But I do not wish to end on a carping note. This new text is a fine achievement, and readers of Demosthenes will look forward eagerly to the regular appearance of the remaining three volumes.

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HOW WE READ PLATO NOW

J. ANNAS, C. ROWE (edd.): *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*. (Center for Hellenic Studies Colloquia 6.) Pp. xii + 270. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002. Cased, £32.95. ISBN: 0-674-01018-3.

For half a century of more, most commentary on Plato, at least in the English-speaking world, has assumed a standard paradigm which divided the dialogues into three chronological groups. The early dialogues give a vivid picture of the historical Socrates. Although these generally end on a note of uncertainty, influential scholars have claimed to find within them a coherent 'philosophy of Socrates'. The middle period dialogues are more positive and give a central rôle to the theory of Forms. But the late or 'critical' dialogues cast doubt on that theory. In recent years this way of reading Plato has been subjected to criticism from several quarters There has been no consensus on a new paradigm, but many scholars would agree in emphasizing the need to take account of form as well as content in interpreting Plato. Some have been influenced by developments in literary theory and others by a re-evaluation of the styles of interpretation employed by ancient platonists. The present volume, which derives from a colloquium on 'Plato and Socrates: Approaches to the Interpretation of Plato's Dialogues', covers many of the key issues in this debate. It contains seven papers, each of them paired with a substantial commentary.

The assumption that the key to interpreting Plato's dialogues lies in understanding the author's intellectual development is relatively modern. C. C. W. Taylor, writing on 'the Origins of our Present Paradigms', shows how this way of reading Plato originated with Romanticism. It was 'modified rather than subverted' by the advent of stylometric methods which seemed to establish in an objective way the order in which the dialogues were written. Most twentieth-century scholars placed a good deal of weight on these methods in arguing for their developmental interpretations. But, as Charles Kahn shows in his paper on 'Platonic Chronology', it is questionable whether they were entitled to do this. Although it is possible to divide Plato's dialogues into three stylistic groups, these do not correspond very closely to those required by the standard paradigm.

Annas defends a style of interpretation for which she finds precedent in ancient commentators such as Plutarch. It is based on the principle that for Plato 'Even the boldest claims are still subject to argument'. The reader should thus accept such claims, 'not because of Plato's authority, but on the basis of the understanding of Plato she has achieved as a result of her own use of reason and argument'. Consequently there is no need to invoke development to explain how Plato could write dialogues of *ad hominem* argument, such as those commonly assigned to his 'Socratic'

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period, as well as those so-called 'middle period' dialogues which expound bold ideas. They could even have been written at the same time. Annas adopts a similar strategy in eliminating the middle–late contrast. The fact that these dialogues appear to offer arguments against the theory of Forms has commonly been held to show that Plato must either regard these arguments as defective or else have undergone a radical change of view. But for Annas there is another option: 'until we argue the matter more thoroughly we simply aren't in a position to say whether or not the theory will stand up' (p. 13).

David Sedley explores a different style of ancient commentary, one which found in the dialogues a consistent body of doctrine but sought to explain difficult passages by arguing that Socrates sometime speaks ironically. Sedley 'to some extent' commends the practice of these commentators but, as he also brings out, the appeal to irony makes it very easy to read whatever meaning one wants into a text. It can thus be a dangerous tool for the Platonic interpreter.

Another line of approach is represented by Christopher Gill writing on 'Dialectic and the Dialogue Form'. He argues that 'a particular Platonic dialogue is a determinate dialectical project and has a distinct dialectical ethos' (p. 158). So the main thrust of his chapter is to criticize those who seek to read ideas across dialogues. He thus takes issue with both unitarian and developmentalist in interpretations.

Doubts about developmental styles of interpretation bring into question the idea that there is a distinct 'Socratic' philosophy to be found in the dialogues. However, Terry Penner, writing in 'The Historical Socrates and Plato's Early Dialogues', argues that we can find in certain 'early' dialogues a consistent ethics which can be attributed to the historical Socrates. This ethics is both intellectualistic and deterministic, and, Penner believes, fundamentally true. However, his view has major difficulties, some of which Rowe develops in his generally sympathetic comments. The most important is perhaps that Penner's view requires him to hold that, Plato having more or less grasped in his early period a systematic doctrine that was fundamentally true, then abandoned it for one that is fundamentally false.

The influence of literary theory on Platonic interpretation is evident in Andrea Nightingale's contribution which contrasts what she calls 'eikastic and fantastic mimesis'. Eikastic mimesis is the kind found in the in the early dialogues which provides is a realistic, up-close representation in which the main character is difficult to comprehend. Fantastic mimesis makes use of unrealistic 'chronotopes'. It reveals the distance between us and the truth. Thus the eschatological myths force the reader to confront not just a limited earthly view but the divine eternal perspective.

As the editors themselves make clear, the essays in this book, although wide-ranging, do not provide a comprehensive view of recent thinking about Plato's dialogues. In particular, there is no representation of the Straussian and Tübingen schools of interpretation. Nevertheless all the contributions (including the commentaries, which I have largely ignored) are distinguished contributions to Platonic scholarship. Anyone who is making a serious study of Plato will need to read it. For the more general reader it also provides the best available account of the different approaches to be found in recent scholarship and relates them very helpfully to some ancient styles of interpretation.

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