

## Book Reviews

Christopher P. Long: *Socratic and Platonic Political Philosophy: Practicing a Politics of Reading*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. 240.)

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If asked to explain Plato's political philosophy, one would most likely consider the *Republic*, the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. Long surprises us by deciding not to pay attention to these three "political" dialogues, focusing instead on the *Protagoras*, *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, the *Apology*, and the *Phaedrus*.

A common assumption, that Socrates can be separated from Plato, or ignored completely, in political theory, also gets challenged by Long, who supposes that dialogue and reading together are illustrative of political activity, making Socrates and Plato partners in expressing a single political philosophy. In order to accomplish this task, politics must be practiced as philosophy and philosophy as politics. The dialogues other than the "political" ones mentioned above show us exactly how blurred these lines become in a correct understanding of Socratic/Platonic political philosophy. As readers we become interlocutors with the personages in the dialogues as well as other readers with whom we come to share our experience. Long's claim is that interpersonal reflection upon the central issues of political life erotically pulls us towards an outcome that tends to perfect both ourselves and those with whom we live. Doing philosophy in Socratic fashion is to engage in political activity just as proper political activity manifests itself through doing philosophy. The dialogical act with a view to comprehending justice is both philosophical and political, and this is why ultimately Socratic and Platonic political philosophy cannot be separated.

It is not that Long draws no distinction between Plato and Socrates when it comes to politics. The work opens with a distinction between the topology of Socratic politics and the topography of Platonic politics. The former concerns the *logos* as it unfolds between Socrates and his interlocutors as we witness them in the dialogues. The latter concerns "a space that opens up between us and the Platonic text" (x) as we read and reflect upon the dialogues. We can be transformed through the dialogical process much as sometimes happens with the characters in the dialogues themselves. As readers, we move back and forth between Socratic topology and Platonic topography, realizing how interdependent one is upon the other. We seek to enter into the topology by imagining ourselves discoursing directly with Socrates, but we

can only indulge this imaginative enterprise through the topography Plato lays out. And when we back out of the topology, we are immersed in the topography. In essence, we have two dialogical levels both of which are interdependent upon the other.

Long begins with the *Protagoras*, where the main point seems to be to show that true politics—politics that is philosophical—is distinct from demagoguery, a form of speech-making practiced in the political assemblies. Socratic politics needs a community of learning, and much of the struggle of this dialogue concerns whether it can finally be established. No community is established, but we do learn about the necessary connection between community and the pursuit of excellence. An examination of the *Gorgias* follows to indicate another dimension of the topology that needs to be in place for Socratic politics to occur. Here the object is to realize that politics should be about the best and not the most pleasant. This dialogue turns us in that direction and thus reverses the pairings in common politics where rhetoric prevails over dialogue, power over truth, and politics over philosophy. Platonic writing makes us appreciate Socratic speech and how it helps to reverse the polarities just mentioned. Dialogue can prevail over rhetoric if both truth is our object and we are speaking to the individual herself and not just what may please her. Focusing on justice with these two objects in mind can help truth overcome power and finally have philosophy triumph over power. Long does not seem to be suggesting that we witness these reversals in the *Gorgias* itself, but that the intimate connection between Platonic writing and Socratic speaking awakens these reversals in ourselves. It is a form of caring for our own souls.

The idea of Socratic and Platonic politics being a looking after our own souls is perhaps best exemplified, Long claims, in the *Phaedo*. Here the death of Socrates calls us to remember him, but we do so through Plato's writing. The death of Socrates emphasizes why Socratic and Platonic politics are coupled, even if different. Their end is the well being of our souls, but neither can stand alone in pursuing that end. One of the factors necessary, and sought first in the *Protagoras*, is a true dialogical community. In the *Phaedo* we find that community. Perhaps because we have that community, we also see, according to Long, a willingness to reexamine fundamental beliefs about important topics that generally characterizes philosophy. This reexamination can only be done in the company of others, making the process fundamentally political. So since the *Phaedo* tells us that philosophy is the art of dying, we must practice that art with others in a way that also cares for the soul. In so doing, we learn that we must deploy the Forms as if they were real, certain, and eternal because "they are capable of drawing those willing to seek them *as if* they surely existed into [a] more just and truthful relation to one another" (96). Hence caring for the soul requires that one always be looking upward—not just sideways at one's neighbor—even if one is not always certain or clear about what one sees there. There are, however, risks to this gaze.

Perhaps even more than the *Phaedo*, Plato's *Apology* points to those risks, as Socrates is essentially unheard by those conducting his trial. Yet the very risk of being unheard also points to the possibility of success, since through Plato we see what it is like to keep our gaze upwards through the din of ordinary politics. For as Plato depicts the private integrity of Socrates through his devotion to justice through philosophy, Long notes that this focus transforms the reader by teaching that the seemingly private act of philosophy cannot help but seep into the public world. Indeed, Long claims that as the "powers of discernment" increase in the individual as he or she considers justice in the community, so too does the community become transformed politically through the dialogical acts that are philosophy. And although the *Apology* demonstrates the failure of Athens to appreciate this connection, and perhaps indicates the likely prospects in multitudes generally, it nevertheless brings to each new generation of readers the hope of a different outcome.

The *Phaedrus* teaches the love of truth in words, whether written or spoken. It is perhaps no accident that the *Phaedrus* is the capstone dialogue for Long, since it involves both a collaborative reading between Socrates and Phaedrus of Lysias's text as well as a consideration of what constitutes beautiful speaking—endeavors with which we, together with Long, are engaged as we encounter Plato and Socrates. Because of the issue of beauty in the dialogue, Long gives special attention to eros, which must be simultaneously directed to one's partners in dialogue and to the beautiful itself. The other interlocutor must be a true object of one's interest or the dialogue fails, and the dialogue as a stepping stone towards excellence cannot succeed if one's focus is not upon ideals, however elusive. The power behind both is eros, and pursued properly it produces a way of life that is the union of philosophy and politics. The lessons Socrates is teaching Phaedrus on what to consider in reading *Lysias* are the same things Plato is asking us to consider in reading his dialogues. In the end, though Socratic politics may be an exercise in direct dialogical exchange, Long points us to Platonic politics, which is "rooted in the capacity for a written text to be brought to life by collaborative readings and rereadings in which the things said in the text are permitted to speak directly to and perhaps even transform the lives of those engaged with it" (163). The *Phaedrus* is the most illustrative of a successful Platonic politics.

Although "Socratic philosophy is the practice of politics," Platonic politics seems the object of this study, for it is "the practice of philosophy undertaken each time we take up a dialogue and engage together in the imaginative activity of collaborative reading" (186). What happens though if we bring the *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws* back into the picture? Are these to be considered a purely Platonic political philosophy as opposed to the Socratic/Platonic one we find here? If so, not only are we left with the question of their relationship, but the scope of the politics to which Long's book refers may be of a rather limited sort. The scope issue arises from the very title of Long's work, which suggests that there are other politics besides the one of reading. Indeed, in numerous places Long speaks as if politics is simply social

interaction of some sort among whatever sized group, which suggests that there may be as many forms of politics as there are social interactions. In other places, the Socratic/Platonic political philosophy seems to concern the whole community.

Long holds that the collective readings will have a salutary effect upon the wider community. Yet if there are other politics besides this one, we must wonder about their interrelationship. If a philosophical politics is the *only* legitimate one, on the other hand, then not only are its prospects incredibly dim (as we have seen historically), but the possibility opens up that this is not a politics at all, but a withdrawal from political life, or at best a self-contained politics among a small minority of dedicated readers. Long both hopes and believes that the benefits of this politics will seep into the wider community. If, on the other hand, the ideal is a whole society of communal readers, it's unlikely we are talking about anything other than the most specialized of social orders. There may be good reasons to bring back into the picture the three Platonic political dialogues mentioned earlier as a way of solving the scope problem at both the philosophical and social levels.

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Adriel M. Trott: *Aristotle on the Nature of Community*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xiii, 239.)

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Adriel M. Trott offers a meticulous reading of Aristotle's *Politics* that challenges many of the prevailing interpretations. While nearly all conceptions of political community in the history of political thought derive from premises based on the "logic of exclusion," Aristotle's political theory, rightly understood, is fundamentally inclusive (5). Modern social-contract theorists and even Aristotle's premodern counterparts describe a relationship between nature and reason which is either hierarchical or a fundamental opposition. Trott argues, by contrast, that Aristotle's dynamic account of the activity of reason "as joined to the work of reason in the human being and the polis" is unique and should be recovered as a powerful resource for contemporary political theory (6). Trott's book is both technically proficient and timely, showing how Aristotle's political theory could supplement current controversies regarding refugees, the stateless, and protest movements such as Occupy. Aristotle's *Politics* shows how the political community is grounded in and