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## BOOK REVIEWS

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PLATO'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE: THE *Theaetetus* AND THE *Sophist* OF PLATO TRANSLATED WITH A RUNNING COMMENTARY. By Francis MacDonald Cornford. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935. Pp. xiv+336. \$4.50.

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES OF PLATO AND HEGEL. By M. B. Foster. New York: Oxford University Press, 1935. Pp. xiii+207. \$3.00.

Like most of the doctrines which scholars have attached to the name of Plato, the doctrine of eternal Ideas, of intelligible Forms separate from the things which our senses perceive, has run a varied history in the course of scholarship. Recognized by some scholars as the center and essence of the Platonic philosophy, it has been considered by others to be of non-Platonic origin, possessing interest to Plato—like other doctrines of Pythagorean, Eleatic, Heraclitean, or other lineages—as material on which to exercise his dialectic, but in the end stunningly refuted by him. Professor Cornford leaves the reader in no doubt concerning the place of the doctrine of Forms in his conception of Platonism: Together with the doctrine of the immortality and divinity of the rational soul, it is, he says (p. 2), “a doctrine which, in common with most scholars, I hold to be characteristically Platonic.” His translation and commentary on the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* may be viewed as a protracted and determined attempt to rehabilitate the doctrine of Forms in the Platonic dialectic and theory of knowledge.

Professor Cornford's translation of the two dialogues is both eminently readable and faithful to the Greek; for the most part such passages as one might be inclined to question could be reduced to the single head of passages which bear out his thesis more clearly in the English than in the Greek. He has attempted, he tells us (p. viii), to follow Plato's own practice in keeping to the current language of educated conversation and refusing to allow any word to harden into a technical term. He has succeeded consistently with the first of these objectives in producing a smoothly flowing text, and he is particularly happy in finding unobtrusive modern equivalents for Greek expletives and for the numerous brief answers of interlocutors. He is less happy in the pursuit of his second objective. It is not inconceivable that if Plato avoided a technical use of

terms—a single word for a single meaning and single meaning for a single word—he did it because of a conscious purpose dictated by his dialectic. Professor Cornford, however, seems to be constantly disturbed by what he sometimes refers to as the ambiguity of Plato's use of words: Sometimes the ambiguity would be removed by the introduction of the doctrine of Forms at that point (as pp. 109 and 118); sometimes the exact meaning which a word has in its successive appearances are stated carefully (as p. 119 [δοξάζειν] and p. 198 [εἰκλών]); sometimes a single word will abruptly change its meaning and be translated by a different English word in a fashion which Professor Cornford anticipates will puzzle not only the reader but the respondent in the dialogue (as p. 248 [τὸ ὄν]); sometimes two words are used "indifferently" and are therefore interpreted as synonymous (as pp. 186, 257, 261, and 276 [εἶδος] and [γένος]); sometimes a word is alternately technical and non-technical as λόγος wanders through four meanings in the *Theaetetus* (p. 412) to assume the meaning first of definition by genus and differentia (p. 170) and then to become "statement" or "discourse" (pp. 303 and 307) in the *Sophist*. An addition of many technical meanings is not an adequate rendering of non-technical words. Professor Cornford is content to permit terminology to vary and words to change their meanings, but there must be fixed things for our words to refer to, and a "Platonist" would recognize, even when the text does not supply the hint, that those fixed things are the Forms.

The translations are complete except for two omissions, one in each dialogue: a paraphrase is substituted for *Theaetetus* 192A1-192C5 in which the three ways by which one thing may be mistaken for another are expounded, on the ground that the reader would experience as much difficulty as Theaetetus in following the argument in its original form, and the long exercises in dialectical division which occupy *Sophist* 218D-230E are summarized on the grounds that, whereas the method was new to Plato's public, the modern reader, familiar as he is with classification by division, might be wearied by a translation. The commentary which accompanies the translation is printed either before or after the passage in the text to which it is relevant, in such fashion that the dialogues are broken into small sections by the interpolated commentary. For the most part there is perhaps a page of commentary for a page of text, although in the *Sophist* the stream of the text is interrupted more frequently and the interpolations become longer.

Professor Cornford prefixes to his translation of the *Theaetetus* a brief introduction in which he discusses the doctrine of Forms as it appears in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Parmenides*. At first sight the *Theaetetus*

would seem an unpromising dialogue in which to seek further evidence for it, but Professor Cornford meets that difficulty by arguing that the negative conclusion of the inquiry into the nature of knowledge in that dialogue is indication of Plato's intention to show that if the Forms are excluded from consideration no knowledge is possible (p. 28). Professor Cornford consequently occupies himself with pointing out from time to time in the commentary the absence of the Forms (cf. pp. 83, 99, 101, 106, 110, 118, 135) and with interpreting every reference to the virtues to be an occult allusion to the *Republic* and to the doctrine of Forms (cf. pp. 83, 85, 86, 89, 106). Moreover, the reader is constantly assured that "the Platonist" would be aware of these distinctions and would at once recognize the necessity of the Forms behind the devices of the *Theaetetus* (cf. pp. 108, 129, 135, 162, and *passim*). The subject matter of the *Sophist* makes it less urgent to invoke the testimony of "the Platonist" to bring out a meaning the text might have for the initiated; substitute devices, however, appear to accomplish the task: "the trained Academic reader accustomed to think of Platonic Forms" makes his appearance (p. 250), as does "Plato's view" (pp. 220, 222, 259), and sometimes even "Plato would reply" (p. 254), all of them, by a strange fatality, devices by which the Forms are introduced on non-textual grounds. To be sure, the interlocutors in the *Sophist* seem to be as reluctant to lend support to Professor Cornford's interpretation as those of the *Theaetetus*; but whereas in the latter dialogue the *absence* of the Forms renders the dialogue inconclusive, in the former their *presence* is disguised by the use of other words. "The true meaning of the argument," the reader is told (p. 221), "is somewhat disguised by the Stranger's avoiding the mention of Forms and speaking only of 'names' and the thing which is called by them," and of course he does mention "kinds" frequently and "Forms" occasionally, and the reader is told (pp. 257, 261) that the words are synonymous. It is a little disturbing to be assured in heading and commentary throughout the length of a passage (251A-259D) which seems to be concerned with the nature of discourse that Plato is in fact discussing the relations of the "Forms themselves." In general the effect of Professor Cornford's analysis is to separate the metaphysical, the dialectical, and the psychological (the body of the *Sophist* is divided neatly into three parts) and to emphasize the metaphysical. But though one might be disposed to question the possibility of such distinctions in the Platonic dialectic, one would be justified in raising the question only if it were documented as carefully as Professor Cornford has documented his analysis—and only if the alternative view were furnished, as was Professor Cornford's, with a new

translation. Professor Cornford has made a very important contribution to Platonic scholarship. He has expounded a coherent and well-documented interpretation of the Platonic dialectic and his commentary abounds with wise and learned statements. His remarks on the nature of dialectic are particularly judicious, and his distinction of the Socratic method from the Platonic (pp. 184 ff.) and the Platonic dialectic from the Aristotelian logic (pp. 264 ff.) deserve careful consideration. As he puts it (p. 268), "No satisfactory account of the relations of Platonic Forms can be given in terms of Aristotelian logic." One might question whether Professor Cornford's version of the Platonic dialectic might have been more satisfactory if he had not thought of logos as "definition by genus and specific differences" (p. 170), or if Forms were not distinguishable into "generic Forms" and "specific Forms" (p. 257), or if the Platonic methods of Collection and Division were not exercised on a "structure of Forms . . . conceived as a hierarchy of genera and species" (p. 267).

Where Professor Cornford's whole effort is turned to the reconstruction and elucidation of ideas expressed, putatively, in the dialogues, Mr. Foster expends his scholarship on the doctrines of Plato and Hegel to bring out a truth adumbrated but unrealized in their work. In a highly suggestive Preface, Mr. Foster develops his view concerning the relation of philosophy to the history of philosophy: Philosophy can be preserved from both the opposite excesses of sophistry and mysticism only by the discipline of historical study; to philosophize is to study the history of philosophy philosophically. Mr. Foster's essay in that genre of philosophy attempts to show the inadequacies of Plato's conception of the Polis under the guidance of the Hegelian criticism and then to show the inadequacies of the Hegelian political doctrine and criticism by standards which they themselves involved. Plato's cardinal error lies in his attempt to construct the Polis in terms of an analogy to *Techné* or art, for this analogy leaves no place for the characteristic activity of the rulers based on knowledge, not of an external matter like that of the artisan, but of themselves as matter. Plato consequently confuses the universal order of society with the political order of the state, as he confuses art with nature, the useful with the fine arts, philosophical knowledge with love, and in general the universal with the individual. (It is interesting to observe that, according to Professor Cornford, Plato limited the *Theaetetus* strictly to the consideration of the individual, the *Sophist* to the consideration of the universal.) The key to Plato's political theory is consequently in the three-fold division of the Polis, particularly in the difference between the rulers and the ruled. This division was introduced into the state to elucidate

the idea of justice, but it made ideal justice impossible; on the other hand, it indicated the presence among the incompatible elements of Plato's thought of some recognition of ideal freedom: The virtue of the auxiliaries, courage, being self-mastery was reflexive and therefore resisted the analogy of *Techne*, but at the expense of distinguishing the auxiliaries from the rulers; the virtue of the guardians, wisdom, contains the element of ethical freedom, but their role was limited to the administration, not the creation, of law; the artisans finally possessed the beginnings of economic freedom, denied to the other members of the Polis. Plato's error consisted in separating the ruler from the ruled and in particularizing the virtues to classes. Hegel's criticisms of Plato indicate these weaknesses, but he himself, though he went beyond Plato, committed much the same errors, since, like Plato, he had no conception of will although, unlike Plato, he did have the word. The source of almost all in modern philosophy that is distinctively modern is the Christian revelation (p. 192), and Hegel's advance of Plato is explained by the circumstance that he absorbed into his philosophy the teachings of the New Testament, his failure by the circumstance that he failed to absorb the Old Testament, particularly the doctrine fundamental to all Christian doctrines—creation.

To summarize the conclusions of a book which follows a dialectical plan as conscious and close as that which Mr. Foster employs is to do it an inevitable injustice. It is a dialectic which abounds in dichotomous distinctions and at each important point of the argument numerous double analogies, from art, from the physical and biological sciences, from metaphysics and religion, render plausible conclusions which seem fantastic when stated without their grounds. As a piece of philosophic history, however, Mr. Foster's book has the disadvantage that it uses the work of his predecessors as matter, ignoring their peculiar form, for his own philosophical constructions. Mr. Foster's dialectic is neither Platonic nor Hegelian, and the purely scholarly historian might properly object at a dozen points that Mr. Foster has misinterpreted his authors. As philosophy, on the other hand, it suffers in cogency and immediacy from the circumstance that it passes to the solution of problems from a consideration of other men's solutions without the preliminary precaution of convincing the reader that the problem has been properly posed. Nonetheless, Mr. Foster has indicated an important relation between philosophy and the history of philosophy; it is possible that if he had considered the method or form by which Plato or Hegel undertook to solve problems, and if he had then applied those methods to problems anew

instead of digging among the solutions or matter of their philosophy, his book might have been more cogent as philosophy and more accurate as history.

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