

JOINING THE BEGINNING TO THE END¹

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A Stranger from Athens, Cleinias from Crete, and Megillus from Sparta walk along the road from the Cretan city of Cnossus to the cave and temple of Zeus. The Athenian Stranger asks about the divine provenance of the laws in Crete and in Sparta, and his fellow travellers are happy to answer his queries. The journey promises to be agreeable, for along the road there will be convenient shady places under the lofty trees where they can relax; this is emphasised as important, for they are old, all three of them, and the heat of the day is upon them (πνίγους ὄντος τὰ νῦν, 625b3).

This is the opening scene of the *Laws*. It reminds the reader of the *Phaedrus*; there too the discussion takes place in the countryside, Socrates feels himself a stranger (230c), he and Phaedrus enjoy the shade of a lofty tree (230b), and the heat of the day is upon them (ἐν τῷ πνίγει, 258e7). Thesleff noticed the similarity and inferred from it that Plato began to write the *Laws* shortly after the *Phaedrus*.² The ancient tradition according to which the *Phaedrus* was Plato's first dialogue³ invites a different explanation: when Plato in his old age embarked on writing the *Laws* he returned in his thoughts to his first work.

When Plato wrote the *Laws* he knew it to be his last great work. Its main hero, the Athenian Stranger, in whose guise Plato enters the dialogue, refers to his old age in the opening scene in the first book

¹ I am very grateful to Doina Cornell for her invaluable comments in preparing this paper.

² H. Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki 1982, p. 187.

³ Diogenes Laertius, III, 38. My arguments in defence of this ancient dating of the *Phaedrus* can be found in my articles *Dating of the Phaedrus and Interpretations of Plato*, in: *Antichthon*, 22, 1988, p. 26–41; *A Preliminary to the Study of Plato*, in: *Symbolae Osloenses*, 67, 1992, p. 80–88; *Plato's First Dialogue*, in: *Ancient Philosophy*, 17, 1997, p. 31–45.

(625b), in the second book he complains of the loss of his agility (657d), in the fourth book he boasts of the sharp intellectual sight that his old age has granted him (715de), in the sixth book he expresses anxiety as to whether the gods and his old age will permit him to accomplish the work (752a). It would be natural for Plato to think of his first work when commencing the work which he believes to be his last. This alone would suffice to explain the similarities between the opening scene of the *Laws* and the *Phaedrus*. But there were other and more weighty reasons for Plato's recalling the *Phaedrus* in the *Laws*. In the former the theory of Forms is announced and the Forms identified with truth itself (247c), and in the *Laws* the discovery of truth straight at the beginning (ἐξ ἀρχῆς εὐθύς, 730c3) is highlighted as a special mark of trustworthiness (πιστὸς γάρ, 730c4). Plato saw his first work as being closely united with his last in his thought and wanted this unity to be seen by his reader.

The laws proper are introduced in the dialogue by a long prelude (τὸ προοίμιον, 734e4–6) in which Plato justifies the need for a new civic constitution that would pay due regard to all four virtues, to virtue in its totality, and not merely to one of the virtues, as the Cretan and the Spartan constitutions do in a one-sided promotion of courage (630ab). Towards the end of this long prelude, in the fifth book, the Athenian Stranger asks what character one must have if one is to lead the best and most noble life (ποιός τις ὦν αὐτὸς ἂν κάλλιστα διαγάγοι τὸν βίον, 730b3–4), and how is one to be led and educated (730b5–c1). He answers his own question by pointing to truth as the guiding principle of everything good both for gods and for men (ἀλήθεια δὴ πάντων μὲν ἀγαθῶν θεοῖς ἡγείται, πάντων δὲ ἀνθρώποις, 730c1–2). He intimates that a man who is to be blessed and happy (μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων) ought to partake of the truth straight at the beginning (ἐξ ἀρχῆς εὐθύς) so as to live as a true man throughout a prolonged life (ἵνα ὡς πλεῖστον χρόνον ἀληθῆς ὦν διαβιοῖ, 730c2–4).

Plato does not explain how this is to work, how the partaking of truth is to model one's character so as to provide one with the best life blessed with happiness. But he introduces this passage on truth by the assertion that only he who practises throughout his life what he preaches (ἅπερ ἂν ἄλλον νοουθετῶν εἶποι τις, φαίνεσθαι ταῦτα αὐτὸν δρῶντα διὰ βίου, 729c4–5) can educate others properly. This suggests that we ought to look to Plato's own beginnings to find the truth of which he here speaks. And indeed, when we consult Plato's dia-

logues, we find that the *Phaedrus* is the only dialogue in which truth is perceived correspondingly. For in the *Phaedrus* the truth itself, that is the Forms (247c), sustains the divinity of gods and humanity of men (246a–249c). We can learn there that it is by contemplating the truth that the philosophers are guaranteed a blessed life here on earth (μακάριον τὸν ἐνθάδε βίον διάγουσιν, 256a8–b1), for it is the sight of the truth, and in particular of the Form of Beauty closely associated with the Form of Temperance (254b) that gives the Charioteer (ἡνίοχος, 246a7 and *passim* throughout the palinode), the power to control the lower parts of the soul and in virtue of it lead a good and blessed life (253c–256b). It is to these passages that Plato refers in the *Laws* when he suggests that those who are to live the best and most noble life must be educated so as to become „well and easily guided by the Charioteer“ (εὐηγίους, 730b6).

According to modern developmental theories, Plato discovered the Forms several years and a considerable number of dialogues after Socrates' death, for it is assumed that in his early period Plato shared Socrates' agnosticism. In line with these theories the passage on truth in the *Laws* could only be read as Plato's regret that he was not one of the blessed, having discovered the truth, that is the Forms, relatively late in his life. But this fits ill with the assertion at the end of the passage that the early discovery of the truth and a long life lived partaking of it makes a man trustworthy (πιστὸς γάρ, 730c4). Trustworthiness (πιστότης, 630c5) is expressly stated in the *Laws* as being of primary concern to Plato as soon as the Athenian Stranger begins to reveal his own views concerning laws. By invoking the *Phaedrus* in the opening scene of the *Laws* Plato prepares the ground for the trust that the Stranger is to command. The passage on truth can work as a commendation of Plato's own trustworthiness only if it was commonly known that he discovered the Forms at the beginning, which chimes with the ancient tradition that the *Phaedrus* was his first dialogue.

There are other passages in the *Laws* that presuppose the dating of the *Phaedrus* as Plato's first dialogue if they are to be fully understood. Half way through the *Laws*, in the sixth book, the Athenian Stranger is praised by the Cretan Cleinias for joining the beginning to the end of his discourses (τὴν ἀρχὴν νῦν τελευτῆ προσάψας περὶ τῶν τε εἰρημένων καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ῥηθήσεσθαι, 768e5–6). Superficially viewed, it may seem that this praise refers merely to the link that the Athenian Stranger has established between two sections of

the *Laws* when he transformed the end of his discourse on political institutions into the beginning of his discourse on legislation. But Cleinias' effusive praise of this accomplishment suggests that Plato is here playfully pointing at something much more profound. For Cleinias says: „I liked everything that you said before, Stranger, but what you have said just now is even more to my liking, this joining of the beginning to the end, concerning that which has been said and that which is to be said.“ (768e4–6) This „joining of the beginning to the end“ must be an extraordinary accomplishment, if it is praised more highly than everything that has preceded it.

Plato is here highlighting his joining in thought of his first to his last work. As if anxious to ensure that the reader understands his meaning, the Athenian Stranger in his response to Cleinias' praise steps out of the immediate context of the discussion on political institutions and of legislation. „Thus far, then, the old men's play (παιδιά) has been played well“ (καλῶς ... διαπεπαισμένη, 769a1–2), he says, echoing thus the *Phaedrus* where Socrates maintains that the philosopher writes for the sake of amusement (παιδιᾶς χάριν, 276d2). It appears that Plato can still view his writing as play and amusement, and as far as that goes, the unity between the *Laws* and the *Phaedrus* is not problematic. But there is an aspect of the identification of writing with amusement in the *Phaedrus* that Plato now wants to correct. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates holds that the philosopher writes *merely* for amusement, for only the spoken word is considered by him to be worthy of serious pursuit (σπουδή, 276e5). This view now threatens to relegate to the realm of mere play Plato's life-long work, and needs to be put right. Many passages in the *Laws* are devoted to the task of revising the Phaedran views on writing.

It is notable that Cleinias from Crete is entrusted with initiating this revision, not the Stranger from Athens who preeminently embodies Plato's thought, as if Plato wants to indicate here that the impulse for his change of views on this matter came from the outside. Cleinias tells the Athenian Stranger: „You seem to mean that noble and serious pursuit of men“ (σπουδήν, 769a3). What Plato in his youthful embrace of his teacher's views had regarded as mere play, his readers have long since experienced as a most noble and most serious activity.

What follows Cleinias' gentle rebuke confirms that Plato is here reinterpreting the Phaedran views on writing. The Athenian Stranger accepts the correction and goes on to compare the work of the legisla-

tor to that of a painter (ζωγράφων, 769a7; γράψαι, 769c1). In the *Phaedrus* Socrates compared the art of writing to painting (γραφῆ ... ὁμοιον ζωγραφία, 275d4–5), but while in the *Phaedrus* the metaphor was employed to denigrate the written word as static and lifeless, in the *Laws* it emphasizes the strength of the written word. This strength lies on the one hand in the stability and permanence of the written word, and on the other in its openness to fresh thought and thus to improvement. For just as painted pictures can be improved and their colours brightened up if good painters improve them from generation to generation, so can the written word be perfected, and with it the political constitution that depends on it (769d). The term that Plato uses for this process of „brightening up“ is φαιδρύνων (769c7), „phaedradizing“. Here Plato resumes the line of thought that he introduced in the *Timaeus*, where the very preservation of culture is attributed to the written word; those destitute of letters (ἀγράμματοι) are without art and voice (ἄμουσοι, ἄφωνοι, 23bc). This is in sharp contrast to the *Phaedrus* where Socrates equates the invention of writing with cultural decadence, true wisdom being supplanted by its mere semblance (275ab).

The correction and reinterpretation of the Phaedran attitude to writing was made a demanding and pressing task because of the *Seventh Letter*, presumably written when Plato was in the process of writing the *Laws*, which appears to have endorsed the views on writing expressed in the *Phaedrus*. The *Seventh Letter* states that every serious man avoids writing about subjects that are really serious, and that if anyone commits to writing the things of most worth, „then surely, not gods, but men have themselves bereft him of his wits“ (344cd). In the *Phaedrus* we read that any written work is a matter of reproach to its author if he thinks it contains important truth of permanent validity (277d). This similarity has served as a powerful argument for the late dating of the *Phaedrus* for all those who accept the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter*. For if the letter is genuine, then it was written by Plato in his mid-seventies, addressed as it is to Dion's friends shortly after the murder of the latter in 354 B.C. However, on a closer look there is a major discrepancy between the two, which makes it unlikely that they both belong to the same period of Plato's life. In the *Phaedrus* the deprecation of writing stands in contrast to an unreserved eulogy of the spoken word; the latter is alive and endowed with soul (λόγον λέγεις ζῶντα καὶ ἔμψυχον, 276a8), of which the former is a lifeless image, a mere phantom (275c–276a). In

the *Seventh Letter* the spoken word is held to be just as powerless to convey the truth about true being as the written word (341c–e). Tarán noticed this discrepancy and inferred from it that the letter cannot be authentic.⁴ But if the letter presents a fundamentally un-Platonic doctrine, as Tarán argues, how could it ever have been included in the Platonic Corpus? In other words, who but Plato could have allowed himself to be so „un-Platonic“? The *Seventh Letter* provides us with the information that fully explains Plato’s despondency concerning the capacity of the spoken word to communicate truth, as well as his transient relapse into the Phaedran denigration of the written word.

In the attempt to transform the tyrant Dionysius into a philosopher-ruler Plato revealed to him the essence of his philosophy (*Seventh Letter*, 340b–341a), which according to the *Phaedrus* only the spoken word of a philosopher could communicate (*Phaedrus*, 276e–277c). Yet Dionysius proved incapable of grasping the doctrine, which must have occasioned Plato’s despair of the communicability of truth by the spoken word (*Seventh Letter*, 341c). Another mishap concerning this affair occasioned Plato’s relapse into the Phaedran disparagement of the written word. For not only was Dionysius unresponsive to Plato’s teaching, but he had the temerity to record in writing and publish what Plato told him. This irked Plato deeply. „That much I know,“ he reflects bitterly, „that written or put into words (γραφέντα ἢ λεχθέντα, 341d2–3), it would be done best by me, and that, if it were written badly, I should be the person most pained“. It is because he is intent on disqualifying Dionysius’ composition on this topic that Plato reiterates the Phaedran condemnation of the written word. All new arguments offered in the *Seventh Letter* deal with the incapacity of the spoken word to convey the truth about true being (342a–e). And what is more, beneath the arguments against the written word there can be detected Plato’s great pride as a writer, when he states that nobody could write on philosophy better than himself. The *Seventh Letter* helps us understand why it became imperative for Plato in the *Laws* to reinterpret and correct the Phaedran attitude to writing. When the Athenian Stranger says that his discourse is to be considered a canon by which to judge other discourses that may have been spoken or written in a contentious spirit and because of a rather foolish agreement with other statements (διὰ

⁴ L. Tarán, *Academica: Plato, Philip of Opus, and the Pseudo-Platonic Epinomis*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia 1975, p. 153 (n. 659).

φιλονικίας τε ... καὶ διὰ συνχωρήσεων ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ μάλα ματαίων, 957d3–4), he is in effect ruling out the rash statements against writing pronounced in the *Seventh Letter*, for they are incompatible with his views as expressed in the *Laws*.

In the *Laws* we may perhaps put our finger on the precise spot where, after having wrestled with the Sicilian affair, Plato returns to writing the *Laws*, realizing that to bring the work to completion is after all his most important task. In the seventh book the Athenian Stranger observes that human affairs are not worthy of serious concern (τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματα μεγάλης μὲν σπουδῆς οὐκ ἄξια, 803b3–4), echoing the language with which the *Seventh Letter* denounced writing (οὐκ ἦν τοῦτω ταῦτα σπουδαιότατα, εἴπερ ἔστ' αὐτὸς σπουδαῖος, 344c6–7). Yet he forces himself to take human endeavours seriously, however unhappy these may be (ἀναγκαῖόν γε μὴν σπουδάζειν· τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ εὐτυχές, 803b4–5). He then once again begins to see a brighter perspective: „Pursuing our concern through a proper medium (διὰ προσήκοντός τινος, 803b6) would perhaps be appropriate to us,“ he muses. „What do I mean by this?“ he asks. He explains that about serious matters a man should be serious, and that since man is made the plaything of God, the most worthwhile way to conduct one's life is to be engaged in the noblest of pastimes (παίζοντα ὅτι καλλίστας παιδιάς, 803c7). The Phaedran reflections on writing are here again recalled and thoroughly revised. For in the *Phaedrus* writing, although at one point it is called by Phaedrus a very noble pastime (παγκάλη παιδιά, 276e1), and conceded by Socrates to be so, it is nevertheless contrasted with a much more noble serious pursuit (πολὺ δὲ καλλίων σπουδῆ, 276e4) of the spoken word performed by the philosopher practising dialectic. This contrast is missing in the *Laws* where the noblest pastime is simply identified as the most serious human concern (ὁ δὴ φαμεν ἡμῖν γε εἶναι σπουδαιότατον, 803d). Underlining Plato's own vacillations, the Athenian Stranger gives vent once again to his dejection with human affairs. „Humans are mere puppets, with little share in truth,“ he complains. But at this point Plato has had enough of this melancholic despondency and rebukes the Athenian Stranger through the mouth of the Spartan Megillus: „You rubbish our human race completely, Stranger.“ „Be not amazed, Megillus, but have compassion with me,“ says the Stranger. From now on he decides to treat the human race again as worthy of some serious concern (σπουδῆς δέ τινος ἄξιον, 804b9–c1). This makes him consider the education of the young, which raises the need

for an educational paradigm, as Cleinias points out (811b8–c2). „My good Cleinias, I rather think that I am fortunate ... I think I am not wholly in want of a paradigm,“ the Athenian Stranger says, explaining that there can be no better educational paradigm than the discourses that he expounded „from early dawn until now“ (ἐξ ἔω μέχρι δεῦρο, 811c7).

What discourses does Plato have in mind, what does the „early dawn“ signify? Within the fictional setting of the *Laws* these words refer only to the discourses held by the Athenian Stranger and his two companions on the road from Cnossus to the cave and shrine of Zeus. But if we look back to the opening scene, we note a striking discrepancy, for there the talk is of „midday heat“ (πνίγους ὄντος τὰ νῦν, 625b3), not of the „early dawn“. This indicates that we are not supposed to identify the „early dawn“ with the opening of the *Laws*, but to direct our look past it to Plato’s beginnings. As has been seen, the „midday heat“ is one of those features in the opening scene that serve to recall the *Phaedrus*; this reminder is reinforced as the metaphor of the „early dawn“ carries us past the opening scene of the *Laws* back to the *Phaedrus*. As if he were afraid that future generations might forget that the *Phaedrus* was his first dialogue, Plato indicates its proper place within the corpus of his works.

Surveying all of his „collected works“ thus,⁵ the Athenian Stranger is overcome by immense pleasure (καί μοι ἐπήλθε λόγους οἰκείους οἶον ἀθρόους ἐπιβλέψαντι μάλα ἡσθήναι, 811cd). In the very act of expressing this sentiment Plato’s mind dwells again upon his beginnings. For in the *Phaedrus*, in spite of all his criticism of the art of writing, Socrates concedes that an author will experience pleasure at beholding his written discourses (ἡσθήσεται τε αὐτοὺς θεωρῶν, 276d4–5) „when forgetful old age comes“ (εἰς τὸ λήθης γῆρας ἐὰν ἴκηται, 276d3–4). The metaphor of the „early dawn“ is balanced in the *Laws* by a metaphor of the „sunset of life“ at which the Athenian Stranger finds himself (ἡμεῖς δ’ ἐν δυσμαῖς τοῦ βίου, 770a6).

The pleasure Plato experiences at beholding his collected works as he stands at the sunset of his life invites further revision of the Phaedran views on writing. The Athenian Stranger maintains that any legislator or educator of substance who comes across spoken discourses or written works „akin to *these discourses*“ (ἀδελφά που

⁵ *Collected works* is T. J. Saunders’ perceptive rendering of λόγους ἀθρόους in his translation of the *Laws* (published in *The Penguin Classics*, 1970).

τούτων τῶν λόγων) has the duty to preserve them by committing them to writing (μὴ μεθιέναι τρόπῳ μηδενί, γράφεσθαι δέ, 811e4–5). „These discourses“ refers to the „collected works“ produced since dawn; in other words, Plato here speaks of the totality of his dialogues beginning with the *Phaedrus* and ending with the *Laws*. It is clearly implied that Plato now perceives writing his dialogues as a duty to mankind. What was a mere pastime when he wrote the *Phaedrus* has become his most serious concern. In consequence, the Phaedran distinction between the spoken and the written word has been overridden. In the *Phaedrus*, the spoken word was the legitimate brother (ἀδελφὸν γνήσιον, 276a1–2) of its bastard sibling, the written word; in the *Laws* the written and the spoken words are regarded as equally genuine siblings (ἀδελφά, 811e4).

The picture drawn by the metaphors of „joining the beginning to the end“ and of works assembled „from the early dawn“ is supplemented by a metaphor of discourse viewed as an organic body, which is taken from the *Phaedrus*. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates maintains that every discourse should be composed like a living being, with a body of its own, so as not to be „without a head“ (ἀκέφαλον, 264c4). In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger expresses his determination to bring his work to completion so as not to leave it „without a head“ (ἀκέφαλον, 752a2). Plato accomplishes this task at the end of the *Laws* with the constitution of the „nocturnal council“ of the guardians which is likened to the city’s „rational part“ (τοὺς δὲ νῶ ἀπηκασμένους, 965a1). The task of „joining the beginning to the end“ is completed with the outline of education for the members of the nocturnal council; as I shall argue, this programme involves the totality of Plato’s works.

The educational programme is laid out in a brief sketch that begins at 965b with the assertion „we must proceed, then, to a higher type of education than the one previously described“ (ἐπί τινα ἀκριβεστέραν παιδείαν τῆς ἔμπροσθεν, 965b1–2), and ends at 968b with the proposal that it is to be a duty of the members of the nocturnal council to take part in the education „that has just been outlined“ (παιδείας ὀπόσης διεληλύθαμεν, 968b1). The adjectival pronoun of quantity ὀπόσης indicates a great amount of education, and that is what is to be expected, since those who undergo it can qualify as the guardians. Nevertheless, ὀπόσης contrasts starkly with the brevity of the educational programme it qualifies; its meaning becomes clear

only if we realize that it points to the totality of Plato's works as this programme's full course.

The programme opens with the method of dialectic reminiscent of the *Phaedrus*. In the *Laws*, Plato states that a guardian of the laws must be able not only to look at the many (πρὸς τὰ πολλὰ βλέπειν), but also to press towards the One and obtain knowledge of it (πρὸς δὲ τὸ ἓν ἐπείγεσθαι, γωνναί τε, 965b8–9). With this knowledge and with his eye concentrated on the One he must bring everything into a well ordered unity (καὶ γνόντα πρὸς ἐκεῖνο συντάξασθαι πάντα ξυνορῶντα, 965b9–10), for there is no better way of investigating anything than that of being able to transfer one's look from the many dissimilar things to the single Form (ἢ τὸ πρὸς μίαν ιδέαν ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ ἀνομοίων δυνατὸν εἶναι βλέπειν, 965c2–3). In the *Phaedrus*, Plato says similarly that the dialectic method consists in bringing together the „manifoldly scattered“ through one's look concentrated on the single Form (εἰς μίαν τε ιδέαν συνορῶντα ἄγειν τὰ πολλαχῆ διεσπαρμένα, 265d3–4); the ability to focus one's eye on the One and on the many is what marks the dialectician (δυνατὸν εἰς ἓν καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ πεφυκόθ' ὄραν, 266b5–6).

Since the *Laws* is admittedly a late dialogue, these similarities might appear to speak for a late dating of the *Phaedrus*. But in the *Laws* the programme of education begins with the outline of the dialectic method that echoes the *Phaedrus*; what follows is evocative of the early elenctic dialogues. In other words, the place of the Phaedran outline of dialectic within the educational programme is analogous to the place of the *Phaedrus* within Plato's „collected works“. The guardians must apply the dialectic method to problems of plurality and unity of virtues, investigating on the one hand how is it that there are four virtues, that is courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, and on the other hand in what sense there is only one virtue, a certain Oneness being present in all four of them (965d). The method is to be applied in the same way to beauty and goodness (περὶ καλοῦ τε καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ταῦτὸν τοῦτο διανοούμεθα), enquiring how each of these is many and how it is one (ὡς πόλλ' ἔστιν ἕκαστον τούτων καὶ ὅπως ἓν τε καὶ ὅπη, 966a5–7). As in the early elenctic dialogues, such as the *Laches* and the *Charmides*, the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, no solution is offered to these problems in the *Laws*. To those who do not know Plato's work, the educational programme is ἀπρόρρητον (968e4), it cannot be revealed „beforehand“, for its meaning remains

hidden to those who have not undertaken a thoroughgoing study of Plato's collected works.

The outline of the dialectic method and its application to problems of plurality and oneness is followed by a concise statement that the same method is to be applied to all serious matters (περὶ πάντων τῶν σπουδαίων ἡμῖν αὐτὸς λόγος), for the guardians of the laws are truly to know the truth about the laws (ὅτι δεῖ τοὺς ὄντως φύλακας ἐσομένους τῶν νόμων ὄντως εἰδέναι τὰ περὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν αὐτῶν, 966b4–6). This instruction refers to all the remaining dialogues of Plato, for the educational programme without any further ado culminates in a brief summary of the main content of the tenth book of the *Laws*: if the guardians are to acquire true belief in gods, they must learn that the soul is the oldest and most divine of all things generated, and that the movement of the stars is governed by cosmic reason (966d9–967a5); this implies the definition of soul as self-moving movement (892a–896d). The programme becomes a circle, for it begins and ends with the *Phaedrus*.

The similarities concerning the notion of the soul in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Laws* have led a number of scholars to believe that the two share the same proof of the immortality of the soul, from which they derived a strong argument for the late dating of the former dialogue.⁶ But this is wrong, for although the soul is defined in both as the principle of motion, there is a fundamental difference between the two. In the *Phaedrus* the soul is proved to be immortal because it is declared to be the ungenerated first principle (ἀρχὴ δὲ ἀγένητον, 245d1); in the *Laws* it is emphasized that the soul is the generated principle of motion (ἀρχὴν ἄρα κινήσεως ... γενομένην, 895b4, cf. 892a–c). What is proved in the *Laws* is not the immortality of the soul, but only its priority to all bodily matter, to which the soul im-

⁶ See e.g. H. Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, Helsinki 1982, p. 177 (n. 56): „...the proof of immortality in *Phdr.* 245c–246a is much more sophisticated than *R X* 617d ff., and it is adopted again in *Leg. X* 894b ff., cf. de Vries 1969.9.“ G. J. de Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato*, Amsterdam 1969, p. 9: „A stronger argument [for the post-*Republic* dating of the *Phaedrus*] may be found in the proof of the soul's immortality, offered in the *Phaedrus*; it is hardly conceivable that Plato would have published the rather clumsy argumentation of *Rep. X* if the far better argument of *Phdr.* (used in the *Laws* too), based on the soul's motion, had been at his disposal.“ See further L. Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'amour*, Paris 1908 (repr. 1964), pp. 70 and 97.

parts motion (δέδεικται ψυχὴ τῶν πάντων πρεσβυτάτη, γενομένη γὰρ ἀρχὴ κινήσεως, 896b2–3). In other words, Plato is arguing that the soul was generated before the body (ψυχὴν προτέραν γεγονέναι σώματος, 896c1–2). What stands between the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* is the creation of the soul by the demiurge, which Plato described in the *Timaeus*. In order to introduce the Phaedran notion of soul in the *Laws*, Plato had to revise it.

The institution of the nocturnal council together with the educational programme for its members profoundly transforms the constitution proposed in the *Laws*, which thus becomes „divine“ (τῆς θείας πολιτείας, 965c9–10). Aristotle’s remark in the *Politics* that Plato in the *Laws* starts with the intention of constructing a constitution that would have more in common with existing political constitutions, but step by step transforms it back to the mold of the other constitution, that is, the ideal state of the *Republic* (ταύτην βουλόμενος κοινοτέραν ποιεῖν ταῖς πόλεσι κατὰ μικρὸν περιάγει πάλιν εἰς τὴν ἑτέραν πολιτείαν, 1265a3–4), is often quoted in the notes on this transformation.⁷ Plato himself underlines this profound change not only by calling the constitution divine, but also by a new attitude of the Athenian Stranger towards the actual realization of the proposed city. While in the middle of the *Laws* he politely declined Cleinias’ invitation to become one of the founders of the city (753a), now near the end, after Cleinias has agreed to enshrine in law the proposed programme of education, he spontaneously expresses his willingness to assist in bringing it to life (968b5–9).

The transformation which occurs in the last book of the *Laws* of the „second best city“ (φανεῖται δευτέρως ἂν πόλις οἰκεῖσθαι πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον, 739a4–5) into one that resembles the „best constitution“ (τὴν ἀρίστην πολιτείαν, 739a7) is dramatic, but it does not go against the grain of the dialogue as a whole. The change begins to take place at the very moment when in the fifth book Plato expresses his intention of presenting in the *Laws* the second best constitution. For it is second best only in comparison to the best constitution of the *Republic* which is reaffirmed in the *Laws* as its paradigm (παράδειγμα, 739e1). The Athenian Stranger gives a brief summary of the principles of the ideal state and says that the proposed second best constitution is to follow it closely so that it may resemble it as much as possible (739e2–4). The two are alike as far as the education of the guard-

⁷ Cf. E. B. England, *The Laws of Plato*, 1921, n. on 968a.

ians is concerned, but their economic foundations remain different. Plato says that the paradigm of the best constitution is based on the principle of sharing: friends hold all things in common (κοινὰ τὰ φίλων, 739c2–3), their children, wives, and their property (κοινὰς μὲν γυναῖκας, κοινούς δὲ εἶναι παῖδας, κοινὰ δὲ χρήματα σύμπαντα, 739c4–5), whereas the second best constitution is based on the principle of private property. The introduction of the ideal city into the *Laws* as a paradigm has a dual function; it directs the dialogue towards the educational programme that ensures the rule of philosophers, and at the same time serves as a device that harmonises the otherwise incompatible principles on which the best and the second best constitutions are based, thus providing for consistency in Plato's political thought.

Plato's concern in the *Laws* with bringing disparate strains of his thought into unity comes to the fore when he endeavours to reconcile the view that nobody commits injustice voluntarily, expressed in his earlier writings,⁸ with the need to incorporate the common distinction between voluntary and involuntary offences, albeit qualified, into the legal system proposed in the *Laws*. „In what way can I bring my thoughts again into harmony with my own discourses“ (τίνα οὖν αὐτότροπον ἔγωγε συμφωνοίην ἂν τοῖς ἐμαυτοῦ λόγοις, 860e2–3), he asks, insisting that he cannot repudiate his view that all injustice is involuntary (ὡς πάντα ἀκούσια τὰ ἀδικήματα, 861c8), for doing so would be alien to his thought (οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐμὸν ... εἶη, 861d4). He solves the problem by refusing to call an involuntarily caused damage an injustice (ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἀδικίαν τὸ παράπαν θήσω τὴν τοιαύτην βλάβην, 862a5–6), while defining as injustice only those offences that are commonly considered to be voluntary. Having made this proviso, for all practical purposes he incorporates the common distinction between voluntary and involuntary offences into his system of law.

Plato's preoccupation with the consistency of his thought is most conspicuous in his endeavour to bring into harmony his first work and his last, the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, and it has therefore been obscured because of the late dating of the former by modern Platonic scholarship. This among other things has led to a curious emendation of the passage concerning Plato's refusal to abandon his thesis that all injustice is involuntary, quoted above. Plato says that he cannot

⁸ See esp. *Hippias Maior*, 296bc; *Gorgias*, 468cd, 509e; *Protagoras*, 345e, 352c; *Meno*, 77d–78b; *Republic*, 589c.

abandon the thesis, for abandoning it „would be neither *mine* (ἐμόν, 861d4) nor pious“. Plato's „*mine*“, which stands in the codices ALO, means „true to me“, „true to my character“. Burnet nevertheless emends the text on the basis of later manuscript corrections A³ O² into οὐ γὰρ ἂν νόμιμον ... εἶη, which Saunders accepts as he translates „I should be breaking the laws of men“.⁹ But this cannot be right, for the Greeks generally believed that men do commit injustice voluntarily, and the distinction in law between voluntary and involuntary offences was habitually made on that basis. Plato himself adheres to this distinction after reinterpreting it, and at times he simply slips into the common legal usage without heeding his own terminology, as when he speaks of „voluntary offences committed according to total injustice“ (τὰ ἐκούσια καὶ κατ' ἀδικίαν πᾶσαν γιγνόμενα, 869e6).

Plato had to bring unity into his works if he was to recommend his works to posterity as the best programme of education, which he does towards the end of the *Laws*. Cleinias asks the Athenian Stranger to expand the brief outline of education. The Stranger answers that the first thing to do is to assemble suitable candidates for the membership of the nocturnal council, but there he stops; he insists that to say anything more at this stage would be meaningless. It would be pointless to „prescribe“ (ἐν γράμμασι λέγειν, 968d6) the appropriate times at which the candidates ought to learn this or that subject, he maintains, for they would not understand what would be the right time for it before each of them received knowledge of the subject in his soul (πρὶν ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκάστῳ που μαθήματος ἐπιστήμην γεγονέναι, 968e1–2). It is not because he considers any further explanations concerning the programme of education inexpressible (ἀπόρρητα, 968e3) that he refuses to provide them at this point, but simply that they cannot be communicated before the time is ripe for their communication (ἀπόρρητα, 968e4). What can this mean? The key lies in this passage's concluding statement: any further elucidations „are inexpressible before their time for told beforehand they would explain nothing“ (ἀπόρρητα δὲ διὰ τὸ μηδὲν προρηθέντα δηλοῦν τῶν λεγομένων, 968e4–5). Cleinias is not acquainted with philosophy, he has not studied Plato's works; no wonder he does not understand what the words of the Athenian Stranger signify. He asks in perplexity: „What are we to do, Stranger, if the matter stands thus?“ The *Laws* is approaching its end, the last exchange between the Athenian

⁹ T. J. Saunders, *op. cit.*

Stranger and his two interlocutors must therefore contain the answer to Cleinias' perplexity.

In response to Cleinias, the Athenian Stranger says that the actual foundation of the proposed city ought to be their common task; he would like to take an active part in it: „I shall participate in this daring undertaking (συνκινδυνεύσω) by expressing and explaining my views on education and on intellectual and moral upbringing which this discourse has set *again* in motion“ (τῷ φράζειν τε καὶ ἐξηγεῖσθαι τὰ γε δεδογμένα ἔμοι περι τῆς παιδείας τε καὶ τροφῆς τῆς νῦν αὖ κεκινημένης τοῖς λόγοις, 969a1–3). The brief outline of education for the guardians „has set again in motion“ Plato's thought on this subject. The Spartan Megillus realizes that there is only one conclusion that can be drawn „from all that has been said“ (ἐκ τῶν νῦν ἡμῖν εἰρημένων ἀπάντων, 969c4): the foundation of the planned city must be either abandoned, or the Stranger must be persuaded to take part in it. Cleinias agrees and asks Megillus to help him in persuading the Stranger of his indispensability. The *Laws* ends with Megillus' laconic „I shall do so“ (Συλλήψομαι, 969d3). This exchange between Cleinias and Megillus might seem strange and completely otiose, for the Athenian Stranger has expressed spontaneously twice in a row (968b5–9, 968e–969a) his willingness to actively participate in the project. By giving such a strong emphasis to the task of persuading the Stranger Plato evidently wants to communicate something very important. We can decipher his meaning if we take stock of the profound transformation of Plato's views on the written word which is highlighted in the *Laws*.

At the opening of the tenth book we read that laws set out in writing (ἐν γράμμασι τεθέντα) remain firm and permanent (πάντως ἡρεμεῖ), ready to withstand scrutiny for all time (ὡς δώσοντα εἰς πάντα χρόνον ἔλεγχον, 891a). Not only does the immutability of the written word, so negatively assessed in the *Phaedrus* (275d), acquire here a highly positive meaning, but Plato now ascribes to the written word the capacity to „withstand scrutiny“, which in the *Phaedrus* was a privileged characteristic of the spoken word (278c).¹⁰ In the elev

¹⁰ It is interesting to note how his late dating of the *Phaedrus* misled Stallbaum. Stallbaum effaces the contradiction between the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* on this matter by importing the Phaedran censure of writing into the latter, and taking πάντως ἡρεμεῖ to mean „they cannot answer questions – *quum nihil respondeant*“ (*Platonis Opera*, Sumptibus Hennings, Gotha 1860, vol. X, sect. III, p. 153). Ritter

enth book the Athenian Stranger says that the highest honour should be bestowed upon those who show the highest respect for the writings of the good legislator (922a). Finally, in the last book it is maintained that one must hold in one's inner self (ἐν αὐτῷ) the writings of the lawgiver, so that they may serve as an antidote to any other written works (καθάπερ ἀλεξιφάρμακα τῶν ἄλλων λόγων, 957d6), for thus they will keep the judge on the path of righteousness, and will ensure the constant improvement (ἐπαύξησιν, 957e1) of men who are just.

Far from viewing his works as a lifeless imitation of the spoken word, Plato now credits his works with a life of their own. When it is emphasized so strongly towards the end of the *Laws* that without the Athenian Stranger one should not even think about founding a model city, what Plato really means is that the precondition for it is a thorough study of all his works. It is through his dialogues that Plato is ready to help wherever men of substance get together with the intention of improving their lives and the lives of their fellow citizens. The concluding passages of the *Laws* recall the end of the *Phaedrus* as its opening scene recalls the Phaedran opening. The *Phaedrus* ends with Phaedrus' wish to partake of Socrates' philosophy: „For friends share all things in common“ (κοινὰ γὰρ τὰ τῶν φίλων, 279c2–3). When the Athenian Stranger decides to join the foundation of the proposed city, he declares it to be „a common task for friends“ (ὧ φίλοι, ἐν κοινῷ καὶ μέσῳ ἔοικεν ἡμῖν κείσθαι, 968e7–8).

points out that this is wrong since in *Laws*, 891a, ἡρεμεῖ is given as an advantage of the written word, not its disadvantage (C. Ritter, *Platos Gesetze*, Leipzig, 1896, vol. I, pp. 294–295). England agrees with Ritter and observes that the *Phaedrus* cannot be regarded as a forerunner of *Laws*, 891a (E. B. England, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 459–460, ad loc.). De Vries, who is obviously acutely aware of the implications that the discrepancy has for the dating, simply denies the discrepancy: „...in *Laws* 891a the opposite view is not to be found, as Shorey, *What Plato said* 555 suggests“. (G. J. de Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato*, Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam 1969, p. 252, ad *Phdr.* 275d5–6.). Shorey in the passage quoted does indeed find in *Laws* (891a) a view that is opposite to *Phaedrus*, 275de. Morrow, to whom de Vries also refers, speaks of „the unresponsive language of a legal document“ when referring to *Laws* (891a), but in doing so he simply projects the *Phaedrus* into the *Laws*, as Stallbaum had done before him. (G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, Princeton 1960, p. 477).