Plato's Perspectivism

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ABSTRACT

This paper defends a 'perspectivist' reading of Plato's dialogues. According to this reading, each dialogue presents a particular and limited perspective on the truth, conditioned by the specific context, aim and characters, where this perspective, not claiming to represent the whole truth on a topic, is not incompatible with the possibly very different perspectives found in other dialogues nor, on the other hand, can be subordinated or assimilated to one of these other perspectives. This model is contrasted to the other models that have been proposed, i.e., Unitarianism, Developmentalism, and 'Prolepticism', and is shown to address and overcome the limitations of each. One major advantage of 'perspectivism' against the other interpretative models is that, unlike them, it can do full justice to the literary and dramatic character of the dialogues without falling into the opposite extreme of turning them into literary games with no positive philosophical content. To say that Plato's dialogues are 'perspectivist' is not to say that they contain no 'doctrines' on the soul, for example, but, on the contrary, to stress the plurality of doctrines, with the observation that each is true within the limits of the argumentative function it is introduced to serve and of the specific dialogical context.

Keywords: perspectivism, developmentalism, soul, Forms, truth, division, phantasma, eikôn, Neoplatonism.

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In this paper I will defend a 'perspectivist' reading of Plato's dialogues, though with some trepidation. The first cause of trepidation is my skepticism regarding the value of general debates about how to read Plato's dialogues. The problem with such debates is precisely their generality: they tend to degenerate into endless quarrels about whether or not Plato had doctrines or whether or not the philosophical arguments can be understood independently of the dramatic context, where these questions mean little or nothing addressed in the abstract. Interpreting a particular dialogue and having the aptness of one's methodology assessed by its specific results is probably a much more fruitful way of contributing to the debate on how to read Plato than publishing books proclaiming a 'new paradigm' or a 'third way' in Platonic studies. This paper will, like other papers of its type, suffer from the defects of being schematic and of discussing passages from several dialogues in isolation from their context. On the other hand, it will be seen that an advantage of the 'perspectivist' model is precisely its emphasis on the irreducible diversity of the dialogues and its refusal to assimilate them to one narrative, whether it be a developmentalist or unitarian one. The other cause of trepidation is the misunderstanding to which the term 'perspectivism' is subject. So it is necessary to clarify right away how this term is to be understood in relation to Plato.

WHAT IS 'PERSPECTIVISM'?

The term 'perspectivism' is today so closely associated with the name of Nietzsche that to speak of Plato's perspectivism cannot help but seem guilty of an absurd anachronism. Yet what is not often enough, or perhaps not at all, noted is that Nietzsche arrived at his 'perspectivism' through his reading of Plato. In a text on the *Symposium* written when he was only nineteen years old (August 1864),[1] Nietzsche rejects categorically the interpretation according to which the first five discourses are false accounts of love to be corrected by Socrates' discourse as the only true account; instead, he insists that all the speeches are true, presenting different perspectives that are not rejected, but rather incorporated by Socrates into a broader perspective (420). This reading is one he continues to defend in the notes for lectures on Plato dating approximately a decade later. There he maintains that the *Symposium* presupposes the *Phaedrus* in that *all* of its speeches put into practice the philosophical rhetoric defended in that dialogue; he furthermore sees as evidence of the fecundity of such rhetoric that the *Symposium* offers *seven* instead of only three speeches on eros.[2] He concludes that 'It is completely false to believe that Plato had wanted in this way to present different misdirected approaches: they are all philosophical λόγοι and all true, presenting always new sides of the one truth' (106).[3] This perspectivism is nonetheless, of course, quite different from the one Nietzsche himself will defend once he develops the notion of 'will to power': according to that view, and counter to the Platonic view, there is no one truth onto which all the perspectives are perspectives. The perspectivism attributed here to Plato is the one the early Nietzsche attributes to him: not the view that there exists no Truth, but rather the view that we can obtain no more than multiple and partial perspectives onto that Truth.

THE 'PERSPECTIVIST' MODEL VERSUS OTHER INTERPRETATIVE MODELS

The 'perspectivist' model for interpreting Plato's dialogues is the thesis that what the

young Nietzsche claims about the speeches in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* is true of the dialogues as a whole. Each dialogue presents a particular and limited perspective on the truth, conditioned by the specific context, aim and characters, where this perspective, not claiming to represent the whole truth on a topic, is not incompatible with the possibly very different perspectives found in other dialogues nor, on the other hand, can be subordinated or assimilated to one of these other perspectives. We can get a better idea of this model by contrasting it to the other models that have been proposed, i.e., Unitarianism, Developmentalism, and 'Prolepticism', and seeing how it addresses the limitations of each. In suggesting that the dialogues are all different perspectives on one truth and that they do not offer any evidence of fundamental changes in Plato's philosophy, the 'perspectivist' reading is Unitarian. On the other hand, in speaking of irreducibly different perspectives, it can embrace the fact that represents an objection to Unitarianism, i.e., that the dialogues simply do not offer a unified and systematic body of doctrines. Perspectivism has an affinity to Developmentalism in that the latter also recognizes different perspectives on a topic or issue in different dialogues; the difference is that for Developmentalism each perspective is exclusive of the others and thus the different perspectives are to be interpreted as *different views Plato took on a topic at different times*. Only Developmentalism therefore requires the establishment of an objective, non-question-begging chronological order to the dialogues and the failure to meet this requirement is its principal weakness. Perspectivism might appear to have some affinity to Charles Kahn's Prolepticism, to the extent that the latter too sees the perspectives of at least some dialogues as limited and as pointing beyond themselves. However, there is a major difference. While Kahn has claimed that his 'proleptic' reading of the dialogues does not make chronological assumptions,[4] it still sees the so-called 'Socratic' dialogues as partial expressions of a vision that comes to be expressed more fully in other (later?) dialogues, most specifically, the *Republic*. Therefore, this reading is committed to the assumption that Plato had only one perspective on an issue, though he chose to express it gradually, hinting at it in the Socratic dialogues and waiting until the *Republic* to express it fully. The problem with such a reading, apart from the lack of clarity regarding the kind of order it wants to attribute to the dialogues, is the evident arbitrariness of privileging one dialogue such as the *Republic* by making it the one that all the others are merely 'anticipating'. Indeed, when Kahn turns to the *Republic* itself, he must grant that it too does not offer the complete picture but points beyond itself,[5] something he would presumably say even of the 'late' dialogues since he describes even the 'unwritten teachings' as provisional (386-388). But if *all* the dialogues are 'proleptic', then Prolepticism becomes indistinguishable from Perspectivism.

This is presumably why Kahn's Prolepticism has quietly been superseded by a form of Perspectivism. Already in his 1996 book, Kahn referred to 'Plato's view of the perspectival condition of human discourse and cognition' and claimed that 'it is surely a mistake to interpret these frequent shifts in dialectical perspective as if they reflected fundamental changes in Plato's philosophical position' (386). In a later article (2005), however, Kahn develops and defends this perspectivism independently of the proleptic reading defended in the book. While there is for Plato only one reality, Kahn affirms that the principle of perspectivism entails that this unity cannot be captured by any unique, definitive formulation. Each formulation will be conditioned by the circumstances and specific concerns of a particular dialogue (15-16).

While he considers it the task of the interpreter to uncover the profound structure of Plato's thought that underlies the different perspectives, at the end of his essay he makes this crucial clarification: 'What I am calling the underlying unity for a set of schemata is not itself a definitive doctrine but only a deeper perspective for seeing things together' (2005, 28). This is to say that for Plato there are only perspectives, as Kahn makes explicit when he speaks in conclusion of 'this irreducible multiplicity of perspectives' (28). There are therefore no final doctrines, but only doctrines relative to the context of a specific dialogue (14). Though unacknowledged as such, this represents a radical shift from the 'proleptic' reading to the extent that the latter interprets some dialogues as only anticipating the same doctrines finally presented in other dialogues. In any case, the thesis Kahn ends up defending in the later essay is the one I want to pursue and defend here.

As implied by Kahn, a major advantage of 'perspectivism' against the other interpretative models mentioned is that, unlike them, it can do full justice to the literary and dramatic character of the dialogues without falling into the opposite extreme of turning them into mere literary games with no positive philosophical content. The problem is not that there are no 'doctrines' in Plato's dialogues, but that there are too many doctrines. To say that Plato's dialogues are 'perspectivist' is not to say that they contain no 'doctrines' on the soul, for example, but, on the contrary, to stress the plurality of doctrines, with the observation that each is true *within the limits of the argumentative function it is introduced to serve and of the specific dialogical context*. Thus, within a certain context it makes perfect sense to treat the soul as tripartite and doing so can be productive in revealing certain things about the soul. In another context, however, this must appear a gross simplification, because it cannot fully account for the complexity of human behavior (even in the *Republic* Socrates at one point nonchalantly allows that there may be many other parts between the three: καὶ εἰ ἄλλα ἄττα μεταξὺ τυγχάνει ὄντα, 443d7). In yet another context tripartition might appear an unnecessary and artificial complication that misses the essential unity of the soul.

But, one will insist, the soul is either tripartite or not! And if we cannot know which it is, then none of the assertions we make about its unity or multiplicity can be claimed to be true in any sense. This view, however, that of different ways of depicting the world only one can be true or none are true rests on an impoverished conception of truth. Even if it does not claim to be the final account of the essence of the soul, tripartition is *true* in the sense that it *reveals* something important about the soul, for example, the possibility of self-conflict. A unitarian account of the soul as lacking parts, as long as it too does not pretend to be the final account of the essence of the soul, can be *at the same time considered true* in that it *reveals* something else important about the soul, for example, its distinction from the body. The notion of perspectivism clearly has some association with the art of painting. It would obviously be absurd to claim that a painting that depicts an object's front is the true depiction while one that depicts its back is false. The ideal, of course, would be a depiction that not only depicts all angles of a thing simultaneously (as perhaps Cubism strives to do), but that would somehow depict what *the thing is in itself* such that it can show all these different sides. If the latter is impossible, then the 'truest' depiction would be one that shows us a thing from as many perspectives as possible while also indicating that the thing itself transcends even the totality of these perspectives. The claim here is

that a particular Platonic logos, itself only an image, shows us a thing, whether it be the soul or love or even being itself, from a perspective that, while true in revealing something important and essential about the thing in question, pretends to be no more than one perspective among others, even if it may be better than others in the sense of *more encompassing.* The goal of the dialogues, accordingly, is not to provide the one true account, either systematically or developmentally, but to multiply perspectives.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOUL

That we can attribute to Plato the conception of truth and of logos assumed above will be defended below. First, however, in order to give a concrete illustration of the perspectivist reading and start to make the case for it, let us pursue further the topic of the soul. In acknowledging that the account of the soul as tripartite is only a partial truth and far from a final or fully adequate account of the soul, we are only taking seriously Socrates' own words: after first raising the question of whether or not the soul is tripartite, Socrates warns that they will never arrive at an accurate answer (ἱκανῶς) through the methods they are currently employing (435c9-d1). What they settle for is an account that is 'sufficient' (ἱκανῶς 435d6, ἐξαρκέσει 435d7) in the present moment (ἔν γε τῷ παρόντι, 435d5) and that is how we must understand what follows. Socrates does refer to a 'longer way' that would presumably provide a more accurate account (435d2-3), but the difficult question of what this longer way is does not have to be answered here to make the point that what we get in the dialogue is an account that is only adequate for this particular context. If we remain within the *Republic*, some have seen the psychology of Books 8-9 as being at odds with the simply tripartite division of Book 4.[6] In Book 10 we get an indication of what the 'longer way' is when Socrates asserts that we could know the true nature of the soul only if we considered it in complete separation from the body (611b-612a). The question, of course, is whether we could do so while embodied. Socrates here must leave open the question of what the soul's true nature is and whether it has many parts or just one (εἴτε πολυειδὴς εἴτε μονοειδής, 612a3-4). All he claims to have provided in the *Republic* is an account that is ἐπιεικῶς (612a5).

If we turn to the *Phaedrus,* there we get a description of the disembodied soul as tripartite, but Socrates treats this as only an image and not a full account of the soul's nature. Here again Socrates suggests that such an account would need to be a very long one, but now he qualifies it as also being *divine;* the shorter account, which alone is the *human* one, is to describe *what the soul is similar to* (ᾧ δε ἔοικεν, 246a5). The resulting image of the soul, furthermore, is clearly the one indispensable to the myth Socrates proceeds to recount. If we turn to the *Phaedo*, there it is the simplicity of the soul that is emphasized, with conflicting and changing desires apparently assigned to the body. Emphasizing the soul's simplicity in opposition to the body of course suits the theme of purification in the dialogue. But we need to note again the language. Even in the failed affinity argument for the soul's immortality Socrates does not claim that the soul is simple and unchanging, but rather that it is 'most like' (ὁμοιότατον) what is divine, intelligible, uniform (μονοειδεῖ), indissoluble and always in the same state (80b1-3). Finally, before we draw conclusions about Plato's 'development' from the differences between the accounts of the soul in these dialogues and that found in the *Timaeus,*

we should note not only the radically different context (different main speaker, different aim), not only the famous qualification that the discussion of the *Timaeus* can offer only an *eikôs muthos* as a result of dealing with things that are themselves only images, but Timaeus' explicit warning, receiving Socrates' enthusiastic endorsement, that we should not be surprised if we should not be able, in many respects and on many questions, such as the nature of the gods and the coming to be of everything, to produce accounts that fully and in every way agree with each other or are exact (πάντῃ πάντως αὐτοὺς ἑαυτοῖς ὁμολογουμένους λόγους καὶ ἀπηκριβωμένους, 29c5-6).

The point is that these doctrines about the soul, understood as 'perspectival', are all partial and contextual truths, revealing *within their clearly defined limits,* and as such perfectly compatible, so that we do not need to speculate about which one is earlier or later.[7]

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE FORMS

The same point could be made with regard to Plato's presentation of the Forms, the other topic so central to the 'developmentalist' interpretation. If I have argued elsewhere that there is no 'theory of Forms' in Plato (Gonzalez 2003), this is not to deny that there are many things said about the Forms in the dialogues and in this sense many 'theories': the point is rather that these different accounts all leave open fundamental questions about the Forms that any one final theory or doctrine would need to answer and that the differences between them are all fully explained by context.[8] When the context is a myth about the creation of the kosmos by a demiurge, it is the paradigm/copy model that is dominant. When the context is an account of the causes of generation and destruction, with no reference to a demiurge, it is the 'participation' model that is dominant. Why should this surprise anyone or lead anyone to groundless speculations about a 'change' in Plato's theory of Forms? And why would anyone think that Plato has abandoned his theory of Forms when in the *Parmenides* both models are shown to be inadequate? Perspectivism in a sense simply acknowledges and accepts what we find in the dialogues: different theories of Forms, each suited to a different context and none providing, *nor even pretending to provide* a final or adequate explanation of the relation between Forms and particulars.

PERSPECTIVIST TRUTH IN THE DIALOGUES

But what evidence is there for ascribing to Plato a 'perspectivist' conception of truth? What strikes me when faced with this question is not the difficulty of finding such evidence in the dialogues but the difficulty of finding evidence on the other side, that is, the difficulty of finding any claim in the dialogues presented as unqualifiedly true. Consider the case of the Forms just discussed. How does Socrates express the relation between Forms and particulars in the *Phaedo*? As follows: "that nothing else makes it beautiful than the presence of beauty itself or the sharing in it or in whatever way it comes about: about this I will not defend a position, but only that it is through the beautiful that all beautiful things become beautiful" (100d).

What Socrates declines to do here is not something that is done elsewhere: nowhere do we have one of these accounts of the relation between Forms and sensible particulars defended *to the exclusion* of the others. What we find

instead is sometimes one account assumed, sometimes another, depending on the context. The Sceptics of the New Academy were right in claiming that nothing in Plato's dialogues is affirmed as being absolutely and unqualifiedly true, but they were wrong in claiming that nothing is affirmed as being true. We find many truth claims in the dialogues, but they are presented as being true *for now in this context or with qualification.* This also excludes a possible variation on the Sceptical reading that is attractive not because it finds any basis in the texts but because it sounds so appealingly 'modern': what one could call the 'Thought Experiment' reading. Why can we not imagine Plato simply 'trying out' different theories of the Forms in different dialogues to see how they work out? This reading would be incompatible with the 'Perspectivist' reading defended here because it implies that Plato would eventually reject some of the theories he tries out on the way towards at least trying to come up with the one that works best (so that this reading can also count as a version of Developmentalism). It is easy for us to imagine Plato proceeding in this way because this is how a modern scientist works. Unfortunately, this is not what we find in the dialogues and for the reasons already given. We do not find different accounts of the Forms and of their relations to sensibles being *tested*; on the contrary, we find them simply being *assumed*, and with the necessary qualifications, for the particular purpose at hand. (The exception that proves the rule, of course, is the *Parmenides,* in which, however, *all* the accounts found in other dialogues are tested in order to be *all* refuted.) Could anything be further from the aim of testing different accounts of the Forms than the passage from the *Phaedo* cited above?

Let us further consider what might appear an obvious counter-example to the 'perspectivism' defended here: is not Socrates in the *Republic* presenting his definition of justice as unqualifiedly true and rejecting that of Thrasymachus as unqualifiedly false? The answer is No. First, what Socrates initially objects to in Thrasymachus' definition is not its falsity but its lack of clarity and ambiguity (338c). What is not often enough noted is that Socrates' own account of justice ends up showing that Thrasymachus' definition is true, once the words 'stronger' and 'advantage' are properly understood.[9] As for Socrates' definition in Book 4, he presents it as itself ambiguous and nowhere pretends that it can be the last word on the topic. He does not say that 'justice is doing one's own work', as careless paraphrases might suggest, but rather: 'it may well be the case that justice is, when it comes about in a certain way, doing one's own work' (κινδυνεύει τρόπον τινὰ γιγνόμενον ἡ δικαιοσύνη εἶναι, τὸ τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττειν, 433b3-4). Even after Socrates describes how justice thus defined functions in the city and the individual, he concludes only that in describing the just city, the just man, and justice in this way '*we might not appear, I think, to be telling a complete falsehood*' (οὐκ ἄν πάνυ τι, οἶμαι, δόξαιμεν ψεύδεσθαι, 444a6). This must be the weakest conclusion in all philosophical literature and it comes after a long and complex argument. Justice can be said to be 'doing your own job' as long as we fully understand what is meant by 'doing your own job'. But can we fully understand that? Can we do so without fully understanding the Good? What we see here in the *Republic* is something we see everywhere in the dialogues. Definitions, such as those of courage in the *Laches*, are not rejected as simply false, but as partial and limited. Seeing these limitations can lead us to a broader perspective and in this way a 'truer' definition, though we never arrive at the Truth. Those who think that Socrates's definition of courage in

the *Republic* is that Truth must again simply ignore the serious qualifications with which Socrates presents that definition there (Καὶ γὰρ ἀποδέχου, ἦν δ'ἐγώ, πολιτικήν [ἀνδρείαν] γε, καὶ ὀρθῶς ἀποδέξῃ. Αὖθις δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ, ἐὰν βούλῃ, ἔτι κάλλιον δίμεν, 430c3-4).[10]

Matters are no different if we turn to those supposedly 'late' dialogues that are considered more systematic and doctrinal. Who would be willing to maintain that of the six or seven definitions of the sophist we get in the dialogue of that name, the last one captures the whole truth about the sophist, even though it does not describe most of the sophists we encounter in Plato's own dialogues, and that the preceding definitions are all simply false? As for the ontological digression in the same dialogue, if we are tempted to proclaim the account of not-being as 'difference' to be the whole truth on the matter, does not Plato remind us that this account requires simply 'dismissing' (i.e., not explaining) not-being understood as the contrary of being (258e-259a)? Yes, in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, in the *Timaeus*, we get one dominant voice rather than a plurality of voices. But does not Plato use his dramatic art to prevent us from taking this one voice to be authoritative, to be presenting the final word on the topic? What the Visitor has to say about not-being and the sophist is not false, but neither is it the full truth, as the other truth embodied in the silent but present Socrates should remind us.[11] Diogenes Laertius, in defending a dogmatic Plato, claims that the characters in the dialogues can be divided into those who present true doctrines and those who present false doctrines (III.52). Such a claim is simply indefensible.

The clearest evidence against Diogenes Laertius' claim are the two dialogues that we saw to have inspired Nietzsche's perspectivism by explicitly presenting multiple perspectives on the topic of eros: the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, in pointing to limitations in the preceding speeches, does not simply refute them nor require us to dismiss them: it is a culmination, but only in the sense of offering a broader perspective that includes, to a greater or lesser degree, the more partial perspectives of the earlier speeches. Furthermore, Plato appears to go out of his way to counter the illusion that Socrates' speech is the Truth about love that can include and *aufheben* (in the Hegelian sense) all other true perspectives on love. The entrance of Alcibiades at the very least prevents Socrates from having the last word. We have the other significant detail that Socrates does not present his account of love as his own perspective, but rather as that of a female priest, a perspective he has only tried to make his own as much as possible.[12] Furthermore, Aristophanes is ready to answer the critique of his own view in Socrates' speech but is prevented from doing so by the commotion of Alcibiades' entrance (212c). Finally, there were other speeches on love given that evening that have simply been forgotten by Aristodemus (180c). In short, Plato appears to use all his formidable literary skill in this dialogue to multiply perspectives and emphasize their incompleteness.[13] An interpretation guided by the principle of Diogenes Laertius would be absurdly impoverished and even perverse.

In the case of the *Phaedrus*, while Socrates initially rejects his first speech on love as a blasphemy, his later reflection on his two speeches as an illustration of division arrives at a very different conclusion. Both speeches, he claims, begin with madness as one form, but while the second speech pursues the 'right side', i.e., that of divine madness, and thereby arrives through further divisions at the kind of love that is the source of the greatest goods,

the first speech pursues the 'left side', that of a purely human perturbation, and thereby arrives through further divisions at a kind of love that it *rightly* (μαλ'ἐν δίκῃ, 266a5) censured (265e-266b). Note that on this account the first speech is no less true than the second, despite Socrates' earlier claim that his first speech like that of Lysias had nothing sound or true in it (μηδὲν ὑγιὲς λέγοντε μηδὲ ἀληθὲς, 243a1): each speech is a half-truth. If we were previously under the impression that Socrates had changed his mind in moving from the first to the second speech, we are now told that the two speeches, though saying opposite things about the same form, are perfectly compatible when understood as pursing different sides of a division and thus as half-truths. Even of his second speech, Socrates says that 'perhaps we touched upon some truth, whereas on the other hand it is likely we were swept in another direction' (265b6-c1); he therefore calls it 'a not altogether improbable speech'. Even Socrates's great speech on love in the *Phaedrus,* therefore, presents us with only another one of those qualified truths.

DEGREES OF TRUTH

The above assumes that it makes sense to talk about 'partial truth', of views or statements being more or less true. Is there evidence in Plato for the idea that there exist 'degrees of truth'? Indeed there is. The locus classicus is the Cave Analogy from the *Republic* in which we find used the comparative ἀληθέστερα (515d6) in the context of the claim that the prisoners after being turned around will at first consider the shadows 'truer' than the objects they are currently seeing, though of course, as they will come to see, the opposite is the case. Each order of objects seen in the ascent out of the Cave represents a higher degree of truth, which implies that even the lowest order of objects, i.e., the shadows on the wall, are 'true' to a degree, but not *as true* as the objects that cast these shadows, which in turn are not *as true* as the objects of which they themselves are images. As we see, the idea of degrees of truth is tied to the metaphysics of image and original: the shadows on the wall can be considered somewhat true to the extent that they are shadows of things that are images of things that are ultimately real.

It will be objected, however, that the Cave Analogy in its entirety is incompatible with attributing perspectivism to Plato. While there may be perspectivism within the Cave and even in the initial stages outside the Cave when things are contemplated in reflections and at night, the analogy ultimately describes the transcendence of this play of images in a direct and full vision of the truth: 'In the end, I believe, he will be able to see the sun itself in its own place, not images of it in water or some other place, and to contemplate how it is' (τελευταῖον δὴ οἶμαι τὸν ἥλιον, οὐκ ἐν ὕδασιν οὐδ' ἐν ἀλλοτρίᾳ ἕδρᾳ φαντάσματα αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ αὑτοῦ χώρᾳ δύναιτ' ἂν κατιδεῖν καὶ θεάσασθαι οἷός ἐστιν, 516b4-6). Two points need to be made here. First, note that this direct vision of the truth is itself described in an image and indeed an image in tension with other images given in the dialogues. In the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo* this direct vision of the Good and the other Forms appears reserved for our disembodied souls, which is why knowledge in this life is there described as taking the indirect form of *recollection*. Here in the *Republic*, in contrast, we apparently emerge from the Cave with our bodies and there is no talk of recollection. Thus even when it comes

to an account of how we know and what kind of knowledge we achieve, we are confronted with perspectivism: indeed, it is mainly this conflict between different models of human knowledge that led Charles Kahn to defend perspectivism in the reading of Plato's dialogues.[14]

The second point to be made, however, is that this difficult question of whether and to what extent human beings can achieve a direct vision of the Forms (a question also raised by Diotima's description of an ascent to a vision Beauty Itself [210e ff.] while at the same time insisting on the corruptibility and incompleteness of human knowledge [208a-b]) is ultimately not relevant to the defense of a perspectival reading of the dialogues. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Plato achieved a full and direct vision of the nature of the Good and that he even lectured on what he saw, as the notorious reports on Plato's lecture on the Good suggest. The point is that neither the vision nor the lecture are to be found in the dialogues.[15] For whatever reason (and determining the reason would require a discussion of what Plato says in critique of writing and on the limitations of language), what we find in the dialogues are only different, partial accounts of the Good and the other Forms, always in different contexts and in relation to different interlocutors. Perhaps by engaging these different perspectives and, in the words of the *Seventh Letter*, 'rubbing them together' (344b), a vision like that described in the *Republic* will be sparked within us. But then that possibility depends precisely on a perspectival reading of the dialogues. If we read the dialogues as containing doctrines meant to express the whole truth on a topic, they will inspire only complacency and, like the perception of a finger in the example from the *Republic* (523c-525a), will spark no thought.

PHANTASMA VERSUS EIKÔN

There is another text, however, that appears to present the biggest obstacle to attributing to Plato a 'perspectivist' conception of truth. Is not the critique of the *phantastikê* art in distinction to the *eikastikê* art in the *Sophist* a clear rejection of perspectivism? Recall that according to the distinction the Visitor makes there, the difference between an *eikôn* and a *phantasma*, both being images (*mimêma*), is that the former copies the true proportions of the original whereas the latter distorts the true proportions in favor of those that will appear beautiful (οὐ τὰς οὔσας συμμετρίας ἀλλὰ τὰς δοξούσας εἶναι καλὰς, 236a5-6) to someone seeing the copy from an unbeautiful perspective (τὸ φαινόμενον μὲν διὰ τὴν οὐκ ἐκ καλοῦ θέαν ἐοικέναι τῷ καλῷ, 236b4-5). We can think here of a sculptor distorting the true proportions of the human body in producing a statue to be placed in the pediment of a temple and therefore to be seen from far below. Because the Visitor will later class the sophist under this *phantastikê technê*, it is assumed that Plato would reject as deceptive a presentation of the truth that would take into account the perspective of the spectator.

A number of points need to be made here. First, this distinction between an *eikôn* and a *phantasma*, which significantly is not made in the extensive discussion and critique of imitation in the *Republic*, is by no means clear and unproblematic when transferred from things like temple sculptures to discourse (what the sophist is said to produce are εἴδωλα λεγόμενα περὶ πάντων, 234c5-6). What would be an 'eikastic' discourse as opposed to a 'phantastic' discourse?[16] This question receives no answer in the *Sophist* since the Visitor, despite his initial hesitation about whether to class the sophist under the one or the other, gives no explanation

or justification when he finally classes the sophist under the *phantastikê technê* (266d-267a, long after recalling both the distinction and the hesitation at 264c) and gives no indication of who the sophist is being contrasted to, i.e., who is to be classed under the *eikastikê technê*. We might be tempted to answer these questions ourselves by maintaining that it is the philosopher who produces an *eikôn* rather than a *phantasma* of the truth by disregarding entirely the perspective of the audience or interlocutor. The problem is that this suggestion flatly contradicts the account of true, dialectical rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* as requiring different kinds of speech in relation to different kinds of souls (271b), an account that clearly reflects Socrates' practice in the dialogues. Furthermore, in the *Sophist* the *phantastikê technê* is eventually divided into the art that produces *phantasmata* on the basis of knowledge and that which does so on the basis of *doxa* (267d-e). Since the sophist is classified under the latter, one might, as some have suggested,[17] classify the philosopher under the former. In this case the philosopher would be someone who makes *phantasmata* of the truth, adjusted to the perspective of the addressee, but does so on the basis of knowledge of the truth, in agreement with the characterization of true rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*. One problem with this suggestion is that the Socrates of the *Republic* who claims to produce his images of the Good based on *doxa* and not knowledge (506b-e) would become indistinguishable from the sophist.

Even if we insist, however, that the philosopher's art is 'eikastic' rather than simply 'phantastic',[18] there is still a way of explaining this without rejecting perspectivism as such. The negative point made about the *phantastikê technê* is that it completely disregards the truth (χαίρειν τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐάσαντες, 236a4) in seeking only to produce an image that is pleasing to the audience. If Socrates speaks differently to different interlocutors and presents the truth from a different perspective in different contexts, this does not require that he dismiss the truth and seek only to gratify his hearers. In a recent book on the *Republic* I have critiqued elsewhere,[19] Roslyn Weiss (2012) argues that Socrates in Book IV is presenting a distorted account of justice. If we ask why, her answer is that this is the only account that Socrates' interlocutors, Glaucon and Adeimantus, would find agreeable. This is to attribute to Socrates only the *phantastikê technê* in the negative sense, thereby turning him into a sophist. In contrast, according to the perspectivist reading, Socrates' definition of justice in Book IV is not a distortion of justice but a true copy that faithfully reproduces true characteristics of the original. But it is only a copy that fails to capture the whole truth about justice (Socrates characterizes the idea of doing your own work, identified earlier with justice in the city, as a 'τύπον τινὰ τῆς δικαιοσύνης' [443c1] and an 'εἴδωλόν τι τῆς δικαιοσύνης' [443c4-5], i.e., of justice as it exists in the soul, the truth of which 'is something like this, as it appears' [Τὸ δέ γε ἀληθές, τοιοῦτον μέν τι ἦν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡ δικαιοσύνη, 443c9-10]), that presents only one truth about justice, and that presents this one truth rather than others on account of the goal of the specific discussion and the characters of the interlocutors.

Here we should recall Socrates' claim in the *Cratylus* that 'it is not at all necessary in order for something to be an image that it reproduce in all respects what the thing of which it is an image is like' (οὐδὲ τὸ παράπαν δέῃ πάντα ἀποδοῦναι οἷον ἐστιν ᾧ εἰκάζει, εἰ μέλλει εἰκών εἶναι, 432b3-4); indeed, if it did so, it would not be an image at all, but a duplicate of the thing itself. The reason for maintaining that Socrates' account of justice in book IV is an *eikôn* rather

than a *phantasma* is that, far from being the crowd-pleaser that Thrasymachus' definition in Book I is meant to be, it is an account that appears, at least initially, odd and even perverse (even to modern readers like Weiss!). Recall that the ironic feature of an *eikôn* is that it will appear all wrong to those standing some distance from the truth precisely because it faithfully reproduces true characteristics of the original. So if Socrates adjusts what he says to suit the soul of the particular interlocutor, what he judges to be 'suitable' is not producing contentment in the interlocutor with what is said, but rather provoking the interlocutor and leaving him unsatisfied. If we question the rigidity of the distinction in the *Sophist* while still acknowledging its central point, we can say that Socratic discourse, and indeed the Platonic discourse of the dialogues, is a *phantasma* to the extent that it takes perspective into account, but is an *eikôn* to the extent that it challenges this perspective in remaining faithful to the truth.[20] In short, the discussion in the *Sophist* is not a rejection of perspectivism if we understand the latter rightly as the tension between a commitment to the truth and a sensitivity to the multiple ways in which this truth is reflected and in which it therefore can be approached.

PERSPECTIVISM AS A PRINCIPLE OF DIALECTIC IN THE PARMENIDES

This discussion cannot be complete without at least a brief mention of the most obvious and radical case of perspectivism in Plato's dialogues: the hypotheses of the second half of the *Parmenides*. Here we see defended argumentatively opposite perspectives on the most fundamental questions. This of course is what has led some to see here nothing but sophistry: a kind of extreme display, and therefore *reductio ad absurdum*, of the sophistic technique of *Dissoi Logoi*. The perspectivism I am defending here might indeed appear to be attributing to Plato nothing but this ability to argue on every side of an issue that characterized the sophistic *Dissoi Logoi*. But I would suggest that here, as in other cases, Plato, rather than simply rejecting a sophistic or rhetorical technique, appropriates it and transforms it for his own purpose. The ability to argue on different sides of an issue becomes for him, not a means of persuading an audience of anything for the sake of achieving power, but rather a means of getting at a truth that cannot be captured in one logos. It seems clear to me, for example, that the first two hypotheses in the second half of the *Parmenides* must both be true: the One as One must exclude multiplicity (137c4-5) and therefore any attribute, including 'being'; at the same time, the One must *be* and as participating in being must be *multiple*, in which case it ends up including along with being *all* attributes, even contradictory ones. If both of these hypotheses are true, there seems to be no way of overcoming their contradiction in one logos: the transition from one to the other is simply that of starting again from the beginning, allowing the One to appear differently (πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς read: ἐπανὲλθωμεν, ἐαν τι ἡμῖν ἐπανιοῦσιν ἀλλοῖον φανῇ, 142b1-2). Dialectic, the learning of which is supposed to be the point of the exercise of the second half of the *Parmenides* (135b-d), is being able to see and argue both sides of the question. When we recall that this exercise is said to be applicable not only to the One, but to anything we might set forth as being and not being and suffering anything else (136b8-9), we see that the perspectivism of the hypotheses has universal applicability. If the 'One' is chosen as the

subject, it is because it brings out most clearly what lies behind the whole exercise, which is the fundamental Platonic problem of the One and the Many: how the Many must be seen as One while remaining Many and the One must be seen as Many while remaining One. As Proclus expresses the point in his commentary on the *Parmenides*: 'It is necessary for being to be both one and many. For every unity implies a multiplicity correlated to itself, while every multiplicity must be comprehended by a unity appropriate to it' (*In Parm.* 620, 4-6). Perspectivism is the response precisely to this problem. If reality itself is structured as a series of perspectives and images that point to a higher unity that both is and is not this multiplicity, what better way of expressing this in writing than by writing dialogues in which each is its own world, completely different from and in some ways even contradicting the others, but in which all together point to a Truth that transcends them? Indeed, Plato's principle for composing dialogues could be the words cited from the *Parmenides* above: 'Let us start again from the beginning'. A perspectival reading of the dialogues is thus much more in keeping with Plato's metaphysics than are the rival readings that covertly assume worldviews radically different from Plato's. The model for Unitarianism is Hegel's notion of a closed system that fully describes reality. The model for Developmentalism is modern Empiricism and Positivism: we continually modify our hypotheses in the attempt to explain the given facts.[21]

NEOPLATONIST PERSPECTIVISM

It is not the suggestion of reading Plato perspectivally that is anachronistic. To counter therefore the false impression that may have been created by beginning with Nietzsche, let us conclude with the Neoplatonists.[22] The perspectival reading defended here has real affinities with what we find in some Neoplatonist commentators on Plato. The Neoplatonists were, at least in many cases, Unitarians not because they ignored dramatic and argumentative context but, on the contrary, because they used this context to explain seeming disparities in what is asserted in different dialogues.[23] Long before Nietzsche argued that both of Socrates's speeches in the *Phaedrus* are considered partially true, for example, the same thesis was defended by the Neoplatonist Hermeias (or Syrianus through Hermeias).[24] The most important figure here, however, is arguably Proclus. His commentary on the *Parmenides* recognizes that the first two hypotheses must be both true. In his commentary on the *Republic* he sees no problem with the tripartite soul not including parts of the soul recognized as distinct in other dialogues, i.e., sensation and imagination: the description of the soul in the *Republic*, he explains, is concerned only with those parts relevant to political virtue (*In Rep.* 233.25).[25] Commenting on the passage 443d7 cited above where Socrates appears to refer to other parts of the soul between the three parts, Proclus, while defending the thesis that there are only three parts relevant to political virtue, sees the reference as possibly being to sub-branches of the three parts (such as love of wealth and love of honor) distinct from those on which Socrates focuses here for the purpose of showing the conflict between the parts (232.10). We find a similar move when Proclus addresses the question of why at the end of Book 1 the function of the soul is not identified with its highest function: theoretical contemplation. The answer is that the only activities here attributed to the soul are those that are relevant to the topic of the conversation:

political justice (27.5). In this way and many others Proclus constantly demonstrates sensitivity to context and awareness that what is said is not the whole truth but the aspect of the truth relevant to the particular context.

This approach is also evident in Proclus' extraordinary commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, with the attention it gives to the context-setting prologue (*In Alc.* 18.13-19.10) and its constant demonstration of how Socrates adapts his discourse to the character of the interlocutor, an approach followed by the later commentary on the same dialogue by Olympiodorus.[26] As for Proclus' commentary on the *Cratylus,* the study by R. M. Van den Berg (2008) has noted that no character in Plato's dialogues is for Proclus Plato's mouthpiece and that, in the case of the *Cratylus*, the positions of Hermogenes and Cratylus are both taken to be true and compatible (99). On the basis of this Proclus commentary as well as the others Layne, in a recent study of Neoplatonic hermeneutics, reaches a conclusion worth citing here in full for the affinity it shows between the Neoplatonic approach to Plato and the 'perspectivist' reading defended here:

Notably, the importance of the connection between the materials of the dialogue and the Soul or arguments of the dialogue already explains why Socrates' views and arguments can change from one dialogue to another. This, for Proclus, is not a sign of his inconsistency but rather a sign of Plato's mindfulness of the unity and cohesiveness of characters and contexts in each dialogue. Who Socrates' interlocutors are and where they currently stand in their philosophical development dramatically alters the 'materials' of the text and accordingly alters the dialogue and its intent as a whole. Moreover, these materials also modify the Form or style of the methods utilized by the characters in the dialogue itself (Layne, 2014, 86).

Where the modern 'developmentalist', in short, sees inconsistency, Proclus saw only a plurality of contexts.

As Harold Tarrant has pointed out in his *Plato's First Interpreters,* these interpreters had no problem with finding truth in what is said by characters such as Callicles and Pausanias (2000, 31, 130). He also notes how later Platonists found at least as much truth in the words of Protagoras as in those of Socrates in the *Protagoras* (113). He furthermore documents their efforts to reconcile seemingly contradictory claims in the dialogues, e.g., the different accounts of virtue (137). The Neoplatonist interpreters, in short, in line with their metaphysics that at least bears a strong kinship to that of Plato, found truth reflected everywhere in the dialogues. This is not to deny that there are certain elements of the Neoplatonist reading that are at odds with the 'perspectivist' reading defended here: their restrictive selection of dialogues to focus on, their tendency to read doctrinal content into the slightest dramatic detail, and their aim of incorporating all the disparate perspectives of the dialogues into one univocal and final metaphysical theory. Yet apart from the general sensitivity to context and to multiple partial truths, the feature of the Neoplatonist reading that most opposes it to contemporary 'developmentalist' readings and that most makes it an inspiration for the 'perspectivist' reading defended here is its insistence, already alluded to in the quotation from Layne above, on the uniqueness of each dialogue. For a good description of this feature we can again turn to Tarrant:

> The internal literary and philosophic unity of each dialogue was forcefully affirmed by the later Neoplatonists, for whom a dialogue was a miniature cosmos, containing within itself matter, form,

> nature that combines them, soul, intellect, and good (41).

Specifically, the form was identified with style; the matter with the characters, settings, and preludes; the soul with the arguments; the intellect with the overall aim or skopos served by the preceding; the good with the realization of this skopos in the reader.[27] Since all of these were different for each dialogue, each dialogue had to be understood on its own terms. The similarity of each dialogue to a cosmos is the first reason given in the anonymous *Prolegomena* for Plato's choice of the dialogue form. While the *Prolegomena* defends a 'dogmatist' rather than a 'sceptical' reading of Plato, it also shows how attention to the dialogue form brings with it a certain perspectivism to the reading of Plato:

> For in the same way as a dialogue has different personages each speaking in character, so does the universe comprise existences of various nature expressing themselves in various ways; for the utterance of each is according to its nature [ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ διαλόγῳ πρόσωπά εἰσιν φθεγγόμενα καθώς ἑκάστῳ πρέπει, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ ὅλῳ κόσμῳ διάφοροί εἰσιν φύσεις φθογγὴν διάφορον ἀφιεῖσαι. φθέγγεται γὰρ ἕκαστος κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν] (*Anon. Proleg.* 15.2-7).

It would be as absurd to reject anything said in the dialogues as simply false as it would be to reject any nature in the cosmos as non-existent. In the broader context of the dialogues as a whole, each dialogue, like each character within a dialogue, expresses the truth according to its unique nature, each dialogue reflects the cosmos from the perspective of its own unique world. When the anonymous commentary turns to the question of how to order the dialogues, the order that is preferred, after chronological orderings are dropped without even being taken seriously, is a pedagogical one in which each dialogue makes its unique contribution by providing a distinct angle on the truth: some dialogues, for example, are classified according to whether they approach virtue from a natural, social, ethical, purificatory or contemplative perspective.[28]

I conclude with an ancient principle that, while of uncertain origin,[29] has come down to us as a principle of the Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato: 'Plato is a man of many voices (*polyphônos*), not of many views (*polydoxos*)' (Stobaeus 2.55.5-7).[30] This principle is of course somewhat ambiguous. It could mean that Plato had only one doctrine on an issue and simply expressed it in different ways; this could furthermore be how the principle was understood by some Neoplatonists. Yet for reasons given above, the principle as thus interpreted would capture neither what we find in Plato's dialogues nor even what we find at least sometimes in Neoplatonist readings.[31] As a principle of the 'perspectivist' reading defended here, it would need to be understood as claiming that there is *one truth* (for example, about the soul), a truth that is as such inaccessible to us, but many perspectives on this truth, each true within its limits and its particular context. In the end, to read the dialogues according to such a principle is simply to introduce into Plato's strategy of writing the perspectivism that has from the very beginning characterized the interpretation of Plato. In reporting the famous dream in which Plato *saw himself* as a swan that no one could catch, the anonymous commentator reports that each person will interpret the dialogues according to what appears to him (ἀλλ' ἕκαστον πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτῷ τὴν ἐξήγησιν ποεῖσθαι, 1.34-35). If we cannot pin down Plato's view on love in the *Symposium,* for example, it is because he does everything in his power as a great writer to prevent us from doing so. The 'perspectivist' reading is simply an acknowledgement of this fact. Plato's

approach to the truth to which he aspired was to multiply our perspectives on it by writing only dialogues of extraordinary diversity. He *chose* to fly and never to stop flying. Our only hope of catching him is to join him in this flight, that is, to show in our interpretations of Plato the same sensitivity to the multiplicity of perspectives that his dialogues show.

NOTAS

1 'Über das Verhältniss der Rede des Alcibiades zu den übrigen Reden des platonischen Symposions.' In Nietzsche 1994, 420-424.

2 Nietzsche 1995, 105-6.

3 'Es ist ganz falsch zu glauben, daß Pl. damit verschiedene verkehrte Richtungen habe darstellen wollen: es sind alles philosoph. λόγοι u. all wahr, mit immer neuen Seiten der einen Wahrheit.'

4 Kahn 1996, 48.

5 See Kahn 1996, 157, 222, 378-9. Of the *Symposium, Phaedo* and *Republic* taken together, he concludes that they offer not a systematic theory but rather 'a suggestive sketch' (368).

6 The argument of Roochnik is that 'the conception of the soul which Socrates articulates in his famous 'tripartite psychology' in book 4 is both partial and provisional and how, commencing with the interruption that opens book 5, it is progressively revised. The subsequent sections of the dialogue, books 5-7 and then 8-10, each contain an increasingly more complex, richer, and more truthful psychology than what Socrates presents in book 4. Despite such revision, the book 4 account is not simply negated or junked as the *Republic* unfolds' (2003, 2-3).

7 'For instance, the difference between the incomposite soul of the *Phaedo* and the tripartite soul of the *Republic* is not *necessarily* explicable in terms of Plato's abandoning an earlier, Socratic doctrine of a single, rational soul in favour of his own belief in a composite soul with an irrational, lower part that accommodates our desires and passions. It may not even be clear why this 'inconsistency' should matter. . . . Arguments are always contextualized. They are apparently the most important element in the Platonic textual edifice but not the only one; the means not the end' (Charalabopoulos 2012, pp. 8-9).

8 Rowe has challenged developmentalism by defending a perspectivism in relation to the Forms (2007, 39-48). He claims, for example, that the so-called 'two-worlds' view 'is just one of several Platonic perspectives on things' (44). Rowe, however, abandons such perspectivism and embraces developmentalism when it comes to Plato's supposed 'theory of action' (49). Against this latter thesis of an opposition between the Socratic 'intellectualism' of the 'early' dialogues and a different theory of action in the 'middle' dialogues, see Gerson 2014, 419-428.

9 Already by the end of Book 1 Socrates has argued that the just are stronger than the unjust and that justice is to their advantage (351a ff.)

10 On Kahn's earlier 'proleptic' reading, a whole group of dialogues, including the *Laches,* is to be interpreted from one perspective, i.e., that of the *Republic* (see Kahn 1996, p. 41). The 'perspectival' reading I am defending insists that the *Laches* and the *Republic,* for example, are approaching the question of courage from very different perspectives and that one perspective is not to be subordinated to, or assimilated to, the other.

11 See Gonzalez 2000.

12 For reasons for not identifying the perspective of Socrates with that of Diotima, see Gonzalez 2012.

13 For further detail on how Plato does this, see Gonzalez 2013.

14 'In the area of epistemology we find two fundamentally different theories of human cognition: recollection, in a series of dialogues beginning with the *Meno*; and the intellectual vision of Forms, in the central books of the *Republic.* [. . .] I want to suggest that such variation is deliberate and systematic, and that it obliges us to rethink the status of philosophical doctrines for Plato ' (2005, 15).

15 It will have been noted that I do not discuss the 'esotericist' or 'Tübingen' interpretation of Plato above when I contrast the 'perspectivist' model to other models. The reason is that the Tübingen interpretation is perfectly *compatible* with the 'perspectivist' reading of the dialogues. Where the Tübingen reading goes beyond the 'perspectivist' reading is in seeing all the perspectives of the dialogues as pointing to unwritten teachings *that are themselves no longer perspectival or provisional but rather constitute a univocal and final philosophical system expressible* more geometrico. My disagreement with the Tübingen reading has always been with this dogmatic interpretation of the unwritten teachings. That there were unwritten teachings and that we should pay attention to them is indisputable, but I see no reason for thinking that these teachings were any less provisional or any less of a 'sketch' than what we find in the dialogues, agreeing in this regard with Kahn as cited above (1996, 386-388). This, however, is a debate that takes us outside the dialogues and cannot be pursued here. For my critique of the Tübingen interpretation, see Gonzalez 1998, 10-13.

16 See Collobert 2012, p. 93, for the suggestion that "Plato seemingly collapses the distinction set forth in *Sophist* between an *eikôn* and a *phantasma.*"

17 Such as Collobert 2012, p. 93.

18 Collobert asks, 'Yet how is it possible that the philosopher deludes his audience by making mere illusions even though they are grounded in knowledge? Plato would have made our life easier had he maintained in the *Sophist* that the *eikon*-maker is the knowledgeable imitator' (2012, 94).

19 The longer version of my review can be found in Études Platoniciennes [en ligne] 11 (2014), with a shorter version in *Philosophical Review* 124/4 (2015): 571-575.

20 A question that must remain open here is whether this faithfulness to the truth requires on the part of the philosopher *knowledge* of the truth in the strictest sense. Those for whom the philosopher produces his images might stand far away from the truth (in the language the Visitor uses to describe those who are fooled by the sophist, language used again to describe those who experience *phantasmata* from a distance: πόρρω τῶν πραγμάτων τῆς ἀληθείας ἀφεστῶτας, 234c4), but the philosopher himself would presumably need to be characterized by what the Visitor contrasts to this distance: ἐναργῶς ἐφάπτεσθαι τῶν ὄντων (234d5-6). The Visitor oddly describes this closeness to the beings themselves as the necessary result of the experiences (παθημάτα) that come with age (234d5). But when Theaetetus suggests that this is why he himself is still so far from the truth, the Visitor replies that they will all attempt to lead him as close to the truth as possible (ὡς ἐγγύτατα) without these experiences (234e5-6). The suggestion of degrees here is important: the philosopher clearly needs to be much closer to the truth than are those fooled by the sophist, but this closeness admits of degrees that fall short of full knowledge.

21 As Charalabopoulos notes, the division of the dialogues into three chronological groups 'is clearly a product of the evolutionism and scientific optimism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a firm belief in linear progress and the model of the natural sciences as the ultimate road to knowledge' (7). He even goes on to suggest that this division 'derives mainly from a barely admitted anxiety on the part of the humanities to get prestige by appropriating the methods of the sciences' (11).

22 I use the term 'Neoplatonist' here simply as the commonly used designation and with no pejorative sense, recognizing that it would be more accurate to refer to these philosophers simply as 'Platonists'.

23 As Renaud and Tarrant rightly note: 'This is why it is incorrect to say the dialogue form and its close relation to the content were 'discovered' by nineteenth century German scholarship, in particular by Friedrich Schleiermacher. This unity was rather re-discovered at that time, after the ancients, such as Albinus, Proclus and Olympiodorus' (2015, 196).

24 The commentary of Hermeias is thought to be based on the lectures of Syrianus. See Layne - Tarrant 2014, p. 184, n. 25 & p. 202, n.1, for the debate and the bibliography. See Syrianus' argument about the principle of non-contradiction not applying to what transcends speech and knowledge: *In Met.* ii. fol. 13, b. Hermias rightly insists that Socrates' first speech has some truth within it (ἀλήθειάν τινα εἶχεν ὁ Σωκράτους λόγος, *in Phdr.* 77: 9-15). For more on his reading, see Gonzalez 2015.

25 On how Olympiodorus in his commentary on the *Alcibiades* also reconciled unitary and tripartite conceptions of the soul, see Renaud - Tarrant 2015, 232-234. Renaud and Tarrant recognize in this context, in support of Olympiodorus' reading, that both conceptions are to be found in the *Republic* itself, but they reveal their modern bias in describing this as 'wavering' on Plato's part (233). In referring again to this feature of Olympiodorus' reading, Renaud and Tarrant contrast it with Vlastos' developmental thesis of a distinction between an 'early' Socrates who does not divide the soul and a 'later' Platonic Socrates who defends tripartition (252).

26 Proclus asserts that Socrates' discourse is always adapted to the character of the interlocutor (πανταχοῦ γὰρ ὁ Σωκράτης τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις προσώποις οἰκείως προάγει τοὺς λόγους, *In Alc.* 28.10-11). Socrates has three forms of knowledge, i.e., dialectical, maieutic and erotic; while he always employs all three, which one is given emphasis will depend on the character of the interlocutor (27.13-30.4). Renaud and Tarrant claim that Proclus is nevertheless not interested in the individual character of the interlocutor but tends to see the interlocutor instead as only a universal type (2015, 179-181). They therefore appear to regard the commentary of Olympiodorus as better following the principle articulated here: 'It is important for him that what Plato has his characters say depends on who speaks and to whom they speak, and sometimes on why or where they do so—that is, it depends on the personally relevant reasons why what is said is said' (192).

27 See Layne, 82-85.

28 26.23-35. For an interpretation and correction of the confused text here with a reconstruction of the reading order, see Westerink 2011, pp. xxxvii-xl.

29 Tarrant suggests it may have been introduced by the Middle Platonist Eudorus of Alexandria (2000, 73); Annas 1999, p. 9, attributes it to Arius Didymus.

30 See also Cicero *Academica* 1.17 in which Plato's auctoritas is described as 'varius et multiplex et copiosus'.

31 Tarrant explains this principle as follows: 'The limitation of disagreement between dialogues to Plato's differing voices entails that, when he divides goods into two at one point, into three at another, and into five at another, it does not signify *vacillation* about their correct division, but one division is into their kinds, another into their locations, and another into their species' (2000, 74). But even this is not so much a matter of different forms of expression, as it is of different aspects of a doctrine. See p. 212 for the flexibility such a principle could produce in an interpreter such as Alcinous.

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