

Marcelo D. Boeri,
*¿Serías capaz de hablar
 si nadie te respondiera?*
*Filosofía y drama en
 Platón.* Berlin: Logos
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In this book, Boeri offers a reading of selected passages from Plato, striving to honour both the philosopher and the literary artist. He emphasises the intrinsic—and indeed almost natural—interaction between the dramatic and philosophical elements that constitute the essence of the dialogues. As the author acknowledges, approaching Plato from this perspective is certainly not a new hermeneutical stance (cf. pp. 58-59). Consequently, his ambition is modest: to illustrate not how one ought to read Plato (a goal he deems both arrogant and unattainable), but rather how he endeavours to engage with Plato's texts (p. 10).

The book contains eight chapters, a prologue, a list of abbreviations, bibliographical references, and an index. The chapters are not logically sequenced (except for Chapter 5 and 6), meaning each can be read independently. This might be due to the compiled nature of the book, in which Boeri has gathered, in some cases with modifications or expansions, his published works from the last fifteen years. Nevertheless, the text maintains unity through Boeri's reading approach, which effectively integrates dramatic and philosophical dimensions of the dialogues.

Throughout the introduction, Boeri explores the Platonic dialogue as both a literary work and a philosophical argument, reviewing the divergent modes of interpreting the Platonic corpus. He also considers the well-trodden question of why Plato chose the dialogue format to convey his philosophical message. Boeri is interested in highlighting the fact that dialogue seeks to actively engage the reader in philosophical discussion—this is the second pillar upon which the author's interpretation rests. Finally, he provides two examples concerning the characterisation of paradigmatic figures (Callicles and Pro-

tarchus) to illustrate how this literary aspect enhances the philosophical discussion.

Chapter 1 (“Platón como artista literario y como filósofo”) articulates the argumentative axis of the volume. By analysing the advantages and disadvantages of both analytical and non-analytical readings of Plato, Boeri demonstrates that these approaches are complementary, using dramatic elements from the *Parmenides* as illustrative examples. Without conducting an exhaustive analysis, which the selected texts would warrant, Boeri merely points out the connection between certain dramatic details—often found in introductory pages or prologues, as in the case of the *Philebus*, *Statesman*, *Protagoras*, *Lysis*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, or elsewhere, such as in the so-called “Defence of Protagoras” in the *Theaetetus*—and the subsequent philosophical discussions.

Chapter 2 (“Filosofía y drama en el Teeteto y el Sofista”) examines two complex dialogues. In addressing important philosophical issues such as knowledge, opinion, and error, Plato illustrates in the *Theaetetus* how its dramatic structure clarifies the philosophical method, particularly the Socratic dialectical technique. Boeri demonstrates that attempts to define *epistēmē* often fail because they overlook the personal disposition of the interlocutors and their capacity for self-transformation, as self-recognition of one’s ignorance is essential to knowledge. The author also analyses the *Sophist*, emphasising the discussion on the “Sophistry of noble lineage,” which reveals the legitimate techniques—dialectical or sophistical—for argumentation and indicates that proper refutation can transform the soul of the refuted (including the reader’s), allowing for clearer discernment between knowledge and ignorance.

In Chapter 3 (“Broma, sentido del humor y argumento en Platón”), Boeri highlights

certain passages from *Protagoras*, *Euthyphro*, *Meno*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Theaetetus*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*, where humour plays a crucial role in the development of the argument. The author focuses on the ‘ridiculous’ yet fundamentally serious theses posed by Socrates and the ‘mockery’ he directs at his interlocutors, particularly those who exhibit excessive arrogance. This mockery serves as a corrective mechanism, as it compels interlocutors to alter their presumptuous epistemological status and adopt a more conducive attitude for collaborative inquiry.

Chapter 4 (“Teeteto y Protarco: dos personajes filosóficos”) examines *Theaetetus* from the eponymous dialogue and *Protarchus* from the *Philebus*, whom Boeri describes as ‘ideal interlocutors.’ Plato skilfully portrays these characters to emphasise that the attitudes of interlocutors are crucial in our interpretation of the texts. While some resist dialogue, *Theaetetus* and *Protarchus* actively seek collaboration to uncover the truth. They are open to changing their viewpoints when mistaken and prioritize honest responses over pleasing Socrates. Additionally, they sense progress in their discussions, even if a clear resolution is not reached.

The next two chapters explore the character of the Platonic Socrates. Chapter 5 (“Sócrates, Platón y el problema del conocimiento, la ignorancia y el autoengaño”) focuses on ‘Socratic intellectualism,’ which refers not only to propositional or theoretical understanding but also to practical knowledge. This is illustrated through the dramatic traits in *Charmides*, where Socrates embodies *sōphrosynē*, highlighting the coherence between thought, discourse, and action. Chapter 6 (“La ignorancia socrática como virtud epistémica”) examines the link between Socratic-Platonic epistemology and contemporary theories of ignorance.

It argues that Socratic ignorance, distinct from obstinate ignorance or “illusion of knowledge”, is essential for gaining knowledge, especially in social contexts where individuals depend on one another and no one possesses complete knowledge. This perspective portrays knowledge acquisition as a collaborative and social endeavour, reflecting modern epistemic labour division.

Chapter 7 (“Poetología y filosofía en el *Simposio*”) examines the interplay of poetic and philosophical elements in Plato’s *Symposium*, focusing on the nature of Eros. The author argues that the successive speeches represent stages toward philosophical understanding, culminating in Diotima’s speech, which epitomises philosophical insight. This contrasts with Alcibiades’ emotional perspective, who fails to translate the concept of inner beauty into action. Boeri emphasises that, despite its rich literary imagery, the dialogue reveals a deeper philosophical discourse on the link between beauty and goodness. Through the development of Alcibiades and Socrates, the chapter illustrates their transformative journeys in understanding love, evolving from superficial attraction to a rational appreciation of true beauty and wisdom.

In Chapter 8 (“Poetología, persuasión y conocimiento en el *Fedro*”), the author emphasises Plato’s literary skill, noting the rich prose and character development in the *Phaedrus*, despite criticisms regarding its alleged compositional flaws. Boeri suggests that these perceived defects may serve a pedagogical purpose, encouraging readers to engage more deeply with the text. The chapter explores the philosophical foundations of true persuasion, arguing that it must be rooted in knowledge and truth. In particular, the discussion of the cicadas acts as a dramatic prelude to the philosophical discourse, illustrating the interplay

between rhetoric and dialectic. The author also examines the complexities of persuasion, emphasising that effective rhetoric requires both knowledge of the truth and an understanding of the audience’s cognitive capacities.

In the conclusions, Boeri summarises the key outcomes of his interpretative approach: a) both interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue—conceived as *thought*—serve as pathways to self-knowledge; b) dialogue involves collaborative inquiry, requiring participants to openly express what they truly think about a given point, respect established *homologíai*, demonstrate epistemic humility, and be willing to modify their beliefs if necessary; c) dialogue has a therapeutic function, transforming an individual’s soul; d) knowledge should be viewed as connected to action rather than merely “theoretical”; e) finally, the interplay between the dramatic and philosophical elements in Plato’s dialogues enhances the reader’s appreciation of the profound richness of Platonic texts.

I would now like to address two points that I find contestable. Firstly, there are several assertions that require qualification. a) Regarding Platonic dialectic as a method of questions and answers, Boeri states: “se trata de un procedimiento *que no acaba jamás*”, and “el modo platónico de hacer filosofía se encuentra *en las antípodas de cualquier forma de dogmatismo*” (p. 62). Furthermore, he later writes: “El diálogo platónico permite tratar los temas de una manera *siempre abierta* y, de este modo, *nunca establece ‘doctrinas’ de una manera definitiva*”. (p. 107) [my italics]. While these assertions, which are partly true, have been endorsed by many scholars for centuries, I believe Boeri could have acknowledged that such claims might still be subject to question today. The issue of the seemingly never-ending dialectical procedure can be traced back to F. Schlegel, who, drawing from J. G. Fichte,

interpreted Plato as a “progressive” philosopher, perpetually advancing in the pursuit of knowledge and continually questioning various topics without ever reaching a definitive conclusion.¹ However, it is essential to distinguish between the *image* that emerges from the dialogues (see p. 59) —that of a constant questioning that appears endless (compare Theaetetus’ disquiet in *Sph.* 261b3)—and the crucial matter of whether Plato, who constructs this *image* and intends to communicate it, truly had anything more substantive to convey, something “more valuable” (*Phdr.* 278d8) that could support the arguments or ideas partially outlined in his texts. I find myself inclined to an affirmative response (see, e.g., *R.* 506e2, *Lg.* 969a2) and believe that Plato’s philosophical efforts were not endless (cf. *R.* 532e3). The fact that he refrained from more openly communicating his thought is another matter. b) Boeri concludes his book by rightly asserting that Plato provides “un monumental testimonio de que el diálogo es una manera apropiada para hacer filosofía y, a la vez, para mostrar su carácter ‘comunitario’” (p. 301). However, he is mistaken in claiming that Plato never wrote a work “sobre estas cosas (esto es, sobre su filosofía), pues ella no es expresable en modo alguno.” [To maintain coherence in Spanish, the parentheses must be removed here]. The text of *Ep. VII* 341c4-6, which Boeri references, is controversial and remains so, but it seems reasonable to me to interpret that it is not “his philosophy” that Plato leaves unwritten, but the most significant aspects of it (see *Ep. VII* 341b; 344d5)—those “things” he was serious about (341c2), ultimately what he would have considered of greatest value.² Whether this treasured core of his philosophy is expressible or not is one of the most contentious points that continues to divide Platonic criticism.

Secondly, it would have been interesting to include the perspective of the Tübingen-Milan School and its reference to the “unwritten doctrines” as an additional level of depth in our reading of the dialogues (the author is aware of this interpretative line; cf. p. 13). I refer to the possibility of clarifying certain passages of the corpus by, albeit hypothetically, appealing to the pair One (unity)-Indefinite Dyad (multiplicity),³ which Plato may have posited as the first principles of his philosophy. Allow me to elucidate this with just two examples.

Towards the end of Chapter 1, the reference to the subjectivity of the boys in the *Lysis*, each of whom has a different opinion on who among them is the best-looking (*Ly.* 204b3), suggests a depth in the discussion that eludes Socrates’ interlocutors, who remain ensnared in the (physical) surface of the issue. The Platonic Socrates’ focus is not merely on the most beautiful but on beauty itself. His pivotal question, “who among you is *ὁ καλός*?” (*Ly.* 204b), steers the conversation towards the essence of friendship and a foundational principle, *πρῶτον φίλον* (*Ly.* 219d). When Socrates struggles to recall the previous discussion on friendship due to its many facets (*Ly.* 222e6), he implies that the investigation should refocus on unity rather than multiplicity. This suggests that the conversation’s limitation lies in the multiplicity that distracts or diverts from the objective, necessitating a return to a unified principle that encompasses all perspectives. This idea is foreshadowed in the opening scene, where the lads accompanying Hippothales and Ctesippus, “standing in a group”, divert the solitary Socrates from his intended path (*Ly.* 203a-b). In this regard, it is significant that Socrates confesses, before concluding the conversation, that he intended to engage another boy, one from the group of older ones (*Ly.* 223a), but was interrupted. What did Plato mean by this dra-

matic hint? Would a more mature treatment of the “first friend” be possible? I believe so, and such a treatment would involve a discussion at a deeper level of investigation addressing the interrelation between multiplicity and unity, the principles that the “unwritten doctrines” postulate.

In Chapter 3, it would have been intriguing to include an analysis of Glaucon’s humorous (and emblematic) exclamation in *Republic* 509c (Καὶ ὁ Γλαῦκων μάλα γελοίως, Ἄπολλον, ἔφη, δαιμονίας ὑπερβολῆς), a fundamental passage from a philosophical standpoint. The argument pertains to the good itself, which transcends οὐσία, and is simultaneously imbued with a jest that alludes to non-multiplicity (Ἄ-πολλον). It does not appear to be mere coincidence—and I cannot believe that it is—that Plato has Glaucon utter the only exclamation in the *Republic* that mentions the god Apollo at this crucial moment in the dialogue. Is this a profoundly serious jest that those closest to the Academy would have read and associated with the supreme principle of Platonic philosophy, namely, the One?⁴ This question is difficult to answer, although the idea is most suggestive. Regardless, if we wish to avoid being overly pretentious, it seems to me that the point here is that this jest aims to draw our attention to the extreme separation of the idea of good, to its unity, which transcends being itself, that is, the multiplicity of all things that are.

Finally, let me note a few corrigenda that could improve the manuscript for any future reprint. The table of contents lacks corresponding page numbers. Additionally, there are errors in Spanish hyphenation (e.g., p. 155, n. 13; p. 287, lines 27 and 29; p. 298, lines 16, 20, and 22). Chapter 3 exhibits inconsistent spacing between footnotes, and Chapter 5 has the highest number of misprints. Lastly, in-

consistencies exist in the list of cited authors, particularly Allen, McCoy, Santas, Sorabji, Spinassi, Szaif, and Tigerstedt. I only point out two inaccuracies on the part of the author. On p. 82, Boeri attributes a statement from *Sph.* 230d5 to the anonymous Visitor instead of Theaetetus, who actually claims that recognising our knowledge limits is “the best and wisest of states.” Plato may be encouraging readers, especially novices like the young mathematician, to adopt a moderate stance toward philosophical discussions, acknowledging both their intellectual strengths and limitations. Furthermore, on p. 147, there is a mistranslation regarding Theodorus’ withdrawal from dialogue. Boeri translates, “no (me) arrastren a la arena, que suele ser dura,” while the original Greek states “no (me) arrastren a la arena, a mí que ya estoy rígido.”

Despite such observations, Boeri’s book represents an intelligent reading of Plato’s work. Its main virtues include: a) clear, accessible prose that encourages a positive reader attitude and a desire to explore the selected passages in greater depth; b) the author’s effort to blend dramatic elements with philosophical interpretation; c) consistent emphasis on philosophy as a collaborative activity, highlighting the importance of interlocutors’ dispositions; and d) measured use of secondary literature.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. e.g. Krämer, H. J. (1988). Fichte, Schlegel und der Infinitismus in der Platondeutung, *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 62, pp. 583-621.
- 2 See Szlezák, Th. A. (1985). *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie. Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen*, Berlin-Boston, Walter de Gruyter, p. 399.

- 3 The literature on this topic is extensive. I only refer to Gaiser, K. (1968). *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre. Studien zur systematischen und geschichtlichen Begründung der Wissenschaften in der Platonischen Schule.* Stuttgart, Ernst Klett Verlag, pp. 441-557.
- 4 Reale, G. (2010) [21 ed.]. *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone alla luce delle “dottrine non scritte”*, Milano, Bompiani, pp. 338-339, noted this point, perhaps drawing on the anonymous *Prolegomena de Philosophia Platonica*, 1. 52 ed. Westerink.