
All too often, philosophers who specialise in ancient thought are unaware of the extent of their debt to the editors of the texts they study. An occasional nod in the direction of the apparatus criticus, an even more occasional mention of Greek (or Latin) usage at the time of their author, and a reference or two to LSJ are generally all that authors of philosophical monographs on ancient thought give their readers by way of information on the state of the original text that they claim to interpret. Whatever the reasons for such reluctance, it fosters among non-specialists the illusion that our text of, say, Plato’s dialogues reproduces, in almost every detail of wording, accentuation and punctuation, the text that Plato wrote.

The extent to which the philosophical study of ancient texts relies on the often silent labour of codicologists and philologists is impressively demonstrated in the present edition and commentary of Plato’s *Ion* by Professor Rijksbaron (hereafter R.). Even those who treat their ancient texts as manna from heaven will not fail to be interested in R.’s detailed account of the sources, both direct and indirect, of his edition. He explains that a collation *in situ* of all the available manuscripts convinced him that S, a Venetian manuscript originally from Cardinal Bessarion’s library, is not only a primary witness, but also a more reliable source than had so far been thought. For these reasons, R. added it to the bank of manuscripts (T, W, and F) upon which most other modern editions of the *Ion* (as well as of other dialogues in the same tetralogy) are based. R.’s handling of the indirect tradition is just as impressive, especially since, unlike Burnet and Méridier, he has taken care to record, not only the readings of Stobaeus, but also those of Proclus. Proclus is a particularly intriguing witness in so far as his quotations of the *Ion* reveal that his text of the dialogue differed from ours in a number of places; there was, in his time, no canonical edition of Plato. As a result of R.’s meticulous collation of the sources, his apparatus criticus is a model of its kind and his edition of the dialogue set to become definitive for a long time to come, especially when it is supplemented by a full account of the textual transmission that is currently being prepared by Lorenzo Ferroni.

Also included in the introduction to the edition of the text is a brisk survey of the Homeric quotations in the dialogue. R. largely endorses the conclusions reached by Labarbe in his 1949 classic study (*L’Homère de Platon*), but adjusts them whenever they depend upon the incomplete or unreliable apparatus criticus of earlier editions. One might have expected R. to compare Plato’s Homeric quotations in the *Ion* with Xenophon’s references to the same lines in his *Symposium*, although the fact that the two works are unlikely to be independent of each other.
goes some way to justifying the omission. R.’s attitude to the Homeric question and its bearing upon the interpretation of the dialogue is brisk and matter of fact. Since he assumes that Plato quoted Homer from a copy rather than from memory and thus that, by the time the dialogue was composed, the Homeric text was relatively stabilised, R. does not tangle with Nagy’s evolutionary model of the stages in the shaping of the Homeric poems and the putative role that rhapsodes played in this evolution. This may have been a prudent decision.

R.’s rare knowledge of Greek syntax—especially the syntax of the verb and the use of particles—as well as his familiarity with the distinctive features of Plato’s style makes his commentary especially valuable. All scholars of classical Greek will benefit from his detailed notes on the use of: the vocative and the proper name (pp. 96-100) in forms of address; μῶν to elicit a positive answer, as opposed to its more usual function (p. 108); the value of the indicative active perfect to express what Goodwin (1889:45) called ‘the continuance of the result of an action down to the present time’ (e.g., pp. 131-32); the present infinitive versus the aorist infinitive after σχολή and verbs expressing volition, command, ability etc.; σχεδόν τι and the difficulties of translating it (pp. 215-218). Plato scholars will be more immediately interested in R.’s account of the differences in meaning and context of utterance between expressions often taken to be synonymous in their author, such as ἐθέλω and βούλομαι (p. 116); τέχνη and ἐπιστήμη (pp. 151-52 and 202-04) and ὠληθὴ λέγω and τάληθη λέγω (pp. 154-55). Plato’s use of ἤτερος and ἄλλος, as R. also demonstrates, is less tidy than it is usually taken to be (pp. 196-200). Lastly, R.’s account of Plato’s use of ἦ and ἦ to formulate questions (pp. 103-06) achieves the rare distinction of filling a lacuna in Denniston, who had not included ἦ in his discussion of interrogative particles.

The book, however, is not all about editorial decisions and Greek usage at the classical period. Far from it since R. also deals with the philosophical significance of Plato’s various pronouncements on the value of poets and poetry and offers a detailed reconsideration of the lexical and other evidence to determine the likely date of composition of the dialogue.

R.’s overall interpretation of Plato’s poetics appears to me to be the only section that leaves something to be desired in this otherwise superb book. The few pages that are devoted to the issue are too brisk and too systematising in intent to provide a fully convincing analysis of Plato’s ambiguities on the issue of the epistemic status and value of poetry. R.’s position, which may, understandably, have been evolved partly as a reaction against recent attempts to claim that Plato’s thinking on poetry was both less negative and closer to ours than previously assumed, is that Plato’s hostility to poets and poetry neither lessened nor varied in the course of his writing life: