6. Dialogue and Dialectic
and each generation can contribute to the fund by coining new general terms, new “common types,” that accrue value through the accumulated sense of repeated use.

Pater holds fast to the “modern view” in this understanding of the historical construction of general terms. For him, as for Darwin, “the ‘type’ itself is not but is only always becoming” (PP, 19). And yet, at any given time, it effectively is. As Pater explained in his description of Diaphaneitē, certain general types are recognized by “the world.” Such a general category is treated as given, datum, its value produced by the accumulated repetitions of past experience. Pater’s is a limited, historical idealism.

What is most important for us to see is that this treatment of general ideas differs radically from Plato’s. Pater elides the difficult notion—which he, following Aristotle, duly mentions—that Plato makes his Ideas “separable” from their phenomenal, shadowy instantiations (PP, 163). Instead, Pater continues to focus on the Platonic figure of the “ladder” by which we reach the Forms by means of their phenomenal forms. According to Aristotle, Plato’s great step beyond Socratic induction was in making the Ideas “separable” from their instances, but according to Pater, Plato’s advance over Socrates was instead to make the Ideas real things and then to make them persons (PP, 166–67). Thus, even while preserving his “modern” emphasis on the historical construction of general ideas, Pater manages to invest them with a mythic, Platonic value.

Pater follows Plato in claiming the “enthusiasm” for ideas as a true form of possession (PP, 172). But his possession by the ideas, types, or Forms differs significantly from Plato’s. Like other “moderns,” Pater’s greatest affinity is for the other “side” of Plato’s doctrine—not its passion for the acquisition of “eternal and immutable ideas,” but the practice or method of a tentative, hesitant, never-concluding aspiration toward “ideals” (PP, 195). This modern emphasis is all on the side of becoming, of process, of “tendency.” Its philosophical practice is called dialectic.

6 · Dialogue and Dialectic

On the one hand, Pater’s interpretation of Platonic dialectic assumes the priority of real dialogue, of an actual conversation between two or more different interlocutors. On the other hand, that reality exists in
memory or aspiration—in life, but not in art—and Pater is unusually sensitive to the fact that what we actually have before us is a literary form, the written record or imaginary representation of an experience, not the thing itself. For Pater, the memory of the Socratic method, preserved in Plato's literary form, stands as one more mythic representation of a lost archaic past when experience was direct, informal, and took place "face to face." The informal, oral conversations of Socrates figure in Pater as "the first rough, natural growth," the organic ground from which Plato's written, formal Dialogues spring (PP, 79, 177). However, if the Dialogues are but a representation of experience, figures of life and not life itself, still they get closer to the reality of experience than Sophistic argument, which Pater characterizes as "mechanical" by comparison (PP, 100).

For Pater, dialectic is the most lifelike form of philosophical inquiry. Plato himself admits that "'like ourselves, our discourses . . . have much participation in the temerity of chance'" (PP, 185). In his discussion of Plato's method, Pater focuses on this quality of accident or surprise, of new information or argumentative force suddenly appearing from "without," as if in conversational exchange. For that reason the dialogue form appropriately "figures" and lends its name to the dialectical method of argumentation (PP, 183). In dialogue, the philosophical advantages of subjective relativism take literary form; points of view are represented as separate persons, proper names marking their difference from one another. Both dialogue and dialectic make difference, separation, and distinction graphically visible as a part of their effective method. The search for knowledge is seen as a function of communal experience, and it is developmental in form. Knowledge unfolds in time. A sequence of conversational exchanges represents the necessarily tentative, skeptical approach to knowledge, the repeated adjustments in response to new information, the never-concluding aspiration toward a view more complete than anyone's "separate" human perspective could ever achieve.

Dialectic represents the life of the mind as movement toward that complete perspective. The movement is never-ending, because complete knowledge can never be fully achieved in human time; like "life itself," the dialectical method admits further possible movement until the end (PP, 185). One of Pater's favorite figures for the dialectical process compares it to the ascent of a mountain. On the way up, one perspective succeeds another until finally, at the mountaintop, the climber achieves "what Plato would call the
'synoptic' view of the mountain as a whole" (PP, 180). But as Pater notes, while in the process of climbing, when dealing with other persons, there is room for error up until the very last moment. "Another turn in the endless road may change the whole character of the perspective" (PP, 190). A literary dialogue closes, and thus it provides an equivalent of the synoptic view in its retrospective "sense of an ending." But the dialectical process never ends. For those who pursue it thoroughly, it is "co-extensive with life itself" (PP, 185).

Portraying dialectic as "co-extensive with life itself" is quite a different matter from saying that it is "like" life. On the one hand, Pater assumes that an actual dialogue took place prior to Plato's literary re-creation; his belief in the mythic priority of Socrates to Plato, of oral culture to literary culture, leads Pater to make actual dialogue between persons the model for dialectical method. Yet, on the other hand, he assumes that "the dialogue of the mind with itself" is the original activity, which both actual conversation and literary dialogue simply express (PP, 183). To make "the dialogue of the mind with itself" his fundamental category in a discussion of Plato is a bold and characteristic move on Pater's part, which again reveals much more about his own "modern view" than it does about Platonic dialectic. In Plato and Platonism this last Paterian adaptation of Arnold's famous phrase has the effect of equating dialectic with the rise of self-consciousness, interiority, and aesthetic-historical expression.

Pater develops this side of his argument in several ways. For example, he makes a traditional association of Socrates and Plato with the rise of Greek humanism or individualism. Against the "lifeless background of . . . the unconscious social aggregate," the "conscious individual, . . . the Greek had stepped forth, like the young prince in the fable, to set things going" (PP, 21). This romance "fable" casts Socrates as the practitioner of the momentous historical shift inward, the first philosopher to turn from star-gazing to the "cosmical order" within. Thus it is truly said, Pater reports, that "Socrates brought philosophy down from heaven to earth" (PP, 81). Again equating dialectic with an interior process, Pater formulates the difference between sophistry and true dialectic as a matter of insides and outsides. The essential sophistic "vice" derived from the fact that their hold on things was merely external, or "superficial," whereas dialectical treatment yields and expresses an internal hold on the subject matter under consideration (PP, 116–18). The essential function of the Socratic method was to create
such a self-conscious interiority, "to flash light into the house within."

Fully occupied there, as with his own essential business in his own home, the young man would become, of course, proportionately less interested . . . in what was superficial, in the mere outsides. (PP, 120)

This domestic fantasy of internal order is more Pater's than Plato's, a variation of the Paterian figure of the "house of thought." Pater goes on to attribute to Socrates a desire, which Pater calls the "central business of education," to teach young men their importance to themselves (PP, 90, 120, 139). The fulfillment of humanism in Paterian terms is found here at its very origins in the sense that self-knowledge is somehow "sacramental" (PP, 91).

Pater manages this remarkable shift inward in part through his treatment of the Platonic doctrine of recollection. He discusses the Meno in his chapter on the Pythagorean influence. "Eristic Meno" asks Socrates whether learning can reasonably be possible: How can we reach the utterly unfamiliar? How can we learn what we do not already know? Of course, the famous Platonic answer is that we do already know: one can learn because one innately has access to knowledge through reminiscence. Learning is a matter of gradually becoming conscious of this innate potential, fleshing it out in terms of finite experience, through dialectic, in time.

Plato dramatizes this doctrine through the dialogue between Socrates and Meno's slave boy, who discovers within himself a knowledge of geometry as he is guided by the graduated questions of Socrates. The Socratic method "induces" knowledge, or causes it to be expressed, and perhaps at this point we can begin to appreciate Pater's attempt to assimilate Platonic recollection to his own Hegelian scheme of expression in history. With this anecdote of Meno's slave boy, Pater (as well as Plato) purports to show innate knowledge coaxed out and revealed—to prove, in other words, that "recovery is an act of reminiscence" (PP, 65).

In fact, the story shows more forcibly (though also more tacitly) the power of dialectic, of leading questions from without, of the guiding authority of another interlocutor. Pater's figures reveal the essential role of the dialectician: "the reasonable questions of Socrates fall like water on the seed-ground, or like sunlight on the photographer's

1. Bloom notes that this emphasis is "highly Paterian, and closer to Pater's Marius than to Plato" (introduction to Selected Writings, p. 239, n. 19).
negative” (PP, 63). Dialectical treatment, then, is as necessary as water to organic growth or, with even more intense a wit on Pater’s part, as the process of photographic “development” to a “negative.” Socrates’ own favorite figure—which portrays his questioning as “being after all only a kind of mid-wife’s assistance”—admits to less intervention than Pater’s (PP, 83). But Pater, too, throws the emphasis on reminiscence and recovery:

Those notions were in the boy. . . . Ancient, half-obliterated inscriptions on the mental walls, the mental tablet, seeds of knowledge to come, shed by some flower of it long ago. . . . (PP, 66)

Everything is inside (“present from the first,” as Pater describes Leonardo’s prevision of the Mona Lisa), the “seeds” of all knowledge waiting for the appropriate “tendency” or care in order to “develop.” Like the Interpreter, the dialectical interlocutor coaxes articulation from within a mythic wholeness.

Through a modern transposition of Platonic recollection, Pater establishes the basis for treating “the dialogue of the mind with itself” as the original dialectical activity. The dialectic that is “co-extensive with life itself” is essentially this “continuous company we keep with ourselves through life” (PP, 185). But in order for that “company” to have any potential for dialogue or conversation, it must be diversified. In this respect, Pater’s forceful emphasis on the personal quality of Platonic ideas serves him well, and here again it should be noted that his emphasis is characteristically Paterian rather than Platonic.

For Plato “all knowledge was like knowing a person,” Pater repeatedly argues, because knowledge is emergent, slowly developing, and plastic or physiognomic (PP, 129). Like Adam naming the animals, Plato gives names to invisible acts, processes, and abstractions; he conceives of the ideas as living things (PP, 141). Pater criticizes the Eleatics’ anti-Homeric aversion to polytheism as well as their anti-anthropomorphic conception of deity; their conception of the One was without color and form, without personal presence, a god “neither here nor there, then nor now” (PP, 33). But in Plato, Pater argues, the One becomes “delightfully multiple, as the world of ideas.” According to Pater, Plato restores the Homeric pantheon as an allegorical pantheon of Virtues, “like a recrudescence of polytheism in that abstract world; a return of the many gods of Homer, veiled now as abstract notions” (PP, 46, 168–69). As a result of Plato’s mode of conceiving the ideas, then, the world within is now a populated place: “he made us
freemen of those solitary places . . . he peopled them with intelligible forms" (PP, 143).

Not only does Pater re-allegorize the Platonic ideas as persons, he also imagines the mind populated with the various aspects of its own personal identity. All these internalized characters take part in “the dialogue of the mind with itself”: the advocatus diaboli, the dog, the child, the youth, each one offering from time to time his characteristic point of view (PP, 183–84). Thus Pater imagines the diverse “company we keep with ourselves.” The Paterian “dialogue of the mind with itself,” as Part One of this book made clear, is an achievement of conscious self-division which permits both mobility and fixation; here we see the same sort of conscious self-division equipping the mind with all possible points of view. In our discussion of Marius we found a historical-fictional world peopled with epiphenomenal projections of the central self, each one representing a stage in the Bildung of our protagonist, and here we see all those stages of growth potentially contained in one place. Pater’s conception of the “dialogue of the mind with itself,” in other words, has been enriched once more within the context of Plato and Platonism. What Pater has imagined in this little vignette of the internal company is a figure of the mind itself as mythic manifold, enfolding in its interior all the “aspects” of the complete person, all possible moods and points of view, all moments and stages of a life history which unfolds in time.

In this sense, dialectic operates on the principle of Justice, as it is defined in the fourth book of The Republic: “the doing, by every part, in what is essentially a whole consisting of parts, of its own proper business therein” (PP, 111). This proportionate relation of parts to a whole is also expressed in Pater’s dominant figure of synthesis in this volume, the figure of music. Musical form is “synthetic” both synchronically and diachronically; it emphasizes proportionate relation both at every moment, as harmony, and also over the course of time, as sequence. Used in The Renaissance to stand for the ideal goal of all aesthetic expression because its content is not separable from its formal relations, music is used in Plato and Platonism to represent aspiration in general within “the human mind itself.” The aesthetic aspiration toward musical form has become in this last volume historical aspiration as musical form. For Pater, dialectic is that form, in which all life as well as “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.” Like music, dialectic figures the sense of life as temporality, as the pleasure in relations unfolding in surprising ways at each moment, the sense of total form accumulating as growth over time.

Pater takes account of this aesthetic element in his understanding
of dialectic. According to Plato's own figure in *The Republic*, to pursue the dialectic is to enter upon "a voyage of discovery" (PP, 114).

Socrates says: "I do not yet know, myself; but, we must just go where the argument carries us, as a vessel runs before the wind." (PP, 185)

But Pater questions this figure. He cogently points out that often the dialogue in progress produces a feeling of continuous surprise, as if its movement were random, and yet at times the dialectic seems clearly guided by "a kind of 'Providence'" (PP, 184). With the subtlest of secularization-effects, Pater recognizes in that "kind of 'Providence'" a figure for the "end" of literary form, the moment of closure which lends a retrospective coherence and shape to the work as a whole. After all, as a model for dialectical process the ascent of a mountain does envision the end of the journey at the highest point, the position on the mountaintop where "the 'synoptic' view of the mountain as a whole" is available at last (PP, 180).

In this volume Pater has formulated a theoretical model to accommodate the paradox of an unguided search that is nevertheless in the hands of "a sort of 'Providence.'" Both functions may be figuratively understood as aspects of one mind: the experiencing aspect in the midst of dialogue is supervised by the aspect of the dialectician, who lends direction while effacing his guiding role. Dialogue is a *figure for* dialectical method, and the "dialogue of the mind with itself" is simply another figure for those mobile parts of a divided whole, understood as the self-divisions of an individual consciousness as well as the divisions of history. By internalizing the figure of the dialogue, Pater transfigures it, making the figure metafigural: a general model of the aesthetic function controlling the "organic."

Pater criticizes the Sophists because they have no real goal for their superficial inquiry, whereas the goal of Platonic dialectic is absolute: the complete knowledge of the Beautiful and Good "as in itself it really is." While Pater has, with his "modern view," put more emphasis on the process toward the goal than on the goal itself, there is nevertheless a strong sense of teleology in this volume. "Our pilgrimage is meant indeed to end in nothing less than the *vision* of what we seek" (PP, 192). Until the end of the journey we cannot see, "as if in a single moment of vision," all the stages of ascent and perspective which comprise the "synoptic" view from the mountaintop (PP, 158). But at the closure of a Platonic Dialogue, one has access to the process as a completed form. Pater has faith that aesthetic form can provide a modern "equivalent for" or "sense of" Platonic Form. He approxi-
mates in the literary form of his own volume that synoptic view, providing at once a sense of lively exploration and a sense of providential teleology which is one effect of his formal stance of distant retrospection. In the final section of this study we shall see how this late volume appreciates life in time from the perspective of completed form.

It is a life, a systematised, but comprehensive and far-reaching, intellectual life, in which the reason, nay, the whole nature of man, realises all it was designed to be, by the beatific “vision of all time and all existence.” [PP, 183]

7 · Paterian Recollection: The Anagogic Mind

The Paterian Plato is constructed as a mythic whole, a figure who synthesizes all philosophies before him and generates all that come afterward. His relation to Socrates serves to emphasize Plato’s emergence as a distinct figure against the background of orality or prehistory, and thus Plato/Socrates becomes one of Pater’s “two-sided” figures, representing both the mythic manifold and its break into literature and into history. Pater’s own relation to Plato, as it is constructed in this volume, is another such “two-sided” figure, a “twofold power, an embodied paradox” (PP, 87).

Like Plato’s literary re-creation of Socrates, we might think of Pater’s Plato as merely a “stage disguise,” were it not for independent evidence (PP, 75). That Pater’s interpretation of Plato largely recapitulates contemporary sources only makes this point all the more interesting, for Pater has effectively shaped the perspective of his lectures to synthesize the “received” or “common” views of his contemporary historical moment. With the persona adopted in these lectures, therefore, Pater attunes the “Diaphaneité” to the music of his own day. In so doing, Pater tacitly casts himself as a modern Ficino, “translating” Plato to his own later age, re-creating a Plato who would be recognized by his contemporaries in the late nineteenth century and who is recognizable now as a particularly late-nineteenth-century Plato. The Paterian Plato is a figure “fitted” to its intellectual environment.

Pater’s identification with Plato works both ways, as do all the

1. Esp. Grote and Müller (see above, Part Four, sec. 4, n.2).