
Philosophical Training Grounds: Socratic Sophistry and Platonic Perfection in *Symposium* and *Gorgias*

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Schrecklich ist die Verführung zur Güte!
(Terrible is the temptation to do good!)
—Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

What does it mean to apply the principle of charity to works like the *Symposium* and the *Gorgias*?¹ Not, I would like to suggest, what is usually assumed. Generations of scholars have spent thousands of hours constructing elaborate defenses for the statements made therein by Socrates—that punishment is good for the criminal, that Pericles was a bad politician, that Socrates is a good politician, that desire always implies lack, that pleasure always involves pain, that rhetoric requires no skill and imparts no benefits, that we are irresistibly drawn to those activities we know to be good for us—as though this were the way to do justice to Plato. To be sure, if we were dealing with treatises, it would be only fair to construe the various arguments in as plausible a manner as possible. But since we are dealing with dialogues, and with an author who never speaks in his own voice, I would propose that we apply a *literary*² principle of charity. While the philosophical principle of charity urges us to assume that the ideas in a text are true until proven otherwise, the literary principle of charity states that it may, under certain circumstances, be more generous to assume that some of them are false, obviously false, known to be false, *designed* to be false. Ironically, the attempt to be charitable in the first sense can easily lead us to be unkind at the second. The “charitable” scholars have turned Plato into a lesser mind.

When it comes to the *Symposium* and the *Gorgias*, as I hope to show here, many of Socrates’ key claims and rhetor-

ical moves simply cannot and should not be saved. In the *Symposium*, Socrates treats Agathon to a display of manifest sophistry, and then goes on to make a speech whose central implication is defeated by the very existence of Alcibiades, a walking counterexample. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates deploys premises Plato gives us every reason to reject, and concludes with a tirade whose length and whose bitterness bespeak despairing resentment rather than magisterial wisdom. Should we say, to be charitable, that Socrates' arguments are good *simpliciter*, or good when properly understood, or good when slightly amended, or good enough for his interlocutors, or good enough for the ancient Greeks? We should not. No appeal to Socratic irony, no deployment of the developmental hypothesis, no amount of tinkering will redeem them. Charity consists, here, in cutting them loose, in refraining from the temptation to attribute to an author the views of one of his characters. Charity consists in understanding the role of fiction in the project of a thinker whose aims are formative as much as informative, and for whom philosophy is above all a way of life. It consists, in other words, in understanding the function of bad arguments in excellent works of philosophy.

1. a platonic coccyx

the irruption of a drunken, unruly Alcibiades into the singularly placid thinking-party of the *Symposium* has presented aficionados of Plato's philosophy with a bit of a puzzle. What need is there for any more discussion, once Socrates has finally revealed the ultimate truth about Eros and the good life, simultaneously synthesizing and transcending all previous contributions, bringing the dialogue together and to a conclusion? Doesn't the final speech, which Socrates will subsequently call a "little satyr play" (**saturikow . . . draïna**, 222d), feel somewhat anticlimactic, not to say bathetic, or at least as otiose and awkward as a vestigial appendage? What are we to do, in short, with this Platonic coccyx?

Some have reacted by pretending it does not exist: one eighteenth-century English translation surreptitiously omits the Alcibiades section, stopping at Stephanus page 212a³, and so do at least two critical studies of the *Symposium*.⁴ Others have sought to account for it by saying that it completes the dialogue, proving that Socrates' theories are fulfilled in his praxis, since he *incarnates* the ideal lover as well as just describing him. What once looked like a threat to the dialogue's coherence now starts to look like a necessity: "there *had* to be a concluding part," writes Paul Friedländer, "in which the ascent to the heights would be depicted in the reality of actual life" (3.28, my emphasis); "this apparently accidental after-thought is," adds Theodor Gomperz, "the true root from which the whole work sprang" (394).⁵ Many have since agreed that "Plato's chief purpose in this speech is to show us that Socrates put into practice the morality implicit in Diotima's theory" (Dover 164); "its main purpose is to present to us a vivid portrait of *Socrates* as the perfect exemplar of Eros" (Bury lx); "Socrates confirms the value of inner beauty" (Dorothea Frede 410n23); "Socrates emerges as the star example of the philosophic lover" (Santas 1988:15); "in the *Symposium* the great lover in the spiritual sense is Socrates himself, as we learn from Alcibiades' speech" (Burnyeat 55).⁶ As a corollary, the scene purportedly serves to exonerate the historical Socrates from charges brought against him, whether of "indulging in impure relations with his disciples" (Bury lx) or of corrupting the youth in other, less sexual ways: Socrates cannot have made Alcibiades vicious, Plato is taken to be suggesting, because Alcibiades was vicious to begin with. Thus, according to R. E. Allen, "Plato's portrait of Socrates in the *Symposium* is a powerful defense of Socrates" (1984 II:106); "the entire work," Richard Patterson concurs, is "Platonic praise of Socrates" (212).⁷

I shall leave aside the question of how a dialogue which is made up, using an imaginary "Alcibiades" to defend an equally imaginary "Socrates," can vindicate a historical person. (Suffice it to add that if Gregory Vlastos is right, and

the Socrates we see in the dialogue is massively distinct from the Socrates we hear about in Alcibiades' speech,⁸ the issue becomes even more complicated.) For now, I just want to ask how the *Symposium* could ever be considered to place Socrates, even the *character* Socrates, in an entirely favorable light. For what Alcibiades actually does is to undermine—merely by existing—a key premise of the speech in which, so generations of Plato scholars have agreed, we learn what Plato has to teach us about love, goodness and philosophy. His function in the dialogue is not to confirm Socrates' claims but, on the contrary, to place them in doubt; it is to raise questions which are not answered; it is to generate effects which a straightforward treatise, like the works of Aristotle, could never hope to produce.

2. ascent and dissent

consider, first, the Ascent from desire to philosophy, so memorably described by Diotima at the end of her speech, and so heartily endorsed by Socrates in statements bookending it.⁹ A man¹⁰ may start out desiring a particular boy, the story runs, but he will soon become aware that the beauty of all boys is the same, and hence become a lover of beautiful bodies in general (210b). Next he will realize that souls are even more beautiful than bodies, and find himself transformed as a result into a lover of beautiful souls (even those housed in not-so-beautiful bodies). From his new vantage point on the third rung of the ladder, he will perceive that the beauty of souls is the same as other types of beauty—that of customs and, especially, that of knowledge—and accordingly end up a lover of knowledge (210c). Finally, recognizing that all such things (bodies, souls, customs, knowledge) are beautiful by virtue of partaking in a common essence, The Beautiful itself, he will blossom into an admirer of Beauty (210d). Forsaking “human flesh [and] any other great nonsense of mortality,” he will direct his devoted gaze [qeašqai] and his desire for union [suneiāi] away from

the beloved and onto the Form, remaining its companion for the remainder of his natural life.¹¹

What is striking here is not just the fact that the Ascent requires us to leave the beloved behind—a thought chilling enough to have provoked straightforward, text-denying disavowals from conciliatory interpreters¹²—but also the fact that absolutely nothing is required, beyond the mere apprehension of our mistake, in order to move us up from one level to the next. As soon as we perceive (intellectually) that we are mistaken, and that what we really love is, say, not the beauty of bodies but the beauty of souls, we will automatically surrender our initial desire and enthusiastically embrace a new one. Even before we reach the highest plane of enlightenment, that vision of Forms which allows us to understand what beauty actually is in itself, and which thus confirms our local insights to have sent us on each occasion in the right direction, we find ourselves irresistibly driven by reason.¹³ In short, according to the uncompromisingly intellectualist Socrates of the *Symposium*, a calculus of desiderata is entirely sufficient to motivate action.

What, then, can possibly be holding Alcibiades back? Why is Alcibiades not on the stairway to virtue? His calculus of desiderata is just as it should be, and even finds itself expressed in impeccably Socratic idiom. Socrates, he laments,

makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings [οἶτι . . . αὐτοῦ; ἐφ' ἑμαυτοῦ μέν ἀγέλω], which cry out for the closest attention. So I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die. Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame . . . I know perfectly well that I can't prove he's wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet, the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become one constant effort to escape from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I'm doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should. (215e–6b)

Not merely susceptible at an instinctive level to the erotic attraction of philosophy, Alcibiades also seems to understand fairly well both its means (refutation, agreement) and its ends (care of the self [*epimeleia eautou*]¹⁴), and senses that such care is far more important than any political activity. And he has only to *suppose* Socratic conversation to be good for him, if the implicit psychology of the Ascent (or indeed the explicit philosophy of the *Protagoras*) is correct, in order to lose all temptation to stray from the master's side. By rights, he should be a philosopher by now. But he is not one. And the explanation for this fact could not be simpler: like most of us, he knows what he should be doing, but he enjoys doing something else. While his reason informs him of his duty, the irrational parts of his soul (drives toward sex on the one hand, glory on the other) sing a different, and louder, song. As Alcibiades himself says so eloquently, he caves in to desire.¹⁵

In short, Alcibiades disproves Socrates' speech not by arguing against it (he has, after all, not heard it) but *merely by existing*. For those readers who pay attention only to what is explicitly stated, the *Symposium* says that progress is merely a matter of increased awareness. But for those who are alive to characterization, the dialogue *shows* that increased awareness is far from being sufficient. Alcibiades forms a direct counterexample to one of Socrates' key premises, simply by being the living, breathing, drunkenly staggering incarnation of motivational conflict that he is.¹⁶ His very existence constitutes proof positive that Plato (who is, after all, his creator) understands something Socrates does not—that motivational conflict is part of human nature—and hence that Socrates is not, contrary to a belief which remains extraordinarily widespread, Plato's spokesman in the *Symposium*. Alcibiades' function is to put us on notice that there is a fundamental flaw in the picture of love as sketched by Socrates,¹⁷ a gaping hole that nothing in the dialogue can fill.¹⁸ That, and not posthumous vindication, is the primary *raison d'être* of his speech.

3. the developmental hypothesis

socrates is, of course, famous for advocating new forms of life, forms which few are willing to adopt. Here, however, what he is asking us to do is not to *act* differently, but instead to *believe* something which flies in the face of all empirical evidence. Indeed, the idea in question, this most counterintuitive of intuitions, is not even one to which Socrates himself subscribes in all of Plato's dialogues. Thus in the *Phaedrus*, a work often considered the *Symposium's* thematic companion-piece, the course of true love does not run so smooth. Far from drifting lightly up the ladder of love, the *erastes* here finds himself continually subject to temptation, even after being vouchsafed that precious vision of the Forms which constitutes the highest level of the Ascent. Here is how Socrates, having divided the soul into three parts—a "bad horse" (presumably desire), a "good horse" (quite possibly the spirited component¹⁹), and a "charioteer" (very likely reason)—describes what happens when a man lays eyes on a beautiful boy:

When the charioteer sees that face, his memory is carried back to the real nature of Beauty, and he sees it again where it stands on the sacred pedestal next to Self-control [~~meta;swfrosunh-~~]. At the sight he . . . has to pull the reins back so fiercely that both horses are set on their haunches, one falling back voluntarily with no resistance, but the other insolent and quite unwilling. They pull back a little further; and . . . one horse . . . bursts into a torrent of insults as soon as it has caught its breath, accusing its charioteer and yoke-mate of all sorts of cowardice and unmanliness for abandoning their position and their agreement. Now once more it tries to make its unwilling partners advance, and gives in grudgingly only when they beg it to wait till later. Then, when the promised time arrives, and they are pretending to have forgotten, it reminds them; it . . . forces them to approach the boy again with the same proposition; and as soon as they are near, it drops its head, straightens its tail, bites the bit, and pulls without any shame at all. The charioteer is

70 philosophical training grounds

now struck with the same feelings as before, only worse . . . and he violently yanks the bit back out of the teeth of the insolent horse, tongue and jaws, sets its legs and haunches firmly on the ground, and 'gives it over to pain.' (254c–e; cf. *Phdr.* 246a–b)

Nothing could be more different in tone from Diotima's Ascent than this breathless, bloody battle. One imagines Diotima's lover arriving at the top of his ladder without having broken a sweat; the horse-drawn human of the *Phaedrus* is, by contrast, battered and bruised by the time he arrives—if indeed he ever arrives—at the blissful, sex-free union (256b–c), his "charioteer" having been required to punish his "dark horse" for repeated, possibly incessant, certainly forceful, attempts to commandeer the vehicle.

Scholars have responded to the discrepancy in two main ways. One group tries to reconcile the two dialogues by claiming that they are complementary, showing us different aspects (or filling in different details) of the same overall theory.²⁰ The other group, perceiving the futility of such efforts, invokes the now-standard *developmental hypothesis*,²¹ explaining that Plato's philosophy, like that of most thinkers, must have evolved as he went along. Among other things, Plato began in his "middle period" to countenance the existence of multiple components within the soul—the charioteer and horses which, in the *Republic*, are also known as **to;logistikon**, **to; qumeidev**, and **to; epiqunhtikon**²²—and, as a consequence, the possibility of motivational conflict. Freedom from temptation became the province of the perfected philosopher, of the one who has scaled Diotima's ladder all the way to the realm of eternal Forms, and ceased belonging as an automatic birthright to any given individual. Indeed, the **telew~ filosofo~** had to be born with a philosophical nature (*Rep.* 375e), a "talent for philosophy" (*Phdr.* 252e) which, in addition, had been refined by training, over and above the mere acquisition of superior knowledge.²³

Now since the *Symposium* falls, on most chronologies, early in the middle period, scholars have tended to conjecture that Plato's understanding of human nature was still rel-

atively rudimentary at the moment of the *Symposium's* composition, and that he, like his character Socrates, still fully believed that a glimpse of higher things was sufficient to turn lust into philosophy.²⁴ On the face of it, the developmentalist approach does not sound entirely far-fetched. But when we also learn that these same scholars tend to assume that the *Republic* is *the very next dialogue Plato wrote* (with the *Phaedrus* not following far behind),²⁵ things start to look a little strange. Are we really to believe that Plato, as it were overnight, converted wholesale from a unitary conception of the psyche—entirely constituted, or at least entirely motivated, by reason—to a sophisticated tripartite picture of the soul, with an awareness of the difficulties this poses and even a three-ingredient recipe for their attenuation (nature, nurture, knowledge)? Given that Alcibiades incarnates motivational conflict, it would surely make more sense (be less “expensive,” as philosophers have it) to accept that Plato is already implying something in the *Symposium* that he will have Socrates state explicitly in the *Republic*.²⁶

The metaphorical bill is even higher for those who reject the developmental hypothesis and yet remain wedded to the belief that Plato would never knowingly allow Socrates to make a mistake. Such writers are forced to perform intellectual acrobatics in order to reassure us that the ascent makes perfect psychological sense just as it is,²⁷ and that it is Alcibiades' own fault if he fails to profit from his association with Socrates.²⁸ They rarely stop to ask whom, exactly, Socrates *should* improve if not the ones who stand in greatest need of improvement;²⁹ or to acknowledge that a programme of improvement would be well advised to start with people as they actually are (people like Alcibiades) as opposed to assuming that people are already almost perfect (like the man on the ladder). Theirs, I would argue, is an act of misplaced interpretive charity. Rather than expending infinite amounts of energy construing Socrates' claims in the most convincing way possible, adding a qualification here and a modification there,³⁰ they would do better to extend their charity to *Plato* and to

acknowledge that a composer of dialogues has every right, and perhaps every reason, to make a protagonist fall on his face in order to serve his own literary and formative purposes.

4. dubious dialectic

we should really be ready for Socrates to lose his footing during the Ascent speech. For what immediately precedes it—the sole and only piece of live Socratic dialectic in the *Symposium*³¹—is a piece of argumentative logic so palpably, profoundly and multiply flawed as to make the head spin. Here is the essence of the exchange, Socrates speaking first, Agathon second:

“Wouldn’t Love have to be a desire for beauty, and never for ugliness?”

He agreed.

“And we also agreed that he loves just what he needs [i.e., lacks] and does not have.”

“Yes,” he said.

“So Love needs beauty, then, and does not have it.”

“Necessarily,” he said.

“So! If something needs beauty and has got no beauty at all [**to;e;pd;ee; kallou~ kai;nhdan;kekthmenon kallō-**], would you still say that it is beautiful?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then do you still agree that Love is beautiful, if those things are so?”

Then Agathon said, “It turns out, Socrates, I didn’t know what I was talking about in that speech. . . .”

“Don’t you think that good things are always beautiful as well?”

“I do.”

“Then if Love needs [i.e., lacks] beautiful things, and if all good things are beautiful, he will need [i.e., lack] good things too.”

“As for me, Socrates,” he said, “I am unable to challenge you. Let it be as you say.”

“Then it’s the truth, my beloved Agathon, that you are unable to challenge,” he said. “It is not hard at all to challenge Socrates.” (201a–c)

However co-operative Agathon may be as an interlocutor,

it should surely be obvious to any minimally alert reader—even at an intuitive level—that there are serious problems here. For in order to establish the thesis that Eros is utterly un-beautiful and un-good, Socrates is actually making the following six claims:

- (1) Love is a desire for beauty.
- (2) We lack whatever we desire.
- (3) Love lacks beauty. (By syllogism, from 1 and 2.)
- (4) Love has no beauty at all.
- (5) Good things are beautiful.
- (6) Love lacks good things. (Ostensibly by syllogism, from 2 and 5.)

Socrates has, it seems to me, entirely failed to prove (a) that love lacks all beauty, (b) that love even lacks the specific type of beauty it is interested in, or (c) that love lacks goodness. There is, first of all, no justification for leaping from (3) to (4).³² Love may lack *some* beauty, but we need not conclude from this that it lacks *all* beauty, that it is in no way (~~nhdanh~~) beautiful. To translate into the world of human individuals (taking “love lacks beauty” as a Pauline predication³³), a handsome man could very easily desire an attractive boy: the man would lack, as it were, the specific beauty of the boy, while possessing beauty in his own person.³⁴ Secondly, there is no reason to imagine that we are unable to desire what we already have. To extend our example, a man could continue to desire a boy even after a love affair has begun between them; he could, in other words, desire not to obtain a beauty he lacks but to preserve a beauty he already has.³⁵ And how do we know about this possibility? *Because Socrates himself raised it*, a little earlier in his conversation with Agathon. “Whenever you say, *I desire what I already have*,” he cautioned, “ask yourself whether you don’t mean this: *I want the things I have now to be mine in the future as well*.” (200d) What is more, he is about to define Eros, in Diotima’s name, as a desire for something it

already has: "In a word, then, love is wanting to possess the good forever." (206a)

Just as strikingly, and even more immediately, Socrates' speech undermines the more general claim that love lacks all beauty. The entire onus of its first part is, after all, to cure Socrates of his extremism, his tendency to view things as either totally *f* or not *f* at all:

So I said, "What do you mean, Diotima? Is Love ugly [*aijscrow*], then, and bad [*kakov*]?"

But she said, "Watch your tongue! Do you really think that, if a thing is not beautiful [*kalon*], it has to be ugly [*aijscrow*]?"

"I certainly do."

"And if a thing's not wise, it's ignorant? Or haven't you found out yet that there's something in between wisdom and ignorance?" (201e–2a)³⁶

Why, if Socrates has already been effectively taught by Diotima at some unspecified date in the distant past, does he continue now to act as though there were nothing in between, as though something is either utterly beautiful or completely devoid of beauty?³⁷ Has Socrates, in his eagerness to put Agathon to the elenctic sword, forgotten what Diotima taught him, both about the in between and about continued possession? Diotima's position is far more sophisticated than the "truth" Socrates uses to berate Agathon; while it may at first appear as though the Agathon elenchus presents us with Socrates' mature views and the Diotima flashback with the route he took in order to acquire them, we should probably ignore the stated chronology and read the sequence from 201a to 202a as a more or less continuous argument, moving continually towards increased refinement and plausibility.

Finally, it is straightforwardly illegitimate to argue from "love lacks beautiful things" and "all good things are beautiful" to "love lacks good things." Why could love not lack all and only those beautiful things which are not also good?³⁸ Socrates is clearly assuming that since all good

things are beautiful, all beautiful things are good. This rather striking mode of argumentation, inferring from “all A’s are B” to “all B’s are A,” has been termed the fallacy of the undistributed middle. When the fallacy is deployed, it does not normally take very much work to come up with a counterexample. Thus for instance I may acknowledge that all people named Mike are men, but I may not wish to conclude from this that all men are named Mike. Similarly, while I recognize that all cats have four legs, and that my dog has four legs, I may be reluctant to accept that my dog is a cat. Now there are those who would object at this point that the term “undistributed middle” postdates Plato by several centuries, and that Plato was a lowly ancient who could not be expected to understand such logical subtleties.³⁹ Just because there was no word for it, however, does not mean that such an elementary mistake could not be seen for what it was. And it would indeed be very strange if Plato had been unaware of it, since he has his characters argue about it on at least two separate occasions.

First case: Socrates against Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro*.

It is then not right to say “where there is fear there is also shame,” but that where there is shame there is also fear, for fear covers a larger area than shame. Shame is a part of fear just as odd is a part of number, with the result that it is not true that where there is number there is also oddness, but [it is true] that where there is oddness there is also number . . . where there is piety there is also justice, but where there is justice there is not always piety, for the pious is a part of justice. (*Euthyphro* 12c–d)

Second case: Protagoras against Socrates (note the role reversal) in the *Protagoras*.

Socrates: Then what do you mean by courageous men? Aren’t they those who are confident?

Protagoras: I still hold by that.

Socrates: Then . . . the wisest are the most confident and the most confident [παρρηλικώτατοι] are the most courageous [ἀνδρειώτα-

toi]? And the logical conclusion would be that wisdom is courage? **Protagoras:** You are doing a poor job of remembering what I said when I answered your questions, Socrates. When I was asked if the courageous are confident, I agreed. I was not asked if the confident are courageous. If you had asked me that, I would have said, "Not all of them." . . . But by following this line of reasoning you could conclude that strength and wisdom are the same thing. First you would ask me if the strong are powerful, and I would say yes. Then, if those who know how to wrestle are more powerful than those who do not . . . Again I would say yes. After I had agreed to these things, it would be open to you to . . . prove that wisdom is strength. But nowhere in this process do I agree that the powerful are strong, only that the strong are powerful. (*Prot.* 350c–e)⁴⁰

Plato knows full well that "all A's are B" implies only that *some* B's are A (that B is a subset of A), and not that *all* B's are A. He has Protagoras argue it against Socrates, and Socrates argue it against Euthyphro, and us—so it seems to me—against Socrates in the *Symposium*, where Alcibiades is too witless to do the job himself. Socrates' "proof" for love's lack of goodness cannot be sustained. And in general, his so-called refutation of Agathon falls apart so fast and in so many different directions that it is hard to know which way to turn in order to avoid the falling rubble.

We receive no warning, mind you, from the vast majority of Plato's interpreters, so intent are they on assuring us that the building is structurally sound. On point (c), as I just mentioned, we are told that the undistributed middle was not a fallacy yet; on point (b), we are told that love could not possibly be the desire for continued possession of beauty;⁴¹ on point (a), we are told (i) that Socrates is not really saying that love is completely lacking in beauty, (ii) that a handsome lover is still ugly in as much as he is a lover (whatever this means), and/or (iii) that beauty is fundamentally one, on Socrates' view, so that to lack part of it is to lack it entirely.⁴² As if this were not enough, we are told (on all points put together) that Socrates is merely exposing a conflict within Agathon's views, not presenting any of his

own.⁴³ There is no shortage of defenses for the elenchus. And as a result almost everyone, a surprising number of otherwise critical readers included,⁴⁴ has found a way to read it as a glorious victory for Socrates and his superior intellectual abilities, the perfect lead-in to an equally flawless speech about love, philosophy and the life well lived.⁴⁵

5. pericles, socrates, and plato

many and sophisticated are, as we have seen, the ruses readers have adopted in order to clear the fictional Socrates of charges actually or potentially pressed against him. The last-mentioned, Socratic irony, is usually sufficient for commentators to extricate themselves from particularly sticky situations: Socrates, they argue, doesn't actually *endorse* the offending view (e.g., that love lacks all beautiful things) but merely repeats the view of his interlocutor, in such a way as to bring out its incompatibility with other views that the interlocutor also holds (and which Socrates endorses no more than he did the first). Socrates' aim is simply to reduce the interlocutor to confusion (*aporía*), so that he will admit his ignorance—"a reward we could not fairly be dissatisfied with" (*Tht.* 187c)—and perhaps, if confusion is anything like wonder, set him, in addition, on the road to philosophy (*Tht.* 155d). In other words, Socrates is both the "torpedo fish" that renders its victims numb and the "gadfly" that goads them to action. (For the "torpedo fish," see *Meno* 80a–b, 84a–b, and Terence H. Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford 1979), 122–23; for the "gadfly," see *Apol.* 30e.)

Now while there is something generally *à propos* about all of this, I am not convinced that it applies to the point-counterpoint with Agathon, at the end of which Socrates insists—without the slightest compulsion to do so—that what has defeated Agathon is the *truth*: not Agathon's own admissions, not Socrates' cunning, but just the way things actually are. And even if Socratic irony did explain the Agathon elenchus; even, indeed, if it accounted for the curiously

smooth ascent, which we could perhaps, if desperate, ascribe to the stately sophistical Diotima;⁴⁶ still, no amount of Socratic irony could ever save Socrates from what happens in the *Gorgias*. For here, in the context of an increasingly heated debate with Callicles, Socrates makes the following peculiar argument about the great statesman Pericles:

At first Pericles had a good reputation . . . But after he had turned [the Athenians] into “admirable and good” people, near the end of his life, they voted to convict Pericles of embezzlement and came close to condemning him to death . . . Shouldn’t he . . . have turned them out more just instead of more unjust, if while he cared for them he really was good at politics? . . . But Pericles certainly showed them to be wilder than they were when he took them over, and that toward himself, the person he’d least want this to happen to. . . . And if wilder, then both more unjust and worse . . . So on this reasoning Pericles wasn’t good at politics. (*Gorg.* 515e–516d)

Pericles, that is, cannot have been a good politician, for good politicians make their citizens just, and just citizens do not seek to harm those who have improved them. The argument is already somewhat problematic in itself (all the more so if, as Irwin claims, it is historically inaccurate⁴⁷), but notice what happens when we add the following claim:

Socrates: It wouldn’t be at all strange if I were to be put to death. Would you like me to tell you my reason for expecting this?

Callicles: Yes, I would.

Socrates: I believe that I’m one of a few Athenians . . . the only one among our contemporaries—to take up the true political craft and practice the true politics. This is because the speeches I make on each occasion do not aim at gratification but at what’s best. They don’t aim at what’s most pleasant. And because I’m not willing to do those clever things you recommend, I won’t know what to say in court. (521d–e)

In arrogating to himself the role of the one “true politician” in Athens, Socrates is claiming to be the only person who really sets about raising the moral level of his fellow citizens. Yet if there is one thing we know about him—and just in

case we had forgotten, Socrates inadvertently reminds us, in the very words he uses to frame his assertion⁴⁸—it is that Socrates is also about to be put to death by these very citizens it has been his mission to improve.⁴⁹ (Notice, incidentally, that Anytus, one of the two accusers named in *Apology*, is also a character in the *Meno*: within the world of Plato's fiction, at least, he has had the opportunity to benefit from contact with the master.) By his own argument, Socrates is in fact even less successful than Pericles: if *almost* being put to death makes someone a poor statesman, surely being handed an actual jar of hemlock must promote one into the class of world-beating political failures.⁵⁰

The Pericles section is a work of unparalleled Platonic brilliance. It is as though Plato set himself the challenge of making an otherwise ruthlessly logical and unblinkingly astute character condemn himself out of his own mouth, over the space of a mere seven Stephanus pages. How could Socrates, the arch detector of inconsistencies, possibly fail to notice that a set of arguments he himself produces generates an intolerable contradiction? Simple: make him respond to a question on a separate topic, and make him respond with emotion. Have Callicles taunt him with the entirely accurate claim that his disdain for worldliness may land him in trouble one day. Have Socrates rise to the bait, telling Callicles with unusual resentment that it is Callicles who will be the one in trouble come the afterlife (526e–7a) and that he, Socrates, is *proud* of his incapacity to please the crowd. He, Socrates, tells the truth, not what people want to hear; no wonder they do not like him. Callicles may not notice that Socrates has now unwittingly offered Pericles a defense, but we do. “On your own admission,” a resurrected Pericles could say, “people do not like those who seek to improve them. How are you now going to use my fate as evidence against my political talents?”

Once again, Plato is setting before us a collection of mutually inconsistent views and—just as Socrates would, under similar circumstances—forcing us to choose among them. Here are the three main claims:

- (1) Good politicians will be loved by their citizens. (Pericles, who was nearly condemned to death, must have been a bad politician.)
- (2) Socrates is likely to be (and, as we know from independent evidence, actually was) condemned to death.
- (3) Socrates is the only true politician in Athens.

To repeat, Socrates clearly believes all three statements; we are not dealing here with a case of Socratic irony. (Even if he did not believe (1) and (3), he could hardly imagine them to be *Callicles'* views: Callicles does not consider Socrates to be a good politician, and, despite his casual agreement at 516c, has no interest in the moral improvement of citizens.) But since, by syllogism, what follows from (1) and (2) should be the *contrary* of (3), Socrates is not entitled to all of them. Which one shall we then discard? Clearly not (2); and presumably not (3); instead the untenable view must be the idea that good intentions will always be rewarded, that teachers of virtue will always make their pupils better people. After having impugned Pericles on the basis of an unrealistically optimistic view of human nature, finally Socrates, when his own reputation is at stake, is revealing himself capable of a more earthbound one: *it is not always a teacher's fault if the pupil turns out badly*.

And why, after all, should Socrates *not* subscribe to this eminently sensible position? His counterpart in the *Theaetetus* is fully willing to acknowledge that there have been

many cases where people . . . thought that I was no good. They have then proceeded to leave me sooner than they should, either of their own accord or through the influence of others. And after they have gone away from me they have resorted to harmful company, with the result that what remained within them has miscarried; while they have neglected the children I helped them to bring forth . . . ; finally they have been set down for ignorant fools (*Tht.* 150d–e).

Surely no reasonable person would blame Socrates for

what happens to such rogue disciples, any more than she would blame him for the fate of Alcibiades,⁵¹ or fault philosophers generally for the waywardness of their followers (“it’s inevitable that the greater number are vicious . . . philosophy isn’t responsible for this” [*Rep.* 489d, cf. 539b–c]). Surely the *Gorgias* Socrates is right that, as his counterpart says in the *Meno*, pandering sophists are much more likely than demanding philosophers to be adored by their charges, for all the corrupting ambitions of the one set and the ennobling ambitions of the other.⁵² Yet if Socrates *is* right, then Pericles may yet deserve the high reputation he holds among Athenians; the conspiracy against him (if it ever existed) may have been every bit as unmerited as the conspiracy against Socrates will be. Socrates’ critique of politicians does not hold up. Neither, accordingly, does his critique of sophists, who

do this absurd thing: while they claim to be teachers of excellence, they frequently accuse their students of doing them wrong, depriving them of their fees and withholding other forms of thanks from them, even though the students have been well served by them. Yet what could be a more illogical business than this statement, that people who’ve become good and just, whose injustice has been removed by their teacher . . . , should wrong him—something they can’t do? (519c–d)

It is true, of course, that it would be illogical to attribute injustice to the just. But Socrates is being disingenuous here. He knows as well as Callicles that “teachers of excellence”—even those who really do seek to make their charges upright individuals—may not succeed. Between his first and second sentence yawns a vast abyss, the abyss of individual agency, susceptibility, and errant desire.

6. the *GORGIAS* unravels

notice, now, what happens next. Not only does Socrates’ tacit admission, in his rancorous retort to Callicles, play havoc with the attack he launched, a mere two pages earlier, on sophists at large; it also throws us all the way back to the

start of the dialogue, placing in doubt what appeared at the time to be his victory over Gorgias. It reveals Socrates' entire argument, which has seemed to hold up under pressure from three separate interlocutors, to have been built on the flimsiest of foundations. It shows, to change the metaphor, that one sustained pull on the Pericles thread is enough to make the whole dialogue unravel in our hands.

Difficult as it is to summarize such a rich and complex text, I propose that we view the entire dialogue as *a systematic challenge mounted by Socrates, point for point, on Gorgias' apologia for rhetoric*. Socrates refuses to accept anything Gorgias says on behalf of his profession: first, that it is a craft [**τεχνή**], consisting in the learnable and teachable skill of turning persuasive speeches on legal matters (449b, 449e, 454b); second, that it is often used for the good of others, inveigling patients to take their bitter medicine, for example (456b), or cities to invest in costly military defenses (455e); and third, that it benefits the orator himself, by giving him the power to gain pleasure and avoid pain (452d–e). Socrates begins by characterizing rhetoric as a mere “knack” [**εμπειρία, τριβή**] (462c, 463b, 465a). If it were a craft, he reasons, then it would know and impart the truth about its subject matter, and since its subject matter is justice, orators and their students would necessarily be just (460b–c); but as we know, students are often unjust, sometimes towards their very benefactors (456d–7c, 461a). As for its ostensible social utility, the nearly-tragic case of Pericles proves that orators who convince their fellow-citizens to build long walls and stronger ships and the like are clearly not helping in the ways that count.

The remainder of the dialogue (on this admittedly schematic rendition) consists in Socrates' repeated assault on the idea that oratory is advantageous for the orator. Are the rhetorically talented happier than the rest of us? No, declares Socrates, because pleasure is not a good; the happiest are those who have no needs and have no pleasures, like stones, or like the dead (493e). And then, since some pleas-

ures are beneficial and others detrimental (500a), we need to be able to distinguish between the two categories, a matter in which oratory can be of no assistance. Nor does it help to appeal to the criteria of respect and power. No-one admires orators (466b); further, those who are in a position to have innocents thrown in jail do not really have power, since power is the capacity to achieve what is good for us, and acting unjustly is *bad* for us, more harmful to the perpetrator than it is to any victim. This must be so, for (a) whatever is shameful [*aischron*] is either painful or harmful (474d–475a); (b) committing injustice is shameful; (c) committing injustice involves no physical pain; ergo (d) it must involve harm (475a–c). And then, in order to rule in a democracy one must please the people, which in turn involves becoming like the people, sacrificing our autonomy in the process.⁵³ Finally, we should recall that in the afterlife we will only have (or be) souls, not bodies (524b), which means that the soul is the most important possession we have; and since our souls will then enter a perfect system of rewards and retributions, with those of philosophers (like Socrates) faring well (526c), and those of tyrants, orators and hedonists (like Callicles) faring badly (526e–527a), it is good for us, while embodied, to be good.⁵⁴

Now Socrates' argument on the first point, about crafts and knacks, is highly problematic. Even if it were true that those who know the meaning of justice are necessarily just, presumably those who know the meaning of justice also know the meaning of *in*justice; so must they not, by the same token, also be unjust?⁵⁵ One might respond that this is a subtle objection, so subtle that it escaped Plato's attention (though he shows himself fully cognizant of it elsewhere⁵⁶). A first-time reader might easily be forgiven, therefore, for imagining, as does Friedländer,⁵⁷ that Socrates has straightforwardly defeated Gorgias. She might equally be forgiven for supposing, as does Irwin,⁵⁸ that if Socrates has made a mistake, it is also *Plato's* mistake; or, again, for joining Kahn⁵⁹ in the belief that Socrates is merely reproducing Gor-

gias' own views, hiding behind his habitual ironic mask. But once we reach the Pericles section, things really should change dramatically. It should, at this juncture, become clear to each and every reader that Socrates' premises are flawed; that Plato is aware they are flawed; that they are Socrates' own premises, not merely borrowings from the worldview of his interlocutor; and taking all in all, *that Plato deliberately has Socrates fail to defeat Gorgias*.⁶⁰

Certain readers may, in fact, begin to detect Plato's ironic strategy in advance of the Pericles section. For in the surrounding, more general debate about hedonism, Plato has Callicles state not only that the good life consists in indulging a maximally numerous and maximally large set of appetites, but also that such indulgence paradoxically requires *courage*. "The man who'll live correctly," urges Callicles, "ought to allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them. And when they are as large as possible, he ought to be competent to devote himself to them by virtue of his bravery [*ajdreia*] and intelligence" (492a); "this isn't possible for the many," he adds, "because of the shame they feel" (*ibid.*). At times, that is, we may feel ashamed to satisfy a certain craving—to eat, say, a tenth slice of chocolate cake—but must dauntlessly overrule the voice in our head which tells us to put our fork down. In order to make our hedonism complete, we must resist, as Brecht would put it, the temptation to be good.⁶¹ And so, while Callicles merely speaks of the motivational conflict that Alcibiades incarnates, and while the particular species of motivational conflict varies, arguably, from one dialogue to the other, the *Gorgias* replicates to perfection the overarching structure of the *Symposium*.⁶² For if Callicles knows that humans are sometimes subject to temptation, surely Plato does; if Plato does, then his spokesman should too; if Socrates behaves here as though there were no such thing as motivational conflict,⁶³ then he is not acting as Plato's spokesman, any more than his counterpart at Agathon's banquet.⁶⁴

7. the uses of oratory

ever the consummate non-spokesman, Socrates has signally failed to carry the first point against Gorgias and rhetoric. Even the (absurd) possibility that rhetoricians might concern themselves with the moral welfare of their charges is, astonishingly, not ruled out by Socrates' elenchus, still less the (entirely reasonable) possibility that rhetoric teaches justice, in the sense of a body of information about the law. (It should always be borne in mind that the closest contemporary analogue to oratorical training is law school.) And the collapse of the Pericles argument also brings Socrates' *second* criticism, that orators are never of any help to other people, down with it. Since we need no longer hold Pericles to the extraordinarily high standard of making the Athenians both virtuous and grateful, a standard to which no one would ever dream of holding Socrates, we are free to return to the customary assessment of his contribution. Pericles did indeed help the Athenians, at least temporarily, by convincing them to make short-term sacrifices for long-term gains; and he showed himself, in the process, perfectly able to "pick out which kinds of pleasures are good ones and which are bad" (500a).⁶⁵

We are left with a third and final charge, namely that rhetoric is of no use to the orator himself. Here the quality of Socrates' "proofs," whose very quantity bespeaks a doubt in the persuasive capacity of each, varies considerably from one to the next. Thus the claim that orators are never held in high esteem [oujnonizesqai] is what hardened Platonists would call a "deliberately misleading paradox" (compare Irwin *Plato: Gorgias* [Oxford 1979], 137) and what others might call a barefaced lie; the posit that power in a democracy requires self-abasement is clearly question-begging;⁶⁶ and the extreme position which, not content with subordinating pleasure to virtue as an inferior good, denies all value to the former is unlikely to move an average virtue-seeker, still less a hedonist.⁶⁷ Socrates' main hope resides in the ar-

gument that what goes by the name of power is not worth having, *and this argument is vitiated from the start by the very same presupposition that defeated his first and second challenges to rhetoric*. For in order to make his case that the purportedly mighty (like Archelaus of Macedonia) never achieve what they want, Socrates has to rely on the assumption that they do not actually want to enrich themselves and their friends, harm their enemies, and always remain safe from prosecution; what they want deep down, he imagines, is "the good," i.e., that which will, over the long term, have done them the most benefit.⁶⁸

It is already tendentious to assert that we do not want things we know to be bad for us. However much I may now regret my decision, and however clearly I suspected it to be a bad idea, I ate that tenth slice of chocolate cake because I *wanted* to; perhaps indeed I ate it in part *because* I knew it was bad for me (even fourth-century Aristotle knew of such perverse desires).⁶⁹ It is yet more problematic, however, to add that what is really good for us is justice. My acts of injustice must, as we saw above, be harmful, since they are not painful; but why must they be harmful to *me*?⁷⁰ Conversely, it must be good for my acts of injustice to be punished, but why must it be good for *me*?⁷¹ The mistake becomes obvious when, later in the dialogue, Socrates describes the fate awaiting Archelaus and his kind. "From among those who have committed the ultimate wrongs and who because of such crimes have become incurable," says Socrates, "come the ones who are made examples of. These persons themselves no longer derive any profit from their punishment, because they're incurable. Others, however, do profit from it" (525b–c; cf. *Phd.* 113d–e).⁷² If punishment benefits bystanders, then punishment need not be good for the culprit in order for it to be, in general, a good thing. And so, by analogy, iniquity need not be bad for the one who commits it in order for it to be, in general, a bad thing. Archelaus need not be harming himself by having his enemies executed, and he is certainly not harming himself by seeking to avoid retribution.

Given that, as an incurable, he stands to derive no benefit from his own punishment, should we not say that when he protects himself, he is doing exactly what he wants?⁷³

Socrates' reasoning is bad enough here, but worse is to follow. If it is good for an individual to be punished, he continues, then it is good for him to turn his friends and family in to the authorities (480b; reprised at 508b).⁷⁴ Are we not in the presence of a classic *reductio ad absurdum*? Polus certainly seems to think so: "I think these statements are absurd [αῖοπα], Socrates, though no doubt you think they agree with those expressed earlier" (480e). And Polus is right. Socrates' claims are entirely consistent with those he has been adducing; their patent absurdity should make us reconsider the soundness of those which led up to them. So, too, should the final corollary, "if [an] enemy did something unjust against another person, . . . he should scheme to get his enemy off without paying what's due" (480e–481a). For if punishment is good for me, then surely escaping punishment is bad for me, and helping other people escape punishment is bad for them; and if it is bad for them, then it constitutes an injustice, *and Socrates should not be advocating it*.⁷⁵ To put it another way, the only people who would maliciously strive to protect their enemies are people who already believe that injustice is bad for the perpetrator—and those people would, *ex hypothesi*, not have the malice necessary to embark on such an undertaking.

That Socrates fails to convince Polus (who, as we just saw, cries foul) or Callicles (who asks whether Socrates is joking) is immediately apparent. It is, however, even more salient at the end of the dialogue. For what, other than desperation, could possibly lead a staunch advocate of rapid question and answer, in whose eyes a handful of sentences strung together constitute a reprehensibly "long style of speechmaking" (449b),⁷⁶ to a fire-and-brimstone tirade filling almost five Stephanus pages (523a–527e)? And what else would reduce the famously passionless advocate of rationality to a policy of sending an interlocutor to hell? Socrates does not even

content himself with saying, in a general way, that all hedonists will be punished somehow or other in the afterlife. Instead, he targets Callicles directly: "I take you to task, because you won't be able to come to protect yourself when you appear at the trial and judgment I was talking about just now." Further, the torments he promises him are equally specific, and are, in fact, *a direct response to Callicles' earlier taunts*.

Callicles: As it is, if someone got hold of you or of anyone else like you and took you off to prison on the charge that you're doing something unjust when in fact you aren't, be assured that you wouldn't have any use for yourself. *You'd get dizzy, your mouth would hang open* and you wouldn't know what to say. . . . Socrates, "how can this [philosophy] be a wise thing, the craft which took a well-favored man and made him worse," able neither to protect himself nor to rescue himself or anyone else from the gravest dangers . . . ? Such a man *one could knock on the jaw* without paying what's due for it. (486a–c, my emphasis)

Socrates: When you come before that judge, the son of Aegina, and he takes hold of you and brings you to trial, *your mouth will hang open* and *you'll get dizzy* there just as much as I will here, and maybe *somebody'll give you a demeaning knock on the jaw* and throw all sorts of dirt at you." (527a)

To be sure, the myth of an after- (or pre-, or inter-) life ruled by a system of fitting rewards and punishments is found elsewhere in Plato (see esp. *Rep.* 614b–21d, *Phdr.* 248c–249c), and it is entirely conceivable that Plato himself entertained such a notion. That, however, is not to say that it is deployed in a convincing manner in the *Gorgias*. Socrates should have mentioned it much earlier, while trying to convince Polus that injustice is bad for the agent: the latter view immediately follows, and indeed *only* follows, within a two-world framework. (Even if it could be established that injustice harms the soul without recourse to such a framework, it would still remain to be shown that the health of the soul always outweighs the flourishing of the body.) He should have restricted himself to a short statement

(or, conversely, allowed his interlocutors to discourse at equal length). And most importantly, he should have kept his statement free from personal *ressentiment*. The conclusion of the *Gorgias* offers us the spectacle of a human, all too human individual who has been stung by a failure to convince, not one of a demigodly philosopher calmly laying out the truth. And if, as Kahn believes, "it is the extraordinarily seductive power of this portrait of Socrates that helps to make so many of us sympathetic . . . to the philosophical claims of these dialogues" ("Drama and Dialectic," 120; see also *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 146), could it not also be the case that the repellent power of that same portrait—one which, as Nehamas has pointed out, makes his execution credible⁷⁷—puts the rest of us on guard against his philosophical claims?

8. was gorgias refuted?

astonishing as it may seem, Gorgias' sales pitch has remained entirely unscathed, for all the objections that have been thrown at it over the course of the dialogue. Rhetoric is still free to have a central subject matter (the law), to be a teachable and learnable skill, to provide a power that is good for the orator, and help the orator's friends and fellow-citizens take their literal or figurative medicine (John Cooper, *Reason and Emotion* [Princeton 1999], 41); in spite of Socrates' relentless onslaught, Gorgias has every right to persist in the conviction that oratory is (1) a craft (2) of benefit (a) to the orator and (b) to other people. And we, the readers, have every right to do the same. For over and above the fact that Socrates' arguments are not, as Allen surmises, fundamentally sound, it has to be added that they are not even flawed in ways that would admit, as Irwin thinks, of subsequent correction.⁷⁸ Their key posit, that doing injustice is bad for the doer, depends on a belief in a life after death, and *such a belief could never be produced by means of argumentation*. Accordingly, Socrates has not changed Callicles' mind,

knows he has not changed Callicles' mind—the present tense of his concluding exhortation gives him away⁷⁹—and indeed *could* never change the mind of a Callicles.⁸⁰

From the outside, it may seem quite natural to expect the pleas of a crusader for justice to fall on a hedonist's deaf ears, the two positions being, as Alasdair MacIntyre would say, "incommensurable."⁸¹ Yet from the inside, Socrates' defeat sets up a final and devastating contradiction, between what he promises and what he delivers. Unlike such "early" dialogues as the *Euthyphro*, in which the elenchus serves to reduce an overconfident interlocutor to a (salutary) confession of ignorance, the *Gorgias* presents a Socrates who endows it with a *constructive* capacity. "If there's any point in our discussions on which you agree with me, then that point will have been adequately put to the test," he tells Callicles; "*mutual agreement will really lay hold of truth in the end*" (487e, my emphasis). Absolute knowledge may still elude our grasp, that is, but when a position has survived repeated challenges, we can begin to feel confident about it, so confident indeed that we are liable to call it a "truth" (Vlastos 1991:114)—much as we might, after several years of victories, start calling an athlete "unbeatable." And the superior advantage of suffering wrongs over inflicting them is, in theory, just such a "truth":

Socrates: among so many arguments, this one alone survives refutation and remains steady: that doing what's unjust is more to be guarded against than suffering it (527b).

Socrates: These conclusions, at which we arrived earlier in our previous discussions are, I'd say, held down and bound by arguments of iron and adamant . . . for my part, my account is ever the same: I don't know how these things are, but no one I've ever met . . . can say anything else without being ridiculous [*i.e., without self-contradiction*]. So once more I set it down that these things are so (508e).

The challenge Socrates issues to Polus—"if I don't produce you as a single witness to agree with what I'm saying, then I suppose I've achieved nothing worth mentioning" (472b-c)—

must be understood on precisely these terms. Since the other-cheek-turning stance has, in Socrates' experience, proven to be the *only* consistent set of attitudes, he feels supremely confident that Polus will become "ridiculous" (*katagelasto-*) should the latter try to propose anything different; indeed in a sense Socrates *must* convince Polus and the others in order for his "elenctic certainty" to remain intact, in order for his pet convictions to remain undefeated in combat.⁸² It is striking, therefore, that Socrates does not in fact produce Polus, still less Callicles, as "witness" for his position, with the result that he has, on his own standards, achieved nothing worth mentioning (Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* [Cambridge 1995], 82). Even as he wrote the *Gorgias*, the dialogue which lays out in the fullest detail what it would mean to subscribe to a positive proof by elenchus, Plato must have known that it could not be done.⁸³ He must have known that the elenchus can only ever establish the mutual incompatibility of two beliefs, and never indicate which one is the culprit.⁸⁴ The long-winded, ill-tempered, highly rhetorical performance at dialogue's end is the most eloquent possible evidence of its failure to do anything more.⁸⁵

9. spiritual exercises: seven points in conclusion

the holes in Socrates' logic are so numerous, so broad, and so manifest that it is a wonder anyone ever took him for the mouthpiece of a brilliant and original thinker. An unprejudiced reader should, it seems to me, react either by considering Plato a blundering fool (on the assumption that he stands firmly behind his character) or by regarding him as an exceptionally sophisticated literary craftsman (on the assumption that he does not). Yet the vast majority have seen neither clumsiness nor genius of the relevant variety, and it remains standard, even to this day, to consider Socrates as having scored a resounding victory over the antagonists of the *Gorgias*, just as it remains standard to consider Alcibi-

ades, in the *Symposium*, to provide nothing but confirmation of Diotima's ladder-of-love theory. By the time of the *Symposium*, the 1995 *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* tells us, "one can now be quite confident that the views put into his [Socrates'] mouth are Plato's own views" (David Bostock, "Plato," 684); the Diotima speech, concurs the 1999 *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, represents "Plato's theory of erotic passion" (Richard Kraut, "Plato," 711). "Since Aristotle himself treats the middle and late dialogues as undissembling accounts of Plato's philosophy," it continues, "we are on firm ground in adopting the same approach" (Kraut, 713).⁸⁶

But is the ground really so firm? It is true that Aristotle appears to have turned a singularly deaf ear to Platonic irony. This does not mean, however, that there is no such thing; for all his privileged position as Plato's student, Aristotle is not the final authority on the Platonic corpus. Indeed, there seems to be some tension between his overall reading method on the one hand and, on the other, his famous reference to a stock of "unwritten beliefs" which, he suggests, Plato made available to initiates but never committed to parchment.⁸⁷ And then, subsequent generations of Platonists, even within the Academy, saw the dialogues as evincing a type of skepticism, a philosophy that withholds its firm assent from any particular standpoint (John Cooper, ed., *Plato: The Complete Works* [Indianapolis and Cambridge 1997], xxiii). The Seventh Letter may not be authentic, but the very fact that it was once *thought* to be authentic, so that Plato was widely thought to have kept his most important beliefs to himself and his friends (Letter VII, 344c–d), speaks volumes on post-Aristotelian reception. Nor is that reception entirely surprising, given Socrates' famous and striking remark in the *Phaedrus* that "a written discourse on any subject can only be a great amusement . . . no discourse worth serious attention has ever been written [down]" (*Phdr.* 277e). According to Cooper (xxiv), the skeptical view prevailed within the Academy for two hundred years, until Antiochus of Ascalon

reduced Plato to the status of systematic philosopher in the first century bce; perhaps one day soon scholars will look back on the two millenia that have since passed as a rather extended interregnum between two periods of genuine contact.

In the meantime, Plato scholarship presents a curious amalgam of disparate positions. Some interpreters continue to push the esoteric-doctrine doctrine, elevated to more recent prominence by Strauss and his followers;⁸⁸ others, in increasing numbers, make a case for the importance of Platonic irony (John Cooper's introduction to the Hackett *Plato* being the most prominent); everyone else carries on treating the claims and arguments put forth by Socrates as items to be understood and emulated, perhaps sometimes amended, certainly always adopted. Plato's desire to leave critical space between himself and his purported mouthpiece is routinely covered up, denied, or simply not imagined as a possibility. My first point in conclusion is that Platonic irony is real, and widespread; in particular, the *Symposium* and the *Gorgias*—quite possibly the *Protagoras* too⁸⁹—are deeply impregnated with it, so much so that their proper interpretation absolutely depends on taking it into account. My second point, a corollary of the first, is that the traditional developmental theory is flawed. Dialogues like the *Gorgias* (and the *Protagoras*) already gesture towards the complex psychology of the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*: the shift, if there was one,⁹⁰ took place earlier than is usually thought.

If, however, the *Symposium*, *Gorgias*, and *Protagoras* are heavily laden with Platonic irony, and if that irony has nevertheless gone unnoticed by the vast majority of readers, should we not admit that the dramatic gulf between construction and reception bespeaks a marked deficiency on Plato's part? On the contrary. By allowing so many to miss the point of the dialogues in question, Platonic irony has not failed but rather fulfilled its primary function, that of *audience partition*. (This is my third point.) While every other

text “rolls about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn’t know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not” (*Phdr.* 275e), Plato’s separate their recipients into three separate groups, driving some people away by giving the impression of irremediable incompetence, encouraging others (the Allens, Bostocks, and Clays) to attend only to the words of Socrates, and offering the happy few, finally, an opportunity to go beyond the mere accumulation of knowledge.⁹¹ Fourth point: over and above *teaching* us, Plato’s dialogues have the capacity to *train* us. If we have a predisposition for detecting and are interested in resolving conflicts within a position—if, that is, we instinctively posit logical consistency as a desideratum in life⁹²—then we stand to learn not only *what* to think, but also, and far more importantly, *how* to think.⁹³

Like mathematics textbooks, Plato’s dialogues (the irony-rich among them, at least) provide us both with models and with *exercises*, sample arguments being accompanied by problems for us to solve on our own. The *Gorgias* shows us, through Socrates, how to perform a *reductio ad absurdum* (Callicles and the catamites); it also invites us, so it seems to me, to go on and find the *reductio* in Socrates’ own position (Polus and the exonerated enemy). And just as it shows us what it would look like to detect a hidden conflict among philosophical commitments (when Socrates appears to defeat Gorgias), so it makes room for us to bring such a technique to bear to Socrates (when his Pericles argument puts that “defeat” into question). Similarly, the *Symposium* enables us to try out our capacity for recognizing an undistributed middle when we see one (“love lacks all beautiful things”), and for noticing a counterexample when it is thrust before our eyes (Alcibiades, incarnator of motivational conflict). The test cases themselves are not always important: it does not matter whether I know what nineteen times eleven comes to, what the exact definition of a statesman is, or why Pericles was quite a good one after all.⁹⁴ What matters is my ability,

in general, to multiply one number by another, to collect and divide, to locate holes in an argument. What matters, in other words, is the *method*; and a method, unlike a set of facts or ideas, can only be acquired through practice.⁹⁵ It can only be acquired, by consequence, when the ostensible mouthpiece makes mistakes. Point five: *training and teaching are anti-theoretical aims*; at the precise moment in a text where one is taking place, the other is necessarily absent.

While this way of using the dialogues is not forced upon the reader (if it were, audience partition would be sacrificed), it is nonetheless encouraged. Clues as to their formative potential are planted right in the dialogues; each contains an inset manual for use, a coded set of instructions on how it may be employed for the purposes of training. (Such would be my sixth point.) In the *Gorgias*, our guide is the reaction of the interlocutors, with Callicles' suspicion of a hoax, for example, alerting us to the presence of a *reductio* in the vicinity. In the *Symposium*, positive hints are joined by cautionary tales. Not only does Plato have his protagonist say "it is not hard at all to challenge Socrates" (201c)—though Socrates is no doubt being ironic here, Plato is also being ironic at his expense⁹⁶—but he also puts on stage the very incarnation of a wrong-headed attitude towards philosophy, in the persons of Apollodorus and Aristodemus. Front-runners in the relay-team that leads us back to the thinking-party, these two have no reason to be in the dialogue other than the fact that they show us how *not* to be a "lover of Socrates" (*Swkratou- ejasthv*, 173b). While Aristodemus slavishly imitates the master's habit of going barefoot (173b, 220b), Apollodorus, who has spent the last three years "ma[king] it [his] job to know exactly what [Socrates] says and does each day" (173a), triumphantly parrots the credo about knowing his own ignorance and spending his days in dialectic:

I used to think that what I was doing was important, but in fact I was the most worthless man on earth—as bad as you are this very

moment . . . my greatest pleasure comes from philosophical conversation, even if I'm only a listener . . . I'm sorry for you and your friends because you think your affairs are important when really they're totally trivial. Perhaps, in your turn, you think I'm a failure, and, believe me, I think that what you think is true. But as for all of you, I don't just *think* that you are failures—I know it for a fact. (173a–d)

The smug, self-satisfied Apollodorus, with his arrogance of humility, and the superficial imitator Aristodemus, with his affectation of asceticism, should immediately put us on notice: in order to profit from what follows in the *Symposium*, it is not sufficient to understand what is being said.⁹⁷ It is a mistake to think that we can improve ourselves merely by sitting all day at the feet of the master, soaking up information by osmosis, as though “wisdom were like water, which always flows from a full cup into an empty one when we connect them with a piece of yarn” (175d–e). However illuminating the master's sayings may be, simply memorizing and repeating them will not do, any more than will the emulation of his mannerisms. As Michael Frede has pointed out (216), even the acquisition of a perfect and complete set of true beliefs would not necessarily help, because it could easily co-exist, judging by the characters in Plato's dialogues, with a parallel set of *false* beliefs. We could never extirpate the latter, indeed could never so much as notice they were there, without the method. What the method gives us is a principled way to justify our beliefs, to the degree to which justification is possible; what it gives us, above all, is a way to live in harmony with ourselves, a way to introduce consistency into our soul. It is this consistency to which, I believe, everything else is instrumental⁹⁸ in a philosophy which (seventh and final point) presents itself as a way of life as much as, or more than, a set of theoretical doctrines.⁹⁹

It is in part because philosophy has largely ceased thinking of itself as a way of life, and has reconceived its mission as one of theory-generation, that the *Symposium* and the *Gorgias* are so routinely read without any attention to Platonic

irony. We encourage our students to focus almost exclusively on what Socrates says (in, say, the Ascent speech), on the grounds that what Socrates says is what Plato means, and that what Plato means is what we stand to learn by reading his texts; we save sophistications, if at all, for advanced courses, as though the proper use of the dialogues were not the very first thing one should learn about them. In so doing we respond to a contemporary cultural bias which decrees that every book is valuable for its “message,” not for its transformative potential. There is nothing, however, which obliges us to follow the trend. Each of us is free to apply a literary principle of charity, and to gain, in the process, the capacity to use Plato in the way he would have wanted: as a stepping-stone, that is, on the way to perfection.

notes

1. Charles L. Griswold, Alexander Nehamas, Andrea Nightingale, and Allen Wood provided detailed and immeasurably helpful comments on this paper. I am also grateful, as always, to R. Lanier Anderson.

2. Fourth-century Athenians did not, of course, employ the terms “literature” or “fiction.” It is, however, sufficient for my purposes to establish that they were used to engaging with, and indeed enjoying, written or spoken dialogues that were universally recognized as being imaginary. And we know that they were, since fifth-century comedies (still in circulation in fourth-century Athens) routinely revolved around far-fetched, and non-mythical, plots: no one could possibly assume that contemporary audiences took the *Lysistrata*, for example, to be a representation of something that had happened in their own homes. Even tragedies—like Agathon’s *Antheus*, the example Aristotle gives at *Poetics* 1451b22–24—were sometimes invented in their entirety. Thus Aristotle can hardly have been alone in understanding that there were truth-tellers (such as historians), there were liars, and then there were poets. (For the contrast between poets and historians, see *Poetics* 1451b1–6.) Aristotle, significantly enough, classes Plato’s dialogues alongside Homeric and other poetry (1447b11–12). It seems to me that Plato’s audience may already have suspected, and been invited to suspect, that at least some of what they were reading was neither an attempt to report Socrates accurately (history) nor an attempt to put forward a false view of Socrates (deceit), but instead something else, something to be evaluated on other terms—just as Socrates, in the *Phaedrus* (264c), suggests evaluating fabricated speeches on the basis of their construction, not just on their effectiveness, and certainly not on their correspondence to speeches that were actually made.

Whether the (implicit) understanding of fictionality dawned in the fifth cen-

tury, as Margalit Finkelberg claims in *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998), 26–27, or in the fourth, as Andrew Ford has it in *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton 2002), 230–31, we may reasonably speculate that Plato's dialogues postdated it. Ford goes so far as to suggest that "something like the eighteenth-century notion of literature was formulated in the fourth century bce," (4). Arthur Danto feels similarly: "It has often been noted that the Greeks . . . did not have a word for art in their vocabulary. But they certainly had a concept of art," *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*, xiii.

3. I refer to the translation by one Floyer Sydenham. It should be noted that Sydenham may, in part, have been acting out of moral scruples. According to Thomas Taylor, who restored the Alcibiades speech in 1804, Sydenham suppressed it on the grounds "that some part of it is so grossly indecent that it may offend the virtuous and encourage the vicious." See *The Works of Plato*, Thomas Taylor and Floyer Sydenham, tr. (1804; Frome 1996), 11.487.

4. In Léon Robin's study, *La théorie platonicienne de l'amour* (Paris 1908), 23, the "analyse du banquet" stops at Stephanus page 212a. Similarly, John F. Miller omits all mention of Alcibiades in "The Esoteric Unity of Plato's Symposium," *Apeiron* 12, presenting Socrates as "mouthpiece for Plato's sublimest vision" (25), and his speech as "culmination" of all the others (19). I have also seen a syllabus for a 1999 introduction-to-philosophy class on which students are warned "We will skip the drunken speech of Alcibiades. Suffice it to say that drunks are most witty to themselves."

5. Friedländer is unwittingly echoing the sentiments of a young Friedrich Nietzsche: "the reader of the dialogue must remain uncertain as to the extent to that this insight . . . can be realized in life at all. This is why Alcibiades then appears . . . Socrates' impact on such an estranged man . . . is the most wonderful vehicle Plato could possibly have introduced as proof of the reciprocal effect of love for beauty. Alcibiades . . . shows the practical side of the man devoted to beauty, while Socrates shows the theoretical side," "On the Relationship of Alcibiades' Speech to the Other Speeches in Plato's *Symposium*," David Scialdone, tr., *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 15.2 (1991), 4.

6. Compare Diskin Clay, "The Tragic and Comic Poet of the *Symposium*" in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, John P. Anton and Anthony Preus, eds. (Albany 1983), 190, 196–97, and Martin Warner, "Dialectical Drama: The Case of Plato's Symposium," *Apeiron* 24.4 (1992), 161. See also Andrew Barker, "The Daughters of Memory," *Musica e Storia* 2 (1993), and William S. Cobb, *The Symposium and The Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (Albany 1993). Barker, reacting against Nussbaum's critique (to which we shall return), defends the Alcibiades speech, arguing—yet again—that "its role is . . . to reinforce those conclusions," viz., "the conclusions for which Diotima had so eloquently spoken" (184). And Cobb, for all his understanding of Platonic irony (8), and for all his incisive criticisms of the Agathon elenchus (to which, again, we shall return), ends up with the standard view about the Alcibiades speech: "Alcibiades is still operating on the lowest level of Diotima's staircase, while Socrates is at the highest level" (83).

7. See also Leo Strauss, quoted in Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven 1968), 285 n.31. James Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage 1991), 110, also buys the defense-against-corruption-charges line, but is at least willing to accept the corollary: having done nothing to "give birth in the beauty of" Alcibiades, Socrates must come off as something of a failure by his own lights.

8. "Despite the provenance of this composition from a dialogue of Plato's middle period, its Socrates is unmistakably the philosopher of the earlier one: he is portrayed as voicing that total disavowal of knowledge which is so striking a feature of the Socrates of the earlier period who . . . is Plato's re-creation of the historical figure. The discourse of Diotima which Socrates professes to report . . . is as strong an affirmation of Plato's *un*Socratic doctrine of transcendent Forms as is anything he ever wrote. But Alcibiades has not heard what Socrates says he learned from Diotima. In the speech about Socrates Alcibiades now proceeds to deliver . . . , Plato brings back to life the earlier *un*Platonic Socrates," Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca 1991), 33.

9. "I'd like to tell the truth . . . You will hear the truth about Love" (199b); "This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was persuaded." (212b)

10. I preserve the masculine here, in keeping with the pederastic focus of the *Symposium*. It is, however, quite possible that Plato considered biological sex irrelevant to the question.

11. Diotima: "there if anywhere should a person live his life, beholding [**qewneww**] that Beauty. If you once see that, it won't occur to you to measure beauty by gold or clothing or beautiful boys and youths—who, if you see them now, strike you out of your senses, and make you, you and many others, eager to be with [**sunonte-**] the boys you love and look at them forever, if there were any way to do that, forgetting food and drink, everything but looking at [**qeašqai**] them and being with [**suneinai**] them. But how would it be, in our view, . . . if someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality, but if he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form? Do you think that it would be a poor life for a human being to look there and to behold it [**qewnewou**] . . . and to be with [**sunonto-**] it?" (211d–212a).

It is noteworthy that Plato scholars tend to take seriously the claim (by Diotima) that philosophers lack wisdom as it were by definition—"no one . . . who is wise already loves wisdom . . . Those who love wisdom [**oiJ filosofouñte-**] fall in between those two extremes [of wisdom and ignorance]" (204a)—even though it stands in some tension with this later claim (also by Diotima) that philosophers can obtain direct and enduring contact with the Forms. Thus Richard Patterson, "The Ascent in Plato's Symposium," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1991), writes *both* that Plato believes that philosophers are those who know their own ignorance (212), *and* that Plato believes beautiful souls embody true knowledge, learnable and teachable (206). He does not seem to see any need to adjudicate between these two beliefs, or to bring them into

alignment. Similarly, Michael J. O'Brien, in *The Socratic Paradoxes of the Greek Mind* (Chapel Hill 1967), writes, within the space of three pages (123–25), (1) that Socrates possessed “the awareness of the limits of his own knowledge,” (2) that “knowledge of good and evil . . . alone assures good, noble, and beneficial action,” and (3) that “Socrates exemplifies all the many aspects of the good and the noble.” But if Socrates’ knowledge is limited, and if knowledge is necessary for virtue, how can Socrates be a paragon of excellence? Alexander Nehamas raises this question in *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley 1998), 67, and *Virtues of Authenticity* (Princeton 1999), 69.

12. Terence H. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford 1977), 169, Patterson (note 11), 205, and A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1989) 44–48, 53–54, all claim that the ideal lover can hold onto previous desires even while moving up to the next level. But Diotima's words clearly speak against such a reading: “he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and he must think that this wild gaping after just one body is a small thing and despise it” (210b); “[he must] see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, *not polluted by human flesh* or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality” (211e, my emphasis). Vlastos bites this bullet in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton 1973), 31.

In “Out of the Cave: What Socrates Learned from Diotima,” *Nomodeiktēs: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*, Ralph. M. Rosen and Joseph Farrell, eds. (Ann Arbor 1993), 412–13, 416–17, Dorothea Frede wishes to align the ascetic *Symposium* with the eros-friendly *Phaedrus*. “Alcibiades is rejected,” she writes, merely “because he is not willing to mend his ways” (413)—otherwise, no doubt, Socrates would have accepted his offer. But this cannot work: Socrates rejects Alcibiades *before* he knows whether the latter is a way-mender or a recidivist.

13. It has been objected to me (by Christopher Bobonich, Charles Griswold, and Alexander Nehamas, in separate personal communications; I am grateful to all three) that Alcibiades does *not* form a counterexample to Socrates’ intellectualism, because Socrates’ view is merely that Knowledge—capital-K Knowledge, derived in part from acquaintance with the Forms—is sufficient for virtue, and Alcibiades lacks such Knowledge. It seems to me, however, that Socrates’ view is the far stronger one that correct *belief* is sufficient for virtue. This idea finds an echo in the position of the *Protagoras* Socrates, who claims that “no one who knows *or believes* [οὐτε εἶπεν; οὐτε οἶσθαι] there is something else better than what he is doing, something possible, will go on doing what he had been doing, when he could be doing what is better . . . no one goes willingly toward the bad *or what he believes to be bad* [ἐπιγε τα;κακα;οὐδὲ; ἐλθν ἐφεται οὐλεπ;αἰ οἶται κακα;εἶπαι]” *Prot.* 358c–d, my emphasis; compare Michael Frede, “Introduction,” *Plato: Protagoras*, (Indianapolis 1992), xxix.

One could phrase the matter as a choice of incongruities. Either absolute Knowledge is required for us to be ruled by reason, in which case it is very hard to explain the lover's preternaturally smooth ascent; or else belief is sufficient, in which case Alcibiades, who clearly believed the examined life to be good for him, should not have strayed from the straight path.

14. For care of the self, see also *Phd.* 82d, 107c, 115b.

15. Socrates may “prove” in the *Protagoras* that an out-and-out hedonist cannot consistently believe in the possibility of being overcome by desire, but Alcibiades, as presented here, is not an out-and-out hedonist (he is, after all, tempted by the Socratic way of life).

16. I agree with Martha Nussbaum that it is over-hasty “to treat as Plato’s only the view expressed in the speech of Diotima as repeated by Socrates,” since Plato “describes a certain theory of love and then follows that description with a counterexample to the theory,” *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge 1986), 167. Nussbaum is not, however, referring to Alcibiades’ motivational conflict. What interests her is what Alcibiades *says*, rather than what he *is*; what needs qualifying, on her view, is the Socratic tendency to abstract away from particulars, rather than the virtue-knowledge biconditional. In my view, the Platonic irony in the *Symposium* is there to put in question how easy, rather than (or at most in addition to) how desirable, it would be to put Diotima’s Ascent into practice.

For an earlier statement (1968) of the Nussbaum view, see Rosen (note 7), who writes that “the love of Socrates for Alcibiades is deficient” (280), and that “the *Symposium* . . . is a criticism as well as an encomium of Socrates” (xxxv); swimming very much against the tide of Plato scholarship, Rosen considers that, far from defending Socrates against the charge of corrupting Alcibiades (283), “the main purpose of the second part of Alcibiades’ speech is to charge Socrates with *hybris*” (301). Compare also Jonathan Lear, *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge 1999), 163, and Vlastos (note 12), 31. Finally, for a diametrically opposed reading, see Warner, who writes—astonishingly enough—that “Alcibiades’ . . . insistence on down to earth particularity serves . . . to reinforce Diotima’s otherwise inordinately high-flown conclusions” (note 6, 161).

17. I am not, of course, claiming that the fictional character Alcibiades proves the existence of motivational conflict (if so, then the gods in Homer might prove the existence of Mount Olympus). I am merely arguing that Alcibiades’ characterization proves something about *Plato’s attitude* towards such conflict. It does so all the more, perhaps, for being the sole instance of an interlocutor informing Socrates that he endorses his recommendations but that he cannot bring himself to implement them. (I am grateful to Alexander Nehamas for bringing this fact to my attention.)

18. On this point, compare the powerful reading of Jonathan Lear (note 16). “This is what Diotima’s ascent lacks: the resistance which needs to be overcome,” writes Lear. “This, I believe, is a possibility Plato saw; and he saw that it was a possibility which Socrates ignored. It is Socrates’ failure to grasp this possibility which is dramatized in the *Symposium*” (166). On Lear’s view, “Alcibiades would be seen as *acting out* a refutation of Socrates’ theory of love” (149); “Since he is the incarnation of the human-erotic, his drama must cast doubt on the very idea of eros as a force for ascent” (156).

19. This might explain the reference to “cowardice and unmanliness” in the passage I am about to cite.

20. Thus R. E. Allen, "The Elenchus of Agathon: *Symposium* 199c–201c," *Monist* 50 (1966), writes that "Eros, whose object is the beautiful [as in the *Symposium*] may [nevertheless] seek, as the *Phaedrus* claims it does, bad things" (463), and Dorothea Frede claims that the *Phaedrus* "explains . . . the temptations and containment of carnal desire" (note 12, 417)—as though these "temptations" were there to be explained, and the idea of seeking bad things so much as conceivable, in the *Symposium*! On a side note, Frede also wishes to align the two dialogues over the issue of immortality. In the Great Speech of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes in some detail what happens to souls after death and before (re)birth; in the *Symposium*, by contrast, Socrates-Diotima explicitly denies such immortality, and proposes instead an ersatz, pseudo-immortality of (spiritual) progeny. Like Price (note 12, 29–34), Frede plays down the discrepancy, claiming that it is simply a matter of focus, the *Phaedrus* dealing with one aspect of human existence, the *Symposium* with another. But if that had been Plato's desire, he could easily have satisfied it by leaving the question of actual immortality *open* in the *Symposium*. Rejecting such attempts at conciliation, Hackforth suggests that "the *Symposium* was written when Plato had come to feel doubts about the validity of that . . . argument for the soul's immortality," "Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*," *Classical Review* (1950), 45. What Hackforth says about immortality I would (also) say about motivational conflict.

21. For a summary of differences between the views of the "early" Socrates (sometimes taken to be the views of the *historical* Socrates, at least on Plato's reconstruction) and those of the "middle-period" Socrates, see Vlastos (note 8), 48–49; the claim that Plato gradually abandoned the Socratic paradoxes was already made by Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung: Sokrates und die Sokratiker, Plato und die alte Akademie* (Leipzig 1889), II:1, 746–48, and Hans Raeder, *Platons Philosophische Entwicklung* (Leipzig 1920), 96–97, 99, 210–11, 215, 402; both quoted. in O'Brien (note 11), 196 n.18. (Compare, to some extent, Theodor Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy* (New York 1905), 2.353. The alternative position, which was held by most readers up until the late nineteenth century and has been revived, more recently, by Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago 1964), 61–62; Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill 1965), 10; O'Brien (note 11); Rosen (note 7), xxxiii); Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: the Philosophical Use of a Literary Form*, (Cambridge 1996); Charles L. Griswold, Jr., "E Pluribus Unum? On the Platonic 'Corpus'," *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999), and others, suggests that Plato's beliefs did *not* substantially develop over the course of his writing career, but that the dialogues together form a reasonably unified system. I shall return to the unitarian view towards the end of this paper.

22. For conflicting sources of motivation in the *Republic*, see esp. *Rep.* 435b–44b. The language of *Rep.* 440a–b—"don't we often notice in other cases that when appetite forces someone contrary to rational calculation, he reproaches himself and gets angry with that in him that's doing the forcing, so that of the two factions that are fighting a civil war, so to speak, spirit al-

lies itself with reason?"—is particularly close to that of our *Phaedrus* passage. For the possibility of backsliding even on the part of the best-intentioned and most informed individuals, consider what Socrates says here about the need to forswear poetry: "we'll behave like people who have fallen in love with someone but who force themselves to stay away from him, because they realize that their passion isn't beneficial . . . whenever we listen to it, we'll repeat the argument we have just now put forward like an incantation so as to preserve ourselves from slipping back into that childish passion for poetry which the majority of people have." (*Rep.* 607e–8a)

23. "No . . . tool makes anyone who picks it up a craftsman or champion unless he has acquired the requisite *knowledge* and has had sufficient *practice* . . . And doesn't it also require a person whose *nature* is suited to that way of life?" (*Rep.* 374d–e, my emphasis) Compare also *Meno* 70a, *Phdr.* 269d, and O'Brien (note 11), *passim*, esp. 95–96, 107, 146 n.27, 151.

24. "The *Phaedrus* . . . depends crucially on the notion of the divided soul, which Plato first introduced in the *Republic* and which accounts for the difficulty that lovers have in controlling their sexual appetites even after they have begun to realize that love is primarily directed not toward sex but toward philosophy. By contrast, the *Symposium* does not appeal to such a divided soul. An undivided soul, all of it always desiring what it considers best, is subject to no such conflicts. It cannot possibly be tempted by desires for the body once it has determined that the soul is more beautiful and therefore worthier of love. And according to the *Symposium*, lovers desire the higher objects of love as soon as they become aware of their existence," (Nehamas, note 11, 1999, 348).

See also Vlastos: "whereas Socrates had thought reason all-powerful this new tripartite model endows each of the three parts with independent dynamism: each is in principle autonomously motivating and may, therefore, successfully resist each of the other two" (note 8, 86); "If Socrates' assumptions are correct, what is necessary *and sufficient* for moral reformation is intellectual enlightenment. The reformer's job is then to make us see that to indulge bad appetites or passion would be damaging to our own happiness. If he can bring us to understand our good we shall be bound to pursue it: our own desire for the good will drive us to it; incontinence (*akrasia*)—doing the worse while knowing the better—will then be a psychic impossibility. Not so if the reformer were proceeding on Plato's tripartite analysis" (88).

And Michael Frede on the *Protagoras*: "If we find this highly intellectualistic account of the passions as judgments of some kind implausible, we should keep in mind that it is only Plato, in the *Republic*, who, precisely to explain how one can act against the interests of one's reason, for the first time introduces different parts of the soul, each with its own desires, allowing us to understand how irrational desire may overcome the dictates of desire and reason. Here in the *Protagoras*, Socrates seems to argue as if the soul were just reason" (note 13, xxx).

25. Vlastos has the *Symposium* immediately followed by the *Republic* which, in turn, is immediately followed by the *Phaedrus* (note 8), 47; the

Plato entry in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* claims that "the usual chronology for the middle period includes *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, in that order," David Bostock, "Plato," *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, (Oxford 1995), 683; Nehamas has *Symposium* and *Republic* separated only by *Phaedo* (note 11, 1998), 196 n.33; and other scholars (e.g., Leonard Brandwood, *A Word Index to Plato* [Leeds 1976], xvii) do likewise.

26. This is all the more salient given the fact that one of the main proponents of the developmental hypothesis, Gregory Vlastos, sees no difficulty in attributing *akrasia* (overcoming of reason by desire) to Alcibiades: "We know that the speaker is a highly acratist character" (note 8), 35. Vlastos writes this in an unrelated context, and no doubt fails to see the conflict this claim sets up with his general picture of the Platonic corpus.

Some scholars, like Dorothea Frede (note 12), 403, and Kenneth Dover, *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge 1980), 165, do in fact concede that Plato has, by the time of the *Symposium*, already adopted the tripartite psychology of the *Republic*. They do not, however, conclude from this that Alcibiades' speech and Socrates' speech stand in tension with one another: on the contrary, Frede's view is that "Alcibiades unwittingly echoes Diotima's claims" (410 n.230).

27. There are at least two, equally unsatisfying, explanations for the remarkable ease with which the lover scales his ladder. According to Irwin (note 12), 170–71, the ascent is a type of elenchus: in search of beauty, the lover tries out one hypothesis (as it were) after another, rejecting each until he hits on the right one. As Price correctly retorts, however, the ascent is driven by *attraction*, not dissatisfaction (note 12), 42; see also Joseph P. Lawrence, "Commentary on Patterson's 'The Ascent in Plato's Symposium'," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1991), 218. On Richard Patterson's account, 196, the lover never acquires a *new* desire but instead merely discovers what his old desire has, deep down, been all along: it was always in fact love of the Form of Beauty, but somehow it disguised itself as erotic desire, interest in laws, and such-like. This approach seems to me to conflict with the insistent rhetoric of *learning* (ta;kala;maqhmata, ekeinō to;maqhma, ekeinou tou kalou maqhma) in Diotima's recapitulation of the ascent (211c).

28. On Ilham Dilman's view, Alcibiades only flees Socrates because he does not understand what the latter has to offer him: "Unwillingly and unknowingly—these come to the same thing here" *Morality and the Inner Life: A Study in Plato's Gorgias* (London 1979), 41. "A person who sees Socrates as a piper has misunderstood the nature of his activity, and cannot benefit from it," concurs Barker (note 6), 188; "the structure of his [Alcibiades'] soul," he adds, "provides no basis for dialectical recollection" (188). Presumably the slave in *Meno* has the ability to recollect Forms—but not Alcibiades.

29. Jonathan Lear does recognize this as a serious problem: "Only those who *already* have a divine-erotic principle within them will be able to learn from Socrates' example, but they are the ones who don't really need him . . .

. The others Socrates leaves to their own devices" (note 16), 161. See also Dover (note 26), 164, Arieti (note 7), 110, and Rosen (note 7), 290, 301, 306. For a parallel case, consider what Irwin says about Callicles in the *Gorgias*. Here Socrates argues that being set straight is pleasurable. Why, then, is Callicles not enjoying his medicine? "For him pleasure and benefit do not go together, since his pleasures and inclinations are misguided," *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford 1979), 123. But Socrates has not been saying that *perfect* humans enjoy having their errors beaten out of them (surely perfect humans do not require such treatment!); he has been saying that *all* humans enjoy it. I might as well say that all humans enjoy being whipped as much as the Baron de Charlus, except those poor fools whose pleasures and inclinations are misguided.

30. Thus Dilman writes that "When Socrates says 'we will what is good' he does not purport to convey information about human beings . . . His remark is a grammatical one in the sense that it tells us something about his use of the word 'will'" (note 28), 39. Dilman adds (36) that Socrates "must know in himself the temptation to take the easy way out, to put oneself first, not to stick up for what is right in the face of adversity." Nothing (in the early dialogues at least) suggests anything of the sort, and plenty (even in the middle-period *Symposium*, both in the Ascent speech and in Alcibiades' encomium) suggests the reverse.

31. Socrates also converses, of course, with Diotima. But this conversation is merely reported (perhaps indeed fabricated) by Socrates, whereas the exchange with Agathon is presented as taking place in real time.

32. There may also be problems with claim (5), that all good things are beautiful. As Seth Benardete notes, "On the basis of the presumed identity of the beautiful and the good, Socrates had gotten Agathon to agree that eros is not the good; but among the traits Eros has . . . are several that are good without being attractive. He is tough, shoeless, and homeless," "On Plato's Symposium," *Plato's Symposium* (Chicago 2001), 193. One could also add that Socrates himself combines unparalleled virtue with a physical appearance that leaves something to be desired. Still, the Greek word **kalon** is notoriously ambiguous, and one could easily imagine a defense of (5) along the lines of a particular definition. The defense might end up being circular—good things are beautiful because whatever is beautiful [**kalon**] is *ipso facto* good—but I am going to resist pursuing it, since there are so many other, less equivocal problems with the Agathon elenchus.

33. "Pauline predication": as in "love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude . . ." (I Cor. 4–5). This is at least the way Vlastos uses the term "Pauline predication," which he borrowed from Sandra Peterson (see Nehamas note 11, 1999, 190 n.13).

34. Compare Nussbaum (note 16), 178. R. E. Allen is surprisingly pointed in his response to Nussbaum: "The White Queen, as a result of practice, sometimes believed six impossible things before breakfast. Perhaps you can too," *The Dialogues of Plato* (New Haven 1984), 2.101. Like most Plato scholars, Allen cannot countenance Socrates making a mistake—since

Socrates is, on his assumption, the mouthpiece for Plato. Hence Allen's rhetorical question: "If Plato were as slipshod in argument as this, why bother to read him?" 100. As soon as we understand that Plato may at times be deliberately making Socrates fail, I would answer, we may have all the more reason to "bother to read him."

35. See Dover (note 26), 135, and William S. Cobb, *The Symposium and The Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (Albany 1993), 70–71.

36. Compare the exchange between Socrates and the eponymous sophist in the *Protagoras*. As in the *Symposium*, Socrates assumes that if something is not *f*, then it is the opposite of *f*; Protagoras, however, pulls him up short.

Socrates: what are we going to say if he asks next, 'Isn't piety the sort of thing that is just, and isn't justice the sort of thing that is pious? . . . Is piety the sort of thing to be not just, and therefore unjust [μηδικαιον, α]λλ'ιαδικον], and justice impious? What are we going to say to him? Personally, I would answer . . . that justice is the same kind of thing as piety, and piety as justice . . .

Protagoras: It's not so absolutely clear a case to me, Socrates, as to make me grant that justice is pious, and piety just. It seems a distinction is in order here. . . . Justice does have some resemblance to piety. Anything at all resembles any other thing in some way. . . . But it's not right to call things [the same] because they resemble each other in some way, however slight, or to call them [different] because there is some slight point of dissimilarity. (*Prot.* 331a–e)

Vlastos calls Socrates' argument here—which he continues to make, in spite of Protagoras' rebuke—a "miserably lame duck, . . . deduced by the shadiest of logic," "Introduction," *Plato: Protagoras*, Benjamin Jowett, ed. (Indianapolis 1956), xxix.

37. Plato knows better about the existence of intermediary states (the *μεσον* or *μεταξύ*), as we can tell not only from the Diotima speech but also from *Gorg.* 467e, *Phd.* 89e–90a, *Rep.* 583c, and elsewhere. Compare O'Brien (note 11), 132.

38. It could perhaps be objected that Socrates has previously claimed that love lacks *all* beautiful things, which would necessarily include those beautiful things which are also good; see M. C. Stokes, *Plato's Socratic Conversations: Drama and Dialectic in Three Dialogues* (Baltimore 1986), 144. That may be so, but this expansion does not reappear in Socrates' statement of the syllogism (it begins "if Love needs beautiful things," not "if Love needs *all* beautiful things"). As we have seen, Socrates is not entitled to the claim that love lacks all beautiful things without exception. Claim (6) is thus invalidated whether or not we trick out the syllogism with friendly amendments.

39. M. A. Stewart, "Plato's Sophistry," *The Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* (1977), claims, 21 *et passim*, that Plato did not understand fallacy. See Rosamund Kent Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy*, vol. 48 (New York 1962) *passim*, and "Plato's Sophistry," *The Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* (1977), 50; Michael Frede, "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, Supplementary Volume* (1992); and Waterfield, "Introduction to the *Euthydemus*," *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues* (London 1987), 302, for a more robust approach

to fallacy in the Platonic corpus. And note that Nehamas (note 8), xvi, considers the Agathon elenchus a *parody* of Socratic dialectic. (His reasons, mind you, differ from mine, and he views the Ascent speech as unironized Platonic doctrine. See Nehamas [note 8], xiii.)

40. Incredibly, O'Brien finds a way to extricate Socrates even from this crashing error. Protagoras, he writes, did not agree merely that courageous people are confident, but that courageous people are *the* confident [τούτῳ γάρραλευν-]; "this slip," he adds, "allows us to acquit Socrates of the fallacy charged to him," (note 11), 134. (Strangely enough, one doesn't find volunteers willing to embark on a similar rescue mission for Euthyphro.) Taking a different tack, Vlastos proposes a retranslation: instead of "the wisest are the most confident and the most confident are the most courageous," he offers "[the wisest are the most confident] and being most confident are also bravest" (note 36), xxxiii n.34. This meaning is not entirely excluded by the Greek, but it requires us to believe that Socrates has suddenly abandoned a rather careful, copula-rich style for something uttered "hastily and not as lucidly as he should have" (*ibid.*). Plato is not recording an actual conversation, and he has full liberty to make Socrates speak with as little haste as he pleases. Why does he allow Socrates to give even the *impression* of having failed to distribute the middle? And why, when Protagoras has pulled Socrates up on his mistake, does he not have the latter protest his innocence?

41. "Strictly speaking, the conclusion does not follow; love might possess present beauty and desire future beauty," writes Warner (note 6), 169, but this "would be grotesque," 170.

42. According to Price (note 12), 18, Socrates' view is not that love lacks *all* beauty but only that it lacks *some* beauty, namely the *eternal* variety. This reading has the unfortunate disadvantage of conflicting with what Socrates actually says. Allen is the one who tells us that "the *lover* is lacking, ugly in as much as he's a lover." (1984, 2.44) And Warner's is the view about the oneness of beauty (170).

43. Thus R. E. Allen (note 34), 2.43: "Socrates further assumes that Eros is always love of the beautiful, or the good—the two terms are here used interchangeably . . . he is entitled to this assumption: Agathon had said that ' . . . there is no love of the ugly.' It follows that, since Eros is love of what it lacks, it cannot be beautiful or good . . . Agathon is refuted." Actually, it does not follow, since (i) Eros could desire continued possession of something it already has, and (ii) nothing Agathon says entitles Socrates to assume that the beautiful and the good may be used interchangeably. M. C. Stokes gives a fuller account of how Socrates could be seen to derive all necessary premises from Agathon's speech, adding that Agathon clearly considers Eros to be eternally beautiful (note 38), 127–28. On Stokes' view, this disqualifies the continued-possession counter. If, however, one really wished to pursue this increasingly fantastical line of argument, one could object that Agathon says nothing about the relevant *mental states* of Eros. Perhaps Eros could desire his future beauty, unaware that it is assured.

44. Thus Benardete, whom we saw above raising problems for the iden-

tification of beauty and goodness, nonetheless feels that Agathon has been “brought to see his error” (note 32), 180. And Arieti, who takes a rather deflationary attitude towards Socrates’ speech, classing it alongside all the other speeches as a reflection on its author rather than on the truth (note 7), 105–7, considers dialectic—as instantiated, here, by the exchange between Socrates and Agathon—to be the antidote to all this egotism, 111.

45. Thus Robert Lloyd Mitchell, *A Reading of Plato’s Symposium* (Lanham 1993), 109, “What did this thing was the truth.” See also Dorothea Frede (note 12), 399 n.5, and Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford 1995), 161. Contrast, however, Daniel Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysus: A Commentary of Plato’s Symposium* (Albany 1993), 67: “I see no means of contradicting you’ . . . The means were there, but he [Agathon] missed them.”

46. Price, for one, blames Diotima for some of the shortcomings in the speech: “living one’s life and transmitting it are processes similar in kind. Plato could better her in making that out” (note 12), 35. There has been some debate as to whether Diotima’s biological sex is designed, in a Greek context, to cast doubt on her claims. See David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York 1990), ch. 6.

47. Irwin notes (note 29), 237, that the Athenians did not come as close to inflicting the death penalty as Socrates suggests; nor did Pericles build ships and walls in order to please the people—on the contrary, the people had to be *forced* to accept these measures (Thucydides 1:90:3, Herodotus 7:144:1–2). Socrates’ story, Irwin concludes, “is a perversion of the historical conditions,” 235. It is of course impossible to know what Plato’s own view of Pericles was, but we can at least note that his Socrates is not always quite so critical. In the *Meno* (99b–c), Socrates appears to accept that Pericles had talent, claiming merely that he lacked *wisdom* (compare Merlan 413). And in the *Protagoras* (319e–20a), Socrates goes so far as to grant Pericles wisdom, claiming merely that he lacked the ability to transmit it to his children. Ironically, Socrates himself was, in real life, equally incapable of passing his wisdom on to his children (Nehamas [note 11, 1999], 12–13). There appear to be no end of Pericles ironies in Plato.

48. We are in fact reminded of Socrates’ execution much earlier in the dialogue, when Socrates says that it is better to be executed unjustly than to execute someone unjustly (469b), and then again when Callicles first brings up the possibility that Socrates will be unable to defend himself if someone accuses him wrongly (486a–b; 511a–b, 521b). Readers of the dialogue tend to note (a) that it contains numerous allusions to the death of Socrates (Friedländer [note 5], 2.261, Allen [note 20], 189, Irwin [note 29], 240), (b) that Socrates “proves” Pericles a bad politician (Friedländer 2.270, Irwin 1979:233–35), and (c) that Socrates claims to be the one true politician in Athens (Friedländer, 2.271, Allen, 189, Irwin, 241). They do not draw the conclusion that Socrates must be just as bad a politician as Pericles, or Pericles just as good as Socrates. (Irwin argues, 240, that Socrates claims only to be *trying* to improve his fellows, and not *actually* improving them; but

surely Pericles would claim exactly the same.)

Nehamas forms a rare exception: “does this argument not apply even more directly to Socrates himself,” he asks, since Socrates “was not nearly but actually and horribly executed by his own countrymen?” (note 11, 1999), 48. Still, even Nehamas does not see Platonic irony at work: “In the *Gorgias*, more radically and perhaps more as Plato’s own spokesman, Socrates is made to deny that the great statesmen even possessed *areté* themselves since, he argues, they seem to have left the citizens actually worse than they found them when they came to power” (38, my emphasis).

49. There may perhaps be some Socratic irony here, as well as Platonic irony. For Socrates is, and must surely know himself to be, a master rhetorician. He claims here that if taken to court on charges of corrupting the youth, “I won’t be able to say . . . ‘Yes, I say and do all these things in the interest of justice, my “honored judges”’—to use that expression you people use—nor anything else.” (522b–c) The *Apology*, of course, shows Socrates using just such language in his defense. (As the *Apology* portrays it, the trial’s outcome has nothing to do with his abilities as a speaker, even if it may have something to do with what he chooses to say.)

50. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates claims that he has the capacity, like a moral weatherproof, to endow people with protection against doing wrong: “if someone were to . . . prove that I am unable to provide *this* protection for myself or for anyone else, I would feel shame at being refuted” (*Gorg.* 522d). On this basis, surely Socrates stands “refuted.” Could we not bring forward Alcibiades as an example of someone for whom Socrates has failed to provide the said protection? Indeed, as Nehamas has noted (note 11, 1999), 70–71, 102, Socrates never improves *anyone* in the elenctic dialogues. Could we not, then, turn Socrates’ question to Callicles around and ask “Well now, has Socrates ever improved any of the citizens? Is there anyone who . . . because of Socrates has turned out admirable and good?” (515a, paraphrased).

51. The conventional wisdom about Plato thus manifests a strange asymmetry. Just as long as we have the *Symposium* in our hands, we are supposed to regard Alcibiades as exonerating Socrates, who cannot be held accountable for the behavior of those who associate with him. As soon as we pick up the *Gorgias*, however, we are told to look down with scorn upon the sophists, who disclaim responsibility for their disciples.

52. Socrates: “the whole of Greece has not noticed for forty years that Protagoras corrupts those who frequent him . . . to this very day his reputation has stood high; and not only Protagoras but a great many others” (*Meno* 91d–e).

53. Thus Socrates to Callicles: “you should now be making yourself as much like the Athenian people as possible if you expect to endear yourself to them and have great power in the city. . . . You mustn’t be their imitator but be naturally like them in your own person if you expect to produce any genuine result toward winning the friendship of the Athenian people . . . For each group of people takes delight in speeches that are given in its own character, and resents those given in an alien manner” (513a–c).

54. R. E. Allen offers a sober, this-worldly, non-question-begging explanation for the view that justice is good for the just. "To satisfy our own needs we must rely on our fellows," he writes, "and if we are to rely on our fellows, we must aim at their good as well as, and as part of, our own" (note 34), 227. This may very well be true of real life, but it is probably not what Plato's Socrates has in mind. In the *Republic*, after all, Socrates states that "a decent person is most self-sufficient in living well and, above all others, has the least need of anyone else" (*Rep.* 387d).

55. Rhetoric, as Gorgias presents it, is "concerned with those matters that are just *and unjust*" (454b, my emphasis). If, therefore, orators successfully taught their charges the meaning of justice, they would also successfully teach them the meaning of injustice.

56. A number of Platonic dialogues feature the suspicion that those who are capable of great virtue are capable of equally great evil. "Whenever someone is a clever guardian, then, he is also a clever thief. . . . If a just person is clever at guarding money, therefore, he must also be clever at stealing it" (*Rep.* 334a); "the more able and expert a mind is, the better it is, and more capable, whatever the activity, of acting both well and badly" (*HMin* 375e–6a); "moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence . . . at times harm us, at other times benefit us" (*Meno* 88b; compare *Rep.* 491a–b, *Rep.* 518e–9a, *Euthyd.* 281d–e).

57. "A person trained in oratory (*ῥητορικός*) *knows* what is just. Thus, he is just, must act justly, and cannot do wrong. Here Socrates shows that Gorgias is caught in a contradiction." (Friedländer [note 5], 2.250) R. E. Allen, who recognizes that there are serious problems with Socrates' argument (note 20), 195, nonetheless feels that it would be sufficient for Socrates to say that rhetoric is not *reliably* good, and hence that Socrates has effectively won the debate: "Gorgias in fact tripped over the joint claims that rhetoric is an art dealing with issues of right and wrong and yet morally neutral," 195–6. This weaker criticism of rhetoric would, however, *not* be sufficient to place Gorgias in a contradiction. For there is no conflict between (1) rhetoric failing to make all students good and (2) some students not being good; nor, more generally, is it impossible for a craft (1) to deal with issues of right and wrong and (2) to remain itself morally neutral. That is what the legal profession is for.

58. Irwin is under no illusions about the "refutation" of Gorgias. "The 'disharmony' is between Gorgias' views and Socrates' views, not internal to Gorgias' views," he writes (note 29), 128; after all, "a shepherd does not make his sheep into shepherds," 214. But then, since he has no room for Platonic irony—if Socrates believes P, he clearly feels, then Plato must believe P too—Irwin is left in something of a quandary. He can only conclude that "the *G[orgias]* makes claims inconsistent with the Socratic Paradox [that virtue is knowledge and vice ignorance] But we have seen that the *G[orgias]* does not explicitly reject the Socratic Paradox," 222. (When he says "the *Gorgias* does not explicitly reject the Socratic Paradox," he presumably means that *Socrates* does not explicitly reject the Socratic Paradox; this, of course, is not the same thing at all.) Indeed, in a later work, *Plato's*

Ethics (New York 1995), Irwin goes so far as to claim that “Plato shows [in the *Gorgias*] why the Socratic view is more difficult to reject than we might at first have thought,” 99.

59. “I would see the charge of inconsistency at 457e as an example of Socratic irony,” Charles H. Kahn, “Drama and Dialectic in Plato’s *Gorgias*,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), 84. While Kahn admits that Socrates’ *argument* for the Socratic Paradox is “surprisingly weak,” 82, he clearly believes that we are supposed to accept the Paradox itself, 110. As I have been attempting to show, however, the Pericles section seems to me to constitute decisive evidence that Plato himself rejects it.

60. Again, see John Cooper, who straightforwardly acknowledges that Socrates “appeals to considerations he has given Gorgias no reason at all to accept,” “Socrates and Plato in Plato’s *Gorgias*,” *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton 1999), 44 n.20.

61. Lanier Anderson has dubbed this phenomenon “inverse akrasia.” See R. Lanier Anderson & Joshua Landy, “Philosophy as Self-Fashioning: Alexander Nehamas’ Art of Living,” *Diacritics* 31 (2001), 44 n.26. Compare Rosen on Alcibiades: “Alcibiades is divided against himself,” writes Rosen (note 7), 290; “despite the magnitude of his ambition he is never completely and genuinely possessed by it.” Still, Rosen ultimately appears to feel (like so many others) that Alcibiades lacks knowledge, rather than the strength to do what he wants, 300.

62. Critical responses to the two dialogues also bear striking similarities. Each dialogue is usually taken to constitute “Plato’s defense of Socrates, his life, his methods and his doctrines, against various challenges,” Irwin (note 29), 4; and in either case, scholars tend to assume *both* (1) that it is the interlocutor’s fault (that is, the fault of Alcibiades or Callicles) if, succumbing to the temptation of politics, he fails to heed Socrates *and* (2) that there is no such thing as temptation—even though (1) and (2) are mutually exclusive. Friedländer makes both claims on the same page (note 5), 2.266: “If pleasures may be both good and bad, it is clear that we must desire those that are good. Once we know the difference between good and pleasure, there can be no doubt as to which should rule”; “he [Callicles] concedes that there is something in what Socrates is saying when the latter demonstrates the superiority of the just life . . . But Kallikles cannot appropriate this conclusion for his own life, and Socrates knows why: love of the demos (*οἰθημου εἶψω*) lures him, counteracting the influence of Socrates.”

63. At times in the *Gorgias*, Socrates does appear to allow for the existence of non-rational, good-independent desires (Irwin [note 29], 7, 190–91, 195, 221; Cooper [note 60], 59)—but somehow without noticing that he is doing so, or at least without noticing the insuperable conflict this sets up in his belief system. As Irwin puts it (note 58), 218, “Socrates’ previous argument against the value of rhetoric assumed the truth of the Socratic Paradox. The defense of temperance and continence assumes the falsity of the Paradox. The conclusions of these two main lines of argument in the dialogue are never satisfactorily reconciled.” Should we say, as Plato scholars have a way of doing in other circumstances, that Socrates is ex-

pressing his own view when he denies the existence of good-independent desires, and merely rehearsing the view of his interlocutor (Callicles) when he does not? Would it be more charitable to assume this or to acknowledge that, in a dialogue that witnesses Socrates proudly proclaiming “what philosophy says always stays the same” (482a), he starts out in position A, moves to not-A, and returns again without any warning (at 509d; see Irwin [note 58], 229) to A?

Gerasimos Santas, who takes the Socratic paradoxes as expressions of Plato’s own beliefs in the “earlier dialogues” (“The Socratic Paradoxes,” *Philosophical Review* 73 (1964), 147)—including the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias* and the *Meno*—believes he can help out with a slight qualification. “I suggest,” he writes, “that Plato meant that if a man has knowledge of what is virtuous and also knowledge that it is better for one to do what is virtuous, then he will always... behave virtuously.” (159) This qualification ostensibly rescues Plato from absurdity, since the revised paradox allows for cases in which people commit evil acts while knowing they are wrong. It also ostensibly “removes . . . the extreme intellectualism” from the view. And it is ostensibly in keeping, finally, with the textual evidence, since the idea “that knowledge that an action is just . . . is sufficient for doing it” cannot be derived “from Platonic doctrines.” (161)

The argument is odd for numerous reasons. First, “that knowledge that an action is just . . . is sufficient for doing it” is exactly what Socrates appears to be arguing at *Prot.* 358c (which Santas, recall, classifies as a “Platonic doctrine”). Socrates is not making the weaker claim provided for him by Santas, but instead this stronger claim. Secondly, Santas’ amendment does not remove the intellectualism: all it does is to add a further piece of knowledge to the set of necessary—and sufficient—conditions for virtuous action. The paradox remains as problematic as before. Thus (thirdly), even if I know both that an action is bad and that bad things harm me, I may still choose to do it. As Santas himself admits, without seeing the extent of the damage to his argument, it may be a mistake for “Plato” to speak “as if there is no stronger desire or passion than this central desire for things that are good for one” (163).

64. Once again, compare Cooper (note 60), 32: “Callicles conspicuously employs ideas . . . which depart from those Socrates himself relies on in other Socratic dialogues and indeed earlier in this one. Furthermore, these ideas line up very closely with the quite different ideas on these matters espoused by the Socrates of the *Republic*. . . . I believe that we should see Plato in the *Gorgias* as recognizing and drawing attention to weaknesses—doubtful points—in the Socratic moral psychology . . . Thus an important part of the philosophical communication conveyed by the author to his readers in this dialogue . . . is that there *are* those weaknesses, those doubtful points, and that they *do* demand attention. So Socrates is not speaking simply and straightforwardly as Plato’s mouthpiece in this dialogue.”

65. According to Nicholas White, “Rational Prudence in Plato’s *Gorgias*,” *Platonic Investigations*, Ed. Dominic J. O’Meara (Washington 1986), 140, 148, et passim; compare to some extent Irwin (note 29), 205–6), Callicles’ mistake is that he does not always or fully appreciate the need for

"rational prudence." If he genuinely wishes to maximize the amount of pleasure he has over the course of his life, then he will need to *plan*, sacrificing present pleasures for the sake of larger future satisfactions; it will not do to indulge in "whatever he may have an appetite for at the time" (492a). There is thus a conflict in his belief system, and it is this conflict that Socrates sets out to expose. But even if rational planning really is what Socrates has in mind—and Cooper, for one, thinks it is not (note 60), 55n41, 57n44—it is surely noteworthy that Pericles stands as an exemplar of the skill. Pericles, an orator, knows very well which short-term interests should be subordinated to which long-term gains, and also advocates the power required to implement such decisions. What need, then, for philosopher-kings?

66. That is, it already assumes that rhetoric is impotent. For the view that a politician has to resemble the majority in order to receive its vote depends on the unsubstantiated premise that successful *deception* of the majority (what Socrates here calls "imitation") is impossible. Callicles has absolutely no reason to accept such a premise ("I'm not really convinced by you," he retorts at 513c), and neither do we. It is notoriously feasible to rule a population by means of trickery; indeed the Socrates of Plato's *Republic*, who is quite comfortable with the "noble lie," proposes nothing different (414b–c, 459c–d). All of this does not, however, prevent Irwin from awarding victory to Socrates. "Callicles is embarrassed," he writes, "when he has to face the consequences of his own position, which contradict his own ideals" (note 29), 240; "Plato suggests that Callicles cannot maintain his self-respect; his chosen way of achieving his goals makes him depend on the public opinion of the masses he despises" (note 29), 179.

67. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates appears to assume that all pleasure derives from the mere cessation of pain (hence his strange argument at 496d–e). In the *Republic*, by contrast, Socrates enjoins Glaucon to "take a look at the pleasures that don't come out of pains, so that you won't suppose in their case also that it is the nature of pleasure to be the cessation of pain or of pain to be the cessation of pleasure" (*Rep.* 584b). Should we really blame Callicles for characterizing Socrates' picture as "nonsense" (494d)? (On this point, see Irwin [note 29], 192, 196.)

68. Polus is careful, at 474c–d, to distinguish between the admirable (**to; kalon**, with its opposite **to; aijsrown**) and the beneficial (**to; agaqon**, with its opposite **to; kakon**). Socrates will effectively run the two together, arguing that the admirable thing to do just so happens also to be what is most beneficial for the agent.

69. Aristotle allows not just for akrasia but even for positive perversity: "One person pursues excesses of things because they are excesses and because he decides on it, for themselves and not for some further result." (EN 1150a18–22).

The idea that we always desire things that are actually good for us could, as Kahn points out (note 59), 115; (note 21) 140, be a fallacy which recent philosophers refer to under the name "opaque context": from (1) I want what is good for me and (2) what is good for me turns out to be X, it does

not follow that (3) I want X. To take an analogous example, (1) Oedipus deliberately killed a man at a crossroads, and (2) that man turned out to be his father, but we cannot legitimately conclude that (3) Oedipus deliberately killed his father. (Unless, of course, we are irredeemable Freudians.)

70. Some scholars, like Allen, are entirely satisfied with Socrates' argument here: "if *a* is more ugly or shameful than *b*, *a* surpasses *b* either in pain or in evil. Refutation follows from this lemma as of course" (note 34, 205). Others, however, have seen the problem. "When Polus said that doing wrong was less admirable, he clearly meant that it was less *wfelimon* [useful] *for the community*, and from this it does not immediately follow that it is less *wfelimon for the agent*" (E. R. Dodds, *Gorgias. A Revised. Text with Introduction and Commentary* [Oxford 1959], 249); "useful *to whom*? Why precisely to the person punished, and not rather to society, the protection of which, after all, is one of the uncontested ends of punishment?" (Gomperz [note 21], 347; see also Vlastos [note 8], 144; Mary Margaret Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment* (Berkeley 1981), 180, 241, 244; and even Kahn [note 59], 117).

Gomperz is probably the only one who takes Plato to be deliberately placing fallacious arguments in Socrates' mouth. Dodds provides Socrates with two incompatible alibis: (1) neither he nor Plato could have known this was a fallacy, given that "when the *Gorgias* was written the study of logic was still in its earliest infancy"; (2) Socrates is "repay[ing] the Sophists in their own coin" (Dodds, 249). Similarly, Vlastos believes (1) that Plato—and *a fortiori* Socrates—"is himself unaware of the fallacy," 148, and (2) that "Socrates giv[es] Polus not less than he deserves," 156.

71. I leave aside here the rather important caveat that in an imperfect society—and which society is not?—punishment cannot be relied on to benefit the criminal. "If . . . the system in the present society is not just," notes Irwin (note 29), 163, "then Polus has no good reason to accept punishment in present society if he can help it." (See also Dodds (note 70), 254, Mackenzie 181–82.) Once again, the context surely forces us to consider Socrates' own case, and wonder whether his execution did him, personally, any good.

72. R. E. Allen attempts to extricate Socrates from the contradiction: "punishment, if it is imposed justly, is imposed . . . for the sake of the soul of the wrongdoer—or if he is beyond cure, *for his own sake and* that of his fellows." (note 20), 208, my emphasis. But Socrates says only that incurables are punished for the sake of others, not that they are also punished for their own sake. Compare Dodds (note 70), 254.

73. Vlastos notes (note 8), 146, 278, 304, that Socrates' argument here depends on the "Socratic fallacy" and is therefore ineffectual against Polus; Charles Kahn agrees that it is "a weak and tricky argument" (note 59), 111; and Irwin, who notes that Isocrates dismissed the "miserable Archelaus" line as a mere philosopher's paradox, sums up as follows: "he [Socrates] has not proved that the tyrant or rhetor does not know what is good for him, or that I would not become a tyrant or rhetor if I knew what was good for me" (note 29), 150, 146.

Friedländer, mind you, is quite happy to speak of “the defeat of Polus” (note 5), II:256, and O’Brien is just as happy to speak of the “inexorable logic” (note 11, 90), which proves that “wickedness involves the greatest injury to the wicked” and that “to suffer punishment for injustice is actually a benefit” (89). Some are barely able to contain their excitement at “the brilliant 466a–468e” (Terry Penner, “Socrates on the Impossibility of Belief-Relative Sciences,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 3 [1987], 301), “Socrates’ most effective argument” (Penner, 313). “If ever man was laid by the heels in argument, it was Polus,” adds an exuberant Allen (note 20), 199.

74. Here Socrates has mysteriously metamorphosed into Euthyphro. Compare Friedländer: “How far we are moving in a paradoxical world is shown by the conclusion (480c) that we should accuse ourselves and relatives or friends, to uncover their offenses—yet we know how the author of the *Euthyphro* condemned the charge brought by a son against his father when this actually happened before a court in Athens” (note 5, 2.258). No paradoxicality, however, for Allen, who is quite taken with the idea that “the usefulness of rhetoric must consist in obtaining punishment for ourselves, our family, or our country,” (note 20, 206). “Fallacy,” he insists, “is often in the eye of the beholder” (206).

75. Socrates specifies that the enemy has not done anything unjust to the person in question (480e). And even if he had, Socrates might very well consider it an act of injustice to do any kind of harm to his soul. In the *Republic*, his counterpart is adamant that “it isn’t the function of a just person to harm a friend or anyone else,” enemies included (335d, my emphasis); the *Crito* Socrates, similarly, insists that one must not, “when wronged, inflict wrong in return, as the majority believe, since one must never do wrong” (49b).

76. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates insists repeatedly that there be no long speeches (448d, 449b, 461d, and perhaps 447b–c). Yet he himself makes two long speeches, not just the myth at the end but also the classification of crafts and knacks at 464b–6a. In both cases, he blames his interlocutor: “I deserve to be forgiven, though, for when I made my statements short you didn’t understand” (465e, to Polus); “You’ve made me deliver a real popular harangue, Callicles, because you aren’t willing to answer.” (519d) Friedländer sees no problem here, finding it merely “amusing” that Socrates gives a lecture right after criticizing Polus for so doing (note 5), 2.252. (Oddly, Friedländer also believes that “Socrates is incapable of delivering speeches,” 1.155!) Cooper, however, notes the conflict (note 60, 42 n.17). And Nehamas (note 11, 1999, 96), points out that a similar thing happens in the *Protagoras*. After hearing a few remarks totaling less than a Stephanus page (334a–c), Socrates complains to Protagoras that “if someone speaks to me at length I tend to forget the subject of the speech,” adding “I don’t have the ability to make those long speeches: I only wish I did” (334c–d, 335c). He then goes on, at 342a–347a, to make a five-page peroration—ironically enough, about “laconic brevity” (343a).

77. This in contrast to *Xenophon’s* Socrates, who “is so innocuous that

Kierkegaard wondered why the Athenians would have ever been tempted to put such a man to death," Nehamas (note 11 1998), 107; see also 209 n.68, and Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates* (Princeton 1992), 15–16. Irwin acknowledges the animus against Callicles—"Plato takes a rather unattractively malicious pleasure in depicting the incompetence of the unjust and unphilosophical man . . . facing the life after death" (note 29), 248—but attributes it, for some reason, to Plato. And Vlastos finds similar animus in the *Protagoras*: Socrates "is not a wholly attractive figure in this dialogue," he writes; "his handling of Protagoras is merciless, if not cruel" (note 36, xxiv).

78. Irwin does notice many a problem in Socrates' argumentation, but sees these as Plato's own mistakes, later to be corrected. He concludes his analysis by saying that "the argument of the *G[orgias]* should be studied both for its own sake and as a first attempt at the task attempted again in the *R[epublic]*" (note 29, 250). Nowhere does he countenance the possibility that Plato might *already* know, say, that an individual talented at guarding will also be talented at stealing, and that Plato deliberately withholds such knowledge from his literary character.

79. See Cooper (note 60), 52 n.32. The dialogue ends with Socrates saying "let's not follow the [way of life] that you *believe in* and *call on* me to follow. For that one is worthless, Callicles" (527e, my emphasis). Even before this, Socrates' failure to bludgeon his opponent into submission has been clear. At a certain point, Callicles begins humoring Socrates, just giving him the answers he wants (497a–c, 505c, 509e–10a, 514a, 516b); then Callicles stops answering altogether, and Socrates starts answering *himself*, in what appears to be almost a parody of the elenchus (note especially Socrates' amusing concession that "if my opponent has a point, I'll be the first to concede it" [506a]); finally, Socrates delivers his immense speech about the afterlife, without any help even from his alter ego. A similar thing happens in the *Protagoras* (360e), when the title character decides merely to placate Socrates, rather than giving him a serious response.

80. The most powerful objection comes from McKim and Kahn, who brilliantly hypothesize (Richard McKim, "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed. [New York 1988], passim; Kahn [note 21], 138) that the very shame felt by each of the three interlocutors betrays an unacknowledged adherence to virtue. Still, Kahn's conclusion only follows if the interlocutors are feeling what we would now call *guilt*, as against shame proper. A fifth- or fourth-century Athenian might well feel ashamed if he spent all of his life philosophizing, turned his friends in to the authorities, or resisted taking revenge when harmed; such shame would presumably not constitute evidence of his fitness for Socratic excellence. And even if Gorgias and Polus do feel the right kind of shame, Callicles succumbs to something else, namely a pair of arguments that are probably the weakest in the entire dialogue.

The first of the two is particularly egregious: "Do you observe the result, that when you say that a thirsty person drinks, you're saying that a person who's in pain [because thirsty] simultaneously feels enjoyment [because

drinking]? . . . But you say that it's impossible for a person who's doing well to be doing badly at the same time. . . . So, feeling enjoyment isn't the same as doing well, and being in pain isn't the same as doing badly." (496e–7a) This is hardly a cast-iron proof, since all Callicles needs is a simple distinction. As Irwin notes, "if I am healthy and sick, I am healthy in one part . . . and sick in another. Why might we not also say that I enjoy in one part and feel pain in another?" (note 29), 202. And after all, why should it be any more possible to feel pain and pleasure simultaneously than to be doing well and doing badly simultaneously?

It will not do to explain away the situation (*à la* Stewart) as a lacuna in ancient Greek logic. For when it suits him, Plato is perfectly happy to have Socrates make all the necessary distinctions: "If someone said that a person who is standing still but moving his hands and head is moving and standing still at the same time, we wouldn't consider, I think, that he ought to put it like that. What he ought to say is that one part of the person is standing still and another part is moving." (*Rep.* 436c; compare *Th.* 165c–d). And in the *Euthydemus*, Plato is clearly satirizing the sophists who refuse to do so (see e.g., 296a–b, and Waterfield, who notes [note 39], 302, that "throughout the dialogues, Socrates is made to commit fallacies, often ones which are scarcely less blatant than some of Euthydemus' and Dionysodorus', and often the same ones that these two sophists commit"). It will also not do to appeal (*à la* White [note 65], 151) to Socratic irony. Instead we have to recognize that Socrates is here deploying a sophist's trick in order to browbeat his opponent into making an unforced concession.

81. For "incommensurability," see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame 1990). Dilman admits that Socrates cannot convince Polus without begging the question; an interlocutor will not accept Socrates' premises, in other words, unless he already believes that goodness is good for the agent (note 28, 35). Compare Griswold on the *Protagoras*: "The life of self-governance through philosophical reason is founded on commitments about value one resolutely insists upon for oneself and others, but could not fully justify rationally to someone not disposed at the outset to accept those commitments, however intelligent and discursive that interlocutor might be"; "Socrates cannot, through force of argument alone, justify to someone his own stance about what fundamentally matters unless his interlocutor is already disposed to Socrates' base line view of what matters" (Charles L. Griswold, Jr., "Relying on Your Own Voice: An Unsettling Rivalry of Moral Ideals in Plato's *Protagoras*," *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 [1999], 306–7, 305). For his part, Irwin concedes that any argument against the existence of *akrasia* is question-begging—unless, that is, it is directed to a hedonist (note 12, 105). Accordingly, Irwin considers Callicles to be "beaten" (note 29, 206).

82. Thus Irwin: "Socrates replies that even the toughest interlocutor, Callicles, must find himself admitting, even reluctantly, the truth of Socrates' views. Agreement between Socrates and Callicles will show that Socrates' beliefs are inescapable for any rational person" (note 29, 4). And for all his reservations on specific points, Irwin does not hesitate to conclude that

overall Socrates is right, and that “Callicles . . . has been beaten” (206). Cooper, by contrast, adamantly insists that “Socrates has not in fact refuted Callicles” (note 60, 73–74). Socrates, he writes, “evidently thinks that these arguments are sufficient to show that the life to which Callicles urges him is no good at all. . . . But, from what Plato writes in preparing and presenting both sides of the dispute, the reader should infer that Plato himself does not agree” (68). Cooper shows (73) that Callicles could maintain his hedonism even while accepting (a) the concomitance of pleasure and pain and even (b) a distinction between good and bad pleasures; Cooper goes so far as to claim—a far cry from Irwin and Allen!—that “Callicles’ ideal is quite an attractive one” (56 n.41).

83. Note also that the quest for elenctic certainty requires good faith on the part of all discussants: “you’d no longer be adequately inquiring into the truth of the matter with me,” Socrates chides Callicles, “if you speak contrary to what you think” (*Gorg.* 495a). Such a quest is incompatible, therefore, with Socratic irony. Compare Saunders: “Socrates insists that the interlocutor must himself believe in his answer . . . Hence if Socrates himself commits a fallacy, it is presumably not deliberate” (31, 31 n.2). And Vlastos: “Could we be expected to think of Socrates as ‘examining’ Polus . . . and ‘examining’ himself thereby . . . by fooling his opponent? Resorting to deception in that procedure would be . . . ruining whatever hope Socrates might have had of giving to him or getting from him this kind of help” (note 8, 147; see also 43, 134). And also Nehamas: “If the results of the elenchus . . . are to be true, then they must be reached on the basis of beliefs that are not only sincerely held but that are also themselves true” (note 11, 1999, 66).

84. See Vlastos (note 36), xxviii–xxx, and also xxxix (“anyone who could excogitate by pure deduction a fact of human nature would have to be more than a master of argument—he would have to be a wizard”). Vlastos assumes, however, that the mistake must be *Plato’s*; it is, after all, the “grand methodological hypothesis” of Vlastos’ work that “in any given dialogue Plato allows the persona of Socrates only what he (Plato), at the time, considers true” (note 8, 117, 117 n.50). On Vlastos’ account (note 8, 113–14), and also on Nehamas’ (note 11, 1999, 65–66; though see also page xix), the *Gorgias*-period Plato holds (1) that everyone possesses a stock of true moral beliefs somewhere within his or her soul, (2) that only this set is internally coherent, and (3) that refutation will accordingly leave none but the true beliefs standing. It is only around the time of the *Meno*, where Socrates is able to argue an untutored slave into retracting hypotheses but not into offering better ones, that Plato changes his mind, 119. One cannot help thinking that if these were actually Plato’s opinions, the *Gorgias*—where Gorgias and Polus both pick the wrong view to reject, and Callicles refuses to be convinced—would be a strange way of putting them on display.

85. I have focused here on the claims we are *not* supposed to accept in Plato’s dialogues, and have avoided taking a position on what exactly is supposed to replace them. Some—like Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher’s Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato* (New York

1973), 17–18, Jaeger (qtd. O'Brien [note 11], 144), Brandis (quoted, Klein [note 21], 8), and O'Brien, 109–10—have argued that the truth is always there to be read between the lines, making each dialogue a riddle with a ready answer. Others have suggested that the answer, an “esoteric doctrine,” needs to be provided separately and privately by Plato. A third group holds that there *are* no answers, and that Plato puts all certainties into question; one function of Platonic irony would precisely be that of allowing the author to distance himself from his own (half-)beliefs (see Rowe 88–9, M. Frede 214–15, Philip Merlan, “Form and Content in Plato’s Philosophy,” *Journal of History of Ideas* 8 [1947], 423–24, Rosen [note 7], xxi, Kahn [note 21], 388, Charles L. Griswold, Jr., *Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Phaedrus* [New Haven 1986], 248 n.27, and Griswold [note 21], 394). Finally there are those (including Friedländer [note 5], 1.169–70, Lawrence [note 27], 222, and D. Anderson [note 45], 93–94), who feel that absolute knowledge is possible, but that it does not take conceptual form. As a result, it could never be delivered directly through the writings, reconstructed on the basis of clues found therein, or even communicated in private. Instead, this knowledge takes the form of a *revelation*; all else, all the training in dialectic, is just preparation, just a way to make the soul ready to receive this life-transforming vision.

86. On the same basis, the *Cambridge Dictionary* informs us that in the *Meno* “Plato demonstrates that even a slave ignorant of geometry can begin to learn the subject through questioning” (710); no mention here of the flagrant problems with the “demonstration,” as pointed out by Daniel Anderson (note 45), 135, and others.

Another recent claim (1998) that the voice of the middle and late period Socrates “has always been considered to be unmistakably Plato’s own” is made by Alexander Nehamas in *The Art of Living* (note 11), 101; though contrast *Virtues of Authenticity* (note 11), xix).

87. “This is why Plato in the *Timaeus* identifies matter and space: he identifies ‘what participates’ with ‘space,’ although in his so-called ‘unwritten teachings’ [*ej̄ toī legomenoī agrafoī dogmasin*] he gives a different account of ‘what participates’” (*Physics* 4.2, 209b).

88. See e.g., Rosen (note 7), xv. The esoteric-doctrine view may take some comfort from the fact that Plato clearly understands the possibility, at least, of using inconclusive written works in conjunction with an oral instruction reserved for initiates: evidence may be found at *Th.* 152c, 180b, 184a.

89. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates continues to assume that there is no such thing as motivational conflict, insisting that “knowledge . . . always prevails, whenever it is present, over pleasure and everything else” (357c) and, as we saw earlier, that “no one who knows or believes there is something else better than what he is doing, something possible, will go on doing what he had been doing, when he could be doing what is better . . . no one goes willingly toward the bad or [even] what he believes to be bad” (358b–d; see also 345e, 352c, 357c). Knowledge, on his view, is thus both necessary and sufficient for virtuous action (Vlastos [note 36], xxxviii n.47), with the

corollary that all vice has its origin in ignorance. Protagoras, by contrast, realizes that excellence in any domain requires (a) natural talent and (b) training as well as (c) knowledge (327a–d, 351a). Protagoras' triad of necessary conditions makes a reappearance in the *Republic*—this time in the mouth of Socrates. Horneffer (qtd. O'Brien [note 11], 99) and V. Tejera, "Methodology of a Misreading: A Critical Note on T. Irwin's *Plato's Moral Theory*," *International Studies in Philosophy* 10, 136, have made similar claims for the *Hippias Minor*. For the triad of necessary conditions, compare O'Brien, 107.

For other statements of the "Socratic Paradox," see *Lach.* 199d and *Meno* 77b–8b. An intriguingly different formulation is found at *Crito* 49a, where Socrates asks "Do we say that one *must* never in any way do wrong willingly, or *must* one do wrong in one way and not in another?" [οὐλένι; τροπῶ/φανερον εἰλοντα- ἀλλικητέον εἶναι, ἢ|τινι; μὲν ἀλλικητέον τροπῶ/τινι; δε; οὐ] (my emphasis; the normative force is carried by the gerundive suffix -τεον). It is as though Socrates, who is here discussing the merits of a potential jail-break, for once acknowledges the possibility that he *could*, though he will not, choose the bad course of action. (Compare, perhaps, the *Hippias Minor*: "it is not those who unintentionally cause injury, commit crimes, tell lies, deceive and make mistakes who are better; no, those who intentionally do all this are better" (372d); here, however, Socrates may be deploying the claim as part of a *reductio*.)

90. My view is potentially compatible with that of those (like Kahn) who consider Plato's philosophical position to have remained constant throughout his career. But I should note that on the whole I find the developmental hypothesis (once modified) more compelling. Any development-denier is obliged to do two things: first, square the "Socratic paradoxes" with the existence of motivational conflict; second, find hints of Plato's overall solution in the "earliest" dialogues. Thus O'Brien, who finds it simply "intolerable" to posit that "Plato uses Socrates to attack Socratic doctrine" (100), and who concludes that "Plato taught that no man did wrong intentionally" throughout his career (108–9), attempts to defend the firmly-held "ethical paradoxes" (92) by arguing (a) that they represent an ideal state of affairs and (b) that they work in reality, as long as we complete them by adding in a good nature and an effective training (19 and 107 respectively). O'Brien also claims to find this solution between the lines in the *Laches*, the *Charmides*, and the *Protagoras* (109–10, 122, 143). Still, O'Brien's two defenses (ideal and real) seem to contradict one another; further, the fact that not all humans are endowed with virtuous natures would seem to vitiate the strong claim that "no man does wrong intentionally." (Thus Archelaus, as we saw above, probably does exactly what he wants to do.) And the second point finds O'Brien equally inconsistent: on the one hand, Protagoras' views constitute the evidence he needs for Plato's own awareness, at the time of the Protagoras, of the true answer to the question; on the other, "Protagoras is beaten in the debate" (138). My point, however, is not that it is impossible to construct a development-denying reconstruction, merely that it is difficult.

91. Griswold: "Socrates objected that the written word cannot ask or an-

swer questions, does not know when to speak and when not, and cannot defend itself. Plato's dialogues do, however, overcome these objections at least in part. . . . For they announce their deeper message only to those readers able enough to find it" (note 84), 221. And Rosen: "Just as Socrates tests the nature of his interlocutors, so Plato tests the nature of his readers. Just as Socrates is protected from unsatisfactory companions by his daimonion, so Plato is protected from unsatisfactory readers by his irony" (note 7), xx–xxi. See also Schleiermacher (note 84), 14, Strauss (note 21), 52–4, D. Anderson (note 54), 63.

92. Griswold notes that there can be—as Plato knows—no way to argue someone into philosophy, since willingness to engage in rational argument presupposes an acceptance of its fundamental commitments. Accordingly, Plato's objective in deploying irony is to "draw the reader into philosophizing," "Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato Wrote Dialogues," *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (New York 1988), 160: as soon as she begins to protest about the logical leaps, Plato has her (minimally) on his side. This is an account with which I have much sympathy. I would only add that the strategy will fail in most cases, leaving some readers cold (the Callicles types), filling others with misplaced warmth (the Apollodorus types). Wholesale conversion is, in my view, far less likely than the bringing "on line" of a disposition which already exists in the reader.

93. On this point, see esp. Griswold (note 84), 10–14 and "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature* 26, (2002), 88, 95, 99–100; Cooper (note 60), 50–51; and Arthur A. Krentz, "Dramatic Form and Philosophical Content in Plato's Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature* 7 (1983), 39, 43. See also Cobb (note 35), 8; M. Frede (note 39), 219; Victor Goldschmidt, *Les dialogues de Platon: Structure et Méthod Dialectique* (Paris 1947), 3; Rosen (note 7), xviii, xxv; Trevor J. Saunders "Introduction to Socrates," *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues* (London 1987), 36; René Schaerer, *La question platonicienne; étude sur les rapports de la pensée et de l'expression dans les Dialogues* (Neuchâtel 1938), 87, 216; and Bernard Williams, "Introduction," *The Theatetus of Plato* (Indianapolis 1990), ix. Note that it is Platonic irony, and not the dialogue form per se, that makes such training possible; Berkeley's dialogues, for example, do not function this way. (See John Cooper, "Introduction," *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis 1997), xxii n.21, M. Frede (note 39), 203–4; for a history of attention and inattention to the dialogue form, see Krentz (note 92) 44–45 n.3. Since, however, a separation between author and character is indispensable, the writing must at least be *literary* in mode.

94. Thus in the *Politicus*, the Visitor notes that when children are tested on spelling, "the inquiry takes place [less] for the sake of the single question set before him [than] for the sake of his becoming more able to answer all questions relating to letters"; so too the inquiry he is conducting with Young Socrates into the nature of a statesman—which is to say, the entire content of the dialogue—is "set before us [less] for the sake of that very thing [than] for the sake of our becoming better dialecticians in relation to all subjects" (*Pol.* 285d). Hence Hadot: "the subject-matter of the dialogue

counts less than the method applied in it" (note 45, 93).

95. See Nehamas: "what cannot be transmitted . . . is the ability to follow the methods and to apply the rules" (note 11, 1999, 22). The elenctic dialogues already put the method on display; the ironic dialogues require us to come up with our own objections, rather than passively following Socrates' lead. They are therefore, I would argue, more effective as training devices.

96. Compare Cobb (note 35), 71. Consider also the way in which Plato, via Agathon, Socrates, and "Diotima," presents us with a series of positions, each of which is no sooner adopted than it is (overtly or quietly) discarded. Eros is first beautiful (195a), then ugly because seeking to possess what it lacks (201c), then only *part*-ugly (202d), and then (potentially) beautiful and simply seeking to *remain* that way—"love is wanting to possess the good forever" (205e)—before finally turning into a desire neither to obtain nor yet to retain but instead to *create* beauty, "whether in body or in soul" (206b). Perhaps there is an implication that the refinement could continue beyond what we are given in the dialogue; perhaps, in other words, there is an instigation to go further on our own. Similar remarks could possibly be made about retractions in the *Phaedrus* (see *Phdr.* 242b–43b, 265b–d, and Nehamas [note 11 1999]. 349–53) and in the *Theaetetus* (191b, 195c, 199c, 200a).

97. It is surprising to find Martin Warner claiming that Apollodorus, "unlike Alcibiades, has . . . opened his eyes towards the light" (note 6, 162).

98. Note that Socrates' arguments about immortality in the *Phaedo* are not mere intellectual games but designed, instead, to help us overcome the fear of death: "You should, said Socrates, sing a charm over him every day until you have charmed away [*εξεπαύητε*] his fears" (77e); "a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation [*ὡς περ ἐπαύειν*]" (114d). Compare also *Rep.* 608a.

99. Those who have taken Plato to consider philosophy as a way of life include Rosen (note 7), xix; Griswold (note 84), 231; and of course Hadot (note 45), 91–93, 107, 154, 157. For the most part, mind you, Hadot focuses on Socratic (not Platonic) irony, as though Plato and Socrates always went hand in hand; he frequently assumes Socrates is speaking for Plato (see e.g., 149 and 91, respectively).