ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PLATO CENTRE AT TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN –

2011/12

The Plato Centre has now for a series of years sustained a high level – and we think quality – of activity, and we are glad to be able to say, after assessing it as a whole, that this year is no exception; if anything it has perhaps been the most satisfactory period that the Centre has enjoyed in its not inconsiderable history (founded in 1997, since 2005 officially in its present premises, with major library, seminar room, and study area situated in the basement of 1937 Building).

These activities and achievements come under a variety of headings that have become well-entrenched over the years:

The Reading Seminar
This is a weekly, two-hour event, during term and sometimes beyond, dedicated to the careful study, in the original and translation, of a major ancient work. This year we focused, for all of Michaelmas Term and part of Hilary Term, on Plato’s monumental and towering contribution to physics, cosmology, and metaphysics, the dialogue Timaeus. In close continuation, we turned to Aristotle’s De Caelo, which is in many ways a response to, while building on, the Timaeus. The overall impression is certainly that we have had few seminars that have been so vigorous and stimulating. Indeed this has prompted more than one of us to try their hand publishing something on this relatively under-studied work of Plato’s; and it was capped by a one-day workshop on Plato Timaeus and Current Physics – more on which below.

The Intensive Reading-Week (21-25 May 2012)
Now in its third year, this event, which takes place after the end of the teaching year, is dedicated to an intensive, week-long study of a Platonic dialogue, in original and translation. The event is in large part the product of our Ph.D. student, David Horan, and his ten-year mammoth project of translating all of Plato’s works – a project that is now half-way towards what promises to be a most successful conclusion. This year we studied the Phaedo (it was the Parmenides and the Sophist in previous years), a tour-de-force of philosophy and literature, most subtly and forcefully rendered in David’s translation which we had the chance to check and in a number of cases revise. Especially for this event, we were pleased to welcome from Athens our former Newman Fellow, Dr Eleni Kaklamanou, who was a treasured member of the Centre, first as graduate student and then as post-doctoral fellow.

Workshops (10 March 2012; 11 May 2012)
Plato’s Timaeus and Current Physics (10 March)
While of course the details of Plato’s physics have been well-superseded, Plato’s general claims – especially that physics needs to be based in mathematics, and that this requires the need to postulate non-physical entities, numbers and geometrical figures – provide for a productive interface with modern and current physics. The task of this one-day workshop was to bring together ancient scholars, modern philosophers of science, and scientists, with the aim of identifying and
beginning to discuss such points of intersection between Plato and current physics. As we thought this should be more of a pilot event, this was achieved, in what was felt all-round to be an excellent day, by drawing on mainly local talent: members from the Plato Centre; young philosophers of science from TCD and more widely in Dublin; and two or three physicists (esp. Prof. Donnacha O’Driscoll from UCD, who gave an excellent presentation on the *Timaeus* from the perspective of modern physics). We can say that we had a most probing and productive discussion, to the satisfaction of all (and not least Professor Simons from Philosophy) across the eras and disciplines. We hope to organize a more high-profile international event on the same topic next year or the one after.

*The Reconsideration of the Chronology of Plato’s Dialogues – in co-operation with the Museum Graeco-Latinum from Moscow (11 May)*

This event was made possible by the visit of Professor Shichalin and his Moscow-based team of researchers and graduate students that make up what is perhaps the most important locus of ancient philosophy in post-USSR Russia. Their approach to the Platonic corpus is distinctive and of particular interest; not least due to their careful attempt to situate the production of the Platonic dialogues in its historical context and to identify the audience that Plato was addressing, and the occasion he was responding to, in each dialogue. This was a most satisfactory day of scholarship but also of conviviality and the making of new friends.

*The Annual Stephen MacKenna Lecture (20 March 2012)*

This annual flagship event, in memory of the great Irish translator of Plotinus, Stephen MacKenna, and addressed to both scholars and the wider public, is now past its first decade, so it was appropriate that it should be held by one of the most distinguished scholars of the Platonic tradition, Professor Jan Opsomer from Leuven. Professor Opsomer’s talk, held in the Long Room Hub and attended by a large and various audience, was addressed to the topic ‘Why the Christians are wrong about creation, according to Julian the Apostate’ and gave us an acute sense of the vigour, intensity, and extent of the debate between Platonists and Christians on the question of the source of the universe and the nature of creation – he made this old controversy look entirely topical.

*Visitors – and Newman Fellow*

*Philipp Steinkrüeger* (Newman Fellow, October 2011-September 2012)

It has been a particular pleasure and reward to have had with us this excellent graduate student from Cologne and Leuven. Philipp, who is working on Aristotle’s conception of science and its reception by later Platonists, has set another example (following that of ex Newman Fellow, Dr Peter Larsen) of how, and how closely and productively, a Newman Fellow can, on a daily basis, work with the rest of us in the Centre (not least with his predecessor Dr Larsen, with whom he has become good friends).

*Professor Greg MacIsaac* (Carleton University, Canada; visit during Michaelmas Term)

Professor MacIsaac was a most welcome addition to the Centre during the first Term. Like Philipp, he was a daily presence at the Centre; he took a most active part in the Reading Seminar, and we were
especially pleased to be introduced, through a number of work-in-progress seminars that he gave us, to his ambitious and interesting project on the unity of Plato’s philosophy.

Professor Damian Caluori (University of San Antonio, Texas; visit during June 2012)
Professor Caluori is currently visiting us for the month of June, while he is concentrating on two major projects: finishing a book on Plotinus based on his Oxford D.Phil. thesis (it was supervised by the late Michael Frede, one of the finest ancient philosophers of the last century, and won a prestigious prize); and completing a translation and commentary on The anonymous commentary on Plato’s Parmenides. On 12 June Professor Caluori gave us a talk, on Plotinus account of wholes and parts and its metaphysical application especially to the understanding of the soul and intellect, which we generally felt was impressive and in part quite brilliant. He gave us another talk, on the anonymous commentary on Plato’s Parmenides, on June 28; and he is already been engaging with some of our own work-in-progress (esp. on Aristotle’s defence of the possibility of metaphysics).

Visiting Speakers – Colloquia and Work-in-Progress Seminars
Our numerous visiting speakers have addressed us both through Colloquia and Work-in-Progress Seminars (this year we have tended to run the two together and not distinguish too carefully between them). They have included, in addition to our visitors, Professors MacIsaac and Caluori (see above): (1) Professor Robert Zaborowski (University of Warmia and Mazury and member of the Polish Academy of Sciences), on ‘Emotions in Early Plato’ (30 September 2011); (2) Professor John Bremer (Institute of Philosophy and Cambridge College, USA), on ‘Meno’s opening gambit’ (28 October 2011); (3) Arnis Ritups (University of Leuven), on ‘Infallible Intellect in Aristotle, the commentators, and Plotinus’ (17 February 2012); and (4) Dr. Tom Angier (University of Kent), on ‘Aristotle’s Ethics’ (9 March, 2012).

Graduate Students
Dr. Peter Larsen (as he now is) completed his Ph.D. thesis, on ‘Plato’s Theory of Perception’, earlier this academic year. The thesis was examined by Professors Jonathan Lowe of Durham and Peter Simons of TCD, and passed without changes. Both examiners recommended that it be revised for publication as a monograph, and Peter, in co-ordination with Professors Lowe and Deborah Modrak of Rochester – the former an expert on the philosophy of perception generally, the latter of ancient accounts of perception – is now working towards this end.

David Horan has, after his successful transfer onto the Ph.D. register in October 2011, been making quite impressive progress and is on course to complete, some time towards the end of the next academic year, a penetrating thesis on Plato’s Parmenides.

Emily Parker is in the process of completing her thesis on the figure of Joseph in the work of Philo of Alexandria, under the direction of Dr. Zuleika Rodgers. Dr Rodgers, director of the Herzog Centre for Judaic Studies, is a member of our executive committee, and we are particularly pleased about this co-operation between the Herzog Centre and the Plato Centre.

Keith Begley, now at the end of his second year, has produced careful work, based on recent research in linguistics, on the concept of antonymy; a highly promising chapter on Heraclitus, in which he has also successfully applied the work from linguistic; and the outlines of a chapter on Lao
Tzu – all of which, once it comes together, promises an original piece of work, historical as well as systematic, on the notion of duality.

**Governance and Website**

While the activities of the Centre are organized and supervised by the deliberations of its Directors, Vasilis Politis and John Dillon, and its Governing Committee (which includes Dr Ashley Clements from Classics, Dr. Zuleika Rodgers of the Herzog Centre, as well as Professors Andrew Smith and Fran O’Rourke from UCD), its daily life – and it is very much a venue for continual labour on a daily basis – is the result of a co-operative effort, which draws on: its graduate students and postdocs; graduate students and staff from other departments in TCD, especially Philosophy and Classics; a number of other philosophers and classicists from the Dublin area; and its many contacts and friends abroad.

The website of the Centre has been expertly looked after by our webmaster, Peter Larsen. While conforming with College regulations, its distinctive design is our own. It is repository of the countless elements of our recent history, while of course also communicating our current events and overall aims and mission.

**Looking ahead**

For next year we are looking forward to two new graduate students: Jun Su, from China, who will work on Aristotle; and Pauline Sabrier, from France, who will work on Plato. We have decided to award the Newman Fellowship to both, which they will therefore share. We are looking forward to 2013 Stephen MacKenna Lecturer, Professor Paul Calligas from Athens, who is a distinguished authority on the work of Plotinus and who is in the process of completing a translation, into modern Greek and into English, and commentary of Plotinus’ great work, the *Enneads*.

17 June 2012

Vasilis Politis, Director

John Dillon, Director Emeritus