

J. Angelo Corlett

Interpreting Plato Socratically

Socrates and Justice

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For my mother

Preface

It's easy to figure out that 'justice' (*dikaioṣunē*) is the name given to the comprehension of the just (*dikaioṣ sunesis*), but the just itself is hard to understand. It seems that many people agree with one another about it up to a point, but beyond that they disagree—Socrates, *Cratylus* 412c-d¹

This book is a sequel of sorts to my book, *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues* (Corlett 2005), which was my attempt to render dubious the Mouthpiece Interpretation of Plato's dialogues. While “the attempt to understand and develop Plato's philosophical views has a lengthy history, beginning with Aristotle and Plato's institutional successors in the Academy toward the end of the fourth century BC” (Brittain 2008: 526),² I made my focus in that book contemporary attempts to

¹Unless stated otherwise, throughout this book translations of Plato's works shall be used from Cooper and Hutchinson (1997).

²Charles Brittain goes on to state of the Mouthpiece Interpretation that it contains “controversial assumptions.” (Brittain 2008: 528) Brittain adds that the history of Platonism discredits the idea that there was a strand of Platonic orthodoxy that is reliably Plato's own set of views. (Brittain 2008: 530f.) Hence his statement that “The Platonic tradition is remarkably heterogeneous...” (Brittain 2008: 527) So as far back as one can trace the history of Plato scholarship, there are a variety of ways of approaching Plato's works that seemed reasonable to a variety of interpreters. Moreover, “...the idea that Plato's dialogues already presented a well-defined, comprehensive, and essentially correct philosophical *system* seems not to have arisen until the first century BC.” (Brittain 2008: 526) Thus one ought to resist the temptation to think that, historically speaking, there is one best way to interpret Plato because that particular approach traces its roots back to Plato or thereabouts. The Mouthpiece Interpretation, no matter how popular it is among philosophers these days, enjoys no such privileged position.

justify that approach to Plato's dialogues. Since the publication of that book, more has been written in defense of the Mouthpiece Interpretation and against the Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation. This book devotes a significant amount of space to addressing such discussions. But more than that, it seeks to do what *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues* did for the concept of mimetic art in some of Plato's dialogues, except for the most part with various concepts of justice within the Platonic corpus.³

Much has been written by philosophers on the subject of Socrates' views of justice, though most of it pertains to his views on a limited number of concepts related to distributive justice and how the ideal state ought to be structured. I devote a chapter of this book to concepts of distributive justice in the Platonic corpus. But since few philosophers have devoted their energies to what Plato's Socrates and other characters in Plato's writings articulate about criminal justice and punishment, on the one hand, or compensatory justice, on the other, much of this book is devoted to a philosophical exploration of what mainly Plato's Socrates had to say about matters of what is known today as corrective justice, and with some surprising results.

After the publication of *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues*, there were concerns raised, not about the plausibility of my critique of the Mouthpiece Interpretation of Plato's works, but about some of what I argued in support of the Socratic Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation. Most of that book addressed attempts by some leading philosophers of Plato to justify the mouthpiece approach to the Platonic Question. The Platonic Question consists in the cluster of questions about how Plato's works ought to be approached in light of their literary style and contents. Should Socrates or some other character be considered to be the mouthpiece for Plato's beliefs, doctrines, or theories, as mouthpiece interpreters insist? Or is there insufficient reason to suppose that this approach is warranted? If so, what alternative approach might there be that might better answer the Platonic Question? Why did Plato write mostly in more or less aporetic dialogue form? Was it to convey to readers of his dialogues his views about certain matters,

³The exception is Appendix II to this book wherein the concept of art is discussed. It is included in order to serve as an updating of sorts to the treatment of the subject found in Corlett (2005).

or was there another reason?⁴ While there are a variety of approaches to Plato's dialogues, I shall direct my primary attention to the most prominent one among contemporary philosophers of Plato (the Mouthpiece Interpretation) before I present and defend my alternative approach: the Socratic (Anti-Mouthpiece) Interpretation.

Chapters 2 and 3 address these concerns directly as a further defense of my approach to Plato's works against concerns raised at the 2006 American Philosophical Association session devoted to the book by Lloyd Gerson, Gerald Press, Charles Young, David Gallop, and some of those who have reviewed *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues* in some academic journals, as well as some of those who have written on the Platonic Question but were not discussed in the previous book. But as Nicholas D. Smith informed me during one of our many discussions about how Plato's dialogues ought to be approached, "the proof is in the pudding." He urged that it is one thing to successfully render problematic the Mouthpiece Interpretation. However, it is quite another thing to support my Socratic Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation by way of plausible textual exegesis. While a lengthy chapter in *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues* is devoted to precisely that aim in terms of the concept of mimetic art in Plato's dialogues, this book seeks to expand the textual interpretive evidence in favor of the Socratic Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation by explicating what Socrates has to say about certain justice concepts according to this approach. The results of my studies, I believe, will prove philosophically significant.

For example, the relatively few philosophers who have studied Socrates on criminal justice and punishment construe him as one who holds to some kind of moral education theory of punishment. But I will argue that this view is misleading. While it is true that there are a few passages, celebrated as they are by anti-retributivists, wherein Socrates expresses that some criminals ought to receive a moral education for their wrongdoings, the far majority of passages in which Socrates addresses issues of punishment are retributivist in character, based on considerations of desert, not moral education or social utility. Indeed, there are even pericopes in Plato's works wherein Socrates seems to express a view which favors the compensation by wrongdoers

⁴For a taxonomy of approaches to the Platonic Question, see Corlett (2005: 3f.). For purposes of this book, I shall not repeat the variety of positions propounded on the Platonic Question.

to their victims. This paints an entirely different picture of Socrates on criminal wrongdoing than what we are led to believe by those who have influenced philosophical thinking about these matters. For the sake of the history of philosophy, then, it is important to attempt to set the record straight about Plato's Socrates and criminal justice, *assuming for the sake of the Mouthpiece Interpretation, of course, that the character Socrates sincerely assents to the views he expresses in Plato's dialogues*. It will not do to allow one's own rather personal views on justice to affect how one interprets a select passage or two on justice from Plato's writings as if that constituted proper philosophical method in approaching Plato's works. One must do what one can to search throughout Plato's works to find each and every passage therein pertaining to justice and treat each such passage according to the category of justice to which it pertains, and then to permit Plato's characters to speak for themselves on the matter. When it comes to Socrates and criminal justice, what we find is that some who think they know about "Plato's theory of justice" are quite far off the mark when it comes to what Socrates actually argues about criminal justice and punishment, for instance. The history of philosophy in general, and Plato studies in particular, demands that we are more careful about what is attributed to either Plato or Socrates. Again, this assumes for the sake of the Mouthpiece Interpretation that it is legitimate to attribute any view whatsoever to either Plato's Socrates or Plato himself. The first chapters of this book undermine any attempt to ascribe to Plato either a belief, doctrine or theory at all. But if one is to engage in such an ill-founded interpretation of Plato's dialogues, then one ought to avoid misattributing to either Plato's Socrates or Plato himself particular beliefs, doctrines, or theories about justice that are sometimes ascribed to them.

Moreover, this book not only seeks to explicate what Socrates says but does not necessarily believe about criminal justice in some of Plato's works, it also directs attention to the discussions of justice (more broadly than either the notions of retributive or compensatory justice, *δικαιοσύνη*) in various of Plato's works. I attempt this aim at the expense of some well-respected mouthpiece interpreters who have misattributed certain theories, dogmas or beliefs about justice to Plato. I untangle this confusion and provide what seems most clearly to be

the justice-related beliefs reasonably attributable to Plato's Socrates if it were justified to ascribe to him beliefs about such matters.

I thank Thomas C. Brickhouse, Gallop, Jay Kennedy, John J. Mulhern, David Murphy, Press, Smith, Burleigh Wilkins, and Charles Young for their incisive comments on some or all of what eventually became this book. All references and quotations from Plato's works are taken from the translations in Cooper and Hutchinson (1997) unless otherwise indicated. Chapter 7 is a revised version of "Punishment and the Socratic Roots of Retributivism" which appears in J. Ryberg and J. A. Corlett, Editors, *Punishment and Ethics* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp. 1–15. A version of part of Chapter 2 was presented at a special author-meets-critics session of the American Philosophical Association devoted to my book, *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues*, Portland, Oregon, 24 March 2006. A version of Chapter 6 was presented at the Department of Philosophy, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece, on 8 October 2013. I thank the audience at that lecture for helpful comments.

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About the Author

J. Angelo Corlett, PhD, is Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at San Diego State University and the author of more than 150 books and articles on philosophy. His books include: *Analyzing Social Knowledge* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); *Responsibility and Punishment* (Kluwer, 2001, 2003, Springer 2004 and 2014); *Race, Racism, and Reparations* (Cornell, 2003); *Terrorism: A Philosophical Analysis* (Kluwer, 2003); *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues* (Parmenides, 2005); *Race, Rights, and Justice* (Springer, 2009); *The Errors of Atheism* (Continuum, 2010); and *Heirs of Oppression* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010). Many of his articles have been published in journals such as *Analysis*, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *The Classical Quarterly*, *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, *The Journal of Ethics*, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, *Philosophy*, and *Public Affairs Quarterly*, among others. He is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Ethics: An International Philosophical Review*. *Interpreting Plato Socratically* is his second book on the Platonic Question.

Chapter 1

Introduction



*Justice is said—and well said—to be the daughter
of Respect.*

Plato, Laws 943e.

In my book, *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues*, I provide a critical assessment of numerous arguments proffered by Julia Annas, Terence Irwin, Richard Kraut and some others in favor of the philosophically prominent¹ Mouthpiece Interpretation of Plato's dialogues (also referred to by some as the “dogmatic” approach to Plato's dialogues) according to which it is justified to ascribe to Plato some or all of the informational contents of what this or that character in Plato's dialogues states beyond mere elements of philosophical method such as

¹The prominence of the Mouthpiece Interpretation is implied in the following statement: “There is, of course, also a historical precedent for denying that the Platonic dialogues advance positive doctrine—a non-dogmatist (or ‘sceptical’) tradition that goes back to the New Academy of Arcesilaus and Carneades. But it has always been a minority opinion. Dogmatism and (for the last two centuries) developmentalism have dominated Anglo-American Platonic scholarship.” (Beverluis 2006: 86) The equation of the non-dogmatic or Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation, on the one hand, with the skeptical tradition of Plato scholarship, on the other hand, is a common mistake among mouthpiece interpreters, as we shall see in Chapter 2. Moreover, as we shall see in that chapter, some mouthpiece interpreters tend to use the prominence of the Mouthpiece Interpretation as a reason why it ought to be adopted, thereby committing a kind of fallacy of appeal to authority when in fact that authority is what is precisely in question when it comes to serious consideration of the Platonic Question.

argumentation and analysis. The name for this approach to Plato's dialogues can be found in some of the writings of Gregory Vlastos,² among others. According to one of its recent proponents, "The idea is not that Plato held views *dogmatically*, but that he held *views* (δόγματα) which he advanced in the dialogues." (Beverlysluis 2006: 85)³ After exposing the fallacies in the reasoning in support of the Mouthpiece Interpretation and thereby rendering dubious that approach to the dialogues (Corlett 2005: Chapter 2), I articulate and defend what I call the "Socratic Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation" according to which Plato's employment of the dialogue form itself either intentionally or unintentionally prohibits readers' abilities to discern the substantive philosophical mind of Plato himself. Instead, the informational contents of Plato's dialogues ought to be studied as the philosophically profound works that they are in encouraging us to think analytically about the nature of justice, art, knowledge and education as we read the *Republic*, of knowledge and reality as we read the *Theaetetus*, of compensatory justice as we read the *Gorgias*, of law and punishment as we read the *Laws*, etc.. For even if one were to assume the controversial authorship of the *Seventh Letter* as do many proponents of the Mouthpiece Interpretation,⁴ there is inadequate direct textual evidence from the Corpus Platonicum that Plato purports to somehow expound his positive substantive philosophical beliefs, doctrines or theories in his dialogues, and secondary evidence from one or more of his students in the Academy (most notably, Aristotle) is problematic.⁵ My Socratic Interpretation of Plato's dialogues is a species of the Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation, also called the "non-dogmatic" approach by some, and the Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation is misleadingly referred to as the "dramatic" approach by others. While the full name I have given my approach to Plato's

² See, for example, Vlastos (1960: 508), where Vlastos, in discussing the concept of justice in Plato's *Republic*, writes: "For what is his mouthpiece, Socrates, trying to accomplish?"

³ In later chapters, I shall clarify what is meant by "dogma" and "doctrine" and their cognates.

⁴ Mouthpiece interpreter-critics of the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* are represented most recently in Burnyeat and Frede (2015).

⁵ Corlett (2005: Chapter 3). Also see Chapter 2 of this book for a discussion of this issue that supplements my earlier discussion.

dialogues is the “Socratic Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation,” I shall hereafter refer to it by its abbreviated name: the “Socratic Interpretation.”⁶

By “theory” and its cognates is meant a systematic account of doctrines or beliefs to which Plato sincerely assents in his dialogues, ones which answer specific questions that a theory must answer regarding, say, the nature of something (art, justice, knowledge, reality, etc.), its justification (moral or epistemic, for example: knowledge), an explanation of why it is important, etc.. By “doctrine” (δόγματα) and its cognates is meant a conceptual aspect of a theory of Plato’s to which Plato sincerely assents. In this sense, doctrines are parts of theories in the way that a concept of truth is part of a theory of knowledge according to standard justified true belief theories of knowledge and epistemic justification. And doctrines are beliefs one accepts through a rigorous justificatory process such that they cohere with important aspects of one’s theory of this or that. By “belief” and its cognates is meant the Kripkean notion of a proposition to which one sincerely assents without ambiguity concerning the nature of the proposition and the extent to which one holds it. (Kripke 1979)⁷ Unlike a doctrine, a belief need not in order to qualify as a belief importantly cohere with one’s overall system of propositions one accepts that constitute one’s theory of this or that. Indeed, a belief need not satisfy the rigors of accepted propositions wherein such claims are made one’s own subsequent to somewhat rigorous consideration or even as the result of reflective equilibrium. In other words, while what we accept is a considered judgment, a belief need not be. But each is a proposition to which one sincerely assents. So it is the claim of the Socratic Interpretation that Plato’s choice of the dialogue form in which he wrote most of his works prohibits us, neither in principle nor in an *a priori* manner, from extracting his beliefs, doctrines or theories from them. Rather, it is that there is a fundamental lack of epistemic justification in light of the available evidence to subscribe to the Mouthpiece Interpretation which seeks to attribute substantive philosophical

⁶The Socratic (Anti-Mouthpiece) Interpretation is not to be confused with the Socratic Mouthpiece Interpretation, as we will see below. The former approach denies what the latter affirms, namely, that Plato puts into the mouth of the character Socrates his own beliefs, doctrines or theories.

⁷For a discussion of Kripke’s puzzle, see Corlett (1989).

beliefs, doctrines or theories to Plato based on what this or that character in his dialogues expresses. In light of this lack of justification on behalf of the Mouthpiece Interpretation, it constitutes a fundamental attribution error to assert that “Plato says” this or that in his dialogues. Instead, one ought to state more accurately and less problematically that, for instance, “In the *Republic*, Socrates says.....” or “In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates argues...,” etc.. To infer from what any character in Plato’s dialogues expresses to what “Plato says” without adequate justification amounts to something akin to what John J. Mulhern refers to as the “Plato says fallacy.” (Mulhern 1971) It is to confuse a character’s stating something, no matter how strongly and repeatedly, with Plato’s endorsement of it.⁸ When it comes to Plato’s dialogues, this is a dubious inference to make (that is, the inference from Plato’s Socrates’ stating something to Plato’s believing it).

As an example of how mouthpiece interpreters often assume either without argument or without adequate argument the Mouthpiece Interpretation and then proceed to create their own puzzles about what they presume Plato believes, one might refer to a particular discussion of the concept of justice in Plato’s corpus between some leading mouthpiece interpreters. Raphael Demos discusses some paradoxes in the discussion of the ideal state in Plato’s dialogues, most notably in Plato’s *Republic*. (Demos 1957) According to Demos, an important paradox emerges when “Plato populates his heaven with the forms of just individuals no less than with that of the just state.” Demos continues: “But if there be no just citizens, (except perhaps for the rulers) how can there be forms of just men? The paradox seems all the more acute because Plato launches his project of constructing the ideal city for the express purpose of making the ideally just man more visible. Yet, when the edifice has been built, there are no just individuals to be seen within its walls.” (Demos 1957: 164) Beside the facts that Demos has begun his discussion of some of Plato’s dialogues with locutions such as “Plato populates his heaven” and “Plato launches his project,” and even admitting later on that “The theory I have proposed does not agree with all the evidence in the text, but perhaps it agrees better with such evidence than alternative theories” (Demos 1957: 173),⁹ he goes

⁸ A similar view is found in Nails (1995: 230).

⁹ After all, “It is not a question of decisive proof but of probability.” (Demos 1957: 173)

on to conclude that “The parallelism between justice in the individual and justice in the city is part of a more grandiose scheme in Plato’s thought.” (Demos 1957: 174) Thus from beginning to end Demos has presumed the legitimacy of the Mouthpiece Interpretation, as most contemporary philosophers of Plato do. Yet if the Socratic Interpretation is plausible, then the very paradox that Demos sees as belonging to Plato’s alleged “grandiose scheme” dissolves. For in that case, Plato has no such scheme, much less a grandiose one, in his dialogues. Rather, he writes brilliant dialogues wherein Socrates and his interlocutors are discussing the plausibility of an ideal state that they have in some cases “constructed.” But it takes no convoluted reading of Plato’s works to see that Socrates and even some of his interlocutors fail to approve of the product of such thinking, as it possesses many flaws.

Furthermore, in his discussion of the concept of justice and the individual in Plato’s *Republic*, R. W. Hall argues for a different interpretation of the problematic aspects of what is argued therein. He concludes,

With this distinction between justice in the individual and justice in the state in mind, it seems that a plausible case can be made for an alternative interpretation of the relation between the individual and the *polis* in Plato’s thought. Instead of interpreting the relationship as a ruthless subordination of the individual’s well being to the good of the state, or as the individual’s discovery of his true good in service to the state, I suggest that the individual has his own good: “personal” justice. The individual’s good is neither opposed to, nor quite that of the *polis*. Rather the two goods, the justice of the individual and that of the state, exhibit a relation of mutual dependence. Only in the just state can citizens acquire personal justice; but only if they are personally just can the citizens adequately perform their social function and so bring about the justice of the *polis*. (Demos 1957: 158)

However, while Hall’s interpretation of the passages in question might be plausible, what is unsupported is his unargued for ascription of the entire idea to Plato. Similar examples of the mouthpiece error on this particular matter in Plato’s writings are found.¹⁰ The philosophical

¹⁰See, for example, a discussion of the respective views of R. Demos and R. W. Hall in Skemp (1960). Also see a discussion of the views of Demos and Hall in Mulgan (1968). For a discussion of the views of Demos, Hall, Skemp and Vlastos, see Hall (1972). In each case, some version of the Mouthpiece

significance of this embarrassing mouthpiece presumption is that what they attribute to Plato as being “unpalatable” (Mulgan 1968: 86) or “distasteful” (Mulgan 1968: 86) amounts to an attribution error that misunderstands the content of “Plato’s overall view” (Mulgan 1968: 87)—whatever that is. While those such as Gregory Vlastos might do well to rescue Plato’s *Socrates* from the wreckage into which he gets himself, say, with regard to this issue of the concepts of individual and collective justice (Vlastos 1960), this is hardly the same thing as rescuing *Plato* from the same absent some plausible argument that would ground the Mouthpiece Interpretation in the first place. Yet it is Vlastos himself who believes that he has actually rescued *Plato* from such poor reasoning about the concept of justice in the ideal state. For Vlastos concludes: “...Plato is completely exonerated of the charge leveled against him in recent years: that he committed the colossal *ignoratio elenchi* that would be involved in undertaking to prove that *justice* (i.e., justice₁) pays by merely proving that psychic harmony (the resultant of justice₂) pays.” While it makes good press for one’s own thesis to be able to infer, if one can, that one has figured out what Plato was really up to here or there in his dialogues, or to actually resolve a puzzle set out therein, it is unjustified to do so all the while never addressing the fundamental question of how to even approach the dialogues the meanings of which one is seeking to unlock. Thus accuracy of the history of philosophy is at stake here, and those of us who are concerned with it must face the fact that we must either provide sound arguments for the Mouthpiece Interpretation, or admit that there are none, and then live with the philosophical implications of that position. Vlastos has provided no reason for our thinking that “Plato is completely exonerated” of certain charges in that, first, those making the charges themselves are making the Platonic presumption, and secondly, the Platonic presumption requires sound support if

Interpretation is presumed, and locutions such as “Plato believes” abound therein. It should be noted, however, that Hall’s version of the Mouthpiece Interpretation is more subtle than the others, though phrases such as “the theory of justice in the *Republic*” are found in his argument. (See Hall 1972: 7, 16) Perhaps, then, Hall’s take on the problem of justice in the *Republic* is best categorized as a version of the “Theoretical Interpretation” of Plato’s dialogues. (Corlett 1997: 423–437)

these sorts of discussions are to be justified and taken with legitimate seriousness.

Recently, Annas seeks to provide a description of “Plato’s account” of the relation of virtue to law, more specifically, how “Plato’s account” “developed from the *Republic* to the *Laws*.” She writes:

My own position is that Plato consistently, throughout his intellectual life, held to a very general thesis about political and social life, namely that the only good society, one worth living in, is one which has the unified overall aim of making its citizens happy, and that this can be achieved only by having them educated and formed to develop the virtues and so to live happily.... *Republic* and *Laws* are two ways in which Plato worked out his vision of how the good society can be achieved. (Annas 2017: 8)

While Annas might well have a “position” on this matter, her reasoning about the Platonic Question which underlies her “position” as it is expressed directly in some previous works has been found to commit various logical errors. (Corlett 2005: 31–33) So her continued commitment to the Mouthpiece Interpretation of Plato’s dialogues is unwarranted absent adequate philosophical and textual justification.

What such mouthpiece thinkers have done is to put the philosophical cart before the horse, as it were. Instead of taking seriously the meta-philosophical Platonic Question, they seem to ignore it (or give it rather short shrift) in favor of assuming their particular take on particular passages within the works of Plato. Then they set about trying to wrestle with this or that concept or problem in Plato’s dialogues. While struggling with a concept in Plato’s works is itself important, actually attributing a belief, doctrine or theory to Plato is problematic. It is a misattribution error that requires correction. A primary difficulty with Plato studies, of course, is that the very dialogical style of writing that Plato employs does not lend itself to straightforward interpretation in order to apprehend his ideas. So one must be ever careful to not presume this or that about what is in Plato’s mind insofar as substantive philosophical views are concerned.

The Socratic Interpretation does not hold that it is impossible to extract from the dialogues, say, implicit methodological ideas to which Plato might have adhered, such as his obvious respect for reason understood in general terms of philosophical argument and analysis. What stands between the Socratic and mouthpiece interpretations is not the fact that the author of Plato’s dialogues respects reason in

the pursuit of wisdom, but rather that mouthpiece interpreters routinely and without adequate justification attribute all manner of positive substantive philosophical beliefs, doctrines or theories to Plato, such as a theory of forms, a theory of art, a theory of justice, a virtue ethic, a metaphysic, etc.. Socratic interpreters find inadequate justification for such ascriptions.

Consonant with Socrates' statement in *Charmides* 161c about philosophical inquiry more generally, the real issue at hand when discussing the Platonic Question is not which character says this or that and which one allegedly speaks for Plato, but rather whether or not this or that claim made by the character, including Socrates, is true. The Socratic Interpretation asks readers of Plato's dialogues to follow his mentor Socrates' advice in studying Plato's works instead of interpreting Plato's works through the mind of one or more of his students. For it is more plausible to think that Plato was more influenced by his mentor than he was by his students. Moreover, given the fact that nowhere does Socrates, so far as the textual evidence suggests, systematically set forth and defend his own beliefs, doctrines or theories, it is unjustified to attribute such beliefs, doctrines or theories to Plato. Indeed, as I shall argue Chapter 4, it is not even adequately justified to attribute such words to the historical Socrates! The most important question before us in investigating the Platonic Question is not whether or not Plato subscribes to this or that belief, doctrine or theory found in his dialogues. What is most important is whether or not, or to what extent, this or that belief, doctrine, argument or theory (should there exist any theories) presented in the dialogues is plausible, and why. To lose sight of this point is to lose sight of one of the most fundamental facets of Plato's works. It is to misunderstand the basic intent of Plato in choosing the dialogue form. It is to misunderstand at least part of the very essence of what Plato is attempting to do in his works. And this holds true even though there is some degree of aporetic disparity between the dialogues, from one period of Plato's writings to another.¹¹

¹¹ Of course, such aporetic disparity might be due wholly or in part to the work of scribes or redactors of the extant Platonic corpus. So one ought to be mindful of not assuming that such aporetic disparity from earlier to middle to later dialogues is a sign of the maturity or development of Plato's thought as characterized in his dialogues.

In light of this important clarification of the primary point of the Platonic Question, it remains puzzling why devotees of the Mouthpiece Interpretation go to such lengths to attempt to prove what is by Socrates' own lights an insignificant question (or at least not the main point of philosophy), implying that the answer to what I refer to as the Platonic Question is a skeptical one at best. And for those interested in how to best fit Plato into the history of Western philosophy, perhaps it is best to describe Plato as the Socratic Interpretation does, namely, as a philosopher who chose to not propound his own philosophically substantive views in his writings, but who rather sought to engage readers in the mutual quest for wisdom on a variety of important topics. Of course, one of the many virtues of the Socratic Interpretation is that Plato turns out to be a rather modest philosopher. But again, I take this to be a good-making feature of this approach to Plato rather than as a weakness as it makes more sense to think that Plato was influenced more by his humble mentor than he was by one of his students as mouthpiece interpreters so often want to suggest or imply.

The Socratic Interpretation does not commit itself to the hyperbolic notion that Plato was a skeptic in general, or even a local skeptic with regard to this or that philosophical concern under discussion in this or that of his dialogues. Indeed, that would amount to a self-contradiction as the Socratic Interpretation disallows us the privilege to know to what Plato's substantive philosophical views amount. Of course, this does not mean that we cannot surmise some of Plato's positions about his philosophical method and style, whether or not he is committed to a respect for the law of non-contradiction, philosophical analysis and argumentation, etc.. But ascribing these kinds of general claims to Plato is not akin to ascribing to him all manner of specific beliefs, doctrines or theories about substantive philosophy. This is a point that some mouthpiece interpreters for whatever reason fail to grasp or refuse to accept in their approach to Plato's works. For them, Plato is either a "dogmatist" or "theoretician" (on the one hand), or he is a skeptic (on the other).¹² For them, Plato's dialogues are to be approached either as works containing Plato's views, or they are to be approached relativistically making him out to be a skeptic. But such

¹²An example of this view is found in Annas (1992: 64), as discussed in Corlett (2005: 31–33).

mouthpiece interpreters provide us with a false dilemma, a bifurcation fallacy. For neither one of these extreme approaches is one we either ought to adopt or one that is defended by me. Instead, the Socratic Interpretation sees Plato neither as a skeptic nor a relativist, neither as a dogmatist nor a theoretician insofar as his aim in composing dialogues is concerned. His aim is rather to take readers on a philosophical, analytical journey with Socrates and his interlocutors in investigating various important problems, and we as readers are to continue the argumentation and analyses wherever they lead.

In this book, I set out to expose some further errors of the Mouthpiece Interpretation, such as the one wherein contemporary philosophers follow the lead of M. M. Mackenzie (MacKenzie 1981) in thinking without adequate textual support that Plato was anything but a retributivist concerning the moral justification of punishment. I also assess Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith's latest attempt to address what I refer to as the "Socratic Question" insofar as it might be thought that Plato's Socrates might represent the mind of Plato. (Brickhouse and Smith 2010) And I continue my exposition of various Platonic themes in line with the Socratic Interpretation of Plato's dialogues. Indeed, the chapters of this book on Socrates and justice are intended to demonstrate that it is possible to provide a Socratic Interpretation of Plato's dialogues, one that refuses to commit the fundamental attribution error of ascribing to Plato various substantive philosophical theories, doctrines or beliefs.

In closing these introductory remarks, it is important that I clarify some key assumptions I make throughout this book. First, I assume that there exists sufficient genuineness in the apocryphal and pseudopygraphal writings of Plato to consider them as legitimate sources to cite, and that there is not substantial reason to rule out any of them as not being sufficiently reflective of Plato's genuine corpus of writings. Second, I wish to clarify a distinction, implicit in *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues*, that there are strong and weak versions of the Socratic Interpretation: (1) that it is impossible even in principle to find Plato's beliefs, doctrines or theories in Plato's dialogues (stronger version); (2) that it is possible but has yet to be adequately proven that Plato's beliefs, doctrines or theories are extractable from his dialogues (weak version). I subscribe to the weaker version of the Socratic Interpretation according to which it is possible in principle to prove the Mouthpiece

Interpretation. However, given the weakness of the arguments and paucity of evidence adduced in favor of it, it is unjustified (or at best only weakly justified) to accept it as a viable approach to Plato's dialogues.

Briefly, this book proceeds as follows. Chapters 2–3 seek to answer further previously unaddressed questions about the viability of the Socratic Interpretation, and to clarify issues along the way. They also refute arguments against the Socratic Interpretation (or ones that might be raised against it) that have heretofore been unaddressed. When coupled with my previous work on the Platonic Question, I am hopeful that no significant philosophical stone is left unturned in attempting to address what has been or might be said to cast doubt on the Socratic Interpretation. Chapter 4 is devoted to an analysis of Brickhouse and Smith's defense of Socratic studies. I seek therein to extend the Socratic Anti-Mouthpiece Interpretation to an approach to Plato's works that attributes what Plato's Socrates says to the character Socrates. While this seems counter-intuitive to some, the analysis set forth has important implications for both Socratic studies and Plato studies. Chapter 5 considers some of what Socrates says about certain concepts of distributive justice, dealing with such justice concepts as equality, freedom, rights, etc.. Chapter 6 provides an in-depth Socratic Interpretation of the concept of legal obligation in Plato's *Crito*, resulting in a unique answer to the age-old cluster of questions about Socrates' words in the *Apology* and the *Crito* on such matters, including why Socrates chose death when he had alternatives presented to him that would have prolonged his life. Chapter 7 considers and refutes the popular idea that Plato had a theory of punishment that amounts to a "moral education" theory of punishment. In fact, Plato had no theory of punishment. But what Socrates said about punishment hardly amounts to such a view. Instead, most of what Socrates expresses in Plato's works is consistent with a retributive notion of punishment, embracing standard retributivist ideals of responsibility, desert, and proportionality. Chapter 8 pertains to what Socrates said concerning compensatory justice, to my knowledge a topic never before addressed by philosophers of Plato or by contemporary philosophers of law. The results might shock the moral senses of most contemporary philosophers who are bent on utilitarian-based accounts of "justice" that tend to either discount or deny the moral legitimacy

of compensatory justice because it tends to create inequalities amongst citizens. Appendix I serves as a defense of Harold Cherniss' critique of the use of Aristotle as a witness to Plato's beliefs, doctrines or theories against Lloyd Gerson's critique of Cherniss' critique. In the end, the attempt of Gerson to bolster the Mouthpiece Interpretation of Plato by a resurrection of the use of Aristotle for such purposes fails miserably. Finally, Appendix II is a critical discussion of a recent attempt to interpret the concept of mimetic art in Plato's *Republic* in mouthpiece terms.

This book seeks to add to the increasing numbers of works on justice in Plato and Socratic studies. But in the end, it is a vindication of how the Socratic Interpretation can and does serve as the most plausible approach to Plato's dialogues. If the proof is in the pudding, this pudding has the right consistency, and the right taste.

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