

# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

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**Livio Rossetti, Alessandro Stravru (ed.), *Socratica 2008: Studies in Ancient Socratic Literature. le Rane 54*. Bari: Levante, 2010. Pp. 353. ISBN 9788879495585. €32.00 (pb).**

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The book collects the 13 papers presented at the second “Socratica” conference (Naples, 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> December 2008): 7 papers are written in Italian, 2 in English, 2 in Spanish, and 2 in French. The book contains a very useful introduction to contemporary scholarly literature on Socrates (pp. 11-46), written by the two editors, and an obituary (pp. 335-347) of professor Mario Montuori (1921-2008), who made many contribution to Socratic scholarship. At the end of the volume there is a brief presentation of the contributors (pp. 349-353).

The introduction provides an appropriate frame for the book, since it is designed to prove that it is opportune to dismiss the prejudice against the sources on Socrates different from Plato’s (early) dialogues. Of course, this proposal is debatable, and indeed one might wonder whether the sources different from Plato (with the significant exception of Aristotle) preserve something philosophically worthwhile with respect to Socrates’ thought.

In his opening paper (*I Socratici “primi filosofi” e Socrate “primo filosofo”*, pp. 59-70), Livio Rossetti reconsiders the question concerning the birth of philosophy, on the basis of the use of the nouns “philosophy” and “philosopher” in the Greek of the V and IV century BC. Since these nouns are more frequently used after 399 BC, Rossetti argues that the birth of philosophy took place at the time and immediately after Socrates. According to Rossetti, while Aristotle considered the descriptions of nature given by the so-called Presocratics “philosophy”, the Socratic called themselves philosophers in order to distinguish themselves from the Sophists, who claimed to possess wisdom, and not merely to pursue it, as the Socratic did. All in all, I think that Rossetti’s very stimulating proposal deserves the attention of the scholarly community, and may inspire new research on this interesting topic.

The second paper by Noburu Notomi (*Socrates versus Sophists: Plato’s Invention?*, pp. 71-88) holds for a thesis under certain aspects opposite to Rossetti’s one (I would have

expected a discussion of these conflicting views, but the papers are rather independent from each other). According to Notomi, Socrates and the Socratics were not completely different in their behaviour from the Sophists, and they did not want to distinguish themselves from the Sophists; Notomi considers two interesting analogies among the Socratics and the Sophists: a) the professional activity of teaching for fees and b) the art of rhetoric and of dialectical argument. Plato was thus the first who sharply distinguished his master from the Sophists. According to Notomi, without Plato's distortion of Socrates' figure, "this picture of the history of philosophy would have been correct" (p. 87).

Aldo Brancacci, in his paper *Sull'etica di Antistene* (pp. 89-117), offers a general reconstruction of Antisthenes' thought and tries to explain what place ethics takes within his philosophy. Brancacci briefly recalls the importance of Antisthenes among the Socratics ("è un fatto [...] che, nel periodo immediatamente successivo alla morte di Socrate, Antistene fu considerato il più rappresentativo esponente della cerchia socratica", p. 91). Therefore, the study of Antisthenes may provide a great deal of assistance in reconstructing the true contents of the philosophy of his master, especially with respect to the aspects neglected or changed by Plato's Socrates. One of these aspects is the research concerning terms (*episkèpsis tôn onomàton*) the linguistic analysis which eventually leads us to the discovery of the proper definition (*oikeios logos*) of a thing. According to Brancacci, this research is truly different from Plato's dialectic, because the proper definition is not established on the basis of a correspondence with a thing's idea. Antisthenes used these dialectical techniques mainly in order to pursue ethical research: knowledge of ethics, indeed, implies a moral behavior, and thus dialectic is connected to moral life – and this is what philosophy aims to achieve. This picture shows how logic and ethics are related in Antisthenes' thought, and how they concur to build up philosophy.

Domingo Placido (*Esquines de Esfeto: las contradicciones del socratismo*, pp. 119-133) focuses on the figure of Aischines of Sphettus, a Socratic mentioned by Plato in his *Phaedo*. We have scarce evidence of Aischines' philosophical activity. However, Placido observes that the titles of his lost dialogues are similar to the ones of Plato, and hence we could conjure a similarity in content. Aischines probably taught rhetoric for money (cf. Diogenes Laertius II, 20): he was not a rich aristocrat like Plato, whose wealth allowed him to teach for free.

Luis-André Dorion (*L'impossible autarcie du Socrate de Platon*, pp. 137-158) claims that Plato's Socrates (Socrates<sup>P</sup>) is not sufficient in order to outline a reliable picture of the historical Socrates. Dorion presents, as evidence in favor of this, the opposite views held by Socrates<sup>P</sup> and by Socrates<sup>X</sup> (viz. Xenophon's Socrates) with respect to *autarkeia*. The characters of Plato's dialogues do not attribute autarchy to Socrates (Socrates<sup>P</sup> is presented as a poor man, but has a plenty of friends who can help him); on the other hand, Socrates<sup>X</sup> appears to be self-sufficient and wants to make his companions autarchic from a material point of view. Socrates<sup>P</sup> is more interested in intellectual autarchy; but he is also conscious that nobody may ever be autarchic under this respect, since we are always in need for wisdom and virtue (true "philosophical" autarchy may be achieved only by a god).

Walter Omar Kohan (*Sócrates: La paradoja de enseñar y aprender*, pp. 159-184) dwells on some paradoxical features of Plato's Socrates, who presents himself either as

the only one who practices “genuine politics” (*Gorg.*, 521d), or as restrained by his own *daimonion* from practicing any politics (*Apol.*, 31c-e); Socrates says that he has never been a teacher (*Apol.*, 33a), but his companions considered him their master (*Apol.*, 39c-d); he claims that he knows very little (*Apol.*, 21b; 23a), but the oracle said that he was the wisest of all men (*Apol.*, 20e-21a). Kohan thus thinks that “Socrates es un enigma y una paradoja por las fuerzas contradictorias que su figura parece portar sin demasiada incomodidad” (p. 181).

Lidia Palumbo (*Socrate e la conoscenza di sé: per una nuova lettura di Alc. I 133a-c*, pp. 185-209) tackles Plato’s Socrates, or, at least, the Socrates of the *Alcibiades I*, whose authenticity has been questioned. According to Palumbo’s original and stimulating interpretation, in *Alc. I*, 133b7-10 Socrates suggests that self-knowledge (which appears to be identical with the knowledge of one’s soul) must be grasped through reflection on the self, namely on one’s soul. Palumbo interestingly connects this reflection with the dialogical structure which has been employed by Plato for doing philosophy. According to Palumbo, Plato’s dialogue does not need the presence of a second person, because it is basically a dialogue with the self: this is what distinguishes Plato’s dialogue from Socrates’ (“io credo che, per quanto sia possibile distinguere Socrate da Platone, questa curvatura solitaria dell’atto del pensare sia per così dire la cifra platonica, piuttosto che quella socratica, del filosofare”, p. 202). Palumbo agrees with David Sedley in maintaining that Plato’s dialogues are “an externalization of his own thought-process”,<sup>1</sup> but in my opinion her conclusions are even stronger, since she seems to claim for interiority as a *proprium* of Plato’s way of doing philosophy.

Gabriele Cornelli and André Leonardo Chevitaese (*Socrate tra golpe oligarchico e restaurazione democratica (404-403 a.C.)*, pp. 211- 224) dwell on Socrates’ initial proximity to the oligarchy of the Thirty and on his later rejection of their government. Cornelli and Chevitaese underline that in his *Seventh Letter* Plato defends Socrates from the accusation of impiety, but says not a word on the second accusation, that of corrupting the youth. According to Cornelli and Chevitaese, this second accusation was politically the stronger one, but it was more difficult to refute it, because Alcibiades and Critias, who had been Socrates’ pupils, were involved in the oligarchy.

Donald Morrison (*Xenophon’s Socrates on Sophia and the virtues*, pp. 227-239) analyzes some difficulties involved in Xenophon’s description of Socrates’ idea of wisdom, which appears to be either one of the other virtues, and thus seems to be identical with that virtue, or to be a virtue which can be sometimes good and sometimes bad. In the first case, Xenophon presents an intellectualistic treatment of virtues, according to which, if someone possesses wisdom, his behavior is virtuous; but this seems to contradict the idea that wisdom may lead men to destruction, as in the cases of Daedalus and Palamedes. After a careful analysis of Xenophon’s text (according to the “analytical” hermeneutics, that Morrison defends on p. 230, n. 8), Morrison claims that wisdom is a sufficient but not necessary condition for the possession of the other virtues.

Alessandro Stavru (*Essere e apparire in Xen. Mem. III 10.1-8*, pp. 241-276) dwells on a passage of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* in which Socrates converses with the painter Parrhasius and with the sculptor Cleiton. Socrates asks them how is it possible that art shows the interior world of the man the art represents. According to Socrates, painting is able to represent someone’s *ethos*, whilst sculpture expresses *pathos*. From this

dialogue, we may infer that Parrhasius and Cleiton are able to follow Socrates' arguments, and they both think that the representation of eyes (in the case of painting) and of movements (in the case of sculpture) is able to create a certain appearance of the interior qualities and passions of the represented subject. This passage shows Xenophon's acquaintance with the Sophists' writings on the necessity of choosing among the best qualities of the subject which is treated by a rhetorical discourse: the artist also has to pick up the best qualities of the bodies he represents, in order to create a certain pleasure among those who see the painting or the sculpture. Stavru claims that Xenophon is giving a theoretical exposition of the artistic praxis of his times.

Michael Erler (*La parrhesia da Socrate a Epicuro*, pp. 279-298) draws a distinction among Plato's Socrates and Epicurus' one with respect to "frankness": whilst the first is not always frank, because he sometimes hides his knowledge behind irony, Epicurus presents a Socrates who is committed to frankness under every circumstances. These differences among the two portraits of Socrates are underlined by Philodemus in his *De libertate dicendi*.

Graziano Ranocchia (*Il ritratto di Socrate nel De superbia di Filodemo (PHerc. 1008, coll. 21-23)*, pp. 299-320) focuses on a passage of Philodemus' *De vitiis* (PHerc. 1008), in which Socrates' irony is presented under a negative perspective. Ranocchia claims that Philodemus does not endorse this view, which is proper of the stoic Ariston of Chios: the Stoics thought indeed that Socrates was a dogmatic philosopher, and not an ironical thinker, like the one described in Plato's dialogues (a philosopher who could be a model for the "skeptical" Academy of Arcesilaus).

Michel Narcy (*Socrate et Euripide: Le point de vue de Diogène Laërce*, pp. 321-332) focuses on Diogenes Laertius' account of the relationship between Socrates and Euripides. Narcy deals with a comic fragment quoted by Diogenes (II, 18), from which it could be inferred that Socrates has been negatively represented. Contrary to the allusions we can find in the Old Comedy, Diogenes does not believe that Socrates collaborated with Euripides, but he tries to show Socrates' superiority over the poet.

The quality of the book is very high and the editorial work has been truly brilliant. Of course, there are a few typos (e.g. on p. 48 we read "the *pamphlet* wrote by Lysias" instead of "the *pamphlet* written by Lysias"; on p. 193, a question mark should probably be added after "essere simile ad essa").

The quality of the papers is high too, and in many cases new stimulating perspectives are proposed.

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#### Notes:

1. David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 2.

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