

Giovanni Reale

The School of Athens by Raphael

Edited by Martin Cajthaml and Jakub Jinek

Translated by Marco Arnone

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In his Journey to Italy Goethe writes that one can not look at great paintings like the School of Athens only as a whole, since “the pleasure derived from the first impression is incomplete; only when one has seen and studied every detail, slowly and part by part, the enjoyment is complete”.

In this book Giovanni Reale aims at achieving exactly this, namely studying and describing Raphael’s fresco slowly and part by part, with the full reproduction of the cartone. This is the only way to achieve Goethe’s complete enjoyment.

Reale shows how Raphael proceeds according to a perfectly Platonic scheme, and follows it with the utmost precision. The general scheme (as pointed out by Winner) is the one presented by Plato in book VII of the Republic, where he states that it is necessary to start from those disciplines that “bring the soul from becoming to being”, that is from the mathematical sciences, and through them reach the highest level of knowledge, that brings to the perception of the Absolute.

The fresco is indeed an extraordinary history of philosophical thought, from a Platonic point of view, from its origins to the late Hellenistic period, covering almost a thousand years, symbolically contracted in an eternal present.

Giovanni Reale (1931) has taught History of Ancient Philosophy at the Catholic University of Milan, where he founded a Centre for Platonic Studies, and now teaches at the new Philosophy Department of the Università San Raffaele, Milan (Italy). He has applied the canons of contemporary hermeneutics and epistemology to the study of Greek philosophy, showing that it is at the roots of Western culture. His research covers the whole spectrum of ancient thought, both pagan and Christian. Reale is internationally recognized as a leading scholar of ancient thought. His works have appeared and were translated in many languages.

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