

I have argued in *Interpreting Plato*, Plato very often is arguing dramatically against views put forth by his interlocutors, rejecting the views of both Socrates and his disputant, sometimes arguing that the solution lies in the mean, sometimes suggesting that the method the disputants are using to pursue a conclusion is fallacious or even silly. When Aristotle argues against a position found in the dialogues, he is arguing discursively against a position against which Plato is arguing dramatically. Thus, the two actually agree!¹³

Let me conclude with this last thought. When I read Plato with my students, we are, to be sure, interested in what Plato had to say—to the extent that we can make sense of it—but we are still more interested in the truth of the matter. *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*: we love Plato, but we love truth more. We continue to argue where the dialogues have left off. We too ask what justice, what piety is; we look at what Thrasymachus and Euthyphro and Callicles and Meno and Socrates had to say, but then we keep on arguing among ourselves. The dialogues thus become not ends in themselves, but a means to further philosophical reflection. Such a use, I hope, is true to Plato's spirit.

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Plato's Dialogues as Enactments¹

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It is common, and commonsensical, to assume that the dialogues, however peculiarly, contain and assert Plato's philosophical doctrines.² It is assumed that philosophers have doctrines that they present in their treatises, and so the dialogues come out of much scholarship looking like treatises. This means that their primary mode of operation is conceived as *saying*; they are only secondarily thought of as perhaps *doing* something.³ The problem is that what

1. This paper has benefitted from the comments of Debra Nails, Holger Thesleff, Joanne Waugh, and Elinor West. The errors that remain are my own.

2. E.g., I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London: Routledge, 1962). By "doctrine" I mean, as the word itself indicates, a settled teaching, a definite view about something that is or can be communicated to others in words. Examples would be references to "Aristotle's doctrine of the mean," meaning his view of the nature of the moral virtues, or to "Christian doctrine," meaning the theological and moral beliefs that constitute Christianity. It is consistent with this usage that ones teachings may change from time to time, but it is not to be assumed that anyone who writes prose, even that anyone who writes "philosophical prose," *eo ipso* has doctrines or that such doctrines are being communicated in that prose. These are propositions that, it seems to me, are to be proven if they are not evident *prima facie*.

3. On uses of language as doing rather than saying, see J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*

13. Why Aristotle would misunderstand Plato, even when he had studied for many years at the Academy, is a question I try to answer in *Interpreting Plato*, 9-10.

they say seems variously equivocal, contradictory, or aporetic, and their author anonymous.⁴

One alternative has been to take the dialogues as performances⁵ or mimes,⁶ or as instantiating their philosophical doctrine rather than directly asserting it.⁷ There is a philosophical doctrine that can be put into propositional or assertoric form on this view, but Plato has left it to us to observe, infer, and state it.⁸ The dialogues are mimetic in the sense that they act out a point that is essentially propositional or could just as well be expressed in propositional form.⁹ This view is an improvement on the previous one, because it

(Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980).

4. The logic of these problems is often forgotten. They begin from facts about the dialogues, e.g., Platonic anonymity. It is a fact that Plato *nowhere* speaks; there is no character called Plato, and Plato wrote no treatises. This entails that, if you want to attribute a claim or an argument to Plato, as distinct from the character into whose mouth he has put it, then you must have a justification other than tradition, comfort, and habit for the belief that *this* character speaks for Plato. It might seem so obvious as to be in no need of proof that Socrates speaks for Plato, but then on what principle can it be justified to assign that role to the Eleatic Stranger or the Athenian Stranger or Timaeus? It must be a principle and, indeed, a defensible one, if the attributing of claims and arguments to Plato is not to be merely a matter of habit and preference, but to show something about the dialogues. The question is addressed directly in a recent article by Michael Frede ("Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form," in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, suppl. vol. [1992], ed. James C. Klagge and Nicholas D. Smith, 201-219). I think Frede is correct to conclude that "the dialogues are not philosophical treatises in disguise" (219), but his assumption that "Sometimes we are confident that an argument . . . is Plato's argument, i.e., an argument Plato himself endorses" (203) begs the very question about the impact of Platonic anonymity that he himself raised so well on the previous page.

5. Gilbert Ryle, *Plato's Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) and Mitchell Miller, *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980) and *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). The question of the dialogues' performance remains an open one.

6. Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

7. Robert S. Brumbaugh, *Plato for the Modern Age* (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1962) and "A New Interpretation of the Republic," *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967): 661-70.

8. This would also be consistent with Kitto, *POIESIS: Structure and Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 243-56.

9. Klein (*Commentary*, 17) makes it quite clear that he believes a doctrine is being acted out: "Answers can be given in a written text by the very action it presents. This is what usually happens in Platonic dialogues and what constitutes their dramatic or mimetic quality." The idea conflicts, however, with the assertion of the well-known

recognizes that the dialogues are dramas or doings,¹⁰ but it still sees them also and ultimately as sayings. The proponents of this view are right about the importance of the performative and dramatic aspects of the dialogues, but the problem remains that these aspects are, in the end, *subordinated* to the traditional assertoric and propositional ones. So recent scholarship seems to offer two alternatives: either the dialogues are disguised treatises that directly assert Plato's philosophical doctrines or else they are plays or mimes that indirectly express his doctrines by somehow acting them out.¹¹

I do not mean to assert that these are exclusive alternatives, but only to indicate some broad lines of recent scholarly approach to the dialogues. The same may be said more generally: that modern Plato studies have been plagued by a number of recurrent problems that can be stated as alternatives or oppositions and that resist resolution. Let me mention some of them briefly.

■ Much scholarship seems to make us choose between an emphasis on doctrinal-dogmatic, i.e., on the doctrines of Plato (or Socrates) and an emphasis on literary-dramatic aspects of the dialogues, such as plot, setting, and characters.¹²

■ Similarly, but not identically, what are sometimes referred to as the philosophical versus philological approaches;¹³ studies focus on the arguments and their logic or else on traits such as language and structure.

■ The doctrinal approach, in turn, raises the problem of dogmatism versus

"philosophical passage" of the *Seventh Letter* (341c-d) that the kind of knowledge or philosophy that Plato is after "cannot be put in writing like other subjects," but must, instead, be generated in the soul.

10. On drama as a doing, see H. S. Thayer, "Meaning and Dramatic Interpretation," in *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 47f.

11. One could try to escape the dilemma by claiming that the dialogues are both; that is, sometimes assertoric and treatise-like, other times (e.g., the myths) indirect and mimetic. Thus, Glenn Morrow, "Plato and the Mathematicians: An Interpretation of Socrates' Dream in the *Theaetetus*," *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 309-33; Amelie Rorty, "A Speculative Note on Some Dramatic Elements in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Phronesis* 17 (1972): 227-38; and Berel Lang, "Presentation and Representation in Plato's Dialogues," *Philosophical Forum* 4 (1973): 224-40. But this strategy does not escape the dilemma. It turns out either that Plato's philosophy reduces to dogma after all (Morrow, Rorty), or else that it is truly a coincidence of form and content, hence a philosophy of a kind other than dogmatic, as is maintained here.

12. For examples of doctrinal or dogmatic studies, see "Introduction," n. 13 *supra*.

13. Michael Stokes (*Plato's Socratic Conversations* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986], 10) presents this as the essential characteristic of recent Plato studies. But see my comments in *Plato's Dialogues*, 1-4.

skepticism and leads to the quest for a “third way”¹⁴ that underlies the present volume. Is Plato a dogmatist, as we are implicitly taught for the most part today, or is he a skeptic, as might be suggested by the lack of a definite conclusion to many dialogues and as he was thought to be in the New Academy of Arcesilaos and Carneades and by a long tradition of “academic” skepticism?

■ Inconclusive versus conclusive. How are we to interpret the “aporetic” dialogues in which, at least *prima facie*, no definite conclusion is reached, no doctrine is taught? Is there a doctrine hidden or hinted at in them? Or do they really have no doctrine to teach? This is, perhaps, a more serious problem than many appreciate today; of the twenty-four dialogues generally accepted as genuine, the vast majority do not, at least *prima facie*, end in an agreement between Socrates and his interlocutor(s) about the answer to the question they have been discussing.¹⁵

■ Literacy versus orality. Are the dialogues essentially literate texts, that is, texts written for an audience of readers as is assumed by those who interpret them as Platonic treatises? Or do they represent an essentially oral culture in which teaching (*paideia*) proceeded in a very different way?¹⁶

■ This leads to the problem of the written versus the unwritten. While we tend to assume that the dialogues are, like other philosophical texts, the written form of the author’s teachings, the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* suggests to some that Plato did not intend the dialogues as expressions of his true doctrine at all.¹⁷

■ Socrates versus Plato. Even if we were sure that the dialogues are

14. E. N. Tigerstedt (*Interpreting Plato*, Stockholm Studies in the History of Literature 17 [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977]), followed by Watson (187-208 *infra.*) shows how the history of Plato interpretation has oscillated between dogmatic and skeptical poles. Luigi Stefanini (*Platone* [Padova: CEDAM, 1932-1935; 2nd ed., Padova: CEDAM, 1949; repr. 1992]) tries to find a middle way in the idea of “constructive skepsis.” He cites (I.364) with approval comments on the *Republic* by V. B. Brocchieri, *La dottrina dello stato nella Cultura Ellenica* (Milan, 1934), 167, to the effect that the dialogue constantly swings from the empirical to the transcendental, from the ideal to the practical. See also n. 25.

15. It is worth noting that of the twenty generally accepted dialogues in which Socrates leads the discussion only five are nonaporetic or conclusive in the required sense: *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, *Republic*, and *Symposium*.

16. See the discussions by Hershbell (25-39), West (41-60), and Waugh (61-77). For the state of the question on orality and literacy in the history of Greek culture and its application to Plato’s dialogues, see Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. chs. 6-9.

17. In the latter half of the twentieth century, this view is most closely associated with the “Tübingen school.” See “Introduction,” n. 17.

doctrinal, it is a problem to distinguish whose doctrines these are since the main character in most of the dialogues is “Socrates,” and we know that there was a historical Socrates who was a widely influential philosophical figure in the latter half of the fifth century.

■ This is connected to the problem of the historical versus the “Platonic” Socrates. How can we tell the one from the other? Whose views are actually presented in a given dialogue? This, in turn, leads into the whole “problem of Socrates” and the reliability of Plato’s characterization in relation to Xenophon, Aristophanes, and other sources.¹⁸

■ Unitarian versus developmental accounts of Plato’s philosophy. Did Plato’s philosophy remain the same throughout his life?¹⁹ Or did his philosophical beliefs, as seems more likely *prima facie*, change and develop?

■ Problems of chronology and stylometry. The developmental view that has dominated almost all Plato scholarship since the nineteenth century has depended in large part on stylometric analysis to determine the chronological order in which the dialogues were written, from which, in turn, the doctrinal development is traced. But serious and fundamental criticisms have been made of stylometric analysis and the logic of the arguments supporting the generally accepted chronology.²⁰

■ This leads to an opposition, little appreciated, between chronological and dramatic orderings of the dialogues. Apart from whether any precise chronology can be established, is it more illuminating of Plato’s philosophy to consider the dialogues in their compositional order or in the order indicated by

18. See n. 60.

19. The most famous of Platonic “unitarians,” those who oppose the widespread acceptance of the idea that Plato’s philosophy developed from an early Socratic to later critical and Platonic positions, was Paul Shorey; see esp. *The Unity of Plato’s Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1904) and *What Plato Said* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1933). For the background of the position, see “Introduction,” 4-5.

20. The sources of stylometry are Lewis Campbell, *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato* (1867) and Lutoslawski, *The Origin and Growth of Plato’s Logic* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897). The *locus classicus* for the history and criticism of stylometry and chronology is Holger Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1982); his “Platonic Chronology,” *Phronesis* 34 (1989): 1-26, is not to be read apart from the full monograph. Thesleff’s arguments are now becoming more widely accepted. See, e.g., Jacob Howland, “Re-reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology Reconsidered,” *Phoenix* 45 (1991): 189-214; Richard A. McNeal, *Law and Rhetoric in the Crito* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993), 46-57; Debra Nails, “Platonic Chronology Reconsidered,” *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 3 (1992): 314-27 and “Problems with Vlastos’ Platonic Developmentalism,” *Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1993): 273-91, and “Plato’s Middle Cluster,” *Phoenix* 48 (1994): 62-67.

such dramatic indicators as Socrates' age?²¹

■ The problem of myths versus discursive accounts or arguments. Extending to fables, tales, protreptic sermons, and other non-discursive forms, the problem is how to understand these if we assume that the dialogues are meant to tell us Plato's doctrines and give us his arguments for them.²²

■ The problem of indirection versus directness. As suggested earlier, if we assume that the dialogues express Plato's doctrines, a problem is posed by the fact of Plato's anonymity. The doctrinal approach may be appropriate for texts whose authors address us directly, but Plato evidently does not.²³

■ Finally, the problem of form versus content. It is a familiar move to distinguish sharply between the literary style and dramatic form of the dialogues on the one hand, and their philosophic content (their doctrines and arguments) on the other. But the question may be asked whether it is appropriate, legitimate, or even possible to do so.²⁴

In the literature, these problems are usually approached individually or a few at a time in connection with each other, but it is reasonable to suspect that they are all connected. A clue is provided by the oppositional form in which they are often expressed, which suggests that the solution will be or involve

21. In her recent edition and translation of the *Gorgias*, Stefania Nonvel Pieri takes a middle ground, discussing first the chronological and then the dramatic position of her dialogue: *Platone. Gorgia* (Filosofi antichi, Nuova Serie 1 [Napoli: Loffredo Editore, 1991]), 29-34.

22. The myths have long been felt as a problem and, in consequence, there has been a minor industry in explaining their role in Plato's philosophy. Studies in the modern period begin with Henke's *De philosophia mythica Platonica* (Helmstedt, 1776) and Huttner's *De Mythis Platonis* (Leipzig, 1788) and include, among the most important monographic studies of this century, J. A. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato* (London, 1905; repr. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960); Karl Reinhardt, *Platons Mythen* (Bonn, 1927); P. Frutiger, *Les mythes de Platon: Etude philosophique et littéraire* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1930), and Paul Friedlander's chapter, "Myth," in *Plato: An Introduction*, trans. H. Meyerhoff (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1958), 171-210. For a fuller account of the discussions, at least up to the early 1980s, see Kent F. Moors, *Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), ch. 1.

23. A point appreciated by Kierkegaard in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and *The Concept of Irony, with Constant Reference to Socrates*.

24. Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," 13-23, and esp. "On Style," 24-45, in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1969) is still worth reading. Similarly, R. G. A. Buxton (*Persuasion in Greek Tragedy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 2): "Every play worth the name is a unique imaginative creation, a complex of words, silence, gestures, movement and (sometimes) dance and song; all of which, taken together, constitute the work's total effect or 'meaning.'"

a way of transcending these oppositions.²⁵

I propose a solution in some respects similar to Kant's "Copernican Revolution."²⁶ On the prevailing assumption that a philosophy is a matter of assertions, doctrines, content, and treatises, we have not been able to solve the problems of Platonic scholarship, since this assumption always leaves aspects of the dialogues unexplained, excluded, or unintegrated into what we take Plato's philosophy to be. In fact, we are confronted by a set of opposing alternative orientations. Let us, therefore, try looking at matters from a different point of view. My proposal also owes something to Jaeger's description of how a history of *paideia* would have to be written.²⁷ Instead of beginning with a definition of what philosophy or a philosophical text is (i.e., doctrines supported by arguments), we may have more success by beginning with the assumption that the dialogues *are* philosophical documents and then make our concept of Plato's philosophy conform to what the dialogues are.²⁸

In other words, I propose that we rethink or reconceive the dialogues as a different *kind* of document or text: neither treatise nor mime, but enactment. This may offer the beginning or hope of a solution to the persistent problems we have had by enabling us to bridge the gap between the opposed orientations discussed above. At the same time, I am painfully aware of what an early stage I am at in being able to explain what I mean by "enactment."

By referring to the dialogues as enactments, then, I mean to say what *kind* of documents they are: I do not think that they are wholly or principally

25. See Walter Watson, "The Dogmatic Plato, the Skeptical Plato, and the Dialogic Plato," 187-208.

26. Second Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

27. Jaeger, *Paideia*, trans. Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939-45), vol. 3, 300, n. 3.

28. This is actually more consistent with the broad ancient meaning of the term *philosophia*, which, in any case, was not in wide use before Plato. Indeed, he seems to have invented the narrow and technical notion of philosophy as a special discipline in contradistinction from that of the sophists, as Jaeger (*Paideia* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1944], vol. 3, book 4, chs. 2, 8) and Havelock (*Preface to Plato* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963]) already saw. More recently, Monique Dixsaut [*Le naturel philosophe* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1985)] has considered the invention of philosophy in the dialogues from a variety of points of view; see also Alexander Nehamas, "Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato's Demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (1990): 3-16 and a paper delivered to the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy by Edward Schiappa, "Isocrates and Canons."

treatises nor that their primary mode of philosophizing is assertoric.²⁹ I do not mean to say that they are nowhere or never assertoric, but that such assertions as may be made cannot be abstracted from their full context without falsification.³⁰ A simpler but probably just as mysterious way of saying the same thing is that the dialogues do and make as well as say.

The word "enact" means both to act or play a part and to make to be, as a legal enactment; thus, it articulates two things that I think are primary: (1) the by now less controversial point that the dialogues are plays, whether they were performed, read aloud, or read silently, and (2) the perhaps more controversial point that—beyond saying things—they actually make things.

Albert Cook writes: "A play enacts. In doing so it not only makes a statement; it also *creates an effect* (my emphasis), in a given context, on an idealized (Greek) spectator. The effect unites with the statement, as the mythos with the logos."³¹ I emphasize the phrase "creates an effect" in contrast with "makes a statement" because I think it expresses something true and essential about Plato's dialogues: whatever statements they may make, whatever doctrines they may assert, they also create effects that are distinguishable from those statements and may even contradict them.³² The most obvious example

29. Victorino Tejera (*Plato's Dialogues One by One: A Structural Interpretation* [New York: Irvington, 1984]) follows Buchler (*Toward a General Theory of Human Judgment* [New York: Dover, 1951], *Nature and Judgment* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1955]) in distinguishing among "modes of judgment" and argues that the philosophy of the dialogues is in the "exhibitive mode." I agree that it is important to distinguish different modes in which philosophy may be written or done, and in that sense I agree that the dialogues are exhibitive. I also think, however, that Buchler's modes of judgment reduce to different ways of saying something propositional and to that extent our analytic tool kit needs to be supplemented. This is what I attempt briefly and without detail here by speaking of "modes of philosophizing." Philosophers assert or claim things, but they may also philosophize in other modes.

30. I merely restate here what might be called The Schleiermacher Principle: that statements made by characters in the dialogues can *only* be properly understood in their full context of character, setting, and moment. *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (Cambridge & London 1836), 14.

31. Albert Cook, *Enactment: Greek Tragedy* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1971), xv.

32. Daniel Anderson (*The Masks of Dionysos* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1992]) argues that, following the hints in the *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh Letter*, Plato has screened his audiences by putting inconsistencies or contradictions into the dialogues that will indicate to the attentive reader that s/he should move to a different level of analysis or interpretation. Similarly, David Halperin argues that "Plato . . . systematically goes about undermining and subverts the very theories that his philosophical personae propound" precisely in order *not* to "leave his readers with a body of dogma" ("Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity," in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*, 118f.).

of this would be how often Socrates' statements that he doesn't know seem to us and even to other characters in the dialogues to contradict the true state of affairs.

If statements operate primarily on the mind, on the intellectual or rational level of experience, these other effects that the dialogues create operate through the imagination and emotions. I speak as if the intellect, imagination, and emotions were separate and distinct, but I don't believe that and I don't believe that Plato believed it. In any case, in speaking of the dialogues as enactments, I mean that they create effects in and through the imaginations and emotions of the audience or readers as much as, perhaps even more, than through reason or intellect.

How do the dialogues do this? Let me appeal briefly to the examples of Dante, More, and Cervantes, who deliberately and artfully break down the barrier between "reality" and "fiction"³³. The principal character of the *Divine Comedy* is Dante himself, who "narrates" what he "experienced" in hell, purgatory, and paradise; in consequence, it becomes difficult or impossible to distinguish between Dante the poet and Dante the pilgrim. Of course, rationally we know that Dante the poet, a historical person about whom we possess reliable factual information, wrote the lines we read. Yet when we say something like, "Dante says that . . ." or "Dante describes . . ." or even "Dante writes . . .", which Dante do we mean? And how can we be sure?

In *Utopia*, More makes himself a character—or, rather, like Dante, creates a fictional character called More—who is present at the description by Raphael Hythlodæus of the island of Utopia and its customs. While Raphael is a true believer in the utopian system, the character More is and remains dubious about the value or possibility of importing utopian ways. Certainly this insulates More the author against possible attack for expressing such opinions, but doesn't it also make us unable to tell what that More believed?

Throughout Part I of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes repeatedly refers to his work as a "truthful account" and as "history." In Part II, partly in response to the counterfeit Part II of the work by a certain Avellaneda that had been in circulation,³⁴ Don Quixote encounters persons who have read about his exploits and are anxious to meet him. But *we* are at this very moment reading about his exploits, so what is the difference between these fictional "readers

33. Or history and poetry. Elinor West rightly reminds me that the word "fiction" is dangerous in these contexts. The text I was teaching when I realized that Plato effaced this distinction was the *Phaedo*. There, the narrative structure cooperates with the cast of characters, the mythological revision, the dramatic action, and the conversation to *accomplish* the immortality of Socrates.

34. See, e.g., Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (New York: Signet, 1979), 526, n. 2.

of *Don Quixote*" and us? Cervantes, like Dante and More, uses a variety of strategies to blur our usual sense of the distinction between reality or history, on the one hand, and an imagined world of fiction or poetry, on the other.

Plato does that too, and so successfully that scholars are still trying to decide where the "historical" Socrates leaves off and the "Platonic" Socrates begins.³⁵ Unlike More and Dante, Plato does not make himself a character in his own fiction. Like Cervantes, who carefully attributes authorship to a certain moor named Cide Hamete Benengeli, Plato sometimes constructs elaborate fictions about the origin of the text or the narrative we are reading.³⁶

But unlike in the *Divine Comedy*, *Utopia*, and *Don Quixote*, the barrier that is effaced is not only between "reality" and "fiction," but also—and more importantly for philosophical purposes—between the ordinary or popular view of reality and a very different one that is Plato's.³⁷ In other words, the effect that is created by Plato's dialogues is the reality-for-the-audience, the actual experience of the world as he sees it, not only intellectually entertained through our thinking about claims and arguments, but also imaginatively entered into and emotionally charged or felt. I will suggest some of the dimensions of this in a moment.

The effect is created by various techniques used in compound and complex ways. One is the retelling and revision of stories (legendary, poetic) that are defining or formative ones for the Greeks individually, socially, and cosmically.³⁸ Because these stories have the cultural stature that they have for Plato's audience, they will involve not only reason, but also memory,

35. Perhaps a testimony to this is the enormous modern "Socrates" literature. See Richard D. McKirahan, *Plato and Socrates: A Comprehensive Bibliography (1958-1973)* (New York: Garland, 1978) and Andreas Patzer, *Bibliographia Socratica* (Freiburg: Alber, 1985). The most recent works in English are: Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Luis Navia, *The Socratic Presence: A Study of the Sources* (New York: Garland, 1993); *Socratic Questions*, ed. Barry S. Gower and Michael C. Stokes (London: Routledge, 1992) and Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). All except Navia believe that it is readily possible to make the distinction.

36. E.g., *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*.

37. By "view" here I do not mean Plato's doctrine of reality, but his vision, to which we will turn below.

38. Stories from the Homeric poems, for example, frame the *Crito* and *Protagoras*. On the intellectual and social role of the Homeric stories, see W. J. Verdenius, "Homer, the Educator of the Greeks," *Medelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* 33 (1970): 9ff. and Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato*. On Socrates as a "hero," see Robert Eisner, "Socrates as Hero," *Philosophy and Literature* 6 (1982): 106-18.

imagination, and feelings. Irony and anonymity also have not only the intellectual effects that are usually discussed,³⁹ but also, and perhaps more significantly, effects on feeling and imagination.⁴⁰ Irony is not merely a trick that, once solved, becomes a key enabling us to decode Plato's encrypted message. Other techniques with similar effects are the use of metaphorical and allusive language,⁴¹ of characters taken from the historical experience of the audience,⁴² and of the numerous types of humor.⁴³

39. The general studies by J. A. K. Thompson, *Irony: An Historical Introduction* (London, 1926), D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), and Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) should be supplemented by the more specifically Platonic research of Gavin Ardley, "The Role of Play in the Philosophy of Plato," *Philosophy* 42 (1967): 226-44, W. Boder, *Die sokratische Ironie in den platonischen Fruhdialogen* (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1973), Charles L. Griswold Jr., "Socratic Irony and Platonic Irony" in *Plato's Dialogues: The Dialogical Approach*, ed. V. Tejera and R. Hart (forthcoming), Paul Plass, "Philosophic Anonymity and Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *American Journal of Philology* 85 (1964), C. Rowe, "Platonic Irony," *Novus Tellus: Annuario del Centro de Estudios Clásicos* 5 (1987): 83-101, and especially G. J. de Vries, *Spel bij Plato* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1949), unfortunately published only in Dutch with a summary in French.

40. Freud's account of irony (*Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, ch. 6; *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. A. A. Brill [New York: Modern Library, 1966], 757) could have been written with Plato's dialogues in mind. "The essence of irony consists in imparting the very opposite of what one intended to express, but it precludes the anticipated contradiction by indicating through the inflections, concomitant gestures, and through slight changes in style—if it is done in writing—that the speaker himself means to convey the opposite of what he says. Irony is applicable only in cases where the other person is prepared to hear the reverse of the statement actually made, so that he cannot fail to be inclined to contradict. As a consequence of this condition, ironic expressions are particularly subject to the danger of being misunderstood. To the person who uses it, it gives the advantage of readily avoiding the difficulties to which direct expressions, as, for example, invectives, are subject. In the hearer it produces comic pleasure, probably by causing him to make preparations for contradiction which are immediately found to be unnecessary."

41. For the ancient recognition of Plato's literary art, see F. Walsdorff, *Die antiken Urteile über Platons Stil*, *Klassische-philologische Studien*, 1 (Bonn: Scheur, 1927). On matters of style, see Holger Thesleff, *Studies in the Styles of Plato* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1967).

42. On the significance of the characters, see, e.g., Mary Whitlock Blundell, "Character and Meaning in Plato's *Hippias Minor*," in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*, 132-72, and Lucinda Coventry, "The Role of the Interlocutor in Plato's Dialogues," in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. C. Pelling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 174-196.

To suggest what I mean, briefly: in reading fiction we are prepared and we expect to mentally (imaginatively) inhabit a fictional world; this is, perhaps, the principle source of the pleasure fiction provides. There is a whole-minded entry into a fictive world, a willing suspension of our disbelief. But this is just what the strategies of Dante, More, and Cervantes and, I am arguing, Plato keep us from doing at the same time that they draw us into a world that we intellectually know to be imaginary. The result is that poetry and history fuse, with consequences that transcend Aristotle's distinction between them in the *Poetics* (9; 1451a36-b12). The measure of Plato's success in this is that he is the only one whose fictional world has so regularly and so persistently been mistaken for the historical one.

Like other dramas, as Albert Cook noted,⁴⁴ Plato's dialogues "create an effect." What is the effect that they create? I am arguing that unlike treatises or mimes, Plato's dialogues actually create in the reader or audience the experience of the world as Plato envisions it. It is important to note that they do this, at least sometimes, apart from any doctrine that could conceivably be inferred; it is at least arguable that sometimes they create an experience in conflict with doctrines that seem to be taught, or at any rate have been put into the mouths of Plato's characters.

On my Kantian or Jaegerian strategy, this implies that the philosophy to be found in the dialogues just *is* this experience; in other words, it is comprehensively what is presented to the audience or reader intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively. This means, first of all, that Plato's idea of philosophy is not a matter of doctrines: neither positively (so that he becomes a neo-Pythagorean or Neoplatonist) nor negatively (so that he becomes a skeptic). What needs to be rejected is the supposition that a philosopher must be either a dogmatist or a skeptic, the supposition that these are the comprehensive and mutually exclusive options. But Plato never speaks; therefore, in the plain sense of the words, there are no Platonic doctrines in the dialogues nor does Plato assert that dogmatic assertions are not possible.

This is not to say that Plato has no philosophy, but that what he means is not of the same *kind* as what we usually mean. There *are* recurrent principles, beliefs, attitudes, and values that we may—indeed, we feel compelled to—attribute to him. I agree. But I deny that they are settled doctrines that could be written down or taught orally either in the unitarian or the

43. On Plato's use of humor, see Otto Apelt, "Über Platons Humor," *Neue Jahrbuch für das Klassische Altertum* (1902): 247-66; Gavin Ardley, "The Role of Play in the Philosophy of Plato," *Philosophy* (1967): 226-44; H. D. Rankin, "Laughter, Humour and Related Topics," *C & M* 28 (1967): 186-213 and "A Modest Proposal about the Republic," *Apeiron* 2 (1968): 1-22.

44. See n. 31.

developmental sense, being persuaded instead of Tejera's and Nails's "open-endedness."⁴⁵ I would include among them such beliefs as that there is a soul, that it is more important than the body, that there are such things as virtue, courage, wisdom, and the rest, that philosophy is the best way of life, and so on. Two comments: (1) these are general beliefs and I note that while Socrates often states his conviction of them, he equally often denies any knowledge of the specifics (e.g., what exactly virtue is) and (2) Socrates' certainty is moral rather than logical. He never professes to prove any one them; rather than being conclusions, they are usually the premisses of arguments and propositions to which Socrates insists on getting his interlocutors' agreement. If I seem to be denying to Plato what is the distinctive mark of philosophy by reducing his beliefs to these generalities, I have several replies to make.

First, recall that I am explicitly suggesting that our expectations about what philosophy must have been for Plato may be anachronistic.⁴⁶ Let me emphasize this point. I do *not* say that no claims or arguments are made; nor do I say that we should ignore the claims and arguments and any doctrines that are proposed or discussed.⁴⁷ We should, indeed, study them closely, examine the arguments, reject the faulty ones, and look for better. This is to do what Socrates repeatedly insists that he is doing and tells his interlocutors that they should do. In so doing, we are pursuing the knowledge and truth, the pursuit

45. Tejera (*Plato's Dialogues One by One*, 7) well describes the dialogues as having "literary closure while remaining intellectually openended." Debra Nails takes this idea one step further in her concept of "The Double Openendedness of Plato's Method" (Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, October 1993). It is consistent with positions recently taken by Anderson (1992), and Kosman, Halperin, and Sayre in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*.

46. "Retrojections," Cherniss might have said. See *The Riddle of the Early Academy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945; repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 61ff. He was arguing, of course, against assumptions, (still common) about what the early Academy was and how it operated. See my *The Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1982), 126-28, 135, 142-43.

47. E.g., the doctrines that may be hinted at of piety (*Euthyphro*), courage (*Laches*), friendship (*Lysis*), poetic inspiration (*Ion*), justice (*Republic*), or moderation (*Charmides*), that knowledge is recollection (*Meno*, *Phaedo*) or right opinion with a *logos* (*Theaetetus*), or the various accounts of the soul (*Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*). Even, I would go so far as to say, the theory of Ideas; for my point is not that Plato does or does not (did or did not at some moment in his life) believe them to be true, but that the dialogues are not meant to teach them to us as Plato's doctrines.

of which is philosophy; we study them *qua* truth.⁴⁸ What we should *not* do is study these claims, arguments, and doctrines *qua* Plato's settled doctrines that we may remember and repeat as Plato's.⁴⁹ The question of Plato's own adherence to any of them has been carefully, deliberately, and consistently made indeterminable.

Second, I would agree that the dialogues do actually and are intended to teach their readers and audiences. However—a point that has been stated by Jaeger and Havelock⁵⁰ but tends to be lost sight of—while the dialogues do “teach,” the way in which they do so is not what we, coming later in a long tradition of professional and technical philosophy, expect. That is to say, they are paideutic in the ancient and general sense, not in a modern and distinctly philosophical one.⁵¹ What is taught in this sense in the *Protagoras*, for example, is no doctrine of virtue (unified or otherwise) nor of hedonism, but exactly what the framing interaction with Hippocrates suggests: that the sophists are variously foolish, vain, competitive, self-contradictory, ignorant of the very things about which they claim to be teachers, and therefore dangerous both to the soul of the student and to the society in which they ply their trade. But these are not the sorts of claims or doctrines in which subsequent philosophers have been interested or have thought to be the special province of philosophy.

Third, with Thesleff,⁵² rather than speak of doctrines, I believe it is more accurate to call this all a “vision.” There are several reasons for doing so. For one thing, it is consistent with the language of psychic seeing that Plato sometimes makes Socrates use.⁵³ For another, the terms *theoria* and *theasthai* as indicating what philosophy is and what philosophers do are used in

48. What might be called the “analytic turn” given to the study of all ancient philosophy since the mid-century has been true to this aspect of Plato's dialogues. The conviction of scholars from Ackrill and Bambrough in the 1950s to Barnes and Williams in the 1980s that the study of ancient philosophers could be productively combined with present philosophizing, that what is of interest is not just what they may have thought, but what the truth is, coincides with the view often stated by Plato's Socrates.

49. And in this respect the analytic turn has erred. For it does not follow from Socrates' having said in the dialogues that philosophy is concerned to know the truth that the dialogues actually state or are intended to state what *Plato* thinks the truth is.

50. By Jaeger, *Paideia*, and Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, n. 28 *supra*; we have recently been well reminded of this by Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece*.

51. Something recognized by Miller (*The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* and *Plato's Parmenides*) and Alexander Nehamas, “Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic,” 3-16.

52. Holger Thesleff, “Looking for Clues: An Interpretation of Some Literary Aspects of Plato's ‘Two-Level Model,’” in *Plato's Dialogues*, 17-43.

53. E.g., *Phaedo* 99b.

significant contexts in several dialogues.⁵⁴ Moreover, it captures the peculiarly Greek sense of *theoria* as a cognate of *theatron*. The dialogues are certainly, from one point of view, full of theories, but theories more as visions than as doctrines.

The term “vision” also seems more appropriate to the kind of writing Plato's dialogues are, their use of myths, the mystifying critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, and the language of the *Seventh Letter* about philosophic knowledge as something not amenable to expression in writing, but rather like a flame kindled in the soul. What he has to show us is his vision, and it is also a vision with respect to us, who “get it”—in plain words—*only* as a “vision.” I think this is just facing the facts: about the dialogues as fictions, whether fictional speeches, dramas, or narratives and about how little agreement Plato scholars have been able to come to about Plato's doctrines in the kind of detail and precision that we expect on the assumption that doctrines and systems are what philosophy is all about.

So a first point about Plato's philosophy is that it is a vision rather than a matter of doctrines. As important, though, that vision, those beliefs even insofar as they are expressible in words, are not the only point or focus of the dialogues. What the dialogues show us is that for Plato, philosophy is also a matter of attitudes and practices; philosophy is a way of life, as the Hellenistic schools correctly saw. It is not only thoughts and ideas; philosophy is also a matter of feelings and images, doubts and hesitations, moral and political purpose, continuing engagement with others, perpetual reflection, dialogue.⁵⁵

54. E.g., *Phaedrus* 250b (justice, temperance), 250e (beauty), *Symposium* 211d (beauty), *Republic* III, 402d (beauty), *Republic* VII, 517d speaks of the descent from divine *theoria* to that of human things, *Republic* V, 486a speaks of the philosophic nature as “a mind habituated to thoughts of grandeur (*megaloprepeia*) and contemplation (*theoria*) of all time and all existence” (Shorey). Shorey (Loeb *Republic ad loc*) compares the passage with 500b-c, *Theaetetus* 173e and 174e where similar things are said about the philosopher. His references to similar *sententiae* in Marcus Aurelius (7.35), Livy (24.34), and Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2 suggest that it became a commonplace in ancient discussions of philosophy.

55. As for Peirce, so, I would say, for Plato, the Final Truth is the goal sought, but as a guiding idea rather than as something we really expect to attain. Similarly, John Dewey writes in “From Absolutism to Experimentalism”: “Plato . . . still provides my favorite philosophic reading. For I am unable to find in him that all-comprehensive and overriding system which later interpretation has, as it seems to me, conferred upon him as a dubious boon. The ancient skeptics overworked another aspect of Plato's thought when they treated him as their spiritual father, but they were nearer the truth, I think, than those who force him into the frame of a rigidly systematized doctrine. . . . 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

What the dialogues create in us is the *experience* of this as philosophy, and of Plato's vision: of human life as lived in a reality through which we catch enrapturing glimpses of the ideal;⁵⁶ but frustratingly, the ideal remains beyond our grasp just because we live in time and space. Precisely because of their disconcerting combination of the eternal and the ephemeral, the ideal and the real, the dialogues actually *embody* (what some of them try to articulate) how the eternal and ideal is glimpsed but never really grasped in the ephemeral real world in which alone we philosophize. As I indicated earlier, I think the dialogues do and make much more than they actually say.

They cause us to experience both stability and change; as they embody Plato's vision of reality, so they themselves both remain what they are and are always becoming. What is stable is the morally and intellectually serious practice of improving oneself, one's neighbors, and one's fellow citizens, which is the pursuit of truth, knowledge, wisdom, or, in other words, philosophy. The dialogues contain stable doctrines and a stable doctrinal system only in the sense that these are (said to be) the aims of philosophizing. What changes, on the other hand—both *in* the dialogues and *about* them—is the propositions that one finds oneself compelled to affirm—including no proposition—as truth or knowledge at different times, under different circumstances, and in conversation with different interlocutors.

Plato's dialogues present a vision of human life as a troubling but pregnant interpenetration of the stable and the everchanging and of philosophy as conversational interactions that are dramatic, as are the kinds and circumstances of human lives. To put it metaphysically, the dialogues create in us the experience of essence-in-existence, of forms-in-things.⁵⁷

If I am on the right track in what I have been saying, the idea that the dialogues are enactments provides a way to transcend the oppositions, to solve many of the problems that have persisted in modern Plato scholarship. Again, I can only briefly suggest at the moment what I think the solutions are.

■ Dogmatism versus skepticism is a false dichotomy, at least as applied to Plato. Plato *has* beliefs, attitudes, principles, but they are *not* asserted dogmatically. It *is* a philosophy, but *not* one whose defining characteristics are doctrines or the solutions to philosophical problems.

■ The "aporetic" dialogues are not a problem unless one expects or demands that a philosopher's writings contain doctrines. But there are many

Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and political turn, and not to the artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor." I thank my colleague, Charles Landesman, for bringing this observation to my attention.

56. Like Alcibiades' likening of Socrates to the busts of Silenus (*Symposium* 215aff.).

57. See Watson, 187-208.

reasons to believe that this is not the enterprise of the dialogues. For, as Socrates states in the *Meno* and implies in many other dialogues, *aporia* is actually an important and philosophical experience.

■ Despite the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, we do not have to believe *either* that Plato's philosophic doctrine is found in the written dialogues *or* that he taught unwritten doctrines orally. The Tübingen school (and others) are right to the extent that Plato doesn't put his doctrines in the dialogues, but wrong that he *has* doctrines expressed orally or that such doctrines are more important than what is in the dialogues. In other words, his true philosophy *is* written in the dialogues, but it is *not* something doctrinal or dogmatic.

■ The distinction between Socrates and Plato is a problem in the dialogues only if one's primary interest in reading the dialogues is to establish doctrines and therefore to distinguish between those attributable to the former and those attributable to the latter.

■ Similarly, distinguishing between the historical and the Platonic Socrates is important to those who want to establish the views of the historical Socrates. But it ceases to be a problem in the interpretation of Plato's dialogues if we look at the dialogues as dramatic enactments in which there is a *character* called Socrates who, like many other characters in the dialogues, bears some resemblance to historical characters, but whose appearance here is part of the broader literary-philosophic or paideutic strategy of the author.

■ The opposition between unitarian and developmentalist approaches to the dialogues dissolves if we give up the assumption that Plato's philosophy must consist of some doctrines that either do or do not develop and change over time. I agree with Shorey that the main lines of what I would call Plato's vision remain the same. At the same time, I think it is likely, though not finally very important, that Plato's interests and literary practices changed.

■ The problem of myth and other nondiscursive forms is a problem only if you expect philosophic utterances to be assertoric or propositional, and a philosophic text to be expository prose, a treatise. In Plato's dialogues, however, both myths and arguments are actually tools for getting us to have an experience and to form us intellectually and morally.

■ Similarly, the problem of anonymity, like myth, irony, and *aporia*, is not a problem to be solved, but a technique that Plato used to accomplish what he wanted, which was not the construction or communication of a body of settled doctrine. By keeping his own beliefs and argument hidden, he encouraged his audience to confront their own beliefs and arguments, that is, to become better philosophers.⁵⁸

■ As for form versus content, seeing the dialogues as enactments suggests

58. See Kosman, Halperin, and Sayre in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*.

how, rather than an opposition, they actually coincide. In the essay previously mentioned, Susan Sontag writes,

A work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question. . . . works of art . . . give rise not to conceptual knowledge (which is the distinctive feature of discursive or scientific knowledge—e.g., philosophy, sociology, psychology, history) but to something like an excitation, a phenomenon of commitment, judgment in a state of thralldom or captivation. Which is to say that the knowledge we gain through art is an experience of the form or style of knowing something, rather than a knowledge of something (like a fact or a moral judgment) in itself (30).

Sontag may distinguish a little too carefully between works of art and attempts at “discursive or scientific knowledge,” or she may just not be thinking of Plato, but what she says here about “a work of art encountered as a work of art” applies to Plato’s dialogues encountered as enactments, as what they are, rather than as disguised (“discursive or scientific”) treatises. They do *not* give rise to conceptual knowledge, knowledge of a fact or moral judgment. Rather, they create a kind of excitation, commitment, and captivated judgment, and the knowledge that we derive is in the “form or style of knowing,” rather than in an object or judgment known. To understand the dialogues and our experience of them in this way seems to me to explain better than can be done on the treatise and doctrine approach, both why they are so endlessly fascinating and why we never come to clarity about what Plato’s philosophic doctrines are.

All of this indicates how considering the dialogues more in terms of what they do and make than in terms of what they appear to say might help us get beyond a lot of persistent problems. Finally, let me give some idea of what it would mean to look at some particular dialogues as enactments, as I have been suggesting.

First, two general examples. Without reiterating the interpretive problems about Plato’s alleged metaphysical dualism, I would point out that the vision of a two-level reality (one-many, same-different, immutable-changing, etc.) is enacted in my sense, that is, brought into being in the experience of the reader in virtually every dialogue, by the contrast between Socrates and his interlocutors with respect to character, behavior, lives, and attitudes, apart from any claims or arguments made. Another way of saying this is that virtually all of the dialogues embody and operate within the two-level vision, but they vary in perspective, emphasis, and level.

Another, perhaps more striking, example is that of philosophy as a distinct discipline. There is no persuasive evidence that anything like what we and Plato call philosophy existed before his time. I would attribute its existence to the dialogues, creating something to be called philosophy as distinct from

something else called rhetoric or sophistry.⁵⁹

More specifically, the *Protagoras* can be read as “Socrates’ *nekuia*,” developing the Homeric theme of a journey to the underworld (315c-d); i.e., an enactment, as I have already mentioned, of Plato’s vision of the teaching of virtue, actually a revision of the traditional idea, and of his judgment of the sophists as teachers. The drama of the *Protagoras* is an exhibition, for young Hippocrates’ benefit, of the sophists’ ignorance and the psychic danger that poses for their would-be pupil. Socrates’ fallacious arguments and seeming hedonism, like his extremely aggressive and contentious tactics, are means of bringing about that exhibition at the more personal, particular, and phenomenal level at the same time that they offer us glimpses of and inducements to the higher level.

The *Phaedo* is certainly about the immortality of the soul, but most or all of the arguments allegedly put forward for the claim that the soul is immortal seem poor and unsatisfactory, though scholars never tire of tinkering with them to make them work. I suggest that we try reading it as an enactment of the immortality of Socrates, and I want to point out only two large-scale aspects of that. First, of course, is the insoluble confusion of the historical Socrates and the character in the dialogue; second, the effect of the narrative framing. *Phaedo* narrates the discussion to Echecrates apparently a longish time after Socrates’ death. But the effect of this is that, within the narrative, Socrates speaks in the present tense; he remains alive. More often than in many other narrated dialogues, Plato even reminds us of the narrative frame by returning to it momentarily, and yet while we read and even after we stop reading, we continue to speak of Socrates in the present tense; so Socrates has *become* immortal in the souls of us who read these dialogues and from there he⁶⁰ has become an immortal figure in Western culture.

59. This position is adumbrated by Alexander Nehamas (“Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic”). It was suggested earlier by Jaeger (*Paideia*) and Havelock (*Preface to Plato*). Similarly, it has recently been argued by A. T. Cole (*The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991]) that Plato should be understood as the inventor of rhetoric.

60. The “he” who, I argue, has become immortal is *Plato’s* Socrates, the character in the dialogues. This is independent of whether or to what extent that character is like the historical Socrates. I personally do not believe that it is rationally possible to distinguish Plato’s character from the historical Socrates, and I believe that, closely examined, many of those who work on “Socratic philosophy” base their arguments on a combination of the wish to know what Socrates really believed and assumptions that are untestable. However, for the present purposes, which are to understand and interpret the dialogues consistent with accepted philological and historical evidence and methods, that doesn’t matter. If scholars are interested in ascertaining what the historical Socrates believed and if they believe that Plato’s dialogues are a useful source of information on that subject,

The *Phaedrus* can be read as enacting the philosophical seduction of Phaedrus, attempting to carry him away from the level of ephemeral persuasion and everchanging opinion, on which Lysianic rhetoric remains, to the quest of eternal knowledge and proof that is philosophy as embodied by Socrates, an enactment with cultural ramifications—mythological, sexual, and intellectual.

I have only been able to sketch here positions and interpretations that will require a good deal more explanation and argument. But I hope to have made at least a *prima facie* case for studying the dialogues as enactments, a kind of text essentially unlike the familiar treatise-form of Western philosophical writing, and embodying a vision of philosophy that is, likewise, essentially different from the more traditional Western notion of philosophies as a matter of doctrines and systems. I hope to have made it at least plausible that Plato is neither a dogmatist nor a skeptic, but someone for whom, on the contrary, philosophy is a matter of vision and character and a way of life.

IV

Dialectic and Dialogue:

Between Skepticism and Dogmatism

that is fine. But it is a conclusion more extreme than mine—and therefore requiring more and better evidence—that the claims and arguments of Plato's Socrates were those of the historical Socrates.

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