

*Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy*, by Harold Tarrant. Cambridge University Press, 1985. pp. IX + 182.

This review actually constitutes a re-reading of a work which appeared first, as can be seen, some time ago, and which I fastened on eagerly then, since it treats of many subjects close to my heart. In this short but closely-argued work, Harold Tarrant sets out to restore to a place in the sun that very obscure moment in the development of the Platonist tradition which goes by the name of the 'Fourth Academy'. This was the name given by later historians of philosophy (e.g. Sextus Emp. *PH* 1. 220) to denote that phase of the School presided over by Clitomachus' successor, Philo of Larisa, and his associate Charmadas, from about 110 to 90 B.C.E., and to which Antiochus of Ascalon (who ultimately founded the 'fifth' or dogmatic Academy) belonged for many years. The characteristic of this group, in the area of epistemology, was a departure from the more purely sceptical position of Carneades towards an acceptance that things were 'graspable' (*katalēpta*) "as far as concerned their nature", though not in such a way as to satisfy the Stoic criterion (S.E. *PH*. 1. 235). What exactly Philo and his associates meant by that is by no means clear, and it is one of the many interesting questions discussed by Tarrant (in. ch. 3), but it plainly takes a step in the direction of accepting a criterion of certainty. It was this cautious and compromising position that Antiochus found ultimately unsatisfying, and which led him to accept the Stoic criterion in its full form.

It is the position of these men, then, and positions which he unearths in a few further sources, that Tarrant makes the subject of his monograph. It is divided into an introduction, six chapters dealing with specific issues, and an epilogue. The introduction sets out, first, the characters involved (those mentioned above, along with Eudorus of Alexandria and the author of the *Anonymous Theaetetus Commentary* — whom Tarrant would like, but does not quite dare, to identify with Eudorus); then the issue, which is the criterion of knowledge; and thirdly, Tarrant's own thesis, which is broadly that the transition from the scepticism of Carneades to a revived Platonist dogmatism is philosophically plausible. This, I think, he succeeds in establishing. It is some of his later extrapolations from this basic thesis that cause me more concern, though even then I am not prepared to assert dogmatically that he is wrong.

He begins (ch. 1) with a most useful and sound survey of the varieties of scepticism to be found in the late Academy. Making good use of Cicero's *Academica*, he shows that to set up a straight sceptic-dogmatic dichotomy in relation to Philo and his followers is not to do justice to them. "The evident' (*enarges*) is allowed as long as it does not imply observable truth; *dogma* is allowed as long as it does not imply an unacceptable level of certainty or commitment" (p. 31).

A separate, short chapter is devoted to Charmadas and his views on rhetorical theory (derivable from Cicero's *De Oratore*), and then Tarrant turns to deal with his central concern, the epistemological doctrine of the Fourth Academy, under the headings of

Sensation, Evidence, and Apprehension (ch. 3). Here he is to be commended for throwing much light on the situation, and establishing his primary thesis. Philo's position seems to be that there are indeed facts that are evident, and that general truths are attainable, but that there is no such thing as Stoic-style certainty — that is, that no given particular fact can be taken as Stoically-certain. This is a perfectly reasonable position, even if it did not ultimately satisfy Antiochus, since the Stoic position is only reasonable, in turn, if one accepts Stoic metaphysics.

So far so good, then. However, Tarrant has other theses to advance which are more controversial. Basically, he wants to posit a continuation of the Fourth-Academic tradition, past Antiochus, through the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., down at least to Plutarch. To support this idea, he wants to redate the *Anonymous Theaetetus Commentary*, hitherto loosely dated to the second cent.C.E., to the late first cent. B.C.E., and to connect it closely with the figure of Eudorus of Alexandria. This is the subject of ch. 4. He makes the good points (pp. 67–8) that the author regards himself as an Academic as well as a Platonist, whereas these have become two distinct groups by the second century C.E.; that his view that the subject matter of the *Theaet.* is simply knowledge, rather than the *criterion* of knowledge, was still controversial when he wrote, whereas after Thrasyllus had labelled the work as 'On Knowledge' it cannot have been; and that second-century authors show comparatively little interest in the *Theaetetus* as a source for Platonic epistemology, whereas the dialogue was of importance for such a man as Philo of Alexandria. But his other points have little force, and even these lose some of their significance when one considers how little evidence we have to go on.

This thesis, however, I am not too bothered with. More troublesome is his notion, developed in the Epilogue, that Eudorus was, not the distinctly dogmatic Pythagorean fellow-traveller that he seems to me to come across as, but rather as a thinker true to the Fourth Academic tradition. I'm afraid that I can see no indication in what we can identify of Eudorus that he was anything but a dogmatic Platonist; nor yet do I see that Plutarch's acceptance, later, of the unity of the Academy, and his willingness to use anti-Stoic arguments of Arcesilaus or Carneades can count as specific loyalty to a 'Fourth-Academic' tradition. Antiochus' polemical view did not make them followers of the Fourth Academy.

On the other hand, his analysis of Sextus Empiricus, *AM* 7. 89–260 as deriving from Antiochus' *Kanonika*, and his suggestion that this work is to be dated to the period before his break with Philo and the Fourth Academy (ch 5), I find ingenious and seductive, though not absolutely persuasive. It does, however, provide a plausible explanation of the curious account of Plato's epistemology that appears at 7. 141–4, as well as the accounts of Speusippus and Xenocrates that follow. That the doctrine of the Ideas as thoughts of God should originate in the Fourth Academy (ch. 6), however, I find much less persuasive. It is quite possible that they held this doctrine, but I see no reason for not crediting it already to Xenocrates in the Old Academy. Once one accepts that God is an intellect, as he did, and especially if one demythologises the *Timaeus*, as he also did, it seems inevitable that the

Ideas must be seen as the contents of such a divine intellect. This need not involve depriving them of objective reality; a distinctive feature of God's thought is that the objects of his thought are also realities, so that the Ideas, or 'Idea' (= the World of Ideas), as it is often termed, can be presented in later Platonism as a third *arkhē* besides God and Matter.

But none of these objections should be taken as derogating from the fact that this book is a most stimulating contribution to the understanding of a little-known area of ancient thought, and one that has long deserved to be taken as seriously as Tarrant has taken it. One does not always have to agree; one can salute the scholarly spade-work as well as the sometimes daring flights of speculation, while still withholding complete assent. That, after all, would be quite in the tradition of the Fourth Academy.

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