

Necip Fikri Alican: *One over Many: The Unitary Pluralism of Plato's World*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021. Pp. xxx, 396.)

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Bookshelves weigh heavy with studies on “Plato’s metaphysics.” Their aim, in nearly every instance, is to reconstruct from the dialogues, and at times with the help of ancient testimony, Plato’s understanding of reality, particularly the relationship between the Forms (or Ideas) and sensible particulars (i.e., objects of everyday sense experience). Given the abundant literature available on “Plato’s Forms,” it is reasonable to ask whether there is anything meaningful left to say about them. The question is not merely a matter of whether scholars are able to generate new ideas and interpretations. Novelty will never be lacking in scholarship. The issue is, rather, whether the conversation hitherto about the Forms has given us meaningful insight into Plato’s thinking and whether it ought to continue as it has developed.

How one approaches the “theory of Forms” or any other issue raised in the dialogues depends in no small part on how one reads Plato. A commonly held opinion among scholars today is that the dialogues contain “Plato’s philosophy.” On this view, although dramatic in form, the dialogues are treatises in disguise, which reveal Plato’s own personal views on the nature of reality, knowledge, and values. Instead of speaking directly to his readers in his own voice, Plato uses characters like Socrates and Timaeus as mouthpieces to speak on his behalf. When Socrates in the dialogues, for instance, expresses his commitment to the existence of Forms, it is really Plato doing the talking. The drama of the dialogues, on this view, is a shell and philosophy the kernel. The job of the Plato scholar, therefore, is to dispose of the shell and retain the kernel. This review is not intended as an endorsement or repudiation of this approach to reading Plato. The point is simply that what one takes Plato to be doing depends largely on how one reads him. Reading the dialogues as treatises will naturally lead one to regard Plato as a dogmatic philosopher, that is to say, someone interested in promulgating philosophical theories.

Now, the tendency to read the dialogues as treatises has dominated Platonic scholarship for the better part of the last century. Gregory Vlastos, Richard Kraut, and Gail Fine are just a few scholars who belong to this scholarly tradition. We can add to this list Necip Fikri Alican. Alican is perhaps best known for “Rethinking Plato’s Forms” (*Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica*, no. 47 [2013]: 11–47). In this paper, coauthored with Holger Thesleff, Alican offers a unique way of thinking about the Forms. On Alican’s view, rather than locating the Forms in a world separate from sensible particulars, Plato understands them to exist alongside sensibles in a single world characterized by varying degrees of reality. Thus, against the dualistic account of reality often ascribed to Plato, Alican attributes to him a unitary pluralism, according to which “the Forms [exist] in the upper level and sensible phenomena in the lower level of an integrated whole” (5).

Alican's thinking about the Forms did not end with his collaboration with Thesleff. Over the next several years, he would publish several essays developing the ideas originally articulated in "Rethinking Plato's Forms." *One over Many* is a collection of these essays. The text consists of seven chapters. Serving as an "exegetical and analytical anchor for the alternative interpretation developed throughout the remainder of the book" (67), chapter 1 (the only chapter not previously published) provides an overview of the standard interpretation of Plato's metaphysics, which takes the Forms to exist on a completely different metaphysical plane from sensible particulars. Chapter 2 is a reprint of "Rethinking Plato's Forms." Chapters 3 and 4 find Alican reflecting further on Plato's stratified view of reality and "the philosophical preconceptions shaping the reception of [his] metaphysics" (145). The remaining chapters apply Alican's interpretive model of "unitary pluralism" to various scholarly problems concerning Plato's metaphysics, including the allowance for Formless things and empty Forms (chapter 5), the existence of negative Forms (chapter 6), and the possibility of intermediates existing between Forms and sensibles (chapter 7).

Throughout the text, Alican is careful not to overstate his case. He never claims to know what Plato had in mind regarding the Forms. He says as much in the introduction: "The general aim of the book, as well as that of each chapter, is friendly persuasion rather than conclusive proof" (14). Alican's modesty is understandable given not only the amount of scholarship needing to be confronted, but also the "widespread agreement [in the literature] on a dualism of worlds" (67). Nevertheless, in Alican's view, the lack of agreement on the nature of the Forms and their relationship to sensible particulars provides scholars with a golden opportunity to reassess Plato's thoughts on the structure of reality.

It must be said that Alican puts forward an original and compelling conception of the Forms. They are not simply abstract universals existing within particulars, as Bertrand Russell suggests. Nor are they perfect paradigms existing in a world entirely their own, as I also suggested in my book *Plato, Metaphysics, and the Forms* (Continuum, 2008). Indeed, the Forms, on Alican's view, are not a homogenous class of beings on ontological par with each other, but rather can be divided into three categories: Ideal Forms, Conceptual Forms, and Relational Forms. Although these categories stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other, they do not exist in separate worlds. The same can be said about the relationship between Forms and sensible particulars. Rather than occupying distinct realms, they exist together in a single world separated from each other by gradations. The result is not a two-world conception of reality, but rather a stratified view of a single reality "consisting of a higher and lower level and untold layers in between" (116).

Alican, without a doubt, offers a refreshing perspective on the Forms. He shows little concern for the dramatic elements of the dialogues and cuts right to their philosophic core. In that respect, it is as good a text on "Plato's Forms" as I have encountered. However, questions remain: Is Plato a

metaphysician in the traditional sense? Did he promulgate a “theory of Forms”? What role do the Forms play within the broader context of dialogues? These are not questions that interest Alican, who takes for granted that Plato had a metaphysics. Alican is not alone. In fact, his scholarship ranks among the finest in the tradition that regards Plato as a dogmatic philosopher. But in treating Plato as a dogmatist and in trying to reconstruct a metaphysics from the dialogues, one may ask whether Alican has missed the point. Should we ignore the dialogues’ dramatic elements or are they perhaps the key to understanding Plato’s philosophy? This is an issue that deeply divides scholars. Alican, for one, does not hesitate to peel away the dramatic shell in hopes of exposing what he considers to be the philosophic kernel. In doing so, we are left to wonder whether Plato would recognize the view presented as his own. Yet this is the unavoidable result of Plato scholarship that trains its attention on decontextualized passages rather than the dramatic whole.

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George Thomas: *The (Un)Written Constitution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 175.)

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George Thomas’s *The (Un)Written Constitution* begins with the observation that there is a startling disconnect between how some conservative judges and justices speak in public about what they do—we stick to the plain text of the constitution!—and what they actually do in practice, which is rely on principles, theories, and structural insights to animate and interpret ambiguous constitutional text.

As Thomas himself notes, this observation is “hardly news” (5) to scholars and practitioners familiar with the debate. When speaking with fellow elites, conservative academics and jurists describe originalism in a more nuanced manner, as an interpretive approach that deploys text, structure, and history to decide constitutional questions. The project of *The (Un)Written Constitution* is to illustrate this disconnect between elite and public discourse around originalism by showing how it plays out in certain Supreme Court opinions. In doing so, Thomas adds texture and depth to the conversation around originalism by teasing out the unwritten ideas, principles, and “political theor[ies]” (6) that undergird these landmark decisions.

The (Un)Written Constitution is organized into five chapters sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion. Instead of proceeding