EXCAVATING PLATO’S CAVE

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DEDICATION

To all those who have helped me along the way
    ....who have been
integral to the process…
    and who have
    ... replaced
    every word
    in my vocabulary…
    with a pause.
Love isn't the work of the tender and the gentle; Love is the work of wrestlers.

—Rumi
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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The dominant philosophical approach to Plato’s dialogues is the mouthpiece interpretation according to which Plato intends to convey as his own in the dialogues, various theories, doctrines, and/or beliefs. Two principal interpreters of this approach are Richard Kraut and Julia Annas, each of whom upholds the respective tenets of the mouthpiece interpretation. Contrary to their views, I argue that some of the primary arguments for the mouthpiece approach to Plato are highly problematic and claim that, due to their misdirected analyses, mouthpiece interpreters are akin to the prisoners in Plato’s cave. I argue (along with others) that the Socratic interpretation is a more promising approach by which to interpret Plato’s dialogues insofar as it regards more heavily the influence of Socrates on Plato and (in particular) the significance of movement. I further suggest that the Socratic interpretation reveals a deeper reality about the human condition, as presented in the Allegory of the Cave. As such, it provides a unique and valuable means by which to understand the significance of reason and action in our lives.

Thesis Keywords/Names: Julia Annas, anti-mouthpiece interpretation, dialectic, dialogue form, human condition, interpretation, Richard Kraut, mouthpiece interpretation, movement, myth of the cave, Plato, reason, Socrates, Socratic interpretation
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have been genuinely transformed. My love of reason, my development and understanding of its use, and my respect for the role that it plays (and shall continue to play) in my life, has changed me forever. I am profoundly and humbly indebted.
PREFACE

The great poet Robert Frost once wrote:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.¹

Truth be told, this sentiment is not foreign to me. It is not, I imagine, foreign to anyone who holds within her heart the true sense of wonderment that nature begets and the true sense of wonderment that our further wanderings into its great, wide open might produce. When my father passed away in May of 2010, a rush of images came flooding to the surface. One such image was this road — the one less traveled, and the one both he and I walked arduously together on for the greater part of my formative years. In reflection, I suppose, our journey extended (and extends) well beyond even what might be deemed my seminal years; for even though he is now “six feet under,” he has never left my side. Instead, he has gone back to that “primordial ooze” of the abyss, which Loren Eiseley so magically describes in The Immense Journey as:

the one place on the planet where conditions remain as they have been since the beginning…where the cold is the same at the poles as at the equator, where the seasons are unchanging, where there is no wind and no wave to stir the ooze above which the glass sponges rise on graceful stems, or the abyssal sea squirts float like little balloons on strings above the mud. This is the sole world on the planet which we can enter only by a great act of the imagination.²

It is likewise a world my father could not wait to return; he loved the water, he always had. Years prior, he had revealed to me the various rivers and bodies of water that he wished to be returned to upon his death. “I don’t want any of this burial crap…and no funerals either,” he said, “though a party is fine (as long as it’s a good one).” Moreover, he exclaimed, waving


his arms about like a mad scientist, his hair equally participating in the excitement: “cremate me — preferably in a ‘green’ facility — and then scatter my ashes in the water.” In the midst of all of this somewhat theatrical display, he would then grab his diamond-willow wading stick, his green, trusty, disaster-of-a-fishing-hat, and his binoculars. Then for good measure, just before leaving, he would turn and shout over his shoulder, “It’s back to the ooze for me, kid!” And then, just like that, he would slip out the door — off to explore some far away corner of the great outdoors. He could be so dramatic when he wanted to be; but I loved that about him. Curiously, in light of his musings, I always wondered (though never asked) if I was also supposed to provide him upon his scattering with a pair of waders or a flashlight, or even perhaps some fins. It is, after all, dark down there in that abyss, and it’s quite a haul to the bottom! Nonetheless, giant leap into the primordial ooze aside, my father still speaks to me; he never ceases (despite his physical absence) to teach me something. In this way, it is fair to say, then, that not only has taking “the road less traveled by” made all the difference, but so too has he with whom I first embarked and continued along with on such a journey.

In 1973, my poppa graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara. This is not to be dismissive of his pre-collegiate years, however. It is just that I have limited time, I suppose, to provide you with what can only be referred to as the “incomplete highlights of an otherwise complete life.” So however disjointedly it may seem, it is from this point that I commence. Not surprisingly, given his long-standing proclivity for operating “outside of the box,” my father’s doctoral thesis was the first of its kind. It is even (alongside some other studies of his) a current resident of the Santa Barbara Natural History Museum and several related-in-kind academic journals and publications. What he had to say and what he did made a difference. He changed the course of Southern California history, in fact, his efforts

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3 This is one year prior to my being born and approximately eleven years prior to our paths’ intersecting.

resulting in the preservation of land, plants and various species of animals, among them the ever-elusive white-tailed kite and the long-sought-after-by-many-a-fly-fisherman steelhead trout. He also changed the course of academic history in the state of California in terms of establishing a viable interdisciplinary approach to the study of biology, ecology, and the various social sciences that (according to my father and other like-minded thinkers) must be considered holistically, as part of one coherent system of thought. By way of the paradigmatic environmental studies program that he created and proctored (alongside some of his fellow colleagues), his impact was felt in colleges statewide and, to a large degree, nationwide. His classroom became a model to which all other schools looked; his methods and findings informed the creation and evolution of dozens of new programs and inspired countless individuals to join the ranks in fighting the good fight for Mother Earth.

His impact also extended beyond California, finding its way inevitably into one of my father’s favorite destinations. By way of his research in Yellowstone Park and its surrounding areas shortly after the great fires of 1988, his influence stretched invariably into Wyoming and across the infinite skies of Montana, that “big sky state” that so rightly deserves its majestic name. But my father’s preservation efforts and successes were certainly not limited to Yellowstone. In 1996, with the intent of eventually retiring and watching over the land like the good steward that he was, my father purchased 160 acres of open space, roughly fifteen miles outside of Helena. He set the land up under a strict conservation easement, one

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7 The heart of which was (and is) located at Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, CA.

8 My father retired in 2002. In addition to other capacities and research endeavors, my father taught at the collegiate level for nearly 30 years (23 of which were at Saddleback College).
that would serve to protect the land for centuries to come. He dug a well, and further, set up solar panels and a wind machine so that the cabin he would soon come to design and help build would be self-sufficient and “off the grid” — always something for which he strived, both literally and metaphorically.9 Upon his death, I became trustee of this land, bestowed with a trust and faith in my abilities to mindfully care for the property in the same, or at least equivalent, fashion as that with which he exercised. Thus, while I certainly have hesitations in terms of my abilities to be as good a steward of the land as my father, given my background in the sciences is nowhere near as extensive, I am now the proud (and honored) steward of my father’s legacy — that special place he calls “Merlin Nature Preserve” and that last tangible piece of everything that he stood for; it was (and is) the culmination of his work and evidence of his amazing love and dedication for all things wild and free.10

It is not an understatement to say that my father was a great man. He was the greatest man I know, in fact. In the years prior to his death, he had evolved into what George Carlin might refer to as an “old fuck,” and I say this knowing that that is precisely what he would have regarded himself as had he had the opportunity to watch Carlin’s final filmed performance in 2008. He was not an “old man” or an “old fart,” the former being a state of mind, the latter being a complacent and somewhat bland, if not crotchety, type of lemming. No, he was an “old fuck” to be sure! A “prickly pear,” as mom and I used to call him, “with one hell of a bloom.” And when he was young, he was a “young fuck”! He kicked and screamed through life his whole way through — his slender legs taking him, his intellect, and his cool charm wherever they led, but he always took time to howl at the moon along the way. He called it like he saw it, but was never afraid to listen and, likewise, never afraid to tell you that he loved you or that he was wrong. He questioned the system but more

9 Not coincidentally, one of my father’s favorite movies (alongside a host of other gems) is a wonderfully, eccentric film titled Off the Map. In it, the wife of Samuel Elliott’s character loved to garden in the nude — down (at least on one level) to her bare essentials working with the bare essentials. Of course, my dad also loved Earnest Goes to Camp and Tremors, films that are (quite defensibly) nowhere near the same in caliber. However, these “inconsistencies” just make me laugh; he was a unique bird indeed — that father of mine — and quite complex!

10 The phrase 'all things wild and free' is commonly used with respect to the efforts and life works of such naturalists (i.e., defenders of nature, environmental activists or advocates, etc.) as John Muir, Edward Abbey, and Henry David Thoreau, among others. I include my father here among this noble group of warriors.
importantly created solutions to address its inadequacies; and though it pained him when people refused to see his point and he often balked loudly when his message got lost in translation, this never discouraged him from trying. My father laughed, loved, and cried with the best of them. And he was an amazing fly-fisherman, with — as I only recently came to find out thanks to my mother’s recollection — an odd affinity for polishing shoes. He had other idiosyncrasies too, including (but certainly not limited to) feeling compelled to whittle spoons or door handles (every so often) out of wood, and (on a more regular basis) eating all but one corner of each potato chip (which I usually snatched up). What is more, he quite arguably — followed closely by only my mother, in second place — let the loudest and longest farts I have ever heard (though I’m sure if he were here right now to contest such a claim he would do so vehemently, despite its being true). My father was brave, too; in terms of medical procedures, for example, he had the wherewithal to withstand more intensive surgeries in his final years than he could count on two hands. And despite his fervent loathing for such measures and his equally ubiquitous dislike and distrust of doctors (save a handful for which he had quite the rapport), he made it through each and every one of them like a champion — bruised and battered, but still ticking; the same can be said, no doubt, of the various healthcare professionals brave enough to enter the ring with him and endure. My father was also and, without question, brilliant. He was so smart and so eloquent, in fact, that he swam laps around himself even — he was a trailblazer in every sense of the word, a true sophisticated cowboy. And while he certainly “enjoyed the hell out of the ride” — pissin’ and moanin’ when the mood hit him, or equally, just to see if he could get a rise out of someone — he did so with as much strength and grace as humanly possible. “I’m not perfect, kid,” he would say. “Yeah, yeah, I know,” I would reply, all the while thinking that “perfect” is exactly what he was despite any proclamations by him that he was anything but flawless.

The truth is, my dad was perfect for me even if he wasn’t “perfect” in an absolute sense. He was exactly the father that I needed and, without hesitation, exactly the kind of friend I

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11 Here I mean to include doctors/professionals: from Southern California — John Zamarra, Beverly D., John Brizendine, Paulo Zizzo, Frank Rivera, Vanessa Madrigal, Kenneth Martinez; from Manchester, NH and The Elliott Wellness Center — James Conway and Chamille; and from Boston Medical — Samuel E. Ellias, Jules M. Nazarro, Thai Vu, and Oz Shapira. Your professionalism and respect for those with whom you interact speak volumes!
needed, too. And he came into my life at precisely the right time; though, I must admit that I struggle still with being able to say definitively that he left with the same sort of exactitude in which he arrived. Of course, death is just a part of life; I know this. I understand this. For my questioning his time of departure is not a reflection of his judgment or even of the fairness of life; it is, rather, really only a testament to my missing him so terribly and wishing, furthermore, that he were still here. “Life is not for pussies,” he used to say, grinning. “A famous actress said that, you know?” “Yeah?” I replied, already nodding my head as he looked at me with a goading expression, as if to jog some ancient memory in my “sieve of a brain.” 12 “Yeah,” he would say, smiling infectiously still. “I concur,” I agreed, “it most certainly is not for pussies.” And there we would be — both of us grinning — him at me, and me at him…together, like two idiots.

Truth be told, life is a bitch, or rather she can be. At the least, she seems a fickle one — sometimes fair, sometimes harsh…usually an amalgamation of both, along with a dash of some other veritable spices. 13 Either way, I suppose, she’s pretty amazing. Had it not been for her, I would not be sitting here today, nor would I have had the opportunity to spend so many wonderful years with such an amazingly bright, articulate and passionate man — one who so powerfully impacted my soul that the effects of his presence are still yet rippling and unfolding. Brian Andreas writes in his book, Some Kind of Ride:

They left me
with your shadow,

12 This is a quality or characteristic that my mother oft reserves when referring to herself and to which I have subsequently clung.

13 Of course, if I had to speak literally, life would not have any of these value statements attached. Life just IS. It is a process — a process of which we are a part and which we have the ability to affect and ideally perfect. Life can certainly be considered amazing in its own right (and ought to be). But it is only when we speak of morality (and thus things which fall under the scope of reason) when labels of “fairness” come into play. That is, while life itself cannot be considered fair (or otherwise), things that take place within the process of life can certainly be considered so. This is because reason (and all that reason entails) concerns a notion of rights. It concerns what we consider to be valuable and important as individuals and a collective people. It also concerns a belief in the importance of balance and harmony. And when these things are violated or infringed upon in ways that shake us to the very core, resonating into the chambers of our hearts a discord of immeasurable proportion — or equally that leave us barely capable of picking our grief-stricken heads up out of our hands or unable even (impotent from the unfairness of it all) to stifle from our lips the vitriolic words: “nature is a whore” — this is so because we desire a certain sense of justice. We desire, in the end, that which is good and that which is beautiful.
saying things like
Life is not fair
& I believed them
for a long time.

But today, I remembered
the way you laughed
& the heat of your hand
in mine
& I knew that
life is more fair
than we can
ever imagine
if we are there
to live it. 14

While I certainly do agree with Andreas’ message, I must confess that the way in which my father was inevitably forced to spend his twilight years was anything but “fair.” However, when one considers his life holistically — from the vantage point of that immense sky in which the sun both descends and ascends, I suppose — his final hand reveals something far greater than his last minute dealings. His was a hand that reflected the life of a great man who did great things. And he was a great man until the day he died, despite perhaps what he might have thought about this, given the debilitating effects of Parkinson’s on his body and mind. Even with Parkinson’s, his final exit was powerful and strong and, quiet fittingly, in total agreement with the Walden pickerel of Thoreau’s pond to which Eiseley refers. “He lived with me all that winter,” Eiseley writes:

and his departure was totally in keeping with his sturdy, independent character. In the spring a migratory impulse or perhaps sheer boredom struck him. Maybe…he felt, far off, the pouring of the mountain waters through the sandy coverts of the Platte. Anyhow, something called to him, and he went. One night…he simply jumped out of his tank….He made his gamble like a man — or, should I say, a fish.15

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14 Brian Andreas, Some Kind of Ride: Stories & Drawings for Making Sense of it All (Decorah, IA: StoryPeople, 2006), 33.

15 Eiseley, The Immense Journey, 23.
As far as I’m concerned — man or fish — my father never came off the pedestal I put him on; nor, in fact, will he ever. He deserves this degree of adulation. He just *IS* that to me and a usurpation of his crown (or fin) is impossible.

I hope with all of my heart that he knew all of this — that he knew my respect, love, like and admiration for him were and are rivaled only by my gratitude for having had the opportunity to be a part of his life and to learn from him the many poignant lessons that I did (and still do). We had our moments, of course. We butted heads, frustrated the hell out of one another, and became so angry with each other at times that we would even fall into deep, intractable spells of silence, though this usually only lasted until one of us broke — either with a laugh, a hug, or an “I’m sorry” (often all three). I suppose this is something that every father and daughter relationship endures, at least, that is, “any that’s *worth* a damn,” he would say.\(^\text{16}\) It most certainly is something that friends endure, and moreover a distinct scenario to which the “care-giving/care-receiving” union relates. Through it all, we stuck invariably by each other’s side. We were loyal wolves, he and I. And while it is true that a bit of me died with him when he passed away — moving from my “self” into that vast unknown, grasping desperately as he swam away,\(^\text{17}\) holding on tight so that I, too, might return to the primordial ooze with him and not be left behind — I feel comforted in the thought that perhaps this vacancy in my heart will only serve to allow more room for the lessons he will inevitably continue to teach me in this wild ride we call life. Like Plato, my father continues to exist in the “spaces, breaths, and moments in between.”\(^\text{18}\) He lives forever in my heart and in my mind — among those things eternal\(^\text{19}\) — and thus has bestowed upon (and within) me the greatest, though, perhaps most bittersweet gift, of all… LOVE.

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\(^{16}\) I smile to myself here, recalling what has been attributed to Confucius concerning the importance of challenge: “The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.” No doubt he wrote this with fathers and daughters in mind!

\(^{17}\) I think here of another favorite movie of my fathers (and mine): *Big Fish* — an enchanting tale about a father, his son and the mysterious relationship between fact and fiction (among other things).

\(^{18}\) The "spaces, breaths, and moments in between" refers to a theme present throughout my thesis, as discussed in the subsequent pages.

\(^{19}\) Among those things that seem to be unfettered by space and time.
In loving memory of my father, teacher, mentor, and friend - Dr. Lee B. Waian, Ph.D. (September 10th 1935 - May 16th 2010). You are deeply and invariably missed.
INTRODUCTION

Education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes…[Rather] the power to learn is present in everyone’s soul … [E]ducation is the craft concerned with…how the soul can most easily and effectively be…turned the right way…looking where it ought to look … [That is to say] education is…concerned with…[a] turning around …from darkness to light.\(^{20}\)

[D]ialectic is the only inquiry that…[systematically attempts to grasp with respect to each thing itself what the being of it is ]…[that] travels this road, doing away with hypotheses…and [proceeds] to the first principle itself, so as to be secure. And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric bog, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards.\(^{21}\)

When reading Plato’s dialogues, one is often left wondering where — in the midst of the vast corpus of his works — Plato actually is. Through whom, if anyone, is his voice being articulated? To which beliefs, if any, does he subscribe? For what reason did he write dialogues instead of treatises? Unlike Aristotle, and various other ancient Greek philosophers, Plato never stepped foot onto the stages\(^{22}\) he created, he wrote no treatises stating authorship of a particular view,\(^{23}\) he provided no clear textual evidence of a specific theory, doctrine, or belief to which he may or may not have subscribed,\(^{24}\) nor did he even assign to himself a starring role, let alone a supporting one, in any of the dialogues he

\(^{20}\) Plato, \textit{Plato: Complete Works}, ed. J. M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), \textit{Republic} 518c-518d; All references to Plato's works herein are taken from this source.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 533b-533d.

\(^{22}\) What I am alluding to here as “stages” are the vast array of dramatic features Plato displays in his writings, inclusive of stylistic prose, the use of analogy and the intricate ensemble of characters displayed in the dialogues. For greater detail on the interpretation and dramatic components of Plato’s works, see J. Angelo Corlett, \textit{Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues} (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2005), 14-16 and 39-43; Gerald A. Press, ed., \textit{Plato’s Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations} (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993); R. B. Rutherford, \textit{The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). It should be noted that while Corlett’s \textit{Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues} dedicates some discussion to the topic of dramatic composition, it provides an analytic approach to the Platonic dialogues. This is, to a certain degree, in opposition to the works of Press and Rutherford, who (while anti-mouthpiece in approach) focus more predominantly on the dramatic components of Plato’s writings.


\(^{24}\) Ibid., 28.
presented.\textsuperscript{25} Instead, much in the same manner as his most influential predecessor Socrates, Plato took a position in the spaces, breaths, and moments in between…amidst “the living exchange of ideas.”\textsuperscript{26}

This thesis looks at these spaces in between\textsuperscript{27} and attempts to uncover the truth behind the veil of ignorance\textsuperscript{28} that has for so long overshadowed the real purpose, it seems, of Plato’s dialogues. In so doing, it presents replies to the aforementioned questions concerning Plato’s “beliefs” and philosophical approach and provides an alternate paradigm by which to interpret the Platonic corpus. I shall propose that the Socratic anti-mouthpiece interpretation (a mode of interpretation advanced by J. Angelo Corlett and henceforth referred to as the “Socratic interpretation”) is the most viable method by which to construe Plato’s dialogues and one which, likewise, upholds most faithfully the directive of Socrates: that is, \textit{to live the examined life}\textsuperscript{29} In brief, the Socratic interpretation\textsuperscript{30} is directly opposed to the mouthpiece interpretation which, to date, has been the dominant approach to Plato’s works in analytic philosophy. The mouthpiece approach contends that Plato’s dialogues communicate Plato’s theories, doctrines or beliefs. In contrast, the anti-mouthpiece approach (of which the Socratic interpretation is a version) argues that while Plato certainly had ideas and beliefs, that he had theories, doctrines or beliefs that he wished to convey to readers as

\textsuperscript{25} Rutherford, \textit{The Art of Plato}, 7.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 15. By taking “a position” amidst the “living exchange of ideas,” I am suggesting that Plato exists (metaphorically) in the exchange of ideas (or movement) within his corpus of writings. While it is not being contested that Plato had ideas (he most certainly did), it is being maintained that it is impossible to ascertain which beliefs, if any, are attributable to him. This is in large part due to the dialogue form utilized in Plato’s writings and the general nature of dialectical discourse aimed at the discovery of truth, whatever that truth may be. Thus ‘taking a position’ differs from ‘maintaining a belief’ in that the essence of Plato’s writings (i.e., the thing which embodies the spaces, breaths and moments in between and the thing which, if anything can be attributable to Plato, characterizes Platonic philosophy) can best be captured by focusing not on the titular ownership of a particular idea (i.e., which beliefs, if any, are Plato’s), but rather on the exchange and content of ideas presented in the texts. ‘Taking a position’ is, quite simply, a reference to or concerning the march toward truth and the process of reasoning. The “spirit” of Plato exists in this movement.

\textsuperscript{27} Again, the “spaces in between” is intended to reflect the concept of movement and the dialectical process of reasoning.

\textsuperscript{28} Technically, the term ‘veil of ignorance’ is utilized by John Rawls with respect to justice and morality. For greater detail see: John Rawls, \textit{A Theory of Justice} (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

\textsuperscript{29} Plato, \textit{Apology}, 29b; 38a.

\textsuperscript{30} For detailed overview of the Socratic interpretation see Corlett, \textit{Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues}, 44-65.
his own is another matter. Furthermore, even if he had such ideas that he wanted to convey to his readers, it is rather unclear how they might be discovered unproblematically. With this in mind, and because of its emphasis on the significance of the dialogue form itself and the elements associated with the Socratic “method,” I shall also contend that the Socratic interpretation is particularly promising insofar as it seems to adhere most closely to various metaphysical hypotheses posited in the Platonic corpus and, by connection, to the movement of logos. It should be noted that in making such a claim, one need not maintain that a system of metaphysics be attributed to Plato, nor even that a metaphysical system of thought exists in the Platonic dialogues at all. Rather, by such an assertion, I am merely suggesting that via careful consideration of various metaphysical illustrations presented in the dialogues, one can arrive upon a plausible correlation between the posited nature of reality — especially insofar as that reality entails movement — and the dialectical movement of the dialogue form itself, which Plato purposely chose to employ in his writings. It is worthy to note that this latter point — i.e., that Plato intentionally chose to write in the dialogue form — is a view that by and large is uncontroversial and generally accepted by Plato scholars as datum; I am in agreement with such a stance. In addition, I maintain that the dialogue form employed by Plato displays an inherent movement of ideas wherein there is an evolution of reason or thought vis-à-vis discussion, be it limited to one interlocutor or a multitude, one concept or a plethora of them, and/or whether the discussion is situated locally, moderately or globally.

31 While it is debated whether it can be said of Socrates that he had a specific formalized method, the following sentiment by Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith seems to best capture what is most common to Socrates’ way of doing philosophy: “all of [the] examples of Socratic philosophizing…involve the examination of the life-shaping beliefs of the interlocutor…through the generic medium of argument, but not through a specific form of argument.” “The Socratic Elenchos?” In Does Socrates Have a Method?, ed. G. A. Scott (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 155. Further, they argue, “what was unique…about Socrates as he is presented in the Platonic corpus is that he was completely dedicated to living the examined life and the full recognition of his own ignorance…the very practice of the examined life, even if it never yields moral knowledge, improves us by continually showing us when our beliefs fall short. Far worse than never to attain moral knowledge would be not to try and attain it, or to give up on trying not to be ignorant.” (Ibid., 156). Moreover, John M. Cooper adds, “all that [Socrates] knew, humbly, was how to reason and reflect, how to improve himself and (if they would follow him in behaving the same way) help others to improve themselves, by doing his best to make his own moral, practical opinions, and his life itself, rest on appropriately tested and examined reasons — not on social authority…or custom or any other kind of intellectual laziness.” Introduction to Plato: Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), xix. These fundamental essences about Socrates’ approach are echoed resoundingly by the following characteristics, and as such, can reasonably be considered part of the Socratic way of doing philosophy: open-mindedness, persistence, courage, sincerity, and humility (especially of the epistemic variety). See Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 45-57 and 83.
This is not to say, however, that unity or development exists in Plato’s works or even that, if such systems did exist, they would necessarily be attributable to Plato. Rather, what is being implied is that the process of reasoning from thought A to thought B requires movement. Thus, the literary connotation of the “spaces, breaths, and moments in between” carries with it the objective of turning the readers’ attention toward that which exists in the interim. The “spaces in between,” then, is a nuanced inference employed to bring light to the fact that between thought A and thought B resides the moving principle or force of reason.

**MAIN ARGUMENT**

That being said, the following parallels will be explored in this thesis. First, it will be argued that the mouthpiece interpretation is a problematic approach to Plato’s works, insofar as it fails to recognize the significance of the dialectical process of reasoning and its intrinsic movement throughout the dialogues. Specifically, in their failure to consider the dialogue form itself and the movement that reason or *logos* entails, I maintain that mouthpiece interpreters remain stuck in the darkness of Plato’s cave. As such, they fail to see the true purpose of Plato’s works and instead remain trapped by their own dogmatic ignorance; in this way, they are prisoners. Such a statement of purpose regarding Plato’s works is not to be confused with the claim, however, that Plato himself had specific intentions he wished to convey or even that if he did, we as readers could definitively come to know these based (among other things) on the form in which Plato chose to communicate. What is more, it will be argued that such interpreters impose limitations on their own knowledge by refusing both (a) to take seriously the ‘Platonic Question’ (i.e., the problem of how to approach the

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32 Alan C. Bowen provides an interesting perspective when he asserts: “Readers of Plato’s dialogues have from ancient times asked, ‘What did Plato think?’ But not all have meant this question in the same way…By and large, the moderns take certain Platonic texts…as indicating their author’s philosophical thought…Consequently, the question…at the heart of modern thought is…but a creature of German Critical Philosophy and Idealism (the thesis that philosophy must be systematic), German Romanticism (the view that a text expresses and is determined by the mind, spirit, and personality of its author), and the rejection of Neoplatonic interpretation.” “On Interpreting Plato,” in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1988), 58. Bowen continues by stating, “[W]e should perhaps inquire whether those dogmatists who initiated the modern era of Platonic interpretation were right to suppose that the question ‘What did Plato think?’ necessitates reading the corpus as the record of its author’s systematic thought. Is the question as they took it reasonable or well put? I suspect it is not.” (Ibid., 58-59).

33 This is not to suggest, however, that one read Plato’s texts between the lines.
writings of Plato) and (b) to offer sound arguments against the Socratic interpretation. In so doing, philosophically speaking, they ironically become their own prison guards. These dual analogies will be supplemented by a unique portrayal of Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave’, which specifically integrates elements of life inside the cave. Further, in order to make clear just how it is that the arguments of mouthpiece interpreters remain fettered, I shall analyze the claims of Richard Kraut and Julia Annas, respectively, first by concentrating specifically on Kraut’s arguments about justice, the forms, and how he thinks one ought to approach the Platonic texts, and second by examining Annas’ arguments concerning what she alleges to be the problematic nature of philosophical myths. Ultimately, it will be maintained that both thinkers’ arguments, while certainly articulate and worthy of consideration, are problematic insofar as they fail to recognize the movement of the living logoi. Both my emphasis on the significance of movement and the particular claims of Kraut and Annas I explore in this thesis differ from the primary foci and claims discussed and refuted in the works of Corlett. As such, I offer an original philosophical contribution that serves to provide additional evidence in support of the Socratic interpretation. For clarity’s sake, this first area of focus (i.e., Excavation I) will be broken down as follows. First, I shall provide an overview, the contents of which highlight how the mouthpiece and Socratic interpretations differ. Second, I shall offer an illustration of life inside the cave; this will represent part one (of two) of my particular adaptation of Plato’s myth. Third, I shall provide an analogy of my illustration; this section will be devoted to explaining how and why mouthpiece interpreters are stuck in the cave, generally speaking, coupled with a discussion about the significance of movement, the dialogue form and Socrates. Lastly, I shall provide a subsection of this analogy that focuses upon Kraut’s and Annas’ respective arguments; the aim of this subsection will be to illustrate precisely how and why, in respect to the general shortcomings of the mouthpiece approach, the arguments of Kraut and Annas fail.

As a second point of focus, it will be maintained that enlightenment and the use of reason or logos requires us to act. I argue that once we realize our ephemeral nature (i.e.,


35 What is being suggested here is that enlightenment necessitates a level of comprehension that moves beyond that of opinion and focuses on “what is.” Enlightenment, roughly speaking, can be considered
that we are human beings and as such are not eternal), we become conscious of the fact that, in order to gain significance, we must utilize our ability to reason and play an active role in the intellectual progress of our selves, others and society. That is, we must participate in the *logos*. In essence, we realize that we must take action because that is the only way to become meaningful, and by the same token, the only way to become immortal. As Diotima says in the *Symposium*: “[a] mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal”\(^{37}\) and “how would it be...if someone got to see the Beautiful itself in its one form?...[I]n that life alone, when he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen — only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue...but to true virtue...[A]nd if any human being could become immortal, it would be he.”\(^{38}\) Figuratively speaking, what is being implied here, it seems, is that the use of reason and “giving birth to ideas” via the process of dialectic is the primary, if not only way, for a mortal to become immortal. Similarly, it is the primary way for a human being to make a difference; for the staying power of an idea far surpasses the physical limitations of any thinker and thus allows for an impact of far greater scope than that which can be obtained by not participating in the process of reasoning at all. Ultimately, ideas are those children that bring us true immortality and allow us (in one sense) to continue participating in the march toward truth even after we are gone. This sort of active participation requires following reason wherever it may guide us.\(^{39}\) As such, reason is both the means by which we escape the cave and the means by which we return to the cave and relate ourselves to the universal; in so being, the use of reason is intimately tied to the meaning of life itself.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{36}\) As I am employing it, the “use of reason” can be understood as the dialectical tool by which one reaches enlightenment.

\(^{37}\) Plato, *Symposium*, 207d.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 212a-b.

\(^{39}\) Plato, *Euthyphro* 14c; *Phaedo* 82d; *Laws* 667a.

\(^{40}\) It should be reiterated here that the use of “universal” within such a claim need not endorse the idea that a system of metaphysics exists in the Platonic dialogues or that one, should it exist, necessarily be attributed to Plato. Rather, what I am suggesting is simply that our temporality qua temporality makes us non-eternal, and hence (in one sense) something *other than* universal. Ultimately, the ways in which we relate and, to a certain extent, become “one with” the universal is via our ideas and our actions therein relative to such reasoning; in this way, we gain significance and meaning. We, in essence, transcend the boundaries of our respective
What is more, I claim that our meaning and general momentum in life seem to follow the same pattern as the dialectical movement of Plato’s dialogues. How? Consider first the broad claims that: (a) *reason entails movement* in that arriving upon ideas requires a consideration of what came before,\(^41\) and (b) *action entails movement* in that actions imply movement beyond the idea that has been arrived upon in both an internal and external fashion. Then consider the human condition in terms of: (a) its transitory nature, (b) our development or maturation process, and (c) our unique capacities and ways in which we make lasting, substantial differences — mentally, physically or otherwise. Ultimately, it seems that both our meaning and development in life rely to a large degree upon reason and action — i.e., the same sort of movement that powers the dialectic in Plato’s dialogues and thereby allows one to relate to the universal and come closer to “the good.”\(^42\)

As in the case of the first discussion, and to supplement my claim that enlightenment and the use of reason, or *logos*, necessitate action, a unique portrayal of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave will be utilized. In particular, and by way of a Socratic interpretation of the myth, I will focus on Socrates’ declaration “They’re like us” and the ascent from the cave of unknowing. It will be maintained that in affirming “They’re like us,” Socrates might very well have been implying that the shadows themselves and not just the prisoners are “like us.” This second area of focus (i.e., Excavation II) will be broken down as follows: First, I shall provide an overview, the contents of which highlight why it is that I feel the Socratic interpretation offers a unique explanation for the philosopher’s return to the cave and the means by which I propose to defend this claim. Second, I shall provide an illustration of life outside the cave (or the ascent); this will represent part two (of two) of my particular adaptation of Plato’s myth. Third, I shall provide an analogy of my illustration; this section will be devoted to explaining the similarities of ascent between the prisoner(s) of Plato’s cave temporality in ways that truly substantiate us.

\(^41\) In *Theaetetus* 155b, for example, Socrates says: “It is impossible that a thing should ever be what it was not before without having become and without any process of becoming.” Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155b.

\(^42\) In the Platonic dialogues, truth is often referred to as being related to “the good.” While “it is right to think of knowledge and truth as good-like . . . it is wrong to think that either of them is the good — for the good is yet more prized.” Plato, *Republic*, 509a. Emphasis provided. In this connection, reason then is also intimately related to “the good.” Ultimately, though hardly capable of being elaborated adequately in this thesis considering its scope, “the good” is that which we should strive for above all else. The good is also that which is universal.
and the prisoner depicted in my version and, more specifically, the nature and importance of reasoning as it relates to the human condition. Lastly, I shall provide a subsection of this analogy focusing on Socrates’ declaration, “They’re like us”; the aim of this subsection will be: (a) to illustrate precisely how and why it is that enlightenment necessitates obligation and duty and, further, what this means in terms of our significance, and (b) to demonstrate, in general, how the Socratic interpretation offers readers a means by which to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the potential parallels present in Plato’s ‘Myth of the Cave.’

**A NOTE ON METHOD**

It should be noted that the exposition of Plato’s cave that I am conducting will be explored in a slightly different light than that of the cave in Plato’s dialogues. For the purposes of this thesis, Plato’s cave will be considered from within the confines of a fictional, rural (though notably extreme in its condition) correctional facility. I exercise a fair amount of liberty as it concerns the actual legal processes involved with sentencing and release, for example, and do so because these are not my focal points. Rather, my analogies and subsequent illustrations of prison life are aimed primarily at illuminating the human condition and the significance of reason in relation to that condition. The ‘human body-prison cell parallel’ finds support throughout the Platonic dialogues. For example, Socrates exclaims to Axiochus during the consolation of his impending death:

> And so, Axiochus, you pass away, not into death, but into immortality, nor will you have good things taken from you, but a purer enjoyment of them, nor pleasures mixed with the mortal body, but entirely undiluted by pains. For once you are released from this prison cell, you will set forth yonder, to a place free from all struggle, grief, and old age, a tranquil life untroubled by anything bad, resting in undisturbed peace, surveying Nature and practicing philosophy, not for a crowd of spectators, but in the bountiful midst of Truth.

With this in mind alongside the image of Plato’s cave, the following exploration will be presented in two parts: First, from the perspective of the prisoner (who has been held in a

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43 One can reasonably construe from this statement both a general and a less general inference. Specifically, one could reasonably infer the correlation to mean the human body is a prison cell (generally speaking) and the human body is a prison cell when the use of reason is not employed in one’s life (less generally speaking).

44 Plato, *Axiochus*, 370d.
solitary confinement cell within a solitary confinement cell block), and; second, from the perspective of the escapee (who is akin to a prisoner who has just been removed from his solitary confinement cell and released into life outside the prison). The first depiction will correspond to Excavation I; it will represent life “inside the cave.” The latter depiction will correspond to Excavation II; it will represent life “outside the cave” or the ascent. No depiction of a “return to the cave” will be offered, though I do briefly discuss what this might entail in the ‘Conclusion’ section of this thesis.

Further, while I certainly could have taken a more conventional approach to my portrayal of Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave,’ I intentionally chose a different path. First, Plato’s dialogues and his Myth of the Cave have been studied extensively. Few adaptations (if any) have strayed from providing a picture of Plato’s characters in a situation other than a cave. In light of this and with respect to the many creative mechanisms employed in Plato’s works, I thought it particularly fitting to offer a unique adaptation of my own. Second, insofar as a consideration of things familiar and relatable can facilitate or strengthen understanding, I anticipated (with this in mind) that it might be helpful to provide a modern adaptation of Plato’s cave (as a prison). Perhaps the reader has been to prison or known someone who has? Perhaps she has worked in a correctional facility or been involved with programs designed to assist ex-inmates? Or, even if none of the above obtain, quite arguably there seems to be no dearth of media in modern society relating to prison and prison life. As such, it seems reasonable to contend that some shared (or at least familiar) notion of “life behind bars” exists within the scope of contemporary culture in ways that are less removed than those associated with “life inside a cave.” With this in mind, however, one should note that even the modern adaptations I present in this thesis are still quite rogue. This is so because I did not want to pervert (inadvertently or otherwise) whatever messages might be present in the original content. Thus, I opted to walk a tight line and not stray too far from the images set forth in Plato’s myth. Ultimately, even if only nominally modern, by placing the characters of Plato’s myth in a present-day and imaginably familiar setting, it is believed that whatever message might have been lost in time or via misattribution,45 cast aside as merely

45 Per one of the desiderata of a plausible approach to Plato’s works as represented in Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 1-3, it is necessary for a plausible approach to not commit a “fallacy of misattribution.” This
an allegory,46 or deemed of minimal significance today, might instead be considered otherwise. For surely, as John H. Randall, Jr. comments, Plato’s works exhibit “an eternal and ever-renewed significance.”47 Finally, and not entirely removed from the above rationale, it is anticipated that if Socrates’ message as presented in the Republic is truly understood and embraced for what it is (or, at least, seems to be), then a contemporary depiction of the cave will offer a fresh perspective on the meaning of reason, action, enlightenment, and obligation (as presented by Plato) and thus provide fertile ground for discussion about how we ought to behave here in this day and age — as individuals and a collective people — and what we ought to strive for if significance (i.e., making a lasting and substantial difference) is indeed our goal.

46 By “merely an allegory,” I agree with Corlett in that just because Plato’s dialogues are dramatic in nature, it does not follow that “taking the dramatic features of the dialogues seriously rules out taking philosophical analysis and argumentation seriously.” Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 41. Nor does it follow that an allegory cannot be a sound device by which to put forth philosophically challenging questions. Certainly, it is plausible that the message the author was trying to convey might not have been as well understood or appreciated if tackled from a non-allegorical stance.

CHAPTER ONE

EXCAVATION I

WHY MOUTHPIECE INTERPRETERS ARE STUCK IN THE CAVE: AN OVERVIEW

[I]f you think that Plato developed a philosophy, and then put it into dialogue form in order to popularize it because he happened to possess literary ability also — you will never arrive at the slightest understanding of the philosophy actually present in and expressed through the dialogues. You may be a “Platonist”; but Plato will remain a closed book to you — just as Santayana will, if you do not make his style central.48

As noted previously, it is my contention that the Socratic interpretation of Plato’s dialogues is the most viable method by which to construe Plato’s works and one which likewise seems to uphold most faithfully the directive of Socrates: that is, to live the examined life. The Socratic interpretation is directly opposed to the mouthpiece interpretation which, to date, has been the dominant approach to Plato’s works in analytic philosophy. Among the primary differences between the two methodologies is the contention that, in the case of the latter, Plato’s dialogues communicate Plato’s theories, doctrines or beliefs. While the Socratic and mouthpiece interpretations both attribute certain philosophical methodologies to Plato (e.g., that he intentionally wrote in dialogue form, that he approached philosophy in ways commonly associated with Socrates, etc.) and share certain beliefs about what might reasonably be considered a “purpose” of Plato’s works (e.g., that his works reflect an attempt to illustrate the importance of reason), the mouthpiece interpretation – in its claims that Plato’s dialogues communicate Plato’s theories, doctrines and/or beliefs - seems to desire that all manner of substantive philosophical views discussed in Plato’s works be attributed to him in one form or another. What distinguishes the various forms of the mouthpiece approach is the extent to which Plato’s mind is contained in the corpus.49

Specifically, the theoretical version of the mouthpiece interpretation (the most systematic in

48 Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, 133.
49 Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 6.
kind) claims that Plato’s views should be seen as theories – that is, that his views “are so well worked out that they are systematic in nature and contain a full defense.”\footnote{Ibid., 6.} In contrast, the doctrinal version, though rarely differentiated from the more austere theoretical version, holds that Plato’s views amount not to theories but rather strongly held convictions, while the doxastic version (the least systematic in kind) holds that Plato’s works reflect neither theories or doctrines but rather Plato’s own beliefs. One should note that in addition to the above positions, the mouthpiece interpretation can also maintain varying degrees of unity and development\footnote{In terms of unity, the ‘local unity thesis’ maintains that a conceptual unity (or coherence) of Plato’s thought obtains within a particular dialogue, while the ‘moderate’ and ‘global’ version claims this unity extends between a selection of dialogues (in the case of the former) and across the entire corpus of Plato’s works (in the case of the latter). Mouthpiece advocates of the ‘developmentalist thesis’ claim Plato wrote dialogues that show the ongoing changing of his theories, doctrines and/or beliefs. Such changes might obtain in the form of ‘local developmentalism’ (within a particular dialogue), ‘moderate developmentalism’ (from one dialogue to another), or ‘global developmentalism’ (throughout the entire corpus of Plato’s works). For greater detail, see Corlett, *Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues*, 6-8.} and/or different modes of intentionality and unintentionality.\footnote{For example, the intentional mouthpiece interpretation holds that “the contents of Plato’s dialogues reflect intentionally what is on Plato’s mind when he composed a certain work” while the ‘unintentional mouthpiece interpretation’ holds that “the contents of [Plato’s] writings contain the mind of Plato unintentionally.” Corlett, *Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues*, 5. Mouthpiece interpreters that advocate intentionality, such as Richard Kraut, Julia Annas, Terence Irwin and Charles Kahn are “straightforward in [their] insistence that the leading character in a dialogue is Plato’s intended spokesperson” while those who advocate unintentionality argue that “Plato’s primary aim was to construct philosophical and literary masterpieces though he did not mean to do so in order to communicate his mind…though one can piece together at least a good part of Plato’s metaphysics, ethics and so on from careful studies of the corpus.” Ibid.} Moreover, proponents can align themselves with versions of interpretation that are more or less dramatic and/or Socratic in nature. A Socratic mouthpiece interpretation takes Socrates to be the main inspiration in terms of Plato’s decision to write in the dialogue form and a dramatic mouthpiece interpretation holds that Plato’s dialogues are to be construed as dramas.\footnote{The anti-mouthpiece interpretation can also embrace either of these approaches. But unlike the mouthpiece interpretation (whether dramatic or Socratic), the anti-mouthpiece approach does not claim that Plato’s dialogues reflect Plato’s own theories, doctrines and/or beliefs. Corlett, *Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues*, 9.}

In the end, however, although mouthpiece interpreters may vary in their specific methodology – that is, whether they choose to embrace the dramatic elements of Plato’s dialogues,\footnote{Thomas A. Szelzák is a proponent of this approach, specifically stating that “The dialogues are…to be read as dramas: as plays with a continuous plot and a carefully thought-out constellation of characters.” As cited} for example, or to maintain a more or less austere version of interpretation —
they all contend that the basic points and conclusions of the Platonic corpus express Plato’s own convictions (in some form or another).\textsuperscript{55} Richard Kraut and Julia Annas offer clear examples of the mouthpiece interpretation via their assertions that Plato “maintains” or “thinks” this or that. Specifically, Kraut avers, “Plato thinks that such a conflict cannot happen, because he upholds a conception of the individual’s good that makes it coincide with that of the just community.”\textsuperscript{56} And Annas claims that Plato has a theory of justice and specific objectives he wishes to achieve in relation to justice. Namely, “Modern moral philosophy,” Annas states, “tends to give prominence to act-centred theories. The notions that are prominent in moral philosophy tend to be those of duty, obligation, ought. Little attention is paid to the notion of virtue and vice…By contrast, Plato’s theory of justice is agent-centred. In fact…the Republic is best read as an attempt to shift the centre of gravity of Greek ethics from an act-centred to an agent-centred type of theory.”\textsuperscript{57} In addition to Kraut and Annas, other proponents of various forms of the mouthpiece approach include (but are not limited to): Gregory Vlastos, Terence Irwin, C.D.C. Reeve, Nicholas P. White, David Sachs, C.C.W. Taylor, and Charles Kahn.

In contrast to such assertions, the Socratic interpretation (a version of the anti-mouthpiece approach) maintains that Plato’s corpus of writings cannot be claimed with a meaningful degree of certainty to contain his theories, doctrines or beliefs. Again, that Plato had ideas or beliefs of his own is not being contested. Rather, what is being maintained is that it is impossible (given the evidence available) to ascertain which beliefs or ideas (beyond those of certain philosophical methodologies and other “small” matters) are attributable to him and, further, that approaching and analyzing the dialogues with the assumption and goal of claiming that Plato believed this or that (theory, doctrine or otherwise) is likely not even congruent with the purpose (it seems) of Plato’s dialogues at all as per the evidence we do

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 20.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Julia Annas, “Plato and Common Morality,” \textit{The Classical Quarterly, New Series}, 28 (1978): 444. While it is not entirely outside the scope of this thesis (though it certainly requires further investigation), it is my belief that the Socratic interpretation provides a more accurate construal of ethical behavior (by way of enlightenment).
\end{itemize}
have available (e.g., the influence of Socrates on Plato, the dialogue form, the dialectical process and movement therein, etc.).

A point of clarification is warranted here as it concerns the “purpose” of Plato’s dialogues. Namely, claiming that a purpose exists in Plato’s works is oft rashly conflated with the assertion ‘Plato had an agenda’ – a claim which commonly indicates a knowledge about an individual’s personal beliefs or intentions and which, at face value, might appear in contrast to the tenets of the Socratic interpretation (i.e., that it is impossible, given the evidence available, to ascertain which beliefs or ideas are attributable to Plato). In response, however, one should first remember that the Socratic interpretation is not opposed to ascribing certain philosophical methodologies to Plato or even certain ideas or intentions, such as a desire in his works to illustrate the importance of reason in one’s life. What is more, it seems reasonable to suggest that if a purpose subsists in Plato’s dialogues, that purpose (i.e., as the author’s intended aim or goal) be attributed to Plato, the author, and not someone else. The mouthpiece and Socratic interpretations can agree on this point. Second, even if the above were not to obtain, one need not treat ‘purpose’ and ‘agenda’ as necessarily equivalent when it comes to intent. That is, one can reasonably identify a purpose in Plato’s works without claiming to know “what it is that Plato is up to” on a personal level. In other words, ‘Plato intended to x’ is not the same as ‘Plato’s works seem to exhibit purpose x’. Moreover, even if one were to equate ‘purpose’ with ‘agenda’ (and intention), one ought to consider the nature of an agenda. Despite the fact that “to have an agenda” (i.e., to have a purpose or an intended aim or goal) is commonly regarded egocentrically (e.g., “All people have agendas!”), an agenda need not consist of providing an overt (or even covert) declaration of personal beliefs (for example) or a desire to proselytize another into believing one’s particular convictions (whatever those may be). To paint it in this way, and with such a broad brush at that, seems to do ‘agenda’ a disservice. In contrast, an agenda qua agenda can consist quite simply of nothing more than a presentation of matters to be explored, examined and discussed (e.g., “on the agenda today is x, y and z”). In this way, one might say that “to have an agenda” is simply ‘to introduce topics of discussion purposefully’ (e.g., Plato, as the author, introduced topics of discussion purposefully and did do so in the dialogue form). An
agenda of this sort is certainly more neutral in character than the previous depiction and hardly seems threatening to my argument or to any interpretation of Plato, for that matter, which concedes to the idea that an author can have an agenda without it being the case that the agenda be biased in ways that common usage implies. With these points in mind, it seems that any assertion which claims of the Socratic interpretation that one cannot argue in its favor and, at the same time, maintain that a purpose (or agenda) exist in Plato’s works, is a non sequitur.

In the end, it is not the position of the Socratic interpretation that we can never ascribe or attribute anything at all to Plato. We can. And we can do so most reasonably by referring first and foremost to the texts themselves and by taking seriously the influence of Socrates on Plato. But the position that all manner of substantive philosophical views discussed in Plato’s works be attributed to Plato (i.e., that Plato’s dialogues communicate Plato’s theories, doctrines and/or beliefs) bears a large burden of proof – one that falls solely on the mouthpiece interpreters to defend. Moreover, when one considers the evidence we do have available (e.g., the influence of Socrates on Plato, the dialogue form, the dialectical process and movement therein), the Socratic interpretation seems to avoid the fundamental error of remaining “oblivious to the depth of the Socratic influence on Plato in composing the dialogues…Part of [this] depth,” J. Angelo Corlett maintains, “includes the conviction that in order to understand the dialogues, one must see them as Plato’s way of attempting to teach not theories, doctrines and/or beliefs but [rather] how to live the examined life.” In this way, the Socratic interpretation seems to embrace what is perhaps most essential about Plato’s works, that is, that the dialectical process reveals the significance of one’s ability to

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58 One should note, however, that this does not mean that a neutral agenda must lack passion or interest, on behalf of its progenitor. For one can certainly present ideas with much artistic flair, verve and engaged interest without necessarily taking sides. Moreover, one can have a neutral agenda and still be motivated by a certain goal (e.g., love, reason, truth). Consider, for example, the role of a judge — an individual who is generally identified as a neutral figure who is, yet, still passionate about, motivated and informed by the laws of the land and/or justice. See also Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 61-62.

59 One might consider that in Philosophy of Religion, for example, the atheist, agnostic and supernaturalistic theist all concur that the world exists, but it is the theist who must prove that there is anything beyond the world that exists. Only she bears that burden. It is the same in this case. See Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 13, 23-24.

60 Ibid., 44.
actively allow reason to be the guardian and ruler\(^{61}\) of his or her soul and the moving principle\(^{62}\) by way of which one arrives at the good.\(^{63}\) Proponents of various forms of the anti-mouthpiece approach (of which the Socratic interpretation is a version) include (but are not limited to): J. Angelo Corlett, Debra Nails, Kenneth M. Sayre, John Hermann Randall, Jr., Gerald Press and John M. Cooper.\(^{64}\)

**INSIDE THE CAVE**

Imagine a human being living (or, rather, serving time) in an enclosed earth and brick solitary confinement cell. We do not know of this person’s past accounts, what he may or may not have done, and what circumstances existed which landed him in this situation; we only know that he has been here since he was 18 years old and that he is now 37. For the past nineteen years this man has seen nothing around him save the partial images of moving feet and hands illuminated by the flickering light of a candle perched high above him on a shelf carved into

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\(^{61}\) By “guardian and ruler,” I am making reference to the role of philosophers, and hence reason, in the individual’s life and the life and structure of the polis, as discussed in the *Republic*. More specifically: “those who are to be made our guardians...must be philosophers.” Plato, *Republic*, 503b; “I don’t suppose...that just and fine things will have acquired much of a guardian in someone who doesn’t even know in what way they are good. And I divine that no one will have adequate knowledge of them until he knows them...[Won’t] our constitution be perfectly ordered, if a guardian who knows these things is in charge of it?” Ibid., 506a-b; and, “In the case of just and beautiful things, many people are content with what are believed to be so, even if they aren’t really so, and they act, acquire, and form their own beliefs on that basis...Will we allow the best people in the city, to whom we entrust everything, to be so in the dark about something of this kind and of this importance?” Ibid., 505e.

\(^{62}\) Of interest here is a comment made by Socrates to Theaetetus regarding the concept of movement. Specifically, “[E]verything is really motion....Motion has two forms...the one being active and the other passive. And through the intercourse and mutual friction of these two there comes to be an offspring of infinite multitude.” Plato, *Theaetetus*, 156a.

\(^{63}\) In the *Republic* 508c, Socrates refers to ‘the good’ as being analogous to ‘the sun’: “The sun is not sight, but isn’t it the cause of sight itself and seen by it?...What the good itself is in the intelligible realm, in relation to understanding and intelligible things, the sun is in the visible realm, in relation to sight and visible things.” Plato, *Republic*, 508c. Here (in terms of ‘the intelligible realm’ and ‘visible realm’) it might also be helpful to recall Socrates’ illustration of the divided line. Specifically, “there are these two things, one sovereign of the intelligible kind and place, the other of the visible...it is like a line divided into two unequal parts.” Ibid., 509d. The good thus seems analogous to that which gives us light, metaphorically (in terms of the intelligible) and literally (in terms of the visible).

the cell’s interior. On occasion, the candle would reveal what appeared to the
prisoner to be his own shadow. And on others what appeared to be someone or
something else’s. When the light revealed the latter, it was accompanied by
sounds of footsteps, keys, and a sliding metal plate which scraped against the
concrete and arrived at his feet as if “by magic,” delivering his only source of
“nourishment.” Occasionally, there would be what sounded like two sets of
footsteps or more and people conversing. Other times, when the light shifted,
revealing his own shadow (or that of something else’s), it was accompanied by no
sound save the words coming out of his own mouth - in earlier years asking
“whose there?,” in middle years exclaiming, “Oh! You’re back,” and in later
years chatting casually with the shadow, the prisoner asking it how it’s been and
the shadow responding “I’ve been lonely…and you?”

By this reply from the shadow, I mean to imply that the shadow (now transformed into the
prisoner’s reality) is ironically the voice of reason. As such, its comment is not literally a
translation of the shadow being lonely but rather that the shadow as a representative of
reason has been lonely. To clarify, it is necessary to consider the prisoner’s confines and lack
of reasonable discourse with fellow human beings. The comment of the shadow, as a
representative of reason, is meant to allude to the necessity of reasonable discourse to one’s
prosperity. For the prisoner, true reason has vacated the prisoner’s confines (as witnessed by
the prisoners’ belief that the shadow is a real figure and not merely just a reaction to light).

65 I purposefully chose to illustrate a “flickering…candle perched high above” as the prisoner’s source of
illumination in hopes that a parallel would be drawn to Plato’s depiction of the sun. Further, of interest to note
in relation to the analogy of light in the Platonic dialogues, Joel Warren Lidz remarks: “Perhaps Plato uses a
light metaphor because light, being purely homogenous, has the quality of oneness, and does not create the
heterogeneity manifest in the world, but merely allows that heterogeneity to manifest itself. Light has the
character of a power (dunamis) — specifically, a power of showing forth (apophainesthai). It permits that
which is other than light itself to be seen while itself not being an object of perception.” “Reflections on and in

66 What is intended here is not a reference to the prisoner’s questionable or lacking culinary sustenance,
but rather the lack of intellectual nourishment that the prisoner is receiving. Kenneth M. Sayre makes mention
of this necessary source of nourishment when he states: “While nothing is said in the Phaedrus about the care
these seeds require in order to flourish, one thing surely needed is proper nourishment. Mention of this need
occurs in the Theaetetus, where Socrates bemoans the ‘bad nourishment’…provided in conversations with other
teachers. Proper nourishment comes with the love of beautiful discourse of which Diotima speaks in the
Symposium.” Plato’s Literary Garden, xvii. Emphasis provided. The Timaeus also refers to discourse as
nourishment via Socrates’ statement, “Apparently I’ll be getting a complete, brilliant banquet of speeches in
payment for my own.” Plato, Timaeus, 27b. Emphasis provided.
MOUTHPIECE INTERPRETERS AS CAVE-DWELLERS: AN ANALOGY

Beginning with the contention that mouthpiece interpreters are stuck inside the cave, the aforementioned depiction of Plato’s allegory offers valuable insight as to why such a claim might be valid. First, however, before one can expound on such a claim, it is necessary to make note of the fact that, unlike Plato’s analogy of the cave, my depiction offers an illustration which does not assume a subject matter that is initially removed from reality or innocent in experience and use of rationale. While Plato’s analogy depicts prisoners who have been “fixed in the same place” since childhood “their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them,” my portrayal offers a slightly different vision, one which does not separate itself from Plato’s original message but rather helps to expose the complex genius of Plato’s allegory. Specifically, in Plato’s myth, it can be hypothesized that the purpose of such a manipulated positioning is suggestive of the sentiment that one’s state of existence in a world void of reason is akin to living the life of a prisoner. Moreover, once this manipulated view of reality settles in and becomes further removed from the truth and the good, it becomes harder to escape such bonds, and as such, when tested (as one bears witness to in the philosopher’s return to the cave) is held on to with ferocity. For what is merely familiar has malignantly and erroneously transformed itself into what is believed to

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67 Plato, Republic, 514a.
69 By truth and the good being mentioned separately, I am taking into consideration the following statement by Socrates in the Republic 508e: “[W]hat gives truth to the things known and the power to know the knower is the form of the good. And though it is the cause of knowledge and truth, it is also an object of knowledge. Both knowledge and truth are beautiful things, but the good is other and more beautiful than they.” Plato, Republic, 508e.
70 The prisoners of the cave, as depicted by Plato, consider the philosophers’ journey a wasted and pointless effort; ultimately, for them, the truth exists inside the cave: For, wouldn’t it be said of “this man [who] went down into the cave again …that he’d returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn’t worthwhile even to try and travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they somehow get their hands on him, wouldn’t they kill him?” Plato, Republic, 516e-517a.
be true, and what is believed to be true becomes vehemently defended despite its inherent errors.

As it is illustrated in my allegory, this claim is not only bolstered but reintroduced in a different light. Namely, by depicting a prisoner who has not been “fettered” since childhood and has presumably been exposed to a version of reality which is closer in approximation to the truth than that of the perceived truth encountered inside the solitary confinement cell, it becomes strikingly more apparent that the nature of the intellect is tenuous indeed. Rather than being a fixed attribute which requires no work to maintain, the intellect relies upon active participation in reasoning.\(^71\) One must, in order to acquire understanding, “work like a slave to attain it,”\(^72\) Socrates urges. Further, one must, in order to maintain that understanding, continually educate oneself, for “what we call studying exists because knowledge is leaving us, because forgetting is the departure of knowledge, while studying puts back a fresh memory in place of what went away, thereby preserving [it].”\(^73\) In addition, in order to reveal one’s preserved understanding, he or she must be able to “survive all refutation…judge things not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being, and…through all of this…[come out] with his account still intact.”\(^74\) And perhaps most of all, one must never forget that this common search for knowledge and wisdom\(^75\) is “but a search and never an intellectual resting place where all answers are given and settled once and for

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\(^{71}\) Randall, Jr. makes an interesting comment regarding the relationship of knowledge and participation when he states, “it is more accurate to say that in the dramatic dialogues Plato is primarily concerned with what today is called ‘existential knowledge’ — what Paul Tillich calls ‘participating knowledge.’ For him the object of knowing is at the same time, and in the measure it is truly known, an object of passionate commitment, of what the Symposium calls eros, love.” Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, 139. And, Drew A. Hyland avows that “by abandoning talk of Plato’s…theory of Forms [for example]…we open ourselves up to a decisive recognition that is a crucial element of…the ‘existential’ teaching of the dialogues. That is that philosophy, as a human experience, is always situational. It always arises out of specific situations, and especially, specific encounters with particular individuals who believe different things, have different experiences of the world, have different problems and aspirations, and have very different intellectual abilities. The dialogues teach us that we must always begin our philosophic thinking with the recognition of those context-specific issues.” “Against a Platonic ‘Theory’ of Forms,” in Plato’s Forms: Varieties of Interpretation, ed. William A. Welton (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 266.

\(^{72}\) Plato, Republic, 494d-e.

\(^{73}\) Plato, Symposium, 208b.

\(^{74}\) Plato, Republic, 534c.

\(^{75}\) The Socratic approach embraces the idea that philosophy is a common search for knowledge and wisdom, as Socrates suggests to Laches in the Laches 189c.
Hence, as John H. Randall, Jr. states, “the philosopher as a lover of wisdom desires to be wise but never fully obtains the wisdom for which he strives.” For the prisoner in my illustration, as compared to the prisoner of Plato’s cave, this understanding had its start within a different paradigm. As such, my prisoner’s retreat into life inside the solitary confinement cell can be contrasted on a prima facie level to that of the prisoners of Plato’s cave. Metaphorically speaking, my prisoner likely entered the cave nearer the line of the intermediate—a line akin to the dividing line of opinion to which Socrates refers in the Republic 476b-480a and Republic 505e-511e. Nonetheless, where the prisoner of my allegory eventually ends up (prior to being released) is, in effect, the same place as the prisoners in Plato’s allegory. Both are resigned to a state of imprisonment by their own minds and attitudes, confined, subsequently, to the darkness of ignorance.

Why such a differentiation between Plato’s prisoners and the prisoner depicted in my version of the allegory is significant is because it is being argued that the mouthpiece interpreters are, to a certain extent, akin to the prisoners of Plato’s cave. Now clearly, to suggest that said scholars are lacking intelligence or untrained in thought would be a ludicrous contention; this is not what I am suggesting. Rather, what is being implied is that mouthpiece interpreters seem to be stuck in the dark about the true purpose, it seems, of Plato’s dialogues, particularly regarding their approach to Plato’s works. Metaphorically speaking, their sight, like that of the prisoners, is misdirected. Ultimately, I am making a simple claim that advocates of such an approach seem to be, not ignorant, but rather “lovers of wisdom”...

76 Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 56.
77 Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, 143.
78 As it pertains to my illustration, while the prisoners of Plato’s cave are depicted in a state such that they never knew anything other than the interior so-called realities of the cave, my prisoner (in being exposed to a world outside of the cave prior to his confinement in the prison cell) likely carried with him a certain set of assumptions and opinions about what reality entailed, founded largely on the experiences he maintained in the outside world.
79 The parallel with darkness and ignorance is being drawn from the cave and sun analogies, namely “nothing is darker than what is not or clearer than what is” and “opinion is neither ignorance nor knowledge…it lies between them…as being intermediate…darker than knowledge but clearer than ignorance.” Plato, Republic, 479c; 478d. In the case of the prisoners, the things which are not reality, or the “what is not” are seen, erroneously, as the things which are reality, or the “what is.” Plato, Republic, 477b. As such, they become confined to the darkness of ignorance.
of opinion rather than…lovers of wisdom and knowledge,”<sup>80</sup> insofar as they
“[hold]...conventions…that [roll] around as intermediates between what is not and what purely is.”<sup>81</sup> What is more, they contend at times (and with dogged commitment at that), that their approach is the correct approach to Plato’s works. It is here, perhaps, that mouthpiece interpreters further propel themselves into the darkness of Plato’s cave. By refusing to provide sound arguments against the Socratic interpretation, mouthpiece interpreters fail to actively participate in the dialectical process about the fundamental aim of Plato’s dialogues, metaphilosophically speaking. Such a lack of participation further distances themselves from the truth and, in turn, results in a metamorphosis of being merely prisoners to being both imprisoned subjects and their own prison guards! As such, while not ignorant, it can be argued defensibly that mouthpiece interpreters precariously walk the line, slipping into the dark chasm below far too often and, by way of their own hands, hold their heads firmly underground by refusing to fully take part in the dialectical process when it comes to their overall approach to Plato’s works. Metaphilosophically, mouthpiece interpreters refuse to toil their way up the steep incline, out of the cave of unknowing, and into the vast expanse of light. In effect, it seems they remain in the dark regarding how Plato’s works might best be approached, all things considered. In order to establish this thesis, the following sections will explore and expand upon the significance of Plato’s dialogue form and the dialectical process of reasoning, both of which appreciate and reflect not only the movement inherent in Socrates’ dialectic,<sup>82</sup> but also the tireless attempt on Plato’s behalf to uniquely engage his community and prospective readers in the critical art of philosophy.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MOVEMENT:
HOW MOUTHPIECE INTERPRETERS REMAIN SHACKLED IN THE CAVE**

When discussing the problematic nature of the mouthpiece interpretation, it is important to consider both the significance of movement in the dialectical process of reasoning and the significance of movement in the dialogue form itself, which is a literary

<sup>80</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 480.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 479d.

<sup>82</sup> And, I might add, in philosophy in general.
form that Plato purposefully chose to employ and which, by nature, inherently contains a
dialogical energy qua dialogue. When reading Plato’s corpus of works, in fact, one finds an
abundance of metaphysical illustrations that lend themselves to support this very notion. It is
my hope that the various illustrations explored in this section, along with the abovementioned
analogy, will provide ample support for my claim that the mouthpiece interpreters are
misdirected in terms of their general approach to Plato and thus are stuck in the cave.
Specifically, by attempting to attribute to Plato theories, doctrines or beliefs, not only are
mouthpiece interpreters ignoring the very likelihood that we do not have in our possession all
of Plato’s works in their original forms, and that as such, we should be cautious in attributing
any particular theory, belief and/or doctrine to him, their approach to Plato’s works is
opposed to the purpose (it seems) of Plato’s dialogues qua dialogues, and to the dialectical
process of reasoning itself. To begin, let us consider the following passages from the
Cratylus, the Symposium, and the Theaetetus, respectively:

‘Wisdom’ (‘phronēsis’)…is the understanding of motion…and flow…‘judgment’
(‘gnōme’) expresses the fact that to judge is to examine or study whatever is
begotten….Understanding (noēsis) itself is the longing for the new….But to say
that things…are new is to signify that they are always coming into being. And
such things are what the soul longs for. ‘Knowledge’ (‘epistēmē’) indicates that a
worthwhile soul follows…the movement of things, neither falling behind nor
running…ahead.84

Even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same – as a person is
said to be the same from childhood till he turns to an old man – even then he
never consists of the same things, though he is called the same, but he is always
being renewed and in other respects passing away, in his hair and flesh and bones
and blood and his entire body. And it’s not just his body, but in his soul, too, for
none of his manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, or fears ever
remains the same, but some are coming to be in him while others are passing
away.85

[T]here is nothing which in itself is just one thing….What is really true, is this:
the things of which we naturally say that they ‘are’, are in process of coming to
be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one another86 … [as
it pertains to] the condition of the soul….Isn’t it by learning and study, which are

83 Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 3.
84 Plato, Cratylus, 412a-b.
85 Plato, Symposium, 208a.
86 Plato, Theaetetus, 152d-e.
motions, that the soul gains knowledge and is preserved and becomes a better thing? Where as in a state of rest, that is, when...[the soul] will not study or learn, it not only fails to acquire knowledge but forgets what it has already learned?...And so...motion, is beneficial to both the body and soul, while the other has the opposite effect...so long as the revolution continues and the sun is in motion, all things are and are preserved...but that if all things should be ‘bound fast’...and come to a standstill, all things would be destroyed and, as the saying goes, the world would be turned upside down....You must not assign it any particular place; for then, of course it would be standing at its post; it wouldn’t be in the process of becoming.87

Now, some may argue that these textual examples are open for interpretation and, thus, unreliable sources of evidence in support of my argument for the significance of movement and reason in one’s life and the approach to Plato’s dialogues. One ought to consider, however, the aporetic nature of the dialogues themselves and the discussions therein.88 Specifically, the aporetic nature of the dialogue revealed in the Cratylus, the Symposium, and the Theaetetus (not to mention the nature of such metaphysical topics of discourse in general) is strongly suggestive of the importance of movement to the dialectical process of reasoning. Plato’s use of aporia asks of its readers not to take what is being presented at merely face value or even what is being presented as an idea that is confined to the ownership of its author, but rather to consider the content and validity of an idea and continue the process of reasoning beyond the boundaries of that particular texts’ pages so that, ultimately, the dialectical process of reasoning continues.

As it concerns the Cratylus, for example, it might be argued that Socrates appears to support a view that is in contrast to the idea that I am promoting as significant (i.e., the concept of movement). However, in reply, one might note that while Socrates does indeed discuss the realities of motion versus stagnation, in no way does he subscribe (absolutely or otherwise) to the nature of a thing along these lines. Rather, he states:

[W]hether I’m right about these things or whether the truth lies with Heraclitus and many others isn’t an easy matter to investigate. But surely no one with any understanding will commit himself or the cultivation of his soul to names, or trust them and their givers to the point of firmly stating that he knows something....It’s certainly possible things are that way, Cratylus, but it is also possible that they are

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87 Ibid., 153c-e.

not. So you must investigate them courageously and thoroughly and not accept anything easily.\textsuperscript{89}

Ultimately, Socrates is putting himself to the same test of reason that he expects of other people, further arguing that nothing should be taken at face value or is what it appears to be and no more. Instead, everything that one desires to know should be put against the light of reason. Thus, seen from this perspective, it is plausible to contend that Socrates is merely reiterating that one must live the examined life, and furthermore, that such a life of reason necessarily requires movement.

Further, in its discussion about the realities of the human condition, the \textit{Symposium} likewise offers valuable insight concerning the significance of movement and reason. Specifically, Diotima’s discourse concerning the nature of \textit{eros} relies heavily upon the concept of change.\textsuperscript{90} From a literal standpoint, the dialogue speaks of the biological process of evolution. For example, Diotima states of the human condition and change:

\begin{quote}
If you really believe that Love by nature aims at what we have often agreed it does, then don’t be surprised at the answer. For among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible…to be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves behind a new young one in place of the old. [And even] while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same…he is always being renewed and in other respects passing away.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

From a figurative standpoint, the dialogue also speaks of the significance of another form of evolution — i.e., the dialectical ascent of reason. “And what is still far stranger,” Diotima claims, “not only does one branch of knowledge come to be in us while another passes away and that we are never the same even in respect to our knowledge, but…each single piece of knowledge has the same fate.”\textsuperscript{92} Moreover, “some people are pregnant in body…while others are pregnant in soul…and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring

\textsuperscript{89} Plato, \textit{Cratylus}, 440c-d.

\textsuperscript{90} Technically, we are made aware of Diotima’s speech (or rather Socrates’ reporting of her discourse) by way of Apollodorus who claims to have learned about it from Aristodemus.

\textsuperscript{91} Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 207d.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 208a.
to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue."93 More specifically, “When someone has been pregnant with these in his soul from early youth,” avows Diotima:

and, having arrived at the proper age, desires to beget and give birth, he…will certainly go about seeking beauty…[For] he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful…and if he…has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue….In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside of him for ages….[T]he children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal [than human children]. Everyone would rather have such children…. [For these] offspring, which because they are immortal themselves, provide their parents with immortal glory and remembrance.94

Thus, regardless of literal or metaphorical interpretation, the Symposium seems to offer its readers ample evidence for the general significance of movement, be it in the form of biological change or the dialectical process of reasoning.

Finally, the Theaetetus provides additional support to the claim that the aporia reflected in the Platonic dialogues is indicative of the significance of movement and reason in one’s life. Specifically, not only does the discussion in the Theaetetus end inconclusively, thus requiring of us as readers to continue the dialogue, it is here in this discussion that Socrates describes his role as that of a midwife. In particular, “Socrates…as…‘midwife,’” claims Cooper, “brings to expression ideas of clever young men like Theaetetus, extensively develops their presuppositions and consequences so as to see clearly what the ideas amount to, and then establishes them as sound or defective by independent arguments of his own.”95

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93 Ibid., 209a.
94 Ibid., 209b-d.
95 John M. Cooper, “Notes,” in Plato: Complete Works, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 157. It might prove beneficial to note (at least as it pertains to the idea of motion and the intimation that nothing should be “bound fast” or “assigned” a particular place, as presented in the Theaetetus) that the Sophist also looks extensively at the notion of change (or movement) as it relates to reality (and necessarily to knowledge). In particular: “so change is the same and not the same. When we say that it’s the same and not the same, we aren’t speaking in the same way. When we say it’s the same, that’s because it shares in the same in relation to itself. But when we say it’s not the same, that’s because of its association with the different. Because of its association with the different, change is separated from the same, and so becomes not it but different.” Plato, Sophist, 256b. Cooper notes, “the visitor may be intimating the general principle that sometimes a ‘nature’ or real ‘kind’ has no single place in a systematic division; it unifies a set of differently located functions…each thing is to be understood through a full, lively awareness of its similarities and differences in relation to other things — the sort of awareness that the varied divisions encourage us to reach.” “Notes,” 236. As such, it is not illogical to infer from the content of the Sophist that the visitor
Taking the aforementioned passages together, alongside even a basic understanding of the human condition (i.e., we change over time as a function of aging and other factors) and the movement inherent in dialogue (i.e., there is an exchange which occurs between its interlocutors), one can begin to see how mouthpiece interpreters, by their failure to recognize the importance of the movement of the *logos*, might remain stuck in the cave. However, to explicate this point beyond what might appear to be merely an appeal to literary value, it will be necessary to discuss with more precision just how it is (in relation to said movement and the dialectical process) that mouthpiece interpreters’ arguments remain fettered. For the purposes of illustrating this task, I have chosen to focus on two of the principal figures in the mouthpiece interpretation camp, namely, Richard Kraut and Julia Annas. I shall provide an overview of some of the basic ideologies that each espouse concentrating on: (1) for Kraut — the arguments of justice and the forms and, as he proposes it, the proper approach to Plato’s works, and (2) for Annas — the problematic nature of philosophical myths in the Platonic dialogues. I shall critically assess each of their views.

In regard to Kraut, my aim will be to reveal that his endorsement of a theory of either justice or the forms in the Platonic dialogues is unfounded, inasmuch as it is based predominantly on a failure of Kraut’s view of Plato’s alleged theories to satisfy even the basic desiderata of a theory. Of equal importance, I shall contend that Kraut’s understanding of the dialogue form and the proper approach to the Platonic corpus is, like his defense of Platonic theories of justice and forms, dubious. In regard to Annas, my intent will be to expose the weakness in her argument that the philosophical myth is problematic, claiming instead that the philosophical myth poses no problem whatsoever if one is focusing on what one ought to be focused on, that is, if one is focusing on *reason*. After the abovementioned arguments have been sufficiently explicated, I shall demonstrate both how Kraut and Annas each share a common bond and, moreover, why this bond of commonality is problematic. In

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might be suggesting that the reality or nature of a thing maintains a unique relationship to its components and itself, and as such can be considered the same and different depending upon the frame of reference. It can, for instance, be resting *and* in motion without producing a contradiction of thought. For example, “So if change itself ever somehow had a share in rest, there would be nothing strange about labeling it resting.” Plato, *Sophist* 279b.
so doing, I shall expose the true nature of the mouthpiece approach as one that, while cogent in many respects, remains profoundly misdirected.

**RICHARD KRAUT ON PLATO**

To begin, let us turn our attention to some claims made by Kraut. Kraut maintains the idea that the Platonic corpus reveals a coherent set of theories, inclusive of, but not limited to, a theory of forms and a theory of justice. For example, Kraut contends:

Plato’s moral and psychological theories...[have] been misunderstood because he sometimes uses the concept of self-interest in a broader way than we do....Had he talked in [a] more straightforward way, he might have spotted a mistake in one of his doctrines: the claim that every unjust act subverts the rule of reason in one’s soul by unduly strengthening spirit or appetite (588E-589A). Plato should have recognized exceptions to this....By claiming that injustice always nourishes these parts of the soul, Plato encouraged the misinterpretation which I have been trying to correct.

Beyond the sense one gets upon reading this passage that Kraut professes to know what it is that Plato is “up to” in his dialogues and, moreover, that he knows (as well) that how Plato went about his project was flawed, is the even more basic assertion that Plato had a theory or doctrine at all that I find particularly troubling. Recall that the theoretical mouthpiece interpretation, of which Kraut is an advocate, claims that Plato’s works contain Plato’s own theories — theories which are to be understood not merely as strong convictions (as the doctrinal approach maintains) or beliefs (as the doxastic approach contends), but rather as views that are “so well worked out that they are systematic in nature and contain a full defense.” But what exactly does this mean? That is, what is required of a view in order for it to be considered systematic, with full defense and something more than just a strongly held conviction or belief? With this in mind and because it is my specific claim that Kraut’s endorsement of a theory of justice or of the forms fails to satisfy even the basic desiderata of what is required of a theory, it is necessary to set forth exactly what desiderata of a theory

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96 Cf. footnote 51.


98 In other words, what is required of a “full-fledged theory” (or theory in the strict sense) and how is this different from strongly held convictions (or theory in a weak sense)?

99 One could argue that Kraut’s attribution of a theory of justice or the forms to Plato might better be
are being left unfulfilled. Generally stated, if one wants to reasonably attribute a theory of justice or the forms to Plato (or any theory to any author for that matter), it is important to meet the requirements of a specified set of desiderata. Without such fulfillment one has no way of knowing what is being discussed, let alone whether the collective contents of such a discussion can reasonably be considered to be a theory. Drew A. Hyland asserts of Plato’s works and of the forms in particular: “with the use of the term ‘theory’ a certain set of implicit assumptions about what Plato is doing get applied to the dialogues….The term ‘theory’ as applied by scholars to Plato’s discussions of forms seems to imply an explanatory ‘system’ that is…comprehensive…‘proveable’…consistent…and [with] confirming instances.”

More precisely, “before one decides whether there is a theory of [justice or the forms],” argues Corlett, “one must ask in general terms what one would require of a theory of [justice or the forms]. What [do such theories] entail?” A theory of either justice or the forms will at least satisfy the following conditions: (1) it will describe the nature of justice or a form (i.e., what is justice? What is “a form”?), (2) it will describe the nature of various forms of justice or forms (i.e., what are the features of justice? What types of forms “exist”?), and (3) it will provide an account for or establish causal relations in regard to justice or forms (i.e., how does someone or something become just? Is this the same as justice? In what way does someone imitate the forms? Are the forms a cause of its imitations?). Ultimately, treated as ‘strong convictions’ (as opposed to theories). If so, Kraut’s approach would reflect a doctrinal mouthpiece approach, which still bears a similar burden of argument regarding the claim that Plato’s works reflect his own views. However, Kraut repeatedly and explicitly uses the term ‘theory’ in reference to various views held by Plato (e.g., theory of the forms, theory of justice), and not ‘convictions.’ As such, it seems reasonable to argue that by doing so he feels the views expressed adequately satisfy what is required of a theory.

Hyland, “Against a Platonic ‘Theory’ of Forms,” 260-261. Hyland continues: “The problem is…not one of these elementary conditions can be established in regard to the various discussions of forms or Ideas in the collection of diverse Platonic dialogues that do raise them as an issue…[Moreover,]…my point here is…to point to the common assumption…that Plato intended to present a consistent theory of Forms…But why make the assumption that Plato “intended” a consistent theory?…[I]s this assumption…an imposition of later scholarship, founded on the assumption that since most modern philosophers intend consistent theories of this or that, Plato, being a philosopher, must have had the same project?”

Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 73.

Ibid., 73-74. Interestingly, the Timaeus 51c poses similar questions that look strikingly similar to the desiderata listed above, namely: “But we must prefer to conduct our inquiry by means of rational argument. Hence we should make a distinction like the following: Is there such a thing as Fire by itself? Do all these things of which we always say that each of them is something ‘by itself’ really exist? Or are the things we see, and whatever else we perceive…the only things that possess this kind of actuality….Is our perpetual claim that there exists an intelligible Form for each thing a vacuous gesture, in the end nothing but mere talk? Now we
if one hopes to support the claim that Plato’s works demonstrate a theory of anything (as opposed to simply a strong conviction or belief about this or that), one must satisfy at least the abovementioned desiderata for the following reasons. First, simply for clarity of discourse, one must know the exact nature of the thing in question (not something merely like it or similar to it). Second, in order to distinguish and understand the relations between various types or features of a thing, one must be able to uniquely identify these types and forms on their own. Third, in order to understand and depict our relationship to a thing (inclusive of its various types and forms) and, equally, how something might actually become or imitate a thing — it would seem that we also must be able to precisely state what sort of causal relations are involved. Of course, while there “might well be other necessary conditions of a theory,” Corlett argues, “[this] would only serve to increase the burden of proof on the mouthpiece interpreters in that the new conditions would also have to be found to be satisfied in supporting [any such] claim.”

In addition, when considering the abovementioned desiderata, it is also important to make sure that one does not conflate the following two queries: (a) are the conditions set forth for a theory of this or that satisfied by the Platonic texts themselves? In other words, do the dialogues provide sufficient evidence for the existence of a theory of this or that without having to rely upon external evidence and/or reconstructive measures? and, (b) do the conditions set forth for a theory of this or that require additional support in order to stay afloat? Specifically, do the contents of the dialogue require the employment of rational reconstruction in order to identify a plausible theory of this or that? While the Socratic interpretation is willing to concede to the possibility of the latter (though it would still be maintained that rational reconstruction does not necessarily lead to Plato’s theory per se), the former query remains extremely problematic; and, particularly so for mouthpiece interpreters certainly will not do justice to the question before us if we dismiss it, leaving it undecided and unadjudicated, and just insist that such things exist.” Plato, *Timaeus*, 51c.


104 Rational reconstruction, as it is used here, is the use of reasoning to piece together (conceptually) what Plato might have been trying to convey in his writings, but for one reason or another (as far as we can tell), did not fully articulate. While rational reconstruction can certainly lead to a deeper understanding of what an author might mean, one must be careful not to attribute something to the author that might run counter to some of her primary tenets as expressed in her own writings. For greater detail see: Corlett, *Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues*, 5n11.
who claim that Plato’s works indeed reveal Plato’s own convictions. In other words, based on the extant texts of Plato, it seems that even if the desiderata set forth for a theory of this or that were satisfied, they would still require the employment of rational reconstruction in order to be deciphered. Rational reconstruction poses a problem for anyone trying to reveal a theory, whatever that theory may be, because such a process cannot (with certitude) be said to reveal or represent an author’s position. This is so, due to the complex nature of interpretation, textual evidence and translation. Moreover, even if a theory of this or that was decipherable in Plato’s works (as Kraut claims), it does not logically follow that the theory (reconstructed or otherwise) would necessarily be a theory attributable to Plato.

Keeping the aforementioned desiderata and queries in mind, let us consider Kraut’s explanation of justice and the forms in Plato’s writings. Specifically, Kraut writes:

The idea that I am attributing to Plato is that when we act justly, we should do so because we recognize a certain pattern of distribution to be fitting. The philosopher who returns to the cave is not doing so merely because she wants to benefit those who dwell there; rather, [the philosopher] does so because she remembers what others have done for her…. [Further the] lover of justice is a

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105 Some mouthpiece interpreters argue that additional support (i.e. secondary evidence beyond that of Plato’s works) is needed to adequately show that Plato is expressing a certain theory or view. Terence Irwin, for example, argues: “It is legitimate to point out that Plato never speaks in his own person in the dialogues, and legitimate to wonder whether this is a device for disassociating or detaching himself from the arguments or conclusions attributed to the main speaker (usually Socrates). The ancient evidence [i.e., Aristotle], however, offers no sound basis for doubting that Plato is presenting his own philosophical views.” “Plato: The Intellectual Background,” in The Cambridge Companion to Plato, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 77. However, notes Corlett, such additional support must be “coupled with [and backed by] internal and primary evidence (from Plato himself)” in order to be convincing. Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 28.

106 One might raise the objection that rational reconstruction raises a general problem for my argument, too. After all, does not the Socratic interpretation make a claim about Plato’s position? In response, however, a few things can be said. First, the Socratic interpretation does not argue that Plato’s “position” (so to speak) constitutes his theories, doctrines or convictions. Moreover, it does not rely upon secondary evidence or reconstructive measures in order to determine what the dialogues may or may not reflect; it examines the Platonic texts themselves. Further, while the Socratic interpretation is not opposed to the use of rational reconstruction per se nor to the use of supporting evidence, the burden of argument regarding the attribution to Plato of anything beyond certain philosophical methodologies or beyond certain basic beliefs (such as a respect for reason) falls solely on those who wish to establish, like mouthpiece interpreters, that Plato’s works communicate Plato’s own convictions (theories, doctrines or otherwise).

107 One could take a more cautious stance and argue instead that any substantive philosophical theory, conviction or belief present in Plato’s works is likely to be Plato’s (as opposed to necessarily Plato’s). In so doing, she avoids some of the criticism raised against the mouthpiece approach. But she does not escape the fact that her position still bears a burden of proof regarding why any such views are likely to be Plato’s as opposed to just views in general presented in Plato’s works.
lover of a certain kind of human pattern in human affairs….She…distributes [benefits to others]…in order to achieve a certain balance that is appropriate in human relationships. That is why Plato thinks there is a kinship between loving justice in social arrangements and loving the order among the Forms.\textsuperscript{108}

Moreover, Kraut claims:

If we understand Plato in the way I propose, then the justice of requiring philosophers to rule is intimately connected with the advantage of governing in this situation. One cannot profit from an act that dissociates one from the Forms, since imitation of the Forms is the goal at which one must always be striving, if one is to lead the best life. The Forms are a just order, and we fail to imitate them if we refuse to do what is justly required of us in human relationships.\textsuperscript{109}

Now, while I agree with Kraut that acting justly necessitates a consideration of order\textsuperscript{110} and relationships, it does not seem that Kraut’s sentiments capture all of what justice (and being just) amount to. Indeed the “lover of justice” is “a lover of a certain kind of human pattern in human affairs.” But what type of pattern? And what does this pattern require? Moreover, as stated previously, the desiderata of a theory of justice or a theory of forms include that the nature of justice and forms — individually and in regard to their various manifestations — and the causal relationships of both be described and/or accounted for. Simply stating that a “lover of justice” is “a lover of a certain \textit{kind} of human pattern in human affairs” and that “there is a kinship between loving justice…and loving \textit{the order} among the forms” does little or nothing to describe or establish any of these desiderata. Instead, such an explanation, while helpful to an extent, remains enigmatic and ambiguous. Now to be fair, I must confess that the general ambiguity expressed in the Platonic texts makes it challenging for anyone to completely escape its grips without some abstruse element attaching itself to one’s gear, or in this instance, sans arriving upon a definition which is \textit{unambiguous} in nature.\textsuperscript{111}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[108] Kraut, “Return to the Cave,” 53-54.
\item[110] Generally speaking, I maintain it reasonable to assume the stance that acting justly requires a consideration of order and the recognition of pattern. Moreover, it seems reasonable to consider order and the use of reason intimately related, if not necessarily related.
\item[111] “One’s gear” is a reference toward climbing or excavation gear. I am taking some literary license with this term to try to elucidate the fact that because the potentially endless meanings in Plato’s writings seem to rely (to a certain degree) on ambiguity (or more precisely, the intellectual wading through of ambiguities), one cannot, if he or she is trying to support the claim that a theory exist, ignore this. Rosemary Desjardins offers a
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certainly Plato’s texts reveal an irresistible overlapping of epistemology and metaphysics, especially as it pertains to the concept of justice and the forms. But this does not mean that the ambiguity that such an overlapping entails should be disregarded. This is especially true if one is attempting to attribute a theory of justice or a theory of forms to an author. Such an endeavor requires that one refer first to the primary texts themselves for such clarity before considering other secondary sources. And if the primary texts do not provide clarity in and of themselves, then it seems rather specious to ignore such facts and attribute a theory of this or that to Plato (in this instance) despite the lack of primary evidence.

In order to clarify this matter, it is helpful to consider the following statement made by Nicholas P. White:

The Forms are central to Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology. So is the distinction between them and the objects of perception in the natural world around us. The contrast between these two sorts of entities is involved in [Plato’s] main theses about what there is and what can be known. Since this contrast is drawn in terms of both the metaphysical and the epistemological status of each kind of entity, [Plato’s] views about Forms and perceptible things fall simultaneously under both metaphysics and epistemology.

unique perspective here when she states: “Given the problem of ambiguity in language, and the need to move from surface to deep-level meaning, it is hardly surprising that the first step in a dialogue’s development usually requires that one be shaken from a complacent kind of satisfaction with the surface of language and forced to recognize that language does not transparently and unequivocally mean, just like that.” “Why Dialogues? Plato’s Serious Play,” in Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings, ed. Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1988), 116. Ultimately, while such ambiguity might be allowed in terms of claims regarding strongly held convictions or beliefs, theories in a full-fledged form (i.e., views that are systematic and with full defense) require a greater amount of desiderata be met.


113 In the case of Plato, many consider Aristotle to be a worthy spokesperson for Plato’s intentions. For example, see Irwin, “Plato: The Intellectual Background,” 51-89; and Richard Kraut, “Introduction to the Study of Plato,” in The Cambridge Companion to Plato, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 22-24. However, such a blanket assertion that Aristotle is “our most important external witness” is nothing more than an “innocent until proven guilty” argument, and as such — especially when coupled with the fact that Aristotle “often disagrees with Plato,” “does not always understand Plato’s meaning,” and “has a tendency to interpret Plato in light of a linear progression of philosophical doctrines from the predecessors of Plato, as if Plato shared the same philosophical assumptions and interests as they” — is “unconvincing.” Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 28-29.

114 One should note that a lack of clarity does not necessarily mean a lack of evidence. There could, for example, be plenty of discussion about x or y. But if one hopes to establish that such evidence indicates the presence of anything more than a conviction or belief about x or y (be it Plato’s or any author’s for that matter), certain conditions must be met. Clarity of subject matter is one such criterion.

115 White, “Plato’s Metaphysical Epistemology,” 280. Emphasis provided. Nickolas Pappas makes a
What this means for describing with accuracy the nature of justice or the forms and/or the various forms of justice and the forms is that one must consider descriptions within the texts that are inherently ambiguous due simply to the fact that they straddle philosophical arenas. Specifically, because the descriptions in the texts of justice and the forms are spoken of variably from an epistemological standpoint and metaphysical standpoint, one cannot always be sure what is meant by justice or the forms or what the nature of each concept entails.\textsuperscript{116}

Moreover, one can find consistent evidence of such ambiguity in the texts themselves. For example, the \textit{Phaedo} and the \textit{Republic} seem to be among the primary dialogues in the Platonic corpus that deal explicitly with the argument that the forms are distinct from perceptibles (i.e., from objects of perception). However, this distinction remains blurred. In the \textit{Republic}, Socrates maintains that “every perceptible thing that appears beautiful appears ugly also, and analogously for ‘just,’ ‘double,’ ‘large,’ and ‘heavy.’”\textsuperscript{117} Specifically, Socrates states:

\begin{quote}
I want to address a question to our friend who doesn’t believe in the beautiful itself or any form of the beautiful itself….Is any one of them any more what we say it is than its opposite? No, each of them always participates in both opposites….They are like ambiguities one is entertained with at dinner parties….One cannot understand them as fixedly being or fixedly not being or as both or as neither\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

“From a modern point of view,” contends White, “it looks as though facts about what we can know and facts about the natures of certain sorts of objects are being curiously intermingled.”\textsuperscript{119} Additional ambiguity in regard to this relationship can be witnessed in the similar reference to the ambiguity of “Plato’s” concept of justice and the forms when he states, “The Republic… interweaves questions of reality or being with questions of knowledge…[Trying] to make the whole system work…leads Plato into some tangles.” \textit{Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Republic}, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 129.

\textsuperscript{116} Mouthpiece interpreters might claim that this fact only entails various degrees of evidence about what Plato believed. But this seems to beg the question. That is, even if such descriptions entail various degrees of evidence about x or y, how does it follow that we are justified in attributing these beliefs to Plato? In the end, the burden of argument falls on those, like mouthpiece interpreters, who wish to attribute to Plato anything beyond certain philosophical methodologies or other such “small” matters.

\textsuperscript{117} White, “Plato’s Metaphysical Epistemology,” 284.

\textsuperscript{118} Plato, \textit{Republic}, 479a-c.

Greater Hippias, when Socrates declares, “the finest of pots is foul put together with the class of girls” and “the wisest of men is seen to be a monkey compared to god in wisdom and fineness and everything else.” Though one can infer a meaning from said relational analogies, what exactly these relationships signify is not clear. “However natural such attributions of nonrelational properties might have seemed to Plato,” argues White, “they certainly seem awkward in many cases.”

Further, as it pertains to the order and pattern of the forms and of our relationship to these forms, the Platonic dialogues offer various descriptors, though no unequivocal, clear description or link of causality. Interestingly, even Kraut admits to this when he states: “Clearly Plato [thinks] that the Forms exhibit the highest kind of orderly arrangement….But he does not say precisely what the orderliness of the Forms consists in….[W]e are not told whether the Forms have parts or whether they achieve their order in some other way.” Kraut further alleges that:

the Forms constitute the highest harmonious order, and when human beings are related to each other in the pattern prescribed for the ideal city, their relationships with each other constitute a pattern which is the best political imitation of the Forms there can be….For the best sort of human life is one which is dedicated to the project of imitating the Forms and one which never does anything to reject them as a model.

Once again, however, while indeed providing a thoughtful account, Kraut fails to describe what exactly that order is and what, if any, causal relationship exists. Ultimately, it seems

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120 Plato, Greater Hippias, 289a-b.
121 White, “Plato’s Metaphysical Epistemology,” 287.
122 White notes, “Along with the term ‘imitation’ [Plato] uses the term ‘participation’ for the relation of exemplification that a perceptible thing may bear to a Form. If we call a perceptible thing F, then we can say that it ‘participates’ in F-ness. Plato never says, however, that ‘This is F,’ said of a perceptible thing, is equivalent to ‘This participates in F-ness’ or could be replaced by it.” “Plato’s Metaphysical Epistemology,” 295. In other words, as it pertains to justice, for example, to act justly is not actually justice itself, though it is related (however ambiguously so). No causal link or exact relationship to the form of justice is distinguishable outside of the general claim that one relates to it by acting justly.


124 Kraut, “Return to the Cave,” 52-53. It might be also interesting to note that the concept of mimesis could come into play here by suggesting that this is why mimesis is not condemned by Socrates per se but rather is condemned only when the mimetic feature acts to pull the individual farther away from the truth or from reason.

125 One can be justified in believing that so-and-so is providing a theory without being able to offer a
that Kraut’s view is inadequate on a fundamental level in that it cannot offer definitive descriptions or causal links of the nature of justice or the forms and the various manifestations of each based on the evidence available in the Platonic corpus — descriptions and explanations which are necessary if one hopes to adequately support the claim that a theory of justice or forms exists in Plato’s dialogues and, moreover, if one hopes to reasonably attribute any such theory to Plato.\textsuperscript{126}

Additionally, I maintain that Kraut’s view is problematic because it fails to consider the significance of the dialectical process itself as it relates to order and relationships. “For Plato, the engagement in the analytical process is its own reward. Critical thought is inherently valuable….\textsuperscript{127} What is more, in order for anyone to relate to anyone or anything (i.e., a concept, abstract object, etc.), one must participate in the dialectical process.\textsuperscript{128} As Kenneth M. Sayre argues, “Plato wrote in the form of dialogues in order to provide a dialectical context in which philosophic knowledge can take shape in a reader. From this it follows that the right way to read a Platonic dialogue, whatever else it amounts to, must be a manner of reading that allows this dialectical process to get under way.”\textsuperscript{129} Randall, Jr. also alludes to this when he states, “The method of Plato, the poet, the dramatist, the artist, is the\textit{ dramatic} method. And this is not a mere technique of exposition, but an art of discovering and discerning Truth.”\textsuperscript{130}

Perhaps, then, regarding Kraut’s position, it would be more accurate to suggest that the driving impetus behind the philosopher’s return to the cave is not a figurative tip of the

\textsuperscript{126} One should note that my particular point here has more to do with whether a set of beliefs expressed in the dialogues count as a theory and less about whether those beliefs are attributable to Plato.

\textsuperscript{127} Corlett, \textit{Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues}, 86.

\textsuperscript{128} One could agree that the dialectical process is important while also believing that Plato is offering his own views. However, mouthpiece interpreters, by not taking seriously the Platonic Question or even participating in discussion about how we might best relate to or approach the dialogues seem dismissive of its importance in a fundamental way.

\textsuperscript{129} Sayre, \textit{Plato’s Literary Garden}, xiv. In terms of the mouthpiece approach, it seems that the dialectical process is somewhat “tethered to the starting gates” insofar as analysis of the dialogues begin and end with the assumption that its contents reflect Plato’s own theories, convictions or beliefs.

\textsuperscript{130} Randall, Jr., \textit{Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason}, 144.
hat to one’s fellow compatriots or to the forms per se, but rather, a metaphorical nod of respect to the dialectical process of reasoning itself, though the elemental features Kraut discusses are indeed necessarily involved. Charitably speaking, Kraut’s claims give light to the idea that order, relationships and reason are related. But he stops short of defining what it is exactly that order and relationships entail. What is more, Kraut’s apparent inattentiveness to the significance of the dialectical process remains disconcerting. As such, his explanation for the philosopher’s return and requirement to rule seems somewhat lacking, as does his ability to ground the attribution of any theory of justice or the forms to Plato.

Furthermore, let us also consider Kraut’s explanation of what he considers to be the proper approach to the Platonic dialogues. Specifically, Kraut claims that:

[o]ur best chance of understanding Plato is…to begin with the assumption that in each dialogue he uses the principal interlocutor to support or oppose certain conclusions by means of certain arguments because he, Plato, supports or opposes those conclusions for those reasons. In reading him this way, we need make no hazardous assumptions about why he wrote, and why he wrote in dialogue form.\(^{131}\)

Moreover, Kraut insists, “This methodological principle is not an a priori assumption about how Plato must be read, but is rather a successful working hypothesis suggested by an intelligent reading of the text and confirmed by its fruitfulness.”\(^{132}\) According to Kraut, because “we possess every philosophical work [Plato] ever composed”\(^{133}\) coupled with evidence from secondary sources, such as Aristotle, for example,\(^{134}\) there is no good reason to suggest that we should not “take Plato to be using the content of his interlocutors’ speeches, the circumstances of their meeting, and whatever other material he has at his disposal, to state conclusions he believes for reasons he accepts.”\(^{135}\) But such an argument

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\(^{131}\) Kraut, “Introduction to the Study of Plato,” 29.

\(^{132}\) Ibid. I might comment here, cautiously, that this is likely not the “fruitfulness” that Sayre is referring to when he avers, “a proper reading of [Plato’s] dialogues is one that enables…a conversation [between author and reader] to progress in a fruitful direction.” Plato’s Literary Garden, xvi.


\(^{134}\) For greater detail, see Kraut’s, “Introduction to the Study of Plato,” 20-24. One should be cautious, however, in their appeals to external evidence. For, “unless [the secondary or external] evidence [from Aristotle] is coupled with internal or primary evidence (from Plato himself),” one can be led astray. Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 28.

seems anti-philosophical, not to mention, a tad pretentious. First, in stating that the mouthpiece interpretation is “not an a priori assumption...[but rather] a successful working hypothesis suggested by an intelligent reading of the text,” Kraut seems to imply that those who do not approach Plato’s works in the manner he is advocating are less intelligent than the mouthpiece interpreters or, at the very least, are not reading the texts intelligently because they are not beginning with the same set of assumptions as are they. Moreover, Kraut maintains such an argument despite the fact that mouthpiece interpreters have yet to provide one unproblematic reason in favor of such an approach!\textsuperscript{136} What is more, to approach Plato’s dialogues as Kraut does, is not only “hazardous” but is, contrary to his assertion, an \textit{a priori} assumption of grand proportion. Not only is there a “possibility that we are \textit{not} in possession of the whole of what Plato composed,”\textsuperscript{137} what we are in possession of originated (according even to Kraut) “\textit{in the form of copies made during the medieval period}.”\textsuperscript{138} Thus, we should take heed, warns Corlett, of the fact that “the difficulties of translation by scribes and exegetes who may have interjected their own respective worldviews into the texts over time might well have changed the contents of the original texts of Plato, whatever and wherever they may be.”\textsuperscript{139} Thus, if for no other reasons than these, one should be cautious of attributing anything to Plato without sufficient evidence.\textsuperscript{140}

Additionally, the fact that Plato wrote in the dialogue form should encourage one to proceed with caution. The interpretation of dialogues, by their nature, can be somewhat ambiguous in that they involve, generally speaking, more than one interlocutor. For example,


\textsuperscript{137} Corlett, \textit{Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues}, 3. Emphasis provided.

\textsuperscript{138} Kraut, “Introduction to the Study of Plato,” 20. Kraut further contends that these copies “\textit{derive ultimately from the original sheets of papyrus on which Plato wrote}.”

\textsuperscript{139} Corlett, \textit{Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues}, 36.

\textsuperscript{140} Of noteworthy mention, Kraut’s assumptions concerning Plato’s works seem reminiscent of literalists in Biblical scholarship who think the entirety of the contents of Biblical texts must be taken at face value.
the *Symposium* features seven different interlocutors,\textsuperscript{141} the *Phaedo* four, and the *Euthydemus* five. As such, based purely on the fact that more people are speaking and sharing ideas with one another, the discussion between said interlocutors has the potential of becoming more convoluted than that of a treatise, for example, with only one speaker.\textsuperscript{142} More importantly, however, the dialogue form contains a certain amount of energy in it that other forms of discourse do not; this is especially true in the Platonic dialogues. For example, Sayre claims that what makes Plato’s works unique (among other things) is “the seemingly almost perceptible energy with which they work to brighten our mental vision.”\textsuperscript{143} Charles L. Griswold, Jr. further clarifies this point in his discussion about the relationship between the energy of Plato’s corpus of writings and the dialogue form itself. He states, “The resistance of Plato’s writings to systematization, [e.g.,] their ability to keep philosophizing alive, is…inseparable from the kind of writings [that] they are — namely, dialogues.”\textsuperscript{144} In this connection, according to Sayre, a defective approach then would be one that “fails to bring the reader to a stance from which this energy can be tapped and all the more so if it actually blocks the reader’s access to the energy of the dialogues.”\textsuperscript{145}

While Kraut does contend that “the dialogue form provides a natural way to air challenges the reader might be expected to make to the theories under discussion,”\textsuperscript{146} he claims that if we “[abandon] the [texts] on the grounds that [they do] not contain what Plato believes, we have no way of supporting one suggestion as opposed to another regarding what he does believe.”\textsuperscript{147} But this is, it seems, precisely the point of the Platonic dialogues! One of the fundamental purposes of the dialogue form is to engage its readers in the philosophical

\textsuperscript{141} Eight interlocutors if one counts Diotima as separate from Socrates.

\textsuperscript{142} This is not to say, however, that a treaty cannot be convoluted either. For certainly, it can. Rather, what I am suggesting is that with the introduction of more than one speaker, such as in the case of the Platonic dialogues, there is a greater chance of ambiguity about what is being said and who is maintaining such an argument (insomuch as often times ideas are built upon collectively, via the discussions of the various interlocutors).

\textsuperscript{143} Sayre, *Plato’s Literary Garden*, xii.

\textsuperscript{144} Griswold, Introduction, 1. Emphasis provided.

\textsuperscript{145} Sayre, *Plato’s Literary Garden*, xii.

\textsuperscript{146} Kraut, “Introduction to the Study of Plato,” 27.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 29.
process, not with the goal of determining what it is that Plato believes but rather, with the
goal of determining what the reader believes and why; and moreover, whether what one
believes is sound.\textsuperscript{148} Certainly the declaration echoed by Socrates in the Charmides 161c,
“[it] is not who said [what], but whether [or not] what [is] said is true,” reflects this very
sentiment. Further, the “‘literary garden’ cultivated by the dialectician,” Sayre maintains, has
as one of its goals “[inseminating] the mind of [its] reader with the vital discourse conducive
to learning”\textsuperscript{149} so that these seeds might germinate and become “‘tender growths.’”\textsuperscript{150} What
is meant by this is that the dialogue form is a “horticultural tool,” of sorts, by which the fruits
of reason can be unearthed. The dialogue form, as employed by Plato, uniquely reveals this
process of reasoning that Socrates so encouraged, and Kraut’s dismissal of the significance of
this metaphilosophical fact (even if unintentional) is frankly quite alarming, especially
considering the general caliber of his philosophical work. Kraut seems to “[treat Plato’s]
dialogue form\textsuperscript{151} as a thin shell around a kernel of philosophical doctrine.”\textsuperscript{152} Of course,
doctrine is not what is being advocated here; rather, what I am suggesting is that the
mouthpiece approach treats the dialogue form, and by extension the dialectical process, as
something unimportant to the understanding of Plato’s works. Hence, Kraut, like others in
the mouthpiece interpretation camp, takes for granted the true weight of Socrates’ words and,
as a result, offers arguments of interpretation that are regrettably misdirected. Ultimately, it
seems that for Kraut and many other mouthpiece interpreters, literalism trumps a more
nuanced and careful approach to Plato’s works.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{148} Nails offers a similar perspective when she states: “The dialogue form provides a means of encouraging
readers and listeners to reason dialectically to defensible positions of their own, rather than to treat Plato’s
words — or those of Socrates — as so authoritative as to obviate the necessity for intellectual labor.”
“Mouthpiece Schmemouthpiece,” 16.
\textsuperscript{149} Sayre, Plato’s Literary Garden, xv.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} That is, a form that reveals the movement of the logos and hence, the dialectical process.
should be noted that this comment, as utilized in Halliwell’s review, is originally intended for D.H. Rice’s
treatment of the dialogue form in A Guide to Plato’s Republic. However, I found it appropriate to utilize here in
this context.
\textsuperscript{153} The mouthpiece interpretation “shares much in common with Christian fundamentalism insofar as each
holds firmly to the idea that the literal meanings of texts are most important….In point of fact, neither set of
texts has as its purpose the transmission of theories, dogmas, and/or beliefs. What each set of texts does in fact
Now, let us turn our attention to the view of Annas, a mouthpiece interpreter who, like Kraut, maintains that Plato’s works contain and reveal Plato’s own convictions. Since I have chosen to utilize Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” to illustrate the Socratic interpretation both in theory and in practice, I thought it particularly relevant to look at Annas’ treatment of Plato and mythoi, specifically focusing on her contention that philosophical myths are problematic in nature. According to Annas, “Plato has a well-known epistemological problem over his myths. He uses the myth form to express truths that are profound and important; yet for him myth or any form of storytelling has low epistemological status, the preferred philosophical method being argument.” While “it is clearly a mistake,” she argues:

to make Plato’s myths or imagery central to interpreting his thought, at the expense of the arguments…it is also a mistake to ignore the myths (or images) as being clearly dispensable. For Plato, his use of philosophically low-grade forms to present important philosophical content produces a problem, a problem which [Plato] never explicitly solves, but which is inescapably obvious to an author who has chosen to do philosophy in a literary medium. Annas goes on to affirm that “the mixed genre of the philosophical myth is of its nature problematic…[and that while] the easy modern assumption that myths can be ignored on the grounds that they ‘do not lend themselves to logical analysis’ may be congenial to our own view of the relation of myth to reason…it fails Plato; it solves his problem by trivializing it.”

Now, while I agree with Annas that Plato’s myths should not be dismissed as merely mythoi because they do have rational depth, it is difficult to understand why Annas

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155 Ibid., 121-122.
157 Jean-François Mattei comments: “It seems to me unfruitful to oppose in Plato’s works the muthos to the logos…with the sole object of concluding that one is logically superior to the other. Rather,…mythical
assumes that Plato’s use of *mythoi* to present important philosophical ideas poses a *problem* in the first place. Even though Annas admits that “myth and fiction may be regarded as expressing important truths in a generally accessible form,”\(^{158}\) by referring to the myth as a problem, she in effect both negates the status of *mythoi* as a viable tool in dialectical discourse and deflates the significance of reasoning in the Platonic dialogues. If Plato’s intent is (for example) for readers to focus on the unfolding process of reasoning in regard to this or that problem, then it should not matter — assuming the discovery of truth, whatever that truth may be, is indeed the goal and not Plato’s dissemination of his own views as mouthpiece interpreter’s claim\(^{159}\) — whether Plato utilizes “philosophically low-grade forms to present important philosophical content” or whether he chooses to approach said topic via the traditional argumentative format. In fact, it could be disputed that if Plato did not have such a high-esteem for reason, then perhaps the deployment of *mythoi* would not have been used at all. Employing the use of *mythoi* (or storytelling)\(^{160}\) and various other literary devices into his works seems quite fitting, given Plato’s pedagogical influence (i.e., that of Socrates),\(^{161}\) his artistic proclivities,\(^{162}\) and as an attempt to reveal the irony behind those who

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\(^{158}\) Annas, “Plato and Common Morality,” 443.

\(^{159}\) While it is possible that Plato’s dialogues can both enable readers to search for and grasp truth and also reveal Plato’s own views, mouthpiece interpreters such as Kraut and Annas have done little to satisfy their burden of proof regarding what would justify the latter, making it in turn unreasonable to accept the mouthpiece approach to Plato’s corpus of works.

\(^{160}\) “*Mythos* and cognate words originally mean no more than ‘speech’, and the usage survives in Plato whereby *mythoi* and *logoi* are put together and both are opposed to action (e.g., Plato, *Republic*, 376d9-10). By Plato’s time *mythos* has come to mean something like ‘story’; to favor *mythoi* over *logoi* is to favor storytelling over argument.” Annas, “Plato’s Myths of Judgment,” 121.

\(^{161}\) What is meant here is simply that Socrates’ style, as presented by Plato, includes an employment of both imagination and reasoning.

\(^{162}\) By “artistic proclivities,” I do not mean that Socrates was drawn to the arts per se, but rather that he was an artisan of reason, a master of the dialectic. Indeed in the *Theaetetus* 150c, Socrates refers to himself as embodying the “art of midwifery” with the difference between literal midwives and himself being that he “[attends] men and not women, and…[watches] over the labor of their souls, not of their bodies.” Moreover, he claims, “the most important thing about [his] art is the ability to apply all possible tests to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth.” Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150c. And in the *Symposium* 177e, Socrates refers to himself as “understanding” the “art of love.” Plato, *Symposium*, 177c. However, Socrates’ account of love, as presented by Diotima, is heavily laden with metaphorical reference toward the love of reason and the desire for wisdom. Specifically, Diotima claims:
focus only on words rather than on conceptual content. Randall, Jr. elucidates this point when he states: “Plato dramatically presents to us [the] underlying and controlling subject matter itself, and makes us see what the talk is about — lest we forget, like many moderns, and imagine the talk is about talk itself, about words. The Truth we are made to see is not a fixed body of doctrine, but itself something dramatic — a never-ending process, a life.”163 Thus, for Plato, the use of myth appears to be a stark reminder of the necessity to love and honor the logos from both an intellectual and an artistic standpoint. This is not to be confused, however, with the idea that artistic ability is more important than reason, but rather that the imagination — as a part of the artistic and intellectual mind — is often a valuable component in the process of reasoning. Randall, Jr., again offers valuable insight to such a claim when he argues:

Plato is not only an artist, but also an artist-philosopher, an artist who not only saw life, but loved wisdom, loved wisdom as only an artist can, and loved the kind of wisdom only an artist can see….Moreover] his followers…have uniformly been artists, men of imagination. When they have been men of religion…they have been…poets in religion….When [they]…have been humanists…they have been artists of human life….And when they have been great scientists, like Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, Newton, or Einstein, they have been great scientists because they have possessed the artist’s insight and imagination.164

Ultimately, Plato’s use of mythoi seems a devoted testament of faith in the power of the logos and all that it entails.165 Whether reason is dressed in formal, black and white apparel, like

163 Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, 144. Randall, Jr. goes on to provide a beautiful description of just how it is that Plato makes something “seen.” Specifically: “In the Lysis, for instance, two beautiful boys, and two ugly old men, meet and proceed to talk about friendship. Though they are friends, they cannot manage to say just what friendship is. But we are made to see. ‘Friendship’ emerges, the Idea of Friendship, from the living dialogue” (144-145).

164 Ibid., 135-137.

165 One might even argue that the ability to comprehend metaphors, analogies and mythoi (specifically, in being able to extract the conceptual meaning) is a higher form of reasoning than literal analysis, for example. Though well beyond the purview of this paper, it is an avenue worth exploring, as it seems that such an
that with which one might associate argument in its traditional form, or whether reason is delivered to us in fancy sandals\textsuperscript{166} only sans the suit, it is \textit{still} reason. In reply to Annas’ argument, I am compelled to ask, then: is not Plato’s decision to use myths in his dialogues itself a display of the love of reason to its fullest extent? Is it not trusting reason to its fullest extent...having confidence that if reason is being focused on as it ought to be, then it will provide light regardless of its attire?\textsuperscript{167} For surely it is the case that Socrates asked of his interlocutors not to take things at face value, urging them instead to follow reason wherever it guide them. By implementing myths into his dialogues, Plato is not introducing a problematic element; rather, he is testing and pushing his readers, it seems, to make sense of philosophical concepts and ideas. Indeed, you might even say that he is turning their heads by way of various literary tools (inclusive of \textit{mythoi}) toward that “which is” and, thus, urging them to embrace the process of the dialectic itself. As such, Annas’ claim that Plato’s myths present “epistemological problems” is, in the spirit of charity, questionable at best. The use of \textit{mythoi} seems only a problem for those who are not focusing on the significance of the process of reasoning itself (and all that reason entails). Likewise, it is only a problem for those who ignore the fact that argumentation legitimately employs apt analogies, mythological or otherwise, to illustrate certain points of philosophical import.\textsuperscript{168} Ultimately, Annas’ claim is likely only to be a problem for mouthpiece interpreters who have already

\textsuperscript{166} By this I mean to make reference to Socrates’ attire as described by Apollodorus in the \textit{Symposium} 174a. Specifically, “[O]ne day he ran into Socrates, who had just bathed and put on his fancy sandals — both very unusual events.” Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 174a.

\textsuperscript{167} Further insight into this claim may be supported via Plato’s discussions on the written word. Specifically, one should note that the written and spoken word is not condemned by Socrates as bad per se but, rather “it is the kind of writing that poses as truth but which fails to defend itself that is condemned by Socrates. Genuine philosophical inquiry is justified in both spoken and written form.” Corlett, \textit{Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues}, 69. Thus, whether philosophical inquiry is delivered in traditional format or otherwise it should not make a difference, so long as truth is the aim that the dialogue is striving to reach.

\textsuperscript{168} As stated earlier, Annas does admit via her recognition that “myth and fiction may be regarded as expressing important truths” (“Plato and Common Morality,” 443) that “some of [Plato’s] myths at least are worth non-literary study” and that “Plato nowhere says or implies that there is a single all-purpose distinction between storytelling and reasoning such that all stories are necessarily stupid or immoral. He in fact clearly believes that some \textit{mythoi}...do have rational depth.” “Plato’s Myths of Judgment,” 120-121.
made up their minds, without plausible supportive argument, that Plato indeed has theories, doctrines or beliefs that he wishes to convey in his works.

In all, it seems that while both Kraut and Annas desire to discover and attribute what it is that makes “Plato’s philosophy” so unique, they each in their own way, ironically, overlook the one intricacy that makes his dialogues truly Platonic (if such a thing can be). If Plato revered his teacher Socrates as much as we can reasonably assume he did, then he, like Socrates, is more likely to have taken a back seat of sorts (or rather, a middle one), choosing instead to “beget labor” upon his readers rather than actively give birth himself. For, “You are forgetting my friend,” Socrates says to Theaetetus, “I don’t know anything about this kind of thing myself, and I don’t claim any of it as my own. I am barren of theories: my business is to attend to you in your labor.” Specifically, while it is not being denied that Plato had ideas that he expressed in the dialogues — for certainly this is something the mouthpiece interpretation and the Socratic interpretation agree upon — it is in no way obvious which ideas were his and moreover, that any of those ideas amount to theories, doctrines or beliefs that Plato held or wished to advance. For surely, as Hyland states, to attribute a theory of anything to Plato “has neither been helpful nor innocent, but has obstructed our openness to reading the dialogues as what they are, as invitations to and as imitations of philosophy, as dialogues, between discrete individuals with different characteristics, in different situations.” What is more, based on the significance of reason and the philosophical dialectic in Plato’s works, it is likewise in no way obvious that the ideas discussed in the Platonic dialogues were meant to be anything other than ideas. One of the primary (if not the main) purposes of employing the dialogue form, after all, is to allow

169 This is to make reference to Socrates’ role as a midwife. For greater detail, see the Theaetetus 148e - 151a.

170 Plato, Theaetetus, 157d.

171 For example, Frede states: “the form of a Platonic dialogue is such that the mere fact that an argument is advanced in the dialogue does not yet mean that it is endorsed by Plato.” “Plato’s Arguments and the Dialogue Form,” 203. Moreover, contends Corlett, we “ought to use the dialogues as the philosophically informative works that they are, recognizing Plato as, like his teacher Socrates, a master of the dialectic.” Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 23-24. Others who have posed arguments along these lines and thus challenge the superiority of the mouthpiece interpretation include: Sayre, Plato’s Literary Garden; Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason; Press, Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Anonymity.

for active participation and, as such, a collective march toward the truth (whatever truth that may be). This march personifies the movement of the *logos*. If indeed our ultimate significance as human beings relies upon the enduring power (or extension) of ideas and, thus, our active participation in the march, then surely a corpus of texts that reveal nothing other than ideas is reasonable.\(^{173}\)

Thus, it seems that what Kraut and Anna s ultimately fail to recognize in their articulate, yet metaphilosophically misdirected analyses of Plato’s works, is the binding medium of the dialogues themselves;\(^{174}\) they neglect the very thing that embodies the spaces, breaths, and moments in between and gives light — however esoterically — to the meaning of how and why we ought to “live the examined life.” In other words, both Kraut and Anna s overlook the significance of the dialectical process of reasoning in and of itself.\(^{175}\) As a result, they relegate the dialectic to a status that is less significant than it really is, or they conflate it, more often than not, with mere literary technique.\(^{176}\) Such neglect results in an allegorical retreat into the cave. Thus, while clearly above ground in so many ways, Kraut and Anna s seem to remain shackled below by their dismissal of this fundamentally resounding element — a shackling that seems to consist of and result in a gross

\(^{173}\) For a further point of reference regarding the importance of active participation, the staying power of ideas and the human condition, see the *Symposium* 209b-d, which offers a poetic illustration of what I feel to be central to such discussion. Additionally, use of the word “our” in terms of human significance and the march toward truth, above, refers both to our significance as *unique individuals* and our significance as a *collective* (e.g., society, species, etc.).

\(^{174}\) Of particular interest to note here is the idea that this “binding medium” can be paralleled to the unity thesis, namely in that one can plausibly infer a local, moderate, and global unity of Plato’s alleged thought by taking into consideration this particular aspect. For greater detail about the unity thesis, see Corlett, *Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues*, 6-7. In a different vein, the *Timaeus* 50c offers a unique articulation of the nature of the process of reasoning and its binding medium when it reads, “we need to keep in mind three types of things: that which comes to be, that in which it comes to be, and that after which the thing coming to be is modeled, and which is the source of its coming to be. It is in fact appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother, the source to a father, and the nature between them to their offspring.” Plato, *Timaeus*, 50c. What I take this to mean is that the dialectic (i.e., that which nurtures the ability to reason — the mother) is the binding medium between that which gives us life (reason — the father) and that which allows us to become significant (i.e., our ideas — our offspring and source of immortality). It should be noted that action is an assumed component of reasoning and contributes to our significance.

\(^{175}\) On the one hand, overlooking the significance of the dialectical process does not seem to be a necessary consequence of the mouthpiece approach (i.e., that Plato’s works contain Plato’s own convictions). On the other hand, it does seem to follow insofar as it — by not taking seriously the Platonic Question — does not seem to allow for movement beyond its own assumptions.

\(^{176}\) Anna s, “Plato’s Myths of Judgment” 121-122.
misrepresentation of Plato’s works. For, the matters that are discussed in the dialogues are not meant to “begin and end” with Plato, so to speak, or represent ‘Plato’s truths.’ Rather, they are ideas to be embraced and explored by each of us and, when held up to the light of reason, dismissed or advanced accordingly…not as ‘Plato’s ideas’ but, rather, as ideas in general — ours and those presented in the dialogues — that endure (or fail to endure) by virtue of being sound. What is more, in their attempt to attribute theories, doctrines or beliefs to Plato, they miss (as it concerns the Platonic corpus) what seems a more philosophically promising approach to the dialogues and their respective contents, all things considered. This is to say, they miss the movement of the living logoi. In essence, unable (or perhaps simply unwilling) to disengage their gaze so as to look directly into the light, Kraut and Annas remain looking at the shadows of words, or at best, at the words themselves and no more. To quote Socrates:

[W]herever you turn, there is nothing…which in itself is just one thing; all things become relatively to something…[W]e [should never] allow the use of such words as ‘something’, ‘of something’, or ‘mine’, ‘this’ or ‘that’, or any other name that makes things stand still. We ought, rather, to speak according to nature and refer to things as ‘becoming’, ‘being produced’, ‘passing away’, ‘changing’; for if you speak in such a way as to make things stand still, you will easily be refuted.

In the case of Kraut and Annas, and of the mouthpiece approach in general, I believe this refutation spares no mercy.

177 Eugene N. Tigerstedt echoes this sentiment when he comments that the mouthpiece method of interpretation is often a vain attempt to stop the living logoi in their flow, to remove a wave out of stream. Plato’s Idea of Poetical Inspiration (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1969), 6. While Tigerstedt’s comment is used in Corlett’s, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues to make reference to the idea that if one detaches any “single moment of the dialogue from the whole…[one does] serious disservice to the author’s intent and to the general understanding of the dialogue” (86), it can likewise be used in this context to make reference to the movement of mind, akin to the living logoi. Ultimately, what I am suggesting is that Tigerstedt’s statement can be used to provide additional support for the claim that the movement of ideas in the Platonic dialogues (i.e., the living logoi) is essential to the understanding of Plato’s works.

178 Plato, Theaetetus, 157b-c. The Timaeus 48c further articulates this concept via a discussion about the intrinsic nature and properties of fire, water, air, and earth: “We tend to posit them as the elemental ‘letters’ of the universe and tell people they are its ‘principles’…In fact, however, they shouldn’t even be compared to syllables. Only an unenlightened person might…make such a comparison.” Plato, Timaeus, 48c.
CHAPTER 2

EXCAVATION II

WHY ENLIGHTENMENT AND REASON REQUIRE US TO ACT:
AN OVERVIEW

So I chant incantations over you and offer you little tidbits from each of the wise till I succeed in assisting you to bring your own belief forth into light.179

It is at this point in my thesis that I offer a uniquely Socratic interpretation of the philosopher’s obligation to return to the cave. As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, the concept of movement, the nature of reality (or more specifically, the human condition), and the dialectical process of reasoning will be of primary explanation for the enlightened individuals’ requirement to act. My analysis will focus on the prisoners’ ascent and Socrates’ declaration “They’re like us.” I will conclude that the prisoners’ ascent to truth requires both a redirection of sight (via reasoning) and an unyielding courage. Action and participation in one’s escape from the cave is an implied component of this fortitude. Moreover, I will conclude that it is plausible, given the aforementioned significance of the living logoi, that Socrates’ statement “They’re like us” is meant to imply that we are not only like the prisoners, but like the shadows as well. In particular, I suggest that the nature of the human condition — specifically the fact that we are temporal beings — compels us to act for the very purpose of gaining significance. Significance is desirable insofar as it offers us, among other things, a kind of immortality180 — the sort that allows us to continue “creat[ing] in the

179 Plato, Theaetetus, 157d.

180 I do not mean for ‘immortality’ to be taken in a literal sense or in ways that many traditional theologies might regard it or an afterlife. Rather, I intend that it be considered symbolically, as something akin to a longing ‘to be remembered for doing something worthwhile’ or ‘to leave a footprint or impact in ways that matter.’ In this respect, let us consider the importance of connection. In particular, by and large (and taken within the proper context), most will agree that humans desire to connect with others in ways that matter be that “other” a person, a thing, a moment, a feeling, or an idea etc., and that furthermore, we long to do so in a variety of forms (e.g., by way of love, understanding, intellectual contributions, shared laughter, tears, etc.). For example, teachers, mentors, coaches and/or parents desire to pass along certain abilities and/or ways of participating in life that will allow for the student, mentee, athlete, and/or child to succeed and live prosperously, virtuously,
beautiful” — and it does so by way of offering its contributor or progenitor (i.e., she who actively participates in the march toward truth) a sort of continued existence in the dialectical process despite the literal restrictions posed by her mortality. Hence, metaphorically speaking, in order to achieve this feat, those who have escaped the cave and recognized the transient nature of their own selves must return to help those lost in the dark; they must utilize their ability to reason and play an active role in the intellectual progress of their selves, others and society. To begin, let us return to the image of the cave from our first “excavation.” That is, let us return to the recitation: “imagine a human being living (or, rather, serving time) in an enclosed earth and brick solitary confinement cell.”

**OUTSIDE THE CAVE**

Now, imagine one day, the door of the enclosed earth and brick cell is opened. A voice yells at the prisoner, “get up...move it...time to go.” The prisoner, shocked, remains frozen. He can see nothing but a blinding light illuminating the dark figure of what appeared to be a large man. The flickering light of the candle from the ledge far above him was now exhausted; the partial images it revealed before...no longer there. Again, the voice in the doorway yells, “let’s go...didn’t you hear me?...you’re outta here.” The prisoner rubs his eyes, trying to comprehend what it is that he’s hearing and who or what is saying it. He shrinks back into the corner, frightened and confused. A moment later he feels hands on him, grabbing him roughly by the arms and forcing him to his feet. He fights vehemently, swinging his arms madly about with every ounce of his strength, but to no avail. The guard drags the prisoner from his cell, down a long hallway, and up a steep flight of steps. Though the new light of the cell’s exterior reveals doorways, windows, and other people, the prisoner cannot see...nothing around him is intelligible. At the top of the stairway, the man throws a bag at the prisoner. “Your clothes are in there (some stuff donated by the school) and a fresh pair of socks.” The prisoner grips the paper bag nervously and rubs his eyes. Though his pupils are laboring intensively in their attempt to adjust to the light, he can now make out that the guard smirking in front of him is the same figure who had been standing in his cell entryway earlier...the same individual which had

and in ways that make a difference. With any such transactions, it seems that there is a perpetuation of sorts that occurs — a passing of values from one to another, an exchange of “goods” from old to young (sometimes young to old, old to old), etc. — that represents a movement from self to other and, thus, exemplifies an extension of self beyond self and the establishment of one’s symbolic or metaphoric immortality.

181 On immortality, Randall, Jr. states: “In most passages, as in the *Symposium*, the yearning for deathlessness is a longing to ‘create in the beautiful.’ In one way only, it is held, can mortal nature become immortal, by generation: generation of the body, thus partaking of immortality in one’s children and descendents; or generation of the soul, thus procuring a glory and renown immortality renewed in the memory of mankind.” Randall, Jr., *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason*, 216.
forced him to his feet. “Well…put your clothes on man, we haven’t got all day,” the guard says. Reaching into his paper bag, the prisoner pulls out a wrinkled, musty shirt and puts it on. “Huh…will you look at that,” the guard says, “if that ain’t somethin’…You know what your shirt says!??” The prisoner blinks, bemusedly. “Never mind, man…you’ll get it soon enough. Congratulations!” the guard says, as he puts his hand on the doorknob in front him, “you’re now officially an ‘escapee’…Fly away…you’re free, birdie!” And with the turn of a knob the light of day comes crashing in….revealing a brand new world in front of him and a shirt that reads “*and the truth shall set you free.*”

**THE PRISONER’S ASCENT: AN ANALOGY**

Nickolas Pappas provides an interesting anecdote about Plato. “It is hard to imagine,” he states, “a more highly honored role in fifth-century Athens than that of the tragic playwright; and as a very young man, according to rumor, Plato aspired to become one. But after he showed his works to Socrates, and Socrates quizzed him about every line of verse, Plato burned his poetry and never wrote any more.”182 Why I make note of this here is not to attest to its validity per se, but rather to agree with Pappas that:

> [if] such a confrontation had never taken place, it would have been necessary to invent one. For nothing less than stifled literary ambitions could account for the Platonic dialogues’ skillful presentations of character, or for the subtle connections they draw between people’s lives and the abstract theories the people espouse. The language remains grounded in ordinary speech, but is ordinary speech made elegant and elastic.183

Plato’s dexterous ability to navigate the seas of literal and figurative speech is both symphonic and insightful. In addition, his depiction of the cave is especially telling,

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183 Ibid., 10. One should note that an addendum to Pappas’ thoughts could reasonably include the following modification: “[if] such a confrontation had never taken place, it would have been necessary to invent one. For nothing less than stifled literary ambitions [aside from, of course, the artistic-philosophers’ mind] could account for the Platonic dialogues’ skillful presentations of character, or for the subtle connections they draw between people’s lives and the abstract theories the people espouse.” Such an adaptation pays reverence to the notion of Plato as an “artistic-philosopher,” as intimated in the writings of Randall, Jr., *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason*, 135-137.

184 Artistically speaking, the Platonic dialogues maintain a literary cadence that is both poetic and rhythmic in their own right. Regardless of the complexities being discussed by the various interlocutors, the dialogues seem to have a musical air to them. The words often seem to roll off the pages as if they were notes in a symphony; they are moving and poignant. In addition, the dialogues themselves make several references to music and harmony. For example: “a moment’s reflection suffices to show that the case of poetry and music [is guided by the god of Love]. Indeed, this may have been just what Heraclitus had in mind…[the] one, he says, ‘being at variance with itself is in agreement with itself…like the attunement of a bow or a lyre’…For surely
containing “so many levels of meaning that each rereading reveals something not seen the last time.” As it pertains to my interpretation of Plato’s allegory, it is this sensitivity to the interweaving of imagination and intellect — which Plato so masterfully employed — upon which I am relying, too.

With that being said, let us consider a few key elements of the aforementioned portrayal of life “outside the cave.” The first two elements will provide support for the explanation of ascent; the final one (introduced separately under the heading 'A Socratic Interpretation of Socrates' "They're Like Us": The Obligation and Duty of Enlightenment') will provide support for my claim that emergence from the cave and enlightenment logically entails action and duty. To begin, let us focus our attention on the similarities of ascent and response between the prisoner who is released from solitary confinement, as depicted in my analogy, and the prisoner who is released from Plato’s cave. Specifically, while my story offers an alternative vision of ascendance from the cave than that of Plato’s and, likewise, a differing reenactment of the dynamics between the prisoner and he who is setting him free, its message is the same. In both scenarios, the ascent to reason requires a change from the prisoners’ current setting and/or state of mind; it requires a turning into the light. As such, upon first introduction to “reality,” the prisoners of both depictions are blinded; they are “pained and dazzled and unable to see things whose shadows [they’d] seen before.” Furthermore, the prisoners of both depictions demonstrate the same resistance to the light.

there can be no harmony so long as high and low are still discordant; harmony, after all, is consonance, and consonance is a species of agreement...Music is therefore simply the science of the effects of Love on rhythm and harmony.” Plato, Symposium, 187a-b. Also: “One who is just...regulates well what is really his own and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale — high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious.” Plato, Republic, 443d-e.

185 Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, viii.

186 While it seems fair to suggest that imagination is not equivalent to the intellect (or reason), it does, however, seem reasonable to maintain that imagination is a component of reasoning and moreover a means by which the subject matter at hand can be illuminated. With that being said, I will do my best to follow reason where it may lead, while painting a picture of the journey along the way.

187 Beyond the obvious difference that the prisoner of my myth is being released from a correctional facility and not a “cave” is the fact that the prison guard does not directly “[point] to each of the things passing by [and ask] him what each of them is...compell[ing] him to answer” or further “[tell] him that what he’d seen before was inconsequential.” Plato, Republic, 515d.

188 Ibid.
Even with “someone [dragging them] away from there by force, up the...steep path, and...into the sunlight”, they fight; they are “pained and irritated at being treated [this] way” and want to “turn around and flee towards the things [they are] able to see.” R. K. Elliott provides an interesting perspective on the prisoners’ desire to “flee,” or rather, to return to objects of familiarity, when he asserts:

From an educational point of view, the desire to return to the shadows represents the tendency of the perplexed disciple to abandon philosophy and revert to the hedonism of the multitude, but it is meant to indicate also that any Socratic who does not hypothesize the Forms must either remain in a state of perplexity concerning the good or must call the things that please him good.

Joel W. Lidz echoes this sentiment when he writes, “the familiar is the comfortable, and the comfortable is so attractive that it leads the escapee to deny the evidence of his own senses. Such is the power of one’s origins, and hence the importance of the examined life.” Ultimately, for both the prisoner of my allegory and those of Plato’s, the ascent and response is the same: neither wishes to remain in the light and instead desires to flee toward the comforts of his or her own deluded reality.

Further, while I do not paint a picture beyond my prisoner’s entrance into the “new world,” I do allude to the idea that soon enough (relatively speaking), as he continues to adjust and comprehend what it is that he is seeing — what it is that is actually true — he may (by way of reason and participation in reasoning) “be able see the sun, not images of it in the water or some alien place, but the sun itself, in its own place, and be able to study it.” Sayre nicely summarizes this idea concerning one’s ability to reach such a state when he further comments: “while the path enables one to reach the state of understanding desired, it does not guarantee achievement merely by taking these steps.” We must work, and tirelessly at that, if we hope to gain a proper understanding of the truth. Consider also the

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189 Ibid., 516a.
190 Ibid., 515e-516a.
192 Lidz, “Reflections on and in Plato's Cave,” 125. I find this statement particularly insightful in that it alludes, quite powerfully, to the grip that each of our own lives has on us — where we come from, who our influences are, what our familial upbringing has been like, etc.
193 Plato, Republic, 516b.
194 Sayre, Plato’s Literary Garden, 160.
observation, which Dale Hall attributes to A.S. Ferguson regarding the human condition of the prisoner and the state of existence outside the cave:

[T]he Cave can be understood only if we recognize that the inmates’ condition is ‘in some sense unnatural.’ Unnatural, that is, because their confinement deprives them of sunlight, the ‘natural medium for the eye’….The eye can realize its natural *arête* (excellence) of seeing well only in sunlight, just as the psyche can achieve its proper excellence of knowing only because the world is informed by a final principle of intelligibility, the Form of Goodness…. [Hence, the] allegory shows that in suffering *apaideusia* we are turned from the Good to bear a condition as unnatural as that of men deprived altogether of sunlight.  

In its recognition of the unnatural state of the prisoners when reason is not employed, one can reasonably infer that *reason is a function of the human dimension*. This means that every human has the power to activate this innate capacity, and as such, Plato’s allegory can be understood as a message of tremendous optimism. “This inference is confirmed when Plato emphasizes that the evil of *apaideusia* arises from no innate incapacity, for the inmates could be turned towards the light were they only released from their bonds by the right *paideia*. *Paideia* is not the creation of a power or faculty of men, it is not a matter of ‘putting sight into blind eyes’… but the means by which their natures are perfected.”

Randall, Jr. echoes these notions in his claim: “If the dialogues have shown men what they are, and given them self-knowledge, they have also revealed to men what they might become, and given them the compelling urge to perfect their human life.” I pay respect to these observations in my analogy by the guard’s assertion that the prisoner will “get it soon enough” coupled with the sentiment displayed on the prisoners’ shirt. As such, it seems reasonable to suggest that at the core of Plato’s Myth of the Cave and, subsequently, at the core of the *Republic*, lies an optimism of utmost profundity. We, as creators of our own intellectual destiny, have the ability to make a difference.

Further, of particular interest to my argument and something that this analogy likewise serves to illuminate, is the idea that arriving at truth involves a *process* of reasoning.

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196 Ibid., 79.
198 For greater detail about this notion see the “A Socratic Interpretation of Socrates' "They're Like Us": The Obligation and Duty of Enlightenment” and the “Conclusion” sections of this thesis.
Edward O. Wilson offers some interesting insight on this matter in his writings about nature and the intellect. He states:

There will come a time when the bird of paradise [in this case the object of investigation] is reconstituted through a synthesis of all the hard-won analytic information. The mind, exercising a newfound power, will journey back to the familiar world of seconds and centimeters, where once again the glittering plumage takes form and is viewed at a distance through a network of leaves and mist. Once again we see the bright eye open, the head swivel, the wings extend. But the familiar motions are now viewed across a far greater range of cause and effect. The species is understood more completely; misleading illusions have given way to a more comprehensive light and wisdom. With the completion of one full cycle of intellect, the scientist’s search for the true material nature of the species is partially replaced by the more enduring responses of the hunter and the poet.\[^{199}\]

Wilson’s description about the process of reasoning is not only elucidating but also seems aptly fit in terms of my discussion about Plato’s cave and the many layers of meaning to which my analysis alludes.

Perhaps more directly related, however, is an account of maturation offered by Sayre. “When the discourse planted and nurtured by dialectic finally matures into philosophic understanding,” Sayre articulates, “it achieves — in the words of the Phaedrus — a kind of ‘immortality’ …and grants its possessor ‘well-being’ …in the highest degree of which humankind is capable.”\[^{200}\] The use of “matures” in Sayre’s analogy helps to illustrate the maturation process that is necessary in order to arrive upon truth. Maturity is inclusive of physical, mental, and emotional growth, though maturity of the rational kind seems the most important of all.\[^{201}\] Frede offers some additional insight on maturation when he states,


\[^{201}\] One might note here that by mentioning these types of maturity individually, I am not implying that the three are necessarily wholly separate processes. If one is to examine Aristotle’s works on emotions, for example, one will find that the relationship between reason (in this instance referring to ‘mental’) and *pathē* (generally translated as emotions, passions or affects) is quite complicated. Marlene K. Sokolon states that, at best: “Aristotle employs *pathē* as an umbrella, or overarching term categorizing complex physiological/cognitive states that can affect judgment and be habituated into dispositions…Even though there is no clarity as to the precise delineated category of the *pathē*, this does not confuse his apparent point. For Aristotle, emotions are aspects of the soul that can be loosely understood as ‘nevertheless, in some way, having a share of/participating with (metekhousa) reason.’” *Political Emotions: Aristotle and the Symphony of Reason and Emotion* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 19. In terms of the Platonic dialogues and
“knowledge, or at least a certain kind of knowledge Plato is particularly interested in, is a highly personal kind of achievement. To gain this kind of knowledge one has to sort out one’s own, often rather idiosyncratic, beliefs, which are tied in to one’s own experience, way of life, interests, status, and the like.”

Ultimately, maturity requires, if one is to take shape properly, that one develop the skills of reasoning, among other things, and that one “become an artist of the dialectic,” pursuing wisdom to its inexhaustible end. As such, the analogy of the blinding light that the prisoners face can be broadened and compared to the art of reasoning itself. Namely, if one is not familiar with the dialectical process and the movement therein, one is blinded by the light that reason emits. As it pertains to the contention that mouthpiece interpreters are “stuck in the cave,” this parallel seems particularly fitting in that they seem to have remained oblivious to the general purpose of the Platonic dialogues; as such, they remain as blinded and indignant to leave their cells as the prisoners are when they are first accosted.

the quest for truth, this shared process of maturation in which the physical, mental and emotional participate, must be lead by reason. This is what is being implied by way of my claim that maturity of the rational kind seems the most important of all.


203 By “properly,” I mean “to reach his or her fullest potential.” For example: if one matures properly, one can expect to reach his or her fullest potential.

204 This is not to literally say that mouthpiece interpreters are unfamiliar with the dialectical process. Of course they are familiar with it. However, when it comes to the purpose of Plato’s dialogues and to their approach, they seem to “operate with blinders on” (as if it were a stranger) insofar as they relegate it to something insignificant (or rather less significant than it is) to the understanding and interpretation of Plato’s works.

205 An interesting point of irony can be inserted here via a claim made by Kraut: “It is in Book VII of the Republic that we find Plato’s well-known and powerful image of the human condition: Ordinary human beings, untouched by philosophical education, are likened to prisoner’s in a cave who are forced to gaze on shadows created by artificial light and cast by artifacts paraded by unseen manipulators….Their conception of what exists and of what is worth having is so severely limited and the deception by which they are victimized is so systematic that they cannot even recognize that they are confined, and would not immediately regard an interruption in their routine ways of thought as liberation.” “Introduction to the Study of Plato,” 10-11. Kraut’s observation might beg the question of just who it is, in fact, that maintains such a “severely limited” conception and, likewise, whose level of deception victimizes them “so [systematically] that they cannot even recognize that they are confined?” If I am able to deliver irony in the form of frankness: it seems that it is the mouthpiece interpretation camp, the members of which cannot (or rather choose not) to see, “that an interruption in [their] routine ways of thought [is] liberation!”
Secondly, one should note that I purposefully chose to refer to the prisoner emerging from the cave (or, rather solitary confinement cell) as an escapee\(^{206}\) rather than a prisoner “released from [his] bonds.”\(^{207}\) I did this to support the argument in the previous excavation concerning the tenuous nature of the intellect and its requirement that one must “work like a slave” to attain it. Loren Eiseley echoes these sentiments when he states of the difficulty of such an “immense journey”:\(^{208}\) while we certainly “cannot know all that has happened in the past, or the reason for all these events, any more than we can with surety discern what lies ahead,”\(^{209}\) this shall not “deter some of us from attempting it,”\(^{210}\) nor ought it. Moreover, regardless of the fact that “we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know....The important thing is that each man possess [his own] wilderness and that he consider what marvels are to be observed there.”\(^{211}\) Ultimately, I use the word “escapee” to suggest participation in the sort of “immense journey” to which Eiseley and, of course, Plato allude. In order to do this and be successful, the escapee must be passionately committed to following reason where it leads. He must in his ascent toward truth, “work like a slave;” as such, the escapee’s climb in my depiction of Plato’s allegory represents the prisoner’s metaphorical escape from the shadows of his or her respective past which landed him in prison in the first place.

What is more, the term “escapee” helps to solidify the point that “the movement from less clear to more clear is a gradual process, not a sudden revelation of truth, and demands an arduous process of habituation on the escapee’s part.”\(^{212}\) Generally speaking, a successful

\(^{206}\) The term “escape” is also used by Socrates to Adeimantus in the Republic 491a, specifically: “We must now look at the ways in which this nature is corrupted, how it’s destroyed in many people, while a small number (the ones that are called useless rather than bad) escape.” Plato, Republic, 491a. Lidz also refers in his article, periodically, to the prisoners being akin to “escapees.” See Lidz, “Reflections on and in Plato’s Cave,” 124-126.

\(^{207}\) Plato, Republic, 515d.

\(^{208}\) Loren Eiseley, The Immense Journey.

\(^{209}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{210}\) Ibid.

\(^{211}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{212}\) Lidz, “Reflections on and in Plato's Cave,” 125. This is not to deny, however, the “A-ha!” experience that many of us have from time to time. Rather, it is simply a reference to the importance of our active participation in the march toward truth and what this sort of participation usually involves.
escape requires a well-thought out plan, and thus implies action in various respects. That is, whether physical, mental or both, the act of successfully escaping requires (at the least) intensive preparation and execution — two aspects that concern, among other things: exploration, discovery and creation. “Escaping” is thus, characteristically multi-faceted and layered, as is the ascent from darkness to light; it implies a level of active participation beyond that of he who is simply just “released” from one’s bonds. J. Bronowski addresses this idea when he states:

The discoveries of science, the works of art are explorations....The discoverer or the artist presents in them two aspects of nature and fuses them into one. This is the act of creation, in which an original thought is born, and it is the same act in original science and original art. But it is not...the monopoly of the man who wrote the poem or who made the discovery. On the contrary....The poem or the discovery exists in two moments of vision: the moment of appreciation as much as that of creation; for the appreciator must see the movement, wake to the echo which was started in the creation of the work....[That is,] In the moment of appreciation we live again the moment....We re-enact the creative act, and we ourselves make the discovery again.214

Bronowski’s sentiments can be paralleled with Socrates’ similar claim in *Phaedrus* 276e-277a regarding the process of creation and re-creation: “The dialectician chooses a proper soul and plants and sows within it discourse accompanied by knowledge — discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it, which is not barren but produces a seed from which more discourse grows in the character of others.”

Ultimately, by using the term ‘escapee’ I mean to emphasize the respective sentiments of Wilson and Bronowski regarding the process of reasoning and the nature of what might rightly be deemed a “successful escape.” More directly, I make use of it to reinforce the reflections already set forth in the Platonic corpus. For, as Socrates says, while “wondering...is [certainly] where philosophy begins and nowhere else,”215 this does not mean that ‘wondering’ is where philosophy ends. There is much more to it than that. And while “you must,” as Socrates avows, “put your whole heart into what [you] are doing”216 —

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213 It is also, arguably, even multi-pronged insofar as “multi-pronged” implies a sort of forward movement as in the case of a “multi-pronged attack,” for example.


216 Ibid., 148d1-2.
especially if what you are aiming for is knowledge — such a statement is not equivalent to what Theaetetus seems to make of Socrates’ claim when he replies: “If putting one’s heart into it is all that is required, Socrates, the answer will come to light.”\(^{217}\) In the end, my replacement of the word ‘prisoner’ with that of ‘escapee’ is meant to reveal the arduous nature of acquiring knowledge and the inexorable work entailed if one desires to come closer to the truth. In this connection, too, ‘escapee’ seems more aptly fit, insofar as it seems to capture more completely just what it might in fact mean to put one’s ‘whole heart into’ that for which one aims and thus truly undergo transformation of a significant kind.

### A Socratic Interpretation of Socrates’ "They’re Like Us": The Obligation and Duty of Enlightenment

This brings us now to the core of my analogy. In an attempt to demonstrate how the Socratic interpretation can provide a unique explanation for Socrates’ statement “they’re like us” and thus, a unique explanation for the obligation and duty that enlightenment entails, I turn to the oft-debated question of why Socrates made such a claim in the first place.\(^{218}\) For, if Socrates is an enlightened philosopher, why would he ever compare himself to those inside the cave? While many have considered such a statement to signify that Socrates is implying that the prisoners are “like us” insomuch as “us” is: (1) a general term for human beings, (2) alluding to the notion that escaping the bonds of ignorance requires a redirecting of one’s sight toward “what is,” and (3) a point of parallel for the claim that the path to knowledge is a long and arduous one, I argue that the statement “They’re like us” is more complex than this.\(^{219}\) This is not to say, however, that I do not agree with these inferences. In fact, I embrace them as components of my analogy. But I also maintain that there is more to

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\(^{217}\) Ibid., 148d4-5. Among the most obvious differences is the fact that the word “whole” is missing from Theaetetus’ reply. For certainly there is a difference between putting one’s ‘whole heart’ into something versus merely just putting one’s ‘heart’ into it.

\(^{218}\) Plato scholars who have pondered this query include, but are not limited to: Richard Kraut, J.W. Lidz, Julia Annas, Dale Hall, Nicholas P. White, and R. K. Elliott.

\(^{219}\) It is worth noting too that many Plato scholars have likened the “Allegory of the Cave” as supplemental to the “aim” of the Republic to endorse a particular type of political system. For example, C. C. W. Taylor, “Plato’s Totalitarianism,” in Plato’s Republic: Critical Essays, ed. Richard Kraut (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 31-49.
Socrates’ statement than meets the eyes. Specifically, I contend that “They’re like us” is not only a reference concerning the prisoners being like us or an evocation about the inherent struggle involved in the acquisition of knowledge, but of equal importance, it is a reference concerning the transitory nature of human beings — an idea which is born by way of consideration of the shadows themselves being “like us.” For, while “it [is] the Living Thing’s nature to be eternal,” says Timaeus to Socrates in his grand account of creation, “it isn’t possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten.”  

Considered from this perspective, and in light of the epistemic humility that Socrates so embodied as a philosopher, it makes sense why Socrates would make such a claim about the shadows. To further elaborate, by approaching the Myth of the Cave Socratically — i.e., by taking into consideration the nature of the dialogue form itself and the movement therein, by considering the various elements associated with the Socratic “method” (i.e., humility, persistence, courage, etc.) and by following the light of reason — it is not unreasonable to contend that Socrates might be implying that the images — the shadows themselves (not just the prisoners) — are like us. After all, we are as dependent on oxygen, food, and water for our temporal existence as shadows are on light; as such we are transitory and not eternal. Because the nature of reality, logically deduced, entails movement (i.e., we grow old, we die), and because Socrates can reasonably be considered an enlightened individual who would (by being enlightened), be familiar with such truths about reality, why would such a statement not be made? “It’s a strange image you’re describing, and strange prisoners,” Glaucon says. “They’re like us,” Socrates responds, “the truth is nothing other than the shadows.” While the shadows in the cave from the perspective of the prisoners are truth of one sort (representing what is), the shadows in the cave from the perspective of the enlightened philosopher are truth of another sort (representing what is not). In other words, depending on one’s level of enlightenment, the shadows will mean different things to their respective perceivers. And because Socrates is an enlightened individual, it is reasonable to think that he would see a reality about the shadows that is more comprehensive in nature than

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220 Plato, *Timaeus*, 37d.
221 Cf. footnote 31.
222 Plato, *Republic*, 515a-c.
that of the unenlightened individual. What my analogy aims to reveal is this added layer of complexity and richness to which Socrates’ statement seems to allude. And it does so by uniquely focusing on the shadows themselves, not just the prisoners, thus further illuminating the paradoxical nature of the human condition. As such, it offers valuable insight into why, in fact, we must take action and participate in the intellectual progress of ourselves, others, and society.

That is, by interpreting Socrates’ statement as such, we are offered a direct link to why it is required of the philosopher to return to the cave. Because the nature of reality is transitory (just as the nature of the shadows are), in order to gain significance and meaning, those enlightened must return to help those still stuck in the dark. For surely, Eiseley claims, “this is the most enormous extension of vision of which life is capable: the projection of itself into other lives. This is the lonely, magnificent power of humanity. It is, far more than any spatial adventure, the supreme epitome of reaching out.” Thus, one’s return to the cave is not, as Annas claims, “doing what is impersonally best” or even merely, as Kraut contends, a recognition and love of “a certain kind of…pattern in human affairs” (whatever that pattern may be). Rather, our return (and hence our significance) is very personal indeed, depending largely upon our recognition of self. Moreover, it depends on our participation in life itself and the liberating acts which make life meaningful. John Evan Seery provides some insight here by way of his discussion about the ‘double-perspective’ that The Republic offers its readers. He states: “Double-perspective is another way of saying that the Republic prompts us to look at ourselves from an enlarged point of view, yet without losing sight of our very real limits….This is the comedy and tragedy and wonder of the Republic, when we realize that it is we who are those souls now, at every moment, choosing

\footnote{The Timaeus 47a-b offers a helpful and articulate account of the power of eyesight properly focused, and thus its ability to detect layers of complexity: “our ability to see the periods of day-and-night, of months and years, or equinoxes and solstices, has led to the invention of number, and has given us the idea of time and opened a path to inquiry into the nature of the universe. These pursuits have given us philosophy, a gift from the gods to the mortal race whose value has neither been nor ever will be surpassed. I’m quite prepared to declare this to be the supreme good our eyesight offers us.” Plato, Timaeus, 47a-b.}

\footnote{Eiseley, The Immense Journey, 46.}

\footnote{Julia Annas, An Introduction to Plato’s Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 267.}

\footnote{Kraut, “Return to the Cave,” 51-52.}
their lives.”227 Lidz offers a similar perspective regarding the recognition of self and liberation when he avows, “Socrates does not explain how…liberation takes place, though it seems fair to assume that the parable seeks to produce the very phenomenon it describes. One escapes the cave by recognizing that it exists and by understanding its nature. Our liberation paradoxically consists in an understanding of our finitude: “Know Your Self.”228 While Lidz does not explore this claim any further, nor does he make any argument that our finitude is directly related (and or possibly expressed) by way of Socrates’ statement “They’re like us” (in terms of “us” being a reference to the shadows), it is important to make note of insofar as it (as well as Seery’s ‘double-perspective’) seems to most closely correspond with what I am proposing as substantial in regard to the human condition and its various parameters, and more specifically, in terms of recognizing one’s “self” therein and what such recognition entails. Ultimately, it is my claim that in order to make a difference in ways that substantiate us as unique and significant and, likewise, in ways that allow us to come in closer proximity to the good, we must play an active role in the intellectual progress of ourselves, others, and society. To paraphrase Randall, Jr.: Athanatos (immortality) is a quality of being, according to Greeks, that is attributable not only to the gods, but likewise to men — i.e., men who are aimed at the good and whose souls participate in the Ideal.229 Specifically, “Justice is deathless, Beauty is deathless, and [so too] the soul of man can put on such deathlessness.”230 However, one need not think of this in ways ethereal, but rather something that is “attainable here and now, in living human experience, if anywhere.”231 With this in mind, it seems then that in order to attain such a status, we must be and remain part of the dialectical process both in theory and in practice. Or in terms of the duty sense of this expression, we must be and remain epistemically responsible.232

228 Lidz, “Reflections on and in Plato’s Cave,” 124.
230 Ibid., 218.
231 Ibid.
Taking this into consideration, the images of Plato’s cave provide us with yet a second parallel (and one which further substantiates my claim above). For just as shadows are dependent on the light sources’ strength of illumination for their significance, we are dependent on the active use of reasoning, or strength of illumination, for ours. Socrates’ claim then can be construed, ironically, as one of both ignorance and enlightenment. We are like the prisoners in that to escape the bonds of ignorance we must employ the use of reason; and we are like the shadows in that, once reason has been employed and we have followed its lead, we find ourselves like the very images illuminated by the fire in Plato’s cave. We realize that we are transitory, in that the moment the sources which bring us light are extinguished, so too, are we. Seen from this perspective, the claim “they’re like us” makes absolute sense and provides valuable insight into why enlightenment necessitates duty and obligation. That is, enlightenment — both in its acquisition and in its effect — necessarily involves active participation, intellectually and practically applied.

Furthermore, while recognition of self, and the interrelatedness of enlightenment, the use of reason and action give us our freedom, they also remind us of the very real and ironic parameters that restrict us. For while the march toward truth allows us to escape the darkness of Plato’s cave, the duty and obligation that enlightenment entails and which give us our significance, by definition, keep us shackled as “captives” of another sort. Ultimately, the Socratic interpretation allows us to see that we are all prisoners...be us emerging from Plato’s cave, a solitary confinement cell, or our own living rooms. The captivating and translucent beauty of the allegory is that we have a choice as to which type of prisoner we would like to be: a prisoner of ignorance or a prisoner of reason. And if the choice is the latter, can that really be considered a prisoner at all?

233 Though one might also argue “characteristically.”

234 It seems that even Kraut would agree with this sentiment: “If there is a single goal towards which we should always be striving, then it is the imitation of the Forms, not, more narrowly, their contemplation...the project of imitating the Forms, though no mere aggregate, is diverse and does not consist solely in one kind of activity.” Kraut, “Return to the Cave,” 58-59.

235 Now, some might argue here that being a prisoner of reason is indeed still indicative of being a prisoner. However, I am inclined to reply that this is likely only to be an argument for those who fear or wish to avoid the consequences of their respective actions, inactions, or otherwise. The duty and obligation that reason entails ought not to be seen so much as restricting or confining in character, but rather as freeing. Furthermore, if immortality (hypothetically speaking) is the gift we get for participating in the process of reasoning rightly,
CHAPTER 3

OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Now there might be some concerns raised about my line of defense of the Socratic interpretation of Plato’s Myth of the Cave and, more broadly stated, of his dialogues in general. The first objection concerns the claim that my account of the mouthpiece approach is not truly representative of all styles of the mouthpiece interpretation. As such, my argument in favor of the Socratic interpretation over all forms of the mouthpiece approach requires further justification. The second objection concerns the claim that not every canonical work of Plato’s is a dialogue in the traditional or relevant sense as the Socratic interpretation seems to imply. Some of his works, for example, feature only one primary speaker and very little (if any) dialogical exchange. Based on this, readers can at least discern some of Plato’s views from the content of his texts because there is no confusion about which characters might be speaking on his behalf. Thus the Socratic interpretation appears problematic insofar as it claims that there is in fact no unproblematic way to discern Plato’s views from that of the characters depicted in his dialogues. The final objection concerns the claim that my particular defense of the Socratic interpretation is nothing more than a literary theory in disguise thus reducing Socrates to nothing more than a dialogical character. As such, the Socratic interpretation seems to disregard the significance of the very individual which its approach claims to embrace as vital to Plato and the interpretation of his works. With these objections in mind, I offer a number of responses and maintain that the Socratic interpretation remains a more accurate approach to the interpretation of Plato’s dialogues, all things considered.

then it seems reasonable to expect of us to play by its respective rules, so to speak. There are very few things in this life, if any, that are free. This is especially so (and I would claim rightfully so) in regard to immortality.
OBJECTION ONE

First, it might be maintained that my claim that mouthpiece interpreters remain shackled and, as such, are metaphorically akin to the prisoners of Plato’s cave, does not apply to all mouthpiece interpreters.²³⁶ What about, for example, dramatic mouthpiece interpreters, in particular, scholars such as Thomas Szelzák? Szelzák is a dramatic mouthpiece interpreter who argues that “the correct understanding of the dialogue-form and the correct understanding of the Platonic conception of philosophy are interdependent²³⁷…. [Plato’s] dialogues are…to be read as dramas.”²³⁸ Further, according to Szelzák, these dramas include a variety of dramatic techniques, inclusive of Plato’s “employment of the continuous plot, occasional interruptions in the narrative of the dialogues, changes in interlocutors of Socrates, and the uses of irony and myth.”²³⁹ Considering only the abovementioned characteristics, Szelzák’s approach appears to embrace the dialogue form in a way that other mouthpiece interpreters do not.²⁴⁰

However, to this I would reply that while the dramatic mouthpiece interpretation is certainly a more accurate interpretation of Plato than that offered by Kraut and Annas’ literalist approach, insomuch as it takes into consideration the various literary aspects of the dialogues,²⁴¹ it still falls victim to the attacks put forth by the proponents of the Socratic interpretation (e.g., for the Socratic interpretation attacks all mouthpiece interpreters comprehensively, as all mouthpiece interpreters, regardless of the variety, contend that Plato had theories, doctrines, or beliefs that he conveys in his dialogues). Furthermore, even aside from the unfounded contention that Plato had theories, doctrines or beliefs that he wished to convey, the mouthpiece interpretation is problematic for a number of reasons. On a basic level, it is implausible because it bases its argument in favor of such an approach on entirely

²³⁶ Or rather, to all varieties of the mouthpiece interpretation.
²³⁷ Thomas Szelzák, Reading Plato (London: Routledge, 1999), 4.
²³⁸ Ibid., 118.
²³⁹ Corlett on Szelzák. As cited in Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 10.
²⁴⁰ Though certainly a more difficult case to characterize than others, I (following Corlett) characterize Szelzák as a mouthpiece interpreter of Plato insofar as he refers to “the” Platonic conception, above, as opposed to “a” Platonic conception. Thus, his locution indicates something which seems equivalent to “Plato’s conception,” thereby constituting a mouthpiece approach.
²⁴¹ Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 9.
too many unreasonable assumptions. For instance, the mouthpiece interpretation assumes that it is “innocent-until-proven-guilty” insofar as it operates with the rationale that unless or until a document of Plato’s surfaces that explicitly and unambiguously states Plato’s purpose behind writing the dialogues (i.e., that he did or did not intend for the content of his dialogues to be construed in such-and-such a fashion), then it is justified in ascribing the content of his works to him (e.g., Plato “believes” x or y, Plato’s theory of justice, etc.). Moreover, rather than utilize primary or internal evidence to support its position, it appeals to external or secondary evidence (i.e., Aristotle as the interpretive guide and “most important external witness”). And on a less basic level, the mouthpiece interpretation is implausible because it fails to take seriously the fundamental influence of Socrates on Plato. That is, it seems to regard the medium in which Plato chose to write (i.e., dialogues), the dialectical process, and the significance of reason itself as merely trivial components to the understanding of Plato’s works. By refusing to address the Platonic Question, by failing to provide sound arguments in favor of their approach, and by directing readers to interpret the content of Plato’s dialogues as Plato’s own convictions (despite evidence to the contrary), supporters of the mouthpiece approach encourage readers to participate in the art of philosophy — i.e., “to live the examined life” — in ways that are incongruent with the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues. In light of this, Plato might say of the mouthpiece approach that its biggest obstacle to its emergence from the cave is its unawareness or sometimes outright refusal to involve itself in the dialectical process of reasoning or the logos, that is, its lack of desire to turn its head (and, by relation, the heads of others) so that it might fix its gaze on the “sun itself, in its own place, and be able to study it.”

242 This is contrary to the Socratic interpretation, according to which unless or until such a document surfaces we are not justified in attributing any such views to Plato.

243 Irwin, “Plato: The Intellectual Background,” 77.

244 Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 19-37.

245 Be it an explicit or an implicit directive.

246 Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 44.

247 Plato, Republic, 516b.
OBJECTION TWO

Secondly, it might also be argued by mouthpiece interpreters that, strictly speaking, not every canonical work of Plato’s is a dialogue in the traditional or relevant sense as the Socratic interpretation seems to imply. The one work that comes to mind is Plato’s *Apology*, which consists, save a few terse responses by Meletus, wholly of Socrates’ speech to the court of Athens. Therefore, on the basis of the *Apology* (and other “non-traditional” dialogical texts, such as *Letters* and *Epigrams*), readers can discern (at the very least) some of Plato’s views from the content of his texts because there is no confusion about who might be speaking on his behalf (in this instance, Socrates). Taking this into consideration, it appears that the Socratic interpretation may be problematic because it asserts that there is no unproblematic way, given the contents of any of Plato’s works, to discern Plato’s views from that of his dialogical characters. Hence, *prima facie*, the mouthpiece interpretation seems to be at least somewhat justified in its claim, while the strong version of the anti-mouthpiece interpretation appears problematic.249

In reply to this objection, however, several things might be said. Let us first consider whether the *Apology* actually constitutes a dialogue in the traditional or relevant sense. Given the textual evidence in the *Apology*, it is very likely that Socrates’ words constitute a speech within the context of a greater dialogue, namely in the context of a courtroom discussion involving (at minimum) the judge, the jury, Socrates and certain others present. More specifically, the *Apology* begins with the declaration by Socrates, “I do not know, men of Athens, how my accusers affected you” and is shortly thereafter followed by, “One thing I do ask and beg of you, gentlemen: if you hear me making my defense in the same kind of language as I am accustomed to use in the market place...pay no attention to my manner of speech — be it better or worse — but...concentrate your attention on whether what I say is just or not, for the excellence of a judge lies in this, as that of a speaker lies in telling the

248 Many scholars agree that the authenticity of *Letters and Epigrams* are questionable.

249 This point arose during a conversation shared with J. Angelo Corlett regarding the dialogical nature of Plato’s works.

Moreover, later in the dialogue, in an attempt to bring the accusations of Meletus to light, Socrates states, “I shall try to defend myself against Meletus…[Meletus] says that I am guilty of corrupting the young, but I say that Meletus is guilty of dealing frivolously with serious matters, of irresponsibly bringing people into the court.”\(^{252}\) More directly, Socrates asks of Meletus, “Come here and tell me, Meletus…who improves our young men?”\(^{253}\) and “what person…has knowledge of the laws to begin with?,”\(^{254}\) to which Meletus replies, “The Laws” and “These jurymen, Socrates.”\(^{255}\) Thus, while the dialogue between Socrates and Meletus is curt, at best, an exchange of “pleasantries” still exists. Further, even in the subtext of the Apology — for example, “[The jury now gives its verdict of guilty, and Meletus asks for the penalty of death]”\(^{256}\) and “[The jury now votes again and sentences Socrates to death]”\(^{257}\) — there is indication of the presence of the dialogues’ participants. Thus, with these textual points in mind, there is a real sense in which the Apology is a discussion taken out of the immediate and larger context within which it arose and is therefore reasonable to classify as a form of dialogue.\(^{258}\) Consistent with the Socratic interpretation, the Apology is, then, one movement in the more general symphony of a courtroom dialogue.

Secondly, the question arises as to whether or not the content of the Apology reveals Plato’s views. Though not much effort need be dedicated to uproot the soundness of this query, suffice it to say that the conclusion (e.g., the Apology reveals Plato’s views) does not logically follow from the premises. Even if it were true that the Apology was not considered to be a dialogue in the traditional or relevant sense, and even if it were true that every word in

\(^{251}\) Ibid., 17d-18a.
\(^{252}\) Ibid., 24b-d.
\(^{253}\) Ibid., 24d-e.
\(^{254}\) Ibid., 24e.
\(^{255}\) Ibid.
\(^{256}\) Ibid., 35d-e.
\(^{257}\) Ibid., 38b-c.
\(^{258}\) One might also argue that I am bending the “nose of wax” to prove my point by way of an appeal to historicity. However, the historical accuracy of a dialogue has nothing to do with whether or not it qualifies as a dialogue qua dialogue (in terms of form). What is more, even if I was making such an appeal, most Plato scholars and historians take the discussions portrayed in Plato’s dialogues and the trial particulars of Greek life (e.g., trials which occurred in front of a jury, a judge and others etc.) as more or less factual.
the *Apology* reveals what Socrates believes, it does not follow that we are justified in ascribing such views to Plato. Thus, as indicated both in the Introduction and in Excavation I, respectively, the mouthpiece interpretation remains problematic because it cannot show that what Socrates utters is what Plato believes, nor that the manner in which Plato wrote (e.g., dialogical in nature) is crucial to the understanding of Plato’s works.

**Objection Three**

Lastly, it might be stated that my particular approach to the Platonic dialogues is nothing more than a literary theory in disguise.\textsuperscript{259} If one remains uncompelled, for example, by my analysis of movement, the significance of the dialectic, and the importance of the dialogue form itself concerning the interpretation of Plato’s texts, and instead maintains that my interpretation amounts to merely an appeal to theoretical and literary device, so be it. “But wait,” one might say, “that means, as you are proposing it, Socrates is reduced to nothing more than a dialogical character.” To this concern, I would reply, that while such an approach might reduce Plato’s Socrates to a dialogical character, it does not follow that the historical Socrates is reduced to a dialogical character. There is, after all, a difference between the character Socrates in Plato’s works and Socrates himself.\textsuperscript{260}

Furthermore, even if it were true that my interpretation did reduce Socrates to a mere dialogical character, is not such a role precisely what Socrates, as presented by Plato, would have desired? Moreover, is it not precisely where Plato’s Socrates would have aspired to be anyway, not “bound fast” to the pages of books, but rather moving amongst the “living exchange of ideas,”\textsuperscript{261} not “fettered” to the confines of personal libraries, but rather alive amidst the courtyards, office buildings, coffee shops, households, political institutions, and

\textsuperscript{259} I am grateful to Michael Jenkins for raising this concern.

\textsuperscript{260} What is more, even if all we “know” about Socrates has come to us by way of various individuals other than Socrates, this does not mean that those who have spoken about or presented Socrates actually speak for or represent Socrates. In other words, there is a difference between ‘*presenting* x or y’ and ‘*representing* x or y.’ What is more, one can certainly pay homage to the significance of a figure on/for an individual (in this case, of Socrates on/for Plato) without making the claim that the affected individual (e.g., Plato) is a mouthpiece for the revered figure (e.g., Socrates). Simply stated: just because Plato revered Socrates in ways that we can reasonably assume he did, it does not follow that Plato spoke on behalf of or for Socrates, or even that Plato’s Socrates (as presented in the dialogues) is the same as the actual Socrates (from a historical sense).

\textsuperscript{261} Rutherford, *The Art of Plato*, 15.
classrooms of contemporary Athens? “Dialogical character” or otherwise, the spirit of Socrates permeates time, space and philosophical discussion. In this connection, and certainly as Randall, Jr. argues, “Plato [is] no refugee.”262 This is to say, the ideas that one arrives upon when reading Plato’s texts can have a home within and amongst each and every one of us. As such, Plato both resides and transcends.263 Further, the process of reasoning itself (as represented via the dialectical interplay of Plato’s Socrates and the dialogues’ assorted interlocutors) resonates truth — a truth that remains eternally significant, “no less interesting today than when first proposed.”264

Inevitably, for all those whom Socrates encounters in the pages of Plato’s texts, the character of Socrates unpeels himself from the bitter stagnancy of written word….spreads his magnificent wings and dialectically takes flight from the inexhaustible and captivating intellect of Plato — that beloved “Son of Apollo”265 — into the elastic immortality266 of the spaces, breaths, and moments in between. And he does so, whether one likes it or not.267

Here, perhaps, in this vast expanse of possibility, lies Plato’s ultimate overture of irony.268

262 Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, 143. By this I am not implying that Plato is an exile or without a homeland but rather that his ideas can have a home within each of us (as individuals) and amongst, through, or between each of us (as individuals within a collective).

263 Cf. footnote 262.

264 Sayre, Plato’s Literary Garden, xi.

265 As is well-known, Apollo is considered among the most important and many-sided deities of Greco-Roman mythology. He has been recognized as a god of light and the sun, a god of truth and prophecy, a god of medicine and healing, a god of music, poetry, arts and more. See also, Frederick J. E. Woodbridge’s homage to Plato (as cited in Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, vii) in the “Conclusion” section of this thesis or see Frederick J. E. Woodbridge, The Son of Apollo (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), 31.

266 By “elastic immortality.” I am implying that ideas, as they are exchanged and discussed by their interested parties, go through periods of stagnancy and growth. As such, figuratively speaking, an elastic immortality could be said to mean ‘an eternal existence (or state of being) with a temporal flair.’ Paradoxically, it could also be said to mean ‘a temporal existence (or state of being) with an eternal flair.’

267 Once you see the light of reason — that is, once you stare truth in the face and it stares back at you — your life will never again be the same. Furthermore, one is blinded by the light that reason emits when one is not familiar with the process of the dialectic. Hence, as I interpret it, truth is arresting when it takes hold of you and alarming in its sincerity. Ultimately, we are all prisoners of truth; She is our greatest of masters.

268 The “vast expanse of possibility” is our way of making a metaphorical reference to the limitless opportunities available to us if we only have the courage to proceed. Because Plato, and by extension Socrates, exists in those spaces, breaths, and moments in between — and, as the Socratic interpretation would suggest, are not bound to any theory, doctrine, or belief — we can anticipate our understanding of the dialogues to bring us ever-evolving levels of enlightenment, disillusionment, and joy, as we navigate (by way of the dialectical process) the corridors of our imagination, soul, and mind. Thus, the irony that Plato seems to be offering is one of eternal change (an oxymoron in itself).
For inescapably, whether we are tearing the chains from our fettered neck and arms, or conversely, allowing them to cut the veins of our wrists year after year,\textsuperscript{269} the truth will eventually find us.\textsuperscript{270} And when it does,\textsuperscript{271} it will remind us of just how very human we are, both by setting us free and by never letting us go.

\textsuperscript{269} This is not to imply, however, passivity. Rather, it is a metaphor for varying degrees of activity. Moreover, it is meant to be a metaphor for the idea that the truth will get under our skin despite, perhaps, even our most meager attempts of activity. This is so because it is living and breathing and by far the most powerful gift that one could ever receive.

\textsuperscript{270} Though most people rarely find truth, at least truth in its more comprehensive form, truth inevitably finds us; that is to say, some truth cannot be escaped. For example, death is a simple fact (or truth) of life. Death is also a truth that finds us inasmuch as no human can \textit{physically} escape its grip. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that truth can be paradoxical in nature in that it both finds us and is found.

\textsuperscript{271} Or rather, when we recognize that it has been all along staring us in the face.
CONCLUSION

Randall, Jr. makes use of a beautiful eulogy by Frederick J. E. Woodbridge to describe the enchanting character of Plato, the teacher…Plato, the soul. In it, Plato is depicted as a swan, and according to Woodbridge:

> Just before he died, we are told, Plato dreamed that he was changed into a swan, and, flying from tree to tree, caused much trouble for the bird-catchers who vainly tried to take him. Simmias, the companion of Socrates, interpreted the dream to signify that all men would desire to catch the spirit of Plato, but none would succeed, for each would interpret him in his own fashion. It was a true dream, repeatedly fulfilled by admirers of Plato.²⁷²

In concurrence with others who have argued as much, it has been my claim throughout this thesis that there is no question that Plato had ideas, but that Plato had theories, doctrines or beliefs that he wished to convey to readers of his works as his own is another matter. Furthermore, even if he had such ideas that he wanted to convey to his readers, it is rather unclear how such beliefs, ideas or theories might be discovered unproblematically. In this connection, this thesis closely examined two things: (1) In Excavation I, I claimed that mouthpiece interpreters, such as Kraut and Annas, remain stuck in the cave by their disregard to satisfy even some of the basic desiderata of a plausible approach to Plato. My emphasis on the significance of movement and the particular claims of Kraut and Annas I explored differed from the primary foci and claims discussed and refuted in the works of Corlett. As such, I offered an original philosophical contribution that serves to provide additional evidence in support of the Socratic interpretation. In general, I concur with those who have argued that the mouthpiece approach refuses to take seriously the influence of Socrates on Plato, the significance of the dialectical process (or movement of logos), and the dialogue form. Moreover, I agree with those who have maintained that the literary devices exhibited in the Platonic corpus provide further support for the Socratic influence on Plato and contribute profoundly to the reader’s understanding of Plato’s works. Of course, various proponents of the Socratic anti-mouthpiece approach have argued for each of these points, respectively; (2)

In Excavation II, it was my contention that the Socratic anti-mouthpiece interpretation offers a unique approach to Socrates’ declaration, “They’re like us.” The gist of this section involved an excavation of Plato’s cave by way of the same arguments of reasoning maintained in the first excavation, i.e., the significance of the *logos*, the dialectic, etc. At the core of my argument lies the Socratic injunction to follow reason where reason guides us. Even deeper lies the necessity to take action. Ultimately, it was suggested that in order to become significant and thus gain the sort of immortality to which Diotima alludes in the *Symposium* and which *Phaedrus* 277a-b (and Sayre) discusses in terms of that which provides its possessor “a seed forever immortal [thus rendering] the man who has it as happy as any human being can be,” one must actively participate in the intellectual development of one’s self, others and society; that is, in order to uniquely substantiate oneself in any sort of enduring fashion, one must take part in the movement of the *logos*. Both excavations were accompanied by unique adaptations of Plato’s ‘Myth of the Cave.’ The first adaptation concerned “life inside the cave,” while the second focused on “life outside the cave” (or the ascent). Though I did not provide a third adaptation, one which concerns a “return to the cave,” I intimated that such a journey was next in line as per the message on the prisoner’s shirt (i.e., “*and the truth shall set you free*”) and via my discussions about action, the obligatory nature of enlightenment and what this means in terms of our significance. A possible depiction of this third adaptation might include the inmate, now free, returning (so to speak) to help others in various ways, such as: (a) entering an occupation that serves to provide education, guidance, mentorship and other sorts of assistance to individuals who might be at risk, (b) participating in volunteer, public service, and/or humanitarian efforts related to social justice, education, the arts, etc., (c) engaging in activities that serve to continue the advancement of one’s own intellectual and moral growth and, of course, above all (d) encouraging others to develop within them the various skills associated with reason so that they might be able to apprehend and embrace the truth (whatever the truth may be) and participate in life uniquely so that (to paraphrase Socrates): they might be better for the rest of their lives.273

The Socratic interpretation is, of course, one way among many to approach the Platonic corpus. But it is one that takes seriously the “Platonic Question,” the influence of Socrates on Plato, the dialogue form, the dialectical process and the movement therein. In so doing, it allows us to consider Plato (the author) and the contents of Plato’s dialogues without necessarily getting “stuck” on authorship. This is not to suggest, of course, that authorship in general (or the recognition thereof) is insignificant. For purposes of historical accuracy, recognition of scholastic contribution, and an authentic presentation of the evolution of ideas, it most definitely is important. In fact, the Socratic interpretation takes particular heed to these points in its claims that we must be careful not to attribute views to Plato without sufficient evidence. Moreover, it discourages us from remaining fixed in our gaze on “who wrote what” — that is, remaining “focused on the shadows of words, or at best, at the words themselves and no more” — and, instead encourages us to turn our heads and focus on reason itself, on whether the arguments presented are sound and why (or why not). In this way, the Socratic interpretation is a dynamic, life-affirming and philosophically meritorious approach to Plato’s works that allows us to embrace the dialogues completely (and by connection the character of Socrates) by redirecting our sight to the “the spaces, breaths and moments in between.” Here, if anywhere, is where Plato resides.

In addition, a point about Socrates that was not mentioned earlier but warrants mention now is this: Socrates’ dialectical prose was a prose for which he lived and died. That is, the way Socrates approached philosophy (e.g., his form of dialectic) is what figuratively gave him life and what literally gave him death. The weight of this fact alone should make one consider the Socratic interpretation as more plausible than competing approaches to Plato in that it takes the influence of Socrates on Plato (inclusive of the process of reasoning) as a matter of ultimate philosophical significance. The underlying goal of this thesis was twofold: namely, (1) that it develop a cogent line of attack against the mouthpiece interpretation, and (2) that it offer a viable defense of the Socratic approach. These two points were accomplished by my providing an analysis of Plato’s Myth of the Cave that is consistent with the Socratic interpretation of Plato’s works subsequent to rendering

274 I use ‘prose’ ironically. Since it is generally agreed upon that Socrates never actually wrote anything, prose in the technical sense of the word is not applicable. However, ‘prose’ in the broader sense of the term (as style or manner) is applicable, especially as it pertains to Socrates’ “method” and philosophical approach.
problematic the reasoning of Kraut and Annas in favor of the mouthpiece approach. It is my hope that it has served its purpose faithfully, extending more than just an mélange of arbitrarily placed hooks; and has instead — by weaving the line of reasoning into a comprehensive and respectably-sized net,²⁷⁵ casting it into the sea of dialectic, and relying upon the power of reason to make murky waters clear — resulted in bringing back a few converts²⁷⁶ or (even) merely a “much-gnarled line.”

Lastly, it is important to note that comparing Plato’s cave and its contents to that of the human condition is not necessarily unique. Other thinkers have made this analogy.²⁷⁷ However, I believe that my interpretation goes, perhaps, one step further than theirs. While I indeed embrace many of the aspects of the “cave-human condition comparison” put forth by various scholars,²⁷⁸ such as Hall, for example, who states: “The allegory is a ‘myth,’ an

²⁷⁵ A “respectably-sized net,” is a reference toward a conversation between the Visitor and Theaetetus concerning one who practices sophistry in the Sophist: “Is it obvious…that he’s a kind of cheat who imitates real things? Or are we still in doubt about whether he truly knows all the things that he seems to be able to engage in controversies about?…[We] have to regard him as a cheat and an imitator….Well, now it’s our job not to let the beast escape. We’ve almost hemmed him in with one of those net-like devices that words provide for things like this. So…he won’t get away from this next point.” Plato, Sophist, 235b. Emphasis provided.

²⁷⁶ I chose “converts” to delineate the difference between persuasion and good argument. While converts generally refer to those who have traded in one belief system for another, as in the case of an individual who has converted from Christianity to Islam, for example, I mean it in a broader sense (though by necessity it will still maintain this general characteristic). Specifically, it is not merely my hope to have persuaded readers to consider the arguments set forth in this thesis, but rather, to have persuaded readers — indeed, to have further compelled them to consider — that the Socratic interpretation is the most viable existing approach to the Platonic dialogues. In addition, one can infer from my reference to “a much-gnarled line” an analogy of fishing: namely, when a fisherman pulls up his or her line and finds the bait attached to the hook chewed at or gnawed upon, he or she can reasonably conclude that at the very least a fish (or some other organism) has been biting or struggling with the bait. As such, a “much-gnarled line” is a reference toward philosophical discourse and the dialectic (or dialogue about this particular matter) continuing.


²⁷⁸ For example, J. R. S. Wilson puts forth an interesting account of Plato’s cave when he suggests that the originals and objects they are carrying reflect the various states of human existence, or (as Wilson claims)
imaginative and poetic image of our condition, whose purpose is to redefine our self-awareness by offering an idiom in terms of which we can contemplate the character of our lives,”279 my interpretation seems to be the only one that recognizes a seemingly deeper paradox in regard to Plato’s myth.280 More precisely, my interpretation does two things. First, it recognizes and accepts the metaphorical distance between originals and images.281 Second, and at the same time, it paradoxically eliminates the distance between originals and images. My interpretation suggests that perhaps an even deeper message of Plato’s allegory lies in the “qualities of moral character” in the soul. He states: “the fact that the objects are made and carried by men will indicate that they stand for qualities of men; the men who carry them can perhaps be seen as stand-ins for the prisoners themselves, rendered immobile as these are by the requirements of the allegory.” “The Contents of the Cave,” 119. Lidz also contributes to the idea of the cave-human condition uniquely when he avers, “The persons…referred to as having ‘small’ (i.e., petty) souls would seem to correspond to those in control of the fire and artifacts: their vision is relatively clear when compared to those in chains. The original condition of the soul is that of being attached to ‘food and similar pleasures’ which ‘turn the soul’s eye downward’…The reference to food and its effect on the soul is reminiscent of another soteriological myth, that of Adam and Eve…The Myth of the Cave also presents a transformation which is Janus-faced, for the escapee both gains and loses something as a consequence of escape. Whereas Eve’s failure to keep her soul turned upwards toward the word of the Creator produced a rupture in her being such that she was no longer subordinate only to God, but now subordinate to the relatively inferior Adam, so the failure of those with small souls to keep their souls looking upward toward true beings renders them subject to an inferior mode of being.” “Reflections,” 130-131. 279 Hall, “Interpreting Plato's Cave as an Allegory of the Human Condition,” 84.

280 There are a plethora of ironic nuances in the Republic and its various analogies and, arguably, just as many authors who have commented about such nuances. The late Gregory Vlastos was perhaps the most notable advocate of the Socratic irony approach, claiming Socrates’ proclamation of ignorance was, among other things, ironic and a “central paradox” of the Platonic dialogues. As cited in Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 52. In a similar vein, Seery also provides some commentary on the role of paradox in the Platonic corpus, though generally centers his discussion around the political aspect of irony. In regard to the human condition as presented in the Republic Seery claims: “The Republic is, to be sure, cast ostensibly as a utopia, but it is a utopia that is presented ironically…The irony of the Republic invites us into…a double-perspective on things: Via a false show of modesty, we allow ourselves the indulgence of entertaining the idea of a higher, in some sense, better world; then we are brought back to our senses, our vision retracted and undercut as unreal; but finally we retain it, although with a deepened sense of the stakes involved.” “Politics as Ironic Community,” 245. Ultimately, while it is not being maintained that the role of irony is insignificant in terms of interpretation, Vlastos’ view in particular is at odds with the Socratic approach insofar as it assumes that we are to take a particular, fixed position in interpreting Plato’s dialogues, namely, an ironic one. However, this ironic stance presumably leaves us with what Socrates or Plato actually thinks about this or that (i.e., an approach that is in concurrence with the mouthpiece interpretation and, hence, opposed to the Socratic interpretation). For greater detail see: Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 52-53.

281 As it concerns images, for example, the Platonic corpus includes a variety of uses of mimesis (e.g., imitation). In the Phaedrus 276a, Socrates describes the concept of writing being an imitation of the words of one’s soul: “It is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom is should remain silent.” Plato, Phaedrus, 276a. To which Phaedrus responds, “You mean the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows, of which the written one can be fairly called an image.” Thus, the written word is only a copy of knowledge, not knowledge itself. Corlett, Interpreting Plato’s Dialogues, 68. This concept of original versus image is continued in Plato’s Myth of the Cave when the distinctions between types of knowledge are discussed.
fact that the levels of distance between us and the truth\textsuperscript{282} are not quite as far as we think them to be, rather, as they appear to be.\textsuperscript{283} If the “shadows are like us,” then that which is our image (while certainly not us per se) can reveal volumes about our reality (or that which is the original). This seems, of course, to be what many of the conversations held by Socrates and various interlocutors in Plato’s works centered on. For instance, in attempting to explain and understand justice, examples of just action are given (i.e., images of justice) or when attempting to explain and understand eros, examples of eros are given (i.e., images of eros).

However, just as Socrates is not content to stop there (or anywhere short of attaining the truth for that matter), my interpretation suggests that if one digs deeply enough, one might find that the further removed one is from the truth (assuming, of course, one recognizes this distance) the closer one is to it. By proposing that the “shadows are like us,” I am intimating that Socrates is suggesting that the images are both the antithesis of us (as originals) and the equivalent of us (as the essence of what it means to be originals). As such, my interpretation allows for the reader to recognize both the particularity of the self (as individuals) and the universality of the self (as collective beings). It allows one to see a bigger picture, to gain a more holistic sense of the way things actually are; it reveals the process — a process of which we are a part and which we have the ability to affect, and ideally, perfect. Randall, Jr. provides additional insight here when he states:

Plato himself — in the dramatic dialogues — is not a dualist...though his followers have usually converted the artist’s distinction made in experience into a gulf dividing the universe into two different ‘realms’...The very elusiveness of the Platonic Ideas — the difficulty of fixing precisely their status — is an indication that they are not what they have been taken to be by a literal-minded tradition: a fixed and static structure of a separate ‘intelligible realm,’ remote from the passions of living, but rather [they are] a process of human idealizing, a

\textsuperscript{282} Throughout the dialogues, Plato seems to consistently portray his characters as being distanced from or removed from the truth (to one degree or another). For example, in the opening moments of the Symposium, when Apollodorus is asked to relay the speeches of the gathering at Agathon’s, we are made aware first that the party was “really...a long time ago” and moreover, that the story was relayed to Apollodorus by Aristodemus. Plato, Symposium, 172a–174a. Hence, we are prepared from the beginning of the dialogue that the information we are receiving is at least twice removed from the actual event. Further, when Socrates is giving his speech on eros at this gathering (as recited via Apollodorus), he cites a conversation he had about eros with Diotima, thus adding yet another layer of distance. Ibid., 201d-212c.

\textsuperscript{283} Recall my reference earlier in regard to Socrates’ declaration, “They’re like us.” Specifically, I argued that there is more to this statement than “meets the eye.” This, of course, also makes reference to the distinction between sense perception and reality.
living direction of natural events and tendencies to a perfected form — they are a process of human art. 284

In more precise terms, my analysis seeks to establish a means by which we as readers and active participants can more completely embrace the spirit of the Platonic dialogues and thus seek, attain, and establish meaning in a more complete sense — one that involves significance on both a personal and a societal level. For, while certainly “Man must be arched and buttressed from within, else the temple wavers to the dust,”285 writes Marcus Aurelius, it must not be purely with ourselves and our own maturation or development that we are concerned; indeed, growth is many-sided and multi-pronged. Moreover, as Socrates says to Lysimachus: “Well, it would be a terrible thing, Lysimachus, to be unwilling to join in assisting any man to become as good as possible.”286 And, as Randall, Jr. avers: “the basic distinction between what is and what ought to be, between the actual and the ideal, is not a metaphysical dualism….It is a fluid distinction made in experience, made by men dealing with their world.”287

It also worth mentioning here that the dialogue form in which Plato chose to write speaks to this very idea of “men dealing with their world.” From a broad perspective, language — as a form or style of communication — is a product intimately tied to our desire as human beings, to communicate and share various ideas, feelings, and beliefs. As such, it is an attempt to “deal with [the] world” and our place in it — to find some semblance of order — and, thus, a desire (on some fundamental level) “to connect,” “relate,” and “be related to.” Language is, of course, one of many forms of expression — art and music representing other examples — a smile, the physical touch, a “glance of the eye” even, representing yet three more. According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, “One of the most beautiful things in nature, is a glance; it transcends speech.”288 Moreover, he writes:

284 Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, 141-142.
286 Plato, Laches, 200e.
287 Randall, Jr., Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason, 141.
the eyes speak all languages. They wait for no introduction...ask no leave of age, or rank...but intrude, and come again, and go through and through you, in a moment of time....The mysterious communication established across a house between two entire strangers, moves all the springs of wonder....[For] the eyes of men converse as much as their tongues, with the advantage, that the ocular dialect needs no dictionary. 289

What is more, while language is certainly one style or form of communication among many (as is the glance), it is also informed by a particular style or form. 290 This point is particularly important as it concerns the Platonic dialogues. There is a difference, for example, between writings that are informed by (and thus have as their aim) a desire to relay theories or doctrines versus those that are informed by (and thus have as their aim) a desire to encourage participation of a different sort. In the case of Plato, it seems that the dialogue form that he purposefully chose to employ is informed by (and thus has as one of its aims) a desire to encourage participation in the dialectical process of reasoning — a process that, furthermore, is characterized by movement. It longs for its readers to “deal with their world.” And it does so from the vantage point that in order to effectively participate or “deal” with anything, one must not only recognize or “see the movement” (as Brownowski argues) but also must be part of the process, as opposed to mere spectators on its sidelines. One must be actively engaged and aimed at the good. In this connection, enlightenment requires action and, moreover, relies upon our ability and efforts to participate in the critical art of philosophy or that “process of human art” to which Randall, Jr. alludes.

Ultimately, my analysis seeks to allow readers an avenue by which to recognize in Plato’s works the genuine effort required in order to truly attain knowledge while speaking further of the paradox involved in such a journey. Again, the more one recognizes one’s distance from the truth, the closer one is to it. This observation is also consistent with perhaps the most characteristically recognized Socratic statement, namely: All I know is that I do not

289 Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Conduct of Life (Lexington: Forgotten Books, 2010), 155-156.

290 The language utilized by an author (e.g. word selection, sentence construction, mode of delivery etc.) is, to a large extent, informed by her aims (i.e., the result or form of reader participation she is trying to exact). One can, for example, employ a writing style that reflects a particular cadence (e.g., fluid or abrupt) or tone (e.g., words that are inclusive or exclusive in character, nurturing or combative, etc.) in hopes of encouraging readers to participate with the material being presented in such-and-such a way (e.g., as observers or participants).
know. 291 My analysis thus reveals a powerful message of optimism. That is, the light of truth reveals that the ability to make a difference and become significant (as signified via the birth of ideas and action) is an inherent possibility of the human condition — and therefore a capacity within each and every one of us 292 — so long as we have the strength and courage to unearth it, embrace it, and follow reason to its very core. 293

291 “Perhaps some of you will think I am jesting,” Socrates argues, “but be sure that all that I shall say is true. What has caused my reputation is none other than a certain kind of wisdom. What kind of wisdom? Human wisdom, perhaps. It may be that I really possess this, while those whom I mentioned just now are wise with a wisdom more than human; else I cannot explain it, for I certainly do not possess it, and whoever says I do is lying… I am very conscious that I am not wise at all.” Plato, Apology 20e. Further, in the Cratylus 428d, Socrates states: “I have long been surprised at my own wisdom — and doubtful of it, too.” Plato, Cratylus, 428d.

292 This is to say: the truth (or rather the capacity to pursue the truth) is in each and every one of us and is obtainable by way of the use of reason (which involves and implies active participation). As such, we all, as rational beings, have the ability to make a difference.

293 Here, my use of “unearth it, embrace it, and follow it to its very core” is meant to signify the excavation of the cave and the return to it.
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WORKS CITED


**WORKS CONSULTED**


