

Samuel Scolnicov. *Plato's Method of Hypothesis in the Middle Dialogues*. Edited by Harold Tarrant. Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag, 2018. Pp. 253. Paper, €39.00.

This volume, a lightly-edited version of Prof. Samuel Scolnicov's 1974 Ph.D. thesis, is a fitting tribute to his impressive career. It will perhaps be most useful for those interested in better understanding Scolnicov's work and his views on Plato as a whole, not least for the comprehensive list of his publications that requires a full twelve pages of print. Scholars with an interest in Plato's method of hypothesis will also find some useful remarks on key passages in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* as well as on Greek mathematical analysis.

Illuminating other aspects of Scolnicov's work is clearly part of the intention behind enabling broader access to this study. As Harold Tarrant notes in his introduction: "When I finally read the thesis in Cambridge University Library I felt that here was the key to much else that he had published on Plato" (10). One example that stuck out to this reader was the extended discussion of what Scolnicov calls the "restricted" versus "unrestricted" principle of non-contradiction in the *Republic* (128–139), a key foundation for his 2003 translation of and commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*.

It will be no surprise to those familiar with Scolnicov's other interpretations of Plato that his thesis contains a careful and serious study of Plato's method of hypothesis. In some ways the book is a product of its time; it predates a rich literature on the topic that has developed in the last forty years. Nevertheless, Scolnicov's unique interpretation still stands out for his helpful discussion of Greek mathematical analysis (both the primary evidence and the secondary literature up to the 1970s) and his contention that Plato applies the hypothetical method extensively in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*.

Scolnicov's characterization of Plato's method is self-consciously sparse and primarily negative, but can be summarized as follows (it is worth noting that the thesis is most clearly stated in the final chapter, which I would recommend reading first). He stresses that the method is not deductive, by which he means that it does not seek novel conclusions that can be derived

from a set of given premises. Instead, it starts with a single conclusion as already given, then searches for premises from which that conclusion can be derived. The *main* or *most important* premise is what Plato refers to as the hypothesis, and he considers it as the reason or cause of the conclusion. The next step is to find a further hypothesis from which the first one can be derived. These hypotheses are always posited only provisionally, thus do not provide a deductive proof. There is also no set procedure for finding them: intuition, divination, or the suggestion of an interlocutor are all equally viable. The goal, however, is to ground each hypothesis in a higher one. This procedure is to be repeated until all hypotheses are grounded in the unhypothetical first principle, the Idea or Form of the Good.

One of the virtues of Scolnicov's interpretation is that he sees the method of hypothesis as operative throughout each of the three dialogues discussed. With that in mind, much of the book is dedicated to an explanation and summary of the main arguments and main hypotheses in each dialogue (he explicitly lays out eleven hypotheses for the *Phaedo* on 98–112 and seven for the *Republic* on 145–149). One drawback of this approach is that the main thread of Scolnicov's argument is sometimes lost in the detail, it not being clear how his understanding of an individual argument or interpretive issue bears on his understanding of Plato's methodology. Another concern is that it is not clear how to identify an application of the method elsewhere or, given the tight connection that Scolnicov sees between the method and the rest of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology, whether it even could be applied in another context. This does not, however, detract from the usefulness of the book as an insightful commentary on key passages from each dialogue.

The editor provides a helpful list of more contemporary readings on the subject, though it is not meant to be comprehensive (he does list Hugh Benson's 2015 book *Clitophon's Challenge*, which is a good first-stop reference for an overview of the interpretive issues and a more comprehensive bibliography of the English literature). Scolnicov's own discussion and bibliography provides helpful references and context not often mentioned in contemporary discussions, especially late 19th and early to mid 20th century French and German scholarship.

Those interested in Platonic scholarship from these time periods are likely to find helpful pointers.

As Hanna Scolnicov puts it in the foreword, this volume is a labor of love, not least for editor Prof. Harold Tarrant and director of Academia Verlag Dr. Jürgen Richarz. Their work, as well as Professor Scolnicov's, has clearly been a success.

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