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INTRODUCTION

Platonic Dramatology

Alfred North Whitehead’s quip that all subsequent philosophy is merely a footnote to Plato has often been repeated, but those who repeat it do not seem to have thought much about the difference between the source and the scholarship on it. Whereas all subsequent philosophers have written treatises (even if they have also produced some more literary works), Plato wrote only dialogues. And in these dialogues he not merely presented various philosophers in conversation with non-philosophers, but he gave the philosophers and their interlocutors specific individual identities, backgrounds, and views. Plato’s depiction of philosophy is, in other words, neither impersonal nor abstract. The conversations are shown to have occurred at different times and places, and mostly but not always in Athens. The philosophical figure who guides the conversation in most of the dialogues is Socrates, but he is not Plato’s only philosopher. Plato also presents conversations in which an “Athenian Stranger,” Parmenides, Timaeus, or the Eleatic Stranger takes the lead. Socrates is said to be present at some of these conversations but not all. Sometimes Socrates and another philosopher question the same interlocutors; more often, however, Plato shows them talking to different individuals. Some of these individuals are known historical figures; others are not. As depicted in the Platonic dialogues, then, philosophy is not an activity undertaken by a solitary individual in his or her study, attempting to replicate or ascend to Aristotle’s first principle of thought, thinking itself. Philosophy is an activity

1. The authenticity of his letters has often been questioned, and letters are not, in any case, treatises.
undertaken by a variety of different embodied human beings, coming from different cities and schools, having different views and concerns, talking in different ways to nonphilosophers. In this book I investigate the significance of these differences: first, for Plato's own understanding of the nature of philosophy, and second, for ours.

Previous scholars have, of course, noticed that Plato presents more than one philosopher and that there are differences not only among his philosophers but also in his depictions of Socrates. Nineteenth-century commentators may have followed the lead of Friedrich Schleiermacher in trying to understand the dialogues in terms of Plato's "development," because they were convinced that the only way the work of any author could or should be understood was to trace the changes in his thought over time. But many twentieth-century students of Plato adopted the essentially speculative "chronology of composition" rather than the "unitarian" reading championed by Paul Shorey and Hans von Arnim, at least in part because the "chronology" provided an explanation for the differences in the philosophical "spokesmen" whereas the unitarian reading did not. 4


Kenneth Sayre endorses the chronological understanding of the development of Plato's thought and treats the "late dialogues" as statements of arguments or doctrines much like treaties, but in Plato's Literary Garden (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) he emphasizes the pedagogical function of the "middle" dialogues.


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These scholars agreed that there are "early" dialogues, like the Apology and Crito, in which Plato depicts the historical Socrates refuting his interlocutors; "middle" dialogues, like the Republic and Phaedo, in which Plato attributes his own arguments to Socrates; and "late" dialogues, like the Sophist and Laws, in which Plato generally presents his more mature philosophical understanding in the mouth of a non-Socratic spokesman. Building on the pioneering studies by Lewis Campbell and Wilhelm Dittenberger, scholars undertook "stylistic" computer studies to show regularities and changes in word use to support this "dating." 5

Recently, however, serious questions have been raised about the evidence for, and the validity of the assumptions underlying, the "chronology of composition" and the "stylistic" studies used to confirm the "theory." 6 "In no ancient source is there ever any suggestion that Plato changed

Sokrates and Platon (1819-23) and Die Einteilung zur Übersetzung des Platon (1804-18) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996). According to Holger Theisfeld, Studies in Platonic Chronology (Helsinki: Societas Scienarium Fennica, 1982), 1, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann first suggested the study of the dating of the composition of the various dialogues, in System der Platonischen Philosophie (Leipzig: Barth, 1912), in contrast to studies of the development of Plato's thought, such as that later undertaken by Schleiermacher. Theisfeld recognizes that the two concerns have often been mixed and were finally merged in many Anglo-American commentaries. E. N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 1-51, breaks down the various attempts to interpret Plato even further by individual author—in terms of the development of his thought, the order of the presentation. This thought: the chronology of composition, and his biography (about which, Tigerstedt assures us, after reviewing the scarce ancient sources on gossip and citing one of the most famous "biographical" studies by Ulrich von Wilamowitz in support, that we know very little).

5. The exception is, of course, the Philēbou, which most commentators regard as "late," even though Socrates is the major philosophical spokesman. For a recent claim regarding the "remarkable...degree of consensus that has emerged" concerning Platonic chronology, see David Sedley, Plato's "Caryatid" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6. Debra Nails, Agora, Acadêm, and the Conduct of Philosophy (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 15-68, observes, on the contrary, that "there is unanimity about almost nothing across the various methods of ordering the dialogues" (15). Nevertheless, Charles H. Kahn, "On Platonic Chronology," in Annas and Rowe, New Perspectives on Plato, 93-127, defends the general chronological schema.

6. According to Nails (Agora, 101-14), Gerard R. Ledger, Re-Counting Plato (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), is the best of the stylistic studies. The varying results of the stylistic analyses are summarized in Leonard Brandwood, The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Thesleff, Studies, 65-99. From the nineteenth century onward, stylistic research has shown that the Critias, Laws, Philēbou, Statesman, Sophist, and Timaeus are characterized by certain linguistic mannerisms absent in other dialogues. Because this group includes the Laws, it is often said to be "late," although Thesleff, in Studies, points out that the linguistic affinity among these dialogues does not, in fact, prove anything about their date or Plato's "development," even though many scholars seem to think it does.

7. Howland, in "Re-Reading Plato," was the first to bring out and criticize the assumptions underlying the "chronology of composition," especially concerning the "development" of Plato's thought. Howland's critique was soon followed by that of Kenneth Dorsey. Good in Plato's Elatic Dialogues (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1-17; Nails, Agora; Charles H. Kahn, Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and the exchange Kahn had with Charles Grisworld in Ancient Philosophy
his views in a radical way," Kenneth Dorter reminds us. "Aristotle, for
element, always write[s] as though Plato consistently defended the theory of
forms throughout his life. . . . Neither does Diogenes Laertius, that reposi-
tory of anecdotes of every stripe, provide the slightest hint of such an
ocurrence." In the Politics (2.6:1264b26–27), Aristotle says that the Laws
was written later than the Republic, and Diogenes Laertius (3.3) reports that
"some say that Philip of Opus transcribed the Laws, which were in wax."8
But Aristotle's remark does not give us any guidance about the order of
the rest of the dialogues, and an inference from a centuries-old rumor that
Plato must have left the text of the Laws unfinished does not provide a firm
basis for determining the order or dates at which the dialogues were writ-
en.9 Reviewing the scant historical evidence for the "chronology of com-
position" in his introduction to Plato: The Complete Works, John M. Cooper
"urge[s] readers not to undertake the study of Plato's works holding in
mind the customary chronological groups of 'early,' 'middle,' and 'late'
dialogues . . . and to concentrate on the literary and philosophical con-
tent."10 The fact is, we do not know when or in what order Plato wrote the
individual dialogues. If we want to discover how Plato saw the world or

8. Dorter, Form and Good, 3. As G. E. L. Owen observed, "There is no external or internal evi-
dence which proves that the Laws or even some section of it was later than every other work. . . .
Diogenes' remark that it was left on the wax does not certify even that it occupied Plato to his
796, 793. Dionysius of Halicarnassus' report in On Literary Composition, ed. W. Rhys Roberts
(London: Macmillan, 1910), that "Plato did not leave off combing and curling and in every manner
replacing his dialogues, even at eighty years of age" (35), should also make commentators hesitant
to date the dialogues in terms of their composition. Dionysius also relates a story told about the
finding of a tablet which showed that Plato had set down the first sentence of the Republic in many
different ways. This story lends support to Thesleff's contention that the dialogues cannot be
dated by stylistic or stylistic evidence, because they were constantly being rewritten. Marks of
their early composition were thus cancelled out by traces of later revisions (Thesleff, Studies, 71).
9. Dorter observes with regard to the stylistic studies attempting to determine the date or
order in which the dialogues were composed: "The search was on for measures of stylistic affinity
Candidates that were found included reply formulas (the responses of the interlocutors—useless,
however, in the case of a narrative like the Timaeus), clauseula rhythms (the ends of periods or
colon); avoidance of hiatus (flowing a word ending in a vowel with one beginning in a vowel),
and use of kaper (anomalous appearing words) or unusual words. But each of these
events presents difficulties in measurement. In measuring reply formulas do we take into account
the personality of the interlocutor and the nature of the questions being asked? And do we count
slight variations as being the same; or formulas imbedded within longer sentences in the same
way as isolated formulas? . . . we must also decide whether to take into account the nature and
subject matter of the dialogues. Should we expect to find the same stylistic features in a narrative
myth (Timaeus), an exercise in abstract dialectic (Parmenides) . . . or a set of speeches (Symposium),
as in dialogues like the Republic, Theaetetus, or Laws?" (Dorfer, Form and Good, 5-6).

what he thought, we need to find another way of showing how more than
a few dialogues are related to one another by theme or shared characters.
We need, in other words, to formulate another account of the character,
the organization, and content of Plato's corpus.

I. Taking Account of the Literary Form and
Context of the Dialogue

Plato did not write treatises, although commentators following Aristotle
have tended to present him and his thought as if he had.11 Because Plato
himself does not speak in the dialogues, we discover what Plato thinks—or
at least what he wants to show his readers—in his selection of the characters,
the setting, and the topic to be discussed by these individuals at that time
and place, as well as the outcome or effects of the conversation. Socrates
is usually but not always the philosopher guiding the conversation.
Because Socrates is not the only philosopher Plato depicts—indeed, in some
dialogues (like the Timaeus and Sophist), Socrates mostly sits and listens
to another, possibly superior philosopher present his arguments—we cannot
assume that Socrates speaks for Plato. Because Socrates is by far the most
common philosophic voice, however, we cannot take one of the others—
the Athenian stranger, Parmenides, Timaeus, or the Eleatic stranger—as
Plato's spokesman either. These philosophers do not merely articulate dif-
ferent understandings of the best way to argue as well as of the character
of philosophy, politics, the cosmos, and being; they also engage different
interlocutors.12 In addition to the complex interplay of characters, moreover,
the dialogues also have settings—indications of specific times and places—
and depict a variety of actions or outcomes.13 To be sure, Plato does not

Unity of the Platonic Dialogue (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), 1-4. On the problems involved
in taking Aristotle as a guide to reading Plato, see Harold Cherniss, Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and
the Academy, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942); John R. Wallach, The
Platonic Political Art (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 26-29; Ronya Weiss,
12. On the different kinds of dialogue represented by Plato's different philosophical interlocu-
tors, see Michael Frede, "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form," in Methods of Interpreting
Clay, Platonic Questions: Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher (University Park: Pennsylvania State
University Press, 2000), 256-58, 269.
13. In Platonic Questions, Clay reminds his readers that "Plato was hardly the first to write a
Socratic dialogue, [but] he was, so far as we can now determine, the first to invest his dialogues in
dramatize any murders or celebrate any marriages; the dialogues are neither tragedies nor comedies. But in some of the conversations (like the Statesman and the Philebus), the interlocutors are convinced; in others, like the Protagoras, they admit that they have been defeated in argument but remain unpersuaded; and in some, like the Meno, they get angry when they are refuted. In all cases, readers are encouraged to understand the status and character of the arguments not simply in themselves or in the abstract, but as presented by this particular philosopher with his distinctive background and approach to a specific person or persons at the time and place indicated, with a discernible (sometimes lack of) effect.

Since Plato does not speak himself, it is necessary to look at the arguments in context. Each dialogue is a specific conversation. In the following account of Plato’s thought, I have therefore proceeded dialogue by dialogue. Since Plato presents a variety of philosophers speaking to different interlocutors, in different circumstances, with different results, I begin the discussion of each dialogue by reminding readers of the situation, that is, what we know about the characters and the setting. To show how the characteristics and interests of the interlocutors affect the arguments that the philosopher speaking puts forth, I have also taken up the arguments in the order in which they occur and looked at each step at the results, which are not always logical. At times we are told about the emotional reaction the philosopher or his interlocutor has. Sometimes characters leave; sometimes others take their place. Why? And why at this particular juncture? It is, of course, possible to abstract out arguments from the dialogues; it is certainly possible if one has the right historical time. 

recognizable historical settings. ... (Moreover.) Plato is concerned not only with the words spoken and arguments made but the record of significant action. These actions tend to be lost sight of in philosophical readings of the Platonic dialogues (10).

14. Ruby Blondheim, The Play of Character in Plato’s Dialogues (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), represents a big step toward the kind of reading of the dialogues I am advocating. James Arieti, Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991), also emphasizes the dramatic character of the dialogues, but he does not bring out any connections among them.

15. It seems obvious, if not axiomatic, to say that even the arguments, narrowly construed, are presented in stages, that is, that they develop and are developed in the course of a dialogue. But David Roochnik, Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s “Republic” (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 15–13, shows that many commentators have isolated Socrates’ presentation of the three-part soul in the Republic from its context, even though they have found it necessary to refer to later parts of the dialogue in explicating it, and have presented it as “Plato’s” argument. Grace Hadley Billings, The Art of Transition in Plato (Menasha, WI: George Banta, 1926), observes: “One of Plato’s favorite methods of developing a theme is that a partial or superficial view of the subject is first presented, only to be superseded or supplemented by further discussion” (11).

also possible to read arguments taken from several dialogues thematically. But by taking the arguments out of context, a commentator loses most, if not all, of what Plato is showing his readers. And Plato only shows; he does not state or say anything in his own name.

The price of presenting the arguments in context is that the presentation tends to look like a summary. The following accounts of the individual dialogues are not mere summaries, however; they represent attempts to bring out what is shown: who is persuaded or not, by what arguments, with what results. Plato’s understanding is to be found in what he shows, first in individual dialogues, taken as a whole, and then in his corpus, read as a whole. It is not to be found in individual arguments Plato puts in the mouths of specific characters conversing under particular conditions.

The results of one conversation are, moreover, often indicated only in a later conversation. It is not sufficient to read single dialogues in complete isolation from the others. We do not learn from Plato’s Parmenides, for example, what young Socrates’ reaction to the elderly Eleatic’s demonstration of argumentative gymnastics was. Only by reading the dialogues shown to take place afterward do we see that Socrates never followed Parmenides’ advice. In other words, the context of the conversation(s) depicted in each individual dialogue is determined not only by the immediate setting but also by the order or sequence of the dialogues Plato indicates by means of their dramatic dates.

Commentators as early as Thrasyllus observed that some of the conversations are explicitly linked to each other. If we go beyond the traditional tetralogies (for example, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, and Phaedo) and look at the dramatic dates (the indications Plato gives of the time at which readers are to imagine the dialogue having taken place, not the much later and more speculative time of composition), however, we see that the dialogues represent incidents in one overarching narrative. They depict the problems that gave rise to Socratic philosophy, its development or maturation, and its limitations.

17. Diogenes Laerarius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 3.61–64. reports that Aritophanes the grammarian divided some but that he could not arrange all of the dialogues into tetralogies. Bernard Suzanne, http://plato-dialogues.org/tetralog.htm, has tried to revive and update the Thrasyllian approach to the organization of the dialogues in tetralogies, although the sets of four that Suzanne identifies differ from those posited by Thrasyllus and have not been adopted or endorsed by anyone else.
II. The Overarching Narrative Indicated by the Dramatic Dates

Each of Plato's other philosophers takes charge of the conversation in one or two dialogues: the Athenian Stranger in the Laws and Epinomis, Parmenides and Timaeus in the dialogues that bear their names, and the Elatic Stranger in the Sophist and Statesman. The problem with determining whether Plato's characterizations of the philosophers is consistent or differentiated, for example, whether the various philosophers articulate fundamentally the same Platonic understanding of things (the unitarian thesis) or whether they represent fundamentally different positions (which may or may not correspond to stages in Plato's own development), arises first and foremost with regard to Socrates. Present in thirty-three of the thirty-five dialogues, Socrates certainly appears to be Plato's most important philosopher. As readers we learn more about his education, background, appearance, family, city, and associates than we do about any of the other philosophers. It is not so clear, however, whether Plato always attributes the same arguments and views to the character named Socrates. The advocates of the chronology of composition argue that he does not. 18

Plato gives us our first view of the young Socrates in the Parmenides, a dialogue in which the conversation is directed by the older Eleatic philosopher. And if we list the dialogues in the order of their dramatic dates, we see not only that the dialogues featuring Socrates can be so ordered, but also that the non-Socratic dialogues can be incorporated into the narrative that emerges on the basis of the dramatic dating. That order can be summarized as follows:


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<td>421–420</td>
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<td>413</td>
<td>Ion (treated thematically in note to the Republic)</td>
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<td>411</td>
<td>Republic</td>
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<td>n.d.</td>
<td>Philebus (thematically related to the Republic)</td>
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<td>402–401</td>
<td>Meno</td>
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<td>399</td>
<td>Thaetetus, Euthyphro, Cratylus, Sophist, Statesman, Apology, Crito, and Phaedo</td>
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<tr>
<td>387–386</td>
<td>Menexenus</td>
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In this list I use horizontal lines to group the dialogues into periods or stages of Socrates' development as a philosopher. I have organized the subsequent account of the dialogues on this basis.

In attempting to establish the dramatic dates of the dialogues, I have relied on the philological, philosophical, and archeological work of many scholars. 19 These dates are admittedly subjects of ongoing controversy. At the beginning of each chapter in which I treat a set of dialogues, I have therefore noted some of the relevant disagreements. Plato often gives slight indications of the time at which a conversation occurred—by means of an ambiguous reference, as to a battle at Megara in the Republic (there are several such battles) or to the presence of a person whose identity and life span are known independently of the dialogues. In two important cases, the Republic and the Phaedrus, scholars have shown, partly on the basis of internal evidence and partly on the basis of inscriptions, that the conversations depicted could not have taken place among those persons indicated

19. Debra Nails, The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), is invaluable to scholars pursuing questions about the dramatic dates of the dialogues. I have not agreed with her in every case, for example, concerning the specific dates of the Euthydemus and Lysis, but I have found her analyses of other scholars as well as her own arguments about the dates and the personage of the dialogues extremely helpful.
at the time and place indicated. Likewise, scholars have long known that there are anchronistic references to events that occurred after the conversation is supposed to have taken place, for example, in the *Protagoras* (327d) and the *Symposium* (194a), two other dialogues whose authorship has rarely been questioned. Both the impossibility of the actual occurrence of some of the conversations and the occasional anchronistic references serve, or should serve, to remind readers that the dialogues are Platonic literary inventions, not historical reports. I have taken Plato’s indications of the times at which the conversations took place merely as hints of the order in which he wanted his readers to imagine the conversations taking place. The coherence of the narrative that emerges when one strings the dialogues together in the order indicated corroborates the character and significance of the dramatic dates. Because in some dialogues the date is sketchily presented, and there are in a few cases contradictory indications, I do not think the dramatic dates can do anything more than indicate the order and connections among the dialogues.

Read in the order indicated by their dramatic dates, the dialogues tell a story. The evidence for the dating of the dialogues as well as for the readings that are summarized here is more fully presented in the relevant chapters of this book.

The story begins not with the *Parmenides*, the earliest appearance of Socrates, but with the *Laws*, usually taken to be the last dialogue Plato wrote. As noted earlier in the introduction, the evidence for the dating of the composition of the *Laws* is slight and highly questionable. But whenever Plato wrote it, in this dialogue Plato asks his readers to imagine a conversation that took place after the Persian Wars, to which there are many references, but before the Peloponnesian War, to which there is no reference at all. Occurring before the Peloponnesian War, the dialogue also occurs before Socrates became a public figure in Athens. Indeed, the *Laws* shows us why Socratic philosophy emerged and was taken up with such passionate interest. In the conversation he has with two elderly Dorian statesmen, an anonymous Athenian stranger draws extensively upon pre-Socratic Greek poetry, pre-Socratic Greek political experience or “history,” and pre-Socratic philosophy in proposing a new and better regime. But at the end of his legislative proposals (*Laws* 965c--66a), the Athenian tells his interlocutors that the city he has described in speech will not come into being unless they and the people who will help them found the new colony in Crete join together in an investigation of the unity of the virtues as well as of the noble and the good. Such an investigation is necessary if the city is to

Apology, before he wrote dialogues depicting a younger Socrates, like the *Parmenides*, he may have “filed in” lacunae in the story. We don’t know. All we have are the finished products, and there is some dispute about which dialogues he actually wrote. Since I take each of the dialogues to depict a separate conversation, I do not think the overall narrative would be seriously harmed if some of the more questionably authentic dialogues were ignored. In this respect I follow both the reasoning and the practice of Rutherford (*Art. 3*). I have created the *Alcibiades* II and *Ion* only in the notes as thematically related, respectively, to the *Alcibiades I* and the discussion of Homeric poetry in the *Republic.* For the dramatic dating of the *Ion*, see John D. Moore, “The Dating of Plato’s *Ion,*” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 15 (Winter 1974): 435–39.

An abbreviated version of the argument put forward in fuller form in chapter 1 can be found in Catherine H. Zuckert, “Plato’s Laws: Postlude or Prelude to Socratic Political Philosophy?” *Journal of Politics* 66 (May 2004): 374–99.


21. In the heyday of such debates, Eduard Zeller went so far as to question the authenticity of the *Laws*, upon which most of the stylistic and chronology analyses of the chronology of composition rest, but he later withdrew his doubts. Recognizing that the “authenticity,” that is, Platonic authorship, of many of the dialogues was brought into question in the nineteenth century, and in some cases, such as those of the *Alcibiades* and the *Theogony*, continues to this day; I am struck by the fact that most of those judgments involve a decision by a commentator concerning what sort of writing or argument is truly Platonic, based on a reading of part of the corpus, which is then applied to the rest. Do we know the character and extent of Plato’s literary and philosophical abilities? Are our presumptions about what Plato thought or could have written to be preferred to an examination of the works long attributed to Plato himself? In line with an increasing tendency in current scholarship, I have accepted the traditional list of thirty-five authentic dialogues to be found in Diogenes Laertius, acknowledging that Diogenes is not an altogether reliable source but believing that he is closer to Plato and his students than the authors of more recent constructions and speculations. For excellent if critical accounts of the various debates about the authenticity of the dialogues, see *Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato*, 13–22; and *Thesleff, Studies*, 86–96. See Thomas L. Pangle, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *The Roots of Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 3–17; for a more thorough account of the reasons to accept the ancient lists of authentic dialogues, not as perfect but as the best we have.

22. Walter Niconowski, “Cicero’s *Socrates*,” in *Law and Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. John A. Murphy, Robert L. Stone, and William T. Braithwaite (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), reminds us that Cicero recognized that “Plato’s *Socrates* is a sort of, made or created by Plato” (216) in De finibus 3.2 and De oratore 3.69. One of the clearest instances of such a recognition on Cicero’s part occurs, ironically, when he describes the last speech in Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* as “that which Plato made him employ” (Tusc.写字 dox. disputationes 1.97; Niconowski, “Socrates,” 228). But contemporary commentators have not always adhered to this earlier insight. Kahn, in *Plato and the Socratic Dialogues*, argues that the *Apology of Socrates* alone is historical. Donald Morrison, “On the Alleged Historical Reliability of Plato’s *Apology,*” *Archiv für Geschichte d. Philosophie* 82 (2000): 435–65, gives a detailed critique of Kahn’s argument. For a more general discussion of the reasons the *Apology of Socrates* should be read as a literary work by Plato, with a historical basis rather than a historical report, see R. B. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 29–34. David Wolfsohn, “Interpreting Plato’s Early Dialogues,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (Winter 2004), also observes that “the particular configuration of the historical elements is not historically accurate. Among other things, the ubiquity of anachronism… suggests that the dialogues are not intended to represent conversations that actually occurred.”

23. I make no claim about the order and time in which the dialogues were written or conceived. Plato may have composed some of the dialogues depicting Socrates late in life, like the
achieve its stated goal (770c–d). To make every member of the community as virtuous as possible, the leaders need to know what human virtue or excellence (areté), traditionally defined in ancient Greece as the kalokagathia (nobility and goodness), really and truly is. In other words, to establish the best possible form of common human life and thus solve the political problem, it is necessary to raise the questions characteristic of Socratic philosophy. But, as the Athenian also has to explain to his philosophically untutored interlocutors, raising such questions will be politically problematic, if not pernicious, because the questioning of accepted opinions encourages the tendency of young men to become impious and rebellious and thus threatens the stability of the laws as well as the future of the regime.

As everyone knows from reading the Apology, Socrates’ questions concerning the noble and good finally provoked his fellow citizens to accuse and convict him of impiety, although it took them more than forty years (and possibly defeat in war) to act against him. But, as Plato indicates in the Parmenides (dramatically dated 450, shortly after the Laws), there were perhaps even more serious philosophical problems with Socrates’ search for knowledge of the “ideas” of the virtues, the noble, and the good. In this dialogue a youthful (nineteen- or twenty-year-old) Socrates is not able to tell the elderly Eleatic philosopher why he thinks there are ideas of relations and the virtues, but not of natural species or more lowly phenomena like hair and mud. Nor is Socrates able to explain how sensible things participate in purely intelligible beings or how purely intelligible beings can be known by non–purely intelligible humans.

In the two dialogues he suggests occurred earliest, Plato thus shows that it would not be possible to establish the best possible form of political order without engaging in something like Socratic philosophy. But that philosophy involved two different kinds of problems—philosophical as well as political—from its very inception. Plato does not devote a single dialogue to depicting Socrates’ own philosophical education and development. There is, indeed, a gap of seventeen years between the first glimpse we get of the young Socrates in the Parmenides and his emergence “on stage” in Athens, so to speak, in the Protagoras. What we do see, negatively, is that Socrates never followed Parmenides’ advice to engage in the sort of argumentative gymnastics that the Eleatic models in the last two-thirds of the Parmenides. Plato does have Socrates give three retrospective accounts of his own education and development in three dialogues that are shown to have occurred much later. On the last day of his life, Socrates famously explains how he turned away from the investigations of nature we now

call pre-Socratic philosophy and formulated the argument concerning the ideas we see him present in the Parmenides. In the Symposium Socrates tells his friends how he learned from “Diotima” to move beyond thinking in terms of opposites, the “is” and “is not” characteristic of Parmenides and his student Zeno, to investigating opinions, especially about the noble and good. In his Apology Socrates attributes that turn in his thought to the oracle at Delphi in explaining how and why his philosophy has aroused the enmity of some of his fellow citizens. In both the Symposium and the Apology, the divine instruction or inspiration, we might say, that led Socrates to turn to examining opinions, especially about the noble and good, rather than merely criticizing previous philosophical arguments (logoi), appears to have occurred after 450 but before 435.

In the dialogues that follow the initial presentation of the problems to which he was responding, Plato presents four stages or periods of Socrates’ philosophizing. In the first stage, the two sets of conversations that Plato indicates took place at the very beginning and then at the end of the first part of the Peloponnesian War—the Protagoras, Alcibiades, and Charmides, followed a decade later by the Laches, Hippias Major, and Hippias Minor—we see Socrates repeatedly demonstrate the inadequacy of the understandings of virtue, the noble, and the good held by his contemporaries. In the face of the proven inadequacy of their current understanding, Socrates urges his interlocutors to join him in further philosophical investigations of the good and the noble, but his invitations do not bear fruit. His two most notorious sometime associates, Alcibiades and Critias, do not stay with Socrates long enough to acquire nontraditional or noncontradictory conceptions of a human life that is truly kalois k'agathos (noble and good). The two generals or statesmen to whom Socrates speaks in the Laches are too busy with public affairs to engage in any further conversations, and the sophists (Protagoras and Hippias), who claim to be able to teach politically ambitious young Athenians how to succeed, do not seek to be corrected (and embarrassed) by Socrates again.

25. I have been asked several times why I do not include “Diotima” (and Aspasia in the Menexenus) among the Platonic philosophers (whom I do not think should, strictly speaking, be called spokesmen, because no one in the dialogues speaks for Plato simply or directly). Although Socrates tells his interlocutors what he learned from Diotima and Aspasia, and explicitly calls them his teachers, Socrates reports what they told him. Plato does not show either of the women speaking directly to other interlocutors. Nor does either of these women present as comprehensive a view as Plato’s philosophers.


27. Cf. Xenophon Memorabilia 1.2.34.
In the second stage, constituted by a group of dialogues that Plato indicates occurred during the second part of the Peloponnesian War between 416 and 411, Socrates no longer remains content merely to show the inadequacy of the opinions held by his interlocutors. He begins to put forth a kind of positive teaching of his own, albeit in the form of images and myths. He also asserts that he possesses a certain limited kind of knowledge of ta *erôtika*. In the Symposium (unquestionably dated in 416), Socrates meets again with many of the Athenians present at his initial encounter with Protagoras. But instead of questioning the opinions of the sophists, with whom these Athenians had associated, in the Symposium, Phaedrus, and Republic Socrates engages in a contest with the poets, the origin of the traditional notions of *kalos k'agathos* to which the sophists adhered. Rather than demonstrate the internal incoherence of the traditional notions as he had in previous conversations, in these dialogues (completed, I argue, by the argument concerning the human good in the Philebus, which has no definite dramatic date) Socrates puts forth a vision of another, better understanding of a noble and good human life, the life of those who join together in seeking knowledge of what is truly noble and good. As we see in later dialogues, Socrates succeeds in attracting a certain number of regular associates, even though he does not persuade everyone to whom he speaks of the pressing need for, and the unparalleled enjoyment to be gained by, such philosophical investigations.

Socrates does not succeed, however, in putting forth a comprehensive view of the intelligibility of the whole. That is the reason he always describes himself literally as a philosopher, a seeker of wisdom, rather than a knower or wise man. The *Timaeus* clearly follows the conversation related in the Republic, although not necessarily immediately; in the *Timaeus* Plato reminds his readers that Socrates never presents a cosmology, that is, an account of nature as a whole, by having Socrates sit silently listening to an explicitly mythical account of the intelligible construction of the cosmos given by another philosopher-statesman. Indeed, in the person and speech of *Timaeus* Plato presents a model or paradigm of philosophy that is Noticeably different from that represented by Socrates. Socrates seeks knowledge by examining the opinions of others, particularly about the true objects of their endeavors, the noble and the good. According to Timaeus, philosophers not only acquire knowledge of the intelligible order of the cosmos, but also duplicate that order within their own souls by observing and then contemplating the intelligible order of the movements of the heavenly bodies. They and only they are truly happy. To acquire the skills and self-control needed to learn about the orderly movements of the heavens, however, such philosophers need to be raised under a certain regime. To show how the regime described in the first four books of the Republic could actually come into being, Timaeus is asked to explain how the cosmos came into being up to the point where there are human beings capable of becoming citizens of that regime. Although Timaeus' account of the construction of the cosmos by the demiurge is a philosophical tour de force, incorporating the best of ancient Greek natural science (and has, therefore, often been taken as "Plato's cosmology"), he does not perform the job assigned. Toward the end of the dialogue, Timaeus suggests that women arise from cowardly males. There are not and never have been any potential female guardians in Timaeus' cosmos, but in the city Socrates initially describes, as in the Republic, there are to be both male and female guardians. In the conversation that follows, Critias thus has to present another, more traditionally mythological account of the origin of ancient Athens and Atlantis to replace Timaeus' defective beginning. Although Timaeus' account of the generation of the various kinds is laughable, it nevertheless points to a fundamental difference between his philosophy and that of Socrates. Socrates never presents an explanation of the order or generation of the cosmos, but he can account for human eros in a way Timaeus does not. Indeed, Socrates presents philosophy as a fundamentally erotic activity.

Because he and his readers are human beings animated by a variety of desires, Plato turns his readers' attention back from Timaeus contemplation

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18. The closest Socrates comes is a mere assertion that the cosmos must be the work of intelligence, to which he gets Protagoras to agree without giving any supporting arguments in Philebus 28c-30c. Francis MacDonald Cornford, Plato's Cosmology: The "Timaeus" of Plato (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1917), 75-79, points out that Socrates' description of the orbits of the spheres in the myth of Er at the conclusion of the Republic does not correspond (and makes no claim to correspond) to empirical observations of the orbits of the heavenly bodies the way 'Timaeus' account does. Aristotle's observation (Metaphysics 987b9-8) that Socrates busied himself about ethical matters and neglected the world of nature as whole, although he sought the universal in these ethical matters, thus describes the character presented in Plato's dialogues.

20. Pace Jill Gordon, "Eros in Plato's Timaeus," Epochy 9, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 295-77, both A. E. Taylor, A Commentary on Plato’s "Timaeus" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 260, 261-64, 433, and Cornford, Plato’s Cosmology, 281-13, 149f, correctly observe that eros becomes a part of the human soul only after it is attached to a mortal body and confused. When Timaeus states that lovers of *nous* and *epistêmê* (*ton de nous kai epistêmê oran*) regard the intelligible principles as first causes (66d-e), he is referring to the same and the other, which the god forced together in the world soul and embedded in the orbits of the heavenly bodies. Plato, *Timaeus* 54b, correctly states: "Because these principles may be beautiful and good, but they are not the beautiful or the good in themselves, that is, the objects of philosophical eros as Socrates describes it; the intelligible principles embedded in the orbits are copies of the purely intelligible beings made by the Demiourgos."
to the Socratic search for wisdom, especially concerning the best life for human beings, in the third stage of his depiction of the philosophical life and career of Socrates, in a series of dialogues said to occur in the last decade of the fifth century. These dialogues have often been grouped with the dialogues depicting Socrates’ critically important encounters with the sophists and infamous young Athenians during the first part of the Peloponnesian War as “early” and “elenctic.” In fact, however, there are two important differences between the two sets of dialogues. In the Theages, Euthydemus, Lysis, Gorgias, and Meno, Socrates has acquired the reputation and following that he is shown merely to be seeking in the earlier set of dialogues. As a result, Plato is able to show us the effect Socrates has on some of his regular associates as well as the kinds of people he does not attract or retain as regular companions. Having shown that Socrates does not claim to be able to give a coherent account of the whole and that he encourages his companions to join with him in a search for knowledge, Plato depicts the personal more than the philosophical results as well as some of the characteristic misunderstandings of that search. He does not have Socrates present a grand doctrine.

In the fourth stage or period, constituted by the eight dialogues with dramatic dates that explicitly connect them to Socrates’ trial and death, Plato presents a defense of his teacher. In the first three of these dialogues, he presents the grounds and consequently a defense of Socrates’ claim that he is wise only so far as he knows that he does not know. In the Theaetetus he has Socrates show the brilliant young mathematician why the art in which he takes so much pride cannot be considered knowledge, properly speaking. In the Euthyphro Plato dramatizes the dangers of relying on divine inspiration, especially the sort of inspiration that gave rise to the stories told by the ancient Greek poets. And in the Cratylus he has Socrates demonstrate the inadequacy of names or words as a source of knowledge of the beings.

If human beings cannot acquire knowledge by means of number or divine inspiration or words, however, how can we come to understand anything about ourselves and our world? Does it make sense to continue seeking knowledge we can never attain? Socrates’ famous disclaimer concerning his own knowledge, combined with his persistent questioning and refuting of others, made him appear to be merely a destructive critic of traditional morality, an eristic “sophist.” That criticism is leveled in its most fundamental form by an anonymous Elean Stranger. In a set of conversations said to take place the day after the Theaetetus, Euthyphro, and Cratylus, the stranger first accuses Socrates, in effect, of being a sophist. By refuting the opinions of others in private conversations, Socrates appears to know all the things about which he questions his interlocutors, even though he himself knows “ironically” that he does not. (In other words, Socrates fits the last and apparently best definition of a sophist.) In the Statesman the stranger then suggests that the questioning of traditional opinions about the just and the noble in which Socrates engages undermines the rule of law, and with it the best possible form of government.

Plato presents Socrates’ response to these charges in his Apology, Crito, and Phaedo. In the Apology Socrates argues that his questioning of the opinions of his contemporaries with regard to the just, noble, and good constitutes the greatest possible service not only to Athens but also to the god of Delphi. In the Crito Socrates then demonstrates that he and his philosophy do not undermine the rule of law both in argument and in deed. And in the Phaedo Socrates finally presents his close associates in private with both arguments and an example he hopes will enable them to persist in their philosophical investigations after his death. The fact that many of the individuals present went on to write “Socratic” dialogues and to establish various philosophical schools suggests that Socrates succeeded in leaving a philosophical legacy. In the Menexenus Plato dramatizes the political legacy Socrates left to his own city, anachronistically and thus from the grave, so to speak, by having the philosopher present a speech he attributes to Aspasia in which he shows the Athenians how to understand their city’s history and thus their own political lives more moderately and justly.

Reading the dialogues as discrete incidents in an ongoing story allows us to preserve the integrity of the individual works of art. By stringing them out in the order of their dramatic dates, we not only get a “through-line” that helps us see the shape of Plato’s corpus as a whole; we also follow Plato’s own indications about the relations of the conversations to one another. In contrast to the chronology of composition, we are not led to present inferences based on interpretations of the content of the dialogues as if they were based on externally determined historical “facts” about the time at which the dialogues were written—facts, to repeat, that we do not know.”

30. As Eduard Munk, Die Naturliche Ordnung der Platoniischen Schriften (Berlin: Dümmler, 1857), vii, pointed out long ago, attempts to date the dialogues on the basis of style or word use involve inferences from highly questionable assumptions. Plato was a consummate artist who was able to use many styles in depicting exchanges between different individual characters. Even if, as the stylistically studies show, there are six dialogues in which Plato uses similar phrases and constructions, Treszaff observes, the evidence that these dialogues were written “late” is slight. Nor does it follow that Plato intended these conversations to be read as “late” productions (Treszaff, Stud-
The order in which we read the dialogues affects the way we understand them, both singly and in relation to one another. To mention some particularly egregious examples: on the basis of a supposed chronology of composition, the Apology of Socrates is usually considered to be an early work, whereas the Parmenides is thought to be a middle or even late production. According to the indications of the dramatic dates, however, the Parmenides depicts one of Socrates’ first public appearances, whereas the Apology occurs at the end of his life. In the Parmenides we look forward to Socrates’ future development; in the Apology he tries to explain to his fellow citizens what he has already done. According to the same chronology of composition, Crito is early, the Phaedo a dialogue from Plato’s middle period, and the Sophist and Statesman late. But if we follow the dramatic dating, we see that the Sophist and Statesman are explicitly shown to occur the day after Socrates is indicted. Following the conversations in which an Elatic “stranger” implicitly accuses Socrates of being a sophist and of having brought the charges on himself, the Apology, Crito, and Phaedo all appear to be responses to his more philosophical accusations as well as to the legal indictment.

Reading the dialogues in the order indicated by their dramatic dates thus yields two immediate benefits. First, it enables us to take account of the

III. Atypical Kinds of Dialogues

A. The Narrated Dialogues: Socrates’ Interior

Most of the dialogues are presented as prose dramas, but some—nine, to be precise—are narrated. And like the narrative that emerges on the basis of the dramatic dates, the narrated dialogues highlight the role and figure of Socrates. Four of these dialogues—Lovers, Lysis, Charmides, and Republic—are entirely narrated by Socrates. Two—Protagoras and Euthydemus—are narrated by Socrates, following an introductory dramatic exchange. The three dialogues that are not narrated by Socrates—Parmenides, Symposium, and Phaedo—all contain accounts or reports of incidents in the education of Socrates, discoveries or lessons that, I argue in chapter 3, contributed to making Socrates the distinctive kind of philosopher he became.

31. The dialogue the slave boy reads in the Theaetetus was originally narrated to Euclides by Socrates, but Euclides tells Terpsich that he removed all the signs of its narration, for example, “he said,” and thus transformed it, in effect, into a dramatic dialogue. As a result, we readers do not know whether Socrates made any comments on the conversation as he related it to Euclides. Scholars disagree about the historical status of narrated dialogues. Whereas Thesleff argues (Stud. iel. 56–62) that narrated dialogues probably preceded the dramatic, Rutherford observes (Art. 45) that Xenophen never makes Socrates the narrator and suggests that Plato was first to do so.

The four dialogues entirely narrated by Socrates are conversations he himself chooses to relate, in all cases to an anonymous audience of an indeterminate number. By relating these conversations, Socrates appears to be trying to affect, if not to control, what people in general know and thus think about his interrogations of others. He often seems to be trying to correct some widespread misapprehensions and misunderstandings of his philosophical activity. The fact that he chooses to relate these conversations makes them stand in contrast to the explanation of his philosophical activity that he was required, if not forced by law, to give in the Apology.

In all four of the dialogues narrated entirely by Socrates, we hear about conversations he had with noble young Athenians. Rather than corrupting the young with whom he associated, in all four cases Socrates shows that he was trying to help them become better by encouraging them to seek the most important kind of knowledge. In two of these dialogues, the Charmides and Lovers, Plato shows that Socrates himself went to a gymnasium in search of young people with whom to conduct his philosophical investigations. In two others we see that Socrates was either invited or forced to take part in the conversation that ensues by the desires of his young associates. The primary reason Socrates engaged in conversations with others, it becomes clear, was his concern for the young. He was not trying to learn something himself so much as to attract them to a life of philosophy.

As narrator, Socrates is able to explain how he happened to talk to these specific individuals and comment on how they or others reacted to the exchange. In the Lovers he does not tell us why he went to the school of Dionysius, but once there, he uses the opportunity to challenge other misconceptions of philosophy and to encourage all of his auditors to seek the most useful form of knowledge, how to be just and moderate. In the Charmides Socrates explains that, arriving home with the army from Potidaea, he went to the wrestling school of Taureas, anxious to resume his usual conversations and to discover whether any of the youths had proved themselves to be particularly noble or handsome and wise in his absence. As in the Lovers and the Lysis, so in the Charmides, it becomes clear that the other men and boys do not gather in the gymnasium primarily to philosophize.

Socrates is forced, therefore, to take account of their concerns—whether about the course of the war or attracting lovers—in order to induce them to take part in the philosophical conversations he himself prizes. This need to speak, at least initially, to the political concerns or personal desires that move his young associates was one of the reasons Socrates' compatriots did not understand the true character of his own philosophy or its potential benefits for the city. As in the Lovers, so in the Charmides, Socrates admits that he is excited by the presence of handsome youths, but he also shows that he conquered his bodily desires by conversing rather than seeking to lie with them. (If we did not have Socrates' testimony about his own feelings, we might, on the basis of what Alcibiades says in the Symposium, think that Socrates was simply indifferent to bodily beauty or frigid.) In the Charmides we also see Socrates try to convince two future tyrants of Athens, both relatives of Plato, to become moderate. He and we both know that he did not succeed; Charmides and Critias found Socrates' conversations amusing and wanted to compel him to stay and talk more, but they were not persuaded to become more moderate. As narrator, Socrates is nevertheless able to show that he understands the difficulty human beings experience in exercising self-restraint, and that he was trying to make these young aristocratic Athenians more moderate and more pious.

Socrates famously begins the Republic by explaining that he went down to the Piraeus with Plato's brother Glaucias to see the first celebration of a new foreign goddess, and that he stayed to talk about justice as a result of a combination of Polemarchus' threat to restrain him by force and his own desire to accommodate Glaucus. When Polemarchus' father Cephalus leaves, readers are reminded that Socratic conversations were more attractive to the young than the old, and that Socrates preferred to talk to the former. It is impossible for human beings to become better, more just, or more moderate without questioning, challenging, and finally replacing old opinions and conventions. But, Plato shows in the Republic (as in all his other dialogues), Socrates challenged accepted opinions, particularly about the noble and the good; he challenged these opinions in private, however, by talking to individuals, not in public, by speaking in the assembly or disobeying the law. In the Republic Socrates describes a new and more

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34. To be sure, on the basis of Plato's comments in the Seventh Letter, we might read all the dialogues as, at bottom, constituting a defense of Socrates. This seems, nevertheless, to be emphatically the case in the dialogues Socrates himself narrates (and not so obviously the case in dialogues like the Philebus or Statesman).

35. In his Apology 39d, Plato's Socrates states that he will disobey "the men of Athens," if they forbid him to philosophize in the future. Until the Athenians convicted Socrates of the capital crimes of impiety and corrupting the young, the law of Athens did not forbid philosophy. If, as "the laws" in the Crito claim afterward, it was the particular members of the Athenian jury who
beautiful "city in speech" in an all-night secret meeting, but he concludes
that the purpose of that city is to serve as an internal paradigm for the
individual to use in ordering his soul. As in the Charmides, so in the Republic,
Socrates begins by taking account of the political ambitions and interests
of his interlocutors. He gradually attempts to show them, however, that
they will be able to realize their desire to live the best possible form of
human existence only by philosophizing in a Socratic manner. It is not
clear at the end of the dialogue that he succeeded. Plato's brothers did
not become tyrants like Critias and Charmides, but they did not become
philosophers either.

At the beginning of the Lysis, readers are also reminded of the unconven-
tional, possibly illegal and impious character of Socratic philosophy
when Socrates explains that he accompanied a group of young men at
their behest to a gymnasium where some handsome young boys were cel-
brating a festival. It is not clear that older men like Socrates were allowed
to attend such celebrations; at the end of the dialogue, the slave tutors
of the two boys to whom Socrates has been talking take them home forc-
ibly. The young men want Socrates to demonstrate his erotic knowledge
by showing one of them how to attract a beloved boy. As in the Lovers, so
in the Lysis, Socrates shows that a lover attracts his beloved by providing
him with useful knowledge more than by preening himself or the beloved.
As in the Lovers, so in the Lysis, Socrates does not claim to have shown
what the philon is, or even what the search for knowledge of it, philosophy,
would entail. He does say, however paradoxically at the end of the dialogue,
that he and the two young boys have become friends. Socrates claims,
in other words, to have established a kind of community with the boys,
dedicated to their mutual improvement, even if and when he has not suc-
ceeded in explicitly answering the question they are debating to his or their
satisfaction. As in the Republic, so at the end of the Lysis, it is not clear
whether the boys will remain Socrates' friends. In fact, we learn from the
Phaedo that Menexenus became a regular companion of Socrates but Lysis
did not. Menexenus did not become a philosopher; however, as we learn

from the dialogue that bears his name, he had political ambitions which
Socrates tried to help him realize in a way that would benefit all Athen-
ians. From the narrated dialogues, we learn that Socrates did not always
have the effect he sought. He was not able to convince most of his young
interlocutors to pursue a life of philosophy. He was not even able to per-
suade some of them to act more justly in conventional, political terms.
His comments as narrator nevertheless show us what he intended as well
as his own recognition of the limited kinds of effects he could have on his
interlocutors in a single conversation.

In the two dialogues narrated by Socrates after a dramatic prologue,
the Protagoras and Euthydemus, we see him interrogating the sophists.
Those who accused Socrates of corrupting the young thought that he was
a sophist. Socrates' interrogations of the sophists not only highlight the
differences between him and the sophists, but also indicate the reasons
his compatriots confused him with them. Because they claimed to teach
virtue, the sophists charged fees for their lessons. As Socrates emphasizes
in his Apology, he did not claim to teach virtue, nor did he charge a fee.
In his conversations with the sophists, Socrates nevertheless shows that he
knows how to argue better than the sophists do by proving that they do
not know what virtue is. In other words, he shows that the sophists do not
really know what they are talking about and that they do not, therefore,
justly charge fees for their lessons. At the same time, Socrates (or Plato)
indicates that he was familiar with the sophists personally as well as with
their doctrines, and that Socrates' familiarity with the sophists contributed
to his compatriots' belief that he was one of them. Before taking a young
Athenian to meet the famous sophist, in the Protagoras Socrates warns Hip-
pocrates, who had awakened him to ask for an introduction to the soph-
ist, to be careful about the lessons he acquires. But we also observe that
Socrates relates an account of his victory over Protagoras to an anonym-
ous Athenian audience immediately thereafter and thus contributes to
the formation of his own reputation as a kind of "super-sophist." In the Eu-
thydemus, Socrates' old friend Crito asks Socrates to relate the conversation
he had with a pair of sophists the day before.36 Although Socrates makes

36. The fact that the two narrated dialogues that are related to named individuals (as opposed
to an anonymous audience), the Euthydemus and the Phaedo, are related in the first case to one
of Socrates' closest friends present at his death, and in the other, by another of Socrates' friends
present at his death, to a friendly figure who asked specifically what Socrates said and did (Phaedo
57a–58a), suggests that these two dialogues are particularly concerned with what Socrates wanted
his friends to know about his activity.
the sophists look ridiculous, at the end of the conversation he nevertheless urges Crito to bring his sons and come along with him to take lessons from the brothers. In these dialogues Plato shows not only that Socrates was not a sophist but also that the sophists were not his primary targets or enemies, as some commentators have claimed. The sophists may not have possessed the knowledge they promised to purvey, but they at least recognized the importance of speech or argument in learning to be virtuous. Without the insight provided by Socrates’ comments about his own intentions and efforts, it was difficult to distinguish him from them.

Whereas the dialogues narrated by Socrates emphasize the effects he had, or at least wanted to have, on young Athenians, the dialogues narrated by others contain sections explaining how and why Socrates came to engage in the kinds of inquiries he did for his own sake, to discover the truth, and not simply for the sake of his investigations might have on his interlocutors or audience. On the last day of his life, in the *Phaedo*, we hear Socrates retrospectively relate the reasons he gave up the investigations of natural phenomena in which he had engaged as a youth and turned to an examination of the arguments (logoi) of others. In the *Parmenides* we then see Socrates use the argument about the ideas he developed as a hypothesis in the *Phaedo* to critique Zeno. However, Socrates was unable to respond to the questions Parmenides raised about his argument concerning the ideas. We do not learn how Socrates responded to Parmenides’ demonstration of philosophical gymnastics at the time. Only later, in the *Symposium*, does Socrates tell a story about the way “Diotima” taught him to examine opinion, as that which is between knowledge and ignorance, being and not-being, and so enabled him to escape the aporia that results from Eleatic arguments in terms of mutually exclusive “is” and “is not.”

If Plato had not written these narrated dialogues, his readers would have only the external view of Socrates provided by the dramatic dialogues. Judging only on the basis of appearances in the absence of Socrates’ own account of his endeavor, readers, like Socrates’ compatriots, might have found it difficult to distinguish his attempts to attract young companions from those of the foreign sophists or older male lovers. We might have observed that Socrates did not charge a fee to listen to him converse, nor did he seem to seek physical pleasure from his intercourse with young men. But why, then, was he so anxious to talk to them and to persuade them, as opposed to more mature thinkers and philosophers, to join him in his examinations of opinion? In other words, why did Socrates become the distinctive kind of philosopher he was? In the dramatic dialogues we see how he interrogated others about their views of the noble and good. We learn about the steps or stages in Socrates’ own education that led him to undertake these investigations, however, only through the retrospective indirect discourse that a narration makes possible.

### B. The Undated Dialogues: A General External View of Socrates

An attentive reader will have noticed that the narrative I’ve just sketched does not include three of the four dialogues that have no dramatic date: *Hippias Minor, Minos, Lovers*, and *Philebus*. Socrates is the major spokesman in all, so they clearly take place during his lifetime—even more precisely, during the period in which he was known to be examining the opinions of his contemporaries about the just, the noble, and the good. His interlocutors in all appear to be young, if nameless, Athenians. The absence of specific personalities and times is one of the main reasons many commentators think the *Hippias Minor, Minos, and Lovers* are spurious, composed by an imitator, not by Plato himself. It would be easiest for a commentator attempting to show the coherence of the Platonic corpus in terms of the dramatic characteristics of the dialogues, including particularly the dramatic dating, to dismiss the three brief undated dialogues as inauthentic and to relate the *Philebus* thematically to the *Republic*, as in the list above. However, because the grounds for declaring these as well as other dialogues inauthentic are problematic and therefore a source of contention, it appears better (and safer) to show how these and other possibly, but not certainly, spurious dialogues can be included in a coherent account of the corpus.

Like the dialogues with more specific dramatic dates, these dialogues point to the centrality of Socrates to the Platonic corpus. Even if they are not genuine, these dialogues reflect what are, and what Plato’s contemporary

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38. Leo Strauss, “On the Minos,” in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), observes: “As for the character of the companion, we suspect that he was no longer quite young” (74).

39. Cf. Strauss, *Symposium*. 11: “Today, some of the dialogues which have come down to us as Platonic dialogues are regarded as spurious. I believe it is wise to suspend our judgment on this subject and simply to accept all dialogues which have come down to us as Platonic.”
admiringers saw to be, central themes in his presentation of Socrates: the desire on the part of all human beings to acquire and possess the good, the questioning of the justice of established laws and customs, and the true character and utility of philosophy. The failure to name the individual interlocutors or to indicate the specific time at which these conversations occurred may, as some commentators have argued, reflect a lack of artistry on the part of the author. It may, however, serve to indicate the general pervasiveness of these themes or questions in Socratic philosophizing. Few scholars have expressed doubts about the authenticity of the Philebus, although it has no specific time or setting beyond Athens, and Socrates' interlocutors have only generic names meaning "lover of or beloved by the young" and "first principle or ruler." This dialogue also begins, rather inartistically, in the midst of a conversation already under way and ends before it is completed.

The Hipparchus and the Minos are the only two dialogues that begin abruptly, without any dramatic introduction, with one of the "what is...?" questions for which Socrates was famous. These are also the only two dialogues that bear the names of ancient tyrants. The reason appears initially and externally to be that no other characters in these dialogues are named except Socrates. Upon examination, however, there also appears to be a thematic connection between the naming of the tyrants and the questions posed in these dialogues. In the Hipparchus Socrates tries to persuade a young moralist that "lovers of gain" may not be the "shameless rascals" he takes them to be, if gain is a good, and all human beings seek the good. And in the Minos Socrates tells a slightly less young and thumotic Athenian that law cannot be defined merely in terms of what the Athenians say is law. Other cities also have laws, different laws, and all these cities claim that their laws are just. "Laws" so understood look like a variety of attempts to discover what is truly just and should be judged accordingly. Both these dialogues thus dramatize the way in which Socrates challenges the basis and content of traditional morality. And we see that the specific questions Socrates raises about the content and basis of the traditional morality that declares gain seeking to be base, if not bad, and the law to be just, also lead him to question the grounds on which the self-seeking, lawless rule of tyrants had been castigated. In the Hipparchus Socrates claims that the Athenian tyrant was in fact a wise and good man who tried to educate his subjects, although Socrates then points out that Hipparchus wanted to educate his subjects so that they would admire his wisdom more than that of the god at Delphi. And in the Minos Socrates suggests the Athenian belief, propagated by the tragedians, that the founding legislator of Crete was a tyrant may not be true. No reader exposed solely to these two dialogues would be surprised to learn that Socrates had aroused the ire of some of his fellow citizens and that he was accused and convicted of illegally corrupting the young. In other words, even if these dialogues are not authentic, they present a popular view of Socrates that is consistent with Plato's other works.

In the Lovers Socrates tells an anonymous audience that he went to the school of Dionysius, where he saw two young boys disputing. Because Plato had a teacher named Dionysius (Diogenes Laertius 3.5), one translator has wondered whether Plato did not represent himself as one of the handsome youths from families of good repute, who quit their own debate to listen to Socrates' interrogations of others. Because Socrates asks what it is to philosophize, the dialogue seems to raise the central question of the entire Platonic corpus. Its authenticity has been questioned, however, even in ancient times.

Unable to hear what the boys were saying, but inferring from their gestures that they must be talking about the theories of Anaxagoras or

40. As Strauss explains: "Since no one else appears to be present at the conversation, the work could not carry as its title, as most Platonic dialogues do, the name of a participant in a Socratic conversation or of a listener to it" ("Minos," 65).

41. Christopher Bruell, On the Socratic Education (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), observes that, according to Socrates in the Republic (346a), "a tyrant is believed to be one who defers neither to law nor to any other consideration in his grasping for more." (9).

42. Socrates cites the authority of Homer: a poet whose authority was more widely respected in ancient Greece generally, in opposition to the tragedians. The fact that the story about Zeus educating his son Minos in the cave comes from a tale Odysseus fabricates to test, if not simply to deceive, his wife should make us wonder how seriously Socrates himself takes the story about the divine origins of the laws of Crete. Some think Zeus and Minos had something more like a "devoid party" than an intellectual "symposium" in the cave, Socrates admits, but he suggests that if that were the case, Minos would not have forbidden drinking by law among the Cretans. No wise ruler would treat the ruled in a way so obviously different from himself. The question the dialogue leaves open, however, is whether Minos was a wise legislator.


44. James Leake, trans. "Lovers." in Pangle, Roots, 80n1. In the quotations from the dialogue that follow, I have departed somewhat from Leake's translation on the basis of my own reading of the Greek. For the Greek I have referred, unless otherwise noted, to Platonic Opera, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and vol. 2-5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990-97).
Oinopides, Socrates opens the conversation by asking another observer what the boys are talking about, "no doubt something great and noble" (Lovers 132b). On the contrary, the observer responds, "they are philosophizing, babbling about the heavenly bodies, and other such nonsense" (132b). When Socrates asks in surprise whether it is shameful to philosophize, we are reminded of the difference between Socrates and his cosmological predecessors. Socrates investigates human opinions, especially about what is noble and good; he does not contemplate or record the movements of the heavenly bodies, although he is familiar with the arguments of those who do.

A second observer breaks in and urges Socrates not to question the first about the nobility of philosophy. Having "passed his whole life putting others in a headlock, stuffing himself, and sleeping" (132c), the first observer knows nothing about philosophy. The second reveals himself to be a rival of the first when, denigrating the gymnast as the gymnast had denigrated philosophy, he declares that he would not regard himself as a human being if he considered it shameful to philosophize.

Socrates observes that the two rivals represent the two traditional poles or components of ancient Greek education, gymnastics and music. And, as represented by these two lovers, he shows that neither of these poles, in itself or in conjunction with the other, constitutes an adequate understanding of either love or education. As in the Lysis, so in the Lovers, Socrates demonstrates both in the action and the argument of the dialogue that an older man can persuade handsome youths to associate with him more effectively by promising to teach them something of use to them than by trying to make himself attractive through gymnastic exercise or learning a great many things with which to ornament his own speeches and make himself look wise.

By questioning the observer who believes that it is noble to philosophize, Socrates quickly shows that this young man understands philosophy to consist of the acquisition of much learning that gives a man a reputation for wisdom. This youth is a lover of honor who wants to be admired for his learning more than a seeker of wisdom per se. Socrates exposes the vacuity of this understanding of "general" or "liberal" education by observing that it is impossible for any human being to learn everything, certainly not to learn everything well. He reasons as follows: since we cannot learn everything, we should learn what is noblest and best. The best, which is to say, the most useful kind of knowledge human beings can acquire, is how to make ourselves better. From observing what goes on in cities, we see that making people better involves knowing how to correct or punish them. That art or science of punishment is called justice. We recognize, moreover, that in order to know how to make human beings better, we need to know what a human being is. Such knowledge, in the case of a single human being, is called self-knowledge; following the adages of the god at Delphi (in contrast to the inscriptions of the tyrant Hipparchus), we identify such self-knowledge with moderation. Justice and moderation are thus fundamentally the same. This knowledge constitutes what we call the political art, and this art belongs to anyone who rules others justly and moderately, whether we call him a king, a tyrant, a statesman, a household manager, or a slave master.

As does the Hipparchus and the Minos, so the Lovers culminates in an erasure of the distinction between tyrannical and other forms of rule. It is not the law, the limits placed on the power of the ruler, or the participation or the consent of the governed that determines whether rule is good or not. The only factor that determines whether rule is good or bad, noble or base, just or unjust, is the knowledge of the ruler. Socrates does not claim to possess this knowledge. Nor does he seek or claim to rule. All he claims to know is that knowledge of the noble and good is the most important kind of knowledge for human beings to acquire, and we should therefore seek above all to acquire it.

The only dialogue in which Plato shows Socrates expressly inquiring about a definition of the human good is the Philebus, the fourth dialogue that lacks a specific date. Here there is no explicit reference to politics. In fact, Socrates suggests both in his arguments and in his action that the human good is to be found in the private intellectual life of an individual, either thinking by himself or in conversation with others. Although the dialogue is not set at any particular place or time in Athens, and Plato seems to have named Socrates' two interlocutors on the basis of their function in the conversation, no one has questioned the authenticity of the Philebus—probably because the subject discussed is so central to Socratic philosophy, if not to the Platonic corpus as a whole. 45 It is treated more fully in the analysis of Plato's presentation of Socrates that follows.

45. On the basis of Aristotle's statements and Plato's own report of a lecture he gave concerning "the good," members of the so-called Tubingen school have argued that the dialogues are merely proscriptive and that Plato presented an "esoteric" or secret teaching to members of his Academy. See, e.g., Thomas A. Slezak, Reading Plato, trans. Graham Zanker (New York: Routledge, 1999), 116–91; Hans Joachim Krämer, Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics, trans. John R. Catan (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 93–114. Kenneth Sayre, Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 168–74, has pointed out that there is, in fact, more
IV. Plato’s Other Philosophers

Socrates is obviously the most important character in the Platonic dialogues, but he is not the only character, or even the only philosopher. Indeed, many commentators have claimed to find stages in the development of Plato’s thought represented first by a historical Socrates, then a spokesman named Socrates who puts forth Plato’s own “theory of the ideas” (as announced by Aristotle), and finally a series of other spokesmen who articulate Plato’s later thought. Such a reading, however, flies in the face of some of the dramatic details Plato himself put into the dialogues. By having Socrates not only be present but also engage in introductory exchanges with the other philosophers before they take charge of the conversation, Plato seems to go out of his way to show that his philosophers do not represent interchangeable names for the figure serving as his “spokesman.” Two of the five dialogues in which other philosophers take charge of the argument are shown to have occurred, moreover, at the very beginning, if not before the inception, of Socrates’ public career. In terms of the dramatic dating, these dialogues are not “late.”

Even when presented merely as anonymous “strangers,” Plato’s philosophers represent distinct individuals who exemplify and articulate different understandings of philosophy—the manner in which philosophical continuity than some of the esotericists are willing to admit between the dialogues, especially the arguments Socrates presents concerning the character of the human good in the Philebus and the “puzzling” characteristics of the lecture Plato gave on the good. Szlezak admits some overlap but argues that the critique of writing in the Phaedrus as well as some gaps in the arguments in dialogues like the Republic point toward the oral teaching. In chapters 1 and 2, they argue, the lecture, among others, has drawn too sharp a distinction between oral and written discourse in reading Socrates’ critique of the latter in the Phaedrus. Like Treggiari (interpreting Plato, 65-82), I find it difficult to accept an account of Plato’s teaching based on his own writings, at least primarily, but on statements by Aristotle and secondhand reports. For a brief summary of critiques of the Tübingen school, see Rutherford, Art., 37-38.

46. Although Aristotle attributes a theory of the ideas to Plato, in the dialogues Plato has three different philosophers present three different arguments about the ideas (which are in themselves, to be sure, in all cases pure intelligible and unchanging). As in the Parmenides, Republic, and Phaedo, Socrates talks about ideas of the good, the noble, the virtues, and quantitative relations. According to Timaeus, the demiurge or god constructs the cosmos by copying the eternal ideas, including the ideas of the same and the other that he forces together in constructing the soul of the cosmos. Although the god and the cosmos he fabricates are said to be good, he does not refer to an idea of the good. Like Timaeus (and unlike Socrates) the Elistic Stranger includes the same and the other among the five greatest ideas (which include being, rest, motion but not the good or the noble). In the myth the Elistic tells about the effects of the changes in the direction of the movement of the cosmos, the god does not construct a soul of the cosmos or the particular kinds of beings present in it as imitations of the ideas.

investigations can and should be conducted as well as the results that can be gained through such inquiries. Plato uses the contrast between Socrates and the other philosophers to dramatize both the advantages and the limitations of Socratic philosophy. The irreconcilable differences between and among these philosophers point to the irresolvable problems that led Plato to conclude that the most human beings could ever do or achieve would be to seek wisdom, like Socrates. They would never be able simply to possess wisdom or to become wise. The following introductory sketch is merely that; I present the arguments for these suggestions much more fully in the chapters that follow.

A. The Athenian Stranger

Because Socrates is not said to be present when the Athenian Stranger proposes a set of laws to his old Dorian interlocutors in the Laws, many commentators have taken the Athenian to represent Plato himself. If we pay attention to the indications Plato gives about when the conversation took place, however, we see that it occurred before Socrates became an active participant in Athenian public life. It is not likely, moreover, that Plato himself would have ignored the Peloponnesian War entirely in putting forward his own understanding of Greek political history. Convinced that the Laws is Plato’s last work—whether by the rumor that it was left in wax and copied, if not composed, by Philip of Opus; by Aristotle’s statement that the Laws was written after the Republic; or simply by the observation that all the interlocutors are elderly—most commentators have not noticed that the Laws was written after the Republic; or simply by the observation that all the interlocutors are elderly—most commentators have not noticed that all the poetry, history, and philosophy to which the Athenian refers are pre-Socratic. The anonymous “stranger” in the Laws is emphatically Athenian; as Glenn Morrow has shown, many of the institutions and laws he recommends have precedents in pre-Periclean Athens. Unlike Socrates, who stayed in Athens except for his military service, but like all the other philosophers Plato depicts, the Athenian “stranger” has traveled to another city, perhaps to learn, but demonstrably to share his wisdom—

philosophical and political. The dialogue itself points to a reason for the Athenian to remain anonymous (rather than merely hiding the presumed identity of the criminal Socrates, who is fleeing prosecution). If he succeeds in convincing the old Doriains that the laws he proposes are better than those they now have in Crete, the Athenian will have replaced Zeus as the purported source of the laws. The anonymous Athenian stranger represents the “intelligence” or “mind,” which he argues is the only true source of law and is itself divine. This mind may in principle belong to all human beings, but, the stranger shows, people develop the requisite kind of intelligence only in communities like Athens, where they can learn and compare the different ways human beings have ordered their communities. At the very end of the Laws the Athenian provides for such learning in the city he proposes in the Nocturnal Council. The Athenian’s account of the need for such a council and the questions its members will discuss convince his Dorian interlocutors that they will not be able to establish the city he has recommended if they do not compel the Athenian to stay and help them. The Athenian has promised Clinias the “credit” or glory for founding the new colony, however; he himself will remain the invisible brains behind the operation.

Socrates would not have been able to persuade the old Doriains to accept his recommendations, because, we know from the Apology, Socrates would not have accepted the constraint initially put on the discussion by the Dorian “law of all laws,” which commands everyone to praise the law and forbids anyone to question its justice unless they are old and there are no young people present. Nor would Socrates have been allowed to practice philosophy in his accustomed manner in the city the stranger proposes, as we see in the laws the Athenian proposes concerning piety and the punishments for impiety, as well as in the prohibition of “busybodies” who voice their thoughts about the laws, education, or upbringing outside the council.

Some readers have suggested that the differences between the Athenian Stranger and Socrates can be explained by the differences in their interlocutors and circumstances. These differences are integrally related, however, to differences in the content and form of the two philosophers’ arguments. The Athenian never directly and explicitly confronts his interlocutors with the contradictions inherent in their opinions and so never “corrects” them the way Socrates does Polus and Callicles in the Gorgias. On the contrary, the Athenian characterizes the first third of their conversation as one of the “preludes” he himself has been the first to suggest are necessary to persuade people to obey the laws. The Athenian never raises the “what is . . . ?” (law, in this case) question that is typical of Socrates. The Athenian does not, because he does not see or describe a world organized into a variety of unchanging kinds of beings or ideas. He points rather to “the god, just as the ancient saying has it, holding the beginning and the end and the middle of all the beings, [who] completes his straight course by revolving, according to nature. Following him always is Justice, avenger of those who forsake the divine law” (Laws 716a). To support the necessary beliefs in the existence of gods, and in the propositions that these gods care about human beings and that they cannot be bribed, he emphasizes the priority of motion or “soul” to body and the intelligibility of the orbits of the heavenly bodies. The gods that are in or behind these motions can look down and survey human affairs, but they cannot be reached or affected by human pleasures or gifts. They have agreed, he concludes, “that heaven is full of many good things, and also of the opposite, and that [because] there are more of the latter, there is an immortal battle going on” (906a). Understanding the cosmos in terms of such unending strife is characteristic of Socrates’ predecessors, but not of Socrates himself. At the very end of the dialogue, the Athenian suggests that the “guardians of the laws” must seek knowledge of the unity of the virtues as well as of the noble and good. Without knowledge of the goal, these “guardians” will not be able to direct or preserve the city and its laws. The Athenian does not explain, however, whether or how such knowledge is compatible with the cosmology he also insists the guardians must learn, if they and their citizens are to remain pious.

In sum, in the Laws Plato shows that the Athenian Stranger is able to have a much greater and more direct effect on politics than Socrates, without encountering the same danger of prosecution and death, precisely because the Athenian does not act or think like Socrates in some decisive respects. On the other hand, Plato also indicates, the Athenian will not succeed in establishing and maintaining the laws he recommends without introducing something like Socratic philosophy into his city. Because it seems impossible to incorporate that kind of philosophy and to preserve the kind of piety the Athenian argues is necessary in the citizen body, it appears at the end of the dialogue that he has not been able to solve the political problem or the philosophical quandaries associated with it.

B. Parmenides

Several commentators have seen that the arguments the elderly Eleatic philosopher of that name presents in Plato’s Parmenides bear a family
resemblance to, but are not identical with, those found in the historical philosopher’s poem. A few have observed that the argument about the ideas young Socrates uses to critique Zeno’s defense of Parmenides (by showing the paradoxes that result from a denial of the unity and homogeneity of being) constitutes a kind of modified Eleaticism. Like Parmenides, Socrates argues that what truly is, is always and unchanging, and that only what truly is, because it does not change, can be known. For that reason, perhaps, Parmenides concludes his critique of Socrates by conceding that something like Socrates’ argument about the ideas is necessary if philosophy is to be possible. If there is nothing purely intelligible, hence unchanging and eternal, there is nothing we can seek to know. Everything we declare to be true will change.

Unlike Parmenides, Socrates maintains that there are essentially and hence always different kinds of being. He “solves” some of Zeno’s paradoxes this way, but he does not and cannot resolve all the problems associated with an assertion of purely intelligible forms of being. As Plato’s Parmenides points out in his famous critique of Socrates’ argument concerning the ideas, Socrates cannot say exactly what there are ideas of. (The lists of “things in themselves” of which we can have knowledge that Socrates gives as examples change from dialogue to dialogue. Sometimes, as in the Phaedo, the list includes equality; at other times, as in the Phaedrus, it includes knowledge; only in the Republic is the Idea of the Good said to be the source of all other ideas or kinds of being and thus “beyond” them.)

Nor, Plato’s Parmenides famously points out, can Socrates explain how sensible things participate in purely intelligible ideas. As some astute critics have observed, Plato’s Parmenides spatializes being in a way that neither his nor Socrates’ argument would, strictly speaking, allow. Nevertheless, as Plato shows in the Phaedo, on the very last day of his life Socrates admits that he still cannot explain exactly how sensible things participate in the purely intelligible ideas. He insists only that we have to refer to such ideas to determine what things are. It is not clear, moreover, that Socrates is ever able to explain how sensible human beings can acquire knowledge of the purely intelligible.

48. Stanley Rosen, The Question of Being (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), points out: “Although these Ideas are ‘frequently mentioned’ in the dialogues, there is no uniform account of their nature” (48).


Because Parmenides presents his demonstration purportedly to show Socrates how he can improve as a philosopher, most commentators have sought to show how the arguments Parmenides gives first to prove that one is and then to show the consequences of the proposition that one is not represent an improvement of “Plato’s” argument about the ideas. Few commentators have observed the parallel between the organization of Parmenides’ demonstration and the historical philosopher’s poem. If one takes seriously the parallel and the references implicit in both the name and the similarity in the arguments presented, however, one sees that the demonstration constitutes a critique of the historical Parmenides’ argument. His argument, as presented in the poem as well as in the dialogue, cannot generate a conclusion about the intelligible character or organization of being, because that intelligibility is not and cannot be revealed on the basis simply of the opposition between “is” and “is not.” As G. W. F. Hegel later saw, and both Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger maintain, being is intelligible if and only if it is essentially differentiated. The question then becomes how and into what kinds. As Plato humorously shows in the Euthydemus, sorting things according to whether they are or are not but without any consideration of what they are or are not leads to a series of ridiculous aporias. Because Parmenides’ demonstration leads to just such an aporia, some commentators have concluded that the dialogue is a joke.

In the dialogues that follow the Parmenides in terms of the dramatic date, we see that Socrates’ differentiated understanding (or hypothesis about the character) of being leads him to argue in a different way from Parmenides, Zeno, and their sophistical followers. Instead of asking whether something is or is not, Socrates asks what it is. For Socrates the character of his interlocutor is important, moreover, in a way it is not for the Eleatics. In selecting an interlocutor, Parmenides explicitly seeks someone tractable. Aristotle raises few objections and so performs his role to the satisfaction of the elderly Eleatic. Since Aristotle later became one of the Thirty, Plato’s readers might be led to contrast Parmenides’ utter lack of concern about the character and opinions of his interlocutor or the effect his interrogation might have on either with Socrates’ attempt to convince Charmides and Critias to become more moderate. In the narrative introduction to the Parmenides, Plato shows his readers that Parmenides’
austere form of argumentation did not have the attraction that Socrates' refutations of others had for young listeners. Both in the Parmenides and other dialogues, Plato shows that young men like his brothers Glauccon and Adimantus and his half brother Antiphon, who initially were attracted by the "antilogistical" refutations of the claims of others, gradually became convinced that no one knew anything and so dropped philosophy as a useless endeavor. Precisely because he concentrated on seeking knowledge particularly of the noble and good, instead of arguing simply about what is and is not, Socrates continued to attract young aristocratic associates in a way the Eleatic and his followers did not.

C. Timaeus

Timaeus is a singular character in the Platonic dialogues who gives a singular speech. Unlike Parmenides and Socrates, there is no evidence outside the dialogues that Timaeus ever existed. Yet, unlike the Athenian and Eleatic "strangers," Timaeus is given a name. No other philosopher in the dialogues gives such a long, uninterrupted speech without any interlocutor. No one presents such a detailed account of the intelligible organization of the cosmos or suggests that the four elements have geometrical shapes that explain their distinctive properties and interpenetration in the shifting contents of chôra. No other Platonic philosopher explains how the human body is constructed or how our senses work.

At first glance, Timaeus' account of the construction of the cosmos appears to be truly comprehensive, incorporating the insights of all previous philosophers. Like Parmenides (and Socrates), Timaeus begins by distinguishing the being(s) that are always and purely intelligible from those that come to be and are only imitations of the former. Because the cosmos is visible, Timaeus reasons, it cannot be eternal. But because the cosmos is beautiful, he infers that it must have an intelligible order and a good origin or maker. Like Socrates in the Symposium, Timaeus thus traces the beautiful to the good and suggests that the origin—at least of all sensible beings—is good. Adapting Parmenides' argument about being, Timaeus emphasizes the unity and completeness of the cosmos; he too gives it a spherical shape. In the construction of the cosmic soul, which not only holds it together but also makes the motions of the heavenly bodies intelligible, Timaeus brings together being, sameness, and difference, three of the greatest eidê, according to the Eleatic Stranger. Like the Athenian Stranger, Timaeus insists not only that the movements of the heavenly bodies are intelligible but also that the discovery and observation of the orbits of the heavenly bodies have beneficent effects on human beings. And in showing that lower forms of bodily existence also have an intelligible structure and organization, Timaeus incorporates not only Pythagorean geometry but also Empedoclean medicine.

Timaeus does not present his lengthy speech merely to display his erudition, however. He gives it as part of the just compensation that he, his host Critias, and Critias' other guest, Hermocrates of Syracuse, offer to pay Socrates in exchange for the presentation of the "city in speech" described in the Republic that he had given them the day before. Charged specifically with showing how the people who would populate Socrates' city come into being, so that Critias can then describe that city at war in the guise of ancient Athens, Timaeus gives a speech that is supposed to provide the cosmological basis for the political analysis Socrates gives in the Republic and so, in effect, to complete Socratic philosophy.

Including "ideas" of the four elements or places where they are typically found, however, Timaeus' understanding of the intelligible organizing principles of the cosmos proves upon examination to differ from the understandings of the "ideas" put forward by Socrates and the Eleatic. His description of the basis and character of the intelligible movements of the heavens also differs from that given by the Athenian Stranger. But the most significant differences and defects in Timaeus' account arise in his description of the constitution of human beings.

Human beings are able to understand the intelligible movements of the cosmos, Timaeus suggests, because the divine part of our souls is made of the same "stuff" as the soul of the cosmos. But even though the divine part is encased in the head and separated as much as possible from the rest of the body, the intelligible order in human beings is completely disrupted when the divine part of the soul is joined to a mortal soul and body. Philosophy is the happiest and best way of life for human beings, Timaeus argues, because contemplation of the intelligible order of the movements of the heavenly bodies enables human beings to recapture and reconstitute a similar kind of order in their souls. Only those who have become orderly themselves can introduce or impose order on the lives of others, moreover. Timaeus' account of the construction of the cosmos—and the living beings within it—thus points to the need for a philosopher-statesman of the kind he himself is said to be. The kind of philosophy Timaeus both
practices and advocates does not involve the questioning of opinion in which Socrates engages, or even the copying of the ideas of the virtues onto the souls of citizens that Socrates attributes to philosopher-kings in the Republic. Timaeus does not mention any such ideas; the “things” he calls “ideas” are the intelligible divisions that enable us to distinguish different kinds of beings. His ideas are closer to those of the Eleatic Stranger, although Timaeus says that the demiurge has to force being, sameness, and difference together in constituting the soul of the cosmos, whereas the Eleatic argues that these great ideas coexist.

The three parts of the human soul Timaeus describes resemble the three parts of the soul Socrates analyzes in the Republic. Timaeus does not say anything about the need to enlist thymos in controlling the desires, however. Indeed, Timaeus says little about thymos or the virtue of courage most clearly associated with it—even though he is supposed to be describing people who become warriors. Timaeus’ failure to describe the coming into being of people who could become citizens of Socrates’ city is most manifest, however, when he explains that there were not any women at first and hence no need for sexual organs. The first men were constituted by the gods. Generation is not natural, according to Timaeus, although degeneration seems to be. Only after the souls of cowardly men are reincarnated as women do humans have to be equipped for sexual procreation, if there are no courageous women by nature, however, Socrates’ city cannot have both male and female guardians.

Timaeus’ “likely” story about the divine construction (or making) of the cosmos shows what has to be the case for human beings to acquire even the limited knowledge of the world we now possess. He does not and cannot give a plausible explanation of how the world or anything else was, is, or will be generated. In order to be good, Timaeus argues, the cosmos has to be complete; to be complete, it has to contain all other possible forms of incomplete life. Precisely because they are incomplete, these defective and needy beings have desires; they do not contain the means of supporting their own continued existence or motion within themselves. Unlike Socrates, Timaeus never characterizes sexual generation as the manifestation of an implicit or instinctive desire for immortality.

Nor does he talk about the higher forms of that desire, which lead poets and legislators to create new forms of human life, much less a desire on the part of philosophical educators “to beget in the beautiful.” For Timaeus, human eros is merely the sign of our incompleteness; it becomes part of the human soul only after it is joined to a mortal (as opposed to a starry, cosmic) body. Eros heightens the confusion and disorder caused by the bodily desires; it does not direct human effort and striving toward the noble and good. Timaeus does not, therefore, like Socrates, urge his listeners to seek self-knowledge by examining their opinions to see what they truly desire. He urges them rather to look outside themselves to the heavens to find an order they can not only comprehend but also incorporate. Later readers have tended not to notice the differences between Socratic striving and Timaean contemplation, because Plato’s student Aristotle sought to combine them. Plato dramatized the differences between the two kinds of philosophy by attributing them to two different individuals.

D. The Eleatic Stranger

The day after he has been indicted for a capital crime, Socrates is introduced to an anonymous visitor from Elea. In the two conversations that follow, the stranger implicitly accuses Socrates, first, of being a sophist and, second, of having brought the accusation on himself. The stranger is too polite to name Socrates, however, and few readers have paid much attention to the implicit charges. They have been more impressed by the critique the Eleatic gives of all previous philosophy, Parmenidean as well as materialist.

51. The Eleatic’s final definition of the sophist as someone who knows how to make others think that he is all wise, even if he knows that he is not, by refusing his interlocutors in private conversations looks much more like Socrates than it does like Protagoras, Hipippas, Prodicus, Euthydemus, and Dionysodorus, all of whom sought students by claiming to teach them how to be virtuous, especially how to become a persuasive public speaker and so acquire influence in public assemblies. Along the way to this final definition the Eleatic argues that sophists cannot be adequately distinguished simply by their seeking young students, charging fees, or knowing how to compose and deliver speeches. Since most people are not able to recognize a truly knowledgeable statesman, the Eleatic observes, they will not trust anyone who seeks to exercise political power unchecked by law. Not able to distinguish someone who steps outside the letter of the law on the basis of knowledge, or who questions the law for the sake of learning how to rule better from someone who merely seeks to escape legal restraints on his own desires, they will accuse the former of seeking tyrannical power and corrupting the young.

Even more explicitly than Socrates, the anonymous stranger is a follower of Parmenides. He is introduced as a member of the Eleatic school, but he finds it necessary to break with his philosophical “father” in order to explain how it is possible for something like a sophist to exist. Like Socrates, the Eleatic suggests that being must be differentiated in order to be intelligible. Also like Socrates, the Eleatic calls the intelligible divisions or kinds “ideas.” Unlike Socrates, however, the Eleatic does not speak of ideas of the good, the noble, or the just. He refers rather to the five greatest ideas: being, rest, motion, sameness, and difference. He criticizes “friends of the forms (or ideas),” such as Socrates, for insisting on a complete disjunction between being and sensible becoming. Because they maintain such a complete disjunction, the Eleatic points out, “friends of the forms” cannot explain cognition or logos, because both thought and speech or argument involve motion. Indeed, the Eleatic announces, the purpose of his own account of the ideas is to explain how logos is possible. One of the reasons he initially breaks with his teacher Parmenides is that it is impossible to account for the difference between the name and the thing to which it refers, if being is one. By showing that being itself is divided into different kinds, some of which can coexist, like being and rest or being and motion, but others of which cannot, like rest and motion, the Eleatic suggests that being itself is organized in the same way that languages are. Just as some letters (vowels and consonants) can be combined but others (consonants only) cannot in making words, so some words (nouns and verbs) can be combined but others cannot in making sentences. It is necessary to learn which can and cannot be combined in order to determine which are true, that is, possible, combinations of words, and which are not, that is, false.

At first glance it might appear that, like Timaeus, the Eleatic represents both an extension and an improvement of Socratic philosophy. Understanding being to be differentiated, like Socrates, the Eleatic asks what something (in this case, a sophist, statesman, or philosopher) is. Also like Socrates, the Eleatic understands philosophy to consist in the dialectical sorting of things, according to the traits they share or do not. Unlike Socrates, however, the Eleatic states that he sorts things solely according to their similarities or differences; unlike “the most well-born form of sophist,” he does not sort or define things according to whether they are noble or not. Although both Socrates and the Eleatic divide things “diairetically” into two as well as by their joints, the Eleatic begins and continues to divide things down the middle, according to whether they are the same or different, departing from this process only when necessary (as in the case of politics), whereas Socrates asks whether and to what extent something shares in one of the eternal ideas, like beauty or nobility, or not. Although both philosophers use the same words in asking what something is, they prove upon examination not to be asking the same question in fact (and so illustrate the difference between word and deed [or fact] as well as the confusion that difference causes). When Socrates asks what something is, he is seeking to find out what it is in itself. When the Eleatic asks what something is, he is trying to determine in what respect or respects it is the same as itself and different from others. Things do not exist and cannot be known “in themselves,” according to the Eleatic. They are known only in comparison to others, as same or different.

Important differences between the Eleatic and Socrates also emerge in the discussion of statesmanship. According to Socrates, just rulers need to be philosophers. At the beginning of the Sophist, the Eleatic declares that the sophist, statesman, and philosopher are three different types, although he admits that it is difficult to distinguish them. Like Socrates, the Eleatic characterizes those who pretend to be wise, whether about everything or only about ruling, as sophists. Unlike Socrates, however, the Eleatic never suggests that someone who possesses political science or the royal art needs to know philosophy. According to the Eleatic, a statesman knows how to direct and use the arts that have practical effects. More precisely, he needs to know how to mix courage and moderation in his citizens. Unlike those who consider courage and moderation to be virtues, and so like Socrates would encourage people, both individually and in groups, to acquire as much of each as possible, the Eleatic maintains that courage and moderation are opposed traits that need to be balanced, if a city is to survive. A city composed entirely of moderate people who mind their own business will become too gentle to defend itself against aggressors, whereas courageous peoples tend to risk wars with others until they are defeated and destroyed. A statesman knows how to join people with the two opposed natural inclinations with bonds both human (mating) and divine (inculcated opinions). He supervises “lawful educators and nurses” (Statesman 308c) in making citizens “better from worse” (293d–e) and distributes tasks and offices justly “as far as possible” (297b) in order to keep the city safe. According to the myth the Eleatic relates in the middle of the
dialogue, human beings had to develop the political art (like all other arts) to protect themselves from wild beasts (who might include other human beings) after the gods ceased to care and provide all the necessities for them. Political associations and knowledge are, in other words, primarily defensive. Nature, as the Eleatic depicts it in his myth of the reversed cosmos, is not kind. It was not constructed as an image of the eternal ideas by a god, as Timaeus suggests, nor does it have its source and ruling principle in the idea of the good, as Socrates says in the Republic.

The Eleatic demonstrates more concern about the character of his young interlocutors than does either Parmenides or Timaeus. He indicates that he himself possesses at least some of the knowledge he attributes to the statesman by attempting literally to en-courage the modest, if not moderate Theaetetus and to moderate the “manly” young Socrates. The Eleatic does not try to impart this knowledge to the young Athenians, however, or inspire them to seek it on their own. He is, indeed, generally unconcerned with human desires or motivation. To the extent that he is trying to teach his young interlocutors anything, it is dialectics or philosophy. At one point he says they have not posed the problem of the statesman “for its own sake, but for the sake of becoming more skilled in dialectics” (285d). The demonstration he gives the young mathematicians of the particular way in which he sorts things may be related to, but it is also obviously different from, the demonstration Parmenides gave young Socrates of the kinds of arguments he should practice in order to become more proficient at philosophy.

The differences among the Platonic philosophers in comprehensive view, interlocutors, and approach are summarized in table 1.

This brief sketch of the varied characteristics and doctrines of the Platonic philosophers suggests that, in the Platonic dialogues, the Athenian Stranger and Parmenides present the problems, both political and philosophical, that confronted later thinkers, and that Socrates, Timaeus, and the Eleatic Stranger all represent related but differing attempts to solve these problems. There are common elements. All five of the Platonic philosophers recognize that neither being nor the cosmos is homogeneous; all five draw a distinction between the purely intelligible aspects and the sensible, changing manifestations of the intelligible elements. This distinction is central to what is often called Platonism. There are, nevertheless, important differences among Plato’s philosophers with regard to the character and “location” of the intelligible aspects of being. According to the Athenian Stranger, there is an immortal war going on between the orderly and disorderly souls; Parmenides, on the other hand, presents the propositions that one is and that one is not as mutually exclusive. According to Parmenides, there cannot be a battle. The Athenian is centrally concerned about the direction, regulation, and ordering of human life; Plato’s Parmenides appears to be almost completely indifferent to human needs, sensations, and desires. Like the Athenian, Socrates, Timaeus, and the Eleatic all explicitly attempt to show human beings how we can best order our lives. The principles and goals of the orders they propose differ significantly, however. Socrates insistently urges his interlocutors to seek what is truly noble and good by examining opinions, their own, first and foremost. Timaeus urges his listeners to observe the order of the heavens so that they can reconstitute such an order within themselves. Because no human being is apt to be able to acquire the knowledge of how to use and coordinate all the kinds of arts needed to weave together moderate and courageous people in order to preserve them by preserving the city, the Eleatic argues, people have to rely on a kind of approximate, practical knowledge, based on trial and error, that gradually becomes embodied in laws. He does not urge people to observe the order in the heavens, because he thinks that order has been, and may well again be, reversed. Nor does he argue that a statesman or his people must seek knowledge, first and foremost, of what is truly noble and good. On the contrary, he observes, in a world in which human beings find themselves naturally unprotected against the ravages of climate and wild beasts, they have to concentrate on organizing themselves politically to defend themselves if they are to survive. Goodness and justice, though desirable, must be subordinated to the requirements of safety.

All three of Plato’s “second-generation” philosophers’ recommendations concerning the way human beings should organize and conduct themselves in order to live the best possible lives are supported by three different views of the partially intelligible organization of the world in which we find ourselves. Because Timaeus and the Eleatic (as well as the Athenian) Stranger include motion in the intelligible aspects of being, they are able to present better, certainly fuller, cosmological explanations of the context and grounds of their recommendations for the best form of human life than is Socrates. This is one of the reasons many later commentators have identified Plato more with the views articulated by these non-Socratic philosophers; they seem to give better, more comprehensive views of the whole. But if Plato thought the views presented by Timaeus or the Eleatic were truer than the arguments presented by Socrates, why did Plato
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athenian Stranger</th>
<th>Peripatetics</th>
<th>Socrates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categorical view of the cosmos:</td>
<td>One is (or is not).</td>
<td>Separate ideas are always and intelligible. Sensible things participate in the eternal ideas. The idea of good is also the knowledge humans must.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive prelude; nonconfrontational</td>
<td>Investigates the logical consequences of the proposition that One is, then, that One is not.</td>
<td>Confrontational refutations or &quot;corrections&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not ask What is it?</td>
<td>“Ask What is it? (which follows from a doctrine of separate ideas); investigates opinions (a mix of in intelligible and sensible).”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeks ways of enticing human emotions in educating and controlling them.</td>
<td>Little concern about human motives or emotions</td>
<td>Errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muses logos/mythos</td>
<td>Quotes only one line of poetry</td>
<td>Relates myths and gives arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposes legislation, a &quot;city in speech,&quot; to elderly Dorianable to establish it.</td>
<td>No politics or legislation.</td>
<td>Claims to practice the &quot;true political art&quot; but does not legislate, proposes a &quot;city in speech&quot; to Plato's brothers to show them how to live as individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travels</td>
<td>Travels</td>
<td>Does not leave Athens except for military duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly Dorian legislators</td>
<td>Socrates: respectable youths. Aristocra becomes one of the Thirty.</td>
<td>Young politically ambitious; foreign teachers Crito is an exception, but he is concerned about the education of his sons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not criticize laws in front of the young.</td>
<td>No concern about the facts of his arguments on his interlocutors.</td>
<td>Interested most in his fellow Athenians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The incompatibility of the Socratic ideas needed to define the goal of the polity (verse) with the doctrine of the intelligible motions of the cosmos and strife between good and bad souls needed to support piety.</td>
<td>Cannot explain how &quot;intellegible&quot; and &quot;sensible&quot; are related or how human beings can acquire knowledge of the purely intelligible. In other words, he lacks self-knowledge.</td>
<td>His doctrine of the imitatio or &quot;participation&quot; of sensible beings in purely intelligible beings does not explain motion or the relations human beings have to the world around them. Antagonizes fathers. Uncertainty of knowledge gained.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The secrecy and mixed composition of the Necessity Council—in sum, the conflicting requirements of politics and philosophy.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timaeus</th>
<th>Elatic Stranger</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosmos is constructed by a good god, looking to eternal ideas. World soul is a forced mix of luminosity, difference, and being. Its body is composed of four geometrically defined elements in space-time (above).</td>
<td>&quot;Greatest&quot; god of being, motion, rest, same, difference, some exist, some are mutually exclusive. Things/ideas are known only in relation to each other, not in themselves. The motion of the cosmos changes direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives an extended speech, combining mythos and logos.</td>
<td>Prefers dialect, dividing down the middle into same and other, but defines arts by separating off different kinds, if necessary, as in politics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Ask What must be the case for humans to be able to understand the organization of the cosmos? He bases his account on observation and mathematics, not an examination of opinions.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonetetic</td>
<td>Nonetetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a poet, according to Socrates.</td>
<td>Does not mention poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a statesman.</td>
<td>Defines the statesman but does not engage in politics, at home or abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travels.</td>
<td>Travels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None. Audience of other anti-democratic politicians</td>
<td>Young mathematicians and gymnasts, not politically ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't give a plausible account of generation or eros.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not show how a just city could come into being, as promulgated.</td>
<td>No account of human motivations, even to seek knowledge. No account of the attraction of the realism of poetry or of sex.</td>
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</table>
continue to make Socrates the most prominent philosopher? Plato is known to have reworked the dialogues until his death. He could have changed the name, if not the entire character of his leading philosophical speaker, if he wanted. The prominence of Socrates in the dialogues, which I stressed earlier in this introduction, suggests that Plato thought that Socrates' position or practice was most important. The question to which the remainder of this study is dedicated is why.

Although Socrates did not and apparently was not able to give a plausible account of the intelligible organization of the sensible world, to say nothing of a coherent account of the intelligibility of the whole, Plato seems to have thought that Socrates represented the necessary and hence best place from which human beings should begin their inquiries. He emphatically and explicitly began with the question that is, in Aristotelian terms, first for us, although not necessarily first per se—namely, how should we live? In presenting Socrates as his leading but by no means only philosophical "spokesman," in contrast to other philosophers who give better accounts of the world or the intelligibility of the whole but not of distinctively human concerns, Plato shows that he understood full well the problem that has bedeviled human thought since the nineteenth century: The mathematical, sometimes materialistic concepts that enable us to understand and manipulate the nonhuman world do not explain human actions—unconscious or conscious and intentional—very well. But Aristotle's extension to the cosmos, even simply to biological organisms, of the purposive, teleological accounts that fit human affairs better than the more reductive, quantitative alternatives has not withstood the onslaught of modern physics. Plato does not present the problem merely as a matter of different forms of knowledge or ways of understanding things, however. Unlike modern philosophers, he does not contrast the humanities and their fundamentally hermeneutical approaches or interpretations of things with the quantitative or process studies characteristic of the natural and social sciences. Plato suggests that there is no one, fully comprehensive way of understanding the whole, because the whole is made up of essentially different kinds of beings. The real problem is identifying what these essentially different kinds of being are and how they are interrelated. Because of the inherent limitations of our mortal minds, human beings may never be able to comprehend the whole. In the meantime, we still have to live as well as we can. To do so, we need to know our peculiar situation and powers, limited as they are. That means we need to seek self-knowledge, first and foremost. By making Socrates the most promi-

V. The Organization of This Book

The account of the dialogues in subsequent chapters follows the order indicated by the dramatic dates. Attempting to preserve the integrity of each conversation depicted, I have sought not only to show how the dialogues read in this order constitute a coherent narrative but also how reading them in this order affects the way we read and understand each of the individual dialogues. Although I have studied and presented the dialogues individually, none of the studies presented here can possibly be as thorough or as definitive as a monograph dedicated to a single dialogue. I am presenting a new framework in which to view the corpus as a whole, and that attempt alone has resulted in a very long book. There is much more detailed work to be done.

Read in the order indicated by their dramatic dates, I argue, the dialogues can be divided into three basic groups or parts. Part I of this study concerns the problems posed by previous philosophy and Socrates' initial response. In three of his autobiographical statements we learn how Socrates formulated his response to the problems posed by the Athenian Stranger in the Laws and the elderly Eleatic in the Parmenides. But we also see that Socrates failed to attract followers or future philosophers merely by refuting his contemporaries' opinions about the noble and good. In part II, I thus argue, Plato presents two different paradigms of philosophy, represented by Socrates and Timaeus, as potential answers to the political and philosophical problems dramatized in the earlier dialogues. Although Timaeus articulates a more comprehensive account of the whole than Socrates ever does, we see that he is not able to give a plausible account of human life. In the dialogues that follow the Timaeus in terms of their dramatic dating, Plato suggests that, despite its philosophical and political
limitations, Socratic dialogic practice is more effective than Timaean contemplation. In part III, I then argue that in the eight dialogues explicitly leading up to his trial and death, Plato presents a defense of Socrates—philosophical as well as political. In the conclusion I seek to explain why, in light of the criticism represented by the other four philosophers, Plato made Socrates his chief philosophical protagonist.

PART I

The Political and Philosophical Problems