

On Dissenting Adults: "What Do We Mean When We Say Plato Says?"

By:

NORBERTO M. CASTILLO, O.P.*

In the anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic philosophy*, it reads that shortly before Plato died, he dreamt that he had become a swan which flew from tree to tree thereby causing much anxiety to the hunter who never succeeded catching the fowl in his snare. Simmias, the Socratic, interpreted this dream as meaning that many interpreters would try to understand Plato, but whatever 'success' they would manage would end up interpreting the man according to their own view (Westerink, 3, 29ff).

The 1992 *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* opus is an anthology of discussions on the theme 'Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues' delivered by eleven recognized scholars in Platonic studies at a symposium organized by the Philosophy Department of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in March 1988. James Klagge and Nicholas Smith as supplementary volume editors spin the Prologue and Afterword respectively.

I. A Case of Presuming and Tending Positions

Studies on Plato have always intrigued its readers no end, both in the developmental content and doctrine, as they are in terms of the unique approaches suggested he employs. Method in the context of Plato does not refer to some architectural structures so to say, if dialogues can be at all considered structures. Rather, the inventive design of Plato requires a conjuration of a creative set of varying approaches, the general features of the dialogues notwithstanding. This may take the form which contracts the author among other things, as a literary figure who is

*Fr. Norberto Castillo, O.P. is a Philosophy professor at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila.

playful with his arguments and whose elusive position and personality are difficultly configured by the pronounced insistence on the use of the dialogue form. It appears that the dialogue form encases both medium and message.

Scholarship in Plato, as is probably equally true with other philosophers of the classical magnitude, demands a closer anatomy of the nature of the text in both its verbal and nonverbal nuances, and the modes of inner registrations which the text engenders. Perhaps, this is one of the more critical problematic which derives from the inner philosophic tension of a mind in context, whether it be of the author or of the reader. Plato is one of the less than a handful of philosophers who does not easily, or even after some time, unconsciously tolerate any of his premises to be farmed out in the open.

This anthology emits the characteristic energy of scholars in breathing the intellectual integrity that there will be no fast and cold answers, only stubborn questions. These are questions which refract a larger reality, a wider vision, and a transcending expectation. With some discerned data at hand, presuming and tending positions would at best elicit richer insights which dialogues offer incomparable material and nourish Platonic studies as one of the most intense there is.

II. A Case of Philosophy as Literature

The challenge in Platonic studies intensifies in the hypotheses of the rare configuration which layers style of writing as conjunctive with parable; the thin margins, if at all this distinction is tenable, that divide, or otherwise interface the form of literature and the substance of philosophy; the tension that gathers between the challenge of new politics and the cult of conventional poetry; and the hidden agenda of verticalism of purpose that lurks behind the horizontalism of conversation. There may be more than a grain of truth to the allegation that in Plato, the more we seek his philosophy with our intellectual baggage, the less we find; the less we insist on mindsets in our interpretive choreography, the more we discover his ontological tracks and epistemological leads. The Socratic profession of knowing nothing is a diametrical step backward toward forward midwifing harvest.

The dialogic philosophic talk functions as the philosopher's identity. The primordial intuitions grow in a keen emotional bonding with the very life and vocation of the persona of the philosopher. But this conviction demands creative distantiation as Plato speaks in versatile forms, e.g., in several 'removes' in the characters and interlocutors of the different dialogues, and indeed in several 'positions' which Socrates variably assumes.

The art of the textual presentation swings between seemingly catchy questions which map the vortex of the corpus of the text. When is Socrates

expounding as the historical Socrates, and when is Socrates articulating the historical Plato? Various solutions have been formulated and the most fundamental initiation toward the conceptualization of any solution at the moment seems to divide the problem into its manageable historical parts. The dialogues are divided into three parts, e.g., the early, the middle, and the later versions. This departmentalization which specifics are very much controverted, does not in any way touch the heart of the enquiry. Reality in its epic proportion and encapsulated into its historicizing body and soul may just be a general scan which provides leads to a multitude of questions.

III. A Case of Crosstext as Crosscheck

This exegetical division is facilitated largely on the examination of both internal and external evidences. A glimpse of the times and mind of Plato is signatorially provided by the Seventh Letter which is traditionally considered to be written by him, though controversies on its veracity, e.g., stylistic difficulties, consign this text to the appendices and not in the very corpus of the opera. These cogent historical facts which are deemed to have taken place in the life of the author, and its substantives via crosstextual references with Theaetetus, the Sophist, the Statesman, the Phaedrus, etc., have been verified to crosscheck.

In the same Seventh Letter, are allusions of statements viewed as expressions of the author's *propria persona*. Except for the lecture 'On The Good', it is less paradoxical that *propria persona* statements should be gleaned from a text as the Seventh Letter which is written in personal prose understandably. Given this premise, the possible consequence of another alternative authorial intention of the dialogues emerges. It is not the intention of the author to formulate a set of philosophical doctrines, e.g. to compose a philosophical treatise.

The possibility immediately sets the teacher in Plato and the student in Aristotle, in many ways, at poles apart. A lingering question however looms in the horizon: if such is the case, how reliable are Aristotle's commentaries on Plato's views? We are not surprised at James Klagge's observations. W.K.C. Guthrie and Emile Brehier have raised these questions many, many years back. Is Aristotle guilty of a case of impulsive reductive thinking, of reading into the text, rather than allowing the text to read into us?

IV. A Case of Conflicting Intuitions

The score on Plato's credibility on the historical Socrates is less challenged by critics compared to the philosophical position which Plato is alleged to support, and consequently taken up and criticized by Aristotle. With the issue on Forms as problematic, Gail Fine's "Aristotle's Criticisms

of Plato" offers gems of insights into their respective positions, and provides some form and context to the different philosophical universes within which their minds orbit. The analyses procured on their basal philosophical presuppositions which Fine addresses as a case of "conflicting intuitions", radically humbles the apologetic mode of studying a thinker's position, especially so when we deal with minds of the present magnitude.

The case of Aristotle interpreting Plato may indeed suffer dire limitations as our readings of the works of Guthrie and Cornford to name a few, have primed us. The impossibility of Plato interpreting Aristotle aside, we are confronted by the very fundament of differing visions of the nature of the philosophical act and infrastructure. Unless this bottomline is clarified and emphasized, we will be endlessly entertained by the usual deluge of comparative studies so to say, when there was hardly any basis for comparison right from the start. Fine improves the substance of imagination of this pseudo-problem, probably a creation of Aristotle himself.

V. A Case of the Believing Sceptic

We are made to understand that the dialogues are not treatises, the mode which Aristotle's writings are for example, and are therefore not expected to intently provide mental constructs. But this does not altogether mean that a mental construct such as the Form of Good does not have a basis in fact. This does not mean that arguments will proceed forever ad infinitum.

If, to be a sceptic is to be an enquirer, the genuine philosopher is a genetic enquirer. But scepticism, as probably happens in any other 'ism', comes in different stripes and shapes. Scepticism is not cynicism, nor is it simply dogmatism upside down.

Thus Julia Annas' piece "Plato the Sceptic" qualifies the situation that while "for Plato, insistence on further enquiry, when one has found intellectually satisfying results, is immature", the sceptic for scepticism's sake will not let go despite the fact that the senses provide grounds for equipollence for the grasp of forms. A suspension of judgement, the *epoche*, detaches the interlocuter from commitments so that space is provided for what could be a more positive search for truth. The premature dialectician as a case shown in Republic 7, either gets used to the sceptical discomfort of equipollence which is not the objective, or he endeavors to enquire further.

Plato's scepticism is a means, not an end; it is a frame of mind, not a fixation. And this passion is burdened with commitment and more importantly, with direction. In this sense does an enquirer part ways from a sceptic. Plato can be read as a sceptic but this way of reading him in the middle and later dialogues does not seem to be the right spirit. So, when Plato settles for mathematics toward his "mature" dialogues, mathematics

stood for creative discipline prior to the ultimate process of dialectics of creativity, which in turn stood for thinking about thinking.

This will save Annas from what she fears as the phenomenon of "rash assent". This is fearsome no doubt, and I guess this reservation can be applied too in the phenomenon of rash dissent. On both scores, a notorious commonality between us and a good number of the ancients has been experienced.

VI. A Case of Authorial Distantiation

If ever there is a philosopher who was a consummate artist in the production of his text, Plato will find few competitors. L. Kosman's piece "Silence and Imitation in the Platonic Dialogues" engages us into this conviction. Plato's silence can be more dramatic than his words, more conversational than his enigmatics, more revelatory than his persuasions. It is a silence which flourishes in constant genesis of Being.

But Plato needs no 'apologia pro scripta sua'. The exhaustive use of 'dramatis personae' in place of 'propria persona' is equipped with its unique transformative character given the space and the time. Versatility is accomplished with essential distantiation, as if to say that the view is clearer from afar, insight is sharper from behind, and truth is never a trophy of definitives but a fluid that lubricates approximations.

So, when Plato affirms in *Timaeus* that play is essential to effective learning, he is consistent in his inconsistency, a game crafted by an intelligence of a supreme order. It may, for example, be conjured that Socrates at a particular line is speaking 'for' Plato, but we are not certain of the consequence that results when he is to be imagined to be the voice 'of' Plato. One does not only measure the location of the feet at its circumscribed locus; the anatomy will have to extend to what the eyes view beyond. It is a ventriloquy which goes beyond the silence of the renunciation of speech.

It is also a displacement of speech with a projection into a "created other". Displacement means the use of convention to replace the very same convention as suggestive of creating another alternative. This matrix is created through a discourse which is transformed, not merely transmitted, from the persona of the writer to the *dramatis personae* of the characters, between the major characters and the impact of their dialogue on the supporting cast, from the specific dialogic framing to the readers and audience. Kosman's equation involves the "poet and fictional voice, between dramatist and dramatic character, between author and persona".

The theatrical design delivers the author's persona to limbo and leaves the text to speak for itself. Authority, if this matter could be

alluded at all in the dialogues, and the suspect of authorial persona, hardly appear. The represented and the representation spin and spiral into a distilled form of reason and reasonableness. The context begs, "What do we mean when we say Plato says?"

Such detachment of the author is awesome - and humbling. But this very strength of the opus may also cause its bane. The radical openedness emitted by this opus cannot be taken to be absolutely heraclitean processing. This parcelled thinking can be fatal if we miss the pythagorean, the parmenidean and the reasonable sophistic strains which too germinate in Plato's petri dish.

It will take Plato to speak for and about the dialogues. It will take Plato to read his text for us, as the way we should read his text. This seems to beg the issue and probably an occasion for wishful thinking to extract from an opus written by a man who did not have much trust on the written word. This means being ready and able, to stomach the words of Socrates "we'll just have to go where the winds of the argument carry us" (Rep.3,394D5ff). Plato does not only require a release from imaginational cramps, he also expects visceral malleability.

The "analysis will have to continue unabated," Kosman rightly expects. We have been witnessing that. And the experience have been anything but boring, or tiring. If the author is elusive, we are, in our attempts to read or interpret portions of the dialogues, left to ourselves choreographing with detours, hypotheses, fallacies, aporia and irony. The language of mimetic discourse does appear complex, and perhaps will appear more complex for the reader who is too impulsive in reading when he should be listening, and chaffing when he should be graining.

The point here is the invitation to explore, to expand, to rethink, and to reconsider the Philosophy in the dialogues as a way of life, and being the life of the way. It is thus a variegated mediation between Form and representation. Kosman installs this process as Plato's central figure of reality. It is "the reality of appearance (which) is nothing less than that of Being in so far as Being makes its appearance". We have here a repeat of the product of the latest researches by scholars which demythologize the belief nurtured by manuals in philosophy that clearly, and thus wrongly, Plato was an idealist and his student Aristotle a realist.

Kosman deftly manuevers another blow, artfully, but no less deadly, to the traditionally held Platonist interpretation of framing Plato as an idealist, even at times, incorrigibly. The truth of the matter is, that the very life of Being is a concomittant approximation of both word and nature. In Plato, Kosman insinuates, lies the very germ of the life of relation, participation, imitation, silence, and yes, of dreams.

There lies the dream of the Form enchanting the particular, or vice versa. There lies the anxiety in the dream, that if logos has no meaning at all, is ergon indeed very far behind? And there lies the dream that

when *ergon* draws near, can the reality of *logos* be a breath away? In the silence of the projected mimetic voice, the world of Being flows in flux. This much, Kosman believes, Plato is. This far, Kosman invites, Platonists should reposition themselves.

VII. A Case of Philosophical Rebirthing

If we accept the major premise that philosophy is the engagement with questions and less of answers, it may not be difficult to assert that answers take the form as a totality of questions. The primacy of the question appears to be the radical process being instigated in the dialogues. The dramatic dialogue "represents an attempt to recapture the original and authentic erotic context of philosophy - the exchange of questions and answers from which emerges, dialectically, an image of excellence: the lover's beautiful speeches". "By its very form, then, the Platonic dialogue aspires to engage the reader...to awaken *eros* in the reader - to arouse, in particular, his hermeneutic *eros*, the desire of the text".

David Halperin composes "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity" with the *Symposium* as a text case. The task which the author sets himself to accomplish is even made more complex with the material which is "beyond dispute the finest work of fiction, of prose literature, to survive from the classical period - as well as one of the trickiest texts of all time to interpret". "In the *Symposium* at least - Plato says one thing and does another".

The *Symposium* contains a series of layerings of distinct dialogues, nesting with intervening indirectness over each other. The author illustrates this with an ideogram (p.98). The series of 'removes' contrast the retrospective irony with its prospective dimension, a significance which stretches awareness with asymmetry. The author locates a case of misguided *eros* which blows the downfall of Athens and the demise of its prominent personalities intersected by shortlived exuberance of shorttimed triumph of the first phase of the Peloponnesian War.

Eros is both yes and no. It pursues what eludes. It pursues the perpetuation of self and mortality, both of which are elusive. *Eros* is a mediation between life and death, between being and becoming, between presence and absence, between mortality and immortality. Desire is the offspring of *eros*. This is not a simple case of giving birth, but rather, an exemplar of 'birthing'.

As form cleaves to substance, *eros* is dramatized in complex narrative structure. The narrative is a unitary discourse of *logos* 'birthing'. In here lies the dynamism of the spoken word over the written form, that the former sustains life while the latter asphyxiates it. Desire as the self-propagating oasis of knowledge is itself self-renewing that defies reductionism and staticity. Writing is at best to serve as mere memoranda, and is nothing compared to the art of living speech (276A5-9) inscribed in the

soul. There is nothing compared to 'melete' of attentiveness and mental alertness. Or "the state of restless and urgent desire".

The combination of dialogue and narrative in the Symposium is one of symbiotic sublimity. The dramatic form prepares the way for the erotics of narrativity. This eroticism interplays the distance of the past with the proximity of the present, the distance which signals crossing the space in time in order to resurrect the past in the present. Old stories never die, they only stand and wait.

Is Plato's opus to be read as literature or as philosophical text? The mode of reading occasions the mode of experience we expect to derive from the text's hermeneutic eros. But more antecedently, we have to be extremely cautious whether we are asking, and not begging the question. At times, the 'answers' posit themselves unrecognized because we are blinded by raising the wrong question.

It is not therefore an issue of dialogues or dialectics. It is not an issue of philosophy or literary criticism. It is not a case of alternatives of which a choice assumes to be the choice, of a case between the right choice over a wrong one. It is a fundamental case of dialogues and dialectics and beyond. Plato's tentativities, contraries, or even contradictions, are possessed with an objective which goes beyond the text into what Halperin calls "a realm of pure transcendence." Questions and answers take this form of transcendence when they are imbued with life's palpitation and circuited with our neuron's sensitivity.

VIII. A Case of Philosophical Character

When philosophy is positively a productive persuasion of its contexts and specificities, epistemic leads are provided impetus by the text. But when a text runs a critique against the grain of the conventions of its times, reading becomes, if doubly engaging, precautionary many times over. This kind of text can only come from an unusual intellect, an intellect which leaves its mark forever in the heritage of mankind.

To create this mark and forever, Plato performs his philosophical task with incarnate ingenuity, integrating life and function, function and purpose, purpose and destiny. Mary Whitlock Blundell weaves this thematic in her piece, "Character and Meaning in Plato's *Hippias Minor*".

Dramatization is meant to keep philosophy open, and as doors are opened, philosophy matures without brittleness, argumentative without losing particularity. So, the Socratic elenchus invites us to purge ourselves to gain strength, the strength that enables us to see people as having arguments to pursue, and not vice versa. Philosophy is therefore endowed with a face, a body, a personality, and a future. In shorthand, this is philosophical character.

This character is enfolded in Hippias Minor. Bereft of tissues, the Hippias Minor is no different from a bundle of arguments where speakers are mere talkers. In the absence of the prevailing culture, tradition and context, characterization of the new hero which Plato seems bent to construct disappears at the mercy of literary archetypes which has long captivated Athens in convoluted captivity. The problem as a living present and therefore a real danger is identified. Its reality besets the whole society and an altogether different educational strategy will have to be formulated to liberate the individual from this overwhelming tyranny he is born into.

If liberation needs be realistic, it must grab the horns of the causes, symptoms no longer. Popularity though endemic can be blinding, power though persuasive can be debilitating, conventions though comforting can be complacent. Hippias is a professional product of his own success, of his kind of expertise. It is a success wrought by the pressures of style and contemporaneity, an expertise gained by rote encyclopedism and studied sophistication.

The unreflected life is superficial and rootless; it is a ruthless rape of character and personality by neglectful omission.

Plato at times, soothes this problem with humor. Humor liberates when we learn to laugh when we realize that the gap created between our inadequacies and our capacities is the making of our own folly. Dangers are defanged, fears are defrocked, and threats are occasions of fun (Rep. 396D-E). Indeed, nowhere else is it a source of grim comedy to see Hippias enfold the sophist at his worst elements in his tragic vulnerability for the aphrodisiac harvested from applause and approval. This cultural paradigm exemplified the dialectical rut that viscerated Athens at its tragic ebb.

IX. A Case of Platonizing Plato

Plato's Dialogues could probably be considered to be one philosophical text written by man for man, which finer form is accounted by the uncertainty of its very form. Quite complicatedly, the Dialogues is a text which is composed of several texts, and each and every individual text is made up of more subtexts.

S. Marc Cohen and David Keyt write the next piece entitled "Analysing Plato's Arguments: Plato and Platonism." The problem is echoed with the usual strains, "Plato writes dialogues; and it is often unclear which character, if any, in a given dialogue speaks for Plato." "Secondly, when a character in a dialogue advances a thesis, it is often unclear what the thesis is." And finally, when a thesis is backed by an argument, crucial premisses are often missing." The problems addressed by the authors are in no uncertain terms a concatenation of three formulations, different no

doubt, but an interface of one major issue: Are we analyzing Plato, or indulging in mere Platonism?

The paper signifies to delimit its scope and intention to deal with the case of the missing crucial premisses which is not saying at all that the sanctum of the previous two issues will be respected. The development of the paper appears to be that of interpretation or hermeneutics, of which the dialogues seem to be most fertile though not encouragingly hospitable a material. But does the enthymemic act of filling in of a missing and tacit premise mean an act of expounding Plato or an act of Platonizing? Interpreting this paradox leads to a paradox of interpretation in six stages. I have recasted Cohen and Keyt's formulations when I thought their paradoxes could read less paradoxical. These are -

1. The principle of charity leads to sympathetic interpretation. The presence of an enthymeme does not necessarily result in a 'non sequitur'. Given more than one possible premisses, there will always be one that could be judged better than the next one. Cross-referencing with the same text or with other texts by the same author should be explored. An apparent enthymeme involves stretching a context. When this fails, the enthymeme is real. It is one thing 'to attribute' a tacit premise to the author of the text, it is another thing for an interpreter 'to hold' to such premise as reasonable. An example of this is Anaximander's proposition that the earth is drum-shaped.
2. A real enthymeme is interpreted as false if the explicite premise is false.
3. A valid interpretation leads to the formulation of good argument. A good argument is made of premisses, both explicit and implicit, which are interpreted to be valid.
4. The act of interpretation does not happen in isolation. It is an act which involves the intervention and influence of the current 'intellectual regime' when the interpretive act occurs. Interpretation brings a classic text to a form contemporary to the current mind.
5. The principle of charity dictates that a classic text like Plato's be held sacred, and sympathetic interpretation render it not only with respect but also with circumspective competence.
6. Major philosophers never really disagree, they only see things with different eyes.

There are limits however to the application of the principle of charity in the interpretive act. We have seen this happen in the six stages above. This sobering act is accomplished by the principle of parsimony or simplicity. These two principles will have to balance each other.

Now comes the main thread of ramified problem: Is the interpretive act an exposition of Plato, or an act of Platonizing? Filling in a tacit but considered premise is not only an application of the principle of charity. It is inevitable an event that the work of such immensity continues to historicize toward transcendence. Philosophy is not only a product of history, it is itself a concrete paradigm of history. It has an inner life which communes with the concrete present. The dialogues constitute an exemplar of doing philosophy which doing in turn is exemplar philosophy.

For a man who believed that his writings will necessarily stultify the spontaneity of his revelatory resources, scholars in Plato fan the hope that Platonizing enterprise may simulate the dialogics better, and stimulate a better approximation of the man Plato and his mind.

X. A Case of Disabling Philosophical Authority

Michael Frede is a household name in the hearth of Platonic scholarship. In this volume, he writes the piece "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form."

If the style reveals the man, the dialogues reveal an exceptional combinatory art of conveying a philosophy in the form of rare literature. The mixture of literary fiction and philosophical genes jibe a homegrown homogeneity, a concoction which effects as it affects audience contact and personal participation.

Arguments there are if the dialogues constitute philosophy. The use, and the insistence on the dialogic form of question-and-answer form, augur no less than the deliberate objective issuing from the author's sustaining intuitions. The style and the content of the dialogues seem inseparable as substance or insight cannot be recognized assundered from its form or vision.

Philosophical arguments there are, but these arguments cannot be ascertained whether these are 'the' authorial positions. The formulation, or better, the manner of presentation of these arguments in dialogics precisely endorses this form of constitutional ambivalence. Cases of fallacy, inconsistency or falsehood are dreadful in the context of a philosophical treatise, but the dialogues do not belong to this category. Frede recalls that Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine have explored into the dialogue form yet this problem of ambivalence is nowhere as we find it in Plato's version. Authorial position and identities are clear in the case of Aristotle and his species.

Assessments will have to be processed regarding the formal features and authorial intentions of the platonic dialogues.

It is quite tenable to accept the form that the author does indicate some sympathies for certain characters, though he is not necessarily

committed to what they say, e.g., Socrates, and the fictional characters Timaeus, the Eleatic Stranger, etc. It will be hazardous an idea therefore to take it axiomatically, that we can outrightly discourse the author's position in the person of Socrates for example. It is highly probable, that while the student in Plato installed a profound respect for his teacher Socrates, there existed ideological distantiations between them. This phenomenon is to be expected given the evolution of the mind in the dialogues. It is then probable that the position held by the character Socrates in the dialogues otherwise functioned as a counter criticism of the traditional position of the very same speaker. Extreme caution will have to be observed that the main speaker does not necessarily connote the main position, if there are any, e.g., allegedly of Plato. This would be too linear a thinking in a nonlinear opus which is not written as a treatise.

The conventional philosophical arguments as both germ and substance affirm and address the cardinals of authority, knowledge and expertise. Given these, especially in treatises, inconsistency, fallacy and falsehood are tracked and filtered. But this does not happen, quite often and quite consistently, even if the respondents claimed and alluded to conventional authority et al. in the dialogues. The situation in fact becomes more dilemmatic as respondents find themselves denying what they have just affirmed and conversely. The sampling though random is too forceful to hypothesize otherwise.

The configuration of the platonic problem as philosophical is quite unique, in fact especial, taking man as incorrigibly philosophical and especial. The questions are ominous and awesome like life, and they penetrate and threaten the viscerals of man like life. They sink deep into the depths of the sanctum of his consciousness. They are personal questions which bifurcate his character, ambitions, interests, relations, attachments, beliefs, convictions and dreams. They are questions in flesh and incarnate no less real, and elicit more horizon than what is expected. Obviously, questions pertaining man are complex and concatenated.

In this arena, who is the expert? Who is the authority? What knowledge can sustain life's unpredictability? Absolutely nobody whose feet still trod this earth.

Neither Socrates as Plato knew him. Neither Plato as he knew himself. And neither any of those myriad of characters whose fictions figured everydayman in his various compositions in the dialogues. It is the Socratic ignorance that installs the hallmark of the endlessly concatenated questions which pulsate in unquenchable passion. It is the virtue which draws the sparks of spontaneous combustion that fans the human forest of Athens to either freeze or to conflagrate at the very center of its gravity.

It is this same Socratic ignorance which bonds the teacher and the disciple into an aeviternal conviction that the written word leaves their

search for the philosophy of life seemingly suspended, if not defenseless. Writing a treatise would have annointed this weakness; the weakness to pontificate, to dogmatize, and no less to live a life that should not have been lived at all.

Not all is lost however. The dialogue form even as a mediation is still a good choice in the absence of a better. This form provides the space for tentativities, the opportunity to address issues without necessarily endorsing them, and the freedom to permutate probabilities.

This is the stance of the kind of knowledge that Plato hungered for. It is 'the' knowledge that transcends honest opinion, architected premises and even landscaped views. It is the knowledge that gnaws the conscience, arrests the heart and goads the viscerals. It is the kind of knowledge that creates visions and charts destiny. It is the kind of knowledge that seeks the higher things as the basis of the good life.

Only the dialogue, it seems, can resurrect the scenario where the philosopher, as every man should be, can be real and be exposed as a reasoning animal vulnerable to the pressures of intellectual regimes, immersed in his collective consciousness and caught in his times' social metaphors. It is in the dialogue that man here and now is taken here and now. It is in the dialogue, that readers of the text are not expected to simply remain in their seats but are expected to stand up and examine their own selves. He is said to have read well when he has internalized the threshold he is expected to ascend to. He who has internalized and ascended is said to have understood well.

The dialogue form prompts a corresponding reaction to the global enterprise that philosophy really is, or should be, and indeed is not only a way of life but is in fact life itself. Arguments need not then be structured for life is not skeletal.

Man is a living argument.

Unexpected premises should be allowed entry anytime for life's continuity should be open to other configurations.

Man is a premise of surprise.

XI. A Case of Becoming or Being a Philosopher

It is the considered view that the dialogue form is at once context and purpose, and together, as nature and art. This intrinsic craft of substitutionality inherent in the opus makes any interpretive act wary with precautionary hypotheticals.

Kenneth Sayre composes the next piece "A Maieutic View of Five Late Dialogues." The aging Plato's later works are examined from the

Socratic description of the formatives of the philosopher and his philosophy, vis-a-vis, from the vantage cosmos of the Seventh Letter, the Phaedrus, etc.

The primitive mistrust for the written word or any other perceptible form such as symbols to express philosophy is quite explicit. At best, words and symbols are mere images, to serve as reminders to memory. But neither are reminders as prompters, nor memory as a reserve, constitute philosophy. The genuine philosophical discourse such as goodness, justice, excellence, etc., is "inscribed in the soul" (Phaed. 278A 3).

For the spiritual inscription of philosophy, the Seventh Letter is an excellent source. It demands a constant marination in terms of repeated conversations (341C 7) about the matter, a tireless plumbing into its depths of 'names, definitions and sense perceptions' (344B 5) in the context of friendly crossexamination (344B 6), and questioning and answering without indulgence in ill will (344B 6-7). Obviously, this is nothing short of living philosophy as life. This is "generated in the soul like a torch-light kindled by a leaping flame and straight away becomes self-sustaining (341C 6-D2)." It is wisdom and intelligence which shines forth (344B 7).

The philosophic process takes a long time to achieve, agonizing as it is obsessive, humbling as it is possessive. Some mortals are not quite cut for philosophy, for some natural affinities are required (340C 2, 344A 3). Hard work (340C, E), persistence (340D 3), a suitable ordered regimen (340E 2), develop a rare mental discernment which is difficultly reflected in written arguments. A reflection of 'living with the matter' contemporizes until the maieutic resurrection comes with the 'many beautiful discoveries' (150D 7-8). Objectivity and viability emerge with the consensual 'friendly crossexamination' if what is generated in the soul can self-sustain and stand the test of life.

Conversation therefore is a fundament both as process and as emergent product in the birth and birthing of philosophy. If Plato submitted to the dialogue form in print, this probably meant that this was the better alternative given the long term hindsight and circumstance, of still being able to incite participation in the conversational mode, whether staged or carefully read, even if this would never be the ideal. Philosophy may dispense with Plato but never with the dialogue form. What seems to be co-essential to the dialogic form as an approach, is the matching co-essentiality of the content which is never to be considered at all as a treatise. In effect, the amorphousity in text conveys the generative nature of philosophy, it can never be institutional; the suspended nature of the conversation points to a wider horizon, it can never end up in the formulation of right arguments so to say; and the characterization, even if fictionalized, of enfleshed personae, leaves us discerning - about our own selves.

XII. A Case of Wishful Cases

Consensus can be either boon or bane. It can either mean a blessing or a curse. With the tonnage of Platonic studies that has been issuing these past years, we can probably exact anything but consensus. The nature of Plato's philosophical initiation and impulse that require the congruent personalism and internalization may find this a natural consequence and hardly a matter to be surprised about.

Truth by consensus does not necessarily convey truth of the matter. Truth by consensus as an essential property is absolutely aplatonic. Nicholas Smith's Afterword asks "Why are we rarely ever able to get to the truth of the matter?" Smith suggests some of the probable reasons:

- a) We tend to conceive of the issues in too narrow a way.
- b) We tend to focus on and be focused by the points of view promoted by those with the highest status in the profession.
- c) We get caught up in interpretative fads.
- d) We tend to ask only questions that reflect our own narrow preoccupations or interests, or the preoccupations or interests of our non-scholarly colleagues.
- e) We tend to limit our interpretative work to texts and contexts only.

Some interpreters depend solely on the text (internal evidence), others on contexts (external evidence), still others on both of these. On any of these, interpretation is not needed, Smith believes. Text and context provide the facts for interpretation but do not provide the additional principles of how interpretation should be made operational. Given the thesis that text and context may provide some 'leads' toward the interpretative enterprise, it does follow that we should limit ourselves to the operation of these 'leads'.

If Plato's distantiation from the text created a variety of opportunities for the author to convey his message in a variety of approaches, the interpreter of the dialogues could probably avail of a similar space. Some form of distantiation by the interpreter from the text and context can be creative of opportunities "to achieve a variety of goals which are rarely explicit, rarely complete, perhaps often inconsistent and without clear priorities among them, and which therefore rarely provide clear procedures for reaching a decision." In this sense, we have to sort out the natural facts and authorial intention on one hand as constituting the scientific discourse, and the principles of interpretation as methodological norms on the other hand. The latter are variable appropriations depending on the justifications educed from their rational warrants.

Genuine scholarship thrives on the mentality that successes so called are less attended to than the excitement that errors breed. This attitude that welcomes chaos as the beginning of wisdom seems quite Platonic.

Nicholas Smith wraps the opus' "Afterword: Platonic Scholars and Other Wishful Thinkers" articulately. And indeed passionately. But before all else, we must admit that Plato wrote his text, granted the seeming distantiating and the undoctrinal style, with a bonding though tenuous which is still characteristically his. There can be no substitute for the primacy of the text. A study of contexts is no mere substitute either. Principles of interpretation seeks for the 'of' and the 'about', in short, for the roots which justify the act of appropriation and the use of such tools. These are tried and tested criteria for convergence.

Substitutional experimentations on the application of interpretative principles which find no roots in text and context at all may open new routes and uncover the unheard. This can be disarming but risk-taking is one thing which 'becoming' philosophers are never without. 'Becoming' philosophers may as well teach us a lesson or two on the Philosophy of Risk. The neatly packaged 'Being' philosophers have already received their rewards.

There is virtue yet on trying the undone in order to view the unseen. There is no stopping students on Plato from some form of adventurism which opts for the untried. 'Wishful thinking' requires a grounding which is more than a virtue, it requires the creative eros which grounds virtue.

Smith's brilliant piece is suspect as shadowed by the parallel workings in natural sciences and in philosophy of science. This is understandable if we take Smith's homegrounds. It is a fact that ancient philosophy has inspired and continue to inspire the natural sciences and its attendant philosophies. Democritus, Epicurus and Aristotle, among others, have been singled out in the works of other authors. It is too, an established fact that Copernicus, Galileo, and even Heisenberg have counted their inspiration on Plato.

Substitutionality between ancient philosophy and natural sciences is not new. In a sense, the attitude of adventurism worked wonders in the Antehoc phase of natural sciences. In a more tragic sense, this same attitude proved fatal for philosophers of science whose reconstructivistic mentality was spawned by a convenient if not adventuristic divorce from text and context. Perhaps, Smith is not suggesting this at all.

Or perhaps, is it I who is engaged in my kind of wishful thinking?