

**FATTAL, M. (2016). *DU BIEN  
ET DE LA CRISE. PLATON,  
PARMÉNIDE ET PAUL DE TARSE.*  
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Michel Fattal is a member of the International Plato Society, lecturer since 1994 at the Université de Grenoble Alpes, a specialist on ancient and mediaeval philosophy. M. Fattal has published so far nineteen books and more than forty articles, most of them dealing with philosophical theories about *logos*, including the Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Plotin, Saint Augustine, and the medieval reception of the Greek philosophy. The academy of moral and political

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sciences awarded him the Charles Lyon-Caen Prize, rewarding him for the publication of *Platon et Plotin, Relation, Logos, Intuition* (Paris, l'Harmattan, 2013). Michel Fattal is thus a most distinguished scholar and now he publishes a fine book on the good and the crisis, linking Plato, Parmenides and Paul of Tarsus. As is his style, Fattal builds his argument using short items, each from two to four pages each, on specific subjects, easing the task of the reader. Even though learned and fond of etymological turns, all the Greek quotes are transliterated in Latin letters and translated into French, so that even lay readers may understand his stand. The volume also puts together papers to be delivered in 2016 in Brasília and Bologna.

The two key concepts are “to put together” (*sundein*) and “crisis” (*krisis*). Crisis comes from the Greek *krisis*, separation, and the verb *krino* means to split apart, and then to decide, to judge. From Parmenides to Paul of Tarsus, *krinein* implies a norm or criteria for choosing what to do and what to avoid doing. Parmenides already proposed that critical reason, or *logos*, splits apart truth and opinion. Michel Fattal aims thus at studying the critical *logos* of Parmenides and the noncritical *logos* of Paul of Tarsus. He starts by considering how the good is relational (*desmos*) at the *Phaedo* (99c5-6):

99 ξ τὴν δὲ τοῦ ὡς οἶόν τε βέλτιστα αὐτὰ τεθῆναι δύναμιν οὕτω νῦν κεῖσθαι, ταύτην οὔτε ζητοῦσιν οὔτε τινὰ οἶονται δαιμονίαν ἰσχὺν ἔχειν, ἀλλὰ ἡγοῦνται τούτου Ἄτλαντα ἂν ποτε ἰσχυρότερον καὶ ἀθανατώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον ἅπαντα συνέχοντα ἐξευρεῖν, καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ δέον συνδεῖν καὶ συνέχειν οὐδὲν οἶονται. ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν τῆς τοιαύτης αἰτίας ὅπη ποτὲ ἔχει μαθητῆς ὅτου οὖν ἥδιστ' ἂν γενοίμην: ἐπειδὴ

δὲ ταύτης ἐστερήθην καὶ οὔτ' αὐτὸς εὐρεῖν οὔτε παρ'  
ἄλλου μαθεῖν οἷός τε ἐγενόμην, τὸν δεύτερον

99c the power which causes things to be now placed as it is best for them to be placed, nor do they think it has any divine force, but they think they can find a new Atlas more powerful and more immortal and more all-embracing than this, and in truth they give no thought to the good, which must embrace and hold together all things. Now I would gladly be the pupil of anyone who would teach me the nature of such a cause; but since that was denied me and I was not able to discover it myself or to learn of it from anyone else.

It is thus the good that embraces (*sundeî*) and holds together (*sunecheî*) everything. Plato (*Phd.* 99c5) puts together under a single article (*to*) *agathon* and *deon*, the good and necessary at once, considering that the verb *deo* means to happen and to put together. The good (*agathon*) is necessarily to put together. At the *Phaedo* the good is self-sufficient as it is principle (*arche*) and cause (*aitia*), being thus relational cause and causal relation. Participation (*methexis*) means also to put together (*metechein*), so that the good is a bond at the heart of the human language. Furthermore, Fattal argues that in the *Phaedo* Plato addresses not only the study of the vertical relationship, a hierarchical one, linking the sensible and the forms, but also the horizontal links that the forms establish among themselves, later developed in the *Sophist*. The *Phaedo* extends the principle of mutual exclusion of direct contraries to indirect ones, proposes the rule of inclusion or inference enabling forms to be related to each other.

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Michel Fattal turns then to Parmenides and to the origins of the crisis, especially his Poem (8 Fr. 50-52):

[50] Ἐν τῷ σοι παύω πιστὸν λόγον ἠδὲ νόημα  
ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης· δόξας δ' ἀπὸ τοῦδε βροτείας  
μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων.

50 Here shall I close my trustworthy speech and thought  
about the truth.

Henceforward learn the opinions of mortals,  
giving ear to the deceptive ordering of my words.  
(English translation by John Burnet, 1892).

The goddess of the Poem is at the same time *thea* (goddess) and *aletheia* (truth), urging the disciple to avoid opinion and preferring truth. So much so, that Parmenides, for the first time in western philosophy, considers that reason, or *logos*, has a function in relation to truth and critical assessment, enabling later Greek philosophy to establish ontological and gnoseological hierarchies.

All those are the necessary steps conducing to a different Pauline reason, or *logos*, for it is a pneumat-ic one. Fattal concludes the study by focusing at the First Letter to the Corinthians, dated around 56 AD and particularly comments a key excerpt:

Paul, 1 *Corinthians* 2, 14-16

14 ψυχικός δὲ ἄνθρωπος οὐ δέχεται τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ, μωρία γὰρ αὐτῷ ἐστίν, καὶ οὐ δύναται γινῶναι, ὅτι πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται.

15 ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει [τὰ] πάντα, αὐτὸς δὲ ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἀνακρίνεται.

16 τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου, ὃς συμβιβάσει αὐτόν; ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν χριστοῦ ἔχομεν.

14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

16 For who has known the mind of the LORD, that he will instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

New American Standard Bible

Paul proposes a spiritual conversion of the *nous*, intelligence, reason, intellect, so that the human being gets a superior understanding or judging capacity, and as such the spiritual human being discerns and judges (*ankrinei*)

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everything. This is thus the result of the conversion of the physical to the spiritual, enabling the spirit (*pneuma*) to foster critical discernment. Those proposals result also from the conflicts within the Corinthian church and they establish a non-critical reason or *logos*, in opposition to the critical one of Parmenides. The criteria proposed by Paul are spiritual, beyond and above the material world. Michel Fattal finishes the volume by questioning what he defines as nihilist approaches countering classical metaphysics, notably those thinkers of suspicion, such as Freud, Nietzsche and Marx. Fattal does not consider that Freudian Subconscious, Nietzschean *Der Wille zur Macht* or Marxian infrastructure could explain and define humans, human values and conscience. Paul's reason or *logos*, on the other hand, broadens human aspirations, as it draws its strength from God, from love (*agape*), a superior grace. Michel Fattal concludes by stating that Paul's methodical and dialectical reason or *logos* is valid for humans in any time. Michel Fattal relates classical ontology to Christian reasoning, opposing critical and non-critical, physical and spiritual reason, pledging for the eternal value of a spiritual approached grounded on love. Not all modern scholars will agree with his stand, but the main strength of the volume is in the in-depth analysis of philosophical concepts from ancient to modern times.

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