

warnings have been issued before. However, it is not a bad thing that the problem has been stressed again, especially in such a systematic and judicious study. The book is clearly written and well documented.

*Antti Arjava*

GREGORY VLASTOS: *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991. 334 p.

GREGORY VLASTOS: *Socratic Studies*. Edited by Myles Burnyeat. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994. 152 p. ISBN 0-521-44213-3, GBP 30.00 (hb). ISBN 0-521-44735-6, GBP 9.95 (pb).

These two important volumes constitute Gregory Vlastos' intellectual testament for future generations of scholars in Socratic and to some extent also Platonic studies. The earlier of them turned out to be the last work finished by the author himself who died shortly after the book was published. At the time of his death at the age of 84, Vlastos was, however, preparing a companion volume including revised versions of his important and influential articles on Socrates' elenctic method of argument, his disavowal of knowledge, and his relationship with the Athenian democracy. Familiarity with the theses presented in these papers, especially the one on the elenchus, is virtually presupposed from the reader of *Socrates*. Therefore, it is very convenient to have them now published together in a collection edited by Myles Burnyeat.

Together with G.E.L. Owen, Gregory Vlastos must be regarded as the most important contributor to the huge growth and improvement of scholarship in ancient philosophy especially in English-speaking countries during the last couple of decades. He was obviously a most stimulating teacher and it was his insistence on a thoroughgoing training both in classics and in philosophy that played an important part in revolutionizing the role of ancient philosophy in academic communities. For Vlastos it was never sufficient just to recount what ancient philosophers *said*; the important thing was to understand what they *meant*. This required interpreting ancient texts in the light of the argumentative clarity and rigor of the best analytic philosophy. Perhaps it is just his striving for clear and precise presentation that has aroused so much debate and controversy around his numerous papers on Presocratic and Socratic philosophy. Even if he has not always succeeded in convincing his readers he has very often set out a fruitful basis for future critical discussion.

These qualities of clarity and precision, but also controversiality, are very much in the foreground both in *Socrates* and in *Socratic Studies*. Vlastos' main thesis is that in his dialogues Plato attributes to Socrates two philosophies which are not only incompatible but even antithetical and irreconcilable. In the dialogues, conventionally dated as early ones, we find a Socrates who is exclusively a moral philosopher, who does

not discuss epistemological, psychological or metaphysical questions, who seeks knowledge by elenchus, i.e. questioning his opponents and refuting false beliefs by deducing their negation from premisses agreed to by the opponent, who disavows any certain expert knowledge but is a philosophical populist who believes that every human being has in his mind the true moral beliefs needed to refute the false ones and reach moral truth. In the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Cratylus*, and *Republic*, however, we find a very different Socrates who presents a complex metaphysical theory of separately existing Forms and a tripartite soul which learns by recollecting pieces of its innate knowledge, who seeks demonstrative knowledge by a hypothetical method borrowed from mathematics and is confident that he has found such knowledge, and who is an elitist convinced that only a handful of exceptionally talented and well-trained philosophers are able to reach the truth. Besides the philosophical thesis of the irreconcilability of the philosophies of these two Socrateses Vlastos also presents the historical thesis that the former of them is in fact the historical Socrates, whereas the latter is merely a mouthpiece for Plato's own doctrines.

Vlastos' forceful defense of his central claims cannot be done full justice here, let alone conclusively refuted. However, they do not seem very plausible to me. The historical thesis claiming the authenticity of the character of Socrates in the elenctic dialogues is mainly based on the evidence of Aristotle, who clearly distinguishes Socrates' doctrines from Plato's later ones. Vlastos exaggerates the reliability of Aristotle as a historical source on earlier philosophies and underestimates Plato's creative ability at the early stages of his career. While we need not agree with the pessimistic conclusions of Charles S. Kahn, for example, that any historical claims about the philosophy of Socrates beyond a couple of familiar paradoxes are bound to be inconclusive Vlastos' reliance on the historical authenticity of Plato's account and Aristotle's confirmation of it seems to be far too optimistic.

Vlastos' philosophical thesis is at least equally controversial. According to him, the philosophies of the two Socrateses in Plato's dialogues are not only different but even antithetical and irreconcilable. The evidence for the sharp discontinuity between early and middle Plato is, however, far from conclusive. Most Plato scholars nowadays seem to reject the discontinuity thesis and opt for a moderate version of a developmental view of his philosophy. The novelties presented in the so-called middle dialogues are seen by them more as an extension and completion of the philosophical program of the Socratic dialogues and an answer to some aporias Plato had been driven to than a beginning of a completely new problematic.

Vlastos' insistence on fundamental discontinuity is mainly based on his interpretation of the Socratic philosophical method, the elenchus. He thinks that the seeking of moral truth through a method which proceeds through questions and answers and deduces the refutations of the opponent's false beliefs from premisses admitted by the opponent himself represents a completely different philosophical attitude from that behind Plato's later method, which is inspired by contemporary mathematics and relies on hypothesis and demonstrative argument to raise the metaphysical structure based on

the theory of Forms.

Even if we admitted the irreconcilability of the two methods, Vlastos' case would be weakened by the fact that he exaggerates the role of elenchus in the Socratic dialogues and underestimates other elements which show continuity between so-called early and middle Plato. What is a little more disturbing is that even Vlastos himself has to admit that there is a bridge from the Socratic elenchus to Platonic metaphysics. It is very natural to ask how it is possible that each and every human being has somewhere in her or his mind those true beliefs needed to refute all the false ones. This is a necessary condition of the successful application of the elenctic method to reach moral truths. One way to justify it is Plato's theory of the soul as having gone through several incarnations and acquired pre-natal knowledge about everything, knowledge which was supposed to be recoverable through recollection. Thus Platonic metaphysics after all seems to give answers to problems arising from nowhere else than Socratic elenchus.

Vlastos does not pay too much attention to the problems of Platonic chronology. He accepts the conventional division between early, transitional, middle and late dialogues and sneers at Kahn's attempt to move the date of the *Gorgias* back to a position immediately following the *Apology* and the *Crito* as not having "gained a single adherent in the critical literature". The more radical revisions of traditional chronology like that of Thesleff are not even mentioned. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, there is a danger that the prevalent orthodoxy in Platonic chronology will become more and more dogmatic. Second, Thesleff's attempt to date at least some of the elenctic dialogues to a much later period in Plato's development has consequences that are worthy of consideration from the philosophical point of view. If the elenctic dialogues are not early works but dialectical exercise pieces written for the Academy, perhaps partly by people other than Plato, they could be seen as throwing new light on the problematic relation between Plato and Aristotle and the early history of Aristotelian dialectic reflected especially in the *Topics*. The acceptance of the revisionist chronology would of course also lead to a major reinterpretation of Plato's philosophical development. As far as I know, this has not seriously been attempted in recent scholarship, but the line of thought could still be worth following.

Quite apart from the controversial chronological questions, Vlastos' view of the relation between the Socratic elenchus and Aristotelian dialectic based on ἔνδοξα is far from satisfactory. His assumption of a fundamental antagonism between these two methods seems to me to be quite artificial. He seriously underestimates the power of Aristotle's dialectic to criticize prevailing moral conceptions. Even if reputable beliefs constitute the court of last appeal for settling moral disagreements, it is not just the statistical frequency of support but also the more or less fundamental role in the total system of beliefs that determines the degree to which a belief is reputable. Aristotle's dialectic has the power to distinguish our most basic convictions from those that are less basic and correct the latter in the light of the former in much the same way as the Socratic elenchus. The difference between the Socratic and Aristotelian methods is not in the critical power but in the fact that the elenchus is directed to an individual opponent

whereas Aristotelian dialectic is more communal. This criticism of Vlastos' account of the elenchus has been made in different forms by many commentators. The revised version of his paper on the elenchus published in the *Socratic Studies* reveals that he had already made minor concessions to his critics. It is a pity that he did not live long enough to give further consideration to these questions.

Despite these criticisms it should be admitted that Vlastos' two books are major achievements in their field. They contain brilliant pieces of scholarship the lasting value of which is quite independent of the controversial general framework. The discussions on irony, piety, the rejection of retaliation, and the role of virtue and happiness in Socratic-Platonic philosophy are particularly enlightening. *Socrates* and *Socratic Studies* will remain necessary equipment for all scholars of ancient philosophy for a very long time.

*Juha Sihvola*

RICHARD BUXTON: *Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994. XVI, 250 p. ISBN 0-521-32978-7. GBP 35.00 (hb). ISBN 0-521-33865-4. GBP 12.95 (pb).

Ever-growing interest in Greek religion and mythology has recently given rise to high-quality contributions addressed not only to specialists but to a wider audience as well. In addition to the book under review we may mention Ken Dowden's *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (1992) and the brand-new English translation of Fritz Graf's *Griechische Mythologie* (originally 1985). Common to all these treatments is that they contribute to the liberation of Greek myth from the realm of just entertaining stories, deformed history or literary fiction, and recognize its value as a mode of thought by which the Greeks constantly described, organized and motivated the realities of their everyday life.

The present study especially stresses the principle that myths are to be interpreted within their determined historical and cultural context. This is a principle more than familiar to those who (like the present reviewer) have followed the work of Italian historians of religions such as Brelich, Bianchi and Sabbatucci. The Italians, however, do not receive any special acknowledgement in Buxton's book which appears more inspired by other eminent contemporary mythologists (Vernant, Detienne, Vidal-Naquet, Calame, Graf, Burkert, Bremmer).

The author approaches the contexts of mythology from various angles. Particularly rewarding is the section where the myth-telling situations (the narrative contexts) are discussed. In fact, this is a surprisingly little studied territory, despite its fundamental importance. One obvious reason for this is that myths have been predominantly read in the form of written texts and treated in terms of philological-historical *Quellenforschung* or literary criticism. However, recent discussions of the im-