

Book Reviews

Livio Rossetti/Alessandro Stavru (eds.): *Socratica 2008. Studies in Ancient Socratic Literature*. Bari: Levante 2010, 353 pp.

Socratica 2008 presents essays from a conference on Socrates and his successors held in Naples in 2008. The introduction to the volume documents the recent resurgence of interest in those ancient thinkers grouped under the unhappy title “lesser Socratics”. Alessandro Stavru and Livio Rossetti see this interest as a sign of a shift in reception, where the notion that philosophers such as Xenophon, Aeschines, or Phaidon of Elis are of lesser consequence than their contemporaries has been drawn into question. According to Stavru and Rossetti, the dismissive attitude towards the “lesser Socratics” and the *Sōkratikoí logoi*, which has held sway at least since Schleiermacher, is injurious both in its own right and to the reception of Plato, because the latter’s philosophical and literary output has been shaped by exchange with the former. The first section of the book examines Socrates and the “lesser Socratics”; the second treats Plato’s representation of Socrates; the third, Xenophon; and the fourth, the reception of Socrates in later antiquity.

Livio Rossetti’s essay “I Socratici ‘primi filosofi’ e Socrate ‘primo filosofo’” opens the first section. It asks the historical question of how the terms “philosophy” and “philosopher” have come into broad use in the context of Socraticism. Although scholars have shown previously that those terms have been popularized through the Socratic writings, the matter has yet to receive the attention it deserves. Taking his clue from a passage in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (I 2, 31) which discusses a law against philosophers under the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, Rossetti claims that the term “philosophers” has been applied to a community of Athenian intellectuals at the end of the 5th century BC, some time after the word “philosophy” made its first few sporadic appearances in the works of the early pre-Socratics. Among those intellectuals, Socrates accepted the title “philosopher” and described himself as such in the later years of his life. On Rossetti’s account, Socrates’ students then spread the term “philosophy” through their writings, in no small part by means of the new literary form of those writings. According to Rossetti, the Socratics began the genre of the philosophical dialogue as a means to convey the thoughts of the master not in a final form, but in their development. Further, Rossetti claims that no dogma is given in their dialogues; rather they show the movement towards *sophia*, thus a *philo-sophia*. As he sees it, both Socrates’ unsettled reflections and their representation in this dynamic literary form have led to the crystallization of the term “philosophy” into its now common usage. One may have wished that Rossetti sought greater support for his thesis in the texts of the *Sōkratikoí logoi*. There is also a lack of additional argumentation for the view that the dialogue form essentially conveys a mere approach to *sophia*, especially when one considers the works of founders of schools, such as Antisthenes or Plato, who developed philosophical doctrines. (In this same volume Aldo Brancacci speaks about the “dogmatical” character of Antisthenes’ philosophy: 91.) But Rossetti sees his essay as a prelude to “future investigations” (69), a promise that is realized in his *Le dialogue socratique* (Paris 2011).

In “Socrates versus Sophists: Plato’s Invention?”, Noburu Notomi poses the question of whether the dichotomy of Socrates versus the Sophists is not merely an invention of

Plato's. Following a cursory discussion of evidence, which is supposed to show a Sophistic turn among the Socratics, as well as arguments for the claim that Xenophon avoids the philosopher/sophist distinction, Notomi concludes that Plato crafted the anti-Sophistic Socrates. To this, one could object that the fact that the difference between the "philosopher" Socrates and the Sophists is not always clear as a terminological matter does not imply that this difference was seen only by Plato. Moreover, if it is the case that Plato introduced the distinction, then this would not imply that the distinction between Socrates and the Sophists is merely his invention. At the conclusion of the essay, Notomi himself raises the possibility that Plato alone correctly understood Socratic philosophizing.

In the essay "Sull'etica di Antistene", Aldo Brancacci directs his gaze to the contemporary of Plato, who was known as the leading Socratic after the death of Socrates. Brancacci attempts to understand Antisthenes' research in logic and semantics in connection with his ethical works. Developing from Socrates' insistence on the *logon didonaildechesthai*, Antisthenes proposes a theory of *oikeios logos* ("proper concept") that in contrast to the Platonic idea does not need to be anchored in a transcendence, but rather possesses full autonomy. In this theory, the process through which one reaches the "proper concept" is an *episkepsis tōn onomatōn* ("study of terms"), which is Antisthenes' interpretation of Socrates' *exetazein* ("investigation"). In the case of ethics, the "proper concept" of the moral end (*telos*) must contain a "Socratic strength" (*Sōkratikē ischys*) and an "effort" (*ponos*). Brancacci interprets these as a "capacity for moral endeavor" (109). If the happy coincidence occurs of moral exertion and "justified true belief" (following Platon's *Theaitetos: alethēs doxa meta logou*), then the realization of "truth" is possible. This "truth" is nothing other than "moral conviction" (105). In this manner, according to Brancacci, Antisthenes binds his "intellectualism" to a moral practice, which arguably makes him the first proponent of a virtue ethic (113).

In "Esquines de Esfeto: las contradicciones del socratismo", Domingo Plácido traces the tension between the Socratic picture of Aeschines and the reports of his transgressions to the changed economic situation in Athens following the end of the Peloponnesian War. According to Plácido, Socraticism was a matter for the upper classes. Thus Aeschines, supposedly the son of a sausage-maker, was driven to the contradiction of which Lysias accused him of in courtroom remarks. However, Plácido bases his thesis on the assumption that anecdotes about Aeschines deserve credibility. One may doubt this, however, because they seem to be founded on conventional motifs. For example, the claim that Aeschines taught rhetoric comes from the same source that accuses Socrates himself of such activities (Idomeneus in Diogenes Laertius II 20).

Louis-André Dorion's "L'impossible autarcie du Socrate de Platon" opens the next section of the volume, which is chiefly devoted to Plato's Socrates. Dorion devotes his piece to the distinction between the depictions of Socrates in Xenophon and in Plato. While Xenophon emphasizes the independence (*autarkeia*) of Socrates in material as well as in intellectual matters, Plato's Socrates is not especially self-sufficient. Furthermore, although the ideal of independence in general is also an ideal of Plato's, the Platonic Socrates stands on his own feet neither in financial nor in intellectual matters, at least not entirely. In Dorion's account, the erotic dimension of Socratic philosophizing in particular (as recorded in the *Symposium*) shows that Plato's understanding of philosophy is compatible with a representation of Socrates as someone who is fully aware of his own imperfection. However, if the ideal of independence is indeed esteemed by Plato (as Dorion himself admits), then the question arises as to why the figure of Socrates, whose perfection is especially emphasized at the close of the *Phaidon*, is not depicted as realizing it.

Walter Omar Kohan turns in “Sócrates: La paradoja de enseñar y aprender” to the apparent contradictions in the figure of Socrates. On the one hand, Socrates withholds himself from all political activity, while on the other he represents himself as the sole true politician of Athens. He claims not to teach, but he is surrounded by students. Often, he says he knows nothing, but the Delphic oracle calls him the wisest of men. After Kohan tries to show this paradoxical behavior in selected passages from the *Apology*, *Meno*, *Lysis* and *Euthyphro*, he draws the conclusion that the unified figure of Socrates dissolves upon closer inspection into many versions of Socrates. It is recommended that we (according to Kohan) take the paradoxical enigma of Socrates as food for thought. Yet the question remains as to whether or not these supposed contradictions cannot be dissolved upon closer examination. Socrates was not a politician in the sense that Alcibiades was, though he devoted himself to his *polis* in a philosophical manner. He did not teach as Protagoras did, though his maieutics had a pedagogical element. Finally, Socrates was not a learned man like Hippias, although his awareness of his own ignorance made him ripe for philosophical insights.

Lidia Palumbo’s essay (“Socrate e la conoscenza di sé: per una nuova lettura di *Alc.* I 133a–c”) treats the analogy between the eye and the soul in one of Plato’s most controversial dialogues, the *Alcibiades*. Socrates tells his listener that just as the eye needs a mirror to see itself, so the soul needs a reflection of the soul in order to gain self-awareness. Palumbo argues that Plato did not mean reflection in another soul, but rather in the same soul, that is, it reflects itself in itself. Thus, according to Palumbo, the subject of *Alcibiades* is not a dialectical principle of self-knowledge, but rather a kind of introspection. Thus, while the dialectical method of the historical Socrates always requires a partner, the originality of Plato lies (according to Palumbo) in his understanding of self-knowledge as the dialogue of a single soul with itself. However, Palumbo offers no discussion of the further reflection in God that comes up in the final lines of the passage (*Alc.* 133c1–7).

Gabriele Cornelli and André Leonardo Chevitarese argue in “Socrate tra golpe oligarchico e restaurazione democratica (404–403 a. C.)” that the true reason for the judgment against Socrates is to be found in his reputation as an anti-democrat. The authors suggest that Socrates was a moderate collaborator of the Thirty Tyrants. Unfortunately, the thesis finds support only in disputed evidence (e.g., in the unreliable testimony about the refund of confiscated property after the regime of the Thirty Tyrants). Furthermore, it relies on a narrow reading of the evidence (the record in Diogenes Laertius II 43 of remorse among the Athenians concerning the execution of Socrates is not taken seriously). In some points, the thesis seems to require an implausible reading of the evidence (the authors admit, for example, that Socrates was noble enough not to take part in the arrest of Leon the Salaminer, but see it necessary to note that the philosopher had not exerted any effort to help the victim). Moreover, it seems unlikely that Socrates felt the wrath of Athenian democrats three years after the declaration of amnesty, which was praised by Aristotle for its noble mindedness (*Athenian Constitution* XL 4–12). Cornelli and Chevitarese also fail to explain a connection between the supposed grounds for judgment against Socrates and the recorded accusation of impiety.

The third section, on Xenophon, begins with Donald Morrison’s “Xenophon’s Socrates on Sophia and the Virtues”. Here, Morrison attempts to conciliate the contradictory statements on wisdom in the *Memorabilia*. By his account, the contradiction is that the Xenophonic Socrates argues for a unity of virtues on the one hand, and for an ethical opportunism on the other. Supposing my reading is correct, Morrison’s proposed solution is that Xenophon’s Socrates sees wisdom as potentially harmful. However, the wise man may find an approximately correct decision where no influence of heavenly power is to be found.

Alessandro Stavru treats the “Essere e apparire in Xen. *Mem.* III 10.1–8”. In that passage, Socrates discusses art with a painter and a sculptor of the 5th century BC, namely, Parrhasius and Cleiton, respectively (the latter of whom some have taken to be the famous Polykleitus). Stavru attempts to show that the alternating use of words such as *apeikazein* and *apomimeisthai* in this passage is not due to stylistic considerations, but terminological distinctions. On this reading, the dialogue is Xenophon’s discussion of the aesthetics and *ēthos*-theory of his time.

As the first essay of the section *Nachleben*, Michael Erler’s “La parrhēsia da Socrate a Epicuro” treats a comparison between the concept of frankness (*parrhēsia*) in Plato and Philodemus. While Epicurus (*Gnom. Vat.* 29) and Philodemus (*De libertate dicendi*) argue for frankness at any price, Plato’s Socrates takes a significantly more nuanced position. Socrates pays homage to the ideal of *parrhēsia* in the *Gorgias*, but the practice of frankness in the Platonic dialogues is either conditioned by the character of Socrates’ listeners or by a particular dialogue scenario. Building on thoughts of Thomas A. Szlezák, Erler shows how, in contrast to the uncompromising position of the Epicurians, the practice of frankness in the Platonic dialogues is open to limitations by circumstance. The Platonic Socrates connects the “trattamento parresiastico” (294) of his dialogue partner with “forms of indirect communication” (293), for example with the well-known Socratic “disimulation” (*eironeia*).

“Irony” is the primary subject of Graziano Ranocchia’s “Il ritratto di Socrate nel *De superbia* di Filodemo”. The essay concerns a quote from Ariston, which is given in a treatise of Philodemus’ (on the *Papyrus of Herculaneum* 1008, col. 21–23). The quote attempts to connect irony with arrogance. The characterization of the ironic person, who is presented unsympathetically, plays unmistakably on the Platonic Socrates. Through an examination of the representation of Socrates in the Peripatos and among the Stoics, Ranocchia arrives at a twofold conclusion: first, he identifies the author of the quote as the Stoic Ariston from Chios, and second (building on the work done by Anna Maria Ioppolos), he interprets the portrait of the ironic person as a critique on Arcesilaus. Given that Arcesilaus, a proponent of the Academic Skepticism, presented himself as a teacher of philosophy and, despite this, persistently claimed his own ignorance in the Socratic manner, his paradoxical conduct was found to be “ironic” by his contemporaries. Thus, the critique of the ironic person in Ariston’s work is directed at a representative of the New Academy.

Michel Narcy turns in “Socrate et Euripide. Le point de vue de Diogène Laërce” to the evidence in Socrates’ biography which speaks of the cooperation between Socrates and Euripides. His study result shows that the text from Diogenes Laertius is far from poorly composed. Indeed, the subtlety of its form is supposed to support two theses: that the claims of collaboration between Socrates and Euripides are doubtful, and that the philosopher appears to stand above the tragedian.

The volume closes with a *Nachruf* on Professor Mario Montuori, who is best known for his work on Socrates and on John Locke. However, the reader’s exchange with the Socratics hardly finds an end when the reading of the volume is done. Instead, the essays of *Socratica 2008* provoke new desire for further attention to the topics treated. I hardly know a greater praise to give to an academic work than this.

Gheorghe Pascalau
Ottheinrichweg 4, 69181 Leimen
georgepascalau@yahoo.com