
Reviews

The Circle of Socrates: Readings in First-Generation Socratics

George Boys-Stones and Christopher Rowe, trans. and eds.

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George Boys-Stones and Christopher Rowe's *The Circle of Socrates: Readings in First-Generation Socratics* (hereafter "*Circle*") promises to fill an important gap, an English translation in one volume of the various fragments we have from the work of the men in Socrates's inner circle. Yet it is more than just a collection of early Socratic fragments; *Circle* incorporates selections from our main sources on Socrates, Plato and Xenophon, alongside the fragments to give readers a taste of the controversies that arose among Socrates's disciples in the years immediately following his death. Thus, the editors provide us with the first genuine collection of Socratic Memorabilia, a collection that paints a fuller picture of Socrates and the concerns of his followers.

In what follows I will briefly summarize the book, highlighting its intended purpose and audience, and then assess it, focusing on its potential to fulfill its purpose and on its pedagogical value. I will not offer a philosophical assessment of the book's interpretation of the fragments, except where it bears on its classroom use.

Summary

In the introduction, Boys-Stones and Rowe make it clear that *Circle* is "an attempt to highlight and make more readily available what we consider to be some of the more interesting and illuminating material by the first-generation followers of Socrates, and to make the case that it ought to be taken into account by mainstream scholarship of classical philosophy" (vii). To this end, the editors arrange the fragments thematically, chapter by chapter, according to the following topics:

1. Argument and Truth
2. Happiness and the Good
3. Virtue and Pleasure
4. Body and Soul
5. Education

6. The Erotic Sciences
7. Alcibiades and Politics
8. Aspasia and the Role of Women
9. God and the World
10. Lesser Divinities and Socrates' "Sign"
11. Debates and Rivalries

It is noteworthy that the editors include chapters on special Socratic themes such as erotics, Alcibiades, Aspasia, and Socrates's divine sign, which would probably not appear in a more philosophically-minded edition, though they are near to the hearts of classicists and scholars of Socrates. In addition to the effort of making the fragments accessible by arranging them thematically, the editors include relevant selections from the works of Plato and Xenophon to provide a complete picture of each theme as it bears on Socrates's legacy. Each chapter begins with a brief summary of the theme, keeping interpretation of the fragments to a minimum, but drawing attention to any controversies that emerge from them as well as to the various resolutions they propose. In particular the editors take great care to address the fragments' contributions as much as the passages from Plato and Xenophon.

After the summary, the chapters proceed to the texts, which are numbered and indexed by chapter for easy reference. The first passage from the first chapter, for example, is listed as 1.1, and the first passage from the second chapter is listed as 2.1. The number of passages in each chapter varies widely. Chapter 3, for instance, on the issue of virtue and pleasure, has the most, sixty-one, while chapter 10, on Socrates's divine sign, has a mere eighteen, almost all of which come from Plato; only four of the passages come from an author other than Plato or Xenophon.

In general, the chapters try to include a representative set of fragments alongside key passages from Plato and Xenophon. The editors try very hard to give the early Socratic fragments an equal voice to that of their more influential cousins. Of them, chapters 1, 8, and 11 stand out because they contain long passages from Antisthenes whose works *Ajax* and *Odysseus* are given in full in chapter 1 and substantial passages of his *Aspasia* are contained in chapter 8. Chapter 11 (on various minor debates which fall outside of the bigger philosophical controversies in the other chapters) presents fragments from only the early Socratics, who took a keen interest in these debates and describes in some detail the positions of the men involved. There are no passages from Plato and Xenophon in this chapter because we have no texts by them on these minor debates.

The book concludes with three extremely useful scholarly items: a bibliography, an index of the early Socratics, and an index of sources. The bibliography is as comprehensive as anyone could reasonably expect given the present stature of the fragments in classical and philosophical scholarship. It includes references to every primary text and edition in a variety of languages, and *all* of the scholarship available to date. The Socratic index is

astonishingly complete. It of course includes entries for the authors of the fragments translated in the text, but it also contains entries for every other Socratic we know of from biographers such as Diogenes Laertius. In addition, the index has brief biographies of these early Socratics and references to any fragments they have left and citations for how to find them. Finally, the source index helpfully provides readers with citations for locating each fragment in its original source.

Assessment

In this section, I will consider whether *Circle* lives up to its own standards: does it encourage a wider readership of these early Socratic fragments and does it secure them a place in classical and philosophical scholarship? To these questions, I will answer that *Circle* does encourage wider readership of the fragments and it does secure them a place in classical scholarship. I will, however, qualify my answer in several ways.

Does *Circle* encourage a wider readership of these fragments of early Socratics other than Plato and Xenophon? It does—indeed admirably—in making these fragments more accessible. Simply by translating them into English and collecting them in one volume, the editors have already gone quite far in making them more accessible. By also arranging the fragments thematically, the editors give the fragments a context (which they don't otherwise have), ensuring their greater intelligibility to readers, where they might not be if they were organized in some other fashion. (Simply numbering them, for example, would not serve, I think, to make the fragments more accessible.) In addition to this, by publishing with Hackett, the editors have ensured that *Circle* will be affordable and circulate widely. The low cost of the book will no doubt encourage instructors to adopt the title in their course if not to buy it for themselves and for their own edification. In sum, through sound editorial judgment and excellent publisher selection, *Circle* promises to be the best source for beginning study of early Socratic fragments for many years.

Does *Circle* also secure a place for the fragments in classical and philosophical scholarship? I say “yes,” but add that it won't do so firmly.

By combining the fragments with selections from Plato and Xenophon, *Circle* enables scholars familiar with Plato and Xenophon to compare the fragments with Xenophon's and Plato's dialogues and learn from the comparison. In doing so, scholars may fruitfully uncover the original controversies that motivated Plato and Xenophon to write. Scholars will also, I believe, discover the problems Plato's and Xenophon's solutions were originally intended to solve. Along the way they will learn more about other Socratics (who stimulated Plato and Xenophon) and may find themselves more interested in the work of these men than of Xenophon or Plato. On the other hand, mixing the fragments with passages from Plato and Xenophon runs the risk of stifling these lesser voices with the overwhelming bravado of Xenophon

and Plato whose more finished work and better developed thought drowns out everyone else. The editors acknowledge this risk and stress their efforts to moderate Plato's and Xenophon's contributions (ix). But the editors do not succeed in this. Selections from Plato and Xenophon dominate almost every chapter, forcing the fragments into a supplementary position rather than a position of equality. Chapter 3, for example, contains forty-eight passages from Plato and Xenophon compared with seventeen from other early Socratics; chapters 6, 9, and 10 have more than twice the number of passages from Plato and Xenophon; and selections from their work comprises the majority of the passages in chapters 2, 4, 7, and 8. Except for chapter 11, in which, as I've mentioned, there are no passages from Plato and Xenophon, the early Socratic fragments enjoy a narrow majority over selections from Xenophon and Plato. Yet, in these chapters, the selections are considerably longer than the fragments. The result is really a compendium of selections from Plato and Xenophon on important Socratic issues with fragments from other early Socratics added for color. The editors should not, I think, be blamed for this; it is a testament to the influence of Plato and Xenophon that their contributions dominate. Despite the editors' efforts, they simply cannot decrease the weight of this influence in order to allow the influence of others to emerge.

Another reason *Circle* may not firmly secure a place for the fragments in classical or philosophical scholarship is its limited classroom use. *Circle* is best suited to graduate courses. Its focus on the debates and controversies among early Socratics including Plato and Xenophon will create greater interest among graduate students and faculty in classics and philosophy concerned with Socrates. Its organization also makes it easier for faculty to develop an enticing course by encouraging students to read the fragments against the more familiar work of Plato and Xenophon and, consequently, enhance their understanding of Plato's and Xenophon's work. For the same reasons, however, it is not suited to undergraduate study. Undergraduate philosophy students won't likely have the opportunity to study these early Socratic fragments in depth because they will be required to study other areas of philosophy. Undergraduate classics students will be likewise required to focus on mastering their Greek and Latin through the study of set texts such as Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* and Virgil's *Aeneid* before venturing out into a close study of these fragments. Between the two, classics students will probably have more of an opportunity to take such a course, but—assuming they have the chance—it is likely that the course will be organized entirely around the text. Because of its organization, *Circle* almost forces an instructor to organize his or her course around the text to take full advantage of it. This could prove restrictive and discourage instructors from adopting the book for their course. *Circle* may, of course, be used as a supplement to a course focusing on Xenophon's dialogues and the early dialogues of Plato. But here too *Circle*'s structure proves too inflexible. The copious selections from Plato and Xenophon discourage instructors from

adopting *Circle* as a supplement to a course on Socrates. Indeed, the editors stress in the introduction that *Circle* “is not itself about Socrates, at least not directly” (vii); it is instead a text “which bear[s] witness to the thinking of first-generation followers of Socrates . . . and which resonate[s] with lines of thought to be found in Plato and Xenophon” (ix). So, *Circle* is not intended to be a supplementary text, nor is it suited to act as an appendage.

Conclusion

Ultimately, *Circle* is a fine text with a great deal of potential, but it has limits. It will succeed in encouraging a wider readership of these early Socratic fragments and it will go a long way in securing them a place in classical scholarship. It will not, however, find as much success in this endeavor as its editors hope because of its highly specialized nature. While it may suit graduate courses on the intellectual legacy of Socrates, it does not suit the needs of regular undergraduate courses on these topics and it discourages instructors from adopting it as a supplement to some other related course. Thus it will not swiftly find its way into the consciousness of classicists and philosophers.

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First Philosophy: Fundamental Problems and Readings in Philosophy: Knowing and Being, 2nd ed.

Andrew Bailey with Robert M. Martin, eds.

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First Philosophy is an anthology offering a comprehensive introduction to metaphysics and epistemology for the beginning student. It offers a balance of pre-1950 and contemporary works, broken into chapters on the nature of philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, philosophy of mind and free will. The selections are complete chapters or sections of larger books or entire stand-alone articles, though the editor also includes an alternative table of contents with abridgements focusing on the crucial material and allowing for shorter reading assignments. Also included a list of the selections in order of date of publication for instructors wanting to cover them in chronological order. At the end of each section are open-ended “Suggestions for Critical Reflection” which can provide excellent fodder for class discussion followed by an annotated list of suggestions for further reading.