

BONAZZI (M.) *Academici e Platonici. Il dibattito antico sullo scetticismo di Platone.* (Il Filarete: Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Milano 213). Milan: LED, 2003. Pp. 284. €24.50. 8879162195.

This book aims to reconstruct the ancient debates on the legitimacy of any sceptical interpretation of Plato's thought and its legacy.

In ch.1 Bonazzi examines the Neoplatonists' reception of scepticism, which showed hostility and scarce knowledge of the actual positions of the historical sceptics, typically conflating Academics and Pyrrhonists and confusing empiricism and scepticism. B. argues convincingly that this fuzzy picture was mainly dependent on reflections on the limits of 'scepticism' found in Plato (*Theaetetus*, *Cratylus*) and Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 4), and that the Neoplatonists' attacks (which he describes inaccurately as charges of contradiction, rather than self-refutation) were inspired by those well-known arguments. However, B. himself risks incurring the charge that he lays against the Neoplatonists by overlooking fundamental distinctions between Pyrrhonists and Academics and neglecting details within these traditions. For example, Arcesilaus' claim that he did not even know he knew nothing is not the same as Sextus' move of clarifying the purely subjective value of his utterances (50-1); 'Nothing is true' is not one of Sextus' slogans (51); 'to introduce ἀκαταληψία' is negative dogmatism from a Pyrrhonian perspective, not from an Academic one (85); arguing *in utramque partem* is no more characteristic of Academic than of Pyrrhonian scepticism (93-4); the distinction between the adhesion to the πῖθάνον as the conclusion of an *ad hominem* argument and as one endorsed *in propria persona* is conflated with the different distinction between the approval of the πῖθάνον as a criterion of action and the assent to it as a fallible criterion of truth (104-5).

Ch.2 discusses the reaction of the author of the *Prolegomena in Platonis philosophiam* against those who 'maintain that he [Plato] too professed ἀκαταληψία' by drawing on aspects of his writings, such as: the frequent occurrence of expressions of doubt and hesitation; the tendency to argue *in utraque*; the destruction of the definitions of knowledge and number in the *Theaetetus*; the criticism of both senses and intellect; the disavowal of knowledge and teaching in the dialogues (as B. stresses, these arguments make no distinction between Plato and his characters, Socrates in particular). The Neoplatonist replies by quoting Plato (often the very dialogues used by his opponents) to clarify that he was not a sceptic at all: Plato refutes false (empiricist) conceptions of knowledge but lets the soul know the truth that already lies within; Socrates does not know anything, in comparison with divine wisdom; Socrates does not teach anything, but his maieutic method helps people to recollect; Plato argues tentatively *in utraque*, but in the end arrives at the truth.

In ch.3 B. concludes, on the basis of circumstantial evidence, that the supporters of the sceptical interpretation of Plato criticized by the Neoplatonists were members of the Hellenistic Academy, to be precise the

'fourth Academy' of Philo of Larissa. A debate on Plato's scepticism developed in the context of the quarrel between Philo and Antiochus; the former argued for the unity of the Academy, and saw Plato as a (mild) sceptic like himself, avoiding rash dogmatic conclusions and continuously campaigning against all pretensions to infallible knowledge; the latter favoured a return to Plato's doctrinaire *vetus Academia* before Arcesilaus' sceptical turn. B. sketches a quite standard draft of the various phases in the sceptical Academy, but maintains that it is unnecessary to trace subtler distinctions between Arcesilaus', Carneades', Clitomachus', Philo's and Metrodorus' views of Plato's scepticism since they all agreed in interpreting him as a supporter of ἀκαταληψία. This is unconvincing: ἀκαταληψία assumes different forms in the hands of different thinkers, coexisting with very different varieties of scepticism (it is not by chance that B. writes later, contradicting himself, that Philo's view was misinterpreted by those Neoplatonists who fought it, because for Philo Plato 'is not "an ambassador" of *akatalepsia*' (137)).

In ch.4 B. examines the Pyrrhonists' refusal to consider Plato and his school as genuinely sceptical, adopting a recent reading of the notorious *crux* at *PH* 1.222 which makes Aenesidemus and Menodotus deny Plato's scepticism. He also reconstructs Favorinus' position as [215]

an attempt to reconcile Academics and Pyrrhonists, but this conjecture seems to leave Favorinus with a position which is either (more likely) pure Philonian fallibilism or non-Academic Sextan-style Pyrrhonism.

Chs 5 and 6 analyse two attempts to reconcile a 'doctrinal' interpretation of Plato with the thesis of the unity of the Academy. According to the anonymous commentary on the *Theaetetus*, the Socratic *aporia*, irony and dialogue are not symptoms of scepticism, but didactic tools for triggering recollection in the reader; almost all the Academics shared Plato's main doctrines and argued dialectically against the adversaries of Platonism, in particular Stoics and Epicureans and their empiricist epistemologies, maieutically preparing the path for that Platonic message they presupposed. B. attributes the same interpretation to Plutarch, on the basis of less definitive evidence (B.'s reading of *adv. Colot.* 1121F-1122A, according to which for Arcesilaus ἀκαταληψία and ἐποχή would only be starting-points for the dogmatic wisdom of the ancients, appears difficult to square with the text).

Academici e Platonici is a comprehensive overview of a complex and fascinating topic, and will be a sufficiently solid introduction for advanced students and a helpful tool for scholars wishing to engage in further research, thanks also to extensive references and bibliography. What this book gains in breadth of historical reconstruction it sometimes loses in originality, precision and depth of philosophical analysis, some interesting proposals notwithstanding. A suitable conclusion bringing together the various threads of the ancient debates would have been welcome.

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