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## Developmentalism

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Brandwood 1992:90–120; Kahn 2002:93–112; Thesleff 2009:213–30). Stylometry was unable to establish divisions within this latter group (Kahn 1996:43–4)

The existence of three groups of dialogues does not in itself establish the truth of developmentalism, though it does provide a basis for it. It is possible to hold that the dialogues were written in a certain order and to deny that this chronology reflects any significant changes in Plato's view (Kahn 1996; Shorey 1903:4). The most influential version of developmentalism was motivated by a desire to restrict the scope of Plato's most famous theory, the theory of forms (q.v.). Unitarians since ancient times had regarded the theory of forms as a distinctive and enduring feature of Plato's philosophy. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, however, this doctrine came under scrutiny. Some scholars took the critique of the theory in the *Prm.* to be either a refutation of the theory of forms (Ryle 1939a:134) or a call for significant changes in it (Owen 1953a; cf. Krau 1992c:14–19).

This criticism required modification of the three stylometric groups of dialogues. The strategy behind this grouping was to confine the theory of forms, or at least objectionable versions of it, to the middle group of dialogues. On this interpretation the 'middle dialogues' become precisely 'dialogues containing the theory of (paradigm) Forms'. In order to accomplish this it was necessary to move three dialogues in the first stylometric group, the *Cratylus*, *Phaedo* and *Symposium*, into the middle group of dialogues. The remaining dialogues in the first group labelled 'Socratic' or 'early' were held by some to represent the philosophy of the historical Socrates (Vlastos 1991a). This Socratic group was held to be purely ethical in content and not to contain any reference to

## DEVELOPMENTALISM

### *William Prior*

Developmentalism is a theory concerning the order of composition and the interpretation of Plato's dialogues. It is a modern phenomenon; ancient interpreters of Plato were 'unitarians' (Annas 1999:3–5; unitarians believe that there is a systematic unity of Platonic doctrine or belief among all the dialogues). There are several varieties of developmentalism; what is common to them all is the idea that the philosophical views contained in the dialogues, which are taken to reflect Plato's own views, changed significantly over time.

In order for a developmentalist theory of Plato's philosophy to exist it is necessary to determine, at least in broad outlines, the order in which the dialogues were written. Until the advent of stylometry (the measurement of changes in Plato's style, some of them unconscious) in the latter part of the late nineteenth century there was no agreement on this order. The research of Campbell and other scholars led to the establishment of a late group of dialogues, including the *Timaetus*, *Critias*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Laws*, a penultimate group of dialogues, including the *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*, and an early group consisting the remaining dialogues (for thorough surveys of stylometric studies, see

the theory of forms. Two dialogues belonging to the penultimate stylometric group, the *Tht.* and *Prm.*, which were thought to be critical of the doctrines of the middle period, were placed by some scholars into a late, 'critical' group of dialogues. One scholar boldly proposed moving the *Timaeus*, which contains the paradigm version of the theory of forms, from the late group of dialogues to the middle group (Owen 1953a).

This version of developmentalism was the dominant interpretation of Plato among analytical scholars in the middle years of the twentieth century. Questions about it arose, however. Some dialogues did not fit the early-middle-late schema. The *Meno*, a dialogue of the first stylometric group of dialogues, seemed in some respects to be a Socratic dialogue, yet it contained the doctrine of recollection (q.v.), which was associated in the *Phd.* (72e–7a) with the theory of forms. Some scholars regarded it as 'transitional' between the early and middle dialogues. Some scholars (Allen 1970; Prior 2004) argued that some Socratic dialogues contain an early version of the theory of forms. The greatest impediment to acceptance of this version of the developmentalist picture, however, has been the *Ti.* Owen's (1953a) attempt to re-date the dialogue to the middle period was criticized by Cherniss (1957) and, despite vigorous and prolonged scholarly debate, has not won the support of a majority of scholars (cf., e.g. Brandwood 1992:112–14; Irwin 2008:80; Silverman 2002:12).

The presence or absence of the theory of forms is not the only criterion used to distinguish groups of Platonic dialogues. Penner (1992) has argued that the relevant distinction is between a simple and a tripartite theory of the soul, and that the breaking point between the early Socratic account of the soul and the Platonic theory comes in bk 4

of the *R.* This version of developmentalism does not involve modification of the first and second stylometric groups of dialogues, as does the version outlined above. Differing conceptions of dialectic provide the basis for yet another conception of developmentalism: the Socratic elenchus being succeeded by the Platonic method of hypothesis and finally by the method of collection and division (Robinson 1953).

As noted above, the chief opposing view to developmentalism is unitarianism, the view that Plato's view altered little or not at all over the course of his career. It is often assumed that one must be either a developmentalist or a unitarian. This, however, is not necessarily the case. Unitarianism and developmentalism are polar opposites: there is space, inhabited by many scholars, between the options of radical change and little or no change in Plato's view. It is also possible to reject the stylometric chronology on which developmentalism is based, or the idea that the dialogues represent (stages of) Plato's thought. Even if the stylometric chronology is accepted, however, the most fruitful reading of the dialogues remains a matter of interpretation.