

D. Ebrey-R. Kraut (Eds). *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Second Edition. Cambridge University Press 2022. 620 pp. \$32.99 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781108457262).

Dealing with a philosophical giant such as Plato is an arduous task, not only because of the extraordinary richness of thought delivered to us in his *Dialogues*, but also because of the inestimable cultural value of his entire production. Philosophers and scholars from all over the world have never ceased to confront them. The literature devoted to him is vast, and the innumerable interpretations of the great Athenian's thought are heterogeneous. We can already find this in the writings of his most brilliant pupil Aristotle, and writing on Plato has perpetuated to this day. Many images of Plato are so antithetical that it is uncomfortable—if not impossible—to form one that is not diametrically opposed to another. In other words, there are as many images of Plato as there are interpretations of his thought given to us over the centuries. Yet it is often the case that interpretations of Plato are not always accompanied by a direct or exhaustive knowledge of his texts, which is why a work of introduction and analysis of the enormous amount of issues in the *Dialogues* can prove necessary for those who approach Plato's works for the first time.

From this point of view, the *Cambridge Companion to Plato* is an indispensable tool for all scholars of Platonic thought or students. Originally published in 1992 and edited by Richard Kraut (Charles and Emma Morrison Professor in the Humanities at Northwestern University), It has now been released in a second edition by the same Kraut along with David Ebrey (Researcher at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin). This second edition is enriched by the presence of new contributions, while the introduction and other contributions published in the first edition have been entirely revised. Plato's output is quite extensive, and the first problem for those dealing for the first time with the study of Plato's work is how to approach the *Dialogues*. A preliminary step, as the editors point out, is to divide the *Dialogues* into three groups: the Socratic dialogues, the middle period dialogues, and the late dialogues. The book is rather voluminous, which is why—since this is a review and not an essay—I will mainly focus on a few key-issues of Plato's philosophy: Plato's Socrates, his theory of ideas, and his theory of politics.

In the study of Plato's philosophy, historical contextualization proves to be of primary importance, something that is discussed by T. H. Irwin in his extensive contribution entitled 'Plato in his Context' (39-81). In fact, Plato did not operate within a philosophical vacuum, but was able to deepen the theses of his predecessors. The questions that Plato addresses at first are those concerning nature and problem of the moral. As Irwin states, while one may not be surprised by the influence of Socrates and Heraclitus—as Aristotle himself recounts in his *Metaphysics*—the influence of Cratylus—also noted by Aristotle—is more surprising. This is to reiterate how the study of the context in which Platonic speculation arose cannot be taken for granted.

Instead, the next essay, written by Leonard Brandwood and entitled 'Stylometry and Chronology' (82-116), is devoted to the problem of sources. As he states in the very opening lines of his contribution 'for a correct understanding of Plato, account needs to be taken to the fact that his philosophical activity spanned some fifty years, during which time certain doctrines underwent considerable changes' (82). For an appropriate understanding of Platonic thought, it proves central



to comprehend in what order Plato wrote his *Dialogues*. Brandwood, in his essay, considers the stylometric method usually used to resolve the question of the order of Plato's *Dialogues*. As is well known, this method consists of analyzing an author's language by going in search of recurring stylistic features. Towards the first half of the 19th century a scholar such as G. Grote had considered any possibility of establishing the chronological sequence of Plato's *Dialogues* vain. Nevertheless, Brandwood says, 'hope was revived with the introduction of the stylistic method by L. Campbell. Observing an increased use of technical terminology in what there were then taken to be Plato's latest works, the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Laws*, he calculated from Ast's *Lexicon* the number of words that each of the twenty-four dialogues had in common exclusively with these three' (83). Of course, Brandwood not only considers the hermeneutical proposals of Grote and Campbell but also those of W. Dittenberg, M. Schanz, W. Lutoslawski, G. Janell, F. Blass, L. Billig and so on.

Another theme which occupied the minds of so many philosophers and historians of philosophy is the image of Socrates that Plato provided us with in his *Dialogues*, especially in the *Apology*. This delicate aspect is considered by Eric Brown in his contribution entitled 'Plato's Socrates and his Conception of Philosophy' (117-145). First of all, as Brown says, 'because Plato presents Socrates as a philosopher and as a deeply admirable human being this character offers a model of what Plato thinks philosophy is' (117). A central point of Plato's Socratic model of philosophy is the love of wisdom and in this regard, Brown asks what kind of wisdom Socrates loves and in what way he loves wisdom. On the first aspect, Brown says that 'big wisdom does not focus narrowly on one kind of work but concerns how to do everything one does—how to live' (120). Concerning the love of wisdom, Socrates identifies the critique as one of its fundamental aspects. Secondly, for Socrates, learning proves to be fundamental: 'While Socrates lacks wisdom and is thus not justified in claiming that he knows about how to live, he rightly takes himself to have acquired better beliefs—to have learned' (127). Finally, Socrates considers of vital importance to live by philosophizing himself and others, but this becomes possible through the combined work of 'exhorting' and 'showing' (cf. 131). Brown's essay is then followed by these significant contributions: Agnes Callard's 'Being Good at Being Bad: Plato's *Hippias Minor*' (146-172), Gail Fine's 'Inquiry in the *Meno*' (173-201), Suzanne Obdrzalek's 'Why *Erōs*' (202-232) and Gábor Betegh's 'Plato on Philosophy and the Mysteries' (233-267).

David Ebrey, in his essay titled 'The Unfolding Account of Forms in the *Phaedo*' (268-297), addresses the problem of forms as it turns out in *Phaedo*. As is well known, Plato's theory of forms is addressed systematically in both the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, and since the *Phaedo* appears prior to the *Republic*, Ebrey considers this Platonic dialogue 'a promising place to look for his account on why they are fundamentally different from ordinary physical objects' (268). And indeed, very important theoretical aspects emerge from the *Phaedo* dialogue, bringing them together to form a comprehensive picture of the entire Platonic metaphysics: the theory of Ideas, theory of Principles, and doctrine of the Demiurge. The step forward that Plato makes in this dialogue consists in not having stopped at the simple definition of Socrates, since the logical procedure is also composed of the demonstration, which in this dialogue is now elevated to an authentic foundation. As Ebrey says, a form 'is what we are looking for when we ask the "what is it?" question' (273); but among its main

characteristics is surely that it is not something perceptible at the sensible level, but also a priori or, as Aristotle calls it, pre-existing knowledge (προϋπαρχούσης γνώσεως). But in such a process, sensible experience obviously proves indispensable, since it stimulates the intellect to become aware of purely noetic determinations, which we draw not from experience but from the very depths of our consciousness. This aspect of the *Phaedo* is of extraordinary importance since what is sensible is no longer considered in a deleterious way, that is, as mere deception or appearance. There is now a significative (and definitive) recognition of ‘what changes,’ of the sensible alongside the Immutable, the pure noetic objects that previously held the title of true Being. Rather, now the existence of two kinds of Being is affirmed, namely: the Being of pure noetic objects and the Being of sensible things.

Richard Kraut, in his contribution entitled ‘The Defense of Justice in Plato's Republic’ (298-327), investigates the problem of justice in connection with the problem of forms. Indeed, the strong and pregnant political motives that can be found in Platonic reflection have as their essential source also dialectics or metaphysics, which certainly constitute its development and justification on the theoretical level. On the other hand, for Plato, Forms are good, which is why Kraut states the following: ‘We must transform our lives by recognizing a radically different kind of good – the Forms – and we must try to incorporate these objects into our lives by understanding, loving, and imitating them, for they are incomparably superior to any other kind of good we can have’ (307). An authentic political theory cannot rest on mere descriptive moves, but instead on a unifying principle of thought. The main merit of Plato's reflection on the state consists in being not so much a political revolution as an intellectual one. In fact, Plato's innovation consisted in his emphasis on causes and first principles, avoiding the need to take his starting point from a particular political constitution, but by thinking about the different forms of government with their corresponding mental attitudes.

Elizabeth Asmis' contribution, entitled ‘Plato on Poetic Creativity: A Revision’ (328-357), follows. Far from being a condemnation of art in absolute terms, Plato's critique of art must be circumscribed to two very specific spheres: logical and historical. The former performs the function of bringing out the more proper character of art that aims at truth; the latter, on the other hand, allows us to delineate the perimeter of the critique that the Athenian philosopher carries out in the *Republic*. The art to which Plato refers and which he criticizes is, in fact, that which had historically manifested itself in Greece. What Plato targets is the poetry of Homer and Hesiod and, more generally, any form of art based on the mere imitation of what is given to us in the sphere of mere sensible appearances (as in the case of the figurative arts).

The next contributions are those Henry Mendell (‘Betwixt and Between: Plato and the Objects of Mathematics,’ 358-398), that of Constance C. Meinwald (‘Another Goodbye to the Third Man,’ 399-432), that of Michael Frede entitled ‘Plato's Sophist on False Statement’ (433-463), that of Emily Fletcher devoted to the problem of cosmology and human nature in the *Timaeus* (464-492), that of Verity Harte entitled ‘The Fourfold Classification and Socrates' Craft Analogy in the *Philebus*’ (493-521).

The volume ends with the contribution by Rachana Kamtekar and Racher Singpurwalla, entitled ‘Laws in Plato's Late Politics’ (522-558), which considers what is generally seen as a paradigm shift in the field of Platonic political reflection. As Kamtekar and Singpurwalla state, ‘it is commonly

thought that Plato turns to law in the late dialogues due to his increased pessimism about the possibility of philosophical rule' (522). However, it should not be thought that in the dialogue *Laws* there was a renouncement of Plato's previous theoretical work, and thus an abandonment of the dialectical foundation in favor of a philosophical-natural and theological one. In fact, one should not overlook the fact that this work —similar to the rest—shows the need for a theoretical justification conducted on the basis of the method of ideas. Kamtekar and Singpurwalla, in this their contribution, analyze the roles played by law in the following Platonic dialogues, *Republic*, *Statesman* and *Laws*, 'focusing on *how* laws conduce to individual virtue and civic unity in each of these dialogues' (523). In Kamtekar and Singpurwalla's opinion, in the *Republic* Plato focuses on institutional legislation, while with the *Statesman* dialogue Plato focuses on 'some standards of what is good, just, and fine for the city as a whole' (533), where in the *Laws* Plato proposes a more concrete model of the city than the highly idealized one present in the *Republic*. In fact, the first model in the *Republic*, therefore, serves as a firm point of support, to whose perfection the politician will turn his gaze to regulate his praxis. It is precisely by virtue of the first model that we are able not only to understand the nature of subsequent models (as in the case of the more concrete model proposed in the *Laws*), but also to evaluate those laws that must approximate the rational model and to evaluate the behavior of a true politician.

In conclusion, this ponderous volume edited by David Ebrey and Richard Kraut not only proves to be a highly valuable tool for scholars of Platonic thought and ancient philosophy, but also an excellent guide for all those students interested in the imperishable fascination of Plato's *Dialogues*.

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