ridiculous nature of the etymologizing generally or at more specific points (e.g. the discussion of σκληρότης at 434c–435b; see pp. 138–46).

Since my interest in the *Cratylus* is linguistic rather than philosophical, I leave philosophers to debate S.'s interpretation and its philosophical implications. Perhaps I may dwell instead on the fact that if the etymologies are indeed meant seriously, they provide far clearer insight into the etymological science of Plato's day than they do if satirical and unquantifiably exaggerated. Questions, and the possibility of answers, arise. If, as S. argues, Plato thought words were coined by specific individuals, and that etymological decoding was 'cognitive archaeology' (p. 32), does this conception of the point of etymology survive into later tradition, or did it disappear? It is often said that ancient etymologies aim to uncover synchronic relationships between words, not the historical origins of words (e.g. J. Lallot in *Revue de philologie* 3rd series, 65 [1991], 143; P. H. Matthews in G. Lepschy [ed.], *History of Linguistics*, ii [London and New York: Longman], 25); does this idea need rethinking or did etymology become synchronically conceived at some point after Plato? Furthermore, S.'s interpretation opens the possibility that serious study of the *Cratylus* etymologies may yield insights into the alterations early etymologists allowed words to undergo: is it really the case that 'anything goes', or are there any restrictions or at least preferences, such as one may find in at least some Hellenistic and later etymologists' conceptions of alterations or πάθη?

The book is lucidly written and masterfully combines accessibility to readers without Greek with close attention to questions of language and text. Platonic scholars will welcome this careful and learnedly documented exposition of S.'s view on a controversial subject. More general readers will find here a book that well complements reading of the *Cratylus* itself and provides a way into its appreciation.

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THEAETETUS

D. SEDLEY: *The Midwife of Platonism. Text and Subtext in Plato's* Theaetetus. Pp. x + 201. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. Cased, £30. ISBN: 0-19-926703-0.

In this important new book on Plato's *Theaetetus*, David Sedley offers a subtle and original interpretation of the dialogue. Instead of treating it as an aporetic, critical dialogue in which Plato rejects, or at least re-evaluates, his middle-period metaphysical and epistemological doctrines, especially those of the *Republic*, S. proposes to read the *Theaetetus* as furthering the same agenda. His reading offers a story about what we are supposed to learn from puzzling through the hard problems and arguments of the *Theaetetus*. It thus stands in contrast with some of the most important recent commentaries on the *Theaetetus*, such as those by Cooper, McDowell, Burnyeat, and Bostock,[1] which are methodologically less confident about what conclusions we should draw from the dialogue as a whole.

[1]J. M. Cooper, *Plato's Theaetetus* (PhD Dissertation Thesis, Harvard, 1967; New York and London, 1990); J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973); M. F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis, 1990); D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1988).

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The *Theaetetus* looks, on the surface, like a throwback to the early aporetic, 'Socratic' dialogues, such as the *Euthyphro* or the *Laches*, in which a number of answers to the question 'What is X?' are proposed and rejected. Of course, no one now would place the *Theaetetus* in this group: as S. notes, (1) the question 'what is knowledge [*epistēmē*]?' is not typical of the virtue-oriented early dialogues; (2) the treatment of the question is notably more sophisticated and sustained; and (3) stylometric analyses put the dialogue in the company of late middle-period dialogues like the *Parmenides*. Nonetheless, its aporetic nature, and the fact that it contains no direct, explicit reference or sign of commitment to metaphysical doctrines such as the theory of Forms, has suggested to some that Plato is here critically rethinking those doctrines: everything is back on the table for reconsideration. S. rejects this as a guiding principle of interpretation.

First, S. takes seriously Plato's celebrated image of Socrates as 'midwife' of philosophy in the *Theaetetus*, and sees the *Theaetetus* as Plato's demonstration that the most successful of Socrates' attempts to deliver healthy offspring of a pregnant subject was with Plato himself: (i) Socrates is barren, and ignorant of the main tenets of Platonism, but (ii) elements of his views about knowledge (especially those deriving from his self-proclaimed maieutic expertise) point the way forward to those ideas, which were offspring of Plato's delivered with the help of his midwifery. This helps to explain why the theory of Forms is suppressed: Plato is attempting to show that 'as Socrates' philosophical heir, he has not betrayed the legacy entrusted to him' (p. 10), while maintaining historical fidelity by keeping the figure of Socrates in the dialogue innocent of Plato's own mature philosophical views. Furthermore, there are two levels of midwifery (and hence two levels of dialectic): one internal to the dialogue, on Theaetetus, which fails, and an external one which invites the reader to see what Theaetetus and Socrates do not. Thus, the aporetic nature of the dialogue does not imply that Plato has changed his mind about any of his central doctrines, and the astute reader has to keep in mind at all times the various levels on which the discussion is being conducted.

Second, we are meant to see how Platonic views waiting in the wings would help to solve the numerous problems that Socrates and his interlocutors encounter in their search to understand what knowledge is. The solutions needed, according to S., are precisely the classic Platonist doctrines which one finds in the *Republic*, and in later dialogues such as the *Timaeus*, most notably, a two-world metaphysics and epistemology, according to which there is a world of becoming (the material universe) distinct from the world of being (that of the Forms), where the former is grasped (only) by opinion (*doxa*) and the latter is grasped (only) by knowledge (*epistēmē*). At the same time, S. develops the idea that the *Sophist* and other later dialogues contain important innovations that help to solve the problems raised in the *Theaetetus*, in ways that may have been prepared by Socrates but go beyond anything that he could have seen on his own.

S.'s solution to the question of the *Theaetetus* was inspired by his work on the ancient traditions concerning Plato's epistemology. He is in the vanguard of the recent trend of following the lead of the ancients on Plato; for example, he has published an edition of the *Anonymous Commentary on the Theaetetus*, with an Italian translation, and we can see in the book under review some of the main philosophical and scholarly highlights that S. takes from his work on this fragmentary treatise. What unites the ancient commentators on Plato's epistemology is that they offered unitarian interpretations of Plato and aimed to reconcile apparently inconsistent passages in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, and

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Timaeus on the question of Plato's view about the nature of knowledge.[2] In this book, S. comes down in favor of the Middle Platonist 'object-related' interpretation, such as is found in Alcinous' *Didaskalos* (as opposed to the Academics' skeptical interpretation of Plato's epistemology and Anonymous' 'subject-related' interpretation); this takes the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* as the canonical texts for understanding Plato's view of knowledge. According to this interpretation, knowledge is to be distinguished from opinion by the kind of objects they are directed towards: knowledge can only be acquired concerning the Forms, and as long as one directs one's attentions to the sensible world alone, one will never be able to get past opinion or *doxa*.

S.'s book is not a line-by-line commentary; it offers a blueprint for a reading of the *Theaetetus* rather than that reading itself with all the necessary details. Thus, for example, in the final section where Socrates investigates the definition of knowledge as true judgement with an account by examining three different possible senses of 'account' (*logos*), S. is perhaps too quick to conclude that the failure of the three senses of *logos* to give us a viable definition shows us that knowledge and judgement are necessarily directed towards different kinds of objects, and that the object-related interpretation is the only way to go. He may be right—but first one would want to eliminate other options, e.g. that there are other interpretations of *logos* to consider, or that the proposed definition may work if they identify and eliminate implicit and faulty assumptions about what kind of things have accounts. Even so, his reading of the *Theaetetus* as an indirect argument for the theory of Forms points us forward in a new and exciting direction.

Of course, everything new turns out to be old. S.'s reading is a descendent of Cornford's approach to the *Theaetetus*, which fell out of favor in the late 1960s and early 1970s—and indeed of the Middle Platonist interpreters to whom S. has drawn our attention.[3] But the time may be ripe for a reconsideration and return to the possibility that the *Theaetetus* as a whole demonstrates how epistemological inquiry goes wrong when coupled with a materialist Forms-free metaphysics—see, for example, the 1999 Duke University PhD dissertation by Gokhan Adalier, 'Materialism in Plato's Theaetetus'.[4] S. provides a powerful case for a fresh new reading of the *Theaetetus* not as an aporetic dialogue or one that is critical of Plato's middle-period metaphysics, but rather as showing how things go wrong when Forms are absent from the picture.

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[2]Cf. David Sedley, 'Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*', in C. Gill and M. M. McCabe (edd.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 79–103.

[3]F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge. The* Theaetetus *and the* Sophist *of Plato Translated with a Commentary* (London, 1935).

[4]See also G. Adalier, 'The Case of Theaetetus', *Phronesis* 46 (2001), 1–37.

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