

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

### PHILOSOPHY

#### DANZIG (G.) **Apologizing for Socrates: How Plato and Xenophon Created our Socrates.**

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The principal thesis of Danzig's book is that interpreters of Plato and Xenophon should pay more attention to the polemics regarding Socrates in the decades after his death. This historical context, Danzig asserts, can help us perceive the 'unity' of each dialogue's 'various components' (4). In particular, it can illuminate the function of passages that appear superfluous, weakly argued or contradictory. It therefore complements such existing approaches as the assumption that Socrates adapts his argumentative style to his interlocutor or the assumption that Plato's thinking changed during his career. Danzig seeks to prove his thesis by focusing on Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro* and *Lysis*, and Xenophon's *Apology*, *Memorabilia* (especially 3.11 and 4.2) and *Oeconomicus*. He also refers to other Platonic and Xenophonic works, 'minor' Socratic works like Phaedo's *Zopyrus* and Greek literature more broadly. For reasons of space, I will address only a few of these, but my comments pertain to the whole.

Danzig is surely right that this approach is one way to cast light on Socratic dialogues. Socrates' execution simultaneously put his posthumous reputation in question and scared his followers into fleeing Athens (D.L. 2.106, 3.6). Those who returned joined a lively literary debate with the likes of Polycrates, Theodectes and – possibly – Lysias about the character of both Socrates and their own Socratic philosophy. Danzig's analysis of Plato's *Apology* displays the potential of considering these contexts. He argues that Socrates' detractors charged him with arrogance and shameful incompetence at his trial, and that Plato was concerned to answer these charges as well as the official ones of impiety and corrupting the youth. For example, Plato's version of the oracle story is a notorious crux for historians. If the oracle was so important to Socrates' mission, why does Plato not mention it elsewhere? If Socrates only began this mission after hearing the

oracle, what led Chaerephon to ask the question in the first place? Danzig proposes that Xenophon's simpler version, in which the oracle does not initiate Socrates' mission, is probably truer. Plato convoluted the story in order to deflect charges of arrogance (49–53). It is for the same reason that, unlike Xenophon's Socrates, Plato's Socrates deigns to suggest a counter-penalty: refusing to do so would vindicate accusations of arrogance (53–56). Plato also answers the charge of shameful incompetence, first by displaying Socrates humiliating Meletus (44–46), second by comparing Socrates' uncompromising behaviour to the heroic choice of Achilles (59) and third by having Socrates argue that the outcome is actually good for him (61–63). Danzig relies on A. Adkins' *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford 1960) for the premise that honour-and-shame culture influenced Athenian judicial oratory. More recent work confirms this premise, including D. Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 1995) 61–118 and A. Lanni, *Law and Justice in the Courts of Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2006) 25–31. Regarding Socrates' 'shameful incompetence' at trial, see also the intriguing third-century papyrus at G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* (Naples 1993) 1C.550.

On the other hand, Danzig underemphasizes the slipperiness of this approach and overemphasizes its ability to exclude alternative explanations. For example, M. Montuori analyses the problems in Plato's oracle story in much greater depth, but comes to a very different conclusion: Plato simply invented it (*Socrates: Physiology of a Myth* (Amsterdam 1981) 57–143). In the case of the *Euthyphro*, Danzig argues that Plato uses the title character both as a foil for Socrates, allowing him to dissolve charges of impiety and corruption, and as a stand-in for Meletus, allowing him to turn the tables on Socrates' accuser (115–49). Danzig notes that this explains the complexity of *Euthyphro*'s case, which undermines what could otherwise be a 'philosophically interesting' conflict between filial duty and law-abidingness. If *Euthyphro*'s father were clearly guilty, then the parallel between *Euthyphro* and Meletus would dissolve (135–36). But this is also compatible with Plato's intention to display Socrates pushing his

interlocutors into critical reflection about complex, real-life scenarios. In the case of *Memorabilia* 4.2, Danzig plausibly argues that Xenophon's apologetic purpose requires him to walk a fine line: on the one hand, Socrates must not give any sign of 'corrupting the youth'; on the other, he must not appear to fail shamefully (179–99). This is true, but it is also true that Socrates' erotics were intensively explored by Aeschines, Phaedo, Plato and Xenophon as a mechanism for ethical transformation. In fact, in the paradigmatic case of Alcibiades, apologetics and the problem of ethical transformation overlap. Since multiple explanatory principles can shed light on these dialogues, we might even ask whether it is profitable to seek 'the unity' underlying each.

In sum, this book is well worth reading for anyone interested in the historical Socrates or the authorial agendas of Plato and Xenophon. My principal criticism is that, despite some judicious provisos by the author, it tends to present apologetics as 'the key' to these texts. It would be better to think of this as a rewarding exercise in exploring just how far this interpretive tool can take us.

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