

Reproduced with permission of the University of Chicago Press. For personal, noncommercial use only.

*Plato's Thought.* By G. M. A. GRUBE. London: Methuen & Co., 1935. Pp. xvii+320. 12s. 6d.

Scholars have disposed, apparently since the time of the Alexandrians, of two principal devices by which to explore the works of philosophers: the commentary and the topical exposition of questions according to the mind of the given philosopher. It is natural that Platonic studies, as resuscitated during the last century by use of stylometric methods and as expanded by the introduction of chronological considerations, should be devoted alternately to the exposition of the contents of successive dialogues and to the exploration of the themes which recur in various of the dialogues. Professor Grube, maintaining that these modes of exposition supplement each other, has followed the second—the method of questions—and by implication (p. vii) has undertaken in *Plato's Thought* to write a companion piece to Taylor's *Plato*,

*the Man and His Work*, which to his mind is a model of the first method. Eight subjects are traced in the eight chapters of the book from their first appearance in the dialogues to their final statement: the theory of ideas, pleasure, *eros*, the nature of the soul, the gods, art, education, and statecraft. Taken together these subjects will give, Professor Grube is convinced, an adequate understanding of Plato's view of life as a whole and of his philosophy of man. He has performed the task he has set himself with great care and thoroughness; he has enumerated meticulously the loci of discussion of each of the subjects he has chosen, he has set them down in a defensible chronological order, and he has restated the discussions as accurately and in as great detail as possible.

Criticism of Professor Grube's book may, consequently, be summed up as criticism of the literal-mindedness of the dominant school of Platonic scholarship as manifested in a workman-like example. It exhibits yet another instance of the curious fatality which has attacked recent studies of Plato, the most obvious manifestation of which is an apparent desire to restate as completely as possible whatever Plato said in as nearly Plato's words as possible; yet, notwithstanding that by far the greater part of Professor Grube's book consists of paraphrase and direct quotation from Plato, one may doubt that it states what Plato meant, on grounds which Professor Grube himself occasionally supplies when he tires of paraphrase (as on p. 275)—that the philosophy loses all effect by being summarized. In a single chapter he will struggle to expound "the development of Plato's technical vocabulary" (p. 14) and complain that Plato seems "to have deliberately avoided using a consistent technical vocabulary" (p. 44); the Ideas are analyzed as "logical entities" (pp. 30 and 31), yet to consider them merely logical entities is to deprive Platonism of its inspiration and emotional appeal (p. 50). Professor Grube is disturbed constantly by Plato's vague use of words (pp. 185, 204, and *passim*); yet faced by Plato's analogical mode of thought, on the one hand, and his suspicion of mere allegory, on the other, Professor Grube prefers to be chary of all metaphor and to look for systematic expositions of theories, though he complains that they can seldom be found. There are, consequently, many contradictions in Plato's thought, or, if the poles of the contradiction occur in different dialogues, considerable evolution. The contradictions are permitted, regretfully, to stand, but the evolution is welcomed, and Professor Grube is fond of suggesting that the development is taking place before our eyes in the dialogues. For purposes of tracing this development, the *Laws* are taken as the statement of Plato's mature position on most questions, although the reader is assured that Plato's metaphysics is of crucial importance to his philosophy, and little trace of metaphysics is found in the *Laws*. It is sometimes the virtue of a method to detect confusion where it was unsuspected, but where the object on which the method is exercised is the work of a dialectician as shrewd as Plato, one may suspect that the method has not obeyed the precepts of his dialectic and has not cut at the joints of

the argument. Professor Grube has employed accurate and shrewd scholarship in expounding Plato's thought in eight instances, but the student of Plato might have reasonable grounds for suspecting that something is lacking or perhaps for doubting that an enumeration of instances, even when they are stages in an evolution, are sufficient in themselves to convey the thought of a philosopher who was fond of recalling his master's objection to an enumeration of virtues when he sought to know what virtue is.

RICHARD MCKEON

*University of Chicago*