

IV

---

REVIEWS

PRIKAZI



---

JEREMY BELL AND MICHAEL NASS (EDS.), *PLATO'S ANIMALS*,  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, BLOOMINGTON, 2015.

Aleksandar Kandić

So many books and studies on Plato's philosophy have been published that it is almost impossible to come up with some original, fresh topic, or unique interpretative position. Yet, somehow, *Plato's Animals* is a volume which manages to accomplish this. Compared to other philosophy books, the cover design is also rather unique: it is entirely filled with dozens of animal silhouettes, some of which appear in Plato's dialogues, and some – such as giraffe, kangaroo, or rhino – being obviously included for visual effect. One should not expect *Plato's Giraffes* to be published anytime soon. At the end of the volume, an index of animals is conveniently given and it numbers around 42 species. It is interesting, however, that there is only a handful of articles published on Plato's use of animal metaphors. Such metaphors are very prominent in Plato, and they are usually interpreted and mentioned within other more popular, broader topics: ethical, political, mythological, and so on. But the editors of *Plato's Animals* are right to say that the use of animal analogies by the great Athenian philosopher is largely underestimated – it is so important and central to the issues discussed in the dialogues that it demands a separate, very

well founded study. This original collection of essays, therefore, successfully fills this gap in Platonic studies.

According to the authors, there are seven aspects of the animal in Plato's dialogues. The seven corresponding sections of the book contain two essays each, and the total number is fourteen. In the first section, the role of the animals in Plato's myths and fables is examined. In her essay "Making Music with Aesop's Fables in the *Phaedo*", which opens up the volume, Heidi Northwood explains why Plato recalls poetry and Aesop's fables at the beginning of the *Phaedo*. Why are animal metaphors important for the proof of immortality? Northwood suggests that in Plato's view Socrates' and Aesop's lives were similar, as well as that Aesop's fables and Plato's thought intersect in many ways. The second essay in this section is David Farrell Krell's "Talk to the Animals: On the Myth of Cronos in the *Statesman*". Krell deals with the enigmatic description of a mythological "golden age" during which humans lived with animals in peace, and possibly even conversed with them. This is only a beginning point, as Krell moves on to other dialogues, such as *Menexenus* and the *Timaeus*. Furthermore, both

in the *Statesman* and the *Timaeus*, universe itself is called *zoion* – a living animal. The next two sections, which contain four essays, share similar topic: the animal metaphors used to portray Socrates. Michael Naas in “American Gadfly: Plato and the Problem of Metaphor” considers the image of Socrates as “gadfly”, which is a rough English translation of the Greek word *muops*. Naas argues that this translation is both appropriate, and potentially misleading, since the metaphorical meaning of “gadfly” in American English has mostly political aspects, and not the philosophical, which would be more suitable to Plato’s thought. Next, Thomas Thorp in “Till Human Voices Wake Us and We Drown: The Aporia-fish in the *Meno*” examines another very important image of Socrates: the stingray, or torpedo ray. Thorp suggests that torpedo ray is a better metaphor of Socrates, because unlike stingray which literally stings its prey, torpedo ray “electrifies” its surroundings, just like Socrates “narcotizes” his interlocutors. In “We the Bird-Catchers: Receiving the Truth in the *Phaedo* and the *Apology*” S. Montgomery Ewegen recalls the comparison between Socrates and the “prophetic swan” in the *Phaedo* by which the relationship between *logos*, interpretation and truth is explained. The image of prophetic swan is supposedly used to signify a conception of philosophical *logos* which precedes all reason. The final essay devoted to Socrates is “The Dog on the Fly” by H. Peter Stevens. Stevens returns to the “gadfly” metaphor and compares it to the popular depiction of Diogenes of Sinope as a “dog”. Why did Plato glorify Socrates, and vilified Diogenes despite their obvious similarities? Stevens believes that, in this regard, Plato was inconsistent with his own philosophical standards.

The fourth section of the volume looks into the animal images Plato employed to develop his political

philosophy. Jeremy Bell in “Taming Horses and Desires: Plato’s Politics of Care” argues that the example of horse training is central not only to Plato’s political thought, but also to his philosophy in general. According to Bell, the horse metaphor is appropriate for human condition as it expresses the duality between wilderness and tameness, thus emphasizing the need for care by which the good is brought up and nurtured. Bell also recalls the famous image from the *Phaedrus* in which the soul is compared to a chariot and a charioteer drawn by two horses. In “Who Let the Dogs Out? Tracking the Philosophical Life among the Wolves and Dogs of the Republic” Christopher P. Long examines the opposition between well-trained dogs and wild wolves by which the distinction between the guardians and tyrants is clarified in the *Republic*. Long points out the “dual nature” of wolves which are both savage beasts and cooperative pack animals. Only the gentle, well-trained dogs can represent a model for Plato’s guardians. The following section deals with the gender issues in Plato. Marina McCoy in her essay “The City of Sows and Sexual Differentiation in the *Republic*” deals with Glaucon’s rejection of the non-luxurious city as “a city of sows”. McCoy argues that this Glaucon’s characterization conceals a more general rejection of female *eros* in favor of masculine forms of desire on the basis that the Greek term for “sows” was used as slang for female genitalia. Sara Brill in “Animality and Sexual Difference in the *Timaeus*” offers a detailed reading of the cosmogony in the *Timaeus*. Brill believes that the distinction between mind and mindlessness is understood through the concept of animality. Therefore, for Plato, cosmogony has to be zoogony. This opens up the question of sexual differentiation not only among humans and animals, but also at the level of the cosmos which contains all these different species.

The next two essays belong to the section which considers Plato's philosophical methodology. Holly Moore's essay entitled "Animal Sacrifice in Plato's Later Methodology" examines Plato's conception of *diairesis*. When Socrates claims in the *Phaedrus* that ideas or categories must be divided along their "natural joints", he - according to Moore - implicitly compares dialectician to a butcher, as well as the conceptual world to a living animal. Therefore, an inherent anthropocentrism exists not only in Plato's understanding of collection and division, but also at the fundamental level of his ontology. Drew A. Hyland reads Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* in "The Animals That Therefore We Were? Aristophanes' Double-Creatures and the Question of Origins". Hyland argues that Plato draws the line between humans and animals not, as is commonly understood, by the distinction between reason and desire, but by the distinction between specific human form of *eros* and animal-like desires. In fact, Socrates claims that humans participate in a uniquely rational form of *eros*. The final section of the volume is devoted to the animal imagery in Plato's conception of death and afterlife. In "Animals and Angels: The Myth of Life as a Whole in Republic 10", Claudia Baracchi suggests that Plato's myth of death and regeneration tells us that non-human animality always underlies and marks human life. This interpretation is based

on Plato's claim that the traces of previous lives, both human and non-human, are retained within any living soul. The closing essay is Francisco J. Gonzalez' "Of Beasts and Heroes: The Promiscuity of Humans and Animals in the Myth of Er". Gonzalez compares Plato's conception of reincarnation in the tenth book of the *Republic* to the one from the *Phaedo* in the light of the Neoplatonist view that the account of reincarnation in the *Republic* actually undermines any meaningful distinction between human and animal souls.

In general, this volume demonstrates that even if Plato places animals within the lowest ranks of cosmic hierarchy, they still constitute an important, irreplaceable part of the world. Almost every dialogue contains at least some animal imagery! What makes us human is not complete separation from the animal, but rather the subtle, gradual articulation of our innate animal characteristics, achieved through philosophical education, proper reasoning and moral practice. Once again Plato delights us with his "out-of-the-box" thinking: instead of drawing a sharp line between human and animal, as one might expect on the basis of Plato's metaphysical, epistemological and ethical considerations, he manages to create a conception of the world in which the two opposing natures appear to be developing out of each other. This is particularly emphasized by Plato's theory of reincarnation.