

## Review of *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Plato*, 2nd edition (2023), edited by Gerald A. Press and Mateo Duque

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What is retrospectively called the first edition of the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Plato* was published as *The Continuum Companion to Plato* in 2012,<sup>1</sup> edited by Gerald A. Press. I supplied the following blurb for the cover of that edition: ‘The editor has assembled a remarkable range of contributors, able to cover – as successfully as any team could, within the space of a single volume – the outlines of the complex and fissiparous world of Plato, Platonism, and Platonic interpretation up to the present day. The book represents a unique resource for advanced students and professional scholars alike’. The back of the new edition says that the new edition is ‘fully updated ... [and] includes nineteen newly commissioned entries on [a range of topics not previously treated]’: cf. p.1, which talks of ‘add[ing] several articles dealing with areas of research on Plato that have blossomed since the first [edition]’, which has incidentally allowed the editors ‘to expand the already broad reach of the first edition with articles by younger scholars and those in parts of the world not previously represented among contributors ... [I]t also features revisions to the majority of articles from the first edition, including eight which have been completely rewritten, and twelve which have had the references substantially revised’.

I now move on from the role of advocate/publicist<sup>2</sup> to that of journal reviewer, in order to give a more in-depth perspective on the project as a whole: eleven years on, it remains essentially the same project. I stand by my judgement that the contributors ‘cover ... the outlines’, etc., and that the volume represents ‘a unique resource for advanced students and professional scholars alike’; there is certainly nothing else quite like the *Handbook*.<sup>3</sup> What I shall do here is to talk about its limitations as well as its virtues, and in particular about

what exactly students and scholars will and will not find in it.

That the ‘reach’ of the volume is deemed to include breadth of representation, as between young and old(er) contributors, and between different parts of the world, confirms what I think to be true in any case, namely that the *Handbook* is intended as much as a guide to work on Plato as to Plato himself (the title, *Handbook of Plato* is ambiguous between the two, as I suppose *Companion to Plato* was too). This becomes explicit on p.6, near the end of the Introduction: ‘Contributors include not only philosophers but specialists in classics, comparative literature, English, Greek, history and political science; and they are professors in [fifteen countries]. – Rather than a small number ... of long articles on a proportionately limited array of subjects, we have gathered together a rather large number – more than 160 – on a very large array of subjects. And rather than articles that share a single methodology or interpretive approach, we have been pluralistic, seeking to include many approaches. In fact, our aim was to have all of the current approaches represented in order to give as complete a picture as possible of the current state of knowledge and research about Plato. Pluralism in interpretation is not only a fact; ... it is, importantly, how error and vacuity are avoided (Heath 2002 [= Malcolm Heath, *Interpreting Classical Texts*, no page reference given]).’

This reference to Heath seems to me to misrepresent him. ‘Pluralism’, as I understand his argument, has to do with the proposal that progress in the understanding of ancient texts often arises from, perhaps even requires, interaction between different interpretations and interpretative approaches; merely listing or contrasting such approaches, in the manner of the *Handbook* (given that – not least for

reasons of space – it excludes more or less all comment on this or that approach), is hardly an example of pluralism in Heath’s sense. Further, Heath’s book is about literature rather than about history, and about literature rather than about philosophy. Now of course the Platonic dialogues count as literature as well as philosophy. Plato is uncontroversially one of the greatest writers of antiquity. But he is also undoubtedly a philosopher, that is (to put it as uncontroversially as possible, and even if the *Handbook* sometimes comes as close as it could to denying it without actually doing so: see below), someone who is concerned with wisdom and knowledge and with finding a path to or towards those goals, in the service of which he constructs *arguments*. One of the largest omissions from the *Handbook* – I shall come back to this observation, and its explanation – is a sense of that argumentative aspect of Plato; perhaps even necessarily, since even the entries for particular dialogues, except for the *Republic*, are limited to two to three pages (*Republic* gets about twice as much; *Laws* just the same as the rest), and apart from forty or so pages on ‘Important Features of the Dialogues’ (there are twenty such listed), the largest part is devoted to ‘Concepts, Themes and Topics Treated in the Dialogues’. The consequence is that the reader gets an idea of the subjects (concepts, themes and topics) that come up in the course of Plato’s argument, but little or no sense of the reasoning that either accounts for their introduction or justifies their presence. The whole strikes this reader as a classic case of not seeing the wood – as in *bois*, *bosco*, *Wald* – for the trees. (One of the first things I looked for even in 2011/2012 was an index of passages. Its absence is symptomatic: textual references for the most part serve just to locate ‘concepts’, etc., so that references to the text can be dis-

covered via the index to concepts, and do not need to be listed separately. Again, there is no discussion of passages, only a juxtaposition of rival interpretations involving the same passage within a single entry, or more usually a description of a particular interpretation as ‘controversial’, vel sim., or else the accidental appearance of a rival interpretation in a different part of the volume.)

But that, again, is part of the design of the *Handbook*. The idea is not to allow us access to *an* understanding of the whole wood,<sup>4</sup> but rather to the range of different understandings of and approaches to it from antiquity to the present day, with a distinct bias towards the modern. Chapter 5, the last part of the volume, on ‘Later Reception, Interpretation and Influence of Plato and the Dialogues’, gives us twenty-three brief summaries of different ways of seeing or approaching Plato: ‘Ancient hermeneutics’, ‘Aristotle’, ‘Academy of Athens (ancient history of)’, ‘Jewish Platonism (ancient)’, ‘Neoplatonism and its diaspora’, ‘Medieval Islamic Platonism’, ‘Medieval Jewish Platonism’, ‘Medieval Christian Platonism’, ‘Renaissance Platonism’, ‘The Cambridge Platonists’, ‘Early modern philosophy from Descartes to Berkeley’, ‘Nineteenth-century German idealism’, ‘Nineteenth-century Plato scholarship’, ‘Developmentalism’, ‘Compositional chronology’, ‘Analytic approaches to Plato’, ‘Vlastosian approaches’, ‘Continental approaches’, ‘Straussian readings of Plato’, ‘Plato’s unwritten doctrines’, ‘Esotericism’, ‘The Tübingen approach’, and finally ‘Anti-Platonism, from ancient to modern’. Modern approaches receive more space than pre-modern ones: ancient Platonism down to Plotinus, a.k.a. ‘Academy of Athens’, and Neoplatonism, for example, are each given the same number of pages as Tübingen or Strauss, while Strauss, along with Tübingen, gets a second bite under

‘Esotericism’, Tübingen even a third bite under ‘unwritten doctrines’. The prominence allowed to Tübingen only partly counters the trace of Anglo-Saxon/US bias evident in the tiny space allotted to the ‘Continental’ tradition (itself perhaps understood somewhat differently in the Introduction, p.4), which is equal to that given to Vlastos, or to Strauss, neither of whom is likely nowadays to feature prominently in the landscape of Plato interpretation outside the US (and perhaps decreasingly even there); the first might well seem already sufficiently covered under ‘Developmentalism’ and ‘Analytic approaches’, the second under ‘Esotericism’.<sup>5</sup>

The singling out of nineteenth-century German scholarship makes it look intended as a turning point, which indeed in classical studies generally it surely is. But in the *Handbook*’s order of things, it is just another moment among many others. In Gerald Press’s view, Plato studies had taken a decisive turn in the recent past. The ‘dominant approach’, he proposed in 2018, can be summed up as ‘the continuing decline of dogmatic and nondramatic [sc., or including, philosophical?] interpretation and the expansion and ramification of the more literary, dramatic, and nondogmatic “New Platonism”’. What was a growing insurgency twenty years ago can now be described as a, if not the, dominant approach: a sentence I cite from the abstract to Press, ‘The State of the Question in the Study of Plato: Twenty Year Update’, *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 56/1 [2018], 9-35, which itself refers back to, and takes up ‘The State of the Question in the Study of Plato’ (*SJPh* 34/4) from 1996. Press’s approach to Plato is genuinely universal, taking into account *all* literature on Plato, that is, whether literary, historical, philosophical, or whatever.<sup>6</sup> From such a perspective, the lack of interest in Plato’s argument (see above) is not surprising.

It is still less surprising when we go back to Press's 1996 article. We need to distinguish, he suggests there, 'among the diverse purposes for which scholars study Plato's dialogues. For a substantial amount of the Plato literature is essentially concerned with discovering Plato's answers to the questions of concern to contemporary scholars and researchers, or, more plainly, "the enterprise of mining Plato for the purposes of one's own philosophising" [cited from R.H.Weingartner, *The Unity of the Platonic Dialogue*, 1973]. Guthrie is correct that there is nothing intrinsically better about what he calls, on the other hand, "the historical approach" or "a scholar's approach" [the reference is to W.K.C.Guthrie, *Twentieth Century Approaches to Plato*, 1967], but the difference is often overlooked. The historical and scholarly approach has its own aims and uses, and is the concern here' (p.507) – as it is, in terms of overall emphasis, in the *Handbook*.

It will be helpful here to dwell a little longer on Press's admirably scholarly and wide-ranging 1996 article. He there sums up 'the state of the question at mid-[20<sup>th</sup>]century' by saying that beginning in the late 1950s 'the question had changed, from something like (1) What were Plato's doctrines and how did they develop, as revealed by analysing the arguments alone in the dialogues taken to be essentially treatises? to something like (2) Should we take literary and dramatic aspects of the dialogues into consideration in trying to understand Plato's thought?' (p.511). 'Dogmatic' interpretation, or, less provocatively, interpretation that attributes certain theories to Plato, is in this context implicitly associated with philosophical analysis of the arguments for those theories. Press recommends a quite different approach to the arguments: 'The question about the arguments is not simply whether they are valid or invalid, but why

does Plato make *this* character present *this* argument – valid or invalid, clear or ambiguous – in these dialogical circumstances?' (p.515). Then, in the final section of the paper, 'Questions for the research agenda', Plato's arguments more or less disappear from the map altogether – as they do, in the way I have suggested, from the *Handbook* itself.

I have already identified myself clearly enough with what Press calls the 'dogmatic' or 'doctrinal' line of interpretation, though I prefer to talk of 'explorations'<sup>7</sup> (Plato, on my view, has *general* positions that he will die for, like Socrates, e.g., about what makes for a good human life, but no doctrines or dogmas as such). My question now, a quarter of a century on from Press's statement of the research agenda, is how far that agenda has been taken up. As we have seen, he himself, in 2018, described something like it as constituting the 'dominant approach'. If, like Press, we take into account the whole spectrum of work on Plato, across the world and across a multitude of disciplines, he may well be right. If he is right, and if that 'dominant approach' involves the suppression of, or a decline of interest in, Plato's arguments *as* arguments, and in whether they are valid or invalid, or, more broadly and helpfully, persuasive or unpersuasive, then I would regard that as a wholly retrograde step. Plato's Socrates (say: the Socrates of the *Apology*, the *Crito*, or the *Theaetetus*), like all Plato's other leading characters, is concerned with finding the best argument available, and it is surely not a big leap to suppose that Plato himself shared the same concern. Of course we can and must take account of dialogue form, the issue of anonymity, and the whole gamut of issues listed in the *Handbook*, and maybe others besides. But I urge that we must at least begin by trying, not just to identify the

structure of each dialogue, but to *understand* both its argument as a whole – because every dialogue is a whole – and any particular argument or arguments it includes, as arguments (for the most part quite rational arguments, too, whatever admixture there might be, on occasion, of wit, provocation, or anything else that he may happen to add to the mix: see below). If we do not do this, then we shall be in danger of missing the very thing that Plato himself takes care, through his characters and the interplay between them, to place centre stage: philosophy, understood as the search for wisdom and knowledge. (Assessment of the *quality* of Plato's arguments will also be important: we owe it to him as much as to ourselves. But it can come later.) In the 'ancient quarrel' between philosophers and poets, Plato firmly locates his Socrates, his Eleatic Visitor, ..., and – I propose, even insist – himself among the former (cf. p.254 of the *Handbook*, in an entry on 'Hermeneutics'). Plato also, of course, belongs among the poets, and indeed in the presentation of his own arguments/the arguments of the dialogues he can often deploy poetic and dramatic techniques. But to treat him *just* as a poet or dramatist is like calling a chess playing, strategically astute football manager *just* a chess player, even though we might well want to analyse his chess playing as well as his football management (and assess how his grasp of chess strategy helps him manage his team on the football field).

If, again, we add together all the publications on any aspect of Plato from across the world over, say, the past thirty or forty years, it could be that Press is right about the presently 'dominant approach', i.e., on a purely arithmetical reckoning. But of that vast number of publications a significant proportion is concerned precisely with the sort of examination of Plato's arguments that I have described as es-

sential, many of them written by authors<sup>8</sup> who might once have been termed 'analytic philosophers', as in the *Handbook*, but now more usually call themselves plain 'philosophers'.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, given the mere three pages the *Handbook* devotes to 'Analytic approaches', and the implicit and explicit downplaying of the importance of philosophical analysis, many of its own contributors are such authors and philosophers, and the bibliography is stuffed full of their books, chapters and articles. The reason for the contradiction is clear. Like the author of the entry for 'Analytic approaches',<sup>10</sup> the *Handbook* in general restricts itself to a narrow view of the analysis of arguments, identifying it with the deployment of a particular set of 'techniques ... involv[ing] recasting portions of the dialogues as concisely stated deductive arguments, exploring questions relating to validity as well as to truth, exposing contradictions and equivocations, and making explicit all essential assumptions' (p.406). But we have now emerged from what Terry Penner once termed 'the age of diagnosticism',<sup>11</sup> in which only '[sc. properly] logically structured' arguments,<sup>12</sup> largely missing in Plato, are deemed worthy of philosophical attention.<sup>13</sup> The lack of arguments of such a type does not indicate a lack of arguments in general;<sup>14</sup> Plato's dialogues *teem* with arguments, sometimes spread over dozens if not hundreds of pages, and many of them are poorly understood – not surprisingly, if their very existence has regularly been put in doubt.<sup>15</sup>

I now turn to more particular aspects of the *Handbook*. Chapter 1, 'Plato's life, historical, literary and philosophic context', is largely unexceptional. We have entries on Plato's life, 'Aristophanes and intellectuals', 'Comedy' (on Plato's alleged use of 'the techniques of Old Comedy': but did Plato really need to borrow parody and satire from there?), 'Education'

(including the sophists), ‘Eleatics’, ‘Isocrates and logography’, ‘Orality and literacy’ (including a sideswipe at ‘the widespread but waning practice of “rationally reconstructing” arguments alleged to be implicit in texts from the history of philosophy’, p.25: a reference to ‘analytic approaches?’), ‘Poetry (epic and lyric)’, ‘Pre-Socratic philosophers’, ‘Pythagoreans’ (an outstanding piece), ‘Rhetoric and speechmaking’, ‘Socrates (historical)’, ‘Socratics (other than Plato)’, ‘The sophists’ (an entry that reappears, without explanation, in Chapter 4, at pp.344-7), and ‘Xenophon’.

Chapter 2, which begins with an essential piece on ‘The Platonic corpus and manuscript tradition’, is mostly a mix of summary and the briefest discussion of individual dialogues (with one item covering ‘Dubia and Spuria’, except for *Epinomis*, which gets its own section), usually with a few references to the literature. This part of the volume, then, is like a tourist guidebook for someone thinking of visiting a particular area for the first time, with indications of the most interesting sights – but, on occasion (to continue the metaphor), with some views closed off, for a few of the entries tend to shut discussion down rather than open it up. Thus, for example, the entry for the *Apology* translates 30b2-4, without comment, as ‘from virtue comes money and all good things for men in public and private’ (p.55), instead of what John Cooper, *Collected Dialogues* (announced by the *Handbook* editors as the default translation used), gives in the main text: ‘excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men ...’. Admittedly, the *Handbook* does not explicitly commit Socrates to the view that wealth is a good, as the alternative translation in Cooper does (taking *ta alla agatha* as ‘the other goods’ rather than as ‘the goods besides’), but a reader might well ask why, then, it should matter that

money should come from virtue/excellence or not, if it is not a good? The Platonic Socrates certainly shows no interest in money himself, and in *Theaetetus*, for example, he is quite dismissive of it. The way we take the *Apology* sentence (on which see Burnyeat, *JHS* 2005) makes a fundamental difference, not marked by the *Handbook* entry, for our understanding of Socrates in the dialogues. Or, for another example of problematic summary, take that of the *Politicus*: ‘the Eleatic expresses concern that the statesman might become hidden in a group described as “the greatest enchanters among the sophists” (291c). This danger is forestalled by dividing governors into leaders of genuine and imitative (303c) polities, including kingly and tyrannical monarchies, aristocracies and oligarchies, and lawful and lawless democracies’ (p.113). On the face of it, the pair ‘genuine and imitative’, followed by three pairs of constitutions, suggests that the first of each of the pairs of constitutions is meant to be ‘genuine’ (cf.<sup>16</sup> the entry under ‘Law, convention (*nomos*)’ in chapter 4, on the same dialogue, and referring to the same context: ‘a city without an expert ruler should [according to the Eleatic Visitor] stick rigidly its laws, even if the processes by which those laws are chosen are not particularly rational’, p.271). But all six types of constitution are declared to be ‘difficult to live with’, and ‘not correct’ (303b4-5), and the *politikoi* in them not *politikoi* but *stasiastikoi* (303c1-2); in which case the *politeiai* themselves are precisely *not* ‘genuine’. But perhaps after all this is what the *Handbook* entry intends (cf. the entry on ‘Politics and the (figure of the) *Politicus*’, later in chapter 4, which is admirably clear on the point): the danger of the statesman’s being hidden among those ‘enchanters’ and ‘sophists’ is ‘forestalled’ by the identification of the one genuine statesman, and his separation



from all the rest, i.e., all existing ‘statesmen’. Unfortunately, one would probably have to be aware of the issues already to notice the ambiguity in the entry.<sup>17</sup>

In chapter 3, the ‘Important Features of the Dialogues’ are ‘Anonymity’, ‘Characters’, ‘Comedy’ (overlapping with ‘Comedy’ in chapter 1, ‘Humour’ in this chapter; ‘comedy’ here includes ‘absurdity’, read as ‘funny’ rather than as provocative), ‘Drama’, ‘History’, ‘Emotions’, ‘Humour’, ‘Irony’ (three types distinguished), ‘Language’ (a mixed bag of subjects), ‘Literary composition’ (*inter alia*, on literature vs philosophy in the dialogues; Vlastos compared with Strauss), ‘Musical structure’, ‘Myth’, ‘Pedagogical structure’, ‘Pedimental structure’, ‘Play (*paidia*)’, ‘Proleptic composition’, ‘Reading order’, ‘Socrates (the character)’, ‘Tragedy’. Philosophy, I suppose, is not included because philosophical approaches will be covered separately in chapter 5; but it will come as no surprise if I say that I miss an item on ‘Argument’.

Finally, to chapter 4, ‘Concepts, Themes and Topics Treated in the Dialogues’ (chapter 5 I shall consider as sufficiently discussed above). Many of the entries necessarily deal in ‘dogmas’ and ‘doctrines’ – necessarily, at least insofar as these ‘dogmas/doctrines’ are embedded in the literature, even if for one reason or another we are not to identify them with Plato. ‘Aesthetics’ is followed by ‘*Akrasia* (incontinence, weakness of will)’, curiously not cross-referenced either with the entry for ‘Intellectualism’, even though ‘Socratic intellectualism’ is mentioned at the end, or with that for ‘Desire’;<sup>18</sup> then come ‘Animals’ (how clear is it, in light of *Timaeus*, that for Plato a certain ‘animality’ is essential to the makeup of human beings [p.185]?), then ‘Antilogy and eristic’, ‘Aporia’ (useful on the positive value of *aporia* in Plato), ‘Appearance and reality’, ‘Art’, ‘Beauty’, ‘Being and becoming (*on, onta*;

*gignesthai*)’ – an entry consisting mainly of examples of the contrast from *Timaeus*, *Theaetetus*, *Republic*: what more could be done in two pages?; then we have ‘Cause’ (focused on forms as causes), ‘Cave (the allegory of)’, ‘Character’ (mainly ethical), ‘City (*polis*)’ (mainly on *Republic*), ‘Cosmos’ (mainly a summary of *Timaeus*), ‘*Daimôn*’ (three pages on Plato’s uses of *daimôn* and *daimonios*), ‘Death’ (including immortality), ‘Desire’ (cross-referenced with ‘Intellectualism’, and actually giving a clearer understanding of that topic; on the other hand, not everyone agrees that *Republic* and other later dialogues ‘make room for irrational desires bringing about actions’); then ‘Dialectic’, ‘The divided line’ (taking up the same space as the next topic, ‘Education’), ‘Elenchus (cross-examination, refutation)’ (including a short critique of Vlastos’s theory of ‘the elenchus’), ‘Epistemology (knowledge)’, ‘Eschatology’, ‘Ethics’ (Plato as ethical reformer, moral critic, perhaps throughout the dialogues), and ‘Excellence (virtue, *aretê*)’. The entry on ‘Forms (*eidos, idea*)’ does not attempt to ‘arbitrate disputed issues’, but neither does it state most of them. But then again, who could do better, on such a challenging subject, in just over two pages? Well, actually, the authors of the coming entries on ‘Ontology (metaphysics)’ and ‘Participation’, which both refer back to ‘Forms’, though the compliment is not returned). After ‘Forms’, we have ‘Friendship’ (more than half on *Lysis* [q.v. in chapter 2]), ‘Gender’ (a thoughtful survey), ‘Goodness (the good, *agathon*)’, then ‘Happiness (*eudaimonia*)’. One would have expected the two things, ‘goodness/good’ and ‘happiness’ to be connected, but neither entry refers to the other. ‘For the Platonic Socrates, the good is that for the sake of which everything is done’, starts the former; ‘Plato takes it as uncontroversial that all of

us wish to be happy’, says the latter: so just what is the relationship between the two? The former entry is preoccupied with the form of the good, the latter with eudaemonism; *inter alia* it may have helped throw light on the role of forms (q.v., a subject left more than a little mysterious, at least so far) to bring the two somehow into dialogue. But that is one of the costs of dividing everything up into small pieces. Next, ‘Hermeneutics’ (questions raised include whether Plato means to endorse a polysemic reading of his texts: a crucial issue, especially for the *Handbook*), ‘Image’ (mostly on ‘imitation’ of forms; referring to *mimêsis* but not cross-referenced with the entry on it), ‘Inspiration’, ‘Intellectualism’ (see above on ‘Desire’), ‘Justice ...’ (almost all on justice in the *Republic*), another entry entitled ‘Language’, covering some of the same ground as the entry in chapter 3, but achieving greater depth – and twice the length), ‘Law, convention’ (on which see on chapter 2 above), ‘Logic’ (on logic in Plato/Plato’s use of logic, ‘there is still much to do’: hear hear! say I (and have said: since we ceased openly patronising Plato on this score, we have barely begun). After ‘Logic’ there is ‘Logos (account, argument, definition)’ (on the uses of a term), ‘Love’, ‘Madness and possession’, ‘Mathematics (*mathêmatikê*)’ (Plato’s knowledge/understanding/use of), ‘Medicine’, ‘Metatheatre’ (‘self-reflexive’ theatre, Plato’s dialogues as), ‘Method’, ‘*Mimêsis* (imitation)’ (half on the *Republic*; positive and negative paradigms of ‘imitation’), ‘Music’, ‘Mysteries’, ‘Myth’, ‘Nature (*phusis*)’ (as in ‘the study of nature’: *Timaeus*), ‘Non-propositional knowledge’, ‘The one (*to hen*)’ (the entry – roughly on how much of Plotinus was already in Plato? – might easily have been in chapter 5), ‘Ontology (metaphysics)’ (in effect the second entry on forms: see above), ‘Orphism’, ‘Paid-

*erastia* (pederasty), ‘Participation’ (the third entry on forms), ‘Perception and sensation’, and ‘Philosophy and the philosopher’, which comes to the following – dazzling – conclusion: ‘If sophists find refuge in the darkness of not-being, philosophers are difficult to see because of “the dazzling brightness of the region where they reside” ([*Sophist*] 254a). That is why the sophist may claim that *he* is the philosopher, and the statesman hold that public affairs demand a realism that the philosopher is devoid of. When it comes to those three “kinds”, the difference between them is not to be found in a definition (that may be why Plato never wrote the dialogue of the *Philosopher*, alluded to in [*Sophist*] 254b), but ever again in Socrates, who is not a philosopher but *the* philosopher, a subject eluding the predicate. He might have been no more than a disinterested slightly eccentric sophist, if his bite had not startled Plato awake and opened the history of Western philosophy’ (p.324). Finally come ‘Piety’, ‘Pleasure’, ‘Poetry’, ‘Politics’ (see above: another paradigmatic entry, along with ‘Philosophy ...’), ‘Reason’ (three pages), ‘Recollection’ (also three pages), ‘Rhetoric (*rhetorikê*)’, ‘Self-knowledge’, ‘The Sophists’ (repeated from pp.42-5), ‘Soul’, ‘The sun simile’ (Sarah Broadie’s *Plato’s Sun-Like Good*, Cambridge 2021, is not mentioned), ‘Theology’, ‘Time’, ‘Vision’, ‘Women’ – nicely balanced, with references to controversies but no actual bibliographical references, and ‘Writing’ – no references, or cross-references to controversies, and no bibliographical ones either, but still, like ‘Women’, a useful short introduction to the subject. Here are two places, among others, where the *Handbook* really is to Plato rather than to the ways we conceive, use – and misuse – him.

Despite its apparent length (more than eighty pages out of about five hundred in total)



the bibliography is understandably patchy, since it is based – as its title, ‘References’, tells us – on individual entries in the preceding chapters, and the authors of those entries are often highly selective in their references to the literature (occasionally, as we have seen, giving none at all; they were evidently not given a clear brief).

But like the *Companion*, the *Handbook* remains a ‘unique resource’,<sup>19</sup> despite its weaknesses and mis-steps. I am not sure that it is the ‘essential reference text’ it claims to be (on its back cover), not just because of the availability of the internet,<sup>20</sup> but (1) because among its ‘scores of lucid and authoritative essays’<sup>21</sup> are some middling ones, and some that I think are positively misleading, in ways that I have illustrated, and (2) because, as I have indicated, I think the *Handbook*’s agenda for the study of Plato fundamentally mistaken. That agenda, however, is hardly so obtrusive, overall, as to prevent the *Handbook* from being thoroughly useful for a wide variety of readers.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The Continuum International Publishing Group was taken over by Bloomsbury Publishing in 2011, with Continuum titles being published under the Bloomsbury name from late in 2012; the *Companion* evidently missed the cut. While the *Handbook* calls itself a ‘second edition’, and refers to the first, it nowhere identifies the latter as the *Companion* (even on the copyright page).
- 2 In return for which role I was not offered a copy of the volume, a fact I mention not as a complaint but as an explanation of my inability to cross-check with the first edition (the voluminous typescript that was sent to me long since went into the recycling; the published version was, and is, expensive [it is currently on offer on a well-known site for well over \$200] – as is its successor).
- 3 Which stands, then, as a suitably solid memorial for its creator (Gerald A. Press, 1945–2022). I gather that the volume was completed before his death; Mateo Duque, listed as co-editor, evidently saw it to, and through, the press, as well as adding something to the Introduction (see below).

- 4 If there is such a thing as ‘the’ wood at all: yes, I say; no, it seems, according to the *Handbook* (because that would amount to a ‘dogmatic’/‘doctrinal’ interpretation, a mode that is now apparently passé, even though the volume includes numerous illustrations of it). See below.
- 5 The first page of the Introduction indicates that perceived ‘stature’ played a part in editorial policy; perhaps it has some influence here.
- 6 In principle, too, in all languages, though the *Handbook*’s bibliography is thin on work in any language other than English, even if more non-native English-speakers may have been recruited for the new edition.
- 7 Press, 1996, p.514, citing the late Tom Robinson.
- 8 Mainly adorning philosophy departments, but not necessarily so (as in my own case, classicist as I am by training, largely self-taught as a philosopher)
- 9 My own experience of philosophy (and classics) departments in North, Central and South America, Japan and Korea, the Antipodes, in Europe generally, and now in China confirms the patent respect and attention now paid to Plato as a philosopher, whatever state of affairs may have obtained in the past. See further below.
- 10 Presumably one of the original cohort, in the first edition, since he refers to the period since 1954 as ‘the past half-century’.
- 11 ‘If Plato is held to be committed to the belief that the Form of Largeness is itself a large object, he is being held to be committed to something that ... makes no sense ... – How can such beliefs be attributed to a great philosopher like Plato? The answer from within the tradition of Vlastos, Owen, Ryle and others is roughly this: because of conceptual confusions and mistakes of logical grammar. Real enough human disappointments, compounded by misleading analogies that are deep within language, tempt to metaphysical extravagance, generating all sorts of queer and mysterious entities and theories, with all sorts of unnoticed absurdities. It is the duty of the clear-headed reader of Plato [so Vlastos and the rest propose], while appreciating his great pioneering work, to track down the symptoms of his confusions and to diagnose his errors. I think of this period of the last fifty years or so within this particular Anglo-American tradition of the study of Plato as an age of diagnosticism.’ (Terry Penner, *The Ascent from Nominalism*, (Dordrecht 1987), p.xiii).
- 12 ‘[I]n focussing attention on texts that lend themselves to logical analysis we run the risk of slighting other important, if less logically structured, aspects of Plato’s thought ...’, ‘Analytic approaches ...’ p.409; quotation continued in n.14 below.
- 13 See Brian Leiter’s introduction to Leiter (ed.), *The Future of Philosophy* (Oxford 2004), pp.11–12: ‘In light of the great variety of substantive and methodological approaches surveyed above, it is time to pronounce the “bogeyman” of analytic philosophy

- laid to rest: so-called “analytic” philosophers now include quietists and naturalists [as Leiter has defined these]; old-fashioned metaphysical philosophers and twentieth-century linguistic philosophers; historians of philosophy and philosophers who show little interest in the history of the field. Given the methodological and substantive pluralism of Anglophone philosophy, “analytic” philosophy survives, if at all, as a certain style that emphasizes “logic”, “rigor”, and “argument” – a stylistic commitment that does little to demarcate it, of course, from Kant, Hegel, Descartes, or Aristotle’. What serves to excludes Plato from this latter list is no more than his lack of systematic engagement with logic.
- 14 As the entry on ‘Analytical approaches’ comes close to implying: ‘But in focusing attention on texts that lend themselves to logical analysis [such as the ones mentioned from *Parmenides*, *Republic*, *Euthyphro*, *Theaetetus*?], we run the risk of slighting other important aspects of Plato’s thought. It would clearly be an error, for example, to develop an interpretation of a Platonic dialogue without attending to details relating to setting and characterisation ...’.
- 15 A last remark on the editorial policy of the Handbook. ‘The editors continue to believe that the major developments in ... the last forty to fifty years are the decline in developmentalism, expansion of literary and dramatic study, appreciation of the complexity of Plato’s character, Socrates, and the clarification of the essential difference between the philosophy in Plato’s dialogues and that of the generations after him who invented and elaborate the Platonism that has had a sustained influence on all subsequent thought’ (Introduction, p.2). This does not seem much of ‘a process of significant reorientation’, as it is then called, whichever fifty years are in question; items 2 and 4, at least, are hardly new, and developmentalism never took root in many parts of the world. (After another six lines, the ‘first edition Introduction’ is apparently repeated: ‘We continue to believe what was said in the first edition Introduction, which follows’.)
- 16 The Handbook regularly writes ‘q.v.’ for ‘cf.’ (as, e.g., in ‘q.v. *Dubia* and *Spuria*’, p.71).
- 17 For a discussion of the two interpretations, see now Anders Sorensen, ‘The Second Best City and its Laws in Plato’s *Statesman*’, *AGPh* 104/1 (2022), 1-25. Sorensen calls the interpretation I think intended by the Handbook entry on the *Politicus* (and alluded to under ‘Law ...’) ‘traditional’, and sets out to defend it against the sorts of objections I raise above; the defence is complex, and to my mind unsuccessful.
- 18 ‘Many scholars [claims the author of the entry under ‘*Akrasia* ...] believe that Plato denied the possibility of *akrasia* ... on the grounds that desire is a species of practical reason (e.g. Penner 1991): so far as I know, Penner – who is more accurately represented under ‘*Desire*’ – never suggested such an idea, in his 1991 or anywhere else, nor can I think of anyone else who has.
- 19 See the opening paragraph of this review.
- 20 Far be it from me to divert readers away from printed books, which continue to be essential to my life, and I hope will to the whole of academia and beyond. Printed journals, I gather, may be on the way out, but books, surely, will survive and flourish.
- 21 The description is from one of the three cheerleaders (taking on the role I played with the ‘first edition’: see above) cited on the cover. My own summing up would be that there are some really exceptional entries, from the brilliantly laconic to the fully magisterial (or both).