

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03898-1 - The Platonic Art of Philosophy

Edited by George Boys-Stones, Dimitri El Murr and Christopher Gill

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Introduction

George Boys-Stones

According to an anecdote preserved by Athenaeus, Socrates once reported a dream he had had in which he saw Plato as a crow, jumping on his head and cawing. ‘I think, Plato,’ Socrates concluded, ‘that you have heaped a lot of untruths on my head.’¹

The anecdote apparently has anti-Platonic roots,² but underneath the polemic there is an important question. Ought we to expect ‘truths’ about Socrates from Plato? Or rather, perhaps: what sort of truth ought we to expect? After all, no one seriously believes that Plato’s dialogues are meant as historical records in the most literal sense. Yet the attempt to disentangle the historical Socrates from them (to see as it were where Plato is telling the truth and where he is interposing his own philosophical character) has been a lively, even dominant tradition within recent Platonic scholarship.³

The honorand of this volume, Christopher Rowe – represented on the cover of this volume by another ‘CRow(e)’ – has been at the forefront of attempts in recent decades to rethink our approach to Plato, and to recognise that his philosophical artistry involves a more nuanced engagement with his teacher, one that cannot be usefully unpacked at any point in terms of ‘inaccuracies’ in his portrayal of Socrates – as if portraying Socrates was ever his point. Rather, we are to think of Plato as philosophising *in the tradition of Socrates* so that, as he puts it in Rowe 2007a, Plato is in every relevant sense *consistently* ‘true’ to Socrates through his work. From this perspective, Rowe rejects the ‘developmentalist’ reading

¹ *Deipnosophistae* II, 507cd.

² It seems to be a ‘vicious parody’ (Riginos 1976: 54–5) of another story in which Socrates dreamed that he saw Plato as a swan (e.g. Apuleius, *On Plato* 1.1 [182]). Other complaints about Plato’s ‘misrepresentation’ of historical individuals are recorded at DL 3.35 (Socrates again, on hearing the *Lysis*); Athenaeus II, 505d and 506a (Gorgias and Phaedo respectively, on hearing the dialogues named for them).

³ See Dorion 2011, especially 13–14.

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of Plato which is based on an attempt to trace the path from the ‘real Socrates’ to a ‘mature Plato’ who is someone else altogether. Instead, Rowe invites us to engage with the dialogues on their own terms: as the philosophy of Plato the Socratic.

Rowe’s determination to understand the dialogues rather than to judge them has led him to combine, to an unusual degree, two strands in modern scholarship on Plato (and ancient philosophy generally) which normally constitute two quite separate traditions. One is the more philological, or at least textually based, approach which remains strong especially in continental Europe. The other is an approach centred on themes, issues and theories, which is broadly informed by analytic philosophy and is dominant in English-language scholarship. Over the years, Rowe has published a remarkable series of commentaries or annotated translations of Plato’s dialogues, a process which is continuing with translations for Penguin Classics and other series.⁴ On the other hand, especially in Penner and Rowe (2005) and his wide-ranging monograph (Rowe 2007a), as well as in many papers, he has addressed central, fundamental questions in scholarly debate on Socratic and Platonic ethics, epistemology, politics and psychology. In general, his intellectual (and personal) outlook has been resolutely open and international, pressing lines of inquiry in a way that goes beyond received academic traditions.

Rowe’s work on Plato has not only combined philological and philosophical strands but has also brought out the integral connection between these two aspects. His translations of Plato aim at a strongly literal rendering (even at the expense of a smoother English style) with a view to bringing out clearly the salient philosophical point that is being made in any given passage. This focus on accuracy has generated some exceptional insights. For instance, his re-interpretation of a single sentence in the *Statesman*, 300c4–6, formed a key part of a radical re-thinking of the relationship of this dialogue to Plato’s earlier political thought. He showed how a new understanding of the syntax of the sentence removes a crucial piece of evidence for the common view that the *Statesman* marks a transition away from the knowledge-based political theory of the *Republic* towards the constitutionalism of the *Laws*.⁵ In his 2007 monograph, significantly entitled *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing*, Rowe shows how searching examination of specific passages and fundamental questions about the core ideas and overall shape of Platonic theory are intimately

⁴ A full list of Rowe’s publications to the end of 2012 is given in this volume.

⁵ See further Rowe 1995: 15–18, 230–1; also discussed in Gill 2002a: 156–8.

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interlinked. For example, close attention to Socrates' comments on the discarnate psyche in *R.* 611c–612b, a passage often seen as an afterthought to the main argument, becomes an integral part of a re-evaluation of the significance of the idea of the tripartite psychology for Plato.⁶

Latterly, Rowe's research has focused more especially on the Socrates–Plato relationship, and on the question whether there really is a decisive break between Socratic and Platonic philosophy. A crucial stimulus for this move has been his collaboration with Penner and their shared re-examination, in connection with the *Lysis*, of Socratic ethics and psychology (Penner and Rowe 2005). But in Rowe 2007a and other publications in this period, this has been extended to a far-reaching re-assessment of the question whether Plato ever, in fact, repudiates the key Socratic theses on ethics, psychology and epistemology. This line of inquiry, as noted above, represents a frontal challenge to the developmental approach to Plato that is widespread especially in English-language scholarship, and also to Aristotle's evidence, which is widely taken as supporting a developmental view. This inquiry is very much a part of Rowe's ongoing work; but it has already had an energising effect on Platonic scholarship in opening up a quite new understanding of the nature and direction of Plato's philosophy in his middle and later periods.

The contributors to this volume were invited to respond in their own way to these distinctive features of Rowe's work, but it is fascinating to see how similar themes recur and intertwine. Monique **Dixsaut** sets the tone for the whole volume in the first chapter, which addresses most explicitly the way in which a need for a multi-dimensional and nuanced approach to the reading of Plato's works emerges from their character as dialogues: Plato has *deliberately* chosen not to give the kind of 'linear' account of a philosophical 'system' which would invite two-dimensional comparisons with the thought of others (for example, of Socrates). Dixsaut comments on quite how deliberate that choice is, focusing on moments where the dialogues invite reflection on how appropriate (for example in terms of length) the various contributions are. The answer is that a contribution is appropriate so long as it does not lose sight of the question. This accounts for the many new beginnings and 'digressions' one finds in Plato as well. Interpreters of Plato need to remember that 'unity' is not the same thing as 'continuity'.

A 'dialogical' conception of unity like this is one that can be extended beyond the exegesis of individual dialogues to challenge the 'linear'

⁶ Rowe 2007a: 140–1, 165, 170–2, a point taken up in Chapters 4, 6 and 7 below.

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assumptions made by developmentalist readings of Plato. Rowe has been a champion of the idea that many of the differences between different dialogues can be explained by the different perspectives they take rather than by a change in Plato's underlying beliefs. María Angélica **Fierro** argues that this may be the case even for one of the most compelling of the examples stressed by developmentalists: the supposed shift in Plato's view of the body. On a traditional account, Plato inclined to see the body as an impediment to philosophy in relatively 'early' works such as the *Phaedo* or *Symposium*, but accorded it a more clearly constructive, teleological role in later works such as the *Timaeus*. Fierro uses the *Phaedrus* to make a case that it is Plato's focus, not his view, that has changed. For in the *Phaedrus*, these two extremes clearly co-exist: the dangers of bodily distraction are given full acknowledgement in the speeches on love, but so is the possibility that the body can support philosophical activity – and even that the philosopher may ultimately aspire to the bodily condition of the gods.

The developmentalist conviction that there is a sharp break between earlier 'Socratic' dialogues and those in which Socrates increasingly becomes merely a mouthpiece for Plato's mature views is also contested by Noburu **Notomi**, who adopts Christopher Rowe's challenging suggestion that Plato's works are all fundamentally 'Socratic'. Notomi takes the *Phaedo* as his lens on the question, arguing that everything about this work – including the choice of narrator, Phaedo, and its setting in Phlius, the ancestral home of Pythagoras – suggests that its unifying theme is the nature of philosophy as an activity oriented towards the care of the soul rather than the body. In this light, we can see that the 'Platonic' elements of the dialogue (for example the introduction of 'forms') are not a matter of Plato striking out in new directions, as Aristotle rather implies; on the contrary, they represent 'Plato's way of developing Socrates' ethical message' (p. 67).

A very similar conclusion is arrived at in David **Sedley**'s reading of the moral psychology of the *Republic* – one which happens to take an explicit 'digression' as its unifying perspective on the work. Sedley observes that the central portion of the *Republic* (Books 5–7 in the ten-book division – which, as Sedley cautions, may not have been the original one) appears for the most part to discard the tripartite soul of Books 4 and 8–9 and resume the 'intellectualist' view normally associated with Socrates. (Sedley identifies the *Euthydemus* and *Phaedo* quite specifically as intertexts here.) Where Rowe has argued that this is because Plato never really moved away from Socrates' position, Sedley rather suggests that his intention is to allow us to focus on the virtue of the philosopher, which is defined in terms

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of contemplative activity. Sedley also maintains that Plato himself is evidently keen to resist a crude developmentalist view of his works: he makes his own case for the continuity of his thought with that of Socrates.

The lessons for intellectual progress in the central image of the digression in the *Republic*, the Cave, are the subject of more detailed study by Thomas **Johansen**. Johansen starts from an old puzzle about the Cave. It appears to be about the ethical and political redemption of people 'like us'; yet it is clearly meant to pick up the lessons of the Sun and Line concerning the philosopher's need to be educated in a scientific understanding of the cosmos at large. Johansen argues that the puzzle is to be answered by finding ways in which the Cave itself shows that ethical progress requires broader cosmological understanding. To take one example which the *Timaeus*, with its emphasis on our perceptual and intellectual engagement with the heavens, might help us to appreciate: the prisoners can only improve in understanding about anything at all thanks to the 'sight' (that is, cognition) whose ultimate source is the sun. The sun, then, already mediates between the Good, of which it is an image, and the prisoners' ethical progress. (That there is not more detailed emphasis on cosmological studies is only due to the fact that the prisoners are, *ex hypothesi*, not citizens of Callipolis and thus not already enrolled on the ideal curriculum.)

In addition to their focus on the structural cohesion of the dialogues tackled, the chapters so far have been increasingly interested in the theme of 'Socratic intellectualism'. 'Reflective commentaries' by two of the co-editors (so-called because they comment reflectively on other chapters in the volume and on related claims made by Rowe) highlight this theme by focusing on what we should mean by 'Socratic' (Christopher Gill) and on what we should mean by 'intellectualism' (Dimitri El Murr). **Gill** argues that the focus of Rowe and Sedley on the continuity in *Socratic thought* (so described) within Plato's work might risk underplaying the possible differences between the historical Socrates and Plato just as much as the traditional developmentalist view exaggerates them. Gill suggests that a sympathetic reading of Plato might entail a yet more radical rejection of the 'Socratic' question – abandoning the very terms 'Socratic' and 'Platonic' and the quest to identify all or some of the dialogues as one or the other. There is after all no indication from Plato himself that he wished us to do this. Instead, we should focus on the philosophical positions advanced: in the case of the *Republic*, for example, the moral psychology can be read as a sophisticated, double-jointed combination of tripartition (requiring

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harmonisation under the leadership of reason) and a form of intellectualism that is properly understood as its result.

As to ‘intellectualism’: as Johansen and Sedley make clear, the philosopher’s intellectual journey is very clearly oriented towards (and so, presumably, to be understood in terms of) the Good. But what arguments does Plato offer for its pre-eminence? **El Murr**, developing a suggestion of Rowe’s, argues that this follows from the – psychological – fact that the good, as a matter of fact, is something whose mere appearance is never considered desirable. (Contrast justice, or beauty, for example.) It is what Plato argues to be the universal recognition that the good exists independently of opinion that makes it so important for human thought: the concept that can make everything else intelligible, as the sun makes things in the sensible world visible.

From moral psychology we move to dialectic – beginning once again with a question about structural unity in a dialogue: for M. M. **McCabe** argues that the apparent simplicity of the *Euthydemus* relative to other dialogues only makes it harder to see its real unifying purpose. This purpose is found by her in a ‘deep’ epistemological discussion which emerges from Socrates’ encounter with the sophists, and picks up and develops his attempt early in the dialogue to reflect on wisdom – rather than taking (and leaving) it as the springboard for the display of sophistic fireworks. In particular, McCabe identifies the sophists’ systematic and recurrent refusal to allow Socrates to qualify his statements as a challenge to our understanding of how one might *reasonably* qualify a principle such as the principle of non-contradiction. It is Socrates’ failure to adduce reasons which would provide this qualification that ultimately limits the scope of his inquiry into knowledge in this dialogue and puts him trouble with the sophists – *real* trouble, from which it will take the work of further dialogues to rescue him.

The prohibition on ‘qualification’ which is a feature of the brothers’ practice of eristic in the *Euthydemus* is used by Michel **Narcy** to explain certain features of Socrates’ engagement with Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates imagines himself challenged by Protagoras to treat him fairly; but because he is no longer there to defend himself, this can only mean dealing with his words without allowing further qualification. Socrates thus proves himself a master of eristic in responding to Protagoras – but precisely because it is the fairest way of responding to him. (The contrast between eristic and dialectic is maintained, however, by the fact that this eristical display is subservient to the dialectical encounter with Theaetetus.) Narcy suggests that the focus on Socrates’ use of eristic, understood as an

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inflection of the ‘elenchus’, is what explains the choice of Euclides as the narrator – indeed, as the ‘author’ – of the *Theaetetus*: eristic characterised the Megarian school, of which he was the founder.

If the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* adopts a literalist approach to his engagement with Protagoras, Ugo **Zilioli** argues that he is more devious in his discussion of the ‘subtler thinkers’ supposedly allied to his way of thinking. Through an analysis of the fundamental features of their epistemology, Zilioli concludes that they coincide with the Cyrenaics, who by Plato’s day had developed a strong version of the identification of knowledge with perception. Plato’s sensitivity to the historical setting of the *Theaetetus* does not allow him to have Socrates engage directly with the school of Aristippus; but the ‘Megarian’ frame (along with the traces of Megarian thought that colour the narrative) serves duty here too, inviting us from the beginning to re-read the earlier dialogue between Socrates and Protagoras as one that plays out in an engagement between Plato and his Socratic contemporaries in general.

Terry **Penner** continues the exploration of Plato’s engagement with theories of the incorrigibility of perception represented by Protagoras, at least as represented in the *Theaetetus*. Penner argues that such incorrigible perceptions have something in common with the ‘propositions’ of modern semantics: they give content, that is, to our expressions or beliefs by denying that these expressions or beliefs refer to real things in the world. This works well, Penner suggests, for the operation of a ‘neutral logic’, that is, an analysis of meaning that is indifferent to whether a sentence is, as a matter of fact, true or false. But Plato might have thought that philosophy ought, rather, to be concerned about things in the world – the things that *speakers* refer to, rather than the (hypothetical?) entities to which sentences refer. In this light, Plato’s analysis of false belief might be more radical than we generally assume. Suppose that we believe one thing (say, Theodorus) is another (say, Theaetetus), and apparently find ourselves committed to the paradoxical claim that Theodorus is Theaetetus. Plato might really have thought that the problem in this case is not to do with ‘intentional contexts’ or the mismatch of memory and perception (the ‘wax tablet’ analogy, compared by Penner with Frege’s move). The problem is that we both know and do not know the same object – with implications, of course, for Plato’s understanding of ‘knowledge’.

Penner’s suggestion that Plato remained more focused on real-world entities than modern semantic theory, and appropriately so, has some resonance in Denis **O’Brien**’s argument with what he sees as the prejudicial insistence of modern logic that being is never a predicate – and of

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commentators, that Plato cannot have thought that it was. At the heart of O'Brien's argument is an analysis of the answer to Parmenides that Plato develops in the *Sophist*. Parmenides had said that it was not possible to talk or think of 'what is not in any way at all'. Surprisingly, perhaps, Plato agrees – but he also adds crucial specification. Parmenides was right if we understand 'what is not in any way at all' to mean 'what is contrary to being'. We can, however, talk of non-being in the sense of what is *other* than being. And not only can we talk about it: absolutely everything there is – except being itself – participates in the 'form of non-being'. This analysis requires, and so supports, the idea that being can be predicated: to say, for example, that 'non-being is' (that is, that it participates in being, one of the 'great kinds') is not to say that it 'is *something*'.

Reflections on politics and history characterise the remaining papers – tied as ever, however, to questions of form and unity. We begin with the *Timaeus*, which contains one of the most striking and puzzling *discontinuities* of any of the dialogues. For before we get to Timaeus' cosmology, which is the meat of the dialogue, there is a long trailer for the account of Atlantis and its encounter with ancient Athens that will be the subject of the *Critias*. Furthermore, it is puzzling that the characters of the dialogue accept the veracity of the Atlantis story every bit as much as they do that of Timaeus' cosmology. Sarah **Broadie** argues that all of this is meant to focus our attention on the question of *why* it matters whether something is true. Socrates and the others can accept Critias' story as true precisely because, as uncritical historical description, its truth does not matter very much to the philosophical among them at all. Conversely, Critias' deep concern with the truth of the Atlantis tale, which is allied to his failure to acknowledge the significance of how Socrates arrived at the ideal political constitution in the 'yesterday' of the dialogue, shows his own very unphilosophical outlook. This prepares us to see what matters in the case of the cosmos: although its structure is a matter of evident historical record (unlike the constitution of the *Republic*), what will matter in Timaeus' account are the reasons for its being this way (which Critias' account of Atlantis pointedly ignores).

Broadie emphasises that the Atlantis narrative, for what it is worth, is accepted as true by its audience. Mauro **Tulli** explores further the positive implications of this observation in his suggestion that Plato has more interest in, and respect for, history than Aristotle, for example. In insisting that Solon began to write the story down as a poem, and that the 'writings' exist for Critias to consult, Plato indicates that the historicity of the story does matter. One reason for this may be that it has an inspirational

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function: if the ideal city existed once, it could exist again. (Note the crucial role of Solon the lawgiver in the transmission of this history.) But at the same time, Plato has a lesson to teach here about what the best kind of literature is like. The lesson is indicated by the fact that he is following in the footsteps of Solon in writing about Atlantis – in the case of the *Critias*, starting to do so but not finishing, just as Solon had done. And Solon's work (he says) would have been greater than that of Homer and Hesiod. So this, Plato suggests, is literature suitable for the ideal city. It is so, presumably, because it is grounded in appropriate education and understanding – something signalled by its convergence with the political lessons of the *Republic*.

Plato's interest in history is further explored by Malcolm **Schofield**, who shows how he puts a revisionist account of two historical states – Cyrus' Persia and Athens at the time of Salamis – to the service of the political theory of the *Laws*. The key aim of the legislator for Plato is friendship: this was (he suggests) deliberately produced under Cyrus as a matter of monarchical policy, and emerged in Athens through collective fear of invasion. The 'second-best' state of the *Laws* steers a middle path between these two historical precedents, invoking wisdom and freedom as ideals supportive of friendship rather than appealing to a benign dictator on the one hand, or the action of chance on the other.

Schofield chooses 'friendship' as a theme appropriate to the occasion. All of us involved in this volume would wish to concur that Christopher's generous friendship is not the least of his moral virtues – and a fitting end-point to this tribute to his intellectual inspiration.

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CHAPTER ONE

*Macrology and digression**Monique Dixsaut***Introduction**

The title of this volume being *The Platonic Art of Philosophy*, it would hardly seem appropriate to use a purely stylistic approach. Yet my aim here is to take what are apparently formal features of speech, namely macrology and digression, and to see whether the words gain in some dialogues a philosophical meaning, and if an analysis of their usage might not even lead to a better understanding of how to philosophise according to Plato.

In the Platonic dialogues, the opposition between macrology and brachylogy (speaking at length and speaking briefly) is part of a strategy to turn these rhetorical categories against rhetoric, a strategy whose evolution can be traced from the *Protagoras* to the *Statesman*. But once the context ceases to be agonistic, and when it is no longer a matter of criticising one type of speech but of worrying about the length of one's own speech, whether past or future, these two words lose their technical character. The fear of an over-long speech is the most frequent cause of the author's incursions into his own texts, where his concerns are transposed into reflections by the protagonist on his own speech. They interrupt the flow of the discourse in order to inquire whether at some point the *logos* has ceased to move in a straight line and therefore ceased answering the question being discussed, or whether it is opportune to explore a problem and thus risk being carried too far away. When the very act of putting this kind of question finds its legitimacy challenged, this requires a distinction between two kinds of measure and finally the need to go beyond both kinds. For if a *logos* is judged too long as regards due measure, is it the undue length alone that makes it a digression, or is it the fact of deviating from the subject that produces a sense of undue length?

It is difficult to know what is, and what is not, digressive in Plato, because we are dealing with dialogues, that is, a kind of *logos* whose continuity is, by definition, broken up by the alternation of questions and