

In addition, the sheer range of references to figures both historical and contemporary is not entirely unproblematic. Indicative of great erudition and passion for the subject (and used to wonderful effect in isolated sections), these references and allusions, cumulatively, can leave the reader winded, struggling to follow out all of the threads of the discussion. While intellectually exhilarating, this feature of the book might be somewhat daunting for those new to the subject, and this is something that instructors planning to use the text in a course should keep in mind. That being said, there is no reason to insist that these complexities be absorbed on a first reading, and certainly one need not be familiar with every figure cited to appreciate the general thrust of Aho's arguments. Intrepid readers can pursue some of the helpful suggestions for further reading provided at the end of each chapter.

These minor misgivings aside, supplemented by selected primary readings, *Existentialism* could quite effectively be used as a core text in a post-secondary course on the subject. Depending on the instructional context, guided reading of selected sections might be advisable. The book's potential appeal, however, is not limited to the formal classroom; indeed, it will no doubt serve as an engaging introduction and overview for intellectually curious readers of all stripes. Furthermore, those already well-versed in the subject matter will find fresh perspectives and insights on familiar central themes. Aho's book thus succeeds in its stated goal of demonstrating that existentialism, far from being 'outdated' or 'moribund,' remains an urgent and vital philosophy for our times.

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Socratic and Platonic Political Philosophy: Practicing a Politics of Reading

CHRISTOPHER P. LONG

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Political philosophy in the Continental tradition rarely fits neatly into existing conceptual schemes, and Christopher P. Long's recent work could accordingly be classified under any number of philosophical subdisciplines. Long presents fresh interpretations of six of Plato's Dialogues in order to juxtapose a Platonic politics of writing with a Socratic politics of speaking. His organization and method follows six decades of hermeneutical engagement (by figures such as Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Martha Nussbaum) with classic texts from intellectual history. Accordingly, Long walks a fine line between ahistorically importing biased assumptions into each text and missing the underlying gap separating ancient and contemporary life worlds. The book's trans-historical, inter-disciplinary attempt to treat "hermeneutics... as a political activity" (127) serves both as its original sin and its saving grace.

In Chapter 1, "Politics as Philosophy," Long reads the *Gorgias* by juxtaposing Socratic political speaking ('topology') with Platonic political writing ('topography'). He continues with an interpretation of *Protagoras* in Chapter 2, "Crisis of Community," focusing on the influence of social relationships upon one's way of life. Chapter 3, "Attempting the

Political Art” features an original reading of *Gorgias*, which finds Long repeating his refrain that Plato’s performed political praxis upon us readers parallels Socrates’ performed political praxis upon his interlocutors. In Chapter 4, “The Politics of Finitude,” Long offers a reading of the *Phaedo*, whereby Socrates and Plato articulate and employ discourse’s power of communal transformation. Long portrays text reading as a political act of opening oneself up to the possibility of being moved by written discourse. He continues with an interpretation of the *Apology* in Chapter 5, “Socratic Disturbances, Platonic Politics,” in which Socrates deconstructs the dichotomy between public politics and private philosophizing without entirely conflating *praxis* and *theoria*. Long interprets the *Apology* both as a Socratic failure to inject philosophy into politics and as a Platonic possibility which invites readers to complete such a project by attending to justice as a community-animating ideal. In Chapter 6, “The Politics of Writing,” Long mines the *Phaedrus* to articulate Socratic political praxis as “doing things with words animated by a love of wisdom” (165). He concludes in Chapter 7, “Philosophy as Politics,” with a recapitulation of Socratic and Platonic politics as an “erotic idealism” whose ideals are capable of enacting “transformative possibilities” in and through listeners and readers (170).

Long’s methodology is risky, yet it often pays off. His interpretations run deep and wide, and he explores the original Greek language and ideas at length. His fruitful examination of Plato’s “showing” and Socrates’ “telling” harmonizes their distinct voices in imagining new relational possibilities, envisioning the limits of extant political structures, and in modeling the enactment of ideals (176). However, the conclusions that he feels entitled to draw sometimes range between the trivial and the unwarranted, and it is difficult to see why he feels the need to engage with the actual texts of the Platonic dialogues when his main points seem rather straightforward: abstract ideals should inform concrete actualities. Communities and relationships influence individuals’ ways of life. Speech has the power to transform the commitments of hearers and readers. But perhaps the paramount difficulty with Long’s work is that its notion of ‘the political’ seems under-determined. Long is in good philosophical company in positing a primordial political sphere that is ontologically prior to actual political structures and practices. However, he is too quick to call ‘political’ any connection between people and ideas, and he seems to equivocate between the political and the ethical in recalling Socratic and Platonic attempts to cultivate virtue in interlocutors and readers (123). Long discusses ideal justice and ideal morality in one breath, ignoring the fact that modern politics has largely been premised upon the separation of the right from the good. If Long is interested in the (worthy) goal of recovering a virtue-oriented political praxis, then he must reckon more directly with its anti-democratic historical roots in Plato’s corpus. I agree that a substantive political notion of the good is worth fighting for, yet Long remains vague enough about such a concept that it fails to adequately perform the moral tasks that he assigns it. At points, Long admits that politics is a partial, not exhaustive, motive of Plato’s axiological writing; however, the undertone of his project is that politics is everything and everything is politics. Such an expansive move actually serves to reduce, rather than enrich, other areas of human experience.

Long’s project hinges on interesting connections between such disparate regions of experience. Such a synthetic approach is promising, but also problematic. He attempts to bridge the gap between the ideal and the real, but thereby insufficiently acknowledges their distinctiveness. Likewise, his interpretation of *technē* as being “erotically oriented toward the best” (47) conflates several categories (*technē*, *eros*, and *agathos*) to the point of losing the meaning of each. Finally, he equivocates between valuing the

concrete over the abstract and valuing the ideal (the just, the good, the true, and the beautiful) over the actual (58). Long's attempt to navigate a deconstructive *via media* between binaries is laudable, but he occasionally ends up subtracting from—rather than sublating—the significance of opposing concepts. Of course, such is the risk one must take to engage in a “dialogical poetics” of authentic speaking and attentive listening (73). As Long would suggest, the real litmus test of the truth within his writing awaits actualization by the reader who continues the political project which Long has inherited from Socrates and Plato.

This book packs 205 fascinating pages (including bibliography and index) into a slim, solidly bound, gloss-wrapped, hardcover volume featuring playful medieval cover art of the two namesake philosophers. Within its pages, Long—despite some ambiguities of its manifold textual purposes—offers his readers lively re-interpretations of philosophical classics that promise to rejuvenate the political agency of anyone willing to submit oneself to the dialogical practices of philosophy.

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Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy

STEVEN NADLER, Ed.

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The timeliness of the edited volume *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy* should not be understated. For instance, the Portuguese Jewish congregation in Amsterdam has recently held a public discussion to reconsider Spinoza's excommunication, issued in 1656. Also, it is clear that we are in the midst of a renaissance in Spinoza studies. Especially in the disparate philosophical movements in France and Italy since the mid to latter half of the 20th century, Spinoza is cited as an ally, an uncanny contemporary, and a friend. Louis Althusser finds in Spinoza a model for his own rethinking of the political-historical; Gilles Deleuze finds in Spinoza a paradigm for his concept of the body without organs; Antonio Negri finds in Spinoza a model for a materialist ontology of revolutionary practice. What is it of Spinoza that calls to us in the present to recognize him as one of our own?

Given the eminence of Spinoza for us today, it is important to ask if we have the hermeneutical resources to do justice to Spinoza's philosophy. Both Slavoj Žižek and Stephen Nadler have commented that there seem to be as many Spinozas as there are readers of Spinoza. Each of us brings our own preconceptions and historically contingent questions to bear on our interpretation of his philosophical commitments. Yet Nadler's point (in the Introduction to this volume) that Spinoza is a sort of ‘Rorschach test’ extends beyond the contemporary and reaches back into the history of his reception.

In the history of Spinoza's reception, there have been at least two main problems. The first is that most interpreters did not have full access to his texts. Since Spinoza's complete works have now become readily accessible (and are for the most part available for free online) and have been translated into many different languages, this first problem has arguably been overcome. The second problem is that Spinoza is approached without a proper understanding of his philosophical heritage. It is this second problem that