

Donald R. Morrison, ed.

The Cambridge Companion to Socrates.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011.

436 pages

\$95.00 (cloth ISBN 978-0-521-83342-4); \$30.99 (paper ISBN 978-0-521-54103-9)

Unlike many of its counterparts (e.g., *A Companion to Socrates*, Blackwell, 2006), this companion (*CCS*) devotes more of its contents to Socrates' philosophy and less to his historical and political circumstance and his many influences upon subsequent cultures. In this sense, the *CCS* is more a companion to philosophy than is its counterparts. Those pieces in *CCS* which are less philosophical nevertheless survey a variety of scholarly literature devoted to a specific problem closely related to doing Socratic scholarship (e.g., an overview of the primary sources for Socratic philosophy, itself a famously problematic issue). Those readers seeking discussions of matters more ancillary to Socratic philosophy will do better to consult, say, the *Blackwell* volume.

Like that counterpart, the articles in *CCS* are uniformly of a very high level of scholarship, and each is authored by leading scholars in Socratic thought or in ancient philosophy more generally. *CCS* will be of particular use to scholars seeking to acquire a greater proficiency in Socrates, as the majority of problems central to that scholarship each receive sustained attention. Seasoned Socratics, too, will find some original and controversial work here and should therefore not overlook it.

Each piece includes its own bibliography. When taken together, these constitute as thorough a bibliography as one could hope to find on Socrates. A bibliography is also included at the book's end and is arranged according to kind and subject (e.g., Studies of Particular Authors/Aristophanes). There are, in addition, name and subject indexes as well as an index of passages.

A clear strength of this volume is its collection of essays concerning the fabled "Socratic Problem." Socratic scholars—perhaps unlike those of any other philosopher—carry the burden of first working to identify what their primary sources shall be. This is because we do not know, and may never know, which texts, if any, present us with the personality and philosophy of the historical Socrates. Socrates himself wrote nothing, after all, so we are reliant mostly upon his contemporaries for whatever we may know about him. In addition to Plato, students Xenophon, Euclides, Aeschines, Simon the Cobbler and others wrote about the Master; from Xenophon we have substantial extant texts (e.g., *Apology*, *Memorabilia*); and Aristotle's indirect testimony can hardly be set aside. Yet these accounts of Socrates differ widely, and scholars are not univocal as to how best to address the matter. I know of no other volume that has devoted such an array of worthy studies to this complicated issue.

Louis-Andre Dorion provides a fascinating history of the scholarly debate surrounding what in Plato or Xenophon might present the most reliable account of Socrates. A related and no less compelling piece is Klaus Döring's, which focuses on what we know about Socrates' lesser-

known students and their portrayals. David K. O'Connor's study is about the life and work of the relatively unappreciated Xenophon, once considered *the* primary source of Socratic thought. Aristophanes, a contemporary of Socrates, is considered yet another source for Socrates, and David Konstan considers what we may learn about Socrates from him. While it is true that Socrates is mocked in *The Clouds*, mockery, as Konstan notes, succeeds only if it is based on the truth.

Socrates' trial and execution are probably the best documented events in his life. Josiah Ober discusses those questions about them that most perplex scholars: Why was a model of the good person charged with public wrongdoing? Why did he undergo trial and execution rather than pursue philosophy in exile? How could a democracy committed to free speech and public debate convict and execute that citizen who most embodied that commitment?

As Socrates emerges in Athenian culture, a growing reliance upon natural science and forensic argument is taking place that challenges traditional values, including the role of the divine in human life. Paul Woodruff examines Socrates' contributions to this "new learning" and its effects upon his own thought. Although Socrates' philosophical activity resulted in charges of impiety against him, it is nevertheless evident that certain religious beliefs partly informed his thought. Mark McPherran, a noted expert on the religious dimension of Socrates' life and philosophy, examines how Socrates helped to usher in the rational theology that would later find expression in Plato and the Stoics.

Hugh Benson is perhaps the foremost authority on the so-called '*elenchus*,' Socrates' dialogical method of answering questions about virtue (e.g., 'What is courage?'). Benson here presents a comprehensive account of the problems and questions that have been posed about this method, including the view that there is in fact no Socratic *elenchus* in the dialogues. Benson's considered view is that the dialogues demonstrably feature Socrates practicing a distinctive, coherent and plausible method throughout.

Potentially related to what we might come to decide about the *elenchus* is Socrates' thematic call for self-examination. This is the subject of Christopher Rowe's piece, in which he closely examines the *Apology* (37e3-38a6) and the *Phaedrus* (229e4-230a6) to determine what, and how, one examines (*exetazein*) according to Socrates. These two passages, quite aside from their intrinsic relevance to this issue, are significant for their probable denominational difference. Presumably, the *Apology* features an intellectualist Socrates, whereas the *Phaedrus*, comparing the human psyche rather to a chariot with three steeds, has Socrates presenting a non-intellectualist (probably Platonic) account of the soul. But common to both accounts, Rowe argues, is that, "there is no trace of that thoroughly modern idea that the key to life lies in identifying our *personal* histories and . . . whatever it is that makes us *uniquely* ourselves" (213). Instead, in both cases, the aim of examination is to become as wise as it is possible for the human to be.

A further problem of Socratic scholarship comes in the form of his frequent denials of knowledge about virtue. This makes it even more difficult to identify Socrates' own philosophy than the Socratic Problem had already made it. Richard Bett examines this problem, addressing such questions as what, precisely, the object of Socrates' ignorance is supposed to be; what the

epistemological presumptions are that underlie his claims; and what Socrates himself thinks the philosophical significance is of this ignorance.

A related characteristic of Plato's Socrates is his seeming and frequent irony—related because some of his denials of knowledge may in fact be cases of irony (e.g., “It is from you sophists that I seek wisdom.”). Melissa Lane's essay challenges the idea that Socrates—whether that of Plato or of Xenophon—is systematically ironic because, as she demonstrates, the main passages normally deployed in favor of an ironic interpretation avail themselves of plausible, alternative accounts.

Terry Penner, perhaps the premier defender of ‘Socratic Intellectualism’ (i.e., the view that Socrates thinks that all questions about human desire, action and virtue are to be answered strictly by reference to intellectual categories, there being no irrational elements that would help to explain human action), provides a detailed explanation of the psychology of action and ethical views that this idea generates. Helping to explain intellectualism are Penner's frequent, insightful comparisons made with the non-Socratic psychologies that appear in Plato and Aristotle.

The subject of Christopher Bobonich's essay is Socratic *eudaimonia*, or happiness, a concept vital to ancient ethical and political theorizing. Bobonich inquires about the role *eudaimonia* plays in the Socratic thought of Plato's early dialogues and, importantly, what relationship there is, for the Socrates portrayed therein, between it and knowledge and virtue. This is a tremendously thorough study which critically examines a variety of doctrines attributable to Socrates and raises questions about their coherence with one another. It is particularly relevant to questions and problems posed by Socrates' intellectualism.

Some scholars regard Plato's Socrates as being apolitical or, at any rate, possessing views that barely qualify as being political. Charles Griswold begins his study from the observation that Socrates' losing his life over his commitments to free speech and relentless inquiry situates him as a political actor, quite aside from his philosophizing. Griswold's essay seeks to examine how Plato's Socrates thinks of the relationship between philosophy and politics; it thoughtfully challenges apoliticist interpretations.

A. A. Long closes the volume with “Socrates in Later Greek Philosophy,” a piece which is informed by three salient facts about Socrates' life. These are that—incredible though it may seem to us—1) Socrates' life, trial and death were relatively minor events for both his contemporaries and their immediate descendants. 2) His philosophical significance owes itself to his students, and others, who interpreted his philosophy and his life in a variety of ways. 3) His cultural presence grows increasingly up through the third century, C. E. Long's paper illuminates how Socrates and his philosophy were received, developed and transmitted to the medieval period and beyond by the Hellenes.

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