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Chapter 1

The Dialogical Mode in Modern Plato Studies

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I. Introduction.

Most of us were introduced to Plato as the inventor of a philosophical system called Platonism, characterized by certain doctrines such as the doctrine of Ideas, that knowledge is Recollection, the tripartite Soul, the ladder of Platonic Love, and the ideal Society. These doctrines, as we were taught, which respond to certain perennial philosophic problems, are contained in (i.e., the philosophic content of) the dialogues, which are, therefore, their literary form. This is a very old view of Plato and it rests on a very old assumption among philosophers that logical (ideal, conceptual, propositional) content can be appropriately distinguished and examined apart from the particular form or words in which that content happens to be expressed.

This traditional view of Plato has encountered certain difficulties. For example, doctrines attributed to Plato are expressed in the dialogues with apparent vagueness; one finds apparent inconsistencies or even contradictions between the doctrines of one dialogue and those of another; Socrates sometimes seems to use fallacious arguments; in fact, the character of Socrates himself poses the problem of deciding whether Plato presents the doctrines that the dialogues supposedly contain as those of the historical Socrates or of himself; and the aporetic

conclusions of many dialogues might seem to flatly contradict the hypothesis of doctrinal character or intent.¹

The prevailing response to these problems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been the developmental view which argues that, of course, Plato's doctrines changed over the years from an earlier "Socratic" period, through a "critical" middle period, to a mature "Platonic" position and that we can track these changes by reading the dialogues in their order of composition. And we're able to determine their order of composition, roughly at any rate, by means of content analysis and of stylometry, statistically tracking the changes in minute and presumably unconscious characteristics of Plato's literary style, such as hiatus. Thus, all in all, the traditional view of Plato as the expounder of metaphysical system of doctrines has been able to remain in tact into the late twentieth century.

Since the early nineteenth century, however, a new mode of interpretation - here called the dialogical approach - has been growing up and a new picture of Plato's philosophy is emerging. The purpose of this essay is to delineate these new developments and locate them historically. At the same time, much of what is said here should be understood as tentative. Let me emphasize that I am attempting to describe an intellectual movement that is still in process of development. While there is diversity among particular lines of interpretation, however, it is the common ground, the general similarities and agreements, that I want to illuminate here.

Although Plato's dialogues have been studied and interpreted in every generation from that of Aristotle and Speusippus to our own, study of the history of Plato studies is relatively young, even if it is no longer in its infancy. The work of E. N. Tigerstedt provides both a

¹ Although this is little appreciated, only five of the dialogues in which Socrates is a leading participant could be said to end with a definite conclusion.

scholarly standard and a substantial sketch of such a history.¹ We owe a great debt to the bibliographical labors of Manasse, Cherniss, Brisson, McKirahan and others,² and we have remarkably powerful bibliographic tools in *L'Année Philologique*, *The Philosopher's Index*, and the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*; but there is a great deal to be done in order to fill out and fully ground this new approach to Plato.

II. The Dialogical Mode and the Traditional Mode.

Briefly stated, the traditional mode of interpretation is doctrine-oriented (or dogmatic), non-contextual, and non-literary (or non-dramatic); the dialogical mode is literary (or dramatic), context-oriented, and primarily non-doctrinal. These three elements are related, but essentially independent; and because the commitments of the traditional mode *are* traditional the differences I am pointing to can be difficult to see. Let me clarify what I mean by the terms.

By 'doctrine-oriented' or 'dogmatic', as already suggested, I mean interpretation that is focussed on, primarily interested in discovering doctrines, i.e., settled teachings, expressed or

¹ *Plato's Idea of Poetical Inspiration* (Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum. Societas Scientiarum Fennica. Vol. 44, No. 2, 1969), *Interpreting Plato* (Stockholm Studies in the History of Literature, 17. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), and *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato: An Outline and Some Observations*. Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, 52 (1974). Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1974). These three monographs are collected with Tigerstedt's, "Furor Poeticus: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato," [*JHI* 31 (1970), 163-78] in *Tigerstedt on Plato*, ed. Gerald A. Press (in preparation). For a critical appreciation of some of Tigerstedt's work, see Alan C. Bowen, "On Interpreting Plato," pp. 34-48 in Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed., *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1988). On the history of Plato studies, see also, F. Novotny, *The Posthumous Life of Plato* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977).

² The principal sources are: Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, "Platonic Scholarship: 1945-1955" *CW* (1957), 173-82, 185-96, 197-201, 209-11. E. M. Manasse, "Bücher über Platon. I. Werke in deutscher Sprache." *Philosophische Rundschau* (Tübingen) Sonderheft 1 (1957). "II. Werke in englischer Sprache." *Phil Rundsch* Sonderheft 2 (1961). "III. Werke in französischer Sprache." *Phil Rundsch* Sonderheft 7 (1976). Harold Cherniss, "Plato: 1950-1957". *Lustrum* 4 (1959), 5-308 & 5 (1960), 321-648. Luc Brisson, "Platon: 1958-1975". *Lustrum* 20 (1977), 5-304; L. Brisson and H. Ioannidi, "Platon: 1975-1980," *Lustrum* 25 (1983), 11-294; Brisson and Ioannidi, "Platon: 1980-1985," *Lustrum* 30 (1988), 11-285. Richard D. McKirahan, *Plato and Socrates. A Comprehensive Bibliography (1958-1973)* (New York: Garland, 1978).

expressible in univocal propositions, supported by probative arguments, and cohering, at least prospectively, into a doctrinal system, whether or not those doctrines are supposed to have changed. The point is the focus on doctrines. Most of the well-known modern interpretations of Plato are doctrinal in this sense,³ guided from the outset by the assumption that, since Plato is a philosopher, he must have doctrines. Thus, although they may disagree widely as to exactly what Plato's doctrines are, each presents us with such doctrines. Dialogical interpretation is primarily non-doctrinal; that is, it is not focussed on them, does not presuppose that in the dialogues Plato solely or primarily communicates or teaches us doctrines. This is an issue on which substantial diversity remains within the dialogical movement. Some scholars use literary and contextual evidence to discover definite doctrines in the dialogues,² while others find less rigorous 'visions',³ and others do not find any doctrines or doctrinal system in the dialogues at all.⁴

The contrast between 'non-contextual' and 'contextual' concerns the extent to which an interpreter studies and uses historical, political, and cultural context in interpreting the dialogues. Traditional philosophic interpretation is often transhistorical; that is, it takes the issues under discussion to be the essence of the dialogue and takes these issues in a generalized sense so that

³ E.g., Zeller, Ritter, Robin, Burnet, Taylor, Shorey, Crombie, Cornford.

² E.g., Mitchell H. Miller, Jr., in *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1980) and *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Kenneth Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), and Ronald M. Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge: A Commentary on Plato's Theaetetus* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1992). This is generally true also of 'Straussian' interpreters (see n. 54 *infra*) and the 'Tubingen school' (see n. 46 *infra*).

³ E.g., Thesleff, "Looking for Clues: An Interpretation of Some Literary Aspects of Plato's 'Two-Level Model'", pp. 17-45 in *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. G. Press (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993) and my "Knowledge as Vision in Plato's Dialogues," *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* (forthcoming).

⁴ E.g., Stefanini, *Platone* (Padova: CEDAM, 1932-1935; 2nd edn., Padova: CEDAM, 1949), Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato*, and Tejera, *Plato's Dialogues One By One* (New York: Irvington, 1984).

they seem to be essentially perennial (transhistorical), and therefore makes little or no use of contextual matters, perhaps on the view that such things are accidental or peripheral; so also if chronology is considered relevant.⁵ Dialogical interpreters are contextual in the sense that they take these matters as important or decisive in determining what Plato is up to in a given dialogue or a given dialogical moment.⁶

The terms 'dramatic' and 'literary', which characterize dialogical approaches to Plato separately or together, are to be distinguished.⁷ Word-choice, grammar, syntax, style, idiom, irony, humor, metaphors, references, quotations, and allusions are objective literary characteristics of the dialogues; characters, setting, action and stage business, dramatic framing, the absence, presence, or multiplicity of narrative levels are similarly objective dramatic characteristics. Traditional interpretation is non-literary and non-dramatic in the sense that it takes these elements to be inessential, accidental, merely the form, however brilliant, in which

⁵ Although it is well-known that many of Plato's *dramatis personae* were historical, traditional interpreters rarely consider their biographies relevant to interpreting the dialogues in which they appear, and failure to follow up literary and historical allusions or to consider what is known about the real-life stories of characters other than Socrates and Alcibiades is common. See the abundant evidence and critical comments in Holger Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, 70; Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1982). See also Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 10, 35-8.

⁶ See, e.g., Haden, pp. XXX-XXX. Admittedly Plato may manipulate history for artistic or other purposes, but such cases seem possible to trace and make relevant to interpretation. For an exemplary study, see Mary Whitlock Blundell, "Character and Meaning in Plato's *Hippias Minor*," pp. 131-72 in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, ed. James C. Klagge and Nicholas D. Smith (OSAP, Suppl. Vol.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁷ Harry Berger, Jr., "Levels of Discourse in Plato's Dialogues," pp. 75-100 in Anthony J. Cascardi, ed., *Literature and the Question of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

Plato has cast the essential philosophic (i.e., doctrinal) content.⁸ The dialogical mode takes these matters to be precisely essential.

Thus, traditional interpretations are mainly or largely interested in Plato's doctrines and they discover them in the dialogues by looking only at the arguments presented, not at the historical context or at literary and dramatic characteristics. The dialogical approach, conversely, begins with context and with these literary and dramatic elements and works from them to an interpretation of a dialogue that does not necessarily find a doctrine to be attributed to Plato or Socrates.

The crucial insight that underpins the dialogical approach - articulated directly or indirectly by virtually every contributor to this volume - stated generally, is that form and content are not separable for interpretive purposes. More specifically, formal (i.e., literary and dramatic) characteristics are in a strict sense essential to the content or meaning of Plato's dialogues, and, so far from being separable from their philosophic content, actually determine it. Although the aim of the dialogical mode is to overcome the traditional distinction between form and content, I am here using the term 'formal' broadly, to include linguistic or philological, literary, and dramatic elements; and I am using 'content' to indicate the traditionally distinguished doctrines and arguments, which are traditionally taken to be identical with what philosophy is.

The view of Plato that has been emerging since the early nineteenth century, on the contrary, tries to see the philosophical and the literary aspects of the dialogues as united, without giving undue precedence to either of them. The doctrines and arguments found in the dialogues

⁸ A classic example is Cornford's version of the *Republic*, which excises the interlocutors' replies. For the contrary point in general, see Michael C. Stokes, *Plato's Socratic Conversations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), and for detailed evidence that Plato uses seemingly equivalent Greek expressions in systematically different ways, see Seth Benardete, "The Right, the True, and the Beautiful," *Glotta* 41 (1963), 54-62 and "XPH and DEI in Plato and others," *Glotta* 43 (1965), 285-98.

are interpreted as those of particular literary characters, not Plato or Socrates in some simple, straightforward sense. The settings, characters, speeches, and plots embody or enact the philosophy that Plato is understood to be presenting.⁹

Hence, the dialogical turn is not the replacement of an older interpretation of what Plato's philosophy, or Platonism, is by a new and different one, so much as it is the replacement of a number of interrelated commitments, orientations, and assumptions of earlier Plato study - some dating back to antiquity, others developing later - that have preformed and determined the shape and content of diverse specific interpretations. What the new Plato studies share is not, at least so far, specific interpretations of dialogues or of Plato's philosophy as a whole, but rather assumptions, commitments, and orientations toward the process of interpreting them. It is a different *mode* of interpretation.

One could state the disagreement between the traditional mode and the dialogical mode in terms of two issues. First, concerning doctrines and arguments expressed in the dialogues, to whom are they to be imputed: the historical Socrates, to Plato, or to the literary characters who actually assert them? And how are they to be interpreted: as attempts at timeless, universal, 'philosophic' arguments? or as the speeches and 'actions' of literary characters? Second, concerning the objective literary characteristics of the dialogues (language, character, setting, allusion, irony, myth, etc.): are they to be taken as extrinsic, inessential to Plato's philosophic enterprise? Or are they to be taken as intrinsic, essential to it?

To sum up, the dialogical turn in Plato studies reflects the increasing recognition that the dialogues are a unique blend of philosophy *and* literature. This is not to say that two essentially different things, philosophy and literature, have been stuck together, but rather that things which are elsewhere two are here (as perhaps nowhere else among the monuments of Western culture)

⁹ See, esp., Griswold, pp. XXX-XXX, Tejera, pp. XXX-XXX, and Thayer, pp. XXX-XXX *infra*, and my "Plato's Dialogues as Enactments," in Francisco Gonzalez, ed., *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

one. Plato's dialogues are *sui generis* and they require for this reason a special mode of interpretation that combines what Pascal calls *l'esprit géométrique* and *l'esprit de finesse*.

When one looks at the dialogues without the traditional assumptions about the nature of philosophy, doctrine, and argument, it is plain that the dialogues are elaborately and carefully crafted as literature and that Plato has carefully maintained his anonymity. So, the literary characteristics are to be taken as essential, doctrines and arguments are to be imputed to the well-defined literary characters, and not taken as Plato's attempts at timeless, universal proofs. The general picture that emerges, then, is this: the salient characteristics of the dialogues are their literary qualities along with the philosophic doctrines and arguments contained in them. But, more specifically, literarily they present a world dominated by the figure of Socrates, who both is and is not the historical Socrates, who is interrogative (not assertive), ironic (distanced, self-effaced), and aporetic (troubled, doubtful).

III. Plato Interpretation from the Academy to the Nineteenth Century.

But, a critical reader may ask, if this is what the dialogues really are like, why should the tradition of interpretation for so many centuries run the other way? If Plato *really* doesn't intend to assert doctrines and really *does* intend us to read them subtly and dramatically, why did it take almost twenty-five centuries for scholars to figure this out? And how has the dialogical mode developed? These developments can only be sketched here and a great deal of detailed scholarship remains before the picture will become clear and definite.

It is often assumed that we know, more or less, when and how the dialogues were originally produced and in what form they were originally published. Actually, the questions are

all controverted.¹⁰ The dialogues during Plato's lifetime will have remained largely under his control, but there is evidence that they were undergoing revision even then and many questions of authenticity or semi-authenticity are still open.¹¹ Plato was a writer, and like any writer his habits may have changed. What exactly happened is open to much discussion. Similarly doubts remain about the Academy: what were its actual functions? Who and how many were the students? And what happened with respect to the dialogues? Were they performed? If so, how, by whom, and for whom? Were they published? If so, in what form and for whom? Were they written or intended as exercise books? Did they function as exemplars of philosophical writing as the writings of Gorgias and Isocrates seem to have been intended?¹² Philosophic protreptics (à la Tübingen)?¹³ Advertisements (à la Arieti)?¹⁴ All of this matters for establishing reliably what Plato himself thought he was doing, and on all of it we should not yet take firm positions.

However, to consider the dialogues in this time frame - that is to say, before and without any accretions of traditional interpretation - suggests that he did not have and/or was not in the dialogues trying to communicate a doctrinal system. The reasoning for this is clear and simple. Plato was an excellent writer; the expository prose treatise form was already in use by others; he

¹⁰ For salutary reminders of how slim and shaky our evidence is and how little we can say we know with certainty, see Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, *The Son of Apollo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), esp. Ch. 1 and Harold Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945; repr. New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), and Gilbert Ryle, *Plato's Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), esp. Ch. 2.

¹¹ H. Thesleff (1982), *Studies in the Styles of Plato* (Acta Philosophica Fennica, 1967), and "Colloquial Style and Its Use in Plato's Later Works," *Arctos* 7 (1972), 219-27.

¹² On the sophists' pedagogy, see G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). Also Werner Jaeger, *Paideia* 1 (NY, 1945), Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1968), and Guthrie, *HGP* 3.

¹³ See Kurt Gaiser, *Protreptik und Paränese bei Platon. Untersuchungen zur Form des platonischen Dialogs* (Stuttgart: Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, 1959). On the Tübingen school more generally, see p. 46 *infra*.

¹⁴ James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato* (Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991), 59 and *passim*.

could have chosen it, but did not. Therefore, he chose to write dialogues. In the dialogues as we have them, Plato has gone to great pains to remain anonymous,¹⁵ that is to assert no position or doctrine himself. To begin with, many of the dialogues end without a clear or definite answer to the question primarily discussed. The character Socrates cannot simply be Plato's mouthpiece, both because he does not always lead the conversations¹⁶ and because of the inconsistencies and contradictions between positions he takes in various dialogues.¹⁷ Moreover, many of the dialogues end without a clear or definite answer to the question primarily discussed. Thus, apart from an interpretive presupposition to the contrary, the dialogues do not seem to assert any doctrines or doctrinal system, whether Plato's or any other.

If it is true, as I am suggesting, that Plato was trying not to be a doctrinal philosopher in his writings, it is nevertheless also true that the intellectual currents of his own time militated against it. And two crucial developments of the next generation, that of Speusippus and Aristotle, have largely determined Plato interpretation from then until now. First, after Plato's death control of the Academy and of the texts passed to Speusippus (347-336), Xenocrates (339-314), and Polemo (314-269). Along with Philip of Opus and Crantor (330-270), these men shared the doctrinal orientation characteristic of Pythagoreans and other philosophic schools of

¹⁵ On Platonic anonymity, see Phillip Merlan, "Form & Content in Plato's Philosophy," *JHI* 8 (1947), 406-30; Ludwig Edelstein, "Platonic Anonymity," *AJPhilol* 83 (1962), 1-22; Paul Plass, "Philosophic Anonymity and Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *AJPhilol* 85 (1964) 254-78 and "'Play' and Philosophic Detachment in Plato," *TAPA* 98 (1967), 343-64; Tigerstedt (1977), who also points out, as does Griswold, pp. XXX-XXX, how Plato uses irony, both that of Socrates in the dialogues and his own in the *construction* of them to mask himself. See now L. A. Kosman, "Silence and Imitation in the Platonic Dialogues," pp. 73-92 in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, ed. Klagge and Smith.

¹⁶ E.g., in the *Sophist*, *Politicus*, *Timaeus*, and *Laws*.

¹⁷ A clear and recent example of what might be called the "mouthpiece fallacy" is Julia Annas: "After all, Plato does put forward his views in the mouth of Socrates" (*An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981. P. 9.) For a critique of it, see Harry Berger, Jr., "Levels of Discourse in Plato's Dialogues," pp. 75-100 in Anthony J. Cascardi, ed., *Literature and the Question of Philosophy* (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

the period.¹⁸ And - this is the important point - it was these dogmatic or Pythagorean Platonists who came into control of the dialogues and their interpretation. Thus the reading of the dialogues as doctrinal begins in the Academy itself, with Plato's successors.

The second crucial event of the period is the development, in Aristotle's school, the Lyceum, of a new kind of writing about philosophy, which has come to be known as doxography.¹⁹ For our purposes, there are two important facts about the doxographies, from Theophrastus through Diogenes Laertius and later. First, as the name indicates, they are flatly doctrinal, brief recapitulations of the "opinions" of each philosopher reorganized by the doxographer according to the official divisions, Physics, Ethics, and Logic, and according to certain historical "successions". Everyone included, of course, has doctrines; so too Plato. And, in fact, the trend prevailed in all the philosophic schools, including Aristotle's, to state doctrines within the framework of philosophic systems. Second, doxography became the conventional

¹⁸ See Zeller, *Plato and the Older Academy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), 559-81, and Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy [HGP]*, Vol. 5, pp. 457-92 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). Although Philip Merlan argues that Platonism is essentially identical with Neoplatonism, bibliography on the neoplatonic doctrinal character of the thought of Plato's successors will be found in his *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (2nd edn., The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960), 8ff.

¹⁹ Hermann Diels, *Doxographi Graeci [DG]* with its long, detailed "Introduction", remains the basic source. Diels' view has been powerfully attacked by Jaap Mansfeld; see, *Studies in the Historiography of Greek Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990) and *Heresiography in Context* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), esp. Ch. 1, "Diels' Error."

wisdom for the rest of antiquity and has continued to dominate visions of the history of ancient philosophy down to the present time.²⁰

Thus both in the Academy and in the wider philosophical world addressed by the doxographies, Plato's dialogues were being read as if they were doctrinal; and there is no indication that anyone was taking their literary or dramatic characteristics into consideration as essential determinants of the philosophic meaning. It is even doubtful whether the lost dialogues of Aristotle or the other Academics had such qualities to any great extent.²¹ It was already settled that the doctrines and the arguments were the essence and point; the *prima facie* Socratic aspect of many dialogues, their ironic, interrogative, and aporetic character, had already completely disappeared from view.

The New Academy of Arcesilaos (315-241) and Carneades (214-129), however, presents a new development in the history of Plato interpretation that is interesting for two reasons. First,

²⁰ A major attack was mounted on the reliability of the doxographical tradition by Cherniss [*Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935) and *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1944)] showing that Aristotle systematically misrepresented the views of his predecessors in support of his own views. John B. McDiarmid ["Theophrastus on the Presocratic Causes," *HSCP* 61 (1953), 85-156] showed that Aristotle's distorted view was the foundation of Theophrastus' doxography, and Diels, *DG* shows that the entire doxographical tradition rests on Theophrastus. The obvious inference, noted but rejected by Kahn [*Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmogony* (New York, 1960), 17-24] and Kerferd ["Recent Work on Presocratic Philosophy," *APQ* 2 (1965), 130], is that our conventional picture of early Greek philosophy, deriving as it does from the doxographers, is essentially Aristotelian polemic; however, few scholars have been willing to accept that conclusion. Guthrie (*HGP*, 1.42; cf. *JHS* 77 [1957], 35-41) probably spoke for an entire generation of scholars unwilling to rethink their whole paradigm, when he responded, not to Cherniss' two volumes of detailed, item-by-item analysis, but to McDiarmid's extension, that Aristotle's untrustworthiness "has sometimes been immensely exaggerated. . . . To sum up, the amount of extant writing either from Aristotle's own pen or taken down by his pupils from his teaching is sufficient . . . to guarantee the soundness of his judgement in general". Havelock, *Preface to Plato* is one of the few to have faced the consequences of Cherniss' arguments, though his own have not met with wide acceptance. For an attempt to escape from Aristotle's influence, see Antonio Capizzi, *La Reppublica Cosmica* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1982), English tr., *The Cosmic Republic: Notes for a Non-Peripatetic History of the Birth of Philosophy in Greece* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1991). And for a more balanced judgement of the nature and causes of Aristotle's criticisms, especially as they appear in the *Peri Ideon*, see Gail Fine, Aristotle's Criticisms of Plato," pp. 13-41 in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, ed. Klagge and Smith.

²¹ Notwithstanding Cicero's praise for the beauty of Aristotle's style; e.g., *De or* 1.49 3.67, 141.

because of its recognition of the Socratic, aporetic element in Plato's thought; and, second, because it initiates a continuing minor stream in Plato interpretation that leads from them to Cicero,²² Augustine,²³ the Renaissance Humanists and beyond.²⁴ It was skeptical, rather than dogmatic, but doctrinal nevertheless - only they denied that Plato had or was trying to communicate settled doctrines. And, although they focus on the non-dogmatic, non-assertive character of the dialogues, they no more than their predecessors, seem to have been interested in the literary aspects of the dialogues.²⁵

With the exception of Augustine's *contra Academicos*, then, the Plato interpretation that passed from the ancient world into the European middle ages was Neoplatonism, an eclectic metaphysical and religious system constructed by Plotinus, later enlarged with elements from Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, etc. and Neo-Pythagorean texts, as well as doctrines associated strictly with Plato.²⁶ Although some sensitivity to the dialogues as literary is attested on the part of some Neoplatonists,²⁷ the allegorical interpretations that it underpinned were wholly doctrinal

²² The *Academica* is primarily concerned with epistemology, with Cicero defending the Middle Academic probabilism of Carneades.

²³ The *Contra academicos*, which opposes the skeptical academic position, nevertheless recorded that position in a form that made it available to medieval European Christians on account of Augustine's status as authority.

²⁴ The skeptical interpretation is reiterated in Stefanini's "constructive scepticism" (*Platone*, Vol. 1, pp. xxxii-xxxiv; cf. Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato*, 106f.). For the following sketch of the history of Plato interpretation I rely heavily on the work of E. N. Tigerstedt; see n. 1 *supra*.

²⁵ For the ancient recognition of Plato's literary art, see F. Walsdorff, *Die antiken Urteile über Platons Stil*, *Klassische-philologische Studien*, 1 (Bonn: Scheur, 1927).

²⁶ Tigerstedt, *Decline and Fall*, 7. For a brief survey, see, A. H. Armstrong, *Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (Littlefield Adams), 175-96. Despite Merlan's argument that Platonism and Neoplatonism are essentially identical, since they share six doctrines (*From Platonism to Neoplatonism*, p. 1, n.), the surveys in Armstrong or Zeller (*Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), 311-23 show their essential difference.

²⁷ See, e.g., *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, ed. and trans. L. G. Westerink (Amsterdam 1962), 1.20-46, 15.2-20, 16.15-17 and *Olympiodorus: Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. and trans. L. G. Westerink (Amsterdam 1956), 2.29-31 and 156-162.

and systematic, lacking the Socratic, aporetic element or any flavor of the New Academy. Indeed, during most of the Middle Ages only the *Timaeus* was known and Plato continued to be identified with Neoplatonism until there was more direct knowledge of Plato's works.

Renaissance Platonism was still, essentially, Neoplatonism, but the revival of the New Academy brought to light again the Socratic and aporetic Plato of the dialogues, and thinkers such as Bruni, Vives, Melanchthon, Nizolio, and Montaigne see Plato as a doubter rather than a dogmatist.²⁸ But scepticism was too much for others, such as Ioannes Serranus and Henri Estienne, who found a third alternative to the previous two - Plato as either Neoplatonist or Skeptic - the view that Plato has a doctrine, but not the Neoplatonic one and a doctrine to be derived from the texts alone. Thus the revival of the New Academy liberated Plato from the Neoplatonic systematization, even though it took two more centuries before seventeenth-century historians of philosophy, such as George Horn, Thomas Stanley, and J. G. Voss, began the push to know what Plato himself thought and said and scholarship began to discover differences between Plotinus and Plato.²⁹ By the eighteenth century, the identification of Plato and Neoplatonism was moribund, though few would see Plato as skeptical. And Kantians (later followed by Hegelians such as Zeller) are able to find a Platonic as distinguished from a Neoplatonic or Plotinian doctrine. Once again the aporetic or Socratic element disappears from view; and few interpreters have considered the literary character of the dialogues as important for understanding them philosophically.

²⁸ Tigerstedt, *Decline and Fall*, 31-38. For Renaissance Scepticism in general, see Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Vangorcum, 1960). and Charles Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A study of the influence of the *Academica* in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972). And see already Paul Shorey, *Platonism Ancient and Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), pp. 9-10. Despite the works mentioned here and the rest of the scholarship from Zeller on, Julia Annas ("Plato the Sceptic," pp. 43-72 in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, ed. Klagge and Smith) finds the sceptical interpretation in need of explanation.

²⁹ Tigerstedt, *Decline and Fall*, 49-63.

IV. Growth of the Dialogical Mode.

As indicated earlier, the essential elements of the dialogical turn are emphasis on literary and dramatic characteristics of the dialogues, attention to context, and less emphasis than has traditionally been placed on the doctrinal orientation. Given the earlier developments, the decisive figure for the transformation of modern Plato studies is Friedrich Schleiermacher.³⁰ He is important, however, not for his idea of the preexistent unity of Plato's system that is only slowly unfolded in the dialogues, but rather because it was he who first observed in his Introductions that the situations and characters in the dialogues are very specific and took the position that, because of this, arguments must be interpreted in their specific context. Arguing against the traditional approach of stripping away the literary form in order to analyze the philosophical subject matter, Schleiermacher writes that these³¹

spectators of the analysis [will] fail altogether to attain to a knowledge of the philosophy of Plato, for in that, if in anything, form and subject are inseparable, and no proposition is to be rightly understood, except in its own place, and with the combinations and limitations which Plato has assigned to it.

The path from Schleiermacher's recognition of the decisiveness of literary and contextual factors to the dialogical mode that is emerging today, has involved many contributions, both those essentially critical of prevailing interpretive practices and those contributing to the construction of a new mode of interpretation

³⁰ As has been recognized recently by Griswold (1988), 3, n. 6 and Yvon Lafrance, "Autour de Platon; continentaux et analystes," *Dionysius* 3 (1979), 17-37. The continuations of Schleiermacher's approach are sketched in Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 3-9, and Arthur A. Krentz, "Dramatic Form and Philosophical Content in Plato's Dialogues," *Phil & Lit* 7 (1983), 32-3.

³¹ *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, tr. by William Dobson (Cambridge & London 1836), p. 14. The "General Introduction" (1-47) states his overall position in opposition to the then-prevailing mode, which he refers to as 'analytic'; the rest of the volume contains his introductions to individual dialogues, in which this general view is refracted.

On the critical side, Sprague's work on fallacy showed that Plato was, on at least some occasions, using arguments for purposes other than to establish doctrines.³² Tigerstedt's work, which is just now becoming well-known, sets contemporary Plato interpretation in its historical context, enabling scholars to overcome the hegemony of the tradition, to become more self-aware and self-critical.³³ Finally, the work of Thesleff has undermined the developmental view by showing that stylometry does not produce unequivocal results and that the order of composition, on which the developmental hypothesis essential rests, cannot be known.³⁴

On the constructive side, although he remained committed to a doctrinal view of Plato, Shorey's work served both as a corrective to the extreme developmental position and as an exemplar of attentiveness to literary detail and nuance in the analysis of individual dialogues.³⁵ More important, perhaps, is the attempt to find a way of thinking about the dialogues and Plato's philosophy that is not or not simply a matter of doctrines and arguments.

In the United States, Frederick J. E. Woodbridge inaugurated a way of reading the dialogues that emphasized their dramatic and literary qualities, looking for "themes" rather than

³² Rosamond Kent Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy* (London, 1962). See also, Maurice C. Cohen, "The Aporias in Plato's Early Dialogues," *JHI* 23 (1962), 163-74.

³³ Esp. *Decline and Fall* and *Interpreting Plato*, see n. 17 *supra*.

³⁴ Holger Thesleff (1967) and (1982), n. 4 *supra*. Thesleff's critique is accepted and carried further now by Debra Nails, "Platonic Chronology Reconsidered," *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 3 (1992), 314-27, "Problems with Vlastos' Platonic Developmentalism," *Anc Phil* 13 (1993), 273-91, and "Plato's Middle Cluster," *Phoen* 48 (1994), 62-67.

³⁵ Paul Shorey, *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (Chicago: Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago, 1903) and *What Plato Said* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), see esp. the "Preface" and Ch. 2.

doctrines, while being, like Shorey, skeptical about the evidentiary basis of doctrinal orientation and of developmentalism.³⁶

In Europe at about the same time several important works appeared. Wilamowitz' literary and philological but highly subjective approach to Plato³⁷ was influential especially in German-speaking countries. Between 1928 and 1930, Friedländer's *Platon* appeared, a major monograph treating general aspects of the dialogues (vol. 1) and each of the dialogues individually (Vols. 2 - 3).³⁸ It is literarily sensitive and contextual and reads Plato in a rather existential way, but does not offer any doctrines or doctrinal system. In several subsequent editions and translations it quickly became and remains one of the half-dozen "standard works" on Plato since the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁹

Like Friedländer, in the 30's, René Schaerer argued explicitly but at greater length for an intimate relation between what Plato's philosophy is and the literary dialogue in which it is presented.⁴⁰ Not widely read in its own time, it has become more influential since a second edition appeared in 1968. This delayed influence is a trait that Schaerer may share with another

³⁶ *The Son of Apollo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929; repr. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). Among those who follow Woodbridge are, John Herman Randall, Jr., *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), Jerome Eckstein, *The Platonic Method: An Interpretation of the Meno* (New York: Greenwood, 1968), and Victorino Tejera, *Plato's Dialogues One by One: A Structural Interpretation* (New York: Irvington, 1984).

³⁷ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Platon: Sein Leben und seine Werke*, 2 vols (Berlin 1919).

³⁸ Paul Friedländer, *Platon* (Berlin 1928- 30; 2nd edn, Berlin 1954-57; 3rd edn, Berlin 1964-75). *Plato*. Tr. Hans Meyerhoff. Vol. I: An Introduction (London, 1958; 2nd edn 1969). Vol. II: The Dialogues, First Period (1964). Vol. III: The Dialogues, Second and Third Periods (1969).

³⁹ Along with Grote, *Plato and the other companions of Sokrates* (London 1865), Raeder, *Platons philosophische Entwicklung* (Leipzig 1905), Ritter, *Platon, sein Leben, seine Schriften, seine Lehre* (Munich 1910-1923), Taylor, *Plato: the Man and His Work* (London 1926) and Wilamowitz, n. 35 *supra*.

⁴⁰ René Schaerer, *La question platonicienne. Étude sur les rapports de la pensée et de l'expression dans les dialogues* (Neuchâtel, 1938; 2nd, expanded edn., Paris, 1969).

major study of the 30's, Stefanini's *Platone*.⁴¹ Stefanini identified the oscillation in Plato interpretation between the dogmatic and the sceptical poles and proposed, but scarcely worked out, a more satisfactory view he referred to as "constructive scepticism".⁴²

Beginning in the late 50's, and continuing to the present, the "Tübingen school" has paid close attention to the literary quality of the dialogues, while arguing an explicitly doctrinal interpretation of Plato's philosophy as "esoteric".⁴³ Plato's true doctrines, which are remarkably similar to those of the Neoplatonists and Christian Platonists, are expressed only very indirectly in the literary dialogues as we have them; the true, "unwritten" doctrines were transmitted to his disciples only orally. The arguments of the Tübingen scholars have been subjected to extensive

⁴¹ Luigi Stefanini, *Platone*. 2 vols. (Padova: CEDAM, 1932-1935; 2nd edn., Padova: CEDAM, 1949). The 2nd edn. has recently been reprinted (Padova: Istituto di Filosofia, 1991).

⁴² Stefanini 1.xxxii-xxxiv. Cf. Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato*, 106f.

⁴³ The 'school' was founded by Kurt Gaiser and Hans-Joachim Krämer; it has found some explicit adherents in France, England, and the U.S., but has become a major movement in Italy. For the basic ideas, e.g., Kurt Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre. Studien zur systematischen und geschichtlichen Begründung der Wissenschaften in der platonischen Schule* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1959) and "Plato's Enigmatic Lecture 'On the Good'," *Phronesis* 25 (1980), 5-37; H.-J. Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles. Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie* (Heidelberg: Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1959) and "Die platonische Akademie und das Problem einer systematischen Interpretation der Philosophie Platons," *Kant-Studien* 55 (1964), 69-101. As illustrations of international influence, see also, H.-J. Krämer, *Plato and the Foundation of Metaphysics*. Transl. by J. R. Catan. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); Domenico Pesce, *Il Platone di Tübinga* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1990); Giovanni Reale, *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone: Rilettura della metafisica dei grandi dialoghi alla luce delle "Dottrine non scritte"* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1987); Marie-Dominique Richard, *L'enseignement oral de Platon. Une nouvelle interpretation du platonisme* (Paris: Les Édition du Cerf, 1986). For a recent summary of the position, see W. Kullmann, "Platons Schriftkritik," *Hermes* 119 (1991), 1-21.

and detailed criticism by a number of major scholars,⁴⁴ and revisions in the position have been made.⁴⁵

Contextual considerations are essential to the dialogical mode, and most of the scholars and works mentioned in this section have brought matters of linguistic, historical, and cultural context to bear in their interpretations. No one, however, has so changed our understanding of the intellectual context in which Plato's dialogues were produced as has Eric Havelock, who presents Plato as the turning point in the transition from an oral-aural culture to the literate-pictorial one that is our own.⁴⁶ This fundamentally re-orientes our way of interpreting the dialogues, undermining traditional assumptions about their origin, publication, audience, and doctrinal content.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Criticisms by, among others, Kurt von Fritz ["Zur Frage der 'esoterischen' Philosophie Platons," *AGPh* 49 (1967), 255-68 and "The Philosophical Passage in the Seventh Letter and the Problem of Plato's 'Esoteric Philosophy'," pp. 408-47 in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. Anton and Kustas (Albany: SUNY Press, 1971)], Vlastos ["On Plato's Oral Doctrine: Rev. of Krämer's *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*," *Gnomon* 41 (1963), 641-55, reprinted in Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (2nd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 379-403], and Isnardi-Parente, "Per l'interpretazione dell'exkursus filosofico della VII epistula Platonica," *Parola del Passato* 19 (1964), 241-90. Tigerstedt's *Decline and Fall* is intended as an extended refutation. The most recent critiques are Luc Brisson, "Pré-supposés et conséquences d'une interprétation ésotériste de Platon," *Méthexis* 6 (1993), 11-35 and Franco Fronterotta, "Une énigme platonicienne: La question des doctrines non-écrites," *Les Études Anciennes* 11 (1993), 115-57.

⁴⁵ For example, by Krämer, "Retraktionen zum Problem des esoterischen Platon," *Museum Helveticum* 21 (1964), 137-67. It is perhaps significant that, Thomas Szlezák, who currently holds the chair formerly held by Gaiser at Tübingen, represents a more moderate position. See, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985) and *Come leggere Platone?* (Milan 1991)

⁴⁶ Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963; New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967), *Prologue to Greek Literacy* (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Press, 1971), *Origins of Western Literacy* (Toronto: Institute for Studies in Education, 1976), *The Literate Revolution and Its Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Cf. Kevin Robb, ed., *Language and Thought in Early Greek Thought* (La Salle, IL: Hegeler Institute, 1983), esp. pp. 207-27 for a critical assessment of Havelock's program by A. W. H. Adkins.

⁴⁷ See now, Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. Chs. 6 - 8.

On the traditional view, Plato's philosophy is to be sought in the logical structures, the arguments, of the dialogues. Dialogical interpreters have sought access to Plato's philosophy in alternative structures. Brumbaugh, perhaps developing insights of Woodbridge, has interpreted the dialogues as dramatic enactments of their philosophic doctrines.⁴⁸ Jonathan Ketchum has interpreted Plato's philosophy from dialogical structures based on the concepts of protrepsis and paraenesis being developed by the Tübingen School.⁴⁹ Tejera, unlike Brumbaugh, explicitly follows Woodbridge and invokes Buchler's distinction among modes of judgement, seeking structures in the enactments.⁵⁰ Thesleff has applied the architectural concept of pedimental structure to relate the literary structure and underlying philosophic content of the dialogues.⁵¹

The three essential elements of the dialogical mode - attention to literary and dramatic characteristics, contextualism, and a less doctrinal orientation - do not always co-incide; in fact, the emergence of the dialogical mode may be best described as the gradual realization that all three do belong together in a satisfactory interpretation of the dialogues. A significant example of this is the work of Leo Strauss and his students and followers, who attempt deep, detailed, and thorough analysis of the dialogues that integrates literary and contextual detail, while nevertheless finding doctrines and a doctrinal system (which, interestingly, coincides with

⁴⁸ Robert S. Brumbaugh, *Plato's Mathematical Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), *Plato on the One* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), and *Plato for the Modern Age* (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1967).

⁴⁹ Jonathan Ketchum, *The Structure of the Platonic Dialogue* (unpublished Ph.D. diss., SUNY Albany, 1981). Ketchum's approach is developed by Mitchell H. Miller, Jr., in *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1980) and *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁵⁰ Tejera, *Plato's Dialogues One by One* and *infra* pp. XXX-XXX. Jacob Klein (*A Commentary on Plato's Meno* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965]) discussed the idea of the dialogues as mimes but used it to discover their doctrines. Much more satisfactory is L. A. Kosman, n. 16 *supra*.

⁵¹ Thesleff (1967), esp. 33-5, 167 and "Looking for Clues: An Interpretation of Some Literary Aspects of Plato's 'Two-Level Model'", pp. 17-45 in *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. G. Press (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).

Strauss' notion of "classical political theory").⁵² However, Strauss' promotion of what he calls "logographic necessity" - an emphatic interpretation of something Socrates may have said unemphatically at *Phaedrus* 264 and an extension of Schleiermacher's insight about the specificity of characters and argument - has brought important attention to the comprehensive unity and specificity of each dialogue.⁵³

The foregoing is merely a sketch of the most significant contributions to the emergence of the dialogical mode. What I have been trying to suggest is the gradual convergence of the three essential elements indicated at the outset, a growing awareness on the part of scholars that these fit together into a unified conceptual framework without knowing or agreeing what that framework is. By the title of this volume, as well as in other essays, Tejera proposes that the framework be "dialogism", a notion he borrows from Bakhtin. Briefly, Bakhtin's literary theory contrasts monological and dialogical discourse, the former using a single style to articulate a

⁵² Leo Strauss, *The City and Man, What is Political Philosophy?, and other studies*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959, *The Argument and Action of Plato's Laws*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975. Among Strauss' most productive and influential students are Stanley Rosen [*Plato's Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) and *Plato's Sophist: The Drama of Original and Image* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983)] and Seth Benardete [*The Being of the Beautiful: Plato's Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)]. Among their students are Ronna Burger [*The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of a Philosophic Art of Writing* (Mobile: University of Alabama Press, 1980)], Charles L. Griswold, Jr. [*Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), ed., *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1988)], and Drew Hyland, *The Virtue of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's Charmides* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981). For a critique of the Straussian approach as "dramatistic" rather than genuinely dramatic and doctrinally committed to Strauss' idea of "classical political philosophy", see Harry Berger, Jr., "Levels of Discourse in Plato's Dialogues," pp. 75-100 in Anthony J. Cascardi, ed., *Literature and the Question of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Strauss' interpretation of the *Rep*, more fully articulated and defended by Allan Bloom, has been carefully criticized by George Klosko ["The 'Straussian' Interpretation of Plato's *Republic*," *Hist Pol Th* 7 (1986), 274-93] for inattention to the scholarly literature, failure to appreciate the problems in appealing to such disputed works as the *Rivals*, *Minos*, and *Ep. 2*, over-reliance on a dubious interpretation of a few passages in *Phdr* and *Ep. 7*, and recurrent fallacies of *secundum quid* in the argumentation.

⁵³ See *The City and Man*, pp. 60: "One cannot take seriously enough the law of logographic necessity. Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs." Strauss and his followers share with the Tübingen school a belief in the primacy of the *Phaedrus* perhaps derived from Schleiermacher, but nowhere adequately defended.

single unified worldview, the latter using many styles or voices that express many worldviews that are not unified by the author into an overall judgement or interpretation.⁵⁴

The traditional form of philosophic expression in the Western tradition, the expository prose treatise, or even the didactic poetry of Lucretius or the catechetical dialogues of Augustine, is from the literary point of view monological in this sense; which is to say, that it is doctrinal from the philosophic point of view. Plato's dialogues are neither; and when one applies Bakhtin's notion to Plato it immediately helps to resolve many of the puzzles and clarify the refractory elements with which a non-literary and doctrinal reading is confronted.

It cannot be said that the various scholars whom I have here included do or would accept the dialogical label either in Bakhtin's sense or as I have defined it here in relation to Plato interpretation; and it remains to be seen whether the term will become widely accepted. In any case, though, there is a potential confusion to be avoided with contemporary discussions of "dialogical rationality".

Literary theories and terminologies, including Bakhtin's notion of dialogic discourse, are part of contemporary debates about the nature of rationality. Reference is often made in these debates to Plato and the dialogues as the origin or exemplar of a "dialogical rationality" that is proposed as the (transhistorically) correct view.⁵⁵ Whether these claims are true or not, the

⁵⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), *Speech Genres and other late essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), and see David Lodge, "After Bakhtin," pp. 89-102 in Nigel Fabb et al., eds., *The linguistics of writing: Arguments between language and literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Methuen, 1987).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, tr. P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

important consideration is that they are not primarily interested in the interpretation of Plato's philosophy, but rather in solving contemporary philosophical problems.⁵⁶

The primary interest of the dialogical mode properly so called, however, is to interpret the dialogues in a way that is true to the nature and content of the dialogues themselves. It is determined by what I have called the objective literary characteristics and the ascertainable contexts of the dialogues in conjunction with seemingly familiar philosophical questions and arguments.

V. Conclusions.

As I have already suggested, the dialogical mode is a shift in orientation, away from the unilateral philosophic interest in Plato's doctrines toward a multidisciplinary approach. There can be said to be growing agreement about interpretive strategies and assumptions; but there is not agreement about specific results or specific interpretations of individual dialogues. If we can speak of a dialogical movement in Plato interpretation, that is to say, it is interdisciplinary and pluralistic;⁵⁷ and, as I have indicated, it is a movement characterized by considerable differences in particular interpretive lines.

More importantly, however, the dialogical turn opens up a new agenda for major, co-operative work that needs to be done: on the works in their *original* situation, the early history

⁵⁶ For example, David Roochnik's recent book, *The Tragedy of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 1990), whose subtitle, *Toward a Platonic Conception of Logos*, bespeaks this kind of orientation toward contemporary issues. In this respect, the work of Roochnik and other scholars of a more continental orientation, such as John Sallis and Drew Hyland, coincides with the more explicitly articulated aim of analytical interpreters to make use of Plato's dialogues for the elucidation and solution of contemporary philosophical problems.

⁵⁷ Holger Thesleff has remarked "the necessity of having to cope with a flourishing plurality of approaches to an author as multidimensional as Plato is" (Press, ed., 1993, 17).

of interpretation, collecting and organizing the literary data (e.g., jokes and allusions), establishing standards, principles, and rules for assessing our interpretations and others', interpreting all the individual dialogues on the basis of large-scale awareness of the literary and contextual data that determines philosophic meanings, and finally looking at the corpus as a literary-philosophic whole to see what this new mode of interpretation can tell us about Plato's philosophy if it is true, as we think, that it is non-dogmatic.

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