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PIVOTAL PLAY AND IRONY IN PLATONIC DIALOGUES*

HOLGER THESLEFF

Introductory Remarks

Plato's literary artistry has received more attention in recent years than before.¹ I shall here try to dwell briefly on two structural aspects of this artistry.² (1) It seems clear today that Plato tends to compose many of his dialogues 'pedimentally', that is, in a 'pyramidal' manner: a particularly important point, together with a shift of perspective, is introduced somewhere near the centre of the text.³ (2) Plato's abundant use of playful remarks, jokes, 'wit', sarcasm, and ironical approaches is often manifested in a specific way in these central passages or sections (here CS).⁴ Some comments on these two tendencies, and the combination

* Among the persons who have helped me with this survey, I am particularly grateful to Harold Tarrant, Necip Fikri Alican, and Lassi Jakola.

¹ With ever better editions, translations, and commentaries since the 19th century, and with detailed studies of Plato's Greek not only for 'stylometry', ever more scholars have realized that Plato was not only a philosopher but also a remarkably interesting writer.

² The present notes are based on many years of study of Plato, correcting myself and others. Some references are given in the Bibliography, below. See also D. Nails – H. Tarrant (eds.) 2015 (henceforth also referred to as SS). I may of course have missed important new observations in the most recent discussion.

³ Following some observations by Friedländer, myself, and some others, I published an essay on this compositional grip in Press (ed.) 1993 (=Thesleff 1993). It does not seem to have been studied systematically since then. Some details below (see also Concluding Remarks).

⁴ It is understandable that 'Humour in Plato' has never been, and can hardly be, studied on a large scale. His own remarks on writing as παιδιὰ (or παιδεία at the same time?) have very often been

of them from a common perspective, are perhaps worth while. I believe they will contribute to a better understanding of Plato's philosophical thinking.

*

An agreement about some interpretational keys to Plato would facilitate the understanding of my following analysis, though this is not the place for arguing for them, and any agreement is probably not necessary.

My first key would be what I have called Plato's 'Two-Level Model' of thinking (here TLM), which is also reflected in his dialogue style. Its background is easily found both in religion and in Presocratic philosophy, but it has taken a distinctly Platonic shape in practically all the dialogues.⁵ His Universe, like his ethics, epistemology and ontology, consists of two fundamental, but co-existing, 'levels', a 'better' and a 'less good'. The first, and 'higher' one, sometimes functioning as an ideal, can be metaphorically called the 'divine'; the second is the 'human' level. But there is a contact between them: a continuum, in principle open for every human soul. They are not 'opposites' (like universal forces in most eastern traditions, still present e.g. in Heraclitus). Nor is there a secret field, open for the initiated, as in shamanism and its Greek reflections (such as the mystery religions). Plato's upper level consists of intellectual 'abstractions' (to use a later term), all reflecting in one way or another the ἀγαθόν; the lower one is 'concrete' or 'sensual'. In modern terms, Plato's thinking can be said to be both 'intuitional' and 'analytical', with a trend to analysis upwards towards the higher level. But emotions belong to the lower level (catastrophically so, according to most romantics), and fantasy is rated very low by Plato.⁶ Plato was not him-

ventilated (see especially *Phaedrus* 276b–277e). And readers, like all people, react differently on what should be regarded as humour or irony, and on the right place for it. Interestingly, Plato's own playfulness is left unanalyzed by the mass of authors, old and recent, quoted in the collection of Morreall (ed.) (1987). Somewhat later, Sprague (1994) observed three kinds of 'humour' in Plato, and Scolnicov (2004) discussed afresh some aspects of Plato's irony. To me, humour is marked by the element of 'incongruity' often noted: it includes an unexpected combination of two different aspects, a 'double exposure', which in Plato's case goes together with his 'Two-Level Model' of thinking. Cf. Socrates in *Philebus* 47d–50e and Gavray (2010). More on this below (and see Concluding Remarks).

⁵ See my *Studies in Plato's Two-Level Model* 1999 (repr. 2009), adjusted in several details later.

⁶ However, beginning with the Cambridge Platonists in the 17th century, many Plato scholars seem

self interested in any intrinsically 'bad' or 'evil' beyond the human level. Both Platonic levels (including sub-levels illustrated in the Divided Line allegory) belong somehow together, like day and night, upstairs and downstairs, theory vs. practice, abstract vs. concrete or the laws of nature vs. phenomena in modern thinking, and there are mediating forces. The upper, 'divine' level is not fully accessible to humans, though philosophical minds are consciously oriented towards it. 'Bad' things, opposed to 'good' ones, occur only on the human level. In a Platonic dialogue, the thought-play easily moves between the two main levels.

Another key is Socrates the εἴρων (whether symbolizing Plato or not)⁷ who moves between the levels somewhat like Eros in *Symposium*. Together with Plato's own aristocratic inclination to understatement rather than overstatement (see the Concluding Remarks), and to his taking an ironical distance rather than engaging hotly,⁸ his employment of two-level irony, a 'double exposure', has been a challenge to his readers over the centuries. We understand him better if we take for granted that his original audiences consisted of rather similarly educated people, informed about the environment where he sets his Socrates acting, and about some specific allusions. Some dialogues are indeed constructed around a theme where Platonic play can be expected from the start: for example, *Euthydemus*, *Ion*, *Hippias Minor*, *Euthyphro*, where the conceitedness of Socrates' partners is soon exposed if not well-known to the audience.

A third clue is the important fact – and I am sure it is a fact⁹ – that Plato normally did not address, orally or in a writing, a general, anonymous audience, as the poets, dramatists, sophists and orators habitually did. As I intimated above, he presented (or even acted) his written pieces orally to select groups of listeners who were able or expected to appreciate his refined language with its allusions both to Socratic philosophy and to its Athenian context. There are

to have understood the dialogues better than most earlier Platonist schools did.

⁷ For the eternal problem of Socrates vs. Plato, see, e.g., Press (ed.) 2000. I have suggested in various connections (see references in Thesleff 2009, Index p. 621, and Jatakari 1990, *ibid.* Bibliography p. 580) that 'Socrates the Younger' (first manifest allusions in *Phaedo*, *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides*, before *Sophist* and *Statesman*) stands for young Plato in disguise.

⁸ This seems to depend not only on natural disposition, but also largely on education, still evident in some quarters of European traditions. More on this in Concluding Remarks. See also below, note 13.

⁹ Argued especially in my essay "Plato and his Public" 2002 (=2009, 541 ff.). If a dialogue was first performed at a symposium (as suggested by Tarrant 2017, 404), the listeners must have been prepared for continuing the discussion 'dialectically'.

traits of a comedian in him, writing in prose to qualified listeners. There is also a tragedian in him. And the dialogues are somehow 'polyphonic' (as some say), or symphonically composed (to use a drastic anachronism), though rather to be understood as chamber music. The oral performance of the original pieces was intended to be part of a preceding and, notably, a following discussion. How his *hypomnematic* manuscripts became successively revised and collected to a first corpus (probably after his death), is a different and difficult story.¹⁰ The problems of the chronological order of the dialogues are still open questions. In the lists below, only numbers 18–28 include certainly 'late' texts.

Some support for this view of Platonic publicity can be found in what we happen to know about Plato's personal life and its context.¹¹ I have published elsewhere some theses about his life which may contribute also to the understanding of Plato's two-level playfulness. I insist, for example, that his early handicaps of shyness, a weak voice, and an inclination to intellectual criticism excluded him from a public career that was still in his time expected from Athenian aristocrats. I further insist that his early fascination with ethical problems and mathematical theory made him basically a φιλό-σοφος (pointedly not a σοφός!), searching for answers to Socratic questions; that in the mid-390s he composed his first draft for an ideal Utopian State where philosophers constitute the leading class; and that only his experiences in South Italy and Sicily in the early 380s made him ready for instructing – rather than 'teaching' – select listeners to his own open-ended φιλο-σοφία in the newly founded Academy. The members mostly consisted of non-Athenians who soon specialized in various branches of Academic searching, and who also contributed to Plato's own literary production.

To repeat: I am not going to argue here any of these points, which may seem trivial to some and controversial to others. I hope they are not necessarily required for noticing some of the cases of 'pivotal humour' in the Platonic texts which I am going to adduce. In this very general survey I cannot discuss the details of the criteria for identifying CSs. I can only hope for careful readers' agreement.

¹⁰ See various hints in Renaud – Tarrant 2015, 260–269, and Thesleff 2002 (see above, note 9).

¹¹ The biographies we have do not give much, but hints are found elsewhere; see e.g. Guthrie IV, 8–38, my *Studies in Platonic Chronology* 1982 (=2009, 167–186), and Thesleff & al. in Press (ed.) 2012, 8 ff.

Central Sections in the Texts

In the following I am listing the texts according to a rough grouping of Plato's apparent 'motives' – a very tentative and inexact principle of grouping, since the chronology is largely unsettled, and also because many motives and themes tend to combine in most dialogues: Numbers 1–9 'The philosopher in opposition to Athenian values'; nrs. 10–11 'The Ideal Philosopher'; nrs. 12–16 'More logic of values'; nr. 17 'The *Republic* as we have it'; nrs. 18–28 'Academic advances'; nrs. 29–32 'Further *Dubia* and *Spuria*'; nr. 33 'The Rest of the Spurious Dialogues'; nr. 34 'The Letters'.

I expect the reader of this article to be acquainted with at least some of the dialogues, so that a detailed record of the structure of the argument or its allusions is not needed, and so that the parallels between the dialogues are easily noticed. I shall focus on what appears to be the Central Section (CS) in each dialogue, and on its function as a kind of *περιπέτεια*, a change of circumstances.¹²

1–9: The philosopher in opposition to Athenian values

1. The Apology of Socrates. This purports to be the three speeches that Socrates held at court. In accordance with the logographic practice of the time, the writer was free to manipulate bits of what was said. There is some marked irony in the beginning and at the end of the composition (the short third speech). We would not expect pedimentality here, but in fact the dialogic elenchus of Meletus (24b–28a) stands out as a kind of CS. It concerns the fatal point of the indictment: the *δαμιόνιον*, which brings the attentive listener closer to Plato's 'upper level'. Yet the over-simple logic notably towards the end of the section (27de) may appear to contain some Platonic sarcasm.¹³

¹² The term was applied by Aristotle (*Poet.* 1452ab) to the (mostly unfortunate) challenges met by the protagonist towards the centre of a tragedy.

¹³ Cf. the Anytus episode in *Meno* 89e–95a. And note the different kinds of irony in the *Apology*. Right at the opening (17a) the brutal contrast *πιθανῶς / ἀληθές ... οὐδὲν* is perhaps meant to depict Socrates realistically.

2. *Crito*. This little dialogue looks like a torso. Socrates' quotation of what he feels the Athenian laws would say to him (50a–54d) may have been conceived by Plato as a slightly ironical CS. His praise of the Athenian legal system is hardly entirely sincere.¹⁴ A slight but direct sign of this is his seldom noted remark at the end (54d): the speech of the Laws rings constantly in his ears like a Corybantic song (not a recommendation from Plato's point of view).¹⁵ Perhaps the (unfinished?) dialogue was meant to have a double aim: to be a defence of the 'lawful' Socrates in front of the Athenians and, more importantly, a defence of his friends who had tried their best to arrange the escape of their stubborn Master, who was in fact prepared to die.

3. *Menexenus*. The frame dialogue of this 'patriotic' speech makes its irony, not to say bitter sarcasm, more obvious than in *Crito*. The speech has sometimes been read, perhaps without its frame, as a serious panegyric of Athens.¹⁶ Plato shows his command of Athenian rhetoric and at the same time its emptiness (cf. *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*). The dialogue is not just a satire. Possibly it was a critical reaction to a particular burial ceremony in the 390s, though the historical review was (secondarily?) brought down to the year 387 (246a) when both Aspasia and Socrates were long since dead. This point could perhaps now be seen as the ironical 'pivot' of the dialogue.

4. *Ion*. Beside rhetoric, Plato felt good poetry to be a serious rival of his philosophy. The *Ion* is a playfully ironical, but very carefully composed criticism of a conceited rhapsode and the nature of poetry. The CS on inspiration as compared to 'magnetism' very clearly stands out (533c–535a) as Socrates' semi-ironical vision. Ion's listeners' reaction, vividly described by himself, is certainly not the best criterion of good poetry from Plato's point of view. This pivotal point is made at the end of the CS via the case of Tynnichus; and one wonders how much of 'divinity' was left in his 'popular' paean which 'everybody' was singing.

¹⁴ Partly for this reason, some scholars have wanted to approximate *Crito* to the *Laws*. My own reasons for doubting the authenticity of *Crito* (1982, repr. in 2009, 395–397) are not valid.

¹⁵ Warning for Corybants, e.g., *Menexenus* 235c.

¹⁶ For a good conspectus of the very varying interpretations of this dialogue since antiquity, see Guthrie IV, 317–323. Tulli (2004) notes a number of parallels with Plato's political thinking (in fact the 'Proto-Republic') without considering the ironical aspects.

5. *Hippias Minor*. This little piece also concerns the interpretation of poetry, now from the aspect of sophistry. It is less carefully composed than *Ion*. Socrates' partner is the conceited sophist Hippias. Against the latter's view of Odysseus and Achilles, Socrates argues (with considerable sophistry himself) that the 'best' man is the one who always lies willingly – if such a person exists (376b). The CS (372a–373c) makes a new approach to the argument by involving Eudicus and pointing out, as a warning (372e), that Socrates is suffering from a fit of confusion.¹⁷ This must be seen as a playful pivot of the dialogue.

6. *Republic, Book I*. The first book of the *Republic* preserved to us is very likely to have been originally a separate dialogue, later revised and rewritten.¹⁸ The basic theme turns out to be δικαιοσύνη, a central concept among Athenian values, and the impact of rhetoric is felt in the background, though the discussion is broadened by its colourful context in Piraeus. The host of the place, the old wealthy metic Cephalus (father of the orator Lysias), soon withdraws after having given the friendly hint to Socrates that 'righteous' living means paying your debts (cf. the end of *Phaedo*). His son Polemarchus takes over as Socrates' partner. Starting from a quotation from the poet Simonides, Polemarchus argues that 'paying everybody his due' may of course mean, in real life, moral complications that Socrates now wants to analyse.

The rhetor Thrasymachus¹⁹ interrupts this controversy like a wild beast (336b). This very vividly described incident (ending at 338c) clearly represents the CS of the dialogue. It has two pivots: Socrates' alleged irony (337a), and his alleged σοφία which is nothing more than circular reasoning with borrowed words never paid back (338b).

The following long discussion includes some more serious philosophy, and Thrasymachus gradually tends to give up his 'right is might' doctrine (338c)

¹⁷ Α κατηβολή, a curiously rare word (cf. Guthrie IV, 194), probably to be interpreted in the same direction as his famous 'fits' of meditation, or the νάρκωσις in *Meno*.

¹⁸ More on this under nr. 17, below.

¹⁹ A well-known teacher of rhetoric whose name suits this context (also alluding to Thrasylbulos) and whose character Plato has depicted accordingly. He is the only person in Plato's dialogues whose behaviour is directly 'vulgar'. Note here the choice of the Syracusan metic Cephalos as the gentle host of the meeting, with suitable allusion to κεφάλαιον in the sense of 'money capital' (as in *Laws* 5,742c) with its offspring or 'interest', τόκος, now named Polemarchus, implying a 'Beginning of the war' of the dialogue (or against Athens?). Cf. also *Gorgias*, below (nr. 7).

which reflects Plato's view of Athenian democracy. The end of the dialogue (352d–354c), however, looks like a somewhat careless addition to 'prove' that the 'right' life is also the 'best' and 'happiest' one. Book 2 will return to these problems.

7. *Gorgias*. This extensive and much read dialogue has also probably undergone at least one revision.²⁰ I have listed it here immediately after *Republic* 1 since its basic structure is very similar. Here Athenian politics and the nature of rhetoric, however, are more concretely in the foreground. Socrates' chief partners are again three. The 'father of rhetoric', the very old Gorgias, is treated with distanced humour, and we may note that (ironically?) no reference is made to the 'frightening' allusions of his name. His speciality is, simply, persuasion. His pupil Polos, the 'Colt',²¹ becomes (like Polemarchus in *Republic* 1) entangled in difficulties when Socrates questions him about the morality and usefulness of rhetoric; perhaps it is no better than the ethics of cookery. The third partner, Callicles, differs from Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1 by being a well-educated symbol of Athenian leadership, and his attack on Socrates is more civilized, and extensively argued. It begins (481b) with the challenging question 'Is Socrates serious?' Socrates answers with a semi-playful defence of philosophy. But Callicles' attitude to philosophy becomes more and more scornful: in real life, where φύσις and violence rule (483b) and conventional νόμος is just a hiding place for the weak (Callicles goes further than Thrasymachus here), philosophy is useless for grown-up people (485cd). Socrates would not even be able to defend himself in court. Callicles speaks eloquently and quotes poetry for his points. But Socrates insists: the 'right' human life cannot be that of the strongest.

This long exchange of speeches (ending at 488a) clearly functions as the CS for the dialogue as we have it. A first pivot comes rather as an exclamation mark in the beginning: Socrates is now very serious indeed! Chaerephon observes on Callicles' initial question. And at the end, Socrates throws out a very strong word, βλάξ, about himself (488b, unique in Plato): 'am I stupid' (like a fish, a νόρκη, perhaps; see *Meno* 80a)? After these περιπέτεια speeches, Plato

²⁰ See Thesleff 2003 (= 2009, 551–556), Tarrant 1982 (also 2012).

²¹ A kind of τόκος. Polos is a historical person, but possibly Plato makes his name also allude to the rhetor Polycrates, an active antagonist of the Socratics towards the end of the 390s.

appears to take over the role of Socrates more distinctly.²² After a long series of partly aggressive *elenchi* this 'Socrates' arrives at a point where Callicles is prepared to give up (505c). And with new self-confidence this Platonic Socrates resumes his argument (506c), presents a kind of a manifesto of philosophy (see especially 506c–509e), and ends his pleading for a 'righteous' philosophy-minded life with a myth ('as if a true λόγος' 523a) about the souls' fate after death. Like a true teacher, or a rhetorician, he finishes the dialogue with a protreptic exhortation: 'Let us follow my reasoning (*logos*, meaning his entire argument), and not yours, Callicles!' Plato's seriousness is here more prominent than a possible satire of rhetoric.

In its present form, the dialogue *Gorgias* can be regarded as the first – and in fact the only extant – sign of Plato's being prepared to present his philosophy in the form of an essentially serious speech to suitable listeners. Our text was perhaps, in its final shape, composed as a protreptic invitation to his newly founded Academy.²³ Similar ideas are developed in parts of the final *Republic*, but there the listeners soon become the Guardians of the Ideal State. See also the late dialogue *Philebus* (nr. 26).

8. *Meno*. This fairly complicated dialogue experiments with a long row of questions around human excellence and knowledge. It starts abruptly with Meno's question whether ἀρετή can be taught, and it ends with the Socratically open question what ἀρετή, after all, means. Gorgias, here considered a sophist, figures in a remote background, and the speakers do not seem to 'recall' (a central concept in the following) what his δόξα was in this case (71d). Socrates leads his opening *elenchus* concerning the nature of ἀρετή (his questioning in fact alluding to rather advanced Platonic terms and concepts)²⁴ to an aporetic climax, the famous νάρκη simile (79e).

In my opinion, this introduces a lengthy CS (79e–86b). It includes the thought experiments with the myths of reincarnation, supposed to imply that all souls have experienced 'everything', so that teaching is just 'recalling',

²² See note 7 for 'Socrates the Younger'.

²³ If so, cf. *Laches*, and remotely *Symposium*. Apart from the *Republic* (and the late *Philebus*) the 'Socrates' of other literarily refined dialogues (such as *Symposium* and *Phaedo*) is not an Academic teacher.

²⁴ Note e.g. the play with geometrical σχῆμα 73d, 75a, alluding to Platonic Forms.

ἀνάμνησις (81d). The CS also includes the intriguing experiment with 'teaching' the slave mathematics. Meno remains somewhat sceptical, as does Socrates. He is affected by his own νάρκωσις (80cd, cf. 84bc).²⁵ A final ironical point comes (86b) when Socrates takes ἀλήθεια to mean 'what is not forgotten'.²⁶

After this CS Socrates very prudently proposes (86c) a 'common search', and then to try a 'hypothetical' method, as in ordinary geometry, for helping us to see a connection between ἀρετή and ἐπιστήμη (soon turned to φρόνησις 88b). This brings us quickly to the Anytus episode (89e–95a), which contrasts Athenian education with Socratically free philosophy. Then Socrates takes the important step (97b) of asserting that there must be a level of ὀρθὴ δόξα, not identical with 'knowledge' but pointing towards it.²⁷ A very playful passage (97e–98c) introduces Socrates' own δόξαι as the walking statues of his 'ancestor' Daedalus: they can be fixed and transformed into ἐπιστήμη only by (dialectical?) λογισμός. This is ἀνάμνησις, he adds, provocatively. The dialogue ends, however, in a Socratically open aporia, since we do not know what ἀρετή is.

9. *Protagoras*. This long and somewhat randomly composed dialogue basically concerns the old question whether ἀρετή can be taught. Its incoherent logic has irritated modern scholars. Socrates is the narrator, and himself a 'searcher', as the opening story emphasizes.²⁸ The dominant, and partly brilliantly executed literary theme, however, is the confrontation of Socrates with some important sophists, first among them old Protagoras whom Plato treats with respect mixed with some slight irony (as he tends to present other seniors). The meeting he is enticed to is held in the home of the well-known host of sophists, Callias. After Socrates' lengthy, rather amusing record of the background, we hear Protagoras' display of his art (320c–328d), a magnificent Platonic pastiche of a sophistic

²⁵ Cf. Socrates' notorious fits of absence, and e.g. the κατηβολή in *Hippias Minor* (above, nr. 5). He is not at all sure about what he says. I cannot here go into the details of the controversial ἀνάμνησις question (later Platonists made it a dogma; *Phaedo* slides over it (72e ff.); in *Phaedrus* (249b ff.) it may concern the mythically privileged whose soul has followed Zeus). It must be noted, however, that the slave's geometrical 'knowledge' comes from a successive repetition and remembering (esp. 85cd) of what he sees in Socrates' illustrations as pointed out by Socrates.

²⁶ As from λήθη, λανθάνεσθαι, not λανθάνειν.

²⁷ This idea is then developed further in *Republic* 4 and in *Theaetetus*, and also in *Philebus*.

²⁸ Much of the defects in the composition could be understood if the dialogue was one of Plato's first attempts to address a somewhat wider audience.

lecture at its best: Protagoras combines *μῦθος* and *λόγος* to show how to teach *ἀρετή*, sophistically. There follows an interlude where Socrates opens a more philosophical question whether *ἀρετή* is a whole or consists of different parts. Protagoras tries to answer but does not like to do it briefly, and Socrates, who prefers an elenchus procedure with brief answers, is prepared to leave the meeting (335c).

Here we can discover a beginning of the *περιπέτεια* of the dialogue, an extensive intermezzo functioning as a CS, I believe. Callias and many others persuade Socrates to stay, and he accepts (with some playful references to the importance of philosophy and dialectic, 335d, 336b), and even Protagoras accepts a 'discussion', whereas some others interfere with self-characterizing comments. Protagoras now (typically for sophists) proposes (339a) to analyse a poem by Simonides about 'being good' (*ἀγαθός*, *ἐσθλός*) where he notes an inconsistency, and Socrates (340cd), backed by Prodicus, observes that Simonides makes a distinction between 'being' and 'becoming' (referring indirectly to Plato's TLM). After some banter, Socrates now gives his own 'speech' (342a–347a) on this theme, in the light of the poem discussed. He begins with a semi-nonsensical (quasi-sophistic) explanation that philosophy started in Sparta where people learnt to use 'laconisms'. Simonides (contrary to Protagoras, we understand) has followed this ancient practice and employed single words cryptically. His poem must be interpreted to mean that 'being good' is impossible, but 'trying to be' is worth praise. This semi-Platonic view is likely to be the pivot of the dialogue. However, its satirically sophistic tone is worth notice.

After this digression Plato's Socrates gives up his play with sophistry. A brief interlude follows, and Protagoras is persuaded to accept Socrates' philosophical questioning (348c). There follow the questions of 'courage' (*ἀνδρεία*) as a specific part of *ἀρετή* (349d, partially resumed until 360d);²⁹ and then the interesting chapters on pleasure (*ἡδονή*) versus 'knowledge' and 'measuring' (*μετρητική*) (351b–359a). At the end Socrates and Protagoras exchange mutual compliments. The questions remain open. Their two very different methods of approaching *ἀρετή* ought to be debated later, they agree.

²⁹ I argued in 1982 (=2009, 192 ff.) that the very similar treatment of this question in *Laches* 190a–199e was possibly written later than the sections in *Protagoras*, but that such problems of chronology should preferably be left open.

10–11: *The Ideal Philosopher*

10. *Symposium*. The formal theme of this famous and fascinatingly well composed dialogue is of course ἔρως, seen from the perspectives of Plato and his educated and well-established contemporaries. The theme also involves the objects of love, centred around τὸ καλόν, and more indirectly ἀγαθόν.³⁰ But a deeper theme is the personality of Socrates the Philosopher. The story is again a narration, this time by a certain Aristodemus who happened to be present: this after-dinner party occurred 'long ago' in the home of the tragedian Agathon.³¹

Before entering the house of Agathon, Socrates has one of his 'daimonic' fits of absence (a longer one later described by Alcibiades, 220cd), but he is well received, and the beginning of the symposium is vividly described. The different speeches on Eros, which Aristodemus then quotes, are in various ways preparatory, some slightly satirical perhaps. The culmination of this series is Socrates' own quotation of what Diotima has taught him.

Without any doubt this section (201d–212c) forms the CS and a περιπέτεια of the dialogue. It is often read as Plato's (perhaps first) public presentation of his Theory of Forms and of its application to his 'teaching' of ἀρετή (note 215a5). I find some playfully ironical aspects worth considering.

Diotima is not a historical person, I believe.³² She starts by continuing a Socratic elenchus, but is then presented as both a sophist and a priestess. She teaches by λόγος and μῦθος (cf. Protagoras) but ends up in a revelation of the

³⁰ As scholars know today, the Greek terms καλόν and κάλλος do not refer only to 'beauty', but also to what is 'fine', and so come close to ἀγαθόν.

³¹ I have argued elsewhere (first in my 1978 essay, 157–170) that the text was written as a Platonic 'correction' of Xenophon's *Symposium* which was set in the home of the traditional host of such gatherings, Callias (cf. *Protagoras*). The otherwise unknown 'Phoinix', who in Plato's version (172b) gave no clear information about the party, could be an ironical anagram of 'Xenoph.', written from right to left in the Phoenician manner (and Phoenicians are not supposed to be reliable, see e.g. *Republic* 3,414c). Plato sometimes emphasizes his own absence from the happenings, in order to have his hands free for presenting his own view (see notably *Phaedo*, *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*). Note in this connection the allusive play with names, even more manifest than in *Republic* I and *Gorgias*. Instead of Callias we have a (pseud-)Agathon who is escorted by an Aristo-phanes 'who appears to be best', and whose hiccup is cured by the 'belch-fighter' Eryximachus (as from ἐρεύγεσθαι). Perhaps Pausanias knows how to stop ἀνία (sorrows, anguish), as he can stop speaking (cf. 185bc).

³² I cannot argue this here. I take her to be an ennobled variant of Aspasia (cf. *Menexenus*); but see the interesting comments by Nails 2002 and SS 2015, 73–90.

'mystery' of Eros (209e). This teaching about the sublimation of love with its τέλος, the καλόν as such, is presented in a rather un-Platonic repetitive and pompous style (often admired by later commentators). Socrates gives an almost orgiastic record of the Philosopher's rising to the open πέλαγος where he can see τὸ καλόν as such and become more godlike himself.³³ Compare here the ὑπερβολή in approaching τὸ ἀγαθόν in *Republic* 6.

These (certainly semi-ironically) effusive overstatements constitute the actual pivot of the entire dialogue. As an effective contrast, the drunken Alcibiades suddenly enters. After a brief interlude, he tells his own story of his dealings with Socrates. For him, Socrates is a satyr-like being, a kind of mediating Eros himself, who may turn love into σωφροσύνη (cf. *Charmides* and the end of *Phaedrus*). He is not the instructor (whom Diotima of Socrates has foreshadowed for the other listeners). This chapter is obviously meant as Plato's humorous defence of Socrates, 'the corrupter of the youth'. The final scenes intimate Socrates 'the victor'. We may notice that he brings both Comedy and Tragedy to sleep (and a good author masters both, 223d) before he, happy and sober, begins a new day.

11. Phaedo. This well-written, much studied and difficult dialogue on the death of the Philosopher is often coupled with the *Symposium* where Socrates is so full of life. However, if Plato meant it so, he has made the composition of *Phaedo* conspicuously different. Probably for similar manipulatory reasons, Plato is not present himself (a point made explicitly at 59b), but the elaborated frame dialogue, the theme of the soul's fate and the two chief partners of Socrates, the Thebans Cebes and Simmias who have met the enigmatic Philolaus (61d), suggest a Pythagorean 'search'.³⁴ Since antiquity, the reasoning and musings of Socrates in *Phaedo* have been read as Plato's attempts to 'prove' the immortality of the personal soul. I agree with the recent tendency to explain it as a series

³³ The sea level (210d, cf. 211b-e; we may imagine it in windless sunshine, cf. the allegory of the Sun in *Republic* 6) probably stands for the divine 'upper level' in the myth of *Phaedrus*, 247c-e. The erotic imagery is of course prominent in Socrates' vision in *Symposium* (especially in the repetition in 212a). The slight self-irony in all this gets a clearly sarcastic turn in *Republic* 6,490ab where the philosopher is said to have a kind of sexual 'intercourse' with 'true Being'.

³⁴ Socrates is One over Two, as so often in Platonic dialogues (an intentional two-level symbolism?). Note also the arithmological and existential speculations in the latter half of *Phaedo*. The impact of Plato's first visit to South Italy seems clear.

of thought experiments, and I would call particular attention to the division of the philosophical part of the dialogue into two halves. The first half (60b–84b) concerns 'young' Socrates' (read: Plato's) study of Presocratic ontology,³⁵ The second half (beginning at 90d) concerns Plato's two-level ontology, presenting glimpses of his own Theory of Forms (mentioned in passing earlier at 65d ff., then also 72e ff. with ἀνάμησις) and various aspects of aetiology, and ending in an eschatological myth with more Pythagorean bias than that in *Gorgias*. We cannot discuss the details here, but I should like to note that Socrates' various suggestions, partly backed by his partners, can be seen as thought-play, on the whole without irony.³⁶ The reasoning remains 'hypothetical' (107b). It exemplifies Socrates' 'hopes' for a philosopher's paradise,³⁷ but gives no logical demonstration of personal immortality. The end of the dialogue (like the beginning) brings us back to the concrete reality where there is room for feelings and perhaps even some humour.³⁸

Between the two main halves, there is an extensive interlude, clearly distinguished as a CS (84c–90d). It begins with a long silence reminding us of Socrates' famous fits of 'absence', but representing also his own aporia. Then he introduces the well-known simile of a 'swan song' (84e), which represents his last 'new attempt' (a 'second sailing', as it turns out, 99cd). This περιπέτεια is underlined by the resumption of the frame dialogue (88c–89a, repeated in a less spectacular context at 102e) and, after a playful, somewhat mystifying reference to the Heracles myth (89c, a kind of pivot for the CS), by Socrates' pointed warning for μισολογία: more reliable λόγοι are always, and now, needed (89d–90d). The implication may be that Socrates will live on because of his λόγοι.

³⁵ Cf. 'The Younger Socrates', above, note 7.

³⁶ E.g. 102d–103b, 107a.

³⁷ See notably 66b, 67b, 82ab, 109cd and 114c.

³⁸ Socrates' mystical last words about Asclepius (son on Apollo) may allude to his 'recent' writing of a paean, part of his sudden interest in poetry (60c–61c). And Socrates 'paying his debt' may sound a bit ironical in view of *Republic* 1.

12–16: 'More logic of values'

12. *Charmides*. A few of the minor dialogues seem to follow the model of *Protagoras* in very different ways from *Symposium* and *Phaedo*. They discuss the nature and teachability of the separate 'cardinal virtues' and other Academic values, but Plato's φιλο-σοφία always leaves σοφία unanalyzed. The *Republic* (see below under nr. 17) starts from the question of δικαιοσύνη. The *Charmides* concerns σωφροσύνη, rather to be understood etymologically as 'saving one's reason'.³⁹ The dialogue is carefully and humorously written as a report by Socrates. Plato's original audience must have known that Socrates, for various reasons, 'failed' to become an instructor of the young men who were expected to be his pupils. In this case Charmides (Plato's uncle) and his cousin Critias both died in the Thirty's final battle against the Athenian democrats (403 B.C.). With some benevolent irony, young Charmides is described at length as an extremely promising example of the virtue under discussion. His only problem just now is a slight headache which Socrates promises to cure by Thracian magic (157c).⁴⁰ When pressed to define σωφροσύνη, Charmides says he has heard from 'somebody' that it means 'doing one's own' (161b). This 'somebody' turns out to be Critias, who now becomes Socrates' chief partner. The change is described as an interruption (162c) which clearly reminds of the cases of Thrasymachus and Callicles, though Critias behaves in a still more civilized manner.

This CS (ending at 165b) culminates in Critias' explanation that he actually means the Delphic maxim of 'Knowing oneself' to be the basis of σωφροσύνη. This assertion leads to the lengthy discussion in the latter half of the dialogue about 'knowledge' (here also γνῶσις 169e) and 'knowledge of knowledge'. The Platonic TLM is now evidently implied. Note here the 'two-gates' dream of Socrates (173a). At the end Socrates is prepared to continue his instruction, even 'by force' (176c), but the problem is naturally left open.

13. *Laches*. This curious little dialogue, written in dramatic form, is probably meant to be read to a specific audience of fathers to boys in need of philosophical education. Its 'Socrates' is made rather unknown to the Athenian es-

³⁹ The correct translation of this term has been often debated.

⁴⁰ Probably with Pythagorean undertones. In some sources the Thracian Zalmoxis occurs as a slave of Pythagoras, Herodotus 4,95.

tablishment, but is gradually introduced as a respectable instructor. 'Courage' (ἀνδρεία) is soon presented as an example of a virtue worth teaching. And after a debate between the two 'specialists' present, Nicias and Laches, it is Socrates who introduces a 'dialectical' approach to this concept, without reaching a definite result.⁴¹

There is no clearly distinguished CS. However, a kind of περιπέτεια can be traced in Socrates' self-presentation, followed by Nicias' characterization of him (186a–188c). It includes perhaps a semi-ironical pivot in Nicias' 'circular reasoning' which ultimately concerns his own 'self' (187e–188b).

A cryptically bizarre point comes at the end of the dialogue.⁴² I would interpret it to mean that Plato is prepared to help in instructing young people, though disguised now as a 'Socrates'.

14. *Lysis*. The style, setting, and arguments of this vividly written narrative by 'Socrates' illustrate in many ways the complications of the notion of φιλία, so important in the Academy. I believe it must be understood as a piece of logical training in φιλο-σοφία for youthful adepts there.⁴³ A first hint comes at the (repeated!) points in the opening that Socrates was on his way from the Academy to Lykeion when a group of youngsters invited him to a new palaestra. There follows much bantering, naturally with erotic undertones. Socrates' chief partners turn out to be the beautiful, intelligent but very young and shy Lysis, and the more sophisticated Menexenus (known from other Socratic texts). Socrates' introductory questioning concerns various aspects of a 'friendly' behaviour, and (with Menexenus from 211b) the two levels of giving and taking, even desire and hate, perhaps implied.

The CS is not very clearly marked, but it can be found beginning at 213d when Socrates turns to both boys and the perspective is broadened (until 217a). Think of cosmic φιλία in poetry, our old teachers (note irony at 214a); 'sameness and difference' (Platonic ontological contrasts); and the two levels of 'good' versus 'bad', 'liking and disliking', all within φιλία. Socrates admits a swimming in his head (cf. *Hippias Minor*, above nr. 5) at this new aporia, and τὸ καλόν is

⁴¹ Cf. here *Protagoras* (above, nr. 9).

⁴² See my arguments in Thesleff 2012.

⁴³ Cf. *Amatores*.

too slippery for a steady grip (216cd).⁴⁴ This looks like a playful pivot of the dialogue. Socrates adds in passing that he suspects that a third entity, between the good and the bad, is relevant in φιλία.

This line of thought is followed in the subsequent discussion. The παρουσία (again a Platonic term) of both good and bad ingredients may offer an explanation. Allusions can be found to the *Symposium* and perhaps to *Republic* 6.⁴⁵ A final aporia leads to a Socratic 'postponement' of further discussion, when the παιδαγωγοί, like foreign 'daimons', take the boys home.

15. *Euthyphro*. This is most likely not an 'early' work (as often believed). It reflects what is more explicitly said in other dialogues. In my view it is best understood as a piece of training in early Academic logic around the themes of 'activity and passivity', 'giving and taking' (cf. *Lysis*), now concerning conventional religion, with the indictment of Socrates as a background. The problems, the play with terms, and the dramatic form of this strongly anti-bigotry (and so anti-Athenian) dialogue, suggest that it was not meant to be spread to wider circles. Socrates' only partner here, Euthyphron, is a kind of professional priest. He is an alleged specialist in one of the traditional cardinal virtues, 'piety' (ὁσιότης, τὸ ὅσιον) which is, interestingly, left out from the list of ἀρεταί in *Republic* 4,427d.⁴⁶

The first row of Socrates' questions about the nature of ὁσιότης includes a play with the terms ἰδέα (5d, ironically for ἀνοσιότης) and εἶδος (6e), but amounts to aporias.

A broadening of the approach leads to a brief CS (10e–11e), a digression about arguments, moving around like the statues of Daedalus. But whose statues are moved by whom? This pivotal point clearly reminds of the more explicit discussion in *Meno* (97d–98a) of δόξαι being fettered by λογισμός. The audience

⁴⁴ There may be some concretely erotical allusions; the presence of Plato's theory of ἔρωρς is felt in the background at any rate.

⁴⁵ Note the much-discussed Πρῶτον φίλον (219c) which may seem related to the ἀνυπόθετον (ἀγαθόν) in *Republic* 6,510b, 511b; but then the manuscripts' καί at *Lysis* 219c6 is better than the emendation ἦ.

⁴⁶ It occurs, in passing, in *Protagoras* and occasionally elsewhere, and with a rather un-Platonic new emphasis in the *Laws*. Euthyphron was a historical person, noted for his mystical contacts with the 'divine' (cf. *Cratylus* 396d, etc.), but the story of his indictment of his father perhaps was Plato's invention to stress the contrast to Socrates.

is expected to know the details of this imagery. It returns as a glimpse towards the end of the dialogue (15bc).

In the latter half of the dialogue we are brought into more, and deeper, philosophical labyrinths. At the end Socrates still tries to press out from the 'Proteus' Euthyphron (15d) a constructive answer. But Euthyphron is suddenly in a hurry, and Socrates has to meet Meletus (cf. the end of *Meno*), without any wise advice for his own trial.

16. Euthydemus. We now turn back to sophistry, but this time to eristics which Plato views with a comedian's eye. The narrator is Socrates, his audience is Crito, but the narrative has an elaborated dramatic frame dialogue which returns with the central section (cf. *Phaedo*). I believe the text of the dialogue is meant to be, and was, enjoyed by more than a narrow Academic circle. In the opening part of the frame Socrates recommends for everybody, with enthusiastic sarcasm, the two erist brothers' teaching of ἐξελέγγειν (272ab, 'to prove wrong').⁴⁷ And the extensive final part of the frame (304b–307c) adds ironically 'protreptic' comments, first to 'somebody' (perhaps Isocrates)⁴⁸ who has recently criticized eristics.

Socrates' report of the prodigiously droll examination that he and his young friend Cleinias underwent by the erists contains of course many philosophical points implied by Plato, and so, if provoked by erists, a wealth of irony.

But a clearly distinguished CS is underlined by the resumption of the frame dialogue (290b–293a): Among all human facilities, one stands out, Cleinias intimates accompanied by Socrates, namely the βασιλική τέχνη (291b). This (indeed Platonic) kind of 'knowledge' may be somehow useful for all members of the society. Here (292a–293a), however, Socrates admits a deep aporia. In his desperation he invokes the erists, the two Dioscuri, for help (cf. Proteus in *Euthyphro*). And after this sarcastic pivot, the semi-nonsensical elenchus goes on.

⁴⁷ Euthydemus is a historical person (see Nails 2002), but his brother Dionysodorus may be Plato's intentional 'doubling' of him (suggested also by the name). In fact much of their argument is 'doublespeak'.

⁴⁸ See especially *Euthydemus* 305b–306d.

17: *Republic as we have it*

17. *Republic 1–10*. Almost certainly, this magnificent work in ten 'books' (originally papyrus scrolls), has grown gradually, been revised several times, and received its final form rather late (not before the 360s).⁴⁹ It contains much of Plato's mature philosophy, and it must have been intended as an Academic 'manifesto' for future Guardians of an ideal State, not for general readers (as often believed since antiquity). Here I can only discuss briefly some traces of CSs in it.

As argued above (under nr. 6), the attack of Thrasymachus was the CS of an early version of *Republic* 1. Later, after some internal discussion in Plato's circle (and under influence also of the Pseudo-Platonic *Clitopho*),⁵⁰ Plato produced a sequel where the serious but friendly criticism by his two brothers came as a new CS (now in book 2), followed by arguments about the gradual construction of a 'good' and 'righteous' society, complemented by ideas taken from Plato's 'Proto-Republic' (now woven into books 2–5). The 'final point', philosophers as leaders being the only solution to free mankind from its misery, is now put (5,473cd) after a comprehensive new discussion of Guardians, their education, poetry, imitation, lies and myths, psychology, and the equality of women in the Ideal State. The point about the philosophers is sometimes regarded as the 'pivot' of the entire work. It may have been at one stage. There follow some reflections about philosophers in real life, and the contrast of real ἐπιστήμη and δόξα.

However, looking at the composition as a whole as we have it, it seems to me obvious that its final CS is formed by the three famous allegories in Books 6 and 7: The Sun, the Divided Line, and the Cave. Their frame is cosmic and metaphysical. But is there any place for play or humour, or at least self-irony like the laughter echoing around the philosophers' leadership (still present at 6,490b, in the sarcastic remark about philosophers 'making love' to real Being)? Yes, Glaucon's apotropaic reaction, Ἀπολλων δαιμονίας ὑπερβολῆς (6,509c, prepared at 506de), to Socrates' profusely stated idea that τὸ ἀγαθόν might 'transcend essence' is really 'amusing' (γελοῖως), not because of the ὑπερβολή as such, but through its implications: Plato's self-irony reflected in his brother's

⁴⁹ For this complicated question, see Thesleff 1997 (=2009, 519–539) and Tarrant 2012.

⁵⁰ Written by somebody who was frustrated at Socrates' vain attempts to define δικαιοσύνη. Plato found his points interesting, and hence, I assume, the dialogue was taken into the Corpus.

words (cf. 4,427d, 9,380bc); the new ancestry of the sun god; Apollon the god had a specific 'upper level' status in the Academy;⁵¹ and the allusion to a final, metaphysical 'Ev via the 'Α-πολλόν' (note here the vocative case with omikron) is likely to have been understood by some of Plato's contemporaries.⁵² But otherwise Plato seems to be very serious about the three allegories.

The middle allegory, the Divided Line (6,509d–511e), stands there as a kind of pivot; note that it symbolizes an 'upper'–'lower' dimension, pointing 'upwards'. Its language is mathematically strict, but several points require oral comments and geometrical illustration. I find it possible that it was a relatively late insertion to fill one (or many) of the 'gaps' that Socrates left open after the Sun imagery (509c6 *συχνὰ ἀπολείπω*).⁵³ The Cave imagery (beginning with book 7) would very naturally follow directly after the Sun.

After the Cave we come back to education, now of philosophers. And then follow, at a distance, the eloquently and perceptively described symptoms of decay of the imaginary Ideal Society, finishing in Tyranny (books 8–9). The first part of book 10 seems to have been added to define Plato's latest position in regard to poetry, Forms and the sensual world (with many playful ingredients),⁵⁴ and the immortality of the human soul. The eschatological myth of the experiences of 'Er the Pamphylian' (from 613e to the end) is much more detailed than the corresponding myths in *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*, and (interestingly) also somewhat humorously bizarre: the 'harmony of the Sirens' song', for instance (616c–617c), alludes to Academic cosmology and at the same time to Pythagorean musical theory. At the end (621b) Socrates states to Glaukon: 'So myth was saved'. I don't

⁵¹ Apollo's specific 'appeal' to Plato is easy to see from the dialogues (but in the myth of the *Phaedrus* it is Zeus who leads the 'Dionic' minds, 246e, 252de). Plato's relations to Apollo were later elaborated in legends. The two-level *δαίμονιας* may also allude to Socrates.

⁵² Neoplatonists have noted this allusion.

⁵³ T. A. Szlezák has argued in various connections (see now SS 2015, 243–256) that such 'gaps' may refer to Plato's oral teaching. I am sceptical about the existence of an esoteric oral 'teaching' by Plato, but surely there was a forthgoing discussion of difficult problems in the Academy. The challenging logic of 'transcendence' gets some clarification by the introduction of 'hypotheses' (see notably 510b, 511b). What Socrates says about the division of the line required geometrical demonstration. For the evidence we have of a late, semi-playfully provocative lecture *Περὶ τὰ γὰ θεῶν* see Thesleff 1999 (=2009, 475–488).

⁵⁴ The *φουτουργός* (597c) probably alludes to the Demiurge of *Timaeus*.

think he means Er's story (as commentators usually believe, not noticing the lack of the article), but μῦθος as a good philosopher's device beside dialectic λόγος.

But the philosophical weight of the *Republic* very clearly lies in its central parts.

18–28: Academic advances

18. *Phaedrus*. This text also contains different layers. I suggest hypothetically the following process. A first and much briefer version of this dialogue may have been written at the days when Plato experimented with pastiches of formal rhetoric.⁵⁵ Then the incident with Socrates' δαίμονιον interrupting him (241d–244a) could have been a suitable CS. Plato much later took up this text again, put it into new surroundings: a piece of idyllic nature where the danger of myths, nymphs and the young Phaedrus,⁵⁶ represent seductive forces. Here the characteristics of human soul became interwoven with a new version of Plato's theory of erotic sublimation.⁵⁷ Eros is a kind of divine μανία.

In this context, the curiously 'apodictic' proof of the soul's immortality (since it is ἀτοκίνητος 245c)⁵⁸ looks as inserted as a new CS. But after Socrates' long second speech now illuminating the soul's flight, there follows a playful interlude on the Muses. 'We have the σχολή' (258e). Again a new CS?

However, what then follows (from 259e onwards) looks to me as a separate, extensive addition, mainly concerned with the limits and problems of writing texts. This part of the dialogue is rather carelessly composed, and a specific CS is hardly worth searching for (unless the observations on the parts of a good

⁵⁵ See esp. *Crito* and *Menexenus*. The *Phaedrus* has often been declared 'very early', but the final version is certainly rather late.

⁵⁶ All commented on enthusiastically (indeed, 'ecphrastically') by Socrates, though the dialogue format is now dramatic. Cf. the opening scene in the strictly dramatic *Laws* 1,625a–c where a description of the environment of the discussion is also included. An attempt at a new device?

⁵⁷ Contrary to *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* describes the 'upper levels' of the Universe in cosmological terms (with some reflexes of Babylonian astronomy, notably 246e), and Plato's experiences with Dion are concretely implied (note 252e and 255d ff.).

⁵⁸ Note that τὸ αὐτό and κινεῖν are complementary concepts in Plato's later ontology. The soul can 'move itself' with the help of its two horses which even the gods need, a bizarre connection to traditional mythology.

λόγος 264c are meant as one). The presence of Plato's preference for oral communication is implied throughout. A lengthy conspectus of formal rhetoric as contrasted to 'dihæretic dialectic' is included (261a–274b). The 'Egyptian' invention of writing (274c–275b) does not help the dialectician whose writings, like many other texts, are produced just for play (276d, repeated with emphasis at 278a–c). With somewhat ironical compliments to Isocrates, the teacher of rhetoric, particularly written prose, and a final prayer to Pan and the present nymphs for 'inner καλόν and σωφοσύνη' (hardly their speciality), the two friends leave for town. The whole work remains notably heterogeneous, in spite of its great literary charm.

19. *Cratylus*. After the musings on literary language in *Phaedrus*, it is reasonable to list the discussion of the nature of language in *Cratylus* which points towards a deeper epistemology (beginning in *Theaetetus*). But *Cratylus* is remarkably 'different' in all respects.

Socrates is confronted with two persons with opposite opinions about the origin and function of 'words' and 'names', the Socratic Hermogenes and the more enigmatically intelligent sophist Cratylus. The latter believes that words have their function 'by nature' (φύσει), but he remains silent for a start. Socrates begins his elenchus with Hermogenes who stands for the common-sense view that words and names can be changed according to human agreement, 'convention'. There is much of amusing Platonic play in the difficulties that Socrates sees in such a view: for instance, there must have been an ὀνοματουργός (389a, cf. again the Demiurge), and even practical implements such as a weaver's shuttle (κέρκις) require a theoretical Form. With the etymology (the term is post-Platonic) of Homeric names Socrates begins to feel inspired as by Euthyphron (396d), and more nonsensical explanations of gods' names appear.

They culminate in the last example (407c–408d), the name of Hermes (the god of language), properly perhaps to be seen, or not to be seen, as the ancestor of Hermogenes; and now Cratylus becomes involved for a minute. The implications of what is said here are sufficiently frame-breaking and 'funny' for being taken as a CS with a pivot for the entire dialogue, I think. Among the many allusions here, note the relationship of all kinds of 'language' and 'speech' (λόγος) with the son of Hermes, the 'double-natured' Pan who moves around 'All' (cf. Plato's TLM), a satyr-like being (like Socrates as described by

Alcibiades in *Symposium*), shingly smooth (bald) and close to the divine at top, but hairy and rough and not very truthful below.⁵⁹

Socrates now goes on, 'explaining' for a while physical phenomena, but then (411bc) sees the truth: such entities, and also values and virtues, are all dependent on 'movement' and 'change': they are never stable. And words may have been changed over time. His long lists of examples are still semi-nonsensical, but the listener (contrary to the naïve Hermogenes) may be suspecting that Socrates himself moves around in the dark, bushy area of *logos*. And any friend of Plato will hope to rise up from this 'lower level' of κίνησις.

Now finally (427b) the two want Cratylus to express his opinion of all this (which in fact has been pointing more and more towards what was expected to be his view about language). Socrates starts questioning him dialectically. He leads his elenchus to the explanation of language as a kind of 'imitation' (μίμημα 430ab) of truth, and a combination of ὀνόματα and ῥήματα (431bc).⁶⁰ We can observe less playfulness here than before. The truth is likely to be a stable super-human level (note Plato's TLM here), whereas the words reflect the movement below (439c). Socrates has a dream about something like a 'theory of Forms' (439c), but the question of its γνῶσις (440a) finishes in an aporia for the dialogue as a whole. The discussion must go on, the partners agree.

20. *Theaetetus*. This is Plato's most comprehensive treatment of epistemology, interestingly avoiding the theory of Forms almost altogether, but heterogeneous and quite difficult at times. The dialogue is almost certainly revised and re-written in dramatic form at least once (142c–143c).⁶¹ The first version may have been very much like the *Charmides*: Socrates discussing a value concept with a very promising and bright young man, who somehow himself represented this idea but died before the dialogue was written.⁶² He is introduced by the mathematician and sophist Theodorus of Cyrene, who has a function similar to

⁵⁹ The description has been sometimes compared to the mirror imagery in *Alcibiades* 1,133c; cf. also *Phaedrus* 255d. A sarcastic allusion to a phallus is also possible.

⁶⁰ This suggests a kind of 'definition' by means of words. The term ῥήμα here means 'qualifier' rather than 'verb'.

⁶¹ See Thesleff 1990 (=2009, 509–518), Tarrant 2010.

⁶² I have argued (see the preceding note) that *Theaetetus* died after a battle ca. 390 B.C. though Plato later made him an icon of Academic geometry.

Critias in *Charmides*. But Theaetetus resembles Socrates also physically (143c), so he is not erotically attractive: his charm, noted by 'Socrates the Younger' (read Plato 147d), his playmate, comes from his intelligence, first demonstrated in terms of his 'generalizing' of a geometrical rule. There are some, but not many, playful points in this opening part where Theaetetus attempts to give some explanations of ἐπιστήμη.

I suggest that Socrates' famous presentation of his 'maieutic' art (149a–151d) was the CS of the first version. This art is a quasi-erotic process which, with god's help (see esp. 150cd), can produce both reliable and worthless offspring. The point of this Platonically bizarre imagery here means that divinely inspired dialectic is highly useful also when there is no erotic relation between the partners.⁶³

Theodorus may have commented on this in the first version, but in the text we have Theaetetus now delivers a new 'child': ἐπιστήμη must be αἴσθησις. This soon (152a) leads to a discussion between Socrates and Theaetetus about Protagoras (one of Theodorus' specialities, as we shall see below) and a lengthy section concerning various philosophers' (Presocratics' and indeed Plato's) theories about ontology, movement, sensual impressions, change, and untruth. Many of the points are important, though flavoured by a certain playfulness. Theodorus then takes over as Socrates' partner at 161a and tries to present a detailed, serious defence of Protagoras. Socrates doubts the Ἀλήθεια (the name of Protagoras' chief pamphlet, 171c) in all this. But we have time (σχολή 172c).

What follows (172d–177c) is certainly the CS for the present dialogue: a digression on the two 'paradigms' of human thinking (roughly to be explained as Plato's TLM). It includes towards the end the motto of 'trying to be like god' (176b), also quoted elsewhere. I see this as an enigmatically ambiguous pivot.⁶⁴

Socrates now goes on questioning Theaetetus, mainly on the problems of movement. Theaetetus suggests (185c–186a) that the soul can perhaps manage the two levels of Being through some of its inborn qualities, and Socrates is impressed.⁶⁵ Theaetetus then (187c) suggests that ἐπιστήμη might be ἀληθής

⁶³ 'Maieutics' does not occur elsewhere in Platonic texts, and its relation to the theories of Eros in other dialogues remains unclear. A Socratic elenchus often has no erotic connotations whatsoever.

⁶⁴ Also *Symposium* 212a, *Republic* 6,500cd; 10,613ab. It certainly concerns only 'philosophical minds', and its religious implications are not in the foreground.

⁶⁵ In fact Theaetetus operates with what I now call 'Relational Forms', see N. F. Alican in SS 2015,

δόξα. But since this leads to a new aporia, he remembers that 'somebody' has proposed the addition μετὰ λόγου (201c).⁶⁶ This has been often regarded as Plato's final position (though pro forma doubted at the end, 209e). But Socrates inserts, as a 'dream', a lengthy discussion of λόγος and its 'elements' (cf. *Cratylus*). So the discussion is left Socratically open, and Socrates goes to hear the indictment against him (210c, cf. *Euthyphro*).

21. *Parmenides*. We now come to dialogues where the artistic structure, and so the question of CS's, are not prominent. *Parmenides* is definitely more heterogeneous than *Theaetetus*, inconsistently composed, and often read as Plato's perhaps desperate self-criticism in front of his own critics.⁶⁷ It begins as a report by a 'Kephalos' of Clazomenae about a very complicated third-hand story concerning young Socrates (read: young Plato) meeting Elean philosophers. This playful opening with its allusions to Platonic distance-seeking (as in *Symposium*, *Phaedo* and notably the *Republic*) is forgotten as the dialogue proceeds gradually towards dramatic form. Socrates first listens to a speech of Zenon, a pupil of Parmenides, about 'one' and 'many', and makes some comments (including references to Plato's theory of Forms). Parmenides is present and finds them interesting (130ab). He starts an elenctic questioning of Socrates about the logic of his theory. The problems remain open, and Parmenides suggests that young Socrates needs more training (136c).

This section is followed by a short interlude (136c–137b): could not Parmenides take over the training of this promising young man? The interlude was perhaps meant to be a kind of CS. Parmenides agrees with a number of sarcastic remarks about the 'laborious play' (πραγματειώδη παιδιάν 137b2) that will result from this. We expect a reconsideration of the theory of Forms. But the basics of these theories return in obviously later dialogues.⁶⁸ Instead, the 'training' that follows concern almost only the logical relations of ἓν and πολλά,

322.

⁶⁶ This much discussed 'somebody' has remained unclear. In *Charmides* 161b 'somebody' was Critias. Perhaps it was Plato, after all.

⁶⁷ My Norwegian colleague and friend E. Wyller has insisted in many connections that it is the best evidence we have of Plato's positive 'henology'. At any rate, *Parmenides* marks, together with *Theaetetus*, the beginning of Plato's 'late philosophy'.

⁶⁸ See Thesleff 1982 (=2009, 304–308).

which were introduced by Zenon is his earlier lecture. And the very young man who now turns up as Parmenides' respondent is a certain 'Aristoteles', one of the Thirty.⁶⁹ This was probably meant to be the pivotal point of the dialogue.

The strictly formal gymnastic 'figures' of the training do not meet our expectations of a correction of the theory of Forms. They look like a secondary addition of a scheme for Eleatic training, perhaps by an assistant, when Plato had lost his interest in his original project of reconsidering his theory.

22. *Sophist*. I list this as the first of the certainly 'late' Platonic dialogues. It follows both *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides* at a distance, and it includes elements from both. But it has a consistently dramatic form, its style is 'late',⁷⁰ and (Old) Socrates has withdrawn to a position of an 'honorary chairman'. The discussion is led by an anonymous Guest from Elea, a full-blown philosopher, with ontology as his speciality. His chief partner is here the highly competent young Theaetetus (recommended by Socrates, 217de). The theme is the characteristics of a 'sophist'. The method, developed in the first part of the dialogue, is a 'diharetic' classification of the concept so as to arrive at a conceptual hierarchy which can, apparently, be used (Platonically) 'upwards' and 'downwards'.⁷¹ The wealth of tentative examples given in this dialogue are partly playful or sarcastic and, if not invented by Plato, probably accepted by him with a smile. The contents are very rich, however, and include much criticism of various Presocratics and later lines of thought.

A glimpse of a CS can be seen at 239e–243e. The piece does not stand out formally, nor with pointed play, but its implication is: does the hiding sophist exist though he seems to be non-existent, and can we commit 'patricide' of Parmenides (241d, is this little sarcasm meant as a pivotal point?) by asserting that there is a 'being somehow' between being and non-being?

⁶⁹ Mentioned at 127d2. I find it clear (though many doubt it) that this is again a Platonic play with names. In fact the criticism of Plato's theory of Forms which we find in some of the Aristotelian *πραγματεῖαι* corresponds very closely with what Parmenides has said in his above questioning of 'young Socrates'. And it is tempting to think that the Academy at this time had about 30 'members'.

⁷⁰ Thesleff 1967 (=2009, 121–122: 'onkos'). Cf. Tarrant 2010, 14–15.

⁷¹ This method seems to have been popular among some of Plato's friends; Speusippus is said to have studied it. Hints at its two-way application occur in passing in *Phaedrus* 249bc, 266b.

The arguments that follow approach successively two interesting new aspects of Plato's theory of 'concepts' (i.e. words) and 'Forms': there can be a συμπλοκή (240c, 259a, etc.) of them in innumerable ways within οὐσία taken in a large sense (meaning also 'being something' = the copula); and the pairs of the μέγιστα γένη (such as στάσις/κίνησις, ταύτόν/θάτερον, 254ce) cover the Universe, laterally, as it were.⁷² This discussion could be regarded as the 'complement' to Plato's theory of Forms, expected at the end of the Parmenides. There also follow more notes on λόγος and δόξα ψευδής (where the sophist seems to be hiding). We arrive finally at a very explicit definition of the sophist as being basically a very insincere 'imitator'. And imitation is a 'two-level' process (like play and irony, we might add).

23. *Statesman (Politicus)*. Though constructed as following immediately after the *Sophist*, the *Statesman* is considerably different. The partner of the Guest is now going to be 'Socrates the Younger' (read: young Plato), and this must contain an allusion to Plato's early interest in statemanship. The examples of διαίρεσις are now fewer and constructive. The Younger Socrates has not so much of his own to add to the Guest's arguments, which are more like a 'lecture' (in the 'late Platonic' manner). And what is particularly notable from our present point of view: the dialogue is provided with a very clear 'Platonic' CS. After a series of tentative definitions of 'statesmanship' as the 'knowledge' of a shepherd-like leader, which evidently is not sufficient, the Guest will tell a myth.

This so-called Cronus myth (268e–274e) certainly forms the CS of the dialogue. One of its points is the somewhat bizarre situation which occurs when the Cosmos under Cronus' rather paradisiac rule (with no philosophy, 272cd) suddenly changes its rotation into the opposite direction. Humans will have to take care of themselves. A new World-ruler, such as the harsh Zeus (272b), will contribute to a new organized society. Many 'turns' of this kind will happen.⁷³ But a human ruler will need more than a shepherd's skill.

The latter, and main, half of the dialogue concerns the qualities to be found for the βασιλική τέχνη (276c) in a human world where δαίμονες are not

⁷² I have discussed them in various contexts and would like to call them, now, 'Relational Forms'. See above, note 65.

⁷³ This often analysed myth obviously includes allusions at least to Plato's *Protagoras*, *Republic*, and some material used in *Timaeus* and the *Laws*.

leading, as in the world of Cronus. Basically, we are now on Platonic ground. The 'dihairetic' method known from the *Sophist* is applied carefully, with very little play. The old Socratic manner of referring to concrete 'parallels' is here, interestingly, turned into a 'paradigmatic' method (277d). The 'model' that the Guest chooses for his argument is 'weaving', 'tying together' (συνπλέκειν) (279d–305e). The art of μετρητική is needed, and preferably a sense for 'what is suitable' (though 'the precise as such' is difficult to reach, 284de), and dialectics is needed in this case (285d), and the art of 'dividing the εἶδη correctly' (i.e. dihairetics, 285d). A conspectus of different types of government follows (290d ff.), and it is notable here that ἐπιστήμη is needed, and indeed law-giving (though not a rule of laws). We seem to be moving somewhere between the social ethics of the *Republic* and the Platonic *Laws*.

At the end the Guest (very un-Socratically) produces a short but clear and serious conclusion (211bc) about the 'best society', woven by the kingly art to make all humans in it, free and slaves, as happy as possible. This may sound rather 'modern', taking account of the numerous different 'strands' that the weaving symbolism implies.⁷⁴

24. *Timaeus*. This famous 'volume' and its short, abruptly finished addition *Critias* (see nr. 25 below), has surprisingly little in common with the other 'late' Platonic dialogues, except for the basic TLM. It is extremely difficult to find a chronological place for it.⁷⁵ Plato may have begun planning it before the *Republic* was finalised, and it took form, with the help of assistants (other than those for *Parmenides*, *Sophist* and the *Statesman*), under pythagorizing influences from the West, yet before *the Laws* was finished (see *Epinomis*). This is very hypothetical. The *Timaeus*, as we have it, begins with a repetition of Plato's 'Proto-Republic' (17a–19b)⁷⁶ followed by the beginning of the Atlantis story as told by Critias. Then follows (from 27c) the essential piece: Timaeus' continuous lecture on the creation and function of the Universe and its parts. This became a standard text, in antiquity and later, for Plato's view of cosmology, psychology

⁷⁴ Interestingly, the Academy never produced the dialogue 'Philosopher' expected to be part of a trilogy; see especially *Statesman* 257a. Cf. *Critias*, and possibly *Epinomis*.

⁷⁵ See the discussion in Thesleff 1982 (=2009, 335–339). I am even more sceptical today.

⁷⁶ The 'Fourth man', missing today because of a sudden ἀσθένεια (17a, cf. *Phaedo* 59b), must have been the young Plato (as few have seen). Plato did not care about chronology very much.

and biology. The Locrian Timaeus is probably not a historical person, but he is introduced (20a) as an outstanding 'philosopher' (later often seen as a Pythagorean). Quite evidently, his lecture is composed out of various specialists' views, applied to Plato's TLM, his theory of Forms, his psychology, and some other elements. At the outset Timaeus calls his lecture 'a probable story' (εἰκῶς μῦθος, 29d), implying probably a slightly ironical contrast to Critias' 'true λόγος' (26e, note Socrates' remark). But there is very little irony or playfulness in Timaeus' myth.⁷⁷ Critias' own explanation (21a–26a) of how the traditions about Atlantis have reached him, should make the attentive reader understand that they are not very reliable.⁷⁸

But are there traces of a CS in Timaeus' lecture? I am not sure if any of the doings of the Demiurge (e.g. the creation of the World Soul 34b–36d) can be seen as 'central' in a literary sense because they are so involved with the entire exposition. Nearest to a Platonic CS comes the rather surprising insertion of the impact of Ἀνάγκη, Necessity (47e–53b), a new and 'different' (48e) approach. It concerns mainly the formation of the four elements before the Demiurge began his work. A lengthy argument introduces a 'receiver' (ἐκμαγεῖον or a μήτηρ, 50cd)⁷⁹ where a kind of protoplasma (a later term) is received as if by a nurse or a mother, who 'sways unevenly in every part, and is herself shaken ...' (transl. Bury), until the 'matter' takes geometrical Forms (52d–53b).⁸⁰ These are then described in detail. The imagery of the 'shaking' process, I believe, is meant as a somewhat playful illustration of Plato's TLM and of the κίνησις that is always below the στάσις towards which all the activities of the Demiurge are oriented.

The physical constitution of the Cosmos is then described in some detail, and the question of causes is again discussed. The younger gods (whose existence is a complicated problem, 40d–41a) continue the Demiurge's work, with less perfection: the soul and body of humans, diseases and other handicaps, animals, etc. are explained with much material of interest for historians of Academic philosophy and science.

⁷⁷ The point of the 'probable story' is repeated later, note especially 59cd. Add perhaps the remark on the Olympian gods 40d. For the ἐκμαγεῖον 50c, see note 79 below.

⁷⁸ A specific warning is the mention of the Ἀπατούρια festival (21b) with its allusion to ἀπατή.

⁷⁹ One of the starting points for the long history of the term *materia*, 'matter' (Aristotle's ὕλη occurs later in *Timaeus*, 69a).

⁸⁰ The 'feminine' movement here reflects lower level phenomena. The sexual allusions are pretty manifest.

The work ends with a brief 'hymnic' statement that this Cosmos, filled with immortal and mortal things, is the best and only world possible.

25. *Critias*. A curious continuation of Critias' Atlantis myth, which was begun in *Timaeus*. It is now introduced by a notice (108a, implied in *Timaeus* 20a) that a trilogy is planned with Hermocrates the Syracusan as the last lecturer. But Critias stops his story in the middle of a sentence, and nothing is heard of the rest of the plan.⁸¹

Critias at first dwells on the myths about Athenian 'prehistory' and then (from 112e) he starts describing the leaders and community of Atlantis and how it (this early Syracuse!) became aggressive towards Athens. The largest part of the story, as we have it, concerns the architectural arrangements in the city of Atlantis.⁸² Any trace of a Platonic CS cannot be expected.

26. *Philebus*. This long and in many ways interesting dialogue on 'The good life' has received relatively little attention in Plato scholarship.⁸³ It is obviously a 'late' work, operating extensively with terms and concepts known from earlier dialogues, and projecting them on basically moral questions and human attitudes – apparently in general, not centering on 'philosophical man', as most Platonic texts do. It is literarily interesting, first, because it is the only treatise-like work in the Platonic corpus, yet formally a quite vivid dialogue written in a heavy 'onkos' style.⁸⁴ Scholars are used to reading in Aristotle similar questions treated in a more easily digested form. Second, quite often *Philebus* offers sudden flashes of humour which sound distinctly Platonic. Some of them are directly or indirectly concerned with one of Socrates' two partners here, Philebus,⁸⁵ who does not say much and prefers to sleep (e.g. 15c), as befits a passive hedonist.

⁸¹ There has been much speculation about the reason for the abrupt stop. At least it suggests a piety to 'Plato's text' by its Academic editors.

⁸² A theme of particular interest to those Academicians who were specialists on preparing new colonies, cf. *Laws* 3–4.

⁸³ The Dublin conference noted in my bibliography under Gavray 2010 was a rare step.

⁸⁴ Thesleff 1967 (=2009, 123–124).

⁸⁵ Certainly a fictitious name, alluding to 'Love of the youthful'. *Philebus* is hardly modelled on Plato's friend Eudoxus, as sometimes suggested; cf. e.g. *Hippias Major* 287e on the 'girl-lover'. Eudoxus was a very active man.

The other partner, Protarchos,⁸⁶ first inclines to side with Philebus but soon becomes an enthusiastic interlocutor to what Socrates says, yet on the whole without opinions of his own. And the leader of the 'discussion' is now, contrary to the other dialogues from *Parmenides* onwards, an ageless 'Socrates' who keeps the dialectic strongly in his own hands. This is very probably the last manifestation we have of Plato's own view and his own voice, only formally filtered by assistants. And we may note here in passing, that a 'Pythagoran' aspect of Plato's TLM comes in with the addition of the contrast *πέρως / ἀπειρία* (later *ἄπειρον*) (16c).⁸⁷

A basic strand in Socrates' argumentation is the possibility of bridging the two ontological levels, represented by 'pleasure' (ἡδονή) and 'intellectual activity' (here often φρόνησις), by a third 'mediating' level. Plato's philosophical theories of ἔρως are almost forgotten in this context. A first breakthrough comes at 21a–22a with something like a Platonic CS. Protarchus is made to agree that a life totally in 'pleasure' would not be worth while, even if possible. Thinking of this brings him into total ἀφασία (21d). We may note here a reflection of Socratic *νάρκωσις* (as in *Meno*, note Socrates' comparison of sea monsters lacking λογισμός, *Philebus* 21c). Anyway, Socrates is now prepared to introduce the idea of 'mixture' (22d)⁸⁸ as a possible solution, and it remains then as one line of thought throughout the dialogue.

Apart from this one passage, I cannot find anything reminiscent of a CS among the innumerable turns in the developing argument. Not even particularly important sections (such as the reflections on the ridiculous 47d–50e, the notes on 'aesthetics' in arts 50e–53c, or the discussion of dialectic 57e–58e) are provided with any evident distinguishing signs. This is, as I said, essentially a discursive text, concerning all kinds of human activity with ἀγαθόν in view. The lengthy summary (beginning at 64c) is shortened at the end (66d–67b). Protarchus, however, would like to make a last question. But Socrates does not

⁸⁶ Son of Callias, perhaps semi-fictitious. Contrary to Philebus, he is very much 'awake' and inserting occasionally interesting comments (e.g. 31a, 45de).

⁸⁷ See Thesleff 1982 (=2009, 346 note 622), 1999 (=2009, 470–471, 476, etc.). The contrast was introduced by Philolaus.

⁸⁸ *Μεῖξις*, *σύμμεξις* and corresponding verbs. One obvious starting point is the idea of 'combining' or 'weaving together' especially in the *Statesman*.

even ask what it is. So the 'dialogue' remains Socratically open (for those who understand the 'humour' of this).

27. *Laws I – 12 (Nomoi)*. This enormous 'dialogue' is in many ways heterogeneous, and probably written by different hands. It is said to have been posthumously edited by the astronomer Philippus of Opous, who added the *Epinomis* (nr. 28 below).⁸⁹ The scene is Crete, and the discussion is led by an anonymous Athenian Guest (who stands for 'Plato' rather than 'Socrates' and tends to speak in long monologues). The two other speakers are the Cretan Cleinias, and Megillos from Sparta; all are depicted as very old men. The discussion concerns, with deep seriousness and even harshness, the organization of the 'second-best society', because the ideal (as in the *Republic*) is possible only for gods. Platonic playfulness is not to be expected, but occasional glimpses may be found especially in the first books.⁹⁰

CSs cannot be expected for this compositional whole. Possibly, however, the idea of motivating the laws for the citizens by introductory προοίμια was originally a Platonic idea, though the samples we have in our text do not sound genuinely Platonic in content or style. The first extensive 'prelude' of this kind takes the total of Book 5 (726a–747e).⁹¹ Maybe Plato had planned it as a kind of CS, though he did not formulate it himself.

Reflexes of genuinely Platonic ontology and psychology occur especially in Books 9–10 (863a–910d), but the grip is here repressively static, religious and, I think, un-Platonic. It is worth noticing, however, that a more constructively 'philosophical' approach is expected from the so-called Nocturnal Council, adduced at the end of Book 12 (960b–969d). See further *Epinomis* (below).

28. *Epinomis*. This 'Addition to the *Laws*' is probably written by Philip of Opous, astronomer and member of the Academy (see above note, 89). Predominantly, it concerns the branches of 'knowledge' or 'wisdom' (σοφία) that the Nocturnal Council can be expected to ponder. These are in the first place theology, astron-

⁸⁹ See Nails – Thesleff 2003.

⁹⁰ E.g. 1,644d, human beings as gods' puppets (θαύμα, at the same time implying something 'remarkable'); 2,664b–d, comments on the three Dionysian choruses required in a good society, where old men over sixty are not supposed to sing but to tell stories.

⁹¹ See further e.g. 6,770b–771a; 7,822d–823d; etc.

omy and cosmology. The *Epinomis* does not follow the model of *Timaeus*, and the various changes from that work indicate either Philip's preferences, or developments in Academic learning, or both. As far as I can see we are not brought nearer the genuine Plato at any point.⁹² On the contrary, the author tends to give a pointedly religious bias to his view of the Cosmos and the σοφία needed for understanding it. The prayer implied before entering on the second part of the work (980c) is hardly meant to be a CS.

29–32: *Further Dubia and Spuria*

With the *Epinomis* we reached a text that the majority of scholars today consider inauthentic. I believe for my part that all of the 'late dialogues' are to some degree 'semi-authentic' in the sense that they are based on drafts conceived or even written by Plato, later expanded, combined and rewritten by one or more assistants.⁹³

However, there are at least four dialogues in the Corpus, whose full authenticity is still under debate for less obvious reasons than *Epinomis*.

29. *Alcibiades I*. Though considered an important introductory dialogue since antiquity, its authenticity has been doubted in modern times for various reasons.⁹⁴ My own doubts are due, mainly, to two aspects: the over-expansive but differently constructed elenchus sections, and the explanation of Socrates' δαίμόνιον as an active divine force within his soul. Playful points are not very common (but there are two at 120b, before the CS). If the basic theme is seen as the 'caretaking' required from a good political leader,⁹⁵ then we can trace two stages in the compositional process. I assume that Plato, himself, wrote a draft on good and less good leadership in Athens, as a discussion between Socrates and Alcibiades. It included a CS such as we have it (121a–124c), on the education of leaders in Sparta and Persia. It was meant to lead to new aspects of leaders' education. This draft was put aside (by new questions raised in *Re-*

⁹² This cannot be argued here.

⁹³ I have collaborated with H. Tarrant on the problems of 'semi-authenticity'. See now Tarrant 2017.

⁹⁴ See Thesleff 1982 (=2009, 361–364), Renaud & Tarrant 2015.

⁹⁵ Cf. notably *Charmides*, *Statesman*.

public, Symposium, and elsewhere), but much later taken up by one of Plato's religiously inclined assistants.⁹⁶ He added the opening frame about god who now allows Socrates to approach Alcibiades, expanded the elenchus sections, and above all, made the CS a περιπέτεια for explaining the religious force of the δαιμόνιον. Socrates now emphasises the contrast body/soul, the latter being 'oneself'. The truth of oneself is reflected in the eyes of the teacher with his divine self (133b).⁹⁷ The final, bizarre point about 'stork's love' (135de) may have belonged to the first version.

30. Hippias Major. This lively dialogue between Socrates and the sophist on the notion of *kalon* may derive from an early sketch by Plato, later expanded by an assistant who added comments pointing to the mid-fourth century.⁹⁸ It has no clear CS, but perhaps Socrates' curious *alter ego* (introduced at 286c, cf. 298b), who gradually takes over the role of the questioner, was intended to have that function in the first version.⁹⁹

31. Amatores (or Erastae or Rivals). A skeleton for a narrative by Socrates who meets two unnamed boys after a school lecture on mathematics¹⁰⁰ and discusses with them what 'philosophy' is. A rudimentary mark of a possible CS can be found (135e–136b). The point of Socrates' argument that follows is to show what philosophy is not. Perhaps the sketch was made by Plato to be developed into a lively dialogue for training in argumentation in the Academy.

32. Hipparchus. A short, Socratically 'open' dialogue on the concept of 'profit' (κέρδος). This value seems not to be, as such, morally condemnable. Plato may

⁹⁶ Cf. notably *Theages, Minos, and Epinomis*.

⁹⁷ This part of *Alcibiades 1* has some points in common with the rather more playful *Charmides*; cf. there Socrates' 'Thracian medicine'; the virtues being reflected in the eyes, 156b–157d; and Socrates wanting to see Charmides (i.e. his soul) 'naked', 154de, cf. *Alcibiades 1*, 132a.

⁹⁸ Discussed in Thesleff 1976. At that time, I wrongly regarded the piece as 'pseudo-Platonic', mainly because I thought that Plato would not use a playful Socratic prose at the time he 'wrote' heavy texts such as the *Statesman* or *Philebus*. 'Semi-authenticity' would solve such problems.

⁹⁹ He has Antisthenean traits. Socrates appears many times 'bewildered' in front of this challenger, notably at the end, 304b–e.

¹⁰⁰ The school master is a Dionysios. He is sometimes thought to have been Plato's own teacher.

have written this, initially, as a sketch for logical training. A digression (228b–229e) on the 6th century Athenian Hipparchus who died as an alleged 'tyrant' but for other reasons, can be taken as a CS. It is loosely attached to the theme of 'profitable' deception. Allusions to Dion's death (354 BC) are in various ways thinkable. We read in the *Seventh Epistle* that Plato felt himself deceived by the profit-seeking Dion. I suggest as a hypothesis that the sketch was finished in collaboration with a younger assistant.

33: *The Rest of the 'Spurious' Dialogues*

Minos (on the meaning of the concept νόμος) is often coupled with the *Hipparchus* because of similarities in the structure. I find the differences more important. *Minos* looks to me as a polemical comment on the first books of the Laws, written by a member of the Academy who emphasizes the divine inspiration of the Cretan lawgiver *Minos* and relies on the Homeric tradition. There is no trace of a CS but at the end a lengthy praise of *Minos* (319e–321b) which rather corresponds to Platonic final myths. — For *Clitopho*, see above.¹⁰¹ — In *Theages* Socrates is asked for advice in education (cf. *Charmides*. *Laches*). There are some parallels with *Alcibiades 1* but no clear CS. The δαίμόνιον is introduced towards the end (128d) as an active divine force requiring a close, even physical, contact with the pupil (cf. also *Symposium*). Socrates' shortcomings are due to circumstances, and we know that Theages was sickly and died young. The weight of the argument comes at the end (cf. *Minos*). — *Sisyphus*. 'Socrates' (placed in a mid-4th century context) discusses paradoxes concerning 'giving advice'. Perhaps meant for Academic training. — *Alcibiades 2*. On the right method to approach the gods. Dependent on *Alcibiades 1*, but with still more religious feeling. Alcibiades accepts the advice of Socrates and, at the end, crowns him with his wreath. A date at the time of Alexander the Great is arguable, but far from certain. — *De Justo*. Probably a school text on 'What is right' for training various typical points (many of them known from Plato's dialogues, cf. also *Clitopho*). — *De Virtute*. An Academic compilation of some questions regarding ἀρετή, found in *Meno*, which is partly quoted verbatim. — *Demodocus*. A collection of four eristic pieces about 'giving advice' (see *Theages* and *Sisyphus*). No specifically Academic traits; not even Socrates is mentioned (but Theages'

¹⁰¹ See above, note 50.

father's name was Demodocus). — *Eryxias*. A relatively long and ambitiously written dialogue in the Platonic narrative manner, on the ethical problems of 'wealth' (πλοῦτος). 'Socrates' emphasizes (without much humour or irony) the difficulties involved and the importance of reason. Probably the digression about an incident with the sophist Prodicus (397c–399a) is meant to be a CS, interesting as one of the author's many attempts to imitate Plato; but its function has nothing of the Platonic spirit. In spite of his shortcomings as an imitator, I see no clear sign for dating the dialogue in the Hellenistic age.¹⁰² — *Axiochus*. The only dialogue in our Corpus which is certainly a post-Platonic addition. It is an interesting, though rather naive, document reflecting various early Hellenistic approaches to eschatology. 'Socrates' offers to a dying person a series of consolatory arguments, the last of which he seems to embrace himself: there is a paradise after life for those who have lived 'righteously'. — The Pseudo-Platonic dialogues found or mentioned outside the Corpus tradition are totally irrelevant here.¹⁰³ So is naturally the list of *Definitions* ('Οποι) added to the Corpus at some stage.

34: *The Letters (Epistulae)*

We have 13 'Platonic' Letters in our Corpus, and a few more preserved elsewhere. Some of them give glimpses of things or themes discussed in the Academy, but nothing of interest in the present context – except for the *Seventh Letter*. This is by far the longest one, and the only one which in my opinion can be classed as authentic on reasonable grounds.¹⁰⁴ It is written to Dion's friends in Syracuse, soon after his death (in 354 BC). In fact, this letter gives a clear reflex of what can be called a CS: the famous ontological digression (342a–344d) with its context. It is the last, and rather explicit presentation of Plato's TLM, though written in a fit of strong irritation at the bluffing boasts of Dionysius II.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² The date is discussed in some detail by the Coll. Budé editor, J. Souilhé 1930, 87–89.

¹⁰³ The (*H*)*alcyon*, on the question of how little we humans know, is preserved independently of the Corpus tradition. For five other dialogues fabricated under Plato's name we have only the titles, and there may have existed many more of this kind.

¹⁰⁴ One of my reasons is precisely the Digression (below) which is the stumbling block for many scholars.

¹⁰⁵ The impressionistic character of the presentation of how the ontological levels should be

Concluding Remarks

Plato uses 'play' (παιδιά) or irony or satire of varying kinds and to a varying degree in all his authentic dialogues. This is worth remembering, though many readers tend to miss or neglect such paraphernalia.

In this article, I have tried to focus on the Central Sections (CS). Their importance as a literary compositional principle in Platonic dialogues is beyond doubt. However, I should now prefer to interpret the so-called 'pedimentality' they are said to express somewhat otherwise than I and some others have done before. The term 'pediment' refers to the arrangement of the figures in the triangular gable of a classical temple. The main function of the Central Section, as I see it now, is a shift or a widening of the perspective of the discussion. It may come close to a περιπέτεια in a Greek tragedy (or the παράβασις in Attic comedy); and it may indeed reflect Plato's dependence on dramatic art. The CS marks a compositional 'shift' in the approximate centre of the 'pedimental' (or 'pyramidal', if one prefers that term) composition of the dialogue.

I have here wanted to call attention to the particularly playful or ironical remarks that often (if not normally) accompany these shifts of perspective. Let me call these playful comments 'pivotal play'. Many (if not all) of these cases require a much deeper study than what has been possible in this short article. On the whole, however, they seem to reflect Plato's 'Two-Level Model'. And I hope they also show that even the Central Sections are not so altogether serious as many readers want to have them. And I also hope that further studies of Plato's playfulness will contribute ever more to our understanding of his thinking.

Let me now stress once more that the cases of 'pivotal play' that I have noted, represent an ambivalently 'two-sided' thinking, indeed like the entire CS. They tend to include at the same time orientations to his 'higher' and his 'human' level.

Interestingly, Plato's CSs seem to fall into two somewhat different categories (the bracketed numbers refer to the order in the above list):

understood, is easily explicable from this irritation of Plato's. The only mystifying point in it is the term εἶδωλον (first at 342b) which may contain (a sarcastic?) allusion both to εἶδος as Form and to the 'imitations' done by human thinkers, writers, painters, etc. (cf. also the Divided Line, *Republic* 6,509d–511e).

- The normal type is a clearly distinguished digression with one or two ambivalent points: *Ion* (4), *Hp.Mi.* (5), *Resp.* 1 (6), *Chrm.* (12), *Euthphr.* (15), *Euthyd.* (16), *Cra.* (19), *Tht.* (20), *Plt.* (23), *Ti.* (24), *Alc.*1 (29), *Hipparch.* (32), *Ep.*7 (33).
- In lengthy dialogues with different themes intertwined the CS sometimes tends to expand, so as to cover at least a part of the themes discussed in the dialogues in question: *Grg.* (7), *Meno* (8), *Prt.* (9), *Symp.* (10), *Phd.* (11), *Lach.* (13), *Lysis* (14), *Resp.* 1–10 (17), *Phdr.* (18). *Cra.*? (19), *Tht.* (20). This may be an additional sign of revision.
- Some possible reflexes of attempts to produce a CS can be found in *Ap.* (1), *Cri.* (2), *Menex.* (3), *Prm.* (21), *Soph.* (22), *Phlb.* (26). *Leg.*1–12 (27)?, *Hp.Ma.* (30)?, *Hipparch.* (32). However, no clear traces of CSs occur in the evident Spuria, except for the ambitious imitation of Platonic composition in *Eryx.* (33)

If my interpretation is correct, it reinforces my theories of limited audiences for the original presentation of Plato's dialogues. Such playfulness as we have met here can hardly have been intended for a general audience, though some texts could easily have been enjoyed by a large public (see e.g. *Ion* or *Euthydemus*). And it illustrates my thesis of an original oral performance of the texts, not meant to be studied word for word analytically – as most of the preserved works of Aristotle – but with an openness for an immediately following discussion.

A rough grouping of the thematic contents of the 'pivots' seems possible:

- (a) Explicit reference to Socrates' δαίμόνιον: *Ap.* (1), *Phdr.* (18, first version?)
- (b) Socrates otherwise 'bewildered' by divine interruption: *Hp.Mi.* (5, κατηβολή), *Meno* (8, νάρκωσις), *Phd.* (11, meditation), *Euthphr.* (15, thoughts like moving statues); cf. *Tht.* (20, first version? A suitable case of μαίεσις), *Phlb.* (26, ἀφασία of partner)
- (c) Aggressive interruption by a dialogue partner: *Republic* 1 (6), *Grg.* (7); cf. *Chrm.* (12)
- (d) The Philosopher interrupting the discussion, ironically or sarcastically:

- political points: *Cri.* (2), *Menex.* (3), *Hipparch.* (32)
- criticism of poetry: *Ion* (4)
- Eros and philosophy: *Symp.* (10, note perhaps sarcasm in the style of Diotima's final pleading), *Phdr.* (18, soul and ἔρωξ)
- instruction: *Lach.* (13), *Lysis* (14), *Alc.* 1 (29, first version?)
- eristics: *Euthyd.* (16)
- ontology, epistemology: *Resp.* Bks 5–7 (17, note also Bk 2), *Cra.* (19), *Tht.* (20), *Prm.* (21), *Soph.* (22), *Plt.* (23, pointed sarcasms), *Ti.* (24), *Ep.* 7 (34).

All cases (clear and less clear ones) share a common function: they are, as it were, exclamation marks for something of particular interest. And this interesting point is normally the shift of perspective that follows.

*

It is reasonable to conclude these remarks with some general reflections about Plato's sense of humour, in and outside the CSs. Plato was an elitist from birth and remained so throughout his life – yet with some notable exceptions from the normal prejudices of his class. He had no disdain for the lower classes whom he wanted to see incorporated in a 'happy' community, but he was not interested in 'ordinary' people. In his dialogues, his choice of characters (sometimes with humorous allusions in their names) are socially and intellectually 'educated' people (the slave in *Meno* is an experimental exception); only Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1 is inclined to 'vulgar' reactions. They are all prepared to communicate with the only Philosopher present, in the first place Socrates, and this protagonist is always directly or indirectly leading the discussion. 'Socrates' (or his stand-in) is the only person in the text whose humour is really relevant or at stake. Humour in 'Socratic' disguise can be safely characterized as one of Plato's basic literary methods.

Plato's humour is generally of a pointedly intellectual kind. It is normally self-ironical in a two-level sense, probably a reminiscence of the historical Socrates' attitude, but at the same time representing Plato's more aristocratic TLM. My subjective impression is that this is not the broad kind of irony often met among, say, farmers or industrial workers. Plato's irony has a personal point. It

includes an 'understatement' of oneself and a playful acceptance of another person's position. It is never scornful or 'cynical' in the modern sense of the word, 'satirical' perhaps at times, as notably in connection with quotations from Homeric poetry (as in *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Republic* 3) or in pastiches of rhetorical or sophistic speeches (see *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus*, *Phaedrus*). A kind of 'dry wit' can be traced in the dialogues. But mild satire, interestingly, is not really a Platonic device. Sarcasm is! Here, as in his irony, the 'upper level' of the TLM is always a background factor. Occasionally Plato's humour can be aggressively sarcastic: see, in the list above, numbers 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 19, 22, 34. Among these sarcastic passages, the 'pseudo-patriotism' in number 3 (*Menexenus*, a funeral speech) may sound distasteful to modern ears (but the text was hardly meant for publication). For bizarre points in the irony, see notably numbers 4, 5, 8, 9, 15, 23. Also a Platonic μῦθος normally includes playful elements. A modern reader would perhaps expect emotionally 'warmer' laughter at times. Such instances do not occur, as far as I can see. And even in lively descriptions, funny incidents or comments are rarely accompanied by laughter (as in *Charmides* 155bc, more provocatively in *Euthydemus* 300d, 303b, etc.; cf. *Republic* 3,388e). A friendly smile (as in *Parmenides* 130a) normally lacks humour.

For Plato, writing was παιδιῶ (though intellectual play) on 'two levels'. Which portions of his writings are, after all, deeply and emotionally 'serious', like the latter half of *Gorgias*? This difficult question could perhaps be answered by analysing protreptic sections in the *Republic* and occasionally later (as in the conclusion of *Philebus*, and the *Seventh Letter*). Intellectual analytic neutrality is common, of course. But touches of play occur even in the 'later' works (see numbers 20–28 in the above list) where several writers probably contributed to the final text.

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