself opposed to the two tendencies I have just referred to. It is opposed, particularly, to the second type of interpretation, the non-doctrinalist one, which in one variety or another currently dominates Anglophone Platonic scholarship – usually in combination with a special 'developmental' thesis: that Plato started as a Socratic, but broke away in mid-career to become a Platonist. My own rival thesis is that Plato stayed a Socratic till the end. That is why, for the most part, he keeps Socrates on as his main speaker; 'Socrates', indeed, is his *alter ego*, his *persona*, his mask. And as it happens, this thesis also turns the normal non-'developmentalist', or 'unitarian' (also 'doctrinalist') type of interpretation on its head. The normal, contemporary 'unitarian' view starts from the 'mature' Plato and works backwards, so that Plato's Socraticism is submerged and obliterated. This view too I find mistaken and unhelpful, even if, over the centuries, it or some version of it has given the world what it understood as 'Plato'. So from at least two perspectives this will appear a radical book. Yet, as I have implied, I believe that this appearance has more to do with the directions that Platonic interpretation has taken in the last century than with the book's theses in themselves. As I read Shorey's *The Unity of Plato's Thought*, for example, from 1903, or Diès on Platonic *transposition* (1913), I have the sense that I am in large part only walking old and overgrown paths again.

However the book is not written primarily in order to argue *against* any particular view of Plato. Rather, its purpose is to argue *for* a view which happens to be in opposition to others. This is reflected in the fact that I make relatively little reference to existing literature on Plato, rarely engage directly with others on particular points, and frequently fail to acknowledge that others have arrived before me at what may look like the same interpretations. My explanation, and excuse, apart from the fact that the book is already long enough, is that despite the extended and detailed discussions of particular stretches of text that occupy the larger part of the book, my overriding concern at every point is less with those discussions in themselves than with the larger argument they are designed to support. It is chiefly for that larger argument, and the light that *it* brings to Plato's texts, that I claim whatever degree of originality the book may have. My broad characterizations of current trends in Platonic scholarship are a product of ten years' service as compiler of 'Booknotes on Plato and Socrates' for *Phronesis*, with up to fifty books a year to read – mainly in English, but also in French, German, and Italian, occasionally in Spanish (or Catalan); crude my characterizations may be, but I dare say they are true enough to life.

My argument is, inevitably, still a work in progress. Since it will never be complete (and I have already had to cut out at least a third of what I

had originally intended to include), now is as good a moment as any to bring it to publication. If the book's title recalls Richard Rutherford's *The Art of Plato* (1995), and, more polemically, Thomas Szlezák's *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie* (originally 1985; volume II, 2004), that is accidental. *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (*PAPW*) has a much closer relationship to the book Terry Penner and I co-authored on Plato's *Lysis* (Cambridge University Press 2005), of which it is, in a way, a direct descendant. My part in *Plato's* Lysis was the first fruit of a five-year Personal Research Professorship awarded to me by the Leverhulme Trust; *PAPW* is the second – and indeed it was the original project for the Professorship. However, as it turned out, *Plato's* Lysis was a necessary first step, helping to shape many of the central ideas in *PAPW*. In some important respects *PAPW* even presupposes the earlier volume, while also applying aspects of its outcomes to a much larger quantity of text: perhaps, in one way or another, up to half of the genuine dialogues. At the same time *PAPW* brings together, and gives a fuller context and meaning to, a significant number of my other publications, whether commentaries, articles or book chapters; some of this published material has been absorbed into the new book, but nearly all of it has been completely re-thought and re-written to fit the new, larger context.

My thanks go, first and foremost, to the Leverhulme Trust, without whose support neither *Plato's* Lysis nor *PAPW* would probably have emerged until five or ten years from now, if at all; in second place to Terry Penner, who as usual has been ready with philosophical support whenever asked, but who is completely innocent of any philosophical crimes that I may have committed over the following pages; then to all those friends, colleagues and students with whom I have discussed various parts of the book, in various parts of the world, over the last fifteen to twenty years; to my talented and inspiring departmental colleagues in Durham; to Durham University, for awarding me a Sir Derman Christopherson Fellowship for the last, crucial stages of the writing of the book; to the Durham Institute of Advanced Studies, for a haven and good philosophical company over the last months; to the two long-suffering readers for the Press (one of whom was Thomas Johansen); to Jodie Barnes, Sarah Parker, Michael Sharp and especially Linda Woodward (best of copy-editors) at the Press; and last but hardly least, to Heather Rowe.

Durham, May 2007

Preliminaries: reading Plato

1 INTRODUCTION

This is a book about Plato as a writer of philosophy: probably the most accomplished and sophisticated such writer the western world has known, but also one of the most puzzling. One of the chief puzzles about Plato's writing, and the one from which I shall begin, is its enormous *variety*. Why should he write in so many different ways? Philosophers, surely, only need to write in one way – as clearly and intelligibly as possible. Granted, virtually every item within the Platonic corpus is written in the same general format, that of imaginary conversations (reported or direct) between two or more interlocutors. However, this format is deployed in markedly varying fashions, and not only that, but often with what appear to be markedly varying outcomes. It sometimes appears almost as if different parts of the Platonic *oeuvre* might have been written by different people.[1] Most strikingly, while a significant number of dialogues, mainly short ones, take the form of an apparently open-ended exploration of particular subjects (often particular virtues – what I shall prefer to call 'excellences': *aretai*), led by a Socrates who continually advocates the importance of such – apparently open-ended – exploration and inquiry, other dialogues seem to show us a quite different Socrates, and a different Plato. Thus, most notoriously, the Socrates of the *Republic* – a work which will figure prominently in the present book – appears, at least on first reading, as an advocate of a closed society in which philosophy, instead of being the instrument of intellectual liberation that those other shorter dialogues seem to promise to make it, becomes the instrument of a political structure in which 'liberation' would

[1] By and large there is now consensus about which dialogues within the traditional corpus are by Plato and which are spurious; only one or two items are still debated, notably the *First Alcibiades*, *Hippias Major*, and *Clitophon*. (I myself think all three of these certainly spurious, along with all the *Letters*. *Menexenus* is by now surely off the doubtful list.)

evidently consist, for the majority of the population, in their control and manipulation by the few (philosophers).

How to explain this and other examples of the way Plato apparently changed, or wavered, in his approach to philosophy and to the writing of it: that will be one of the major tasks to be attempted in the following pages,[2] along with the task of explaining what it is, exactly, that Plato wanted to achieve, and thought he could achieve, by writing as he did. And that, for anyone who has seriously read any part of his *oeuvre* (i.e. by reading any dialogue from beginning to end, rather than just conning pre-selected passages, torn from their contexts), is the biggest question of all. As one of a fine group of undergraduates in Durham recently put it to me, Plato is 'weird', because he makes any reader work so hard to see what it is that he is up to – what he is using his characters to *say*, or in other words what he wants the reader to extract from his text.[3] Studiously (it seems) leaving himself off the list of speakers on every occasion, or at least not appearing in person, he leaves us to guess where to locate his voice. The best guess must be that it is normally the main speaker that speaks for him – and so, since Socrates is usually that main speaker, the chances are that Socrates' voice will also, normally, be Plato's (see section 4 below).[4] But then Socrates himself so often tells us that he has no answers – and when he does seem to come up with answers, they are not always the ones we might have expected, or hoped for (I refer again to the *Republic* as my central example).

At issue here is nothing less than what some might call the meaning of Plato, and of Platonism: 'Platonism', that is, in the sense of what it is that Plato stands for. At the most basic level, is he a philosopher who wishes for nothing so much as to *make his readers think for themselves*, somehow to make use of their own inner resources, without trying to weigh them down too heavily with doctrine? Or is he, on the contrary, someone who writes in order to impart *doctrines*? These are the lines along which the longest-running dispute among Plato's interpreters – beginning, strangely, even with his immediate successors, who might have been expected to know how to read him – has permanently been drawn. However, each of the two types of interpretation appears just as problematical as the other. If the

[2] The outcome of my argument will be to put the emphasis on that 'apparently' in 'apparently changed'. Plato changed a great deal less than appearances might suggest.

[3] 'Nothing is a matter of course; everything can be called into question. To read Plato demands a far higher degree of vigilance and activity than any other philosopher asks for. Time after time, we are forced to make our choice, to decide how we should interpret what we are reading' (Tigerstedt 1977: 99).

[4] See also Kraut 1992: 25–30.

first is right, then why is there so much by way of what look like positive doctrines in at least a significant proportion of the dialogues? And if the second, then why on earth did Plato not try to impart his teaching in a more direct way?

Defenders of the first type of interpretation will typically concentrate their fire on the talk of 'doctrines'. They will propose that Plato has few if any of *those*, pointing to that very richness (I called it variety) of Plato's writing, and explaining it either as proof of his versatility, or else as a sign of the kind of process of continual development and maturation that we should expect of any good philosopher. Talk of 'versatility' is in danger of suggesting that we can retreat into interpreting each dialogue on its own (as some scholars in the last two centuries have attempted to do), and there are too many connections between them, too many constants, to make that a viable proposition.[5] But again, if Plato was a doctrinalist, why was he not more open and direct about it? Because, say some defenders of the 'doctrinal' sort of interpretation, Plato thought his ideas incapable of being properly conveyed in writing; the dialogues are a sort of invitation to the feast, offering an initial encounter with fundamental ideas that could not be fully grasped without deepened contact through the medium of oral discussion within the walls and porticoes of the Academy. Yet what these interpreters generally propose for the main feast centres on a metaphysical system (including a set of first principles) that generally seems a good deal less interesting philosophically – whether to most ancient or to modern tastes – than what we find on or just under the surface of the dialogues themselves. Even more importantly, such interpreters fail to explain why, on their account, Plato needed to write out so many and such varied invitations: so many dialogues, small, medium-sized, large, massive, containing a wealth of action, argument, imagery, all sorts of other varieties of brilliance – why go on writing them, throughout a lifetime, if they were only the first step, and to be superseded by a higher (and not so far obviously more illuminating)[6] state of understanding?

Despite what I have just said, my own interpretation of Plato, or at any rate of Plato *as a writer*, as it unfolds, will turn out to have at least as much

[5] That is, if we want (as I presume most will want) to take Plato seriously as a philosopher. Of course if one decides in advance that he is (e.g.) a dramatist rather than a philosopher, then the objection might not apply. Grote 1865, a brilliant account in its own way, may be said to have tested to destruction the idea that we can appreciate Plato fully without at some point trying to relate systematically what we discover in one dialogue to what we discover in another. (Grote himself was reacting to what he – rightly – saw as the oversystematization of Plato by Neoplatonizing interpreters.)

[6] I refer here simply to the apparent philosophical aridity of the reconstructed 'unwritten doctrines' (Aristotle's phrase) of Plato on which such interpreters often pin their hopes.

in common with that of the second, 'doctrinal', group of interpreters as with that of the first, who may be very loosely termed 'sceptical'.[7] I shall certainly want to reject the understanding of Platonism put forward by the particular 'doctrinal' interpreters I had in mind in the preceding paragraph,[8] but there are certain things that they seem to me to have got right (as, for example, when they insist that Plato does not always say, at any one point, everything that he has in mind, or in hand; or, more generally, when they tell us that we frequently need to look below the surface of the text to find its real intention). It is interpreters of the 'sceptical' mould that I shall treat as my more immediate opponents, and among that rather broad group, one set of interpreters in particular: those who divide off certain parts of the Platonic corpus as 'Socratic' – the 'Socratic dialogues' being those mainly shorter, allegedly 'exploratory' dialogues that I have referred to, dating (it seems) from somewhere near the beginning of Plato's writing career – and who by so doing shift the locus of what is most authentically Platonic to the period of writing that followed. *The* key moment in Plato's development, from that perspective, was the break from the master, Socrates, the moment when the younger man started writing more ambitious and positive works (especially the *Republic*), whatever the degree of attachment he may have felt to the successive outcomes of these.[9]

Perhaps as much as anything else, it will be my aim in the present book to replace this way of dividing up Plato's work, which in my view has become the single greatest obstacle to a proper understanding of Plato and

[7] The term will roughly fit, insofar as the ancient and original sceptics – one variety of whom developed their views inside Plato's Academy itself, a few generations after Plato's death – were people who perpetually *looked* (the Greek verbs are *skopein*, *skopeisthai*, the noun *skepsis*), without ever finding anything solid they could rely on. Academic sceptics read Plato *as* a sceptic: some of the dialogues – especially the so-called 'Socratic' group (see below) – may superficially attract such a reading, but no modern interpreter would be likely to find it satisfactory. It is thus safe enough to borrow the term 'sceptical' for that broad church of non-'doctrinalist' readers of Plato. The members of this same broad church tend also to suppose that their non-doctrinal Plato was typically ready to review his ideas, to modify, abandon and replace them – to 'mature' and 'develop', as I put it in the preceding paragraph: in short, to use a standard term, the majority of such interpreters are 'developmentalists', by contrast with the 'unitarianism' of the their 'doctrinal' rivals, and I shall generally, if somewhat loosely and inaccurately, treat the labels 'sceptical' and 'developmentalist', on the one hand, and 'doctrinalist' and 'unitarian' on the other, as more or less interchangeable. I shall shortly be picking a quarrel with one very common kind of modern 'sceptical developmentalist': the kind that divides up the corpus into 'Socratic' ('early'), 'middle' and 'late' periods.

[8] These are the members of the so-called 'Tübingen school', including most importantly Hans-Joachim Krämer, Konrad Gaiser, and among contemporary scholars, Thomas Szlezák: see especially Szlezák 1985 and 2004.

[9] Since I am speaking here of 'sceptical' interpreters as opposed to 'doctrinal' ones (in my admittedly very crude distinction), the attachment will be less than would be implied by the use of the term 'doctrine'. Doctrines, for some philosophers, will not be suitable things for philosophers to have – as opposed to ideas or theories, which will be perfectly respectable.

Platonism.[10] For it will be one of my core claims that in fact the post-'Socratic' dialogues in all central respects depend and build on, even as they may extend, ideas and arguments contained in the 'Socratic' dialogues. (The scare quotes around 'Socratic' are to be taken seriously; there is in my view no group of dialogues which can helpfully be labelled 'Socratic' as opposed to others.) That is, these dialogues, along with others not normally labelled as 'Socratic' but nevertheless apparently predating the *Republic*, do crucial philosophical work which is not only not superseded by what comes later, but which we need to have properly grasped – and also to *keep in mind* – if we are fully to understand what we find in the *Republic* and other supposedly post-'Socratic' dialogues.[11] Importantly, I shall also claim that Plato remained faithful to the very notion of philosophy that is developed in, and in part illustrated by, the 'Socratic' dialogues. (Even the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic* will turn out to be formed after Socrates' image.[12] But this is to anticipate.)

For many if not most readers of Plato these will look unlikely claims – to say the least. As it happens, the 'doctrinal' interpreters[13] tend to be hardly less *Republic*-centred than the 'sceptical' ones, insofar as for them too it is

[10] The next greatest, in my view, is the idea, much favoured by 'doctrinalists' of all eras, that Plato was, more than anything else, an other-worldly metaphysician who thought that the highest kind of existence would be spent in the contemplation of pure being (*vel sim.*). See especially chapters 2, 7, 8 and 9 below. This approach, for its part, entails leaving out so much of the content of the dialogues, takes so little account of what Plato actually *wrote*, that I for one find it hard to take it at all seriously. Or, to put it another way, a book like the present one, which aims to explain why Plato wrote as he did, is not likely to be favourable to an approach that by its very nature leaves it entirely mysterious why Plato should have written so much that had so little bearing on what he supposedly intended his readers to sign up to.

[11] I shall not of course, impossibly, deny that there are also apparent, and important, discontinuities between the so-called 'Socratic' dialogues and what follows. But it will be my argument that these discontinuities are best seen against the background of an essential continuity – one that after all would be no less than one would expect, given that Plato keeps Socrates on, both in the *Republic* and in other 'non-Socratic' dialogues, as main speaker. I agree wholeheartedly with David Sedley (Sedley 2004: 14) that Plato 'emphasiz[ed] the continuity in his development [i.e. with what Sedley calls the '"semi-historical" Socrates featured in the early dialogues': 3] rather than acknowledging any radical break'. However while acknowledging Plato's own perspective on the matter, Sedley himself 'separat[es] an early Socratic phase from one or more subsequent Platonic phases' (ibid.), thus aligning himself with Vlastos 1991, and against Kahn 1996 – for whom the 'Socratic dialogues' are written to look forward to the *Republic* and other 'middle' dialogues, and so 'can be adequately understood only from the perspective of these middle works' (Kahn 1996: 60). My own view is exactly the reverse of Kahn's (though I register unease about the use of the term 'middle': on dating in general, see section 10 below).

[12] Still more surprisingly, from the perspective of any current interpretation, the same will be true of the members of the Nocturnal Council in the *Laws* (see chapter 10, n. 2 below).

[13] Or at least, modern 'doctrinalists'; for their ancient counterparts, it was the great cosmological dialogue *Timaeus* that counted as more central. But Plato himself takes care to link *Timaeus* with *Republic*, making the conversation represented (fictionally 'recorded') in the former take place on the day after the conversation, 'reported' by Socrates, that constitutes the latter.

the *Republic* – and other dialogues that the 'sceptics' call 'mature' – that take us closer to the heart of Plato: thinking of Platonism as nothing if not a *system* of thought, and more or less unchanging, they then propose *Republic*, along with *Philebus* and *Timaeus*, as the works that will give us the most information for fixing the outlines of that system. The so-called 'Socratic' dialogues (so-called, that is, mainly by the 'sceptics'), for the doctrinalists, are of relatively little interest in themselves, just as for the 'sceptics' these dialogues tend to represent the parts of Plato, i.e. those Socratic parts, that he left behind, whether this is taken to be a bad or a good thing.[14] One of the main tasks of the present book will be to show that both the 'sceptical' approach, which sees the *Republic* as marking Plato's break with Socrates, and its 'doctrinalist' counterpart, which tends to assimilate the 'Socratic' dialogues to the *Republic*, are mistaken: the Socrates of the *Republic is*, with certain important qualifications, the Socrates of the 'Socratic' dialogues; but this latter Socrates is not fashioned after the 'doctrinalists'' image. What should have emerged from my argument by the end of the book is a quite unusual, not to say revolutionary, picture of Plato and his thought. However whether or not this picture will appear plausible will depend entirely on my ability to persuade the reader of the usefulness of certain interpretative moves; or, to put it the other way round, my ability to persuade the reader to share my analysis of Plato's strategies as a philosophical writer. The title of the book may in this sense be taken as a true disjunction: I hope to understand what Plato stands for by understanding the reasons, methods and purposes of Platonic writing. (I admit, however, that many times over the detailed argument will turn out to be the other way round; what Plato wants to say and how he says it are mutually interdependent topics.)

It will be useful here to give a quite full and detailed outline of the key interpretative moves that will underpin my approach, before I turn, in the main part of the book, to particular themes and particular dialogues. The Table of Contents gives a fair indication of the selection of dialogues that will provide the main material for my discussion. Particularly prominent will be *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*,

[14] It will be a bad thing for those who prefer what they see as Socrates' mode of doing philosophy in those dialogues to what they see as his appalling demeanour in the *Republic* (see above); a good thing for those many people who – quite misguidedly, in my own view – tend to think of Socratic methods and ideas as interesting but naive and limited. There has been talk in recent years, especially among North American scholars (of whom Francisco Gonzalez is among the most eloquent: see e.g. Gonzalez 1998), of a 'third way' of interpreting Plato, i.e. one that is describable neither as 'sceptical' nor as 'dogmatic'. Insofar as that could be said of my own reading, it too will belong to this 'third way'. However the main defining feature of this 'third' mode of reading seems to be just that it isn't either of the other two, both of which – as I began by saying – are plainly, by themselves, unsatisfactory.

Republic, and *Timaeus*. I shall have a fair amount, too, to say about *Theaetetus*, but rather little about the *Parmenides*, and nothing or virtually nothing about *Cratylus*, *Laws*, *Philebus*, *Protagoras* and two dialogues closely connected with the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Politicus*. I shall, however, advance a general thesis about those five big dialogues *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Politicus, Timaeus* and *Laws*, in which Socrates is not assigned the role of main speaker, as he is in every other genuine dialogue; clearly, given my overall thesis about the closeness of Plato to his Socrates, this is likely to appear a significant shift, suggesting – perhaps – that disciple did after all finally give up on master (for, as it happens, all five of these dialogues appear to be datable to the latest part of Plato's life: see section 10 below). I shall suggest, rather, that in demoting Socrates Plato distances *himself*, in varying degrees, from the positions he assigns to Socrates' replacements.

2 THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE, FOR PLATO

Plato evidently held dialogue to be fundamental to philosophy: Socrates never ceases to treat dialogue in this way, and for the most part – in Plato's works – carries on his business, which he calls philosophy, through dialogue. But why should dialogue be so important for the philosopher? The answer, it seems, has something and everything to do with Socrates', and Plato's, recognition of the need for *questioning*: only if we go on questioning our ideas can we ever hope to reach the truth, if we can reach it at all.

Some modern interpreters have understood this questioning in terms specifically of 'refutation',[15] because of the overwhelming tendency of Socrates' questioning, in the 'Socratic' dialogues, to end in the discomfiture of whoever or whatever is being questioned.[16] They have then gone on to propose that refutation could even somehow generate, discover, truth, by itself; and such interpreters have reconstructed on Socrates' behalf the assumptions that would be required to make that possible.[17] (I take it that

[15] See chapter 3 below.

[16] Such interpreters typically call Socrates' method 'elenctic'. In fact the Greek noun *elenchos* and the associated verbs, which Plato frequently applies to Socratic activity, as often refer to questioning and challenge as to refutation as such: see Tarrant 2002. I myself will propose that the fact that Socratic dialectic, in the 'Socratic' dialogues, nearly always ends in the refutation of the interlocutor has rather more to do with Plato's rejection of the positions Socrates' interlocutors represent than with the essential nature of Socratic method.

[17] Here is Donald Davidson, building on Vlastos 1983: 'the elenchus would make for truth simply by insuring [*sic*] coherence in a set of beliefs if one could assume that in each of us there are always unshakable true beliefs inconsistent with the false. It is not necessary that these truths be the same for each of us, nor that we be able to identify them except through the extended use of the elenchus. Thus someone who practices the elenchus can, as Socrates repeatedly did, claim that he does not

Socrates and Plato would have been repulsed by any special theories that find dialogical conclusions, in certain contexts, as all that there is to *constitute* truth;[18] whatever else they hold, they will certainly hold that the truth is the truth regardless of what anyone thinks it is, and indeed regardless of whether anyone at all has it in mind.) Reconstructions of this sort are a reaction, in itself noble enough, to the need somehow to square Socrates' repeated claim that he knows nothing with his more than occasional tendency to behave as if there are some things, at least, that he is pretty sure about, even knows. However the combination in Socrates of these two features – as a know-nothing, and (as one might put it) as a conviction philosopher – is perfectly intelligible without any such rich supplementation of Plato's text.[19] The most for which we have textual warrant is the idea that a continuous process of questioning, whether of one person by another or of oneself by oneself, along a particular line may lead to results that for all practical purposes are reliable and unlikely to need to be abandoned. This process of questioning represents the essence of the Socratic – and, as I hold, also the Platonic – notion of philosophy, and it is one that is most consistently displayed in action in the so-called 'Socratic' dialogues. Philosophy, as an activity, *is* the 'art of dialogue', whether internal or with others:[20] *dialektikē technē* in Greek, and hence 'dialectic'. (The 'art of dialogue': sc. through progressive questioning, and on the sorts of subjects expertise in which contributes to wisdom, *sophia*, *philo-sophia* being the love or pursuit of wisdom.)

know what is true; it is enough that he has a method that leads to truth. The only question is whether there is reason to accept the assumption.

'I think there is good reason to believe the assumption is true – true enough, anyway, to insure that when our beliefs are consistent they will in most large matters be true. The argument for this is long, and I have spelled it out as well as I can elsewhere' (Davidson 1993: 184–5, referring to Davidson 1983 [2001]).

18 I mean no disrespect here to the late Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose subtle take on Plato is beautifully expounded by François Renaud in Renaud 1999; Gadamer himself accepts that a Plato who saw the true implications of his position would no longer be a Platonist ('Platon war kein Platoniker', cited by Renaud from Gadamer's *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 1977: 508).

19 Briefly: there are things that Socrates will happily claim to be sure about, and even, in unguarded moments, to know, on the basis of argument; e.g., at the most general level, that knowledge and excellence matter more to everyone than anything else. But underlying his general position is a sensitivity to the limits of what mere human beings can achieve, which causes him typically to deny that *he* knows what he is talking about, even while he allows that others, perhaps, may know (or come to know) more than he does. See especially section 10, and chapters 1 and 8, below.

20 Because of his position as a know-nothing, Socrates typically stresses his own need to be in conversation with others. But when Plato has others describe him, as in the *Symposium*, they vividly describe, among other habits of his, a tendency to spend long periods in self-absorbed thought; and he typically refers to examining *himself* in the same breath as he talks about examining others. See chapter 3 below; for thinking described explicitly as internal dialogue, see, e.g., *Theaetetus* 189D–190A.

3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 'THE ART OF DIALOGUE' ('DIALECTIC') AND THE WRITTEN DIALOGUE FORM

It would be all too easy to slip from the simple proposal that all Platonic dialogues are 'philosophical' (at least to the degree that they were written by an author everyone agrees to have been a philosopher) to supposing that all equally display philosophy in action; and from there, given that the kinds of discussion we find in different dialogues are different, to supposing that Plato had different ways of conceiving of philosophy. Sometimes, as in the *Timaeus*, dialogue gives way to monologue: by the argument in question, Plato will on that occasion have given up on dialogue as the proper medium of philosophy. For the 'sceptical' brand of philosophers, this is likely to be a perfectly acceptable outcome, since few of them will share any great commitment to dialogue as such over monologue as a way of conducting philosophy in the first place,[21] and for them it might even be something of a relief to be able to think of Plato as giving up on it (as their Plato regularly gives up on things);[22] and for the 'doctrinalists'' Plato, too, dialogue may be equally dispensable – a means to a preliminary cleansing of minds from misapprehensions, and as a kind of intellectual gymnastics, but hardly the stuff of real philosophy.[23]

However, such responses would vastly underestimate the nature and complexity of written dialogue in its Platonic mode.[24] Above all, we need to remember the fact that a written dialogue possesses two extra dimensions, one of which will always, and the other will usually, be absent from a real dialogue, i.e. from any live conversation (or indeed one that is merely recorded in writing): (1) an author, and (2) an audience. It is hardly in doubt that Plato constructed and wrote his dialogues *for* an audience (or audiences), given the earnestness with which his main speakers address their interlocutors. He had a purpose in writing – he had things he wanted to say to his audience, ways in which he wanted to affect them. And he was presumably free to write as he pleased: he could set up the conversation as

[21] Especially, perhaps, if the dialogue may be internal; what harm will it do to redescribe any serious internal thought as a kind of questioning? (That, however, would be to miss Socrates' point, which is about the need to *challenge* one's own and others' thinking.)

[22] A special impatience with dialogue form is evinced by the habit some interpreters have – those brought up within the analytical tradition – of trying to reducing Socratic arguments to a series of numbered (and impersonal) propositions.

[23] 'Dialectic' itself, on this account, ultimately becomes severed from conversation and dialogue altogether, and becomes a term for whatever method will lead to philosophical truth.

[24] That is, whatever other writers of philosophical dialogues might make or might have made of the medium; let them be set to one side.

he liked, where he liked, and between whatever characters/interlocutors he liked. If, then, we are fully to understand what is going on,[25] and indeed if we are even to have any chance of grasping Plato's underlying argument, we have no option but to try to come to terms in each case with a whole series of different relationships: between author and text (and its argument – both the philosophical argument, and the 'argument' in the sense of the overall direction or directions of the text); between author and characters/speakers, especially the main speaker;[26] between author and audience; between the speakers themselves. But this already means that a written dialogue is something considerably more than a piece of philosophy. It is philosophy with its participants, and their utterances and actions, shaped, directed, set up, stage-managed by someone for someone else.

I do not mean to deny that it would be perfectly possible to write philosophical dialogues in which the dialogue and the philosophy (in the Socratic-Platonic sense, of progressive questioning: see above) were simply co-extensive. Interlocutor A, a voice perhaps with a name but no necessary identity, would state a position, which interlocutor B, another similarly unspecific voice, then questioned, leading A to restate the original position; if this imaginary dialogue were more than a few paragraphs long, then B would again raise problems with the new statement – and so on. This would be the basic, stripped-down version of Socratic dialectic.[27] But no actual Platonic dialogue is like this. For a start, A and B[28] will be identified as particular individuals, usually with names, and always with identifiable characteristics: A will more often than not be Socrates, and B will be a general,[29] a rhapsode,[30] a sophist,[31] a sophist/rhetorician,[32] a friend of Socrates',[33] a brother of Plato's[34] . . . And the nature and course of the conversation that ensues between A and B will always partly be determined by the choice of the person to play the role of B as much as by the choice of the person to play the role of A – which, if it is Socrates, will ensure that the

[25] I assume that we may ignore the possibility that Plato was a lazy author, who did not make the most of the opportunities available to him.

[26] Plato's dialogues always have a main speaker; this is no doubt itself something to be explained. (It will turn out to be significant that there is always, within a single dialogue, one perspective that is privileged – by the author – over the others.)

[27] The model is based on a combination of passages from the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* with Socrates' actual practice in a range of other dialogues.

[28] I here for the moment leave out dialogues that lapse into monologue, i.e. where B ceases to play any audible part: *Menexenus* as well as *Timaeus* (where there is a C and a D as well as a B).

[29] Or generals: see *Laches*, where Socrates talks to the generals Laches and Nicias.

[30] I refer to Ion in *Ion*.

[31] Say, Hippias in *Hippias Minor*, Protagoras in *Protagoras* . . .

[32] Thrasymachus in *Republic* (especially Book I).

[33] Crito in *Crito*, Phaedo in *Phaedo*.

[34] Or brothers: Glaucon and Adimantus in *Republic* (especially Books II–X).

conversation is or becomes philosophical,[35] since that is his preoccupation, not to say his obsession. (Conversely, if A is not Socrates, that will leave the actual nature of the conversation in principle open: more on this possibility in a moment.) Socrates will have a different kind of conversation with a general from the one he will have with a rhapsode, and a different one with a general or a rhapsode from the one he will have with a friend of his, who is used to his ways. Or, to put it another way, a conversation between Socrates and Ion, rhapsode, on the nature of the rhapsode's and the poet's 'art', as in the *Ion*, will not be the same as a conversation between two anonymous philosophers on the same subject. The conversations on the subject of justice between the sophist/rhetorician Thrasymachus and Socrates, on the one hand, in *Republic* I, and between Socrates and Glaucon and Adimantus, Plato's brothers, in *Republic* II–X on the other *are* actually quite different: at any rate, one is confrontational in form, the other cooperative. (And even as he talks to Glaucon and Adimantus, Socrates repeatedly refers to another sort of conversation that he might have had, using different premisses: see especially chapter 5 below.) Evidently Plato wanted these differences, since he put them there, and it must be our business to ask why he did so.

We may presumably begin by dismissing the possibility that the characterization (and the dramatic action: that too we must take into account) in the dialogues is for merely ornamental purposes, just on the grounds that it is so obtrusive. It is part of that 'weirdness' of Plato's texts that they force us to try to see whatever point it is that they are making through the fog of a conversation with *this* individual, or these individuals, now. I also propose to dismiss the possibility that Plato is interested in, say, Ion, or Laches, for Ion's or Laches' sake (if he is writing for us, his readers, or any of our predecessors, why on earth should he expect them, let alone *us*, to be interested in such figures, neither of whom left much else by way of an imprint on history?). Rather, his interest in them is because of the types of people they are (a rhapsode and a general), and also because the types they represent are, at least within the fictional context, real and familiar – or would have been to the original audience. That is, the *Ion*, the *Laches*, and other dialogues show the philosopher in conversation with some of the sorts of people we, or our ancient counterparts, might encounter; people who, more importantly, hold (or can be induced to entertain) *attitudes or views* that we might encounter, and might even share. To that extent,[36]

[35] That is, it will involve questioning and challenge – and will also be about subjects that matter (not just the weather, or the quality of the wine).

[36] And only to that extent: below, I shall enthusiastically reject the idea that Plato thinks the reader can enter into any meaningful *dialogue* with his texts (or any text).

the conversations between the interlocutors are also conversations between the author and the reader – if rather peculiar conversations, given that the reader's answers are already given for him, by the interlocutor. By the same token, to the degree that the conversations usually involve Socrates' trying to unsettle an interlocutor's apparent certainty about something, or introducing him to new points of view, or doing both things together, we may reasonably suppose it to be Plato's purpose similarly to unsettle the reader.[37] If so, the dialogues will also have a persuasive function, i.e. in addition to any purely philosophical one; and indeed in such a case the philosophical will be employed in the service of the persuasive.

The point may be generalized. If 'philosophy', as I propose, for Socrates and Plato is fundamentally a matter of progress through questioning towards a presumptive truth, then the persuasive function of written dialogue – even in the case of the 'Socratic' dialogues – will usually be more prominent and/or immediate than the philosophical one.[38] It is in principle possible that Plato's arguments reproduce internal dialogues of his own, a kind of talking to himself.[39] However some of the dialogues are clearly not like that – that is, the arguments they contain are not the kind of arguments Plato (Socrates)[40] would have with himself, since they start from other people's assumptions; and in general there seems just too large an element of *staging* – Socrates always seems ahead of his interlocutors, rather than moving along with them.[41] A dialogue like the *Ion* is less like a piece of dialectic than a dialectical clash between two views of poetry and expertise. In *Laches*, the element of dialectical progress is more prominent, and in *Charmides* and *Lysis* it is more prominent still, with the consequence that any sense of confrontation between speakers and views is gradually lessened, and agreement may even be in sight – before, in each of these three

[37] Any reader, that is, who is in a condition analogous to that of the interlocutor (or who knows someone who is).

[38] Some interpreters plausibly attribute a fundamentally 'protreptic' function to Plato's writing as a whole; i.e. they see it as designed (perhaps *inter alia*) to turn people towards philosophy. But as will soon emerge, I believe this understates the case, if 'turning to philosophy' is understood merely as questioning ourselves and the way we presently think: what Plato is after is to change our whole view of the world and ourselves, in a particular and determinate way.

[39] See e.g., Sedley 2003: 1 ('. . . these . . . question-and-answer sequences can legitimately be read as *Plato thinking aloud*'). This would take us some way back in the direction of an identification between dialogue and dialogue-*writing*; more on this in the following section.

[40] On the relationship between Plato and (his) Socrates, see the next section.

[41] I am aware that these are far from being knock-down arguments. Nor do I mean to rule out Sedley's option altogether (see n. 39 above), at least to the extent that Socrates' dialectical exchanges with his interlocutors will in general serve as models of how philosophy is done. I simply find this kind of explanation of Plato's use of the dialogue form unsatisfactory, and not least because there is so much in the dialogues that does not consist of 'question-and-answer sequences'.

dialogues, the conversation formally ends in *aporia*, 'perplexity' or '*impasse*'. So there is plenty of what will count as philosophical by Socrates'/Plato's measure, even if it is a written version of it (and to that extent inauthentic: it is Plato's recreation of progress that might have been made between Socrates and some other person, if they had had the occasion to talk together). But the immediate overall effect on the reader, for all that some interpreters have suggested otherwise, is likely to be less a sense of engagement in the argument, which he or she will usually find fairly baffling, than a sense of sympathy with one or other of the interlocutors. That, certainly, is how modern readers tend to feel, many of them taking at once against Socrates; I hazard that ancient readers felt much the same. (Bafflement, a sense of someone's being done down, but still also a sense of things being less settled than they were before?)

When we turn to other, allegedly 'non-Socratic', parts of the corpus, the proportion of dialectic – that is, of passages that to some degree approach my imaginary model, sketched above, of what pure philosophical dialogue might be – to other kinds of matter in most cases drops considerably. In *Phaedo*, there are four blocks of argument, carefully marked off from the rest; in *Symposium*, a solitary stretch of dialectic between Socrates and Agathon, Diotima and Socrates; *Republic* I is on the model of a *Charmides* or *Lysis*, but the remaining nine books contain relatively little by way of genuine exchange; *Timaeus*, as I have said, is virtually a monologue; and so on. Many, as I have already noted, see all this as a sign that Plato is moving away from the Socratic way of doing philosophy, i.e. through dialogue and conversation (despite *Theaetetus* and *Philebus*, both superlatively dialectical in character; both throwbacks, according to the interpreters in question). My own view, by contrast, is that what the situation in the 'non-Socratic' (or post-'Socratic') dialogues marks is a change of strategy, not a change of mind. If Plato writes in a different way, that is because he has decided to approach his readers – who, in my view, were always his first preoccupation – by a different route. His aim is always to change people's perceptions, by variously stimulating and provoking them (us); even while insisting that philosophy is the key, he by no means always uses dialectic, or the written counterpart of dialectic, to achieve that stimulation and provocation. In fact philosophical dialectic is merely one of his tools. On occasion, as in the *Timaeus*, he can leave it in his bag entirely (and indeed, in a later chapter,[42] I shall argue that Timaeus, the main speaker in that dialogue, is not a philosopher-dialectician at all, even if he has a more

[42] Chapter 10.

than intelligent grasp of Platonic metaphysics). Or else, as in the *Laws*, he can set up a conversation between a philosopher and two non-philosophers who are specifically identified as incapable of dialectical exchange (it simply goes over their heads); a strategy that has immediate consequences for the level of the conversation. The Athenian visitor to Crete in *Laws* cannot, clearly, carry on a discussion with the philosophically unformed Clinias and Megillus of the sort that Socrates, albeit a still youthful one, can conduct, in the *Parmenides*, with the great Parmenides of Elea – the one named philosopher other than Socrates for whom Plato seems to have had any serious time – and his acolyte Zeno.

In short, Platonic written dialogue is not the same as dialectic (philosophy).[43] But this ought not to come as any great surprise. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* tells us roundly that writing is no more than the bastard stepbrother of philosophy, among other things because it cannot answer back. Ask questions of any written document, and it goes on stolidly saying the same thing. Socrates obviously cannot be knowingly referring to the very (written) dialogues in which he participates, since from his point of view within the dialogue these are oral, but[44] we have no good reason to suppose that he means to exempt them from his strictures. Plato preferred to write in dialogue form, and he gives every sign of thinking dialogue the most valuable form of human activity. However his preference for writing in the form of dialogue is not *because* he thought dialogue so valuable as an activity (even if he might perhaps originally have started using dialogue form in imitation of, as a kind of recreation of, the real Socrates' favoured pursuit). For just as, self-evidently, there are different kinds of dialogue/conversation that one can have, most of them entirely unphilosophical, so there are many different kinds of written (Platonic) dialogue. That he employed dialogue form in different ways, some of them not portraying dialectic in action, does not in the least tend to indicate that he ever abandoned his view that *living* dialogue, based on questioning of oneself or others, on the most important subjects, was the only available means to intellectual progress. But that, in turn, need not have deterred him from continuing to place before us, in one extraordinary way after another, alternative visions of the

[43] And how could it be? Take the little *Menexenus*: in formal terms still a dialogue, because it begins with a short exchange between Socrates and Menexenus, but then a monologue – a mock-funeral speech – offered by Socrates to Menexenus. Then too the monologue itself contains hardly a trace of anything we – or Plato – might recognize as a philosophical argument (even while it refers implicitly to ideas that appear in more obviously philosophical/dialectical contexts). At the same time this little piece contains all the complexities, and raises all the questions (about the intended relationship of author to audience, and so on), that attach to its larger counterparts in the corpus.

[44] *Pace* Mackenzie 1982 (see chapter 11 below).

way we, and the world, are, and from presenting those visions in contrast to more familiar ones: that I take to be one of the commonest and most central functions of Platonic writing, from the smallest of its products to the largest.[45] Even if he thinks that we can only advance through dialectic, there is nothing incompatible between that and showing us how differently things might, or will, look, if only we could become able to see more clearly.

4 PLATO AND SOCRATES: MANY VOICES?

There is one standing issue in modern Platonic scholarship over which I may seem to have skated with nonchalance in the preceding section. In the present post-modernist (or post-post-modernist) age, literary interpreters in particular have become worried about the practice – enshrined in Platonic interpretation over two and a half millennia – of assuming that the Socrates of the dialogues speaks for Plato. In principle this worry seems entirely well motivated. The dialogues always contain more than one voice (except when they change to monologue, and sometimes perhaps even then),[46] and in principle it seems perfectly plausible to suppose that Plato *might* have wanted, sometimes (or even often), to side with Socrates' opponent(s) – or, at least, to see their positions as impeding endorsement of Socrates'. Or, again, he might sometimes just have wanted to distance himself from the old man. ('That's just going *too* far.') But it is hard to credit that Socrates' voice is not *in general* Plato's: why else would it always – or very nearly always – be his opponents, rather than Socrates, that are variously defeated, humiliated, or made to think again? Why, again, would Plato keep bringing Socrates back on stage, in dialogue after dialogue, in many cases to say what are often the same sorts of things and support the same sorts of positions, if he did not view those positions with favour? (I started in section 1 above with the *differences* between one dialogue, or group of dialogues, and another; the constants, despite those differences, should be obvious enough on any close reading.) In brief, the worry about making Plato's text univocal may have fine motives, but it is overdone and misplaced. By and large, Socrates is Plato's *portavoce*, his mouthpiece.

But here there is a complication. What about those occasions when Socrates says different things, instead of the same ones? What, for example, of those apparent inconcinnities between the *Republic* and the so-called

[45] This is not to say that all dialogues have this function, and certainly not that it is the exclusive function of all. There are also more specialized dialogues, e.g., *Parmenides*, or *Theaetetus*, and Plato is in any case far too sophisticated a writer and a thinker to be tied down by any simple description.

[46] See chapter 10 below.

'Socratic' dialogues from which I began in section 1? Of course, if these bother us at all, that will probably be a sign that we have already proposed to accept that Socrates speaks for Plato. To find him speaking as he does in the *Republic* is bothering precisely because, having got used to one kind of Platonic voice, we are suddenly presented with what looks like a new one. 'Plato has betrayed Socrates,' comes the cry (in the light of all those appalling political proposals), and the betrayal will seem all the worse because Plato keeps Socrates on, to all appearances simply substituting the new voice for the old one, with the result that he has 'Socrates' endorse ideas that, allegedly, would have had the real Socrates turning in his grave. Did ever a pupil treat his teacher worse?[47]

I do not propose to enter into what is now an old controversy, about the relationship between Plato's Socrates (or any of his Socrateses?) and the historical, flesh-and-blood Socrates, beyond saying that I see no obstacle to supposing Plato's overall portrait of Socrates to be faithful to his own vision of the original one[48] – no obstacle, that is, unless it is the attribution to him of unpalatable and apparently un-Socratic ideas like the ones in the *Republic*. But in this case, as in some others, I believe we need to identify a further feature of Platonic writing that interpreters in general have either missed altogether or – more usually – seriously underplayed. Plato's Socrates speaks for most of the time with his own voice (and Plato's), but he can also 'speak with the vulgar'. That is, he can, on occasion, adopt the colouring and the premisses of his interlocutors or opponents, as an argumentative strategy. 'I would prefer not to go that way,' he will say, by implication, 'but if you

[47] I am here leaving to one side the further complications to the 'Socrates as mouthpiece' interpretation that go along with separating off the 'Socratic' dialogues from others – an approach that I have typically associated with the 'sceptical' brand of interpreters: on *their* view, of course, there will be distance between Plato and Socrates as soon as he embarks on his post-'Socratic' period (cf. n. 14 above). I leave these complications to one side for the obvious reason that I reject the approach from which they flow: *my* Socrates always, or nearly always, fully understands whatever it is that Plato puts in his mouth – even when we might want to protest that it is something the Socrates of the 'Socratic' dialogues, or the real Socrates, will never have thought of (of course, Socrates can't know that he's a character in a written dialogue, but that will usually not matter too much). That is, from Plato's perspective (I claim), any amount of extension, even of modification, of the kinds of things Plato might once have got from Socrates he still sees as *Socratic* – because he sees Socrates, and himself, as having bought into *a system of ideas* (representing the way things really are), which requires exploration rather than construction. Plato does not see himself, and Socrates, as putting together a theory, but rather as investigating the implications of a set of insights that he takes to be true and fundamental.

[48] A vision that will in fact be very complex, if one accepts the substance of the preceding note: 'Socrates' will not be co-extensive simply with what that particular historical person actually said and did, but will include whatever can legitimately be identified as belonging to that truthful picture of things that he – the historical person – had begun to sketch. For the implications of this approach in relation to Platonic metaphysics ('Forms'), see section 10 below.

insist, I will; and even so I shall give you good reason for coming over to my side.' Every reader accepts that there is an element of this in Books II–X of the *Republic*, where Socrates undertakes to show that justice 'pays' even if the just man receives none of the rewards of being just and all of the penalties that accrue to someone who has been found guilty of the worst injustices. What is not so usually noticed, or at least given sufficient emphasis, is that the whole political structure of 'Callipolis', the beautiful or 'ideal' city, is designed to cure a city that is already 'fevered' and *un*ideal;[49] and that even the analysis of the four excellences or virtues (*aretai*) in Book IV, which derives from the construction of Callipolis, depends on the evidence of the behaviour of souls that are internally conflicted and thus themselves out of sorts. As I shall argue in detail in chapter 5, the net outcome is that there is a question-mark over the level of Socrates' (and Plato's) commitment to – or, perhaps better, enthusiasm for – the political and psychological analyses conducted in *Republic* IV: there is more than enough in those analyses that Socrates can accept to allow the overall argument to follow through, but the argument is itself shaped as much by the interlocutors' assumptions and starting-points as by his own. Left to himself, as I shall claim Socrates makes quite clear, he would have rather different things to say about the best kind of city, and the best state of the soul, just as he would argue differently[50] for the claim that justice 'pays'.

This is, however, already to anticipate a set of claims that need to be established in detail if they are to be introduced at all. At this early stage of my argument, my concern is still no more than to indicate the main interpretative strategies that I shall be deploying in the following chapters; and in that spirit I shall simply assert, for now, that I take it to be one of the key features of Plato's use of Socrates that he not infrequently does have him argue from premisses other than his own. However – and this is a crucial corollary, without which 'Socrates' might be in danger of being reduced to one of the 'eristics'[51] that he likes to criticize – when Socrates *does* argue from others' premisses, Plato is always careful to avoid having him commit himself to anything that he would not accept on his own account. Thus *if* the best city had to address itself to the curing of internal 'fever', then

[49] The political arrangements sketched in Books II–IV are 'good', even 'correct' (V, 449A1–2); VI, 497B–D comes close to saying that the constitution of Callipolis is 'best', but in the sequel it is the issue of its possibility, and sustainability, that comes to dominate the discussion.

[50] And in fact has, already (in *Republic* I). None of this is intended to deny that the main political diagnosis of the *Republic*, and its prescriptions, are seriously meant; the question is just about where the argument should *start from*. See further chapter 5.

[51] 'Eristics', in brief, are those who argue merely in order to win, without any regard to the truth; star examples are Euthydemus and his brother Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus*.

it would look something like Callipolis; *if* we observe conflicted souls in action, then an account of the virtues or excellences will need to presuppose a divided soul – and so on. (These, it has to be said, are the easy cases; there will be others where one has to work rather hard to exempt Plato's Socrates from the charge of mere eristic opportunism. But see further in section 6 below.)

So there are, I claim, times when Plato's Socrates merely appears to be speaking with a different voice, and when actually, on closer analysis, he has simply borrowed it for the occasion. However there are also times when he seems genuinely to change his tune, as, most importantly, when he allows that the soul may come to be in such a condition that it is apparently dragged about, and the behaviour of its possessor – the agent – changed, by irrational desires working in conflict with the agent's own reasoning. This is in marked contrast to what is proposed in some dialogues, mainly but not exclusively the ones labelled 'Socratic', and provides what I take to be the only plausible grounds for a distinction – which I nevertheless still propose generally to reject – between the 'Socratic' and the 'Platonic' in Plato. In the 'Socratic' dialogues, and indeed even in the *Symposium*, one of the traditional immediately post-'Socratic' or 'middle' dialogues, our desires are all, and always, for what is really good for us, so that they cannot in fact conflict, despite appearances to the contrary; what causes us to go wrong – and that means everybody – is our beliefs, i.e. about what is good for us. This extraordinary set of claims is, or so it seems, and has been thought, very deliberately rejected, by Socrates himself, in *Republic* IV, in the course of his argument for the tripartition of the soul (based on the very capacity of our desires to conflict). Plato seems to want to justify this move on Socrates' part through a qualification to tripartition, introduced in Book X, that it does not apply to soul in its essence, only as we observe it in the hurly-burly of life; but it looks nonetheless as if the move is a significant one. For one thing, it means that Socrates will in fact have to take seriously the case of the 'fevered' city (insofar as the 'fever' results from internal conflict in individual souls), and so – it seems – the political structure that is proposed for controlling it. And yet there still are ways in which Plato's conception of the soul and of desire, and his theory of action, remain thoroughly indebted to the model apparently abandoned in *Republic* IV. (Indeed I shall argue that Plato thinks he can *preserve* that model, despite all appearances to the contrary.) Here is a set of issues that will keep on recurring in the following chapters – and necessarily so, given that one of my main claims, as already announced, is precisely that Plato remains throughout essentially a *Socratic*. The idea of the soul as unitary

and unconflicted is one of the very marks of the Socratic; if Plato simply decided to set it to one side, that might well be thought enough to put Plato's Socratic credentials in serious jeopardy.

However what I shall claim, and hope to establish, is not only that Plato sees himself, throughout, as a genuine follower of Socrates, but that this view of himself is justified. The usual – 'sceptical' – view is that he both leaves Socrates behind (at some point after the 'Socratic' dialogues) and understands himself as doing so. Thus, according to this more usual kind of approach, there will be a fundamental difference between the earlier Socrates (the Socrates of the 'Socratic' dialogues) and the later one (in the *Republic* and elsewhere); in a more sophisticated version of the same approach, Socrates will be found, in the post-'Socratic' dialogues, saying things whose full import he – unlike the intelligent reader – does not fully understand.[52] My own alternative approach will propose to do entirely without this kind of distancing between Plato and Socrates. Plato *is* Socrates, except, unavoidably, to the extent that Plato as author is also Socrates' creator and manipulator (manipulating him, that is, in a series of moves that he claims ultimately, and, I claim, reasonably, to have derived from *him*). Indeed Plato is Socrates even when he has the latter cede his place as main speaker to someone else. In the *Timaeus*, Timaeus' reservations about the status of central aspects of his account of the cosmos are Plato's – and also Socrates'.[53] The young Socrates whose ideas about forms[54] are criticized by the great Parmenides in the *Parmenides* is meant to be read, not just as an imagined, or possible,[55] immature Plato, but also *as Socrates*: the two march together. And the magisterial demonstrations of the method of 'collection and division' by Parmenides' fellow Eleatic in the *Sophist* and *Politicus* are as little in Plato's style as they are Socrates'.[56] Similarly with the *Laws*, the

[52] See especially Sedley 2004 on the *Theaetetus*, treated as Plato's acknowledgement of his debt to Socrates (his 'midwife'). It is not clear to me how this general approach will handle what I have been treating as the central problem case, that of the *Republic*, where it seems that 'Socrates' can scarcely be unaware of the distinctly un-Socratic nature of large parts of what Plato puts in his mouth. However for Sedley it is the *metaphysical* aspect of the *Republic* that particularly takes this dialogue beyond Socrates; and it is at least true that Socrates embarks on the main metaphysical section of the dialogue only with the greatest show of reluctance. (Yet: in the *Parmenides* a younger version of the same Socrates is to be found defending 'Platonic' metaphysics.)

[53] Compare (or: I shall compare) Socrates' claim in the *Apology* and elsewhere not to have concerned himself with inquiring into the physical world.

[54] On Platonic 'forms' see initially section 10 below.

[55] That is, insofar as the ideas criticized are ideas that Plato might have had, or ideas that someone might have had about Plato's ideas.

[56] This is not of course to deny that Parmenides in *Parmenides*, and his *alter ego*, the Visitor from Elea (Parmenides' home city) in *Sophist* and *Politicus*, are also Plato, to the extent that their starting-points are entirely ones that Plato would himself warmly endorse. Indeed they portray the very