
It is often said that each age produces a Plato to fit its own preconceptions, but it is less often noticed how large a part is played in this by the accepted canon of Plato's works. Today possibly more attention than ever before is lavished on the shorter Socratic dialogues which are usually considered early. New translations are frequent, and great attention is paid to problems in these dialogues such as the Socratic elenchus and Socratic ethics. Yet we ignore, usually without argument, a number of similar Socratic dialogues: *First Alcibiades, Lovers, Hipparchus, Theages, Cleitophon, Minos.* The 'complete' Plato that our students use does not contain them; few translations are available. When we read them they may sound strange, because they have been excluded from what we have grown to consider Platonic. But even a slight knowledge of their history should make us wonder whether we are making a mistake.

In antiquity the Platonic canon was larger than ours. Thrasyllus' influential canon reflects one judgement in the ancient scholarly debate. Among the many Socratic dialogues produced by various schools some had got attached to Plato's
writings, but clearly wrongly. The *Axiochus*, for example, which contains Epicurean arguments, is clearly a later exercise in Platonic style (we do not have to suppose the author stupid enough to be attempting forgery!). Thrasylus excluded six such dialogues from the canon, adding them as an appendix. But he included in the canon not only the *Letters* and the *Epinomis* but the two *Alcibiades* dialogues, *Hipparchus*, *Lovers*, *Theages*, the two *Hippias* dialogues and the *Cleitophon*. None of these were seriously questioned in antiquity as works of Plato; Thrasylus wondered about the *Lovers* (Diogenes Laertius IX 37) and Aelian about the *Hipparchus* (*Varia Historia* VIII 1-2), but did not specify their grounds; and one of these dialogues, the *Alcibiades*, was prized and commented on by Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists, being widely regarded as the best introduction to Plato and the first dialogue that the student should read (see Diogenes Laertius IV 62, Albinus' *Introduction*, and ch. 3 of J. Pépin's *Idées grecques sur l'homme et sur dieu*).

Schleiermacher's work in the early nineteenth century was the first to disturb the accepted canon, and the effects have been with us ever since. Schleiermacher's aim, to restore the reading of the dialogues as dialogues, rather than decorative introductions to parts of a systematic Platonic dogma, was admirable, but his zeal led him in strange directions, and he introduced several bad scholarly habits which