

The Reader of Dialogue

Much more is this the case in dialogue. For here the author is annihilated, and the reader, being no way applied to, stands for nobody. The self-interested parties both vanish at once. The scene presents itself as by chance and un-designed. You are not only left to judge coolly and with indifference of the sense delivered, but of the character, genius, elocution, and manner of the persons who deliver it.¹

Introduction

Having looked at oral dialogue, we turn to the written dialogue to see if they can be defined as one thing. In the oral dialogue we found that one of the most important characters was the eavesdropper who says little, but for whom the dialogue is arranged. We must look, in the same vein, at the stakeholders in the written dialogue, especially the reader. Who are you when you read a philosophical dialogue? In a written dialogue the author does not address you, having vanished before the characters or become a character that addresses others.² What role is there left for the reader? We will find the reader is like the eavesdropper of the oral dialogue - the written dialogue is arranged for you.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first it will examine a tempting misunderstanding of the place of the reader in Socratic dialogues. In the second part this chapter will move to an answer suggested by two Socratic dialogues of the Renaissance

¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, page 132.

² I am not going to argue this point about the author. I am interested in the reader. Suffice it to say that the author does not in dialogue address his reader as if he were there. As Hume puts it, "the dialogue writer desires, by departing from the direct style of composition, to give a freer air to his performance, and avoid the appearance of *author* and *reader*..." Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 3. Often the writer might address the reader outside the dialogue, thereby entering into a different sort of dialogue, but that is a different story.

author Lorenzo Valla. In short, I will try to show that the reader of a Socratic dialogue is not to be confused, however tempting that may be, with the Socratic interlocutor. The reader is an eavesdropper, who may sympathize with the interlocutor, but does not go down in embarrassment with that interlocutor when he is humiliated by the Socratic figure. This chapter is not a sociological study of the types of people likely to read Socratic dialogues at a particular time; it is about the characters the author arranges for the reader. As such it is about the relationship between author and reader, though the author's choices will be discussed in the next chapter.

I should begin by stating that I am concerned primarily with dialectical dialogues, otherwise called "Socratic" dialogues. I am not going to discuss the place of the reader in the tradition of convivial dialogues like the later dialogues of Plato (*Republic* and *Laws*) and those of Cicero or Hume. Nor am I going to comment on the place of the reader in the tradition of dialogues of the dead such as those of Lucian. Perhaps the best examples of the sort of dialogues I am looking at are Plato's early dialogues like the *Gorgias*, *Meno*, and *Protagoras*, and those of Valla that will be treated in the second part of this chapter. (One reason I have chosen to focus on Valla's dialogues is to move the discussion beyond Plato.) A Socratic dialogue is one where an interlocutor — traditionally, but not necessarily, Socrates — through cross-examination of another, convinces him that the other does not know what he thought he knew. The Socratic character convinces the other by asking a series of questions, the answers leading inexorably to conclusions the other did not hold at the beginning. The other is led to, not told of, these conclusions.³ By contrast, in convivial dialogues, the characters are more

³ A good discussion of the Socratic method that characterizes the early Platonic dialogues can be found in Robinson's *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*. "The outstanding method in Plato's earlier dialogues is the Socratic elenchus. 'Elenchus' in the wider sense means examining a person with regard to a statement he has made,

evenly matched, the conclusion is less a victory for any one side, you do not have one interlocutor always questioning and one answering (instead you have longer set speeches by the characters), and the dialogue usually takes place in a private location rather than a public one.⁴

The Socratic Interlocutor

To answer the question about the reader in Socratic dialogues, let us look at what Socrates has to say about how he convinces his interlocutors. Can the relationship between Socrates and his interlocutors be a model for the relationship between the author and reader? In the *Gorgias*, Socrates explains what he is trying to do in conversation by contrasting his style with that of court orators:

My dear sir, you are trying to refute me orator-fashion, like those who fancy they are refuting in the law courts. For there one group imagines it is refuting the other when it produces many reputable witnesses to support its statements whereas the opposing party produces but one or none. ... Yet I, who am but one, do not agree with you, for you cannot compel me to; you are merely producing many false witnesses against me in your endeavor to drive me out of my property, the truth. But if I cannot produce in you

by putting to him questions calling for further statements, in the hope that they will determine the meaning and truth-value of his first statement. Most often the truth-value expected is falsehood; and so 'elenchus' in the narrower sense is a form of cross-examination or refutation." p. 7. It is worth reading the first chapter of Robinson's book simply for the way he criticizes this all too often worshipped method. He does not hesitate to question our heroic Socrates.

⁴ As for dialogues of the dead they achieve their effect largely through the interesting combinations of characters from across time and including the gods. This otherworldly combination can only be achieved among the dead. One of the things one can do when combining characters that could never have met in this world is bring Socrates together with thinkers of another era, in effect producing a "Socratic" dialogue. It is worth noting however, that often Socrates is brought into play to mock him as the father of philosophy, not to use him.

yourself a single witness in agreement with my views, I consider that I have
accomplished nothing worth speaking of in the matter under debate; ...⁵

For Socrates a successful dialogue is one where he convinces only his interlocutor of the truth, and does so without appealing to the authority of others. Because he cannot appeal to others, this conviction is obtained step by step, the other assenting to one proposition after another, until he is forced to agree with the conclusion. Socrates never tells the other explicitly what to think, or produces authoritative witnesses; he draws the desired conclusion, and therefore its approval, from the other. Socrates describes himself, in the *Theaetetus*, as a midwife of ideas.⁶ His delivery method is dialectical cross-examination. There is some question as to whether this is what Socrates actually did; nonetheless, this is the canonical Socratic method that critics take as a paradigm for the relationship between author and reader, or teacher and pupil.⁷

The Reader as Interlocutor

What is the role of the reader of such a dialogue? One answer is that he sympathizes with the Socratic figure; that the reader becomes friends with Socrates. I will deal with this possibility at the end of this chapter. A second suggestion is that we enter into dialogue with the text. It is difficult to pin down just what that would mean; dialogues do not address us, ask us questions, or answer our questions. One possible way in which we

⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 472b.

⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150b. It is a pity he delivered so many still-born children, i.e. that so many of the beliefs he drew out of his interlocutors were phantoms.

⁷ A close reading of Xenophon's dialogues suggests that Socrates was concerned with the opinions of those who listened in as much as those of his interlocutor. I suspect Socrates often sacrificed the interlocutor for the sake of the audience, not the other way around.

enter into dialogue with the text is the method I took in the first chapter on Heidegger's redefinition of dialogue. In that case we brought questions to the dialogue and mined it like an encyclopedia for answers. This is only a dialogue in the vague sense of an interaction through which something meaningful comes. The work of both questioning and answering that takes place is done by the reader. The dialogue forces us to create answers; it does not provide them as a living interlocutor would. Such an interaction with the text if it is a dialogue is better described as a dialogue within the reader, between the characters let loose by reading the text. This is not to demean the experience. I noted then that in reading there can be a quickening sense that something ineffable is being communicated though the text. We bring to life that which comes through the text when we read with an open mind.

A third answer, which I will concentrate on, is that the reader is to the author as the interlocutor is to the Socratic figure. Just as the Socratic figure delivers the interlocutor of his ideas and misconceptions through dialectical cross-examination, so we, the readers, are delivered vicariously of the same ideas and misconceptions by the same cross-examination. It is assumed that, in our vanity, we are tempted to wear the cloak of those who profess to know (the interlocutor), and as that character is humiliated we learn about our ignorance and are purified of our pretensions. The skill of the author, in this model, lies in creating an atmosphere where we will identify with the interlocutor. The dialogue achieves its effect by first entrapping us in the professing character and then cross-examining this profession.

This view is rarely stated explicitly; it is often presupposed in the interpretation of Socratic dialogues. When critics talk about entering into dialogue with the text they sometimes mean entering into dialogue with Socrates as if we were the interlocutor. Or, when critics talk of Socrates' position as if it were the author's position, it follows that

there is a similar equivalence between the author's addressee (the reader) and that of Socrates (the interlocutor). Because the question has not been raised in quite this way, we find this view in asides, like this passage from Walzer, "A critique of philosophical conversation":

Affirmations of this sort (the "Yes, Socrates" type) add to the force of a philosophical argument or, at least, they make the argument seem more forceful (why else would philosophers write dialogues?) because the acquiescent interlocutor speaks not only for himself but for the reader as well. Plato has built our agreement into his discourse, and while we can always refuse to agree, we feel a certain pressure to go along, to join the chorus.⁸

Gadamer can be read this way when he proposes:

A knowledge of our own ignorance is what human wisdom is. The other person with whom Socrates carries on his conversation is convicted of his own ignorance by means of his "knowledge."⁹

I believe Gadamer's position is actually more sophisticated, but he can be sufficiently ambiguous about exactly who is being questioned by Socrates that some readers might be tempted to assume that he believes that it is the reader.¹⁰ Another example of this view is quoted (without question) by Perelman in *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument*:

Dialectic proceeds by way of questions and answers so that one never passes from one assertion to the next without first having gained the approval of the interlocutor. The

⁸ Walzer, "A critique of philosophical conversation." p. 183.

⁹ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, p. 185.

¹⁰ Gadamer's view, as he fleshes it out in *Truth and Method*, is that through careful interpretation we can bring the conversation to life and then learn from it. Our learning through it involves an openness to the question the text is an answer to. See the section entitled, "The model of the Platonic dialectic," p. 325-341.

dialectical art consists in never failing to secure this approval. This method of dialogue is essentially oral and requires the participation of at least two persons. Why does Plato think nevertheless that it could be applied to a written work, where the same person, the author, presents the questions as well as the answers? Plato takes it for granted that no interlocutor could answer differently from the one whom he lets speak...¹¹

For Perelman and Goblots the issue of the reader vanishes before the fate of the interlocutor in a dialectical exchange with Socrates. It is assumed that the only role for the reader is that of a possible interlocutor, and that all interlocutors would answer in the same fashion. Goblots is so fascinated by the struggle of the interlocutor with the Socratic juggernaut that he fails to ask if the reader, himself included, actually reads as if he were an interlocutor.

There is some evidence to support the view that we vicariously read as the interlocutor. As I will show later, authors like Valla deliberately make the Socratic character unappealing at the beginning in case we are tempted to immediately sympathize with him. In addition, authors like Plato will put widely held opinions in the mouth of the interlocutor. The contemporary reader recognizes opinions that he has voiced and is drawn to the interlocutor. The combination of a bizarre or antagonistic Socratic figure, along with a superficially reasonable interlocutor, tempts the naive reader to sympathize

¹¹ This quote is taken from Perelman, *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument*, p. 162. Perelman quotes Edmond Goblots (*La logique des jugements de valeur; théorie et applications*, Paris: A. Colin, 1927) as offering an answer to the question he wants to answer, "what would be the value of the dialectical method, not only for the readers but for Plato himself as well?" It is worth noting that Perelman does not agree with this answer. However he falls for the identical temptation of seeing the reader and interlocutor as identically affected by the dialogue. He forgets the issue of the reader, not mentioning it again. Like Goblots, he is concerned with the effect of dialectic on the interlocutor, not a third party.

with the interlocutor. Obviously anyone who has read a number of Socratic dialogues is less likely to be so tempted, but such a well-read reader is another matter.

Part of the attraction of this answer, as to the reader's identity, is its simplicity and symmetry. It is the simplest answer because then we only have one philosophical relationship to contend with: that of Socratic figure and interlocutor. We do not need a different relationship for the author and reader. It is symmetrical in that it suggests a symmetry between Socrates' project and Plato's. What Socrates did orally, Plato did through writing. This allows us to scale everything we know about the Socratic relationship up to the Platonic one about which we have few explicit statements. The answer is also tempting because of the respect for Socrates within the discipline of Philosophy. We admire Socrates, one of our few philosophical heroes, and would like to think that what he could achieve in oral cross-examination can also be achieved by Plato in the written dialogue, even today. Dialectical cross-examination has been the paradigmatic method of philosophical conviction; it is tempting to ascribe it to a corpus of written works to which we are all attached. If Plato's works can have that effect on the reader, then we can in some sense extend the dialectical grasp of Socrates beyond his martyrdom to our students.

Problems with the Interlocutor

There are a number of problems with the identification of the reader and the interlocutor. First, we should look carefully at the dialectical model put forward by Socrates to see if it can be applied to the reader according to its own terms. I believe, if one takes seriously Socrates' pronouncements about what his method achieves, that it cannot be applied or scaled out to the relationship between reader and author. Let us remind ourselves of the argument.

The dialectical method, which is supposed to guarantee conviction, has a definite target. Socrates, as was said above, claims to be concerned only with the conviction of the person being questioned. He ignores the authority of others when it comes to his own beliefs, and he convinces others without recourse to authority. For this reason only those cross-examined can actually be said to be convinced dialectically.¹² We, and others who witness the exchange, are not participants in the dialectical conviction, nor should we let ourselves be convinced along with the unfortunate interlocutor in the same way that the interlocutor is convinced. At most, we should be open to the possibility that, if questioned directly, we might come to similar conclusions, though from different grounds — our own presuppositions. The conclusions the interlocutor arrives at with Socrates' help are his, and to believe them without going through the process ourselves would be to be convinced by a doubtful witness. In other words, if we are convinced by Socrates while identifying with his interlocutor, this conviction is not dialectical since we were not answering the questions.¹³ The conviction would be an example of exactly what Socrates

¹² Robinson, in an essay entitled "Elenchus," says something along these lines on page 88. "The Socratic elenchus is a very personal affair, in spite of Socrates' ironical declarations that it is an impersonal search for the truth. If the ulterior end of the elenchus is to be attained, it is essential the answerer himself be convinced, and quite indifferent whether anyone else is."

¹³ One might argue that if we can imagine no different answers than those offered by the interlocutor then we are dialectically convinced. But experience tells us that this is hardly the case. We do, while reading the dialogue, imagine different answers. Like Polus and then Callicles in the *Gorgias*, we will disagree with a tack taken by the interlocutor and want to pick up that thread with Socrates. We may even disagree with the initial question from which the discussion stems. I think the burden of proof lies with those who want to argue that the interlocutor and reader are convinced in an identical fashion. The experience of hearing someone being questioned and being questioned oneself is obviously different. Even if the audience is

objects to, a form of intellectual laziness where we form opinions without going through the rigorous questioning ourselves.

That we should not read as interlocutors is shown in other ways by Plato. In the *Gorgias*, quoted above, Socrates questions three different interlocutors: first Gorgias himself, then his disciple Polus, and finally Callicles. In each case he covers similar ground, even though they are witnesses to each other's conviction. At no point does Socrates say, "Well, we can take for granted the point shown in the previous conversation." Each interlocutor has to be convinced independently just as Socrates expects to be convinced without appeal to the opinion of others. Perelman draws our attention to the personal character of the dialectical method. He argues, in contrast to Goblot, that the method does not depend on there being no alternative answers. For Perelman the method is used where demonstration fails - where there are too many different ways to answer. The dialectical method therefore starts from the interlocutor and adapts itself to his beliefs, and the way he answers. It is a rhetorical device to secure conviction where demonstration is not possible. The rhetorical force of the method lies in the questioning and the customized character of each exchange. It can convince where there is no demonstrable truth.

The Eavesdroppers

Another way of looking at the issue of the reader of Socratic dialogues is to look at the models he gives us of the Socratic audience. Look at the extent to which Plato describes a public setting for the Socratic dialogues. Plato includes descriptions of the audience for the Socratic exchange. He creates a framework into which we can fit our

convinced, they are not convinced in the same fashion. This chapter is trying to show how the reader might be convinced.

reading by describing the listening in of others. Take the *Lysis*, which starts in the following fashion:

I was walking straight from the Academy to the Lyceum, by the road which skirts the outside of the walls, and had reached the little gate where is the source of the Panops, when I fell in with Hippothales, the son of Hieronymus, Ctesippus the Paenian, and some more young men, standing together in a group.¹⁴

Socrates is invited to join a group conversing in a newly erected palestra. He inevitably asks who is the prime beauty and discovers that Hippothales has a crush on a youth, Lysis. Socrates, discovering that Hippothales is head over heels in love, offers to engage Lysis in conversation so as to show Hippothales how he should talk to his beloved. The result is an exchange between Lysis and Socrates about friendship with Hippothales "writhing with agitation" at the proximity of his loved one.

I turned my eyes on Hippothales, and was on the point of making a great blunder. For it came into my head to say, This is the way, Hippothales, that you should talk to your favorite, humbling and checking, instead of puffing him up and pampering him, as you now do. However, on seeing him writhing with agitation at the turn the conversation was taking, I recollected that though standing so near, he didn't wish to be seen by Lysis. So I recovered myself in time, and forbore to address him.¹⁵

Socrates clearly views his relationship with Hippothales to be different from the humbling of Lysis. The care Plato puts into creating this atmosphere indicates where we the reader might fit in. Perhaps like Hippothales we are listening and writhing with agitation as we watch our loved ones being humbled. This is different from being humbled and checked ourselves. We sympathize with the interlocutor, but we would feel uncomfortable if included in the conversation. As readers we have a security that not

¹⁴ Plato, *Lysis*, 203a.

¹⁵ Plato, *Lysis*, 210e.

even Hippothales had; we know readers as readers can't be included. We can take this observation a step further. Sometimes we read because we do not want to be included. When one chooses to read about something rather than to participate in a discussion about it, one chooses the security of being an untouchable spectator, gazing on the participants in dialogue without risk. It is easy today to think that we have no choice but to read and to forget that choosing to read involves choosing a distance from which to engage in a subject, a distance that has its advantages and disadvantages.¹⁶

One might reply that it would do the reader good to identify with the interlocutor, that we might still learn that way. We may not be the interlocutor, but could we not profit by imaginatively playing the role? If the Socratic dialogues are any example of such an educational tactic, it does not work.¹⁷ Most of Socrates' interlocutors in the early Platonic dialogues leave, not purified, but antagonized. They leave like Euthyphro, polite but impatient to leave,¹⁸ or grind to a halt like Meno stunned as if by a sting ray.¹⁹ Some

¹⁶ Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (IV. II) makes fun of Euthydemus' reliance on book learning. One of his points is that one needs to get involved in a community of discourse to become wise — books are not enough.

¹⁷ Robinson in *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* criticizes the educational and purgatory effects of Socratic cross-examination. "The irony seems to be a main cause of the anger which, as Socrates declares (*Apology* 21E etc.), often results from the elenchus; and if elenchus really makes people hate you, surely it is bad teaching and a bad form of intercourse in general. We can hardly suppose that after the victim's anger has cooled they admit their ignorance and start to reform their lives..." p. 18.

¹⁸ Plato, *Euthyphro*, "Another time, then, Socrates, for I am in a hurry, and must be off this minute." 15e.

¹⁹ Plato, *Meno*, Meno says, "Socrates, even before I met you they told me that in plain truth you are a perplexed man yourself and reduce others to perplexity. ... not only in outward appearance but in other respects as well you are exactly like the flat sting ray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes

leave furious like Antyus who will later return the insult when he joins forces with others to accuse Socrates of corrupting the young and so on.²⁰ Few leave convinced despite what they say. Few interlocutors (Crito in the *Crito* and the slave boy in the *Meno*) take the learning gracefully in the Socratic dialogues. Only in the later dialogues, like the *Republic* and *Laws*, do we see characters who enjoy learning, but these dialogues are beyond the scope of this chapter. Considering the number of characters in Plato's early works who reject the learning, why would Plato risk our identifying with them? If Plato intended us to identify with the interlocutor wouldn't he have taken more care not to present such violent reactions on their part? Why would he want us to leave furious? He should want us to distance ourselves from the bigots Socrates has to contend with, not from Socrates. We, like those listening to the exchange, should be progressively embarrassed by their blindness.

Sacrificial Characters

Now we are closer to the character of the reader. Perhaps the interlocutor is being sacrificed for the sake of the audience including those who read. Perhaps Socrates engaged people publicly in the hope that the youth who gathered around would learn

into contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now." 79e-80a.

²⁰ Plato, *Meno*, Antyus prophetically warns Socrates, "You seem to me, Socrates, to be too ready to run people down. My advice to you, if you will listen to it, is to be careful. I dare say that in all cities it is easier to do a man harm than good, and it is certainly so here, as I expect you know yourself." Antyus leaves and Socrates says, "Antyus seems angry, Meno, and I am not surprised." 94e-95a. Neither are we.

from the humiliation of the great.²¹ Plato likewise might want to offer a larger audience the chance to profit from the humiliation.

The point is that we profit because we can reject the interlocutor instead of identifying with him. The pernicious opinions of the interlocutor, to which we might be attracted, are sacrificed for and in us. If we identify too closely with the interlocutor we would not be able to reject his pernicious opinions once he is humbled. We would probably choose, like Callicles in the *Gorgias*, to refuse to learn.²²

It is nonetheless important that we can imagine ourselves as the interlocutor. The sacrifice of the interlocutor within us can only take place if we sympathize initially with him. The rejection of the opinions of the interlocutor will only take place if we are at first fascinated by them. For this reason Socrates often appears to be an innocent ignorant questioner and the other the mature authority to side with. For example in the *Protagoras* Socrates sets himself up as the simple representative of Hippocrates who wants to study with the great Protagoras. The sympathetic character of the other along with the promise of conflict with Socrates captivates us. Captivated by the exchange and fascinated by the other, we lose sight of ourselves, and this is why interpreters do not distinguish between reader and interlocutor. Perelman loses sight of the distinction because the work is

²¹ It is worth remembering that Socrates was martyred for corrupting the youth of Athens through his teaching. In the *Apology* he denies that he ever taught anything. One can imagine how the citizens, many of whose sons were impressed by the Socratic habit of humiliation and tried to imitate it, greeted this argument. It is amazing how close the decision of the jury was.

²² Plato, *Gorgias*, Callicles complains about having to continue the dialogue once it is clear that it is not going his way, "How importunate you are, Socrates; if you will listen to me, you will bid good-by to this argument, or else debate with somebody else." 505d. Socrates recognizes the irritation of Callicles, "if you refute me, I shall not be vexed with you as you are with me, ..." 506c.

successful at getting his attention. When the reader stands for nobody, as Shaftesbury suggests, it is understandable that the unfortunate interlocutor stands out as a tempting character with which to confuse oneself.

It is no coincidence that critics have confused the reader with the interlocutor, because, I believe, the author of Socratic dialogues wants us to become invisible to ourselves. He wants us to be captivated by the interlocutor's fate, and in rejecting him to reject that side of ourselves. To become captivated we must be invisible and hence tempted to confuse ourselves. To judge and reject we have to be other than the interlocutor. We have to leave the interlocutor's anger behind with him. The author does not, however, want us to think about the mechanism of sympathy and rejection, because that would undermine its effectiveness.

Valla and Judgement

So far I have made my point negatively by discussing problems with the common view of the reader's role as the interlocutor. What remains is to look positively at the reader's judgement, a term I use to cover the entire process of sympathy, rejection, and purification. It also remains to show that the mechanism is not limited to Plato's early "Socratic" dialogues, but has been imitated by others. For this reason I am going to look closely at two dialogues by Lorenzo Valla, *De libero arbitrio* (On Free Will), and *De professione religiosorum* (On the Profession of the Religious) that nicely illustrate the call for judgement. This discussion will also, I hope, encourage readers who are not familiar with Valla to read his works.²³

²³ Lorenzo Valla was born in Rome in 1407 and died there in 1457. He was the secretary to Alfonso V of Aragon from 1437 to 1448 during which time he wrote works critical of papal power and traditional Aristotelian philosophy. It was during this time that he finished both *On Free Will* and *On the Profession of*

The Frames of Valla's Dialogues

On Free Will and *On the Profession* are relevant to our project of discovering the reader, because both employ an outer frame that explicitly places the reader in the chair of judgement. How does Valla do this? Both dialogues begin with an address to a powerful contemporary dignitary, in other words an authority. Both end with a character other than Valla suggesting the discussion was so excellent it should be sent to the very dignitary it is addressed to, thereby explaining within the dialogue the eventual dedication at the beginning. This authority, and by implication the reader, is asked to judge the value of the work. The dedication and final call for judgement are a frame designed to orient the reader. The author attempts to restrict the role of the reader to that of a judge (and then to make sure that the case of the Socratic character is the best by the end). The explicitness of this process makes these two dialogues ideal texts to illustrate the place reserved for the reader by the author.

In both dialogues there is a Socratic character Lorenzo (Laurentius) who engages, in a combative fashion, another character. The character Lorenzo is clearly the author. Part of Valla's genius is the way he goes to great lengths to make Lorenzo (the character) unpalatable at the beginning of the dialogue. In both dialogues the initial address goes hand in hand with a provocation. In *On Free Will* the opening passage goes:

the Religious. Despite his criticism of papal power he then went to Rome to work as a papal secretary and professor of rhetoric and lived there until his death. One of Valla's lasting contributions was his use of careful philological analysis. In *On the Profession* his character repeatedly comments on the origin of the words he is using, accusing "you friars" of corrupting the words they use. His interest in philological analysis was not mere pedantry; he used it philosophically and for rhetorical advantage. Another aspect of Valla to which he himself draws attention, is the polemical character of most of his work. Rarely satisfied to make a point, he has to insult those before him. That makes his work engaging but it also led to his appearing before the Inquisition.

I would prefer, O Garsia, most learned and best of bishops, that other Christians and, indeed, those who are called theologians would not depend so much on philosophy or devote so much energy to it...²⁴

The dialogue is addressed in a flattering manner to a powerful bishop. In the same breath Valla launches into an attack on those who use philosophy to defend religion. He is attacking the orthodox religious scholars who looked back to Aristotle for a philosophical defense of Christianity, a position that many of his readers, including philosophers today, find attractive. Not far down the page Valla slips into addressing us directly, "You have likewise reached such a degree of insolence that you believe no one can become a theologian unless he knows the precepts of philosophy..."²⁵ The rhetorical effect is to make the reader feel he is being accused of insolence. We are tempted to take the philosophical side (as opposed to the Lorenzo the Socratic's side) simply because Valla is so provocative. The polemical beginning is a rhetorical device for getting our attention and tempting us to sympathize with the other interlocutor.

The provocation is nicely handled in the opening of the second dialogue under consideration here, "Baptista, your honour, many persons commonly marvel at me and some even reproach me personally, partly because I tackle subjects that are too lofty and difficult and, partly, because I never fail to select someone to chastise."²⁶ Here, once more, we see Valla addressing a powerful figure, and launching into the polemical issue that frames the dialogue. The dialogue turns out to be an example of Lorenzo chastising someone much as Socrates humbled public figures. The rhetorical effect of this opening

²⁴ Valla, "Dialogue on Free Will." *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 155.

²⁵ Valla, "Dialogue on Free Will." *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 156.

²⁶ Valla, *The Profession of the Religious*, p. 17.

is similar to that of *On Free Will*, for the reader is engaged and challenged. We expect Valla to be controversial and to a certain extent to enter into controversy with us. What is interesting here is that Valla's reputation for polemicizing is the very issue that he raises polemically here.

The polemical character of Valla's work in general has been noted by most of his commentators. This is not the place to discuss his uses of the rhetoric of praise and blame; however, it is worth noting that Valla seems to be encouraging this myth about himself in *On the Profession of the Religious*. Why? Because his project is one that feeds on controversy. Invective, as Struever points out, is part of his "redefinition of the role of the author/speaker"²⁷ and consequently also of the reader/listener. She argues that the use of invective and the use of the letter form (both these dialogues are framed in letters addressed to the ideal reader) respectively ensure the malevolence and benevolence of the reader. The polemical parts, especially the accusation of insolence, provoke the reader while the epistolary character of the work, addressed in a flattering manner, encourages the reader by the end to judge in a friendly fashion.

Why would Valla want to risk the friendly outcome by being polemical and insulting the reader? For the same reason that Plato would want to the reader to sympathize initially with the unfortunate interlocutor who is humiliated. The reader must have a stake in the discussion if he is to profit from it. To be more specific, the opinions that are rejected in the Socratic dialogue are usually those the author's intended reader might be tempted to hold. The characters and opinions Socrates engaged were often the authoritative ones of his day. It is central to his project that he engage the public

²⁷ Struever, "Lorenzo Valla," p. 199.

characters and popular opinions. A provocative opening makes sure that the reader is not lulled into thinking that he has nothing at stake here.

Likewise, when Valla talks of theologians who depend on philosophy, he is addressing a large segment of his contemporary readers who looked to Aristotle and Boethius for inspiration. If the reader connects the other interlocutor with opinions she has held, then the rejection of these popular notions is felt as a provocation.²⁸ But, just in case the reader does not realize he has something at stake, Valla accuses him of insolence or mentions what an ornery fellow he is. "By the way, did I tell you how controversial my opinions are?" Valla does not do this so that the reader stays connected to the interlocutor. As I mentioned above, this connection between reader and interlocutor is not one of identity. The reader can reject the opinions of the interlocutor, letting the unfortunate interlocutor leave with them in anger.

We can now understand why Socrates is not a likely role model for the reader, at least the first-time reader. First, authors like Valla go out of their way to make the Socratic character unpalatable. Plato does this with Socratic ignorance, irony, and paradoxes. Who, after all, would side with someone who insists that is better to be wronged than to wrong another? Try to remember, if you can, your first encounter with Socrates. Look at how students buck and fight with Socrates when they first encounter him in Plato. The Socratic paradoxes serve nicely to alienate the average "sensible" reader.

²⁸ Sherman in *Diderot and the Art of Dialogue*, argues something similar to my point on page 19. "The dialogue form can force him (the reader) to uneasiness and responsibility. The author, for his part, gives up his position as intermediary between the public and fictional world. The reader in immediate contact with the latter world, is constantly summoned, and may feel himself encouraged to weigh opinions, adopt resolutions, and make judgments."

A second reason why Socrates is not likely to be the intended role for the reader is the logic of judgement. If I am right that the intended rhetorical effect of a Socratic dialogue is to get the reader to distance himself from popular opinions, and if to do so one has to awaken the sympathy of the reader for those opinions (so that the opinions are at stake) then it follows that the reader who sympathizes with the Socratic character has either already been converted, or will not be affected by the dialogue in the desired fashion. A reader who finds the Socratic character the most attractive from the beginning is either free of the opinions that Socrates critiques, or has not connected the opinions he holds in other contexts with those at stake in the dialogue. It is unfortunately all too easy to read about ethical issues without considering one's own beliefs and actions.

To a certain degree it does not make a difference to my argument if the reader does sympathize with the Socratic character. Even if you like Socrates, that does not necessarily mean that you cannot also sympathize with the common opinions carried by the interlocutor. The reader who likes Socrates can still find the experience of reading a Socratic dialogue purges him of his latent affection for other opinions. This does not alter the fact that as readers we are not participants in the dialogue, but among the extended audience who hear about it. It is important to note that just as sympathy with the interlocutor is not the same as being the interlocutor, so sympathy for the Socratic character is not the same as being him. Whichever character we sympathize with, the experience of reading is that of overhearing, then judging, and purging.

This is not to dismiss the intense identification with Socrates which some feel; though I believe this is a later phase in the development of the reader. Identification with Socrates is comparable to the third step in the treatment of Euthydemus described in the previous chapter. Readers, like Euthydemus, first listen in and are purified of their conceits. Only when they are ready does Socrates approach alone in a friendly fashion,

offering to rebuild us in his image. Just as this happened in the oral Socratic circle, it can happen to readers who, as they become familiar with the Socratic corpus, are able to bring Socrates close by reconstructing his character within themselves. They can then enter into friendly dialogue with this reconstruction. It is a testimony to Plato's skill as an author that he has infected so many over the years with this character. The internal dialogue with Socrates is not really with the text, but with an imaginary friend that reading the text brings to life. When the reader talks with Socrates it is more of a soliloquy with that of Socrates within, and as such, we are not readers so much as recreators of dialogue. While reading we are catching the infection of Socrates, but we are not, as readers, talking to him.

The Call to Judgement

We have looked so far at the opening of Valla's framed orientation of the reader. The initial engagement in both dialogues is combined with a final situation where we are called to judge whether Valla was right in the first place. We are called at the end to forgive the Socratic character who gradually becomes the more attractive one, and to reject the superficially reasonable interlocutor. *On Free Will* ends with a call from Antonio, the other interlocutor, to involve others, like ourselves:

Ant. ... Will you not commit this debate which we have had between us to writing and make a report of it so that you may have others share this good?

Lorenzo. That is good advice. Let us make others judges in this matter, and, if it is good, sharers. Above all, let us send this argument, written and, as you say, made into a report, to the Bishop of Lerida, whose judgment I would place before all I know, and if he alone approves, I would not fear the disapproval of others.²⁹

²⁹ Valla, "Dialogue on Free Will." *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 182.

It is as if the characters of the dialogue created the written work. With no author we have two characters in search of an audience. They create the context for the reading of the dialogue. This tidy circularity, which is also found in *On the Profession of the Religious*, is a rhetorical effect that is hard to miss as a reader. The obviousness of it draws attention to the ideal reader of the work, the excellent bishop whose judgement is worth so much. This bishop, who is now a character whose judgement has been praised, is the ideal against which the reader compares himself. The reader begins the work accused of the insolence of philosophy and finishes the dialogue being given the chance to live up to the example of the bishop, judging the dialogue as the bishop would.

The judgement that Valla calls for from his ideal, and hopefully benevolent, reader involves choosing to reject one side for the other. The judgement is between two characters who hold two sets of beliefs that by the end of a Socratic dialogue cannot be reconciled. As I have suggested above, the judgement has all the more force if the reader has been engaged. The judgement called for is not the same as the dispassionate judgement between propositions. The opinions in dialogue have character. When the reader judges which character he prefers he rejects one. The rejection can be seen as a purification of that of the character within him. The reader decides who he wants to be, or, to be more accurate, who he does not want to be. That is the rhetorical power of the written dialogue, its ability to change our very character. There is always the risk that the reader will refuse to judge, in which case the dialogue has failed to move him.

There is also the danger that the reader will still judge in favor of the unfortunate other. Most Socratic dialogues, however, do not leave much room for judgement. By the end the other has shown himself to be a thoroughly unlikable character whatever his opinions. Both Plato and Valla make sure of this by using the very fact of the other's refusal to continue the pursuit of truth as a sign of insincerity.

Then I said: ... "And if a week from today, at the same time and in the same place, our Friar does not present himself and keep the appointment, so to speak, not only shall I make it public, but I shall bring the work to the attention of some very learned and wise person and have it examined by him. ... " As he did not turn up on the appointed day, we were enabled to have the work brought for examination to the designated authority.³⁰

Thus ends *On the Profession of the Religious*. How could we sympathize at the end with a Friar who hasn't the courage to come back and argue the point any further? The unfortunate Friar, as is the case in so many Socratic dialogues, leaves convicted in our eyes. We are invited to judge where the case is clear.³¹

Refusing to continue the discussion and hence the pursuit of truth is the ultimate sin of dialogue. It is a rejection of the very ground of the event. It is a rejection of the reader who is willing to listen. We the readers naturally end up preferring the interlocutor who is committed to knowledge. The other, by quitting, leaves us with only one possible hero, the Socratic fool who provoked us in the first place (and also has to the time to stick around).

More on Judgement

Why doesn't the author invite us outright to judge between positions? "Here are two positions, choose the best please." If he did, the work would not be a dialogue and we

³⁰ Valla, *The Profession of the Religious*, p. 55.

³¹ It is worth noting that later dialogues, like those of Hume and Diderot, are far less clear at the end. Both authors have dialogues where there is no clear victor. But these are not really Socratic dialogues; they resemble Ciceronian ones without a clear Socratic character and without the careful cross-examination. Nonetheless I think this discussion of the role of the reader still applies. We are still tempted to sympathize with interlocutors. We still find our beliefs questioned and ultimately are put in the position of having to decide what we really believe after the dialogue.

would not be judging character. It would be either a survey of opinions or a work of one character, the author, whom we are asked to judge. In the traditional philosophical work, which Collingwood calls the confession, the reader is addressed directly by the author. He is invited into dialogue with the author. The author confesses his belief about the subject and the reader attends silently under the illusion he can respond. As Shaftesbury suggests, the author tries to seduce the reader with this confession, not to put him in the position to judge for himself. In this sort of work there are no other characters from which to judge. For us to judge between characters, not opinions, we have to be given characters, at which point the author loses his privileged status; his call for judgement is just the act of one of the characters. The logic of character is unforgiving. Once the author presents the reader with more than one character he loses his authoritative voice; the author as authority becomes nobody. The author has to resort to subtler tactics to convict and convince.

Another reason we are not asked to judge is because the choice to judge should come from us. To be rhetorically effective, not only how we judge, but that we judge, should appear to be our decision. The author does not want us feeling frustrated the way the unfortunate interlocutor does. The author wants the opposite effect, the illusion of freedom of choice. The author wants us to feel that we chose to stay and listen, that we chose to judge between the positions, and that we chose the position of the Socratic character. The author does this by creating a situation that calls for a decision, without explicitly asking for decision. The illusion of our listening-in is necessary to give us the space to decide. It is for that reason that we are incidentally tempted to think the place of the reader is that of the interlocutor. The author does not want us to realize we are being encouraged to judge - he just wants us to judge transparently and leave with that judgement on our lips.

This also explains the absence of the author. There would be no call for decision if the author told us explicitly what he believed. Then we would be judging the author and work, not the characters set up within. We might take the author as an authority and believe him without deciding for him. In so doing we would hardly be convinced. The rhetorical effect of being talked at is negligible. As in so many circumstances there are times when it is best to be silent and let the other make up her mind. So the author vanishes, creating the space for an informed decision, and forcing us to take responsibility for a character, our own.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have raised the question of the relationship between author and reader of Socratic dialogues. The astute reader will notice that I did not discuss the author much — that is left for the next chapter; instead, I drew attention to the temptation to confuse the reader with the Socratic interlocutor and show how that answer is unsatisfactory. I then argued that authors of Socratic dialogues want the reader to sympathize initially with the interlocutor, but, by the end, to judge between the Socratic and the interlocutor (and to judge for the Socratic character). The reader is provoked into listening in to the conflict and, by the end, is called to judge. In judging the reader purifies himself of the often popular opinions held by the interlocutor. This purification is similar to the effect described in the previous chapter that the staged discussions of the Socratic circle had for possible converts like Euthydemus. The reader, like Euthydemus listens in, and is purified that way, not through direct dialogue. (This is the way in which the oral and written dialogue are the same, and this similarity to those outside is what we will later try to define.)

Does this rhetorical mechanism throw any light on dialogues that are not "Socratic?" Although this is not the place for an extended discussion of the types of philosophical dialogue, it is worth mentioning a major type of dialogue that can be traced to Plato's *Phaedrus*, the rural conversations between friends. These dialogues, taking place outside the polis, are often without the surrounding of eavesdroppers that help us fit in as readers. Only the cicadas listen in to Socrates' dialogue with Phaedrus. Certain dialogues of Cicero, the dialogues of Cicero's Renaissance imitators like Bruni, and those of the English 18th-century authors like Berkeley and David Hume, all fit loosely into this pattern. These dialogues take place in secluded country locations (often aristocratic estates). The characters are friends and their speeches are longer. There is not the systematic questioning that leads one character to contradict himself. Since the characters are often friends they are less likely to humiliate each other. The outcome, without one character's being forced to admit he contradicted himself, is not as decisive as a Socratic dialogue. Instead, you often have one character who shows off his oratorical skills by arguing first one side of the issue and then the other. This character, like Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, first convinces the others of one position and then appears to reverse himself, thereby displaying his ability to argue both sides, a skill that an orator like Cicero appreciated.

The reversal, a feature of a number of philosophical dialogues in the Ciceronian vein, provides a clue to how such dialogues might work rhetorically. The reader is first convinced one way and then surprised by an argument the other way from the same character. This works on the reader in a fashion similar to the provocation of Socratic dialogues. The reader is sucked into one position, only then to have it undermined. The reversal calls into question the first position forcing the reader to judge between positions (though not always characters).

There are, however, some differences between the Ciceronian and Socratic dialogues. The Ciceronian dialogue often ends up emphasizing the importance of rhetoric and discourse over one or the other position. Often the author's concern seems to be the culture of discourse around an issue rather than the individual positions on the issue. Hume leaves us with a picture of how civilized people can coexist who disagree over something like the nature of God.

A second difference lies in the absence of a clear victor at the end. The reversal provokes the reader to judge between the positions rather than merely acknowledging the difference, but the choice is harder. In the case of Hume's *Dialogues* and the dialogue by Cicero which inspired it (*The Nature of the Gods*), the reversal provokes judgement, but the reader is more likely to judge in favor of what might be called the first position rather than the second. The absence of a clear choice in the Ciceronian dialogue, or the fact that often both positions are presented by the same person, means that the reader is not so much purified of any position, as left skeptical of any claims to certainty on either side. It is no coincidence that both Cicero and Hume were skeptics of one kind or another. One can also see the connection between the skeptical result – no one position is a clear victor – and the focus on discourse. On issues where certainty is unlikely, the health of the culture of discourse becomes important. In these dialogues the character of the dialogue itself is the issue.

While I believe the analysis above of the Socratic reader can be modified to explain the relationship in Ciceronian dialogues, that does not mean that we can perfectly fit this model to all philosophical dialogues. It is a testimony to the wealth of rhetorical possibilities of the dialogue that no one relationship can capture all of our experience of the works and their authors. I leave it to the reader to imagine how one might deal with the reader's place in Plato's *Symposium*, or Diderot's dialogue-novels.