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As my title moves from species to genus, my paper proceeds in the opposite direction; thus my contribution to François Renaud’s paper—when I get there—will have been set in a broad context. I begin in section I with the very general question of what we historians of philosophy take as our aims and methods, and what we take ourselves to be doing when we do the history of philosophy. In section II, I provide a derivative account of the extant strands of Platonic interpretation to minimize superficial disputes while emphasizing a handful of genuine disagreements about how we should conduct our research efforts. The review of interpretive strategies serves to show how Renaud’s contemporary approach to Plato’s dialogues, section III, represents a sensitive accommodation of the best features of more limited strategies. What he calls the Platonic dialectical requirement that argument and drama be appreciated as operating together provokes me to ask why that is so, and to look for an answer in Plato’s attitude toward music.

I. DOING HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

I begin with a July, 2015, dialectical exchange—conducted without animus between two accomplished philosophers whose identities I will later reveal; the two disagree about the right way to do history of philosophy. I quote from near the end of their back-and-forth:

My opponent is looking for the single key to unlock Plato’s philosophy; I am skeptical that you can (or should) bring all of Plato’s philosophy back to something as apparently straightforward as the theory of forms. I see Plato as a tangle of

ABSTRACT

François Renaud replies to the question of what principles one ought to employ in the study of Plato by arguing that, and demonstrating how, the argument and the drama operate together successfully in the Gorgias. In agreement with Renaud’s approach, I expose some historical roots with a review of Platonic interpretive strategies of the modern period in the context of history of philosophy more generally. I also try to show why argument and drama operate together, an insight I attribute to Plato’s genius in relation to music.

Keywords: Plato, strategies, history of philosophy, music.

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