

Book Reviews

Matthew S. Linck. *The Ideas of Socrates* (Continuum, 2007), 140 pp. ISBN: 0-8264-9451-X

Is there a doctrine of ideas (forms, *eide*) in the dialogues of Plato? Answering this question requires not only determining what one will count as such a doctrine but also which dialogues one will consider. Matthew Linck finds an entryway into this question by reading three dialogues—*Phaedo*, *Parmenides*, and *Symposium*—and encountering them as they present notions of ideality (Linck employs the expression “the ideas” without capitalization in his text). He selects these because they are concerned with the education of Socrates as well as ideality. Linck’s main contention is that, in approaching questions of ideality in the dialogues, the primary focus should not be on a doctrine itself but rather on the relationship between questions raised about ideality in the dialogues and the person of Socrates. These dialogues are connected, moreover, in that they establish a “biographical chronology,” are narrated by someone other than Socrates, and use framing devices. Linck does not intend a biographical chronology to support a claim about the date of composition of these dialogues or about the historical Socrates (115).

Linck divides his text into four chapters plus introductory and concluding remarks. Orientation to questions of ideality begins with Socrates’ treatment of growth and magnitude in the *Phaedo*. This reveals a presupposed framework of idealizations. Attention to the establishment of this framework is an initial way in which ideality is disclosed. In chapter one, Linck begins with Socrates’ narration of his early intellectual efforts to Cebes (*Phaedo* 95e-99d). Socrates became dissatisfied with Anaxagoras’ materialist explanations less because of its failure to explain things than because of its failure to take account of his philosophical activity, how *nous* is “always already involved in the *constitution* of the very things that are under investigation” (18). Socrates’ story, moreover, reveals his concern for an orientation to the whole, which is expressed as the good. His own search for wisdom is interdependent with the things for which he searches, and a consideration of *nous* in Anaxagoras should show this. Finally, Socrates’ consideration of his imprisonment reveals that an explanation of even a single occurrence requires the search for the good expressed as the whole since no one cause can adequately explain this occurrence.

In chapter two, Linck considers how Socrates, through his practice of positing the ideas in his conversations with Zeno and Parmenides, tries to expel wonder about “the phenomenal encountering of unity and multiplicity, sameness and difference” (44). In response, Parmenides helps Socrates to see that the ideas are not unconnected with him. The discourse on the One, where Parmenides coaches a young man named Aristotle through a series of hypothetical investigations, leads to an examination of issues surrounding reification—treating the ideas as separate things. In addition, separation leads to the necessity of localizing the ideas in a separate region or place which is knowable by gods and not humans. This has the added effect of taking the self out of the process as “*Eidos* becomes a name for the occlusion of oneself” (90). The *Parmenides* foreshadows how Socrates will make use of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* to guard against reification and forgetfulness by holding in view the relationship of the ideas to the self. In chapter three, Linck provides a close reading of Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium* 199c-212a where he describes what was revealed about love by the priestess Diotima’s description of erotic ascent. This speech reveals the sense in which Socrates is brought, through a consideration of *eros* and the particular, into an ethico-erotic relationship of transcendence toward the whole, an underlying dynamic relational structure.

Linck begins chapter four with Socrates’ account of recollection in the *Phaedo*. For Linck this reveals a mutual implication of sensation and intellection because any sensible understanding of a particular is always already “guided by something that transcends my understanding of the particulars” (99). Then Linck contends that Socrates’ hypothesis of ideality is a means of protection against sophistic refutation; however, the ideas are not taken as established and must be examined in a turn to *logos*. In addition, examining this hypothesis reveals the presupposition of a distinction between sensation and intellection which returns the inquiry to the issue of the soul. For Linck, Socrates wants to establish “the soul and body as *moments* of the more primordial being of the self” (107) and to guard against abstracting life from the living body. The soul must be understood as an activity of living. In a similar way the soul requires the possibility of ideas so that it can think. Linck concludes, “The soul *discovers* that it thinks such things... It thinks itself thinking, and it thinks that which it thinks. That which the soul thinks transcends the soul... Thinking is transcendence; it is being beyond oneself. Sometimes, the name of this beyond is *eĩdos*” (111). That Socrates is less afraid of death than he is of misogyny underscores his overriding belief in the existence of an intelligible order.

Linck’s conclusions concerning ideality in the *Phaedo*, *Parmenides*, and *Symposium* are as follows: 1) any account of the ideas has to be done with careful attention to character and context of particular dialogues and should not presuppose an

absolute standpoint from which one can give such an account, 2) Linck's reading of these dialogues does not support the claim that Plato has voiced a systematic doctrine of the ideas through the mouthpiece of Socrates, and 3) although Linck remains open to the possibility of there being such a doctrine in other dialogues, he is also open to the possibility that his study of these dialogues might contribute to a refutation of this possibility.

Linck's study provides a reading of Plato's dialogues that combines exegetical care with attentiveness to broad philosophical horizons. He carefully follows the practice of "inflected reading" that he recommends of presenting salient sections in their larger context and commenting on what they reveal. Where necessary, he supplements these sections with other ancient sources including Aristotle, Euclid, Anaxagoras, and Philolaus, and he provides frequent summaries of his argument throughout. Linck's consideration of contemporary scholars is done in a set of endnotes that are both comprehensive, unobtrusive, and conveniently placed. The text is well organized and free from major typographical errors. Since the *Republic* is a crucial dialogue for considerations of ideality, one wonders what Linck will make of it in future studies.

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