

## ONE

# PLATO: *TESTIMONIA ET FRAGMENTA*

---

---

Dmitri Nikulin

Plato is a unique character among the *dramatis personae* in the history of philosophy. No other thinker arouses so much emotion and dissent among readers and interpreters. Passions are inevitably stirred when one tries to answer a simple question: What does Plato want to say, and what does he actually say? Plato wrote dialogues, which are fine pieces of literature and reasoning but which may always be read and interpreted differently, especially since the speakers often do not commit themselves to any particular philosophical position and the question discussed frequently remains unanswered and sometimes not even explicitly asked. Moreover, it is neither easy to discern Plato's own position at any given moment in the discussion, nor who is speaking behind his characters. When Socrates is engaged in a dialectical debate of a subject (such as wisdom, courage, love, friendship, temperance, etc.) does he *really* mean what he says, if one takes into account his undeniably ironic stance? And is it Plato who speaks through Socrates, Socrates himself, or an anonymous voice ascribed to Socrates, made to say what he has to within the logic of the conversation? Plato appears to always escape and defy any final and finalized conclusion, being an Apollo's bird, the swan that, as Socrates predicted, still remains not captured by generations of later readers and interpreters.

Because of the seeming uncertainty of what has actually been said, reading Plato is a fascinating yet risky enterprise, for we might need to reconsider not only our understanding of a text but also the very principles of philosophical reading and interpretation. It is perhaps not by chance that modern hermeneutics arises with Schleiermacher and flourishes in Gadamer

as primarily an attempt to make sense of the Platonic dialogues, of their intention and proper sense. Yet, since the dialogues appear to be open to a variety of consistent but mutually conflicting interpretations, reading them leads to so much disagreement, misunderstanding, and even mutual mistrust in the guild of fellow Plato scholars.

#### THE TÜBINGEN SCHOOL

Among recent notable attempts to provide a different reading of Plato is the so-called Tübingen interpretation, both an original attempt at reading and understanding Plato, and at the same time one rooted in a philological and philosophical tradition that goes back to the end of the eighteenth century while echoing Platonic (Neoplatonic) interpretations of Plato. This interpretation of Plato originated in the works of two students of Wolfgang Schadewaldt, Hans Joachim Krämer and Konrad Gaiser, who were also joined by Heinz Happ, Thomas A. Szlezák, Jürgen Wipperm, and later by Vittorio Hösle and Jens Halfwassen. In Italy, Giovanni Reale became the main proponent of the Tübingen interpretation, and in France, Marie-Dominique Richard. The two path-breaking works were Krämer's 1959 *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles* and Gaiser's 1963 *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre*, which were followed by a number of other relevant publications.

The Tübingen reconstruction attempts to provide a systematic understanding of Plato based on the evidence preserved in the tradition of the transmission and interpretation of his texts. Dietrich Tiedemann and especially Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, both of whom predate the Romantic reading of Plato and still continue the line of Neoplatonic interpretation, had already argued in favor of the existence of a systematic oral teaching in Plato. It is because of this tradition, which pays attention to the evidence preserved in earlier philosophical works and stresses the necessity of meticulous philological research oriented toward a philosophical understanding of the text, that we now have Diels and Kranz's *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. It is this tradition that made such a profound impact on ancient scholarship of the nineteenth century, including Jacob Burckhardt and Nietzsche, and the whole of twentieth-century Continental philosophy, including the Neo-Kantians, Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Hans Jonas.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the existence of a systematic teaching developed by Plato within the Academy was accepted and argued for by Eduard Zeller, Heinrich Gomperz, Léon Robin, and Julius Stenzel. Thus, in his book of 1908, *La théorie platonicienne des idées et des nombres d'après Aristote*, Robin attempts to show that, if one reads Aristotle carefully and takes seriously what he says about Plato, especially in *Meta-*

*physics* M and N, then one has to assume an account of first principles and ideal numbers in Plato.

The original publications of Krämer and Gaiser have provoked extensive debate, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s. Yet the majority of scholars in the Anglo-American world remained unconvinced that the Tübingen interpretation offered a glimpse into the historical Plato, maintaining rather that it provided a crafty interpretation of a number of texts considered secondary. However, recent work in the history of Platonism and new publications of fragments by Speusippus and Xenocrates (by M. Isnardi Parente and L. Tarán) shed new light on the connection between later ancient works and those of Plato and his disciples, which makes reconsidering the Tübingen position rather timely. Thus, John Dillon (Dillon 2003, 16–22) argues that one cannot properly understand what Xenocrates and Speusippus were doing without seriously taking into account the reports of Aristotle and other ancient writers about Plato's inner-school teachings and discussions.

#### HISTORICAL, CRITICAL, AND SYSTEMATIC INTERPRETATION

A distinguished feature of the Tübingen interpretation is its emphasis on the reconstruction of Plato's doctrine or, rather, of a set of related and mutually consistent doctrines in a *historical*, *critical*, and *systematic* way. Such a reconstruction presupposes, and allows for, the possibility of deducing different kinds of entities from simple principles and for reducing all things back to these principles. (Krämer pays particular attention to the reduction to the principles.) The critical philosophical and historical reconstruction of Plato's views is based on a careful reading and interpretation of his own texts *and* the preserved texts of other ancient thinkers, beginning with Plato's closest disciples. In this respect, the Tübingen School stands within the tradition of *Quellenkritik* insofar as it pays attention to the transmission of Plato's oral doctrines as they are reflected within the extant texts and the history of their interpretation.

This tradition of close textual reading and historical interpretation pays particular attention to *testimonies*, since *any* text or extant testimony might turn out to be important and its careful historical and philological consideration might lead to a new understanding and reconstruction of a philosophical position in its entirety. The Tübingen approach thus attempts to reconsider the understanding of Plato in a systematic way that uses any available means and sources, including all relevant evidence from later writers, which, however, is read not for its own sake, but with a view to a systematic interpretation of a reconstructed whole, within which a fragment might fit—in fact, within which a fragment will only make sense and obtain a *new* meaning.

The collections of ancient Greek texts that have been preserved only in part in contemporary and later writers—such as Diels and Kranz's *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Jacoby's *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, or Bernabé's *Poetae et epici Graeci*—are commonly divided into two parts: the indirect *testimonia* and the direct *fragmenta*. We are fortunate to have had the whole *corpus Platonicum* passed down to us from antiquity, which realized the importance of Plato's works and built itself philosophically around reading and interpreting them. However, we also have a number of testimonies about and fragments of Plato's inner-Academic teachings that do not appear in the dialogues and are preserved in Aristotle's writings and those of Plato's other contemporaries, as well as in late ancient thinkers who might have known of the inner-Academic tradition and its transmission. An important source of testimonies is book X of Sextus Empiricus' *Adversus Mathematicos* (X.248–283), which Gaiser (1963, 32), together with Merlan (1953) and Wilpert (1949), considers a summary report of the inner-Academic teachings, independent of Aristotle's report in *Metaphysics* A.5–6. For the first time, the *Testimonia Platonica* (= *TP*) were collected and published by Gaiser as an appendix to his book on Plato (1963, 441–557). It is quite remarkable that no one undertook this attempt before Gaiser (in part, some of the texts appeared in the appendix to Findlay 1974) and that this important collection of testimonies remains still not fully appreciated and not fully translated into English.

If one takes the testimonies about Plato's inner-Academic teachings and discussions seriously, one is likely to find a picture of Plato quite different from the one Platonic scholarship has been presenting for the better part of the last two centuries. The simplistic two-world scheme—that of the ideal world of forms and the world of the becoming of bodily things—is simply not there. The ontological picture that arises from testimonies is more subtle, nuanced, sophisticated, and complex. However, such an interpretation neither contradicts nor ignores the existing texts of Plato but complements them and in fact clarifies certain points that remain either not fully spelled out, or only raised and slightly touched on, in the dialogues.

If one decides to take both dialogues and testimonies into account, one might further distinguish a “strong” and a “weak” reading of Plato. The strong reading would stress that the reconstructed theories genuinely represent Plato's teachings at the Academy. A weak reading, on the contrary, would suggest that we do not know whether Plato did indeed hold the views ascribed to him, and yet they are consistent with both the existing evidence and the dialogues. The Tübingen interpretation offers a strong reading of Plato, which Krämer, Gaiser, and Szlezák justify through meticulous and detailed philological and philosophical interpretation of the relevant texts.

Yet, even if one accepts the weak interpretation, the systematic reconstruction of the inner-Academic doctrines still remains valid, being consistent with both Plato's dialogues and the extant testimonies.

Krämer insists on the historical character of his interpretation and suggests a view of Plato's thought that originates in a critique of the Presocratics (primarily, of the Eleatic thinkers), continues in the Old Academy, is further transmitted and appropriated by Middle Platonism, and then is taken up by Neoplatonism (see Krämer 1959, 95; 1964, 45–49). Since, however, the Tübingen approach also insists on the importance of orality in the constitution and transmission of philosophy, it attempts to integrate both literary and indirect oral Platonic traditions. The existing testimony thus complements, and does not contradict, Plato's known texts. According to the Tübingen interpretation, a systematic doctrine, or a set of closely related doctrines, has distinct traces in many of Plato's dialogues but is never expressed in its entirety in any one of them. These teachings, referred to by Aristotle as the *ἄγραφα δόγματα*, or "unwritten doctrines" (*Phys. Δ.2*, 209b14–15: *ἐν τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀγράφοις δόγμασιν*), are mostly *oral* in character yet constitute a *systematic* philosophy (see Krämer 1990, 191–217). It might be better to refer to the *ἄγραφα δόγματα* in the plural, as Halfwassen suggests, as "the unwritten doctrines" or teachings. That these teachings come in the plural is further supported by the fact that (1) they were delivered at the Academy on a regular basis; (2) they were oral discussions with the students; and (3) they embrace a number of claims that are related closely and systematically, yet each one of them may be discussed independently on its own (e.g., the doctrine of opposites).

#### THE INDIRECT TRANSMISSION OF TESTIMONIES

The ways of transmitting the inner-Academic doctrines have been explored by Heinz Happ, Konrad Gaiser, Hans Joachim Krämer, Hellmuth Dempe, and Walter Burkert, who establish several parallel lines of passing on the testimonies (see Richard 1986, 79–82; for references, see *TP*). One has to approach the evidence of later ancient writers, such as Sextus Empiricus, Alexander, Iamblichus, and Proclus, with caution, in order to distinguish between properly Platonic elements and later Pythagorean doctrines, although the interaction between the Platonic and the Pythagorean components already began in the Old Academy—in Speusippus and Xenocrates (see Gaiser 1972, 475). And even if Plato's closest disciples, Speusippus and Xenocrates, substantially revised his theories of numbers and especially of ideas, and another disciple, Aristotle, wholly disagreed with and rejected them, their testimonies still need to be taken seriously.

(1) Much of what we know about Plato's inner-Academic teachings, which, from the point of view of the Tübingen School, were not explicitly present but often referred to in the dialogues, comes from the testimony of Aristotle, both in his extant and partially preserved works. Being a disciple of Plato for about twenty years, he certainly knew about the details of the inner-Academic debates and doctrines, which is why it seems very improbable to suppose, as Cherniss does, that Aristotle either misunderstood or deliberately misreported Plato's theories.

In Aristotle's now only fragmentary preserved texts (Aristotle, *Frag.* Ross; see Gaiser 1968, 209–214), the works that are relevant for the reconstruction of the ἄγραφα δόγματα are: (i) the dialogues *De philosophia* (Περὶ φιλοσοφίας) (paralleled in *De anima* A.2, 404b16–30, which contains a critique of Plato's theory of ideal numbers) and the *Protrepticus*. The *De philosophia* is partially preserved in Syrianus' and Pseudo-Alexander's commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the *Protrepticus* in Iamblichus' *Protrepticus*; (ii) Aristotle's philosophical works *De ideis* (Περὶ ιδεῶν), *De bono* (Περὶ ἀγαθοῦ), and *De contrariis* (Περὶ ἐναντίων), which present an important doxographical account of Plato's inner-Academic teachings. These are partially preserved in Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Met.* 59.28–60.2 = TP 22B), from whom they were passed on to Themistius, Porphyry (who originates the whole tradition of the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle), Syrianus, Simplicius, Philoponus, and Asclepius. Here one should also mention Aristotle's *Diäreseis*, which are referred to by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Diogenes Laertius (III.80); and, finally, (iii) of paramount importance are testimonies in Aristotle's preserved works, mostly in *Metaphysics* A, M, and N (*Met.* A.6, A.9, M.6–9, and N.3–4 are particularly important) and *Physics* (especially *Phys.* Γ).

(2) The relevant text of one of Aristotle's disciples is Theophrastus' *Metaphysics*, which was commonly known throughout antiquity and is preserved in full, as well as in partial evidence from Eudemus, Aristoxenus, and Dicaearchus (a fragment from Dicaearchus has been discovered in the Herculaneum Papyrus 1021).

(3) The important testimonies come indirectly from other members of the Academy: Hermodorus' lost *Life of Plato* (the extant fragments are collected in Speusippus 1980), which through Dercyllides were transmitted to Porphyry and Simplicius (*In Phys.* 247.30–248.15).

(4) Fragments of Speusippus, in Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*, preserved only in the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke (*In Parm.* 40.1–41.10).

(5) Fragments of Xenocrates, passed on through the Middle Academy and probably preserved in Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Math.* X.248–283), as well as in Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* (*In Phys.*).

## INNER-ACADEMIC DOCTRINES: EARLY OR LATE?

Whether Plato's systematic reflection was a complete system or Plato kept working on some aspects of his philosophy till the end of his life is a matter of historical and philological reconstruction and dispute. And if Plato had indeed established a systematic doctrine, when did he begin using it? Krämer and Szlezák have argued that a definite system can be discerned in the dialogues relatively early on—in the *Euthydemus*, *Meno*, *Protagoras*, and in the first version of the *Republic*. Some, however—Ross, Paul Wilpert, Julius Stenzel, Cornford, Cornelia J. de Vogel, Enrico Berti, and John Dillon—have argued in favor of a later appearance of systematic theories in Plato in the course of the development of Plato's thought. Richard (1986, 240–241) argues in favor of a subtler genetic account of the ἄγραφα δόγματα, with reference to Gaiser (1968, 294–295), who argues that the mathematization of Plato's ontology begins first with the *Republic*. Two reports may be taken to support such an interpretation of Plato, in favor of the development of Plato's views concerning numbers as representing ontological patterns: *Met.* M.4, 1078b9–12, where Aristotle suggests that the theory of ideal numbers was developed after the theory of ideas, and Plato's own *Laws* (819D).

## CRITIQUE OF THE TÜBINGEN APPROACH

Scholars who embrace positions similar to the Tübingen interpretation, although in some ways different from it, include W. K. C. Guthrie, J. N. Findlay (who has a monistic interpretation of Plato), Julia Annas, Gadamer, and John Dillon. Burnyeat (1987) argues that Platonic mathematics at least partly supports claims about the existence of systematic inner-Academic teachings.

Yet, since the publication of the first books of Krämer and Gaiser, the critique of their work, and of those who joined them, has been relentless. Harold Cherniss argued against the very existence of the ἄγραφα δόγματα even before Krämer's and Gaiser's publications. According to Cherniss (1945), Aristotle simply misunderstood Plato, and hence Aristotle's reports cannot be accepted; therefore, we have to ignore all later testimonies as untrustworthy and pay attention to the dialogues only. A number of prominent scholars have followed Cherniss in his criticism of the tradition and hence confined their efforts to the interpretation of dialogues alone and the logical arguments they contain. Among these are Gregory Vlastos, Luc Brisson, Holger Thesleff, and Margherita Isnardi Parente. Recently, continuing this line of argumentation and criticism, Mann (2006) has argued that one can explain the passages from the *Seventh Letter* and the *Phaedrus* without referring to the inner-Academic oral doctrines; moreover, there is

no thorough agreement within the Tübingen School. The Tübingen followers do not provide a monolithic interpretation of Plato and sometimes disagree in details of their reconstructions, and yet they agree about the major theses of their interpretation. Some critics (Günther Patzig, Jürgen Mittelstraß, and Wolfgang Wieland) suggest that the reconstruction of the oral inner-Academic teaching, even if possible, is philosophically insignificant and trivial in comparison with the dialogues. Indeed, why trust a few dubious later fragments and then interpret several selected passages in Plato in accordance with them? Why divide Plato into *Plato minor* and *Plato maior* (as Tatiana Vasilieva [1985] has suggested)? Moreover, as the critics suggest, the number of testimonies about Plato's oral inner-Academic teachings is relatively insignificant compared to the amount of Plato's preserved works, and these testimonies appear often within a polemical context. Besides, much of the evidence concerning Plato's inner-Academic teachings is preserved in later authors, and hence appears dubious. Therefore, a systematic interpretation of Plato seems to be impossible and does not allow, and in fact obfuscates, a proper understanding of Plato based on, and read out of, his texts alone.

Recently, Charles Kahn (2005) argued that Plato has a systematic doctrine, but that it is not formulated in its entirety anywhere in his dialogues. Moreover, the same doctrine (the theory of ideas or the doctrine of recollection) is presented each time in a different form, according to the context of a particular question discussed in a dialogue.

Alternatively, one can opt for a careful reading of single dialogues without presupposing any overarching systematic interpretation behind and beyond them, and even without taking other dialogues into account. From this perspective, one can read a dialogue as a piece of literature and interpret it with a view to contemporary problems that Plato never faced, as well as to questions he never asked.

The Tübingen approach to Plato, however, takes seriously the oral tradition of the indirect, or doxographical, transmission of Plato. Stressing the reliability of the tradition of the transmission of texts, the Tübingen interpretation to a large extent suspends the fundamental principle of modern hermeneutical interpretation: the *sola scriptura*. This hermeneutic principle stresses the importance of going back to the "original" text as the *only* source of dependable interpretation, and hence implies the rejection of any oral tradition of transmission that is construed as only secondary and therefore untrustworthy. Yet, careful reading and interpretation of the extant texts can provide a picture of Plato that accords with both the later ancient tradition and the dialogues but is quite different from the usual two-world theory.

There is no reason why the ancient tradition of preservation and transmission of texts should not be taken as long-lasting and trustworthy. And

if we agree that a fragment of Parmenides (DK B5) is and can be properly preserved in Proclus (*In Parm.* 708.16) or that of Anaximander (DK B1) in Simplicius (*In Phys.* 24.13), we might also agree that ancient writers could preserve the testimonies relevant to understanding Plato's inner-Academic teachings and debates.

#### SCHLEIERMACHER: INFINITE DIALECTIC

Sometimes, a systematic interpretation of Plato is rejected because it appears to be at odds with the open and aporetic character of the dialogues, where a dialectically discussed question often seems to be left undecided. According to Krämer and Szlezák, modern readings of Plato are dominated by the approach that Schleiermacher introduces in the famous *Einleitung* to his translations of Plato's works. According to Schleiermacher, the reader should be able to understand and interpret the meaning of what is said in a dialogue, even if it might appear incomplete (Schleiermacher 1804). Schleiermacher too pays attention primarily to Plato's dialogues (which in their entirety he takes as forming one living organism) as literary works in which there is an identity and coincidence of literary form and content.

The Tübingen interpreters of Plato argue against the 'infinite' reading of Plato, the origin of which Krämer finds in Fichte and further traces to Schleiermacher and Schlegel. Since, according to Schlegel, truth is infinite and thus unattainable, Plato can "approach it always and ever more through a restless, progressive striving, a steadily progressing philosophizing, an untiring inquiry and striving after truth and certainty, approaching a methodical formation and perfection of thinking and reflection" (Krämer 1999, 81). For Krämer, on the contrary, dialectic is to be considered not an infinite but a finite enterprise that leads from the specific to the general, and from the complex to the simple—a dialectic that can be established through a meticulous comparative analysis of the relevant texts of the dialogues and the indirect tradition.

#### EXOTERIC / ESOTERIC

Another objection commonly made to the Tübingen interpretation is that, if Plato's oral teachings are not contained, or only partially reflected and referred to, in the written texts, then such teachings should be esoteric and accessible only to the chosen or "initiated" few. Such an attitude toward readers was already perceived as arrogant and elitist in Kant (1977, esp. 388–389).

This objection, however, is beside the point, because it is based on a specifically modern understanding—or, rather, misunderstanding—of the

relationship between writing and orality, the attitude to which was very different in antiquity. It needs to be stressed that the Tübingen interpretation of Plato has nothing to do with the “esoteric” interpretation of Plato by Leo Strauss and his followers. For Strauss, every philosopher at all times is in the situation of political persecution, and hence has to construct a specific way of writing, which on its surface is “exoteric,” that is, meant for the general, unsophisticated reader, yet is “esoteric” in its hidden message, accessible only to few “thoughtful” and “careful” readers capable of understanding the true message of and behind a text by “reading between the lines” (Strauss 1988, 22–37). True philosophers, then, including Plato, “must conceal their opinions from all but philosophers, either by limiting themselves to oral instruction of a carefully selected group of pupils, or by writing about the most important subject by means of ‘brief indication’” (Strauss 1988, 34–35). This account of Strauss is plainly contradicted by the fact that the Academy did not practice any secrecy, and that Plato himself delivered a public lecture on the good, where he presented his philosophy to the Athenian people in an accessible way (the lecture, however, did not go well, as we know from Aristoxenus’ account, and many of those in attendance were disappointed, because they expected to learn about the acquisition of the goods of life).

To characterize Plato’s inner-Academic teachings, the Tübingen School indeed uses the term “esoteric,” in opposition to “exoteric,” which, however, does not imply either secrecy or anybody’s exclusion in any way, but is used as it was meant in Plato’s times, when both terms, ἐξωτερικός and ἐσωτερικός, were routinely applied to describe different teaching and research procedures. “Exoteric” meant published works and speeches, i.e., those made public by being written and distributed to a wider circulation. “Esoteric” meant a set of doctrines established within a group of disciples or thinkers, who discussed and elaborated them in mutual conversations as part of an ongoing effort to refine and clarify them. In fact, the very term “exoteric speeches” (ἐξωτερικοὶ λόγοι) was coined by Aristotle in reference to those outside his own circle and school (see Aristotle, *NE* A.13, 1102a26; *Phys.* Δ.10, 217b30; Gaiser 1972; and Gaiser 1963, 336–337). In this respect, Aristotle’s own doctrines would be considered “esoteric,” as would any special modern theory, not because it is closed to the profane but because it uses specific terminology and refers to a particular set of texts and problems that need to be known to whoever wants to understand them.

In later antiquity, however, the use of “esoteric” and “exoteric” changes and becomes closer to what is ordinarily meant by “esoteric” today. Thus, speaking about ancient Pythagoreans, Iamblichus (*De vita Pythagorica* 40.15–52.19) distinguishes between the “esoteric” Pythagoreans, the so-called “acusmatics,” and the “exoteric,” or “mathematicians.” The former

instituted a conservative religious and political union and left a number of enigmatic prescriptions, ἀκούσματα (statements such as “do not speak without light” or brief responses to questions, such as “What is the wisest?” “Number” [τί τὸ σοφώτατον; ἀριθμός, Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 47.17]) that had to be interpreted as pointing to a hidden allegorical meaning. The “mathematicians,” on the contrary, intended to discover mathematical theorems and properties of mathematical objects, transmit, and systematize this kind of knowledge. If one follows Iamblichus’ distinction, then the Platonic mathematical studies in the Old Academy, which were very much in line with the mathematical activity of the Pythagoreans, were rather “exoteric.”

“Esoteric” thus is meant to designate the research activity within a school, whereas “exoteric” reaches out to a broader audience, those who might not yet be familiar with the problematic and notions used within a particular scholarly tradition. In contemporary academic practice, “exoteric” would refer to all of one’s published works, as well as public speeches, and “esoteric” to academic lectures and seminars one regularly holds for students, where, of course, nobody is excluded but everybody is welcome. In order to appreciate a theory and be in a position to develop it further, one needs to be introduced to, and study, a specific subject, learn certain things, be acquainted with a special literature and set of problems and categories. Every category is a condensed, wrapped narrative, and to be able to appropriate and use the category, one has to be aware of this underlying narrative. If one were to mention the amphiboly of the concepts of reflection to somebody who has never read Kant, it would sound rather “esoteric.” Yet, there is nothing secret or exclusive about the amphiboly, and if one reads the *First Critique* or sits in on a seminar about it, one will be able to make sense of this notion.

Besides, clearly, we do not publish everything we think about, because some things we hold true are inevitably fragmentary, some not sufficiently elaborate, and for some we simply have no time to write them down in a way that would be acceptable for publication. From the very recent history of philosophy we see that such thinkers as Wittgenstein or Austin, despite their highly influential and profoundly original set of ideas, were almost reluctant to publish them, i.e., to make them “exoteric,” remaining mostly “esoteric,” i.e., in oral elaboration and discussion with students, friends, and colleagues.

#### ORAL AND WRITTEN: THE CRITIQUE OF WRITING IN PLATO

Plato’s own critique of writing is well known from both *Phaedrus* 274B–278E and *Ep.* VII, 343A–344E. Here, he argues against writing—in writing, which appears ironic and performatively contradictory. Yet, one might say that Plato uses writing in order to suspend it and bring it to the limit of its very

capacities. In a sense, writing dialogues is a minimal compromise one can reach in expressing and developing a thought without making it stagnant. From its inception, the critique is practiced and developed primarily as oral, although this does not mean that philosophy as a practice is incomplete and haphazard. The first systematic writer in philosophy in the modern sense was Aristotle. Yet other philosophers who developed their thought by means of arguments and thorough investigation of the terms they used—most notably, Plato—also tried to find some consistency in the presentation of their thought, for which purpose they investigated various forms of its presentation, including writing.

One should not think that publishing a philosophical theory in the times of Plato meant exactly the same thing as it does nowadays. Oral teaching was of extreme importance: Pythagoras and Socrates did not write at all, and yet the Pythagoreans authored a number of important philosophical insights, and Socrates attempted to formulate general definitions of moral virtues (Aristotle, *Met.* M.4, 1078b17–19), which is thoroughly testified to in Plato's written Socratic dialogues.

Any reconstruction that stresses the importance of the transmitted tradition, which apparently bears testimony to systematic yet oral teachings of Plato, appears to be an oxymoron to modernity, in which, if philosophy is systematic, it has to be written and, if it is oral, it has to remain unfinished or unsystematic. Our modern attitude toward writing in philosophy is strikingly different from the ancient one: only that which is written is worth consideration; the unwritten only represents a non-binding process of thinking, not (yet) verified and often gone astray, which thus is not worth writing down and publishing. And, vice versa, we write down and publish only those things that we consider important, and leave out those that are inconclusive and oral, those that are only a "work in progress" or testify to an ongoing debate that might be of some interest and yet remains inconclusive and hence does not need to be published. Besides, we write because writing is a pass to an immortality within cultural memory that might preserve the name of a writer better than oral speech, which tends to disappear with the dissipation of the living memory. Once again, as philosophers we feel justified *sola scriptura*, so that the oral can only serve as preparation for writing.

As Griswold suggests in his own reading of the *Phaedrus*, "the ideal of modern academic writing in philosophy is clarity of argument, unambiguity of meaning, and overt statement of the author's intentions" (1986, 221). Strangely enough, we do not seem to find any of these requirements explicitly met in Plato's writings. This means that we should try to approach the practice of writing, including philosophical writing, not from our contemporary perspective but from that of ancient writers, which perspective we have to reconstruct and read out of their writings carefully and without

modern prejudices. In the last few decades, there has been a substantial and important discussion about the role of orality and writing in antiquity, which was originated by Milman Parry, and continued in the works of Albert Lord, Eric Havelock, Jack Goody, and Walter Ong.

If the oral philosophy that Plato tends to develop into a systematic enterprise within the Academy lies behind his critique of writing, and these efforts are reflected in the written dialogues, then there might be certain hints of the oral within the written texts. Krämer, Gaiser, and Szlezák have argued that the Platonic dialogues contain “self-testimonies” about the inner-Academic debates and teachings (Szlezák 1999, 19, 53, *passim*). As aforementioned, in ancient philosophy we find an attitude toward speaking and writing that in many ways is opposite the contemporary one: in Plato, it is the oral that is systematic, whereas the written is not. Hence, there are no systematic teachings in the dialogues—possibly only traces of them, alluded to and spoken indirectly, mentioned through deliberate withholdings, hints, and gaps. Thus, in the *Phaedrus* (278D8), Plato mentions “more valuable things (τιμιώτερα)” than those that one puts in writing in treatises, and in *Ep.* VII, 340B1–345C3 (esp. 344D4–5), he says that the greatest and more important things, or genera, τὰ μέγιστα and σπουδαιότερα, are unfit for the inflexible medium of writing and are the highest and first principles of all things, ἄκρα and πρῶτα (περὶ φύσεως ἄκρα καὶ πρῶτα).

When Socrates says in book IV of the *Republic*, “I am omitting much,” what is he withholding? Krämer has argued that it is the thesis (apparent in *On the Good*) that the one (as the principle of all things) is the good (for all things). Besides, one can find a number of other significant omissions in Plato’s dialogues (first discovered by Krämer; see Richard 1986, 59–64): in *Charmides* 169A, the problem is raised whether anything of the existent has a self-directed power; *Euthydemus* 290B–291A, esp. 291A4–5, hints at dialectic as practiced and discussed elsewhere; *Parmenides* 136D4–E3 can be read as making a reference to inner-Academic investigations; and in *Phaedrus* 246A Socrates mentions a human way of brief exposition, as opposed to a long and elaborate divine one. In *Timaeus* 48C–E Plato speaks about the difficulties in reasoning about the beginning of all things, which in the dialogue is referred to only by means of a plausible speech (a “myth”), and not within a systematic presentation. And *Timaeus* 53C–D mentions four elements that are reducible to geometrical entities, whereby the first principles are hinted at but not discussed in the dialogue, and yet they are said to be known to the philosopher or dialectician who is a “friend to god.”

Why does Plato not entrust his philosophy to writing, and in fact argue that to fit philosophy into writing is impossible, so that a systematic theory does not have to presuppose a systematic written exposition? There might be several reasons for it, of which three seem to be important.

(1) In the *Phaedrus* (275D–E), Plato reproduces an argument made before him by Alcidas (On Those Who Write Their Speeches, or On Sophists), that the written word is similar to painted lifelike statues that, however, are utterly lifeless and immobile and cannot talk back when addressed. Similarly, a written speech cannot defend or explain itself beyond what it does and has already said. Because of this, any text is insufficient for self-explanation and self-defense and requires further oral interpretation. The written, thus, may be easily misunderstood and misinterpreted. Moreover, the written originates in the oral, which always has *more* to say—and understands more—about a thing than is and can be presented in writing. Writing, therefore, cannot preserve one’s thought in full: the thought that expresses itself in oral speech and argument, λόγος, can never fully fit the rigid Procrustean bed of a written text. Beautifully written and carefully crafted written dialogue is but an imitation of live oral speech and thinking, and thus can only hint at their fullness but never retain it. Writing makes oral thought “banal” and pinpointed to an immobile text, whereas thinking is a *living* activity.

(2) Against the modern attitude to publication as a preservation of thought, Plato tells us through Socrates, who himself puts it in terms of an Egyptian myth (*Phaedr.* 274C–275B; cf. *Ep.* VII 344D–E), that, quite on the contrary, writing does not provide for memory (μνήμη) but only for a reminder (ὑπόμνησις) in the form of notes. Memory stands for, and preserves, being, whereas reminder is meant primarily for oneself, in order not to forget certain things one deems important.

(3) And, finally, a reason why philosophy should remain unwritten is given by Plato in the *Laws* (968E), where, in playing with the form of words, he says that knowledge is inaccessible (ἀπόρρητα) without previous explanations (ἄπρόρρητα). Burnyeat (1987, 232) takes it that “sheer technical difficulty” was the main reason for Plato’s not writing his doctrines in their entirety. In other words, the ability to properly and fully appreciate the content of philosophical teachings requires preparation and acquaintance with the discussed problematic and terminology. Otherwise, as Gaiser, Krämer, and Szlezák have consistently argued, the listeners or readers might be irritated and disappointed and leave philosophy without having begun practicing it.

So, why write, then? Why does Plato choose dialogue as the written form for philosophy? There might be several reasons for writing. Thus, other forms for presenting philosophical thinking that are familiar to us simply are not there yet, such as the systematic treatise, which begins with Aristotle. Another reason for choosing written dialogue is that it imitates real speech with all its twists and turns of argumentation. Moreover, dialogue falls within Greek theatrical agonistic urban culture, which is always present

and reflected in the dramatic, political, or philosophical dialogue. Besides, as we learn from the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, dialogue can have a hypomnematic character, for example, as does the *Parmenides*, which claims to preserve a number of arguments that are central to understanding the one in the philosophy of Plato and remain such throughout in later Platonism.

Yet, the most important reason for writing dialogues seems to be that, if written dialogue does not, and cannot, fully contain and represent a systematic thought, but rather portrays it in its striving toward self-understanding and a reasoned account of the things that are, then dialogue can be an introduction to philosophy and philosophizing. In other words, Plato's ironic, aporetic, and elenctic written dialogue has a didactic and protreptic (i.e., exhortative or hortatory) character: it invites and introduces readers to philosophy and encourages them to keep practicing it (Aristotle, *Nerinthus*, fr. 1 Ross; see also Gaiser 1959; and Krämer 1964).

#### THE INNER-ACADEMIC TEACHINGS OF PLATO

In the reconstruction of the Tübingen School, the main points of Plato's inner-Academic teachings are the following (see Krämer 1964, 80–81; and Gaiser 1968, 221).

(1) There are two primary ontological principles that are the causes of all things. In establishing the principles, Plato follows the tradition of the Presocratic philosophers of thinking about the ἀρχή or ἀρχαί. Plato appears to be particularly influenced by the Pythagoreans (who also recognize two principles: the limit and the unlimited) and by the Eleatic philosophers. The Eleatic influence on Plato's ontology, however, is negative: for Parmenides and Zeno, the one (ἓν) is being (ὄν), and the many is non-being, whereas for Plato (in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, 142B–157B) the one is opposed to being, on which account it is being that is the many, as the other of the one, and hence the one is beyond being, ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (*Rep.* 509B; see Krämer 1981). Besides, Plato was equally influenced by Heraclitus, in that all physical things are in constant flux and change and thus cannot be known; even the very notion of “constant flux” is profoundly paradoxical. By choosing to write elenctic and aporetic dialogues, Plato follows and imitates Socrates in the very form and genre of Socratic dialogue. Yet, as has been mentioned, there is much affinity between the inner-Academic teachings of Plato and later Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato. Already in Plotinus, the one is the principle, and there are multiple layers of being. Many Neoplatonic philosophers make references to inner-Academic doctrines, and Proclus knew the teaching of Speusippus. Yet, an important difference is that the Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato are monistic, whereas Plato seems to have accepted two first principles.

(2) From these two principles comes a whole hierarchy of being: ideas and ideal numbers, intermediate entities that include mathematical entities and physical things (see Aristotle, *Met.* M.9, 1086a11–12). The ideal numbers are themselves limited in number (the first four numbers [τετρακτύς] play an important role in Plato, although Aristotle reports that they go up to the decad, *Met.* M.8, 1084a1–2; cf. N.3, 1090b24). The monad is the smallest but is not properly a number, so that the first number is two, of which the “elements” are the one (τὸ ἕν) and the great-and-small (τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν). The ideal numbers can also be called “idea-numbers,” insofar as they *are* ideal forms, and all the ideas are structured in the same way as are numbers. The ideal numbers and ideas constitute a system of the highest categories of being. From these, one has to distinguish the (mathematical) numbers (μαθηματικοὶ ἀριθμοί), which are derived from, and are subordinate to, ideal numbers and ideas.

(3) From the ideal numbers come dimensional (geometrical) entities: line, plane, and solid (or length, breadth, and depth). Both mathematical numbers and geometrical objects represent the intermediate realm of mathematical objects, τὸ μεταξύ. The four ideal (one, two, three, four) numbers establish the sequence of geometrical entities and dimensions: for Speusippus, one corresponds to point, two to line, three to plane, and four to solid (Speusippus, fr. 4 Lang = Iamblichus, *Theol. arithm.* 84.10–11). In each case, the determining number is the number of points needed as limits to define the corresponding magnitude, or μέγεθος. However, according to Aristotle, Plato explicitly rejected the point, which he considered a geometrical “dogma,” accepting instead the indivisible line, in which he was joined by Xenocrates (Aristotle, *Met.* A.9, 992a19–24; cf. [Aristotle], *De lin. insecab.* 968a1 ff.). For Plato and Xenocrates, then, what counts as geometrical counterparts of ideal numbers are dimensions, not points: one dimension for line, two for plane, and three for solid, whereas point has no dimensions. This explains the sequence in Plato which begins with an indivisible line, then two, then other numbers (Aristotle, *Met.* M.8, 1084a1). This position is shared by Xenocrates who takes it that a geometrical magnitude consists of matter and number: from two comes length, from three, plane, from four, solids (Aristotle, *Met.* N.3, 1090b21–24). In this sense, geometrical objects follow the numbers in the succession of number—line—plane—solid (Aristotle, *Met.* A.9, 992b13–15, τὰ μετὰ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς μήκη τε καὶ ἐπίπεδα καὶ στερεά; cf. *Met.* M.6, 1080b23–24; M.9, 1085a7–9; Gaiser 1968, 510n; and Szlezák 1987, 46).

(4) After the intermediates come physical appearances, or sensual material bodies (see *TP* 68–72). There are thus three realms of being that are derivable from the first two principles: ideal entities (ideal numbers and

ideas); intermediate mathematical entities (mathematical numbers and geometrical objects); and physical things.

### THE PRINCIPLES

In his inner-Academic teachings, Plato begins with an elaboration of the theory of principles or ἀρχαί, which are the one (ἓν) and the indefinite dyad (ἄοριστος δυάς) (see Aristotle, *Met.* A.6, 987b26). The two principles are not subordinated to one another but play a different role in the constitution of things. The one is the principle of *sameness*, whereas the indefinite dyad is the principle of *otherness*. However, since the principle is not that of which it is the principle, sameness and otherness are not themselves the principles but are their representations, in the forms, as the highest genera or μέγιστα γένη.

The first principle is the formal principle, whereas the second principle is a material principle that appears also as “great-and-small” (τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν), matter (ὕλη) (Aristotle, *Met.* A.6, 987b20–21, 988a13–15; *Phys.* A.4, 187a17–19; see also Simplicius, *In Phys.* 503.10–18). The great-and-small accounts for indefiniteness, disorder, and shapelessness (ἄπειρον, ἄτακτον, ἀμορφία) (Theophrastus, *Met.* 11b2–7; see also Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* X.261 and *TP* 49–55). As the other to the one, the second principle is also represented in the ἕτερον of Plato’s *Sophist* (257B–259B). The indefinite dyad is not non-being per se (because non-being, properly speaking, is not), is not μὴ ὄν or χώρα (Plato, *Tim.* 52A–B), but an *ideal principle* of otherness (ἐτερότης) and inequality (ἀνισότης) that is further associated with motion (κίνησις, Aristotle, *Phys.* Γ.2, 201b20–21).

The two principles are thus the principles of *all* things, including ideal being(s). The one is responsible for the oneness and unity of each thing. The otherness or dyad introduces a difference and is *differently* present in different kinds of things. Within the ideas, the dyad is responsible for the plurality: there is a whole *multiplicity* of beings or ideas. Once again, being (ὄν) has to be considered and thought in its otherness to the one (ἓν). In numbers, the dyad is responsible for doubling a number and its division into halves. As Aristotle reports, Plato recognized *two* infinities: the great *and* the small (δύο τὰ ἄπειρα, τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν) (*Phys.* Γ.4, 203a15–16, Γ.6, 206a28). However, these are rather two different aspects of the same principle of the great-and-small that are present in increasing (e.g., in the addition in numbers) and decreasing (in the division of magnitudes). And, finally, the materiality of physical things is manifest in their changeability and constant change. Unity and multiplicity are thus present in things, and account for both identity and differentiation in all things, including the ideal

forms and numbers. In other words, both unity and multiplicity in and of being come from the first principles.

#### TESTIMONIA ABOUT THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

Plato's *Parmenides* is the key dialogue for a systematic elaboration of the inner-Academic doctrine of the two principles of the one and many (cf. Plato, *Phil.* 16C–D; 26E–31B), which has been repeatedly emphasized by Stenzel, Krämer, Reale, Migliori, and Halfwassen. One might also count as Plato's "self-testimony" the passage in the *Phaedo* (107B4–10), where in a conversation with the Pythagorean Simmias, Socrates refers to ultimate "first presuppositions," at which the investigation should stop.

Besides, there exists consistent evidence from the closest disciples of Plato—from Aristotle, Speusippus, and Xenocrates. In *On the Good*, Aristotle explicitly mentions the one (μονάς) and the dyad as the first principles (Aristotle, *De bono*, fr. 2 Ross). And Speusippus' testimony (fr. 62 Lang = fr. 29 Isnardi Parente = Simplicius, *In Phys.* 151, 6f., in reference to Alexander) coincides with that of Xenocrates (fr. 27 Heinze = fr. 98 Isnardi Parente): "According to Plato, the principles of all things, as well as of the ideas themselves, are the one and the indefinite dyad, which is also called great-and-small," as Aristotle recalls in *On the Good* (κατὰ Πλάτωνα πάντων ἀρχαί καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν ἰδεῶν τό τε ἕν ἐστι καὶ ἡ ἀόριστος δυάς, ἦν μέγα καὶ μικρὸν ἔλεγεν, ὡς καὶ ἐν Περὶ τάγαθοῦ Ἀριστοτέλες μνημονεύει). We also learn about the two principles of the ἕν and the ἀόριστος δυάς from Theophrastus (*Met.* 6a24–6b17; 11b2–7). Important testimonies about the two principles are found in Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Met.* 85.15–86.23) and Philoponus (*In de gen. et corr.* 226.16–30) as well.

#### THE PRINCIPLES: SIMPLE AND INDIVISIBLE

If the principles are the principles of all things, what can one say about the ἀρχαί themselves? The principles have to be *simple* and *indivisible*, because they are the principles of everything else that is multiple and composite, as being constituted by the principles (cf. Plato, *Theaet.* 205D). This claim is also supported by the mentioned fragment of Alexander (*In Met.* 55.20–56.35). In its very notion (which, paradoxically, comes *before* the ideal notions in the proper sense, which themselves come from, and hence after, the principles), the principle is the first and incomposite (τὸ πρῶτον ἀρχὴ εἶναι καὶ τὸ ἀσύνθετον). In his account of the inner-Academic teachings, Sextus too (*Adv. Math.* X.250–251) takes the ἀρχαί to be simple and not evident, whereas the phenomena are—literally—evident: φαινόμενα). The principles of material things are not themselves material (not "visible"),

because physical things are infinitely divisible, whereas the principles are not (*Adv. Math.* X.250).

*Knowledge of the Principles.* But, if the ἀρχαί are first and the source of all composition, how can they be known? For if the simple is ontologically and logically prior, then the cognition of it should be most difficult for us, who are composite and always begin with things that are complex. *Qua* simple and first, the principles can only be known *negatively*. The principle is unexplainable and unknowable from within itself: it is ἄλογον τε καὶ ἄγνωστον (Plato, *Theaet.* 205C9–10; cf. 201E). Since for Plato everything is and is known ultimately in reference to the first principles, for the principles *to be* and *to be known* is a negative determination: the ἀρχαί are different from those things that come from them. Hence, knowledge of the principles is negative, too: because they are simple, or incomposite, and are *before* the multiplicity of being as its (logical and ontological) beginning and cause.

Strictly speaking, from the perspective of the first principles alone there is no distinction between logic and ontology yet. This distinction becomes meaningful only with the multiplicity of beings, at which point one might say that the principles are first not only ontologically but also *logically*, insofar as they are represented in the first *genera*. In particular, in the *Sophist* (254B7–D3), Plato talks about the first genera of sameness and otherness as representations of the principles. In this, the principles can be said to be known *positively*, through logical (categorical) and ontological (mathematical or dimensional) reduction, as well as through the deduction of things from them, of which I will say more in what follows.

*Principles as Causes.* The two principles (ἀρχαί) are thus the first and ultimate causes (αἰτίαι, αἴτια) of other things, both ontologically and logically, but the principles themselves are not caused. Krämer considers a strict distinction and separation between ontology and logic to originate only with the Stoics; certainly, it is not there yet in Plato and the Old Academy, nor even is it explicit in Aristotle. (In this sense, one might say that Hegel returns to Plato.) Hence, both the being (the ontological aspect) and the knowledge (the logical aspect) of things depend on knowledge of their first principles and causes. In order *to be* and *to be known*, each thing has to be understood, that is, causally reduced to or deduced from these principles. As Aristotle argues, to know what a thing is (τί ἐστίν) is to know the cause of its being (τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ εἶ ἐστίν) (*An. post.* B.8, 93a3–4; cf. *Phys.* A.1, 184a10–15). In this sense, Plato's philosophy is an *aitiology* in the sense of the Presocratics, i.e., an investigation of the first causes, principles, and elements of everything existent (Krämer 1981, 4–11).

*Monism or Dualism of the Principles?* If one accepts the requirement of assuming as few principles as possible (see Aristotle, *Phys.* A.4, 188a17–18), one might ask if it is possible to reduce the number of the principles in

Plato to one single principle. Most of the sources, beginning with Aristotle, mention *two* distinct and different first principles in Plato's ἀγγραφα δόγματα: the one and the dyad. Other scholars, however, have supported a monistic interpretation of Plato. Thus, Hölsle (1984, 459–490) argues for accepting one first principle as the unity of unity and multiplicity (*Einheit von Einheit und Vielheit*). And Halfwassen (2002) opts for combining a monism in the *reduction* to the one principle beyond being with a dualism in the derivation and *deduction* of being from the two ontic principles of the one and the many, even if the coming-forth of the principle of the many from the transcendent one cannot be explained rationally, i.e., by way of discursive thinking.

The former monistic interpretation of Plato is Hegelian, and the latter Plotinian. Halfwassen's interpretation is more in line with Speusippus, as well as with Proclus, who places the one beyond (any given) being, multiplicity, or otherness. On Speusippus' and Proclus' reading, the indefinite dyad, *interminabilis dualitas*, appears *after* the one (Speusippus ap. Proclus, *In Parm.* 38.25–41.10 [TP 50]), i.e., the two principles in this reading are not equal but rather hierarchically ordered. Discursive thinking, however, cannot discursively grasp either the identity of the unmediated opposites or the generation of the other, both of which are unthinkable. Hence, if there is either one first principle that embraces the same and the other, or if the one somehow engenders the other as multiplicity—in both cases the one single principle cannot be rationally conceived. On the contrary, Krämer and Gaiser are inclined to accept the dualism of Plato's "archeology," following the majority of ancient sources that speak about two ontologically equal yet functionally distinct first principles in Plato.

*Principles as Opposites.* The first principles appear as opposites to each other and in their representation and action within things. Even if the one (ἓν), *qua* principle, is one, unique, and simple, it is still opposed to the δύο as its other. Both principles are present negatively in relation to each other, so that neither can be considered without the other. All other things can be deduced from the principles as their causes, but the principles themselves are not deducible either from each other or from other things. At the same time, the ἀρχαί are not absolutely symmetrical, because their roles are very different.

This conclusion finds support both in the texts of Plato and in the testimonies. Thus, in the *Sophist* (254E), Plato takes the same and other, the representations of the two principles in being, as paired opposites (along with motion and rest, although being [ὄν] does not have an opposite in the *Sophist* but is conceived in its relation to the opposites). In *On the Good*, Aristotle says all the contraries (τὰ ἐναντία) go back to the two principles of the one (τὸ ἓν) and multiplicity (τὸ πλῆθος); and the opposites are the