

## HOW PLATO WRITES

Plato is a philosophical writer of unusual and ingenious versatility. His works engage in argument but are also full of allegory, imagery, myth, paradox, and intertextuality. He astutely characterizes the participants whom he portrays in conversation. Sometimes he composes fictive dialogues in dramatic form, while at other times he does so as narratives. In this book, world-renowned scholar Malcolm Schofield illustrates the variety of the literary resources that Plato deploys to achieve his philosophical purposes. He draws key passages for discussion particularly, but not only, from *Republic* and the less well-known *Laws* and also shows how reconstructing the original historical context of a dialogue and of its assumed readership is essential to understanding Plato's approach. The book will open the eyes of readers of all levels of expertise to Plato's masterly ability as a writer and how an understanding of this is crucial if we are to appreciate his philosophy.

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*Perspectives and Problems*

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## *Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	I
PART I APPROACHES TO THE CORPUS	13
1 Plato in His Time and Place	15
2 When and Why Did Plato Write Narrated Dialogues?	42
3 Against System: The Historical Plato in the Mid-Victorian Era	52
PART II ARGUMENT AND DIALOGUE ARCHITECTURE	71
4 Callicles' Return: <i>Gorgias</i> 509–22 Reconsidered	73
5 Likeness and Likenesses in the <i>Parmenides</i>	96
6 The Elusiveness of Cratylus in the <i>Cratylus</i>	118
PART III MYTH AND ALLEGORY IN THE REPUBLIC	137
7 The Noble Lie	139
8 The Cave	163
PART IV PROJECTS, PARADOXES, AND LITERARY REGISTERS IN THE LAWS	181
9 Religion and Philosophy in the <i>Laws</i>	183
10 The <i>Laws</i> ' Two Projects	202

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
11	Plato, Xenophon, and the Laws of Lycurgus	219
12	Injury, Injustice, and the Involuntary in the <i>Laws</i>	240
13	Plato's Marionette	251
14	Paradoxes of Childhood and Play in Heraclitus and Plato	275
	<i>References</i>	290
	<i>Index</i>	305

## *Preface*

A book about the way Plato writes might perhaps approach the subject systematically, taking different key elements in his writing in turn. This book takes a different tack. It proceeds by way of examples. The topics it covers are chosen in the first instance because they raise problems of interpretation, problems which either have an immediate literary dimension or turn out upon analysis to illustrate Plato's use for philosophical purposes of specific literary forms or devices. Indeed, the spotlight is for the most part on passages or themes in dialogues whose philosophical importance for the projects Plato was undertaking seemed to me to have been in various ways misunderstood or under-appreciated – often because his ways of writing had not been sufficiently pondered. The dialogues in question are *Parmenides* (subject of my doctoral thesis), *Cratylus* (another early preoccupation), *Republic*, *Gorgias*, and especially (a main focus over the last quarter-century) the *Laws*.

All the studies included in the volume were composed as occasional offerings. All but one date to the present millennium. All were written in response to invitations to give lectures or to contribute to collective volumes (often in honour of long-standing friends and colleagues) or themed issues of learned journals. Nonetheless, I hope they mostly share something of a common style and approach, not least because most were designed from the outset to be accessible to relatively wide readerships. They have been given a common format in this volume (with revisions to content where some updating seemed particularly desirable).

I remain grateful for the stimulus of the invitations I was given to compose the essays republished here and take this opportunity to thank Dimitri El Murr in particular, whose initiatives prompted no fewer than four of them. Many friends and colleagues gave me helpful critical comments on earlier versions, and I benefited from the responses of audiences of those first delivered as talks or lectures. These are detailed and acknowledged with gratitude in the fairly widely scattered original publications.

My title will remind some readers of Danielle Allen's 2010 title *Why Plato Wrote*: it is a pleasure to acknowledge the echo.

I thank the Syndics of Cambridge University Press for accepting the book and Michael Sharp, my publisher, for encouragement and facilitation throughout, together with his colleagues Katie Idle and Bethany Johnson, and at one point a crucial intervention. It has been a pleasure to work with Reshma Xavier at Integra and my copy editor Kathleen Fearn. The original proposal for the volume was helpfully scrutinized by three readers for the Press. The book's years of gestation were challenging years for most of us, and I thank especially James Allen, Carol Atack, Rachel Barney, Kirsten Canavan, Emily Gowers, Matthew Schofield, and Frisbee Sheffield for support over this period. Carol, Melissa Lane, and Shaul Tor have given much appreciated encouragement for the project itself in later stages. Melissa kindly read to the reader's profit two successive versions of the Introduction.

#### **Note on Abbreviations**

Classical references are abbreviated mostly according to *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 4th ed. (2012) but otherwise should be readily interpretable.

## *Acknowledgements*

Most chapters in this volume originally appeared in other publications, reprinted here courtesy of their editors and/or publishers with thanks. Presentation has been rendered uniform, and in some cases revisions to the text (mostly light) have been made.

1. 'Plato in his time and place' (from *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, 2nd ed., ed. G. Fine. Oxford, 2019: 41–64)
2. 'When and why did Plato write narrated dialogues?' (from *Plato, Poet and Philosopher*, eds. E. Moutsopoulos and M. Protopappas-Marneli. Athens, 2013: 87–96)
3. 'Against system: the historical Plato in the mid-Victorian era' (from *For a Skeptical Peripatetic: Festschrift in Honour of John Glucker*, eds. Y. Z. Liebersohn, I. Ludlam, and A. Edelheit. Sankt Augustin, 2017: 344–64)
4. 'Callicles' return: *Gorgias* 509–522 reconsidered' (from *Philosophie Antique* 17 (2017): 7–30)
5. 'Likeness and likenesses in the *Parmenides*' (from *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, eds. C. Gill and M. M. McCabe. Oxford, 1996: 48–78)
6. 'Another two Cratyluses problem' (from *Rereading Ancient Philosophy: Old Chestnuts and Sacred Cows*, eds. V. Harte and R. Woolf. Cambridge, 2017: 181–98)
7. 'The noble lie' (from *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari. Cambridge, 2007: 138–64)
8. 'Metaspeleology' (from *Maieusis: Essays on Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*, ed. D. Scott. Oxford, 2007: 216–31)
9. 'Religion and philosophy in the *Laws*' (De Vogel lecture, from *Plato's Laws: From Theory into Practice*, eds. S. Scolnicov and L. Brisson. Sankt Augustin, 2003: 1–13)
10. 'The *Laws*' two projects' (from *Plato's Laws: A Critical Guide*, ed. C. Bobonich. Cambridge, 2010: 12–28)



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11. 'Plato, Xenophon, and the laws of Lycurgus' (from *Polis* 38 (2021): 450–72)
12. 'Injury, injustice, and the involuntary in the *Laws*' (from *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honour of Julia Annas*, ed. R. Kamtekar (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol. 2012). Oxford, 2012: 103–14)
13. 'Plato's marionette' (Michael Frede lecture, from *Rhizomata* 4 (2016): 128–53)
14. 'Paradoxes of childhood and play in Heraclitus and Plato' (J. H. Gray lecture, not previously published)