proposto da H. Grégoire in ‘Byzantion’ 13, 1938, pp. 396–99—alluderebbe e ai cenni con cui il naufrago Menelao appariva in scena nell’Elena’ e a Euripide in quanto creatore di eroi stracciati, ma non fanno cenno alcuno, né in apparato né nella relativa nota, alla congettura ἵπτων (estraccio), suggerita da Austin in ‘Dodone’ 19, 1990, p. 27, dove, dichiando tuttavia proporre ad accogliere la congettura di Grégoire, aveva rifiutato drasticamente ἵπτων, in quanto emendamento che «sembbe bien tiré par les cheveux!».

Questi dissensi non intendono evidentemente mettere in discussione, né tantomeno sminuire, la validità di questa edizione, che rappresenta una nuova, preziosa acquisizione per la ‘OUP Aristophanes Series’; e anzi si può fondatamente affermare che con questo lavoro appare pienamente realizzato il proposito che, come si diceva, i due studiosi esprimono nella ‘Introduction’: contribuire ‘to the vigorous emerging effort to reevaluate this neglected literary gem by one of Athens’ most famous and important poets».

Giuseppe Mastromarco


‘Das Bild des Dialektikers’ (written by a friend with whom I have discussed, and disagreed about, Plato for thirty-five years), completes a project initiated by the publication of the author’s 1985 volume Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie. Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen (= PSP I). The new book presupposes all the conclusions of the older one, and shows how they fit, or (as I prefer to put it) might be made to fit, the ‘late’ dialogues.¹ The purpose is to show that, as the ‘early’ or pre-‘Republic’ dialogues all point beyond themselves towards the ‘Hauptwerk’, the ‘Republic’,² so the ‘Republic’ itself and

¹ These are understood as – I list them in the order of S.’s treatment – ‘Laws’, ‘Parmenides’, ‘Theaetetus’, ‘Sophist’, ‘Politicus’, ‘Philebus’, ‘Timaeus’. S. takes the ‘early/middle/late’ division of the dialogues for granted; but apart e.g. from the special position he accords to the ‘Republic’ (see below), the division actually plays no great role in his argument, so that to raise questions about how he would justify it would probably be superfluous here. (Anglo-Saxon interpreters have frequently adopted just such a division, and with equally little justification; does S. use it perhaps partly to tease such interpreters, whose approach he so completely rejects that he barely makes reference to them at all? See following note.).

² In implicitly criticizing Charles Kahn for not acknowledging PSP I as a forerunner of his own (very different) ‘proleptic’ reading of the ‘early’ and ‘middle’ dialogues, S. strangely suggests that Kahn’s 1996 book made such readings «wieder populär» (234 n. 4); in fact the number of those who have followed Kahn – at least in adopting his ‘proleptic’ reading – can be counted on the fingers of one hand. It is a curiosity of S.’s approach that he generally does not show any great interest in modern – even early modern – literature on Plato not written in German (even while himself being master of many languages); but it is not in any case, for the most part, his aim, or his style, to debate with his opponents – any more than he supposes that Plato’s expert dialectician – ‘der Dialektiker’ – ever really does so. There are at the same time some signs of an attempt at reconciliation with some of the grander and older figures of German scholarship (even Schleiermacher: 228); the result is the faintest of hints that «platonische Esoterik» is really a natural outgrowth of such scholarship.
the 'late' dialogues point beyond themselves, especially to Plato’s oral teaching about the first principles of things (die mündliche Prinzipienlehre: 234). Hence the title, and the subject, of PSP II; for everything in PSP I hinges on the claim that Socrates is forever the perfect, or expert, dialectician; where, by expert ‘dialectician’, is to be understood someone who, above all, has knowledge, and speaks from a position of knowledge. One might suppose, and many have indeed supposed, that the side-lining of Socrates in most of the ‘late’ dialogues, and the introduction of others as main speakers in his place (Parmenides; an anonymous Eleatic; an equally anonymous Athenian; Timaeus), signal a self-distancing on Plato’s part from the philosophy of the ‘middle’ dialogues; and that, of course, would spell, or at least threaten, the death of the thesis of PSP I, to the extent that – for PSP I – the Socrates of the ‘Republic’ is already the complete dialectician, schooled in the ideas reflected and reported in the accounts of the agrapha dogmata that we have from Aristotle and others. There can be no turning back (no ‘distancing’) for S.’s Plato, only different degrees of explicitness about truths already gained (see esp. ch.10.84, ‘Unterschiedliche Ausführlichkeit in der Darstellung der Prinzipien’).

So how exactly are we to take these new main speakers who usurp Socrates’ position as chief speaker in the ‘late’ works? S.’s answer, put in the broadest terms, is to claim that Plato’s dialectician as represented by his ‘Socrates’ – never to be confused with the historical Socrates, who is for the purposes of the reading of the dialogues of complete irrelevance – already has many different aspects or guises: know-nothing, ‘midwife’, fellow-searcher after truth …; and that the ‘usurpers’ (as I, not S., call them) – Parmenides and the others – essentially serve just to give us further such aspects, filling out the portrait (‘das Bild’) of the dialectician. The main difference is that the new main figures, like the seer Diotima in the ‘Symposium’, appear more authoritative than the old one, i.e. than Socrates in his various guises (but then so too is Socrates himself more authoritative when he resumes his old position in the ‘Philebus’), and that the minor speakers are correspondingly less colourful, as a group, than they were in the ‘early’ and ‘middle’ dialogues: the relationship between main and other speakers, here in the ‘late’ works, is typically either actually what S. necessarily sees as what underlies the ‘early’/‘middle’ works (the ‘default’ position, one might perhaps call it?), i.e. a relationship between teacher and pupil or something resembling it. (The one exception is the ‘Timaeus’/‘Critias’), where – S. claims – there is for once a dialogue between equals; as there must be, if, inter alia, ‘Timaeus’ is to retain both its fictional connection and, what S. wants for it, an equal status, with ‘Republic’.) In short, the ‘late’ dialogues give us more of the same as the ‘early’/‘middle’ ones, saying what may be said to the unschooled, or the as yet

1 That is, they play more authoritative roles in their respective dialogues; Socrates, the expert, was always authoritative, only – earlier on – more prone to hide his light under a bushel.

2 Theaetetus and the young Socrates of the ‘Politics’ are the clearest examples of pupils (apart from Socrates himself in the ‘Parmenides’): both ‘Talente’ on p. 232, but so ungleiche ‘Talente’ on p. 167. On S.’s account, it is not wholly clear what quality the young Socrates shows apart from his ability to follow his teacher without causing trouble (on which see further below).
not fully schooled, while holding back what needs to be held back for face-to-face discussion within the Academy – but all the time promising not only that there is more to be said but that there is at least one person capable of saying it: the author, who like the true expert in the art of *logoi* in the *Phaedrus* always has more valuable things up his sleeve than he writes (above all, on those first principles).

The first chapter of PSP II ("Politeia. Der richtige Umgang mit Dialektik"), which takes us to page 43 out of a total of 235 pages of text, serves as a ‘bridge’ (1 n. 1) between PSP II and PSP I. At the same time it sets the tone of the main part of the book, by presenting everything in PSP I as settled and established. Thus, most importantly, «der unvorbereitete Leser» is warned against supposing that, in a passage like ‘Republic’ 433d, Socrates is himself genuinely at a loss: Glaucon knows better (41). Given the extraordinary degree of Socrates’ hesitation at this point in the argument – the treatment of women and children in Callipolis – it will, presumably, only be someone forearmed and forewarned by S. who would suppose that Socrates was not being genuinely hesitant; on S.’s account, I suppose, Socrates’ hesitation will represent the frame of mind in which ‘Glaucon and Adimantus’ should receive Socrates’ proposals, not being – like him – in possession of the knowledge on which they are based. That Socrates will go on to say that he doesn’t possess such knowledge either will then be something else the ‘unprepared reader’ will have to be warned against taking seriously. After this, the treatment of Socrates in the ‘Theaetetus’ as the barren midwife in S.’s chapter 6 comes as no surprise: midwifery, S. argues, is just one of those roles that Socrates as dialectician takes on, just one of those many aspects of the dialectician qua dialectician, not something that, by itself, gives us his essence.

This chapter on the ‘Theaetetus’, as will be immediately clear, is absolutely vital to the argument of the whole book. S. hardly has the same kind of problem when it comes to finding the right features – that is, the features of the expert, knowledgeable dialectician – in the Visitor from Athens in ‘Laws’ (chapter 2, subtitle ‘Übereinstimmung mit der Politeia’, less than 10 pages), in Parmenides in

---

1 S. warns us (64–5) against supposing that he means us to take the portrait of the dialectician as a portrait of Plato; nevertheless (67 n. 11) this «schlägt natürlich nicht aus, dass die Ansichten der jeweiligen Dialektikerfigur die Ansichten Platons sind».

2 Together, naturally, with the same signs of *holding back*, by the expert, from his less expert, unprepared interlocutors and with verbal and other echoes of key phrases and ideas from the ‘Republic’.
‘Parmenides’ (chapter 5, subtitle ‘Ideenphilosophie und Prinzipiendialektik’, 25 pages), in the Eleatic Visitor in ‘Sophist’ (chapter 7, subtitle ‘Theaitetos und der Gast aus Elea’, 28 pages) and ‘Politicus’ (chapter 8, subtitle ‘Ein genaues Pendant zum Sophistes?’, 37 pages), even in the Socrates of the ‘Philebus’ (chapter 9, subtitle ‘Die Dialektik als Gabe der Götter und die neue Deutlichkeit des Sokrates über seine Gesprächsführung’, 25 pages), or again in the eponymous main speaker in the ‘Timaeus’ (chapter 10, subtitle ‘Der Umgang des Kosmologen mit den Prinzipien’, 11 pages). The recruitment of Eleatics and Pythagoreans (Timaeus) to serve as substitutes for Socrates is Plato’s acknowledgement of his debt to these two ‘Italian’ conceptions of philosophy – or also, reversed: he explains so Eleaten und Pythagoreern zu ‘verehrungswürdigen’ Vorläufern des eigenen Zugangs zur Wahrheit auf dem Weg der Ideenannahme und der Prinzipiendialektik (231). With all these authoritative figures the image of the midwife Socrates, son of Phaenarete, of the dialogue ‘Theaetetus’, must fit at all costs.

Does it? My own view is that S.’s arguments to this effect are ultimately less than successful. Firstly, here as elsewhere S. declines to discuss alternative interpretations, preferring to rely on his own instincts about particular passages, contexts, and whole dialogues. In principle there is absolutely nothing wrong with this, especially given the fact that he thinks that most others come at Plato from entirely the wrong direction. But to the extent that he must want to persuade the non-believer, in such crucial cases I think it would be as well for S. openly to recognize at least that others think that other interpretations are available, and why; for otherwise any apparent victory will appear to be too easily won, and his readers will be left wondering why he didn’t consider this, or that, alternative to his own reading, so in the present case. Take S.’s somewhat heavy-handed treatment of the midwife image on pp. 97–8: surely no one supposes that the image is to be taken entirely seriously; anyone must take it that there is at least a touch of disingenuousness (if not irony) about Socrates’ self-description, since in any case it undermines itself. But then it must, and must in any case surely be intended to, put us in mind of the paradox of the ‘Apology’, of the wise philosopher who nevertheless knows nothing; which is likely, for any uncommitted reader, to bring in a whole (sceptical, then ‘sceptical’) tradition of interpretation that is at least as old as the forerunners of S.’s own – and such a reader will likely remain unimpressed by the suggestion that the image can be seen as complementary to other images, apparently contradictory, of Socrates/the dialectician, especially if the reader in question is already inclined to think that the idea of Socrates as master of the ignorant, rather than that of Socrates the knower, is the more demonstrably dominant in Plato as a whole.

1 Ch. 3, ‘Der Siebte Brief. Das Testen des Kandidaten ist Aufgabe des Dialektikers’, consists of four pages or so on the main points in the letter for S.’s argument; ch. 4, ‘Die Thematisierung des Überlieferungsweges. ‘Symposion’, ‘Theaitetos’, ‘Parmenides’, serves to introduce us to the idea that the various ‘mutations’ in the figure of Socrates each have their own (philosophical) truth, together forming the whole that is the Platonic philosopher (see esp. pp. 64–5).
So far, my claim is only that S.’s implicit claim to victory over his (here as often elsewhere unacknowledged) opponents is too easily made. But my next objection is more serious: it is that S. pays too little attention to the substance of the arguments of the ‘Theaetetus’. His whole concern in the chapter is with the outward signs of the philosophical level of the characters of the dialogue, and of the relationship and interactions between them; but if the outcome is supposed to be that Socrates is in possession of all the answers (because of the way he leads Theaetetus in the conversation, and then in consequence of S.’s overall thesis), we should surely be told what solutions to the puzzles of the dialogue – about the nature of knowledge, or the possibility of falsehood – the expert dialectician would not merely propose, but would have as already established by virtue of his expertise. Now I am myself perfectly happy with the idea that Socrates really does have solutions of some sort up his sleeve, and that the aporia with which the ‘Theaetetus’ closes belongs more to Theaetetus than to Socrates. What I find strange is that S. appears to leave us to suppose that they can somehow be found «auf dem Weg der Ideenannahme und der Prinzipiendialektik» (S.’s phrase, borrowed from elsewhere in the book: see above), without telling us how that might be. This connects with a tired old criticism of the type of interpretation S. represents (that of the Tübingen-Milan ‘school’), which I introduce here only for its application to the specific case in hand: namely that the philosophical value of following the dialectical road – «Ideenannahme», «Prinzipienlehre» – as so far specified remains a mystery, and so by implication, for any hostile interpreter: nil. It might perfectly well have been, after all, that Plato saw in the special knowledge possessed by the dialectician – according to S. – something akin to the Holy Grail, which will be forever beyond our grasp as mere readers of his written texts; that would free S. from any duty to spell out, in general terms, what the content and specific implications of that knowledge actually were. But if we are to be convinced that the Socrates/the dialectician is meant to pose his specific questions in the ‘Theaetetus’ while knowing the answers, and knowing them precisely because of his expert knowledge as dialectician (which seems to be the implication of S.’s argument), then we surely need to be given at least the beginning of an idea about how the dialectician would derive his solutions when not limited to a tiro auditor like Theaetetus, and when not uttering in a written

1 Conversely, S. is rather too ready to appeal to the authority of interpreters who think like himself. So, to take one outstanding example, on p. 179: «Wie H. J. Krämer gesehen hat, wird hier, genau in der Mitte des ['Politikos'], der Begriff des meson tón eschatôn eingeführt als knapper Hinweis auf die nicht ausgeführte Ontologie des absoluten Maßes und der Mesotes-Lehre» (then, in a note, S. adds « ... Krämers Interpretation des ganzen Dialogs ... und besonders des Exkurses ... gehört zum Besten, was über den ’Politikos’ geschrieben wurde»). It is surely at best distinguishing to suggest that Krämer saw anything; what he did was to propose an interpretation of a particular passage which may or may not attract other interpreters – and as a matter of fact has left most of them cold (which does not mean that Krämer was wrong, only that he was not obviously right, as S.’s «hat gesehen» means to imply). As for the fact that the relevant passage occurs «genau in der [arithmetical] Mitte» of the dialogue, why should this not be, if not accidental, at least in part a kind of pun – further evidence of the pleasure in ‘play’ that, as S. is surely right to claim, is (though in the event he actually points to rather few examples of it) «ein wesentliches Motiv» of Plato’s writing (61 n. 6)?
medium. Absent such further enlightenment, I fear that the ‘tired old criticism’ will come back, only directed at S. rather than at Plato.1

One last set of critical observations, this time directed at part of the longest chapter in the book apart from the bridging first: a context in which S. does something he hardly does at all in PSP II at all, and joins in hand-to-hand debate with a particular individual – as it happens, myself. (In effect, I accept S.’s invitation to dialogue, if only, for now, in writing.) On p. 162, S. objects to my characterization of the younger Socrates as philosophical partner in the ‘Politicus’, and in particular to my criticism of the young man for not testing the Eleatic Visitor. This, says S., is to miss the point: «... erstens ist das angesichts der noch geltenden Zielsetzung, die eleatischen Ansichten vom Gast darlegen zu lassen, wirklich nicht die Aufgabe des jugendlichen Antworters»; in the second place, S. asks, is there any context in the dialogues that we can interpret as the ‘testing’ of a «Dialektikerfigur» through a younger and less experienced partner? To the first objection, I respond that S. is relying on too literal a reading of the opening of the 'Sophist' – too literal, perhaps, even from his own point of view; does he really suppose, and is it of any value to his overall thesis to suppose, that Plato wants to give us the Eleatic view (spelled out as what people in Elea think) about the sophist, the statesman and the philosopher? And as for the second objection, S. is already assuming that the dialogues are peopled with «Dialektikerfiguren» as he understands these; an assumption that I decline to share. In my own reconstruction of Platonic dialectic, based on the 'Phaedrus', on 'Republic' VII, 534b–d, and numerous other passages, dialectic rests firmly on, and is nothing without, the possibility of challenge and examination;2 the willingness both to challenge and be challenged, together with the ability to give logoi and receive them from others, is what makes a philosophical soul philosophical, whether more or less experienced. So I am unrepentant about complaining that the young Socrates does not test the Eleatic, or press him harder than he does.

S. further complains (162 n.13) that my comments on the two main ‘characters’ in the ‘Politicus’ forget the connection with the opening of the ‘Sophist’; «woraus einige seltsame Fehleinschätzungen resultieren». I may have been guilty of the particular charge in question, but when I do look at the beginning of the ‘Sophist’, and in particular the Eleatic’s request for a partner who will cause him no trouble and be easily led (217d1 [not «217c1»]), I am all the more resolute about not wanting to follow S.’s lead and see the Eleatic, too, as representing, giving us another true perspective on, the Platonic dialectician. S. may be happy with a Socrates/a «Dialektiker» who prefers intelligent but tame dialectical partners; I am not happy with this idea at all – but precisely because I do not interpret Plato as believing in the existence, even at some unspecified time in the future, of human beings with the kind of (Grail-like?) knowledge that S. attributes

---

1 A third and lesser objection is to S.’s somewhat contorted interpretation of «das massiv eingesetzte Vokabular der ‘Hilfe’» in the context of Socrates’ ‘helping’ Protagoras’ thesis (116–118); an interpretation so contorted, in fact, that it tends to detract from the original thesis about the significance of boëthein tû logû in the context of the ‘Phaedrus’ (connecting the idea with the dialectician’s access to timôtera).

2 It is because accounts or logoi are always open to challenge that they need to be ‘sufficient to help themselves’ (‘Phaedrus’ 22767–2277a1).
to his «Dialektikerfigur». My own version of a Platonic dialectician (for what it is worth), whatever the level of his expertise, will always have the potential to go wrong, and so must always in principle be open to challenge. So a real example of the type will actually – deliberately – look for a partner that will be the opposite of tame: one that will cause him the most trouble and be least easily led. For otherwise, things may go wrong, and then wronger still.

All of which will mean that the Eleatic is in important respects not like a Socrates, or his author; for this and a very large number of other claims that S. will utterly reject (while at least partially welcoming a few), see my ‘Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing’, published by Cambridge University Press in November 2007. Even the title of this new book is partly chosen with S.’s own PSP (I and II) in mind. Now that it has appeared, S. will be able to continue this written conversation between us (side by side with any oral exchanges that may take place in the meantime), returning fire for fire in the form of a review, of his own, of my rival theses and arguments. Meanwhile, of course, nothing that I have said above is intended in anything other than the friendliest of spirits. Nor does it detract from my general view of PSP (I and) II as a magnificent and magisterial, even imperious, statement of a particular type of interpretation that has not generally been given the attention, and close consideration, it deserves. I trust that the above sufficiently demonstrates my own respect and care.

Durham

Christopher Rowe

