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I

INTRODUCTION

So much I can say about writers past or future who claim that they know the things about which I am in earnest, whether by hearing them from me or others, or discovering them for themselves – that in my view they understand nothing of the matter. There is not, and can never be, a treatise of mine about it, for it cannot be put into words like other subjects of study. Only out of much converse about the subject, and a life lived together, does it suddenly, like a light kindled from a leaping flame, spring up in the soul and thenceforth maintain itself. But this much I do know, that whether written or spoken, it would best be done by me, and if it were badly written, I would be the chief sufferer.

Plato, *Epist.* 7. 341 b–d

These words, whether written by Plato himself or in his name by one of those who had experienced 'the shared life' with him, are supported by some remarks in one of his dialogues and must weigh heavily on the mind of anyone who dares to describe and interpret his work. This must be so at any time, but especially at the present stage of Platonic study, when strenuous efforts are being made by some scholars to reconstruct, from hints in Aristotle or the scant remains of others of his pupils, and from writers of later antiquity, the content of Plato's 'unwritten doctrines' (a phrase used once by Aristotle); that is, of the oral teaching which he gave in the Academy and which, so this passage might suggest, must contain his deepest and most strongly held philosophical convictions. It has always been obvious that Aristotle mentions and criticizes as Plato's doctrines which do not appear in his dialogues, and efforts to interpret these and to assess the credibility of Aristotle's accounts are by no means new. But the subject has been brought into much greater prominence in the last twelve or fifteen years, in particular by the intensive researches of a group of scholars in Germany, and this has stimulated discussion not only of the question of the 'unwritten doctrines' themselves but also of the status of the dialogues which we possess

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and the extent to which they can be said to reflect the serious and mature philosophy of their author. It used to be thought that the difference was chronological, that the doctrines mentioned by Aristotle were only put forward by Plato in his latest years after most if not all of the dialogues were written; but it has now been claimed[1] that such teaching was being given by Plato orally when he was writing the dialogues of the so-called middle period, including the *Republic*, if not even earlier.

I mention this at the beginning to illustrate a more general point, that although it behoves a historian to be as objective as possible, and he may hope to be writing for the future as well as the present, he cannot escape entirely from his own situation in the history of his subject. For us this means the history both of scholarship and of philosophy. In scholarship, another feature of modern writing on Plato is its rediscovery of the intimate connexion between literary form and philosophic content. This insight was already shown by the Neoplatonist Proclus in the fifth century A.D., when he wrote in his commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades*:[2]

> The introductory portions of the Platonic dialogues are in accord with their whole purpose. They are not devices thought up by Plato for dramatic effect...nor is their aim purely historical...but as the leaders of our school were aware (and I myself have elsewhere said something of it) they too are dependent on the theme of the dialogues as a whole.

In the nineteenth century this truth was lost sight of, so that Paul Friedländer felt it necessary to repeat Proclus's point in the words (*Plato* I, 232f.): 'One thing, at least, is certain: in Plato philosophy does not begin at the first point of dialectical discussion, but has

[1] By H.-J. Krämer in 'Die grundsätzlichen Fragen der Indirekten Platonüberlieferung', *Idee und Zahl* (1968), 106–50.

[2] *In Alc.* ed. Westerink (1954), p. 8; quoted by Friedländer, *Pl.* I, 366 n. 8. On the history of the matter in modern times, H. Gundert (*Der Plat. D.* 6) notes that Schleiermacher (b. 1768) first saw that form and content belong together, and related this methodically to Plato's purpose. But the insight was lost, and the belief prevailed that in Plato 'Dichtung' and philosophy could be treated in isolation. He mentions Wilamowitz and Natorp, and for the rediscovery in more recent times Stenzel, Jaeger and Friedländer. Other names are mentioned by H. Neumann (*TAPA* 1965, 283 n. 1). One may add R. G. Hoerber in *CP* 1968, 95–105, especially p. 97 n. 42, and E. M. Manasse, *P.'s Soph. and Pol.* 56, for its continuing importance in the later dialogues. (Contrast R. Robinson, *PED* 84, and Jaeger, *Aristotle* 26.)

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already begun in the preliminary casual conversation or in the playful or serious imagery of the frame.' The philosophical importance of the literary and dramatic elements is not of course confined to the introductory conversations, and the need for a restatement of it may be illustrated by reference to Grote, who in spite of his general percipience could write of the *Charmides*: 'There is a good deal of playful vivacity in the dialogue...This is the dramatic art and variety of Plato, charming to read, but not bearing on him as a philosopher'; and again, of the 'dramatic richness' of the dialogue: 'I make no attempt to reproduce this latter attribute...I confine myself to the philosophical bearing of the dialogue.' It is admittedly possible for an over-subtle interpreter to exaggerate the philosophic import which Plato intended us to read into some light-hearted remark of one of his characters; but the recognition of the essential unity of a Platonic dialogue is something which one may hope will not again be lost.[1] None but Plato's contemporaries could enjoy the living interplay of minds which to him was the ideal, but in the dialogues he has left us more than an inkling of what it was like, and we shall never understand him if we ignore the warning in the Seventh Letter and try to turn their essentially dialectical (that is, conversational) approach into treatises 'like any other subject of study'.

This may aid us in forming a judgement of the scattered records of his 'unwritten doctrines', now being pieced together with so much care and skill. Some scholars write as if they gave us, in contrast to the dialogues, the real Plato, speaking of 'the things about which he was in earnest', whereas they are of course only the accounts of others who claimed to know his mind 'either by hearing them from himself or others, or discovering them for themselves'; and such people in his view 'understood nothing of the matter'. If in the dialogues he is not always at his most serious, the 'play' or 'pastime' of Plato is worth more than the earnest study of lesser men. It is the dialogues which down the centuries have inspired and stimulated,

[1] See Grote, *Pl.*[3] (1875), I, 484 n. *i*; 492. Friedländer, one of the most sympathetic and understanding of Plato's interpreters, has nevertheless not always resisted the temptation to over-subtlety in seeing a philosophical significance behind the lightest words of his characters. A stimulating discussion of 'Form and Content in P.'s Philosophy' is that of Merlan in *JHI* 1947.

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irritated and exasperated, but never bored, and when anyone, philosopher or layman, speaks of 'Plato's views', it is the dialogues that he has in mind. Whatever the motives of their author, for all of us, in Europe and beyond, the dialogues are Plato and Plato is his dialogues.[1]

Among philosophers Plato is as popular and highly thought-of as he ever was, but each age interests itself in those aspects of him which fit in with its own philosophical tenor. Without forgetting the influence of other trends such as existentialism, one may say that the prevailing tendency of modern philosophy, at least in the English-speaking world, is towards logical theory, in which such striking advances have been made that they have inevitably affected all the main branches of philosophy. This has led to a concentration on some of the later dialogues, whose purposes are mainly critical, at the expense of the more metaphysical parts of his writings. It has also led to a reappraisal of Plato's attitude to the doctrine of Forms or 'Ideas', usually regarded as basic to his philosophy: that is, the doctrine that what we should call universals have a permanent and substantial existence independent of our minds and of the particulars which are called by the same names. A critic today will sometimes refer to them as universals and no more, though Plato's language in many places makes it clear that they were much more than that to him. In the *Parmenides*, the first of the 'critical' group, Plato brings forward serious objections to the doctrine which he nowhere answers, and opinions differ on the question whether he considered them fatal and abandoned or fundamentally altered it, or retained it in spite of them. Those who, while respecting his intellect, regard the doctrine of Forms as a philosophical mistake, naturally suppose that he himself came to see this, and find proof of it in the penetrating criticisms of the *Parmenides*. Professor Cross illustrates the prevailing attitude when he speaks of 'the difficulty of giving any cash value to a phrase like "timeless substantial entities".'[2] To continue the metaphor, one

[1] What is said above is not intended to belittle the work of those who are trying to recover some of the unwritten doctrines which has obvious historical importance, though the ice they venture on is sometimes treacherous. See further pp. 63 f. below.

[2] R. C. Cross, 'Logos and Forms in Plato', p. 19 in R. E. Allen's *Studies*. It should be added that Allen's brief introduction to this collection puts with admirable clarity the points that I have been trying to make here.

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might reply that it depends what currency you are using. By 'having cash value' the modern philosopher means something like being convertible into terms which have a straightforward meaning; but there have been philosophers in many periods to whom the phrase would seem to convey meaning as it stands. Indeed other scholars claim to see unmistakable signs, in dialogues which must have been written later than the *Parmenides*, that he retained the doctrine to the end of his life.

A dichotomy has sometimes been made between the historical and the philosophical approaches to the study of philosophers of the past, as if they were separate and incompatible. Such a rigid division can only do harm, and it is a mark of many modern philosophers that they are aware of the risk and have a strongly developed historical conscience. Thus for instance Cross (*l.c.*) believes that on the orthodox interpretation the theory of Forms is 'unworkable and...largely meaningless', and for this reason he is disinclined to father it on Plato unless he must. But he immediately goes on to state emphatically that 'the merits of the orthodox interpretation as a piece of philosophy are irrelevant to the question of whether it is the correct interpretation'. If it is wrong (as he believes it is), the evidence must be found in Plato's own words.

It is to be hoped that the days of antagonism between historians and philosophers are over. J. A. Stewart wrote in 1909 of the historians that a philosopher 'is, for them, a dead subject of anatomy, not a living man', and that compared with philosophers 'they are antiquarians, not disciples'. Of Stewart, on the other hand, Professor Allan has noted that his work was not only an adaptation of the Neo-Kantian Natorp, but 'he imagines that Plato had anticipated not only Kant, but Bergson, the Pragmatists, and the greater part of modern psychology'.[1] What has to be avoided is neither a historical nor a philosophical approach, but what Diès called 'a philosophy which usurps the place of history'. Far from treating his subject as 'a dead subject of anatomy', the historian or classical scholar pursues

[1] Stewart, *P.'s Doctrine of Ideas* 129, quoted by Diès in a good discussion of the historical and philosophical approaches, *Autour de P.* 352ff.; D. J. Allan, introd. to Stenzel's *PMD* xxiv, n. 1.

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his chosen method precisely because he wishes to bring him to life, to see him as a whole man, moving, talking and acting in the living context of his contemporary world, the soil in which his own thought grew and flowered. He can do this without belittling the contribution of the philosopher, whose interest in Plato lies rather in discovering what lasting contribution this ancient thinker has made to the advance of philosophy as a whole, and who rightly selects, and may interpret with special insight, what appeals to him most out of the inexhaustible riches of the dialogues. The two approaches are, and must remain, different, not however antagonistic but complementary, each imposing a salutary check on the other.[1]

As a historian I am glad to agree with Professor Dodds that 'Plato's starting-point was historically conditioned', and to continue my story from the previous volumes by introducing him as 'the child of the Enlightenment', 'the nephew of Charmides and kinsman of Critias, no less than one of Socrates' young men' (Dodds, *Gks and Irrat.* 208). The characters in his dialogues include Charmides and Critias themselves, and the Sophists Protagoras, Gorgias and Hippias, not to mention the revered figure of Parmenides, whom Socrates could just have met in his youth. Yet *child* of the Enlightenment must be taken strictly: he was not a part of it. Critias and Charmides, Socrates and the great Sophists belonged to an earlier generation. Socrates lived in Periclean Athens and fought in the Peloponnesian War in his forties. Pericles was already dead when Plato was born, and in his maturity he was a post-war figure writing in an Athens of different intellectual temper. When he put on to his stage the giants of the Sophistic era, he was recalling them from the dead.[2]

In thus making a start from the historical setting, I hope it is

[1] I have developed this theme in the lectures at Cincinnati published in *Lectures in Memory of Louise Taft Semple*, pp. 229–60, especially the second. Cf. also the quotation from Cornford in *The Unwritten Phil.* xiv. Some remarks of Stenzel's (*PMD* 40) are also relevant: 'Such a complex structure as the theory of Ideas must necessarily remain open to various interpretations, since it assuredly contains forces of which the philosopher himself will only gain full consciousness in the course of their development. Any view or interpretation which tries with the help of modern concepts founded on separation and analysis to describe the unconscious syntheses of an earlier time, must feel that it is making a selection, dividing that which, in the eyes of the ancient thinker, could not really be separated.' (Trans. D. J. Allan, with omission of one word which is not in the German.)

[2] See also vol. III, pp. xii, 325 f.

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unnecessary to repeat G. C. Field's warning (*P. and Contemps.* 1) against the tendency to pay too much attention to history and forget how much of his philosophy arises from reflection on realities which are the same in all ages. The dialogues themselves make such an error impossible, and it is to a description and discussion of the dialogues that this book will be mainly devoted.

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II

LIFE OF PLATO AND PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

(1) LIFE

(a) *Sources*[1]

If Plato's Seventh Letter is genuine (a question which will be discussed in its proper place among his writings), we are in the unique position for a writer of his time of having an autobiographical document outlining the stages of his development and concentrating on his part in a historical episode, the violent course of fourth-century Syracusan politics. If he did not write it himself, its historical value is scarcely lessened, since the sceptics agree that it must be the work of one of his immediate disciples written either before or shortly after his death. Such a source is of the highest value, even allowing for the probability that its overriding aim was the vindication of Plato's actions and their motives.

In his own writings Plato keeps himself firmly out of sight, and they reveal little or nothing about his life. He never writes in his own person,[2] and mentions himself twice only, both times in intimate connexion with Socrates, once to tell us that he was present at the trial and once to explain his absence from the group of friends who were with Socrates in his last hours. A number of his friends and pupils wrote about him, including Aristotle, Speusippus, Xenocrates, Philip of Opus, Hermodorus and Erastus, but their productions took the form of eulogies rather than biographies, and were already mingling legend with fact. In a school with a religious basis, such as Plato's Academy was (p. 20 below), there was a traditional tendency to

[1] A full account of the sources is given by Leisegang, *RE* 2342–7. See also Gaiser, 'Testt. Platonica', in *P.'s Ungeschr. Lehre* (separately printed), p. 446.

[2] This has never seemed to me to call for any particular explanation, but if any find it, as Ludwig Edelstein did, one of the most vexing problems raised by the dialogue form, they will find a number of suggested reasons, all somewhat speculative, in his article 'Platonic Anonymity' (*AJP* 1962).

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venerate the founder, and even Plato's own nephew Speusippus is credited with having followed Pythagorean precedent so far as to give him the god Apollo for a father.[1] We also hear of lives by pupils of Aristotle, Clearchus (an 'encomium'), Dicaearchus and Aristoxenus. Plato was also a favourite butt of the poets of the Middle Comedy, from whom we have a number of satirical quotations.

All these early writings are lost, and the earliest extant life is by Apuleius in the second century A.D., who followed the earlier encomiasts in making his subject a typical hero-figure. Not much later is the book devoted to Plato in the *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius, and finally we have from the sixth century lives by the Neoplatonic commentator Olympiodorus and an anonymous author, who carry the supernatural element to even further lengths. The most valuable is Diogenes, who, if his critical standards as a biographer are not what we would accept today, is nevertheless exceptional in conscientiously mentioning his sources, and they include a number of Plato's and Aristotle's contemporaries. Some of these are cited for sober statements of historical fact. He may quote Speusippus and Clearchus for the story of Plato's divine birth, but we also owe to him the knowledge that Plato's retirement to Megara to stay with Euclides after the execution of Socrates is vouched for by Hermodorus.

Not all who wrote about Plato were eulogists. In the miscellany of Athenaeus, a near contemporary of Apuleius, there are lively traces of a hostile tradition which did not hesitate to accuse Plato of such faults as pride, greed, plagiarism, jealousy, gross errors, self-contradiction, lying and flattery of tyrants. For these accusations Athenaeus cites a certain Herodicus, described as a follower of Crates but probably living little more than a century before Athenaeus, and the historian Theopompus, which takes us back to the fourth century B.C.[2]

[1] D.L. 3.2. (For other reff. not given here see Leisegang, *l.c.*) For the Pythagorean precedent see vol. I, 148f. (Plato himself, in establishing his school, probably had the model of the Pythagorean societies in mind: Field, *P. and Contemps.* 34). Field (*o.c.* 2) remarks on the curious fact that the Greeks, who produced the first scientific historians, had little or no idea of applying historical methods to individual biographies.

[2] The attacks, which are quite vicious and absurd, occur mainly at Ath. 5.215 c ff. and 11.506 a ff. For Ἡρόδικος ὁ Κρατήτειος see 215 f.; Θεόπομπος ἐν τῷ κατὰ τῆς Πλάτωνος διατριβῆς 508 c. (See also *RE* VIII, 975 f. and 2. Reihe, X. Halbb. 2185.)

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Theopompus, who wrote a work *Against the School of Plato*, was a pupil of Isocrates, and in view of the rivalry between Isocrates and Plato (p. 24 below) may have thought he was serving his master by these violent attacks. That such denigration was also current among the Peripatetics is shown by the astonishing declaration of Aristoxenus (*ap.* D.L. 3.37) that nearly the whole of Plato's *Republic* was in the *Contrary Arguments* of Protagoras.

In addition to the above, Plutarch and Cornelius Nepos in their lives of Dion say something of Plato's activities in Sicily,[1] and there are naturally a number of scattered references to him in later antiquity, especially in Cicero, and chronological information from Apollodorus.

(*b*) *Birth and family connexions*

In all probability Plato was born in 427 B.C. and died at the age of eighty in 347.[2] His birthplace was either Athens or Aegina (D.L. 3.3). As to his family, in the words of Apuleius 'de utroque nobilitas satis clara'. His father Ariston traced his descent from Codrus, the last king of Athens, and the family of his mother Perictione was connected with Solon, who, as Field remarked (*P. and Contemps.* 4), might be of less venerable antiquity but at least had the advantage of having really existed. Plato had two elder[3] brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus,

[1] Professor Finley (*Aspects of Antiquity*, 77f.) wrote: 'Whenever later writers report anything about Plato in Sicily, as Plutarch does, for example, in his life of Dion, they take their information directly or indirectly from these two letters [Plato's 7th and 8th].' It would be difficult to substantiate this statement. Setting aside historians like Timaeus and Ephorus (Plut. *Dion* 35 etc.), Plut. also quotes Timonides, who, he says, helped Dion in his struggle from the beginning and wrote about it to Speusippus (Plut. *Dion* 35, D.L. 4.5). He was also a philosopher (Plut. 22), i.e. presumably like Speusippus a member of the Academy. I do not see why some of the information about Plato's activities should not have come from him. More important perhaps is ch. 20, where Plut. reports what 'they say' about Plato's dismissal from the Sicilian court and adds: 'But Plato's own words do not quite agree with this account.' (The ref. is to *Ep.* 7.349–50.) Nor did the story of Plato's being sold into slavery, which is told in one form or another by Plut. (*Dion* 5), Diod. (15.7), and D.L. (3.19 from Favorinus), whether or not it be true, originate in Plato's letters. Note how Plut., after naming the ransom at 20 minae, adds 'Other authorities say 30.' It is in any case amusing to note that E. Meyer used the fact that many statements in Plut. are openly drawn from the letters as a weapon *against* those who reject them. See Taylor, *PMW* 14.

[2] D.L. 3.2 quotes Apollodorus for his birth but Hermippus, Plato's own pupil, for his death in the first year of the 108th Olympiad, 348–7 B.C. Others suggest an unimportant discrepancy of two or three years in the date of his birth. For details see Ueberweg–Praechter 1, 181, Zeller 2.1.390 n. 1.

[3] From *Rep.* 368a it appears that they were old enough to fight in a battle at Megara, as early as 424 (Burnet, *T. to P.* 207) or else in 409 (Wilamowitz, *Pl.* 1, 35: neither gives reasons for

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