

problem of knowledge which Plato had identified and the Cynic Diogenes of Sinope was clearly living what he saw as a Socratic life in accordance with nature: Juvenal later (13.122) described the Cynics as 'Stoics without tunics'. The splitting of the Platonic tradition and the tensions between the different schools of Scepticism, Platonism and Stoicism is well shown in the career and work of Antiochus of Ascalon, with whom this chapter closes.

The third chapter looks at Platonism in the Imperial Age and the competing influences of Pythagoreanism and Stoicism – as well as the influence of Aristotle in an age when philosophy became 'a commentary on authoritative texts' (p. 87), although this textual exegesis in no way inhibited the development of original thought. Platonism moved its focus towards theology and the three principles of God, the Forms and matter. 'Live according to nature' became 'assimilate oneself to God' (p. 101). There are some fascinating points here concerning the problems of Fate and determinism: some Platonists coined the idea of 'conditional fate' (rather like the Stoic Zeno who used this argument to a thieving slave who protested that he was fated to steal: 'and to get flogged' was his reply (Diogenes Laertius 7.23)). 'Pythagorizing Platonists' brought their own (mathematical) take on Platonic thought in general (and the *Timaeus* in particular) and sought to establish an 'ecumenical' theology which would create a single system out of the many paths by which men seek God.

The final chapter looks at Neoplatonism in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Plotinus seems to have united the first principle as Good and God and the One, although his concept of the One had already been contested in the 'third man argument' found in Plato's *Parmenides* which shows how a transcendent being cannot generate a multiplicity of *realia*. Bonazzi neatly summarises Plotinus' answer to this dilemma (pp. 140–142) and shows that the Forms (which were divine thoughts for the middle Platonists) were the object and the subject of divine cognition for Plotinus. The human soul remains a mystery: Iamblichus thought we are our souls and that our souls unite us with the world of Forms, but also that we are 'fallen souls' and that the aim of human life is to rediscover our true divine nature, to rid ourselves of passions and to 'be god' by the exercise of contemplative virtues.

The book ends with two appendices: one on Platonism and politics, looking at Cicero and Julian – but oddly not at the tyrannicide Brutus who was an adherent of Antiochus of Ascalon (see on this Sedley *JRS* 87 (1997)) – and one on Platonism and Christianity, showing how the tensions between these dominant world-views ended up in a philosophical rapprochement in thinkers such as Boethius. The book has a generous bibliography and a brief general index.

The book is not an easy read, and the translator clearly lacks a full idiomatic grasp of English, making what is already difficult unnecessarily so. Sentences ramble on and jargon (e.g. 'the eidetic paradigm' p. 108) is used without explanation. The book is not aimed at students unacquainted with the technical language of ancient philosophy, as is shown in a sentence such as: 'Longinus drew on the well-known Stoic theory of *lekta*, which entailed a distinction between the act of thinking and the propositional content of thought, which is self-subsistent' (p. 93). No native English speaker would have written sentences such as: 'is he (Antiochus) the last representative of the great Hellenistic season . . . ?' (p. 66) or 'These are not trifle variations' (p. 9n.20) or the bizarre and misplaced use of 'too' in 'the very possibility of considering matter too to be a principle' (p. 94), and so on. The translator does not know that Anglophone scholars call L. Cornelius Sulla 'Sulla' while Italians call him 'Silla' – so here he

is called 'Silla' three times in two pages (75–6). It is a great pity that such an important, stimulating and authoritative book has been let down by its publishers.

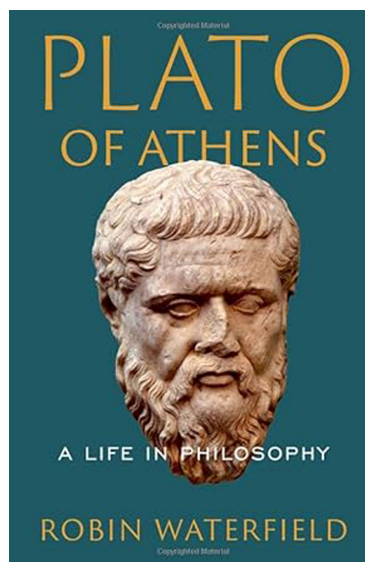
doi:10.1017/S2058631023000788

## Plato of Athens: A Life in Philosophy

Waterfield (R.), Pp. xxvi + 255, ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Cased, £21.99, US\$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-756475-2.

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Nobody is better qualified to write this book than Robin Waterfield. He has published excellent translations of many of Plato's dialogues; and as the author of some wonderfully accessible books on Greek history he also has the knack of setting the work inside the life inside the times. He does not talk down to the reader, but neither does he assume any prior knowledge (of Greek, Greek History or Philosophy). The voluminous bibliography at the end of this book suggests that the

book could have been ten times the length; and it is to the author's great credit that he wears his immense scholarship so lightly. Problems in reading and interpreting this (sometimes difficult) author are made part of the excitement of studying him.

Plato certainly lived in 'interesting times'. His life straddled seven decades of traumatic history as Greece went through the terrors of war and revolution. It is easy to see why Plato devoted so much energy to writing about politics when everything in the political arena seemed to be up for grabs and where empires could rise and fall within a heartbeat. The steamy world of Sicilian politics (as encountered by Plato in his three visits to the island) is vividly recreated here as Waterfield narrates the philosopher's fraught attempts to inject philosophy into Syracusan politics. Waterfield deals sensibly and briskly with some of the legends about the man which have accumulated – was 'Plato' a nickname? (No). Was he gay? (No more than any other man of his class at the time). Did Plato have to run into hiding abroad after the execution of Socrates in 399? (No). Did Chaerephon go to the Delphic oracle to ask if Socrates was the wisest of men? (Probably not). Pythagoras, we learn, did not even invent Pythagoras' theorem (p. 113).

Plato famously set up his Academy in Athens where public lectures were available and no fees charged. Students had to pass an entrance exam which looked for moral rather than merely intellectual excellence, and Waterfield neatly contrasts Plato's Academy with the rival school of Isocrates: this latter was more like a conservatoire where technique was pushed with a view to success rather than the Platonic quest for disinterested knowledge. In the Academy there was a heavy emphasis on maths (including astronomy) to be pursued by reasoning (rather than mechanics) and there was no dogmatic Platonist orthodoxy to be ruthlessly enforced. The big names who worked there disagreed with Plato – a lot. That was the whole point.

Cicero complains (*Letters to Atticus* 2.1.8) that Cato 'speaks as if he were in the *Republic* of Plato, and not on the dung heap of Romulus' and the possibility of applying higher philosophy in the grimy world of society was one which haunted Plato for much of his life, and especially in his late writings and in his visits to South Italy and Sicily. In Croton he met the followers of Pythagoras where he had what Waterfield calls 'an aha moment' (p. 116) as he saw that philosophers really could be political leaders. In Syracuse Plato sought to make his follower Dion into his agent and so influence the rulers Dionysius I and II towards enlightened rule within an agreed framework of constitutional laws. Plato was surely right to insist that 'in states that lack an authentic ruler . . . law must be sovereign' (p. 193), but things were not simple. The new ruler Dionysius II did not think he needed the moral education offered and even ended up outsmarting Plato in a complex blackmail concerning Dion who had been banished by the ruler on specious grounds of treachery but who ended up making a dramatic military comeback. The ruler was impressed by Plato – and for a time his court was awash with philosophy—but his dedication to philosophy was 'no more than skin-deep, like a suntan' (Plato *Seventh Letter* 340d).

The early 'aporetic' dialogues are usually seen to be testing to destruction the knowledge of 'experts' and end with something of a shoulder-shrug, while the late works (such as *Timaeus* and *Laws*) can be dense and remote. It is the 'middle dialogues' which many find the most rewarding, and Waterfield is right to state that this string of works (including *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*) 'constitute probably the most famous sequence of philosophical writings that the Western world has ever produced'. In a key chapter, Waterfield takes us through the key philosophical areas which these dialogues explore – love, epistemology, the theory of Forms, Ethics – and reminds us that these texts 'are not mere academic exercises but . . . attempts to get readers to rethink their most basic beliefs and change their lives accordingly' (p. 176).

The same can also be said for this timely and eloquent book. It encourages the reader to go back to Plato himself and (re)read those texts where the dialogue form is so skilfully used to explore issues which could be a matter of life and death rather than airy philosophy. When Calicles chillingly warns Socrates (*Gorgias* 486a3-b4) that his philosophising could end up costing him his life, he was not joking, and Waterfield ends his book with a passionate and inspiring plea for the place of philosophy in the education of the young. Colleges could start by buying and using this excellent book.

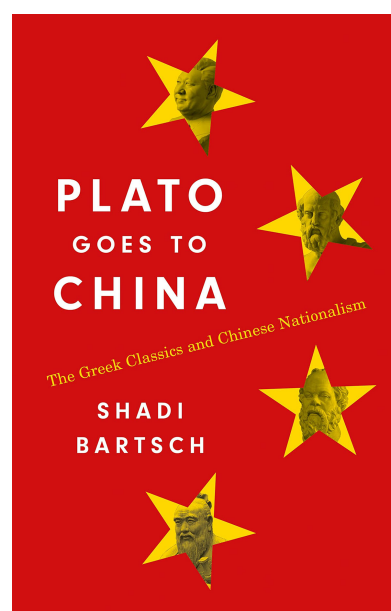
doi:10.1017/S2058631023000776

## Plato Goes to China. The Greek Classics and Chinese Nationalism

Bartsch (S.), Pp. xvi + 279. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023. Cased, £28, US \$33. ISBN: 978-0-691-22959-1

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The popularity of British universities amongst students from China attests to a keen interest in Western academe, especially in STEM subjects. The engaging title of the book, 'Plato Goes to China' suggests that this interest extends to philosophy and the arts too, and promises to satisfy one's curiosity on this score. It more than lives up to its promise. It is a revelation.

This book, based on the author's four Martin lectures delivered at Oberlin College in 2018, is an even-handed exploration

of the ways in which Chinese academics have interpreted Classical Greek political theory and practice, and have compared them with their own over the past century. The reader is at once eager to find out what the Chinese make of the ways in which Greek political philosophy has been applied in the West.

In a closely argued exposition, the author, Professor Shadi Bartsch, traces the vicissitudes in the Chinese system over the last 100 years. She begins by reminding us that the first step towards Chinese–Western engagement was taken by the Jesuits in the 16th century. They introduced Plato and Aristotle into China as well as Christianity, by pointing out parallels already present in Confucianism. Hence it is not surprising to learn that at the time of the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, when the Chinese began to cast about for alternative forms of government, they turned their attention to Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides as having much to say on the matter. The West, after all, had inherited their thinking and had proceeded by way of the Enlightenment to scientific advances and prosperity. A new relationship was considered in which Chinese subjects would become citizens as in Aristotle's *Politics*.

The author recounts that this model of government, based on citizenship, was to influence the May 4th Movement in 1919 and was to be fundamental to the ongoing debate in China. The contributions of many Chinese philosophers are discussed