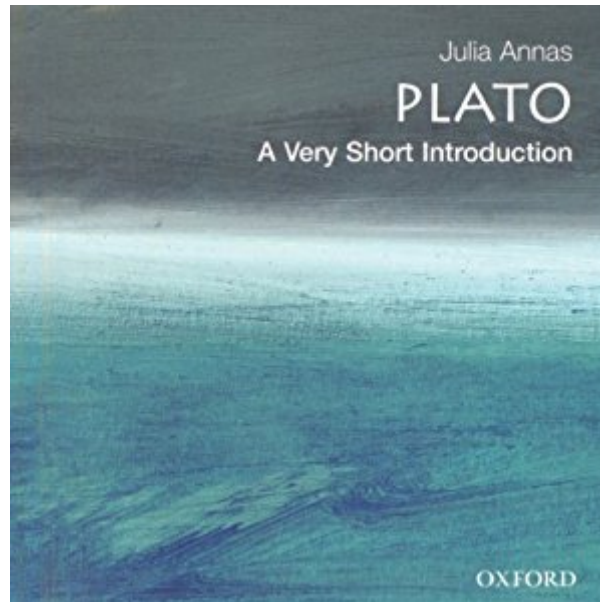




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Plato: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

This lively and accessible introduction to Plato focuses on the philosophy and argument of his writings, drawing the listener into Plato's way of doing philosophy, and the general themes of his thinking. This is not an audiobook to leave the listener standing in the outer court of introduction and background information, but leads directly into Plato's argument. It looks at Plato as a thinker grappling with philosophical problems in a variety of ways, rather than a philosopher with a fully worked-out system. It includes a brief account of Plato's life and the various interpretations that have been drawn from the sparse remains of information. It stresses the importance of the founding of the Academy and the conception of philosophy as a subject. Julia Annas discusses Plato's style of writing: His use of the dialogue form, his use of what we today call fiction, and his philosophical transformation of myths. She also looks at his discussions of love and philosophy, his attitude to women, and to homosexual love, explores Plato's claim that virtue is sufficient for happiness, and touches on his arguments for the immortality of the soul, and his ideas about the nature of the universe.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 2 hours and 56 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: November 12, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00GMDF64Y

Best Sellers Rank: #250 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics >

Philosophers #642 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Philosophy #771 in Books >

Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Greek & Roman

Customer Reviews

Annas does an admirable job here considering how many counter-narratives there are about Plato and how much many fault lines there are in the scholarship. This leads to a non-intrusive and helpful introduction, but it doesn't give one solid rubric for interpretation. Annas does give a good overview of some of the seeming contradictions in Plato, particularly his very differing doctrines around the

"soul" and the "forms." Annas does not try to delineate "true Plato" from "true Socrates" nor does she go through all the interpretation traditions or the sometimes contradictory biographical accounts of Plato. While some readers will be frustrated with this, a book of this length could not do this meaningfully. Annas does encourage close reading of Plato's work and gets a good background to the themes that one should notice in Plato scholarship.

I wish this book had been available when I started to read Plato (a long time ago) In a very readable and engaging style, Julia Annas presents what is known about Plato, helpful suggestions on how to approach his dialogues, and a brief summary of his important ideas and their historical significance. What more can one ask of an introduction?

A glimpse of Plato's life and thought is exposed by Julia Annas with clarity and in a readable way. The philosopher early life, his background and his contemporaries in the philosophical endeavor give the reader some insights in order to interpret Plato's works. Some of the understandings advanced by the author are disputed but in no way misleading. Plato's main concepts and ideas are referred in a comprehensible way. The reader with special interest in Plato's philosophy will profit by this reading. As usual in the Very Short Introduction series, one must not have previous expertise in the field for the purpose of enjoying the ride in Plato's philosophy.

Julia Annas is a good writer, and this book definitely has a couple of things going for it; but this Very Short Introduction (VSI) is pretty bad, on the whole. The organization, on the micro and macro levels, is just a mess. That's the first turn-off. In any particular piece of text, the point she wants to make is not particularly clear, especially with respect to the consideration of how the part functions within the whole. On large scale, I can't begin to figure the rationale for the construction, and I am not completely sure why the chosen chapter topics should serve as fertile grounds for providing a substantial (i.e., potent for the brevity) introduction to Plato. The two things I think the book has going for it are: 1) some of the historical contextualization, and 2) the chapter on Love, sex, and gender, which was only 12 of the far too few 91 pages (it is not 120 pages, as the billing says, it is 104 with the index) of thoroughly illustrated text. On this qualification, of all the books in the VSI series for Oxford Press to commission longer than 100 pages, this should have been the one. Given my familiarity with topic (but by no means a specialist in it), this text should have been 150 pages. I would say that the biggest of all the problems with this text is that it just isn't suited for the neophyte: taking for granted my abovementioned familiarity, there

were some parts of the text where something said made no sense to me. I had to refer to the original Platonic dialogue to try to figure out what the author meant. Another issue is that Plato's thought is present (sometimes) from standpoints in which the interpretation is more than controversial, though presented without the slightest indication of this. (Especially, Unitarian vs. Revisionist understanding of the development of the Platonic texts; see the commentary in Chappell's *Theaetetus*.) The book would have been much better if it either grouped dialogues by themes, or took elements from dialogues and presented major ideas in that fashion, while still being able to incorporate the context and the one decent chapter already included. A point on the printing of the book, for those who may be looking to purchase it: numerous copies of this book, I have found, have a printing error in them. A large swathe of the text in the middle of the book was inverted and inserted into the book upside-down. Three copies from three different (unrelated, e.g., university and public) libraries contained this binding/printing error. Be sure to look inside at what you are getting, first.

Julia Annas provides in her book short (and sometimes not-very-representative) view on Plato's teaching. Sure, each scholar who deals with Plato's philosophy knows that there are several versions of interpretation on Plato's philosophy, and some of them are totally different. One reason of that is that Plato did not present common teaching in single dialogue, rather he suggested way of thinking, the second reason is that Plato sometimes presented different teaching during his life, for example there is difference between early period of Plato's learning and middle one. So that I will not judge Prof Annas' view on Plato. I fully accept that J. Annas presented only (a) short view (b) on some themes (c) in specific interpretation. On the other hand, I do complain for price -- this small book with about 100 pages is expensive, especially for students. If they paid two-three times more, they will buy five-seven more extensive book.

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