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Платон и платоноведение

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International Plato Society: History and Prospects

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INTERNATIONAL PLATO SOCIETY: HISTORY AND PROSPECTS

ABSTRACT. The publication is a slightly altered inaugural lecture presented at the midterm meeting of the International Plato Society which took place at Saint Petersburg on 28–30 August 2018. The midterm was entitled *Plato hodie: The universe of Plato's thought*. The author sketches a brief history of the IPS, describes the international organization of the Society, and explains its aims and prospects, before proceeding to the context of the upcoming Symposium Platonicum XII that is going to take place in Paris on 15–20 July 2019, and will focus on Plato's *Parmenides*. This work of Plato's remains an odd dialogue which, since Antiquity, has given rise to multiple interpretations. However, none of these answers the crucial question on the relation between the second part of the *Parmenides* and the historical Parmenides' *Poem*. Until now, Platonic interpreters have made ἔν the subject of ἔστιν, to which an existential meaning is given. In Parmenides' *Poem*, however, ἔν appears only once, in the position of an attribute. This encourages one to propose a new interpretation of the second part of Plato's dialogue. At the same time, the new reading of the *Parmenides* calls into question not only an interpretation of the dialogue, but also of Parmenides' *Poem*.

KEYWORDS: Plato, Parmenides, the *Parmenides*, International Plato Society (IPS).

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers of this midterm, intended to prepare for the Symposium Platonicum that will be held in Paris in July 2019. In the minutes I have been granted, I will sketch a brief history of the IPS, describe the international machinery of this

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Society, and explain its goals, before mentioning the context of the Paris Symposium on Plato's *Parmenides*, to conclude with the relevance of this learned meeting here at Saint Petersburg.

A brief history of the IPS

As one can read on the site of the IPS (platosociety.org), the First Symposium Platonicum, entitled at the time *Symposium Platonicum 1986*, took place in Mexico City, on the initiative of Conrado Eggers Lan of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Several Mexican scholars were there, and five scholars from abroad: Alfonso Gómez-Lobo (Georgetown University, Washington), Giuseppe Mazzara (University of Palermo), Thomas M. Robinson (University of Toronto), Livio Rossetti (University of Perugia), and Christopher J. Rowe (University of Bristol). I was not present at this event, because in September 1984, I had undergone a very serious neurological operation that required a very long period of recovery.

The Symposium had as its subject *Los diálogos tardíos*, and the Proceedings of the meeting, edited by C. Eggers Lan and entitled *Platón: Los diálogos tardíos. Actas del Symposium Platonicum 1986*, were out in 1987 as part of the ongoing series published by the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The volume was re-issued in 1994, with a "Preface to the second edition", as the third volume in the series International Plato Studies published by Academia Verlag.

This foundational act was symbolic of the orientation of our Society. Of Dutch origin, Conrado Eggers Lan was born in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in 1925. As a result of the takeover by a military junta in 1976, Conrado Eggers Lan, who was a progressive Christian, left with his entire family for Mexico, where he organized this first Symposium Platonicum. We can thus better understand why the Platonic Society wishes to be truly international, in historical continuity with this first Symposium of the IPS, which carried out a synthesis between Europe, South America, and North America. The subsequent period was to be marked by openings toward other parts of the globe.

The IPS was officially founded on September 3, 1989 at Bevagna, a small town 40 km to the south-east of Perugia, Italy, on the occasion of the Second Symposium Platonicum, devoted to Plato's *Phaedrus*. The idea of setting up the Society was launched by L. Rossetti (University of Perugia), organizer of the Second Symposium Platonicum. A session for this purpose, to be chaired by G. Cambiano (University of Turin), was included in the official program of the Symposium. The Bevagna meeting was attended by 95 scholars, 5 of whom were from Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia, Poland, USSR), 3 from Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, Finland), 7 from the Far East (South Korea, Japan, The People's Republic of China), 1 from Australia, and 8 from Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico).

The Third Symposium Platonicum, held in 1992, was the first to be organized by the IPS under the Presidency of Christopher Rowe on the *Politicus*. Its academic and structural outlines had been approved by the Executive Committee (to whose number A.P. Bos had been added, as representative of the C.J. de Vogel Foundation which provides an institutional grant), at a preparatory meeting held in Amsterdam.

The Fourth Symposium Platonicum, on the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, was held in Granada in 1995, under the Presidency of Tomás Calvo,

The Fifth Symposium took place at Trinity College, University of Toronto, in 1998 under the Presidency of Thomas Robinson. It had as its subject the *Charmides*, the *Lysis* and the *Euthydemus*.

The Sixth Symposium Platonicum was held in Jerusalem, in 2001 on the *Laws*, under the Presidency of Samuel Scolnicov.

The Seventh Symposium Platonicum, on the *Gorgias* and the *Meno*, was held in Würzburg in 2004 under the Presidency of Michael Erler.

The Eighth Symposium Platonicum, on the topic of Plato's *Philebus*, was held in Dublin in 2007, under the Presidency of John Dillon.

The Ninth Symposium Platonicum on Plato's *Politeia* was held in Tokyo in 2010, under the Presidency of Noboru Notomi.

The Tenth Symposium Platonicum was held in Pisa in 2013 on the *Symposium*, under the Presidency of Mauro Tulli.

The Eleventh Symposium Platonicum on Plato's *Phaedo* was held in Brasília in 2016, under the Presidency of Gabriele Cornelli.

The Twelfth Symposium Platonicum on Plato's *Parmenides* will take place in Paris on 15–20 July 2019.

And the Thirteenth Symposium Platonicum on Plato's *Sophist* will take place in Athens (Georgia, USA) in 2022.

As one can see, a considerable number of Platonic dialogues have been chosen as the subjects of the various Symposia Platonica that have taken place in Europe, the Middle and Far East, and in Latin America.

Its organization

Since its beginnings, the International Plato Society has wished to be a participatory democracy, despite Plato's criticisms of the direct democracy of his time. Its statutes were approved by the Executive Committee in Piacenza, in 2003, according to the resolution passed by the General Assembly in Jerusalem, in 2001, and ratified by the General Assembly in Würzburg, in 2004. Here is a quick description of the functional structure of the Society.

The President is elected at the General Assembly for a period of three years. Candidates for President are proposed to the General Assembly by one Full Member and seconded by two Full Members. Luc Brisson, Arnaud Macé and Olivier Renaut were elected Co-Presidents by the General Assembly at the Xth Symposium Platonicum for the period 2016–2019. The President, elected by the General Assembly, represents the Society, receives fees, presides over, and calls ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the General Assembly and the Executive Committee, and organizes and presides over the triennial Symposium, which is prepared during a meeting halfway through his or her mandate, like the one that has been organized here at Saint Petersburg.

The Executive Committee is composed of the President, the Vice-President, the former President and the next President, two representatives for Europe, one for the United States of America and Canada, one for Latin America, one for Asia, Africa and Australia, and the representative of the C.J. de Vogel Foundation. No one person shall hold

more than one office at any one time. The Executive Committee runs the Society according to the resolutions of the General Assembly, oversees the finances of the Society, and helps the President as necessary in the current running of the Society.

The Editorial Committee shall be appointed by the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will see to it that the major languages (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish) of publication are appropriately represented in the Editorial Committee, and that there is due periodic renewal of members of the Editorial Committee with due regard for continuity.

Its aims

1) Organization of a Symposium Platonicum normally held every three years.

2) Promotion of Platonic studies throughout the world and communication among scholars of diverse disciplines working on Plato. This is why we have representatives of the five continents who organize Regional meetings: in this way, we promote the diffusion of Platonic studies through the entire world.

3) Preparation of a bibliographical bulletin by Luc Brisson, to be published on the site of the society. This bibliography, which takes account of the publications in a large number of languages, including the five official languages, wishes to cover not only the Standard Modern Interpretation of Plato, but the proliferation of contemporary approaches in various languages.

4) Finally, the publication of the *Proceedings* of selected papers from each Symposium, under the direction of the sitting President, and of books and series of books on Plato, under the direction of the Editorial Committee.

Plato's Parmenides

Let us turn to the theme of the Symposium Platonicum 2019 in Paris.

Plato's *Parmenides* remains a strange dialogue which, since Antiquity, has given rise to multiple interpretations. Proclus (412–485 CE),

our main witness, offers an inventory of these different positions. It is in the sixth book of the commentary by Proclus on Plato's *Parmenides* that the most extensive and explicit information on the interpretation of the *Parmenides* in Antiquity is found. Proclus distinguishes three main kinds of interpretation: logical, ontological, and theological.

The first group of interpretations presents the *Parmenides* as a simple exercise in logic. Two types of interpretation must be distinguished within this group. According to the first one, Plato wished to refute Zeno on his own territory, dialectics. According to the second opinion, Plato wished to present a veritable treatise on logic. In chapter 5 of his *Didaskalikos*, Alcinoos (2nd century CE) discovers Aristotle's ten categories in the *Parmenides*, and extracts examples from it to illustrate the figures of the syllogisms.

The second group of interpretations considers that the subject of the *Parmenides* is ontological. It then maintains that the object of the deductions is "being-one" in the sense in which Parmenides understood it, a Parmenides depicted as a partisan of the Forms.

A third group of interpreters thinks that the *Parmenides* has as its subject the various degrees of being that proceed from the One. This is an interpretation whose origins go back to Plotinus, who based himself on an idea set forth by certain Neopythagoreans. The most illuminating text in this regard is *Ennead* v 1[10].9.1–27. Plotinus (3rd century CE) begins by reading the doctrine of the three hypostases, the One, the Intellect, and the Soul, in the first three series of deductions of the *Parmenides*. The entire Neoplatonic school was to extend and systematize this exegesis of the *Parmenides*, along this path, transposing it onto a theological level. The decisive stage in this area was made by Iamblichus (4th century CE), who wished to see classes of gods in the realities envisaged by the first three series of deductions. For Proclus (5th century CE), the second part of the *Parmenides* thus contains the entire system of Platonic theology, and the interpretation of every other dialogue must refer to this formal treatise of theology. Proclus goes even further, trying to demonstrate the agreement between this

Platonic theology and those of Pythagoras, Orpheus, and the Chaldeans (*In Prm.* 3.801.18–19 Steel).

Today, we find similar types of interpretation. The third interpretation, which reached its summit with Proclus and Damascius, and which was the most widespread at the end of Antiquity and in the Renaissance, has very few adherents; the only ones who accept the production of metaphysical entities from a Principle are some Hegelians and those who follow an “esotericist” interpretation. The second interpretation is a minority one today, although some of its representatives have produced a considerable body of work. It is, indeed, hard to see a Form in the One. To make this One an intelligible form becomes difficult, for one finds a series of deductions that refer to the world of bodies: all / parts, round figure / straight line, etc. The first interpretation is the most widespread one today, although it is situated within a much more sophisticated logical context. This interpretation has the advantage of coinciding with Parmenides’ explicit goal: to provide Socrates with the means for defending the hypothesis of the Forms.

However, none of these interpretations answers this crucial question: What is the relation between the second part of the *Parmenides* and the historical Parmenides? The formulation of Parmenides’ hypothesis, with which the second part of the dialogue deals: εἰ ἔν ἐστιν or ἔν εἰ ἔστιν, is problematic for two reasons.

Until now, Platonic interpreters have made ἔν the subject of ἔστιν, to which an existential meaning is given. In Parmenides’ *Poem*, however, ἔν appears only once, in the position of an attribute:

(It) was not at one time, (only), not will (it) be (at one time only), since (it) is now, all (of it) together, one, continuous.¹

It must be admitted that in Parmenides’ *Poem*, the subject of ἔστιν is not the one, but it is εἶν ‘being’ (DK 28 B 6.1).

This is why I sought to propose a new interpretation of the second part of the *Parmenides*. I make “one” (ἔν) not the subject, but the

¹DK 28 B 8.6, transl. D. O’Brien (1987).

attribute of Parmenides' hypothesis: εἰ ἔν ἐστιν or ἔν εἰ ἔστιν. A grammatical argument can be invoked to support this construction: ἔν is not accompanied by the article τό, as is the case for attributes. The question then arises of what is this being (ἐόν), subject of ἐστιν "it is", in Parmenides' *Poem*. In short, this reading of the *Parmenides* calls into question not only an interpretation of the dialogue, but also of Parmenides' *Poem*.

All these approaches, from the historical Parmenides to the late Neoplatonism, will be discussed at Paris in a spirit of complete openness, where it will be possible to present and defend each interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*.

This midterm at Saint Petersburg

I am very happy to participate in this midterm entitled *Plato hodie: The universe of Plato's thought*. The history of Russia is closely linked to that of the Byzantine world, which was itself deeply influenced by Platonism. One can only be delighted by the growing interest shown in Platonic studies throughout the Russian Federation. I have already worked with Yuri Shichaline, Svetlana Mesyats and Valery Petroff at Moscow, and with Eugene Afonasin at Novosibirsk. Yet this meeting gives me the opportunity to meet a much larger group of teachers and researchers.

Plato's actuality is very real. The history of the Academy, of Middle and Neo-Platonism, and of the Byzantine world have a great deal to teach us. In addition, it is impossible to talk about Socrates without referring to the testimony of Plato.

Plato's cosmology is also highly original. Plato was the first to try to provide a mathematical model of the world that surrounds us. Of course, the mathematics he used were particularly primitive, and the lack of units of measure made any experimental verification impossible, but one would have to wait for Galileo to make progress in this direction.

In the *Republic* and the *Laws*, we find a criticism of direct democracy, some elements of which remain valid today: a critique of rhetoric,

of the influence of some pressure groups on the media; and, above all, the blunt rejection of the dominance of money. The will to at least reduce conflicts, if not to make them impossible, remains a goal still to be achieved. One of Plato's demands, that a human being be defined by its soul, not by its body, is particularly interesting. This position enables women to leave the private domain, in which they were reduced, by their body, to making babies and raising them, to enter the public sphere; above all, Plato allows women to receive the same education as men.

In the field of ethics, reincarnation, or rather metempsychosis, that is, the soul's transition into different bodies, particularly animals, imposes an absolute respect for the animal world, which, moreover, implies vegetarianism. This position also leads one to admire and respect the entire world, which is a living being. In short, the ecologist movement finds an ideal ancestor in Plato.

Finally, I will end by mentioning the myths fashioned by the poets, which act as a vehicle for tradition, that is, collective memory. To be sure, Plato violently criticizes the myths that were popular in his time, which the rhapsodes recited at the great assemblies and which were represented in the theater. Yet he does not hesitate to fashion myths himself, to convince the multitude to recognize their kinship and to obey the laws of the city, without even thinking of infringing them. In this area, I was inspired by the works of Vladimir Propp, who worked on Russian folk tales.

In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude and my admiration for the organization of the midterm in Russia. It is a good example of the multilateralism sought by the IPS, which wishes to open itself up to all cultures. Since its beginnings, the IPS has opted for a transnationalism that enables ways of reading Plato to enrich one another. This midterm is a perfect example.



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