C.D.C. Reeve


This book consists of nine chapters, all of which ‘revise, redeploy, or … reproduce’ work that was previously published over a period spanning 19 years (1992-2011) (p. xv). However, Reeve brings to this book an even longer, and deeper, engagement with the *Republic*, as the author of *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato’s Republic*1 – required reading for any serious student of the *Republic* – and an excellent translator of the dialogue.2

The subtitle of this book might suggest to the reader that the chapters are united by the common focus of each chapter on philosophical and/or interpretative problems arising in the *Republic*, but this would not be quite right: in some chapters the *Republic* is not at all the main work under consideration. The first chapter deals primarily with the *Apology*, and some other early dialogues to the extent that they pertain to ‘the relationship between Socratic wisdom and the god Apollo’ (p. 1), while chapters 2 and 6 focus on the *Symposium*. This book, then, is a book about the *Republic* in a rather different sense than was Reeve’s earlier book. But this should not be taken to mean that this book lacks unity, or that its unity is unrelated to the *Republic*. One way in which the chapters are unified is the presence of two themes running through the chapters, more explicitly in some than others. The first of these is the notion of ethical wisdom as a *technē* (craft), which both Socrates and Plato sought. The second, and closely related, theme is that of the transformation of the ‘unreformed’ Socrates of the early dialogues, in Plato’s hands, into the Socrates we find in later works. The sense in which all this revolves around the *Republic* is as follows: throughout the chapters of this book Reeve traces the development of Plato’s thoughts on various aspects of this ethical wisdom, from the early dialogues up to the *Republic*, where we find a comprehensive and compelling treatment of the issues by a Plato who has come into his own.

Let us now turn to the specific contents of the chapters, about which I will have to be very brief and very selective. Chapter 1 offers a refreshing look at ‘the relationship between Socratic wisdom and the god Apollo’ (p. 1). Given

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the connection between Socrates’ infamous *daimonion* and Apollo, Reeve asks whether Socrates was really a follower of Apollo. Reeve traces an illuminating parallel between the Socratic disavowal of knowledge and the Delphic warning against supposing oneself capable of divine wisdom, but this leaves open the possibility that Socratic and the Delphic epistemology merely happened to coincide. To establish Socrates’ credentials as a genuine, albeit unconventional, Apollonian, Reeve argues that Socrates took Apollo as a ‘source of something genuinely oracular and prophetic, genuinely mantic’ (p. 9). But, the trouble for this reading is, if Socrates acknowledges and adheres to the oracular Apollo, how can we make sense of his rejection of divine authority in the *Euthyphro* (11a)?

In chapter 2 Reeve addresses the lessons that can be drawn from the complicated and asymmetrical relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, focusing on what Alcibiades has to say about Socrates in the *Symposium*. Reeve pays particular attention to Alcibiades’ claim that Socrates is similar to the Silenuses which contain *agalmata* (figurative statues) of gods inside them, apparently meaning by this that Socrates too has an unimpressive exterior yet contains extremely beautiful things inside (pp. 19-23). Reeve takes up four passages that attribute to Socrates beautiful things inside, three of which mention the analogy with *agalmata* explicitly. The question is, of course, what the *agalmata* in Socrates are supposed to be. As is typical for this book, Reeve approaches this question with evident sensitivity and skill regarding both the language in the relevant passages and the historical context, concluding that Socrates contains *agalmata* of virtue. This conclusion becomes a key piece of Reeve’s interpretation, but it lacks the textual grounding that Reeve supposes it has: at 221e1-222a6, where Reeve claims to find this view, we are told that there are *agalmata* of virtue in Socrates’ accounts, but there is no evidence for the view that the *agalmata* in Socrates himself are of virtue as well, in this passage or the others. This view, moreover, is at odds with Alcibiades’ claim about Socrates, given Reeve’s understanding of *agalmata* as marking a distance with the divine yet aiming to construct a bridge toward it. For Alcibiades would then be claiming that Socrates contains not virtue itself but rather something that is markedly distant, merely providing a bridge toward virtue. While Socrates may believe that he lacks virtue, this does not seem to be the view of Alcibiades, who not only finds what is inside Socrates to be

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3 *Symposium* 215a7-b3, 216d4-217a6, 221e1-222a6, and 218d7-219a1, the last being the passage without an explicit reference to *agalmata*.