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Colloquium Report : Dialogues on Plato - New Images of Plato: The Idea of the Good, Campus Gaflei, Liechtenstein, September 2000.

GILL, Christopher, in *1. Plato 1 (2001)* ,
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This is a report of three intense days of debate on Plato in a location of extraordinary beauty, an academic centre in alpine scenery at a height of 1500 metres. The aim was ambitious: to juxtapose, and promote dialogue between, a wide range of contemporary approaches to Plato, and to do so with reference to the most famous of Platonic texts, the Idea of the Good and the Image of the Sun in Republic Books 6-7. The colloquium was co-organised by the International Plato Society (IPS) and the International Academy of Philosophy (IAP) in the Principality of Liechtenstein. The IAP was founded as an institution of university-level teaching and research in 1986, and since 1998 it has been housed in the academic and residential centre in the mountains above Vaduz where this colloquium was held. The IAP is the base of the International Plato Centre, whose objective is teaching and research on Plato and the Platonic roots of Western philosophy, and it was the Centre which worked with the IPS to plan this colloquium.

The academic programme of the colloquium is given below. The colloquium also included a reception given at his castle by the Prince of Liechtenstein, who has been an active patron of the IAP, and a performance of the Hippias Minor and Ion by a German drama-group which specialises in performances of the Platonic dialogues. The Proceedings of the colloquium are to be published under the joint auspices of the IPS and the IAP, co-edited by Giovanni Reale and Samuel Scolnicov.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2000	
Welcome to the Participants	Josef Seifert, Rector IAP
The New Images of Plato	Samuel Scolnicov, President of the IPS
First Dialogue: The "Milan-Tübingen" School of Plato Interpretation	
L'Uno-Bene come asse della Protologia Platonica e i suoi rapporti con il Demiurgo	Giovanni Reale, Catholic Univ. of Milan
Die Einheit des Platonbildes in der "Tübingen Schule": Methodologische Voraussetzungen	Thomas A. Szlezák, Univ. of Tübingen
Critical Approach: On Reading the Platonic Dialogues Esoterically	Hayden Ausland, Univ. of Montana
Second Dialogue: The Traditional and the Aporetic Vision of Plato	
L'Approche traditionnelle de Platon par H.F. Cherniss	Luc Brisson, CRNF Paris
Die Idee des Guten: Platon, ein Aporetiker?	Michael Erler, Univ. of Würzburg

Rilevi critici da una prospettiva unitaria	Maurizio Migliori, Univ. of Macerata
Papers	
L'ineffabilità del Principio	Roberto Radice, Catholic Univ. of Milan
La matematica come forza trainante verso il bene	Elisabetta Cattanei, Univ. of Cagliari
La dialettica di bene e male nella Repubblica e le sue connessioni con l'uno e i molti	Raffaella Santi, Univ. of Urbino

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2000	
Third Dialogue: Platonic Ethics between Hermeneutics and Analytic Philosophy	
>Das absolute Gut und die menschlichen Güter	Rafael Ferber, Univ. of Cologne
Critical Approach from an Analytic Perspective	Christopher Gill, Univ. of Exeter
Plato's Idea of Virtue: between Ethics and Hermeneutics	>Peter McCormick, IAP
Fourth Dialogue: The Deconstructivists and the Contextuals	
Repubblica libro VI: un approccio dialogico	Mario Vegetti, Univ. of Pavia
Critical Approach from a Historical and Contextual Perspective	>Gerald Press, Hunter College, NY
Fifth Dialogue: The Good and Virtue – a Dialogue between Analytic and Classical Ethics	
Socrates and Plato on Virtue and the Good: an Analytical Approach	Christopher Rowe, Univ. of Durham
>Statuto ontologico e forma di causalità: l'idea del bene nella Repubblica	>Franco Ferrari, Univ. of Salerno
Plato between Ethics and Politics	Czeslaw Porebski, IAP
Papers	
L'orientamento al bene nella filosofia di Platone	Franco Trabattoni, Univ. of Milan
SATURDAY, SEPTMBER 9, 2000	
Sixth Dialogue: Plato – a Dialectician, an Idealist, or a Realist?	
L'idea del Bene e la dialettica	Enrico Berti, Univ. of Padua
Platon, idéaliste or réaliste?	Evangelhos Moutsopoulos, Univ. of Athens
Seventh Dialogue: The Good in Plato as Measure or Negation of Any Measure?	
L'héritage de l' <i>epekeina</i> dans la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas	Jean-Marc Narbonne, Univ. of Laval
The Intellectualism in Plato's Account of Human Excellence	John Crosby, Franciscan Univ. of Steubenville
Eighth Dialogue: The Good as Paradigm	
The Form of the Good as Paradigm and	Gerasimos Santas, Univ. of Irvine

Essence	
The Development of a Doctrine of the Good and Plato's Development	Lloyd Gerson, Univ. of Toronto
Ninth Dialogue: The Knowledge of the Absolute Good or Metaphysics as an Idol?	
Good as Foundation of the Platonic Ethics and Good as Foundation of the Aristotelian Ethics	John J. Dudley, Univ. of South Carolina
The Good as the "Sun" and Sum-Total of all Pure Perfections. An Interpretation and Critical Reform of Platonic Metaphysics in the Spirit of Realist Phenomenology	Josef Seifert, IAP

As indicated by this programme, the colloquium was designed as a series of Dialogues, each of which was designed to bring out a specific scholarly approach or a distinctive issue in Platonic interpretation. Debate was promoted partly by the juxtaposition of different approaches and partly by incorporating critical responses in some of the Dialogues. Each Dialogue was followed by open discussion on the issues raised. Clearly, it is impossible in a brief report to encapsulate the insights of all the papers or to replay the debate of each session. I focus, rather, on highlighting the main interpretative approaches offered and some of the recurrent motifs and issues of the colloquium. My summary does not necessarily follow the sequence of papers in the programme of the colloquium.

Images of Plato displayed at the Colloquium

The esoteric (or 'Milan-Tübingen') approach was represented by its two current leading exponents, Giovanni Reale and Thomas Szlezák. Both scholars presented the account of the good in the Republic as a supremely important, though deliberately incomplete, statement of one of the two fundamental Platonic principles, the One, as distinct from the indeterminate Dyad. Both scholars also met the interpretative challenge of showing how Plato's philosophical meaning is conveyed through texts which are (in this reading) explicitly reticent or enigmatic. Hayden Ausland, in his critical response, focused partly on what he saw as unsupported interpretative moves made by Reale and Szlezák and partly on the possibility of other kinds of 'esoteric' readings of Plato, such as that of Leo Strauss. Further criticisms were offered in a subsequent paper by Franco Trabattoni. He argued that the two principles (One and indeterminate Dyad) did not have the same importance in the Platonic dialogues as they acquired in the later Platonic tradition and that the so-called *Aussparungstellen* (passages of explicit reticence) could be explained better by reference to Plato's thinking about the progressive development of knowledge than by the esoteric reading of the dialogues.

Certain other papers in the colloquium took as their starting-point the findings of the esoteric approach to Plato, though without addressing directly the interpretative issues raised by this approach. Rafael Ferber examined three texts which have been taken as central for this reading, those on right 'measure' in the Politicus and Philebus as well as that on the good in the Republic. He did so with the aim of exploring the relationship between the absolute Good and the human goods, an issue which is also of importance for the hermeneutic reading of Plato. Elisabeth Cattanei set out to examine the significance of the mathematical concepts which figure in connection with the idea of good in the Republic. Raffaella Santi explored the relationship between the ideas of goodness and badness and of unity and multiplicity within the argument of the Republic.

The analytic approach, dominant in Anglo-American Plato scholarship, was explicitly represented in this colloquium by Christopher Rowe and by Christopher Gill, the latter responding to the hermeneutic approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Both Rowe and Gill advocated a version of this approach which combined philosophical engagement with Plato's arguments with attentiveness to the significance of the form of Plato's writings (which has not been a characteristic feature of the analytic method). The analytic approach was also displayed in the papers by Gerasimos Santas and Lloyd Gerson. Santas interpreted the Form of good in the Republic as a way of characterising the ideality of the other Forms (a kind of 'Form of Forms'). In a parallel move, Gerson saw the Form of good as an embodiment of certain fundamental properties of Forms, namely their unity, knowability and explanatory power. Enrico Berti's paper on dialectic and the good, while not explicitly analytic, was similar in conceptual approach. He suggested that the type of dialectical definition of the good posited at Rep. 534b-c can be explained by reference to the systematic analysis of contrasting hypotheses outlined in Parmenides 135-6 and exemplified in the second part of the Parmenides.

A different type of issue was explored in two other Dialogues: the significance of Plato's literary form for understanding the overall character of his philosophical project, understood either as exploratory (and perhaps aporetic or sceptical) or as positive (and perhaps dogmatic). Both Mario Vegetti and Gerald Press suggested that the idea of good in the Republic was to be seen as an exceptional move in a particular kind of exploratory dialectical context rather than as the central feature of a determinate set of doctrines. The question whether Plato should be seen as aporetic/sceptical or dogmatic was pursued also by Michael Erler and Maurizio Migliori. Both argued that we could make sense of both aporetic and dogmatic strands in Plato's writings by recognising that Plato's stress on the progressive character of philosophical understanding runs counter to the 'packaging' of knowledge in determinate forms. Migliori also saw this recognition as the basis for a proper reconciliation of the Platonic dialogues and of the evidence for Plato's unwritten doctrines. Luc Brisson argued that the dialogues themselves, if approached with exegetical care and objectivity, provided a sound

base for establishing Plato's philosophical intentions, a view demonstrated by a close reading of Rep. 509a-c.

Three other papers displayed a more systematic philosophical approach, juxtaposing Platonic thought to modern debate. Peter McCormick linked Plato's ideas about moral harmony in the Republic with contemporary work in virtue-ethics on moral character and epistemology. Czeslaw Porebski located the idea of good in the context of the special kind of fusion of ethics and politics attempted in the Republic. John Crosby examined the intellectualism in Plato's conception of human excellence.

The other papers in the colloquium placed Platonic thought in a larger historical perspective, that of the reception of ideas within antiquity or within the whole Western tradition. John Dudley argued that, in spite of Aristotle's seemingly negative view of Plato's idea of good, his own conception of God as unmoved mover can be seen as a development of Plato's idea. The role of the good as a causal as well as ontological principle (together with Aristotle's response to this role) was also the theme of Franco Ferrari's paper. His concern, however, was with Aristotle's writings as evidence for, and commentary on, this Platonic idea. Roberto Radice explored the linkage between the ultimate ontological principle and namelessness in the Platonic tradition, notably in Philo, Numenius and Plotinus.

Josef Seifert argued that Plato's idea of good as pure perfection is best understood as a conception of a 'proto-personal' God. He linked Plato's thinking about perfection with early mediaeval Christian thinking about God as perfection and ultimate reality. Evangelhos Moutsopoulos offered a characterisation of Plato's distinctive philosophical vision by mediating between two versions of Platonism in the later Western tradition, that of idealism and of realism. Christopher Gill and Jean-Marie Narbonne considered the significance of some more recent thinkers for the interpretation of Plato's thinking on the good. Gill examined Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'hermeneutic' reading of Plato and Narbonne brought out the relevance of Levinas for making sense of the distinction between the ideas of Plato and Plotinus on the transcendent good.

Shared Themes and Issues

What common themes emerged from this range of approaches? What, in particular, can be learnt from the colloquium or from the volume to be based on it? The answer to the second question can only be a personal one but may be worth attempting

The colloquium took as its central theme the special status of the idea of good in Republic Books 6-7; and one outcome of the event is an unparalleled wealth of philosophical accounts of that special status. By locating these accounts in divergent types of interpretative methodology, the colloquium also indicates how they can be coherently extended. For instance, the characterisation of the good as a superordinate ('henological') principle of unity advanced by the esoteric approach makes sense within the ontic-mathematical framework proposed by that approach, according to which the evidence of the Platonic tradition is crucial in informing the reading of the Platonic texts. This response is partly paralleled by those using Plotinian or Christian concepts of transcendence to support, or to refine, a transcendental reading of Plato's idea of good. By contrast, as indicated earlier, analytic scholars such as Gerson and Santas see the account of the good as a way of characterising the essential properties of Forms as such, a characterisation based on a reading of the dialogues as fully explicated philosophical arguments in their own right. For more 'dialogic' interpretations, such as those of Vegetti and Press, the allocation of this special status to the good is an exceptional and hypothetical move, almost a gesture, within a localised dialectical context.

A further striking feature of this colloquium was that it offered a series of sustained readings of key Platonic texts, thus exhibiting a key part of the evidential basis on which these divergent accounts of the good depend. Rep. 509a-c, including the extraordinary claim that the idea of good is 'beyond being' (*epekeina tês ousias*), figured as a leitmotif of the colloquium. For Reale and Szelezák, this claim, while not fully explicated in its immediate context, is both seriously meant and intelligible in the light of Platonic doctrine, as a statement of the ontic transcendence of the One. For Brisson and Vegetti, the claim is (as seems to be acknowledged in 509c2) a rhetorical 'exaggeration' (*huperbolês*). It needs either to be qualified (Brisson) or taken as an expression of a hypothetical meta-level principle which the argument of the Republic requires but does not fully analyse or support (Vegetti). Another recurrent text was Rep. 534a-d, on the idea that dialectical definition of the good is a mark of philosophical knowledge. For Gadamer, as explicated by Gill, this text served to establish that the good was no more 'beyond being' than the other Forms, while Berti identified in the Parmenides a type of dialectical procedure by which such definition could be secured. This text also bears on another of the underlying issues of the colloquium, explored in different ways by Berti, Migliori and Trabbatoni. Is knowledge of the highest kind, according to Plato, a non-propositional (even non-verbal) insight or is it instantiated in the process of dialectical (verbal, propositional) definition?

In offering such a concentrated set of analyses and readings of these central Platonic themes, and in providing a context for dialogue between them, I think the colloquium largely realised its ambitious aims. The combination of alpine sunlight and competing interpretations of the Platonic Sun was, certainly, a heady one.

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