Edward Jeremiah’s *The Emergence of Reflexivity in Greek Language and Thought: From Homer to Plato and Beyond* (2012) is an illuminating study that pursues philosophy and philology to the elusive vanishing point of their intersection. It culminates with a dialectical analysis of “the self itself” which justifies the approach that has been guiding him from the start. His observations about the god-like pretensions of the subjectivist antithesis to “Platonic absolutism” are worth noting, but his luminous analysis of the conundrum that blocks German Idealism’s “founding act of self-reflection” is even more significant:

The question of self-knowledge becomes especially critical to the German idealists. Since the self is understood, after the manner of Plotinus’ νοῦς, as inherently reflexive, a detailed account must be given of its founding act of self-reflection. But here they ran aground on a permutation of the very problem we have been discussing. If the self is constituted by the act of self-reflection, and this act transpires discursively as a relation between a subject and an object, observer and observed, then some distance and difference between these two will always obstruct their complete equation, compromising the act’s unity and coherence.

Building on these illuminating reflections on the problem of reflexivity in German Idealism, I will argue that Jeremiah gets the order wrong when it comes to Plato,
and will therefore single out the following passage for criticism:

There is an intriguing structural correlation here between the thinking soul as that which should relate only with itself and shun any association with the body and the senses, and the objects of its thought as things which similarly relate only to themselves as things-in-themselves. A self-relating subject thinks self-relating entities.\(^7\)

My purpose is to illuminate a Platonic solution to the problem Jeremiah describes, and I will show that it was rather on the basis of the Idea as thing-in-itself that Plato was able to discover and illuminate a new kind of self-formation, not the other way around. To validate this reversal, I will begin with Plato’s *Alcibiades Major*, a dialogue that refers to “the self itself [αὐτὸ τὸ ἀυτό],”\(^8\) and has arguably suffered more than any other as a result of nineteenth-century German philosophy, thanks to F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1868-1834) who first banished it from the canon.

The twenty-first century Anglophone reception of Plato has gotten off to a promising start with Nicholas Denyer’s 2001 commentary on *Alcibiades Major*,\(^9\) the real purpose of which is undo the damage done by Schleiermacher by reopening the case for its authenticity.\(^10\) To begin with, this obviously introductory\(^11\) dialogue works in tandem with the far more complex *Symposium*,\(^12\) not only thanks to the presence of Alcibiades himself in both, but because of the argument Socrates uses to show Alcibiades why incurring wounds and death\(^13\) in order to come to the aid of your friends is productive of happiness.\(^14\) This argument turns on an often misleading substitution and an easily recognizable fallacy: since those who die for the sake of their friends in battle “do nobly [καλῶς πράττειν],”\(^15\) they therefore—by substituting “good” or “well” for “beautiful”\(^16\) and “beautifully” (also “nobly,” “honorably”)—“do well,” and in an equivocation exploited frequently in the dialogues, this means they “fare well [εὖ πράττειν],”\(^17\) i.e., are happy.\(^18\) Yet the one who dies nobly in battle does not “fare well” in any sense that we would usually associate with “happiness,” “faring well,” or even “the care of the self.” The definition of courage given at the *Alcibiades Major* 115b5-7 in fact makes this clear—ἀνδρεία is beautiful but not advantageous—as does the fact that Alcibiades regards injustice as advantageous but never beautiful (115a1-9), an insight he notably shares with the Polus of the *Gorgias* (474c4-d2).

But the most arresting passage in *Alcibiades Major* is the famous simile of the mirror,\(^19\) where Socrates analogizes the Delphic injunction by imagining that it
commanded the eye to see itself. What makes this passage even more striking is that our manuscripts lack some lines preserved by Eusebius and Stobaeus to the effect that it is definitely not enough to discover the self even in the most divine part of the self but rather only as reflected by God. The problem of “the [Eusebian] Addition” (Alc. 133c8-17) has generated a great deal of scholarship. But one basic point has received insufficient attention: it was scarcely in the interests of the Neoplatonists, whose commentaries on Alcibiades Major survive, to emphasize as fully Platonic a separation of the most divine part of the self from God, and thus to imagine a transcendent God as “the self itself,” imaged here as a far purer and brighter mirror wherein and whereby alone we would be able to see ourselves. Consider the analysis of Harold Tarrant:

It is clear then that Olympiodorus would reject any reading at 133c that would have Alcibiades gaze into any god outside the human soul. This would of course include 133c10-11 from the disputed lines: ‘so the god too happens to be purer and brighter than what is best within our soul.’ The passage alerts us to the key point in the ancient struggle over the meaning of the dialogue’s climax: the tradition of which Olympiodorus is part has Alcibiades directed towards a god within the human soul or ‘self,’ while the tradition to which Eusebius subscribes has him directed towards a single external god that is apparently the brightest mirror in which a human might see his inner self.

As Tarrant suggests, this is not, from a Neoplatonist’s point of view, merely what Christopher Moore calls “one odd piece of information” in the following passage (emphases mine):

These lines answer no questions about the means by which one knows the god, nor advance more than a merely metaphorical explanation for the improvement in self-knowledge these better reflective surfaces provide. Indeed they mostly restate the implications of the preceding analogy. They do, however, answer one question, and add one odd piece of information. God is purer and brighter than the best in the soul; this suggests that god is separate from the soul.

This separation constitutes this paper’s center, marking as it does the boundary between Plato and both his Neo- and post-Platonic receptions.
In order to get a clearer sense of this boundary, it is useful to see how it gets blurred in Christopher Gill’s work on “selfhood.”28 In “Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Alcibiades,”29 Gill enlists the aid of Jacques Brunschwig,30 who provides “the most acute and suggestive modern reading of this part of the dialogue,”31 to undermine an ultra-subjectivist interpretation of “the Self Itself” championed by Michel Foucault.32 Although Gill’s 2007 paper illustrates the growing importance of Plato’s Alcibiades in the wake of Denyer,33 what makes it more important is that he follows Brunschwig in distinguishing a theocentric reading of the dialogue—explicitly tied to “the Eusebian Addition,”34 and erroneously identified by both as “pre-Neoplatonic”35—from a horizontal and humanist alternative,36 a nuanced version of which he will deploy against Foucault.37 In the process, Gill confirms Brunschwig’s most provocative insight:38 those who regard Alcibiades as genuinely Platonic tend to regard “the Eusebian Addition” as interpolated, while those who emphasize its integral connection to the rest of the dialogue reject the whole as inauthentic.39 I am therefore challenging the validity of Brunschwig’s revealing disjunction by connecting a genuinely and characteristically Platonic “Eusebian Addition” to an authentic Alcibiades, while also upholding the underlying accuracy of his ongoing claim: a humanist reading of Alcibiades must ultimately give way to the theocentric implications of its most arresting and important passage.40 The boundary dividing us, then, is that Brunschwig and Gill fail to grasp that Socrates’ identification of an extra-psychic God with a mirror more perfect than whatever in us is most like the divine is anything but Neoplatonic.41

As a result, another interpretation of “the Eusebian Addition” becomes possible: it is better understood as “the Neoplatonic Deletion.” It was the Neoplatonists who had more to lose than the Christians had to gain,42 and they were clearly more comfortable with the arguably equalizing pairing of θεός τε καὶ φρόνησις (“both God and wisdom”)43 just before the Addition (Alc. 133c5) than with the separation of God from even the most divine part of the soul. By explicitly stepping outside of the circle of reflexivity, the original text of Alcibiades Major—i.e., including the Addition—illustrates the link between German Idealism and Neoplatonism once again by showing Plato to be opposed to both. I am suggesting, then, that long before Schleiermacher purged the entire dialogue from the canon,44 its soul had already been purged from our manuscripts, and it should not go unmentioned that Schleiermacher’s theology tended rather to a subjectivist notion of God, i.e., a god rather within than without.45
In another place I will argue this complex case in more detail,\textsuperscript{46} but for the present I want to build on a combination of my own previous work and the very promising start made by Denyer on the Addition.\textsuperscript{47} Although he too regards the Addition as inauthentic, he makes two other important claims about it. The first is that the Addition merely makes explicit what was implicit in the lines that precede it:

These lines therefore give a fair exposition of what is already implicit [cf. his opening words on c8-17 (emphasis mine): ‘these lines are extent only in the indirect evidence for the text. They make explicit one final detail of the analogy: the comparison between mirrors (last mentioned at 133a3) and God’] in the analogy.\textsuperscript{48}

The second, is that the Addition is directly analogous to the famous Divided Line in Plato’s \textit{Republic}:

Thus, as in the analogy of the Line (\textit{Rep.} 509d-511e), both vision (with its contrast between reflections in pupils and clearer reflections in mirrors), and the intellect (with its contrast between human wisdom and the clearer wisdom of God), provides analogies for the way that the realm of vision as a whole is like, but inferior to, the realm of intellect.\textsuperscript{49}

God as the perfect mirror corresponds to the First (i.e., highest or νοήσις-accessed) Part of the Divided Line while the imperfect mirror of the soul corresponds to the level of διάνοια, i.e., its Second Part.\textsuperscript{50} Meanwhile, in \textit{Plato the Teacher: The Crisis of the Republic},\textsuperscript{51} I have illustrated the link between the methods associated with διάνοια and the so-called “Shorter Way” that reaches its anti-climactic climax in \textit{Republic} 4:\textsuperscript{52} thanks to the Image of the City and the Hypothesis that justifies the soul’s tripartition,\textsuperscript{53} Socrates can show that justice is to our advantage,\textsuperscript{54} just as he did in \textit{Alcibiades Major} by equivocating there on εὖ πράττειν.\textsuperscript{55} The Longer Way, by contrast, is based on the un-hypothetical Good—corresponding in \textit{Alcibiades Major} to the perfect mirror or “the self itself”—and points to the Allegory of the Cave as the real locus of Plato’s account of justice.\textsuperscript{56}

Plato’s fullest description of a transcendent Idea is found in his immortal \textit{Symposium},\textsuperscript{57} and the poetic fulsomeness of the peroration of Socrates’ speech creates a pointed contrast with his reticence in describing the Idea of the Good in \textit{Republic}.\textsuperscript{58} Generally analyzed in terms of the lower and higher mysteries,\textsuperscript{59} Diotima’s discourse is better understood in relation to the logically and
philosophically prior distinction between good things and beautiful ones at 204d4-e7. When asked by Diotima, Socrates cannot say what there will be for the one for whom beautiful things come into being (γενέσθαι)—and that makes two ethical datives in a single eight-word question. But he can answer, and easily, in the case of good things: the answer is that he will be happy. This substitution, I contend, is not based on the identity of the good and the beautiful. Nichols states it bluntly: “The beautiful cannot be reduced to the good.” The clearest sign of this non-identity are cases of noble self-sacrifice, as we suggested above, and as Gabriel Richardson Lear has also observed:

The benefit of beauty per se is not immediately clear. The problem becomes all the more acute when we realize that among the most admired of beautiful things are self-sacrificing acts of virtue. The virtuous life is beautiful, but is it, after all, happy?

It is rather best understood as a shortcut that anticipates the eudaemonist Shorter Way in Republic, and for which the fallacious argument based on εὖ πράττειν in Alcibiades Major has prepared us. It is only because the Idea of the Good is a post-eudaemonist good, like Beauty in Diotima’s discourse, that it can inspire “giving birth in the beautiful,” a process that culminates in Socrates’ reply to Glaucus in Republic 7: it is only an other-regarding Justice that compels the philosopher to return to the Cave.

Plato dramatizes the inadequacy of this eudaemonist substitution of good things for beautiful things for us at least twice. First of all, it leads Diotima to explain as self-serving the examples of self-sacrifice that Phaedrus had used in the dialogue’s first and often overlooked speech. Anyone who knows why τὸ καλὸν means not only “the beautiful” but also “the ethically noble,” and why it, unlike the good or the beneficial, is not generally modified by the ethical dative, and thus why Aristotle distinguishes it in the Rhetoric from the advantageous—i.e., from what is advantageous “for us”—anyone who knows or rather recollects the intrinsic basis of all such things will also know that it was not for the sake of their own fame or happiness that Alcestis and Achilles laid down their lives for their friends. Secondly, it is thanks to the proliferation of ethical datives repeatedly coupled with γενέσθαι in Diotima’s peroration, that she ultimately answers the question that Socrates cannot: what comes into being for the one who climbs her ladder of the beautiful things up to the highest mysteries is not happiness but a vision of the Idea of Beauty, with Socrates’ own speech becoming a perfect example of
its productivity and thus of “giving birth in the Beautiful.”78

We have often been told that since Socrates didn’t, Plato couldn’t accurately describe the Idea of the Good,79 but this truism is importantly untrue. Even if the only thing Socrates had told us about the Good was that it is most like the Sun outside of the Cave, we could be sure that he knew it couldn’t be described in relation to this life of ours,80 where the closest thing to the Good is the fire blazing at our backs as we sit immobilized, seeing nothing but the shadows it makes possible. And if, as we are also often told, Plato and his Socrates were really eudaemonists,81 the Good would not be outside of the Cave but within our ken if not in our immediate grasp: even if we debate how to get happiness, everyone must know what all men seek. It is amusing and revealing that all attempts to explain Socratic eudaemonism depend on Plato’s Euthydemus,82 a dialogue in which Socrates teaches a youngster how to recognize equivocation immediately before he begins the critical speech with one, i.e., the claim that all men wish to εὖ πράττειν,83 only later glossed by εὐδαιμονεῖν.85

For the epigones of Aristotle, the Good will in any case lose its Platonic separation as some ethically chastened version of happiness,86 becoming in the process something else that the Idea of the Good is not: unquestionably “good for us.” As Julia Annas observes:

The culmination of the whole journey is comprehension of the Form of the Good—and this is precisely what is not good for the seeker, or good for others, or good in relation to anything or anyone, but simply and unqualifiedly good, in a way that is completely impersonal and indifferent between individuals.87

It’s not just that the ethical dative is never applied to the Idea: the deeper problem “for us” is that the Cave image makes equally clear—by depicting the cave-dwellers as looking forwards at the shadows on the wall, which is no mirror—that we have not seen and therefore cannot even describe ourselves:

Socrates: ‘A strange image you speak of,’ he said, ‘and strange prisoners.’ ‘Like to us,’ I said; ‘for, to begin with, tell me do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves [ἐαυτῶν] or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?988

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In the Cave, there is no fully formed self that any given thing could be “good for.” It is therefore significant that the justice of the vividly described tripartite self is justified on an eudaemonist basis along the Shorter Way; that’s precisely why the Idea of the Good is the determinative basis of the Longer. It is also the reason that Socrates’ just demand that the Guardians must return to the Cave has become the theme of endless scholarly discussion: it requires considerable ingenuity or rather sleight-of-hand to show that such self-sacrifice for the good of others is at one and the same time good for us. Gail Fine has wrestled with this problem for the eudaemonist Plato:

Hence Plato’s claim that the PJ [sc. ‘psychically just,’ on the basis of the Shorter Way’s tripartite soul] person will benefit others does not violate his eudaemonism. It is sometimes claimed, however, that Plato admits at least one exception to his eudaemonism. For he says that the philosopher—and it emerges that only the philosopher, in Plato’s view, can be PJ, since only he can have the requisite knowledge [note that R. 443c9-444a9 is in book 4; the philosophers emerge in book 5]—must go back to the cave in order to take his turn at ruling. However, he views some aspects of ruling as unpleasant; and that might seem to show that he is not motivated by egoistic reasons. On one view, he returns to the cave not because it is good for him, but simply because it is good—impersonally good or good simpliciter.

Shackled inside the Cave, then, we know neither the Idea of the Good nor ourselves, and the question guiding me in this paper relates to the priorities involved in this Platonic congruence: do we come to know the Good through deeper reflection on ourselves, or can we achieve genuine self-formation only in the light of the transcendent Good? And what I’d like to suggest is that there is another and anti-Platonic congruence to be considered: a Janus-faced project to make the Good immanent. Having begun with a circle of reflexivity common to German Idealism and Neoplatonism, I have suggested that there is another path that comes at Plato from a different direction but which leads to a remarkably similar destination: starting from Aristotle’s account of Socrates, and based on what Gregory Vlastos called “the Eudaemonist Axiom,” there has emerged in the Anglo-American West an ongoing attempt to interpret both Symposium and Republic as if Plato regarded the Good as nothing more than Happiness, thereby justifying Aristotle’s own views as expressed in his famous critique of
Plato’s separate Idea of the Good. In comparison, the Tübingen School—the pincer coming from the East, as it were—is philosophically more sophisticated, but it is equally dependent on Aristotle’s testimony, and it too culminates in the attempt to make the Good immanent as “the One” of the Unwritten Teachings. Having already used Jeremiah’s remarks on reflexivity to call attention to a pre-established harmony between the excision of Alcibiades Major and German Idealism, it will be valuable also to briefly consider Plato’s most thorough account of the One and the Indefinite Dyad in his Parmenides.

Explicitly performed as a gymnastic exercise for the sake of the Good, the Beautiful, and the Just—i.e., the kind of “forms” which are immune to the Third Man—Parmenides considers what he calls “my hypothesis,” i.e., the One, and it is necessary to ask: “Why is this a good way to prepare for what lies ahead?” Since Socrates is a youngster, the Republic is still very much in his future even if we, who are reading Parmenides, have that dialogue—and the Divided Line in particular—in our past. The Neoplatonist appropriation of Parmenides was determined to read it as the highpoint of Plato’s thought, where the ineffable One of the First Hypothesis stood atop a pyramid, with imitations of its unity made successively immanent in the various levels below it. As Gerald Bechtle has put it:

The general importance of the Parmenides for the philosophical speculation of the Middle Platonists and Platonizing Neopythagoreans is such that one could, I think, claim without hesitation that it is from there that they have developed, on a theologico-metaphysical level, the second One as a whole [sc. the ‘One’ of the Second Hypothesis], the ἐν ὄν. Its level is characterized by opposites joined together, from these opposites, then, becoming can come into being.

The goodness of a thing was its unity, and the harmony of Plato and Aristotle could be defended on this basis. But this hypothesis ignores the fact that the part-less One was made dependent on δύναμις in the Second Hypothesis, as was “indefinite plurality” in the Third and Seventh. Our ascent to the Good and the Beautiful—like activity in accordance with Justice, among the shadows of the Cave—by contrast requires us to see why these un-hypothetical and δύναμις-independent Ideas are different in principle from not only hair and mud, man and fire, but from the One and Many as well. They are fully transcendent, and only accessible to νοήσις, like the God of the Addition to the Alcibiades Major with which we began.
What then happens to the self in the moment of ecstatic vision that Plato describes in Socrates’ Diotima-discourse? As the example of the infinitely didactic yet equally ironic Socrates repeatedly proves, it can scarcely be said to disappear by merging into a mystical monism. Has there ever been a richer or more vividly human self than that of Socrates, the son of Phaenarete? If wonder was the origin of pre-Socratic philosophy, then Socratic philosophy seems to begin with wondering about Socrates, he who—in Cicero’s memorable phrase—brought philosophy down from the heavens and into the cities and the lives of men. A true son of Athens, Socrates will justify the dedication of his native city to the Goddess of Wisdom by dying nobly for philosophy, the love of wisdom. The reason that Socrates invokes the example of Achilles in Apology is because he too will lay down his life for his friends, and it would demonstrate a moral blindness to the kind of admiration Plato has been generating for his hero from the start, as well as literary blindness to the role Plato has carved out for himself by writing as he does, to imagine that Socrates sacrifices himself for the sake of his own immortal fame. But what really motivated the midwife’s son?

We seem to have forgotten, and it requires a sympathetic Platonist like Plutarch to reveal to the rest of us the inner consistency between the humility of Socratic ignorance and the certainty imposed by the divine mission that leads to his trial and death. In order to explain the seemingly antithetical relationship between Socrates’ certainty about his divine mission and his intellectual barrenness, Plutarch offers the following analogy based on hearing: just as we cannot hear sounds clearly if there is an internal buzzing in our ears, so too we cannot accurately “hear” the arguments of others if our mind is teeming with its own pre-established conceits and conceptions. According to Plutarch, Socrates’ intellectual barrenness opens him to divine wisdom:

If nothing is apprehensible and knowable to man, it was reasonable for god to have prevented Socrates from begetting inane and false and baseless notions and compel him to refute the others who were forming such opinions.

Once the divine becomes responsible for “Socratic ignorance,” it is easy to see that Plutarch’s (pre-Christian) analogy corresponds to the one based on vision in Alcibiades Major: the imperfect mirror of our soul is still buzzing with error and conceit; God, as perfect mirror without, enjoins silence within. In this light, even
Further, the suspected passage spoils the metaphor. We were told that to see itself an eye should look at another eye (as seems reasonable in a culture with metal mirrors which would not give as clear a reflection of the eye as another eye would). Analogously, a soul should look at another soul, and there see God. But now we are abruptly told that God is a better and clearer mirror, just as there are better mirrors than the eye for an eye. So looking at God is now different from looking at the mirror in another soul. God thus seems to be both outside and inside the soul. It is tempting to see the passage as the work of a late pagan, or Christian writer, concerned to save Plato from the view that God is in our own souls, and hurriedly bringing God in as something external to us.¹²⁴

Against this revealing albeit negative verdict, consider Denyer’s succinct comment on the Mirror Passage as a whole: “God will provide a human soul with better understanding of itself than it could ever get from another human intellect.”¹²⁵ Although we cannot doubt that Socrates seeks self-knowledge and famously wonders about his true self,¹²⁶ can we find any other evidence that he sought “better understanding” from this unfashionable source? Aside from Alcibiades Major and the divine origin of the Delphic exhortation to “Know Thyself,”¹²⁷ Socrates has long since answered that question: his Divine Sign prevented him from doing what he was about to do.¹²⁸ Unless we are prepared to believe that Socrates routinely acted unreflectively,¹²⁹ we cannot doubt that the Sign, which he always obeyed, was thereby “trumping” his reasoning,¹³⁰ a particularly important finding if “Socrates’ moral psychology” requires every agent, Socrates included, to pursue nothing but his or her own good.¹³¹

In Alcibiades Minor, Socrates illustrates the effect of the Sign by himself arresting the intended action of Alcibiades. The ambitious youngster is on his way to prayer; he intends to ask the gods to give him tyrannical power. Socrates’ questions obstruct his path: intent on prayer at the start, Alcibiades gives up his plan at the end. The philosophical implications of this development center on the two times Alcibiades uses the word ἐγώ:¹³² he definitely changes his mind about himself between them, and is brought to see himself better—especially the extent of his own ignorance—as a result of Socrates’ intervention. Appearing first in Socrates’ opening question,¹³³ ὁ θεός creates the close textual connection with Alcibiades Major and the Sign.¹³⁴ In addition to the first three mentions of God,¹³⁵ the three
uses in the long speech between Alc. 148b9 and 150b4 mark it as the locus of instruction about God,\textsuperscript{136} and thus an important cause of the shift in Alcibiades’ use of ἐγώ that betokens his increased self-knowledge.

A quotation from Homer near the end of this despised dialogue strengthens the connection between it and \textit{Alcibiades Major} in a crucial way:

\textit{Socrates:} But I think, as Homer relates how Athena removed the mist from the eyes of Diomedes, ‘That he might well discern both god and man,’ so you too must first have the mist removed which now enwraps your soul [ψύχη], and then you will be ready to receive the means whereby you will discern both bad and noble [ἔθολόν]. For at present I do not think you could do so.\textsuperscript{137}

The fog is first removed specifically from the eyes, but the eyes become the soul immediately after the quotation; this keeps us in the realm of the more famous dialogue’s mirror image. No longer the man who was preparing to pray for tyranny,\textsuperscript{138} Alcibiades is now the new ἐγώ who then responds:

\textit{Alcibiades:} Let him remove the mist or whatever else he likes to call it: for I [ἐγώ] am prepared to obey every one of his commands, without fleeing, whoever the man may be, so long as I am to be the better for them.\textsuperscript{139}

While this response leaves open a “God in Socrates” reading of \textit{Alcibiades Major}\textsuperscript{140}—a reading that likewise requires deleting the Addition\textsuperscript{141}—Plato forecloses that possibility at the end of both dialogues.\textsuperscript{142} The God, through \textit{but not within} Socrates, has prevented Alcibiades’ prayer, and from being the “I” who was prepared to pray it, he has for the moment become the new “I” who seems to have the fog (or whatever else it might be at 150e5) removed from his soul. But despite his promise not to flee (150e6), we know that he eventually will (\textit{Smp.} 216b5-6).\textsuperscript{143}

As for Socrates, it’s easy to see that he came to know himself—in accordance with Delphic wisdom—as the Socrates who obeys the Sign, not as the one who had his own good reasons for doing what the intercession of the Sign prevented him from doing. Securing his own happiness is not Socrates’ guiding principle, nor does Plato expect it to be ours. But even though the Anglo-American reduction of the Good to Happiness (as “the good for us”) distorts the core of Platonism, an even graver threat to Plato—and to the rest of us—comes from the kind of
Continental Philosophy that remains untroubled by Heidegger’s shadow. To state the congruence more ominously, thanks to the dependence of Socratic self-knowledge on the self-transcending and fully separate Idea, Plato is far closer to being a Jew than a German Idealist.

F. H. Jacobi (1743-1819), who initiated the *Pantheismusstreit* by reviving interest in Spinoza, and who exercised a determinative influence over Schleiermacher, expressed the dilemma well:

I repeat: God is, and is outside me, a living, self subsisting being [Wesen], or I am God [Ich bin Gott; a different and larger font is used here for emphasis]. There is no third.

It would be naïve to take it on faith that Jacobi chose the former, but not that Plato did. Glimpsed in the more perfect mirror of what the three Religions of the Book would recognize as “I am what I am” — i.e., that which we are not — the self, purified of the epistemological certainties that alone could justify its eudaemonist end, let alone of its self-maddening pretensions to misconceive itself as the Übermensch, becomes free to be just as elusive, playful, and unforgettable human as the Socrates who Plato made famous, the one who describes himself being schooled by Diotima before leaving the creature comforts of Agathon’s dining-room in order to school the rest of us from a jail-cell, where his true self had always known that it was already housed, if only temporarily.

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NOTES

A shorter version of this paper was presented as “Philosophy and Self-Formation in Plato” at the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy Conference at Deakin University, December 7, 2016.


2. See Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 250-52.

3. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 253: “For the reasons outlined above, just as in the case of the reflexive, the emerging role of the ‘I’ in reflections upon human identity and self-consciousness begins to generate those capillaried networks of linguistic connection upon which the overt concept formations of later philosophy depend.”

4. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 202: “It is of interest how extreme statements of subjectivism often treat the subject in ways otherwise associated with a divine creator of the universe.”

5. In “The (Im)possibility of Holistic Reflexivity,” beginning on 255.

6. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 258: Cf. 259: “There is a thorny contradiction in the notion of reflecting on something that is putatively pre-reflective.”

7. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 204.

8. Alc. 130d4; a similar expression (αὐτὸ ταὐτό) has already appeared at 129b1. I will not enter here into the problem of how this phrase should be translated, but will recommend R. E. Allen, “Note on Alcibiades I, 129b1.” American Journal of Philology, 83, no. 2 (April 1962), 187-190 as the proper starting point for such a discussion. Abbreviations for the dialogues follow LSJ and citations to them are based on the most current OCT versions.


11. For the ancient commonplace that Alcibiades Major was the first dialogue a student should read, see Diogenes Laertius 3.62; cf. Denyer, Alcibiades, 14: “By late antiquity this had become the

12. Note the connection between Symposium and Protagoras as indicated by Prt. 315b9-316a5; of Agathon’s invited guests, only Aristophanes is missing.

13. See Alc. 115b1-4.
15. Alc. 116b2.


17. Alc. 116b3-5. The fallacy turns on the equivocal εὖ πράττειν, best understood in the following grammatical terms: (1) active, “to do well,” (2) middle, “to do well for oneself,” i.e., “to succeed,” and (3) “to fare well.” At 116b3, εὖ πράττειν is used in sense (1), immediately thereafter, at b5, in sense (3). The classic account of this standard trick— “the convenient ambiguity” on 335—is E. R. Dodds, Plato: Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, 335-36. More recently, see Rebecca Benson Cain, The Socratic Method: Plato’s Use of Philosophical Drama. New York: Continuum, 2007, 17 and 120n16-17.


22. Most recently, see Renaud and Tarrant, Platonic Alcibiades I, 187-89.


29. Christopher Gill, “Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Alcibiades” in Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Kevin Corrigan (eds), Reading Ancient Texts; Volume I: Presocratics and Plato; Essays in Honour of Denis
33. Gill, “Self-Knowledge,” 101-102, especially 101n20; cf. Brad Inwood, Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 335n15; note the characteristic “ontological minimalism” (334 and 323). Note that Foucault is even farther from a non-Neoplatonic Plato than Gill, e.g., Hermeneutics of the Subject, 53 (emphasis mine): “What is this identical element present as it were on both sides of the care: subject of the care and object of the care.” It is most unfortunate that Foucault fails to mention J. G. Fichte in these lectures. Cf. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 258-59 and 250-52.
38. Confirmed by Dönt, Paul Friedländer (see “Vorneuroplatonisches,” 39-40), Gill (cf. “Self-Knowledge,” 97n1), and Brunschwig himself (“La déconstruction,” 61); disproved by Denyer, Schleiermacher (see below), and the author.
44. Note that Schleiermacher suppressed the Addition (without comment) before atherizing the dialogue as a whole; see F. Schleiermacher, Platon’s Werke, 1.3.252 and 365.
46. In a work in progress to be called “Ascent to the Beautiful: The Pre-Republic Dialogues from Protagoras to Symposium.”
47. See Denyer, Alcibiades, 236.
48. Denyer, Plato, Alcibiades, 236. This point of view is upheld and strengthened by Brunschwig, “La déconstruction,” 74-75 and André Motte, “Pour l’authenticité du «Premier Alcibiades».” L’Antiquité Classique 30, no. 1 (1961), 5-32, on 27n30. See also “mostly” in Moore, Socrates and Self-Knowledge, 124 quoted above.
49. Denyer, Plato, Alcibiades, 236.
50. As per Rep. 51d8-e1.
52. Altman, Plato the Teacher, chapters 3 and 4.
53. Altman, Plato the Teacher, section §12.
54. Framed in terms of pleasure as well as tripartition in the second and third “falls” of R. 58od2-583b2 and 583b2-587e4. For the continuity of the Shorter Way, pursued both before and after books 6-7, see Plato the Teacher, 142.
55. Alc. 113d1-116e1.
56. See Altman, Plato the Teacher, chapter 4.
57. Smp. 210e2-211b5
58. This contrast suggests that the Glaucon of Symposium (named at Smp. 172e3) who wants to know what was said at Agathon’s is the same young man who does not get the information about the Idea of the Good that he desires in Republic (R. 506d1-2). Certainly Plato provides no conclusive evidence that they are different, but see Debra Nails, The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002, 154. Cf. J. B. Bury (ed.), The Symposium of Plato. Cambridge, UK: W. Heffer and Sons, 1909, 3: “probably not.”
59. See F. M. Cornford, “The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s Symposium” in The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays, edited by W. K. C. Guthrie, 68-80. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1967, 75: “I incline to agree with those scholars who have seen in this sentence [sc. Smp. 209e5-210a2, translated by Cornford as: ‘Into these lesser mysteries of Eros, you, Socrates, may perhaps be initiated; but I know not whether you will be capable of the perfect revelation—the goal to which they lead.’] Plato’s intention to mark the limit reached by the philosophy of his master.”
61. Smp. 204d8-9: τί ἔσται ἐκείνῳ [the first, followed by my comma] ὑν [the second, for whom what comes to be is in not in question, as it is for the first] ἂν γένηται τὰ καλά.
62. Smp. 204e6-7.
64. Lear, “Permanent Beauty,” 105.
66. Cf. the equation of the Beautiful and the Good at Alc. 116c1-2 with 115a13-15, where their opposites are cross-mixed, with “the good things” meaning: “good for me.” The most egregious abuse of such equations is in Protagoras, where Socrates claims that since going to war is noble, it is also good and pleasant (Prt. 359e3-360a3); for the distinction between the Good and the Beautiful there, see C. C. W. Taylor, Plato, Protagoras; Translated with Notes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 165-66 (especially the revealing understatement “less closely tied”). For the dramatic connection between Alcibiades Major and Protagoras, cf. Robert C. Bartlett, Sophistry and Political
67. Note the connection between this famous phrase (Smp. 206e5 and 209a3-b4) and virtue-inspiring λόγοι at 209b5-c2 and 210a4-e1.

68. On R. 519e1-520e3, see Plato the Teacher, section §16.

69. Note especially the use of ὑπεραποθνήσκειν (“to die on behalf of”) at Smp. 179b4 and 180a1; it reappears at 207b4 and 207d2. On the basis of Plato’s statement in Ep. 314c4 that his writings were those of a Socrates who had become καλός and νέος, it might be more accurate to say that Plato returned to the philosophy of a new Socrates, now revealed by the maxim of the beautiful action that had led to his trial and death.

70. Cf. Taylor, Plato, Protagoras, 165: “praiseworthy, honorable, noble” and Cornford, “Doctrine of Eros,” 77: “we must learn to value moral beauty in the mind above beauty of the body, and to contemplate the unity and kinship of all that is honorable and noble—a constant meaning of τὸ καλόν—in law and conduct.”

71. See Barney, “Notes,” 367.

72. See Rhetoric 1358b38-1359a5.

73. Smp. 202d2-e1; our response determines whether we are pregnant in our souls.

74. Smp. 211d8-e1, 212a1-2, 212a3, and 212a6; cf. 204d8-9.

75. Smp. 204d8-11.

76. Cf. τὸ καλόν at Smp. 209b3 (cf. 210d1) with τὸ καλόν at 210d4. While the earlier passage is still in the realm of the good man (209b4-c2), the rich proliferation of “beauty” in 210a4-e1 (fifteen words for it appear there) indicates the connection between the higher mysteries (210a1) and the shortcut of 204e1-7.

77. Put in its proper place at Smp. 202e1-5, immediately after our “pregnancy test.”

78. Smp. 210d4-e1. The parallel passage before “the higher mysteries”—i.e., 209b7-c2 (see previous note)—applies better to the speech of Alcibiades in praise of Socrates than to the speech of Socrates in praise of τὸ καλόν.


80. Hence also the strangeness of the image used to describe us; see R. 515a4-5.


83. Euthd. 277e-278c1.

84. Euthd. 278e3. On the use of fallacy in “the First Protreptic,” see (in addition to the sources listed in the next note), William H. F. Altman, Ascent to the Good: The Reading Order of Plato’s Dialogues from Symposium to Republic. Forthcoming from Lexington Books, 2018, section §3.

85. Euthd. 280b6. For critical attention to the speech, see Russell E. Jones, “Wisdom and Happiness

88. R. 515a4-8 (Paul Shorey translation).
89. See the proclamation at R. 580b1-c9; on the basis of the tripartite soul (580c10-d4), the life of ὁ φρόνιμος is also proclaimed to be most pleasant at 583a1-5.
90. See R. 504b1-505b4. In the context of the previous note, consider also 505b5-d4.
92. Thrasymachus has it just about right when he uses the equivocal phrase ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν at R. 342c3 and 367c3.
99. In addition to Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.6 generally (especially 1095a26-28 and 1096b32-35), see 1097a34-b6 and of course 1098a16-17.
102. See especially Hans Joachim Krämer, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles: Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1959, 547-548: “The One in its nimble worldliness [Weltzugewandtheit] is the highest standard of existence [Seiendheit], value, and truth and thereby, as measure (μέτρον), is in connection to the world [auf die Welt bezogen]. The concept ἕν as μέτρον indicates thereby the basis of Being [Seinsgrund] in its relationship to the world generally and thus represents the correlation, the point of contact between the resting-in-itself [in
sich ruhenden], transcendent Absolute and reality [der Realität].”

103. Prm. 135c8-d1.
105. Prm. 137b3. See Altman, Guardians in Action, 227-29 for the claim that the indivisible One is Plato’s invention, and thus his hypothesis.
106. As suggested by the presence of both Glauccon and Adeimantus at Prm. 126a2, to say nothing of the dialogue’s evident difficulty. For Catherine Zuckert’s early placement of Parmenides, see William H. F. Altman, “Review of Catherine Zuckert, Plato’s Philosophers.” Polis 27 (2010), 147-150.
110. See Prm. 143a2-9, especially λαμβάνειν τῇ διανοίᾳ at 143a7.
112. See Prm. 158c2-7, where διάνοια is linked for the first time to ἀπειρόν πλήθει (cf. Prm. 158c6-7 and 165c2) albeit by using τῇ διανοίᾳ ἀφελεῖν instead of λαμβάνειν τῇ διανοίᾳ, as at 165a8-c5 and 143a7. For further analysis, see Altman, Guardians in Action, section §12.
114. Prm. 130c5-d2.
115. Prm. 130c1-4.
116. Prm. 130b3-6. For the centrality of 130b7-10, see Altman, Guardians in Action, 276n257 and 281-82.
117. Consider the verb θαυμάζειν in both the first and last sentences of Socrates’ first speech in Alcibiades Major (Alc. 103a1 and 104c4), and then confirmed in the young man’s reply (104d4). Clearly the speech’s second sentence—on the Sign, with a promise of future enlightenment about it (103a6)—is intentionally designed to provoke wonder.
118. Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, 5.10 (translation mine): Socrates, however, called philosophy down from the heavens first [primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo], and placed it in the cities, and introduced it even into the home; he forced it inquire about life, and customs, and things both good and bad.”
119. For “dying nobly” (καλῶς θνήσκειν), cf. Simonides’ epitaph on the heroes of Platea in Greek Anthology 7.253 with Ep. 334e1; indeed Ep. 334d6-335a2 further validates a post-eudaemonist reading of Plato. Moreover, what makes Alcibiades worth Socrates’ time is the fact that he would
rather die than be a coward (Alc. 115d5-14); this means he prefers what is καλόν to life, i.e., to what
is good (115b1-c7).
121. For Plutarch’s Platonism, and in particular for a magisterial reading of the first of his “Platonic
Questions,” see Jan Opsomer, “Divination and Academic ‘Scepticism’ according to Plutarch” in
Luc Van der Stockt ed., Plutarchea Lovaniensia: A Miscellany of Essays on Plutarch, 164-194. Lovanii,
1996 and In Search of the Truth: Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism. Brussel: Palais der
122. See Opsomer, In Search of Truth, 157n141; cf. 135n23.
123. Plutarch, Platonic Questions, 1000b-c in Plutarch, Moralia, volume 13 part 1, translated by
125. Cf. Denyer, Plato, Alcibiades, 236.
126. Phdr. 230a3-6.
127. However difficult to separate: see Alc. 124a7-b3, 129a2-6, 130b8-9, and 132c7-10.
128. See Ap. 31d2-4 and Thg. 128d2-5.
1990), 63: “the daimonion sometimes vetoes quite trivial, unreflective, actions. Thus when he [sc.
Socrates] is about to stand up in the palaestra the ‘voice’ says ‘Sit’ [importantly false; it sounds—
Plato never implies it speaks in words—when Socrates has decided to stand and is about to do so],
and sit he does. But neither here is there any trumping of rational argument: there is no rational
argument to trump.”
130. See Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, “Letter to the Editor.” Times Literary
Supplement (January 26-February 1, 1990), 80: “We find it wholly implausible that Socrates could
have made such a morally significant decision [sc. to engage in politics; see Ap. 31d2-5] purely on
impulse.” For more on this, see Ascent to the Good, section §13.
131. Terry Penner never tires of making this claim and therefore it can be found in any of his
writings.
133. Alc2.138a-1.
134. For “god” and Sign in Alcibiades Major, see Alc. 105d5, 105d7, 124c8, 127e6, and 135d6
135. See (1) in the following note.
136. Plato emphasizes this shift in the usual way, i.e., with repeating word patterns: (1) cf. 141a6-7
and 148a1-2, picking up on the first line at 138a1, and (2) cf. 146c6-7 and 148a9-b4.
138. In Alc. 105d2-4, Socrates was the only one who could help him to realize his ambitions.
139. Alc. 150e5-8 (Lamb modified).
view the culmination of a foreshadowing of the climax of the dialogue. Surely, therefore, Proclus
associated this focus upon Socrates’ mind with the culmination of the climax itself.”
141. Tarrant, “Olympiodorus and Proclus,” 23: “This is where Olympiodorus would have him
[sc. Alcibiades] being told to look into Socrates’ soul (as an alternative to his own soul), while
Eusebius would have him being told that he needs to look upon god.” Cf. 27: “There really is
no hint that Albinus has any movement towards an external god in mind as a likely outcome of
reading the Alcibiades, and every reason to believe that the dialogue is already encouraging what
it will encourage for the Neoplatonists—reversion to one’s own inner self.”
142. Alc. 151a7-b3 (Lamb): “Alcibiades: Look now, I will crown you with this garland [it had been intended for the gods], as I consider you have given me such good advice; and to the gods [this distinction creates the foreclosure] we shall offer both garlands and all the other customary things when I see that day has come. And come it will ere long, if they are willing.” Cf. Alc. 135d3-6.


144. Note that “Socrates” in this paper never refers to anyone other than “Plato’s Socrates,” and does so without introducing any Vlastos-inspired distinctions.


146. For Jacobi’s influence on Schleiermacher, see Mariña, Transformation of the Self, 46-49, and Curran, Doctrine and Speculation, 8: “Schleiermacher’s reverence for Jacobi is well attested.”


148. For Jacobi’s exotericism as it bears on this sentence, see 45-51 of William H. F. Altman, The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011; also relevant is 63-74 (“Self-Deification in German Philosophy”).

149. My unpublished “Towards a Theology of Self-Deception” (2006) is available upon request for those who may be interested.


151. For Plato’s awareness of the fragility of εὐδαιμονία through its dependence on events post-mortem, see Mx. 247a4-6.
