

INTRODUCTION

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On March 11-12 of this year, the department of philosophy at the University of Toronto hosted a workshop with the title 'Ways of Interpreting Plato'. As coordinator for this workshop I gave the participants the following guideline: 'What is the correct way to interpret the dialogues of Plato and what are some concrete results of following that method?' Of course, many would abjure the notion of a 'correct way' of interpreting Plato, preferring to take what we might term the Augustinian approach: 'tolle lege'. As all serious students of Plato know, however, in order to move beyond the enjoyment of individual dialogues, and even beyond their 'edifying' portrayals of Socrates, one must employ—whether explicitly or implicitly—some set of principles for relating the results of reading one dialogue to those of the others. This is true even if one takes the extreme position of maintaining that the philosophy in each dialogue is tracked exactly by the literary structure such that one cannot licitly go beyond one dialogue to another to elucidate its philosophical claims.

The idea that literary unity corresponds exactly to philosophical unity is itself a hermeneutical principle, one which is neither obvious nor, in fact, followed by virtually any interpreters of Plato. Among other questions, all the participants in the workshop were asked to address such questions as: 'is developmentalism or unitarianism the correct principle for reading the dialogues?'; is Aristotle's testimony and the testimony of the indirect tradition necessary or even relevant for understanding Plato's philosophy?'; 'are the dialogues distinguishable according to whether they represent the philosophy of Socrates or the philosophy of Plato?' These and many other questions were discussed intensely over the two-day workshop which, apart from the participants, included faculty from Toronto and elsewhere, and graduate students.

The participants included main presentations and a principal interlocutor for each. These were:

1. Michael Erler, Würzburg (Rachel Singpurwalla, U. Maryland)
2. Constance Meinwald, U. Illinois, at Chicago (Allan Silverman, Ohio State U.)
3. Frank Gonzalez, U. Ottawa (Marina McCoy, Boston College)
4. Melissa Lane, Princeton (David Ebrey, Northwestern)
5. Kenneth Sayre, U. of Wisconsin-Madison (Mark Johnstone, McMaster U.)
6. François Renaud, U. Moncton (Debra Nails, Michigan State U.)

The papers included here in revised versions include 2-6. Michael Erler's paper was previously promised to another publication. As a result, neither that paper nor the response by Rachel Singpurwalla are included.