Classical Quarterly **31** (ii) 305–320 (1981) *Printed in Great Britain*

DID PLATO WRITE SOCRATIC DIALOGUES?

My title is deliberately provocative, since I want to challenge both the chronology and the philosophical interpretation generally accepted for the dialogues called Socratic. I am not primarily interested in questions of chronology, or even in Plato's intellectual 'development'. But the chronological issues are clear-cut, and it will be convenient to deal with them first. My aim in doing so will be to get at more interesting questions concerning philosophical content and literary design.

Interpreters should perhaps think more often about such questions as: Why did Plato write dialogues after all? Why does a little dialogue like the *Laches* have such a stellar cast, with so many major figures from Athenian history? Why does Plato re-create the schoolboy atmosphere of the *Charmides* and *Lysis*? Why does he compose such a large and vivid fencing-match between Socrates and the long-dead Protagoras, in a conversation supposed to have taken place before Plato himself was born? The view which I wish to challenge tends to assume that Plato's motivation in such dialogues was primarily historical: to preserve and defend the memory of Socrates by representing him as faithfully as possible. From this it would seem to follow that the philosophic content of these dialogues must be Socrates' own philosophy, which Plato has piously preserved somewhat in the way that Arrian has preserved the teachings of Epictetus. The counterpart assumption tends to be that when Plato ceases to write as an historian he writes like any other philosopher: using Socrates as a mouthpiece to express whatever philosophical doctrines Plato himself holds at the time of writing.

Although there must be some truth in both assumptions – for Plato surely does attempt to give a lifelike portrait of Socrates, and he also sometimes puts in Socrates' mouth views which must be Plato's – yet neither assumption takes seriously into account the fact that the dialogues are works of dramatic art, and in most cases of dramatic fiction. As works of art they produce an effect of literary 'distancing' between author and audience which prevents us – even in works as late as the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus* – from simply reading off the author's thoughts in any straightforward way from what is said by some character in the dialogues. The Socrates of the dialogues is an ambiguous figure, at once Plato's historical master and his literary puppet. A parallel ambiguity attaches to the portraits of Protagoras, Alcibiades, and most characters in these works. The dialogue itself is a unique art form: a piece of rigorous philosophical discussion wrapped in a dramatic, personal setting and projected into the historical past. We have only to compare it with Cicero's elegant but pallid imitations to see what a rich and vibrant artistic structure the Platonic dialogue has. To such artful cunning on the part of the writer there should correspond a degree of hermeneutical subtlety on the part of the reader. But let us begin with chronology.

The standard view, admirably presented by Professor Guthrie in vol. IV of his *History*, is that Plato's earliest writings form a 'Socratic' group, in which he 'is imaginatively recalling, in form and substance, the conversations of his master without as yet adding to them any distinctive doctrines of his own' (p. 67). For Guthrie this group includes *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Charmides*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, and *Ion*. At the end of this group comes the *Protagoras*, which 'takes the argument further than the others', but contains nothing specifically Platonic (p. 214). The *Gorgias* on the other hand is clearly later, more Platonic: 'Socrates the

ignorant questioner has turned into a man of positive and strongly expressed convictions', and we have 'the first of the great eschatological myths' (p. 284). Then comes the *Euthydemus*, and the *Meno* which introduces Pythagorean themes such as reincarnation and mathematics.[1] Writing independently at about the same time, Terence Irwin bases his account of Plato's moral theory upon what is essentially the same chronology, which he regards as 'fairly widely accepted': first a Socratic period, then the *Protagoras*, interpreted as 'Plato's first systematic defence of Socratic ethics', followed by the *Gorgias*, which represents a new departure but still works with 'the inadequate resources of the Socratic theory'.[2] Only in the *Meno* does Plato begin to develop a theory of his own, with the doctrine of recollection and the distinction between knowledge and true belief.

As far as the *Meno* is concerned, I think the prevailing view is correct that sees this work as a curtain-raiser for the middle dialogues – and by middle dialogues here I mean *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*: the dialogues in which we find the classical theory of Forms. Hence I shall not question the standard ordering of the dialogues from the *Meno* on. But I hasten to point out that the entire construction of a chronology prior to the *Meno* rests on sand. Stylometry can tell us that all these dialogues belong to the same 'early' group, but it cannot tell us in what order they were written.[3] And if stylometry is quite useless here, external evidence is extremely meagre. Of course the death of Socrates in 399 is a *terminus post quem* for *Apology* and *Crito*, and presumably for all the rest. Otherwise the only significant datum, in my opinion, is the statement of the *Seventh Epistle* that Plato was about 40 years old when he gave up hope of a political career in Athens and set off for Italy

[1] *A History of Greek Philosophy*, IV (1975), p. 236. Guthrie hesitates about the relative date of *Meno* and *Gorgias*, and discusses *Meno* first; but he recognizes that most scholars place it after the *Gorgias*.

[2] T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: the Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 2, 102, 131. For his chronology see pp. 291–3, n. 33. The area of agreement diminishes, however, if we look beyond recent British and American scholarship. Consider, for example, the five lists cited by Ross in *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (p. 2): almost the only relevant point on which they all agree is in placing the *Gorgias* after the *Protagoras*. Even on this point the 'consensus' was challenged by A. E. Taylor (*Plato: the Man and his Work*, pp. 20, 235), Grube (*Plato's Thought*, p. xii), and by Ernst Kapp, who (writing after 1942, published only in 1968) regarded *Apology*, *Crito*, *Gorgias* as the three earliest dialogues and the only ones to be 'attributed with practical certainty to the period between 399 and 389' ('The Theory of Ideas in Plato's Earlier Dialogues', in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, p. 80). In his recent *Studies in the Styles of Plato* (Acta Philosophica Fennica xx, 1967), H. Thesleff partially follows R. Böhme (*Von Sokrates zu Ideenlehre*, 1959) in placing the *Gorgias* earlier than the *Protagoras* (p. 21 with n. 1).

More recently still, J. Kube, on the basis of a careful study of Plato's theory of *technē*, has proposed an order which largely anticipates the chronology suggested here: his arrangement of the first five dialogues is exactly the same as mine (*Ap.*, *Crito*, *Ion*, *Hi. Mi*, *Gorgias*), and the four dialogues of definition also follow in my proposed order (*La.*, *Ch.*, *Lysis*, *Euthyphro*). Only in regard to the three major 'pre-middle' dialogues (*Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Euthydemus*) do we diverge, since Kube inserts these among the four dialogues of definition. See *TEXNH und APETH* (Berlin, 1969), pp. 122 ff., with Table of Contents, p. x. Kube does not claim chronological accuracy for his arrangement, but he does suggest (p. 121) that it should correspond roughly to the chronological sequence.

[3] Lutoslawski thought otherwise, but he was mistaken, as Ritter pointed out. See C. Ritter, *Platon* I, pp. 246, 261. For Ritter's unsuccessful later attempt to subdivide the group on stylometric grounds see E. R. Dodds, *Plato's Gorgias*, p. 19, nn. 1 and 2.

I am indebted to a recent letter from Dr Leonard Brandwood, confirming 'that stylometry has so far been unsuccessful in indicating any chronological order *within* this [early] group beyond the probability that certain works, e.g. *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Cratylus*, are at or near the end of it'. See his Ph.D. thesis, 'The Dating of Plato's Works by the Stylistic Method – a Historical and Critical Survey', University of London (1958).

and Sicily.[4] I think Dodds and others are correct to see the impact of this momentous decision in the passionate conflict between political and philosophical careers in the *Gorgias*.[5] If this is right, we can date the *Gorgias* around 390–386; and the *Menexenus*, which reflects a similar emotional involvement in Athenian imperial politics, dates itself in (or immediately after) 386. But aside from these clues for *Gorgias* and *Menexenus*, and some hints for dating the *Ion* in the 390s, we have no external evidence worth mentioning for the date of any dialogue earlier than *Meno* and *Symposium*.[6] There are some grounds for putting both *Meno* and *Symposium* in the general neighbourhood of 380, which gives us a plausible *terminus ante quem* for the entire early group.[7] Hence we have 13 dialogues to locate in some 20 years (399–380), where the only fixed points are the *Gorgias* (390–386, with some probability) and the *Menexenus* (386 or 385, with near certainty).

So I propose to begin by sweeping away the historical mirage of an 'early Socratic' period, and clearing the ground for a new construction. This means redating the four dialogues of 'definition' (using this term loosely, to include the *Lysis*), and the *Protagoras* which is their sequel, after the *Gorgias* rather than before. I shall offer positive reasons for this move in due course. But for the moment I insist on a *negative* reason: in order to break the spell of habit and tradition, the sheer inertial weight of so many books in which this order is taken for granted. I submit that the dating of these dialogues in the 390s, in the years immediately after Socrates' death, rests upon *no evidence whatsoever*, but only on two unsupported assumptions: (*a*) that Plato began by faithfully recalling the conversations of his master, and (*b*) that this is what we find in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Lysis*, and *Euthyphro*. I hope to *show* that the second assumption is false. But I want to cast doubt on the first as well.

This first assumption defines an 'early' group where Plato reproduces Socratic conversations 'without as yet adding to them any distinctive doctrines of his own' (to quote Guthrie again, who is following Field and many others). I submit that such a group must either be an empty set or contain at most one member. I shall not dispute the status of the *Apology*, which is after all not a dialogue and may have preceded the creation of the dialogue form. The very partial account of Socrates' philosophical

[4] I have no doubt of the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* (which may or may not entail that of the *Eighth*, but surely none of the rest: see Thesleff (op. cit. in n. 2 above) p. 16, n. 1). If, on the other hand, one shares the scepticism of Edelstein and others, we are left with no information on Plato's early career and hence no basis for dating the *Gorgias* beyond the thematic and emotional links to the *Menexenus*, whose date is secure. These links point, however, to roughly the same date as the evidence from the *Seventh Letter*, i.e. the early 380s.

[5] For the connection between the *Seventh Epistle* and the *Gorgias*, see Kapp, 'Theory of Ideas', pp. 98 ff., as well as Dodds, *Gorgias*, pp. 25–31 and Guthrie, *History* IV, p. 284.

[6] For example, the first chapter of Isocrates' *Helen* mentions with contempt a doctrine of the unity of the virtues in knowledge, which it is natural to read as a reference to Plato's *Protagoras* (and perhaps to the *Meno* as well, though this is much less certain). Unfortunately the date of the *Helen* is unknown; recent scholars place it anywhere from 390 to 380. Since no one doubts that the *Protagoras* was written before 380 (and probably the *Meno* as well), this bit of external evidence is of no real use to us. It has been argued that the apparent reference to Isocrates at *Euthydemus* 304D, 305B ff. must be later than the *Panegyricus* of 380 BC, which would be more surprising (but not impossible, in my view): see G. Matthieu in *Mélanges Glotz* II, pp. 558–60. But there is too much guesswork involved for this kind of (possible) cross-reference to count as historical evidence.

[7] The mention of Ismenias of Thebes at *Meno* 90A could reflect any date after 395; but Ismenias' career came to a dramatic end in 382, and it may be that event which recalled his name to Plato's attention (cf. Guthrie IV, p. 236, n. 4). This is only guesswork, of course; but the later date fits well with Dover's carefully argued case for dating the *Symposium* after 385 and before 378 (*Phronesis* 10 (1965), 1–20).

activity and beliefs could well be historically accurate, even if the *Apology* itself is clearly a work of Platonic art. But as soon as we come to the *Crito* (which has some claim to be the earliest *dialogue*), the situation is quite different. Here we have the text of what purports to be a private conversation at which Plato cannot have been present, and which he is therefore free to invent. Now it would be strange if he had used this freedom to misrepresent Socrates' basic position of respect for law, or his loyalty to moral principles that have withstood the test of rational criticism. But the Socratic conclusion not to escape from prison is argued here on the basis of a highly original theory of tacit contract or consent which we have no reason to ascribe to the historical Socrates.[8] The situation is similar in the *Ion*, where the view of poetry as *enthousiasmos* may be genuinely Socratic, but where it is supported by an elaborate theory of poetry as magnetism which is much more likely to be Plato's own invention. Thus in such brief and early ventures as the *Crito* and the *Ion*, Plato is not only a creative artist but a creative philosopher as well.

The *Ion* is one of the very few dialogues which we have some external evidence for dating in the 390s.[9] Next to it I would put the *Hippias Minor*, which recalls the *Ion* in its brevity, its formal simplicity, and its abundant use of Homeric material. Both works illustrate the Socratic 'mission' of exposing pretenders to wisdom; and both seek to characterize the kind of knowledge that qualifies as τέχνη. I suggest that these are the *only* two dialogues, with *Apology* and *Crito*, to be dated before the *Gorgias*, in the first 10 years after Socrates' death. (I ignore the *Hippias Major*, since I am not convinced that it was written by Plato at all.)[10] The *Gorgias* itself is unSocratic in many respects, and not least in its focus upon a choice between two careers, politics or philosophy, a choice which Plato obviously made with some reluctance, but which Socrates never had to face.

On the hypothetical chronology which I propose, then, before the turning-point of the *Gorgias* Plato is only an occasional author of dialogues, all of them very short;

[8] No reason, that is, beyond the mere fact that Plato puts it in his mouth. As a principle of historical interpretation, this leads straight to the Taylor–Burnet view of Socrates as author of the theory of Forms (not to mention the fact that a similar principle would saddle Socrates with all the foolish things that Xenophon makes him say). Of course there is a special attraction to the principle in this case: why should Plato wish to mislead us concerning Socrates' motives for such a momentous decision? But we must distinguish between (*a*) Socrates' moral stance, and (*b*) the theories and arguments by which it is defended. I suggest that Plato had every reason to represent the former as faithfully as he could, but that with regard to the latter he felt free (or even obliged) to provide the strongest arguments available. Hence in the *Phaedo* Socrates' attitude in the face of death will be grounded in the theory of Forms. In the *Crito* and the *Gorgias* we have the same tendency at work; only the theory is less elaborate.

[9] See H. Flashar, *Der Dialog Ion als Zeugnis Platonischer Philosophie* (Berlin, 1958), pp. 96–100. Note that the 'dramatic date' of the dialogue would be 394–393 BC (or soon thereafter), to judge by contemporary allusions, e.g. to Athenian rule over Ephesus. (So Flashar, and similarly Méridier in the Budé Plato, vol. v. 1, p. 24.) In fact such allusions can only count as evidence for the date of composition: since Socrates was not available in 394–393, the dialogue has *no* dramatic date! And of course the same is true for the *Menexenus*, where Socrates alludes to the King's Peace of 386. The *Gorgias* is also notoriously indeterminate with regard to a dramatic date. (See Dodds, *Gorgias*, p. 17.) Plato is not yet consciously recreating the quasi-historical background characteristic of the *Protagoras* and the *Symposium*, where it makes sense to speak of anachronisms. I suggest that the careful invocation of a particular time and place in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Lysis*, and *Euthyphro* should be recognized as an artistic innovation, like the use of the reported form. The earlier use of a specific setting in the *Crito* is quite different, since that is not a free invention on Plato's part, given the topic of the dialogue.

[10] My doubts on the *Hippias Major* are essentially the same as those expressed by Thesleff, p. 13, n. 4. For the early date of *Ion* and *Hippias Minor*, see Thesleff's view, p. 19, and Méridier (Budé, Plato v. 1, pp. 27 f.), who cites Wilamowitz and others.

he is practising his art on the small jar – as other followers of Socrates may have done at this time, in the 390s. Plato's attention is focused elsewhere, on the political arena; but Socrates and the life of philosophy remain very much on his mind. Then comes the explosion of the *Gorgias*, followed after his return from Sicily by its 'tail-piece', the *Menexenus*.[11] (The *Menexenus* will seem less strange if Plato had written very few dialogues at the time.) It is only after he has broken with Athenian political life and settled down to the full-time practice of philosophy that Plato becomes a systematic writer. It is only then, after Socrates has been dead for a dozen years, that the typical 'Socratic' dialogue takes shape, as a regularly unsuccessful search for definition. Plato now begins to experiment with new literary forms: the *Laches* is the first dialogue to be introduced by a dramatic episode with several speakers; the *Charmides* and the *Lysis* are the first to use the form of a reported conversation to sketch a vivid *mise en scène*. Plato is here working out the formal techniques he will use to more powerful effect in the *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedo*. After the sporadic composition of the *Ion*, *Hippias Minor*, and *Menexenus*, the dialogues now seem to be planned in coherent groups, and were probably written in quick succession. This would explain why we have (on my view) only 5 or 6 dialogues in the first dozen years after Socrates' death, but 7 or more in the half-dozen years after Plato's return from Sicily, followed immediately by the middle dialogues in the 370s.

The chronological order I propose is indicated on the chart below.

I Early or 'pre-systematic' dialogues
- *Apology* (after 399)
- *Crito*
- *Ion*
- *Hippias Minor*
- *Gorgias* (390–386)
- *Menexenus* (386–385)

II Pre-middle or 'Socratic'
- A *Laches*
- *Charmides*
- *Lysis*
- *Euthyphro*
- B *Protagoras*
- *Euthydemus*
- *Meno*

III Middle dialogues (the doctrine of Forms)
- *Symposium* (after 385, before 378)
- *Phaedo*
- *Cratylus*
- *Republic*
- *Phaedrus*

IV Post-middle
- *Parmenides*
- *Theaetetus* (shortly after 369)

Second Sicilian voyage, 367–365

It would be foolish to insist upon absolute dates, but on my hypothesis the seven dialogues in group II (*La.*, *Ch.*, *Lysis*, *Euthyphro*, *Prot.*, *Euthydemus*, *Meno*) must all have been written *c.* 386–380, if Dover is correct in dating the *Symposium* before 378.

[11] See Dodds, *Gorgias*, p. 24; Guthrie IV, p. 213.

I do not see anything implausible here: it would be quite arbitrary to suppose that the composition of dialogues must be evenly spaced over the 390s and 380s. And looking back, from the date of the *Theaetetus*, it seems clear that the middle dialogues must have been largely composed in the 370s.[12]

So much for chronology. My heresy consists in removing the *Protagoras* and the four dialogues of definition (*La.*, *Ch.*, *Ly.*, *Euthyphro*) from their usual place before the *Gorgias*, in the 390s, and relocating them after the *Gorgias*, in the middle and late 380s. Now, what is the significance of such a redating? From the point of view of Plato's 'development', it means that these five works – which in some sense form a unit – belong much closer in time to the middle dialogues, and hence to the doctrine of Forms, than is usually supposed. More important, however, than any guesswork about Plato's biography is the question how we are to understand the dialogues. And in this perspective the point of my non-standard chronology is to suggest that we read these five works *proleptically*, looking forward rather than backward for their meaning: reading them not to find out what Socrates said so long ago but to see how Plato will pursue his paths of inquiry from one dialogue to the next, and ultimately on to the doctrines of the middle dialogues. If I am right, the interpreters who regard these dialogues as essentially Socratic *in content* have been taken in by a kind of optical illusion, the measure of Plato's success in re-creating the atmosphere of the fifth century and making Socrates so lifelike.[13] Instead, I suggest we read them as the work of a philosopher in his 40s, who is organizing his own school in the Academy, and is writing to prepare the minds of his audience – both inside and outside the school – for the reception of his mature philosophy.

My chronological and biographical hypothesis can be regarded simply as a likely story – and I submit that it is, historically speaking, much more likely than the usual view of Plato as memorialist of Socrates' thought. The real choice, however, is not between two historical claims but between two frameworks, two sets of hermeneutical assumptions, two different ways of reading the dialogues. I doubt that there is enough properly historical evidence to decide the chronological issue either way; and in any case chronology limits, but does not determine, the choice of an interpretive scheme.

[12] For dating *Phaedo*, *Republic*, etc. in the 370s, cf. Dodds, *Gorgias*, p. 25; Kapp, 'Theory of Ideas', pp. 90 f.

[13] The first to be taken in was apparently Aristotle, whose account of Socrates' position on definition, *epagōgē*, *akrasia*, and the like seems largely based upon a reading of the Platonic dialogues as historical documents. In this sense, the conception of Socratic dialogues which I am attacking can be traced directly back to Aristotle (as Pierre Aubenque has reminded me). In effect, Aristotle gives Socrates credit for everything in the dialogues before the doctrine of Forms and the theory of Recollection. When he arrived in Athens 33 years after Socrates' death, the memory even of those who had known the man personally would inevitably be coloured by the brilliant literary portrayal that had been presented in the meantime. Of course, there would still be informants enough to remind Aristotle that the theory of Forms was an innovation, and he could see for himself that it was not there in the more typically 'Socratic' dialogues.

Aristotle had no real taste or talent for the history of philosophy, and I see no reason to take his account of Socrates and Plato at face value. (What sensitive reader of the *Cratylus* can believe that the namesake of that dialogue was a teacher from whom Plato believed he had learned something of great importance?) Aristotle systematically neglects the crucial role played by Parmenidean ontology in the formation of Plato's theory, and emphasizes instead a debt to the Pythagoreans which must have been fashionable to proclaim at the time (see W. Jaeger, *Aristotle*, tr. R. Robinson, p. 97), but whose historical reality is extremely doubtful. There is generally a kernel of historical truth in Aristotle's statements about his predecessors, but in order to extract that kernel we must first be able to interpret their doctrine on independent grounds. He is certainly not a model to follow on how to read a Platonic dialogue!

For the documentation and discussion see Th. Deman, *Le Témoignage d'Aristote sur Socrate* (Paris, 1942), and W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* I, xxxiv ff.

Thus one might accept my chronology and refuse to read the dialogues proleptically; or one might stick to the standard arrangement but doubt the faithfully 'Socratic' character of our five dialogues (group II A plus the *Protagoras*). The choice of a hermeneutical assumption can be justified only by its fruits: its success in making possible a more adequate interpretation of the texts. Thus Irwin's reconstruction of Socratic moral theory on the basis of the orthodox chronology can be regarded as evidence in favour of the standard view: anyone who finds Irwin's interpretation of the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* persuasive has to that extent a reason to maintain the standard view and the standard chronology. (Again, the converse does not hold: you might reject Irwin's interpretation but stick to his chronology and to the general 'Socratic' framework.) I cannot deal with Irwin's important book here except to point out where our positions become incompatible: if I am right about the chronology, Irwin must be wrong, at least on the *Gorgias*, since his interpretation requires the *Gorgias* to be later than the *Protagoras* and the four dialogues of definition. More fundamentally, our assumptions conflict in that he sees the shorter dialogues before the *Protagoras* as statements of a single, static theory; whereas I insist upon the movement forwards from one work to another, in the gradual exploration of problems whose solution will only come with the doctrine of Forms and with the moral psychology and theory of education of the *Republic*. In effect, I deny the existence of a distinct Socratic moral theory in the dialogues.[14]

I have applied my principles of interpretation elsewhere to the doctrine of the unity of the virtues, and have attempted to show that an adequate explication of this thesis in the *Protagoras* requires the theory of philosophic eros and philosophic virtue which Plato will provide in the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*.[15] I want here to offer a general defence of this proleptic approach to the dialogues in my group II by tracing a number of major themes that emerge in this group but are wholly absent from, or at best marginal in, the dialogues of group I, which includes the *Gorgias*. Many of these thematic interconnections have been noted before, and some of them have contributed to the notion of the Socratic dialogues as a unified group. (Cf. Guthrie IV, pp. 68 f.). What has not generally been noticed is (1) the systematic and progressive nature of these interconnections, and (2) the fact that they tie my group II closely to the middle dialogues, but *not* to group I. In terms of continuity of theme and conceptual elaboration, the Socratic dialogues and the *Protagoras* have more in common with the *Phaedo* and *Republic* than with the *Gorgias*.[16] The prominence of

[14] I do not deny a recognizably Socratic normative ethics (above all in the *Apology* and *Crito*), with some more general claims (no one does wrong willingly, the unity of virtue in knowledge). But how far and in what directions Socrates himself developed these claims *theoretically* is anyone's guess. What I deny is that Plato's theoretical developments (in *Gorgias*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, etc.) should be regarded primarily as attempts to reproduce Socrates' own thought.

[15] 'Plato on the Unity of the Virtues', in *Facets of Plato's Philosophy*, ed. W. H. Werkmeister (*Phronesis* suppl. vol. II, 1976).

[16] Of course the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* have one major theme in common (the theory of justice and the defence of morality), but the latter is in no sense a *sequel* to the former: Plato begins over again from scratch, with the attack by Thrasymachus (reformulated by Glaucon and Adeimantus) as a replacement for Polus and Callicles.

I cannot deal here with all the arguments brought forward to show that the *Gorgias* must be later than the *Protagoras* (e.g. Dodds, *Gorgias*, p. 21 f. with reference there to Rudberg's article in *Symbolae Osloensis* 30 (1953)). To answer only two points: (1) the arguments which claim that the depiction of Socrates in *Protagoras* is more lifelike ('with no wart or wrinkle smoothed out of the portrait', in Vlastos' memorable phrase) and more aporetic, whereas in the *Gorgias* he is more idealized and more dogmatic, all rely for their chronological inference on the assumption that Plato began by an historically faithful portrayal, which gradually changed into something else. But this is precisely the historicist assumption I wish to challenge. Furthermore, even the

one or more of the themes listed below serves as my primary criterion for assigning a work to group II rather than to group I. These are the philosophic topics Plato chose to explore in the dialogues composed to prepare the readers' minds for the statement of his mature philosophy, while at the same time developing the dialogue into a rich and flexible art form, capable of re-creating a simulacrum of the Socratic world within which Plato's own theories would be expounded and discussed. Thus the thesis I am defending is not about the unity of Plato's thought but about the unity of his literary project in a dozen dialogues from the *Laches* to the *Republic*. The *Gorgias*, like the *Apology* and *Crito*, falls outside this project; the second half of the *Phaedrus* points beyond it to something new.

The six themes to be surveyed are: (1) the theory of definition, (2) the theory of the definiendum, (3) the theory of virtue, its unity and its teachability, (4) the theory of friendship, (5) the concept of dialectic, and (6) the method of hypothesis.

1. The theory of definition is first elaborated by Socrates' practice in the *Laches*, where he neatly illustrates the criterion of coextensivity (namely, that the definiens must be true of the definiendum and of nothing else) by first rejecting a definition of courage that is too narrow – standing firm in battle – and then one that is too broad – psychic endurance or perseverance (*karteria*). The *Laches* goes on to consider two definitions that might pass muster: wise endurance, and the knowledge of what is and is not to be feared. But the positive development of these ideas comes later, in the *Protagoras* and the *Republic*. Our next lesson in the methodology of definition is provided by the *Euthyphro*, which spends little time on the criterion of coextensivity (6D); that criterion is quickly satisfied by Euthyphro's definition of piety as what is pleasing to the gods. (On my view of how Plato writes dialogues, the speed with which Euthyphro catches on to coextensivity should be seen less as a sign of his intelligence than as a reflection of the fact that the reader is supposed to be acquainted with the *Laches*.) On the basis of Euthyphro's theology, however, his definition will generate a contradiction, since the gods may disagree: an explicit assumption of unanimity is required to make the definition coherent (ὑποθέμενος 9D8). The definition now applies exclusively to pious action; it specifies what we may call a *proprium* of piety, a condition both necessary and sufficient. But this definition cannot show *why* an action is pious; hence it is rejected as giving not the essence (*ousia*) of piety but only a derivative property (*pathos*) (11A–B). The *Euthyphro* thus insists that a definition must be explanatory as well as coherent and coextensive. The same dialogue introduces the first careful notice of extensional relations between genus and species (identified here as 'whole' and 'part'), and sketches an example of definition *per genus et differentiam* (12C–E).

pursuit of historical verisimilitude seems to be a secondary development, part of the literary project that begins *after* the *Gorgias*. (See n. 9, above, on the notion of a dramatic date.) (2) It is true that the contrast between *pistis* and *mathēsis* (or *epistēmē*) at *Gorgias* 454C–455A partially anticipates the distinction between true opinion (*doxa*) and knowledge which is first drawn at *Meno* 97B ff., but here again there is no thematic or conceptual continuity. On the one hand, *pistis* in the *Gorgias* belongs to the language of rhetoric: it is the subjective state of 'persuasion', whatever the audience is convinced of, with no intrinsic connection with the truth; since the audience is gullible, *pistis* is more likely than not to be false. The term plays no part in the positive account of knowledge in the *Gorgias*, which is built on the contrast between *technē* and *empeiria* (463B ff., 465A, 501A). The standard Platonic distinction, on the other hand, opposes knowledge to *true* opinion, where the latter characterizes not the ignorant mob but the statesman (*Meno* 98C ff.) and even the philosopher (*Symp.* 202A with 203D–204B), or is an essential point of contrast for the cognition of Forms (*Rep.* 477B ff., *Timaeus* 51D–E). Nothing connects the discussion of *pistis* in the *Gorgias* with the theory of *doxa* in the *Meno*, in the way that the latter is directly continued by the treatment of *doxa* in the *Symposium* and later works.

In the *Laches* and *Euthyphro* the theory of definition is practised rather than discussed. The *Meno* takes up the topic in an explicit way, offering a variety of sample definitions to illustrate the requirement of unity in the definiens (72A ff.), insisting that a definition must be non-circular and make use of terms that are already familiar (75E–76A; cf. 79D). The extensional relations between genus and species, mentioned in the *Euthyphro*, are here more fully discussed (73E1 ff., 74D, 79A3, D6–7). I take it that the sequence *Laches–Euthyphro–Meno* is the only natural order for reading these three dialogues on the topic of definition; and this is confirmed by the development of the next theme.

2. The theory of the definiendum. The *Laches* tells us that a proper answer to the question 'what is courage?' must specify some item which is 'the same in all these cases' of conduct recognized as courageous (191E10 *τί ὂν ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις ταὐτόν ἐστιν;* cf. 192B6–7), something of such a nature (*πεφυκός*) as to be present in them all or apply 'throughout' (*διὰ πάντων*, 192C1). This is probably the first clear statement we have of the notion of a *universal* (anticipating *Meno* 74A9, 77A6, etc.). In the *Laches* this common item is presented as some kind of 'power' or capacity (*dynamis* 192B6). The *Euthyphro* speaks more neutrally of a 'form', 'structure', or 'type' of thing (*idea* at 5D, *eidos* in 6D), but that dialogue goes on to elaborate this notion of a universal property. In addition to the positive form it recognizes a negative opposite: besides the pious, 'which is the same with itself in every action', we have the impious, which is likewise 'similar to itself and possessed of one single form (*idea*) in regard to its impiety' (5D). The characterization in terms of opposites (*enantia*) connects the new notion with an older, Presocratic conception of causal principles. But its originality is defined by its contrast with a multitude of particulars: 'the many pious things' (*τὰ πολλὰ ὅσια*) are to be distinguished from 'that very form (*eidos*) itself by which all pious things are pious' (6D10–11). And this form is described as a model (*paradeigma*) to which we might refer (*apoblepein*) in deciding whether any given action is properly said to be pious (6E). This role of the definiendum as a standard or criterion for predication, and as that *by which* or *in virtue of which* things are as they are, answers to the requirement on the definiens that it must be explanatory if it is to specify the *ousia* or '*what-it-is*' of a thing (11A). If the definition of F tells us what-it-is for anything to be F, it will give us a standard for deciding disputed instances of F.

These passages of the *Euthyphro* obviously have certain features in common with the terminology used to describe the Forms in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. But the distinctive metaphysics and epistemology of the middle dialogues is entirely lacking: there is no trace here of Eleatic oppositions between Being and Becoming, the Intelligible and the Sensible – what Aristotle called the 'separation' of the Forms. So we can imagine that the *Euthyphro* represents an earlier, less 'Platonic' notion of paradigmatic essences.[17] Or we can prudently leave open the question of Plato's metaphysical convictions at the time of writing.[18] What is clear in either case is that

[17] So R. E. Allen, *Plato's 'Euthyphro' and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (1970), and 'Plato's Earlier Theory of Forms', in G. Vlastos, ed., *The Philosophy of Socrates* (1971).

[18] I think myself that Plato will have had the metaphysics of the *Symposium–Phaedo* in mind when he wrote the *Euthyphro*. There is nothing in the text to show that it *must* be so; but the Parmenidean vein is opened by the characterization of the 'forms' in terms of self-identity, self-similarity, and contrariety (compare *Euthyphro* 5D 1–3 with Parmenides frr. 8, 29 and 55–9). In the case of *Lysis* and *Euthydemus*, there are more unmistakable signs of things to come, as we shall see. And in the *Meno* it seems to me certain that Plato has in mind eternal and intelligible Forms as objects previously cognized by the disembodied soul and recollected here, since (*a*) the immortal soul requires an eternal object, and (*b*) unless prenatal cognition was different *in kind* from ordinary learning it could not help to solve the paradox of inquiry. But Plato does

the reader is presented with a new way of envisaging the object of definition – in terms of *eidos*, *idea*, *ousia*, *paradeigma*, 'that in virtue of which things are F' – and that this way will be exploited later by Plato in the formulation of his most characteristic doctrine.

The *Meno* makes use of the same terminology as the *Euthyphro* (*ousia* at 72B1, *eidos* at 72C7) with slight variations of phrasing; the definiendum is 'one thing true of many' (ἓν κατὰ πάντων at 73D1), or 'the same for all cases' (τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τούτοις ταὐτόν 75A4–5). Plato seems deliberately to leave open the question of questions concerning universals: whether the form which all these instances 'have' is something *present* in them (as several formulations suggest) or something *distinct* (as might be implied by the notion of *paradeigma* in the *Euthyphro*). The *Meno* seems slightly more non-committal on this point, since the term παράδειγμα does not recur (but cf. ἀποβλέπειν at *Meno* 72C8). I think it would be unwise to look for a difference of doctrine between these two dialogues as far as the definiendum is concerned: Plato is simply unwilling to clarify here the ontological status of these 'forms' or 'essences'. The unveiling of his ontology is reserved for a separate occasion, in a dialogue specially designed for this purpose, where the priestess Diotima will reveal the Form of Beauty in a marvellous vision to climax an initiation into the mysteries of love (*Symp.* 210–211).

On my view the *Protagoras* comes between the *Euthyphro* and the *Meno*.[19] Here we find no search for definitions and hence no terminology for definiendum: Plato does not pursue the same theme in every dialogue. Nevertheless, the *Protagoras* makes use of the terminology of *dynamis* and *ousia* in a way exactly parallel to the *Laches* and the *Euthyphro* (*Prot.* 330A4, 6, B1; 349B4, 5, C5). In the *Gorgias*, by contrast, where both terms occur, neither one is used in the semi-technical sense connected with questions of definition and conceptual unity.[20] It is a striking fact that the *Gorgias* shows no interest in the theory, methodology and terminology of definition which we have just illustrated from *Laches–Euthyphro–Meno*, and all the more striking because in that dialogue Socrates does *practise* definition, in the lengthy exchange by which he obliges Gorgias to make more and more precise an initially vague characterization of rhetoric (449D–454B). I take it that such procedures were genuinely Socratic, and that to this extent Aristotle is justified in crediting the historical Socrates with the practice of definition. But when Aristotle refers at *Met. M.* 4, 1078b 18 to general

not tell us this in the *Meno*; he is still not ready to reveal his mysteries, though he has begun the initiation by invoking the authority of learned priests and priestesses (*Meno* 81A10). And the proleptic reading of the *Meno* is confirmed by Plato's explicit backward reference on the topic of recollection at *Phaedo* 73A–B.

[19] Or perhaps one should say: at roughly the same time as the *Euthyphro*. Both dialogues presuppose the *Laches*, and both are presupposed by the *Meno*. But the priority of *Euthyphro* to *Protagoras* is suggested by two considerations (other than the sheer scale of the latter): (i) *Euthyphro*, like *Laches* and *Charmides*, prepares for the thesis of unity without mentioning this thesis (cf. 12D, the designation of piety as a 'part' of justice); and (ii) the semi-technical use of οὐσία is motivated by the ὅτι ποτ' ἔστιν question at *Euthyphro* 11A7 but simply taken for granted at *Protagoras* 349B4.

[20] At *Gorgias* 509E1, 510A4, *dynamis* is used as an equivalent for *technē*, as at *Hi. Mi.* 375D–376A. At *Gorgias* 472B6 and 486C1 οὐσία means 'property', in the former instance with a play (pace Dodds) on the sense of 'truth' or 'reality', but no reference to 'essence' or 'entity' as at *Prot.* 349B4, *Charmides* 168D2.

One might find the more technical usage of δύναμις prefigured at *Gorgias* 447C2 (τίς ἡ δύναμις τῆς τέχνης τοῦ ἀνδρός, in connection with the τί ἐστιν question); but the same phrase is used by Gorgias in a colloquial sense ('the power of rhetoric') at 455D7 (cf. 456A5, A8, C6, etc.). Of course the *Gorgias* does draw a distinction between ποία τις and τίς (at 448E6; cf. 462C10–D1) which provides the basis for the πάθος–οὐσία opposition in the *Euthyphro*. But the terminological precision of the latter reflects a theoretical interest which is lacking in the *Gorgias*.

definitions of the moral virtues, he probably has in mind *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, and *Meno*, which is something else again. In the *Gorgias* there is no clear focus on universal concepts, no formal concern either with definiens or definiendum. The question about rhetoric is presented in an informal, pre-technical way, introduced by an exchange between Socrates and Chaerephon to indicate just what kind of question is going to be asked (447C 9 ff.). There is no trace here of the logical sophistication we find in the *Laches* or the *Euthyphro*. I do not see how anyone who reflects upon the lack of theoretical interest in the procedure of definition in the *Gorgias* can believe that it belongs to the series of dialogues that leads from the *Laches* to the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*.[21]

3. The theory of virtue, (*a*) its parts and its unity, and (*b*) its teachability.

If we know anything at all about the historical Socrates, we know he was passionately devoted to the pursuit of *aretē* or moral excellence, and that his practice of philosophy was a kind of exhortation to virtue. In the *Gorgias* Socrates appears as the embodiment of this pursuit, and his concern for moral education is presented as the only true exercise of the political art. (And in this respect, in the concern for politics as moral education, Plato remained a faithful Socratic all his life.) The *Gorgias* also contains an argument for the unity of the virtues, maintaining that the temperate man must be just, pious, brave, and perfectly good (507A–C). What the *Gorgias* shows no trace of, and what is characteristic of the *Laches*, *Protagoras*, and *Meno*, is (i) a systematic discussion of the 'parts' of virtue and how they are related to the whole, and (ii) an explicit raising of the question whether virtue can be taught. The *Gorgias* insists upon the importance of moral education; it expresses some doubt whether the sophists succeed in teaching virtue (519C–520E) and implies that Socrates might do better (517B, 521D). But it does not discuss in detail the problems of teaching and learning any more than it attempts to analyse the virtues. Now it is precisely this question of παιδεύειν ἀνθρώπους, how to train men in excellence and make their souls as good as possible, which is systematically raised in the *Laches*, where it leads to the request for a definition (185B–190E2). This is the central issue not only in the *Protagoras* and *Meno*, but also in the *Euthydemus* and the *Republic*; it is an important underlying theme in the *Lysis*, *Charmides*, and *Symposium*. The doctrine of Forms itself is introduced in the *Symposium* as the final stage of erotic pedagogy; in the *Republic* this doctrine defines the goal of the entire training programme for the guardians. From the *Laches* to the *Republic*, the theory of virtue and how it is to be produced is *the* unifying theme that ties all the dialogues together. (The *Cratylus* is probably the only dialogue from this period in which the topic of moral education is not an essential component.) For understanding the continuity in Plato's treatment of these themes, the division between Socratic and middle dialogues may be more of a hindrance than a help.

The *Laches* is the first dialogue to confront both the question of teachability for virtue and the question of its parts or species. Issues to be discussed at length in the *Protagoras* and *Meno* are here raised in a preliminary way, with some of the problems left implicit in the situation: why do men eminent in *aretē* not succeed in training eminent sons? Is such excellence teachable? If so, who are the teachers? If not, how

[21] The absence of theoretical concern with definition in the *Gorgias* may also be contrasted with the *Charmides*. Although the latter does not focus our attention on formal conditions for correct definition, it clearly describes *sōphrosynē* as a psychic *dynamis* at 160D6 ff. (without using the term) and discusses the conditions of competence that should permit the interlocutor to discover a definition (158E7–159A10), elaborating the point made at *Laches* 190C4–6. Both *dynamis* and *ousia* are used in their semi-technical sense at *Charmides* 168B3–5, D1–2, E5; cf. 169A3.

can it be a *technē*, or form of knowledge? The specific goal of defining courage, in order to know how it may be acquired, is not formulated until half-way through this brief dialogue. The length and weight of the dramatic introduction, the extraordinary prestige of the interlocutors (Nicias and Laches) or of their fathers (Aristides and Thucydides son of Melesias), underline the importance of the topic to be discussed, and suggest that we have here an introduction not to the *Laches* alone but to the whole series of dialogues on virtue and education. A similar motivation is suggested by the choice of interlocutors in the *Charmides*, which is probably the second dialogue in this group. The later career of Critias and Charmides, ringleader and member of the notorious Thirty, casts a grim shadow over the discussion of 'temperance'. We have here a conversation on virtue with the conspicuously bad, to match the conversation with the eminent examples of *aretē* in the *Laches*, thus suggesting in a vivid way the range of possibilities for the young men whose moral future is still open. And the cast of these two dialogues, from Aristides the Just to Critias, spans not only the moral spectrum but also the whole history of Athens in the fifth century. The dramatic framework here restates implicitly the claim that was explicit in the *Gorgias*: that a study of *aretē* is the key to understanding what happens in history.

After the *Laches* and *Euthyphro* have shown, in different ways, that any definition of the virtues in isolation is bound to fail, the *Protagoras* addresses itself to their connections and alleged unity, while the *Meno* goes on to seek a general definition of virtue (and notes, retrospectively, the error of earlier attempts to define the parts separately, 79C8). Taking up the question of teachability where the *Protagoras* had left it, the *Meno* first proposes a positive answer on the basis of an assumption (suggested in *Laches* and *Charmides* and argued for in the *Protagoras*) that virtue is a kind of knowledge. But Socrates is still baffled by the question of teachability, and hence he goes on to offer an alternative account of virtue based upon right opinion. The *Meno* points beyond itself in many ways, and not only in the doctrine of Recollection and the myth of rebirth. The account of virtue based upon right opinion, which is suggested at the end of the *Meno*, is in fact not provided until *Republic* 4.

It will be obvious that this concern with wisdom, excellence, and the possibility of education fits smoothly enough into the biographical framework of a philosopher recently returned from Sicily and busy with the educational scheme of the Academy. I suggest that the seven dialogues in my group II, from *Laches* to *Meno* and *Euthydemus*, be regarded less as a defence for Socrates than as an advertisement for the Academy. They represent both a protreptic to philosophic work and an object for philosophic study. Their ideal reader, capable of following up the hints and movement of thought from one dialogue to the next, would be a pupil or associate of Plato in the Academy.

4. The *Lysis* is the only 'Socratic' dialogue devoted not to the definition of virtue but to the theory of friendship (*philia*). To show that this puzzling dialogue is to be interpreted as a preparation for the *Symposium* and the theory of philosophic *eros* in the middle dialogues would require more discussion than is appropriate here.[22] I will refer only to the one point where the dialogue seems most palpably proleptic. I doubt that any good sense can be made of 'the primary *philon*, for the sake of which all other things are dear' (219D), without looking ahead to the form of Beauty in the *Symposium* and the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, 'which every soul pursues, and for the sake of which it does whatever it does' (*Rep.* 6, 505D11). The characteristic language of *Symposium* and *Republic* is foreshadowed both in the reference to other dear things

[22] Compare Friedländer, *Plato*, tr. Meyerhoff, II, pp. 102–4.

as 'images' (εἴδωλα) of the primary object of affection, and also in the phrases ἐκεῖνο ὅ ἐστιν πρῶτον φίλον... ἐκεῖνο τὸ πρώτον, ὃ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐστι φίλον (219C8–D5). This is a cunning anticipation of the technical terminology for the doctrine of Forms, not used again until *Symposium* 211C (cf. εἴδωλα at 212A4), and then generalized at *Phaedo* 75A: 'all the things on which we set the seal of τὸ αὐτὸ ὅ ἐστι'[23] (cf. 92D9: ἡ οὐσία ἔχουσα τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τὴν τοῦ ὅ ἐστιν). If we deny any forward reference and insist on limiting our framework of interpretation to the confines of the *Lysis*, these formulae must be hopelessly enigmatic. I think they were meant to be recognized by the original readers as puzzles and hints of things to come.

That Plato was capable of planting such deliberate anticipations, in a context where they could at first be regarded only as cryptic or unintelligible, seems certain from the parallel case concerning dialectic.

5. In the *Meno* dialectic is defined as a friendly mode of discussion, to be contrasted with the disputatious practice of eristic, since in dialectic 'one not only gives true answers but answers by means of things [i.e. terms and premisses] which the interlocutor would agree that he knows' (75D). This is only a slight variant on the pre-technical use of διαλέγεσθαι in the *Gorgias* (448D10, 449B4) for a methodical discussion by questions and short answers, in contrast to oratory (ῥητορική) or the making of long speeches. No doubt this was a genuine conversational practice of the historical Socrates; but it was not superficially different from the procedures of some whom we (following Plato) would call Sophists.[24]

It is this superficial resemblance which underlies and justifies such a strange dialogue as the *Euthydemus*, where the Sophists' art is called διαλέγεσθαι (295E2) and hinges on the demand that Socrates give short and unconditional answers to their questions (295A4, 10, B6–10, 297B8, D3, 8). This is precisely the eristic perversion which Plato has in view when he defines dialectic in the *Meno* (75D). The extent to which the *Euthydemus* is dominated by a caricature of dialectic makes it all the more remarkable that, in an earlier context, dialecticians (οἱ διαλεκτικοί) have been introduced as practitioners of a master art, to whom mathematicians hand over the truths (τὰ ὄντα) which they have discovered but do not know how to use: the dialectician stands to the mathematician as the statesman or king stands to the general (290C–D; 291C). When this doctrine is ascribed to the boy Clinias, Crito expresses disbelief; Socrates is not sure from whom he has heard it, except that it was *not* from the eristic brothers, Euthydemus and Dionysidorus: perhaps it was spoken by some superior power or divinity present? (290E–291A). The passage is thus frankly labelled a mystery, and it is hard to see how this mystery could be unravelled by anyone who had not read the account of dialectic in *Republic* 6 and 7, or heard Plato give some comparable explanation.

To this deliberate teaser there is a parallel in the *Cratylus*, where a partially similar account of dialectic is introduced by a summary of our passage from the *Euthydemus*, including the same illustration: the cithara-player as judge of the lyre-maker's art.[25] The *Cratylus* defines the dialectician as one who knows how to ask and answer questions, along the lines of *Gorgias* and *Meno*; but here his art is said to stand as judge over the work of the name-giver or lawmaker, since the dialectician is the user of the product – namely, words – of which the νομοθέτης is the manufacturer

[23] So Burnet. Better read (with Gallop) τοῦτο τὸ ὅ ἐστι.

[24] See parallels in Dodds' note on *Gorgias* 449C2. For confirmation of Socratic practice, cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* 4. 6. 13–15.

[25] *Cratylus* 390B5–10, echoing *Euthydemus* 289B10–C4; note the mention of Euthydemus at *Crat.* 386D.

(390C–D). Since the correct assignment of names is said to require insight into the form (*eidos*) and essence (*ousia*) of the thing named, this passage in the *Cratylus* connects the new and loftier conception of dialectic with the doctrine of Forms (390E; cf. 386E, 389B–390A, etc.). To this extent it is less mysterious, and may serve as partial exegesis of the reference to dialectic in the *Euthydemus*. But the *Cratylus* does *not* explain why the dialectician is set up as an authority over mathematics. For an explanation of this point, and for a full understanding of both passages, there is really no substitute for the central books of the *Republic*.

Some scholars may be tempted on other grounds to date the *Cratylus* later than the *Republic*. I think this would be a mistake; the close parallel to the *Euthydemus* on dialectic tends to confirm the standard dating of the *Cratylus* as roughly contemporary with *Symposium* and *Phaedo*. But even if we leave the *Cratylus* out of account, we have two clear examples of deliberately proleptic writing in the pre-middle dialogues: the anticipation of the Form of Beauty or Form of Good in the *Lysis* and the anticipation of the theory of dialectic as meta-mathematics in the *Euthydemus*.

6. I want to conclude by mentioning another thematic development that culminates in the dialectic of *Republic* 6–7, namely, the method of hypothesis. This method is first sketched in the *Meno* and applied to the question whether virtue can be taught, which question can be answered in the affirmative if we accept the assumption (*hypothesis*) that virtue is knowledge (86E–87C). We then go on to justify this assumption on the basis of a further premiss (*hypothesis*) that virtue is something good (87D2–3; cf. *hypotithesthai* for the parallel assumption concerning temperance in the *Charmides*, 160D1–2, referring back to 159C1). If this double use of *hypothesis* seems confusing,[26] the confusion can be dispelled by looking ahead to the fuller statement of dialectical method in the *Phaedo*, where the notion of a second hypothesis is introduced systematically, in the account of how one justifies a particular premiss by positing another hypothesis, 'the one that seems best among those higher up, until you reach something adequate' (101D4–E1). This upward path is more fully spelled out in the discussion of dialectic at the end of *Republic* 6, where the place of ἱκανόν τι is taken by 'the unconditional' or non-hypothetical first principle (τὸ ἀνυπόθετον, 511B), which in this context can only be the Form of the Good.[27] The *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* do not provide a static theory of hypothesis that could just as well be presented in a handbook or a Discourse on Method. But they do present progressively more complete pictures of a single, flexible view, and the *Phaedo* can help us understand the *Meno* in much the same way as the doctrine of *Republic* 6 helps us understand the talk about 'higher hypotheses' in the *Phaedo*. What I want to suggest now is that just as the *Laches* and *Euthyphro* practise the art of definition without pronouncing the word 'definition', so the final argument of the *Protagoras* practises the method of hypothesis without employing the term *hypothesis* in this connection.

I cannot here argue for the view that the identification of pleasure with the good in the *Protagoras* should be regarded as a convenient dialectical hypothesis, proposed because the many (and even the sophists) can be brought to accept it, and because on the basis of this assumption Socrates can then produce a plausible derivation of his paradoxical conclusion, that virtue is knowledge. That view has been defended by

[26] So R. Robinson in the first edition of *Plato's Early Dialectic* (p. 121), corrected in the second edition, pp. 117 f.

[27] Robinson (*Plato's Early Dialectic*, 2nd ed. pp. 137 f.) denies any connection between ἱκανόν τι in the *Phaedo* and τὸ ἀνυπόθετον in *Republic* 6, but he reads ἱκανόν τι as if it were equivalent to ἱκανήν τινα (sc. ὑπόθεσιν), which it is not.

others.[28] I have three points to add. (1) Since the *Gorgias* had already made Plato's position on hedonism quite clear, no informed reader of the *Protagoras* would have been in any doubt as to the hypothetical nature of the argument. (2) The argument is an exercise in the method described in the *Meno*, in that (*a*) a conclusion (in this case, that virtue is knowledge) is reached ἐξ ὑποθέσεως, on the basis of a premiss, and (*b*) that the premiss is itself not established[29] but can be accepted by the interlocutors, in the way characteristic of dialectic according to *Meno* 75D. (Note that the conclusion in the *Protagoras* becomes the *hypothesis* in the *Meno*.) (3) But this premiss is itself subject to criticism or defence on the basis of some 'higher' *hypothesis*, and ultimately on the basis of something still more adequate and non-hypothetical. The hedonistic premiss is explicitly rejected in the *Phaedo* (68D–69B) on the strength of a higher notion of philosophical wisdom tied to the doctrine of Forms; and this notion of wisdom and virtue is in turn derived from the unconditional ἀρχὴ τοῦ παντός, the Form of the Good, in *Republic* 6. Thus the method of hypothesis, proceeding by an upward path, leads us from the hedonism of the *Protagoras* to the philosophic *eros* of the *Phaedo* and finally to the ultimate Good of the *Republic*. This progression is exactly parallel to the step-by-step clarification of the doctrine of the unity of the virtues, which the *Protagoras* defends by the dialectical *hypothesis* in question, but which cannot be understood without the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*. Just as the *Phaedo* picks up from the *Meno* on the topic of Recollection, so it corrects the assumption of the *Protagoras* and replaces it by something more adequate. The conception of philosophic virtue resting on the erotic passion for the Forms permits us to 'rise above' the *hypothesis* of hedonism and to defend the same true conclusion from premisses much closer to the truth, as Plato saw it.

In closing, let me make clear that in attacking the notion of Socratic dialogues I do not mean to attack the portrait of Socrates which Plato has given us. Where this portrait is unfaithful, we are in no position to correct it. As far as we are concerned, the Socrates of the dialogues *is* the historical Socrates. He is certainly the only one who counts for the history of philosophy.

Hence I regard as authentically Socratic the conception of philosophy as psychic therapy or 'tendence for one's soul', regularly exercised in *elenchos* or cross-examination, and supported by a central core of paradoxes: no one does wrong voluntarily, it is better to suffer than to do wrong, virtue is knowledge, and no evil can happen to a good man. For without these paradoxes and this conception of

[28] See, e.g. A. E. Taylor, *Socrates*, p. 144 n., *Plato: the Man and his Work*, pp. 258–61; G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought*, p. 61; and the detailed exegesis by J. P. Sullivan in *Phronesis* 6 (1961), 10 ff. For recent interpretations which ascribe the hedonism to Socrates (or to Plato) see Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, ch. IV, and C. C. W. Taylor, *Plato's Protagoras* (1976), pp. 208–10 (with bibliography). Other views in N. Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (1968), pp. 111–18; G. Vlastos, 'Socrates on Acrasia', *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 75 f.

[29] It is true that the many are first described as unready to accept the hedonist view (351C3), just as Protagoras himself is unwilling to do so (351C7 ff.). Discussion and clarification is required to get him to assent to it first in the name of the many (354C–E), and then in agreement with the others (358B2–3). So the procedure is not exactly that of the *Meno* (as Geoffrey Lloyd reminds me), where the argument from the *hypothesis* is given first (87B–C), and the *hypothesis* itself defended afterwards (87C11 ff.). (Note that the *Meno* ends by regarding its own *hypothesis* as at least doubtful, since virtue may rest on true belief as well as on knowledge: the *hypothesis* remains a problematic assumption.) But the function of *hypothesis* is essentially the same in *Meno* and in our argument from *Protagoras*: a useful preliminary (προὔργου, *Meno* 87A2) permitting one to solve a problem that cannot be attacked directly.

philosophy, we would not be able to recognize Socrates at all. But it does not follow that any arguments used to support these paradoxes in the dialogues, or any further consequences as to the nature of virtue and wisdom, can be attributed to Socrates himself. On these matters it is better to admit our ignorance. Hence, although I do not doubt the historicity of the figure of Socrates as presented in the dialogues, I do indeed doubt the historicity of the dialogues themselves as reports of philosophical conversations in the fifth century.[30] The dialogues belong to Plato and to the fourth century. So do the doctrines and arguments contained in them. Even where the inspiration of Socrates is clear, the dialogues are all Platonic.[31]

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[30] Thus I very much doubt the historicity of the *Symposium* as an account of Agathon's party, but I do not doubt that Socrates sometimes stood still in the street or in the snow at Potidea, and that Alcibiades was passionately attached to him in the way his speech indicates. The historicity of the meeting with Protagoras in the house of Callias (before Plato's birth...) is at least doubtful. The encounter with Parmenides and Zeno is almost certainly pure fiction.

For those who feel that Plato's artistic simulacra must have some prima facie claim to historical accuracy, I refer to Christopher Gill, 'The Death of Socrates', *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 23 (1973), 25–8.

[31] This is a revised text of the paper read to the Cambridge Philological Society on 1 November 1979. It has since been presented to several different audiences, including the Société Française de Philosophie in Paris, February 1980. I am indebted to a number of friends, colleagues and auditors for helpful criticism, and in particular to Julia Annas, Pierre Aubenque, Jonathan Barnes, and Anthony Long.