Plato's Greater Hippias

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Approximately thirty-five years ago the authenticity of the Greater Hippias was a subject thoroughly aired, particularly by Dorothy Tarrant, who took the negative side, and by G. M. A. Grube, who in the judgment of numerous Platonists successfully defended the composition as genuine.1 The Tarrant-Grube "dialogue" reflects the debate which began in the days of Schleiermacher, who concluded that of the two treatises named after Hippias the Greater Hippias is more likely to be genuine. It was Ast who was the first vigorous sceptic; his negative opinion has attracted such scholars as Ueberweg, Zeller, Horneffer, F.W. Röllig, Zilles, Bruns, Jowett, Windelband, Goedeckemeier, Gomperz, Pohlenz, Wilamowitz, and D. Tarrant. On the affirmative side the following Platonists concur: Socher, Steinhart, Susemihl, Munk, K. F. Hermann, Stallbaum, G. Burges, Dümmer, Apelt, Vrijlandt, Wichmann, Depréel, Adam, Burnet, Mauersberger, Raeder, Ritter, von Arnim, Cornford, Shorey, A. E. Taylor, P. Friedländer, Ross, G. M. A. Grube, and M. Soreth, who wrote the most recent volume on the Greater Hippias.2

It is not the prime purpose of the present paper to enter the debate, except as a πάρεγγελιν, because we feel that G. M. A. Grube has presented the case thoroughly and sufficiently. In our judgment the most weighty evidence is that of Aristotle; in the words of Sir David Ross: "... the


first example of definition quoted by Aristotle in *Top.* 146a21-3 seems to be as clear an allusion to *Hippias Major* 297 e 3-303 a 11, where the definition of the beautiful as ‘that which gives pleasure through hearing or sight’ is discussed, as the second example is to *Soph.* 247 d 3 - e 4. Similarly the suggested definition of the beautiful as ‘the fitting’ in *Top.* 102a6 and 135a13 is probably a reminiscence of *Hippias Major* 293 d 6-294 e 10.” Aristotle’s reference to the *Lesser Hippias* by the phrase “the argument in the *Hippias,*”4 on the other hand, no more indicates the spuriousness of the *Greater Hippias* than do his numerous references in the *Poetics* to Sophocles’ *Oedipus* imply that Sophocles wrote only one drama concerning Oedipus.5

The current study will observe principally the intertwining of the dramatic technique with the philosophic content in the *Greater Hippias,* as several of our previous papers have noted in other Platonic compositions.6 If the *Greater Hippias* proves to contain such intertwining similar to that found in the *Euthyphro, Lysis, Meno,* and *Lesser Hippias,* which are accepted by all contemporary Platonists as authentic, the strengthening of the case of Grube, Soreth, *et al.* remains coincidental to the prime purpose of the present paper – namely, to study another treatise by Plato in which the dramatic techniques are helpful in interpreting the philosophic content.

Since we have published a separate article on the *Lesser Hippias,* reference to that study makes it unnecessary to repeat our remarks concerning the character of Hippias, his tenets and accomplishments, his appearances in the works of Plato and Xenophon, and recent attempts to link Hippias with other passages in Greek literature.7 We may recall merely two brief opinions of Platonists on the dramatic

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8 D. Ross, *op. cit.* (previous note) 3-4.
6 Scholars of the New Testament, likewise, accept more than one letter of Paul to the Corinthian and Thessalonian congregations respectively, although even such a learned man as Origen states: *κατὰ τὸν Παύλου ... ἐν τῇ πρὸς Κορινθίους* and *ἐν τῇ πρὸς Θεσσαλονίκης*; cf. Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Edinburgh 1909) III 184, 203.