THE PLATO CENTRE
AT TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Annual Report.  2009 to 2010

Message from the Director
I write this as Director Emeritus, filling in for our Director, Vasilis Politis, who has been spending a most congenial and productive year at the Wissenschaftskolleg (Institute for Advanced Study) in Berlin, from which we expect that there will shortly emanate, among other things, a major work on Aporia, of which we look forward to celebrating the launch before long.

This has been our fifth year as a real physical entity, with library and seminar room, and we are now well accustomed to our new state. However, conditions of life, it must be said, have been pretty difficult for most of the year by reason of the construction next door of the new Long Room Humanities Hub building beside us, which involved a good deal of noise and dust, not to mention our displacement from our seminar room for the purpose of driving a tunnel from it into the new building.

However, all things, bad and good, come to an end, and we now have the benefit of a fine new facility adjacent to us, in which we look forward to holding lectures and seminars for the future, while we have gained a new seminar room and some extra space in the 1937 Reading Room, which remains our home. The bit of extra space will not go amiss, as the Library is beginning to bulge at the seams, not least by reason of the welcome gift of a valuable collection of books from the library of our much-lamented colleague John Cleary (of whom more below), mainly in the area of Aristotelian studies, but covering many other areas of ancient philosophy and mathematics as well.

In the autumn, by reason both of the absence of the Director and of the dire living conditions, we kept a low profile as regards visitors, but kept going both the Wednesday reading group and periodic Work in Progress seminars on Friday mornings. The reading group settled on the Alcibiades I, as something of a pendant to the Hippias Major of the previous year, with the aim of testing our perceptions of its authenticity or otherwise. I think that it is fair to say that, unlike the Hippias, which came across as genuine early Plato (even if the presentation of Hippias seems somewhat over the top!), the Alcibiades was felt to be in many respects odd – though none the less interesting for that, as it is surely a product of the early Academy.

Work in Progress seminars were contributed by Ugo Zilioli, who is currently attached to the Centre on a Government of Ireland Scholarship, and Greg Cunningham. These were much
appreciated by all participants, and were generally followed by coffee and/or lunch, usually in Dunne and Crescenzi’s

In the new year, we turned, in the reading seminar, first to Republic X, which was being worked on by Greg Cunningham, and constituted a bit of genuine Plato, of a particularly stimulating sort, as an antidote to the Alcibiades.

We then, however, turned, for our post-Platonic text, to none other than George Berkeley’s Siris – beginning with the sampling of some bottles of good retsina, in lieu of tarwater. This attracted the interest, and welcome participation, of a number of Berkeleian colleagues from the Department of Philosophy, and proved most fascinating for all concerned.

As well as this, however, we were happy to welcome, from January on, a number of distinguished visitors, starting with Professor Satoshi Oghihara, of Tohoku University, who was spending the year in Cambridge. He spoke, on Friday, Feb. 12, on ‘The Choice of Lives in the Myth of Er’, a topic that tied in admirably with our reading of Republic X.

Our next visiting speaker, on Friday, April 23, was our colleague, Dr. Timothy Crowley, of the Philosophy Department, UCD, who engaged us in another look at Aristotle’s treatment of the elements.

This was followed, on Tuesday, May 18, by the Sixth Stephen MacKenna Lecture, delivered by the distinguished Platonist, Prof. Christopher Gill, of Exeter University, on ‘The Stoic Ideal of Happiness: Is it still relevant for us?’ – a subject, excellently presented, which engaged the enthusiastic interest of a large and appreciative audience. This event also served as the occasion for the recording of the first instalment in our series of webcasts, all of which can be accessed on our website http://www.tcd.ie/classics/cspt.

Our final visiting speaker seminar of the year took place on the following Friday, May 21, when Professor James Hankinson, of the University of Texas at Austin, the distinguished authority on the work of Galen in particular, delivered a paper on ‘Galen and Alcinous on Analogia’. After a lively discussion, we adjourned to dine at the Trocadero.

The last public activity of the Centre was in fact a Conference in honour of our late and much-lamented colleague John Cleary, organised with great dedication and efficiency by Eleni Kaklamanou and Peter Larsen on the general topic ‘Philosophy and Mathematics’. from Thursday, May 27 to Saturday, May 29. This initiative, originally only intended as a colloquium for Irish graduate students, in fact attracted an international field of scholars, coming from France, Portugal and the United States, and proved a great success. Prof. Peter Simons, Chair of the TCD Philosophy Department, delivered the keynote address, on ‘Euclid’s Context Principle’, and a sequence of interesting papers followed, from both philosophers and mathematicians (see Report on the Conference). It is proposed to publish a selection of these, by way of Proceedings, in a future issue of Hermathena.
We also have in hand the publication of a collection of John’s articles, which will constitute a fine memorial to his scholarly achievement, and a most useful reference work for scholars. Watch for further details on the website in due course.

The final event of the year for members of the Centre was an intensive workshop on Plato’s *Parmenides*. Led by David Horan, the group met from 9:00am – 4:00pm from June 8 – 11. The event, which was attended by a small dedicated group of our members, was a great success, and there are plans to continue this sort of intensive seminar in future years.

Looking forward to the coming year, we have chosen for the autumn to read the *Phaedrus* in the reading group, with special reference to the development of a distinctively philosophic rhetoric. The post-Platonic work for the second half of the year has yet to be decided, but a work of Philo of Alexandria is a possibility, to concord with the interests of our new Newman Fellow, Emily Parker, who has come to us from Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. During the coming year, we will be welcoming to the Centre a number of visitors, first Dr. Robert Zaborowski, from the University of Warmia & Mazury in Poland, on an exchange visit from the Polish Academy of Sciences, in late September and early October, and then two recipients of Long Room Hub fellowships, Dr. Carl O’Brien, of NUI Maynooth, and Dr. Wolfgang Pollechin from the University of Bochum.

In the new year also, we look forward to welcoming our next MacKenna Lecturer, in the person of Professor Michael Erler of the University of Würzburg, and a series of other speakers, to be announced in due course. We will be sorry to say goodbye at Christmas to our Research Associate, Dr. Eleni Kaklamanou, but congratulate her on her appointment to a position in the University of Crete at Rethymno.