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Forthcoming in *Philosophical Quarterly*.

Philosophos: Plato's missing dialogue. By MARY LOUISE GILL. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. vii + 290. Price £30.00.)

The aim of Mary Louise Gill's book is to make sense of a curious absence in Plato's works: two dialogues, the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* apparently promise a discussion of the philosopher. However, there is no indication that Plato wrote such a dialogue. What happened? Gill argues that 'Plato intentionally withheld the *Philosopher*' because it is an exercise for the audience to figure out what the philosopher is — and Plato 'would have spoiled the exercise had he written it' (5). This exercise is a formidable challenge, as arriving at a correct answer requires the student to understand what knowledge is (the philosopher has knowledge), what dialectic is (the philosopher's specific expertise), and what being is (the object of the philosopher's knowledge). By overcoming the challenge, the student 'becomes a philosopher by mastering his methods, and thus the target of the exercise is internally related to its pedagogical purpose' (5-6).

The idea that the *Philosopher* is not a dialogue but the name of an unwritten exercise is buttressed by the dramatic and thematic proximity of the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Theaetetus*: all deal with knowledge of various kinds. The *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, in turn, make reference to the *Parmenides* — and in Gill's view 'the *Parmenides* holds the key to Plato's strategy in our series of dialogues and to the question about its missing member' (3). The *Parmenides* does two things: it highlights problems with Socrates' theory of forms, and then it presents dialectical exercises to improve one's thinking about forms.

After a helpful introduction and a chapter on *Parmenides* part one, identifying participation as the main problem for Socrates' transcendent forms, Gill argues in chapter two that going through the exercises in the second part of the *Parmenides* makes the audience realise that giving up forms altogether in response to part one is not an option (71). Consequently,

To save an explanatory theory of forms, Plato must solve the problem of participation, which is part of the problem of being. He must eventually show that being is a structural feature inside the beings enabling them to relate to their own nature—also inside them—and to natures outside themselves. Then a form and its nature can be numerically, as well as qualitatively, the same. [...] The second part of the *Parmenides* does not show this but sets the stage for the second exercise about being, whose solution will enable Plato to solve the problem of participation and us to locate his philosopher. (74-75)

Gill sees this programme followed through, together with the additional task of defining knowledge, and in particular the philosopher's knowledge, in the *Theaetetus* (chapters three and four), the *Sophist* (chapter five) and the *Statesman* (chapter six). The seventh and final chapter brings together various strands in presenting a solution to the problem of being which is, roughly, that being seems neither to change nor to rest (16). Unlike mathematicians, say, the philosopher's dialectic enables her to study being *qua* being (241). As the phrase indicates, Gill is aware that on her interpretation, Plato's 'later philosophy displays a distinctly Aristotelian bent' (10). Forms are not transcendent, nor is there a category of being: being is not a categorial form (although this is how Aristotle read Plato). Instead, there are various ways in which a thing has being, and the being of a thing considered *qua* being, is the structural core of every being: it is '*inside* the nature of every being ... enabling it to fit together other things

outside its specific nature' (240). The problematic claim, proposed in the *Parmenides*, that things have being through participation, is thus rendered obsolete.

How plausible is this interpretation? First, it is a slight overstatement to Aristotelianise *all* of Plato's later thought: the *Timaeus* clearly does not fit into that schema (cf. 38), and the status of forms in the *Philebus* is more controversial than Gill makes out. Second, many of the passages discussed are extremely difficult and controversial, and despite the meticulous work and extreme care that Gill puts into her interpretations, *that* fact will not change (nor is this expected). This is due, partly, to the fact that by following up hints, Gill winds up reading some of the texts against their letter. Two examples might illustrate that.

a) Although the definition of being in the *Sophist* offered to the giants and to the friends of the forms is rejected by the latter, Gill pursues this hint and arrives at the conclusion that 'the being of something is its capacity both to remain the same and to act on or be affected by other things' (230). In cashing out this capacity, Gill argues that being can be defined by reference to change and rest (cf. 235). If so, anything that has being would participate in both change and rest. Since change is by virtue of participating in being (*Sophist* 256a), change would participate in rest — which is explicitly denied (252d; 254d).

b) It might strike the reader as odd that Gill turns to the *Theaetetus* for a positive account of knowledge: as everybody knows, that dialogue ends in aporia. However, Gill takes this dialogue also to be an exercise, challenging the reader to take the right turns where Socrates and Theaetetus go wrong (12). On the face of it, the interlocutors

consider, and dismiss, different proposals for accounts of knowledge seriatim. To arrive at a positive proposal, Gill argues that each of the accounts builds on the previous one: the problem with each of the proposals is not that it is not necessary, but that it is not sufficient. Gill thinks that perception, true belief, and being able to give an account are jointly necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge (cf. 106-7) so that 'perception' evidently needs to outstrip sense-perception (Gill proposes a somewhat obscure 'mental perception' as a complement, 119-20).

I am not convinced that Gill's reading improves on the traditional one. Remember, Socrates shoots down the last proposal (knowledge is true belief with an account) by highlighting a regress problem: unless you *know* the account, it will not be able to turn true belief into anything better than just true belief (*Tht.* 209e-210b). While Gill maintains that forms are the primary objects of knowledge, Gill eschews foundationalism based on intuition as this would rule out knowledge of the sensible world: for her, forms in the *Theaetetus* are immanent (90-91). Instead, she proposes a two-level model according to which knowledge with account is built on a lower-level knowledge, namely non-inferential recognition of the object (to be) known. Gill makes a good case for this model by reference to knowledge of letters (131-7), and this model can plausibly be extended to other crafts. But it is hard to see how this model could be of any help in more theoretical endeavours, as it is implausible that one can reliably identify (instances of) of the X to be known without having an account of what X is (think about virtue of knowledge as values for X). If so, Gill's two-level account of knowledge may not be as helpful to the philosopher as Gill supposes.

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The strength of Gill's book lies in the detailed analyses and interpretations of various important passages. To that extent, the book is wholeheartedly recommended to those who are working on individual dialogues discussed by Gill. Those who teach or work on late Plato more generally ought to take the trouble (it is not an easy read) to work through Gill's book. This will require going back to the dialogues and matching one's own interpretation against Gill's. Whether or not one accepts Gill's interpretations, it will certainly improve our understanding of (some of) later Plato's metaphysics and epistemology.¹

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