

BOOK REVIEW

Plato's Theaetetus as a Second Apology. By ZINA GIANNOPOULOU. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 205. Hardcover, Price, \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-19-969529-4.

Aside from the introduction (pp.1-19) and conclusion (pp.184-188), Giannopoulou's book treats topics in the dramatic order of *Theaetetus*. The central thesis is that *Theaetetus* is "a philosophically sophisticated elaboration of *Apology* that successfully differentiates Socrates from sophists," and "core elements of Socrates' philosophical life as defended in *Apology*" are "integral to the interpretation of *Theaetetus* as a whole." (2) In well-written and well-edited clear prose, the arguments are delineated without overly taxing notation, cross-referencing, or confusing versions and iterations. In addition to a more direct philosophical approach, significant attention is paid to mining "literary" aspects of the dialogue such as the frame, proleptic readings, and characterization. There is an index of names, topics, and Greek terms (transliterated) as well as a 10-page bibliography. Alternative views and other scholars are mentioned mostly in passing as supporters or dissenters or given credit for ideas, not engaged with in great detail. The Greekless reader will have no problem with anything here (occasional philological arguments are made via single transliterated Greek words that are always translated). No texts outside of Plato receive any attention.

Among questionable aspects of the central thesis identified above are: (1) Protagoras is the only "sophist" in *Theaetetus* (unless you count Heraclitus, but then one wonders whether "sophist" simply means "intellectual"—not unlikely—in which case the book's thesis is even more nebulous: surely Socrates was an intellectual if simply by his intellectual denial of being a "sophist?"); (2) other dialogues distinguish Socrates from "sophists" and their rhetorician relatives (e.g. *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus*, *Republic I*); (3) sophists are absent from a good deal of *Theaetetus*: Giannopoulou, however, sees Protagoras as implicitly present in the refutations

of the 2nd and 3rd definitions of knowledge, because they are relevant to Protagoras' positions, but one must point out that any argument for coherent thought or stable things whatsoever is relevant to them, and so Protagoras is present everywhere such things are posited and not in those parts of *Theaetetus* in particular; (4) if Socrates "enacts the distinction" from a sophist in the second and third definition of knowledge in *Theaetetus*, he also does so in other dialogues that do not mention sophists, and so one must ask what justifies singling out *Theaetetus* as a whole?

As for 'Socraticism' and the *Theaetetus* being a 'second *Apology*', these two dialogues are not the only Platonic works in which "Socraticism" figures centrally: the disavowal of knowledge, the protreptic to philosophy, the concern with Socrates' place in Athens and litigation, the elenchus and its accompanying attitudes toward inquiry, Socratic piety, adumbrations and hints at Plato's philosophical developments in metaphysics and epistemology among other areas, ending in aporia—all figure in other dialogues, and so they do not make *Theaetetus* in particular a "second *Apology*." In all, Giannopoulou's observations do not do enough to justify or precisely explain the nebulous thesis that *Theaetetus* is "a second *Apology*": what is *Apology* and what it means to be "a second" one are not examined critically, but rather taken for granted and explained piecemeal without explicit justification. To be sure, Giannopoulou acknowledges these concerns in the introduction, but too much work is done by staking claims and stating the differences between Giannopoulou's interpretation and those of Sedley, Burnyeat, or others, and too little is done in the way of refining or exploring or carefully supporting those claims, which deserve much more than the bare limning out of arguments provided.

For instance, Giannopoulou submits (6) that Socrates in *Theaetetus* is fashioned from his defense in *Apology*, centrally his midwifery and piety. They, however, could come from *Euthyphro*. More generally, midwifery could have come from the whole array of aporetic dialogues and the repeated disavowals of knowledge. No space is devoted to the unique fruitfulness of the *Apology-Theaetetus* pairing (it is obviously fruitful: just not uniquely so).

Another instance: we are told that the Protagoras-Socrates confrontation "stages" the Socrates-sophists distinction (10-11), and is "compelling" because (1) Protagoras' measure doctrine challenges the notion of

expert knowledge, (2) “Protagoras’ denial of falsity in *Theaetetus* undermines the intelligibility of Socrates’ project in *Apology*,” (3) Protagorean elevation of human wisdom clashes with Socrates’ assertion of paramount divine wisdom in *Apology*, and (4) Socrates reveals the absurdity of Protagoras’ claim to be a teacher of wisdom. But none of that explains why we should see Protagoras as a representative sophist rather than an individual or why *Protagoras* or *Gorgias* or *Euthydemus* don’t fit the bill of “second *Apology*” just as well as *Theaetetus*.

Perhaps the most important question is why we should worry so much about the distinction between Socrates and sophists and why that should be central to a “second *Apology*”? It is of historical interest and likely important at his trial, but it was only one aspect of many issues in *Apology*. Giannopoulou explicitly disavows any historical position as well as any position on the order of the dialogues’ composition. For us, then, philosophically, or culturally, what is the payoff to the differentiation? There is a much bigger payoff to reading *Theaetetus* than adding more to the heap of material in defense of Socrates and knowing that he really was not like the other sophists. Protagoras too is much more interesting as an individual than as a representative of a group of rather diverse intellectuals.

That said, the book contains much more than the loosely woven and questionable central thesis of the title and is worth reading for its astute insights into many passages as well as because there are not enough treatments of the dialogue as a whole, which is large-ish and unwieldy. The insights are, however, spread throughout, and are not brought together into broader arguments or positions. In all, scholars interested in particular parts of *Theaetetus* will undoubtedly want to and have to consult Giannopoulou, because she has written a highly intelligent philosophical and literary commentary on *Theaetetus*. Advanced students too will find it a sophisticated worthwhile way into scholarship on *Theaetetus*.

JACQUES BAILLY

The University of Vermont, jacques.bailly@uvm.edu