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PLATO AND HESIOD

BOYS-STONES (G.R.), HAUBOLD (J.H.) (edd.) *Plato and Hesiod*. Pp. x + 362. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Cased, £60. ISBN: 978-0-19-923634-3.

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This is a rich and original collection which offers new and exciting insights into Plato's interest in Hesiod as, among other things, a source of authority, a sophistic paradigm, a cosmogonist and an alternative to Homer. The volume presents fifteen articles, with seven treating the general theme of Plato and Hesiod and eight focussing on specific dialogues.

H. treats Hesiod's shaping of his own biography and reception and his writing of his own intellectual development into his verse. In fact, the level of philosophical reflection he achieves and encourages with his Myth of Ages is not, H. suggests, so very distant from Plato's version in the *Republic*.

Like H., B.-S. reads Hesiod's epistemological self-awareness as providing an appropriately philosophical target for Plato's critical interest. He argues that Plato takes Hesiod to be representative of both sophistry (in so far as the sophists are prone to citing him as one of their own) and eristic (as the poet of Strife). For all that Plato seeks to distance himself from the intellectual stagnation of such ways of thinking, he also recognises in Hesiod a starting point for dialectical progress.

G. Most tabulates Plato's references to Hesiod and draws some intriguing, if speculative, conclusions about the development of Plato's attitude towards his predecessor. He suggests, for example, that the fact that we see Hesiod cited with approval by rascals like Euthyphro in the early dialogues and then by more acceptable 'Socratic' characters like Timaeus in the late dialogues, indicates a shift in Plato's view of Hesiod's worth. What seems rather more striking about M.'s table is that almost all references to Hesiod across the dialogues, including those made by Socrates himself (which form the majority), seem to be approbative (or, at least, not explicitly critical). What is interesting here is the degree to which Socrates' explicit criticism of Hesiod in the *Republic* has come to dominate our understanding of the relationship between the two authors.

N. Yamagata suggests that the corpus demonstrates a contrast between a Socratic Homer and a sophistic Hesiod. Whereas those myths in the dialogues which seem more Homeric can be and are voiced by Socrates, the more speculative, cosmological and Hesiodic myths, such as that of the *Timaeus* or the Noble Lie, tend to be ascribed to others.

Whilst Y. looks at the ways that Plato's Hesiod differs from his Homer, H. Koning considers the differences between Plato's various Hesiods. The variety in Plato's use of Hesiod results from both the changes of context across the corpus and a desire to interact with the subtleties of his reception by others. K. sees a contrast between a traditional, Homeric Hesiod and an intellectual Hesiod whose interest in genealogy and etymology is presented as a precursor to the philosophical enterprise of separation and categorisation.

B. Graziosi proposes that one can read Plato's reception of Hesiod as motivated by a desire to compete for the moral high ground. Focussing on three passages from the *Works and Days*, she argues that Plato's rivalry is both with his contemporaries (as interpreters) and with Hesiod himself (as an authority). As G. points out, the *Charmides* offers an example of Plato's attempt to settle the issue of *Socrates'* interpretation of Hesiod. Thus Plato even uses Hesiod to assert his authority in matters Socratic.

A. Ford notes that, of Plato's fifteen direct quotations from the *Works and Days* and *Theogony*, only one comes from the latter poem. He takes this as evidence of a tradition of reading the two works in isolation from one another. F. claims that, notwithstanding his evident subtlety as a reader, Plato's 'encounter with Hesiod was shaped by the ways in which Athenian culture preserved and institutionalized this old poetry' (p. 153). It is notable that F.'s hypothesis seems to stand at odds with many of the readings offered in those articles which treat specific dialogues and which, more than once, find Plato interweaving elements from across the Hesiodic corpus.

V. Lev Kanaan focusses on two affinities between the Socrates of the *Symposium* and Hesiod, arguing that Socrates is not only aligned with Hesiod's Eros, but also with his Pandora(s). Eros, Socrates and Pandora are all, in some sense, personifications of the 'tension between appearance and being' (p. 74). L.K. suggests that this Platonic reworking of Hesiodic models represents an 'ambitious model of intertextuality as erotic genealogy' (p. 74).

H. Van Noorden presents a subtle account of Socrates' engagement with Hesiod within the *Republic*. Plato has Socrates construct and present, through his appropriation of the 'myth of the races', a reading of Hesiod as a significant predecessor in ethical argument and epistemological self-awareness, so that he presents a rereading of Hesiod as justifying the very endeavour of rereading and rewriting.

As a testament to the richness of this particular dialogue's engagement with Hesiod, the volume includes four essays on the *Timaeus*. A. Capra points to some suggestive similarities between Hesiod's verse and the *Timaeus–Critias*, arguing that the latter pair seeks not only to 'rewrite epic on an ambitious scale' (p. 202) but to surpass it.

E. Pender gives a more specific account of significant Hesiodic allusions within the *Timaeus*. Like C., she sees Plato as attempting both to adduce and to challenge Hesiod's authority. P. gives a nicely detailed and suggestive reading of the *Timaeus'* 'primal figures' (the Demiurge, Receptacle, etc.) against their Hesiodic background and ends with a particularly valuable suggestion as to the significance of Plato's reworking of Hesiod's Muses within a teleological context.

D. Sedley's piece, though focussed on Hesiod's influence on the *Timaeus*, could well have acted as a prelude to the entire volume. He sets elements of the *Theogony* against the cosmogony of the *Timaeus*, looking in particular at the implications of apparent parallels between Hesiod's Chaos and Plato's receptacle. His broader methodological point is made clear in his conclusion: 'future discussions of the Hesiodic and Timaeian cosmogonies are likely to be enriched if we address the same questions to both in parallel' (p. 258). The other articles demonstrate that such potential riches are by no means restricted to the realm of cosmogony.

M. Regali looks at another specific point of interaction between the *Timaeus* and Hesiod. R. reads the Demiurge's address to the lesser gods at *Timaeus* 41a7–d3 as inviting comparison with the proem to the *Works and Days* and, in particular, with the figure of Zeus. Again, the emphasis is on the fact that Plato is seeking both to incorporate and to challenge Hesiodic authority.

Two essays are illustrative of the fact that such intertextual readings are, in the end, likely to increase the complexity of interpreting Plato, rather than simplify it. This is, of course, no bad thing. Both D. El Murr and C. Rowe investigate Hesiodic influence on the notoriously difficult myth of the Age of Kronos in the *Statesman*. But whereas El M. finds that the Golden Age imagery of Hesiod and others (notably the Attic comedians) provides support for a traditional reading of Plato's myth as presenting two stages of cosmic development, R. finds that particular points of contact with Hesiod's version bolster the case for his preferred three-stage reading.

The essays in this volume are all original, interesting and, in most cases, provocative (in a good way), even though several essays frustratingly conclude that Plato had a complicated and subtle interest in Hesiod, and that he wanted to appeal to his authority and to challenge it. I should have liked to see more attempts along the lines of those made by Van Noorden, Pender and El Murr (among others) to push such readings to the next stage and to investigate the philosophical implications of such a relationship.

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