

‘asking him questions’ is not only more loyal to the Greek, it is also more natural in English.

Allen also goes back to Jowett in revising the set of two famous words, δίκην καὶ αἰδῶ. Instead of the traditional ‘shame and justice’ that are said to be dispensed by Zeus to human beings as self-protection devices, we have in Allen ‘right and reverence’ (322c). These two attributes are important, for they are said to be the natural foundation of communities. In light of the rather notorious history of ‘natural rights’ in modern ethical theory the choice of ‘right’ for δίκη here is overloaded with meaning. Opting out of ‘shame’ for αἰδῶ also obscures the Athenian shame-culture, to which not only Protagoras but also Socrates frequently appeals (cf. ‘it is more shameful to commit injustice than suffer it’, *Gorgias* 474c-d). As to ‘reverence’ for ὄσιον it is not clear how this attribute might explain the idea that man has a natural affinity for justice. Curiously, a few pages later the prosaic equivalent of δίκη, δικαιοσύνη is translated as ‘justice’ (*Prot.* 329c). Some explanation for these choices would have helped us understand Allen’s reasons better. These minor complaints aside, in this exceedingly learned translation and commentary, Allen gives us plenty to think about, and helps us understand why the *Protagoras* especially continues to hold our philosophical interest.

Philosophy, Religion, Classics  
Hollins University  
Roanoke VA 24020

*The Play of the Platonic Dialogues.* By Bernard Freydberg. Literature and the Sciences of Many, Vol. 12. New York: Peter Lang, 1997. Pp. xii + 224. \$46.95.

Gerald A. Press

Traditional interpretations of Plato’s philosophy, which have dominated scholarship until recently, make little of the dialogues’ literary artistry as having any philosophical significance. Perhaps by the same token, they insist on seeing Plato as a philosopher, like most other philosophers, seriously trying to communicate his teachings—specific doctrines and a doctrinal system—through his writings. That he wrote dialogues at all has been a troublesome fact, as has been the fact that he wrote little or nothing else and certainly no treatise in which he presents his views explicitly. This is all the more troubling since, unlike an Augustine or a

Berkeley, Plato seems to disappear into anonymity behind powerful and distinct characters with well-grounded positions of their own. The attempt to extract a set of doctrines that is consistent in either a unitarian or a developmental sense has proved frustrating. One cause of the frustration is the regularity with which seemingly serious philosophy is introduced, punctuated, framed, interrupted, or contradicted by jokes, puns, irony, satire, and other playful devices. There is so much humor and play in the dialogues and it may seem so at odds with the dialogues' presumed seriousness of purpose that Guthrie (1975, 63) was led to sum up Plato's position by quoting *Epinomis* (992b) to the effect that the most truly wise man is playful and serious at the same time. Nevertheless there has not been a sustained monograph on play in Plato since de Vries 1949, which was published in Dutch with English and French summary. A new book on the subject, therefore, is to be welcomed.

Explicitly a development of insights from two pages in Sallis' *Being and Logos* (4), Freydberg's volume, *The Play of the Platonic Dialogues*, has the strengths and the weakness that come from such single-minded focus. He follows Sallis in holding that *mythos* and *logos* are 'related to each other in a measure-giving play which acknowledges a certain distance from wisdom but maintains a cheerfulness in the midst of this distance'.

The book is divided into three parts of four chapters each, which consider the role of play in relation to (I) philosophy, (II) the city, and (III) the soul. Part 1 emphasizes readings of *Republic*, *Meno*, *Symposium*, and *Parmenides*. Although he offers no clear, distinct definition of what 'play' is, Freydberg characterizes it in several ways. It is not simply the opposite of seriousness; it is that in which philosophy begins; the most supposedly serious Platonic doctrines are actually extensions 'of that initiating play which founds all philosophic discourse' (21); the dialogues' playfulness functions to keep discussions open-ended and 'not let anything harden into a doctrine' (37). In Freydberg's view, both intellectually illuminating images (e.g., Sun, Line, and Cave) and intellectually darkening events (e.g., contradictions and interruptions of conversation) are types of play that imitate and initiate the true activity of philosophy.

In part 2, Freydberg argues that the *Republic*'s attacks on poetry are actually playful rather than serious and that the city there constructed exists only in play, rather than in any ontological domain. In fact, philosophy stands in a complementary rather than oppositional relationship with both tragedy and comedy. There is no Platonic political philosophy in the doctrinal sense, though political topics and issues are certainly in play with other sorts of issues. *Republic* is the focal point of this part, but Freydberg also discusses *Timaeus*, *Ion*, *Hippias Minor*, and *Apology*.

Part 3 takes up the role of play in such central Platonic themes as self-knowledge (ch. 9), the *daimonion* (ch. 10), *mimesis* (ch. 11), and the immortality of the soul (ch. 12) mainly in *Phaedrus*, *Apology*, *Republic*, and *Phaedo*. Freydberg argues that, like writing, both imitation and Socrates' *daimon* are topics that exhibit a 'double aspect' in the dialogues. The fact that Plato sometimes presents

them in one way or with one evaluation, but other times in another way or with the opposite evaluation is not a 'contradiction' to be dealt with or explained away. This is a deliberate strategy to hold such notions 'in play', and it both closes them off from the doctrinal rigidity sought by many modern interpreters and at the same time serves to open up intellectual space in which readers may themselves grow philosophically.

There are a number of strong points about the book. Most important, Freydberg appreciates the complexity of play and its functions, realizing, as many interpreters do not, that there is no simple opposition between seriousness and play. Moreover, he touches on many of the most important topics that are affected by Plato's devotion to play, e.g., the complex relation between *mythos* and *logos*, Socrates' thematic *atopia*, the Platonic 'intellectualism' that never reveals Ideas, the frequency of 'playful dodges' and 'playful evasions' (46ff.), and *aporia* as a healthy disruption of our habitual ways. His critiques of Rosen (29-33), Heidegger (132f.), Derrida (128-136), and Hegel (143-148) as being, finally, interpreters who wish to 'harden' the playful fluidity of ideas in the dialogues into dogmatic systems are interesting and useful.

There are also, however, problems. The most serious is signaled on page 1, where Freydberg writes, 'While there are many fine books on Plato, none thematizes play so prominently and develops its role in so thorough a fashion.' Actually, that is not true; see de Vries 1949 for a monograph and Radermacher 1947, Hoffman 1950, Gundert 1965, Plass 1967, and Ardley 1967 for articles on the topic. And there is more in the literature. Guthrie 1975 devoted ten pages to the issue of seriousness and play, with many citations, as did de Vries 1969. Dorothy Tarrant's articles (1946 and 1958) deal with wordplay. Rankin 1967 discusses laughter and humor. Tejera 1984 pays systematic attention to many forms of humor in Plato. Moreover two recent contributions, Ophir 1986 and Desjardins 1988, offer nuanced treatments of the dialogues as 'serious play', a theme already developed in de Vries 1949. Also noteworthy is the substantial literature on irony, which is certainly one of the forms of play that Plato uses throughout the dialogues. The endnote to Freydberg's sentence on page 1, however, refers only to Friedlander and none of the books and articles I have just mentioned turns up in his Bibliography. It may be partly for this reason that the scope of play in the volume is too narrow. It does not systematically include the irony, wordplay, satire, and slapstick that also serve the Platonic ends Freydberg correctly discerns of keeping ideas fluid, distancing Plato's own beliefs, whatever they were, from the reader, and inducing the reader to philosophize. The book also suffers from poor editing, and Greek is sometimes incorrectly transliterated: *ikanos* for *hikanos* twice, and *pharmakonoi* is apparently taken as the plural of *pharmakon* (140).

A sustained study of play in Plato remains an important desideratum for the new directions in Plato interpretation, which are now developing, that see Plato as a non-dogmatic philosopher in whose dialogues seriousness and play may stand in a symbiotic relationship. Such a study would work with a broad and

inclusive conception of all the forms of Platonic playfulness, however, and would begin from a thorough and extensive review of the literature.

Department of Philosophy  
Hunter College  
New York NY 10021

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*Le Non-Être: Deux Études sur le Sophiste de Platon*. By Denis O'Brien. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1995. Pp. xi + 181. DM 58.

Peter Lautner

The book reviewed here brings together the modified versions of two papers published previously in Italy in the early 90's (O'Brien 1991 and O'Brien 1992 respectively). The two most important additions to this volume is a complementary note (103-110) to the second paper which argues against Gregory Vlastos' interpretation of the passage on motion and rest in 255e11-15, and a bibliographical supplement (152-166) in which O'Brien takes issue with a new book on the *Sophist* by Lidia Palumbo (for which see the note by Christopher Rowe in *Phronesis* xlii[1997], 233) and a paper by F. Fronterotta. The work is completed by a useful bibliography of ancient and modern authors and an English summary *ad usum delphini*.