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978-0-521-11355-7 - Ancient Models of Mind: Studies in Human and Divine Rationality

Edited by Andrea Nightingale and David Sedley

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction**Andrea Nightingale and David Sedley*

I

This book started life at a conference which its two editors organized to honour Tony Long, better known to the world of scholarship as A. A. Long. It was held at his own university, the University of California, Berkeley, in September 2007, to mark his 70th birthday. “Models of Mind” was known to us as the working title of a long-term project of Long’s own, and seemed to us to capture a theme that has, more than any other, been the hallmark of his truly seminal contribution to the study of ancient philosophy over four decades and more.

Tony Long was born in England in 1937. Since 1991 he has been Irving Stone Professor of Literature in the Department of Classics at Berkeley, where he is also an affiliated professor in the departments of Philosophy and Rhetoric. But his education and the first part of his professional career were set elsewhere. He took his BA and PhD degrees at University College London. There, among many leading scholars who taught and influenced him, special mention must be made here of David Furley, whose exceptional incisiveness and intellectual clarity in the study of ancient philosophy clearly passed from teacher to pupil. However, Long was not yet specializing in ancient philosophy, and his doctoral thesis (completed in 1964 under T. B. L. Webster) was in fact on Sophocles, later becoming the basis of his highly regarded 1968 book *Language and Thought in Sophocles: A Study of Abstract Nouns and Poetic Technique*.

It was during his tenure of his first three posts – the first at Otago, New Zealand, the second at the University of Nottingham, and the third back at his alma mater – that Long developed his interest in Stoicism. This started from a study of Plutarch’s anti-Stoic works, and led on, in his early years as a lecturer at UCL, to his organization of a seminar on Stoicism at the Institute for Classical Studies. That period saw the emergence of some of his own classic papers on Stoic ethics, logic, and epistemology, and

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the publication of his 1971 edited anthology, *Problems in Stoicism*, covering all the major areas of Stoic thought, which nearly four decades after its publication continues to be regularly consulted and cited.

During the 1970s, the study of Stoicism enjoyed a remarkable renaissance. In this period, Stoicism was, almost for the first time, taken seriously as philosophy, on a par with the work of Plato and Aristotle. The rehabilitation of Stoic ethics that was a key part of this renaissance was due more than anything else to Tony Long's seminal studies, and to now classic studies by others that he put on the map by the timely publication of *Problems in Stoicism*. During his career he has published on a comprehensive range of ancient philosophers and topics, but a very substantial proportion of his total output has been on Stoic ethics, including approximately thirty articles, his scholarly edition (1992, with Guido Bastianini) of the Hierocles papyrus, and his brilliant 2002 book on Epictetus. It is no exaggeration to say that, cumulatively, these studies have transformed the scholarly landscape.

It was also during the seventies, 1974 to be exact, that Long published his celebrated book *Hellenistic Philosophy*. Frequently reprinted, it has also been translated into seven languages. Thirty-five years after its original publication, it remains a uniquely accessible, lucid, and inspiring introduction to its subject. It has been complemented since by the two-volume sourcebook *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (1987, co-authored with David Sedley). His other publications on Hellenistic philosophy are too numerous to describe here, but two in particular can be picked out, because they exemplify his special gift for shedding light on the period by focusing on its heritage from earlier traditions. "Heraclitus and Stoicism" (1975–76) and "Socrates in Hellenistic philosophy" (1988) remain, decades after their publication as journal articles, the classic studies of their respective topics.

After UCL, Long spent the years 1973–83 as distinguished holder of the Gladstone Professorship of Greek at the University of Liverpool, and as a key member of the Manchester–Liverpool ancient philosophy group, whose other regular participants included A. C. Lloyd, Henry Blumenthal, and George Kerferd. Long moved to Berkeley in 1983, and has remained there to the present.

It is impossible to do justice in a short space to the extraordinary range and depth of Tony Long's publications, which are listed in full at the end of this volume. In addition to his huge contribution to ancient philosophy, he has never abandoned his original interest in Greek literature, on which he has published a steady stream of articles over the years. Satisfyingly, his literary and philosophical skills came together in two classic articles

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on Homer, one on the Homeric value system (1970), the other on Stoic readings of Homer (1992).

Tony Long has received widespread recognition for his exceptional contribution to scholarship. Many honours could be listed, but we will restrict ourselves here to two tokens of his extraordinary standing among his peers: his election in 1992 as a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, and in 2009 as a member of the American Philosophical Society.

II

At the September 2007 conference in Tony Long's honour, there were ten speakers. Of these, nine were former students of Long's, all now holding posts in high-ranked universities and colleges. The tenth was Alan Code, who had been Long's close colleague at UC Berkeley for many years. The papers of these speakers have evolved into ten of the twelve chapters in the present volume. (The remaining two chapters have been contributed by us, the two editors, ourselves former graduate students of Long.) Ten others of those who attended the conference generously acted as commentators on the papers. These were Keimpe Algra, Ruby Blondell, Chris Bobonich, Myles Burnyeat, John Ferrari, Mary-Louise Gill, Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, Brad Inwood, Richard McKirahan, and Henry Mendell. We express our warm thanks to all of these; to the UC Berkeley Department of Classics and the Townsend Center, which generously funded the event; and finally, to Michael Sharp, Joanna Breeze, and Nigel Hope, and two anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press.

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In this collection of studies, three familiar Greco-Roman standards of rationality are placed under joint-examination: (a) the divine intellect; (b) a perfected human being, whether this be Socrates or the idealized sage postulated by Stoicism; and (c) the inherent powers and structure of human reason.

The search for a model of intellectual understanding is an early and recurrent feature of Greek thought. It is visible, for example, in the early Greek thinkers (we here heed Tony Long's plea not to call them "Presocratics") Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. These authors all contrast the perfect knowledge possessed by the gods with the blinkered limitations of the human perspective, adding their own expressions of relative optimism or pessimism about our capacity to transcend the latter and aspire

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to the former. In Plato the same motif becomes the ideal summed up as “becoming as like god as is possible”; and he is followed in this by nearly all subsequent philosophers until the end of antiquity, including thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Epicurus. There can be little doubt that not only the earliest but also the most enduring model proclaimed for the human intellect is god.

The chief competing paradigm is the human sage. Although the tradition of the revered sage is no doubt as old as civilization, its penetration into philosophy is due above all to two figures, one of them elusive and legendary, the other very much flesh and blood. The former is Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), whose superior understanding was linked in particular to his reported recollection of many past lives. The latter is Socrates, whose name will be omnipresent in this book. Condemned to death by an Athenian jury in 399 BCE, Socrates became the first philosophical martyr, a fact which bulks large among the reasons for his subsequent canonization as a philosophical paradigm. Stoicism, which emerged a century after Socrates’ death, is in large measure an attempt to construct a formalized Socratic philosophy; the figure of the sage, around whom much Stoic theorizing is built, is recognizably modelled on Socrates.

Although he seems to have deliberately stayed at the margins of political activity, Socrates portrayed his own conduct in Athens as a divinely ordained mission to make the citizens better people. There was therefore little doubt that the paradigm of a human life that he bequeathed was a deeply moral one. But the burning question of how others might set about achieving the same understanding for themselves led Socrates’ followers, and above all Plato, to look for the ultimate sources of his insights. Once these were located in a higher reality (in Plato’s case, the “Forms”), it became legitimate to wonder whether perfect human happiness might not lie in enjoying pure contemplative knowledge of that reality, rather than in the same knowledge’s application to the here-and-now. Whether the chosen paradigm turned out to be god or a perfected human being like Socrates, the question remained: in what aspects is this ideal model to be emulated? Whether the imitation was seen as intellectual, moral, or both in equal measure is a question that has to be addressed independently for each thinker or school, from Plato to the Neoplatonists.

A third perspective, complementary to the first two, finds its model of mind not in paradigmatic individuals but in the powers of reason as such. Reason, whether found in god, in a Socrates-figure, or in you or me, is essentially one and the same power, albeit developed to different degrees. The philosopher’s task is therefore to uncover the structure of reason itself,

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in order to put it on a completely firm basis and to progress towards realizing its full capacity. This is what led both Aristotle and the Stoics to develop their own respective systems of logic and of scientific reasoning.

We have chosen to put the essays in chronological order, starting with Socrates and ending with Plotinus. In different ways, these contributions reflect at least one of the three issues listed above: (a) the divine intellect; (b) a perfected human being, whether this be Socrates or the idealized sage postulated by Stoicism; and (c) the inherent powers and structure of human reason. After listing and describing these essays, we will briefly discuss the ways in which they interact with one another. As we will suggest, each essay shows how at least one ancient philosopher explores and, in some cases, posits a particular “model of mind.”

- (1) Andrea Nightingale, in “Plato on *aporia* and self-knowledge,” argues that Socrates’ “disavowal of knowledge” in the early dialogues evinces a specific kind of self-knowledge. In Plato’s mature work, the philosophical “self” – and thus “self-knowledge” – is achieved by the interaction of the individual person on earth and his or her incorporeal (and impersonal) “reason”, which contemplates the Forms.
- (2) Sara Ahbel-Rappe, in “Cross-examining happiness: reason and community in the Socratic dialogues of Plato,” defends an unorthodox interpretation of Socrates’ ethics, arguing against “egoistic eudaimonism.” Socrates, she argues, places others on a par with himself as the intended beneficiaries of moral choice. This non-egocentric ethical philosophy is based in part on an interpretation of Socrates’ “divine mission” in the *Apology* and other early dialogues.
- (3) Kathryn A. Morgan’s “Inspiration, recollection, and *mimēsis* in Plato’s *Phaedrus*” addresses the status of madness and divine inspiration in Plato’s cognitive hierarchy. She links “inspiration” to the Platonic ideal of imitating the divine. Plato, she argues, turned away from traditional religion and towards the realm of the “divine” Forms in his efforts to conceptualize the “*enthousiasmos*” of the philosopher.
- (4) David Sedley, in “Plato’s *Theaetetus* as an ethical dialogue,” maintains that in Plato’s own taxonomy this work counts as ethical because its topic, knowledge, is an intellectual virtue, most fully captured in the dialogue’s Digression, where intellectual divinization emerges as the truest realization of “justice.” This ultimate convergence between intellectual and moral virtue in Plato’s ethical thinking is then further explored through the case of temperance, *sōphrosunē*, a virtue in which young Theaetetus is declared to have progressed at the end of the dialogue.

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- (5) Allan Silverman, in “Contemplating divine mind,” focuses on the theme of godlikeness as Plato’s and Aristotle’s ethical ideal, comparing their respective conceptions of god (in Plato’s case, the creator god of the *Timaeus*) and drawing the consequences for their respective views of an ideal human life. The chapter is notable for the sharp contrast it makes between Plato and Aristotle on this score – the ideal Platonic life does not, as often thought, involve a flight from the human world, but Aristotle’s may do so. He bases this in particular on the key role of the Good in the Plato’s conception of the highest learning.
- (6) Alan Code, in “Aristotle and the history of skepticism,” moves the spotlight onto distinctively human rationality. Aristotle, he argues, made a constructive use of skeptical puzzles in his efforts to find secure first principles for knowledge. Code highlights Aristotle’s rejection of the requirement that knowledge must always be backed up with proof or demonstration; indeed, even puzzles that have not been fully solved do not present an obstacle to the search for principles.
- (7) Stephen White’s “Stoic selection: objects, actions, and agents” scrutinizes one aspect of the nature of moral thinking in Stoic ethics. Starting from what may seem a terminological technicality concerning the Stoic concept of moral “selection,” he develops a novel analysis of the mode of deliberative reasoning that, at least in its ideal form, characterizes the Stoic sage.
- (8) Richard Bett, in “Beauty and its relation to goodness in Stoicism,” keeps the focus on the Stoic value system. He shows how two apparently distinct kinds of beauty, that of soul and that of body, are – when viewed from a cosmic perspective – inseparable in Stoic eyes, given that the paradigm of beauty is the supremely rational beauty of the world itself. Bett also shows that the two kinds of beauty coalesce at a lower level, in Stoic erotic theory.
- (9) Luca Castagnoli, in “How dialectical was Stoic dialectic?,” examines a style of rational thought regarded as distinctively human – although, as he points out, it was said that, *if* the gods used dialectic, it would be that of Chrysippus. His question is whether, as in the case of its direct forerunner – Socratic dialectic – any significant part is played in Stoic “dialectic” by interpersonal interrogation, as the literal meaning of the term implies. He defends a strongly positive answer, based on close examination of the Stoic self-refutation argument against the denial of proof.
- (10) James Ker, in “Socrates speaks in Seneca, *De vita beata* 24–28,” offers a detailed examination of how Seneca, as a Stoic, appropriates the name

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and voice of Socrates to provide a moral paradigm fit for his own Roman context. Ker focuses in particular on *De vita beata*, arguing that Seneca uses Socrates to argue for various Stoic positions, including the Stoic doctrine of “preferred indifferents.”

- (11) Gretchen Reydam-Schils, in “Seneca’s Platonism: the soul and its divine origin,” charts Seneca’s incorporation into his Stoicism of motifs drawn from Plato’s dualism of divine and human realms. She pays particular attention to the Platonic antitheses between human and divine reason, the intelligible and sensible worlds, and body and soul, showing how Seneca, by exploiting the resources of Stoicism, is able to maintain a careful distance from contemporary Platonism.
- (12) Finally, Kenneth Wolfe, in “The status of the individual in Plotinus”, maintains the focus on this divine–human dualism by examining how Plotinian metaphysics divinizes the human rational self, linking it to the transcendent realm through a doctrine of individual forms. Plotinus, he claims, argued that there were forms for all human individuals; knowing the essence of a particular sensible human being, then, entails knowing his or her intelligible form.

Essays 1–5 and 11–12 deal with the interrelation between (a) the divine mind and (c) human reason. The remaining essays focus mainly on (c) human reason taken in its own right. But (b), the paradigmatic sage, identified with or inspired by the figure of Socrates, is a prominent linking theme, especially in chapters 1–4 and 7–10. Other recurrent motifs include the requirement of self-knowledge (chapters 1, 4, 12), and the constructive role of puzzlement in intellectual progress (chapters 1 and 6).

All who have contributed these chapters were eager to give a concrete expression to the special affection in which they hold Tony Long, as a scholar, as a teacher, and above all as an exceptional human being. He has done a huge amount for his pupils to make them what they now are, but has never expected that they should adopt his own intellectual style. All have benefited from the model that he has provided, as well as from his unfailing advice and support both during their graduate studies and afterwards. But he has always encouraged independence and diversity. It is to be hoped that this book will serve as a testament to his success.

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CHAPTER I

*Plato on aporia and self-knowledge**Andrea Nightingale*

I am honored to dedicate this essay to my dear friend and mentor, Tony Long. This small offering stands in for my great admiration for this man. I thank Tony for his generosity, his brilliance, and his greatness of soul.

Consider the famous Delphic pronouncement, “know thyself.” In archaic and classical Greece, self-knowledge or *sōphrosunē* involved an understanding of oneself in relation to others, both human and divine.¹ The man who “knows himself” understands human limits and does not attempt to overstep these boundaries. The *sōphrōn* knows his place in relation to the gods and understands his station in society.² Challenging traditional views, Plato offers new, philosophical “selves” who achieve different modes of self-knowledge. In the early dialogues, Plato portrays a philosopher who comes to know himself even as he seeks for truths that he cannot fully grasp.³ And, in the middle dialogues, Plato introduces an incorporeal soul that contemplates the Forms and understands itself in relation to these beings. This transmigrating soul, however, is incarnated in a specific person in a given place and time: the incarnated soul shuttles back and forth from a personal life on earth to an impersonal “vision” of higher realities. This “double life” of the soul generates a new kind of self. In these texts, Plato transforms the Greek command to “know thyself.” As Long

¹ For general studies of *sōphrosunē* in the context of classical Greek literature, see North 1966 and Rademaker 2005.

² As Annas 1985: 121 puts it: “in the ancient world the individual personality was not the relevant self to know. What is relevant is knowing myself in the sense of knowing my place in society, knowing who I am and where I stand in relation to others. The self-knowledge that is *sōphrosunē* has nothing to do with my subconscious and everything to do with . . . ‘my station and duties.’”

³ See Annas 2002 for a criticism of the early–middle–late division of the Platonic dialogues. I do not want to comment on the dating of the dialogues. For my purposes, what matters is that the “early” Socratic dialogues are ethical and the “middle” dialogues introduce incorporeal beings (the Forms and the soul), and set forth a metaphysical system that places the soul in relation to the Forms.

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has taught us, the Greek philosophers offered radical reconceptualizations of the “self.”⁴ I want to explore the new “selves” that Plato dramatized and conceptualized in his explorations of self-knowledge.

SOCRATIC SELF-KNOWLEDGE

In Plato’s early dialogues, Socrates famously claimed that he did not possess knowledge. In recent scholarship, many have argued that Socrates spoke truthfully (rather than ironically) in making this assertion. But, in some dialogues, Socrates advances ethical claims and propositions that he appears to “know.”⁵ In order to account for Socrates’ avowals and disavowals of knowledge, scholars have argued that Socrates uses the word “know” in two different senses. Vlastos – whose argument has been especially influential – differentiates between “expert knowledge” and “elenctic knowledge.” He identifies “expert knowledge” as deductive: truth is deduced from fundamental, self-evident principles and is both necessary and indubitable. As Vlastos claims, Socrates does not possess “expert knowledge” but rather “elenctic knowledge,” which is attained when an argument or proposition has withstood repeated elenctic testing. Unlike “expert knowledge,” “elenctic knowledge” is always subject to refutation in future discussions, and is thus provisional and open to doubt. Vlastos argues that Socrates possesses this non-expert, “elenctic knowledge,” even as he persists in searching for something more certain.⁶

Many scholars have accepted the distinction that Vlastos draws between expert and non-expert knowledge, though they have raised questions about the nature of “expert” knowledge. Nehamas and Woodruff, for example, reject Vlastos’ claim that “expert knowledge” is deductive. Rather, they identify “expert knowledge” as the “technical knowledge” exhibited by craftsmen.⁷ “Technical knowledge” is based on principles and techniques that can be tested, explained, and taught. On this account, Socrates denies that he possesses “technical knowledge” of virtue. Nehamas and Woodruff, however, agree with Vlastos that the practice of the elenchus leads to the wisdom that Socrates *does* possess: an “elenctic knowledge” that is

⁴ See Long 1992 and 2001 on the “self” in Greek philosophy.

⁵ See Wolfsdorf 2004 for a detailed discussion of the six “sincere” Socratic “avowals of knowledge” in the early dialogues. As he claims, one cannot simply lift these “avowals” out of their literary context – each claim has its own hermeneutic and epistemological status.

⁶ Vlastos 1994: 42–48.

⁷ Nehamas 1999a: 73–80 and *passim*, 1999b: ch. 2, Woodruff 1992. See also Reeve 1989: 37–45 and Roochnik 1996: ch.4.

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non-expert and non-technical.⁸ It is this kind of knowledge that allows Socrates to advance certain propositions that he takes to be (provisionally) true. In the *Apology*, for example, he claims that “to do injustice and to disobey a superior, whether human or divine, is bad and shameful” (29b). And, as he says in the *Crito*, “one should never return an injustice or harm a human being, no matter what one suffers at their hands” (49c).

I agree with Nehamas and Woodruff’s conception of “expert” and “non-expert” knowledge. I also accept that Socrates possesses non-expert, “elenctic knowledge” of some principles and propositions that he has repeatedly tested in debates. But, as I will suggest, Socrates possesses another kind of knowledge that cannot be identified as “elenctic.” I identify this as “self-knowledge,” which is achieved in part by way of the elenchus but is not itself the object of elenctic inquiry.

In order to explicate this third mode of knowledge, let us consider the distinction between (1) the judgment of another person’s epistemic condition, and (2) self-reflexive awareness of one’s own epistemic condition.

How do we judge another person’s epistemic condition? In examining Socrates’ case, for example, we scholars have asked whether he possesses knowledge of the virtues that he seeks. To make this judgment, we must first examine his claims that he does not possess knowledge. Does Socrates make this claim sincerely or ironically? If we decide to take him at his word, we must ask whether the knowledge that he disavows is deductive knowledge, “craft” knowledge, or some other form of knowledge. And we must also investigate Socrates’ “non-expert knowledge” of certain ethical propositions, which he repeatedly affirms. If we agree that Socrates does have some kind of knowledge of these propositions, we must then identify this mode of knowledge: is it “elenctic knowledge,” true belief, or some other form of knowledge? Scholars have rightly posed these questions, but have not addressed the fact that we are judging Socrates’ epistemic state *as outsiders*.⁹ As external judges, we determine whether Socrates’ disclaimers of knowledge are sincere, and we decide on what sort of knowledge he possesses. As outsiders, we investigate Socrates’ dialectical inquiries and

⁸ Reeve 1989: 37–53; Woodruff 1992; Nehamas 1999a: 73–80; cf. Irwin 1977: 89 and 1995: ch. 2, esp. 27–29, who argues that the difference is not between two kinds of knowledge but rather between knowledge and true belief.

⁹ Clearly, we are judging the epistemic status of fictional character. But, for all intents and purposes, we use the same “external” mode of judgment when we assess real people. A literary text does of course offer a (large or small) set of “clues” about a character; but we look for these same kinds of clues in our dealings with actual people.