

BOOK REVIEW:

SOCRATIC DIALOGUES. BUCHAREST, HUMANITAS, 2015

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More than two thousand years ago, a young, twenty years old boy, found himself listening to the conversations of an old Athenian. That old Athenian was Socrates and that young man is known today by his nickname: Plato. The conversations which Plato listened to were the starting point of some of the most appreciated writings in the history of philosophy and these writings made him, maybe, the most important philosopher known up to date. He wrote his philosophy in the form of the dialogue and his works were continuously rewritten, translated, read, commented and learned since then.

The need to republish Plato's works did not disappear and is as high as always. This is confirmed by the appearance of a volume full of Socratic spirit for the Romanian-speaking reader - one of the most recent volumes containing works of Plato. The volume with the title 'Plato. Socratic dialogues' (in the romanian original: Platon. Dialoguri Socratice) was published in Bucharest, in 2015, at the Humanitas publishing house. It is a hardcover volume of 345 pages containing graphic illustrations made by Mihail Coșulețu. The volume is composed of by older Romanian translations of Laches, Lysis, Charmides, Hippias Minor, Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito. Every dialogue has an introductory study and is abundant in explications, under the form of endnotes. The translations of the dialogues, as well as the introductory studies and the endnotes, are realized by Francisca Băltăceanu, Alexandru Cizek, Petru Creția, Marta Guțu-Maftei, Gabriel Liiceanu, Simina Noica, Constantin Noica, Manuela Popescu and Dan Slușanschi. Gheorghe Pașcalău wrote the foreword and made the selection of dialogues.

The foreword, which has the title ‘Who is the true disciple of Socrates?’, starts with a discussion exactly about what is the role of a foreword. Gheorghe Pașcalău is sustaining that the foreword, always, had the meaning to dissolve the tension which exists between the content and the form of Plato’s works. We also find out that ‘the introduction’ or ‘the prologue’ were born in the context of Platonic philology. A reason for why ‘the introduction’, ‘the prologue’ and ‘the commentary’ are so closely related to the Platonic philology is the existence of different interpretations of the dialogues, which were encountered even between Plato’s direct pupils. ‘The administrators of the Platonic opera always felt the need to systematize what, at Plato, often floated between uncertainty and ineffability’²⁰ (p. 8).

The next topic debated in this preface is maybe the most important because it is helping the reader understand why were these dialogues chosen to be part of this volume: What is, exactly, a Socratic dialogue? Sustaining that the use of aporias is the first common characteristic of Plato’s Socratic dialogues, Gheorghe Pașcalău wrote that ‘between those two extremes – on one side Antisthenes’ and Xenophon’s *positive* and preachy use of the Socratic method, on the other side Aeschines’ interest for the aporetic therapy and *pedagogical* impact of Socrates’ method – are placed the so-called *Socratic* dialogues written by Plato.’²¹ (p. 12)

Before debating the chronology of Platonic writings the author of the preface is making a historiographical commentary on the custom of *Sokratikoi diálogoi* mentioning different antic authors which wrote in this manner without forgetting to note the hypothesis according to which Alexamenos of Teos was the inventor of this genre. Moving forward and reading about the chronology of the dialogues, the reader will

²⁰ In the romanian original edition: ‘Administratorii operei platoniciene au simțit dintotdeauna dorința de a sistematiza ceea ce la Platon însuși plutește adesea între incert și inefabil.’

²¹ In the romanian original edition: ‘Între aceste două extreme – pe de o parte socratismul „pozitiv” și moralizator al lui Antistene și Xenofon, pe de altă parte interesul pentru terapia aporetică și pentru impactul „pedagogic” al socratismului aischineic – se plasează aşa-numitele dialoguri „socratice” ale lui Platon.’

encounter the names of Aristotle, Thrasyllos, Tennemann and a larger discussion about Friedrich Schleiermacher's way of organizing the dialogues. Putting an emphasis on the fact that the use of aporias is specific to Plato's Socratic dialogues, the preface debates Socrates claim of knowing nothing before concluding on the question asked by its title. Gheorghe Pașcalău ends by saying that we should always reask 'Who were the *companions* of Socrates?' and that 'the task to justify Socrates is delegated by Plato to his readers.'

The dialogues and their introductions, as is mentioned in the editor's note, are reproductions from an older edition of Plato's works coordinated by Constantin Noica and Petru Creția, volume I and II. Dan Slușanschi translated the dialogue Laches and wrote an easy to read introduction, which contains a blueprint of the dialogue from R. G. Hoerber. The dialogue Lysis is translated by Alexandru Cizek which also wrote a short introduction which debates the chronology, the role of the dialogue in the Platonic opera and the stages of the dialogue. It is not the case for Charmides, translated and commented by Simina Noica, which has comprehensive introductory study debating the characters, where we have Plato's family tree, problems of time and space dating. Also, we encounter a discussion about different linguistic, historical and philosophical meanings of the dialogue, as well as an exposure of different interpretations. Hippias Minor and Euthyphro were a team project to which Manuela Popescu, Petru Creția, Constantin Noica, Gabriel Liiceanu and Francisca Băltăceanu worked for the translations and for the introductory studies – similar in structure with the first mentions. The Apology of Socrates was translated by Francisca Băltăceanu which also wrote an introduction resembling a historical narration of the event. The last dialogue of the volume is Crito, translated and commented by Marta Guțu-Maftei which wrote about chronological matters of dating the dialogue as well as the internal structure and philosophical interpretations.

We can say, without being wrong, that this volume, published at Humanitas, will undoubtedly bring joy to the Romanian readers of Plato and not just them. By the

selection of the dialogues and with the help of the introductory studies this volume can be easily read by someone who didn't 'meet' Plato or any philosopher yet. For the philosophy reader, the publishing of this volume is very helpful for the simple fact that is compiling multiple dialogues of Plato in a new edition of high printing quality which was certainly waited. We can only say that we are waiting for others dialogues of Plato to be published in the same manner as these were.