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BOOK REVIEWS

Hallvard Fossheim, Vigdis Songe-Møller and Knut Ågotnes (eds.), *Philosophy as Drama: Plato's Thinking through Dialogue*, Bloomsbury Academic 2019, xiii+247pp. [Hardback] ISBN-13: 978-1350082496.

This book comprises a collection of thirteen articles, five previously published, all springing from a seven-year research project funded by the Research Council of Norway. The authors represent the philosophy department of the University of Bergen (Ågotnes, Breidal, Fossheim, Larsen, Rørstadboten, Sampson) and the United States of America (Ausland, Freeland, Howland, Hyland, Sallis, Woodruff) with an additional contribution from Elena Irrera, a Research Fellow in Political Philosophy at the University of Bologna, who could have served as an Aeschylean Athena had the two groups of six required a tie-breaker on some radical issue, such as how to read Platonic dialogues as philosophical dramas.

The umbrella title, "Philosophy as Drama", may be intentionally provocative, since philosophy is in no way a representation of action: philosophy is an activity in its own right. A less provocative title might have been "Plato's Dialogues as Philosophical Dramas", where the dialogues are to be seen as representations of philosophical states of affairs. It is the second part of the title, "Plato's Thinking through Dialogue", which is ambiguous to the extent that it can be interpreted in two diametrically opposed ways requiring Athena's vote: on the one hand, Platonic philosophy (particularly one or other Theory of Forms, and Recollection) is dressed up in dramatic elements (for one reason or another); on the opposing hand, Plato wrote dramas, and as such, his thought is to be discerned in the underlying structure of the dialogue, and not verbatim in what the characters — elements of the drama — say to each other. Athena's services are not required, however, since the articles are scattered along a continuum between these two extremes.

That there are any articles tending towards the more recent understanding of Platonic dialogues as philosophical dramas is actually surprising given the remit of the research project entitled "Poetry and Philosophy: Poetical and Argumentative Elements in Plato's Philosophy". Given the title, we might have expected articles on poetical and argumentative elements rather than on whole dialogues as self-standing dramas, and worse still, articles on elements in Plato's philosophy, sprung entire from the forehead of Zeus, rather than on elements in dialogues. Some of the articles conform to the remit, but some do set out to deal with sections of dialogues as drama, although suffering from minor, occasionally major, outbreaks of Platonic philosophy.

Introduction (1-12):

Ågotnes, Fossheim, and Songe-Møller state that while traditionally "the dialogue form has been regarded as a side issue", "during the last fifty years or so, another approach has gained ground [assuming] that other dimensions of the texts than their argumentative structure and the formulation of their theses are philosophically relevant" (1). This is still far from acknowledging that every dialogue may be a drama, with speakers who are not Plato, and whose motives for speaking with each other may not include spouting Platonic lore. The Introduction rather seems to reflect the sophisticated position of die-hard Platonists attempting a counter-reformation to accommodate and thereby declaw the Dramatic Beast which threatens to undermine the whole of Platonism. The editors have even arranged the articles according to topics (see below) rather than dialogues. The first and fourth topics are relevant to initial dramatic analyses of Platonic dialogues, but the second and third properly belong to a discussion of conclusions to dramatic

analyses, once Plato's position has been thrashed out. Despite the best efforts of the editors to conceal the fact, however, as I have already remarked, some of the articles do actually make the attempt to treat individual dialogues as philosophical dramas. I present the articles in order, subsumed to their topics:

Part 1 Genre and the Philosophical Dialogue:

1. The Whole Comedy and Tragedy of Philosophy: On Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's *Symposium* (15-28). Drew Hyland draws from three Platonic dialogues the notion that it is important for living well to know the relationship between comedy and tragedy; the article deals as much with Aristophanes as with Plato's Aristophanes, but it is Plato's Aristophanes who we learn with relief is comic, albeit with tragic elements, decisively comic because of the absence of *kallos* ("nobility" or 'beauty'" 25) from his speech praising *eros*.

2. A Praise of the Philosophical Written Speech? Ethics and Philosophical Progression in Plato's *Symposium* (29-49). Elena Irrera, the political philosopher from Bologna, adequately summarizes the speeches (altogether ignoring Alcibiades), but believes that "Plato himself seems to play an active role as a 'hidden', external interlocutor" (29). This is one of the oldest positions in Platonism, but Irrera surely innovates when solving the problem of inconsistencies in Phaedrus' speech by suggesting that "two different voices can be traced, namely that of Phaedrus and that of Plato" (32), as if Plato the dramatist could be so incompetent (he actually could, for all we know, and only a thorough analysis of the entire dialogue would prove that he is not). Disappointingly, we are not told whose voices may be traced in the other speeches. Irrera regards the speeches of the dialogue as "the seeds of an intellectual progression, one which matches the stages to be traversed by a lover [her steps of Diotima's ladder of love — IL] directed to an authentically philosophical experience" (44-45).

3. Socrates' Appeals to Homer's Achilles in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and *Crito* (51-77). Hayden W. Ausland provides an excellent discussion on Platonic allusions to Homer, with the emphasis on Homer. Such a discussion would not be out of place in an analysis of these two dialogues (individually) as philosophical dramas.

4. Plato's Ring of Gyges and *Das Leben der Anderen* (79-92). Jacob Howland provides a fascinating insight into Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's documentary film, *Das Leben der Anderen*, problematically using the myth of the ring of Gyges in *Republic* II as some sort of preparation.

Part 2 Virtue and Soul-shaping:

5. Plato's Inverted Theatre: Displacing the Wisdom of the Poets (95-106). Paul Woodruff, a noted dramatist, is ironically the most outstanding example in the book of a die-hard Platonist ("Plato considers", "Plato has reason to reject" [95]; "Plato vehemently resists", "(as Plato understands the gods)" [102]; "now Plato did of course list reverence among the virtues" [103]; "Like many thinkers, Plato holds", "the values that Plato held dear", "Plato, by contrast, holds" [104]). One of the main ideas Woodruff presents in the article is a good one, that the image in *Phaedrus* of a soul having to fly up in order to glimpse the gods moving in rotation around the outside of the heavens is the very opposite of what happens in a theatre, where the audience looks down, without effort, on a scene at the centre.

6. Gods, Giants and Philosophers: On Being, Education and Dialogue in Plato's *Sophist* 245e6-249d5 (107-122). Jens Kristian Larsen has tackled a section of a difficult dialogue with a good sense of the nature of philosophical drama. He notes that the primary audience for the

Eleatic's arguments is Theaetetus himself (107). Furthermore, he correctly characterizes Platonic dialogues as "first and foremost ... dramas in the simple sense that they are literary imitations of conversations ..." (108). He is also aware that any conclusions regarding the Eleatic guest (and I presume he would allow the other participants as well) "... would demand a discussion of the rest of the drama of this dialogue" (119).

7. *Philotimia*. On Rhetoric, Virtues and Honour in the *Symposium* (123-139). Knut Ågotnes appears to regard the dialogue form as a means of obfuscation, "to hide [Plato's] 'true philosophical meaning'" (123). At least, the *Symposium* is, in his view. Not only is the delivery through encomium (praise, a form of rhetoric), but the fictitious meeting is being narrated by Apollodorus who has reconstructed it with the help of Socrates, a Socrates who also emphasizes his difficulty in remembering what Diotima had once told him (123). Unlike Irrera (article 2), Ågotnes surveys not only the other speeches, but also refers to Alcibiades and argues, interestingly, that virtue must be developed by oneself, but honour (resulting from winning in competition) is dependent upon the opinions of others; yet the speakers confuse the two in the speeches praising *eros*.

Part 3 Reason and Irrationality:

8. The Significance of the Ambiguity of Music in Plato (143-160). Kristin Sampson explores the ambiguity of *mousike* as *pharmakon* (remedy and poison), looking at Greek culture, and at various dialogues, assuming that Plato is speaking to us ("*Mousikê*, according to Plato, can be both beneficial and dangerous" [153]). By chance, Plato may well have had this opinion, since dramatic analyses of *Hippias Minor* and *Hippias Major*, dialogues dealing with the Good, reveal that most things are for ends both good and bad, and should not be assumed to be automatically good.

9. Pleasure, Perception and Images in Plato (161-178). Cynthia Freeland examines "various dialogues in which Plato explored ways of explaining pleasure" (161). She claims to survey "some of Plato's accounts of pleasure, focusing on its relationship with pleasure, in order to trace certain changes he appears to make in his fundamental view" (173), this fundamental view being his "replenishment account of pleasure" (162). This article appears in a book on Plato's thinking through drama, and is clearly one of the articles which regards the drama as something to be explained away, rather than explained.

10. The Limits of Rationality in Plato's *Phaedo* (179-188). Hallvard Fossheim sees the drama as in the dialogue (180), but in his observations he does seem to treat, more correctly, the dialogue as the drama. Among some usual points made about drama in Platonic dialogues, Fossheim well observes that *Phaedo* "offers a dramatization of grief" (180) although this is only half the picture: the dialogue dialectically dramatizes both grief and joy. Fossheim, however, does then go on to refer to Socrates' initial remark at 60b regarding pleasure and pain as mutually incompatible, while *Phaedo* "characterized his experience as a 'mixture of pleasure and pain'", a contradiction between two characters' experiences: Fossheim declares this to be the "first puzzle" of the dialogue (181). It should rather be seen as a puzzle dramatized throughout the entire dialogue, alongside other ones, but the article certainly exemplifies the direction the book should have been going in, given the book's title.

Part 4 Place and Displacement:

11. Place (*topos*) and Strangeness (*atopia*) in the *Phaedrus* (191-207). Erlend Breidal provides a sensitive reading of some passages, with a good ear for subtleties in the text, although the conclusions are somewhat unconvincing: Socrates, for example, becomes the dramatization of

conceptual/non-conceptual opposites all on his own, which makes me wonder why Phaedrus also appears in this dialogue (“Socrates is simultaneously absence and presence, sameness and difference, knowing and ignorant, both in and out of place” [203]). The descent into Platonism is complete by the end of the conclusion, where place “represents a transcendence for which the philosopher is striving” and philosophical activity operates in a limbo world, not “in the realm of human beings” (203), which is unfortunate, to say the least.

12. Hunt: Method and Metaphor. A Reading of the *Sophist* 216a1-226a6 (209-229). Gro Rørstadbotten makes several significant observations (in the context of a dramatic analysis): e.g. that “the reader is able to understand somewhat more of who the Stranger is by once again noticing what he is doing”, exemplified on that page by the fact that the Eleatic guest makes a contradiction, then emphasizes it (“the mentioned contradiction is stated even more bluntly” [220]).

13. Plato’s *Sophist*: A Different Look (231-240). John Sallis takes at face value references to the difficulty in distinguishing the philosopher from the sophist and the statesman in the context of the greater discussion about being and appearance. Is it really that difficult to distinguish the philosopher from the sophist without the aid of Being and Non-Being? Nevertheless, the treatment of late dialogues, often considered undramatic in comparison with earlier dialogues, in a book on Platonic drama, is to be applauded and encouraged, especially in the style of articles 6 and 12. As was pointed out in article 6, however, only a complete dramatic analysis can get to the bottom of a dialogue, whether early, middle, or late.

There is an index (241-247).

Ivor Ludlam

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Lisa Maurice, *Screening Divinity*, Edinburgh University Press, 2019. 240 pp. ISBN 9781474425735.

What do God and the gods have in common? According to classicist Lisa Maurice, quite a bit, at least when it comes to the movies. In *Screening Divinity*, Maurice examines two types of film: fantasies based directly or loosely on Greek or Roman mythologies, and Biblical epics and biopics. By bringing them together, Maurice hopes to show the commonalities between these two genres, which share the challenges inherent in bringing gods and goddesses to life in the visual media of film and television. Maurice suggests that these two groups of films can be considered a single genre of “divinity movies”. Her book demonstrates the fruitfulness of this approach.

The first chapter introduces the subject, and then provides historical surveys of particular topics: the cinematic approaches to both sets of movies; the roles of the gods in the Graeco-Roman tradition, and their reception in the Western art-historical tradition; and finally the ways in which Christian and Jewish thinkers have understood and talked about God. The chapter then identifies the fundamental problem that all God-talk — theological, artistic, cinematic — must face: anthropomorphism. As Maurice notes, even if they posit an abstract invisible god, humans can only talk about and depict that god in physical terms.

Chapter 2 addresses anthropomorphism in greater detail. The chapter begins with a sweeping overview of philosophical approaches to the problem (Bacon, Feuerbach, Marx, Darwin) which, though necessarily brief and superficial, appropriately situates film, and the study of film, within a broad intellectual and historical context. Maurice argues that movies about the Greek and Roman