

companion piece to the *Republic*. These ambitious aims are approached with reference to the established scholarly responses to the dialogue, responses that are impressively mastered and respectfully incorporated within an interpretation that seeks to go beyond them. All of this seems an enormously ambitious task for a book of this size, and yet the importance of this work is that it goes far enough in meeting its goals, without tying every argument up into a neat bundle, to have opened many paths to further fruitful discussion.

A central problem, introduced in Chapter 1, is the apparent discrepancy between the criticism in the *Republic* of art as mimesis and the very artful presentation of the *Symposium* itself, a dialogue populated with artistic characters, illustrated by myths, and structured as an imitation of an imitation. Chapter 2 argues that the self-conscious destruction of an established factual narrative, that of Aristodemus, illustrates a distinction between barren mimesis and the 'hybristic' transformation that is part of a dialectical creative process. A relationship between the *Protagoras*, which introduces the major sophists, and the *Symposium*, portraying their students, is established as part of the focus in the *Symposium* on the problem of the transmission of wisdom. This relationship verifies Socrates' claim that wisdom is not a commodity that can be physically transferred or imitated.

Chapter 3 surveys scholarship on the significance of the order of speeches in the dialogue, and foreshadows the reading in Chapter 4 of the early speeches as representative not only of each speaker but also of different genres. For example, Phaedrus, as mythologue, is rehabilitated as an eager learner providing the impulse for the other speeches, not criticized as a poor teacher about love. Aristophanes receives lengthy attention as a representative of the class of poetic mythmakers. His particular myth illustrates the points made in the *Republic* that the natural object of mimesis, delightful as it may be, is the inferior part of human nature. At the same time his mythic narrative may be read as a parody of Platonic dialectic itself, while inviting questions about the nature of human identity in relation to the divine. Agathon, 'the child of plenty' whose highly refined art adorns thoughtlessness, is most tragic, the representative of the brilliance of Athenian manhood corrupted by a facile sophistic education and a mob of fans, thus illustrating the process of corruption of the good described in *Republic* 492a ff.

Chapter 5 interprets the speech of Diotima-Socrates, which introduces dialectic into the dialogue as a 'prism' through which the previous speeches are refracted and transformed. Diotima herself, as a faceless and absent other, is a paradigm for the dialectical process that constitutes the ascent to the divine, and her myth of Eros' birth enacts the activity of philosophy itself. Chapter 6 reads Diotima's account of the Greater Mysteries and the ascent as a 'multidimensional energy focus for the pulsating design' (5) of the dialogue, creatively destroying and transforming each of the previous speeches, and representing a positive idea of art as dialectic. Chapter 7 presents Alcibiades' disruption as an authentic confirmation of Socrates as a unique philosopher on the mystical ascent outlined by Diotima, while he

himself represents the failure of a mimetic, as opposed to a dialectic, search for wisdom. The eighth and final chapter is an overview of the dialogue as a transformative, liberating interplay of diverse voices and genres, all of which, while imperfect and monolithic in themselves, respond to and reflect on one another to yield a whole much greater than its parts. The authors follow Bakhtin in their claim that the *Symposium*, as a self-conscious, dialogical presentation of many voices and genres, infused with disruptive physical humour, is the first novel in history, one which dramatizes the dialectic outlined in the *Republic*. The book ends with a final flourish in which Plato is compared to polytropic Odysseus, that 'clever, angular-thinking Greek' (237), the storyteller who disrupts and transforms a monolithic epic past.

This book makes some big leaps that are usually well supported by argument, but some claims provoke a skeptical response, e.g., that 'thought' (rather than Zeus as a slow thinker) is ridiculed by Aristophanes at 190c1-3 (74). The problem (21), 'How are we supposed to read a Platonic dialogue if every incidental detail is potentially significant?', remains unresolved. Some details seem quite arbitrarily selected for interpretation. A much more productive failure, however, is of the sort inevitable for a single volume on such a complex subject: having elucidated the complex and important relationship between the *Symposium* and other dialogues, this book traces only a few of the many possible paths of connection, mostly to the *Republic*. However, in so doing it offers a paradigm and an open field for further work on Plato's dialectical play.

This book is essential for any serious reader of Plato.

Aara Suksi

(Department of Classical Studies)

University of Western Ontario

Donald Davidson

Truth, Language, and History.

Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press 2005.

Pp. xx + 350.

Cdn\$139.50: US\$74.00

(cloth: ISBN 0-19-823756-1);

Cdn\$54.00: \$27.50

(paper: ISBN 0-19-823757-X).

This is the fifth and final collection of Davidson's essays published by Oxford University Press. The first two collections, *Essays on Actions and Events* and *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (ITI)* were published in the early-

1980s, while *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* and *Problems of Rationality* were released in 2001 and 2004 respectively. As Davidson's work consists almost solely of journal articles, the publication of these volumes makes this the first time in more than twenty years that all of his most important essays are available in book form.

This volume contains twenty essays in four sections. The selection and grouping of these essays provide an insight into how Davidson viewed his own work and where he saw connections between seemingly disparate topics, but more importantly they allow us the opportunity to assess the evolution of Davidson's thought after the publication of the first two volumes. In the first section, 'Truth', he had two main projects. First, Davidson was always a proponent of the Tarskian theory of truth and he here tried to show the usefulness of that theory (e.g., in helping to articulate a theory of meaning), to defend it from various criticisms, and to explain how it differs in important respects from minimalist, disquotational, and redundancy accounts (labels frequently associated with Tarski's account). Second, Davidson argued against the idea that truth can be defined. According to him, 'the concepts philosophers single out for attention, like truth, knowledge, belief, action, cause, the good and the right, are the most elementary concepts we have, concepts without which ... we would have no concepts at all. Why then should we expect to be able to reduce these concepts definitionally to other concepts that are simpler, clearer, and more basic?' (20). This may seem strange coming from someone who endorsed what is frequently called the Tarskian *definition* of truth, but Davidson was careful to show us that Tarski was in fact not defining truth in general, but rather characterizing and formalizing how it is that truth works in particular languages.

The second section, 'Language', is an interesting selection of essays, especially for those who associate Davidson's philosophy of language with the program to develop a formal semantics for natural languages, as articulated in *ITI*. It appears that Davidson was no longer pursuing that project, but had instead embarked on a program more in line with communication-intention theorists like Paul Grice. In this section he argued that if one were to define language as a conventional object which individuals first acquire in order to successfully communicate, a definition which he thinks many philosophers had indeed adopted, then he would (notoriously) conclude 'that there is no such thing as a language' (107). How then do we explain the success of communication? In developing his answer, Davidson adopted a theory whereby the speaker's intentions to be understood in a particular way play the primary role. These are exciting essays that encourage one to question whether Davidson had changed his mind with respect to the program he initiated in *ITI* or merely changed his interest and emphasis.

The third section, 'Anomalous Monism', contains two essays on Davidson's trademark brand of non-reductive physicalism that he first articulated in a series of essays in the early '70s. His goal here was to defend that theory and respond to criticisms. He suggested that many criticisms, in particular of his claim that there are no psycho-physical laws, are a result of his failure to

clearly distinguish between strict laws (which are exceptionless and contain no *ceteris paribus* clauses) and non-strict laws. Davidson came to agree with Jerry Fodor and Jaegwon Kim that there are laws of some sort linking mental and physical events, but, he continued, 'what I have claimed is that such laws are not strict, and that mental concepts are not reducible by definition or by strict "bridging" laws to physical concepts' (194). It remains to be seen whether this is a clarification of Davidson's controversial thesis, or a rejection of those aspects of it that made it controversial and interesting in the first place.

The most unexpected section is the fourth, 'Historical Thoughts'. Davidson is not well known for his work in the history of philosophy, but, as he pointed out in interviews elsewhere, he had the opportunity to teach in almost every area of philosophy during his career as a university professor. This section consists of six essays dealing with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, and Gadamer. In general, the essays concern those aspects of their work that overlap with Davidson's own concerns. About Spinoza he said, 'I suppose it is inevitable what when we try to understand a philosopher whom we find altogether admirable, yet difficult and obscure, we are drawn to an interpretation which we find as consistent and congenial as charity prompts and honesty permits. Thus I do not feel abashed to admit that the reading I find plausible of Spinoza's ontological monism coupled with a dualistic (or multiple) explanatory apparatus is close to my own view of the relation between the mental and the physical' (308). This tendency to read the great philosophers this way is particularly evident in his essays on Plato's *Philebus*, where Davidson suggested that the Socrates of the *Philebus* agrees with him that we can discover moral truths through a careful and sympathetic conversation with a fellow truth-seeker. In this respect, he suggested that the Socratic elenchus is one way to reach communicative and conceptual consensus through what he saw as Plato's unarticulated appeal to what Davidson had elsewhere referred to as the 'principle of charity'.

Overall this is an excellent volume of essays coming from one of the most important philosophers of the last fifty years. It would be of interest to anyone interested in the ways Davidson's philosophy evolved after the publication of the first two volumes, and it is essential reading for anyone working in philosophy of language or philosophy of mind.

John R. Cook

St. Francis Xavier University