

Conference in Newcastle, Australia

On December 4–6 2008 a conference was held entitled *Socrates, Alcibiades, and the Divine Lover/Educator* was held in Newcastle, Australia. It was sponsored by the University of Newcastle's Research Group on Religious and Intellectual Traditions and by the School of Humanities and Social Science. It was also held under the auspices of the Australasian Society for Ancient Philosophy.

The aim of the conference was to explore a variety of topics—philosophical, literary, historical—which have a bearing on the interpretation of the dialogue *Alcibiades I*. The question of the authenticity of the dialogue was not the prime focus of the conference, but naturally it was discussed in a number of papers and also in discussions held after them.

The conference was attended by about 30 people, including a number of overseas guests. There were fifteen papers presented in the following sequence:

Harold **Tarrant** (University of Newcastle): 'Improving persons through love alone? Aeschines the Socratic, *Alcibiades I*, *Theages*, and their Hellenistic Legacy'

Dougal **Blyth** (University of Auckland): 'Socrates and Platonic Models of Philosophical Love'

Dimitri **Kepreotes** (Macquarie University), 'From Gadfly to Divine Educator: a literary approach to the Socratic *Alcibiades*'

Rev. Fergus **King** (University of Newcastle), "'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?': On the Absence of the erotic in the pupil-teacher relationship in the adoption of Platonism in Judaism and Early Christianity'

Yuji **Kurihara** (Tokyo Gakugei University): 'The Place of the *Alcibiades I* in Plato's Early Work'

Brian **Bosworth** (Macquarie University etc.): 'Alcibiades and aristocratic Values'

Victoria **Wohl** (University of Toronto): 'The Eye of the Beloved: *opsis* and *eros* in Socratic Pedagogy'

Marguerite **Johnson** (University of Newcastle): 'Sappho and Love's Role in Improving the Pupil'

Rick **Benitez** (University of Sydney): 'The Perspective on Virtue in *Alcibiades I*'

Neil **Morpeth** (University of Newcastle): '"War as Initiation": Philosophical and historical explorations in times of war, ancient and modern: Thucydides, Alcibiades and Marc Bloch on "campaign"'

Inna **Semetsky**: 'Socratic Paradox or the Problem of New Knowledge'

Anthony **Hooper** (University of Sydney): 'The Dual Role of the Philosophers: a mutual relationship of becoming-towards-Being'

François **Renaud** (Université de Moncton): 'The Divine Sign of Socrates: from the *Alcibiades* to Olympiodorus'

Alastair **Blanshard** (University of Sydney): 'The Afterlife of the Socrates-Alcibiades Relationship'

Matthew Sharpe (Deakin University): 'Hunting Plato's *Agalmata*: On One Modern Answer to the Ancient Question of How to Read a Platonic dialogue'

There was also two round tables:

Informal Round Table A: 'The *Alcibiades I*, its date, and Fourth Century Politics' (principal speaker Elizabeth Baynham [University of Newcastle] and Neil Morpeth)

Informal Round Table B: 'The *Alcibiades I* as Platonic Drama' (speakers included Rick Benitez and Colin Redmond)

Due to pressure of circumstances I was only able to attend the first half of the conference. The highlight for me was the paper of Yuji Kurihara, which carefully explored the way that Socratic ignorance is presented in the *Apology* and the early Socratic dialogues. He noted that the author of the *Alcibiades I* affirms that Socrates knows that he does not know, whereas in the indisputably genuine writings Plato is careful not to say this, but to state that Socrates thinks he does not know. This would be an argument against authenticity, although Yuji did not wish to press this point. Several other points were raised during the conference that might provide minor arguments against authenticity, some historical, some literary, some philosophic. As expected none were decisive, though they did perhaps constitute a body of evidence against the final version of the dialogue dating from the early or middle years of Plato's creative life. However, some scepticism was felt about whether Plato himself would at this stage have desired to revert to a much earlier type of dialogue, largely innocent of typical late-period stylistic manipulations.

Harold Tarrant reports widespread appreciation of the elegant guest presentations of Victoria Wohl and François Renaud, the former contrasting the Platonic tradition with the Xenophontic on the visual mechanics of the lover-beloved relationship, the latter raising questions about the *daimonion* of Socrates, particularly in the target dialogue, and adding material from the later interpretative tradition, primarily Olympiodorus. Several papers touched on the importance of the dialogue or of the relationship in later eras, including that of Matthew Sharpe who arrived in haste from another conference at the end to deliver his paper making use of Lacan.

All present clearly enjoyed the papers and discussions that the conference provided. It has provided a stimulus for further Platonic research in Australia and reinforced the reputation of Harold Tarrant and his team as the leading researchers on Plato and Platonism on this continent.

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