Hegel and the Greeks

This Site is Under Construction: Situating Hegel's Plato

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In this paper, I examine broad features of Hegel's interpretation of Plato from his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, noting how these features resonate with current views of Platonic philosophy.[1] Hegel formed his interpretation of Plato under very different circumstances than those of today. Serious study of the Platonic dialogues had come to the forefront in German Idealist philosophy. As Rüdiger Bubner notes: 'It was this tradition of thought that discovered, in an original way of its own, the *authentic Plato* in place of the various mediated substitutes of before, and indeed saw him as a thinker who was to provide continuing inspiration to the needs of post-Kantian philosophy'.[2] We find Hegel holds Plato in high esteem, most famously as a 'teacher of the human race' alongside Aristotle. His Plato is one who is fundamentally significant in the development of philosophy, raising it to the status of science, although not in a fully systematic manner. At the same time, Hegel distinguishes his Plato from the projects of his contemporaries, Tennemann's esoteric Plato and Schleiermacher's aesthetic Plato. Hegel also forms his view of Plato at a time just prior to the development of stylometric studies of the dialogues, begun in its earliest form by K. F. Hermann (1839) and pushed forward by Lewis Campbell and Friedrich Blass in the later half of the 19th century. (This is not to claim that questions regarding the ordering of the dialogues did not arise earlier than 1839, but that they became scientific and central in Platonic interpretation with Hermann.) The pressures Hegel negotiates in his interpretation are quite distinct, especially in this last respect, yet not altogether alien. There are, I think, interesting reasons for this. (One might think that given Hegel's strong opposition to Schleiermacher (and Hegel's disposition towards development), he might have been inclined towards a developmental reading of Plato. One also might think that given his opposition to Tennemann's esotericism, he might have had more doubts about discerning a system within Plato's unsystematic dialogues. But one would be wrong on both counts.)

We confront the question of 'which Plato' we are contrasting with Hegel's when assessing his work. The Plato we consider is 'under construction'. This has been the case historically, and deep divides exist in contemporary interpretation, especially with respect to hypotheses concerning the chronology of the dialogues, the quest for determining

Socratic philosophy from the Platonic corpus, and the literary character of Plato's dialogues. It was suggested in the past that the *correctness* of Hegel's Plato is of no importance — even if this Plato is wholly imaginary, it would be among the 'foundation stones of Hegelian thought'.[3] This manner of thinking about the 'correctness' or 'incorrectness' of Plato misses an interesting and crucial problem, one Hegel recognises very clearly: Plato's dialogues represent a problem of interpretation. While Hegel expresses great confidence in his interpretation, he recognises and responds to interpretive concerns: 1) the relationship between Socratic and Platonic thought, 2) the dialogue form, 3) Platonic Anonymity and 4) Platonic myth. All of these issues remain with us today. Hegel describes Plato's philosophy as a 'knot' in which previous one-sided philosophies are united in a concrete form (Vol. 2, 13). This is quite an appropriate metaphor for approaching Plato's dialogues in general. In order to clarify the knot of Platonic philosophy, Hegel must also unravel and, at times, cut through what he perceives as misapprehensions of this not-yet-systematic philosophy perennially in need of deciphering. His decisions are informative for us, and demonstrate an awareness of the difficulties involved in interpreting Plato.

Section I: The Lay of the Land

At around the same time as Catherine Zuckert's work on Post-Modern Plato(s) was published,[4] the Anglo-American scene was marked by John Cooper's 1997 'outing' of brewing disputes with respect to the chronology of Plato's dialogues in his introduction in the *Complete Works of Plato*.[5] In his introduction to what has become a relatively standard anthology of Plato's dialogues translated into English, Cooper describes the lack of scholarly consensus as to 'the vexing issue of chronology' of the dialogues (as Gail Fine puts it). Debra Nails published work examining in detail the issue of consensus among Plato scholars and interpreters in 1995. She determines that consensus is neither broad nor deep, and that with the exception of a late group, with some qualifications, very little consensus exists. Appealing *ad populum* for support in using the labels 'early' or 'middle' and never for 'transitional', she contends, will no longer suffice to support philosophical interpretation of Plato's dialogues.[6] Alternative chronologies, challenging traditional arrangements of Plato's dialogues, had been put forth earlier by Holger Thesleff (1982) and Charles Kahn (1981), but Kahn's publication of *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* in 1996, a full length work on his view of the literary form and philosophical significance of the Platonic Dialogues, coincides with Cooper's general announcement about the state of scholarship on the matter.[7] The lack of consensus regarding the chronology of Plato's works primarily concerns the dialogues considered early, middle and transitional (between early and middle and middle and late). It may appear as though the chronological dating and grouping of the dialogues is a small argument among scholars; however, in its context this argument is far-reaching. The impasse regarding the chronology of the 'early' and 'middle' works has inspired the renewed appeal of a 'Unitarian' view of the dialogues. This approach to Plato dates back to Schleiermacher,

and (roughly) holds that the dialogues are unified in terms of their philosophical content.[8] Plato wrote all his dialogues with his core Platonic philosophy or philosophical commitments in place, according to this approach. The diversity of viewpoints and treatments of topics throughout the corpus is only an apparent diversity.

Uncertainty about the chronology of the 'early', 'middle', and 'transitional' dialogues challenges the developmental view of Plato — the view that locates and tracks transitions in Plato's thinking over the course of his career through the Platonic Corpus. This developmental view (also known as the 'genetic approach') began just after Hegel's death, with the discernment of distinct stages in Plato's thought (Karl Friedrich Hermann 1839), became popularised with the work of W. K. C. Guthrie (1962), and culminates in scholarship that aims to discern Socratic thought in the Platonic dialogues. Vlastos, Santas, and Brickhouse and Smith, for example, develop portraits of Socrates' views and/or Socratic thought as found in the early Platonic dialogues.[9] The quest to determine Plato's development is challenged, for instance, if dialogues form different units, as Kahn proposes, and we need to read at least some dialogues proleptically, as he suggests (looking forward to doctrines from the middle dialogues, especially the *Republic*, not backwards to Socrates' ideas). Theselff's chronology has more radical features, grouping together in no particular order most dialogues that might be considered early (*Lysis*, *Charmides*) with those considered middle (*Phaedo*, *Symposium*), and holding that the late dialogues were not written exclusively by Plato at all.

The lack of certainty about the composition dates and groupings of the dialogues results in an appeal to 'thematic unity' with which the dialogues can be grouped, as Cooper proposes. A thematic grouping which designates the 'ethical' (Group I), 'metaphysical' (Group II), and 'later' dialogues (Group III) has been increasingly taken up.[10] This thematic assessment of the Platonic corpus leads to groupings roughly similar to the traditional 'early', 'middle', and late' categorizations, which seems reassuring on the surface, yet is nowhere near the clarity that, for example, Terry Penner argues for with respect to the Socratic nature of the early dialogues.[11] Thematic groupings of the dialogues, despite resembling traditional groupings, allow for a greater degree of flexibility in determining relationships between dialogues. This flexibility may be seen as either an interpretive virtue or an interpretive vice, depending on the Plato one is attempting to construct — how unified the dialogues are. We have on our hands a divide that, on the one hand, advises caution, admitting that the dialogues themselves provide poor evidence for certainty about their composition, and, on the other, argues for this certainty using the content of the dialogues as evidence.

The Unitarian view has a great appeal for scholars interested in the literary aspects of the Platonic dialogues, but attention to the literary features of the dialogues is important in Staussian and the contemporary Tübingen school work on Plato. [12] Many Developmentalists attend to literary detail now as well.[13] At the broadest level, a certain 'Spirit of Schleiermacher' (not the letter) permeates a great deal of contemporary work on Plato, whatever the particular interpretive positions. Gerald Press, an advocate of the

highly literary 'Non-dogmatic and Non-doctrinal' view of Plato, cites Schleiermacher as an historical originator of the literary approach to the dialogues as (well as the Unitarian approach mentioned before, the two often going hand-in-hand). The general point Press articulates about the state of the literature in the 1990's is that the literary aspects of the dialogues have become a 'live debate'. Even if one does not accept an 'anti-doctrinal' position such as Press's, assessing the philosophical significance of the literary features of Plato's dialogues becomes a problem. Press states, '[t]he question [...] is no longer whether literary and dramatic matters are important for understanding the dialogues, but how'.[14] Plato's dialogues are increasingly appreciated as Philosophical-Artistic works, although the meaning of this hyphenation of philosophy and art is extremely difficult to adjudicate.

As we examine Hegel's attempt to determine a not-yet-systematic but identifiable Platonic philosophy, I shall employ a certain amount of the technical vocabulary currently in use to distinguish different approaches to Plato (Developmentalist versus Unitarian being the most crucial), as well as the accepted terminology for such problems as 'the Dialogue Form' and 'Platonic Anonymity'. While this involves some superimposition of current viewpoints onto Hegel, I will try to make clear that Hegel develops his view with much of this vocabulary at hand, and although not defining himself as 'Unitarian' (as opposed to Developmentalist) he nevertheless has a genuine sense of his interpretive options. The 'problem space' in which he works is quite clear to him. Hegel's Plato arises during a period of revived interest in Plato (particularly in response to Kant's critical philosophy) and comes on the scene on the very cusp of modern Platonic scholarship. In my conclusion, I shall return to the issue I raise here with respect to evaluating and classifying Hegel's work on Plato, and I shall show the significance it has for us.

Section II: Xenophon verses Plato: An Initial Knot

Hegel's expositions of Socrates and Plato in his *History of Philosophy* reveal a very distinctive choice of source materials, particularly with respect to Xenophon. Socrates did not write, and in order to construct his philosophy we are forced to rely on secondary accounts of his views from the ancient authors of Socratic Discourses (including Xenophon and Plato), comments from Aristotle, and those from later antiquity by Diogenes Laertius. How these sources are employed, and how their reliability is understood is by no means constant. Hegel cites Xenophon as the main source from which he gleans Socratic thought. This choice might strike us today as a strange choice, especially for anyone who has come to accept the developmental approach to Plato and holds that his early dialogues commemorate and reproduce the views of Socrates. Our present day Xenophon is not Hegel's. Xenophon's reliability as a source has been challenged; however, Hegel's use of this source material is not merely the yea-saying of a classical source. There are philosophical reasons for his focus on Xenophon to reconstruct Socrates' views.

Hegel addresses the distinction between Plato and Xenophon's accounts in the second part of his discussion of the Socratic Principle (subjectivity's consciousness of itself as the source of truth):

> If we consider the universal first, it has within it a positive and a negative side, which we find both united in Xenophon's 'Memoribilia', a work which aims at justifying Socrates. And if we inquire whether he or Plato depicts Socrates to us most faithfully in his personality and doctrine there is no question that in regard to the personality and method, the externals of his teaching, we may certainly receive from Plato a satisfactory, and perhaps a more complete representation of what Socrates was. But in regard to the content of his teaching and the point reached by him in the development of thought, we have in the main to look to Xenophon. (Vol. 1, 414)

While appreciating the artistic power of Plato's depictions of Socrates as representation, Hegel sees these representations as external (inessential). Plato better represents Socrates' mannerisms, personality, and mode of conversation, yet Xenophon provides the body of his philosophical views. Hegel also finds that Xenophon is not the very finest philosophical source. In Hegel's later discussion of the Socratic Philosophers he notes that some followers of Socrates produced Socratic discourses (Socratic Logoi), but went no further, pursuing only the one-sided (subjective) understanding of Socratic culture, which produced varied schools given the 'indefiniteness and abstraction of his principle' (Vol. 1, 450). The Socratic Authors included Xenophon, Aeshines, Antisthenes and Phaedo. As 'faithful Socratics', he explains, they 'abstained from speculative research, and by directing their attention to what was practical, adhered firmly and faithfully to the fulfilment of duties of their position and circumstance' (Vol. 1, 450). The soldier Xenophon's depictions of Socrates focus on the practical effects of engaging in conversation (*dialegesthai*) with Socrates — self-control (*enkrateia*) and temperance (*sophrosunê*). Xenophon's appeal to Hegel seems to lie in his lack of art and philosophical sophistication, in the fact that he appears simply to reproduce Socrates' ideas without these features.

For Hegel, Xenophon's account, with occasional reinforcement from Plato's *Apology*, demonstrates and provides the source for explicating Socrates' principle, the subjective freedom of the individual as a source of his or her ideas. Socrates is very much like a 'little Luther' in respect to this principle. He explains how this subjective principle set Socrates at odds with the *Sittlichkeit* of Athenian culture (its customary, natural morality), and, moreover, how Socrates' trial and execution were necessitated by his philosophical mission. This exposition may seem to us to be a remarkable feat, considering that Hegel does not engage in extensive interpretation of Plato's *Apology* and 'early dialogues'.[15] He uses the *Apology* to confirm Xenophon's account, and makes only a brief reference to Plato's *Protagoras* with respect to Socrates' idea of courage.[16] Aristotle's

Metaphysics (I. 6) also provides backup for Socrates' position on a subject's need to have knowledge of the absolute good (universal) as it pertains to actions. In sum, for Hegel, agreement between Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon helps to determine Socratic thought — very much in keeping with those working on Plato within a Developmental paradigm, such as Zeller, Guthrie, and Brickhouse and Smith. However, unlike them, for Hegel this agreement helps to confirm Xenophon as a primary source, rather than justifying Plato's early dialogues as a primary source. The evidence, agreement between three ancient sources, might seem to confirm what we can reliably construct with respect to Socrates' thought. That this agreement, in turn, additionally confirms the reliability of one account over another is a further step. It would seem to require additional independent evidence with respect to the accuracy of any of the ancient sources, which is not forthcoming, since these sources themselves are our sources for Socratic Thought. So more argument is required. Believing that Plato is more reliable than Xenophon (above and beyond agreement on Socratic thought) is as much a philosophically (and frequently aesthetically) based decision as Hegel's preference for Xenophon.

Hegel's account of Socrates incorporates a resistance to the aesthetic features of the Platonic dialogues. He separates Socrates from Plato and for the most part treats the Platonic dialogues as Plato's works expressing Plato's views. On the one hand, Hegel agrees that there is such a thing as Socratic thought, and does not deny a strong relationship between Socrates and Plato:

> What Socrates began was carried out by Plato, who acknowledged only the Universal, the Idea, the Good, as that which has existence. Through the presentation of his Ideas, Plato opened up the intellectual world, which, however, is not beyond reality, in heaven, in another place, but in the real world. (Vol. 2, 29)

On the other hand, Hegel does not seek out the main content of Socratic thought in Plato's dialogues. Hegel is charmed by Plato's representation of Socrates, though not seduced by it in the end. His position on Socrates reflects something like a Unitarian viewpoint with respect to Plato, yet it is based upon the overall position he maintains with respect to philosophers and the history of philosophy in general. In his discussion of the 'manysidedness' of Plato's dialogues he states: Philosophy is 'essentially one and the same, every succeeding philosopher will and must take up into his own, all the philosophies that went before, and what falls specially to him is their further development' (Vol. 2, 13). Plato's thought represents a knot (as mentioned earlier) — a concrete moment in the history of philosophy — and thus he sees Plato's dialogues holistically. But Hegel's 'unitarianism' here is quite distinctive. There is an overarching unity in all philosophy — its progress towards the Absolute, yet this unity does not lend itself to a blending of philosophers. A philosopher arises in his or her own time, reflecting thought's reflection upon itself within the limitations of a given historical

context. Hegel perceives each individual philosopher as self-contained within this progression. The history of philosophy cannot be, as he states, an 'accumulation of opinions'. Each individual philosopher furthers the development of the concrete (determinate idea) towards the one (absolute) idea:

> Matter — which as developed has form — constitutes once more material for a new form. Mind again takes as its object and applies its activity to the Notion, in which going within itself, it has comprehended itself, which is in form and being, and which has just been separated from it anew. The application of thought to this, supplies it with the form and determination of thought. This action thus further forms the previously formed, gives it additional determinations, makes it more determinate in itself, further developed and more profound. (Vol. 1, 27)

Hegel's choice of Xenophon as a seemingly neutral representation of Socrates makes sense in light of his views of the development of the history of philosophy.[17]

In contrast, contemporary developmentalists regard Plato's early dialogues as representing Socrates' thought. The arguments for this view turn inward, so to speak, into the dialogues themselves, chronologically establishing the order of Plato's dialogues and the exegesis of the positions Socrates holds in the early dialogues as opposed to those held by Plato in the middle and late dialogues. This move is the strongest one available to us, yet, as described earlier, by no means secure. Unitarians like Kahn argue that not only is there an alternative chronological arrangement such that all the major dialogues from which we might discern Socratic thought in fact look forward to the *Republic*, there are additional reasons to doubt both Xenophon and Aristotle as reliable sources for constructing Socratic thought. If Kahn is correct, Hegel's use of Xenophon as a source of the content of Socratic thought amounts to using Plato surreptitiously. Xenophon, he attempts to show, depends on the Platonic dialogues as a source. It may be that Socrates' view has never been as difficult to construct as it is today, as the reliability of all of our sources is increasingly debated. Hegel's confidence in the relationship between Socrates and Plato, that there is a relationship, persists all around. Socrates' presence throughout the Platonic corpus (except for the *Laws*) clearly means *something*, and the shifting functions of Socrates, especially in the late dialogues, must indicate *something* as well. Cashing out these meanings depends on a thorough account or theory of the dialogues themselves.

Section III: The Unity of the Platonic Corpus

Among our contemporary interpretive knots is the question as to how unified Plato's dialogues are. Developmentalists and current Unitarian views diverge. I have already noted that Hegel's approach can be considered Unitarian, as is initially evident in his treatment of Socratic thought. The two philosophers stand related, yet discrete. As such, Plato's dialogues stand alone as the source from which we can grasp Plato's thought, and

as Hegel begins his discussion of Plato, he reckons with the difficulties the dialogues represent for an interpreter. He notes the simple fact that the dialogues are 'fair gifts', yet non-systematic and historically have been subjected to a variety of readings, which have emphasised their form over their content or been crudely dogmatic:

> We have to speak, in the first place, of the direct mode in which Plato's philosophy has come down to us; it is to be found in those writings we possess; indubitably they are some of the fairest gifts which fate has preserved from the ages that are gone. His philosophy is not, however, properly speaking presented there in systematic form, and to construct it from such writings is difficult, not so much from anything in itself, as because this philosophy has been differently understood in different periods of time; and more than all, because it has been much roughly handled in modern times by those who have either read into it their own crude notions, being unable to conceive the spiritual spiritually, and have regarded as the essential and most significant element in Plato's philosophy that which in reality does not belong to philosophy at all, but only to the mode of presentation; in truth, however, it is only ignorance of Philosophy that renders it difficult to grasp the philosophy of Plato. The form and matter of these works are alike of interest and importance. In studying them we must nevertheless make sure, in the first place, of what Philosophy we mean to seek and may find within them, and on the other hand, what Plato's view never can afford us, because in his time it was not there to give. (Vol. 2, 9)

In the passage above, Hegel attributes these misguided interpretations to the lack of understanding of Spirit, which, if understood (as he does), makes understanding Plato's works easier. Hegel is also highly aware of historical context, as he notes that we cannot expect to find what is not Plato's to provide, and this is later how he explains the absence of system in the dialogues: 'The Philosophic culture of Plato, like the general culture of his time, was not yet ripe for really scientific work; the Idea was still too fresh and new; it was only in Aristotle that it attained to a systematic form of representation' (Vol. 2, 17). The dialogues, as historically bound, must be appreciated just as they are, thus both the form and content of Plato's works are of interest and importance.

We shall see how difficult it is to maintain this claim as Hegel assesses the particulars involved in the literary form and literary content of the dialogues. Balancing form and content, or appreciating the dialogues for both their form and content is no mean feat, the danger being to reduce the philosophical content to literature. For Hegel, this danger took the form of Romantic enthusiasm for the dialogues, and he cites Schleiermacher as an opponent:

> It would be perfectly justifiable to return to Plato in order to learn anew from him the idea of speculative philosophy, but it is idle to speak of him with

> extravagant enthusiasm, as if he represented beauty and excellence in general. Moreover it is quite superfluous for Philosophy, and this belongs to the hypercriticism of our times, to treat Plato from a literary point of view, as Schleiermacher does, critically examining whether one or another of the minor dialogues is genuine or not. Regarding the more important of the dialogues, we may mention that the testimony of the ancient leaves not the slightest doubt. (Vol. 2, 10)

The alternative danger is to ignore the form of the dialogue, picking and choosing the content out of context. Hegel criticises Tennemann for this approach (using Plato to formulate proofs of god's existence), as well as the Neo-Platonists, who he claims elevated Platonic myths to theorems.

Much worse, for Hegel, would be to interpret Plato's dialogues as a hodgepodge of ideas without any commitment to any of the positions articulated (as Grote would interpret Plato in 1875).[18] Such a position views Plato as a philosopher as absent altogether, the dialogues being fundamentally fragmentary. Hegel embraces the many-sidedness of the dialogues, rejecting the view that Plato 'merely expounded the system and doctrine of Socrates' as well as the Sophists, Pythagoreans, Heraclitus' followers and the Eleatics (Vol. 2, 12). In a rather clear manner, Hegel's characterisation of Plato at times makes it clear that he sees his own history of philosophy in the dialogues. Plato is a 'little Hegel':

> Thus in Plato's Philosophy we see all manner of philosophic teaching from earlier times absorbed into a deeper principle, and therein united. It is in this way that Plato's philosophy shows itself to be a totality of ideas; therefore, as the result, the principles of others are comprehended in itself. (Vol. 2, 14)

Historically, he notes, Plato's dialogues have been seen as the outward form of this imported content, basically a kind of philosophical variety show. The elements of past philosophical views are sublated within Plato's, but Plato's thought cannot be reduced to these past thinkers.

Hegel's Unitarian approach to the dialogues, in contemporary terms, depends on the constancy of their philosophical conversational aim, which he sees as having both a negative and positive character.

> With Plato there can be no talk of this ambiguity, and the difficulty is only one of appearance. In the Dialogues of Plato his philosophy is quite clearly expressed; they are not constructed as are the conversations of some people, which consist of many monologues, in which one person expresses a certain opinion and another person differs from him, and both hold to their own way of thinking. Here, on the contrary, the divergency of opinions which comes out is examined,

> and a conclusion arrived at as to the truth; or, if the results are negative, the whole process of knowledge is what is seen in Plato. (Vol. 2, 12–13)

Hegel's unified reading of the dialogues is unified in terms of its relations to dialectic divided into two main types: the first, negative dialectic, having two main functions, the second being speculative dialectic. Plato's Aporetic dialogues (those that end without resolution) function to demonstrate that our sense experience does not yield objective truth, what he terms the dissolution of the particular and the production of the universal:

> Hence these first two sides of the dialectic, directed as they are towards the dissolution of the particular and thus to the production of the universal, are not yet dialectic in its true form; it is a dialectic which Plato has in common with the Sophists, who understood very well how to disintegrate the particular. (Vol. 2, 52)

Hegel finds the Sophists to be a source of this dissolution of the particular, although the Sophists did not produce the universal, just confusion. Socrates also confounded the particular, but Hegel sees Plato's aim as generalised.

> In connection with this, the second part of dialectic makes its first aim the bringing of the universal in men to consciousness, which, as we remarked when speaking of Socrates, was the main interest of Socratic culture. From this time on, we may look at such an aim as having been discarded, and simply remark that a number of Plato's dialogues merely aim at bringing to consciousness a general conception.

While Socrates aimed at the individual consciences of people in actual dialectical conversation, Plato, as a writer of dialogues, brings general concepts into view in the aporetic dialogues. Socratic culture is distinctive in this respect, and Socrates, according to Hegel, necessarily comes into conflict with Athenian culture for influencing people in this manner.

> Now because, as has been said, this new principle, by effecting an entrance into the Greek world, has come into collision with the substantial spirit and the existing sentiments of the Athenian people, a reaction had to take place, for the principle of the Greek world could not yet bear the principle of subjective reflection. The Athenian people were thus, not only justified, but also bound to react against it according to their law, for they regarded this principle as a crime. (Vol. 1, 444)

Plato, abandons this kind of conflict with Athenian culture in writing his aporetic dialogues, bringing Virtue, for instance, into view as a universal within philosophical discourse (not within individual persons).[19]

Hegel relates Plato's negative, aporetic dialectic to the Speculative Dialectic, found in the later dialogues. The two dialectics form a whole in terms of Plato's overall philosophical method:

> Now because the universal which has emerged from the confusion of the particular, i.e. the true, beautiful and good, that which taken by itself is a species, was at first undetermined and abstract, it is, in the third place, a principal part of Plato's endeavours further to determine this universal in itself. (Vol. 2, 52)

To be clear, Hegel does not find Plato engaging in speculative philosophy properly speaking — Hegel's admiration for Plato is in that he is the first philosopher to *represent* speculative dialectic: 'We certainly do not find in Plato a full consciousness that this is the nature of dialectic, but we find dialectic itself present; that is, we find absolute existence thus recognised in pure Notions, and the representation of the movement of these Notions' (Vol. 2, 49–50). The dialectic across the Platonic corpus, as Hegel sees it, represents something extremely close to his own confrontation with Kantian critical philosophy. The aporetic dialogues, in a sense, demonstrate how the Understanding can be 'hotwired', exposing the contradictions it arrives at, and in turn they present the need for determination of a concept in Pure Reason. The 'late dialogues' then represent this movement in pure reason. There is no hint in Hegel's account of the sceptical 'Socratic Fallacy' (popularised by P. T. Geach), the argument that in the early dialogues, Socrates must hold that definition is impossible, as requesting a definition presupposes the individuation of examples, but Socrates will not accept examples as definitions. As the aporetic dialogues end without scepticism, but consistently with the optimism that further work can be done, in this respect, Hegel is quite close to the texts themselves.

In contemporary 'Unitarian' terms, we might consider Hegel's view *proleptical* (a notion Kahn endorses with respect to the bulk of the earlier, Group I dialogues). Platonic dialogues should be read looking forward to the *Parmenides* with respect to speculative dialectic and its method of collection (*taxeis*) and division (*diairēsis*). This is where Plato demonstrates speculative dialectic:

> The Notion of true dialectic is to show forth the necessary movement of pure Notions, without thereby resolving these into nothing; for the result, simply expressed, is that they are this movement, and the universal is just the unity of these opposite Notions. We certainly do not find in Plato a full consciousness that this is the nature of dialectic, but we find dialectic itself present; that is, we find absolute existence thus recognised in pure Notions, and the representation of the movement of these Notions. (Vol. 2, 49–50)

The *Parmenides* demonstrates the movement of the universal in *pure thought*. This view is found early on in the text, in Socrates' discussion of the forms (*genoi*) with Zeno, just preceding the critiques of the forms: 'but I would be much more impressed if someone were able to display this same difficulty, which you and Parmenides went through in the case of visible things, also similarly entwined in multifarious ways in the forms themselves — in things that are grasped by reasoning' (*Parmenides* 129e–130a). The universal is hence determined as that which resolves and has resolved the contradictions in itself, and hence it is the concrete in itself; thus this sublation of contradiction is affirmative (Vol. 2, 52). This aspect of Platonic dialectic is speculative in that it does not conclude with a negative result — instead it demonstrates the unity of opposites.

Important work has been done assessing Hegel's understanding of the *Parmenides* and the methods demonstrated in it, whether affirming his interpretation (Gadamer), or detailing it in terms of its plausibility — whether Plato intended the method of collection and division to be identified as *constitutive* of the Idea. [20] The point here is simply that dialectic as it appears in both 'early' and 'late' dialogues is the feature that unifies them for Hegel, and moreover, this issue is one that *any* Unitarian interpretation of Plato's dialogues would confront. Developmental approaches have the benefit of examining the Socratic *elenchus* as a wholly separate issue from collection and division, perhaps confronting a problem with a 'transitional' stage in the *Phaedrus*' discussion of rhetoric. Projects that unify the dialogues must somehow relate the aporetic dialogues and *elenchus* with the method of collection and division. Hegel does so elegantly. While one could claim that Hegel is superimposing his own view of speculative dialectic upon the Platonic texts, or charitably claim that Hegel is philosophising *with* Plato, it is important to remember that Hegel's attention to the *Parmenides* and late dialogues inaugurates scholarly attention to them. He is himself aware of the significance of his contribution: 'The speculative dialectic which commences with him [Plato], is thus the most interesting but also the most difficult part of his work; hence acquaintance is not usually made with it when the Platonic writings are studied' (Vol. 2, 53). Hegel places questions pertaining to the technical philosophical significance of dialectic in the late dialogues on the table.

As Hegel is able to unify the Platonic corpus with respect to Plato's method, he is also able to deduce its positive content, a 'system' he finds expressed in the *Parmenides*, *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, corresponding respectively to Logic, Natural Philosophy and Philosophy of Spirit (ethical philosophy) (Vol. 2, 49). Other Platonic dialogues are integrated insofar as they support this system, that is to say, proleptically. It is important to recognise that the system Hegel constructs from the non-systematic Platonic corpus should be understood as an 'immanent' construction, one that utilises the dialogues at hand and interprets what is said in them. This approach contrasts with the early beginnings of the 'esoteric' approach to Plato. Hegel cites Tennemann as a source for interpreting Plato as an esoteric philosopher — the view that in writing the dialogues

Plato did so in such a way as to communicate only what he wishes to those with the capacity to grasp it. Hegel dismisses this approach:

> How nonsensical! This would appear as if the philosopher kept possession of his thoughts in the same way as of his external goods: the philosophic Idea is, however, something utterly different, and instead of being possessed by, it possesses a man. (Vol. 2, 11)

Simply through communication on philosophical subjects, ideas are pursued and followed, according to Hegel. The philosopher, in the act of expressing him- or herself on philosophical topics, communicates a view. ('They cannot keep them in their pockets'.) He describes an analogy between the philosopher and the person in conversation: if one's words have any meaning at all, they must contain whatever Idea is present in them. This does not seem to be a knock-down argument against esoteric reading of the dialogues.[21] (Typically, stronger arguments either question the sources for the unwritten doctrines of Plato (Plato's Seventh Letter, *Phaedrus*, Aristotle's comments on the Lecture or Lectures on the Good), or question the ultimate purpose of the dialogues themselves — why ultimately did Plato bother to write them?) It may be more helpful to see that Hegel is committed to taking texts at face-value — much like we have seen in his treatment of Xenophon. Ultimately, all forms of philosophical, religious and artistic expression, within their contexts, express the progress of the Idea through history towards the Absolute. Hegel cannot admit a fundamental opacity between historical subjects, their cultures, and their works. Plato cannot be treated any differently. These first-order expressions can, however, be misunderstood — Hegel continues: 'the communication of ideas requires a certain skill; there is always something esoteric in this, something more than merely exoteric' (Vol. 2, 12). Hegel avoids Schleiermacher's hermeneutics at this point, avoiding the idea of the impossibility of achieving inter-subjective understanding. It is only through an immanent interpretation of the dialogues — utilising the dialogues as representative of Platonic thought — and discerning the presence of the Notion there, that he can avoid falling into the errors he claims his contemporaries make. This becomes a most difficult challenge when he confronts the particular literary features of the Platonic texts, which do not communicate philosophical ideas transparently.

Section IV: Literary Aspects of the Dialogue

The literary aspects of Plato's dialogues arguably represent the Gordian knot in Platonic interpretation. The dialogues are part of a literary genre that flourished after the death of Socrates. Plato's dialogues uniquely combine artistic expression and philosophy. How these elements relate, as mentioned earlier, is difficult to adjudicate. Do the literary features and devices in the dialogues somehow support the philosophical issues they contain? Do they further them and/or undermine them? These kinds of questions can be

approached within most interpretive frameworks (excluding a completely analytic approach to the arguments). Indeed, an approach that takes the dialogues at face value — an 'immanent' approach, confronts the literary features directly as part of what is represented in each dialogue. They cannot be written off, as they are part of the whole text. Given that Hegel is committed to an immanent approach, it is not surprising that he devotes much time to discussing the literary aspects of the dialogues. And given that, at the same time, he must distinguish a clear Platonic philosophy, one that transparently reflects the progress of the Notion, in order to avoid Schleiermacher's subjective, literary approach, it is not surprising to find that he must explain away much of the literary features of the dialogues. I suggest, however, that there is considerable tension and instability in Hegel's position, and we shall see that, at times, his assessments contain significant questions that go unanswered.

a. Dialogue Form

We find Hegel's appreciation of the dialogue form stated explicitly, but highly qualified, and there is a tension here that needs resolution. He states: 'The beauty of this form is highly attractive; yet we must not think, as many do, that it is the most perfect form in which to present philosophy; it is peculiar to Plato, and as a work of art it is of course to be much esteemed' (Vol. 2, 14). Dialogue is not the best presentation format, for Hegel. It is 'the first difficulty that stands in the way of comprehension', and he later notes that it is a '[d]eficiency in the Mode of Representation'. None of Plato's oral discourses remain. The dialogues we have present an obstacle to a clear view of his philosophy. Hegel is assuming that there must be a clear philosophy. This assumption is substantial and shared by the Neo-Platonist and esoteric interpreters he opposes, but is also shared by most non-sceptical interpreters of the dialogues (ancient or modern). His worry seems to be falling into a sceptical view, or eliding the dialogues with art. In Hegel's separation of the dialogue form from philosophy, we may also perceive a problem in terms of his use of dialectic to unify the Platonic corpus. As noted earlier in discussing the dialogue form, Hegel sees that the conversations of the dialogues are unlike conventional conversation in that they aim towards the universal, either positively (collection and division) or negatively (bringing to light the universal as necessary).[22] How, exactly do we clearly separate out the dialogue form (the manner of presentation) from the dialectic, since the dialectic transpires in both cases in dialogue form? Hegel does not obviously perceive this problem.

Interestingly, Charles Griswold takes up this problem with explicit reference to Hegel — not to Hegel's interpretation of Plato, but to Hegel's understanding that metaphilosophy itself can be taken up only dialectically.[23] He explains:

> Hegel does not deny the need for metaphilosophy; on the contrary. But he insists that the project can be completed only dialectically, and correspondingly that the effort to set limits compels us to make increasingly comprehensive claims.

> Dialectic and the search for wholeness seem closely connected for both Hegel and Plato [...]. Kant's effort to assign dialectical reason to a non-cognitive status is thus self-defeating. As is clear from Kant's own words, reason's (*Vernuft*) knowledge of the *a priori* conditions for the understanding (*Verstand*) cannot be obtained within those conditions. *Verstand* is modelled on *technē* (art, skill); but the knowledge of *technē* cannot be an example of it. *Technē* made reflexive negates itself [...]. The Hegelian point is, in my opinion, shared by Plato.

If Griswold is correct, Hegel might have had at his disposal a means to examine the dialogue form as a necessary feature of Platonic philosophy. However, I would claim that this insight could only be revealed to us retrospectively. As Griswold discovers, following this line of inquiry into the metaphilosophical function of the dialogue form yields a Plato who contends with the radical critics of philosophy without undermining his own views in doing so. This Plato, whom Griswold contrasts with contemporary critics of reason like Rorty and Derrida, serves contemporary needs, but not those of Hegel. His aim in the *History of Philosophy* (in which Plato plays his part) is to reveal the wholeness of philosophy itself. This overarching whole is an answer to his critics.

Yet, despite the absence of a thorough pursuit of the significance of the dialogue form, Hegel still manages to take note of the kind of illusion it provides the reader. Plato *crafts* the dialogues, and their naturalism is only an appearance — they are not 'real' conversations.

> The dialogue seems to be the form best adapted for representing an argument, because it sways hither and thither; the different sides are allotted to different persons, and thus the argument is made more animated. The dialogue has, however, this disadvantage, that it seems to be carried on arbitrarily, so that at the end the feeling always remains that the matter might have turned out differently. But in the Platonic Dialogues this arbitrary character is apparent only; it has been got rid of by limiting the development to the development of the subject in hand, and by leaving very little to be said by the second speaker. (Vol. 2, 16)

And he again reinforces this observation about the craft of Platonic naturalism: 'The question is so framed that a quite simple answer is alone possible, and, thanks to the artistic beauty and power of the dialogues, such an answer appears at the same time perfectly natural' (Vol. 2, 17).

In perceiving the craft of the dialogues — and that, ultimately, Plato exerts exceptional control over the entire presentation — such that it may appear less controlled than it actually is, Hegel is, to a certain degree justifying the 'immanent' approach that he takes to these texts. (It is tempting, even, to see this observation as a forerunner of the Straussian notion of 'logographic necessity'.) Here we find Hegel struggling with the

dictates of his own approach. If very little is arbitrary in the Platonic texts, as he notices, very little can be explained away easily.

A good example of this 'struggle' is Hegel's approach to the dramatic settings of the dialogues; the places, persons, characters and occasions depicted. Hegel claims that these particularities are all 'external'. At the same time, he notes that the dialogues *explore culture* — entering into ordinary conceptions, those earlier philosophers, bringing 'before us exemplifications from ordinary knowledge', and using methods from the same (Vol. 2, 17). The dialogues are not ahistorical documents, unbound from historical context. For Hegel, it seems that it is a matter of the *extent* to which detail about culture can be pursued in deciphering Plato's philosophical intentions. Hegel's discussion of Plato's use of myth further brings to light the way in which his understanding of historical context is in tension with his aim of bringing Plato's philosophy to light.

b. Myth

Plato's myths occupy a significant portion of Hegel's lengthy introductory remarks on Platonic philosophy. Like the dialogue form, Hegel claims that Plato's myths represent a 'deficiency in the concrete determination of the Idea'. The use of myth in a philosophical context, he determines, represents popular ideas, and its presence in the dialogues intermingled with philosophy 'is inevitable in the beginning of science proper in its true form'. He continues: 'Plato's lofty mind, which had a perception or conception of Mind, penetrated through his subject with the speculative Notion, but he only began to penetrate it thus, and he did not yet embrace the whole of its reality in the Notion' (Vol. 2, 17–18). Plato's use of myth is derived from his culture and its intellectual resources. Its place in the dialogues represents Plato's own limitations. However, Hegel also expresses the idea that Plato may intentionally present myths, and this is itself a drawback to Plato's mode of philosophising:

> Sometimes, in order to give greater completeness and reality, in place of following out the Notion, mere pictorial conceptions are introduced, myth, spontaneous imaginations of his own, or tales derived from the sensuous conception, which no doubt are determined by thought, but which this has never permeated in truth, but only in such a way that the intellectual is determined by the forms of ordinary conception. (Vol. 2, 18)

The divergence here between views of Platonic myth — that Plato's use of myth *reflects* science in its early stage and that Plato *intentionally utilises* myth in philosophy — most likely would not have struck Hegel as a divergence in accounts. If indeed the Notion speaks through human agents, Plato's intentions must only reflect the limitations of the science he expresses. For us, however, this sort of divergence regarding the status of myth makes a great difference. If we determine that Plato intentionally utilises myth, we need to discern its status as a philosophical device. (Hesiod's presentation of myth in the

Theogony, for example, differs from Plato's representations of myths, especially if the text includes criticisms of traditional mythologising (Hesiod, Homer) — as in the *Republic*.) But for Hegel, myth belongs to an earlier stage of cultural development — the pedagogic stage of the human race. He continues: 'It entices us to entertain the content, but takes thought through sensuous forms, so cannot fully express Thought. When the Notion attains its full development, it has no more need of the myth' (Vol. 2, 20). From this perspective Hegel is critical of past interpretations of Plato. 'Too much or too little is found in Plato's philosophy' (Vol. 2, 18–19). It is easy, in other words, to misinterpret. The Neo-Platonists, he notes, raised the myths to the status of theorems (Iambicus would be an example of this). And the early moderns, he claims, find too little in them. It is also possible to over-emphasise them (Romantics):

> However much, therefore, Plato's mythical presentation of Philosophy is praised, and however attractive it is in his Dialogues, it yet proves a source of misapprehensions; and it is one of these misapprehensions, if Plato's myths are held to be what is most excellent in his philosophy. Many propositions, it is true, are made more easily intelligible by being presented in mythical form; nevertheless, that is not the true way of presenting them; propositions are thoughts which, in order to be pure, must be brought forward as such. (Vol. 2, 19–20)

And:

> In short, all that is expressed in the manner of pictorial conception is taken by the moderns in sober earnest for philosophy. Such a representation of Plato's philosophy can be supported by Plato's own words; but one who knows what philosophy is, cares little for such expressions, and recognises what was Plato's true meaning. (Vol. 2, 21)

Hegel's task in interpreting Plato's myths is to separate the wheat from the chaff, finding neither too little nor too much. Ordinary conceptions must be distinguished from philosophical conceptions. Hegel is optimistic that this division can be made with clarity:

> In order to gather Plato's philosophy from his dialogues, what we have to do is to distinguish what belongs to ordinary conception — especially where Plato has recourse to myths for the presentation of a philosophic idea — from the philosophic idea itself; only then do we know that what belongs only to the ordinary conception, as such, does not belong to thought, is not the essential. But if we do not recognise what is the Notion, or what is speculative, there is inevitably the danger of these myths leading us to draw quite a host of maxims and theorems from the dialogues, and to give them out as Plato's philosophic

> propositions, while they are really nothing of the kind, but belong entirely to the manner of presentation. (Vol. 2, 20)

In his discussion of Recollection, we shall see that this procedure has interesting results. The thesis is presented in the *Meno* as having a cultural source — ancient priests and priestesses — yet we shall find that Hegel resists a literal interpretation of this myth. He argues, instead, against the view that Plato holds a 'doctrine of recollection'. Recollection in this mythical form merely *appears* to be an empirical doctrine at first:

> With Plato, however, as we cannot deny, the word recollection has constantly the first empirical sense. This comes from the fact that Plato propounds the true Notion that consciousness in itself is the content of knowledge, partly in the form of popular idea and in that of myths. (Vol. 2, 34)

Plato's account of how we come to learn, *anamnēsis*, although presented as mythical, is of a piece with Platonic Idealism. The myth represents the idealist's challenge to an empirical view of the acquisition of knowledge: 'For learning according to the immediate ordinary conception of it, expresses the taking up of what is foreign into thinking consciousness, a mechanical mode of union and the filling of an empty space with things that are foreign and indifferent to the space itself' (Vol. 2, 33). Hegel notes that the German term *Erinnerung* (making oneself inward, going inward) would be more appropriate for expressing the idea of recollection (Spirit is its own source of knowledge), and that Plato's terminology has given rise to mistaken views (historians, he notes have seized upon determining its source in Egyptian doctrine, and interpreted it as a sensuous conception (Vol. 2, 36)). Yet, the notion of recollection should not be taken as Plato's literal view:

> But when Plato speaks of knowledge as of a recollection, he knows all the time that this is only putting the matter in similes and metaphors; he did not ask, as theologians used gravely to do, whether the soul had existed before its birth, and if so, in what particular place. It cannot be said of Plato that he had any such belief, and he never speaks of the matter in the sense that the theologians did. (Vol. 2, 40–41)

There is something quite interesting in Hegel's treatment of recollection. If we take the view literally, we come up with the 'theological' kinds of questions Hegel indicates. This is to say that a fairly clever undergraduate, upon hearing the 'doctrine', taking it literally and being beholden to a commonsense, empirical view of the acquisition of knowledge, will invariably ask where the 'original forms' came from. It is beyond the scope of this paper to further debate the merits of Hegel's interpretation of recollection. I mean to indicate instead that when Hegel engages in an interpretation of myth, separating the

philosophical wheat from the chaff of the ordinary conception, he does so judiciously, taking into consideration how a myth like recollection is not entirely in step with the ordinary conception. Hegel does not eliminate Platonic myth, but must invest it with philosophical significance. That this procedure presupposes a clear view of Platonic philosophy to reconstruct the myth is apparent, yet any 'immanent' and Unitarian view would need to proceed in just this manner.

c. Platonic Anonymity

Plato's anonymity is an issue in interpreting the dialogues that has come to symbolise their elusive nature. Technically speaking, there is no 'Plato says...' There are dialogues in which different speakers, primarily but not only Socrates, are depicted articulating their thoughts. Plato is all of the speakers, and none of them, since he himself is never depicted as a speaker. It is presently rare for commentaries on the dialogues to exclude mention of this issue, and as it can bear on issues such as the dialogue form, Platonic Anonymity lends itself readily to fundamental questions about the function of the dialogues — why Plato wrote them, and how views of writing expressed in the dialogues (and Seventh Letter) may relate. Hegel is tantalising on this point, at one moment dismissing Platonic anonymity as a pseudo-problem and 'external consideration' (in, perhaps, implicit response to Schleiermacher) (Vol. 2, 12), but within a few pages relating Platonic Anonymity to other literary genres in ancient Greece in which narrators make themselves absent — the poetry of Homer and the *History* of Thucydides:

> By never allowing himself to appear in person, but putting his thoughts always in the mouth of others, any semblance of preaching or of dogmatising is avoided by Plato, and the narrator appears just as little as he does in the History of Thucydides or in Homer. Xenophon sometimes brings himself forward, sometimes he entirely loses sight of the aim he had in view, of vindicating by what he tells them of the life of Socrates and his method of instruction. With Plato, on the contrary, all is quite objective and plastic; and he employs great art in removing himself. (Vol. 2, 15)

I suggest that we might find this 'tantalising' because it is so clear that Hegel possesses more than enough knowledge of the classics to situate Plato historically as a writer — to relate the literary features of the dialogues to other genres. As it stands, Hegel notes that through anonymity Plato avoids preaching and dogmatising. He does not explain why Plato would prefer to avoid doing this, or why there might be a relationship between Plato's use of anonymity and that of Homer and Thucydides. Assessment of Plato's views on writing and rhetoric is noticeably absent throughout Hegel's study (noticeable, because this seems a crucial feature in explicating the dialogues for us at the present time). This absence, it seems to me, is not due to a lack of attention to the dialogues, but can be attributed (unsurprisingly) to Hegel's prioritising of dialectic. The principle

through which he unifies the dialogues is at once his own principle and organises his observations — cutting them short even when they indicate alternative interpretative possibilities. I do not intend here to charge Hegel crudely with being a victim of his own paradigm, especially since his 'immanent' approach threads its way through a very narrow space between Romanticism and esotericism. It is much more interesting to observe how much his approach yields, given its constraints.

Section V: Constructing Plato

At the conclusion of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel bids farewell to Plato:

> The latest philosophy contains therefore those which went before; it embraces in itself all the different stages thereof; it is the product and result of those that preceded it. We can now, for example, be Platonists no longer. (Vol. 3, REF)

Not only can we no longer be Platonists, we can no longer be like past interpreters of Plato. There is presently a scholarship of Platonic scholarship, a charting of the changes in the interpretive methods used to understand Plato's dialogues throughout history.[24] Hegelian 'influences' on interpreters have been noted in this branch of scholarship,[25] yet assessments of Hegel's interpretation of Plato have been left to the philosophers and scholars working on Hegel and the history of German Idealism, or else such assessment remains embedded within particular works on Plato. I surmise that the scholarship of Platonic scholarship has neglected Hegel on the grounds that his interpretation is so strongly philosophical that it 'doesn't count' as Platonic scholarship. However true this may be, something seems amiss with it. The history of Neo-Platonist interpretation of Plato, for example, is well-documented, and is itself a philosophically motivated interpretation. Platonic interpretations are consistently revealed as reflecting the influences of widely accepted philosophies of their times, reflecting 'Kantian', 'Positivist' or 'Marxist' influence. Hegel is neglected in the scholarship of Platonic scholarship, it seems, for being *his own source of influence.* It turns out that the study of the history of interpretations of Plato demonstrates that every interpretation reflects philosophical motivations, direct or indirect. What I have done here is to suggest that Hegel's interpretation of Plato can be examined productively, and situated within a scholarship of the interpretation of Plato. Hegel situates himself within the context of the Platonic scholarship of his day, and addresses this scholarship in light of his own views. The scholarship of Platonic scholarship is an endeavour to make apparent the historically bound nature of this field of inquiry — Interpreting Plato — and to bring further self-consciousness to our constructions of Plato. Reflection on the history of interpreting Plato is a vital part of new Platonic scholarship. Hegel's Plato has a place in this reflective history.

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Notes

[1] All citations of Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy in the body of the paper are from Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* in Three Volumes, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), from the 1840 translation (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co.). This paper is written with gratitude to Frank M. Kirkland and Gerald Press, my earliest teachers of Hegel and Plato.

[2] Rüdiger Bubner, *The Innovations of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 4.

[3] W. T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 7.

[4] Catherine Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[5] John Cooper, 'Introduction' from *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), pp. 12–18.

[6] Debra Nails, *Agora, Academy, and the Conduct of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), p. 68.

[7] E. N. Tigerstedt assess the historical progression of Platonic Interpretation in his work, *Interpreting Plato* (Uppsala: Almquist and Wiksell International, 1977) and includes a critical review of the stylometric dating of the dialogues (p. 19).

[8] Schleiermacher is credited with originating the Unitarian view by most contemporary scholars although this has been challenged by E. N. Tigerstedt, who sees that Neo-Platonist (systematic) interpretations of Plato had fallen into decline prior to Schleiermacher's work. Cf. E.N. Tigerstedt, *Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato* (*Commentary on the Hum. Litt.*, 52, Helsinki 1974). Unitarian approaches to Plato have been held throughout the twentieth century by von Arnim, Randall, Shorey, Jaeger, Friedlander and H. Kramer of the Tübingen School

[9] Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 45–80. Vlastos presents his 'Ten Theses' for the views of the historical Socrates found in Plato's dialogues — as distinct from Plato's views. Gerasimos Santas, *Socrates* (London: Routledge and Keegan-Paul, 1979), presents a Platonic Socrates. Brickhouse and Smith, following Vlastos, further defend the distinguishing of the historical Socrates' views in Plato's works, especially the *Apology*, which they argue is the most accurate record of the events of Socrates' trial.

[10] The thematic grouping of the dialogues is beginning to appear in textbooks on ancient Greek philosophy. Cf. John Peterman, *On Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Irvine: Wadsworth Publishing, forthcoming 2005).

[11] Terry Penner, 'Socrates and the Early Dialogues', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 121–169. He furthers Vlastos' ten theses defending the presence of the historical Socrates' views in the early dialogues, presenting 'twelve theses' that individuate the historical Socrates' views from those of Plato.

[12] See Rüdiger Bubner, *The Innovations of Idealism*, pp. 43–44 for a brief but intriguing discussion situating contemporary Tübingen Platonic interpretation (unwritten doctrines) in light of Schleiermacher's interpretation of Plato.

[13] Michael Frede, for example, maintains a developmental framework for interpreting Plato's dialogues, yet addresses the question of Plato's use of the dialogue form and its relation to argument. The first line of his paper reads, 'Plato's dialogues are works of art'. 'Plato's Arguments and Dialogue Form' in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, ed. J. Klagge and N. Smith, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol. 1992, pp. 201–19.

[14] Gerald Press, 'The State of the Question in the Study of Plato', in *Plato: Critical Assessments*, Vol. I, ed. N. Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 317.

[15] Scholars tend to hold that the *Apology* is not merely a philosophical document, but also a historical document. Charles Kahn even shares this viewpoint, although he opposes the

developmentalist view of Vlastsos and holds a 'minimal view' of the influence of Socrates found in a few Group I dialogues. Scholars who see the *Apology* in this way include, A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen, 1960), pp. 156–67; W. K. C. Guthrie, *The History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 67–93; R. E. Allen, *Socrates and Legal Obligation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 3–36; C. D. C. Reeve, *Socrates in the Apology* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989); Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 88–95.

[16] Hegel cites Plato's *Apology* along with Xenophon's *Memoribilia* and *Apology* on points such as the Delphic Dictum: 'Know Thyself' (435), and the accusation of the corruption of youth (437). The quotation from the *Protagoras*, the definition of courage as the right estimation of what is and what is not to be feared (411–12), is very interestingly divorced from our debates concerning Platonic Hedonism, a debate that is compounded by disputes regarding the chronology of Plato's dialogues. See Christopher Rowe, 'Just How Socratic Are Plato's "Socratic" Dialogues?: A response to Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of Literary Form* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)', *Journal of the International Plato Society* 2 (2002). Hegel mentions Plato's *Phaedo* once in his discussion of Socratic thought, but only with respect to its depiction of Socrates' death (443), a dialogue he describes as expressing popular philosophy.

[17] At the conclusion of the *Lectures* Hegel reminds us: 'The latest philosophy contains therefore those which went before; it embraces in itself all the different stages thereof; it is the product and result of those that preceded it' (Vol. 3).

[18] George Grote, *Plato and Other Companions of Socrates* (London: John Murray, 1875), Vol. 1, 246; Vol. 2, 278.

[19] Plato transposes Socratic philosophy's clash with natural morality into a philosophical position, radically revising the subjective principle (self-determining individual conscience in the *Republic*, and eliminating this altogether in favour of the organic unity of the individual with the state: 'Because these two elements were not homogenous, traditional and conventional morality were overthrown. Plato recognised and caught up the true spirit of his times, and brought it forward in a more definite way, in that he desired to make this new principle an impossibility in his Republic' (Vol. 2, 99). This is another example of the way in which Hegel perceives Platonic philosophy as distinct from Socratic philosophy, building upon it, yet distinct in terms of the progression of ideas.

[20] Charles Griswold, for example, speaks of collection and division as a method in which both 'interpenetrate' each other: '[wholes] are articulated unities, whether division is used in the service of producing speech or for understanding an already given whole, whether natural or artificial), division is implicitly coeval with collection. In choosing out a whole, we must distinguish it from other wholes; every collection seems to presuppose prior division. If collection is a collection of parts or elements, then what is collected has already been divided'. *Self Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1986), p. 175. Griswold locates a more primal level presupposed by this formal method — that of language. In this respect his interpretation has much in common with Gadamer's, particularly his critique of Hegel's *Logic* in *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). Hegel's interpretation of Plato's forms as species ('We translate *eidos* first of all as species or kind; and the Idea is no doubt the species, but rather as it is apprehended by and exists for thought' (Vol. 2, 29) is a view that has been challenged by K. M. Sayre, *Plato's Analytic Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 162, and J. E. M. Moravcsik 'The Anatomy of Plato's Divisions', *Phronesis*, Suppl. Vol. 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), pp. 324–48. In this case, Hegel may very well be imposing Aristotelian categories onto Plato.

[21] It remains an open question for me at this point as to why Hegel, who is familiar with Plato's Seventh Letter, and demonstrates a careful reading of the *Phaedrus* (Vol. 2, 36–40), remains silent on Plato's view of writing. His opposition to Tennemann would, on the one hand, be weakened by acknowledging the problem of writing raised in these texts. On the other hand, Hegel uses the letter as a biographical source (Vol. 2, 4–8) and is perhaps unwilling to claim that a non-philosophical text expresses philosophical ideas. This may be quite a charitable stretch, especially since Hegel is also silent on the *Phaedrus*' post-palinode discussion of rhetoric as well as its method of collection and division. My suspicion is that Hegel found himself between a rock and a hard place on this count, as integrating the *Phaedrus* as supporting the *Parmenides* on speculative dialectic would open the door to esotericism about Platonic texts themselves, or require a much stronger account of why Platonic texts should be read immanently. This, in turn would bring him too close to Schleiermacher for comfort.

[22] Hegel does, however, determine that there is a feature of the conversations, Urbanity, which reflects an openness in conversation: 'Urbanity is true courtesy, and forms its real basis, but Urbanity makes a point of granting complete liberty to all with whom we converse, as regards both the character and the matter of their opinions, and thus the right of giving them the same' (Vol. 2, 15). This characteristic 'gives such gracefulness to Plato's Dialogues', he says.

[23] Charles Griswold, 'Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato Wrote Dialogues', in *Plato: Critical Assessments*, Vol. 1, ed. N. Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), see especially pp. 227–232.

[24] Bubner states: 'as far as the search for the 'true' Plato is concerned, this means we must refuse the *distinction between interpretation and historical fact*. The historical Plato is also the Plato that is most intelligible with regard to further efforts of interpretation. Interpretation and historical research are not alternatives. At most, it is merely a question of differently articulated and plausible approaches that are more or less convincing in relation to the relevant material as a whole. There is no unsurpassable or incontestable reality in itself existing over and beyond our interpretations. And if there were some such reality in itself beyond all interpretations, we should still have to describe it as intrinsically intelligible, and thus as falling potentially within the framework of what we can interpret' (Rüdger Bubner, *The Innovations of Idealism*, p. 45). While on the whole agreeing with Bubner's view on interpreting Plato — that there is no 'true Plato' standing above and beyond our interpretations, I am uncertain that the fragmentary nature of research on Plato can be considered '*the* Plato'. Competing interpretations, as I see it, read the historical facts very differently. Interpretations, based on different readings of historical facts do not become resolved, as on the model of competing theories in the sciences. Any 'resolution' pertains, instead, to philosophical orientation, which can become more reflective, especially in terms of the presentation of research and justification of methodology. Yet if our situation is such that there is no one over-arching philosophy, there will still be competing Platos.

[25] E.N. Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato* (Uppsala: Almquist and Wiksell International, 1977), p. 16.