

Timothy Chappell *Reading Plato's Theaetetus*. International Plato Studies, Volume 20. Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academia Verlag 2004. Pp. 246. 48.50 euros (Cloth: ISBN 3-89665-315-6).

Timothy Chappell has produced a new translation of Plato's *Theaetetus*, with running philosophical commentary, in the style of Cornford's *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*. After a general introduction to Plato, Plato's dialogues and the *Theaetetus*, the book divides the dialogue into short sections, each preceded by a brief summary and followed by detailed interpretation and evaluation. Four transitional sections survey long chunks of the dialogue.

Chappell's commentary focuses on whether the failure of the *Theaetetus* to mention explicitly the existence of transcendent forms supports a unitarian or revisionist interpretation of Plato's works. Unitarians like Cornford take the dialogue to argue indirectly that a satisfactory definition of knowledge requires the forms. Revisionists like Owen, Bostock and Burnyeat suppose that Plato has lost confidence in their existence. Chappell defends a variant of Cornford's unitarian interpretation.

On Chappell's account, the overall project of the dialogue is to show the inadequacy of any purely empiricist account of knowledge as constructed solely out of perception. The refutation of Theaetetus' initial identification of knowledge with perception, besides refuting the sophisticated versions of this theory due to Protagoras and Heraclitus, shows that perception lacks the semantic structure required for an object of knowledge. The failure of various attempts to explain how there can be false beliefs indicates the need for an explanation of how beliefs construed as concatenations of sensory impressions have the required semantic structure. Socrates' 'dream theory' at 201d-202d that all things are composed of unknowable but perceptible elements that can only be named is an attempt to provide this explanation through a kind of logical atomism similar to that of Bertrand Russell and the early Wittgenstein. Socrates

objects that it fails to explain properly how knowables are logically constructed from perceptible simples. Nor is it sufficient to pick on one perceptible simple as a distinguishing mark of a knowable.

Chappell develops his interpretation plausibly, with careful attention to the recent scholarly literature in English. (An exception is David Sedley's *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford University Press, 2004), a 'wonderful book' (47) that reached Chappell too late.) One may legitimately wonder how much of the case that knowables need semantic structure is due to Plato and how much is due to Chappell. Since the dialogue is meant to provoke reflection on knowledge, this wonder is not really an objection.

The failure of the *Theaetetus* to mention the forms is of course only relevant to the unitarian-revisionist debate if it is a late dialogue. Chappell accepts without supporting argument the standard 20th century view that it was written after the *Parmenides* and before the *Sophist*, soon after 369 BCE. But Debra Nails shows in *The People of Plato* (Hackett 2002, 276-7) that *Theaetetus* did not suffer his apparently mortal injury reported at 142a-d in 369 BCE, as late daters assume, but in 391 BCE, a date which suggests composition of the *Theaetetus* before Plato had come to postulate transcendent forms.

Despite his care on details, Chappell is sloppy on generalities. He attributes to Plato's Socrates an argument that it is always better to suffer than to do injustice (n. 2), whereas Plato's Socrates always claims more plausibly that it is worse to do injustice than to suffer it. He attributes to Socrates (n.2) the claim (at *Theaetetus* 149a ff.) that he knows nothing, whereas Socrates admits only to having no answers of his own to the questions he asks of others. Chappell's statement of the theory of forms as 'Plato's view that the whole of reality is structured by transcendent abstract objects which impart their qualities to all the other things that exist' (11)

suggests falsely that forms are apprehended by a process of abstraction, that they are efficient causes, that anything that participates in a form shares all its qualities, and that the forms structure everything else (including souls). He defines the theory of recollection (241) as the theory that knowledge (rather than learning) is recollection.

The translation is vigorous and colloquial, but occasionally misleading. At 152c5-6, Chappell represents Socrates as assuming that knowledge is by definition an infallible grasp of what is—even though Socrates said not long before (145e8-146a1) that he cannot grasp sufficiently by himself what knowledge is. Further, ‘infallible’ imports a modal qualification not present in the Greek. Levett more accurately presents the two characteristics as necessary conditions, and renders the second one as truth rather than infallibility. Also misleading is Chappell’s translation of *allodoxia* at 189b ff. as ‘interchange of beliefs’, when what is intended is a substitution in one’s thought of one object for another. Levett’s neologism ‘other-judging’ is happier.

It is not clear who is Chappell’s intended audience. We get a laborious explanation (13), appropriate for complete novices, of the system of referring to passages in Plato by their location in the Stephanus edition. But the exposition of the theory of forms gets less than one sentence (11). And Chappell often alludes without explanation to such advanced matters as Berkeley’s idealism (n. 10), Cartesian scepticism (n. 10), and the *Meno*’s doctrine of recollection (21).

The book is sorely lacking in scholarly paraphernalia. In the margin of his translation, Chappell prints only the Stephanus reference for the start of each of his main paragraphs (170a1, 170a6, 170b7, etc.); as a result, the reader usually cannot tell where a given section of a Stephanus page begins. He does not tell us which edition of the Greek text he is translating, nor does he ever discuss variant readings. He includes in the bibliography neither the volume number

nor the page numbers of journal articles,. There are no indexes. There is a glossary of frequent technical terms and abbreviations, but some items in it are out of alphabetical order; the entry for the theory of forms is even on the wrong page.

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