

## The Unity of the *Lovers*

The pseudo-Platonic *Lovers* (*Amatores*) offers two seemingly ill-coordinated dialectical exchanges on the subject of whether philosophy is a worthwhile pursuit, the contents of which have been characterized as a bewildering “farrago of concepts” (Annas 1985). One unifying interpretation of the dialogue sees its dialectical exchanges as offering a two-pronged attack on the Peripatetics. The first exchange (*Amat.* 132d8-137b1), which critiques the notion that πολυμαθία or “much learning” is the mark of a philosopher, appears to pit a Platonic one-man/one-skill principle of specialization (cf. *Rep.* 369b5-371b11) against the educational theory informing (e.g.) Aristotle’s *Politics* 1282a3-7 and 1337b15-17 (Werner 1912, Carlini 1962, Hutchinson 1997, Männlein-Robert 2005). In the conclusion to the second exchange (*Amat.* 137b1-139a7), Socrates appears to reject the theoretical life championed by Aristotle at (e.g.) *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177a12-1178b32 (Werner 1912). But this interpretation selectively evaluates the ancient evidence associating the Peripatetics with πολυμαθία, while at the same time misconstruing Socrates’ rejection of the theoretical life identified with the life of a dilettante as a rejection of the theoretical life *simpliciter*.

In this paper, I present an alternative unifying interpretation of *Lovers*. Rather than looking to an external unifying focus, such as the author’s purported agenda vis-à-vis the Peripatetics, I look to an internal unifying focus, in the figure of Solon. In the first dialectical exchange, Socrates’ interlocutor appeals to Solon for authority in support of his definition of the philosopher (*Amat.* 133c1-d1). As the quintessential “poet-politician” (Martin 2006; cf. Ker 2000 and Kurke 2011) Solon embodies the wide-learning and civic-mindedness that Socrates’ interlocutor assigns to the philosopher. Yet,

under Socratic examination, this candidate for the philosopher does not possess “measure” in his learning (a Solonic buzz word; cf. fr. 30.26-27 and 31.8-9 G.P.<sup>2</sup> with Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010), and also fails to be useful in an administrative capacity. Thus, the interlocutor’s notion of philosophy fails to measure up to the dual standard set by his own philosophical authority.

This reading of *Lovers* frees the dialogue from a critical lens that looks for inter-school rivalries in post-Platonic philosophical literature, and opens up the possibility of considering other types and formats of intellectual debate within and between philosophical schools. One such format is provided by the dialectical theory outlined in Aristotle’s *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*. In my conclusion, I offer a few suggestions as to how to proceed along this line of inquiry.

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