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A Fourth Way of Reading Plato's *Phaedo*

Delcomminette, Sylvain, d'Hoine, Pieter and Gavray, Marc-Antoine (eds.)

Ancient readings of Plato's Phaedo. Philosophia antiqua, 140. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015. pp. 363. ISBN 9789004282179.

The papers in this collection on *Phaedo*'s reception in antiquity were given at a conference held at the Royal Academy in Brussels in 2012. The volume becomes the fifth focused study on the reception of various Platonic dialogues, preceded by a study on the *Timaeus* (1999 and 2003, Reydams-Schils, ed.), the *Symposium* (2006, Leshner—Nails—Sheffield, eds.) the *Parmenides* (2010, Turner—Corrigan, eds.) and the *First Alcibiades* (2015, Renaud—Tarrant). The thirteen papers span chronologically from Aristotle to Simplicius, giving us a glimpse into the long, but for the most part, now lost exegetical tradition on this dialogue. Since the only extant commentaries are by Damascius (preserved as lecture notes in two versions) and Olympiodorus (see text in Westerink, 1976-77), four of the 13 papers (by Lernould, Gertz, Trabattoni and Demulder—Van Riel) discuss Damascius and two include Olympiodorus (by Lernould and Demulder—Van Riel). Thus, with Gerz's earlier monograph (2011) focused mostly on the *Phaedo* commentaries of Damascius and Olympiodorus, those interested in the afterlife of this dialogue in Late Antiquity have access to a wealth of scholarly expertise. It is remarkable that the *Index Locorum* covers most of the dialogue since different parts of it attracted different readers at different times. There is no doubt that 'these different readings of the dialogue... tell us a great deal about the philosophical pursuits and aspirations of its readers.'⁽¹⁵⁾

The book also contains an *Index Nominum* and *Index Rerum*.

The importance of the dialogue in Antiquity was that it 'features prominently in debates on the philosophical way of life, on the destiny of the soul in the afterlife, on Platonic Forms, on the acquisition of knowledge, on the virtues and on many other topics.'⁽¹⁾ The introduction by Delcomminette, d'Hoine and Gavray ties the findings in the chronologically sequenced collection of papers together with a summary that shows how the dialogue was read 1) as a historical testimony about the story of Socrates 2) as a work by Plato conveying his most typical and influential doctrines and 3) as a philosophical text considered as a stock of arguments to be discussed and refuted.

The goal of this elaborate review and critical note is to register a fourth way of reading the dialogue, suggested by Plato himself in *Phd.* 89A8, namely as a protreptic.

After coming to the end of the volume, this reader was impressed with the broad range of receptions of the dialogue discussed in the papers and the cohesiveness of the volume despite the fact that it is a collection of symposium papers. I must note, however, that the balance is heavily tipped to the Neoplatonists after Plotinus (six out of the thirteen papers) which is understandable, given the state of the evidence. Also, one would have appreciated more space for Plotinus in whose *Enneads* explicit references to the *Phaedo* number around 100 while the implicit references could hardly be counted (154). The volume has one paper (by Chiaradonna) devoted to the reception of the *Phaedo* in Plotinus' treatise *On the immortality of the soul* (IV.7 [2]). A conspicuous gap is the absence of Iamblichus, but more on that later.

Just as it is impossible to do justice to every aspect of *Phaedo's* influence in antiquity, it is also impossible to do justice to the rich array of insights on offer in this volume. I will paint with a broad brush the merits of the book which is a must have for any serious student of the dialogue. The volume is of interest not just to those who wish to understand the development of philosophical exegesis in Antiquity, but also for those who value the unique insights and critical distance that the ancient readings of the dialogue have to offer to the modern commentator. I will survey the papers with an eye on the three attitudes to the *Phaedo* in Antiquity itself, as outlined in the introduction of the book. These attitudes were 'exegesis, critical response, and appropriation.' (3)

Creative appropriation is the most wide-spread approach to the reception of the dialogue, often combined with critical response or exegesis. Creative appropriation can be historical, literary or philosophical (11).

Delcomminette, in his paper *Aristote et le Phédon* highlights the paradox of Aristotle' philosophical appropriation of the *Phaedo*: out of the seven mentions of the dialogue in the works of Aristotle, only one (*Phd* 66b-67b) appears in the *De Anima* (407b2-5) while the others refer to the 'autobiography' of Socrates, i.e. to the types of causes to which the 'second sailing' is directed (*Metaph* 991b3, 1080a2; *De gen. et corr.* 335b10 cf *Phd* 100b-102a). The rest of the references are to the cosmology of the final myth (the explanation of the fixed earth (*Phd* 109a) at the center of the universe in *De Caelo* 295b11. Thus, Aristotle's main interest in the dialogue concerns questions of the philosophy of nature (17).

Aristotle's criticism of Plato for considering the Ideas sufficient to account for generation and corruption is well known. For him, these changes can be only explained with the efficient cause (30). The most valuable contribution