

Book Reviews

Roslyn Weiss. *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. x + 229. Cloth, \$39.95.

Few monographs have been written on the *Meno* in English; and much of what is written takes a piecemeal approach, emphasizing the dilemma about the impossibility of learning what one doesn't know, the slave boy sequence, knowledge as recollection, concepts of teaching and learning, or right opinion which is sometimes taken as being asserted by Socrates or Plato. Weiss's book has a lot to recommend it. It is the first monographic study on this dialogue in English since Sternfeld and Zyskind's in 1978. Like Weiss's earlier *Socrates Dissatisfied* (1998), this volume challenges some of the orthodoxies of Anglo-American Plato scholarship. It is holistic, clear, and coherent. Unlike many other practitioners of the Socratic philosophy approach to Plato's dialogues, Weiss is also sensitive to literary and dramatic nuance.

The overall argument of the book is that the *Meno* is a defense of Socrates' project as a moral philosopher. Weiss's Socrates accepts that moral knowledge is impossible for ordinary humans, even though this is life's highest aim. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to search for moral knowledge by practicing the Socratic elenchus and appropriate to settle for true opinion. Although her Socrates promotes a doctrine he does not endorse, recollection, doing so is legitimized by its strategic function of drawing Meno back into the inquiry and because it represents the way to obtain true moral opinion. Socrates deliberately deceives Meno, but this doesn't make him a sophist. According to Weiss, he is a "zealot" (11). Some, however, would describe her Socrates as a sophist and a bully. This whole business is philosophy, though not in the modern professional sense.

The book is a consecutive analysis of the whole dialogue as a defense of Socratic moral philosophy. Thus, chapter 1 presents Socrates' examinations of Meno's attempted definitions as attempts to turn Meno from his desire for power and money, and to encourage him to value excellence instead. But then (ch. 2), as Meno's attempts to define virtue fail, Socrates and Meno come to an impasse at which Meno presents his "paradox." Contrary to prevailing opinion in English-language scholarship, Weiss argues at length (65–126) that in the following sections Socrates does *not* present the recollection thesis or its attendant metaphysical notions as his own beliefs. They are deployed as ways to get Meno to continue participating in the moral inquiry they have begun. Thus (ch. 3) the slave-boy sequence is a "farcical" lesson in geometry; but recognizing this enables us to see that recollection actually represents the perpetual presence in the soul of true moral opinions that can be recovered through elenctic questioning. In the last sections of the dialogue (ch. 4), Weiss argues that Socrates is trying to benefit Meno even within the investigation's narrowed limits by persuading him that men attain virtue neither by nature nor by teaching nor spontaneously. Socrates is saying indirectly that true opinion is the source of virtue for most of us. In the concluding chapter, Weiss argues that the Socrates of the *Meno* is consistent with the Socrates of other early dialogues, especially his valuing of true opinion, his fierce commitment to moral inquiry, and his belief that, although the examined life fails to achieve moral knowledge, it is happy and the person who leads it good.

Weiss defends her demotion of recollection also in Appendix I, arguing that the *Phaedo*'s version is a radical departure from the *Meno*'s. Thus they do not evidence a consistent

Platonic dogma of knowledge as recollection, but rather show development in Plato's views. Similarly, Appendix II argues that Socratic moral inquiry is abandoned in the *Republic* with the introduction of the theory of Forms that redefines philosophers in terms of knowledge possessed. These arguments serve to rebut possible criticisms of her view, but they raise problems of their own. If Weiss is correct about the *Republic* being later and marking a new phase in Plato's thought, then it seems anachronistic to have used the *Republic's* Cave metaphor to explain what is on her view an earlier dialogue. More seriously, her assumption of the early-middle-late chronology (cf. 12, n. 20) and the developmental picture it subtends begs the question without considering the numerous persuasive, recent counter-arguments that have caused the view to be abandoned by many.

Similarly, and still more seriously, Weiss fails to confront Cobb ("Anamnesis: Platonic Doctrine or Sophistic Absurdity?" *Dialogue* [1973]), Ebert (*Meinung und Wissen in der Philosophie Platons. Untersuchungen zur Charmides, Meno und Staat*, 1971), and Anderson (*The Masks of Dionysius*, 1993, 125–35), all of whom have previously argued for anamnesis as playful in the *Meno*. In fact, much of the argument of the book as a whole was adumbrated by Tejera (*Plato's Dialogues One by One*, 1984, 31–46), though not from the Socratic or analytic perspective.

Still, the book is remarkably clearly written and sensitive to the logical implications of literary and dramatic details. Her detailed analysis of Socrates' educational project with respect to his interlocutors is excellent. One can appreciate her iconoclastic views: of recollection as something in which Socrates does *not* believe; that the development of conversations in Platonic dialogues is "driven by the character" (17) with whom Socrates is conversing; of the frequency and extent to which Socrates engages in attitude fitting and other rhetorical strategies; of Socrates as behaving in less than ideal ways, "at times careless and at times overly fastidious about" distinctions (36). And finally, Weiss's recognition is most welcome that, as practiced in Plato's dialogues, philosophy is something different from what is called philosophy in our time, but philosophy nonetheless.

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Walter E. Wehrle. *The Myth of Aristotle's Development and the Betrayal of Metaphysics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. Pp. xiii + 279. Cloth, \$75.00.

Walter Wehrle was a clever scholar who struggled all his life with a crippling illness that led to his death at the age of forty-nine. His widow, with the help of a friend and colleague, David Schum, saw this posthumous book into print.

Wehrle focuses on one argument line used by some of those who have theories of Aristotle's development: Aristotle says different things about *ousia* in the *Categories* and in the *Metaphysics*, especially Zeta and Eta, and that, say the developmentalists, can be explained by taking the *Categories* as an early composition, and *Metaphysics* Zeta and Eta as the expression of the mature metaphysical position. Wehrle's objective is to show that this argument is seriously mistaken: mistaken about *Categories*, mistaken about *Metaphysics* Z and H, and mistaken about the character of Aristotle's metaphysics. Wehrle singles out Terry Irwin (*Aristotle's First Principles*, 1990) and Daniel Graham (*Aristotle's Two Systems*, 1987), but he also takes passing shots at Russell Dancy, Mary Louise Gill, Michael Frede, and G. E. L. Owen, and others. He acknowledges the work of J. D. G. Evans (*Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic*, 1977) and Robert Bolton (several articles) as fundamental for his approach (42).

Wehrle does not say much in the work that would touch *other* arguments used by some who believe in Aristotle's philosophical development—for example, he has nothing to say about the Nuyens thesis that Aristotle's theory of the soul changed over time. So the title of the book promises more than it can deliver. A modest formulation of his thesis would be: "If Aristotle's philosophy developed over time, the supposed differences between *Categories* and *Metaphysics* don't tell you anything about that development."