THE IDEA(S) OF ORDER OF PLATONIC DIALOGUES AND THEIR HERMENEUTIC CONSEQUENCES

CAROL POSTER

> ... The song and water were not medleyed sound
> Even if what she sang was what she heard,
> Since what she sang was uttered word by word ...
> Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
> The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,
> In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.
>
> (Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West")

DESPITE THE IMPORTANCE of order (*taxis*) in the Platonic dialogues, scholars who discuss Plato each tend to favour a single method of ordering the Platonic dialogues rather than taking into account the variety of principles according to which the dialogues might be ordered. There is, however, a significant potential for hermeneutic circularity in making interpretive claims based on any one type of ordering of the dialogues, and even more so in proceeding from a specific arrangement within any given typology of ordering. Any idea of ordering the dialogues is as much a product as a starting point of an interpretive scheme. In this essay, I will adumbrate a typology of four distinct ways of ordering Platonic dialogues, give examples of each of those four types of orders and their hermeneutic deployment, and finally suggest that a synthetic approach to these four types of order can be used to adjudicate among competing interpretations of the dialogues. Rather than advocate any one particular order or interpretation of the Platonic dialogues, this article is intended as a methodological prolegomenon to Platonic hermeneutics.

Discussions of the order of arguments within specific dialogues or explications of the theory of the order of a *logos* propounded by Socrates in *Phaedrus* abound,[1] but discussion of the order of the dialogues is usually limited to chronological or genetic issues,[2] rather than metaphysical or paideutic ones. In fact, despite

[1] For the manner in which Plato's theory of the structure of a *logos* is reflected in the structure of his dialogues, see Sallis 1975: 12–19. For a reading of the *Phaedrus* as the defense of a reformed rhetoric, see Burger 1980: esp. 70–108. For an understanding of the structure of the *Phaedrus* as a reflection of Plato's theory of the structure of the soul, see Helmbold and Holt 1952. For a description of the dialogue form as intrinsic to the content of *Phaedrus*, see Griswold 1986: esp. 157–242. See also Ferrari 1987; White 1993: esp. 203–276; Anderson and Anderson 1971; Rowe 1986; Rossetti 1992; Erickson 1979. Additionally, Paul Plass, among several interesting comments on the development of the ideas in *Phaedrus*, notes that it "is held together by a movement of Plato's thought toward progressively greater insight into what is involved in persuasion" (1968: 37).

[2] For treatments of Platonic chronology as an end in itself, see Brandwood 1990 and Ledger 1989. For the historiography and hermeneutics of Platonic compositional chronology, see Tigerstedt 1977. The Owen-Cherniss debate is reprinted in Allen 1965; see also Ryle 1966.

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the generally genetic, as opposed to unitarian, consensus in Anglo-American Platonic scholarship[3] the tendency has been to isolate or decontextualize passages from multiple dialogues to determine "Plato's theory of X," as it were, rather than to look at the Platonic corpus as an ordered whole. Such radically diverse scholarly approaches as, for example, analytic or ordinary language philosophy, feminism(s), Bakhtinian dialogics, and deconstruction,[4] despite their radical theoretical differences, are similar in their practice of citing passages from multiple dialogues without explicitly theorizing the rhetorical and metaphysical implications of multiple orderings of Platonic dialogues. One major exception to this tendency is the school favouring dramatic reading of the dialogues (see below, 285–288).

Unlike modern scholars, however, ancient Platonic commentators were preoccupied with questions of the proper orders of Platonic dialogues and the pedagogical and hermeneutic consequences of those orders.[5] Although Howland (1991: 194–195) briefly summarizes some of the ancient commentators' notions of the various orderings of Platonic dialogues, he only does so to critique Platonic chronology; his deconstructive impetus is not followed by a reconstructive one. And yet, in the very ancient commentators he mentions, it is possible to find modes of ordering Platonic dialogues which might form viable alternatives to chronologies of composition.

The term "order" when applied to the Platonic dialogues is more precisely used in the plural than the singular; for there are multiple orders into which the dialogues may be placed, orders which, though distinct, are also in certain ways interdependent:

(1) chronology of composition: the order in which the dialogues were composed;
(2) dramatic chronology: the order of the dramatic dates when the dialogues were set;
(3) pedagogical order: the order in which we should teach or read the dialogues;
(4) theoretical or metaphysical order: ordering according to some notions of philosophical progression such as an ascent in the hierarchy of being or from elenchic to dogmatic method.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDERS

The order most frequently discussed in twentieth-century scholarship is the chronology of composition. This order is sometimes discussed by classicists or

[3] For unitarian views, see Shorey 1903 and Strauss 1983. The decentering of the author in postmodernist criticism has resulted in what might be described as agenetic reading: see, for example, Derrida 1972. Esoteric readings such as Krämer 1990 and Reale 1990 also tend to decenter developmental issues, as do dramatic readings: see Arieti 1991, 1995; Gonzalez 1995; Press 1995.

[4] For a Bakhtinian reading of Plato, see Harris 1988; for a Freudian/Lacanian one, see Whitson 1988; Pelletier 1990 has a strong analytic orientation; several feminist readings appear in Tuana 1994. For collections representing various self-conscious schools of Platonic interpretation, see Griswold 1988; Klagge and Smith 1992; Press 1993.

[5] See Mansfeld 1994: esp. 1–9, 58–107, 117–125.

philologists for its own sake (for example, Ledger 1989; Brandwood 1990), but more frequently as part of a "genetic" account of the development of Plato's thought. Stylometric analyses of the chronology of Platonic dialogues are often also used to support determinations of the authenticity as well as chronology of given dialogues, but despite claims to a scientific objectivity, stylometry must ground its analyses in assumptions which are themselves questionable.[6] In order to use stylometric analysis to calculate the relative dates of dialogues, the stylometrist must first assign absolute dates to a limited number of dialogues. The final results of any relative analysis of statistical clustering of stylistic features are only as good as the initial assumptions made by the statistician.

Assigning dates by stylistic features also assumes that Plato did not make substantial revisions to his dialogues several years after he originally composed them.[7] If Plato, for example, wrote his Eleatic dialogues early in his career, and then revised them towards the end of his life to eliminate hiatus, both the date of initial composition and the date(s) of revision would need to be taken into account in constructing a chronological scheme, and yet stylometric analysis might yield only the date of revision. Unfortunately, the degree to which Plato revised is not known. Diogenes Laertius' comments concerning the multiple versions of the *Republic* (*Vitae* 3.37–38) might be read as evidence that Plato was revising *Republic* as he was finishing *Laws* at the time of his death, but the passage does not specify when Euphorion and Panaetius claim that the versions of *Republic* were found, and in any case Diogenes is not an entirely reliable source. How much Plato may or may not have revised his work is unknown, and yet the results of stylometric analysis depend on (usually unstated) assumptions about Platonic revision or the lack thereof.

A final assumption on which stylometric analysis of Platonic chronology depends, as Mackenzie (1986: 150) points out, is that it is possible to find stylistic features which Plato did not deliberately and consciously vary. Ledger (1989: 103–104) comments that stylometric analysis of Lysias's speech in *Phaedrus* shows that it is more closely related to Lysias, Xenophon, or Isocrates than to other Platonic samples. From this one might deduce that Plato is an excellent mimic, or that Plato incorporated the actual words of other authors in his dialogues, or that Plato was capable of such statistically significant deliberate stylistic variations that stylometric analysis cannot necessarily be relied on to determine authenticity or chronology. For example, if Plato deliberately eliminated hiatus in dialogues on certain subject matters for certain audiences, but not in others, hiatus would be of little or no use in determining chronology. While sample selection can sometimes create consistent stylometric results, the very use of non-randomized samples raises the question of how the results of stylometric analysis are predetermined by sample selection.

[6] See Brandwood 1990 for a survey of stylometry.

[7] Much recent work in textual scholarship devoted to the theory of documentary vs. eclectic texts addresses precisely this problem of authorial and editorial revision: see McGann 1989 and 1992 for a critique of Tanselle's (1989) notion of a "work."

As Tigerstedt (1977) has argued, analyses of chronology and authenticity are rarely interpretively innocent. Two striking examples in the scholarly literature are the date of the *Parmenides* and the authenticity of *Epistle 7*. The Owen-Cherniss debate concerning the relative dating of *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* has significant implications for how we regard the position of the middle theory of the forms within the Platonic corpus. The debate about the authenticity and date of *Epistle 7* affects our understanding of the unwritten doctrines and the interpretive status of the Platonic dialogues with respect to Platonic philosophy.[8] When chronology of composition is invoked to support arguments concerning the nature of Platonic philosophy, there remains some doubt as to whether the chronology supports the interpretation or the interpretation supports the chronology.

A second type of ordering of Platonic dialogues occurs with respect to dramatic date. If we consider the Platonic corpus as a narrative, the dialogues can be placed in the order of the years in which they appear to be set, in so far as that dramatic date can be determined. This ordering can be quite productive for such projects as reconstructing the narrative of Socrates' life and philosophical development.[9] The philosophical implications of dramatic chronology have resulted in much interesting recent scholarship (for example, Arieti 1991), but dramatic ordering is not without significant difficulties. One problem with this approach is the possibility of Plato's leaving dates deliberately vague or creating impossible chronologies for dramatic purposes.[10] Another major problem in determining dramatic date is specific to such "frame" dialogues as *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, or *Theaetetus*: should the dramatic date used in ordering these dialogues be that of the one or more external frames or of the interior dialogue?

That compositional and dramatic chronology differ greatly is quite apparent. To use examples likely to provoke the least disagreement among most contemporary scholars, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito* are considered early dialogues with respect to Platonic composition and yet late dialogues with respect to the chronology of Socrates' life.[11] While it might appear that there are no method-

[8] For arguments supporting the authenticity of *Epistle 7*, see Morrow 1962; Brisson 1987; Ledger 1989; Poster 1993; Sayre 1995: xviii–xxiii. Edelstein (1966) presents the case against its authenticity.

[9] See, for example, Vlastos 1971 and 1991; Guthrie 1962–81. For sustained critiques of Vlastos's use of theories of Platonic development to recover uniquely Socratic philosophy, see Nails 1993 and Beversluis 1993.

[10] Guthrie (1962–81: 4.285) summarizes the problem of the dramatic dating of Plato's *Gorgias* as follows: "Conflicting historical allusions ... show that Plato was either indifferent to the dating of this conversation or that, as Cornford thought, his vagueness was deliberate." See also Dodds 1959 and Irwin 1979. *Menexenus* also has proven quite resistant to dating. For a summary of the problems in determining the dramatic date of the *Symposium*, see Nussbaum 1986: 168.

[11] While presuming any consensus in Platonic scholarship is quite a hazardous endeavour, Ledger's summary (1989: 87) and Brandwood's historiography of Platonic chronology (1990) display certain shared tendencies in terms of broad groupings of dialogues. Since my purpose is not to argue for any

ological problems inherent in arranging Platonic dialogues in different orders in response to different questions, these orders are not without hermeneutic causes or consequences. Two radically different conceptions of Platonic philosophy may follow from these two different orders.

If, for example, the *Parmenides* is considered in terms of the chronological orders assigned by most modern scholars, it belongs to the late middle or later group of Platonic dialogues.[12] This placement of the *Parmenides* within a compositional chronology of Platonic dialogues constructs a conventional genetic model of Platonic philosophical development,[13] beginning with elenchic or aporetic dialogues in which Socrates, as the main character, addresses questions of universals, definitions, and absolute moral values, followed by a middle group of dialogues which answers these questions with a theory of separated forms and recollection, and finally ends with a later group of dialogues in which Socrates no longer dominates, dialectical method is developed technically, and the forms and participation are subjected to a (possibly fatal) Eleatic critique in such dialogues as *Parmenides* and *Sophist*. If, however, the dialogues are read in order of dramatic date, a quite different philosophical narrative emerges. In the *Parmenides*, the young Socrates encounters the Eleatic critique of the forms, which perhaps in this context could be read as a devastating critique of a realist theory of universals. Dramatically, the encounter with Parmenides takes place within a few years of that with Protagoras, which would expose Socrates to the need to build a foundation for moral values. In the middle dialogues, a middle-aged Socrates responds to the Eleatic critique by developing theories of forms and recollection, and thus saving the phenomena from the Eleatic critique by elaboration of an ontological theory of universals with the Form of the Good not only providing a principle of metaphysical unity similar to the Parmenidean monad, but also serving as an absolute ground for moral values in response to Protagorean relativism. In the dramatically late "early" dialogues, the older Socrates, near death, reverts to the classic position of Socratic ignorance, which could be read, in the context of the dramatic narrative, as a renunciation of his earlier (found in the "middle" dialogues) systematic absolutism in favour of an almost existential moral certainty in face of ontological and epistemological uncertainty. This particular dramatic narrative has rather interesting historiographic implications, in so far as it would tend to confirm the claims of loyalty to Plato advanced by the sceptical academy. Rather than force us to posit a radical discontinuity between Plato and Hellenistic Platonism, as many interpretations of Plato do, placing the elenchic dialogues at the end of a dramatic order allows us to read the second and third academies as continuing the trajectory of Socrates' philosophical development as it evolves in

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specific chronological assumptions but to show the hermeneutuc consequences of multiple orders, I deliberately shall not address issues of the literal accuracy of any specific chronological schemes.

[12] Even Owen (1965) and Ryle (1966) place it no earlier than the middle group of dialogues.

[13] For typical examples of this "standard model," as it were, see Ross 1953 and Guthrie 1962–81: vols. 4–5.

the dramatic sequence of the dialogues, culminating in a Plato *scepticus* (see, for example, Tejera 1993 and Annas 1994).

Taking into account the narratological implications of the framing of several Platonic dialogues adds another layer of complexity to the question of dramatic date. *Theaetetus*, for example, opens with a conversation in which Eucleides describes to Terpsion a meeting between Eucleides and Socrates during which Socrates described to Eucleides a meeting at which Socrates, Theodorus, and Theaetetus were present, which Eucleides wrote down in a book which a slave reads aloud. The inner dialogue is set shortly before Socrates' death, when Theaetetus was still a young, but promising mathematician; the intermediate frame occurs between the inner dialogue and the death of Socrates; and the outer frame is set after Socrates' death, when Theaetetus, now a middle-aged man who has fulfilled his earlier promise, is being brought home, gravely injured, to Athens from an army camp at Corinth.

Framing raises several interpretive issues important for dramatic dating. Considering the dramatic date as that of the inner dialogue constructs *Theaetetus* as an elenchic dialogue, similar to *Lysis*, *Euthyphro*, or *Gorgias*, which raises issues left unresolved in an aporetic ending. Reading the outer frame as the actual dramatic date reinforces the sense of the efficacy of Socrates' educational methods by showing Theaetetus as a successful product of the combination of mathematical and ethical training practiced in the Platonic Academy. A sense of philosophical succession, of Socratic midwifery helping bring to birth philosophical offspring, is reinforced by the presence in the dialogue of three successive philosophical generations—the dead Socrates, the wounded middle-aged Theaetetus, and the young Terpsion. The bridge between generations is Eucleides' book, but not as the dead words which cannot defend themselves condemned in *Phaedrus* (276c) and *Theaetetus* itself, but as words being read in the living presence of their author, a situation which may echo how the Platonic dialogues themselves functioned within the educational paradigm of his Academy. Embedded within the Platonic dialogue framing Eucleides' book about a Socratic conversation is an even earlier book, that of Protagoras, which defends itself by the momentary apparition of Protagoras' head (Ford 1994) and by Socrates speaking in the voice of Protagoras (166a-168c). *Theaetetus* is not *sui generis*, however; similar frames surround such dialogues as *Phaedo* and *Symposium*.

Dramatically locating the framed dialogues according to outer frame or inner dialogue radically changes the narrative order of the dialogues. The inner dialogue of *Phaedo*, for example, is the last possible Socratic dialogue, for in it Socrates dies. If, however, we consider the frame of *Phaedo* as determining its dramatic date, *Crito*, being unframed, represents Socrates' last words, and *Phaedo* must be grouped as one of several dialogues set after Socrates' death. In fact, using the frames to date the dialogues dramatically would make unframed dialogues like *Euthyphro* and *Phaedrus* uniformly earlier than framed dialogues like *Symposium*, *Theaetetus*, and *Phaedo*. The different narrative movements created

by multiple possible dramatic orderings of Platonic dialogues construct vastly divergent philosophical stories.[14]

Dramatic order or interpretation is certainly not a solution to all the confusions of Platonic interpretation. As discussed above, dramatic dates cannot be readily or precisely assigned to all the dialogues, and the frame structures add additional layers of complexity to the problem of determining dramatic date. Even assuming it were possible to organize all the dialogues dramatically, that would still not yield some authoritative interpretation. We can assign accurate dramatic dates to Shakespeare's history plays, for example, and yet this in no way seems to have hindered the almost exponential proliferation of mutually contradictory readings of the plays, despite universal acknowledgment of their dramatic nature.

PAIDEUTIC AND METAPHYSICAL ORDERS

Chronology, however, whether dramatic or compositional, is not the only principle by which Plato's dialogues may be ordered. Both dramatic and compositional chronologies attempt to tie metaphysical truth to time. It is the case that for Christian theology truth becomes welded to temporality in the incarnation, and a significant task of early Church Fathers such as Eusebius was to forge bonds between the spiritual histories of Judeo-Christian scripture and the secular (temporal) histories of the Greco-Roman tradition (Kemp 1991: 1–34), but classical Greek metaphysics is often resolutely atemporal. Parmenides, for example, claims that all change, and perhaps time itself, is illusory. His truth exists in the realm of what Owen (1974) terms the timeless present of the analytic copula. Similarly, the Socratic character of Plato's *Phaedo* and *Meno* argues that things which change cannot be objects of true knowledge, thus placing truth outside time. In so far as one might interpret Platonic metaphysics as arguing for the atemporal or extratemporal nature of truth, viewing the dialogues in any temporal sequence whatsoever, dramatic or compositional, might be constructing an interpretive scheme incompatible with the assumptions underlying Platonic thought.

Another possible ordering of Platonic dialogues, and perhaps the one most frequently encountered in our experience, if not our theories, is order of reading or paideutic order. In what sequence should the Platonic dialogues be read or taught? One tendency of both ancient and modern commentators is to conflate the paideutic order of the dialogues with a chronology of composition. If one holds that there is a significant genetic component to Platonic thought, reading the dialogues in order of composition allows one to move from the simplest or most superficial to the most profoundly elaborated positions in Platonic thought, developing (by *imitatio*) one's understanding of Plato's thought as he himself

[14]These narratives are not offered as defensible "readings" of Platonic philosophy *per se*, but rather as examples of possible ways in which readers could construct interpretations based on various orderings of the dialogues.

developed it. In the past several decades, this synthetic compositional/paideutic order grounded in the early/middle/late scheme exemplified by such scholars as Ross (1951) and Guthrie (1962–81) has predominated in undergraduate education. Such dialogues as *Laws* or *Cratylus*, the chronology of which does not fit into this compositional/paideutic scheme, are often overlooked in the classroom.

This compositional/paideutic scheme has a certain practical appeal in the classroom. In the lower division first semester Humanities survey (*Gilgamesh* to Shakespeare) at my university, short, accessible "early" dialogues like *Apology* and *Crito* are most easily teachable to our student body. In undergraduate philosophy surveys, major middle dialogues like *Republic* and *Symposium* can be introduced, but the late middle or late dialogues like *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Politicus*, or *Philebus* are unlikely to be teachable outside the context of upper division or graduate Plato seminars, because of their complexity, aridity, and level of abstraction.

Although ease of teachability can justify teaching the dialogues in order of the traditional chronologies, an argument could also be constructed for a reverse chronology as the best teaching or reading order of the dialogues. When Hugh of St Victor (*Didascalicon* 6.6) discusses the ideal order in which to read the Christian Bible, he argues that the student should read the New Testament before the Old Testament, because only by knowing how the prophecies were fullfilled in the birth of Christ can the student properly interpret the writings of the Old Testament prophets.[15] In a similar way, it could be argued that reading *Philebus* first would allow the student, when reading the early dialogues later, to see in, for example, the *reductio ad absurdum* of the multiplicity of the virtues in *Protagoras* and *Euthyphro* an *aporia* the point of which is not befuddlement for its own sake but rather a specific stage in an argument leading to a known goal, such as the necessary unity of the form of the Good.

Pedagogical concerns and paideutic ordering of Platonic dialogues were rather more explicitly theorized in ancient commentaries than they are in contemporary scholarly journals for two reasons:[16] firstly, the overt importance of pedagogy in Platonic philosophy and secondly, the relationship of pedagogical theories to theories of the soul. While for us pedagogy is theorized explicitly as a distinct and isolated discipline studied in departments of education, and teaching is otherwise a practical task separated from theoretical areas of our research, among Platonist philosophers the two questions of whether and how some X (for example, virtue

[15] There is an interesting parallel here to Geoffrey of Vinsauf's belief in the superiority of the artificial (non-chronological) to the inartificial (strictly chronological) order in narrative in his *Poetria Nova* (trans. in Murphy 1973). Mansfield (1994: 10–22) discusses Origen's use of the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament.

[16] Those works that discuss Platonic pedadogy from the disciplinary perspective of education are rarely cited in articles in classics or philosophy journals. Scolnicov 1988 is an example of an education specialist's approach to Plato. Golden 1984 and Neel 1988 are examples of approaches to Plato typical of composition studies as a discipline.

or beauty) exists (ontology) and how we know X (epistemology) were closely tied to the question of whether and how X could come to be known, not merely as an abstract philosophical question, but as the pedagogical one of how we might or do learn or teach X.[17]

We share with late antiquity the professionalization of Platonic scholarship. The overwhelming majority of both ancient and modern commentaries on Plato have been written by people teaching Plato in some institutional setting—it is no more likely that anyone not a professional academic (past, present, or future) would read an academic journal than that a member of the general public would have read Proclus' rather arid, jargon-filled *Parmenides* commentary. Despite, however, pedagogy being the economic substratum of Platonic scholarship, few contemporary scholars apart from rhetoricians, whose research has traditionally had a pedagogical orientation, are likely to discuss pedagogical issues explicitly as central to strategies of interpreting Plato. In antiquity, on the other hand, from Middle Platonism to late Neoplatonism, commentators and authors of prolegomena and handbooks repeatedly addressed the paideutic ordering of Platonic dialogues and its relationship to the fourth type of order defined above, namely theoretical or metaphysical order.[18]

In the time, for example, of Thrasyllus (died 36 C.E.), court astrologer to Tiberius and editor primarily responsible for the tetralogic ordering of Plato's dialogues which has remained standard even in many contemporary editions (for example, Oxford Classical Texts, Loeb Classical Library), the dialogues were considered quasi-scriptural texts by most Platonists. Explicating Plato was not a mere scholarly or antiquarian exercise to satisfy some capricious intellectual curiosity, but part of a process of converting the student to philosophy and training the soul.

The *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous, which Dillon (1993: xiii) dates to some time in the second century C.E., is simultaneously a handbook of Platonic doctrine for students and a teachers' manual which explicitly discusses the process by which the reader must come to understand the material being presented.[19] The first stage in the Platonic education is protreptic, turning the student towards philosophy or awakening in his or her (for the Platonic schools did admit women) soul the desire for philosophy. In his *Didaskalikos*, Alcinous outlines the subsequent five stages of education and which dialogues ought to be read at each stage:

[17] Examples of Platonic dialogues which discuss education extensively include *Meno*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Laws*.

[18] For periodization of Middle Platonism, see Dillon 1977; for a more general treatment of philosophical schools and periods after Plato's death, see Armstrong 1967. Merlan (1960) also discusses the evolution of Platonism. For a summary of the various orderings of Platonic dialogues in the fifth and sixth centuries, see Festugière 1969.

[19] See, for example, the metadiscursive comments at *Didaskalikos* 23.1 or 27.1. The frequency and methodology of metadiscursive comments bear a certain similarity to those found in Iamblichus' *Protrepticus*, a work quite similar in its intended audience and simultaneous rhetorical purposes of protreptic and explication.

1) catharsis or expelling false notions: *Euthyphro*, *Ion*, *Charmides*
2) maieusis or awakening of recollection: *Alcibiades I*, *Lysis*, *Laches*
3) physical and ethical doctrines: *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Republic*, *Laws*
4) binding doctrines to the soul by reason: *Meno*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Parmenides*, *Politicus*
5) learning to counter the arguments of the sophists: *Euthydemus*, *Hippias Major*, *Gorgias*.

Alcinous expounds a dogmatic and eclectic (but not necessarily syncretic) Platonism, mixing the dogmatizing and scripturalizing approaches to the Platonic dialogues of the Fourth Academy with Peripatetic logic and the Stoic division of philosophy into ethical, physical, and theoretical branches. Alcinous displays no interest whatsoever in either the order of composition or dramatic dating of the divine Platonic dialogues; instead, like systematic or unitarian modern readers, he assumes that Platonic philosophy is a unified whole and collects together comments on each topic from multiple dialogues with little consideration (and frequently not even citation) of the dramatic or genetic context from which the passage was excerpted. For Alcinous, it is not rhetorical understanding of the composition of the dialogues which is important, but instead the order constrained by both paideutic and metaphysical hermeneutics. For both Middle and Neo-Platonists, the paideutic is explicitly or implictly linked to the metaphysical, for the stages of the philosophical education correspond to the stages in the ascent of the soul as the soul ascends metaphysically upwards through the hierarchy of being. For strictly Pythagoreanizing Platonists, especially those writing more technical commentaries, as opposed to introductory handbooks, like Thrasyllus, Porphyry (232–ca 305 C.E.), and Iamblichus (ca 250–ca 325 C.E.), the metaphysical ordering of the dialogues, especially that grounded in number mysticism, is foregrounded.[20]

Of Thrasyllus, we have extant only his tetralogic arrangements of the Platonic dialogues and brief testimonia and fragments, which can be found assembled in Tarrant's controversial *Thrasyllan Platonism* (1993). Without necessarily fully concurring with Tarrant's optimistic recuperation of a complete Thrasyllan doctrine, it is possible, based on a more conservative set of general assumptions, to identify him as an author whose ordering of Platonic dialogues exemplifies what could be termed metaphysical rationale with paideutic import, as opposed to compositional or dramatic chronology.[21] Tarrant's evidence concerning Thrasyllus' astrological activities suffices to show that Thrasyllus was skilled in an astrological hermeneutics which reads the cosmos as semiotic. Thrasyllus employs

[20] Here I use the term Pythagoreanizing Platonism in O'Meara's (1992) sense to refer to the belief that all Platonic philosophy was derived from Pythagoras.

[21] It is possible that later Platonists may have considered that the "divine" Plato, having a complete philosophical system worked out from the beginning of his career, might have composed the dialogues in a metaphysical order; the significance of the order, however, would not have been a genetic reflection of Platonic development, but a reflection of the metaphysical system the order represented.

a universalizing semiotic which reads or constructs the order of the cosmos of the Platonic dialogues as corresponding to the text that is the physical cosmos, much as Augustinian semiotics read the *Liber Mundi*, because, as the author of the anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (whom Westerink [1962] identifies as possibly Elias or some other member of Olympiodorus' school, hereafter [Elias] for convenience of reference) was to claim, not only was the dialogue for Plato a kind of cosmos, imitating God's cosmos, but also the cosmos a kind of dialogue (4.15.1). Within this system, not only are the stages of philosophical education and the corresponding movement of the soul an intellectual or spiritual progression, but they also reflect a progression upwards from the sublunary through the planetary toward the sidereal sphere. With his Pythagoreanizing background in addition to his astrological profession, Thrasyllus was also strongly interested in number mysticism, from which perspective his organization of the dialogues into nine tetralogies is quite significant.

From the fifth century B.C.E. onwards, Pythagoras was associated with the god Apollo.[22] Pythagoreanizing Platonists, who saw all Platonic doctrine as true Pythagorean doctrine, frequently drew parallels between Plato and Pythagoras not just by assenting to the standard biographical treatments discussing Pythagorean training of and influence on Plato, but also by insisting on Plato's Apollonian character.[23] [Elias] quite explicitly discusses Plato's Apollonian nature, mentioning (1.2.15) that Plato's mother, after bearing Plato, immediately took him up to Mt Hymettus and sacrificed to Apollo. He also describes (1.5.20) Plato correctly interpreting Delphic oracles (which are oracles of Apollo) that other Athenians had misunderstood. Numerology is invoked when [Elias] points out:

> He [Plato] reached the age of eighty-one, another proof of his Apollonian origin. For the number of the Muses, nine, if multiplied by itself, makes eighty-one; and that the Muses are the handmaids of Apollo no one would gainsay. This number eighty-one is called "power of a power," because three, which is the first number inasmuch as it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, if multiplied by itself makes nine (three times three is nine), and nine in the same way makes eighty-one. (1.6.1)

The nine Platonic tetralogies can thus be read as analogous to the nine Muses who clothe divine Apollonian wisdom in artistic dress, just as Plato clothes divine unwritten Pythagorean wisdom in nine written tetralogies. Unlike the dramatic and compositional chronologies described earlier, especially as constructed by modern scholars, the tetralogic ordering of the dialogues is primarily of mystical or numerological significance. While the nine tetralogies had one set of num-

[22] Iamblichus *De Vita Pyth.* 1.40: "They say that he [Pythagoras] was the Hyperborean Apollo, and their proofs are that in standing up in a contest he showed his golden thigh."

[23] See O'Meara 1992. Diogenes Laertius (ca 200–250 C.E.) also cites instances of Plato's association with Apollo (for example, 3.3; 3.44–46). Evidence of Plato's association with the Pythagoreans is too voluminous to require citation.

erological resonances, a second, more paideutic ordering, also numerologically theorized, is simultaneously present in [Elias], for whom, as for most post-Iamblichean Neoplatonists, two simultaneous orderings of Plato's dialogues with different interpretive consequences would not have been contradictory, but rather a necessary outcome of different signs having different *analogiai* corresponding to multiple levels on the hierarchy of being, as Dillon (1976: 256) points out when writing about Proclus (fifth century C.E.):

> At another point, Proclus himself, once again a propos the recapitulation of the *Republic*, makes a remarkable statement. It is possible, it seems, to have various correct *analogiai* to a given surface phenomenon (*In Tim.* 57, 22ff):
>
> And if we formerly took the polis (of the *Republic*) here below as representing the realm of generation, and now take it as representing the cosmic conflict, that should be no cause for astonishment. For it is safe to understand the same thing according to various *analogiai* in relation to different texts.
>
> —since, that is, the same thing by virtue of different aspects of itself can show *analogia* to different elements of reality. It is possible then to postulate a multiplicity of correct "analogies" . . . .

As the Neoplatonic school curriculum evolved from middle Platonism through various iterations of Neoplatonism, the number of dialogues used as standard school texts decreased in number and were fit into an increasingly rigid canon. By the fourth century, the Iamblichean arrangement of ten plus two dialogues had become a curricular standard: the ten dialogues (in order of study, and thus an ascending order with respect to philosophical truth) were (1) *Alcibiades*; (2) *Gorgias;* (3) *Phaedo*; (4) *Cratylus*; (5) *Theaetetus*; (6) *Sophist*; (7) *Statesman*; (8) *Phaedrus*; (9) *Symposium*; (10) *Philebus*, followed by the two "perfect" dialogues: (1) *Timaeus*; (2) *Parmenides* ([Elias] 7.26.18–14).[24] Iamblichus and his followers identified the ten dialogues with the decad and the two with the two first principles. They associated the cosmology of the *Timaeus* with the indefinite dyad, the principle of becoming and thus of the physical cosmos *Timaeus* describes, and the *Parmenides*, read as the central exposition of Platonic mystical theology, discussing the One,

[24] [Elias] gives a rather elaborate philosophical rationale for teaching the dialogues in the Iamblichean order: "The order of these is worth while discussing because the general practice is to lecture on these dialogues. The first to be explained, then, is the *Alcibiades*, because it teaches us to know ourselves, and the right course is to know oneself before knowing external things . . . The last dialogue for discussion is *Philebus*, because here Plato treats of the Good, which is beyond all things; therefore the dialogue, too, should come last, after all the others. Those in between should be arranged as follows. As virtues exist on five different levels, natural, ethical, social, purifying, and contemplative, we must first read the *Gorgias* because it deals with a social problem, second the *Phaedo* because it shows the way of purification, for the life of purification comes after the social life. Then we come to knowledge of reality, which . . . is observed either in thoughts or in things; after the dialogues mentioned we should therefore read, fourth, *Cratylus*, which teaches about words, and then *Theaetetus*, which is about things . . ." ([Elias] 20.26.17–31).

with the principle of being. Reading moves from the ten dialogues of the decad, which is generated number, to the two first principles (which generate numbers), with paideutic order thus being psychagogic by corresponding with a movement upward of the soul as it is brought into contact with iconic and entheastic representations of successively higher levels in the hierarchy of being. Like contemporary stylometrics, albeit with a rather different end, Neoplatonic mystical orderings of the dialogues were grounded in elaborate mathematical formulae.

[Elias] devotes an entire chapter (10) to the question of the order (*taxis*) of Platonic dialogues. His consciousness of the multiplicity of possible orders and their hermeneutic and paideutic consequences reveals an impressive level of interpretive sophistication. He describes two possible orders in which it is possible to learn the Platonic dialogues: the chronological (which he subdivides into order of composition and dramatic order) and the tetralogical (10.24.1–5). In chronology of composition he places *Phaedrus* first because it addresses the question of whether one ought to write books and *Laws* last because of the report that it was left unedited at Plato's death (10.24.6–15). From the dramatic point of view, he places *Parmenides* first and *Theaetetus* last (10.24.16–20) using the frame date rather than the date of the interior discussion as the dialogue's dramatic date. He objects to those who claim Plato composed his dialogues in tetralogies in imitation of the tragic poets by pointing out that Plato himself criticizes the poets for writing "images of images" (10.24.20–25.29). He concludes by recommending the Iamblichean order.

CONCLUSION

While the above examples are far from exhaustive summaries with respect either to ancient or to contemporary treatments of the various orders of Platonic dialogues, they provide evidence of two important general principles:

(1) The ordering of Platonic dialogues has significant hermeneutic consequences for Platonic philosophy, and the types of order assumed by any given interpreter and the specific arrangements of the dialogues within those general types of order construct Platonic interpretations;

(2) That the orders of Platonic dialogues used by various interpreters of Plato are not pre-existent objective orders which supply absolute independent criteria by which it is possible to judge interpretive theories, but rather narratives constructed by various hermeneutic assumptions.

This hermeneutic circularity of the ordering of Platonic dialogues is not, however, an interpretive dead end at which we are left with the rather unsatisfactory conclusion that interpretation based on order is futile because we can never find some absolute truth on which to base it. Instead, understanding multiple

simultaneous orderings of Platonic dialogues can contribute both critically and constructively to our understanding of Plato.

From a critical perspective, the circular nature of the dialogues' orders should serve to make us suspicious of any interpretive schema which relies heavily on any one specific order as evidence of its validity. Constructively, however, we can use the notion of multiple orders to adjudicate among competing interpretive schemata by privileging those interpretations which take into account, or are valid under, multiple simultaneous orderings. Traditional Anglo-American scholarship often attempts to justify various metaphysical assumptions concerning Platonic thought by presuming a necessary connection between Platonic philosophy and Platonic development, often arguing, in a circular fashion, for chronological ordering based on a sequence of philosophical development itself dependent on chronology (for example, Ryle 1966). If metaphysical and chronological orders can be determined independently, when they agree it might be possible to perform an almost Eusebian task of linking Platonic philosophy to Platonic development, but neither Platonic development nor Platonic philosophy should be used as a Procustean bed onto which the other must be fit.

While purely dramatic orderings of the Platonic dialogues have led to innovative and insightful readings of specific dialogues or groups of dialogues (for example, Arieti 1991), Anglo-American scholars have rarely considered non-chronological possibilities of order. The Tübingen esotericists and their followers (for example, Krämer 1990; Reale 1990) in their unitarian-systematic rejection of compositional chronology also ignore the possibility that there might be non-chronological methods of ordering the dialogues. The possibility of non-chronological orders of the Platonic dialogues allows a serious reappraisal of the value of Neoplatonic commentators for our study of Plato, not just as possible sources of oral doctrines, but as sources of hermeneutic methods. If the orderings of the dialogues recommended by the Neoplatonic commentators cannot be dismissed because they do not coincide with contemporary theories of Platonic development, then their rather sophisticated schemes of atemporal orderings should perhaps be discussed by Platonic scholars rather than segregated within Neoplatonic studies.[25] Since the very physical act of reading is necessarily sequential, ignoring the problem of the order in which to read or teach the dialogues is simply to order them unreflectively or by accident.

Just as order (*taxis*) is a crucial concept for understanding of the cosmos in Plato's dialogues, so too is the order of the dialogues crucial to understanding the cosmos of the Platonic dialogues, and like the ancient Platonists we too can use

[25] For discussions of the orders of Platonic dialogues among various Neoplatonists, see Tarrant 1993; Festugière 1969; Mansfield 1994. Scholars who have emphasized the continuity of Plato, especially the late dialogues, with Neoplatonism of late antiquity include Findlay (1976), Dillon (1977: 1–10), and Merlan (1960).

multiple simultaneous orderings of the Platonic dialogues as ways of interpreting the Platonic cosmos.[26]

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
BOZEMAN, MONTANA 59717
U.S.A.

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