It may seem rather a strange project to translate and publish, in 1982, a doctoral dissertation written by a young American in 1884. Strange, that is, until we note that the author was the twenty-seven year old Paul Shorey, one of the handful of really fine classical scholars this country has produced.

Plato was Shorey’s first and ever his greatest love. He is, in the closing words of the work before us, “the philosopher’s philosopher, the perfect and inimitable example to be set before those who think.” In an even more strongly worded passage, Plato is the man “to whom alone of all philosophers who have ever lived it was granted never to be mistaken.” (p.58) Shorey was conscious that these words might appear excessive (see his note ad loc.), but he risked them, as he says, “in order to give a ‘hold’ to the reader who has not attended to what has gone before.” Obviously he believed he had something of great importance to say about Plato. In my view, he did.

To put the matter at its simplest, Shorey believed that the history of Platonic scholarship had been bedevilled by the failure to distinguish between the pragmatic necessity of the concept (a matter of logic), and the various views concerning the nature and origin of concepts (a matter for metaphysics and psychology). Although philosophers disagree totally

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1 The dissertation has, unusually, no vita, but it is probable that the official director was Wilhelm von Christ (1831-1906). Professor Cherniss has kindly copied for me the following passage from Christ’s Platonische Studien, Munich, 1885 (pp.3-4 = 453-4):

... Erst vor anderthalb Jahren brachte mich meine akademische Lehrtätigkeit wieder mit Plato in nähere Berührung....Ein Amerikaner Namens Shorey kam, von einem meiner älteren Amerikanischen Schüler Dr. Sterett empfohlen, hieher, um mit meinem Beirat eine bereits entworfene Dissertation über den ontologischen Gehalt der platonischen Ideenlehre zum Abschluss zu bringen. Ich ersah bald, dass der junge Mann in ganz anderem Grade, als wie wir es an unseren deutschen Studenten zu erleben gewohnt sind, in seinen Klassikern zu Hause war, und das er insbesondere jede Schrift des Plato und fast jede Stelle derselben im Geiste gegenwärtig hatte. Da galt es denn für mich selbst wieder fleissig den Plato zu lesen. . .

The late Benedict Einarson wrote me (May 18, 1974) that Shorey had “prepared himself for writing the dissertation by re-reading all of Cicero’s philosophical works, and that Professor Christ said on reading the thesis ‘Ach! Das hat Fluss.’” (I wish to express here my gratitude not only to Professor Cherniss but also to Professors John F. Latimer and William M. Calder, III, all of whom have corresponded with me on these matters.)
as to what concepts are and how they come about, they all agree (unless
they are total relativists or materialists) that concepts exist. But because
“our own languages are totally without a word to express at the same time
our positing of concepts and our ‘suspension of judgement’ as to the
nature of those concepts” (p.9), the possibility of confusion is considerable.
When, for instance, one scholar differs with another over the nature of
concepts, he may (mistakenly) be thought to be denying their existence
altogether.

Shorey’s belief in the crucial necessity of keeping clear the difference
between the logic of concepts and the psychology of concepts comes out
clearly when he writes,

I consider that every enquiry, not only into the Platonic
forms, but into the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle in
general, not to say all philosophy, depends upon this
distinction. (p.4).

This sweeping claim may, in the case of Plato, be illustrated most readily
from Shorey’s treatment of the Meno (pp. 15-17). He notes, first of all (as
scholars are beginning to do again) the importance of the sophistical
argument against learning cited by Meno at 80DE. He then points out
that the argument is double: it contains both a logical fallacy and a
psychological problem. The former could be dealt with easily by making
verbal distinctions of the sort pointed out by Plato in both the Euthydemus
(276D) and the Theaetetus (197AB), but “the psychological problem
demanded a more subtle explanation.” (p.16)² This something subtler
was the doctrine of recollection. The doctrine is, in itself, not something
with which Plato was satisfied; he made it quite clear, Shorey says, that it
was “no more than a device to rebut Meno’s objection.” (pp.16/17)

Aristotle, on the other hand, did not grasp the psychological
dimension of the problem, and was content to solve it simply as a problem
in equivocation. (Posterior Analytics I.17 a28ff.) Indeed the fact is that
Aristotle was never able to deal with the question to which the doctrine of
recollection is addressed, “in spite,” Shorey says, “of submitting himself
and his readers to misery and torment throughout the entire Meta-
physics.” (p.15)

The remark just cited serves to suggest that Shorey’s dissertation may
be a good deal more startling with respect to Aristotle than with respect to
Plato. The view of Aristotle at which Shorey ultimately arrived, and
which he believed to have been distinctly foreshadowed in the present

² Shorey has written “philosophical problem,” but the context makes clear that this
is a slip.
work, is concisely stated in *Classical Philology XXII* (1927):

... in Aristotle's extant writings we find a logic constructed mainly in a nominalistic and positivistic revolt against the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, and a metaphysic and psychology which was constantly making concessions to and falling back into what was virtually the rejected doctrine... Whenever and whenever Aristotle tries to meet the ultimate problems of metaphysics and epistemology he finds that the identification of absolute reality with the individual material object will not work. (p. 421)

This perceptive passage is considerably more mellow than what he has to say of Aristotle in the dissertation: "Aristotle frequently propounds what is absurd and grotesque," for instance, in contrast to Plato who "anticipated, as if in play, the subtlest doctrines of modern scholars...". (p. 59)

Or: since the problem of concepts "was always for him an insoluble 'riddle'," it often happens that "when he seems to be carping at Plato he is really expressing his own difficulties." (pp. 34/5)

Aristotle is regarded as particularly dense when he saddles Plato with the view that forms are numbers. Shorey's analysis of the route by which Aristotle most probably arrived at this view, and at the view that mathematical numbers occupy a place intermediate between ideal and sensible numbers, is masterly and should be studied in detail. (pp. 34-39)

Should he be correct, we are relieved of much of "the obscurity and bewilderment" of *Metaphysics* Z10. (p.38)

Shorey does not, however, restrict himself to adverse criticism of those who, in his view, have misinterpreted Plato; he gives his own opinion on the probable origin of the forms. Plato's purpose was severely practical: it was "to lay the foundation of logic and avoid the objections of the sophists." (p. 11) An even stronger version of the same point occurs a few pages earlier, when he writes that "the removal of [his contemporaries'] doubts and quibbling objections, or at least the 'dialectical' refutation of these, is the aim more or less of the whole of Plato's thought." (p.7)

The consequence of this position is that "neither the theory of forms nor indeed any particular theory held a privileged position with Plato, to the extent of being the source and origin of all his beliefs..." (p.7)

The way to approach the form is, then, not to ask simply what a form is, "as if we needed to hunt out some particular creature in the thickets of the dialogues," but rather to inquire as to "what problems Plato set himself to solve and how far he succeeded in solving them."

To those of us accustomed to the rhetorical dress in which Plato so
often clothes the forms, these unromantic words may come as a slight shock; they did to me in spite of my sympathy in the matter of sophistic quibbles. Shorey recognizes the rhetoric (e.g. p.21) but is not deceived by it; he never loses sight of the underlying philosophical problems.

This "sense of the problems" is one of Shorey's greatest strengths as an interpreter of Plato. As he wrote later in The Unity of Plato's Thought (1903), "human thought has always faced the alternative of positing an inexplicable and paradoxical noumenon, or accepting the 'flowing philosophy'." Hence two key passages are for him Republic 532D (where the forms are described as both "hard to accept" and "hard to reject") and the similar passage at Parmenides 135AC. For those who regard Plato as a kind of incompetent bumbler engaged in some species of "primitive fumbling" with the problem of universals (see UPT, p.6), he has nothing but contempt.

Another notable strength of Shorey's, quite aside from his incomparable knowledge of the dialogues and his superb feeling for Greek idiom, is his literary sensitivity. He was a great reader of poetry, and an apparently effortless memorizer of favorite passages. A former student, J. Francis Leddy, writes that "he seemed to know all of Homer and Plato and many of the Greek plays by heart."3 a fact that he often demonstrated when conducting oral examinations without a text. This literary feeling, in combination with his excellent understanding of perennial philosophical problems, made him exactly the right interpreter for Plato. He understood the special characteristics of the dialogue form, its irony, allusiveness and lack of technical terminology. Further, although he did, in the words of an early reviewer, have "no high regard for the majority of previous Platonic scholars,"4 his regard for the mind and art of Plato was one of genuine humility.

The characteristic of Platonic scholarship for which Shorey is best known is probably still his unitarianism. Even Shorey of course knew that the dialogues had some order, and he was as conscious as any of us that Plato's moods and interests changed. If he arrived at the conclusion that

4 Gustav Schneider in Wochenschrift für Klassische Philologie 3 (January 13, 1886) p. 38. A briefer notice by the same author appears in Bursian's Jahresbericht 50 (1889) pp. 176-179. (I wish to thank Professor John F. Latimer for sending me copies of these two reviews, together with the English versions of Professor Emeritus Edgar C. Reinke.) Schneider's reviews are on the whole laudatory; he does, however, say that "the author puts research in Plato too one-sidedly into the service of logic." (Wochenschrift, p.35)
Plato belonged to the class of thinkers whose philosophy is fixed in early maturity... rather than to the class of those who receive a new revelation every decade" (UPT, p.88), he was justified in doing so simply on the basis of his knowledge of the dialogues, a knowledge both extensive and minute. The period of Platonic scholarship from which we are just now (happily) emerging, in which it seemed as though Plato had written nothing beyond the Theaetetus, Parmenides, Sophist, and Philebus (and by no means all of any of these), would have appeared to him even more appalling than the period in which he wrote. Further, I think he would have seen a close connection between the atomistic view of Plato and the atomistic study of his works.

It is of course possible (in fact it is well-nigh irresistible) to suggest that Shorey found unitarianism in Plato because he possessed it in such a high degree, himself. He too was a man whose views were "fixed in early maturity." But I prefer to think that he was drawn to Plato because of a temperamental affinity, and that he found unitarianism in Plato because it was there.

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5 Shorey very seldom altered his opinions. In the preface to What Plato Said (1937), he wrote that "in reviewing [my previous writings about Plato] I find little to retract or change...". Professor Cherniss points out to me the unusual admission in the Loeb note to Republic X 596C: "It is a tempting error to refer this to God, as I once did...". (Shorey, Professor Cherniss thinks, is reacting to the criticism of Zeller in Die Philosophie der Griechen II, 1, p. 711, n.4, 4th and 5th editions.) The passage Shorey refers to is presumably in our work, p.54.