

**Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith**

*Socratic Moral Psychology.*

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‘Intellectualism’ is the name given to a group of related psychological-cum-ethical views frequently attributed to the Socrates featured in most of Plato’s early dialogues. Accordingly, it is a rational principle, to the full exclusion of non-rational ones, that lies at the heart of all human action, desire and, thus, virtue. Now, this early Socrates (though ‘Socratic’ and ‘early’ are not interchangeable) is presumably the *historical* Socrates, the one whose views Plato, Xenophon and others present more or less faithfully in their dialogues (though for whom Plato is, by far, the richest and most reliable source). The character ‘Socrates’ who appears in Plato’s middle and late dialogues, on the other hand, stands for Plato himself, someone who does not accept his teacher’s intellectualist views. In very broad strokes, so goes a ‘standard’ account of Socrates and his relationship to Plato.

Brickhouse and Smith issue nothing less than a direct challenge to this account of Socratic moral psychology, as well as to the resulting means of distinguishing teacher from student. Relying upon a series of textual considerations, they develop the argument that Socratic moral psychology includes a role for conative psychic elements—appetites (*epithumiai*) and passions (*pathē*)—in explaining human motivation and virtue. Consequently, too, Plato’s development away from Socrates is a somewhat subtler movement than the stark one resulting from the standard interpretation.

*Socratic Moral Psychology* (hereafter *SMP*) is based upon a series of earlier publications by the same authors, but which have here undergone numerous revisions—marked ones, in some cases—and have been put together for the first time in what Brickhouse and Smith regard as a ‘coherent, single account...that better explains what Socrates says about [moral psychology] than do rival accounts’ (2-3). The primary audience for this book is, consequently, scholars and students invested in Socratic philosophy. Not all recent or contemporary scholars of Socrates interpret the relevant texts as being in any way intellectualist; and not all intellectualists construe the relevant theories in quite the same way as each other. Both groups, though, will no doubt be intrigued by a variety of arguments and textual analyses offered here.

Some of those who resist intellectualist interpretations altogether do so, in fact, because they are dubious of there being sufficiently decisive evidence upon which to build so much as a properly Socratic philosophy, intellectualist or otherwise. Socrates may well be a philosophical fiction, after all, and correctly identifying which (if any) of the source material is truly primary itself remains a special area of inquiry. One feature of the present book that scholars will thus eagerly welcome is its deliberate defense of Socratic studies as a viable research program. The opening chapter is devoted to a review of the most influential skeptical arguments, and a sustained rebuttal of them.

Among Socrates' intellectualist interpreters, it is perhaps Terry Penner who has done the most to expound and defend a robust intellectualism on the basis of the relevant dialogues. This is the account of Socrates that Brickhouse and Smith most explicitly aim to refute. The central philosophical thesis defended in their book is that, contrary to Penner's view, Socratic moral psychology includes a role for appetites and passions in explaining human action. For Penner, they quite simply do not. Instead, all human action is the result of 1) the person's beliefs about what is overall best for him or her to do given the present circumstances, rationally combining with 2) the agent's ultimate desire for happiness (*eudaimonia*). Thus, all intermediate desires (e.g., the desire for health) and all executive desires (e.g., the desire to eat this pastry now) 'automatically adjust to the agent's beliefs' (50, quoting Penner) about the best means to that ultimate end. New information which sufficiently changes the agent's beliefs about the relative goodness of the proposed action (e.g., that pastry is unhealthy) must result in a change in the desire to do it. Moreover, it is only such changes in belief that can get the person to act differently. There are no other kinds of desire—appetites, passions, and so forth—that can influence action independently of considerations of the person's overall good. Socrates is, on this view, an intellectualist about action, desire and virtue, because each relies solely upon the agent's cognitive relation to matters of fact about the world and his or her ultimate aim.

What, then, of so-called appetites (e.g., for pastry) and passions (e.g., anger)? According to this interpretation of Socrates, he must suppose that these are mere urges that remain 'dormant' so long as they are unintellectualized (that is, so long as they are not judged-good by the agent). An appetite is but an additional piece of information the person has about his or her present circumstance—no less than is, say, the fact that it is raining outside.

Why, then, do we so often act upon the appetite as though it were so much more than this? It is in answer to this question that Brickhouse and Smith's study will likely prove most provocative.

The alternative Socratic moral psychology for which they argue is itself an intellectualist account in the sense that cognition remains a necessary element in human action (i.e., the belief that the present action is the best one for the agent to perform) and in the sense that happiness remains the agent's ultimate desire. What they reject is the view that, for Socrates, *all* desires automatically adjust to the agent's beliefs about what is best for him or her. Instead, they argue, Socrates reserves a causal role for appetites and passions to play in human action such that they may influence how their objects appear to the agent. Appetite, say, may present the pastry *as beneficial* to the agent, quite *independently of the agent's judgment* about it. This is why such conative principles are *urges* and *drives* in the first place—a consideration 'missing' (52, n) from the standard account. In such cases, the agent may think-good eating the pastry owing largely to the false representations of appetite, and *not* because of the rational judgment of the agent. It remains the case that the agent acts believing that the present action is the best one for him or her, and does so desiring, ultimately, only what is truly best. But appetite has

falsely loaded the dice, so to speak, in the pastry's favor *by presenting it to the agent as the best means to that end.*

Moreover, the authors argue, Socrates thinks that without appropriate training of these non-rational desires, it becomes more and more difficult for the agent to reconsider his or her appetitive or passionate action. Hence, they argue that, contrary to the standard view, Socrates thinks some non-rational means of moral improvement (e.g., myth-telling, shaming and punishments) are necessary for the acquisition of virtue. Here, then, are some desires that do *not* automatically adjust to judgments about the good.

In support of their position, the authors review a variety of passages in which Socrates makes explicit reference to appetites and passions (mostly the *Apology*), or argues that some (bad) actions have the power to 'look good' to the agent (*Protagoras*), and in which he explicitly calls for remedial punishments for the vicious (*Gorgias*). They believe that standard intellectualism does not adequately explain such passages, and that sometimes it neglects them altogether.

There seem to be two questions that *SMP* helps tremendously to put into focus for intellectualist interpreters. First, for Socrates, what *are* these appetites and passions of which he makes frequent mention? Second, is it more plausible to include, or to exclude, them from an intellectualist account of the human being? (That is, is the account of the person offered by Brickhouse and Smith's Socrates *as intellectualist* as the human being can plausibly be?—or is there yet some incompatibility in the rational/non-rational machinery their picture paints?)

Here are some additional observations about this book. Controversially, the authors include the whole *Gorgias* in their set of primary sources, rather than only its first half. The second half, owing to its 'non-intellectualist', presumably Platonist, content, is customarily excluded from Socratic sources. *SMP* includes an appendix by way of supplementing the text-based defense of their decision. The book also offers a sustained discussion of what is perhaps the least developed element of intellectualist interpretations, namely, how it is that, for Socrates, harming another necessarily harms oneself. Also included are thorough explanations of how, given their re-interpretation of Socratic intellectualism, Socrates' moral psychology is to be distinguished from the moral psychologies of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. If appetites and passions play the role in human life that the authors argue Socrates thinks they do, then his views will be more akin to Plato and Aristotle than is normally supposed. Since, too, the Stoics officially regard themselves as 'Socratic', those texts require some re-examination.

Lastly, the authors devote an entire chapter to Socrates' view of moral education, such education being no longer the exclusive bailiwick of rational discourse. The volume includes a thorough bibliography, general index, and an *index locorum*.

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