

Introduction

This book consists of a selection of papers on Plato's *Theaetetus* presented at the *Third International Spring Plato Seminar*, 21–22 May 2018, Facultad de Filosofía, Universidad Complutense de Madrid/Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, along with three papers by other authors who were invited to contribute to the volume (D. Sedley, M. Boeri and F. Trabattoni). After previous seminars on two Eleatic dialogues, the *Sophist* (2009) and the *Statesman* (2016), the selected Proceedings of which have been published as the first two volumes of this series, it was time for a third seminar, on the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue which has proved problematic from the very beginnings of Platonic exegesis, and continues to tax philosophers and philologists to this day. Its aporetic implications, date of composition, and attribution by Socrates of various doctrines to philosophers such as Heraclitus and Protagoras, along with a refutation of them, have also been the object of lengthy controversy.

The aim of the seminar was, like that of the previous ones, the promotion of Plato studies in Spain within the framework of discussions among a number of international scholars of distinction in the field, while at the same time looking afresh at one of Plato's most philosophically enigmatic dialogues. The resulting volume consists of papers by scholars from Spain (Lisi, Vallejo Campos, Curnis, Ibáñez-Puig, Bossi), France (Narcy), Italy (Ferrari, Trabattoni), Argentina (Marcos de Pinotti, Mársico), Brazil (Araújo), Chile (Boeri) and the Anglo-Saxon orbit (Sedley, Tarrant, Gonzalez, Robinson).

The papers fall into five categories, which attempt to follow the order of the subjects as they are presented in the dialogue: 1. an introductory section, consisting of papers that focus on two characters, one on stage and one behind the scene, Socrates and Plato; 2. a section focused on methodological strategies and dialectic; 3. a number of papers tackling the question of subject and object of perception in the world of flux; 4. some discussion of knowledge and thinking; and 5. three papers on the dialogue's reception.

The volume opens with a short paper by D. Sedley, which, based on his view that a subtext of the *Theaetetus* is that Socrates was the midwife of Plato's own mature philosophy, sets out to make this hypothesis further credible by cataloguing several more authorial self-references in the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Charmides* and *Parmenides*.

In the same section, M. Narcy attempts to show that Socrates' disavowal of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* is no longer as sincere as it was in Plato's aporetic dialogues: in the *Theaetetus* it has become a teaching technique, as Socrates admits at the turning-point of the dialogue (185e). What Socrates is now able to

teach is not only the theory of knowledge he had developed in the *Republic* but also, he maintains, the ontology that the Stranger will put forward in the *Sophist*. What hinders him from teaching them to Theaetetus is his persistent reluctance to be overtly didactic.

The second section opens with a paper by G. Marcos de Pinotti devoted to showing that, not only does the refutation of universal flux in the *Theaetetus* prepare the ground for a number of ontological innovations in the *Sophist*, but it also appeals to a refutation strategy, used profusely in the latter dialogue, which consists in demonstrating inconsistencies between what opponents say and how they present what they say. The key to the refutation strategy is thus the *factum* of language. The philosopher, rather than reforming language in accordance with his theory, gets language to reveal the nature of things. The author concludes that Plato's attitude towards flux theorists shifts from negative criticism to re-appropriation, and demonstrates, by his use of the method of hypothesis and refutation, his fidelity to the Socratic legacy.

A. Vallejo Campos examines the similarities between Socrates' use of dialectic in our dialogue and Aristotle's concept of dialectic as expounded in the *Topics*. He relates the practice of the Socratic *elenchus* in the *Theaetetus* to the program of Plato's dialectic in the *Republic*, where the dialectician must find his way 'through all attempts to refute his theory'. The refutation of the doctrines attributed to Heraclitus and Protagoras are interpreted as a positive *elenchus* that demonstrates the validity of Plato's position in the ontology and epistemology of the *Republic*.

In the third section, we offer some papers on the problematic aspects of perception in the context of the theory of flux. F. Lisi defends the view that there is no refutation of the theory, but that it is intentionally intertwined with similar theories of other philosophers, and he offers evidence from the *Timaeus* (and the *Laws*) which proves that this theory is genuinely Platonic. He also argues that the doctrine propounded as Protagorean does not belong to him.

B. Bossi attempts to demonstrate that, strictly speaking, Socrates does not seem to refute Theaetetus' first 'definition' of knowledge as 'perception'. As the boy is aware of the fact that knowledge deals with universals and must be rigorously proven, she argues that his assumed incapacity to give birth to a positive outcome seems to be linked to Socrates' ability to take his vague answers for other doctrines he deliberately attempts to refute. If so, Theaetetus does not necessarily mean that knowledge is the same as 'sense'-perception but that it implies the 'grasping' of the nature of what is known, a conception which would not clash with the soul's knowledge of common properties.

According to F. Trabattoni, who proposes a fresh interpretation of the so-called ‘self-refutation argument’, the Protagoras of the dialogue does not present his thesis in a qualified way (he never says that it is true *for him*) but refers to it as the Truth without qualifications (166c–d). But how are we to decide, within the Protagorean world, which meta-*doxa* is true and which is false? In the absence of something better than *doxa* itself, the author claims that quantitative considerations are all we have. But these considerations certify that everyone but Protagoras and his followers thinks that he is wrong. If, however, Protagoras is not refuted from a logical point of view, Socrates argues on different grounds that ordinary men in the city believe that some opinions are more stable than others and possess a degree of validity that transcends the constant changeability of things.

In his paper, M.D. Boeri argues that Plato does not limit his view of what knowledge is to the theoretical sphere, but that he is also concerned with stressing the connections between the theoretical and practical realms. He also suggests that Plato noted (and to some extent endorsed) the view that no one can know better than oneself what one is perceptually experiencing when one is experiencing it. If this is right, Plato, even when rejecting the thesis that knowledge is perception, somehow favors Protagoras’ relativist view (every *doxa* is true *for* the person whose *doxa* it is), and, understood in this way, at this specific point the *homo mensura* thesis seems to contain a measure of truth.

The section closes with a paper by X. Ibáñez-Puig, who focuses on the humorous educational role that Socrates plays in the dialogue, when he appeals to Theaetetus’ ‘taste’ by using ‘encantations’, rather than by appealing to his intellectual powers to judge properly. Though it may seem that the wise resemble their doctrines and their disciples resemble their teachers, the author observes that materialists cannot account for the ‘invisible’ process of learning, and Heracliteans cannot have disciples, for, according to them, there is no doctrine to be taught. On the other hand, the author observes, Socrates is not made responsible for the character of Alcibiades, and Plato’s best disciple (Aristotle) did not accept his most relevant doctrine. He concludes with a reflection on the way the so-called ‘humanities’ have been gradually dissolved, thanks to the corrosive effect of ‘our’ Protagoreanism.

Part four is devoted to knowledge and thinking. It opens with a paper by T.M. Robinson, who observes that soul in our dialogue continues to be thought of as intellect (*dianoia*), or the ‘intellective *part* (*meros*)’ of soul which it was in the *Phaedo* and *Republic* (and also in the *Timaeus*, which he dates earlier in composition than the *Theaetetus*). Missing, however, is any reference to the doctrine of Forms and the theory of knowledge which went hand in hand with it. A possible

reason for this, he suggests, can be found in the dramatic placement of the dialogue in the days just before Socrates' trial and death. As for soul, Socrates (Plato) is not recorded as ever having engaged in a dialogue that specifically attempted to define it, and the multiplicity of notions of it which underlie his attempts in the *Phaedo* to prove its immortality suggests that he would have had as much difficulty coming up with a complete and exact definition of it as he had experienced for a lifetime trying to define Forms.

In the next chapter, C. Araújo calls our attention to the risk of interpreting the aviary model on the basis of various Aristotelian assumptions concerning its reading. The author shows that the description of dispositional knowledge as learning from oneself, i.e., as the specification of items from previously known kinds, is incompatible with Aristotle's notion of potential knowledge, since it involves a power of selection of the right items (which would not correspond to the activation of an item of potential knowledge in Aristotle's sense); individuation of items are learnt in general (not simply updated of a latent item of memory); and inquiry and learning (not just knowing) are involved. Socrates dismisses the model, because the knowledge of an item cannot be the explanation of a mistake concerning it (199d2). Araújo offers three arguments against its cogency, emphasizing that mistakes should be explained as a failure in knowing how to select an item, rather than not having knowledge of it. She also responds to the objection that the model leads to a regress regarding truth-makers by arguing that Socrates' midwifery turns the dialogue into a performative argument against the objection, for cross-examination provides truth-makers.

F. Gonzalez observes that there is little agreement among scholars about what exactly 'dialectic' is, and finds it controversial whether not only dialectic, which can be and has been in the modern period understood as a method one can employ by oneself, but also *dialogue* with others is indispensable to the attainment of philosophical knowledge. He reports that some have recognized Plato's commitment to such a view, though with puzzlement; others have denied altogether or greatly qualified such a commitment. In his paper, the author turns to the *Theaetetus* to show not only that philosophical thinking requires conversation with others but also why. Given the lack of an expert to serve as a measure of truth and falsity concerning the topics philosophy examines, and given the unacceptability of the Protagorean thesis that each individual's perception is that measure, Gonzalez claims that dialogue is the only measure we can appeal to. According to him, all the proposed definitions of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* fail because they all abstract from dialogue, while in their very act of examination offering an illustration of dialectical knowing.

F. Ferrari understands that, contrary to what certain interpreters would appear to believe, the aporetic profile of the dialogue does not depend in the least on the lack of a ‘Platonic’ answer to the question of the nature of knowledge, but on the maieutic nature of the dialogue. The author argues that, while operating within an aporetic context, Plato still provides some insights that point towards the way out of the aporia. The thesis he wishes to put forward is that in the discussion that follows the formulation of Theaetetus’ third answer, the one identifying knowledge with true doxa accompanied by logos, Plato provides some meta-epistemological indications by which he aims to outline the general traits that an object must possess in order to prove genuinely knowable.

In the closing section devoted to the reception of the *Theaetetus*, C. Mársico claims that Plato wrote his works in the context of a strong dialogical environment. In her paper she explores the traces of the discussion with Antisthenes which are present in the dream passages of the *Theaetetus*. She provides a novel interpretation of the relationship between Antisthenes and Plato, of the general sense of the *Theaetetus*, and of the Platonic view of the notion of knowledge, which could illuminate his overall philosophy.

According to H. Tarrant, evidence suggests that the New Academy made considerable use of the *Theaetetus* to support their policy of suspension of judgment. Areas included linguistic details, use of argument for and against, and final indecision. Close inspection finds that the dialogue contains high rates of some (but not all) of the language seemingly noticed by the New Academy, and is often surprisingly reminiscent of the *Meno* and the *Cratylus* in these respects. However, the author claims that this language is usually integrated with midwife-style examination of Theaetetus, other sections being virtually free of it. This strongly suggests the existence of different layers of material within them.

M. Curnis closes the volume with a study of the indirect tradition of the *Theaetetus*, which allows readers to establish which parts of the dialogue affected the school programs of Late Antiquity or the environments of Byzantine erudition, oriented above all towards the λόγος μείζων of the last part, that is, the portrait of the philosopher in relation to the city. The author explores the coincidences of many textual passages, which reappear in the humanistic anthological tradition, confirming the consistency of the reading choices throughout all the Middle Ages. He extends the philological comparison among variants to the intertitles of the important Berlin papyrus, which contains an anonymous commentary on the dialogue and constitutes the starting document of the ancient exegetical tradition on Plato.

The Seminar gave us the chance to participate in some very stimulating discussion sessions, and to dine and socialize in a friendly atmosphere. We thank everyone most warmly for their contributions to the meeting's success.

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