

Socratic Moral Psychology. By Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. vii + 276. \$85.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-0-521-19843-1.

J. Clerk Shaw

Brickhouse and Smith aim to articulate and defend an interpretation of Socratic motivational intellectualism that gives due place to non-rational appetites and passions, in contrast to the ‘standard interpretation’, while still remaining distinct from other heretical views of Socratic moral psychology. Chapter 1 defends ‘Socratic studies’ against criticisms. (An appendix defends the place of the *Gorgias* in that research program.) Chapters 2-3 present the core of the authors’ view. Chapter 4 argues that their view best explains how wrongdoing damages the soul and how punishment repairs it, while chapter 5 argues that it best explains Socrates’ views about (non-punitive) education. Chapter 6 digresses into Socratic virtue intellectualism. Chapter 7 compares the Socratic moral psychology they recover with other ancient views. I start with the authors’ defense of Socratic studies, and then I turn to the core of their view.

The authors allow three ‘adequate grounds for ending Socratic studies’ (41): (i) disproving its basic principles; (ii) explaining why its interpretive results are without value or promise; or (iii) providing better interpretive results by other means. Much could be said here—e.g., (iii) sets too low a bar for ending research programs—but I focus on (i).

Brickhouse and Smith defend two basic principles of Socratic studies. The first is Philosophical Identity (the character Socrates expresses coherent views across a certain range of Plato’s dialogues), which is weaker than General Historical Identity (this character roughly reflects the historical Socrates). The second principle is Relevant Dialogues, which specifies the range of dialogues mentioned in Philosophical Identity. Here, ‘precise agreements...are not required...[a]ll that is required is general agreement about a fairly large sub-set’ (18-19). The authors spell out this principle in terms of dialogues that are *included*, even if with some dissent, and dialogues that are more widely considered *debatable*. I suppose that dialogues they do not list (e.g., *Symposium*, *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* ii-x, *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus*) are *excluded*.

I doubt whether any research program should be ended primarily by direct critique of its basic principles, even phrenology and astrology (38). However, I have some worries about these two basic principles of Socratic studies, at least as the authors apply them.

First, General Historical Identity has this advantage over Philosophical Identity: it characterizes what Socratic scholars try to track, beyond bare coherence, when plumping for a particular version of Relevant Dialogues. After all, the following group of dialogues seems fairly coherent: *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Symposium*, *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus*. General Historical Identity

might place inquiries into this group outside Socratic studies; Philosophical Identity does not. One could simply insist that Relevant Dialogues include most of the *included* dialogues mentioned above and exclude the *excluded* ones, but this makes the boundaries of the research program seem arbitrary.

Insofar as this point merely concerns the classification of studies of Plato, it may seem like nitpicking. But a deeper problem lurks for Brickhouse and Smith's particular version of Relevant Dialogues. They include the *Gorgias* and *Meno* while excluding the *Phaedo* (and the *Symposium*, which unfortunately they do not consider). On moral-psychological grounds, they identify just one reason for excluding the *Phaedo*: the appetites and passions are much more closely linked to the body in the *Phaedo* than in their group of relevant dialogues (198). This argument from emphasis, as one might call it, does not rise even to the persuasive level of an argument from silence.

Brickhouse and Smith do also offer an argument from silence for excluding the *Phaedo*: '[i]n the earlier dialogues, Socrates never characterizes one with disciplined appetites and passions as being in a condition that is "as close as he can to being dead"' (197). But he does, in the *Gorgias*. Callicles compares the person with restrained appetites to a stone or a corpse. Socrates does not reject this comparison; rather, he revalues the value of life and death and quotes certain *sophoi* to the effect that the body is a tomb for the soul (492d-493a). The authors cite this passage only in their appendix, where they respond to McPherran (*The Religion of Socrates*, University Park: Penn State Press, 1996): 'we are unconvinced...that the *Gorgias* myth, too, reveals a Socrates who thinks that "death is life and life is death", [and] that the body is a tomb'. It is unclear why the authors decline to read the myth through the lens of 492d-493a, but it hardly matters; that passage is still in the *Gorgias*. So, the authors could say more about why they think the *Gorgias* expresses the coherent set of views found in their Relevant Dialogues rather than the coherent set of views that could be recovered from the list above—especially since the *Gorgias* figures as a crucial source of evidence for them (248). Of course, one might include the *Gorgias* and exclude the *Phaedo* on other grounds, but these receive only cursory attention in the book (196n3).

Now for the core of Brickhouse and Smith's view. Motivational intellectualism says that the proximal cause of every adult human action is the agent's belief about what is best for her, together with her general rational desire for the good. (It is unclear what intellectualism can say about the actions of small children and non-human animals; the *Symposium* might help here.) Brickhouse and Smith think Socrates is a motivational intellectualist, but that he also thinks non-rational appetites and passions can causally influence belief about what is best for the agent, so that these can be distal causes of adult human actions. They begin by citing many passages where Socrates mentions appetites and passions—in which, they claim, he cannot be talking about either beliefs or manifestations of the general rational desire for the good (50-62).

The authors shift their grounds for so distinguishing non-rational appetites and passions. Early on, in differentiating their view from the 'standard interpretation'

(represented by Penner, Reshotko, and Rowe), they emphasize the phenomenology of appetites and passions in contrast to any ‘purely cognitive condition’ (60), their affective valence in contrast to ‘calm’ or ‘sober and unemotional’ cognitive states (57, 61), and their motivational force in contrast to states like sense-perceptions (52n6; cf. 74-75). On this last point, the authors emphasize that the passions play a *causal* and not merely an *informational* role, as in the ‘standard interpretation’. But if sense-perceptions are model informational states, it seems obvious that these causally influence belief, be they ever so sober; and Reshotko, at any rate, explicitly says in *Socratic Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) that ‘[i]ntellectualism need only claim that...[drives and urges] never cause behavior in an unmediated fashion: they cause it by affecting our beliefs’, and that ‘urges and drives *do influence* our rational assessment of different courses of action’ (84, 87; emphasis in original).

Brickhouse and Smith later and more regularly distinguish non-rational appetites and passions on grounds that they are *appearances* (or ‘impressions’) that ‘present’ or ‘represent’ their objects as beneficial, as opposed to being *beliefs* about what is best for them (72, 86-87n13, 104-108, 120, 191, 194, 199-200, 204-205, 210). This is how the authors distinguish themselves from other moral-psychological heretics (Moss, Segvic, and Singpurwalla; 86-87n13). In this mood, the authors sometimes compare such appearances to sense-perceptions and explicitly characterize them as informational states (204, 210). (Not as *mere* informational states with no causal influence on belief, but again, this does not distinguish them from Reshotko.)

This account of the appetites and passions seems more central to Brickhouse and Smith’s project, but how does it distinguish them from their fellow heretics? For present purposes, I draw comparisons with Singpurwalla’s paper (‘Reasoning with the Irrational: Moral Psychology in the *Protagoras*’, *Ancient Philosophy* 26 [2006], 243-258). Singpurwalla distinguishes three views about non-rational passions: (1) that they are non-representational *feelings* distinct from beliefs; (2) that they are representational *appearances* of goodness distinct from beliefs; and (3) that they are *appearance-based beliefs* about goodness (250). In responding to earlier work by Brickhouse and Smith, Singpurwalla argues that non-rational passions should not be identified with mere non-representational feelings: nothing but Humean prejudice prevents us from thinking that representational appearances of goodness have phenomenal content characteristic of the passions. She implies that the same point applies to the phenomenology of *beliefs* about goodness. This seems exactly right as a response to the first strand of Brickhouse and Smith, in which they suggest that belief-driven accounts of Socratic motivational psychology are committed to an ‘unemotional’ or ‘purely cognitive’ picture of agency.

But again, the book contains a second strand that identifies non-rational appetites and passions with representational appearances of goodness or badness, as opposed to beliefs often but not invariably produced by the appearances (Singpurwalla’s view). This causes some confusion; Brickhouse and Smith dis-

tinguish themselves from Singpurwalla and others in part on grounds that ‘the object of an appetite that an agent has deliberately decided not to pursue may well continue to *appear* good to the agent...[e]ven the one with the craft of measurement would not fail to note that the tart looked and smelled good’ (86-87n13). But Singpurwalla recognizes that the appearances persist in the wise person (252); indeed, this is part of her reason for denying that these *are* the appetites and passions, whereas in the Brickhouse and Smith idiom this requires that *the appetites and passions persist*. Are these mere notational variants? If not, who is closer to the truth?

There is an obvious approach to answering the first question: since Brickhouse and Smith and Singpurwalla both recognize a distinction between appearances of goodness and beliefs about goodness, which should we take Socrates to be talking about when he discusses fear, shame, anger, and the like? Passages from the *Protagoras* that the authors do not cite support Singpurwalla’s view. Socrates calls fear a *προσδοκίαν...κακοῦ* (*Pr.* 358d6-7; *La.* 198b8-9), clearly suggesting that fear is a form of belief. That suspicion is confirmed when Socrates then says that what one fears, one considers (*ἡγείσθαι*) bad (*Pr.* 358e4-5). Brickhouse and Smith require that what one fears, one *often* considers bad. Further, Socrates says that the courageous person is distinguished by her noble hopes and fears (360a8-b6). This requires that hope and fear can be shaped qualitatively. But Brickhouse and Smith allow only for quantitative shaping of hopes and fears; on their view, what distinguishes the virtuous person is (in part) that she has *weak* rather than *strong* non-rational passions (esp. 83-86). This view could be rescued if weak passions were noble and strong passions base. However, Socrates’ reasoning suggests that noble fears (for example) are those whose strength *conforms to* the real agent-relative fearfulness of their objects.

Singpurwalla’s reading is also philosophically superior. It seems truer to the phenomenology of emotion to say that hope, fear, anger, shame and so on *directly cause* action. This plausible view can be made consistent with Socratic intellectualism if the passions *are* affectively loaded belief states. It cannot clearly be made consistent with the authors’ reading of Socratic intellectualism, which requires that an affectively neutral (?) belief state always mediate between emotion and action. If Socrates can be saved from this implausible view, he should be. He can be, if we follow Singpurwalla. So, we should follow Singpurwalla.

Overall, this book does not live up to the high standards set by the authors’ earlier work, especially *Plato’s Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). However, I have not discussed the full range of topics it covers, many of which will hold great interest for scholars of Plato. Their discussion of punishment and incurable souls (chapter 4) is particularly engaging. The book is certainly well worth reading.

Department of Philosophy
University of Tennessee

Knoxville, TN 37996