



Introduction to the Philosophy and Writings of Plato

Thomas Taylor

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Lawrence says

FALSE

Erick says

I have some ambivalence for Thomas Taylor. I dislike his obsequious Neo-Platonic (i.e. neo-pagan) preaching; it is often grating on the patience and usually not relevant at all. He was, however, a competent translator and, for the most part, interpreter of the Neo-Platonists and the way they interpreted Plato. This introduction is a good example of that tendency of his. I adamantly do draw a distinction between Plato and his Neo-Platonic interpreters. My position on their interpretations of Plato run from improbable to probable; occasionally they present simply a possible interpretation. The idea that the Neo-Platonists were simply following traditional Platonism going back to the early academy doesn't hold a lot of water with me. They were clearly influenced by traditions outside of the academy. They show an acquaintance with Aristotle, the Stoics, the Pythagoreans, and other more obscure traditions like Orphism and Chaldaic mysticism. Indeed Plato was influenced by some of these earlier traditions, but how much is debatable in some cases. The influence of these traditions are usually relegated to a very particular dialogue and not evident over numerous dialogues. There are some exceptions of course: his position on the immortality of the soul, the existence of transcendent ideas/forms, reincarnation, etc. The almost total dependence on idiosyncratic dialogues like the Parmenides for Neo-Platonist thought, I believe is somewhat problematic.

I have no issue with the Neo-Platonists as a whole. They present some profound and thought provoking philosophical ideas, but here Taylor is supposedly introducing Plato's writings, not Proclus' writings. I usually don't comment on other reviews, but I'm not surprised if someone struggled to understand this introduction. One needs to have not only a comprehensive acquaintance with Plato, but also a basic understanding of Proclus. Also, Taylor will use English terms where one has to have enough acquaintance with Greek to know how the English relates to his line of thought in the underlying Greek, i.e. certain Greek terms can be translated using a number of English terms and Taylor will switch terminology that is related in Greek, but isn't usually in English. This will throw the reader if they don't know the underlying Greek terminology. That being said, I would never give a poor review simply for my admitted lack of understanding. I didn't struggle with understanding Taylor's introduction at all because I have read Proclus enough to know that Taylor is pretty much wholly dependent on his interpretation of Plato. One obvious example is that Taylor uses Proclus' terminology when dealing with the cosmic modal hierarchies - and this is a big clue that Taylor isn't simply interpreting Plato's works as they are, but really as a follower of Proclus.

As it stands, this book serves as a guide to Neo-Platonic thought and it's interpretations of Plato. One needs to understand this going into it. I'm just beginning to read Schleiermacher's introductions to Plato's dialogues. Like his contemporary British counterpart, Schleiermacher (with some help from Friedrich Schlegel) has the distinction of being the first to translate the Platonic dialogues into German during the romantic era. It will be nice to get acquainted with his take.

I have to give this book 3 stars. Some of Taylor's griping and preaching makes his writing almost insufferable at times.

Beverly Crosson says

This book makes no sense to me
