

*Eidos and Dynamis: The Intertwinement of Being and Logos in Plato's Thought.* By Lorenzo Giovannetti. Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici Press, 2022. Pp. 340. Open Access. ISBN 978-88-97820-63-5.

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Lorenzo Giovannetti's book is a discussion of three intertwining themes in Plato's dialogues with the aim of articulating a central insight into Platonic philosophy. The book's sections respectively cover the theory of forms, the first definition of knowledge as perception and its subsequent critique in the *Theaetetus*, and themes from the central digression in the *Sophist*, such as the communion of kinds and true and false speech. Giovannetti ultimately advocates for a realist interpretation of Platonic philosophy in which forms, understood as simple, unique, and causal natures, jointly constitute the mind-independent reality that our discourse reflects. To account for the Platonic view, Giovannetti contrasts the sophistical conception of truth and reality as exhausted by human opinion and perception. The argument in the book demonstrates that such a sophistical view is self-undermining, and that genuine engagement with it demands that we turn our thinking toward the sense in which simple, unique, and causal natures combine with one another and guide the understanding that constitutes true *logos*; in other words, 'being, reality, existence along with its peculiar features (i.e., whatever *does not* come from mind) [are] required to understand why knowledge and language work' (24).

The book is of interest for its insights into such areas as Platonic metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language; but it also recommends itself to Plato's readers more broadly for its macro-level account of Platonic thinking. As Francesco Aronadio rightly notes in the foreword (13), Giovannetti eschews the tendency among commentators to focus on narrow passages in Plato and instead aims at disclosing the larger structure of Plato's thinking by using key passages to consider its metaphysical, epistemological, and linguistic aspects in their inner-relations. Furthermore, the book has the virtue—a highly significant one at that—of developing an especially nuanced account of the copious recent Italian Plato scholarship and framing it with respect to work in English, German, and French. These strengths and its availability in the free, open-access format will hopefully lead it to get the attention it deserves.

In the book's first part, Giovannetti considers the theory of forms. He occasionally associates this theory with the so-called 'middle dialogues', but he aims to show the consistency of the theory with the so-called 'late[r]' dialogues *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*; hence, there is no developmental aspect of Giovannetti's account. In any case, his discussion of forms is divided into the 'Physiology' and

‘Anatomy’ of forms. The ‘Physiology’ concerns four of the forms’ functions: forms (i) determine particulars, (ii) act as objects of knowledge, (iii) act as objects of definition, and (iv) ground linguistic reference to sensible particulars (40). Of these, the first concerns the roles of forms in constituting the nature of reality, while the latter three point to their functions in a cluster of concepts relating to truth, cognition, and language. Giovannetti’s account of forms as ontologically determinate is captured by the principle of Eidetic Determination (ED): ‘When things or events have or display a certain determination (e.g., being or becoming beautiful or equal things), this occurs only in virtue of that determination taken in isolation as an existing reality. Accordingly, if  $F$  is that in virtue of which  $x$  is or displays  $F$ , then  $x$  is or displays  $F$  not in virtue of itself’ (45). In other words, that things are subject to determination entails a source of this determination. Giovannetti’s task then becomes connecting ED to accounts of knowledge, defining, and referential speaking, that is, the second through fourth functional senses of the form.

Giovannetti next turns to the ‘Anatomy’ of forms. These are the structural aspects of forms that Plato often presents as mutually implicative, such as being ‘itself by itself’ (77-79), being one and also one-over-many (79-87), being always self-same (87-88), being intelligible (89-91), and being eternal (91-92). Giovannetti canvasses the various interpretive problems concerning forms, such as whether they are universals, particulars, or universal-particular hybrids, whether they self-predicate, and whether they entail conflation of paradigm and universal. In fact, Giovannetti’s account is especially praiseworthy for displaying a simultaneous awareness of and refusal to get bogged down with interpretive controversies. Ultimately, Giovannetti makes original use of the *Symposium* to argue that forms can only be understood as a connective between reality and language (summarized at 121-123) before turning to *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* to unpack this account.

In the book’s second part, ‘Language and Becoming’, Giovannetti considers the first definition of knowledge as perception in the *Theaetetus* in conjunction with Socrates’ critique of it, giving particular emphasis to the role of the ‘common sensibles’ (184b-187b) in rejecting the Protagorean-Heraclitean view of relativistic flux that the first definition entails. Giovannetti’s account is in many ways an endorsement of Cornford’s ‘classical’ view that Plato intends the *Theaetetus* to show that there can be no knowledge without forms, but Giovannetti makes new contributions as well. He proceeds from the question, ‘what can I learn about the nature of the world by reflecting on the fact that I can speak of it?’ (130). This is in contrast with the first *Theaetetus* definition, implying as it does the perfect coincidence between knowledge and perception: this derives from the Protagorean dictum that to know is to perceive and to perceive is to know, in conjunction with the quasi-Heraclitean view that all is merely becoming, that is, constantly changing flux. On such a view, any particular instance of being is kept together only by its appearing to a subject who perceives it. Giovannetti discusses at length the ‘Secret Doctrine’ (*Theaetetus* 152d-e) that nothing is

one and that nothing ever *is*, and that there is instead only coming-to-be of masses of indeterminacy (141-154). This yields an 'ontology of events' in which being is merely happenings that are not grounded in or determined by anything beyond the fleetingly momentary collision of perceiver and entities perceived (154-172). Giovannetti summarizes this view as 'whatever is part of the world is, roughly put, the event of the encounter between a perceiver and a perceived thing, which only come to be insofar as they are connected' (179). If this is so, then language collapses and we cannot speak of anything, since words presuppose at least some minimal criterion of stability (i.e., a thing indicated) and determination (i.e., a way in which the thing indicated *is*), both of which are impossible in a view of pure arising (173-192).

These considerations lead to Giovannetti's centrally important account of the *Theaetetus* discussion of the common sensibles (193-213). In short, Plato has Socrates and Theaetetus conclude that all acts of sensation bring with them something common that is imperceptible, but is grasped by means of soul. For example, we can distinguish between the sensory presentation of something like the softness of a soft thing and the subsequent cognitive grasping of softness in its appearance via what we might in English call a 'judgment' like 'this is soft'. Giovannetti engages with the dominant interpretations of what exactly the common sensibles are, largely rejecting the accounts that they are forms, objective reality, essences, or predicates (197-204). On his account, the common sensibles are that determinate sense of being that both makes possible and itself determines any perception, judgment, or speech. In other words, that we perceive the soft thing and thereby judge 'this is soft' implies at least a minimally stable 'this' and a determinate nature like 'softness' that could inform such a judgment above and beyond a given instance of perception.

This analysis entails giving particular weight to the common sensible 'being' of which both Socrates and Theaetetus speak (185c-186a). Giovannetti writes, 'If there is to be knowledge at all, there must be some fact of the matter as to what is being experienced. ...[This sense of 'being'] is not just a reference to the "is" of the statement; it is also the idea that the "is" in the statements has some ground in reality' (206). This idea of being is what was explicitly denied in the Secret Doctrine: contrary to the Secret Doctrine, there *must be* some principle of minimal stability and determination that grounds that which becomes as implied by speech, and this is (at least a part of) the meaning of 'being'. Furthermore, this sense of being is essentially related to that which yields the *capacity* to formulate judgments about reality, as well as the *capacity* of reality to admit of stability that can receive kinds of determination, all understood at the broadest level (207).

This connection between being and *capacity* is one of Plato's central focal points in the *Sophist*, and Giovannetti's focus in the book's third section, 'Language and Being'. Giovannetti's nonlinear discussion of the *Sophist* covers a few of the many important subjects in the dialogue's central digression. Giovannetti considers the extension of the notion of 'being' in Plato's thinking, offering something of a 'hybrid' view of existence and predication in understanding being

as a great kind and more broadly in the *Sophist* as that which implies both existence and predicative nature (219-224). He speaks to the communion of kinds and meaning of the Eleatic Stranger's conclusion that some kinds commune with others in a restricted way, or what Giovannetti calls 'selective communion', and the relation between this insight and the controversial discussion of the philosopher's dialectical art at 253d-e (224-251). He considers the equally controversial account of being as the capacity to act upon or be affected (*Sophist* 247d-e, G. 251-260), adapting a version of Francesco Fronterotta's argument that being ultimately entails power to commune with that which is outside of it through acting upon and being affected. Giovannetti summarizes that 'the kind being is one element in the weave [i.e., the complex web of entities jointly composing the whole of reality] with which every other element communes and thereby establishes further relations' (262).

Finally, these issues open onto the question of true and false speech in the *Sophist* (260a-264b), which Giovannetti understands as a resolution of the problem of knowledge and perception in the first *Theaetetus* definition. On this reading, *logos* admits of truth and falsity insofar as it is responsive to or negligent of the selective communion in which kinds can or cannot engage. Giovannetti's account of the truth and falsity of speech (261-300) is subtle, complex, and ultimately represents an original fusion of the many views that he discusses. In essence, it yields the conclusion that kinds—which Giovannetti argues are synonymous with forms—are 'genuinely existing entities' that 'individuate extension, i.e., the *varying* set of all the sensible things that participate in them' (301), and furthermore are what 'provide language with meaningful content, [while] at the same time [being] the cause of the determination of particulars' (307). In this way, reality in its complex and interwoven nature and as anchored in the form or kind 'being' is fundamentally analogous to *logoi*, which are themselves interweavings that presuppose 'being' in every instance. The sophistical view of truth as perception is thereby refuted, as the notions of truth and speech necessarily imply a mind-independent reality to which speech is attentive and that speech can get right, at least in some important sense.

Giovannetti's book is highly convincing and, as I have suggested, of interest to a wide range of Plato's readers. The section on forms would make a great standalone overview of this important and difficult subject, particularly in teaching at the graduate level. On the whole, the book helps to show the unity of Plato's thought in some key ways and the power of this Platonic-realist account for addressing the nature of reality and our means of accessing it through thought and speech in contrast to the sophistical urge to reduce truth, meaning, and value to instances of individuated human cognition.

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