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| Title | Review of John Dillon, The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy (347-274 BC) |
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| Authors(s) | Crowley, Timothy J. |
| Publication date | 2004-04-01 |
| Publication information | Crowley, Timothy J. “Review of John Dillon, The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy (347-274 BC).” Blackwell Publishing, April 1, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0149.2004.00336.x. |
| Publisher | Blackwell Publishing |
| Item record/more information | http://hdl.handle.net/10197/12915 |
| Publisher's version (DOI) | 10.1111/j.1468-0149.2004.00336.x |

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*The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy (347-274BC)*
By John Dillon
Clarendon Press, 2003. Pp. 264.
ISBN 0-19-823766-9

In *The Heirs of Plato* John Dillon explores the development of the Academy in the seventy years after Plato's death in 347 BC, the period generally known as the 'Old Academy'. This period of ancient philosophy has suffered much neglect, due mainly to the poverty of the surviving evidence, but also, in part, due to the perception of the Old Academy's major figures as philosophically sterile followers of Plato. Dillon argues that there is sufficient secondary evidence for a coherent reconstruction of the philosophical activities of Plato's immediate successors; and, furthermore, that their activities merit our serious attention. Dillon's interpretation proceeds on the basis of a few reasonable presumptions: (a) that Plato's teachings went beyond what he wrote in his dialogues, (b) that Aristotle understood Plato (to assume otherwise is "quite absurd", p. 17), and (c) that the figures of the Old Academy were not "philosophical imbeciles" (p. vii). To deny any of these reasonable presumptions would be, Dillon writes, "effectively to preclude our penetrating very far into the true dynamics of the Academy as an institution, and into the relation of the doctrines of Plato's disciples and successors to what they conceived to be his teachings", (p. 1).

The main thesis of *The Heirs of Plato* is that the basis of all later Platonism, and to some extent Stoicism as well, is laid down during the period in question by a series of innovations in, and consolidations of, Plato's teachings. Thus Speusippus stimulated developments in what became known as 'Neopythagoreanism', which itself was to prove fruitful for 'Neoplatonism'; Xenocrates initiated much of what we call 'Middle Platonism'; and Polemo anticipated the chief ethical doctrines of the Stoics. This is a thesis that was already aired in the first chapter of Dillon's ground-breaking *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977). Indeed there is some repetition of the first chapter of *The Middle Platonists* in *The Heirs of Plato*. However, the new book should not be regarded as a reheating of old material. Unlike *The Middle Platonists*, where the discussion of the Old Academy is confined to a fifty page survey intended as an introduction to the later period of Middle Platonism, *The Heirs of Plato* concentrates exclusively on the period of the Old Academy. Apart from bringing more depth and detail to the discussion of Speusippus, Xenocrates and Polemo, it also includes discussion of figures barely touched upon in the earlier work, such as Philippus of Opus, and Heraclides of Pontus. Therefore it is better regarded as a companion volume to *The Middle Platonists*.

In the first chapter, Dillon discusses, firstly, the actual location, and the sort of activities pursued, in Plato's Academy; and, secondly, the nature of Plato's intellectual legacy, in particular the relation between the dialogues and the oral teachings. In both cases Dillon draws upon previously published work. The discussion of the location of the Academy, which is an enthralling piece of historic detective work, is an expansion of Dillon's 1983 article, 'What Happened to Plato's Garden?' (*Hermathena*, 133, p. 51-59; reprinted in Dillon, *The Golden Chain*, Aldershot, 1990). The second part of the chapter is mostly taken from pages 2-11 of *The Middle Platonists*.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 consist of individual studies of the lives and doctrines of the three successive heads of the Old Academy, Speusippus (347-339 BC), Xenocrates (339-314 BC) and Polemo (314-276 BC) respectively. The philosophical contribution

of each figure is examined under three headings: First Principles; Logic; and Ethics. In the case of Speusippus and Xenocrates, most attention is given to their discussion of First Principles, i.e., cosmology and metaphysics. The cosmological speculation of Speusippus and Xenocrates is focussed mainly on interpreting the nest of problems presented by the *Timaeus*, and on the attempt to reconcile this dialogue with Plato's oral teachings, the so-called 'Unwritten doctrines'. The difficulty that Dillon faces in Chapters 2 and 3 is that Aristotle is our principle source not only for Plato's Unwritten doctrines, but also for Speusippus and Xenocrates. This is a problem because Aristotle's account of the thought of his contemporaries is presented at best allusively, more often polemically, and sometimes even sarcastically. Dillon's success in reconstructing for Speusippus and Xenocrates coherent philosophical positions based upon such recalcitrant evidence is probably the highlight of the book.

Speusippus reinforced the Pythagorean leanings to which his uncle, Plato, in his later years had been attracted. The most original and influential aspect of Speusippus' thought is his development of Plato's notions of the One and the indefinite Dyad (which Speusippus called the 'One and Multiplicity'), and his attempt to explain how the totality of being came to be from these principles. Dillon argues that Speusippus made innovations in the understanding of Platonic cosmology, e.g., his notion of World-Soul; but that these were without influence until the Neopythagoreanism of the first two centuries AD, and, later, Neoplatonism.

Xenocrates' cosmological doctrine is something of a retreat from Speusippus' radical position, perhaps in response to Aristotle's criticisms. Dillon reconstructs Xenocrates's cosmological or metaphysical scheme as comprising a pair of first principles, the Monad, or *Nous*, and the Dyad, or the 'Everflowing'; and a World-Soul, which receives the forms from the Supreme God's mind, and projects them upon the physical plane. Xenocrates had a more immediate, and dominant, effect on the development of Platonism, because he systematized what he took to be Plato's philosophy. Xenocrates thereby laid the foundation for the 'Platonic system': it is Xenocrates' definition of Form, for instance, which became the standard definition of a Platonic Form.

Polemo is best known for his doctrine that the purpose of life is to live 'in conformity with nature', which he may well have adopted from Xenocrates. Dillon credits Polemo with an increase in the austerity of ethical theory, which anticipates and may have influenced the ethical theory of his pupil, the Stoic Zeno of Citium. Interestingly, Dillon is friendlier here, than he had been in *The Middle Platonists*, to the possibility that Polemo also anticipated Stoic materialism. Even if this suggestion remains conjectural, it is still clear that Polemo's philosophy is an important bridge between Platonism and Stoicism.

Chapter 5 is a lively survey of the contributions of four minor figures connected with the Academy: Philippus of Opus, Hermodorus of Syracuse, Heraclides of Pontus, who were all students of Plato; and Crantor of Soli, a contemporary of Polemo. These figures each made significant contributions to the Platonic tradition; for instance, Philippus edited Plato's *Laws* for publication, and he was the true author of the *Epinomis*; while Cantor is identified by Proclus as the first commentator, because he wrote an exposition, as distinct from an exegesis, of Plato's *Timaeus*.

*The Heirs of Plato* is a remarkable exercise in how to glean information from fragmentary sources. It is marked throughout by Dillon's masterly use and interpretation of what is often merely anecdotal evidence. In fact, what one might call Dillon's 'trustworthy' approach to anecdotal evidence is a very refreshing feature of the book. It is in sharp contrast to the guardedly sceptical nature of previous

scholarship on this area (as in, for instance, L. Tarán's 1981 study *Speusippus of Athens*). Of course, a guarded scepticism towards the sources is a virtue in the study of Ancient Philosophy, and it does need to be said that the dearth of evidence for the Old Academy often means that Dillon's claims are, as he readily admits, on the speculative side. However, his interpretations of the evidence are sensible and plausible.

If there is a room for a cavil, then it is that Aristotle appears only in the role of a critical source. One might wonder whether the book would have benefited from an additional chapter on Aristotle as Plato's heir. In Dillon's defence, it is certainly the case that a mere chapter devoted to Aristotle's relationship to Plato would inevitably be unsatisfactory; and, furthermore, the theme of the book is the legacy of the Academy: Speusippus and Xenocrates are building upon and interpreting this legacy in their philosophical systems, whereas Aristotle is setting off in his own directions with the Lyceum. But, having said that, it would have been very interesting to have a more expansive account of Dillon's understanding of, for instance, the relation of the material principle of Speusippus and Xenocrates to Aristotle's concept of matter, a topic that is suggestively touched upon, but relegated to a footnote.

In an epilogue Dillon offers a brief but stimulating account of the transition under Arcesilaus of Pitane from the Old Academy to the era of the 'sceptical' Academy. Although this is a natural point at which to end the account of Plato's heirs, it is a measure of the book that one is left wishing that Dillon had continued his investigations into the sceptical Academy. We might hope that he does so in the future. For the time being we can be grateful to Professor Dillon for making this neglected area of the Platonic tradition so accessible and, indeed, philosophically attractive.

I found the following typographical and other errors: p. 35, full stop instead of comma; p. 54, comma inverted in wrong way; p. 63, full stop, instead of a comma; p.97, n.26, "to Aristotle" should be "to Alexander"; p. 143, grammatical error ("it hard to see the point"): in bibliography, spelling mistake (Waterfield's 'The Theology of Arithemetic').

1,572 words.