

Donald Morrison, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xv, 413. ISBN: 978-0-521-54103-9. \$29.99 paper; \$95.00 hardbound.

This book offers fifteen chapters on various topics, all by well-known scholars, though some are not famous for their work on Socrates. The collection itself is a bit of an oddity, as the editor himself is skeptical regarding what has come to be called “the Socrates problem,” and thus does not really believe that Socrates holds any specific position in the history of philosophy. The editor’s own position would appear to leave unmotivated the entire idea of a collection of this sort, and seems to have left the editor without any clear vision of precisely what the collection was supposed to do for its readership. Instead, Morrison says he decided to “invite a diverse group of contributors to define the Socrates who is the subject of their individual chapters differently” (xiv). The result is a level of inconsistency in terms of contributors’ uses of sources texts and historical approach that readers may find confusing.

Morrison’s own view conforms well to the chapter by Louis-André Dorion (“The Rise and Fall of the Socratic Problem”), which reviews some of the history of the problem, and concludes that the problem itself is now also history, as completely resolved in favor of skepticism about the historical Socrates. Dorion concludes that all that is now left for scholars to do on the topic of Socrates is to study the character of that name in the many works by different authors in which a “Socrates” appears, and then perhaps consider “how, and eventually why, a single theme spawned multiple interpretations more or less compatible with each other” (20)—a task that Dorion (and others he cites) think will not at all diminish “our skepticism concerning the possibility of resolving the Socratic problem on the basis of the *logoi sokratikoi*” (*ibid*). Dorion thus discounts utterly the historical hypothesis that would explain compatibilities in these texts in terms of their common reference to the historical Socrates. Those of us who work on Socrates are well aware of the contradictions among the ancient testimonies. Not all of us, however, are as convinced that at least glimpses of the historical Socrates may not be obtained through occasional agreements we find among the surviving texts.

The next three chapters add basis to the skepticism with which the book begins. Diogenes Laertius reports that seven of Socrates’ so-called “students” qualify as the most important ones, but only works by Plato and Xenophon among these seven have survived. Klaus Döring surveys what can be known about the five other authors associated with Socrates (Aeschines of Sphettus, Phaedo of Elis, Euclides of Megara, Aristippus of Cyrene, and Antisthenes). Döring’s review of what can be known of these sources reveals little in the way of agreement in their various portraits of Socrates.

Döring’s chapter is followed by a chapter devoted to Xenophon (by David K. O’Connor), which also makes no effort to find points of consistency to others’ portraits. O’Connor does provide a clear and useful survey of the points emphasized in Xenophon’s works (without any real attention to the *Oeconomicus*, which is mentioned as a Socratic dialogue at the beginning of the chapter, but only cited twice in footnotes

subsequently—had O'Connor wanted to emphasize inconsistencies to the Platonic portrait of Socrates, he could certainly have found ample evidence to exploit in the *Oeconomicus*).

I am not sure why, but not until the fourth chapter do we find a study (by David Konstan) of Socrates' role in what is certainly the earliest of the works treated in this collection: Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Konstan deftly reviews the inherent inconsistencies in Aristophanes' portrait, and (not especially controversially) concludes that "Aristophanes assembled a hodge-podge of intellectual pursuits [...] and combined them all in Socrates" (85). As such, it would obviously be pointless to look to Aristophanes for evidence of the historical Socrates.

Paul Woodruff's chapter five ("Socrates and the New Learning") takes a wholly different approach. Though Woodruff never directly identifies the Socrates of Plato with the historical Socrates, readers will likely assume that such an identity is required for Woodruff's comparison of what he characterizes as Socrates' views with the main lines of thought associated with the Sophists and Nature-Philosophers to whom, if Konstan is right, Socrates is assimilated in the *Clouds*. The upshot of Woodruff's review is that "Socrates was part of the new learning in many ways, but he parted company with its principal teachers on crucial points" (101). All of these "crucial points" are familiar from Socrates' critiques of sophistry and natural philosophy in Plato.

Mark McPherran, the author of chapter six ("Socratic Religion"), freely cites texts from Plato and Xenophon (and others) in piecing together an account of Socrates' various religious beliefs. Again, there is no trace of skepticism about the "Socratic Problem" here—McPherran seems quite comfortable taking the Socrates of the different sources all to refer to the same historical person. But McPherran's chapter, though rich in detail and sophistication, actually manages to leave unexplained some of the actual inconsistencies in the texts he cites (the significant differences in Plato's and Xenophon's versions of the Delphic oracle to Chaerephon, for example, and that the *daimonion* "always turns me away from what I'm about to do but never turns me toward anything" in Plato's *Apology* 31d3–4 and elsewhere, but plainly provides positive advice in pseudo-Plato's *Theages* and Xenophon). McPherran's chapter thus overturns the skepticism with which the volume began, and, until the very last chapter of this collection, sources other than Plato now all but disappear from view in the rest of the book.

Josiah Ober writes on "Socrates and Democratic Athens." Ober focuses mostly on the trial and execution, and emphasizes that much of what we find in the reports of the early Socratics is actually consistent with what we know of the legal and political context of the time. Even if we are convinced that the Socrates of history is unknown to us, Ober's arguments seem to indicate that drawing historical conclusions from our sources is still not unreasonable. I was somewhat puzzled to read Ober's speculations about the prosecution speech of Meletus. I had always been inclined to think that Meletus had allowed his *sunēgoroi* (Lycon and particularly Anytus) carry most of the weight of the prosecution. Ober commits one ghastly error in his chapter, however, in his claim that

the Platonic Socrates' counterpenalty proposal was "a bizarre conglomerate 'penalty': a substantial fine [...] conjoined with the extraordinary honor of taking meals in the public dining hall (*prytaneion*) for the rest of his life" (146). But the text actually makes very plain that the proposal of free meals is counterfactual: it is what Socrates *would* propose *were* he to propose a penalty supposed to be one suited to his actual activities in Athens. The fine is obviously the only actual counterpenalty Socrates proposes to the jurors: see 38b9: "*timōmai oun tosoutou* [the fine of 30 minas]."

Those who already know Hugh H. Benson's work on the Socratic method and conception of knowledge/wisdom will be familiar with the views for which he argues in his chapter. Benson argues for that the single requirement of elenctic argument is the "doxastic constraint," such that the interlocutor must always and only argue for what he himself believes. From this, Benson concludes that the "constructivist" account of the elenchus (which holds that Socrates uses elenchus to argue for certain positions and against others, with confident conclusions that he has achieved such results) is mistaken. Instead, Socrates tests others for wisdom, and when (and because) they cannot maintain consistency, he concludes that they are not wise. Constructive argument, Benson contends, would require a different method. Benson notes that other scholars have not always agreed with his position, but perhaps the most compelling dissenter (Alejandro Santana 2007) is not cited or answered in Benson's chapter.

In his chapter on "Self-Examination," Christopher Rowe goes beyond the "Socratic dialogues" considerably by treating the *Phaedrus* as one of his main sources (and also by citing *Republic X* later in his chapter). The main thrust of Rowe's argument is that Socrates is not really trying to bring to light beliefs his interlocutor has, but doesn't know that he has, but rather simply to try to figure out whether what they happen to believe is true "first, because they all need to know the truth, and second, because if they don't have it to hand now, they need to know that they don't, in order to continue the investigation somewhere else" (212). Rowe finds a different form of self-examination in the *Phaedrus* and *Republic X*, which seeks to determine whether the real essence of the self includes irrational elements. Rowe concludes that Socrates supposed the self to consist simply in "our rational self" (214). Accordingly, the image of the soul as a charioteer and two horses in the *Phaedrus* is, at best, misleading. Never mind the evidence of the tripartite soul in the rest of the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Laws*, none of which Rowe bothers to mention or cite in his chapter.

Given his main research focus on the ancient Skeptics, it is not surprising to find the thrust of Richard Bett's chapter on "Socratic Ignorance" aimed mainly at substantiating the Skeptics' claim to be followers of Socrates. In this chapter (Bett's second publication on Socrates, and very like his earlier pieces, "Socrates and the Skeptics," which was written for a different companion volume¹), Bett calls into question whether or not the

¹ Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar, eds., *A Companion to Socrates*. Oxford: Blackwell. 2006. 298–311.

“Socratic dialogues” of Plato actually present a consistent picture of Socrates at all. Bett concludes they do not: “There does not appear to be a conflict within any given dialogue [...]; but taken as a group, they do appear to point in opposite directions concerning the priority of definition and possession of knowledge in the absence of definition” (229). Because Bett’s Socrates is a proto-skeptic, however, there is no reason to expect (dogmatic) consistency from him.

One of the most original chapters in this collection comes from Melissa Lane, the author of “Reconsidering Socratic Irony.” Lane takes the reader through various versions of interpretations that make “Socratic irony” central to the philosophizing we see in Plato’s dialogues, and then examines the linguistic and social contexts in which these works were to be understood. Many of the claims interpreters have regarded as “ironical” seem better understood as simply sincere, in Lane’s view. But even more interesting is Lane’s sophisticated study of friendly terms of address in Greek, which allows her to read Socrates’ extravagant (and apparently insincere) praise of his interlocutors in a novel, and very persuasive, way. Her conclusion will be a great disappointment to those who find irony everywhere they look in Plato: “Socrates’ self-deprecation, such as it is, is not necessarily ironic; ascriptions of *eirōneia* in Plato do not mean irony; friendship terms of address in Plato do not function ironically; and ironic praise is not, at least in some central cases, best understood as ‘ironic’ at all” (256).

Terry Penner continues to show new developments in his conception of Socratic moral psychology, in his chapter, “Socratic Ethics and the Socratic Psychology of Action: A Philosophical Framework.” In earlier work, Penner seemed to supply no role whatever to the appetites and passions in the explanation of human behavior. But now he finds such a role: “[Appetitive desire] gets us to act is to present itself to our desire for happiness, which turns to the belief-system to produce an estimate of the possible gains from various choices for fulfilling this desire. So the desire for drink operates not by its generating any action, but by leading to a belief as to the advantages of fulfilling the desire” (263–4) Still unexplained in Penner’s latest version, however, are the many apparent endorsements of the uses of punishment throughout the early dialogues. Penner sees that his account is incompatible with the evidence of the *Gorgias*, so he dismisses that dialogue as transitional. He elects not to mention other passages in which the uses of punishment (including whipping and imprisonment) are mentioned in other Socratic dialogues (e.g. at *Cri.* 51b5, *Hip. Ma.* 292b4–11, and esp. *Ap.* 25d6–26a8 where Socrates seems to make the distinction between the various uses of instruction and punishment explicit). Also missing from Penner’s chapter are discussions or citations of many of the more sophisticated treatments of Socratic moral psychology by other scholars that have appeared in recent years, which have emphasized more significant roles for appetites and passions (including, in chronological order, Devereux 1995; Brickhouse and Smith 1997, 2002, and 2007; Boeri 2004; and Singpurwalla 2006).² As

² Daniel T. Devereux. 1995. “Socrates’ Kantian Conception of Virtue.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33: 381–408; Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith. 1997. “The Problem of Punishment in Socratic Philosophy.” In *Wisdom, Ignorance, and Virtue: New Essays in Socratic Studies*. M.

such, Penner's chapter is already considerably out-of-date with the emerging literature in this area.

Christopher Bobonich's chapter on "Socrates and Eudaimonia" surveys some of the important questions scholars have debated about Socrates' commitment to eudaimonism. Bobonich does well to reject the controversial (and uncharitable) attributions to Socrates of what have come to be known as "the identity thesis" (virtue = happiness), "the sufficiency thesis" (virtue is sufficient for happiness) and "the necessity thesis" (virtue is necessary for happiness). As with others in this collection, Bobonich could have profited from reading and considering some other recent work on his topic—in Bobonich's case, the very interesting and plausible suggestion by Naomi Reshotko that the relation between virtue and happiness is a *nomological* one (Reshotko 2006, 140–155). In at least some cases, it appears Bobonich did not understand the other scholars' arguments that he does cite (see, for example, his inappropriate citation of Brickhouse's and my 2007 as committed to the view that Socrates recognized the possibility of what Bobonich calls "clear-eyed akrasia" [310]).

The penultimate chapter, by Charles L. Griswold, is supposedly on "Socrates' Political Philosophy," but Griswold's unitarian approach looks to characterize that philosophy in a way that integrates what Plato has Socrates say on this topic in the *Republic*, as well. Griswold sees two levels of political philosophy offered by the Platonic Socrates: one, which applies only to philosophers, and which advocates political action at the individual, conversational level, and another for the ordinary citizen. The latter do best within a roughly democratic political structure, and do well to "persuade or obey," as per the doctrine announced by the personified Laws in the *Crito*. This same doctrine does not apply, however, to the mature philosopher, whose autonomy is presumably complete and absolute, and thus permits principled disobedience (350–1). Hence, the arguments the Laws provide do not really explain why Socrates refused to leave prison, because these arguments do not apply to Socrates himself. Instead, we are to suppose that Socrates remained in prison (after persuading his poor friend Crito that he did so for false reasons) because had he escaped, his "moral standing and reputation would have been fatally compromised" (351).

McPherran, ed., Academic Printing and Publishing, special issue of *Apeiron* 30: 95–107; Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith. 2002. "Incurable Souls in Socratic Psychology." *Ancient Philosophy* 22: 1–16; Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith. 2007. "Socrates on Akrasia, Knowledge, and the Power of Appearance." In *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*, C. Bobonich and P. Destrée, eds., Leiden and Boston: Brill [*Philosophia Antiqua* series, vol. 106]: 1–17; Marcelo D. Boeri 2004. "Socrates, Aristotle, and the Stoics on the Apparent and Real Good." In J. J. Cleary and G. M. Gurtler, eds., *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 20: 109–41; Rachel Singpurwalla. 2006. "Reasoning with the Irrational: Moral Psychology in the *Protagoras*." *Ancient Philosophy* 26: 243–258; Alejandro Santana. 2007. "Constructivism and the Problem of the Socratic Elenchos." *Ancient Philosophy* 27: 251–267.

The final chapter covers “Socrates in Later Greek Philosophy,” and A. A. Long provides a fine summary and exegesis of the Socratic positions surveyed in Diogenes Laertius’s biography of Antisthenes (D.L. 6.1–19), Diogenes the Cynic (D.L. 6.20–84, the Stoics, and the Sceptics). I was particularly interested to read of some of the later anti-Socratic authors, including students of Aristotle, such as Aristoxenus, who “is said to have written a life of Socrates that was more vicious than the accusations of Meletus and Anytus” (368). The antipathy of the Epicureans is more widely recognized, which Long characterizes both aptly and piquantly: “In their writings, Socrates was portrayed as the complete anti-Epicurean—a sophist, a rhetorician, a braggart, a skeptic, a credulous purveyor of false theology, in sum—a figure whose inconclusive ethical inquiries and neglect of natural science turned human life into chaos” (369). Long also includes sections on later responses to the Socratic elenchus, and the *daimonion*.

In sum, although the book has several good chapters, the project as a whole did not seem entirely to jell. The editor’s own views as to why we should cease to consider Socrates as a figure in the history of philosophy did not serve the purposes of this collection well at all, and the editor also seems to have allowed several oversights and critical failures by the collected authors to pass unchallenged. If such companion volumes cannot at least pretend to offer topical chapters that are really up-to-date with the current literature and controversies, it is difficult to see them as making any effective contribution.

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