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Plato's Introduction of Forms (review)

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R.M. DANCY. *Plato's Introduction of Forms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xii + 348. \$75.00. ISBN 0-521-83801-0.

In this carefully constructed monograph, Dancy aims to show in painstaking detail how Plato's theory of Forms emerged out of Socrates' quest for definitions. Thus, Dancy subscribes to a traditional developmentalist approach to Plato, eschewing the increasingly common approach that seeks to impose some sort of unitarianism on the philosophy in the dialogues (2). By "Socrates" Dancy means the literary character in the dialogues, not the historical person. So the "development" from a search for definitions to the positing of Forms is taken to be a development within Plato's thinking, not a development from adherence to one philosopher's view (Socrates) to another, Plato's (3). Dancy accepts the standard developmentalist division of the dialogues into early, middle, and late. He divided the early dialogues into those whose focus is on definition and into those whose focus is not. The former group includes: *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Major*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, and *Republic I*. It is to the presuppositions underlying the search for definitions in these dialogues that Dancy devotes the bulk of this book. Scant attention is paid to the other dialogues said to be in this group: *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Menexenus*, *Protagoras*, and *Gorgias*. What are usually called "middle" dialogues Dancy calls "doctrinal." The first of these, *Meno*, Dancy argues is a "transitional" dialogue. That is, in it is found a sort of bridge from the search for definition to the theory of Forms. To this dialogue Dancy devotes one lengthy chapter. The other doctrinal dialogues discussed in this book are *Phaedo* and (in a very brief chapter) *Symposium*. In these dialogues, Dancy finds expression of the theory of Forms. The actual discussion of the theory of Forms thus takes up roughly one fifth of the book, making Dancy's introduction to the introduction of Forms very lengthy, indeed. Notably absent from the material treated in this the last part of the book is any discussion of the central books of *Republic* or *Cratylus* and *Phaedrus*, dialogues usually taken to belong to Plato's middle period in which the theory of Forms is constructed. Altogether

absent is any discussion of subsequent developments in the theory of Forms in Plato's so-called later dialogues.

Dancy rests his developmentalist account of the genesis of the theory of Forms on Aristotle's testimony in his *Metaphysics* to the effect that Plato began by embracing Socrates' concern with the definitions of the virtues. Having been influenced by Heraclitus and Cratylus, however, Plato came to hold that these definitions could not correspond to anything in the constantly changing sensible world (111–13). Aristotle in his testimony is explicit that Plato was influenced by the flux doctrine in his youth. Presumably, this makes it at least possible or even likely that when Plato came under Socrates' influence he already held that the sensible realm could not contain objects suitable for definition but that the objects of definition had to be separate. If that is so, then it is difficult to see the justification for insisting that Plato's theory developed from an adherence to definitions (*sans* Forms) to a postulation of Forms. Why not suppose that his postulation of Forms was coincident with his concurrence with Socrates that definitions of the virtues were vital? But then, against Dancy's repeated claims that the discussions of definitions in the early dialogues do not presuppose Forms, it may be in fact that they do.

Dancy would no doubt want to make the reasonable reply that Plato's beliefs at the time of writing the dialogues are unrecoverable and so irrelevant. We are only able to focus on the logic of the actual arguments in the text. The dichotomy of psychology or logic is a false one. As he himself argues, one of the assumptions that Socrates brings to the definitional dialogues is that the Forms are paradigms or essences (115–133). On the face of it this is a metaphysical claim and deserves analysis. It is also certainly worth asking how separation arises out of the postulation of paradigmatic entities. To explore this question, however, is to open up the possibility that there is indeed a theory of Forms in the early dialogues, or perhaps even the possibility that Plato assumed at the time of writing these dialogues that the definitions sought must be of separate Forms. Dancy, however, holds that the search for definitions is a metaphysically innocent enterprise and that only with the introduction of separate Forms does metaphysics enter the picture. This would I think be plausible only if the Socratic search for definitions treated the object of these definitions as terms or concepts. This seems to me to be as far from the truth as anything one could say about these dialogues, and for a reason to which Dancy himself subscribes, namely, that the objects of the definitions are supposed to serve an explanatory role in reality (134–147). Thus, a deed is pious owing to the Form of Piety. This would make no sense if the sought-for definition of piety were of a concept or of a word. But if Piety is a "thing" (a very strange thing,

indeed), then a refusal to explore what Plato meant by claiming this is simply not justified by adducing Aristotle's testimony that Plato separated the Forms.

Adding to the suspicion that Dancy supposes that Socratic definitions are of concepts or terms is the third requirement he adduces for a proper definition, namely, substitutivity (80–114). This is the requirement that the *definiens* must be substitutable *salva veritate* with the *definiendum*. The *definiens* includes necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the *definiendum*. This is a standard and reasonable requirement for definitions in any context other than one in which the *definiendum* is a "thing." There are no conditions for the application of such a thing. And there is nothing else to which the thing is identical but itself. The sought-for *logos* of a Form (which Dancy recognizes is not exactly a definition or a *horismos*) may well be required to give us necessary and sufficient conditions for the presence of an instance of it. The very idea, though, of the Form as a thing being definable or even expressible in a *logos* raises a host of metaphysical issues. One wonders if the aporetic nature of the early definitional dialogues is intended to reveal this fact.

Dancy will not allow that even in *Meno* is there a theory of Forms (240). He rejects the standard interpretation of the Doctrine of Recollection according to which knowledge is recollection of the Forms with which we were acquainted prior to embodiment, though he acknowledges that this interpretation works for *Phaedo*. We are to suppose that, when Socrates uses the word *eidos*, either he is not talking about the things we recollect or, if he is, this does not imply a theory of Forms (211–215). Both alternatives seem frankly far fetched. Leaving aside the question of the cogency of the argument that learning is recollection, if Plato held that we do recollect that which we encountered in a disembodied state, and that it is this fact that solves Meno's paradox, why resist the obvious implication that separate Forms are here in play? The only reason I can see that Dancy gives for his denial of this is that if it were true in *Meno*, this would cast doubt on his thesis that the discussion of Forms in the earlier dialogues does not amount to a theory of Forms.

When we finally do get to the theory of Forms, Dancy finds it to be necessarily connected to separation and to the consequent diminution of the intelligibility of the sensible world (253–283). This seems right, though his discussion of both points is all too brief. He does not address the question of whether separation means that Forms can exist uninstantiated or not. Nor with respect to the diminished reality of the sensible world does he go beyond explaining it in terms of the Argument from Relativity and conflating this argument with the Argument from

Flux. But it is not clear why if it is the case that x is f with respect to y and not- f with respect to z , this in any way diminishes the being or intelligibility of x . Nevertheless, in *Republic* (cf. 479c–d) this seems to be exactly what Plato wants to maintain. Since Dancy apparently does not maintain that *Republic* adds an essential feature of the theory of Forms that is not contained in *Phaedo*, it is at least puzzling why the central and perhaps most notorious implication of the separation of Forms is not here scrutinized. Nor is it clear why Dancy thinks that Plato's embrace of the Argument from Flux amounts to the Argument from Relativity. Plato's acceptance of the former is in any case qualified; otherwise, there would be no cases of predication or sameness in difference in the sensible world to explain. His endorsement of this Argument is, on Aristotle's account, based on his conviction that knowledge exists and knowledge cannot be of *ta gignomena*. If relativity is supposed to entail separate Forms, flux does not. It is only with the added premise that knowledge exists, and that knowledge is not of sensibles, that separate Forms follow. But then relativity is irrelevant to this argument. It seems rather that what Dancy takes to be an argument from relativity in *Phaedo* 74a is really an argument from the deficiency (*ti elleipei*) of sensible equals, not from the fact that something equal to one thing appears unequal to another.

Dancy's insistence on focusing on the analytic core of the theory of Forms is wholly admirable. But his exclusion of the material contained in *Republic* from this core means, among other things, that he has no idea how to connect Socrates' insistence in *Phaedo* 99b on teleological explanations with the explanatory role that Forms are given in the final argument for the immortality of the soul. The most we can say, Dancy argues, is that teleological explanations are not incompatible with the essential explanatory role of Forms (293).

There is a problem in Dancy's locating the core of the theory of Forms in those passages where Forms are explicitly adduced in order to prove the immortality of the soul. It seems a gratuitous inference to say that the essential features in the introduction of Forms do not include teleological explanation just because teleological explanation does not figure into the proof for the immortality of the soul. It is not even entirely clear that teleological explanation *is* excluded from the method of hypothesizing Forms that Socrates describes. If, as he says, hypothesizing is to continue until one reaches "something adequate" (*ti hikanon*, 101e1–2), it is not implausible that this something adequate is the unhypothetical first principle of all in *Republic*, namely, the Idea of the Good. This interpretation leads us back to the explanatory role of Forms in the early dialogues and the possibility that Dancy's analysis of the theory of Forms is based on a spurious essentialism, not about Forms, but about

Plato's theorizing.

This book contains a virtuoso display of what might be termed analytic Platonism, and as such it may help clarify one's thinking about Forms. It does not, however, advance our understanding of Plato's metaphysics very much.

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C. BOWEN and ROBERT B. TODD, intro. and trans. *Cleomedes' Lectures on Astronomy: A Translation of The Heavens*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2004. Pp. xvi + 238. US \$17.95, Can. \$25.95. ISBN 0-521-81586-X.

With *Cleomedes' Lectures on Astronomy: A Translation of The Heavens*, Alan C. Bowen and Robert B. Todd (hereafter B/T) have produced an exemplary and eminently useful translation, the first in English, of an important late Stoic pedagogical text on astronomy. By design this collaborative effort, based on Todd's 1990 Teubner of Cleomedes' *Caelestia* (Greek *Meteora*), is intended both for "a varied readership ... most of whom will not know the ancient languages" and especially for those whose interests lie in later Stoic philosophy, in ancient mathematical astronomy, or in the history of ancient astronomy proper (xii). Enhanced and enriched by an expansive introduction and a comprehensive running commentary on the translated text, this finely produced and affordable volume also features a substantial array of appended explanatory materials supplementary to the translation proper. Taken together, these features render the work a model of what a modern translation of an ancient technical work ought to be.

To appreciate fully the significance of the *Caelestia* a familiarity with the foundational concepts and background information provided in B/T's very detailed and lucidly organized Introduction (1–18) is essential. Divided into three sections, it will reward the patient reader's attention when encountering the translation itself. The first section, "Cleomedes' Date" (1–4), shows how the text's internal evidence is absolutely paramount. For example, in the absence of any external biographical data for its author, information drawn from *The Heavens* itself, both philosophical and astronomical, can establish only that Cleomedes