

Italy, where Benedetto Croce's four-volume masterpiece bears the general title *Filosofia dello Spirito* (1902-1917). To write a book with 'philosophy of spirit' in its title without ever mentioning Hegel is almost like writing a book entitled *On the Origin of Species* without mentioning Darwin's name at all! Certainly, Bettcher did not necessarily have to engage with these developments in her book (although that would have been indeed a novel and fresh way of reading Berkeley), but at least some terminological and historical clarifications would have been useful.

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The Socratic Method:

Plato's Use of Philosophical Drama.

New York: Continuum 2007.

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US\$110.00 (cloth ISBN-13: 978-0-8264-8891-6).

In this short monograph (of 111 pages of text), Cain (hereafter 'C') presents an interpretation of Socratic method that differs in significant ways from what that method was commonly taken to be in the literature on 'Socratic philosophy' in the latter half of the last century. Rather than the conventional description of Socrates' method as epistemic, aiming at moral knowledge, C claims that it is 'psychological' (Chapter 1), by which she means that it operates through a demand for sincerity on the interlocutor's part, causes him to experience *aporia*, and uses his shame at this outcome to achieve aims that can be called morally pedagogical. Rather than defending Socrates, as was often done, against criticism for dialectical tactics taken to be unacceptable and for various logical fallacies, by linking Plato to ancient literary practices of ambiguity and linking his Socrates to ancient dialectical theories (Chapter 4), C finds a deliberate and creative use of ambiguity (Chapter 3) that is philosophically defensible because it aims at the moral improvement of the interlocutor. In C's view, Socrates' method is protreptic (Chapter 2), aiming to move interlocutors from the conventional moral views with which they began to the Socratic moral position that C believes can be deduced from certain *endoxa* (accepted views) that Socrates regularly employs, using in specific ways the different meanings given to the terms under discussion by Socrates and his interlocutors. Socrates' method, according to C, aims to revise the interlocutor's moral beliefs through persuasive use of endoxical premises.

There are several laudable features of the book. Unlike much scholarship on Socrates' method, C seeks to recognize the significance of Plato's literary

art and to distinguish what Socrates tries to accomplish within a dialogue from what Plato tries to accomplish by having him do so. Unlike that scholarship, too, she aims to look at whole dialogues rather than only parts and to interpret them in a more contextual way (5), by seeing the arguments ‘within the framework of the drama’ (51). And she recognizes that there is a ‘complex psycho-dynamics’ (4) at work in Socrates’ treatment of his interlocutors.

On the other hand, despite being heavily weighed down by repetitive program statements, recapitulations and summaries, the book’s argument against the Vlastosians is not as clear as it might be. It isn’t clear at the outset who the argument is aimed at, and it seemed to make better sense to rearrange the chapter claims as I did in the first paragraph above. More seriously, however — and like her opponents — C’s overall argument is based on false or dubious assumptions that are never discussed. The neat division of Plato’s dialogues into early, ‘Socratic’ ones, middle, and late ones has long since ceased to be the scholarly consensus; and with it goes the very existence of a ‘Socratic philosophy’ of which the ‘Socratic Method’ under discussion here would be a part. This is the more surprising since she includes in her bibliography several books and articles critical of these assumptions, including Nails’ critique in *Ancient Philosophy* (1993). ‘Socratic philosophy’ as it was often discussed was an intellectual construct based on a somewhat arbitrary — and inconsistent from author to author (see Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*) — set of dialogues taken to be ‘Socratic’. Worse, in the last ten years the Vlastosian program has been widely criticized and lost much of its old vitality and capacity to motivate scholarly work. From this perspective, C’s book looks a bit like beating a dead horse.

Nevertheless, C is right about many things. She is certainly right that Vlastos ‘decontextualizes passages and isolates the elenctic arguments from the dialectical context of the dialogues’ (8), for Socratic dialectic is much more than just elenctic arguments, as C says. One’s understanding of the arguments narrowly defined is enhanced by grasping the setting, the characters, and the plots in which they are embedded. The great challenge of contemporary Plato scholarship is precisely to read the dialogues ‘as literature and as philosophy at the same time’ (ix), though she needs to go more deeply into the literary aspects of the dialogues than she has done here; into their language, literary structures, humor, allusions, and mythic retellings. It is correct, too, that Plato and his Socrates aim to redefine the terms of moral discussion (35) in ways that both recover the terms’ traditional substantiality and enrich them through an intellectual analysis and criticism that transcends simple realism and sophistic relativism. It is well said that the ends of many dialogues are better understood as ambiguous rather than as ‘aporetic’, and that in so being they are productive for the reader (17).

C is right that Socrates’ refutations are protreptic (Chapter 2), though they may also serve other purposes simultaneously. He often uses the interlocutor’s shame at being found to be in contradiction (23-6) and regularly handles interlocutors in particularized ways (47). This means that many refutative arguments are, in their dramatic settings, *ad hominem*, and C is

correct that this is not the problem it has sometimes been supposed to be, since Socrates' aim is not formal demonstration. Socrates does frequently use endoxical premises and play on the ambiguity of their central terms. C names three such premises as central: all humans desire the good, virtue is beneficial, and virtue is like a *techne* (43). Though I would agree with the first two, the third is a proposition never explicitly stated and open to challenge as a Socratic or Platonic belief, despite its long run in the secondary literature. But her general point — that Socrates uses endoxa as premises — is correct.

The greatest strength of the book, in fact, is the careful analyses of particular cases (68-93), of which there could well be more. They show more clearly than any number of argument summaries that and how Plato's Socrates plays on the ambiguity of central terms in these premises and employs psychological strategies to detach his interlocutors from the conventional or sophistic views they bring to the conversation and to re-orient them toward a more Socratic set of beliefs, values, and practices.

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Paul Churchland

Neurophilosophy at Work.

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This book is a collection of published essays from a pioneer and leading mind in neurophilosophy. The essays were all previously published (ranging over the years 2000 to 2006), and cover a wide variety of topics as they connect with Churchland's philosophical position on the human mind and behavior, a position firmly grounded in the contemporary neurosciences. Two common themes are evident throughout: (i) the power and promise of parallel distributed processing models of brain activity to explain various examples of animal (human and nonhuman) cognition and (ii) a conditional rejection of mental state discourse that either (a) explicitly helps itself to folk psychological entities like beliefs or desires, or (b) analyses cognitive states as types of propositional attitudes, when explaining or predicting human (or nonhuman) behavior. This will come as no surprise to those who have encountered Churchland's twentieth-century work in the philosophy of mind. Churchland continues to