
Here we have a collection of articles, unrevised, ranging over twenty-five years, from a prominent professional philosopher writing mainly in debate with his intellectual mentor Gregory Vlastos, to whose memory the book is dedicated. It divides into four coherent sections, five essays on Socrates (1985-92), six on Platonic metaphysics (1975-84), two on the treatment of art in the Republic (1982, 1988), and introductions reprinted from recent translations of three dialogues (Symposium [1989], Republic [1992] and Phaedrus [1995]). In the nineteen-seventies and at least until the early eighties Nehamas imagined Plato as writing metaphysical dialogues to publish current developments in his thinking like a modern academic (xvi; cf. xvii-xviii). Thereafter Nehamas seems to have begun paying attention to the literary form of the dialogue (see especially the introduction to the Phaedrus), and even proposes that Plato in the Theaetetus for pedagogical reasons did not reveal his full current theory of knowledge (239), yet he never abandons the developmental hypothesis, in the mid eighties following Vlastos’ interest back from Plato to Socrates. Nehemas sets out in his introduction his interpretive principles (xix-xxiii), and applies them to justify his approach to Plato’s dialogues (xv-xvi, xxviii-xxxii).

Nehamas’ thinking about Socrates circles round Vlastos’ work that led to Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher (Cambridge, 1991), but he rejects Vlastos’ use of Xenophon and Aristotle to confirm evidence in Plato for the historical Socrates, on the grounds that the former are not independent witnesses (91-2). Nevertheless Nehamas pursues his own interpretation of Socrates as distinct from Plato, criticising Vlastos for failing to capture the philosopher’s mysteriousness and making him into a dogmatist (96-104). His own Socrates is ignorant of the definitions of virtues (37), and so of answers to all the important debated moral questions that follow from definitional knowledge (32, 35). Unlike Terence Irwin’s Socrates, he has some incidental knowledge, not merely true belief (18-19), about virtues (thus avoiding the ‘Socratic fallacy’, 31-2, cf. 160-3), but (unlike Vlastos’ Socrates) he does not consider himself a
teacher, since this knowledge does not encompass anything important (31, 46, 63-4, 70-5).

Neither is this Socrates an intellectualist, believing action depends on thought alone, since on the analogy of virtue to a craft, expertise would also require practical habituation (46); his intellectualist appearance is well explained by the fact that the people he talks to are generally those with intellectual pretensions (75). His method of refutation is distinguished from sophistry only by its aim: truth, not victory (112, with Vlastos and Kerford). The paradox that his criterion of truth is precisely dialectical victory is resolved on the same principle: not teaching, Socrates only aims to work out in each case which argument should win (116, cf. Gorgias 458a).

Yet Nehamas' Socrates consistently displays virtue, and so his Plato, by contrast, interprets Socrates as indeed a teacher (49-50, cf. 13), and also adopts this role himself. See 62 for Nehamas' attempt to state his distinction between, firstly, Plato's depiction of Socrates' self-understanding and, secondly, Plato's own interpretation of Socrates' function: this is justified not by any analysis of the literary structure of the dialogues, but only, implicitly, by appeal to the developmental hypothesis. His Plato recognises in Socrates' virtuous ignorance a knowledge identical with virtue and happiness, that is, philosophy (117). Notwithstanding the fact that this would render the historical Socrates implausibly—and perhaps ridiculously—self-ignorant, Nehamas' Plato in the Meno interprets the knowledge that Socrates is unaware he has as being the result of recollection (49-50), and (in the Republic) his dialectic as the reliable path to it, on the basis of the distinction between appearance and reality that the theory of Forms introduces (117).

According to Nehamas the theory of Forms, prior to the dialogue Parmenides, is based on a principle attributed to the historical Parmenides (133, 181-2): that all predication is properly essential, i.e., that to say that something is such-and-such is understood as meaning that that thing is what it is to be such-and-such (thus 'Socrates is just' would mean, in effect, 'Socrates is what it is to be just', cf. 168). This is proposed as the common assumption of the time (172). Answering to the oddity of sentences such as the example above, Platonic Forms are interpreted as the
perfect exemplars that such predicates truly name: 'is just' only properly identifies the Form Justice. Self-predications ('Justice is just') turn out then to be merely a description of the Form's nature (178-9), and trivially true. Contra Vlastos, what is at issue in such dialogues is never primarily the abstractness (i.e., universality) of Forms as definienda (xxv-xxviii), but their uniqueness (170, cf. 172).

Sensible instances corresponding to Forms are distinguished not by a lack of exactitude, but by being characterised only accidentally, relative to a certain context (152-4). Thus in the Phaedo and Republic 5-7 Forms are introduced only to explain the primary referents of relative and comparative terms when taken absolutely ('incomplete predicates', 143), and are limited to these predicates. The theory of Forms is thus the consequence of a linguistic error. Nehamas denies that the doctrine of participation of sensibles in Forms is meant to explain this relation, given that no sensible is properly subject to the relevant predicate, but he doesn't justify this claim (182-83), and subsequently seems to contradict it (194 n.41 cont'd, 186, 187).

Nehamas' limitation of the range of Forms and his denial of epistemic weight to the concept of participation both seem designed to reduce the degree of Plato's commitment to the complete ontological subordination of all sensible phenomena, with the aim that the change in the conception of Forms claimed for the late period, from perfect exemplars to logically constitutive genera, does not seem too question-begging. He is similarly motivated to adopt Owen's controversial early dating of the Timaeus (218 n.6), but even so the universal distinction there between being and becoming would support a more metaphysically oriented interpretation of Phaedo, Symposium and Republic 5-7.

For Nehamas Plato's late period, beginning with the Parmenides, is characterised by the rejection of the conception of essential predication. As a result, Forms are no longer excluded, by their radical difference from all participants, from themselves participating one in another, and sometimes even in themselves (212-17). The latter is necessary, since on Nehamas' view now Forms no longer essentially exemplify the attribute they are responsible for, and would not otherwise now be subject to self-predication. Nehamas does not explain how the inference is supposed to
proceed, from the claim that each Form (in the middle period) differs ontologically from sensibles that participate in it, to the claim (not in the dialogues) that a Form may not participate in other Forms. Without that step secured it would not seem necessary for Plato to change the theory to allow for the 'interweaving of Forms', nor, consequently, to make a special case for self-participation. Indeed the account of dialectic in the 'divided line' (Republic 511bc) positively requires predicating one Form of another (or so it seems to me).

The two papers on Plato's views on art involve an analysis of the metaphysics of art in Republic 10, and a comparison of Plato's criticisms with contemporary criticism of television. Of the appended introductions to dialogues, the first two are short, and while that on the Symposium offers a sketch of a plausible account of its dramatic structure (see esp. 312-14), that to the Republic is popular and superficial, which raises the question why these introductions were included at all: they are neither comprehensive nor representative of the dialogues, and do not connect with the previous thematic essays well. Perhaps the best that can be said for them, especially that to the Phaedrus, is that they demonstrate how Nehemas has recently contributed to the dawning recognition among analytically trained Plato scholars that they cannot ignore the literary form of a dialogue in explaining its philosophical achievement or meaning.

The discussion of the Phaedrus, the most recent piece in the collection, is a substantive contribution to the debate on its unity, which Nehemas finds in the topic of rhetoric. The speeches on eros are explained as examples of rhetoric, and their subject, once again, in terms of Plato's development: he revises the simple account of motivation from the Symposium by incorporating the tripartite soul in the doctrine of eros (348-9), taking the opportunity to provide another erotic protreptic to philosophy. Yet the metaphysics, that of the middle period, cannot be meant literally, since the Phaedrus applies the method of collection and division, a signature of the late period. Thus the metaphysics of the speech is an adaptation to the 'complexity' of Phaedrus' own soul, to convert him to philosophy (350). But this tortuous effort to preserve the developmental hypothesis (quite apart from the incoherence of taking the psychology literally, but the metaphysics not) effectively fails by letting the cat out of the bag. If the 'middle period' metaphysics here is to be
explained rhetorically, then why not similarly in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates talks to Pythagoreans, in the *Symposium*, which positively reeks of rhetoric, or in *Republic* 5, in a protreptic passage distinguishing philosophers from non-philosophers? And if Nehamas’ account of Plato’s metaphysics unravels here, then so does his effort to distinguish between Plato and Socrates, and his grounds for finding any Platonic doctrine in the dialogues. In any case, the essay on the *Phaedrus* concludes that this dialogue should not be read for doctrine (353-4).

I have sought to discuss this book as a book, since it is so presented. But the reading is hard going, given that nearly every chapter is a tightly argued journal article and so the central planks of Nehamas’ positions and their interconnections are not laid out systematically, while despite the not infrequent overlaps there are also some inconsistencies and changes of mind, as noted above. Given the evolution of his own approach to Plato (if not his interpretation), the author might have profitably revised these papers to make a better and more coherent book. I should also note that the format suffers from some defects, despite the useful indices. There is no bibliography, notes are placed at the end of each essay, but without page headers indicating their connections, and even within essays there seems to be little consistency in when Greek is transliterated and when not. I found twenty-three typographical errors, and an ungrammatical and apparently mistaken translation of *Republic* 435a7-8 (208: read ‘in that respect in which it is called the same’).

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