

MASTER-MIND LECTURE

SOCRATES

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WHEN not a single sentence uttered by Socrates is known to have survived, is it reasonable to hold that none the less we can know enough of what he thought and taught to speak responsibly of his philosophy? Each generation of Platonic scholars must answer that question for itself. I count it my good fortune that when I began my Platonic studies I had before me the one given by Sir David Ross in the Introduction to his edition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in 1924,<sup>1</sup> restated with masterly force in his Presidential Address to the Classical Association in 1932 on 'The Socratic Problem'.<sup>2</sup> For over fifty years I have lived in grateful indebtedness to that answer. To say that I have had differences with it is not to retrench on that tribute. In honest scholarship disagreement negotiable by argument is normal.

To the *Clouds* of Aristophanes as a source of Socratic doctrine Ross devotes a longish section of his Address. I content myself with a very short one. The 'Socrates' of this comedy is a natural philosopher whose pseudo-science leads him to deny the existence of the deities of common belief<sup>3</sup> and celebrate private rites<sup>4</sup> to his new gods who displace the old;<sup>5</sup> he earns a shady living by purveying instruction, honest or dishonest, according to customer

<sup>1</sup> Introduction, Section II, the definitive refutation of John Burnet's perverse, brilliantly defended, hypothesis (1911: xliii–lvi; 1914: 154–5) which assigns to the historical Socrates the very heart of Platonism, the doctrine of 'separate' Forms and the theory of 'recollection'.

<sup>2</sup> Now conveniently reprinted in Andreas Patzer (ed.), *Der Historische Sokrates* (Darmstadt, 1987). Page references in citations of the Address hereafter will be exclusively to this edition of its text.

<sup>3</sup> *Nub.* 366ff.; 381ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 254ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 365: 'Only these [the Clouds] are gods. All the rest are balderdash.'

demand.<sup>6</sup> This teaches us much about the public image of Socrates fomented by Aristophanes' comedy,<sup>7</sup> little about Socrates himself. It enables us to understand what there was in that comedy to fuel the suspicions on which a quarter of a century later Socrates would be condemned. If we believed the Aristophanic story we too would have judged him guilty on all three counts of the formal charges<sup>8</sup>—'not believing in the gods of the state'; 'introducing other divinities which are new'; 'corrupting the young'. I say, 'if we believed it.' Should we? Does the fact that each of those damaging items characterizes the anti-hero of a fifth-century comedy, a literary genre in which scurrilous distortion for comic effect was not only tolerated, but expected,<sup>9</sup> give us good reason for doing so? Would we have offered the presence of any of them in a comic extravaganza as evidence that it was *true* or even *meant to be thought true*?<sup>10</sup> Neither could we offer any of them as evidence of the truth of any allegation directly connected with them, in particular, the claim, unwisely accepted by Ross (226), that at the date of the production of the *Clouds* (423 BC), when Socrates was forty-six, he was actively engaged in physical and cosmological speculation. Seeing him portrayed as atheist-sophist-physicist, Ross rejects as a matter of course the first and second features of the caricature, but accepts in all seriousness the third, on which the first two are riding piggy-back, and is itself no more supportable by evidence than they.<sup>11</sup> Hence Socrates' supposed addiction to physical investigation we must leave where Ross found it—in the realm of comic fantasy. Our confidence in rejecting it may be all the greater in that all

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 886ff.: both the Just and the Unjust *Logos* are on the menu and Strepsiades can have his choice.

<sup>7</sup> As Socrates is made to recognize in the Platonic *Apology* (18D–19C).

<sup>8</sup> As cited verbatim in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1, more freely in Plato, *Ap.* 24B.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Arrowsmith (1962: 6): in this literary genre 'the humorist's success consists in the very size and absurdity of the distortion' (6).

<sup>10</sup> By such reckoning we could be citing *Acharnians* 526–7 as evidence that Aristophanes wanted us to believe Pericles started the Peloponnesian war to avenge the kidnapping of two of Aspasia's whores.

<sup>11</sup> *Phd.* 97B8–99D1 would be worthless for that purpose, even on the assumption (itself in want of proof, and probably false) that Plato here is recounting Socrates' intellectual biography instead of his own. All we can learn from the text, strictly read, is that its 'Socrates' scanned the books of Anaxagoras hoping, but failing, to find there a teleological cosmology. Cf. Dover (1972: 118).

three of our principal authorities,—Xenophon,<sup>12</sup> Plato,<sup>13</sup> and Aristotle<sup>14</sup>—deny it. Let us turn to them instead.

While the first two agree on many things, including this one, they disagree on others. Their differences come to a head in their accounts of Socrates' response to the indictment at the trial. This is how his defence begins in the Xenophontic *Apology* (11):

What I marvel at most of all in Meletus is on what evidence he alleges that I do not believe in the gods in which the city believes. For all bystanders could see me sacrificing at the common festivals on the public altars and so could Meletus himself if he wished.<sup>15</sup>

A track record of faithful cult observance would be the best exculpatory evidence Socrates could have produced.<sup>16</sup> That Plato's Socrates did not abstain entirely from sacrifice and prayer to the gods we would know from those last words in the *Phaedo* about the cock due to Asclepius and from the prayer to the Sun at dawn in Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*. We would not have known it from the Platonic *Apology*. As evidence of his piety Socrates there cites only obedience to a god left anonymous throughout the speech: he has been in dire poverty because of his service to 'the god' (23C); he has 'lived philosophizing, examining himself and others' because 'the god' had so 'commanded' (*Ap.* 28E); he was 'the god's' gift to the city (30E). That this god is the city's god he never says.

So while in Xenophon Socrates refers only to his sacrificing, never to his philosophizing, as evidence of his piety, in Plato he does the opposite. Which of the two shall we believe? We have no third authority to adjudicate this conflict.<sup>17</sup> But we do have history. We know that Socrates was found guilty by a majority of the run of the mill Athenians who tried him. If his piety had been what Xenophon makes it out to be, its credentials would have

<sup>12</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.1.11ff.; 4.7.2–8.

<sup>13</sup> *Apol.* 19C–D.

<sup>14</sup> *Metaph.* 987B1; cf. 1078B17ff.

<sup>15</sup> So too at the start of the *Memorabilia*: 'That he did not believe in the city's gods—what proof could they have had of that? For he could be seen sacrificing often at home, and often on the city's public altars' (1.1.1).

<sup>16</sup> Only unbelievers deny ritual honours to the gods: Euripides in the *Frogs* (888). Strepsiades (corrupted by Socratic teaching) in the *Clouds* (425–6).

<sup>17</sup> But indirect evidence against Xenophon's allegations may be derived from the *Clouds* and also (as Professor Livio Rossetti has suggested to me) from Aeschines Socraticus frgm. 8 Dittmar (= frgm. 1 Krauss): imputation of atheism to Socrates would be incomprehensible if he had been the model of traditional piety Xenophon makes him.

been sterling in their eyes. No lot-selected jury, weighted as it was bound to be, on the traditionalist side, would have convicted him. Indeed, on that hypothesis he would never have been prosecuted in the first place. Who would have dared indict *for impiety* someone who had been, in Xenophon's description of him (*Mem.* 1.2.64), 'most conspicuous of men' in cult-service to the gods of the state? We must agree with Kierkegaard that here Xenophon's apologetic zeal overreaches itself:<sup>18</sup> making Socrates not only innocent, but innocuous, the defence self-destructs. This puts us on our guard against whatever else in Xenophon's Socratic writings is grist to his apologetic mill.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, there is no indication that Xenophon's personal acquaintance with Socrates was anything but casual, while Plato's seems to have been as intimate and deep as anyone's has ever been with a beloved teacher. Finally there is the fact that Plato's understanding of the philosophical issues in his theme has a philosopher's sureness of touch, while Xenophon's is no better than could be expected from a gifted *littérateur*.<sup>20</sup> Putting those three things together we have no choice but to agree with Ross that Plato (amply supported by Aristotle, as we shall see) should be our primary source. Even so, we need not dismiss wholesale Xenophon's testimony on that account: when it accords with Plato's the corroboration has all the greater force in coming from a witness who feels free to go sharply against him at other points.

But when we go looking for Socrates in Plato's dialogues two of him come into view. In some twenty-four dialogues, composed arguably in the earlier and the middle periods of Plato's productive activity,<sup>21</sup> two very different philosophers bear his name. The individual remains the same throughout: the same ugly, impudent, amusing, exasperating, unstoppably loquacious,

<sup>18</sup> *The Concept of Irony*, p. 54 in the translation by Lee Capel (1965).

<sup>19</sup> Much of the *Memorabilia* is suspect on this ground. For the apologetic purpose which animates this work see Erbse (1961).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Russell's remark, 'I would rather be reported by my bitterest enemy than by a friend innocent of philosophy' (Russell, 1945: 83).

<sup>21</sup> A chronology of Plato's writings on which a substantial, if not complete, consensus had been achieved in Ross's lifetime and has endured thereafter places *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus*, *Meno* (but see n. 79 below), *Protagoras* in the **Earlier Period** of Plato's productive activity; *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic* *Phaedrus* in its **Middle Period**. Since in *Republic I* Socrates has the distinctive traits of his persona in the earlier dialogues in marked contrast to what he becomes in the remaining nine books, the first book may be classed with the earlier dialogues, regardless of the date at which it was composed.

relentlessly intellectual man, who dominates every company he enters by the force of his personality and the energy of his mind. He philosophizes indefatigably. But he does so to propound in those two sets of dialogues philosophies so different that they could not have lodged for long in the same brain unless it were that of a schizophrenic. In this duality I see our opportunity. I shall pursue it by filling out the bifurcation with as much content as can be crammed in it within this short address, highlighting ten tell-tale traits each of which marks fundamental contrasts between the two philosophies Plato puts into Socrates' mouth in those two sets of dialogues. For purposes of reference separate labels will be needed for the 'Socrates' in each. So I shall call his persona in the earlier set 'Socrates<sub>E</sub>' ('SE' for short: 'E' for 'earlier'), the other one 'Socrates<sub>M</sub>' ('SM' for short: 'M' for Plato's middle period). Here then, laid out for your inspection, are ten salient contrasts between SE and SM. In each case I identify an E trait, displayed conspicuously within the earlier group of dialogues and contradicted in the middle one, while its contrasting M trait, accorded prominence only in the middle group, is contradicted only in the earlier.

### I. *The range of their philosophizing*

SE is a moral philosopher, pure and simple. He has views on many topics. But the only propositions he investigates elenctically<sup>22</sup> are moral theses.<sup>23</sup>

SM is a moral philosopher *and* an ontologist *and* a metaphysician *and* an epistemologist *and* a philosopher of science *and* a philosopher of language *and* a philosopher of religion *and* a philosopher of art *and* a political philosopher. The whole encyclopaedia of philosophical science is his domain.

In the whole history of Western thought no philosophy has had a wider range than SM's or a narrower one than SE's.

### II. *Their scientific interests*

Down to and including the *Gorgias* SE evidences no interest in mathematical science or personal expertise in it.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For the meaning of this term see X below.

<sup>23</sup> The high-sounding epistemological thesis that there can be 'knowledge of knowledge and not-knowledge' (*Ch.* 166Eff.) Socrates debates only to discredit it as a definiens of *sophrosyne*.

<sup>24</sup> See Vlastos (1988), 'Mathematics and Elenchus', Endnote A ('Mathematical Texts in [Plato's] Earlier Dialogues').

SM is an accomplished mathematician and regards mathematics as the gateway to philosophy. The curriculum he prescribes for philosophers-to-be in *Rep.* VII consists entirely of mathematical studies: from their twentieth to their thirtieth year<sup>25</sup> they are to study nothing but number theory, geometry, astronomy and harmonics.

In the whole history of Western thought no philosophy has been more isolated from mathematics than SE's, none has sought to bind the two more closely than SM's.

### III. *Their practice of philosophy*

SE has a mission 'to live philosophizing, examining [him]self and others' (*Ap.* 28E), those 'others' being 'anyone of you I happen to meet, . . . young or old, citizen or alien' (29D–30A). He believes that 'the unexamined life is not worth living by a human being' (*Ap.* 38A).

SM believes that the best society will allow question-breeding arguments about right and wrong only to an exceptionally gifted, rigorously trained élite, and even to them only after they have completed their qualifying mathematical studies.<sup>26</sup> Thus SM's 'perfectly good city'<sup>27</sup> SE would judge an exceedingly bad one: it would condemn the great majority of its citizens to a life which SE would consider 'not worth living by a human being'.

In the whole history of Western thought no philosophy has been more populist in its outreach than SE's, none more élitist than SM's.

### IV. *Metaphysical theory of soul*

SE has none. For him the soul is the empirical self, the subject of cognitive competence and moral experience, the 'I' in 'I believe, I choose, I act'.<sup>28</sup> He speaks of it in the *Crito* (47E–48A) as 'that in us, whatever it be, that has to do with justice and injustice'. Concerning the constitution and ultimate destiny of this infinitely precious thing—is it material or immaterial? mortal or immortal?—he does not argue. In the *Crito* (54B–C) he reveals his faith in immortality. In the *Gorgias* (523Aff.) he declares it. Nowhere does he try to prove it.

<sup>25</sup> *Rep.* 537B–C.

<sup>26</sup> *Rep.* 537E–539D. Cf. Nussbaum (1980: 43ff., at 88).

<sup>27</sup> *Rep.* 428E7.

<sup>28</sup> He says 'my soul believes' (*Gorg.* 486E) for 'I believe'.

And this is just what SM does not tire of proving. He runs through a string of arguments for immortality in the *Phaedo*, adds a new one in Book X of the *Republic* (608Dff.), and then still another along entirely new lines in the *Phaedrus* (245C–E). The demonstrand of these arguments is not the traditional belief in the soul's survival after death, but the far stronger dogma of its prenatal, primordial pre-existence. Its corollary is the boldest epistemological doctrine ever mooted in Western philosophy, the theory of 'recollection': anything any man could ever come to know in this life his soul had already known before his birth.<sup>29</sup>

#### V. *Metaphysical theory of form*

SE has forms, but no *theory* of forms. He asks, 'What is the form *piety*? What is the form *beauty*? 'What is *form*?' he never asks. His persistent 'What is it?' question sign-posts a moral inquiry into the definition of this or that form, never a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of form as such. About the essence of each of the forms he investigates he is often perplexed. Of their existence there is never a doubt in his mind nor, be it noted, in that of his interlocutors: not one of them ever contests it. And why should they? What he is talking about are forms existing only 'in' their instances,<sup>30</sup> never 'separately' from them.

For SM, on the other hand, the existence of forms is a 'hypothesis'<sup>31</sup> which divides 'the philosophers'<sup>32</sup> from 'the many'.<sup>33</sup> What is the doctrine that is so divisive? We learn as we watch SM hammer out a set of properties, possessed conjunctively by all and only forms, defining a type of reality which had never entered the head of Tom, Dick, and Harry:

they are inaccessible to the senses;<sup>34</sup>

they are absolutely immutable;<sup>35</sup>

they are strictly immaterial;<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Meno* 81C: 'there is nothing [our soul] had not come to know [in our discarnate state].'

<sup>30</sup> Temperance is 'in' (πάρεστιν, ἔνεστιν) the temperate man (*Charm.* 158E–159A); piety is 'the same in every pious action' (*Euthyphro* 5D); courage 'the same in all' brave ones (*La.* 191E).

<sup>31</sup> *Phdo* 100B5, ὑποθέμενος εἶναί τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό.

<sup>32</sup> *Phdo* 64B: οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες, οἱ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφοι, etc.

<sup>33</sup> The 'sightlovers' and 'soundlovers' of *Republic* V (476Aff.).

<sup>34</sup> *Phdo* 65D *et passim*.

<sup>35</sup> 'Never admitting of any alteration whatever in any respect in any way', *ibid.* 78D–E.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 79A–C.

they 'exist themselves by themselves' or, equivalently, they 'exist separately'.<sup>37</sup> they could and would exist even if nothing else did, while if they did not nothing else could;

finally, they are divine,<sup>38</sup> indeed, the ground of the divinity of the gods themselves.<sup>39</sup>

Having once lived in that mysterious 'other' world,<sup>40</sup> the philosopher recalls it with nostalgia as a lost paradise, longing for his return to it.<sup>41</sup> But even now, exiled, imprisoned, stuck inside an animal, he is not completely cut off from it: he may commune with it in that blend of cognitive and mystical experience that constitutes what SM calls 'recollection'.<sup>42</sup>

## VI. *The religious dimension*

By 'mysticism' we may understand for present purposes 'the belief in the possibility of union with the Divine nature' (OED).<sup>43</sup> SM never says point-blank that the philosopher may achieve union with the divine nature of form. He signals it by powerful metaphors of nutrition and sexual procreation. He pictures vision of form as the soul's ingestion of immortalizing nutriment<sup>44</sup> and also as generative intercourse with form: 'mixing with real being, (the philosopher) will give birth to under-

<sup>37</sup> As I have argued elsewhere (Vlastos, 1987B: 187ff.) the former expression (*αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτὰ εἶναι*: *Phd.* 66A, 77D, 100B; *Smp.* 211B, *Prm.* 130B, 133A–C, 135A–B, *Ti.* 52C–D) articulates for Plato the same metaphysical claim as does the latter (*χωρὶς εἶναι*: *Prm.* 130B–D), namely, that the forms, and only they, have the 'capacity for independent existence' (Fine 1984: 33): their existence is not conditioned on that of any material or mental entity in the universe.

<sup>38</sup> *Phd.* 80B; 83E, 84A–B; *Smp.* 211E; *Rep.* 611E.

<sup>39</sup> They are 'those things to which god's closeness makes *him* divine' (*Phdr.* 249C, text and sense as in Hackforth [1952]).

<sup>40</sup> To which SM refers only by unexplicated locatives ('there' in contrast to 'here', as at *Phd.* 68B4, *Phdr.* 250A) or honorific metaphors ('the region wherein dwells the most blessed part of what exists', *Rep.* 526E).

<sup>41</sup> *Phd.* 66E–67B.

<sup>42</sup> That the experience has both dimensions is clear, e.g. at *Phdr.* 249B6–D3. The description begins with its cognitive dimension (B6–C1) and moves quickly into its mystical one (C1–D2).

<sup>43</sup> On Plato's mysticism a kind of embarrassed silence prevails in Ross, as in virtually all analytical studies of Plato thereafter. For an honourable exception see Cornford (1950: 75–9; 1952: 80–7).

<sup>44</sup> Form-contemplation is the nourishment of immortality which nectar and ambrosia had been traditionally for the gods (*Phdr.* 247D–E; cf. also *Rep.* 490B6).



standing and truth'.<sup>45</sup> Creatures of time though we be, in contemplation of form we may unite ourselves creatively in knowledge and in love with the eternal.

SE's relation to the divine world is severely practical—ethical, not mystical. His gods are the supernaturals of Greek religion with just one difference: they are what the city's gods would be if so transformed in their moral character as to become invariantly just, unexceptionably beneficent, capable of causing only good, never evil, whatever the provocation.<sup>46</sup> Convinced that such is the character of his god, Socrates derives from certain supernatural signs<sup>47</sup> a command to do for the people of Athens on the god's behalf what the god could not do in person<sup>48</sup>—challenge them individually to make the care of the soul their first, most urgent, concern. Socrates' piety is his response to this command.<sup>49</sup> He is a dedicated man, faithful unto death. But his relation to the god is never intimate.<sup>50</sup> Of ecstatic union with his god,<sup>51</sup> or even of imitation of his god<sup>52</sup> there is never a hint.

## VII. *Political Theory*

No bolder, yet more finely integrated, vision of social renovation than SM's was ever projected in classical antiquity. It calls for

<sup>45</sup> *Rep.* 490B–6; and cf. the parallel passage in *Smp.* 211E–212A.

<sup>46</sup> This can be inferred from the following doctrines of SE: since (i) the gods are infinitely wiser than men (*Ap.* 23A5–B4) and (ii) wisdom and virtue are interentailing (*Pr.* 329E ff.), it would follow (iii) that the divine beneficence on which all our good depends (*Eu.* 15A) could not fall below a good man's; since the latter can only do good, never evil (*Rep.* 335A–D; *Cri.* 49C), neither can the former.

<sup>47</sup> *Ap.* 33C5–7: oracles, prophetic dreams, etc.

<sup>48</sup> There is fine insight in C. C. W. Taylor's remark (1082, 109ff., at 113) that, for Plato's Socrates 'there is one good product [the gods] can't produce without human assistance, namely, good human souls'.

<sup>49</sup> He speaks of it as his 'service to the god' (*λατρεία, ὑπηρεσία*, *Ap.* 23C, 29A); it satisfies the description of piety in the *Euthyphro* (13E): 'that glorious work the gods perform by using us as servants' (*τὸ πάγκαλον ἔργον ὃ οἱ θεοὶ ἀπεργάζονται ἡμῖν ὑπηρεταῖς χρώμενοι*). Constituting, as it does, 'the god's gift' to Athens (30E), the greatest boon that ever came to it from the god (30A5–7), it is clearly a 'glorious work' which the god could only have accomplished through Socrates' service.

<sup>50</sup> Only SM dares think of himself as 'godloved' (*θεοφιλής*, *Smp.* 212A).

<sup>51</sup> Only by an exercise of the imagination can Burnet (1911: xlvii) find 'ecstatic vision' in *Smp.* 220C3–5 where Plato represents Socrates as thinking, investigating, searching (*συννοήσας, σκοπῶν, ζητῶν*), *not* contemplating.

<sup>52</sup> *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ* (*Thl.* 176B1–2), sometimes attributed to Socrates in the scholarly literature, is alien to the text and thought of the earlier dialogues.

the restructuring of every social institution—not only government, but family, economic life, war, education, art, the religious establishment<sup>53</sup>—and the subjection of every activity within the polis to the imperial reason of its elite. Athenian democracy SM caricatures savagely.<sup>54</sup> He charges it with obliterating distinctions of merit,<sup>55</sup> so transvaluing values that ‘insolence comes to be called “good breeding”, anarchy “freedom”, wastefulness “magnificence”, shamelessness “courage”’.<sup>56</sup> Classifying it with the degenerate forms of government, he judges it distinctly inferior to both of its contemporary rivals, timocracy and oligarchy, preferable only to lawless tyranny.<sup>57</sup>

For this theory or indeed for any coherent theory of the state we would search Plato’s earlier dialogues in vain. So far from denigrating the laws of Athens, SE voices tender attachment to them, preferring them, he says, to those of any state on earth, ‘Greek or barbarian’.<sup>58</sup> But he never explains why. Analogizing civic to filial obedience (*Cri.* 50E–51A), yet also likening it to the duty of members of a voluntary association to obey rules to which they have themselves agreed (*Cri.* 52B–53A), he seems deaf to the dissonance of the familial model with the contractarian. He feels no obligation to take his part in the activities which make the laws of Athens and determine its policies under those laws.<sup>59</sup> He never shows appreciation of the peculiar debt he owes his city for fostering the freedom of speech<sup>60</sup> that had enabled him to be the city’s gadfly for many years until his death and could not have been for as many days in ‘well-governed’ Sparta<sup>61</sup> or in SM’s ‘perfectly good’<sup>62</sup> state.

<sup>53</sup> *Rep.* IV–V.

<sup>54</sup> *Rep.* 557B–558C.

<sup>55</sup> *Rep.* 562D–563C.

<sup>56</sup> *Rep.* 560E–561A.

<sup>57</sup> *Rep.* VIII.

<sup>58</sup> *Cri.* 52C–53A. Cf. Vlastos (1983: 495ff., at 498–9).

<sup>59</sup> His voice is not heard when moral issues of the highest urgency—e.g. the proposal of genocide against the Mytileneans (Thuc. 3.36–49)—are debated in the Assembly. His excuse (‘if I had undertaken to do politics long ago I would have perished long ago and done no good to you or to myself’, *Ap.* 31D–E) is uncharacteristically defeatist and self-serving.

<sup>60</sup> *παρρησία*, characteristic of Athens (*Rep.* 557B), whose protection was a condition of Socrates’ public pursuit of unpopular truth.

<sup>61</sup> *Cri.* 52E.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. n. 27 above.

VIII. *Moral Psychology*

For SE the intellect is all-powerful in its control of the springs of action; wrong conduct, he believes, can only be due to ignorance of the good. This is decisively rejected in SM's tripartite model of the psyche. Here passion and appetite may motivate autonomously,<sup>63</sup> hence each is allowed independent input in determining whether or not reason's bidding will prevail. This yields a new conception of the motivation of virtuous conduct and of the nature of moral virtue itself. Thus courage, which SE had thought a cognitive achievement, an excellence of the rational soul,<sup>64</sup> SM redefines as an emotional achievement, an excellence of the passionate soul.<sup>65</sup>

These contrary psychological assumptions dictate contrary strategies of moral education. If SE's assumptions are correct, then to make men virtuous it should suffice to bring them to understand that by indulging bad impulse they damage their own happiness. If SM's assumptions are correct, understanding will be useless unless the emotions are engaged. Accordingly he puts high on his agenda something that does not come into SE's at all: the early conditioning of the psyche by state-controlled *μουσική παιδεία* which SM's philosopher-ruled *polis* can provide while Socrates could not, even if there were a thousand of him button-holing Athenians to disabuse them of their conceit of knowledge.

IX. *Moral Knowledge*

On his philosophers' capacity to reach unerring knowledge of the good SM predicates their absolute authority to mould the actions and dispositions of persons in the ideal state (*Rep.* 500D; cf. 540A). SE's diffidence marks the polar opposite to that confidence. He professes to have no moral knowledge at all.<sup>66</sup> How so?

<sup>63</sup> The tripartite model takes account of the fact, ignored by SE, that under given conditions appetite and passion are activated without prompting from reason or even against it. When we run into sudden and extreme frustration anger may well up in us even if we know that it would be better to keep our cool. When we are very hungry we crave food even if we have reason to wish we didn't.

<sup>64</sup> On virtue as *technē*, 'craft-knowledge', in Socrates, *not* Plato, see especially Irwin (1977), *passim*.

<sup>65</sup> Contrast *Pr.* 360D with *Rep.* 442B–C.

<sup>66</sup> *Ap.* 21B; cf. C–D; cf. *La.* 186D–E; *Ch.* 175E–176A; *HMi.* 372B373A; *Gorg.* 506A3–4 and 509A4–5; *Meno* 70B–71B.

Believing, as he does, that knowledge 'is'<sup>67</sup> virtue, how can he deny himself knowledge while assured that his virtue is beyond reproach?<sup>68</sup> He leaves the paradox formally unresolved. But he drops a clue in the very passage in which the disavowal is voiced in its most absolute form: he says he is 'aware of not being wise in anything great or small' (*Ap.* 21B), having just admitted (20D–E) that what he is disclaiming is that 'more than human wisdom' (*μείζω ἢ κατ' ἀνθρώπων σοφίαν*) which others pretend to have, not 'human wisdom': this he does *not* disclaim.<sup>69</sup>

#### X. *Method of Philosophical Investigation*

SE searches for moral truth by a method so peculiarly his own that it has come to bear his name: the 'Socratic' elenchus. Here the court of last appeal for the resolution of moral disagreement is two-person question-and-answer argument in which a thesis is debated only if asserted as the answerer's own belief and is regarded as refuted only if it is shown to contradict other beliefs whose truth the answerer himself accepts.<sup>70</sup> To produce the contradiction SE uses two forms of reasoning: (1) syllogistic, (2) epagogic.<sup>71</sup> The negation of the interlocutor's thesis is derived either (1) by entailment from a sub-set of his own beliefs or (2) from propositions which follow from these by analogy. In either case the reasoning is designed to make his interlocutors aware that beliefs to which they are committed commit them to the negation of their false thesis. If this procedure is to work Socrates must maintain his role as questioner in the elenchus. The profession of ignorance is tailor-made to assure him of it.<sup>72</sup>

Since he is no epistemologist, he is in no position to give an analysis of this method and put his finger on the assumptions on

<sup>67</sup> The connective is best read as a biconditional: '*A* is *B*' is used for '*A* is a necessary and sufficient condition of *B*'.

<sup>68</sup> *Ap.* 37B; *G.* 522D. The asymmetry of his sweeping disclaimers of moral knowledge without abatement of his claims to moral virtue is striking.

<sup>69</sup> 20D4–5. Precisely how he wants us to understand the 'human knowledge' he avows and the 'more than human knowledge' he disavows he does not explain: he could hardly have done so without plunging over his depth in epistemology.

<sup>70</sup> Adapted from Vlastos (1983: 30).

<sup>71</sup> For the latter (often mistranslated and misconceived as 'inductive' in the scholarly literature) as argument by analogy see especially Robinson (1953: Ch. IV), 'Epagoge'. Cf. also Vlastos 1956, xxxvii–xxxix.

<sup>72</sup> Perceiving this, but blind to its deeper motivation, Thrasymachus denounces it as chicanery (*Rep.* 337A).

which it might be reasonably expected to yield truth.<sup>73</sup> So since truth is most certainly what he thinks he gets, in searching by this method he is 'flying blind'—examining his interlocutors by a method which remains unexamined, undefended. He follows it because it works. Not that it enables him to answer all, or most, of the questions he asks. All too often his searches end in *aporia*. But not always. Once in a while he gets spectacular results, reaching moral truth whose force is shattering, overturning long-standing presumptions.<sup>74</sup> He demonstrates, for example, that moral virtue cannot be the class-bound, gender-bound attribute it had been thought since Homer, but has to be a universal human quality, the same in women as in men, in slaves as in masters, accessible on the same conditions to every human being. Again by elenctic argument he subverts the age-old ethos which sanctions retaliation<sup>75</sup> and puts harming enemies on a par with helping friends;<sup>76</sup> the *lex talionis*, backbone of the Greek sense of justice since time immemorial, he shows up as a precept not of justice but of injustice.

Then, all of a sudden, without warning, something unexpected happens in the sequence of Plato's earlier dialogues: in three of them which have often been thought the last in the series, transitional to Plato's middle period—the *Lysis*, the *Hippias Major*, and the *Euthydemus*—the elenchus is dropped.<sup>77</sup> This happens without notice, without explanation.<sup>78</sup> It just isn't there when we look for it. Other Socratic E traits are there, but not this one: Socrates is no longer getting truth by beating it out of dissenting interlocutors. The serious theses he now refutes are proposed and opposed by himself. Of the god's command to 'examine himself *and others*' he now heeds only half: he examines only himself. A still bigger surprise awaits us in the *Meno*. In the first third of this dialogue the elenchus has returned, alive and kicking. But to what end has Plato brought it back? To pillory its ineffectualness—to show that searching by this method for the answer to a 'What is the F?' question, while professing to know nothing about the F, SE is bound to fail, doomed to run into an

<sup>73</sup> For these see Vlastos (1983: 52–5); Davidson (1985: 15ff.).

<sup>74</sup> It is so felt by Callicles in the *Gorgias*: 'if you are serious and what you are saying is true, would not our human life be upside down?' (481C).

<sup>75</sup> Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1367A19ff. Contrast *Cri.* 49B–D.

<sup>76</sup> Aristotle, *Top.* 113A2ff. Contrast *Rep.* 335A–E.

<sup>77</sup> So it will be convenient to refer to those which precede these three, from the *Apology* to the *Gorgias*, as Plato's 'elenctic' dialogues.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Vlastos (1983: 57–8).

impasse from which he can exit only by jumping out of his skin. And so he does. A third of the way through the dialogue a metamorphosis occurs. SE turns visibly into SM.<sup>79</sup> He announces that he now subscribes to that ultra-metaphysical doctrine of the deathlessly transmigrating soul to which he adds a no less boldly speculative epistemological corollary, the theory of recollection. And he turns to a new method of philosophical investigation, consciously borrowed from the mathematicians: the 'method of hypothesis'.<sup>80</sup>

Now at last I can present the hypothesis on which I would predicate the availability of knowledge about the historical Socrates. I follow Ross in the fundamental assumption that Plato's dialogues record the development not of Socrates' mind but Plato's (220). The difference is that while Ross saw a smooth line of development in a uniform direction<sup>81</sup> I see a sharp change of direction. The line starts with Plato still under Socrates' spell after his death, still convinced of the essential truth of Socrates' teaching. Eager to understand it better himself and to make it known abroad, he starts writing Socratic dialogues.<sup>82</sup> But in contrast to Xenophon, whose aim in writing the *Memorabilia* is avowedly biographical (*Mem.* 1.3.1), Plato's, on my hypothesis as on that of Ross, is primarily philosophical. This purpose could be served as well by invented conversations, as by remembered ones. Hence Plato would feel no urgency to give the protagonist of his little dramas lines which preserve verbatim, or even in faithful paraphrase, things he may recall having heard Socrates say. He would feel no hesitation in keeping out of his text what he does recall, if it had not struck him then, or does not strike him now, as the most effective way of formulating Socrates' basic insights and vindicating their truth. If he had lost faith in some argument he had put into Socrates' mouth in a dialogue earlier on, he would

<sup>79</sup> So the *Meno* is a hybrid, its first third (down to 80E) recognizably SE's (except for the resort to geometry for a model answer to the 'What is the F?' question), while the rest of it is clearly SM's.

<sup>80</sup> Only the theory of forms is lacking to capture for the protagonist of the *Meno* all the essentials of SM's metaphysics.

<sup>81</sup> See his *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (1952). I forego here criticism of his dialogue by dialogue account of the unfolding of the theory.

<sup>82</sup> That he is not the first may be inferred from Theopompus' charge (*ap.* Athenaeus 509C) that most of Plato's dialogues had been plagiarized from those of Antisthenes, Aristippus, and Bryson.

feel free to scrap it, replacing it by a new one which refutes the conclusion of the earlier one.<sup>83</sup> Discreditable as such a procedure would be in a biographer, it is exactly right in work which is more concerned to do justice to truth in Socrates' philosophy than to preserve the circumstantial form in which he had pursued it in his lifetime. Plato could act in this way without disloyalty, confident that this is what Socrates himself would have wished done by someone whose concern for truth matches his own.

Is this a plausible hypothesis? Hardly. It requires us to believe that the most daringly inventive metaphysics and epistemology of classical antiquity was produced by a man who had previously been for years—a dozen or so on my reckoning<sup>84</sup>—a partisan of a radically different philosophy derived directly from his teacher and had used all his energies to perfect it and make it known. The tale becomes steeper if we splice into it, as we should, following Ross, Aristotle's report<sup>85</sup> that Plato's earliest philosophically influential contact had been with that wild Heraclitean, Cratylus. So this is the scenario I am hypothesizing: Plato, still very young, comes to Socrates fresh from a previous encounter with an *outré* metaphysician which had left him in doubt that anything in the world remains the same in any respect from moment to moment. Socrates makes him put all those metaphysical worries on a remote back-burner of his mind, and throw himself heart and soul into what he now comes to feel is the vastly more urgent business of searching for the right way to live, pursuing the search in Socrates' company, sharing his convictions. Upon Socrates' death he continues the search by creating Socratic dialogues, and he keeps at it until new developments in his life, precipitated by his contact with the Pythagorean philosophers of Southern Italy, give a new turn to his own thinking, at right angles to his Socratic past: he accepts the Pythagorean doctrine of the deathlessly transmigrating soul;<sup>86</sup> he

<sup>83</sup> As does the terminal argument in the *Laches*, refuting the definition of 'courage' which Socrates had established in the *Protagoras* and used with deadly effect against the sophist (360D).

<sup>84</sup> Taking the year of Socrates' death (399 BC) as the *terminus post quem* for the composition of the elenctic dialogues and taking the year of Plato's return from his first journey to Syracuse (387) to be the one in which he wrote the *Gorgias* (cf. Dodds, 1958: 19–21; Irwin, 1979: 5–8) as the last of the elenctic dialogues.

<sup>85</sup> *Metaph.* 987A32–B7; cf. Cherniss, 1955: 184–6.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Dodds (1951: 209, 'agreeing with the opinion of the majority of scholars'): what led Plato to his 'new transcendental psychology was his personal contact with the Pythagoreans of West Greece when he visited them'.

immerses himself in mathematical studies; he starts excogitating a new philosophy, working with a new mathematical model of knowledge and a new method of philosophical investigation he had learned from mathematicians.<sup>87</sup> Could all this have happened? There is no parallel for it in the whole of Western philosophy. Still, the fact that it never happened again is no reason for thinking it could not have happened then. History is the domain of singularity. Things which confound our expectations do happen in it from time to time. Whether this one did or didn't we can settle not by how it strikes our fancy but by pitting fancy against evidence.

So we turn to Aristotle who has been kept waiting in the wings. We confront him with the SE/SM contrast and ask him to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis that in SE we witness Plato in the earliest phase of his development, philosophizing *more Socratico*, pursuing Socratic insights which he had made his own, while in SM the next phase of Plato's philosophical development is on view, free now to pursue some unabashedly unSocratic lines of thought. Asked to speak to just this issue, what does Aristotle say? On the grand metaphysical 'hypothesis', the theory of forms in which, as we have seen,<sup>88</sup> SM breaks sharply with SE, Aristotle's testimony is explicit, unambiguous, and emphatic: Taking its crux to be the 'separation' of the form, Aristotle declares it was Plato, not Socrates, who made this move.<sup>89</sup> To scholars who give a smaller, earlier, piece of the theory to Socrates, a later, more elaborate, one to Plato,<sup>90</sup> Aristotle gives no support. In his view all of it is Plato's: *he* was the first 'to assert the existence of the *ideas*',<sup>91</sup> who 'introduced the *forms*',<sup>92</sup> who 'brought forward this doctrine'.<sup>93</sup> Socrates' contribution had been to 'give the impetus'<sup>94</sup> to this development since the objects

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Vlastos, 'Elenchus and Mathematics', forthcoming in *A.J.P.* (1988).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. V above.

<sup>89</sup> *Met.* 1078B30: 'Socrates did not make separate existents of the universals or the definitions. But they [sc. Plato: cf. *ἡ Πλάτωνος πραγματεία* in the doublet at 987A29ff.] did separate then, and that sort of entity they called "Ideas".'

<sup>90</sup> R. E. Allen puts this claim into the title of his book, 'Plato's *Euthyphro* and the Earlier Theory of Forms' (1970).

<sup>91</sup> *Met.* 1078B11–12: *ὁ πρῶτος θέμενος τὰ εἶδη εἶναι*. Same thing at 1078B11–12, *οἱ πρῶτοι τὰς ἰδέας φησαντες εἶναι*, where (*pace* Burnet, 1914: 157) the reference is exclusively to Plato in spite of the plural (cf. *ἡ Πλάτωνος πραγματεία* in the doublet of the passage at 987A29).

<sup>92</sup> *εἰσαγαγεῖν τὰ εἶδη*, *Nic. Eth.* 1096A13.

<sup>93</sup> *κομίσαντες τὴν δόξαν ταύτην*, *Ibid.*, A17.

<sup>94</sup> *ἐκίνησε*, *Met.* 1086B3.



of his definitional inquiries were universals, stable objects of knowledge exempt from flux. *His* forms are the unseparated universals he sought to define: 'but Socrates did not separate the universals from the particulars; and right he was, not to separate them' (*Metaph.* 1086B4).<sup>95</sup>

Nor does Aristotle ever suggest that Socrates had any truck with Plato's other great metaphysical speculation, the 'separate', transmigrating, soul.<sup>96</sup> Aristotle's treatment of the *Meno*, where this doctrine first breaks into the Platonic corpus, is symptomatic. Encountering in the first third of the dialogue the view that virtue is the same in all human beings regardless of gender, age, or legal status (73Bff.), he recognizes it as the Socratic invention which it is, assigning it to Socrates by name (*Pol.* 1260A21). Not so when he comes in the *Meno* (80D–E), to the predicament Plato creates for SE to trigger his metamorphosis into SM: Aristotle does not see *Socrates* caught in that impasse; he refers to it non-committally as 'the quandary in the *Meno*'.<sup>97</sup> And when he reaches the point where Plato makes the Socrates of the dialogue break out of the impasse by turning metaphysician Aristotle does not impute that move to the Socrates of history. To the doctrine that learning is recollection he refers only as 'the thesis in the *Meno*' (*Pr. An.* 67A21–22) and never associates it with Socrates in any way anywhere in his writings.

His references to Socrates' moral psychology<sup>98</sup> are no less instructive. Here the polemical shoe is on the other foot: Socrates, not Plato, is the butt of Aristotle's criticisms, and the errors under attack are precisely the ones he has seen put into Socrates' mouth in Plato's earlier dialogues. The doctrine of the impossibility of *akrasia*, which strikes Aristotle as clashing flagrantly with common belief and experience, he refers to no one but Σωκράτης<sup>99</sup> — the Socrates of Plato's *Protagoras*.<sup>100</sup> So too Socrates, and he alone, is the theorist attacked for the reductive conception of

<sup>95</sup> Xenophon's testimony goes the same way. He is aware of Socrates' preoccupation with definition and lists a great number of definitions (*Mem.* 4.6) without coming within a hair's breadth of crediting him with a metaphysical theory of 'separate' forms.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. III above.

<sup>97</sup> τὸ ἐν τῷ Μένωνι ἀπόρημα, *Pol. An.* 71A29.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. VII above.

<sup>99</sup> Not ὁ Σωκράτης: see n. 102 below.

<sup>100</sup> *Nic. Eth.* 1145B23–26; cf. also *Eud. Eth.* 12664B32–36. Without naming his source, Aristotle leaves us in no doubt of it, for his wording in the former passage conserves intact the metaphor in *Prot.* 325C1–2 that knowledge 'could not be dragged about like a slave' by the passions.

virtue which identifies virtue with knowledge: the attack is directed exclusively at SE—the Socrates of the *Gorgias*.<sup>101</sup> In the *Magna Moralia* (1182A15–26) which, if not by Aristotle's hand is written by a close follower who reflects faithfully his own point of view, Plato is praised for having 'divided the soul into its rational and non-rational parts and assigned to each their appropriate virtues', while Socrates is scolded for 'doing away with [i.e. ignoring] the irrational part of the soul', thereby 'doing away with both passion and moral character [*sc.* as independent determinants of action]'. The difference between SE's and SM's conception of the structure of the psyche could hardly have been recognized more clearly as a difference between Socrates and Plato. We can, therefore, be certain that when Aristotle reads Book IV of the *Republic* he takes its 'Socrates' to speak only for Plato. And that he does the same when he reads its Book V is no less certain: taking the institutions expounded in this Book with the utmost seriousness, devoting the first two chapters of Book II of the *Politics* to their criticism, he attacks their theory as exclusively Plato's.<sup>102</sup>

And so too, last but not least, Aristotle's view of Socrates distinguishes him from Plato in preserving that unique and paradoxical feature of the historical figure, the profession of ignorance.<sup>103</sup>

*Soph. El.* 183B7–8: 'And this is why Socrates asked questions and gave no replies: for he confessed that he had no knowledge.'

Aristotle is aware of the link between this profession and Socrates' method of argument to which I called attention earlier on.<sup>104</sup> Recognizing only one form of argument that will fit the

<sup>101</sup> *Eud. Eth.* 1215B2–9, paraphrasing and rebutting tersely the epagogic argument in *Gorg.* 460A–C. That the virtues are forms of knowledge is also ascribed to Socrates by name in *Nic. Eth.* 1144B17 and *Magna Mor.* 1182A20, 1183B8, and 1198A10.

<sup>102</sup> He speaks of their proponent as *ὁ Σωκράτης* (*Pol.* 1261A17, B20, 1262B6, 1263B20), using, as he so often does, the articular proper name to refer to what is said by this persona in a Platonic dialogue, in contradistinction from what is believed by the historical Socrates (cf. Ross, 1924: vol. I, xl–xli, on 'the Fitzgerald canon'), leaving no doubt that the views he is criticizing are Plato's: the whole passage starts off, 'as Plato says in the *Republic* . . .' (1261A6).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. IX above. The profession is attested for Socrates by a variety of other authors as well: Aeschines of Sphettus fr. 10C (Dittmar); Colotes, *ap.* Plutarch, *Mor.* 1117D; Cicero, *Acad.* I.4.16, II.19.124; Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 45.2.

<sup>104</sup> Under X above.

Socratic elenchus, the 'peirastic', where one argues solely 'from premises believed by the answerer',<sup>105</sup> Aristotle sees that this would be the only form of argument left to someone who disavows knowledge. So he cites the disavowal of knowledge to explain<sup>106</sup> Socrates' persistence in taking and keeping the questioner's role in his elenctic arguments. This single testimonium, brief as it is, does double duty in assuring us that Aristotle knows both the disavowal of knowledge and the commitment to the elenctic method as authentic features of Socratic philosophy which are only his, not to be ascribed to anyone else and, in any case, never to Plato.

Thus when we confront Aristotle with that battery of traits that divide SE from SM in Plato's dialogues<sup>107</sup> we find that his testimony is unambiguously clear: he is in no doubt about the fact that in SE, only in him, and in sharp opposition to SM, Plato is speaking for Socrates, recreating Socrates' search by syllogism and epagogic argument, for definable universals; his narrowly moral preoccupations and his intellectualist conception of virtue and moral psychology which had led him to deny the possibility of *akrasia*; his profession of ignorance and his elenctic method of investigation. He sees all of those features of SE as so patently Socratic that he reports them directly as the views of Socrates, while contrasting features of SM's teaching he reports no less directly as Plato's, though he finds both voiced by the same *dramatis persona* in works by the same author.

The implications of this fact have not been realized by scholars who have discounted the Aristotelian testimony, alleging that it is uncritically derivative from Plato.<sup>108</sup> Anticipating this objection, Ross had met (234–5), and disarmed it. He pointed out, first of all, that it was falsely premised: Thus [Aristotle] 'could not have learned from [Plato's] dialogues that Cratylus was Plato's first master; nothing in the *Cratylus* or elsewhere in Plato suggests it' (loc. cit.). And this is only one of many things in Aristotle's testimony which he could not have fished out of any of Plato's

<sup>105</sup> *Soph. El.* 165B4–6, ἐκ τῶν δοκούντων τῷ ἀποκρινομένῳ.

<sup>106</sup> The force of the conjunction in ὁμολόγει γὰρ οὐκ εἶδέναι.

<sup>107</sup> His remarks address all of those traits with the exception of II and V—the practice of philosophy, and its religious dimension. His failure to speak to these two points in no way weakens the force of his testimony on each of the other eight.

<sup>108</sup> Most recently Kahn (1981: n. 13).

dialogues because they simply are not there.<sup>109</sup> Secondly, Ross called attention to the discriminating way in which Aristotle evidently read the Platonic texts from which he does derive his own accounts of major Socratic doctrines. Finding a character named 'Socrates' arguing for one set of doctrines in dialogues like the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* and then the same character arguing for altogether different ones in works like the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, Aristotle assigns the former exclusively to Socrates, the latter exclusively to Plato<sup>110</sup> without ever finding it necessary to explain why he is taking that liberty with his texts. What could have made him so confident of this differential allocation that he should deem it superfluous to argue for it or even to mention that he is making it? What else but the fact that it was supported by all the information he and his readers had been getting from other sources as well—from the stream of Socratic dialogues by Aeschines, Aristippus, Antisthenes and the rest,<sup>111</sup> and also orally from people who had known Socrates in their twenties and thirties and were still around when Aristotle joined the Academy thirty-two years after Socrates' death.

Thus the fact that in his account of all of the main Socratic positions Aristotle records he relies so heavily on Plato's earlier dialogues as his source does not impair the value of the testimony. Quite the contrary. It is a powerful attestation of the confidence he reposes in those dialogues as a source of Socratic philosophy. His trust in them is so great that he makes them his preferred source, content to base on them his account of those distinctive Socratic views which engage his attention, treating what Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates in those dialogues as true blue Socratic doctrine, whose authenticity is so patent that he feels free to impute it directly to Socrates, without feeling obliged to allude to the Platonic authorship of the texts in which he sees it expounded.

To say this is not to imply that we may look to Aristotle for a well-rounded account of Socrates' positive contribution to Greek

<sup>109</sup> Over a third of the forty-two Aristotelian testimonia about Socrates in Deman 1942 fall in this category.

<sup>110</sup> Burnet misses the force of this differential assignment when he remarks that 'for Aristotle, Socrates was just the Platonic Socrates' (Burnet, 1911: xxv): SE is a 'Platonic Socrates', and so is SM, and neither is *the* 'Platonic Socrates'.

<sup>111</sup> *Pace* Ross (1921: xxxv), we have no reason to discount the possibility that Aristotle derived some part, large or small, of his information about Socrates from this source.

philosophy. No one is suggesting that we should. He offers nothing of the kind. Two things in particular he fails to tell us:

First, that during that first period of his life Plato himself wrote as a convinced Socratic, constricting the amplitude of his inventive genius within the narrow confines of Socrates' obsessive preoccupation with ethics. Aristotle assumes that this is so, but does not bother to say it.

Secondly, neither does he trouble to tell us what was the ideological bond of union between SM and SE in spite of all their differences. What was it over and above sentiment that made Plato keep Socrates as the protagonist of those marvellous dialogues of his middle period, undoubtedly the greatest works of literature and philosophy he ever wrote? When Plato came to embrace such flagrantly unSocratic doctrines as 'separate' forms and 'recollection' why should he have put them into the mouth of the man who would have been the first to repudiate them as presumption of superhuman knowledge?<sup>112</sup> This absolutely vital information Aristotle makes no effort to supply.<sup>113</sup> He does not need to. He knows that everyone who has access to his Platonic texts can get it directly from them, observing there that while Plato had now distanced himself from his master in those ways in which SM is a stranger to SE, he still remains at one with Socrates in the eudaemonist foundation of moral theory, in the conviction that virtue is the sovereign determinant of happiness,<sup>114</sup> and in the assumption that moral theory has power not only to explain morality, but to change it, and thereby change the life of man.<sup>115</sup>

If the foregoing argument is correct the reason why we *can* give with sober confidence an affirmative answer to the question with

<sup>112</sup> Cf. IX above.

<sup>113</sup> Which cannot be held against him: he is not composing a chapter on Socrates in a textbook on the history of philosophy. The information he does supply is incidental to his other concerns, most of them polemical, putting an edge on a difference of his with Plato in metaphysics and epistemology or with Socrates in ethical theory and moral psychology.

<sup>114</sup> For a discussion of these two Socratic innovations which are the heart of Plato's enduring Socratic legacy see Vlastos (1984: 181ff., at 183–9).

<sup>115</sup> That this was SM's philosophical bond with SE which made Plato feel that at this deepest level it *was* Socrates who speaks in both is confirmed by what happens in Plato's later work: When the centre of gravity moves far enough from the ethical core of SE's concerns the persona of Socrates is displaced in this period by new protagonists: Parmenides, Timaeus, the Eleatic Stranger, the Athenian Stranger. When the centre moves back to its earlier place, as it does in the *Philebus*, Socrates is recalled to his former role.

which this lecture began is our incredible good fortune in having at our disposal the testimony of two great philosophers each of whom was in a position to know well what we particularly need to learn from each. To Plato we go, for that thorough and deep understanding of his master's philosophy which he had come to know from the inside, having made it his very own. Precious as this is, it would not have sufficed for our purpose if it had stood alone. For the very fact that its transmitter is himself second to none among the creators of powerfully original philosophical ideas would leave us uncertain of the fidelity to their Socratic origins of the doctrines he appropriates and transmits. Here is where Aristotle's testimony is a godsend. It gives us reason to believe that authentic Socratic thought survives in Plato's recreation of it.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The above is, in substance, the text of a lecture to the British Academy (May 1988) revised with the help of invaluable criticisms offered me by my friend Terry Irwin. It should go without saying that all of the views expounded here are my own and that some of them are highly controversial: for their detailed defence, impossible in the present format, see the essays listed under my name in the bibliography. Readers desirous of sampling differing views on 'the Socratic problem' could hardly do better than consult the compilation edited by Andreas Patzer (cf. n. 2 above). They range from the extremes of scepticism represented there by Dupréel, Heinrich Gomperz, and Gigon, to the more moderate views, with evident affinities with those of the present essay, by Lacey, de Struyker and, of course, Ross.

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