question. Do the criteria for her own judgements stem from a well-rounded picture of Plato that has benefited from the 'mistakes' of previous interpreters—illustrating progress in scholarship—or do they stem from uniquely contemporary concerns? Lane's argument urges us to believe that there is a non-contingent way of appreciating the role played by the force of our questions in shaping our sense of Platonic answers, so that we both do not deprive Plato of his historical identity and do not presume that we can positively and absolutely 'get Plato right'. But she mostly provides intriguing hints rather than confident claims of what this might be.

As someone who has read Plato doggedly, regularly, and enthusiastically for a long time, I am probably not the best person to judge whether this book demonstrates the continued relevance of Plato's dialogues or whether it shows, as a book in the publisher's series is (presumptively) supposed to, 'how Classical ideas and material have helped to shape the modern world'. But I certainly learned much of value from it. Does it generate grounds for a revival of interest in Plato, following up the renewed appeal of Aristotle over the past twenty years? It is hard to imagine a groundswell in our age of serious interest in carefully considering Plato's severe, comprehensive, layered but elegant criticisms of claims to truth about knowledge, ethics, and politics, an age so devoted to displacing our attention and dislodging our commitments. But the uncertainty generated by the globalizations of economics, culture, and military power, along with the many conflicts among ethical and religious perspectives, have led many to think about fundamentals. And, indeed, Plato is very good to think with in thinking about them. In so far as Lane's book does not provide all the answers one might hope for to questions about what we are to make of Plato or his progeny, it provides some of them—and providing some rather than all may well be all to the good, or at least to the good of philosophical wonder.

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Plato and his Predecessors: The Dramatisation of Reason, by Mary Margaret McCabe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. viii + 318. H/b £40.00.

The title of Mary Margaret McCabe's *Plato and his Predecessors: The Dramatisation of Reason* is bound to mislead. A more apt title would be something like '*Plato's Later Apologies for Socrates*'; for the book offers an extended account of the ways in which the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Politicus*, and *Philebus* provide a complex defence of the Socratic philosophical method of question and answer.

In Part I, McCabe discusses the ways in which Plato's dramatic representation of some of his predecessors—in particular, as persons who fail to appear as characters in the dialogues—suggests an implicit argument against their views that threaten the philosophical presuppositions on which the Socratic method rests. In Parts II and III, McCabe argues that a positive defence of the Socratic method—as the only means for discovering the truth, for leading the best life, indeed, for having any life at all—is also implicit in these dialogues. In a brief review, it would be impossible to present, much less assess, the complex arguments that McCabe offers for her interpretations of these dialogues. Instead, I will focus my discussion on her most original suggestion that Plato's dramatization of his predecessors in these dialogues implies an indirect challenge to their philosophical positions.

To McCabe, one of the most striking dramatic features of the *Theaetetus, Sophist, Politicus,* and *Philebus* is the fact that the proponents of some of the philosophical positions that Socrates attempts to refute are not present in the dialogues to defend their views—or if they are ever present, they quickly disappear into the ground (Protagoras) or the background (Philebus). Why didn't Plato simply have these characters show up for a show-down with Socrates? One simple explanation would be that it would be historically and dramatically implausible and philosophically unnecessary for them all to show up. Such an explanation would be unsatisfying to McCabe since, on her view, the absence of a proponent of a philosophical view that is discussed in a Platonic dialogue presents a special puzzle. For, according to McCabe, Socrates is represented throughout the dialogues as taking the strong principled stance, that his interlocutors articulate and defend only views that they hold. He places, as she puts it, a 'sincerity constraint' on philosophical method (pp. 27, 29). With this constraint in the background, the absence of a proponent of a philosophical position under examination in any Platonic dialogue is striking and seems to demand special explanation.

McCabe's explanation is that some of the philosophical positions that are considered in this late quartet of dialogues—Protagorean relativism, Parmenidean monism, crude materialism, and Heracliteanism—are 'mean-minded': they threaten the very 'possibility of rational investigation', the 'very business of philosophy' (p. 15). Like scepticism, McCabe argues, these theories are impossible to refute directly, for the very possibility of refutation presupposes the falsity of these theories and thus begs the question against them (p. 134). For this reason, McCabe argues, in addition to attempting to refute these theories directly in the dialogues, Plato challenged these positions dramatically by having the proponents of these views fail to show up. This was not a mere rhetorical trick on Plato's part to mask the inadequacy of his attempts at more direct refutation (pp. 46, 50, 79, 126). Rather, on McCabe's view, it was a device to draw to his reader's attention the very conditions for holding a philosophical position at all (pp. 50, 126, 138). Since these theories imply that these conditions cannot be met, it would be impossible for anyone to hold these theories if

the theories were true. Thus, proponents of these positions, by their own lights, cannot exist: they must be missing persons (pp. 51, 79, 125).

I confess that I find McCabe's general line of argument here intriguing and attractive. On her view, the narrative frame of Plato's dialogue is not just an entertaining adornment, but instead does real philosophical work. Moreover, on McCabe's interpretation, Plato is placed in a flattering light. Never mind the fact that some of the arguments that one finds in the dialogues against these mean-minded theories appear lame: it is impossible to refute such theories directly. According to McCabe, Plato recognized these limitations and nonetheless succeeded in challenging the theories dramatically by calling attention to the fact that they are self-undermining. However, despite the many virtues of McCabe's account, I remain unconvinced.

To explain the reasons for my scepticism, I will focus on McCabe's discussion of Plato's treatment of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus,* a discussion which seems to me illustrative of the difficulties with her general line of interpretation. According to Socrates, Protagoras espoused the following view:

> man is the measure of all things: of those that are, how they are, and of those that are not, how they are not (*τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστι*). (*Tht.* 152a2–4; McCabe's translation)

Socrates interprets this doctrine in the following way:

> everything is for me the way it appears to me, and is for you the way it appears to you. (*Tht.* 152a6–8)

For the purposes of this discussion, I will follow McCabe and others, and refer to this doctrine as Protagorean relativism. One of the implications of Protagorean relativism, according to Socrates, is that every judgement is true (at least for the person whose judgement is in question). Such a position would render the Socratic method of question and answer otiose, for as Socrates himself comments: 'It must be an extremely tiresome bit of nonsense to set about inspecting and trying to refute one another's appearings and judgements, if everyone's are correct' (*Tht.* 161e7–9). McCabe suggests that Plato recognized that the challenges that Protagorean relativism present to the Socratic method are even more significant. According to McCabe, if Protagorean relativism is true, beliefs cannot stand in logical relations to one another nor can one reflect on one's own beliefs (pp. 35–36). Since the Socratic method consists largely of reflection on the logical relations among beliefs, on McCabe's view, the truth of Protagorean relativism would imply not only that the method is useless, but also that it is impossible (p. 47). Further, McCabe argues, such a theory is 'mean-minded' because it would be impossible to refute it without begging the question:

> Socrates cannot show Protagoras to be inconsistent, given that on Protagorean principles the relation of consistency, which is itself the logical relation of agreement, does not apply to my beliefs, since each is entirely insulated from any other. So consistency does not matter. But if consistency does not matter, the sequence of argument disintegrates, and the notions of contradiction, refutation and proof disappear

> with it. Any attempt at a counter-argument will simply beg the question. Protagoras seems irrefutable. (p. 46)

Thus, McCabe argues, if Plato is to defend Socrates's method against Protagorean relativism, he must adopt a different strategy.

McCabe finds an application of this strategy in the following passage where Socrates reflects on the results of his efforts to refute Protagorean relativism:

> Theodorus: We're running my friend [Protagoras] too hard, Socrates.
>
> Socrates: But, my friend, it isn't clear that we're running past where we ought. (*Ἀλλά τοι, ὦ φίλε, ἄδηλον εἰ καὶ παραθέομεν τὸ ὀρθόν*). Of course he's older than we are, so it's likely that he's wiser. If he suddenly popped up out of the ground here, from the neck up, he'd very probably convict me of talking a great deal of nonsense, and you of agreeing to it, and then he'd duck down again and rush off. (*Tht.* 171c8–d3)

The image of Protagoras popping his head in and out of the ground is strikingly odd, and it calls for some sort of explanation. McCabe suggests that this dramatic device reveals why we should not accept Protagorean relativism:

> Protagoras' own theory explains who we are ('measures') in terms of what we believe; and it describes those beliefs as private and piecemeal. But this undermines any systematic account of who we are by disallowing any account of how our beliefs are held together, or of how they are differentiated from the beliefs of others. This is why it is hard to see who exactly is Protagoras here …
>
> … As the context shows, Protagoras has a theory which incorporates a vacuous account of who he is and an untenable account of what it is to believe; as a consequence, this person who defends such a theory is himself fragmented and cut off by the theory itself. But this is not merely a graphic representation of why we should dislike the theory; it is a reason why the theory itself cannot be *coherently* held by someone who lives a continuous life and holds beliefs in a differential way …
>
> … While the *argument* within the frame is unable to show directly that Protagoras is wrong, the frame itself, by reflecting on the conditions for argument, both attacks Protagoras' first principles and shows Socrates' own method to be legitimate. (pp. 49–51, my emphasis)

McCabe's argument for this interpretation involves inferring the best explanation. The best explanation for Socrates's fanciful image of Protagoras is that Plato recognized that a direct refutation of a 'mean-minded' theory like Protagorean relativism is impossible, and so, through the image of Protagoras's head popping in and out of the ground, he attempted to inspire his readers to reflect on the conditions for holding a philosophical position in order to see how Protagorean relativism implies that these conditions cannot be met. However, I doubt that this explanation is best, since it fails to meet what I take to be two general conditions of adequacy.

First, if we are to believe that Plato's fanciful image of Protagoras has 'argumentative content' (p. 51) that succeeds where his attempts at direct refutations against 'mean-minded' theories failed, then we should be offered some reason to believe that this argumentative strategy does not share the limitations of direct refutations. But if direct refutations fail against Protagoras because they

beg the question in their assumption that consistency, inconsistency, refutation, and proof are possible, then any argumentative strategy—whether the argument is explicitly stated or implicitly assumed, whether it is in the dialogue itself or in the dramatic frame of the dialogue, whether it has as its conclusion the falsity of Protagorean relativism or the truth of some propositions about the conditions of personhood and belief—would equally beg the question. Given the terms in which McCabe herself sets up the problem that 'mean-minded' theories present to Socrates, the solution that she offers to Plato is no solution at all.

There is a second problem. If we are to agree that the attribution of a particular implicit argument to Plato serves as the best explanation of his image of Protagoras's head popping in and out of the ground, there should be some textual evidence that Plato himself was committed to the argument that McCabe attributes to him. Unfortunately, there is good textual evidence that Plato would have rejected this argument. Here is the argument that McCabe attributes to Plato:

(1) According to Protagoras, 'truth and appearances are identical in scope: every appearance is true, every truth is an appearance' (pp. 32–33).

(2) Therefore (from (1)), on Protagoras's view, 'there is no such thing as falsehood' (p. 33).

(3) Therefore (from (2)), on Protagoras's view, '[n]o proposition can stand in any relation to another proposition which might allow one to contradict another, on pain of falsehood, or failures to appear, creeping in' (p. 35).

(4) Therefore (from 3), on Protagoras's view, our beliefs are not held together or differentiated from the beliefs of others (pp. 45–6, 49).

(5) Protagoras 'explains who we are ('measures') in terms of what we believe' (p. 49).

(6) Therefore (from 4 and 5), on Protagoras's view, he cannot have *any* identity: 'he is an illusion' (p. 50).

There is much that is fishy about this argument, but I want to focus on steps (2) and (3) on which the argument crucially depends. If Plato believed that Protagorean relativism implies either that falsehood is impossible or that there are no logical relations among beliefs, he has certainly done a good job keeping his view a secret. Plato clearly believes that Protagorean relativism implies that there are no false *judgements*, but this is not equivalent to the claim that there are no falsehoods. On the account that Plato offers, Protagorean relativism appears to be a theory both about the nature of truth and of the nature of falsehood: I am the measure both of the things that are and also of the things that *are not* (*Tht.* 152a, 160c, 166d). For this reason, according to Socrates, an implication of Protagorean relativism is that Protagorean relativism is false for those countless people who believe that Protagorean relativism is false (ψευδῆ) (*Tht.* 170d–e). Nor, do I think that one can *immediately* infer, as McCabe seems to think one can, step (2), that falsehood is impossible, from step (1), the view that 'truth and appearance are identical in scope'. For it can appear to me *not*

to be the case that *P*, or equivalently, it can appear to me that *P* is false.

Further, Plato does not represent Protagoras as believing that inconsistency or refutation is impossible. Throughout the discussion of Protagorean relativism, Socrates assumes that Protagoras would want to avoid committing himself to inconsistent beliefs (*Tht.* 154d, 165b, 166d–167d). Indeed, it would appear that, far from it being the case, as McCabe suggests, that Protagoras's *denial* of the possibility of inconsistency forces him to conclude that persons do not exist, in Plato's *Theaetetus,* Socrates presumes that Protagoras's *concern* to avoid inconsistency would motivate him to adopt the view of personal identity that we persist only so long as our current perception persists (*Tht.* 166a–b). We need not attribute to Plato an implicit argumentative strategy in the dramatic frame of the dialogue to see why he might have thought that, on Protagoras's own view, Protagoras can exist only long enough to pop in and out. The argument for this claim is presented explicitly in the text: given his conception of the conditions on personal identity, he can persist only as long as his current perception. While one might not agree with Protagoras's theory of personal identity, it is not obviously incompatible with the very possibility of holding a philosophical position. And, if I am right to suggest that consistency does matter to Plato's Protagoras (whether it *should* matter to him is a separate question), then not only is Plato not committed to the argument that McCabe says is implicit in the dramatic frame of the dialogue, but in addition, he is not committed to regarding Protagorean relativism as 'mean-minded' in the way that McCabe suggests or as threatening the very possibility (as opposed to the usefulness) of the Socratic method.

There is much more to be said, of course. McCabe also examines Plato's treatment of the views of Parmenides, Heraclitus, and crude materialists in the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Politicus*, and *Philebus*, predecessors who also do not show up as characters to defend their views. Should we read anything into their absence? I would agree with McCabe that it is striking that in these later dialogues Socrates examines these views in the absence of their proponents, if I agreed with her that he was ever represented as committed to what she calls the 'sincerity constraint', the view that contributors to a philosophical discussion cannot fruitfully consider the truth of views that none of them believes. While I agree that Socrates *prefers* to discuss a philosophical view with someone who actually holds the view (who doesn't?), he does not maintain that it is impossible to assess a view when its proponent is either not present or remains silent. Of course, when Socrates is cross-examining an interlocutor in order to test his claim to knowledge, then his interlocutor must reveal his genuine beliefs, and so, in this context, Socrates insists that his interlocutors say what they believe. But when he cross-examines someone so that they both may replace their ignorance with knowledge, he puts no such constraint on the propositions examined. When Charmides asks Socrates to consider a view that he has heard, but does not believe, Socrates expresses his suspicion that the proponent of this view is present in their midst, but he concedes to Charmides

that 'the question we need to consider is not who said it, but whether or not the statement is true' (*Ch*. 161c5–6). In the *Protagoras*, Socrates and Protagoras consider and reject the view that passions can be more powerful than knowledge, a view that is attributed to 'the many' who are not present (*Pr*. 352b–353b). The fact, then, that Protagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and the crude materialists do not appear as characters in the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist, Politicus*, and *Philebus* to defend their views should not raise any eyebrows. And, if Socrates's philosophical method of question and answer does not presuppose the 'sincerity constraint', then much of the elaborate and often ingenious positive defence of this constraint that McCabe finds in the *Politicus* and *Philebus* (pp. 205–7, 263–89) would be unnecessary. Socrates does need arguments against the views of Protagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and the crude materialists if he is to defend his philosophical method, but I would suggest that, whatever their merits, these arguments are presented explicitly in the dialogues themselves rather than in their narrative frames.

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***Tolstoy on Aesthetics:* What is Art?**, by H.O. Mounce. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001. Pp. v + 115. H/b £35.00, $59.95.

H. O. Mounce's new book is an attempt to separate the 'real Tolstoy' from the 'false Tolstoy' on the value and function of art. Contemporary aestheticians are urged to reconsider Tolstoy's views in his oft-derided yet highly influential work, *What is Art?* According to Mounce, some of the standard criticisms of Tolstoy's aesthetics have been ill-informed and unfair. It is assumed, for instance, that Tolstoy advocates an extreme form of didacticism whereby art is valued, not for its aesthetic qualities but solely for its moral content. But in fact, Mounce insists that the real Tolstoy is opposed to heavy-handed didacticism and gives due attention to the way in which an artist conveys her subject. To be 'good' an artwork must still express Tolstoy's religious view of life, but in a creative and evocative way.

The order and progression of Mounce's account reflects the structure of *What is Art?* After an exposition of Tolstoy's life and intellectual influences, Mounce outlines Tolstoy's negative approach to the question of the value and function of art. This approach primarily involves criticism of the aims and assumptions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics, particularly in relation to the notions of beauty and aesthetic pleasure. The positive aspect of Tolstoy's account consists in an extended argument for the decadence of the art of his own time. It is positive because it involves Tolstoy establishing the conditions for true art in opposition to such decadence. Following his com-