In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates says he spent his life examining and questioning people on how best to live, while avowing that he himself knows nothing important. Elsewhere, however, for example in Plato’s *Republic*, Plato’s Socrates presents radical and grandiose theses. In this book Sandra Peterson offers a new hypothesis which explains the puzzle of Socrates’ two contrasting manners. She argues that the apparently confident doctrinal Socrates is in fact conducting the first step of an examination: by eliciting his interlocutors’ reactions, his apparently doctrinal lectures reveal what his interlocutors believe is the best way to live. She tests her hypothesis by close reading of passages in the *Theaetetus*, *Republic*, and *Phaedo*. Her provocative conclusion, that there is a single Socrates whose conception and practice of philosophy remain the same throughout the dialogues, will be of interest to a wide range of readers in ancient philosophy and classics.

*Sandra Peterson* is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.
Why is my verse so barren of new pride?¹
So far from variation or quick change?
Why, with the time, do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,²
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed?
O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love still telling what is told.
(William Shakespeare, Sonnet 76)

¹ pride adornment. ² noted weed familiar garment.
Contents

Acknowledgments xi
List of abbreviations xiv
Preface xv

1 Opposed hypotheses about Plato’s dialogues 1
  1.1 A datum: the two different modes of speaking of Plato’s Socrates 1
  1.2 Two hypotheses to explain the datum 3
  1.3 More on the grand hypothesis and my alternative 5
  1.4 One approach that leads naturally to my alternative hypothesis 7
  1.5 A second approach to my hypothesis from four observations 8
  1.6 This book’s plan to discuss the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues 12
  1.7 The author Plato and the character Socrates 14
  1.8 Plato and the reader 15

2 Socrates in the Apology 17
  2.1 Looking for the Socrates of the Apology 17
  2.2 The label “wise” is a terrible slander 19
  2.3 Socrates is neither an investigator of nature nor a sophist 24
  2.4 Socrates is not a sage 27
  2.5 The thoughtfulness (phronēsis) that Socrates considers so important 30
  2.6 The “greatest things” 32
  2.7 Why the label “wise” is a terrible slander 33
  2.8 Socrates in the Apology sometimes echoes his accusers 36
  2.9 While knowing nothing big, Socrates does know some things 42
  2.10 Socrates’ knowledge that the god orders him to test people is not big 47
  2.11 The Socrates of the Apology 56

3 Socrates in the digression of the Theaetetus: extraction by declaration 59
  3.1 The digression and its setting 59
  3.2 The first part of the digression 61
Contents

3.3 An acute interpretative problem ......................................................... 62
3.4 Theodorus ............................................................................................ 66
3.5 Extraction by declaration ..................................................................... 67
3.6 Reflections on the extraction from Theodorus ....................................... 71
3.7 The second half of the digression: $\text{homoi}i\acute{o}i\text{s theo}i(i)$ ..................... 74
3.8 The solution to our problems about the digression .............................. 85
3.9 Conclusion: Theodorus again, and Theaetetus ...................................... 86

4 Socrates in the Republic, part i: speech and counter-speech .................. 90
   4.1 Strangeness and discontinuity ........................................................... 90
   4.2 Question and answer discussion in book i ......................................... 93
   4.3 A different kind of conversation in books 2-10: speech against speech ........................................................................................................... 98
   4.4 A question about Glaucon and a temporary puzzle about Socrates .......... 101
   4.5 Jostling conventions: question-and-answer conversation within persuasive speech ................................................................................................. 103
   4.6 Glaucon and Adeimantus require of Socrates a made-to-order speech ........................................................ 105
   4.7 The city of books 2-10 is Glaucon’s, built under a condition he imposes ................................................................................................................................. 107
   4.8 The “best” city Socrates describes in the Timaeus .................................. 115
   4.9 Three reasons against finding Socrates committed to his proposals in books 2-10 .......................................................... 118

5 Socrates in the Republic, part ii: philosophers, forms, Glaucon, and Adeimantus ............................................................. 120
   5.1 When can we say that Socrates does not believe proposals he makes in books 2–10? ...................................................... 120
   5.2 Socrates’ depiction of the philosopher ................................................ 121
   5.3 Glaucon’s agreements about forms in books 5–7 do not survive examination ................................................................................................................................. 125
   5.4 What Adeimantus accepts concerning philosophers does not survive examination ...................................................... 136
   5.5 What can we conclude from the description of the philosopher for Adeimantus? .......................................................... 146
   5.6 The effect of distancing Socrates from the content of his speech in books 2–10 .......................................................... 147
   5.7 The characters of Glaucon and Adeimantus ........................................ 149
   5.8 The Socrates of the Republic .............................................................. 160
   5.9 The piety of Socrates’ speech to Plato’s brothers and its worth for Plato’s readers .......................................................... 163
Contents

6 Socrates in the *Phaedo*: another persuasion assignment 166
   6.1 The famous proposals of the Socrates of the *Phaedo* 166
   6.2 Setting and participants 166
   6.3 The emphasis on persuasion 172
   6.4 Remarks on the logical structure of Socrates’ persuasive argument 176
   6.5 “True philosophers” 182
   6.6 Socrates is not among the “true philosophers” he describes 190
   6.7 Why is Socrates not more straightforward? 193

7 Others’ conceptions of philosophy in the *Euthydemus*, *Lovers*, and *Sophist* 196
   7.1 Comparison of some accounts of philosophy 196
   7.2 The conception of philosophy of an unnamed observer in the *Euthydemus* 198
   7.3 The *Lovers* as a compendium of current conceptions of philosophy 201
   7.4 The setting of the *Sophist* 205
   7.5 The Eleatic visitor’s conception of philosophy 207
   7.6 Why does the Eleatic visitor not count Socratic cleansing refutation as philosophy? 210

8 Socrates and Plato in Plato’s dialogues 216
   8.1 Socrates in Plato’s dialogues 216
   8.2 What does Socrates believe? 218
   8.3 Socrates and Plato according to Kahn 219
   8.4 The Delphic oracle and a problem for two views about Plato’s development 220
   8.5 Development and Plato’s creativity 221
   8.6 The testimony of Aristotle about doctrines of Plato 224
   8.7 More about Plato 229
   8.8 Something else to explain and a pure speculation 230
   8.9 A possible objection: the traditional interpretation of Plato 231
   8.10 Plato’s doctrines 233
   8.11 The argument of love; Plato and the historical Socrates 234

9 Socrates and philosophy 236
   9.1 Which of Plato’s dialogues call Socrates a philosopher? 236
   9.2 Classification of previously considered passages 237
   9.3 Some more statements from observers 238
   9.4 More passages in which Socrates suggests a conception of the philosopher 240
   9.5 Passages of Socrates’ self-description 242
   9.6 Why did Socrates, as depicted, call his activity “philosophizing”? 244
## Contents

9.7 One possible reason why Socrates calls his own activities "philosophizing" 246
9.8 Another possible reason why Socrates calls his activities "philosophizing" 248
9.9 Plato and philosophy: one view 250
9.10 Plato and philosophy: a second view 254
9.11 Socrates, philosophy, and Plato 259

Bibliography 262
Index of passages cited 277
General index 286
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the University of Minnesota for the sabbatical leave of 2005–2006 that gave me time to work on this book. For research support during 2005–2007 while I held the John M. Dolan Professorship I am grateful to Asher Waldfogel, who endowed the Professorship in honor of his undergraduate teacher at the University of Minnesota. I am also grateful for Asher’s sustained interest in my project.

I am grateful to the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for their careful reading of the manuscript. For her meticulous and insightful copy-editing I give many thanks to Barbara Docherty. I am most grateful to editor Hilary Gaskin for her attention.

The book’s thesis that Plato’s Socrates sometimes makes statements that reveal the thoughts of his interlocutors and do not express his own convictions first occurred to me while I was thinking about the Phaedo for an essay on Socrates’ last words. The essay was for a conference in honor of Terry Penner on his 65th birthday. (He had been my adviser for a dissertation on Aristotle.) The inspiration of the splendid Penner Fest at the University of Wisconsin in 2001 was a starting point for my book.

Soon thereafter I became interested in the digression of the Theaetetus. Presenting work-in-progress for the Arizona Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy for 2004 was a most valuable experience. Presenting a revision for the John M. Dolan Memorial Conference at the University of Minnesota was also useful. Giving a paper for the Arizona Colloquium in 2005 helped me articulate my thoughts on book 2 of the Republic. Presenting a revision for a Sister Mona Riley lecture at St. Catherine University in St. Paul helped me to progress.

I am very grateful to the many hosts for those events, and grateful to the participants for many thought-provoking comments and energizing reactions.
Acknowledgments

When I realized that an overarching idea tied together my thoughts about the *Theaetetus* and the *Republic*, what I had written seemed to be a start on a book. I then studied the *Apology* to learn how Socrates thought of his whole life near its end. The ensuing *Apology* chapter was the most difficult part of the book to write. After I had written a chapter on conceptions of philosophy in several dialogues of Plato, I added a full chapter on the *Phaedo*.

More people than I can possibly acknowledge here have occasioned or influenced specific points in the book. The decades of students both graduate and undergraduate that worked through my questions about Plato’s dialogues have my gratitude. Among them I thank especially Tom Doyle and Josh Kortbein for their responses to the first draft of the manuscript, and Christopher Moore for written comments on the entire manuscript. Many colleagues at the University of Minnesota and more widely in the profession have shown an interest that helped me. Here I will mention only Betty Belfiore, Norman Dahl, Gene Garver, and John Wallace to thank them for their questions and encouragement over the years.

I would like to record here my gratitude to schoolteachers who made possible my studies of ancient philosophy and whom I cannot now thank personally.

Donald Davidson’s epistemology course that I attended as an undergraduate used the *Theaetetus* as a central text. The dialogue and Davidson’s engagement with it made a lasting impression on me.

My first examples of scholars of ancient philosophy were G.E.L. Owen and John Ackrill, my teachers of Aristotle at Oxford. I continue to find surprising the consideration and time that they gave to me as a B.Phil. student. Although their massive learning could serve only as a distant beacon, they themselves were personal influences.

Ackrill was also the teacher of my first graduate class on Plato at Princeton, a seminar on the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. My second graduate class on Plato was a seminar on Plato’s metaphysics taught by Gregory Vlastos. My last Plato class was on Plato’s theory of forms, taught by Harold Cherniss. Vlastos had persuaded Cherniss, who had no obligation to teach, to offer the seminar. Vlastos participated in that memorable experience. I must also mention that Vlastos had given me helpful advice about my application in 1963 for graduate work in philosophy at Princeton. He gave extraordinary support and encouragement during my graduate studies and afterwards.

An even older debt is to Dr. Johanna Goetzl, my Latin teacher at San Mateo High School in California. Her generous offer to teach me ancient
Acknowledgments

Greek after school (and then her insistence on further after-school lessons in her native German) set me on the path that led to this book. I still remember the fun of our reading a lesson on participles based on a passage in Plato’s *Lysis*.

I offer the book to the reader.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Preface

The Socrates of some of Plato’s dialogues is the avowedly ignorant figure of the *Apology* who knows nothing important and who gave his life to examining himself and others. In contrast, the Socrates of other dialogues such as the *Republic* and *Phaedo* gives confident lectures on topics of which the examining Socrates of the *Apology* professed ignorance. It is a long-standing puzzle why Socrates acts so differently in different dialogues.

To explain the two different manners of Socrates a current widely accepted interpretation of Plato’s dialogues offers this two-part, Plato-centered, hypothesis: (i) the character Socrates of the dialogues is always Plato’s device for presenting Plato’s own views; and (ii) Plato had different views at different times. The Socrates who confidently lectures presents these famous four doctrines: Plato’s blueprint for the best state, Plato’s “Theory of Forms,” Plato’s view that philosophy is the knowledge of those Forms that fits the knower for the highest government stations, and Plato’s arguments for the immortality of the soul.

To explain Socrates’ two different manners this book offers instead an interlocutor-centered hypothesis that the character Socrates, who is permanently convinced that he knows nothing great, has reason to conduct different kinds of examination with different interlocutors. With some, he is the avowedly ignorant questioner. With others, he has reason to appear to be a confident lecturer: the reaction of interlocutors to an apparently confident lecture reveals them. Revealing them is the first step of an examination of them. Throughout Plato’s dialogues Socrates’ philosophizing centrally involves examining.

This book discusses some putatively doctrinal passages that seem the greatest obstacles to its thesis of the constantly ignorant and examining Socrates. Details of each containing dialogue show that, appearing to instruct, Socrates is instead conducting the revelatory first step of an examination. The second step would be critical logical scrutiny of the beliefs revealed. We do not see that second step after these apparently doctrinal
Preface

passages. Nevertheless, Socrates’ practice in these passages is exactly the examination that he says in the *Apology* that he continually engaged in.

The book’s argument has the result – important though negative – that the dialogues it considers give the reader no reason to believe that Socrates, as depicted, held the famous four doctrines or that Plato was endorsing them through his presentation of Socrates.

Since Socrates does not critically examine the famous four putatively Platonic teachings in the dialogues it considers, the book does some examining on his behalf. The book finds that the putative teachings it considers fail critical scrutiny. Their failure gives us reason for the stronger positive result that Socrates, as depicted, and hence Plato, would in fact reject the putative teachings.