

## Problems with Vlastos's Platonic Developmentalism

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Adherents to developmentalism are committed to the interlocking premises that Plato's views evolved or developed over his productive lifetime, and that the chronological order of composition of the dialogues can be reconstructed with sufficient confidence to yield a mapping of doctrines to dialogues. With one further premise, that the earliest dialogues depict the views of the historical Socrates, the orthodoxy of Anglo-American Platonic studies is off and running. The most influential developmentalist of this generation is Gregory Vlastos whose long chain of articles over many years, advocating and elaborating these premises, has been widely accepted: 'early' dialogues are marked by Plato's adherence to the doctrines of the historical Socrates, 'transitional' ones by a movement away from 'Socratic' views and the appearance of seminal theories, and 'middle' ones by a philosophical maturity in which the character Socrates had become a mouthpiece for Plato's very different doctrines.<sup>1</sup>

By his own account, Vlastos long defended his hypothesis with assumption and interpretation, albeit an erudite interpretation.<sup>2</sup> But *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* changes the legacy of Vlastos's proposed chronology and its implications for Socratic and Platonic interpretation by systematically setting out clear and textually grounded arguments for ten theses about the early Socrates, Socrates<sub>E</sub>, and ten opposing theses about the middle Socrates (mature Plato), Socrates<sub>M</sub>.<sup>3</sup> Defying charges of circularity, Vlastos declares that he is '*ordering these dialogues solely by their philosophical content*' (his emphasis 1991, 46n2).

<sup>1</sup> Vlastos 1991, 46n2 credits Ross 1933, 7-24 with the basic content of the chronology, and with having brought together the arguments of what was already a substantial consensus among his forebears by 1924. Vlastos refines Ross's early-middle-late groups with adjustments within the groups, the most influential of which is the partitioning of a group of transitionals. An anonymous referee for *Ancient Philosophy* rightly points out that the stylometric foundation for Ross's (hence Vlastos's) chronology was laid by Campbell in 1867. The stylometric evidence is complex and controversial; I prefer to limit myself here to Vlastos's doctrinal claims because they are a well-focused effort to defend the developmentalist position. I have argued elsewhere, however, that previous stylometric efforts (partially excepting Ledger 1989) have been flawed: Nails 1992 and forthcoming. On the more general issue of the defects of developmentalism, see the comprehensive treatment by Holger Thesleff 1982, esp. 7-52, and the wealth of references therein, and, for recent and differently focussed approaches, Howland 1991, Nehamas 1992, and Kahn 1992.

<sup>2</sup> See Vlastos 1983a, 513n10; 1984, 202n1; 1985, 1n1; 1988a, 373n39; and 1988b, 89-111.

<sup>3</sup> Vlastos 1991, 46 comments that only a 'schizophrenic' could pursue such different philosophies as he will shortly outline, but Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hilary Putnam provide familiar examples of philosophers who have held widely divergent views at different times.

Fair enough. Even if constructed by an unabashedly circular process—friends call it ‘bootstrapping’—if the structure is sound and has compelling explanatory power for our understanding of the dialogues, its value should be readily acknowledged,<sup>4</sup> at the very least, the already widespread use of Vlastosian doctrine designations (‘early’ and ‘middle’) and corresponding dialogue groupings should gain further justification. But I do not believe the structure is sound, and therefore I am suspicious of the explanatory potential claimed for Vlastos’s sequence of dialogues. My narrow aim in this paper is to illustrate, although more schematically than the individual issues deserve, that Vlastos’s principal doctrinal distinctions do not hold for the dialogues as he groups them chronologically, that a host of *ad hoc* arguments, if not special pleading, is required to maintain his program. If I am right, substantive inferences from some dialogue or other’s being thought ‘early’ or ‘middle’ should be drawn with cautious restraint, if at all.

The determination of whether the chronological groups are properly described by the theses involves a straightforward comparison of the sequential list of dialogues to the list of theses. Here then is the familiar set of Platonic dialogues in the chronological order Vlastos proposes (1991, 46-47):

GROUP I (elenctic)	(transitional)	GROUP II	GROUP III
<i>Apology</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>
<i>Charmides</i>	<i>Hippias Major</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>	<i>Critias</i>
<i>Crito</i>	<i>Lysis</i>	<i>Symposium</i>	<i>Sophist</i>
<i>Euthyphro</i>	<i>Menexenus</i>	<i>Republic ii-x</i>	<i>Politicus</i>
<i>Gorgias</i>	<i>Meno</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Hippias Minor</i>		<i>Parmenides</i>	<i>Laws</i>
<i>Ion</i>		<i>Theaetetus</i>	
<i>Laches</i>			
<i>Protagoras</i>			
<i>Republic i</i>			

**Figure 1**

The figure’s appearance of clarity is unjustified. Vlastos’s alphabetical listing of the elenctic and transitional dialogues obscures finer chronological detail that is later deployed in the arguments of his text. He refers to the *Gorgias* as ‘the last of the Elenctic Dialogues’ (1991, 115n39), and argues that the *Euthyphro* is later than *Protagoras*, *Charmides*, and *Laches* (1990, 14n11). *Lysis* is earlier than the *Hippias Major* (1990, 14n11) and *Euthydemus* (1991, 130); *Meno* is later (1990, 9; 1991, 130). *Menexenus* is missing from Vlastos’s 1990 (14n11) list of post-

<sup>4</sup> In fact, Vlastos makes an effort to break the offending circle, and more clearly to distinguish the doctrines of Socrates<sub>E</sub> from those of Socrates<sub>M</sub>, by appealing to the ancient testimony of Aristotle and Xenophon, and by articulating a complex conception of Socratic irony to explain persistent discrepancies. These are matters for another occasion.

elenctic dialogues; apart from noting its *terminus post quem* of 387, he takes no position in 1991 on its order with respect to the other dialogues of the transitional period.

The seemingly tidy group II is compromised by a number of exceptions that footnotes and later text reveal. Socrates<sub>M</sub> (i.e., mature Plato) of the *Parmenides* is the character Parmenides, not the character Socrates, and Socrates<sub>M</sub> of the *Symposium* is the character Diotima, not the elenchus-practicing character Socrates.<sup>5</sup> It is unclear whose views are supposed to be represented by the character Socrates<sub>γ</sub> in *Parmenides* (except that he ‘has been turned for the nonce into a juvenile inexperienced dialectician’, 1991, 85n11) and *Symposium*. The *Symposium* presents an additional complication: Alcibiades’s speech is reckoned to be ‘Socratic’ (more than that, it is Vlastos’s quintessential source for the Socratic irony supposed to be characteristic of Socrates<sub>E</sub>, 1991, 33, 47n11). In addition, two of the *Phaedo*’s three biographical scenes, 57a-61c and 115c-118, are deemed ‘Socratic’ and therefore available for ‘early’ plumbing (though the one in between them, 96e-99e, is deemed autobiographical of Plato and therefore truly group II). Finally, Vlastos gleans among ‘things we would not have learned from Plato if only the Elenctic and Transitional Dialogues had survived’ (1991, 251): Socrates’s facial physiognomy and ‘lowly’ social origins (*Theaetetus* 143e, 209c, 149a); other supposed biographical data from the same dialogue are ignored (e.g., that Socrates was elitist, by thesis VI criteria, sending some aspiring students to Prodicus, 151b), but no principle is given for deciding which statements merit our belief. With all these qualifications in mind, let us now turn to the theses Vlastos proposes.

Although the argument of this paper is directed to only three theses—I, III, and X—I must quote the entire set because I will explain below the sense in which the three I have chosen are more fundamental than the others (1991, 47-49):

IA. Socrates<sub>E</sub> is exclusively a moral philosopher.

IB. Socrates<sub>M</sub> is moral philosopher *and* metaphysician *and* epistemologist *and* philosopher of science *and* philosopher of language *and* philosopher of religion *and* philosopher of education<sup>6</sup> *and* philosopher of art. The whole encyclopedia of philosophical science is his domain.

IIB. S<sub>M</sub> had a grandiose metaphysical theory of ‘separately existing’ Forms and of a separable soul which learns by ‘recollecting’ pieces of its pre-natal fund of knowledge.

IIA. S<sub>E</sub> has no such theory.

IIIA. S<sub>E</sub>, seeking knowledge elenctically, keeps avowing that he has none.

IIIB. S<sub>M</sub> seeks demonstrative knowledge and is confident that he finds it.

<sup>5</sup> This is implicit in 1991, 73-74, where Vlastos says that Socrates<sub>M</sub> ‘declares in T22...’ where T22 is entirely Diotima’s words.

<sup>6</sup> From its earlier formulation (1988b), ‘philosopher of education’ has been added to what Socrates<sub>E</sub> is not, and ‘political philosopher’ has been removed.

IVB.  $S_M$  has a complex, tripartite model of the soul.

IVA.  $S_E$  knows nothing of this model, which would have unsettled his conception of moral virtue and undercut his doctrine of the impossibility of incontinence (*akrasia*).

VB.  $S_M$  has mastered the mathematical sciences of his time.

VA.  $S_E$  professes no interest in these sciences and gives no evidence of expertise in any of them throughout the Elenctic dialogues.

VIA.  $S_E$ 's conception of philosophy is populist.

VIB.  $S_M$ 's is elitist.

VIIIB.  $S_M$  has an elaborate political theory whose ranking order of constitutions places democracy with the worst of contemporary forms of government, lower than timocracy and oligarchy, preferable only to lawless tyranny.

VIIIA.  $S_E$  has no such theory. Though harshly critical of political goings-on in Athens, he says that he prefers the city with her laws to any contemporary state. But he leaves the rationale of the preference unexplained.

VIIIA & B. Homoerotic attachments figure prominently in the conception of *eros* in both  $S_E$  and  $S_M$ . But in the latter they have a metaphysical grounding in love for the transcendent Form of beauty which is wholly lacking in the former.

IXA. For  $S_E$  piety consists in service to a deity which, though fully supernatural, is rigorously ethical in its own character and in the demands it makes on men. His personal religion is practical, realized in action.

IXB.  $S_M$ 's personal religion centers in communion with divine, but impersonal, Forms. It is mystical, realized in contemplation.

XA. In the Elenctic Dialogues  $S_E$ 's method of philosophical investigation is adversative: he pursues moral truth by refuting theses defended by dissenting interlocutors. This ceases in the Transitionals: there he argues against theses proposed and opposed by himself.

XB. In the sequence of dialogues from the *Meno* through *Phaedrus*  $S_M$  is a didactic philosopher, expounding truth to consenting interlocutors. Thereafter the metaphysical theory of the preceding dialogues of the middle period is subjected to searching criticism by 'Parmenides' and then Socrates, assaying a fresh start, shifts to a new, 'maieutic', mode of investigation in the *Theaetetus*.

Benign overlap among the theses is obvious. Thesis I is amplified by theses II and IV (which overlap one another), V, IX, and (to a lesser extent) VII—Vlastos's discussions of which provide textual elaborations of the labels he invokes in thesis I. Indeed, Vlastos says he expects the first thesis to unfold through his account of the others (1991, 53); similarly, I hope some of the others will unravel through my account of the first.<sup>7</sup> Theses II and III already include the only point

<sup>7</sup> But not very far. A systematic and comprehensive refutation of the subordinate theses would require a contest of texts, the outcome of which would be of interest primarily to those already com-

of difference expressed by the halves of thesis VIII; and thesis X offers a more inclusive account of the conduct of philosophy than does thesis VI. Moreover, some theses (e.g., IX) only occasionally admit opportunities to be tested in the dialogues; and Vlastos does not attempt to (re)produce evidence for all his theses (e.g., VII) in 1991, often because he has written extensively elsewhere on these issues. Nevertheless, he points out that there are far more than ten differences between Socrates<sub>E</sub> and Socrates<sub>M</sub>, and pauses to discuss those other distinctions from time to time. Having said that I take theses I, III, and X to be more fundamental, by which I mean more inclusive, than the others, I must acknowledge that Vlastos holds thesis II to be the most important of the lot. That fact obliges me to return to it after I have made my case.

**Thesis I.** The *Ion* violates this thesis, as Vlastos admits implicitly when he unblinkingly raises ‘the theory of poetic inspiration which he [Socrates<sub>E</sub>] develops with great gusto in the *Ion*, alluding to it also in the *Apology*’ (1991, 168). The addition of the *Apology* is significant because, according to Vlastos, ‘without it we would be left wondering if the theory of poetic inspiration expounded in the *Ion* is pure Platonic invention, without any foundation in authentic Socratic thought’ (1991, 288). I find this treatment of the *Ion* difficult to explain except as an oversight (the more so because the admission that a supposedly elenctic dialogue examines a non-moral philosophical subject will put the *Ion* in conflict with thesis X as well).

A more interesting and potent exception to the claim that Socrates<sub>E</sub> is exclusively a moral philosopher—or that *Charmides* is an early dialogue, to put the dispute the other way around—is the lengthy discussion of whether ‘knowledge of knowledge and non-knowledge’ exists (166e-175c). Conceding that the topic is epistemology, in his discussion of the passage Vlastos explains that

[i] Socrates’s ‘arguments sometimes trench on other topics, but the only theses he investigates elenctically are propositions in the moral domain’. Besides,

[ii] Socrates is compelled to investigate the subject ‘only because it was proposed as (an unacceptable) *definiens* of *sophrosyne*; and

[iii] he gives up the search when he becomes convinced that it is not likely to get anywhere, confessing that

[iv] he has no confidence “in his ability to clear up these things” [169a]’ (1991, 47-48 n12).

Let us examine the parts of Vlastos’s explanation.

It is in one sense impossible to refute the claim in [i] because Vlastos (1983, 30ff.; reaffirmed 1991, 14) renders it trivially true by *defining* the method of elenchus as ‘a search for moral truth’, effectively precluding its use for other

mitted to the early-middle-late structure as a solution to the Socratic problem. If my analysis is correct, that very commitment is called into question.

matters. So if *Charmides* violates thesis I, it violates thesis X perforce, according to which Socrates<sub>E</sub> employs only the elenctic method. Vlastos's [ii] combines with [i] in seeking to undermine the epistemological discussion by supposing that Socrates was merely following where his interlocutor led. In other words, we readers ought to take Socrates<sub>E</sub>'s foray into epistemology as an action in the service of moral philosophy. This interpretation, applied seemingly harmlessly in the *Charmides*, is a weasel that would nose its way back in at will, wreaking havoc on more of the Vlastosian structure. For example, all the ontology of the *Republic* has too often been seen as 'in the service' of Plato's political philosophy. Arguably, the entire point of the *Republic* is a moral one: to demonstrate that the slave who found Gyges' ring was, ultimately, unhappy and worse off. And perhaps the moral philosophical discussions of the *Gorgias* are ancillary to the question, What is rhetoric? There is no essential difference between these positions and the claim that the epistemology of the *Charmides* is subordinate to its ethics.<sup>8</sup>

Vlastos's point [iii] is false: the Socratic confession he cites occurs only a quarter of the way through the epistemological discussion; thus, far from giving up the search, as Vlastos claims, Socrates is represented by Plato as digging in. And Socrates's comment [iv] about his inability 'to clear up these things' parallels perfectly the remarks Vlastos himself will be quoting in defense of his thesis III to demonstrate that Socrates<sub>E</sub> disavows knowledge (see below). If we are soon to be exhorted to interpret such remarks not literally but as forms of complex irony, why not now?

Even the *Apology* raises epistemological problems. Vlastos points out, and criticizes others for failing to recognize, that the *Apology* (20-21) is the dialogue that clarifies what kind of knowledge Socrates means to be disavowing when he claims, as he so often does, that he has no knowledge (1988b, 99-100; 1991, 238-240): while 'more than human knowledge' is the prerogative of the god, knowledge or wisdom of the 'human kind' Socrates is willing to admit he has. Vlastos adds, 'Precisely how he wants us to understand the "human knowledge" he avows and the "more than human knowledge" he disavows he does not explain: he could hardly have done so without plunging over his depth in epistemology' (1988b, 100n69). We are free to suppose instead that Socrates does not explain because he could hardly have done so without plunging his jurors into an explanation over *their* depth. Vlastos's blinkered Socrates is difficult to reconcile with a person who, especially according to Vlastos, makes such epistemological dis-

<sup>8</sup> Whatever the differences between Socrates<sub>E</sub> and Socrates<sub>M</sub> on moral philosophy, one thing that is the same throughout is the continuity of ethics and epistemology. In the context of the discussion of *Protagoras*, Vlastos will say that Socrates<sub>E</sub> is not an ontologist because he does not reflect on the ontology he holds; presumably we are to infer that Socrates<sub>E</sub> does not reflect on his epistemology either (since it is claimed he is no epistemologist). Contemporary philosophers seem quite unable to discuss Socrates<sub>E</sub>'s moral philosophy without bringing in its epistemological underpinnings, so there is ample reason to doubt that Socrates himself skated merrily along on the surface of issues concerning how we ought to live.

tinctions as the *Apology* reports.

Socrates<sub>E</sub> also moves beyond moral philosophy in the *Protagoras*, with its ontological dispute over whether ‘man is the measure of all things...’; not that Protagoras says it in so many words, but his view that virtue is necessarily conventional rests on that ontological premise. More centrally, there is the discussion of being and becoming beginning at 339, and the discussion of appearance and reality at 356. Throughout, Socrates’s opposition to Protagoras’s point of view indicates that Socrates has a competing ontological position of his own. This Vlastos concedes. The crux is Vlastos’s assertion that Socrates, who ‘has this ontology’ (his emphasis), is ‘no ontologist’ (1991, 58).<sup>9</sup> Socrates<sub>E</sub>, according to Vlastos, does not reflect on his own ontology, takes the reality of the forms for granted as a New Yorker takes for granted trees and stones. This claim deserves a closer look. Socrates and the New Yorker *both* take trees and stones for granted, which is not surprising, given how the human senses function—but forms? The problem arises in Socrates’s having an ontology of forms which Vlastos cannot have both ways: either believing in forms was common (as the *Parmenides* has it), or it was uncommon (resulting in Socrates’s having so many interlocutors who fail to give him the universal definitions he seeks). If it was common, Plato should receive no fanfare for originating the theory; if uncommon, then either Socrates developed them on his own (so he is quite an ontologist, even if his forms are not separately existing), or he learned them from someone else, in which case it is very difficult to believe he did so without inquiring into their nature. Vlastos could respond that the forms were just a part of the furniture of Socrates’s mind, like trees and stones and his *daimonion* perhaps; and that Plato’s development of a theory of “separately existing” Forms’ is what deserves credit.

But Vlastos takes another tack as well, explaining that Socrates<sub>E</sub> does not press Protagoras on the subject of moral relativism because to do so would lead beyond the moral topics of the moment and ‘Socrates is to be kept down to the role of single-minded moralist’ (1991, 62n68). ‘Kept down?’ *Protagoras* is no transitional dialogue, so Plato and Socrates are supposed to be of one mind at this stage. Who must keep Socrates down, and why? There is a more important issue at stake than the mere interpretation of Vlastos’s peculiar remark, though this is not the place to develop it properly: It can be said of all the aporetic dialogues that they need a theoretical structure to ground them, that they need the epistemology and ontology Vlastos ascribes only to Socrates<sub>M</sub>. Plato writes such a justification in, for example, the *Republic*. But it was not necessary to tack on those other nine books, so to speak, in every case; the dialogues considered individually have philosophical and aesthetic unities that Plato appears to have valued,

<sup>9</sup> In a note to the passage in which Vlastos discusses the *Protagoras*, he acknowledges his own former denial (thirty years back) of the plausibility of his current position, and credits Woodruff 1982 with making a better case against it than he (Vlastos) was able to make at the time. Thesleff has broadened my appreciation of the extent of ontological discussion in the dialogue, for which I am grateful.

and appropriately, beyond a completeness that would necessarily have brought repetition with it.

If the subject of the *Gorgias* is rhetoric (Benardete 1991), if the subject of the *Euthyphro* is religion, then thesis I is violated in those instances as well, but I would not advocate either case. Nor would I deny, however, that interesting and useful philosophy can begin with the assumption that the subject of these two dialogues is other than moral philosophy.

**Thesis III.** With this thesis that Socrates<sub>E</sub> disavows knowledge, Vlastos (1990; 1991, 82-86) seeks to establish that Socrates<sub>E</sub> never committed the so-called Socratic fallacy that appears for the first time, he says, only in the transitional dialogues. Robinson (1953, 50), according to Vlastos, incorrectly inferred its commission in the *Protagoras* (360e-361a) where Socrates, having just been accused of merely trying to win an argument and forcing Protagoras's replies, defends himself, 'I have no other reason for asking these things than my desire to answer these questions about virtue, especially what virtue is in itself. For I know that if we could get clear on that, then we would be able to settle the question about which we both have had much to say, I—that virtue cannot be taught, you—that it can' (Lombardo and Bell tran.). Robinson's argument is contained in a more general 'What is X' discussion that cites *Protagoras* 360e parenthetically without further comment, so Vlastos (1990, 10-11) must first build a case for Robinson, then refute it. The argument he constructs yields that knowing what X is is a *necessary* condition for knowledge about X in the *Meno*, but only a *sufficient* condition in the *Protagoras* (and, by extension, in the other early dialogues)—where the latter is inadequate for a charge of Socratic fallacy. If the argument did in fact turn on the interpretation of two snippets of text, with the outcome requiring only that Plato be cognizant of, and deliberate about representing, the difference between the two formulations, then I might be amenable to Vlastos's interpretation. But Robinson's position is very much broader than Vlastos lets on. Robinson (1953, 51) builds his own argument not only on the transitional dialogues, *Meno* (71, 86d-e) and *Lysis* (223b), of which Vlastos approves, but on the elenctic ones, *Euthyphro* (6e), *Republic* i (354c), and *Laches* (189e-190a),<sup>10</sup> concluding, 'In fact, the impression vaguely given by the early dialogues as a whole is that Socrates thinks that there is no truth whatever about X that can be known before we know what X is.' Try as I might, I cannot get all the passages to conform themselves to Vlastos's sufficient-condition formulation.<sup>11</sup> Plato, at least, seems to have been unaware of it.

The passage at *Republic* i (354c) is worth pausing over, for it is *not* an instance that Vlastos hopes he has explained adequately with his account of necessary and sufficient conditions. No, the maintenance of the thesis that Socrates<sub>E</sub> never

<sup>10</sup> Irwin 1977, 40 cites 190c to the same effect, though Vlastos 1990, 14n8 rejects that too.

<sup>11</sup> Others have seen the problem in *Charmides* although Santas 1972, 138 disproved its occurrence there, according to Vlastos.



commits the Socratic fallacy requires in this case lopping off the tail of *Republic* i, after 354a11 (1985, 26n65). This he explains as follows, ‘That this closing paragraph could not have belonged to the original dialogue is shown by the contradiction between Socrates’ saying at 354c1-2 that, since he does not know what justice is, he cannot know whether or not it is a virtue, and his earlier claim to have shown that no one could fail to know (hence Socrates could not) that justice is a virtue (351a3-6)’ (1990, 15n31). But why take so radical a solution? When Vlastos is at pains to show that Socrates is not a crook (in his chapter ‘Does Socrates Cheat?’), he is ingenious with his suggestions. To keep Socrates from cheating Polus, and simultaneously keep Plato from ‘a crisis in his own characterization of his teacher’, Vlastos says helpfully, ‘Surely it is simpler to suppose that he [Socrates<sub>E</sub>] is himself unaware of the fallacy’ (here, an inferential fallacy in the *Gorgias*). A little later, Vlastos is willing to excuse Plato for being ‘messy’: ‘Plato is simulating a live conversation. When people are arguing on their feet not all of their arguments can be expected to come through in apple-pie order’ (1991, 148 and n68). The problem for someone who would read Plato through Vlastos’s lens is when to apply which principle: do I ditch the passage, plead Socratic ignorance, praise Platonic realism—or retreat to the last trench, irony?

Of *Gorgias*, Vlastos grants that Socrates<sub>E</sub> seeks knowledge, not just true belief (1991, 14).<sup>12</sup> The question is whether he ever finds it and says he has found it—which he must not if Vlastos’s thesis III holds for that dialogue. Socrates<sub>E</sub> must keep avowing that he has no knowledge. Yet (in Vlastos’s own translation) Socrates<sub>E</sub> does claim knowledge (1991, 4-5 and n16): ‘When told in the *Gorgias* (473b) that it would not be difficult to refute his thesis, Socrates retorts: “not difficult, Polus, but impossible; for what is true is never refuted” (τὸ γὰρ ἀληθές οὐδέποτε ἐλέγχεται). Later (479e) he asks: “Has it not been proved [ἀποδέδεικται] that what I said was true?”’<sup>13</sup> He even refers to his position as ‘clamped down and bound by arguments of iron and adamant’, though he immediately turns back, ‘my position is always the same: I do not know how these matters stand’ (508e-509a).<sup>14</sup> Vlastos could of course point out that *Gorgias* is the last of the elenctic dialogues before the transitionals, and that the certainty characteristic of Plato’s maturity is beginning to creep in. And that is just what he does in 1983c (74) wrestling virtue from contradiction: the assumption that Vlastos says Socrates<sub>E</sub> defends (see discussion of thesis X below) is characterized as both an outgrowth of the conversation and ‘Plato’s present to his teacher’, heralding Plato’s loss of faith in the elenctic method.

<sup>12</sup> Nehamas 1992, 165-166 criticizes Vlastos for relying too much on the *Gorgias* generally.

<sup>13</sup> The passage quoted sounds very like what the character Socrates says to Agathon at *Symposium* 201c-d: ‘No, it is Truth, my lovable Agathon, whom you cannot contradict: Socrates you easily may’ (tran. Lamb: Οὐ μὲν οὖν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ...δύνασαι ἀντιλέγειν, ἐπεὶ Σωκράτει γε οὐδὲν χαλεπὸν); but Vlastos allows no comparison here: the character Socrates is of indeterminate early/middle status in the *Symposium* because Diotima has been designated S<sub>M</sub>.

<sup>14</sup> Vlastos 1990, 4 offers two more such instances in the *Gorgias*: 472c-d and 505e.

By 1991, however, Vlastos had developed a more comprehensive approach to the subject of his third thesis, explaining Socrates's about-face in the *Gorgias* with recourse to the notion of paradox. I must back up slightly: Vlastos (1991, 82-86) identifies three features of the disavowal of knowledge. The first two—that Plato treats it as a notorious trait, and that Plato never makes Socrates's interlocutors ask him for an explanation of it—need not concern us. But the third, introduced as 'the most paradoxical aspect of the disavowal, its unique, absolutely unparalleled, feature', is that 'it may be voiced at the conclusion of an entirely successful elenctic argument in which Socrates has to all appearance, proved his thesis to the hilt', whereupon *Gorgias* 508e-509a is cited as an example. Moreover, we are told this never happens after the transitional *Meno*. But Vlastos notes that two middle Platonic passages might seem to conform to the third early feature, so he discusses each. The first (*Republic* 445b) is not an example of the required type, but the second (*Theaetetus*) is crucial to the claim of thesis III that 'Socrates<sub>M</sub> seeks demonstrative knowledge and is confident that he finds it.'

In the *Theaetetus*, though dead last of the group II dialogues, Socrates<sub>M</sub> sounds like Socrates<sub>E</sub> in disavowing knowledge, 'I am sterile in point of wisdom ... I have no wisdom in me... I am, then, not at all a wise person myself, nor have I any wise invention...' (150c-d, Fowler tran.). But none of these pronouncements contradicts the letter of Vlastos's assertion because they occur early on, not 'at the very moment at which he has produced evidence which appears to belie it [the disavowal]' (his emphasis).<sup>15</sup> Vlastos concedes that Socrates 'emphasizes he has not found the answer to the "What is the F?" question about knowledge' at the end of the dialogue, but insists that Socrates is not disavowing knowledge so globally as he did in the beginning. Vlastos quotes Socrates, 'I have none of the knowledge possessed by all the great and wonderful men of the past', and adds: 'he says nothing here or hereafter which appears to cast doubt on what he has come to know in the course of it [the inquiry]'. Narrowly, 'here or hereafter' is correct—but the clause immediately before the one quoted does indeed cast doubt: Socrates had just asked, 'Then does our art of midwifery declare to us that all the offspring that have been born are mere wind-eggs and not worth rearing?' and Theaetetus had answered that it does. Socrates had continued, predicting on the basis of their conversation, 'you will have the wisdom not to think you know that which you do not know. So much and no more my art can accomplish; nor do I know aught of the things that are known by others, the great and wonderful men who are to-day and have been in the past' (Fowler tran.). What Vlastos does not quote echoes what he calls 'the clearest statement in Plato' of the disavowal of knowledge (1991, 84): 'I have no knowledge, nei-

<sup>15</sup> Besides, Vlastos's chronology has the *Parmenides* immediately preceding the *Theaetetus*; he attributes the dearth of positive doctrines in the latter to Plato's 'declining to meet head-on' the 'formidable difficulties' raised in the *Parmenides* (1991, 85). Vlastos also points out, and correctly enough, that Socrates does not repeat his disavowal of knowledge at 187a, when the first of three competitor definitions of knowledge has been discarded.

ther do I think I have any' (*Apology* 21d, Vlastos tran.). Here, and again below, the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* will give us reason to collapse the early/middle distinction.

There are other examples of group II dialogues in which Socrates<sub>M</sub> disavows knowledge, even 'at the very moment' when he has produced seemingly conclusive evidence: the clearest example appears in an elenctic section of the *Cratylus* that begins and ends with just such disavowals: 'I do not know what the truth is about such matters' (384c)... 'You forgot what I said a while ago, that I did not know, but would join you in looking for the truth' (391a). Even in the *Phaedo* (91b), where Vlastos finds Socrates<sub>M</sub> so full of positive doctrines, Socrates claims no certainty for his arguments and, referring to his impending death, remarks 'this ignorance of mine will not last'; in the *Phaedrus* (235c) he says, 'I am conscious of my own ignorance' (all Fowler tran.).

**Thesis X.** According to Vlastos's account of Socrates's method, Socrates<sub>E</sub> practices an adversative, elenctic method that is supplanted in the transitional dialogues by a somewhat similar method except that Socrates himself proposes the theses he then refutes; in stark contrast, Socrates<sub>M</sub> is at first didactic, then maieutic. I will show that these divisions are not so neat as they may at first appear, neither for the elenctic dialogues, nor for the didactic and maieutic ones. There is a simple point to dispense with first. Socrates<sub>E</sub> is not obliged always to use the elenctic method. Right off the bat, neither the *Apology* nor the *Crito* is elenctic, though there is some question-and-answer in both. In the latter, and in the *Gorgias*, Socrates<sub>E</sub> sounds didactic, like Socrates<sub>M</sub>, delivering protreptic speeches (quite a few between *Gorgias* 464b and 527e), which Vlastos readily acknowledges, excusing them because they occur 'only after hard-won elenctic argument had established the great truths which the interlocutor is then exhorted to take to heart'. When Socrates<sub>E</sub> makes protreptic speeches in the *Protagoras* (310a-314b), he is absolved by Vlastos because he has provided a 'curtain raiser to the elenctic drama it precedes' (1991, 116-117 n46).<sup>16</sup> So protreptic is judged an acceptable Socratic<sub>E</sub> practice if it follows or precedes elenchus—just not if it replaces it.

The discussion of elenchus to which Vlastos has always referred his readers (1983b, 30ff; cf. 1991, 14, 113-114) begins: 'Socratic elenchus is

- [i] a search for moral truth
- [ii] by adversary argument
- [iii] in which a thesis is debated only if asserted as the answerer's own belief,
- [iv] who is regarded as refuted if and only if the negation of his thesis is deduced from his own beliefs.'

But there will prove to be serious difficulties with all but the fourth point.

Thesis I has already described Socrates<sub>E</sub> as exclusively a moral philosopher;

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the development of theory in the *Ion* preceded the elenchus.

now thesis X [i] limits the use of the elenctic method to the search for moral truth, forming a constricting circle. If the definition of ‘elenchus’ is permitted to remain so narrow, the dialogues of group II will prove trivially non-elenctic, even if segments of dialogue are otherwise demonstrated to fit the description of elenchus, as has already been found with *Charmides* and *Ion*. Vlastos elaborates of the *Ion*, ‘In explaining the poet to us, Plato lets Socrates speak like a poet for the nonce. But he does not make Socrates abandon his customary elenctic role on that account’ (1991, 287). Since he had already said, ‘Socrates uses the elenchus exclusively in the pursuit of moral truth, remaining from first to last a single-minded moralist’ (1991, 14), we must jettison one statement or the other. For two reasons, I suggest the minimal amendment of changing ‘exclusively’ to ‘almost exclusively’ for the nonce: (a) we get no philosophical mileage from the stiffer criterion, given thesis I; (b) there is a large literature already distinguishing different varieties of Socratic method (cf. n18 below), but these are issues of what *procedure* is practiced. Vlastos’s restriction of elenchus to moral philosophy is rather an issue of the *domain in which* a procedure is practiced, but no argument is given to support such a change of focus.

If the elenctic method is thus freed of constraint, *Charmides* and *Ion*, treating epistemology (in part) and philosophy of art, respectively, cease to violate thesis X. But group II dialogues with elenctic sections do violate it and disprove Vlastos’s assertion that the ‘hybrid’ *Meno* marks the final appearance of the elenctic method ‘because Plato himself has now lost faith in that method’ (1991, 117). In the *Cratylus*, Socrates<sub>M</sub> uses the elenchus to disabuse Hermogenes of a view about the philosophy of language that the interlocutor sincerely believes, proposes and defends: ‘I think no name belongs to any particular thing by nature, but only by the habit and custom of those who employ it and who establish the usage’, he says (384d). By the end of the standard elenctic discussion, Socrates concludes, ‘Then, Hermogenes, the giving of names can hardly be, as you imagine, a trifling matter, or a task for trifling or casual persons: and Cratylus is right in saying that names belong to things by nature and that not every one is an artisan of names’ (390e, Fowler tran.). There is one example of the elenctic method in the *Phaedo*, though it is admittedly truncated and reversed; at 92a-e Socrates deduces the negation of Simmias’s belief that the soul is like the harmony of a lyre from Simmias’s own belief that knowledge is recollection, through which Simmias had been led dialectically earlier in the dialogue (though, even then, it was not new to him). Socrates<sub>?</sub> of the *Symposium* leads Agathon through an elenctic refutation of the claim that Love is beautiful (199c-201d). Parmenides (Socrates<sub>M</sub>) leads Socrates<sub>?</sub> through several elenctic rounds in the first section of the dialogue (*Parmenides* 130e-134e), and the elenchus returns yet again in the *Philebus* of group III.<sup>17</sup> (The method of the *Theaetetus* is special enough that it

<sup>17</sup> This was argued by Davidson 1985, but Vlastos 1988b, 109n115 acknowledged that the analysis was correct. Although Davidson was not the first to point this out (see e.g. D.J. Allan’s Introduction to Stenzel 1940, viii) but the case needed badly to be made again after many years in oblivion.

will pay us to postpone considering it until later.)

Vlastos's second requirement of the elenchus is that [ii] argument be adversative, that interlocutors themselves provide the theses to be examined (1983b, 57-58) which they do not in *Lysis*, *Hippias Major*, and *Euthydemus*, where Vlastos finds the interlocutors too naïve, too stupid, and too clownish, respectively, for the method to work. Vlastos's Socrates<sub>E</sub> is a one-trick pony, an elenchus waiting to happen 'day in day out' (1991, 115) but Plato's Socrates (and the historical one) may well have been more versatile.<sup>18</sup> Vlastos rules out situations in which Socrates himself introduces subjects because he suspects them to be the beliefs of his hearers, for example when an interlocutor has studied with some sophist or other and is reluctant, even ashamed, to defend a sophistical thesis against Socrates's attack. The youngsters in the *Lysis*, for example, are quick to say that their teacher is Miccus, whose reputation as a sophist Socrates knows. Could Plato have desired to illustrate what a philosopher, or what Socrates<sub>E</sub>, might do when confronted with interlocutors unable—for whatever reason—to engage in the elenchus effectively? I cannot see why not. Vlastos can. He says Socrates<sub>E</sub> was keenly aware of his mission 'to live philosophizing, examining [himself] and others' (*Apology* 28e, Vlastos tran., his emphasis), and that the method of the transitionals would have enabled him only to examine himself, a mere partial fulfillment of his mission; therefore, Vlastos concludes, the transitionals with their 'half Socratic' Socrates<sub>E</sub> must signal Plato's having realized the elenctic method was feckless, a realization Socrates<sub>E</sub> never experienced. But it is often the case in life that others allow themselves to be examined only indirectly, or are incapable of elenctic argument; the presence of this attitude or incapacity in potential interlocutors, presumably, would not have absolved Socrates of the responsibility to examine them, so I cannot draw the same conclusion Vlastos does, even if I grant his premise.

There is a more narrow Vlastosian approach to the issue of the transitionals and the fact that they fail to instantiate the condition of [ii]. He says that a problem came to light after the *Gorgias* that persuaded Plato that the elenchus was 'highly fallible' (1991, 115) and rested on 'frightfully strong methodological assumptions' (1983c, 74): namely, 'Anyone who ever has a false moral belief will always have at the same time true beliefs entailing the negation of that false belief' (1983b, 52). This realization caused Plato to ditch the elenchus; and what Plato could not trust, he would not put into Socrates's mouth. Consequently, the next three dialogues to appear after the *Gorgias* (*Lysis*, *Hippias Major*, and

<sup>18</sup> The position I am treating so glancingly here, that Socrates suited his methods to the *psyches* of his interlocutors, is brilliantly developed and defended by Teloh 1986. His methodological analysis, even more subtle and rich than Robinson's, explores the appropriate variety of Socrates<sub>E</sub>'s methods. Teloh discusses the 'benign *elenchus* (refutation) and *psychagogia* [used] on *Lysis*...because *Lysis* is not stuffed with either purported knowledge or false beliefs' (74), in contrast to the eristic used on Menexenus to force him to the point of *aporia*; the boys' *psyches* required and received disparate approaches from Socrates. Examining other 'early' dialogues, Teloh reveals similar differences in Socratic technique, so the diversity of approach is not limited to 'transitional' dialogues.

*Euthydemus*) were conspicuously lacking in elenchus. But this is a puzzling position because the three non-adversative dialogues do nothing either to challenge the faulty assumption or in any other way to address the specific problem that Vlastos says had surfaced in the *Gorgias*. If in the transitional dialogues Plato had chosen interlocutors of equal ability to those of the early dialogues and yet shown Socrates<sub>E</sub> neglecting to perform the elenchus, the reader might have thought to wonder why; but in choosing such plausibly non-elenctically inclined characters, Plato strengthens the view that different personalities simply require different types of examination. The ground falls away for Vlastos's inference that the absence of adversative argument implies the transitionals were composed later than the *Gorgias*.

Vlastos makes *Theaetetus* the final group II dialogue, but that requires a couple of methodological contortions worth considering independently. Robinson (1953, 204) refers to the *Theaetetus* as 'so elenctic that it has been mistaken for an early dialogue', but Vlastos's redefinition of the elenchus puts the dialogue in a class by itself. He says that *Theaetetus* offers theses to be examined, but that Socrates only refutes them after having first elaborated them himself: 'what he refutes in the course of the long-winded argument that follows is his own imaginative construct, with which he chooses to saddle his docile interlocutor' (1991, 266). But the shell of the elenchus is still intact: Socrates<sub>M</sub> refutes a thesis by eliciting additional premises that prove inconsistent with the original thesis. That makes the *Theaetetus* more like the elenctic dialogues than like the transitionals, and much more like the elenctics than like the didactic dialogues of the rest of Plato's mature period; yet Vlastos shuns the term 'elenchus' altogether, calling the 'new' method *maieutic*. The content of the *Theaetetus*, so suggestive of theories to be introduced in the *Sophist*, may understandably make it tempting to find a rationale for distancing its form from that of the early dialogues, but Socrates's method is a very poor ground indeed for giving *Theaetetus* late group II status.

Vlastos reinforces his view that *Theaetetus* is correctly positioned chronologically by agreeing with Burnyeat (1977) that the image of Socrates as a midwife is a Platonic invention (1991, 16). It is true that the images of labor and birth are confined to group II dialogues,<sup>19</sup> but Sider (1991) has introduced persuasive evidence that lines 633 sqq. of Aristophanes' *Clouds* (originally produced in 423) was staged as a birthing scene, evidence so conclusive that it is hardly possible to maintain any longer that Platonic invention accounts for the image of Socrates as a midwife.

Another problematic aspect of Vlastos's account of elenchus is [iii] that it demands that the interlocutor not only provide the thesis to be discussed, but believe in the proposed thesis as well. Vlastos (1991, 14, 123n69; 1983b, 35-36)

<sup>19</sup> Vlastos 1991, 78-79 quotes, 'The true lover of knowledge... may give birth to intelligence and truth, may know and truly live and be nourished and thus find release from labour-pains' (*Republic* 490a-b); and [the philosopher] 'will give birth to true virtue' (*Symposium* 212a). Diotima's (Socrates<sub>M</sub>'s) speech is full of allusions to begetting and birthing (cf. 206c and 209).

makes clear why he wants Plato to have used a sincerity criterion ('Say only what you believe' 1991, 111n21) in the elenctic dialogues:<sup>20</sup> 'its operative force was *to exclude debate on unasserted premises*' (his emphasis)—which would be an improvement on the previous brand of dialectic known to the history of philosophy and attributed to Zeno. I believe Socrates<sub>E</sub> gave only lip-service to such a criterion, but I do not mean that as an insult, as I will clarify after examining the four particular cases in which Vlastos tells us Socrates<sub>E</sub> observed this principle.

Having noticed that Socrates<sub>E</sub> seems often 'complicated, devious, cunning' (1991, 133) toward his interlocutors, Vlastos seeks a means of determining when the reader can be certain Socrates remains 'free of resort to deceit'. The answer is immediately forthcoming, '*when arguing seriously*' (his emphasis 1991, 134). If that seems to verge on non-falsifiable, hold on; Vlastos offers an example of conversation that he calls 'the touchstone of Socratic seriousness': a passage from the *Gorgias* in which Socrates admonishes Callicles, 'you mustn't think that you may play with me and say whatever comes into your head, contrary to your real opinion, nor, conversely, must you think of me as jesting. For you see what our discussions are all about—and is there anything about which a man of even small intelligence would be more serious than this: *what is the way we ought to live?*' (500b-c, Vlastos tran. and emphasis). According to this touchstone example, when Socrates raises the issue of how we should conduct our lives, we can be certain he will not be deceitful. What is terribly wrong with the example is that Socrates does not mean it, is not serious at all: Callicles is refusing within one page (501c) to cooperate, saying he will agree with what Socrates says just to get the argument over with. Socrates does not respond by insisting his interlocutor say what he believes, but by carrying on regardless, and at length. When Callicles later asks ruefully, 'And you are the man who could not speak unless somebody answered you?' Socrates can only reply, 'Apparently I can' (519d-e, Lamb tran.) This makes a mockery of thesis X: the touchstone of seriousness itself is an example of deceit in its context.

Nor does Socrates mean it when he tells Protagoras, 'I won't have this. For it isn't this "if you wish" and "if you think so" that I want to be refuted, but you and me. I say "you and me" for I think that the thesis is best refuted if you take the "if" out of it' (*Protagoras* 331c, Vlastos tran.). Vlastos does not deny that Protagoras is allowed straightaway to abandon the sincerity requirement (233b-c). Instead, he provides a reason for the indulgence granted the sophist, namely, Socrates allows him to 'save face' when losing the argument (1983b, 37-38). I count face-saving among the least respectable excuses for dodging the truth in a *serious* discussion of the way we ought to live, so I count the exchange with Protagoras as another strike against the importance, let alone necessity, of a sincerity criterion.

<sup>20</sup> He attributes the view to Robinson (1953, 15-17) as well. Although this is not the place to develop Vlastos's wider concerns, Vlastos's preoccupation with other issues of intellectual honesty—Socratic irony, and Socratic and/or Platonic deceit (1991, 21-44, 132-156)—that he treats extensively and independently, deserve attention in connection with Socrates's method.

Vlastos (1991, 249) says that, in the first book of the *Republic*, Socrates ‘repeatedly insists on the observance of the “say what you believe” rule’, citing 346a, 349a, and 350e. The text does not bear out his claim. After Socrates has shaken his finger at Thrasymachus, ‘My good man, don’t answer contrary to your real opinion (*παρὰ δόξαν*), so we may get somewhere’ (*Republic* i, 346a, Vlastos tran.), he takes it back only three pages later: “For now, Thrasymachus, I absolutely believe that you are not ‘mocking’ us but telling us your real opinions about the truth.” “What difference does it make to you,” he said, “whether I believe it or not? Why don’t you test the argument?” “No difference,” said I, “but here is something I want you to tell me in addition” (349a-b, Shorey tran.). Besides, Socrates has soon browbeaten the sophist into submission. When Thrasymachus warns him that he intends to answer with approval and nods, as one would ‘for old wives telling their tales’, Socrates retorts ‘No, no...not counter to your own belief’. But when Thrasymachus shoots back, ‘Yes, to please you...since you don’t allow me freedom of speech’ (350e, Shorey tran.), Socrates feigns no more reluctance, and Thrasymachus plays the perfect yes-man to the end. Vlastos (1991, 249) says the yes-men enter only at book 2, with adversative argument characterizing all of book 1, but, in fact, it is Socrates<sub>E</sub> who puts a stop to Thrasymachus’s engaged participation.

While I do not doubt that, in the *Crito* (49c-d), when Socrates tells his friend not to agree to anything contrary to his real opinion (*παρὰ δόξαν*), he means it sincerely, I have no evidence whatever that Socrates holds others to the same high standard. On the contrary, Socrates<sub>E</sub> merely pretends to demand seriousness in the instances outlined above, and the action of the dialogue exposes his lack of conviction in each case. Nor is it ignoble that this should be so: not only is there virtue to Thrasymachus’s suggestion that Socrates examine the argument, not the man; not only is the dialectical exhibition useful to others in the crowd (and to Plato’s readers),<sup>21</sup> regardless of its lack of effect on the interlocutor; but one of Socrates’s finest attributes is his ability to adjust his conversation to various individuals.<sup>22</sup> And these three claims are not mutually incompatible, admitting as they do something uncontroversial in life, that the conduct of philosophy admits opportunities at a great number of levels because situations and people differ so widely. Vlastos and I see Socratic versatility in the conduct of philosophy completely differently. Considering Socrates’s behavior toward Calicles, Protagoras, and Thrasymachus, I cannot believe interlocutor seriousness is a touchstone of Socrates<sub>E</sub>’s method; consequently, I do not believe that debate on unasserted premises is excluded in the dialogues; so I cannot conclude with Vlastos that this was the historical Socrates’s contribution to the history of dialectical argument (1991, 14).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> McPherran 1986 moves convincingly beyond the points I mention here.

<sup>22</sup> Teloh 1986 argues this point carefully for the dialogues he calls early (which include dialogues Vlastos calls ‘transitional’).

<sup>23</sup> For another view of what makes Socrates’s method an advance beyond that of Zeno, see Irwin 1992, 68-69.



**Thesis II.** I promised to return to this thesis, that Socrates<sub>M</sub> holds a theory of separately existing forms and a doctrine of recollection alien to Socrates<sub>E</sub>,<sup>24</sup> because Vlastos considers it ‘the most powerful of the ten’ (1991, 53). In the following sense it is. From the time of Aristotle, but largely *because* of Aristotle’s insistent focus on the topic, scholars have viewed the dialogues’ different accounts of the forms as mirroring ‘development’ in Plato’s theory; from the nineteenth century, it has been popular to map that perceived development (and sometimes development on other issues) onto the dialogues, producing sequences believed to reflect the order in which Plato composed them.<sup>25</sup> Vlastos, late to the fray, could build on the progress of his forebears, especially Ross, by refining the account of the dialogues of the early period with divisions into elenctic and transitional. Since his chief principle for ordering the dialogues remains the extent to which the theory of forms appears in each, it is not surprising that thesis II results in a relatively good fit.<sup>26</sup> The mapping procedure is a circular one, as extensively noted in the literature, but that would not be damning if the circle were very wide, or if some of its elements were grounded outside the circle. But this is exactly where we began: a proposed sequence of dialogues was to be defended by a bold extension *beyond* the traditional reliance on the theory of forms into other key areas of Platonic philosophy. And that is the project I believe has failed. Even if I accept thesis II in its entirety, since I cannot accept Vlastos’s other theses and thereby gain a comprehensive interpretive tool, I am still in no position to infer anything whatever about the order of composition of the dialogues, nor even about what doctrines, if any, the historical Socrates and

<sup>24</sup> It seems to me, but I will not argue here, that *anamnesis* is not nearly so forceful a presence in the dialogues as the theory of forms and that putting them together in one thesis is unfortunate. There are only two passages about *anamnesis* long enough to be considered accounts of the theory, *Meno* (85c-86b) and *Phaedo* (72e-76e), and both are presented with doubts intact: Socrates admits uncertainty (*καὶ τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλα οὐκ ἂν πάνυ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου διασχυρισάμην*, *Meno* 86b), and emphasizes that the immortality of the soul (a key premise) is unproven (*Phaedo* 63c and 114d).

<sup>25</sup> Thesleff 1982, 40-42 and n9 discusses the history of different positions taken on that one issue, providing about three dozen citations from a variety of perspectives. Of those who claim that one can infer the theory of forms from the Socratic dialogues (those of Vlastos’s group I), he lists Shorey 1903, Stenzel 1916 and 1917, Regenbogen 1950, Crombie 1962-1963, Allen 1970, Martin 1973, Findlay 1974, and Gundert 1977. And of these, Vlastos 1991, 59n52 mentions the attractiveness of Allen’s version (without of course approving).

<sup>26</sup> I will not here take issue with his proposed sequence (although many others have entered that legitimate arena for debate). Apart from the variety mentioned in the previous note, Vlastos points out that Dodds 1959, 375 inferred foreshadowings of the theory of forms in the myth that concludes the *Gorgias*, but is unconvinced that Dodds’ analysis is sound. Kahn’s (1981, 318; cf. 1988) development of the notion of *prolepsis* in the dialogues leads him to argue for ‘the anticipation of the Form of Beauty or Form of Good in the *Lysis*’. But anticipation is something short of what would be required to discredit Vlastos’s thesis II. As Thesleff (1982, 40-42 and nn. 2-16) has demonstrated in admirable detail, however, when scholars have tracked other issues through the dialogues, other chronological sequences have resulted. Examples among the fifteen such issues he cites (providing bibliography) are: the virtues, education, logic, and method; some of the issues invite comparison to the topics of Vlastos’s other theses. The selected 132 proposed dialogue sequences Thesleff (1982, 8-17) recounts between Tennemann in 1792 and Kahn in 1981 is sobering.

Plato may have held. To make either of those leaps, I would need to accept Vlastos's description of Plato's authorial intentions—which I cannot justify on the basis of the evidence so far presented.

Vlastos's development of ten opposing theses to distinguish Socrates<sub>E</sub> from Socrates<sub>M</sub> ought to have paid off in a far clearer picture than it has. Of the ten elenctic dialogues, only the *Hippias Minor* remains free of 'middle' elements in my account;<sup>27</sup> the transitional dialogues flip-flop from early to middle and back again to meet the requirements of particular theses; and none of the seven dialogues of group II appears untarnished by 'early' residue. I can only conclude that what supports Vlastos's chronological structure is its scaffolding.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> And there is doubt about that. Thesleff cautions me, 'It can be argued that *Hippias Minor* contains reminiscences of *Gorgias* and that its playful irony presupposes a rather sophisticated epistemological background (e.g. 375d-e).'

<sup>28</sup> I have benefitted from comments of W. Levitan, Holger Thesleff, and anonymous referees.

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