The time is ripe for this project in other respects. In *Plato’s Philosophers; The Coherence of the Dialogues* (2009), Catherine Zuckert has used dramatic chronology to integrate all thirty-five dialogues accepted by Thrasyllus into a coherent narrative unfolding in time, thereby offering an exciting challenge to the dogma of “Plato’s development.” Unlike Zuckert’s, however, the coherent inter-dialogue narrative under consideration here is *pedagogical* rather than strictly chronological: my emphasis will be on Plato as a teacher and I am interested in showing the pedagogical value of reading his dialogues in a certain order. By considering a series that includes both genuine dialogues and *dubia*, I will show how *Theages* and *Cleitophon* prepare the reader for *Republic*, thereby making it easier for the student to see the thematic interconnections between *Gorgias, Theages, Meno, Cleitophon*, and the Allegory of the Cave. It is on the pedagogical value of these thematic interconnections that my authenticity argument rests. But even a demonstration that these interconnections exist necessarily depends on a prior willingness to read the Platonic *dubia* in the first place and, here again, the time is ripe. Recent work on *Theages* (Bailly 2003a, Bailly 2004) and *Cleitophon* (Slings 1999, Bailly 2003b) has answered old arguments (most notably Heidel 1896) for athetizing them without advancing compelling new arguments for restoring them to the canon; this leaves room for the argument based on pedagogical coherence presented here.

In Section §1, the reading order hypothesis will be used to show how *Cleitophon* prepares the reader for *Republic* and then, in Section §2, how *Theages* does so. Section §3 will then show how *Theages* bridges the gap between *Gorgias* and *Meno*. Having given the reader a sense of how the reading order hypothesis can be applied to questions of authenticity, Section §4 will address a methodological circularity: only by reading *Cleitophon* and *Theages* as if they were

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4 For my review of Zuckert 2009, see Altman 2010c.

5 Bailly 2004, 71: “Admitting that it [sc. *Theages*] is not as good as Plato’s usually accepted works does not mean we have to deem it absolutely bad, nor that it is not by Plato. My conclusion to the authenticity question is that the dialogue should remain of “dubious” Platonic authorship, although it is undoubtedly genuine in other senses.” Not only as the foil for Bailly but for many thoughtful observations, Joyal 2000 must also be cited.

6 Slings 1999, 233-4: “Therefore, although not without hesitation, I accept the *Cleitophon* as a genuine work of Plato.” Demetriou 2000 is a thoughtful and indeed indispensable meditation on Slings.
genuine can their place in the reading order be proved. While considering this variant on the hermeneutic circle, I will show how the reading order hypothesis resolves two problems in Platonic hermeneutics by employing the method associated with dialectic in the Divided Line. Finally, Section §5 will summarize how Gorgias, Theages, Meno, Cleitophon, and Republic constitute a pedagogically coherent series within the reading order of Plato’s dialogues.

Section §1. Cleitophon and Republic

Considered in isolation, Cleitophon seems both incomplete and inauthentic. And this is the point: the reading order hypothesis means that no dialogue must be considered in isolation. It is not difficult to identify “un-Platonic” elements in a dialogue where Socrates is attacked and offers no defense to Cleitophon’s extra-legal “charge.” But Thrasyllos recognized that Cleitophon doesn’t stand in isolation: his Eighth Tetralogy consists of Cleitophon, Republic, Timaeus and Critias. When Republic follows Cleitophon, as Zuckert (2009, 332-5) too argues that it does, Socrates’ lengthy monologue must be understood as his response to Cleitophon. In the context of reading order, then, Cleitophon should not only be recognized as the introduction to Republic (Souilhé 1949, 179) but as its literary provocation.

To begin with, then, there has been considerable discussion of “the riddle of the Cleitophon.”7 While the only “riddle” for those scholars who atheitize the dialogue involves discovering its author and determining that author’s purpose, those who ascribe the dialogue to Plato must confront the riddle of “Socrates’ Silence”8 in the face of “Cleitophon’s Challenge.”9 Based on the reading order hypothesis, my approach is to solve this “riddle” by reading Republic as Socrates’ response to “Cleitophon’s Challenge,” i.e., I claim that “Socrates’ Silence” is broken in Republic and therefore that Cleitophon, when read as an introduction

7 In addition to the eponymous Geffcken 1930 and Rochnik 1984, see Slings 1999, Demetriou 2000, and Bowe 2007.


to it, can be proved to have a genuine place among the dialogues of Plato. But before defending my approach, it will be useful to situate it in the context of the recent revival of interest in “the riddle of the Cleitophon.”

In reviewing the work of previous scholars, G.S. Bowe (2007, 249; cf. 245) has usefully distinguished three ways of considering Cleitophon en route to defending the third as his own: (1) as preceding Republic in a dramatic sense, (2) as following Republic, and (3) as independent of Republic. Despite Bowe’s “In Defense of Cleitophon,” I do not believe that the dialogue will be welcomed back into the canon on the basis of a stand-alone approach alone; even if a new consensus pronounces it genuine, it would—much like Critias—probably be regarded as unfinished. Moreover, given the fact that two of the three approaches distinguished by Bowe situate it in proximity to Republic, it seems unnatural to divorce them, especially because the dogma of “hermeneutic isolationism”—i.e. the claim that each of Plato’s dialogues must be evaluated without reference to any other—is so easily refuted on the basis of dyads like Timaeus-Critias and Sophist-Statesman. Indeed it is the implicit application of this isolationist

10 Bowe 2007 is no longer up to date nor does it address the prior Davis 1998 and Ausland 2005. For the best available bibliography, see Moore 2010.

11 This scheme is preferable to the four-fold classification at Roochnik 1984, 134; his (emphasis mine) “(4) The dialogue is a self-contained Platonic work and worthy of serious study,” although it comes closest, leaves no room for the approach I am proposing; although I do not regard Cleitophon as “self-contained,” it is nevertheless a…Platonic work and worthy of serious study.” For Roochnik’s position, see 138.

12 Ficino, A. E. Taylor, Paul Shorey, and S. R. Slings are cited at Bowe 2007, 248 as examples of scholars who changed their minds on the authenticity of Cleitophon; this illustrates how little certainty exists on the question.


14 To say nothing of the Alcibiades and Hippias twins along with Laws-Epinomis. Bowe 2007, 253 n. 42 rejects the authority of Thrasyllus for reading Republic after Cleitophon (as well, presumably, for reading Timaeus after Republic and Critias after Timaeus) on the basis of the criticism of the tetralogical scheme found in Grote. Although I reject Thrasyllus’ organization by tetralogies—the first ignores, for example the Sophist-Statesman dyad interpolated between Euthyphro and Apology, and his decisions to split some dyads (e.g. Hipparchus and Minos) while creating others (e.g. Symposium and Phaedrus)—Thrasyllus gets the Eighth Tetralogy right if only by recognizing its three dyads.

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hermeneutic that makes the riddle of “Socrates’ Silence” particularly difficult and pressing.

But “Socrates’ Silence” in the face of “Cleitophon’s Challenge” is likewise more difficult for those who favor (2) over (1): if “Cleitophon’s Challenge” is not answered in Republic, then an explanation for “Socrates’ Silence” must be found elsewhere, i.e. in some extra-textual—and thus even less likely—place. In addition to following the ancient indication provided by Thrasyllus,16 (1) has the advantage that it eliminates the problem of “Socrates’ Silence” at the start: Socrates is not silent. But because “Cleitophon’s Challenge” is formidable, Socrates will require the entire Republic to meet it just as he will require nine more books to meet the challenge offered by Glauccon and Adeimantus at the beginning of Republic II.

In arguing for (3), Bowe advances arguments against both (1) and (2). Although his argument against (2) might be supplemented,17 it is his argument against (1) that is relevant here:18

Those who take the dialogue as complete and authentic often place the Clitophon dramatically before the Republic. While

16 For the arrangement of Thrasyllus as a reading order, see Dunn 1976 and Tarrant 1993, 179; cf. Cooper and Hutchinson 1997, x: “Thrasyllus’ order appears to be determined by no single criterion but by several sometimes conflicting ones, though his arrangement may represent some more or less unified idea about the order in which the dialogues should be read and taught.”

17 Particularly with respect to the absent Davis 1998; cf. Altman 2012, 32-3 n. 98.

18 The objection to (1) on the basis of “comfort” developed in Bruell 1999, 189-99 (especially 192-3 and 197) is particularly revealing but requires separate treatment; see Strauss 1989, 41 and Altman 2011, 102-3, 111 n. 184-112, 250, 350 n. 5, and 444. For a friendlier critique, see Kremer 2000, 492 n. 20 and 500 n. 28. Incidentally, it is thanks to the lack of any clear guidance from Strauss himself about Cleitophon that this quarrel between two able Straussianes becomes possible; cf. Saxonhouse 2005, 129 on the common ground between Orwin 1982, Roochnik 1984 (”powerful and scary” at Saxonhouse 2005, 131), and Blits 1984. The question of “comfort” is also implicit in Blits 1984, 334 (“one of Socrates’ failures”) and Kremer 2004, ix: it was Nietzsche’s critique of Plato that led him to Cleitophon and he “was unable to discover” in it (emphasis mine) “a Socrates worthy to be Nietzsche’s antagonist and even critic.” It will be noted that even the defense of (1) in Roochnik 1985 offers no “comfort.”
this may seem to some to be a more natural order, it also leads to interpretations of the Clitophon that see Clitophon as going from bad to worse, based on a few remarks in Republic 1. 19

Bowe’s argument depends on the assumption that Plato crafted Socrates’ account of Cleitophon in Republic I in accordance with historical verisimilitude broadly construed:20 once the great monologue he delivers is recognized as Socrates’ immediate response to “Cleitophon’s Challenge,”21 Bowe’s central objection to (1) becomes irrelevant.22 It is my hope that parental storytellers will immediately recognize from experience the efficacy of inserting their own child in the midst of a cautionary tale. The “radical relativist” whom Socrates calls “Cleitophon” in Republic I is who Cleitophon may well become if he fails to recognize that Socrates’ response to his challenge in Republic VI and VII—beginning with the Idea of the Good—constitutes Plato’s refutation of relativism.23

19 Bowe 2007, 251; cf. the somewhat stronger statement at 249: “Those who take the dialogue as complete and authentic place the Clitophon dramatically ahead of the Republic.” See Kremer 2000 for emphasis on the “movement” that Bowe calls “going from bad to worse.”

20 Cf. Orwin 1982, 752: “As has been argued above, we need not take this ending to imply that Kleitophon has left Socrates speechless. It means merely that Socrates’ reply is somehow beside the point, which fact requires interpretation. We learn from the Republic, however, that Kleitophon continues to frequent Thrasymachus: whatever Socrates may have replied, it did not satisfy him.” Comparable is Ausland 2005, 416: “He [sc. Cleitophon] thinks I’m [Ausland is imagining what Socrates might have said to himself] unwilling to give him more but I know I’m unable [cf. Rutherford 1995, 100 and Bailly 2003, 116]. Yet he also seems elated by his own rhetorical performance, so I had best not say anything just now. Perhaps I’ll take the next opportunity that arises to converse in front of him with Thrasymachus and try to get beyond our usual quarrel.”

21 Bowe 2007, 245 n. 3 (emphases mine): “I do not mean to imply (in the case of Republic I and Clitophon) that we should think of this [sc. ‘dramatic ordering’] as an uninterrupted dramatic order, although it is possible to do so on some accounts.” I am implying this but Bowe does not address any other accounts that do so.

22 Bowe 2007, 257: “The assumption that the Clitophon comes before Republic I and that this must mean that we are to understand that Clitophon has followed through on his threat to join forces with Thrasymachus requires us to accept A2 over ADF and places the weight of interpretation on Republic 1.”

23 “Radical relativism” is the felicitous phrase introduced at Rooknich 1985, 140. Not so felicitous is his claim on 141 that “in neither of the two dialogues is Cleitophon refuted by
In the context of Platonic pedagogy, however, I should qualify my statement that Cleitophon is followed immediately by Plato’s Republic: it would be a mistake to fall once again into the happy confusion of Hippolytus the Christian, who regarded the two dialogues as one (Bowe 2007, 246). Once the dialogues are recognized as teaching tools and the reading order is recognized as a coherent syllabus, one has already begun to ask: “How would Plato have taught his dialogues in the Academy?” One thing is certain: if Cleitophon is genuine, he separated it from Republic. I therefore do not believe that Plato expected anyone to read or hear the one immediately after hearing or reading the other. Given the practice of all good teachers, especially those influenced by Plato, it is natural to assume that some discussion followed an encounter with Cleitophon. I therefore suspect the first academicians were asked: “What do you think Socrates replied to Cleitophon?” before learning from Plato’s Republic how he did.

Abandoning this speculative Academy for more modern concerns, I am claiming that Cleitophon is the first-order audience for Socrates in Plato’s Republic.24 Socrates thereby breaks his silence in order to respond to “Cleitophon’s Challenge,” attempts to warn him off from Thrasymachus, and even preemptively attacks the “radical relativism” or “legal positivism” that Socrates’ Cleitophon defends in Republic I.25 To put the central point yet another way: I am claiming that the Cleitophon who appears in direct dialogue in Cleitophon is the Cleitophon whose “challenge” provokes the reply Socrates.

Roochnik grounds his decisionist “defense” of philosophy (cf. “judgment” at 142 with “faith” at Strauss 1997, 131) on the following false claim (141): “Philosophy depends upon an unconditional affirmation of the goodness of philosophical discourse, a value which for it is axiomatic.” As presented in Republic VI-VII, the Socratic philosopher recognizes only the unconditional goodness of the Idea of the Good (533b8-d1); the goodness of the discourse that ascends to it is hypothetical, not axiomatic (511b2-6).

24 Plato’s readers are his second-order audience; the rest of the fictional audience in the home of Polemarchus could perhaps be reckoned his third-order audience.

25 Bowe 2007, 253: “If we accept that Roochnik’s “relativism” or Orwin’s “legal positivism” deserves no good response, we are left wondering why the Republic provides such a good response to it—why it provides a reason for believing that justice is higher than law and thus is not a matter of mere convention—or, as one might more traditionally say, why the Republic clearly defends φύσις against νόμος.”


ALTMAN, William H.F., “Reading Order and Authenticity: The Place of Theages and Cleitophon in Platonic Pedagogy”


Shorey, Paul. 1903. The Unity of Plato’s Thought. Chicago.

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