THE PLATO CENTRE
AT TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Annual Report. September 2012 to July 2013

As we are now at the end of the academic year 2012-2013, it is an opportunity to reflect back on the past ten months, which have been among the most active and rewarding in the Plato Centre’s history. This is due not least to our two new Newman Fellows, Pauline Sabrier from France and Jun Su from China, working on Plato and Aristotle. They have in the course of the year become so much part of the daily life of the Centre, and so admirably involved in the communal activities and indeed the interests of our individual members – including those of Peter Larsen, David Horan, Keith Begley, Brendan O’Byrne, Professor Dillon and Vasilis Politis – that it is hard to believe in their recent arrival. We would also like to congratulate them on the excellent progress they have made on their work, both the course work (as required by the Philosophy Department of every PhD student in hid or her fist year) and the first but significant steps of their PhD thesis.

This year’s series of ten Visiting Speakers Colloquia was extensive, rewarding, and stimulating. Our speakers were: John Haldane from St. Andrew’s; Joachim Auferheide from King’s College London; Dominic Scott from Virginia and Cambridge; Roman Dilcher from Heidelberg; David Lee from Oxford; Catherine Osborne from the University of East Anglia; Cesare Catà from the University of Macerata; Benoît Castelnérac from the University of Sherbrooke; Panos Dimas from Oslo University and Director of the Norwegian Institute in Athens; and Adam Crager from Princeton.

We organized two, two-day Workshops. The first was at the end of November, chaired by our visitor and associate member, Professor George Karamanolis, from Crete and Munich, and addressed to the critical reading of his manuscript on The Philosophy of Early Christianity, which is now about to appear with Acumen Press. The second workshop, held in February, was on Proclus’ Commentary on Euclid. This was attended by two visitors, our own Newman Fellow of last year, Philipp Steinkrüger, who is now in Leuven, and Dr David Lee from St. John’s College Oxford. The main session, on Proclus’ account of geometry and how this compares not only to Plato but to Kant, was most ably directed chaired by Dr Stefan Storrie, who recently completed his PhD in the Philosophy Department and is currently completing a two-year Postdoctoral Fellowship under the Irish Research Council.

Our Annual Stephen MacKenna Lecture, especially intended for a broader audience and wider community, was delivered in early April by Professor Paul Kalligas from Athens, who is an eminent Plotinus scholar and currently in the process of completing a monumental translation and commentary of Plotinus’ Enneads to be published in Greek as well as English. Professor Kalligas gave a most insightful and stimulating talk on Plotinus’ notion of energeia and its relation to the modern notion of energy.

At the end of May, under the guidance of David Horan and based on his fine recent translation of the dialogue, we dedicated an entire Study Week to the reading and examination of Plato’s famous and highly influential dialogue on the nature of knowledge, the Theaetetus. This intensive event was extremely well-attended, also from members of the Philosophy Department who do not consider
themselves Platonists or Plato scholars, and we were especially glad to welcome back not only Professor Catherine Osborne, who had addressed our Colloquium earlier in the year, but three previous Newman Fellows: Eleni Kaklananou, now in Cyprus; Philipp Steinkrüger from Leuven; and Emily Parker from TCD.

We had three International Visitors this year. Eleni Kaklananou, who finished her PhD with Professor Dillon some years ago and who has been a Newman Fellow and a most treasured member of the Centre, was here from mid-May to the end of June. She took a very active part in our activities, especially the Study Week on the Theætætus, and worked hard with Dr Peter Larsen on a paper addressed to the issue of the relation between perception and thought in Plato. We were most glad to hear that she has just been appointed to a position at the University of Cyprus, on which we would like to congratulate her warmly. During May we enjoyed a visit from Pantazis Tselemanis from Athens, who likewise shared in our activities, the Study Week especially but also through several discussions and readings, not least with Jun Su on Aristotle. Finally, we have been enjoying the company and participation of George-Florin Calian from Budapest, and we are pleased that he and his family will be able to extend their stay into next year.

As every year, the stable core of our activities has been the Weekly Reading Seminar, this year dedicated to the Symposium, Plato’s polyphonic work on erotic love. We spent many weeks and more than one term on this great dialogue, and came to recognize the importance of reading it, as with any Platonic dialogue, as a whole and to appreciate the argumentative thread that runs through it and the central questions around which it revolves: whether erōs and erotic desire is invariably and necessarily good; and how erōs can be transformed into something supremely good.

We have also now, for the past year, had the benefit of a new Librarian, our first in-house librarian, John Nugent. He is spending many an hour meticulously cataloguing, labelling, re-arranging … our thousands of books. This is a most necessary and timely task, which was initiated by Peter Larsen and Philipp Steinkrüger last spring, and which needs to be completed, and indeed sustained on a continuous basis, not least as the number of books keeps growing. We were also grateful to receive, earlier in the year, a substantial bequest of books from the widow of the late Professor John Luce.

Finally, it is with particular pleasure that we congratulate David Horan on his very recent completion and submission of his PhD thesis, on The Argumentative Unity of Plato’s Parmenides. This is an incisively argued, comprehensively researched, and finely-presented work. It will be examined in the autumn by Professor Mary Margaret McCabe, of King’s College London, who is a leading expert in the area, and we hope and expect to see it in print in the near future as a significant contribution to the understanding of this most difficult, vexed and influential dialogue of Plato’s, the Parmenides.

Looking forward, it is with eagerness that we are expecting the arrival of Dr Christopher Buckels (and his family) as our next Newman Fellow. Dr Buckels has just completed a PhD thesis on Plato’s metaphysics, under the supervision of Professor Jan Szaif at California at Davis. He came first earlier in the year, when we had to make a difficult decision of selection among a number of excellent postdoctoral applicants for this Fellowship that included shortlisted candidates from Cambridge, Princeton, St. Andrew’s, and Oxford

Vasilis Politis, Director. John Dillon, Director Emeritus. David Horan, Treasurer. 15 July 2013.