PEITHO / EXAMINA ANTIQUA 1 (15) / 2024

A Defense of “Author’s Mouthpiece”*

DOI: 10.14746/PEA.2024.1.14

DAVID J. MURPHY / *New York* /

Twenty to thirty years ago, Plato studies saw considerable debate on the question, does Plato express views – in particular, what we would call “philosophical” views – in his dialogues? Are Socrates or other characters Plato’s “mouthpieces,” so that we can use utterances of theirs in reconstructing Plato’s philosophy? In the debate about what (if anything) Plato “says” in his dialogues, positions have tended to rest on one of two assumptions. I call these the Dialogical and the Dogmatic. The Dialogical Assumption in a strong form (= SD) holds that the dialogue genre excludes authorial speech because it is fiction, and an author of fiction does not, for one or more reasons, speak in his or her own voice in the fiction. Some “dialogists” go on to make conclusions about Plato’s intentions, claiming that his choice to write dialogues and not treatises shows that he wanted to occlude his own voice, whether to force his readers to think for themselves or for some other reason.[1] A weaker dialogism (= WD) admits mouthpiece characters in theory but

---

[*] An earlier version of this paper was read at the APA Central Division conference in Chicago, February 2022. I thank Colin Smith and members of the audience for their criticisms and comments, as well as Joseph Masheck and Wendy Walker.

[1] E.g. Hyland (1968: 41 ff.), Corlett (2018: 3, 9), Peterson (2011: 230 ff.), Marren (2022: 83), Press (2022: 136). A minority of ancient interpreters held that in his dialogues, Plato veiled his innermost thoughts through

bans us from inferring authorial views unless evidence external to the dialogue certifies that a character functions as the author's mouthpiece (Mulhern 2000: 234 n. 6; Corlett 2018: ch. 2 and 3). Against these, the Dogmatic Assumption reads certain utterances of principal interlocutors as conveying the author's views or as providing us material from which to distill the author's views.

The Dogmatic Assumption came under fire in the 1960s. The "Mouthpiece Theory" was attacked by John Mulhern, then by the late Jerry Press, Angelo Corlett, and others. I suspect that this controversy has died down because many of us have come to view the problem as either solved, intractable, or uninteresting. Many interpreters continue to invoke the "mouthpiece" construct but do not argue for it.[2] To be sure, Lloyd Gerson (2000) and John Beversluis (2006) undermined much of the foundation of the Dialogical Assumption. To my knowledge, though, the Dogmatic Assumption and the Mouthpiece interpretation have not been defended with positive arguments that examine ancient practice and formal properties of fiction.

I aim to argue *for* the Dogmatic Assumption. I shall propose reasons to think both that Plato held it and that characters in fiction can perform a "mouthpiece" function. Through the mouthpiece property, I argue, the author can use the character to express what Plato and contemporaries called "thought," *dianoia*, a notion that I shall narrow down to "ideology." I use this fuzzy and contentious term simply to denote views about the structure of reality, "a way to describe the nature and meaning of the world around us" (Ostrowski 2022: 3). I consider views ideological if they are expressed in universal propositions or injunctions or imply them and are presented as worth holding, although statements in fiction about particulars can lead to views about the world and thus be included under ideology in broad sense. When Polus merely relates facts about Archelaus, ruler of Macedonia, he is not expressing ideology. His claim that many unjust people can be happy and the irony by which he goes on to signal that Archelaus' violent deeds have helped him to become happy – that combination is ideology (*Grg.* 470d-471c). In arguing against Polus that Archelaus is miserable because he is unjust, Socrates kicks off a rival ideological claim. Both speakers are making universal claims about life. If we can

---

various tactics of writing; cf. Tarrant (2000: 23 ff.). This still presumes, however, that Plato does put his views into his dialogues. Strong dialogists cannot enlist the skeptical New Academy as forerunners, for the latter, as some ancient critics observed, inferred Plato's skepticism from statements made by characters; cf. Cic. *De Orat.* 3.67; Anon. *in Plat. Philos.* 10. "[A]ncient skepticism ... is in principle a crypto-dogmatic reading of Plato", Press (2015: 188).

[2] A few examples: Chappell (2021), "Plato explicitly says – using Parmenides as his mouthpiece ..."; Bevilacqua (2018: 471 n. 33), "Xenophon, through Socrates' mouth, asserts that ..."; Atack (2018: 514), "ideas ... for which Socrates was the appropriate mouthpiece ..."; Sassi (2015: 108), Socrates in the *Theaetetus* "è portavoce di temi platonici", cf. her p. 137 on Xenophon's Socrates. Livio Rossetti has dubbed Socrates a Socratic writer's *portavoce* in dialogues in which idiosyncratic material is introduced and where Socrates no longer acts and speaks "da Socrate" as he does in presumably earlier dialogues (2008), and on "Plato's *portavoce*" Rowe largely agrees (2007: 15). From similarity between things said by Socrates and by the elder Cyrus in Xenophon's works, Dorion (2020) holds that they are mouthpieces for Xenophon's ideas. Some interpreters stake out mediating positions, e.g. Lane (2016: 62) not a "mouthpiece" but perhaps an "avatar" as in a video game conveying not views but "patterns of argumentative questioning."

conclude that Plato endorses the speech he puts in Socrates' mouth, we can attribute ideology to him, too.

I first adduce fourth-century evidence that Plato's contemporaries as well as his own characters applied the Dogmatic Assumption to mimetic literature. That creates a presumption that it is legitimate for us to apply that assumption, when wielded responsibly, to Plato's dialogues, which are a species of mimetic literature, *mimēsis / poiēsis* (Arist. *Po.* 1.1; *Fr.* 72 R^3 [*On Poets*]). Second, in support of a "mouthpiece" function of characters I enlist certain formal properties of fiction and characters proposed by theorists ancient and modern. I shall not prescribe that we have to produce "Plato Says" readings of dialogues, only that we have good reason to do so. Neither do I propose a scheme of *interpretation* that will tell us how to get the right answer about Plato's meaning in a passage.[3] I am proposing a stance about narrative *discourse* to explain why the ancients inferred authors' thought from characters' words and to justify our making that same move. Assumptions for which I cannot argue here: the flesh and blood individual is the author and creates the work, writing either sincerely or insincerely (I do not hypostatize "author function" or the like, and I leave aside "death of the author" theories); "author" is a synonym of "writer;" Socratic dialogues are a species of fiction.

By "dogma" I mean "view," nothing necessarily stronger than publicly-stated position. Even Socrates, who claimed not to be wise about the things of greatest importance, is shown taking stances about human nature, the good life, the state, the gods, the Forms, etc. It is charitable to suppose that if Plato expressed views on such topics, he believed them, but no one can know his heart of hearts.[4] By Platonic "view," therefore, I mean what we conclude after a process of interpretation that Plato goes on record for. I do not claim that Plato endorsed all that he gives his principal interlocutors to say, that he made them say all that he meant, or that he closed off further inquiry. I do not claim that a dogma or view need be asserted as though Plato or his character *knows* it to be true; foundational metaphysical theses can be asserted as what "seems" so (cf. τὰ ἐμοὶ δοκοῦντα – *R.* 509c3).

I need to emphasize two further restrictions. First, an interpreter who thinks that Plato expresses views in his dialogues need not maintain that therein Plato gives us a philosophical *system*—although ancients who considered themselves Platonists thought that he did. I believe that Plato does hold to a set of commitments that one can at least loosely call a system, but such a belief need not be shared by every interpreter who concludes that Plato expresses some views; one could think that Plato's views are argued *ad hominem* or with some other aim. Second, the interpreter who finds Platonic views in the dialogues should also be ready to account for all dramatic and literary aspects of the dialogues. After all, they are dialogues and not treatises. Most students of Plato will agree with Malcolm Schofield that "[a] Platonic dialogue is the dramatic representation of a conversation between interlocutors, none of whom can be assumed to be merely spokesman for Plato's own views, any more than in any other form of drama" (Schofield 2023: 97 f.). The crux lies in the qualifier, "merely." Do Socrates and other leading interlocutors function *only* as spokesmen for Plato's views, or *not at all*, or "both and" – and if the last of these, sometimes or always? My contention is that they function both as spokesmen under certain conditions and as fleshed-out characters always. Since no one denies the dialogues' dramatic features, I focus on whether and how certain characters function as spokesmen, on whether their speeches are features of the text through which Plato "says" things.

---

[3] Some serviceable rules of thumb are sketched out by Hösle (2006: 152 ff.).

[4] Publicly accepting P may not signal the speaker's conviction that P is true; cf. Cohen (1989).

It matters, what question we're trying to answer. One critic may only be interested in interpretation: decoding what the text says, analyzing the structure of its arguments, the actions of the characters, and so on. Another critic, though, may think that the history of philosophy involves examining philosophers' thought. Twenty-plus years ago, David Sedley voiced the still-prevailing thought that "[o]ne prominent goal that nearly all of us today share with the ancient Platonists is to extract Plato's doctrines and arguments from his text," that there is a time "[w]hen we are engaged in the delicate task of recovering Plato's thought from his philosophical dramas..." (Sedley 2002: 38, 53). For the critic or historian who wants to know about Plato's thought, "what did Plato mean?" is a question that stimulates research and reflection.

One may object at the start that a mouthpiece function cannot be a formal, ideologically charged property of a character distinct from other discursive properties of the character that purportedly are not ideologically charged, since, the objection would run, all utterances express ideology somehow—a view about the world is always implicit in language.[5] My lead-off question, however, was, does Plato express *philosophical* views in his dialogues? When Timaeus draws a distinction between that which always is, which has no becoming and is cognized by intellect with an account, and that which is always becoming, which never *is* and is grasped by opinion/judgment, δόξα, with perception (Pl. *Ti.* 27d-28a), he is expressing a philosophical view. My purpose is to examine whether we can say that the "mouthpiece" property operates over speeches like Timaeus' words in 27d ff., or over Socrates' and Polus' disputation about Archelaus' justice or injustice. Such speeches convey ideology.

Evidence that ancient readers found author's views in characters' utterances is overwhelming. Greek and Roman writers knew to distinguish characters from authors. All the same, on a massive scale, they would ascribe characters' utterances directly to the author, or they would distill a proposition from characters' utterances and ascribe *that* to the author. Because Jonas Grethlein's work on this phenomenon has recently come into print (Grethlein 2021a, 2021b, 2023), I present only a few passages where Plato's characters work from this dogmatic assumption. I know no text where an interlocutor in Plato argues that it is illegitimate to read off authors' views from their characters' speeches, and I know no passage by any contemporary of Plato who laid down such a prohibition. The fact that Plato models what I call the Dogmatic Assumption in his dialogues and does not model the opposed, dialogical assumption creates a presumption that he held assumptions like my "dogmatic." As creatures of their time, Plato will have embedded, and his readers will have recognized, author's speech transmitted by characters' utterances. If this presumption is plausible, the "mouthpiece" interpretation gains plausibility.

---

[5] Edoardo Sanguineti had a "postulato più caro: l'identità ideologia-linguaggio," by which language is "un modo di interpretare la realtà: un' ideologia" (Camon 1982: 193 f.). According to Roland Barthes, "(...) nous n'arrivons pas a trouver un langage libre de toute ideologie, parce que cela n'existe pas," Savage (1979: 435).

In the *Republic*, Socrates proposes restrictions on how poets in Kallipolis "should both speak about and represent gods in poetry" (δεῖ περὶ θεῶν καὶ λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν – Pl. *R.* 383a2-3; for ποιέω as "write poetry/represent in poetry" cf. *LSJ* A.4, *MGS* 1.A). Among passages that he criticizes are lines of Aeschylus, of which he identifies Thetis as the speaker (Pl. *R.* 383a9-c2; *TGF* 3, *incert.* 350 Radt). Thetis, Socrates says, speaks in accusation: "the very god who sang, the one at the feast, the one who said all this, he himself it is who killed my son." All the same, it is the tragedian, not the character, whom Socrates criticizes for accusing Apollo of lies and murder: "Whenever anyone says (λέγῃ) such things about gods, we shall be angry and will not grant a chorus nor allow the teachers to use [his poetry] for the education of the young" (Pl. *R.* 383c1-3). Socrates attributes the character's speech and the views about reality that it carries – its "ideology," i.e. that a god can lie and do wrong – directly to the poet.

"Says such things about the gods" is different from "mentions stories in which characters say such things about the gods." Socrates' criticism of Aeschylus makes sense only if Socrates is taking the poet to convey assertions. Socrates is not anticipating Sir Philip Sidney in holding that "the Poet, he nothing affirms."

In a review of Plato's citations of Homer, Mulhern concluded that "(…) the practice of Homer, as presented in the dialogues, does not suggest that Homer was giving us his own mind in the speeches of his protagonists" or was using "protagonists in the epics as if any were his, Homer's, mouthpiece…" (Mulhern 2015: 270 f.). In many passages we can say that Homer "mentions" or "reports" rather than asserts. But *pace* Mulhern, the dialogues do present some "Homer says" passages as though Socrates or others treat them as conveying the poet's views.

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates infers ideology from a character's speech and attributes *that* to the poet (Pl. *Tht.* 152e5-9). He cites Homer among other "wise men" as authorities for the doctrine that all is flux: "in saying, 'Ocean, begetter of gods, and mother Tethys,' he has said that all things are offspring of both flux and motion." This line is spoken twice in the *Iliad* but by Hera (Hom. *Il.* 14.201, 302). One may counter that Socrates is only using "Homer said" as shorthand for "Hera says in Homer's poem," but Socrates has just said that the comic poet, Epicharmus, also holds the Flux doctrine, and surely he recalls that Epicharmus' comedies are composed of speeches of characters.[6] Socrates does not present Homer as merely representing a story in verse. He attributes assertoric speech to Homer when he says that the poet, along with Heraclitus and Empedocles and "all the wise," joins Protagoras in the *logos* that all things are in flux. Homer is the "general" of this "great army" (Pl. *Tht.* 152d2-153a2), whose doctrine Theaetetus must confront in the ensuing discussion. Socrates adduces the poet as an authority again with the tag, "Homer says and makes clear" (Pl. *Tht.* 153c10-d1), as he reads Zeus' speech about the Golden Cord (Hom. *Il.* 8.17-27) as doctrine about the Flux. In summation he ascribes the Flux doctrine a third time to Homer as support for Protagoras' relativism: "according to (κατά) Homer and Heraclitus and all such tribe, that all things are in motion..." (Pl. *Tht.* 160d6-8). Whatever we suppose Socrates may believe about the poet's intentions, in citing Homer as an authority for a doctrine, Socrates accords him assertoric speech in the poem and extracts his views from words of Hera and Zeus. This is exactly how Theodorus understands Socrates: "(...) about these Heraclitean [*logoi*] or, as you say, Homeric..." (Pl. *Tht.* 179e4).

---

[6] "Like the 'author says x'- statements, these references to an author's activity within the narrated world are more than a simple *façon de parler*; they reflect a specific understanding of literary composition," Grethlein (2021a: 223 f. = 2023, 74).

In the *Republic,* Socrates treats Homer as making ideological assertions: "we should not accept it from Homer or any other poet when he errs foolishly about the gods and says: 'there are two urns by the threshold of Zeus'..." (Pl. *R.* 379c9-d3). The foolish error lies in saying what "the many say" (Pl. *R.* 379c3), that the gods cause humans both goods and evils. "Homer (...) says," however, tags lines spoken by Achilles (Hom. *Il.* 24.527-32). It is hard to think that Plato did not recall their context, the hero's nighttime encounter with Priam, and yet Plato gives himself permission to show Socrates casting their content as Homer's foolishly erring speech. Socrates is not casting Homer's speech as mere mentioning; someone speaking in error about gods makes assertions. In the same way, Adeimantus reports that people call Homer as witness to the belief that offerings can influence the gods not to punish wrongdoers: "he too said..." (Pl. *R.* 364d4-e2). Adeimantus quotes lines spoken by Phoenix (Hom. *Il.* 9.497-501). Socrates and Adeimantus distill assertoric speech, the falsity of which they blame on the poet, from the speech of characters.[7]

Socrates makes a stronger claim that poets assert in their poems when he accuses them of speaking with what we may call a perlocutionary aim, sc. to persuade. In founding Kallipolis, Socrates says, they will "force the poets (...) not to attempt to persuade our youth that the gods engender evils" (Pl. *R.* 391d3-6). Indeed, poets' perlocutionary acts of persuasion have succeeded: "they have persuaded" people of the noble lie about metals, as the rulers of Kallipolis will succeed in doing (Pl. *R.* 414c5-6; cf. πεισθείς – *R.* 391e5) , and "they drag polities into tyrannies and democracies" (R. 568c4–5). Despite acknowledging that poets compose things "poetic and pleasing to the many to hear" (Pl.

---

[7] Adeimantus attributes assertoric, ideological speech to Homer as leader (*R.* 363a8) and to other poets also at 363d4-364a2 and 366a7-b1. Socrates quotes material from epics as: poets' falsehoods, *R.* 381d5, e1, 391d3; blasphemy when mothers repeat it – *R.* 381e5; bad speech about justice – *R.* 392a13-b2. Words in the mouth of Phoenix in *Iliad* 9 cash out as an unholy accusation of Achilles, οὐδ᾽ ὅσιον ταῦτά γε κατὰ Ἀχιλλέως φάναι – *R.* 391a3-4.

R. 387b3; cf. *R.* 390a5), by saying that they attempt to and do persuade, Socrates presents poets also as performing in their fictions what we may call illocutionary acts of assertion, which in turn succeed in their perlocutionary aim of persuading.[8]

In the Platonic corpus I have counted 85 places where an interlocutor treats a fictional character's utterance as the poet's speech, and another seven where an interlocutor treats it as both character's and poet's speech. Epic poets, tragedians, comic poets, and Parmenides are quoted as speakers of their characters' words.[9] About *Phaedo* 94d-e, where Socrates pulls Homer's thought from a speech of Odysseus, Halliwell commented that "the speech may be Odysseus' but the ideas in it are just as much 'Homer's' as is the narrative framework: the poet is held responsible, in a more than a creative or causal sense of the word, for both" (Halliwell 2000: 102).

As do interlocutors in Plato, ancient writers attribute utterances of characters in epic or tragedy, as well as the ideology expressed in them, directly to the poet. Heraclitus (D23 Laks-Most; Plut. *De Iside* 48.370D) criticized Homer "for praying that strife be destroyed from among gods and men" – words in fact in the mouth of Achilles (Hom. *Il.* 18.107). In *Against the Sophists* (2), Isocrates writes, "Homer (…) has represented even the gods as sometimes deliberating about them [that is, future events], not knowing their mind, *dianoia*, but wanting to show us that for humans, this is one of the impossible things." Isocrates' description fits places in the *Iliad* where the gods deliberate (Hom. *Il.* 16.431-58; 22.166-85). Isocrates distills *dianoia* by inference from the characters' words and imputes that to the poet. The orator Lycurgus says that through words of Praxithea in the lost *Erectheus*, Euripides "was teaching your fathers these things," sc. to subordinate private to public good (*In Leocritem* 100-101). Eudemus of Rhodes (fr. 150 Wehrli) stated that in the above-mentioned Ocean and Tethys passages, where Hera is speaking, Homer derived from them the genesis of all other gods (cf. Betegh 2002: 348 ff.).

Of a piece with these treatments of "poet says" passages are treatments by Aristotle and other contemporaries of passages in Plato that they flag as "Plato says." In the *Politics*, having reported that Socrates in Plato's *Republic* says that children and women and possessions should be in common (Arist. *Pol.* 1261a6-8), Aristotle later attributes this stipulation, among others, directly to Plato (Arist. *Pol.* 1274b9-15). The context, in which Aristotle is enumerating distinctive laws of various lawgivers, shows that Aristotle now reports as Plato's thought the stipulations that he had earlier cited as Socrates'. He reports those words as Plato's thought on the same level as the thought of the other lawgivers. Aristotle cites the *Timaeus* and *Laws* by title but attributes spoken content to Plato.[10]

---

[8] This distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts goes back to Austin (1975^2).

[9] The goddess's words are attributed directly to Parmenides at *Smp.* 178b9-11; *Prm.* 128a8-b6; *Sph.* 237a8-9, 244e3-5, 258d2-3. Although in the dialogues, the Eleatic Visitor and Socrates receive confirmation from Parmenides that he had presented his views in his poem (cf. *Sph.* 237a4-9; *Prm.* 128a8-b6), one must assume that Plato, composing these dialogues, invented this confirmation; as writer, he treats words in the mouth of the goddess as Parmenides' speech.

[10] Sc. the Athenian (Arist. *Pol.* 1266b6-7, 1271b1), or Timaeus (Arist. *Ph.* 209b11; *Cael.* 280a30; cf. Arist. *GC* 325b25-32, 329a14-24).

Theophrastus and Strato do the same for the *Timaeus*.[11] Isocrates' student Cephisodorus wrote four books against Aristotle, which in fact heavily attacked Plato, starting with the Forms (Numenius *apud* Eus. *PE* 14.6.9-10). No work this big could have been written without recourse to dialogues for Plato's views. The same will have been true of Theopompus' book against Plato (cf. D.H. *Pomp.* 1.16) and Alcimus' *To Amyntas*, in which Alcimus tried to prove that Plato plagiarized his doctrines from Epicharmus (cf. D.L. 3.9-17). Fourth-century comic poets attribute things said or implied by Plato's characters directly to Plato.[12] Aristotle's phrase, ἄγραφα δόγματα, presumes that Plato had *dogmata* that were written. Speusippus seems to have interpreted things in Plato's dialogues as Plato's teaching.[13] Xenocrates' desire to systematize both the corpus of dialogues and Plato's doctrines (cf. Ge, 2019) suggests that he located doctrines in the master's dialogues. Plato's followers would misrepresent their master if Plato had told them that his dialogues did not contain his views, but they alleged that they did. It is hard to see why Plato for decades would keep his views out of his dialogues but allow his closest students to think they were there.[14]

Alongside his "Plato says" references, Aristotle gives us confirmation that philosophical propositions argued for or presupposed by Plato's interlocutors are propositions that Plato himself held. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle outlines the argument by which, he says, Plato "annihilates" (ἀναιρεῖ) the thesis that the good is pleasure (Arist. *EN* 1172b27-32).[15] Aristotle's outline fits Socrates' argument in the *Philebus* (Pl. *Phlb.* 20e-22e, 60b-61b). With the words, καὶ Πλάτων ἀναιρεῖ, Aristotle invokes Plato in support of his own position in *EN* X.2 that pleasure is one of the goods, not *the* good. I do not find it plausible to take Aristotle's report as attributing any speech act other than what we would call assertion to Plato. If Aristotle learned of Plato's argument from discussion in the Academy, his testimony justifies our taking these sections of the *Philebus* as transmitting views that Plato held. If he learned of the argument by reading the *Philebus*, then we see once again that Aristotle saw no problem in reading Plato's meaning from Socrates' words in the text. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle attributes to Plato a metaphysics, including a theory of Forms, consistent with what has traditionally been understood from the dialogues (Arist. *Metaph.* 987a33-b14). In *On Generation and Corruption* (Arist. *GC* 335b10-16) he attributes that same stance to "the Socrates" of the *Phaedo* (Pl. *Phd.* 96a-101e).[16] In other words, Aristotle confirms that positions staked out in the dialogues were held by Plato. Proclus reports that Aristotle objected to Plato's "banishing tragedy" (Procl. *in R.* 1.49.13-19 Kroll). This notice confirms that Plato's pupil thought that Socrates' criticisms of mimetic poetry in the *Republic* were consistent with Plato's views.[17] Aristotle's objection itself has been thought to have been made in a dialogue, viz. his *On Poets* (*Fr.* 81 R^3). Aristotle's testimonies increase confidence that Plato endorsed views congruent with things that he put into the mouths of his principal interlocutors.

---

[11] Theophrastus: "as Plato says in the *Timaeus*" – Thphr. *Phys. opin.* 12; cf. Pl. *Ti.* 24e-25d; Thphr. *Sens.* 5-6, 83-91 Stratton. Strato from Pl. *Ti.* 80b-c concludes that "Plato himself thinks" (cf. Simpl. *CAG* 9.663.2-8 Diels = 28B Sharples).

[12] Cf. D.L. 3.26-28; Rihll (2003: esp. 171). The line, "is not this a lecture of Plato's?" (Alexis fr. 163 *PCG*) reminds us that in some cases, we cannot tell whether material traces back to Plato's oral discussion or to a dialogue.

[13] Cf. Speusippus, fr. 54 Tarán, 369: "... since from the point of view of his own philosophy Speusippus could not have meant that the soul is either an idea or a magnitude, it has been reasonably suggested (cf. Cherniss, I: 509-511) that he advanced this definition as an interpretation of Plato's meaning in the *Timaeus* in order to defend Plato against Aristotle's criticism but without himself subscribing to it at all." Speusippus' ἰδέα τοῦ πάντῃ διαστατοῦ, suggests that it is related to the *Timaeus* 35a-36e.

[14] Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (Pl. *Phdr.* 275-276) condemns not philosophical writing as such but the expectation of gaining *knowledge* through reading alone. The *Seventh Letter* downgrades writing (*Ep.* 341c) because enlightenment comes by cognizing essences, a cognition not transmitted by someone else's views. Both writings leave room for, and state, many philosophical views.

[15] This is the only instance of [λόγος] ἀναιρεῖ ὅτι οὐκ in the TLG. We might translate, "by such an argument Plato proves destructively that the good is not pleasure."

The dialogists' picture of a Plato who chose to sanitize his dialogues of his own views but whose close associates thought he expressed views in them appears even more improbable when we consider, as Terence Irwin reminds us, that often it is when he is arguing against Plato that Aristotle refers to views in Plato's dialogues:

> If Aristotle's original audience (during Plato's lifetime or at most twenty-five years after his death) had believed that Plato did not accept the views attributed to his character Socrates, then Aristotle's approach would have been both totally unfair and absurdly self-defeating; a defender of Plato would only have to remind Aristotle that the Platonic Socrates was not meant to represent Plato's views (1995: 6).

One premise required by my thesis is the premise that the author can manipulate the fiction by supplying words that carry a level of meaning available to the audience but not necessarily to the characters. Such effects require the audience to grasp discourse about the "real world" riding on top, so to speak, of the character's discourse within the world of the fiction. These manipulations form part of what I call an author's "double game" (Murphy 2023b: 38 f.). An author plays a double game when she seeds her text with discourse that operates on two registers of communication: the story register and, "on top of" it, what I call the rhetorical register, on which author-to-audience communication is transmitted.[18] Socrates employs the notion of double game *de re* in the *Gorgias* when he calls tragic poetry a kind of public oratory, and the poets' practice, "public speaking, ῥητορεύειν, in the theaters" (Pl. *Grg.* 502c-d). He assumes that the poets "speak" the story through what the characters say *and* also "speak" as though they are orators, commenting on contemporary issues to the audience on top of and through the very words that the characters say. In the *Phaedrus* as well he exploits a story register and a rhetorical register. There he embeds criticism of writing in the mouth of Thamus, a character in the myth that Socrates tells (Pl. *Phdr.* 274c-275b). Phaedrus sees through Thamus as Socrates' mouthpiece and unmasks the thoughts as Socrates' thoughts.

---

[16] See Gerson (2013: ch. 4) on Aristotle's ascriptions of views to Plato in the *GC* passage and elsewhere, both in cases when Aristotle cites a dialogue and in others when he does not.

[17] Halliwell (2011) brings out aspects of Plato's presentation that are in tension with the "banishment" narrative.

[18] Similar distinctions have been formalized by others. Among those who work on philosophical dialogues, Klosko (1983: 367), distinguishes between "levels": the Plato's teaching level vs. the "dramatic composition" level. Livio Rossetti has used the metaphors of distillation for our task of extracting Platonic views from a dialogue's dramatic context and of filtration for Plato's expressing views through that context (2001: 118; 2008: 67). Hösle posits that the same statement can stand in relation to "dialoginternen (...) als auch mit dialogexternen Aspekte," the latter relation throwing light on communication from the author (2006: 60 et *passim*). It would be a non-starter to explain authorial ideology as pieces of nonfiction spliced amongst pieces of fiction, because the pretend space-time frame of the story remains constant and constitutes the work formally as fiction.

These two registers in fiction reveal themselves, for example, in anachronisms, which call attention to an author-to-audience register of communication "on top of" the story. As Joseph Luzzi has observed, anachronisms "oblige the reader to acknowledge an authorial presence that self-consciously breathes into a work the air of historical difference" (Luzzi 2009: 75). Aristophanes' reference in the *Symposium* (Pl. *Smp.* 193a1-3) to the Spartan dissolution of Mantinea in 385 could not have been made at the dramatic date of the dialogue in 416.[19] Again in *Symposium*, Pausanias refers to Ionian cities as ruled by barbarians (Pl. *Smp.* 182b6-7). That political arrangement did not hold in the 420s but did after the King's Peace in 387. R.E. Allen remarks (1991: 122 n. 183), "this appears to be deliberate anachronism." In the *Menexenus*, Socrates refers to that same King's Peace (Pl. *Mx.* 245c2-e2), established in fact twelve years after Socrates' death. Macrobius identifies a number of anachronisms in Plato and justifies his own anachronisms by Plato's example, adding that other writers also have anachronisms (Macrob. *Sat.* I.1.5-6). Such references are not of the sort as to be uttered in the story. They can be accounted for only as manipulations by the author.[20]

Akin to explicitly named anachronistic references are intimations of events known to the audience but not to the characters because the events are in the "future" with respect to the time of the story, although "past" for the audience. This is a species of dramatic irony already seen in tragedy. We find an instance in the *Charmides*. Plato's audience knew well that Charmides and Critias would become leaders of the tyranny of the Thirty almost thirty years after the dramatic date of the dialogue. Many commentators see their talk of doing violence (Pl. *Chrm.* 176c-d) as foreshadowing their later political course and as underscoring how they failed to understand *sophrosynē*. By this detail, Plato is hinting at connections that the characters cannot make.

This instance of dramatic irony is more ideologically weighted than the above-mentioned anachronisms. Authorial manipulations that are even more ideologically freighted are veiled criticisms of contemporaries. Many of these are anachronisms as well, since the view in question often became articulated only after the dialogue's dramatic date. It is a good bet that the "late learners" of the *Sophist* (Pl. *Sph.* 251b7) stand for Antisthenes and his οἰκεῖος λόγος doctrine, which is criticized also in the *Theaetetus* (Pl. *Tht.* 201-202). Marwan Rashed (2006) has argued that the *Phaedo* is Plato's response to

---

[19] Mattingly's arguments (1958) that Plato alludes to events of 418 are not compelling; cf. Dover (1965: 1-7).

[20] Striking anachronisms in Plato are compiled by Hösle (2006: 250 f.).

Antisthenes' *Sathon*, and John Dillon (2003: 65-75) sees views of Speusippus criticized in *Philebus* 44a-d. Veiled criticism of contemporaries, whose views were not current at the dramatic date of a dialogue, presumes a readership attuned to authorial messages conveyed by characters' speech.[21]

Since the author's voice in characters' speeches can be heard by audiences via such devices, suppression of the authorial voice is not a necessary property of fiction. If we combine these features of Plato's dialogues with his characters' and his contemporaries' assumption that characters' speech is in the end authors' speech, the conclusion is compelling that Plato's readers – and why not Plato himself? – heard his voice and views in his dialogues. I call the "author speaking to audience" register the rhetorical register. That and the story register give us a double discourse.

Attic drama provides examples of audience reception of messages from the author conveyed through characters' speech, showing that poets were thought to "say" things about the real world in their works. If the audience goes on to read the author's "speech" as urging something of ideological import, that move will be the result of the audience's processing of the work via interpretation. According to Plato's *Apology*, things said about the "Socrates" in Aristophanes' *Clouds* were taken by the audience and by Socrates himself as referring to the flesh-and-blood man, whether truly or falsely. Socrates is shown as complaining that through "a certain Socrates" on stage (Pl. *Ap.* 19c3), the poet accused him, the real Socrates, and persuaded people falsely that he was deceitful and harmful to the city (Pl. *Ap.* 18a-19c). As we saw Isocrates do, here Socrates distills an assertoric element, what he takes to be the rhetoric of the play, and speaks of it as Aristophanes' message, for an accusation (κατηγορία – Pl. *Ap.* 19a8) is an assertion. And as we saw Socrates do in the *Republic*, here too Socrates finds that the poet's illocutionary act achieved its perlocutionary aim. He reasons from "characters said" to "author meant." When the chorus leader says in the *Clouds*, "I punched Cleon in the stomach when he was a big shot" (Ar. *Nu.* 549), Aristophanes effectively boasts of such acts: he lampooned that politician successfully in a speech act that he himself had made in the *Knights*. Athens had previously even forbidden lampooning individuals by name in comedy (schol. Ar. *Ach.* 67). The need for such a decree shows the extent of lampooning on stage and shows that such lampoons were received as real-world speech.[22] The city recognized that pretend productions can carry ideology. As Kendall Walton puts it, "We engage in make-believe in order to think and talk about features of the real world—often ones that matter, and sometimes ones that are not easy to think or talk about in any other way" (Walton 2015: 91).

---

[21] On literary feuds encoded in Plato's dialogues and their implications for author's voice see Murphy (2023b). Sartre's *L'Enfance d'un chef* provides a modern example, for it parodies, among other *Bildungsromanen*, Maurice Barrès' *Les Déracinés*, making that novel the focus of a scene. Because the Barrès novel must be the referent if the parody is to be successful, Sartre has conveyed a real-world message with ideological import through his fiction; cf. Suleiman (1993^2: 249 f.) and Louette (2009).

[22] On the rhetorical register in Attic drama, see further, Murphy (2023b: 43 f., 56 f.).

What conception of fictional discourse allowed ancient audiences to detect story and rhetorical registers, to engage in double games with the author?[23] Socrates' analysis of Homer's and character's speech in *Republic* 3 shows how this double speaking-and-hearing game could be conceived. Socrates explains that the poet "says the things after this just as though he himself is Chryses and attempts (…) to make us think that the one speaking is not Homer but the priest, an old man." The poet says these words, but not "as himself," as he does when he says the words that we assign to the narrator. Socrates goes on, "But whenever he says some speech as [though] being someone else, shall we not say that then he makes his own style (λέξιν) as much as possible like each one whom he designates as speaking?" (Pl. *R.* 393a6-c2). Socrates' conception of the poet as speaking *all* the words helps explain why he attributes utterances of characters to the poet. We have seen that he does the same when the words are spoken by a character in drama. There, actors vocalize on stage, but Socrates treats the words as though they are the poet's and the poet as responsible for the speech. References in the poem to objects that belong to the "real world" are taken as the poet's speech "above" the register of the story. Evaluating the analysis of poet's and character's speech in *Republic* 3, Grethlein concludes, "Instead of inhabiting an ontological level that is separate both from that of the narrator and from that of the characters, the author is viewed as the narrator who creates the story through plain narration and/or impersonation (…) in character speech the author has turned into the character" (Grethlein 2021a: 218).

Most ancient critics did not wrestle over how to justify taking Platonic teachings from the dialogues; they simply took them. By the time we reach the Middle Platonists, some articulated an assumption that anticipates our notion of "mouthpiece" when they said that Socrates or another character speaks for Plato.[24] Diogenes Laertius tells us that Plato himself speaks about certain things, αὐτὸς λέγει, but ascribes them, ἀνατιθείς, to Socrates (D.L. 2.45). Reviewing Plutarch's references to Plato, Bram Demulder concludes that Plutarch took the Athenian and the Eleatic Visitor to be "mouthpieces" of Plato's (Demulder 2022: 50 f.). Plutarch did not treat mimetic literature as uniformly monological, however. Inheriting a hermeneutical tradition from Alexandrian commentators, Stoics and others, he says in *How to Study Poetry* that when characters say things that are morally base, their lines may: 1) merely display poets' mimetic skills; 2) "have been spoken in line with their [viz. poets'] belief and conviction, as they bring out to us and share the delusion and ignorance that they [viz. poets] have about gods" (Plu. *Quomodo*

---

[23] My thesis requires that some terms in the fiction refer to real-world objects as well as to objects in the game of make-believe. Since most referring terms of ideological import are universal terms like "justice," etc., however, I skirt the controversy over whether particular terms in a fiction can refer to real-world objects. Issues are usefully set forth by García-Carpintero (2019) and Friend (2019). It is clear that ancient mimetic literature expects some particular terms to refer to real-world objects, and I apply that approach to literary feuds (Murphy 2023b).

[24] Cf. Tarrant (2000: 27-32).

adul. 17A-B); 3) display characters worthy of reproach (Plu. *Quomodo adul.* 18F). In the case of 3), "the poet himself [may] give hints (ἐμφάσεις) against the things spoken as meeting his displeasure" (Plu. *Quomodo adul.* 19A). Although most of Plutarch's examples of poets' hints come from narrators' lines, *Odyssey* 8.329 is speech of one or more gods. Bad outcomes suffered by base characters also serve as tacit commentary from the poet (Plu. *Quomodo adul.* 19E-20B). Morally improving utterances of characters Plutarch ascribes directly to the poet (Plu. *Quomodo adul.* 20D-21D). Plutarch's hermeneutical assumptions parallel those that he and other ancient critics apply when reading Socratic dialogues: all the lines are the poet's mimetic representation; some lines also carry the poet's views, giving us double speech; poets make illocutionary acts in these passages, for Plutarch sees them identifying and recommending views, whether correct or incorrect, to their audience.[25]

The ancient material creates a strong presumption that Plato would have seen his dialogues as vehicles for expressing views through some utterances of some characters, for in line with Plutarch's analysis, I posit that characters in mimetic literature function as mouthpieces only over some of their utterances. Let us consider now whether this presumption holds out against the demand of Weak Dialogism that the author outside the fiction certify the mouthpiece characters in the fiction, and against Strong Dialogism's contention that authors do not "speak" in their fictions.

As far as I can see, the skepticism of WD is merely asserted, even by Wimsatt and Beardsley, whose formulation was seminal.[26] It cannot appeal to SD for a theoretical basis, for WD admits that authors can express their views through characters' utterances. Proponents of WD do not show why inferences to authorial messages from features of the works themselves cannot be justified if they are made with epistemic caution. Features of Plato's dialogues that lead audiences to think that they carry authorial messages include: their argumentative structure; recurrence of and substantial harmony among a set of conclusions or commitments expressed in universal, and thus, context-independent terms; acceptance of principal interlocutors' arguments and claims by other interlocutors; privileged status of those interlocutors in the eyes of other characters; extradiegetic elements such digs at other intellectuals' positions. On the other hand, denials that a character performs mouthpiece functions threaten to become unfalsifiable even if we do get authorial evidence. If an author named a mouthpiece, after all, critics could retort that the statement is spurious or deceptive or that the author does not control the meaning (Nails 2000: 17).

As examples of passages where the formal property, "mouthpiece," is activated, I suggest Socrates' arguments in the *Gorgias* that injustice is one of the greatest evils of the soul. This universal claim remains unrefuted at the end and is congruent with other dialogues. Socrates is the leading character. On the other hand, dogmatic interpreters might disagree over where in the *Protagoras* Socrates functions as Plato's mouthpiece. The *Symposium*'s discourse may be truly dialogical in Bakhtin's sense, but on my hypothesis, a Mouthpiece interpreter would argue that the mouthpiece function is "turned on" over sentences assigned to more than one character.

---

[25] On differences between Plutarch's and many modern theorists' hermeneutical assumptions, see Grethlein (2021b: 149-54).

[26] "We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic speaker, and if to the author at all, only by a biographical act of inference," Wimsatt, Beardsley (1946: 470).

As I have argued elsewhere, in any case, the *Seventh Letter* goes a long way toward providing certification. Although often challenged, the authenticity of some or all of the *Seventh Letter* has become increasingly accepted.[27] The letter writer says that he was "forced to say" that human ills will not cease until philosophers rule or rulers become philosophers (Pl. *Ep.* 326a-b). Teichmüller (1884: 252), Thesleff (1982: 106) and Trabattoni (2016: 267) have pointed out that the words that the letter writer "was forced to say" closely overlap Socrates' words at *Republic* 473c11-d6. If the letter is by Plato, and if it refers to the *Republic* – as it seems to do – Plato is attesting that Socrates was his mouthpiece.

Turning to SD, although it can appeal to various modern theories of fiction for support, I suggest that at its core are two arguments: the speaker or narrator in the work is not the actual author because the two do not have all the same properties (cf. Beardsley 1981: 302 ff.); a corollary, the work is not fiction anymore if it carries assertions of the author (cf. Levinson 1992: 245 f.). Behind these hermeneutical commitments lies a conception of fiction as an enterprise that deals with entities such as narrators that inhabit an ontological plane other than that of real-world entities like the actual author. Talk about entities other than the author that generate discourse in fiction was unknown in antiquity.[28] This conception of fiction faces powerful objections from theorists like Kendall Walton who gain ontological economy as they hold that mimetic arts are based in modes of pretending. When we pretend, we can mix in real-world content in various ways that others can recognize. Because no theory of fiction and fictional discourse has yet carried the day, however, I shall offer here against SD only some distinctions that help support the Dogmatic Assumption from modern perspectives.

I have argued that the notion of double speech is implicit in ancient treatment of fictional discourse. Francis Dauer's (1995) distinction between referential and formal attributes of characters shows how double speeech can be conceived. Referential attributes are predicates that would be true if the character were an actual person. Formal attributes concern characters' functions in the construction and/or success of the fiction.[29] On Dauer's terms, Socrates and Isocrates are treating Odysseus' and the gods' speech acts as referential predicates, part of the story, and they are treating as a formal predicate these characters' function as devices to convey Homer's views. The poet's audience receives his double speech, story and views, on the story register and on the rhetorical register at once through one portion of text. It is as though hearers hear a musician play a melody, the rhythm of which conveys a message in Morse code. When we describe what happens in the story, we talk about Socrates as a person with *referential* properties, such as "barefoot," whom we imagine as saying and doing things. In our analysis of how the text is constructed, Socrates as an effect of the text has *formal* properties, such as "protagonist." Let's say another formal property of a character, which serves the author's communication of ideology, is Mouthpiece. I take it to be axiomatic that: 1) to treat a character as the author's mouthpiece is to make a formal claim about that character; 2) the mouthpiece function is a device by which the author expresses views in the fictional text; 3) the author may also use other devices to do this.

---

[27] In favor of the authenticity of parts or all of the *Seventh Letter*, cf. Kahn (2015), Szlezák (2017), Notomi (2022) and Forcignanò and Martinelli-Tempesta (2023).

[28] At Pl. *R.* 393a6-7, the notion of narrator should be invoked, if anywhere in Plato, but instead we get only "the poet himself speaks (...) as though the one speaking is someone other than himself."

[29] Similar is Andrea Bonomi's distinction between person in the story and character (2008: 227). We *make believe* that persons in the story are speaking; what we *analyze* are abstract objects such as characters.

Affirming that we must be sensitive to all nuances of the story register, which is primary, I put my rhetorical register as a rider on top of the story register. Jukka Mikkonen (2009) takes a similar approach, contending that *represented* illocutionary acts in the story can be used by the author "in the second place" to perform illocutionary acts toward the audience; "[f]ictional utterances and assertions conveyed by them can be applied as the actual author's assertions." "Double speech" constructs that overlap my story register and rhetorical register have been proposed as well by, e.g., Krukowski (1981), Swirski (2000), and Johnson (2019).

Some theorists hold that fiction contains only pretend illocutionary acts because fictional discourse does not refer.[30] Against this, first, as I have argued, we have good reason to allow real-world reference in fiction. Second, I point to Barbara Herrnstein Smith's distinction between content and speech act: what is pretended in the fiction is the act of reporting or reflecting itself (Herrnstein 1971: 272). We pretend that Socrates was speaking in a given place and time. The content of what is reported, however, need not be pretended; it may express real-world truth. Our discourse about Socrates as mouthpiece is not discourse about the story; it is discourse about how Plato constructed the piece of writing. Our discourse is not vulnerable to the SD objection that Plato is not a constituent of the fiction, for we are talking about Plato's constructing the fiction.

I do not beg the question when I identify a rhetorical register. First, I appeal to *ratio et res ipsa*: we can conceive of putting our own views into fictional characters' speeches, and our audience will catch our views if we share a convention that admits authorial speech. Plato and his contemporaries shared that convention, as well as the assumption that someone's writing counts as his speech (cf. Pl. *Prm*. 127e1; *Tht*. 166c-e). Second, authors and audiences for millennia have shared conventions about mimetic genres that serve as vehicles for the authors' expression of views. In a letter to Atticus, Cicero recalls things about moral duty that "we said" (*diximus*) in an earlier work that must have been his

---

[30] Seminal is Searle (1975).

Republic, a dialogue (Cic. *Att.* 10.4.4).[31] In his preface to *De Senectute*, addressed to Atticus and therefore outside of the fiction, Cicero writes that "the discourse of Cato himself will explicate all our thought (*sententiam*) about old age" (Cic. *Sen* 1.3.). In his preface to Book 2 of *De Divinatione*, Cicero refers to many earlier dialogues and the philosophical views that he had stated in them, and of which, he says, he had sought to persuade readers (Cic. *Div.* 2.1.1-4). Having used characters' speeches as vehicles for what I call ideology, Cicero tells us that he intended their words to express his own views. "Authoritarian fiction" or the *roman à thèse* (cf. Suleiman 1993^2), didactic fiction, theological fiction, political fiction and drama, and other mimetic vehicles of authorial reflection have been with us in one genre or another since before Aristophanes wrote that drama teaches the city (Ar. *Ra.* 687, 1054-1056). In all of these genres, producers put views into characters' utterances, and audiences read them off from there, either directly or by distillation through inference, as we saw Isocrates do.

In the face of these considerations, however, the SD proponent may continue to insist that the author cannot express views through characters' speech because the author is not a constituent of the fiction and therefore not a speaker in the story, even in a story whose characters include the author's eponymous stand-in. I make four points in reply.

First, as SD frames the question, "Who speaks for Plato?," the answer seems to be, "no one." In the premise, "Plato's Socrates says…," we do not have a proper speaker at all. Gérard Genette voiced a standard tenet when he observed that literary characters "are *pseudo-objects* [G.'s emphasis] (…) wholly constituted by the discourse that claims to describe them (…) only an effect of the text" (Genette 1988: 135 f.). The generator of discourse is the author. If we can apply the account of mimetic discourse that we saw in *Republic* 3, all the discourse is Plato's. Effects of texts do not properly speak. If the *author* does not speak to us in the dialogues, nobody speaks to us in them. If a dialogue contains merely pretend illocutionary acts, then no one directs perlocutionary aims like persuading or inspiring or challenging toward us. As Joseph Margolis commented, fiction tells us about the actual world "only insofar as the sentences (…) are construed as the utterances of the author" (Margolis 1980: 268).

Second, in light of the last point, I do not find it convincing to argue that the mouthpiece theory lands the interpreter in a fallacy if she says, "Plato says." Jerry Press (2000a: 37 f.) argued that it is "a fallacy of equivocation" on "says" if we substitute "historical Socrates" or some other "Socrates" for "Plato's Socrates" when interpreting sentences in a Platonic dialogue. Press presented Mulhern's arguments against one who substitutes "Plato" for "Plato's Socrates" as though they pinpointed the same equivocation fallacy. In the premise, "Plato's Socrates says…," however, we do not have a proper speaker at all, since a character is an effect of the text; we pretend that there is a speaker as we participate in the make-believe. Pretend speech acts are not speech to us except to the extent that authorial communication "rides on top of" the pretend speech act. Therefore, the Mouthpiece approach does not *equivocate* on "says" when it moves from "Plato's Socrates says P" to "Plato says P" because the step actually is taken from "We *pretend* that Plato's Socrates says P" to "Plato says P." The semantic value of "says" is the same in both sentences. Press himself later allowed that Plato has "a pedagogical strategy with respect to his readers" (Press 2013: 213). "Pedagogical" implies doctrine in some sense, and "strategy with respect to his readers" implies perlocutionary aims as well as those aims' being inferred by us from what Socrates "*says*." The tricky issue is rather that when we analyze art, *then* "says" is said in many ways about the originator's transmission of ideas. In the 2021 film, *È stato la mano di Dio*, the master filmmaker asks the young hero who aspires to that art, "Ce l'avrai qualcosa di dire o no?" "If a film has something to say about the real world, we expect it to say something relevant and insightful about a debated issue" (Keating 2003: 22). Often artists and critics discuss what was "said" about the real world in the work. When this "speech" aims to convey ideology, then we have parallels to Plato's dialogues.[32] There is no actual agent of real-world discourse except the artist, however much interpretive work the artist leaves to the audience. Rowe makes a useful move in rewording "what he is using his characters to *say*" as "what he wants the reader to extract from his text" (Rowe 2007: 2; compare my notion of "distilling" the author's views).

---

[31] Cf. Zetzel (1996: esp. 305), who identifies the passage in the *Republic* as Laelius' speech on natural law in Book 3.

Third, the dialogical approach comes at a high theoretical cost. We run the risk of shutting ourselves off from Plato's full range of communication if our hermeneutics will not allow us to hear a register that our evidence indicates he and his audience heard in fiction.[33] We might infer conclusions that in fact we do not know are true, e.g. that by writing dialogues, Plato sought to conceal his views. We might not explore historically and philosophically important territory, e.g. whether Plato had a coherent set of commitments, as tradition from the first attests that he did, or whether he sought to influence a public through his writing. As to the latter, we may think he did seek to influence, for he depicts Socrates as seeking to persuade people of moral truths and duties (cf. e.g. Pl. *Ap.* 30a-31a, 31b4-5, 36c5; *Grg.* 493c-494a; *R.* 357a5–b3, 427e). Works like Danielle Allen's study of Plato as "a master of the sound bite . . . the western world's first message man" (Allen 2010: 147) could not and should not have been written if the Dialogical Assumption is true. Taken strictly, dialogism removes Plato's thought – perhaps Parmenides' as well – from the history of philosophy except for what Aristotle and other witnesses report about it. And yet, dialogists tend to keep Aristotle's testimony at a distance. To discuss only how Plato portrayed other people philosophizing is not to investigate his philosophy. Moreover, in the effort to avoid "dogmatic" readings, dialogists often seem to reduce the takeaway from Plato's writing to anodyne messages like "think more deeply" or "practice epistemic restraint." The dialogical approach strikes dogmatists as providing insufficient motivation for Plato to have invested such effort and thought in the positive arguments that occupy so many pages. As Lloyd Gerson put it in a colloquium years ago, the dialogical approach threatens to be "all windup and no pitch."

---

[32] E.g. Luchino Visconti's film, "*La Terra Trema* seeks to refute those who would have denied the importance of the class struggle in Italy at the time" (Keating 2003: 23).). "Aunt Jessie, surely a mouthpiece for Alcott here, says, «This love of money is the curse of America...»" (Mullen 2015: 680). Painters too can aim to persuade viewers to adopt a position, among other reasons for painting the painting, although the construct, "mouthpiece," seems ill adapted to works of plastic arts. "The contents of the close foreground and the bottom corners of a picture were to become areas from which Hogarth would air his authorial views in many of his fictional works..." (Cowley 2019: 62). Paintings like Picasso's *Guernica* or Chen Yifei's *Emancipated Serfs Love Chairman Hua* of 1977 sought to promote a political stance.

[33] "Although we are free to project whatever we want, if we seek to understand the text's dominant design principles, we must consider the target culture's beliefs" (Keating 2003: 16 f.).

Adherents of SD may think that their assumption brings a theoretical benefit of freeing us from the need to account for contradictions among positions that are argued in different dialogues. If Plato is only portraying, one may say, he asserts nothing. In my view, this alleged benefit is insubstantial. First, Socrates says incompatible things even within a dialogue. For example, in the *Apology* he disavows knowledge about "the greatest matters," including justice, but yet claims to know (οἶδα) that certain actions are just or unjust (Pl. *Ap.* 29b6-8). Both the dogmatist and the dialogist, then, must account for inconcinnities in Plato. Second, some contradictions can be shown to be only apparent, while others can be explained within developmentalist or other frameworks. For example, when the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus admit changeable things into "being" (Pl. *Sph.* 247-249), Plato makes an important expansion of his own ontology (Murphy 2023a: 63). Granted, those frameworks too rest on assumptions, but so does SD. Interpreters are not obligated to try to trace the course of Plato's thought across his dialogues, but those who make the attempt find that inquiry philosophically and historically worthwhile.

Adherents of SD may think that their assumption also brings the benefit of freeing us from the need to attribute fallacies to Plato in his own person. I can only take as read the controversy over whether Plato's principal interlocutors commit fallacies. Let us suppose at least one instance: Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul in *Republic* 10. Julia Annas calls this "one of the few embarrassingly bad arguments in Plato" (Annas 1981: 345). The passage (Pl. *R.* 609-611) shows features that I have suggested signal a "mouthpiece" function. The conclusion argued by Socrates, the principal interlocutor, is a universal claim, serves the theme of the dialogue (the just life is the best), is accepted by Glaucon and the others, and recurs in other dialogues. An interpreter who invokes SD to absolve Plato of the flaws of this argument must offer an account of what Plato accomplishes by putting it unchallenged in Socrates' mouth. It is not clear to me that it is a theoretical gain to impose *that* burden on oneself. Why cannot Plato slip up when he "says" something?

Fourth, because we cannot demonstrate by a deductive system that the Dogmatic Assumption is true, it does not follow that a Dogmatic or "Mouthpiece" interpretation is guilty of fallacy (cf. Beversluis 2006: 98), let alone that the Dialogical Assumption is left standing by default. I suggest that to demand that a hermeneutical approach justify itself via a deductive argument, the premises of which are known to be true, is a case of *ignoratio elenchi*. As in other branches of historical inquiry, arguments in favor of a hermeneutic will use premises, some of which are only probable. Virtually certain is the premise, Plato's contemporary readers thought that characters' utterances can convey authors' views. Strong is the premise, producers and consumers of a genre share a conception of its norms. Probable is the inference, Plato thought that characters' utterances can convey authors' views. Probable is the further inference, Plato thought that characters in *his* dialogues could convey his views.

The farther we go back in time, the less intellectual history is a matter of what can be known and shown. In their criticisms of admittedly often naïve dogmatic interpretation, dialogists have regimented dogmatists' analyses as deductive systems, which then are shown to make illicit steps. Arguments that we need when interpreting texts, however, especially when we have little or no corroborating, external evidence, generally are not deductive but abductive, "to the best explanation": let C be a surprising fact; but if A were true, C would be obvious and natural; therefore, one is justified to suspect that A is true. The material that I have examined throughout this paper is "surprising" on the dialogists' assumption that Plato does not "speak" in his dialogues. A dialogist may counter, it would be surprising if Plato had wanted to assert and persuade through writing but then chose to write only dialogues, not treatises. *Not* surprising. The Socratics wrote dialogues for decades, and most of them, as far as we know, only dialogues. To write philosophical treatises would have been the unusual choice for a follower of Socrates.

To conclude that Plato expresses a given view requires the interpreter to consider a wide range of factors; no one today argues that "Plato says or means P" *follows* directly from "Socrates says P." A claim that Socrates, say, functions as Plato's mouthpiece in a given passage is another way of stating the *conclusion* of an interpretive process, not a premise already known to be true, from which that conclusion is deduced.

The pact between ancient author and audience allowed philosophical moves that survive scrutiny in a dialogue, even negative conclusions like "knowledge is not perception," to pass muster as Mouthpiece expressions. Above I suggested some features of a passage or dialogue that help mark a character's speech as performing a mouthpiece function. To attempt to certify views of Plato in particular passages would go beyond the scope of this paper. A minimalist list of some Platonic views was offered by Beversluis (2006), while Gerson expounds stances that he takes to be distinctive of Platonism (e.g. Gerson 2013: ch. 1). To posit that in some passages the mouthpiece function is switched on does not efface other properties of the text such as plot structure or characters' interactions. By positing a mouthpiece function I do not debar other features of the text from conveying philosophical content and pushing us to think.

A worry. If "Mouthpiece" interpretation of the dialogues is a philosophically and historically legitimate enterprise, why do many of its practitioners arrive at differing constructions of Plato's thought? In reply I observe, first, that differing constructions have been made about important aspects of the thought of philosophers who wrote treatises, too—Aristotle, for example. Dialogues are trickier still to interpret by virtue of their form. Second, the Dogmatic Assumption does not promise a method for getting answers. The interpreter's overall hermeneutical system, acumen, and grounding in the texts are all she has as she plumbs the language and structure of a dialogue and treatment of related thoughts in other dialogues.

If one wants only to analyze philosophical content, it may not matter whether a position privileged in the dialogues is Plato's. For historians of philosophy, however, "What did Plato say?" matters. Much historical work amounts to reconstruction based on only probable premises. I propose rhetorical vs. story registers and a Mouthpiece function to explain what historians of philosophy rely on when they seek to derive views of Plato from dialogues. Able to do all that dialogism can do and more, a responsible dogmatism is the more fertile heuristic assumption.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alieva, O. (ed.), 2023, *The Making of the Platonic Corpus*, Paderborn.

Allen, D. S., 2010, *Why Plato Wrote*, Malden.

Allen, R. E., 1991, *The Dialogues of Plato. Volume II. The* Symposium, New Haven-London.

Annas, J., 1981, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic, Oxford.

Annas, J., Rowe C. (eds.), 2002, *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, Washington.

Atack, C., 2018, "Plato's *Statesman* and Xenophon's *Cyrus,*" in: Danzig, Johnson, Morrison 2018, pp. 510-543.

Austin, J. L., 1975^2, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford.

Beardsley, M., 1981, "Fiction as Representation," *Synthèse* 46, pp. 291-313.

Betegh, G., 2002, "On Eudemus Fr. 150 (Wehrli)," in: Bodnár, Fortenbaugh 2002, pp. 337-357.

Beversluis, J., 2006, "A Defense of Dogmatism in the Interpretation of Plato," *OSAP* 31, pp. 85-111.

Bevilacqua, F., 2018, "Socrates' Attitude towards Politics in Xenophon and Plato," in: Danzig, Johnson, Morrison 2018, pp. 461-486.

Bodnár, I, Fortenbaugh, W. (eds.), 2002, *Eudemus of Rhodes*, New Brunswick.

Bonomi, A., 2008, "Fictional Contexts," in: Bouquet, Serafini, Thomason 2018, pp. 215-249.

Bouquet, P., Serafini, L., Thomason, R. (eds.), 2018, *Perspectives on Contexts*, Stanford.

Camon, F., 1982, *Il mestiere di poeta*, Milan.

Chappell, S.-G., 2021, "Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* E. Zalta (ed.), (Spring 2021 Edition), URL =
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/plato-theaetetus/>.

Cohen, L. J., 1989, "Belief and Acceptance," *Mind* 98, pp. 367-389.

Corlett, A., 2018, *Interpreting Plato Socratically. Socrates and Justice*, Cham.

Cossuta, F., Narcy, M. (eds.), 2001, *La forme dialogue chez Platon*, Grenoble.

Cowley, R. L. S., 2019, "How the dice are loaded," *The British Art Journal* 20, pp. 58-64.

Danzig, G., Johnson, D., Morrison, D. (eds.), 2018, *Plato and Xenophon. Comparative Studies*, Leiden-Boston.

Dauer, F. W., 1995, "The Nature of Fictional Characters and the Referential Fallacy," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, pp. 31-38.

Demulder, B., 2022, *Plutarch's Cosmological Ethics*, Leuven.

Destrée, P., Herrman, F.-G. (eds.), 2011, *Plato and the Poets*, Leiden-Boston.

Dillon, J., 2003, *The Heirs of Plato. A Study of the Old Academy (347-274 BC.)*, Oxford.

Dorion, L.-A., 2020, "Cyrus and Socrates: Two Models on an Equal Footing?" in: Jacobs 2020, pp. 45-70.

Dover, K. J., 1965, "The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," *Phronesis* 10, pp. 2-20.

Forcignanò, F., Martinelli Tempesta, S., 2023, "Comparing Corpora, Rethinking Authenticity: Why Are Platonic Letters 'Platonic'?" in: Alieva 2023, pp. 203-221.

Friend, S., 2019, "Reference in Fiction," *Disputatio* 11, pp. 179-206.

García-Carpintero, M., 2019, "Singular Reference in Fictional Discourse?," *Disputatio* 11, pp. 143-177.

Ge, T., 2019, "The Status of Xenocrates in the History of the Text of Plato's Corpus Reconsidered," *Phoenix* 73, pp. 372-387.

Genette, G., 1988, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, transl. J. E. Lewin, Ithaca.

Gerson, L. P., 2000, "Plato *Absconditus,*" in: Press 2000, pp. 201-210.

Gerson, L. P., 2013, *From Plato to Platonism*, Ithaca-London.

Grethlein, J., 2021a, "Author and Characters. Ancient, Narratological and Cognitive Views on a Tricky Relationship," *CP* 116, pp. 216-230.

Grethlein, J., 2021b, *The ancient aesthetics of deception: the ethics of enchantment from Gorgias to Heliodorus*, Cambridge.

Grethlein, J., 2023, *Ancient Greek texts and modern narrative theory: towards a critical dialogue*, Cambridge.

Halliwell, S., 2000, "The Subjection of Muthos to Logos: Plato's Citations of the Poets," *CQ* 50, pp. 94-112.

Halliwell, S., 2011, "Antidotes and Incantations: Is There a Cure for Poetry in Plato's *Republic*?" in: Destrée, Herrman, 2011, pp. 241-266.

Herrnstein Smith, B., 1971, "Poetry as Fiction," *New Literary History* 2, pp. 259-281.

Hösle, V., 2006, *Der philosophische Dialog: eine Poetik und Hermeneutik*, München.

Hyland, D., 1968, "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues," *Ph&Rh* 1, pp. 38-50.

Irwin, T., 1995, *Plato's Ethics*, Oxford-New York.

Iseminger, G. (ed.), 1992, *Intention and Interpretation*, Philadelphia.

Jacobs, B. (ed.), 2020, *Ancient Information on Persia Re-assessed: Xenophon's* Cyropaedia, Wiesbaden.

Johnson, C., 2019, "Investigating Illocutionary Monism," *Synthèse* 196, pp. 1151-1165.

Kahn, C. H., 2015, Review of M. Burnyeat, M. Frede, *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter* (D. Scott, ed.), Oxford, 2015, *NDPR* 2015.11.09 https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/the-pseudo-platonic-seventh-letter/

Keating, P., 2003, "The Fictional Worlds of Neorealism," *Criticism* 45, pp. 11-30.

Klosko, G., 1983, "Criteria of Fallacy and Sophistry for Use in the Analysis of Platonic Dialogues," *CQ* 33, pp. 363-374.

Krukowski, L., 1981, "Commentary on Monroe Beardsley's 'Fiction as Representation'," *Synthèse* 46, pp. 325-330.

Lane, M., 2016, "Antianarchia: Interpreting Political Thought in Plato," *Plato Journal* 16, pp. 59-74.

Levinson, J., 1992, "Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look," in: Iseminger 1992, pp. 221-256.

Louette, J.-F., 2009, "'L'Enfance d'un chef': La Fleur et le coin d'acier," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 109, pp. 365-384.

Luzzi, J., 2009, "The Rhetoric of Anachronism," *CompLit* 61, pp. 69-84.

Margolis, J., 1980, *Art and Literature*, Atlantic Highlands.

Marren, M., 2022, *Plato and Aristophanes. Comedy, Politics, and the Pursuit of a Just Life*, Evanston.

Mattingly, H., 1958, "The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," *Phronesis* 3, pp. 31-39.

Mikkonen, J., 2009, "Intentions and Interpretations: Philosophical Fiction as Conversation," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 7, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0007.012.

Mulhern, J., 2000, "Interpreting the Platonic Dialogues. What Can One Say?," in: Press 2000, pp. 221-234.

Mulhern, J., 2015, "Plato's Putative Mouthpiece and Ancient Authorial Practice: The Case of Homer," in: Nails, Tarrant 2015, pp. 257-277.

Mullen, A., 2015, "Living in Earnest," *Hudson Review* 67, pp. 677-684.

Murphy, D., 2023a, "The Sophist's Puzzling *Epistêmê* in the *Sophist*," *CQ* 73, pp. 53-65.

Murphy, D., 2023b, "Back to Teichmüller: Literary Feuds and the Author's Voice in Plato's Dialogues," in: Alieva 2023, pp. 37-62.

Nails, D., 2000, "Mouthpiece, Schmouthpiece," in: Press (2000), pp. 15-26.

Nails, D., Tarrant, H. (eds.), 2015, *Second Sailing*: *Alternative Perspectives on Plato*, Helsinki.

Notomi, N., 2022, "Plato, Isocrates, and Epistolary Literature: Reconsidering the *Seventh Letter* in its Context," *Plato Journal* 23, pp. 67-79.

Ostrowski, M., 2022, *Ideology*. Cambridge-Medford.

Peterson, S., 2011, *Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato.* Cambridge-New York.

Press G. (ed.), 2000, *Who speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic anonymity*, Lanham.

Press, G., 2000a, "The Logic of Attributing Characters' Views to Plato," in: Press 2000, pp. 27-38.

Press, G., 2013, "Commentary on Byrd," *BACAP* 28, pp. 210-214.

Press, G., 2015, "Changing Course in Plato Studies," in: Nails, Tarrant 2015, pp. 187-196.

Press, G., 2022, "Anonymity," in: Press, Duque 2022, pp. 135-137.

Press, G., Duque M. (eds.), 2022, *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Plato*, London.

Rashed, M., 2006, "Platon, Sathon, Phédon," *Elenchos* 27, pp. 117-122.

Rihll, T., 2003, "Teaching and Learning in Classical Athens," *G&R* 50, pp. 168-190.

Rossetti, L., 2001, "Le côté inauthentique du *dialoguer* platonicien," in: Cossuta, Narcy 2001, pp. 99-118.

Rossetti, L., 2008, "I Socratici della prima generazione: fare filosofia con i dialoghi anziché con trattati o testi paradossali," in: Rossetti, Stavru 2008, pp. 39-75.

Rossetti, L., Stavru, A. (eds.) 2008, *Socratica 2005. Studi sulla letteratura socratica antica*, Bari.

Rowe, C., 2007, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing*, Cambridge.

Sassi, M., 2015, *Indagine su Socrate: persona, filosofo, cittadino*, Torino.

Savage, N., 1979, "Rencontre avec Roland Barthes," *French Review* 52, pp. 432-439.

Schofield, M., 2023, *How Plato Writes. Perspectives and Problems*, Cambridge.

Searle, J., 1975, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 6, pp. 319-332.

Sedley, D., 2002, "Socratic Irony in the Platonist Commentators," in: Annas, Rowe 2002, pp. 37-57.

Suleiman, S., 1993², *Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*, Princeton.

Swirski, P., 2000, "The Nature of Literary Fiction: From Carter to Spiegelman," *MMLA* 33, pp. 58-73.

Szlezák, T., 2017, Review of M. Burnyeat, M. Frede, *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter* (D. Scott, ed.), Oxford, 2015, *Gnomon* 89, pp. 311-323.

Tarrant, H., 2000, *Plato's First Interpreters*, Ithaca.

Teichmüller, G., 1881-4, *Literarische Fehden im vierten Jahrhundert vor Chr.*, Bd. I–II, Breslau.

Thesleff, H., 1982, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, Helsinki.

Trabattoni, F., 2016, *Essays on Plato's Epistemology*, Leuven.

Walton, K., 2015, *In Other Shoes. Music, Metaphor, Empathy, Existence*, Oxford-New York.

Wimsatt, W., Beardsley, M., 1946, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54, pp. 468–488.

Zetzel, J., 1996, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice: A Carneadean Debate in Cicero and Virgil," *CP* 91, pp. 297-319.

DAVID J. MURPHY
/ New York, the USA /
david.murphy20@verizon.net

A Defense of "Author's Mouthpiece"

Against the assumption that their literary form precludes Plato from expressing views in his dialogues, this paper argues that it is legitimate to read certain utterances of characters also as expressions of Plato's views or to infer Plato's views from his characters' speech. Ancient hermeneutical practice, including the practice of Plato's characters themselves, shows mimetic literature's reception as "double speech" on two registers, a story register and a rhetorical register. Although aware of the distinction between character and author, ancient readers attribute ideology in characters' speeches directly to the author. Plato's contemporaries did this with his dialogues. This practice creates the presumption that philosophical dialogues began as a genre both mimetic and assertoric. Evidence from Cicero and Plutarch supports this presumption, and modern examples show writers and artists weaving ideology into their works. Distinctions in modern literary theory help posit "mouthpiece" as a formal property of characters, "turned on" in order for the author to convey ideology at places in the work. I argue that the "mouthpiece" assumption does not entail fallacy and that the theoretical gains of the "author's mouthpiece" construct outweigh its risks. Without vitiating dialogues' status as fiction, the "mouthpiece" assumption serves the history of philosophy and enriches our engagement with the texts.

KEYWORDS

Plato, dialogues, dialogical, dogmatic, mouthpiece, author's views