

IAKOVOS VASILIOU: *Aiming at Virtue in Plato*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-86296-7. 311 pp. GBP 65 (hb).

*Aiming at Virtue in Plato* by Iakovos Vasiliou is a fascinating book. It contains innovative and important insights into Plato's ethics. Vasiliou emphasises the difference of his approach as compared to recent scholarship. His point of departure is that he does not approach Plato's ethics within a eudaemonist framework. He does not deny that Plato's ethics is eudaemonist but emphasises that "in the texts themselves the overwhelming focus is on virtue as a supreme end and aim." (p. 282) Concerning virtue, Vasiliou argues that Plato focuses on two complementary questions: 1) aiming questions – questions of the supreme aim of our actions – and 2) determining questions – questions of how to achieve these aims. Vasiliou argues convincingly that Socrates is committed to the supremacy of virtue (SV) as an answer to the aiming question. On the one hand, he does not have an answer to the corresponding determining question: how to act virtuously.

Vasiliou aims at relative neutrality regarding the various "isms" of Platonic scholarship although he clearly has a research orientation based on an analytical Anglo-American philosophical study of Plato. He argues (p. 18–21) that neither any particular approach to the dialogue form nor any grand theory about Plato, like developmentalism, is likely to furnish detailed and substantial answers to questions about virtue in Plato. Regarding chronology, Vasiliou also tries to avoid commitments and treats the dialogues in a moderately unitarian way. Vasiliou's interpretative tool in reading Plato's dialogues is a distinction between the inner and outer frame of a dialogue. The outer frame refers to the relation between Plato and his readers and the inner frame(s) to the relations between the characters of a dialogue. This approach provides some useful insights particularly into Vasiliou's interpretation of the *Republic*.

Vasiliou discusses dialogues which he considers to be most important from the point of view of virtue. He has a separate chapter on *Apology* and *Crito*, and another on *Gorgias*, while his main emphasis, more than half of the text after the introduction, is dedicated to the *Republic*. He writes: "It is difficult not to read almost all of Plato's dialogues either as preludes to the *Republic*, or as subsequent comments and reflections on it" (p. 166). In chapter four, a shorter treatment is given to the *Euthydemus*, the *Protagoras* and the *Euthyphro*. The discussion of the dialogues is acute and on a high level both philosophically and philologically. It is well versed concerning analytic Anglo-American scholarship and engages with an impressively wide range of textual disputes. At least discussions of the *Crito*, the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* make a lasting contribution to the scholarship on those dialogues.

The distinction between aiming questions and determining questions concerning virtue is the key idea of the book. Socrates is committed to SV but does not know what virtue is. This creates the problem of how Socrates makes actual decisions about what is virtuous in the here and now. Vasiliou thinks that this is a focal question in the *Apology* (for the jury) and in the *Crito* (for Socrates). He writes that Socrates is led either by his divine sign or by the argument that seems best to him at the time. A third option is found in the Callipolis of the *Republic*, where one can follow the guidance of philosopher-kings. The critical question in Vasiliou's analysis of the *Crito* is how such arguments are construed in the absence of the divine sign and the philosopher-kings. He argues (against some recent interpretations of the dialogue) that *Crito*'s position is quite reasonable and that the argument of the Laws basically shares Socrates' views and that the arguments are cumulative. His interpretation appears to be quite plausible.

In the *Apology* (and also some other dialogues, like the *Gorgias*) Vasiliou's distinction between aiming and determining questions works nicely in explaining Socrates' occasional avowals of knowledge in the context of his general disavowal of knowledge concerning virtue. According to Vasiliou, Socrates is fully committed to SV and is even fully conscious of this commitment (p. 27). On the other hand, concerning the determining question of what virtue actually is, he is completely ignorant. The distinction also gives Vasiliou the possibility of presenting SV as a very plausible principle. SV does not mean that one's life, wealth, or appetite gratification never enters ethical analysis. According to Socrates, they should have no room in determining the aiming principle – the aim is always virtue. However, when determining what is virtuous in each case these other considerations may be relevant.

Vasiliou argues that Socrates builds SV on two premises about the soul. Firstly, it is an independent locus of harm and benefit (like the body) and secondly the benefit to our soul is much more valuable than that to our body. A third building block is what Vasiliou calls the habituation principle. It is the principle that if one does virtuous actions one's soul becomes virtuous, while if one does actions that aim to make money one's soul becomes more competent in making money. As Vasiliou emphasises, the principle is well known in the case of Aristotle and it should receive more scholarly attention in the case of Plato, too.

The habituation principle leads Vasiliou to emphasise virtuous actions as opposed to being virtuous. This leads him to oppose many of the mainstream interpretations of Plato's ethics. Vasiliou's interesting interpretation of the *Republic* is critical in this respect. He argues against the prevalent view that the *Republic* abandons an act-oriented account of virtue in favour of an agent-oriented one. He argues that Socrates deals with SV in books I–IV and VIII–IX, and determining questions in books V–VII.

Vasiliou argues that the basic strategy of the *Republic* is to defend SV by showing that acting justly benefits us by benefitting the soul because justice is a type of health for the soul. In an interesting and innovative interpretation he gives much more weight to the education of the guardians in books II and III in the overall argument of the *Republic* than they are generally taken to have. He takes these two books to explain how acting virtuously benefits our soul by explaining the habituation principle, which is crucial for Socrates' argument concerning SV. Vasiliou argues that we should also interpret what happens in *Republic* IV in the light of this project of defending SV. In that book, Socrates tells us what it is to be just when he gives his harmony account of justice. Once we learn what it is to be just, we can see that it represents somehow the health of the soul and that this is the reason why people benefit when they become just.

The fundamental determining question "what is justice?" can only be solved by the philosopher-kings who have access to Forms, according to Vasiliou. Based on this knowledge they can answer the determining questions concerning virtue, including the question of which actions are just. The question of the relation between the Form of Justice or the philosopher's knowledge of justice and Socrates' presentation of it in the earlier books is very interesting for any student of the *Republic*. Vasiliou's interpretation of the *Republic* is interesting and coherent. His view of the Callipolis where the ordinary citizens are very much like the Socrates of the dialogues – committed to SV and disavowing knowledge of virtue and having guidelines set by the philosopher-kings (like the divine sign did for Socrates) – is a very attractive picture to any interpreter who wants to see Plato's vision of society in the *Republic* in a positive light.

*Aiming at Virtue in Plato* is definitely worth reading for any serious philosophically oriented student of Plato. Vasiliou has an ambitious and somewhat controversial main theme, which he manages to keep in focus throughout while simultaneously engaging in many scholarly disputes with scrupulous attention to detail.

Eero Salmenkivi

RICHARD SORABJI: *Gandhi and the Stoics: Modern Experiments on Ancient Values*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012. ISBN 978-0-19-964433-9. XIV, 240 pp. GBP 20.

A distinguished scholar in ancient philosophy, Richard Sorabji broadens his gamut innovatively in this treatise on Mahatma Gandhi and Stoicism. Pointing out that Gandhi was not influenced by the Stoics, Sorabji juxtaposes him with them in word and conduct, bridging adroitly with Christian (esp. Tolstoy), Hindu (esp. *Bhagavadgita*) and other material that did influence him. This subtle yet flexible comparative approach is justified and consistent all through the book. "Where he was actually influenced, he still reinterpreted almost everything he read. The result is that ideas inspired by Western influence may finish up looking rather unlike the originals, whereas ideas that have merely *converged* with the Western ones may be less altered" (p. 5).

Paralleling the idea of a Stoic sage, Gandhi emerges as a *philosopher* in the ancient, original sense of the word. And while a modern man, he looks the part considerably. He even dresses like the strictest of the ancient. The effect is almost as if Sorabji had revived some major figure of the messianic stock to carry out large-scale experiments on internalized philosophy. The Stoics profit by gaining proof of feasibility of their ideas. Possibly even greater are the heuristic merits: "Gandhi also provides a picture of what the Stoic sage might be like at least in certain respects if he ever existed" (p. 45). But the benefit is mutual. The Stoics for one thing provide a philosophical background and a frame of reference especially apt to Gandhi, at least in the West, as West is where the author's expertise and readership reside. Moreover, there *are* striking doctrinal similarities, most notably *indifference* and avoidance of general rules as a consequence of a shared focus on the individual. The conformity seems significantly more pronounced and relevant than any differences, of which, according to Sorabji, views on private property are the most conspicuous.

An introductory chapter that outlines the philosophical Gandhi and his influences is followed by ten chapters concentrating on interrelated and overlapping philosophical topics like emotional detachment and love of family and mankind, detachment and politics, freedom, nonviolence, human rights, *svadharma*, general moral rules, conscience, private property and depoliticization. Some chapters deal more with the Stoics, some with Gandhi. A concluding chapter returns to the thematic of the introduction with an evaluative review of Gandhi as a philosopher. Nonviolence is undoubtedly the most recurrent topic throughout. The Sanskrit word *svadharma*, 'individual duty' turns out to be central in Gandhi's thought and very useful in coping with consistency issues and real-life diversities.

Dispassion is presumably the most estranging aspect of Stoicism for the comfortable European and bothers also the author especially when it comes to disinterest in one's own family. While moral philosophy often amounts to little more than the systematic idealization of personal preferences, Sorabji delightfully comes to see military necessity behind this awkward