such intelligence and coherence deserves better than the piecemeal raiding that is the usual fate of such collections.

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PLATO'S THINKING

M. DIXSAUT: *Platon et la Question de la Pensée*. (Études Platoniciennes 1.) Pp. 330. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2000. Paper, frs. 170. ISBN: 2-7116-1466-2.

There is no scholar of Plato who would not profit enormously from working through the highly original and thoughtful essays collected in this volume. Topics include irony, phronesis, the Sun analogy in the *Republic*, ancient etymology, and the terms *ousia*, *eidos*, and *idea* in the *Phaedo*; in addition, the extraordinarily nuanced and perceptive studies of the *Sophist*, which comprise almost half the volume, will prove indispensable to the student of that dialogue. The essays have all been previously and separately published, though Dixsaut has revised and rewritten them for the present occasion. Despite this diversity of topic and provenance, the essays cohere remarkably well since each sheds light on the central question announced by the volume's title: what is 'thinking' for Plato? D. maintains (p. 12) that this question is distinct from, and more important than, the subordinate question: what is knowledge?

Since it is not possible to discuss each chapter in detail here, I will confine myself to outlining how they respond to the question that unifies the volume, though admittedly at the cost of grossly oversimplifying D.'s careful analyses. Thinking, according to D., requires a recognition of the distance that separates it from what is thought (pp. 38–9), i.e. thinking is characterized by *irony*, where irony is the 'manner of freeing oneself from all content, all positivity, whether empirical or ideal' (p. 19). Thinking is essentially *dialectical*, i.e. a questioning of, and responding to, oneself (pp. 53–4). While ordinary thinking seeks to suppress itself in an opinion (p. 57), philosophical thinking seeks to 'ébranler la conviction' and cannot be reduced to its propositions (p. 70). Thinking is the questioning and desiring reminiscence of what something is in itself (*ousia*; pp. 79–80), rather than the knowledge of metaphysical Forms (*eidos*). It is *phronesis* in a not completely un-Aristotelian sense, i.e. it has to do with the contingent and the particular as well as with the eternal (pp. 109–10). Thinking is not related to the Good as to a metaphysical object or principle outside and beyond itself; instead, the Good is understood only within the exercise of dialectic, being both its cause and a power (pp. 128, 146–7). Unlike etymology, which seeks simply to explicate a meaning already given in the name, thinking instead seeks the thing itself through the *logos* (pp. 173–4). Affirming the errancy and multiplicity of *logos* as the only way of getting at the truth, though a perilous, multidirectional, and interminable way (pp. 184–8, 210), thinking is opposed to the naive Parmenidean *logos* (*muthos*) that wishes to exclude errancy as if it were nothing but error (pp. 183, 185). Seeing negative expressions (not-beautiful, not-just, etc.) as meaningful appeals to inquire and examine (pp. 247–8), thinking is opposed to the 'positivism' that reduces all meaningful negative expressions to positive ones and thus refuses to recognize any negation within being itself (pp. 238, 269–70). While thinking is discursive, it is not

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propositional: propositions can offer only images of the truth, while the truth itself can be neither affirmed nor denied, but only questioned and presupposed by questioning (p. 294).

Both as interpretations of Plato and as characterizations of philosophical thinking, the above claims are perceptive and provocative. What is missing from the volume, however, is any clear account of the relation between thinking and knowledge. D.'s reading of the *Phaedo* argues that the dialogue keeps interrogative thinking and metaphysical knowledge distinct, but does not explain how in this case they are related. Likewise, while in Chapter 1 D. argues that the *noēsis* in which the Divided Line of the *Republic* culminates is not intuitive knowledge, she never explains what exactly it is, and how it transcends that thinking called *dianoia.* And if philosophical thinking is essentially negative and interminable, as D. often suggests, what kind of knowledge could it possibly result in?

Given that D. repeatedly contrasts her dialectical reading of Plato's texts to the non-dialectical readings of many scholars trained in analytical philosophy, it is also surprising that she pays as little attention as they do, if not even less, to the characteristics these texts have as dialogues. In interpreting what is said in a dialogue, she gives no importance to who says it and to whom, nor to the situation in which it is said. Rather than interpret dialogues, she interprets passages taken out of dialogues. In so doing, D. writes as if the dialogues did not essentially differ from treatises and as if the main speaker, whether Socrates, Parmenides, or the Stranger, were simply Plato's mouthpiece. (Yet in her important book, *Le Naturel Philosophe* [Paris, 1985], D. explicitly rejects both assumptions [see pp. 28, 127–8], though there too her actual manner of interpreting the texts gives no evidence of such a rejection. Contrary to what D. claims in the present collection [p. 53 n. 1], a conception of thinking as only interior dialogue would not require for its expression anything like Plato's dramatic dialogues: the form of a meditation would suit it much better.) The reason is presumably D.'s argument that while thinking for Plato is essentially dialectical in the sense defined above, it is not essentially dialogue in the sense of communication or exchange between two people (pp. 50–4). D. even goes so far as to maintain that genuine dialogue, if this means thinking in common, is impossible: 'One does not speak *with* the other unless one stops thinking . . .' (p. 55). But might not speaking with others provoke in one questions that one would otherwise have never asked oneself? And might not the very effort to communicate one's responses enable one to regard them from a more critical and objective perspective? In other words, while perhaps not considering dialogue essential to thinking *per se*, Plato may have considered it essential to genuinely radical, i.e. philosophical, thinking. Furthermore, Plato's dialogues might suggest that the only criterion we have for determining whether or not what we think about justice, goodness, etc., is true is our ability to reach genuine agreement with others. It is then only in a trivial sense that we cannot think with others: we can do so by, in our thinking, continually provoking and responding to each other, sharing the same destination, and being able to determine only together whether or not we have reached this destination.

Whatever the limitations, D.'s discussions of specific texts and problems all make an important contribution and are never less than stimulating and illuminating. The volume exhibits in practice that philosophical thinking which is its subject. More than a work of Platonic scholarship, it is a work of Platonic thinking.

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