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## *Book Notes*



### Socrates and Plato

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#### 1 Socrates, Plato and Others

A new collection of essays explores *aporiai* and aporetic methodology in an extensive range of ancient philosophers.<sup>1</sup> There are four chapters on Socrates and Plato. Other chapters discuss early Greek philosophy (Heraclitus; Zeno and Melissus; Protagoras and Gorgias), Aristotle and Alexander, Platonism (Plutarch, Plotinus and Damascius), the New Academy and Pyrrhonism. I start with it in the hope that my note will catch the eye of scholars working on these other philosophers. Despite what the title might seem to promise, the book does not try to show that all these philosophers, Presocratics and sophists included, belong to one and the same ‘tradition’, but tradition and inheritance are nevertheless important to several chapters, such as John Dillon’s excellent account of ‘Plutarch’s attitude to the aporetic aspect of his Platonic heritage’. More generally, the book gives a valuable overview of Plato’s aporetic writing and its legacy in later philosophy, both within and outside Platonism. George Karamanolis compares Plotinus’ aporetic method of inquiry with Plato’s. Luca Castagnoli’s chapter on Pyrrhonism starts with a summary of *aporia* and inquiry in Plato and Aristotle; he then shows agreement between Sextus Empiricus, Plato and Aristotle on the value and function of *aporia*, and argues that it

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1 George Karamanolis and Vasilis Politis (eds.), *The Aporetic Tradition in Ancient Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. 319. Hardback: £75. ISBN 9781107110151.

shows the influence of ‘an ultimately Platonic legacy’. The part of the book on Plato contains two chapters on the ‘early’ dialogues, as they are called here, one on the *Parmenides*, where Verity Harte explores uses of *aporia* and the verb *aporein*, and one on the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, in which Lesley Brown shows the positive contribution of puzzles and compares ‘labour pain’ *aporia* with elenctic *aporia*. The chapters on *aporia* in Aristotle work together very well. Christof Rapp starts with an account of the *Topics*. Friedemann Buddensiek’s chapter on *Metaphysics Beta* asks why Aristotle thought it necessary, rather than merely advantageous, to go through the *aporiai*; Jessica Gelber then contrasts *Metaphysics Beta* with Aristotle’s biological method, particularly in the *Generation of Animals*, where it is hard to generalize about the function and importance of *aporiai*. She closes her chapter with a tentative suggestion that in Aristotelian biology *aporia* may be less important than in his other scientific inquiries. In a later part of the book Inna Kupreeva returns to the role of *aporia* in Aristotelian science, but now with a view to the account of Aristotle in Alexander of Aphrodisias. Given that my notes focus on Socrates and Plato, I hope it will not seem mean-spirited to point out an absence in an impressively wide-ranging collection. The section on Plato moves directly from the ‘early’ dialogues to the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. But concentrating on the ‘early’ and the late leaves aside other dialogues, such as the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, that might have something to say about how to benefit from *aporia* and overcome it.

Another collection sent to *Phronesis* extends even further beyond the study of Plato.<sup>2</sup> Most of the chapters are about happiness and the good life in Chinese and Greek philosophy (especially, on the Greek or Greek-language side, Plato, Aristotle, scepticism and Marcus Aurelius), which might seem enough for even the most ambitious editors. But there is more besides, such as notes on the difficulty of translating into Japanese the Greek vocabulary of scepticism, and a chapter on Chinese mortuary practices and the aspirations that they suggest. As the title indicates, the contributors often return to the theme of cultivation. Sometimes this means asking how to cultivate (i.e. achieve) a good life, but other chapters explore what is required for a person to be ‘cultivated’, such as in writing or music, and Greek and Chinese views of its place in a good life. The word ‘reverberations’ in the title seems a deliberate avoidance of ‘comparison(s)’, and the most stimulating chapters are those where the authors break free from a comparative approach and give themselves enough space to develop in full a suggestion about either Greek or Chinese philosophy.

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2 Karyn Lai, Rick Benitez and Hyun Jin Kim (eds.), *Cultivating a Good Life in Early Chinese and Ancient Greek Philosophy: Perspectives and Reverberations*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019. Pp. 262. Hardback: £85. ISBN 9781350049574.