

Platonic Interpretive Strategies, and the History of Philosophy, with a Comment on Renaud

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ABSTRACT

François Renaud replies to the question of what principles one ought to employ in the study of Plato by arguing *that*, and demonstrating *how*, the argument and the drama operate together successfully in the *Gorgias*. In agreement with Renaud's approach, I expose some historical roots with a review of Platonic interpretive strategies of the modern period in the context of history of philosophy more generally. I also try to show *why* argument and drama operate together, an insight I attribute to Plato's genius in relation to music.

Keywords: Plato, strategies, history of philosophy, music.

As my title moves from species to genus, my paper proceeds in the opposite direction; thus my contribution to François Renaud's paper—when I get there—will have been set in a broad context. I begin in section I with the very general question of what we historians of philosophy take as our aims and methods, and what we take ourselves to be doing when we do the history of philosophy. In section II, I provide a derivative account of the extant strands of Platonic interpretation to minimize superficial disputes while emphasizing a handful of genuine disagreements about how we should conduct our research efforts. The review of interpretive strategies serves to show how Renaud's contemporary approach to Plato's dialogues, section III, represents a sensitive accommodation of the best features of more limited strategies. What he calls the Platonic dialectical requirement that argument and drama be appreciated as operating together provokes me to ask *why* that is so, and to look for an answer in Plato's attitude toward music.

I. DOING HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

I begin with a July, 2015, dialectical exchange—conducted without animus between two accomplished philosophers whose identities I will later reveal; the two disagree about the *right* way to do history of philosophy. I quote from near the end of their back-and-forth:

My opponent is looking for the single key to unlock Plato's philosophy; I am skeptical that you can (or should) bring all of Plato's philosophy back to something as apparently straightforward as the theory of forms. I see Plato as a tangle of

interconnected commitments that change and evolve from the *Apology* to the end, realized in different and perhaps incompatible ways in his different writings. My opponent wants to penetrate beneath the surface of that tangle and try to find what connects them together in a rigorous way; he wants a kind of doctrinal unity, a kind of single underlying argument and position that pulls things together. I want a reading of Plato that is as holistic as his, but one that preserves the complex motivations behind his philosophical program, and that does not reduce his project to a single impulse, indeed, a single impulse that is rigorously metaphysical: working out the consequences of the theory of forms in all its ramifications. This, in a way, is the point of my “superheroes” criticism: taking Plato’s complex character and flattening him out, making his position intelligible by stripping it of what I see as its depth and complexity. Though it might be characterized as holistic, my objection is to what strikes me as an oversimplified and reductive interpretation.

There may not be an answer to which is the *right* way of doing the history of philosophy. For different figures, the answer might be different; there is no reason why every philosopher has to be the same. Insofar as my opponent and I disagree in this case, the disagreement may be over whether one way or the other is the appropriate way of approaching Plato.

I start out so very far into the future from Plato—and in our recent past—because the problem of the right way to proceed as a historian of philosophy is a *living issue* that rightly

concerns us all. Why would anyone devote the better part of a philosophical lifetime to the study of *someone else’s* philosophy? For one, to satisfy a relentless intellectual curiosity. For another, to mine the author for purposes of one’s own philosophizing. For a third, to point out what others have missed or misinterpreted.

Maybe, but . . . such generic answers do not get us very far. There is a vast difference between curiosity about the nature of reality and truth, or the right way to live, on the one hand, and curiosity about what was on the mind of a dead philosopher and his associates, on the other. Dan Garber argues that Michael Della Rocca morphs Spinoza into a superhero, an ideal type, who “is not the historical Spinoza who lived and worked in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.” Garber calls his own work a “direct reading” and avers that Della Rocca “*rationaly reconstructs* Spinoza’s project”; Della Rocca replies that *all* history of philosophy involves rational reconstruction, a premise with which I agree, though I will not attempt to defend it separately here¹.

The landscape has changed over the last half century. Although I leave entirely aside the relationship between “History of Philosophy and History of Ideas,” the title of Paul Kristeller’s 1964 paper², I’ll repeat from that classic a few methodological points about doing history of philosophy that required a substantial defense in his time but are no longer controversial: The historian of philosophy must have (i) “adequate training... in philosophy and its basic problems”; (ii) the goal of *truth*, attained only in bits and pieces; and (iii) a “certain amount of philological and scholarly training.” It is necessary (iv) to read the philosophers in their original languages—not rely on secondary sources or translations. Kristeller adds a fifth that could be discussed further, though I think his intention is clear: (v) one’s “objective interpretation”

of a thinker should be kept distinct from one's "critical analysis," which relies on one's own philosophical assumptions and opinions. At least the first four points are in the background of the Garber-Della Rocca exchange, and taken for granted; part of Garber's beef, however, is that Della Rocca's Spinoza sides with Parmenides and Plato, and jousts with twenty-first century metaphysicians.

II. SCHOOLS OF PLATONIC³ INTERPRETATION

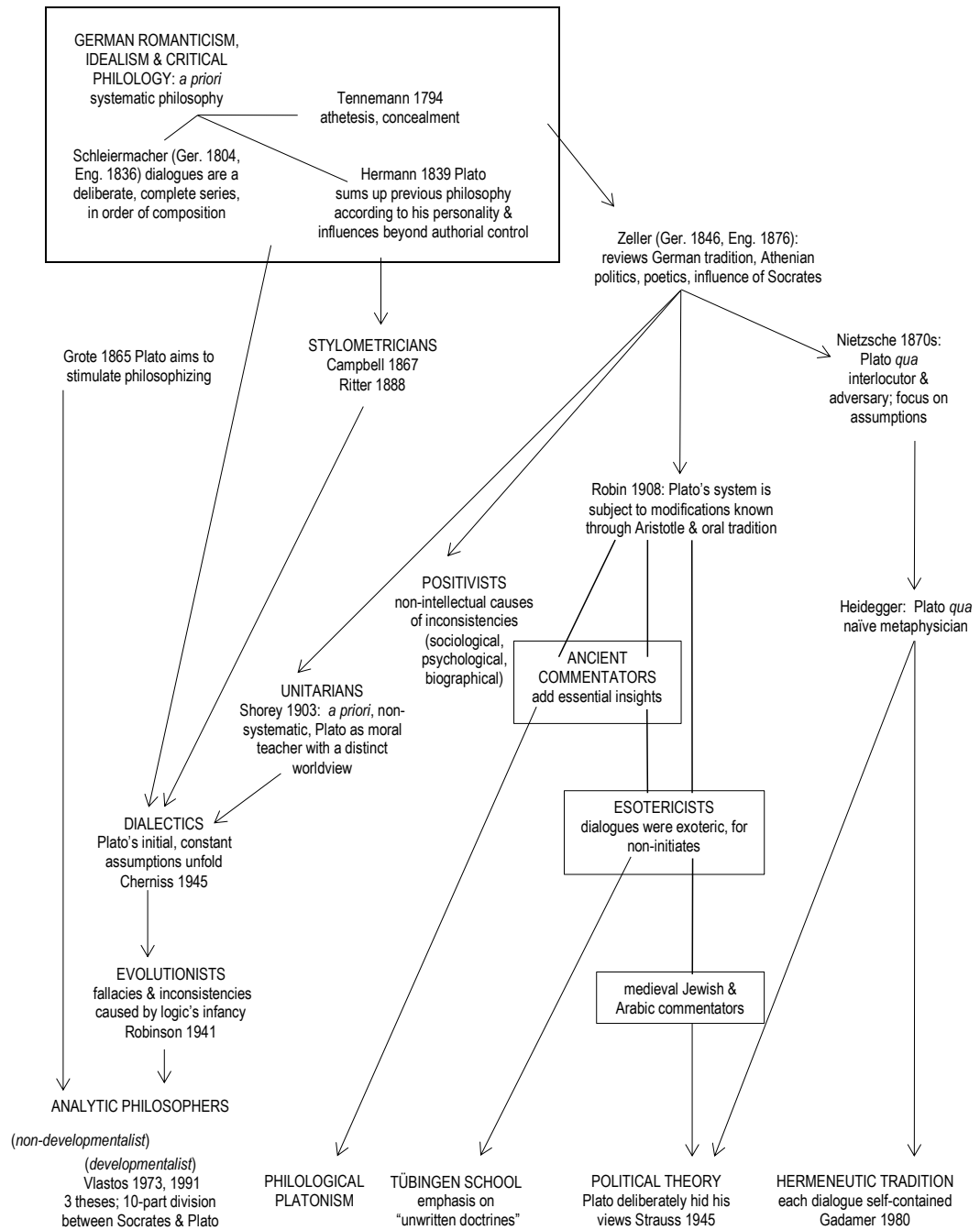
I turn now, however, to big-picture background considerations: something of a whistle-stop tour of varieties of Platonic interpretation, past to present. The reason I consider this worth doing is that different schools of interpretation can have strikingly different assumptions about Plato and — as with the branching of the evolutionary tree — can produce skin-deep resemblances or agreements that mask contrary or contradictory presuppositions that emerge in the conduct of further research. Just as often, an apparent divergence of views, when taken in context, turns out to be nothing more than a semantic squabble easily resolved. Rosamond Sprague objects to what she calls "magpie Platonists" who pick up shiny bits from here and there to make a nest that is a hodgepodge of unreflective claims. Renaud is no magpie.

Starting all the way back with the first scholars in the Academy, there was no sense that Plato needed to be *interpreted* by Speusippus and Xenocrates, just *amplified*. That did not last long. Aristotle raised the question of the relationship of mathematics to Plato's forms and to the forms of the platonists, a controversy with us still. Famously, after the death of Aristotle, all except the Epicureans among the Hellenistic Schools

claimed direct descent from Plato's Socrates. One can see in that period the origin of what has come to be thought of as a dispute over whether Plato was skeptical, as the Skeptics held, or doctrinal (with Cynics, Cyrenaics, and Stoics quarreling over what the doctrines were). Another of the contemporary preoccupations that was already a matter of ancient dispute was whether Plato reserved certain doctrines for his closest associates—that is, whether there was an esoteric doctrine, often associated with Plato's Pythagorean leanings, that was required to elaborate his exoteric dialogues.

The contemporary stage was set in the late eighteenth century in the heyday of German critical philology, idealism, and romanticism; and in the shadow of Hegel, whose grand and impenetrable system—a *priori* and unified—was considered the quintessence of greatness in philosophy. Plato was the darling of the German schoolroom, and everyone read him in Greek. The question was, How can Plato be the great and systematic philosopher we know him to be when the dialogues go this way and that, taking one position here and another there? There were—there are—answers aplenty. Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1794) achieved an elegant systematic philosophy by rejecting all but a handful of supposedly genuine dialogues; and he also held that Plato deliberately concealed the connections among his doctrines as a precaution, offering them only to intimates (Zeller 1876, 87). If the connections were not obvious, later athletes thought, then perhaps Tennemann's collection was still too large. August Krohn, by 1876, had whittled the few to one, the *Republic*.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (German 1804, English 1836) presented Plato as a deliberate and painstaking *author* whose dialogues were written in the very order that perfectly reflected his secure, basic principles. Karl Friedrich



Hermann (1839) opposed Schleiermacher directly, holding the “genetic view” that *qua* philosopher, Plato’s secure, basic principles were deployed variously throughout his lifetime, but that *qua* author, Plato was subject to external factors that accounted for inconsistencies in the dialogues. Schleiermacher’s views won the day, prompting a new and pressing question: In what order did Plato compose his dialogues? The earliest answers were two: he wrote in the order easiest-to-most complex; or he composed the dialogues in the order of Socrates’s life. Soon, however, there were scores of efforts to establish the compositional series by literary, historical, and doctrinal criteria. Eduard Zeller, in *Plato and the Older Academy* (German 1846, English 1876), made the best case he could, in 650 pages, reviewing previous scholarship. Widely influential, Zeller agreed in the main with Schleiermacher, whose clever interpretive key was the recognition of *how* Plato overcame the deficiencies of the written word: “Plato could make no advance in any dialogue unless he presumed a certain effect to have been produced by its predecessor; consequently that which formed the conclusion of one must be presupposed as the basis and commencement of another” (Zeller 1876, 99–100).

I pause to say that all three major strands of Plato interpretation are launched from the German paradigm, multifarious as it was.

Pursuing first what was to become the analytic tradition, stylometricians, hundreds of them, sought to establish the correct order of composition by measuring aspects of Plato’s style. The problem of circularity could not be overcome because the only two firm data were that the *Republic* appeared before the *Laws* and the *Laws* at the end. There was no non question-begging way to organize pre-*Republic* dialogues. Besides, there is textual evidence and testimony that Plato revised his dialogues;

and short dialogues could have been written during the composition of long ones—making any linear chronology suspect.

The English historian George Grote was a student of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham who—like Mill—swam against the German methodological tide, though Zeller often cites Grote’s *historical* observations. Mill (1887, 22) had said,

The title of Platonist belongs by far better right to those who have been nourished in, and have endeavoured to practice, Plato’s mode of investigation, than to those who are distinguished only by the adoption of certain dogmatical conclusions, drawn mostly from the least intelligible of his works, and which the character of his mind and writings makes it uncertain whether he himself regarded as anything more than poetic fancies, or philosophic conjectures.

It is not surprising then that Grote denied Plato had any doctrines and saw the dialogues as empty philosophizing—as skeptics had before him. One can sense Zeller’s frustration when he says that Grote “speaks as if Plato . . . thought nothing of contradicting himself in the most glaring manner, even in one and the same dialogue” (1876, 79–80). Grote’s view might well be associated with some later excesses of the analytic tradition: at worst, passages were ripped out of context and subjected to tests of validity and soundness, sometimes from English translations, an extreme now rare in the secondary literature⁶.

A generation later, the U.S. entered the fray: unitarians such as Paul Shorey (1903, 82–85) were dismissing the credibility of Aristotle and the augmented tradition more generally. The authority of Harold Cherniss (1944, 1945),

who saw the Platonic corpus as having an *organic* unity, mistrusting any testimony outside Plato's dialogues, was extensive.⁷ In opposition to the countercurrent of Léon Robin (see below), Cherniss held that the text always trounces the tradition. Receiving much less attention from specialists at the time was John Dewey, who had complained in 1929:

Nothing could be more helpful to present philosophizing than a 'Back to Plato' movement; but it would have to be back to the dramatic, restless, co-operatively inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn, and not to the artificial Plato constructed by unimaginative commentators who treat him as the original university professor.

The most influential U.S. Platonist of the twentieth century was Gregory Vlastos who, to his credit, was willing to countenance an Aristotelian contribution to our understanding of Plato.⁸ Vlastos said in a nutshell that, when Plato was young, he held the philosophical views he took to be those of Socrates. As he matured, he developed views of his own, the *forms* most significantly, but he became disenchanted with forms and eschewed them in later life. That gives us three underlying assumptions: (1) Plato's views *developed*, accounting for dialogues' inconsistencies and contradictions; (2) we can reliably determine the order in which the dialogues were written—early, middle, late—and map them to the evolution of Plato's views; and (3) Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates only what Plato himself believes at the time he writes each dialogue. This third assumption was new, and it was quickly chal-

lenged by Michael Frede (1992, 214): "we have to keep in mind that, however committed the fictional questioner or respondent of the dialogue may be, *nothing follows* from this about the commitment of the author of the dialogue." Also new was Vlastos's ten-point distinction between the moral philosopher of Plato's *early* period, Socrates_E, and the metaphysically-committed philosopher Plato of the middle and late periods (1991: 47–49). The details of the system did not hold up, though some philosophers still pick out a Socratic philosophy supposedly distinct from that of Plato. We would all do better to emphasize Vlastos_E as the model for the analytic tradition, with such articles as his "The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*" (1954), "Degrees of Reality in Plato" (1965), and "Reasons and Causes in the *Phaedo*" (1969)—all collected in Vlastos 1973. One need not agree with his conclusions to admire the clarity. Analytic philosophy at its best makes hidden assumptions explicit and provides missing premises that charitably rehabilitate abandoned arguments.

It is necessary to return to Zeller to pick up the second major strand of interpretation. While he had used Aristotle's testimony in a quite limited way to shore up claims of authenticity for dialogues atheized by others, Léon Robin (1908) went further, arguing that the coherence of Plato's systematic philosophy requires revision by the testimony of Aristotle and the oral tradition. Robin saw himself as quelling any tendency toward esotericism by emphasizing the Platonic *unity* achieved through modifications in light of Aristotle and the Greek commentators; and he saw himself as deemphasizing biography and history, returning to philosophy. If the sociology of philosophy is of any interest, one might note that the French flag was thereby planted against Anglo-American and German positions. Robin

is largely responsible for the lasting marriage of philosophy with philology, appreciating the essential role of commentators from Aristotle on. I classify Renaud's work in this tradition.

Another development in interpretive strategies surprisingly compatible with Robin is esotericism, still very strong, maintaining that one cannot depend *solely* on Plato's dialogues because, as Plato suggests, the written word (especially when the author does not speak) is inadequate to the purposes of philosophy; hence the importance of the commentators, especially Aristotle, for saying more about Plato's intended meaning. 'Esotericism' can have an innocuous meaning: that is, simply reading dialogues will not yield a nuanced understanding of Plato; one needs to go to graduate school, to take "the longer road" and participate with others in dialectical inquiry for a deeper grasp. The ancient platonists, in this inoffensive sense, are co-participants in a rigorous Plato seminar. 'Esotericism' only begins to sound insidious when the same concrete experience of studying Plato is described in terms of 'masters', 'secret doctrines', and 'initiates' instead—with the connotation of mystery cults.

The Tübingen school, largely neglected in the U.S.,⁹ has two chief assumptions in the account of Thomas Szlezák (2012, 303): It "takes seriously, unlike the common practice since Schleiermacher, clear indications in the dialogues that they are not meant by their author to be autarchic, self-sufficient and comprehensive accounts of his philosophy. The fact that the dialogues point beyond themselves, not only casually and incidentally, but systematically and consistently, is essential for their being understood." Second, the school's adherents "reject as methodologically ill-conceived and wholly unconvincing the attempt (undertaken by Cherniss 1944) to discard the testimony of Aristotle and other sources concerning Plato's

agrapha dogmata or 'unwritten doctrines'. There are two sources of our knowledge of Plato's philosophy: the direct tradition, that is, the dialogues, and the indirect tradition, that is, the *Testimonia Platonica*. Neither of the two branches of the transmission should be ignored."¹⁰

The other important esoteric tradition—but in political theory, not philosophy—can be traced from Zeller through Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger to Leo Strauss. As Hayden Ausland (2012: 302) sees it, "The esotericism integral to Straussian readings of Plato takes as its model a prudential hermeneutics acknowledging several levels of meaning, as developed in medieval Jewish and Arabic philosophy for the sake of pursuing speculation within a society governed by religious law (Strauss 1945), for which the analogue in Plato's time will have been the Athenian political conditions under which the trial and execution of Socrates proved possible." An influential Straussian, Catherine Zuckert, explains, "In his dialogues, Plato presents exclusively the speeches and deeds of others. The dialogues must, therefore, be read like dramas in which one never identifies the views of the author with any particular character" (2012, 298–99). Each dialogue reveals a partial truth, and the parts do *not* altogether form a whole. Dramatic elements are essential because—at least in the view of some branches of Straussianism—"the action of a dialogue undermines its apparent surface teaching or 'argument.'" Plato deliberately conceals his own views.

Contemporary literary contextualists, in the wake of Hans-Georg Gadamer, have some of the same forebears after Zeller: Nietzsche and Heidegger. Again the dramatic aspects are crucial, but equally important is that each dialogue is and must be interpreted as a self-contained whole; thus attempts to interpret

Plato across the whole corpus are feckless. Hermeneutic philosophy at its best permits us to see a dialogue in a whole new way.

Still relevant is Myles Burnyeat's (1979) précis of what remains a contemporary interpretive problem:

The great difficulty in writing about Plato is to combine the depth and strength of the Platonic vision with the Socratic subtlety of the arguments by which it is conveyed. Plato's dialogues are a miraculous blend of philosophical imagination and logic. The interpreter must somehow respond to both, for if the imaginative vision is cut loose from the arguments it becomes grandiloquent posturing, and the arguments on their own are arid, the mere skeleton of a philosophy. So it is already a criticism to say of the books under review that Professor Findlay's work is all vision, without argument, and that Professor Irwin's is all argument with no vision.¹¹

The perennial problem for interpretation is that there are not many human beings who can do both well. Renaud concentrates on a single dialogue and its dramatic elements—but not without the clarity of argument expected of an analyst, and not without appreciation for Aristotle and the commentary tradition.

III. RENAUD'S INTERPRETIVE STRATEGY

Renaud and I, through an amiable dialectical process, have reached close accord about the mutual operation of argument and drama in the dialogues, a position he illustrates

persuasively with its application to Plato's *Gorgias* together with descriptions of *how* the two function together. Only a few quibbles remain.

The first (1.1) is terminological: 'evil' and 'punishment' smuggle religious views into the text of the *Gorgias* that I do not think Plato shared.¹² Instead of "the greatest of all evils is to commit injustice and not to be *punished*," I would have us say, "of all bad things, the most bad is to commit injustice, but worse if uncorrected." Punishment is retributive and backward-looking; correction or discipline *rectifies* and improves the recipient. Although Renaud has done an excellent job of explaining why Socrates has cause in the *Gorgias* to respond to Callicles's mention of such harsh punishments as flogging and execution, I remain sympathetic with Rowe 2007, who uses 'therapy' to describe the corrective use of dialectic. Conventions of punishment change over time and place. I concede that torturing the body to save the soul has been a regular religious practice, and that corporal punishment—whipping and beating—now considered abusive, has a long history of being used for disciplining children, in the belief that physical pain would promote better behavior. Plato's Socrates did not think physical pain was a good way to train horses or dogs, but I leave that aside and simply concede further that execution, explicit at *Gorgias* 480d2, could only be regarded as forward-looking and corrective in the sense that it protects others from harm. The execution remark immediately follows the passage that Renaud so rightly identifies as the proper analogy for correction, as it is used in the dialogue: one should not shrink from presenting oneself to a physician for surgery or cauterization if needed. I would add the earlier analogy from 453e2: arithmetic or the arithmetician teaches us about numbers, presumably correcting our mistakes so that

we learn what is true. Like the health analogy, arithmetic involves a standard for comparison.¹³ Correction or discipline ought to lead one closer to that standard.

Second, Renaud remarks in 3.1 that Plato criticizes the character of Alcibiades and Callicles. Leaving aside the mistake of attributing to the author, Plato, views gleaned from what other people are made to say in dialogues—which would require a considerable defense to establish—Renaud does not like Callicles and accuses him of abandoning the principle of frankness (παρρησία), for example. Plato could affect, but he could not control his audience's reaction to the persons represented in the dialogues. Another student of the *Gorgias*, E. R. Dodds (1959, 14), developed a different impression, saying that Plato's

portrait of Callicles not only has warmth and vitality but is tinged with a kind of regretful affection. True, the young man is insufferably patronizing; true, as the discussion proceeds he becomes unpleasantly rude, and at one stage turns sulky. Yet he likes Socrates, and his repeated expressions of concern for the philosopher's safety are, I think, quite sincerely meant. Socrates on his side perceives in him the true touchstone: he praises his honesty in 'saying frankly what other people think but will not say'; he also recognizes him to be by current standards a cultivated man who, unlike Polus, has acquired some tincture of philosophy παιδείας χάριν. But what is more significant is the powerful and disturbing eloquence that Plato has bestowed on Callicles—an eloquence destined to convince the young Nietzsche, while Socrates' reasonings left him cold. One is tempted to believe that Callicles stands for something which Plato had it in

him to become (and would have become, but for Socrates), an unrealized Plato.¹⁴

I am not taking sides about whose view of Callicles is more appropriate, just pointing out that two reasonable scholars can understand character differently and that we interpreters, therefore, should be careful about ἦθος.

Third, we seem to disagree about how the individual's mind works when reading a Platonic dialogue. Perhaps, as Renaud says at 3.3, "The reader must constantly move from the argument to the drama, that is, from the semantic (or explicit) dimension to the pragmatic (or implicit) dimension, and vice-versa." But perhaps that kind of shifting attentiveness characterizes someone who, like Renaud, seeks to dissect Plato's technique. Plato's art is more subtle, more successful, when the drama does *not* require the reader's conscious attention, when the drama registers in the preconscious while the argument takes the leading role. For reasons that will become clearer when I turn to music below, a unified psyche learns most readily when it concentrates, not when it is distracted from one level to another. The drama is the medium that carries the argument along, intensifying the affective dimension and thereby increasing learning.

Ultimately, the burden of Renaud's paper is to demonstrate that argument and drama, equally indispensable, work together because the objective and the subjective are, he says at the end of his paper, "in tension with each other" (3.3). I do not observe the tension, but it appears to result from whatever grounds his surprising assertion that "basic philosophical questions can only be answered in the first person singular" (conclusion). I do not understand the claim. It might mean that knowledge is itself the kind of thing that would not exist if there were no intelligent beings. That seems

right. There would still be being, reality, the physical universe and its laws, but no grasping of truth, nothing to call ‘knowledge’. Or it might mean that humans are hopelessly subjective and cannot achieve formal knowledge, mathematics being as high an achievement as is possible. Under this interpretation, for example, knowledge of the *form* of the equal—a form not limited to mathematical uses—would be impossible for a human being. That seems wrong—as if omniscience were the standard for ἐπιστήμη or νοῦς.¹⁵ Further, when Renaud says that one of Platonic dialectic’s two purposes is “the attainment of a perfectly self-sufficient or absolute object, an entirely impersonal norm” (3.3), it is the term ‘attainment’ that strikes me. I have attained knowledge (not merely true beliefs) of the form of the equal and the form of the good, even if I lack omniscience; and from that knowledge, I can deduce further true propositions. The statements, “No one does harm willingly” and “Virtue is knowledge” are not first-person singular statements.¹⁶

Quibbles aside, I agree with Renaud that, in the *Gorgias*, the drama contributes to our understanding because Plato observes two principles—διάνοια and ἦθος—that Aristotle later theorizes in the *Poetics*. However, Aristotle should have said that plot and diction are also characteristic of *sōkratikoī logoi*—recalling that plot represents action. There is action in the dialogues. Unlike tragedy and comedy, however, the most important part of a *sōkratikos logos*, its soul, is διάνοια as reasoning or argument.

I want now to plunge deeper into the related question of *why* Plato observes the particular principles that Aristotle theorizes. There is an easy answer and a more complicated one though both are dependent on the assumption that the Platonic dialogues educate us, that we learn from them. Plato, in his *sōkratikoī logoi*, deploys four of Aristotle’s six parts of the

drama: plot, characters, diction, and reasoning; he omits spectacle and song. The easy answer might be gleaned from *Republic* 5: the lovers of sights and sounds, spectacle and song, love learning; but they are so-called philosophers, distinct from the real philosophers who love not only learning but truth and wisdom.

The more complicated answer is one that Stephen Halliwell articulates in a chapter from his 2002 *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, picking up where Charlie Segal left off in 1962: the Platonic critique of the man Gorgias is justified insofar as Gorgias lacks any systematic understanding of the psyche as a whole or of the implications of his views for ethics and psychology—both crucial to genuine learning—but explaining Gorgias’s penchant for having his students memorize and display. The critique fails, however, in that it misses the historical point, which, according to Segal, is that Damon,¹⁷ Gorgias, and Plato represent three stages in the increasing awareness of the undeniable yet inscrutable connections among words, visual images, and sounds and their powerful emotional effects on the psyche.¹⁸ Because Plato understood the erotic dimension of intellectual curiosity, he could write dialogues that brought about both rational and arational effects; the dialogues are successful, in part, because they are multiply attractive.¹⁹ So why not use music as well?

Socrates mentions music (at *Gorgias* 474e4–5) in relation to identifying the standards that govern judgments of sounds as admirable or shameful. Segal and Halliwell are right to insist that Plato *realized* that music is more than the formal study of harmonics; he knew, perhaps from Damon, that music directly and profoundly affects the emotions and is thus central to human motivation—but it is especially difficult to control. As Halliwell (2002, 238) puts it, “Whatever exact ideas were held by the

now shadowy figure of Damon himself, there is no serious doubt that he started a system of theorizing that depended on the attribution of ‘character’ (*ēthos*) to musical works and to the tunings, scales, and melodic patterns (all of which can be covered by the Greek term *harmoniai*) which they employed”. Despite popular attention to the *Republic*’s artful tripartition, Plato knew better than most that the psyche is divided in words only.²⁰ It is not just that the *Republic* explodes the metaphor in a variety of ways; the *Symposium* offers an extended and multifaceted account of the unified psyche.

Plato attended seriously to writing philosophy with his insight that even words are images, including words that together form dialogues; and all images are indistinct, seeming, becoming—requiring studied attention to their likely psychological effects.²¹ We are mistaken then to imagine that we have identified rigid designators, or that propositional logic can shield us from all error. Just as music enters the psyche *directly with immediate effect*, and thus—from Plato’s perspective—needs to be harnessed and carefully used (*Republic* 2–3), so do the cadences and figural language of prose have arational effects on the psyche. So do remembrances of real persons. So do such immortal images as the cave, the chariot, and Diotima’s ladder. Plato’s own images in words weave the arational, the emotional, together with reasoning, and all are crucial to learning.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Garber-Della Rocca exchange (2015, 533) describes the hilly landscape along which historians of philosophy have planted their variety of flags: (1) the degree to which a single principle structures the author’s thought; (2) the degree to which there is a “unifying theme

across different works by the same author and across different stages of a career,” and (3) the degree to which one draws “connections and contrasts” with contemporary philosophy. Clearly this is not the road Renaud takes.

By this standard, I occupy an extreme: (1) I have argued elsewhere (2013) that Plato had a single unhypothetical principle—not the good, but something more like the principle of sufficient reason governing reality, with a derivative principle of non-contradiction governing truth. In so orderly a cosmos, *of course* no one does wrong willingly. (2) A single theme unifies Plato’s works throughout his lifetime: he held the process of philosophical education or learning paramount, and could—by writing dialogues—illustrate Socratic efforts to encourage the intellectual labors of others while compensating for the deficiencies of the Socratic oral method, among which I include the “lack of a shared background to guarantee the level of discussion; inability to introduce large and complex philosophical systems for analysis; and inability to produce contributions to philosophical content” (1995, 215). The dialogue form reinforced the view that each of us must do our own intellectual work and reach our own conclusions—also argued elsewhere (1995, chapter 12). (3) It is philosophically rewarding to work out Platonic passages in relation to contemporary claims. Perhaps it is not so obvious but, in all the historical cases I sailed through in section II, interpreters were making connections and contrasts to the contemporary philosophies of their own times. Doing history of philosophy is doing philosophy; all philosophy is contemporary philosophy. The salient difference among them is the extent to which a historian of philosophy recognizes and makes explicit those connections and contrasts. Because some famous historians of philosophy object to contemporary references, some Platonists are ashamed to mention them in public.²²

Ideally, one should choose the interpretive strategy, the method, that advances philosophy—but the ‘should’ is aspirational, and ‘choose’ is narrowly circumscribed.²³ The texts and teachers who inspire us in our ancient philosophical endeavors are mostly *not up to us* because much of our formative education is determined by our school districts. A graduate education, even university, is too late for most people to acquire the language skills, the expertise at formal reasoning, and the literary insight that a full appreciation of Plato would require. Important philosophical passages are pointed out to students, said to be worth their time—and the “settled” issues observed to be appropriate for undergraduate essays, but a waste of time in philosophical adulthood. Some of it sticks. One point about choosing an interpretive approach to Plato is that each of us has different talents, different backgrounds, and different assumptions—not to mention different educational opportunities. Our academic lives are marked by stages of choosing dissertation topics, or the subject for a gold-standard, peer-reviewed article, or a tenure book. These are not illegitimate matters, but they are artifacts of the de-natured twenty-first century Academy. I commend Renaud for his ability to combine the strengths of what, in their own time, were considered competing interpretive strategies.

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NOTES

1 For the long quotation, see Garber–Della Rocca 2015, 538 (where one must substitute ‘Spinoza’, ‘Della Rocca’, ‘PSR’, and ‘*Short Treatise*’ appropriately for Garber’s original words).

2 Kristeller 1964: (i) 4, 6 (ii) 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, (iii) 8, (iv) 6–7, (v) 11; he points out that the *Journal of the History of Ideas* was founded in 1940, the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* in 1963.

3 This soil is well tilled. In addition to the contributors I cite in subsequent notes, see especially Guthrie 1967, 1–18; Clay 1975; Berti 1989; Press 1996; and—except for the price—Smith 1998.

4 It was generally assumed at the time that Plato began writing dialogues before Socrates was executed.

5 See Nails 2012, 290–91, and additional sources cited there.

6 The analytic tradition is the one in which I was trained, and in which I continue to operate, taking some justification from Aristotle’s treatment of Plato. Fink 2012 does a fine job of showing Aristotle’s primary interest in extracting arguments from the dialogues without ignoring Plato’s interest in character: “How Did Aristotle Read a Platonic Dialogue?” Although I consider the positivists a manifestation of what has come to be seen as the wider analytic approach to Plato I elide them here with only the comment that Gilbert Ryle (1966) was an astute critic of the biography and history of his time.

7 For an assessment of the damage done by Cherniss’s anti-Aristotle view to the practice of Plato scholarship in the U.S., see Gerson, 2014.

8 Vlastos (1973, introduction) identifies Shorey and Zeller as his forebears.

9 Vlastos 1973 includes an unfavorable and lopsided review (‘On Plato’s Oral Doctrine’) of Krämer 1959, originally published in *Gnomon* in 1963.

10 He cites his 1985 and 2004; and he credits Gaiser 1963 and Richard 1986, 243–380 for collecting the *agrapha dogmata*. Both parts of the quotation are adapted to remove these citations.

11 Burnyeat 1979 on Findlay 1974, 1979 and Irwin 1977.

12 The alien intrusion of a religious sensibility occurs again at the end of Renaud’s paper: “the self, delivered from the body, can finally achieve its full, original unity”—though nothing from the *Gorgias* is cited to confirm the claim.

13 Dodds’s 1959 comment on 474d4–5 mentions the standard implicit in health and sums.

14 Numerous citations to the text of *Gorgias* are removed from the short quotation.

15 Glaucon in *Republic*, and Socrates in *Symposium* are depicted as unable to follow their guides to the highest realm of understanding — but their guides are already there, so one need not give up hope.

16 Such an interpretation also has the advantage of coincidence with certain remarks about the value of dialectic: Theaetetus, for example, will make fewer errors after

being subjected to Socrates’s efforts at midwifery.

17 Damon of Oe, son of Damonides, was a music theorist of Pericles’ generation who appears in many inscriptions and texts of the classical period, including a few Platonic dialogues and accretions of the early Academy, where he is presented in a positive light (*Laches*, *Republic*, *Alcibiades I*, and *Axiochus*). See Nails 2002, 121–22, West 1992, 246–53, and Halliwell 2002, 238–40.

18 The awareness culminates in Aristotle’s “full-blown scientific theory” (*Poetics*). Segal’s assessment of Gorgias is based primarily on the *Defense of Helen* 12–14 (1962, 105). Because, when judging Plato, Segal puts his whole emphasis on the tripartite psyche of the *Republic*, he misses Plato’s understanding of these connections, saddling Plato with a pure, rational attempt to suppress the emotions that greater attention to the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* would have cured.

19 Segal says that Damon was “acutely interested in the practical ethical and educative values of the psychological effect of music” and his “work represents another, perhaps earlier, phase of the rational systematization and control of obscure psychic processes. Gorgias continues this kind of approach in the area of rhetoric and poetry.”

20 I present an argument for the unity of the psyche, based on Plato’s *Symposium*, in Nails 2015.

21 Segal’s *logos* is an account, and an account might have many parts, words, images, and sounds.

22 Burnyeat 1985 was right to criticize the injunction to “understand the philosopher as he understood himself” as an “illusory goal.” Burnyeat was referring specifically to Strauss’s injunction, but it is not so far from Garber’s desire to know “the historical Spinoza who lived and worked in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.”

23 Perhaps the wand chooses the wizard.