

## Introduction

### SOCRATIC INTELLECTUALISM

The term “Socratic intellectualism” has come commonly to be used to describe either of two somewhat related features of Socratic philosophy, which may be called “virtue intellectualism” and “motivational intellectualism.” Socrates is generally, though perhaps not universally, regarded as a *virtue intellectualist* because he believed that all virtue is in some sense constituted by a certain kind of knowledge. In this respect, Socrates differs from Plato and Aristotle, who recognized aspects to virtue that were non-cognitive, such as having one’s appetites or passions in the proper order. Socrates is generally, though, again, perhaps not universally, regarded as a *motivational intellectualist* because he believed that all human actions are in some way directly or immediately the result of what those acting *think* is best for them. Socrates’ moral psychology is “intellectualist” because he is committed to the view that every ethical<sup>1</sup> failure involves some *cognitive* failure, for each ethical failure is the direct product of some false belief about what is good for the agent of the failure.

<sup>1</sup> Many ethical theorists these days find it useful to distinguish “moral” from “ethical” concerns, and the argument has been made (e.g. in Anscombe [1958] and, more recently, in Williams [1985]) that the ancients actually did not even have a concept of morality. Whether or not this is true, nothing we say in this book commits us to imputing any *moral* point of view to Socrates. Our focus, then, will be entirely on Socratic *ethical* thought and the psychology of agency (“moral psychology”) associated with that ethical thought.

In most of this book we use “Socratic intellectualism” to refer to motivational intellectualism. Although we take up virtue intellectualism in the penultimate chapter, our primary goal is to articulate and defend a more or less new conception of Socratic motivational intellectualism. We can only say that it is “more or less new” because we are not the first to present an alternative to what had been the received view. Credit for that must go to Daniel Devereux, who first explored it in a magnificent paper published in 1995. It is fair to say that from the time we first read Devereux’s paper we have spent most of our common research on Socrates seeking to refine and develop the view Devereux presented. This is not to say, however, that the view we defend in this book is exactly the same as what Devereux first proposed. In recent years, however, and after considerable debate between ourselves, our view is now, we think, importantly different from Devereux’s. We shall underscore these differences as our discussion unfolds. Nonetheless, the impact of his 1995 paper on us could hardly be exaggerated.

Since Devereux’s 1995 paper first forced us to re-evaluate our thinking about Socratic moral psychology, we have published a number of papers on various aspects of this topic. As we noted, however, our thinking about Socratic intellectualism, especially our thinking about how Socrates conceives of the differences between desires, has changed markedly as we have continued to think about it, and so it would be a mistake to think that one understands the argument of this book merely through familiarity with what we have said previously about this topic. In some cases, the revisions of our earlier work are not only numerous, they also involve significant modifications to the positions we advanced. Moreover, our attempt here is to offer more complete arguments than we have previously. Finally, by putting them together as we have, we hope to show how a coherent, single account emerges that

better explains what Socrates says about motivation than do rival accounts. Specifically, the following works appear in more or less revised form as sections of this book:

- “Apology of Socratic studies,” *Polis* 20, 2003: 112–31, is revised in Sections 1.1 through 1.5.
- Selections from “The myth of the afterlife in Plato’s *Gorgias*,” which appeared in M. Erler and Luc Brisson, eds. *Gorgias-Menon: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum* (International Plato Studies 25), Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2007: 128–37, are revised in Section 4.2.3 and the Appendix.
- “Moral psychology in Plato’s *Apology*,” forthcoming in *Reason and Analysis in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Essays in Honor of David Keyt*, eds. G. Anagnostopoulos and F. Miller, Jr., supplementary volume of *Philosophical Inquiry*, is revised in Section 2.2.
- Selections from “Is the prudential paradox in the *Meno*?” *Philosophical Inquiry* 30, 2008 (festschrift for Gerasimos X. Santas, ed. G. Anagnostopoulos): 1–10 and “The Socratic paradoxes” (in *The Blackwell Companion to Plato*, ed. H. Benson. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006: 263–77) are pieced together in revised form in Section 3.2.
- Selections from “Socrates on akrasia, knowledge, and the power of appearance,” which appeared in C. Bobonich and P. Destrée, eds. *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*. Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill (*Philosophia Antiqua* series, vol. 106) 2007: 1–17, are revised in Sections 3.3–3.4.
- “Socrates on how wrongdoing damages the soul,” *Journal of Ethics* 11, 2007: 337–56 is revised in Section 4.1.
- Selections from “The problem of punishment in Socratic philosophy,” in M. McPherran, ed. *Wisdom, Ignorance, and Virtue: New*

*Essays in Socratic Studies*, Academic Printing and Publishing, special issue of *Apeiron* 30, 1997: 95–107 and “Incurable souls in Socratic philosophy,” *Ancient Philosophy* 22, 2002: 1–16 are pieced together in revised form in Sections 4.2.1–4.2.2 and 4.2.4–4.2.7.

- “Socrates on educating the appetites and passions,” *International Journal of the Humanities* 2.3, 2006: 1999–2008 is revised in Chapter 5.
- “Socrates and the unity of the virtues,” *Journal of Ethics* 1, 1997: 311–23 is revised in Section 6.2.
- “Making things good and making good things in Socratic philosophy,” in T. M. Robinson and L. Brisson, eds. *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides, Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum Selected Papers* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2000), pp. 76–87 is revised in Section 6.3.
- “Socratic and Platonic Moral Psychology,” forthcoming in J. Hardy and G. Rudebusch, eds. *Grundlagen der Antiken Ethik [Foundations of Ancient Ethics]*, Vandenhoeck is revised in Section 7.1.

#### TEXTS, TRANSLITERATION, AND TRANSLATIONS

Citations of Platonic texts throughout the book are to the *Oxford Classical Texts*, and are given in standard Stephanus page, section, and line number of the Greek text. We have elected to use transliteration throughout, as our discussion of the Greek is almost always limited to one or two words at a time. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own. Those of passages from the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito* are taken directly from the translations we provided in Brickhouse and Smith (2002).

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THIS PROJECT

We have been writing about Socratic philosophy together since the late 1970s. Consequently, one might well wonder how we could have convinced ourselves that we really had anything new to say about the subject. Frankly, thanks to Devereux's path-breaking 1995 paper, we came to the conclusion that our previous work had uncritically endorsed a mistaken picture of Socratic moral psychology. We call this picture "the standard intellectualist conception" of Socratic moral psychology because, as far as we can tell, some version of this conception was held by every scholar working on Socrates until Devereux published his paper in 1995.<sup>2</sup> So, in a certain sense, what we are doing in this book is the result of a critical engagement with what has seemed to us to be (at least one of) the inadequacies of our earlier work.

Not only was our acceptance of the standard view uncritical prior to reading Devereux, it was also well behind the times, for Terry Penner had already begun publishing what has now become an extraordinary series of papers in which the clearest and most compelling version of the standard conception of Socratic moral psychology is articulated. One element of Penner's recent work underscored the inadequacies of our own earlier presentation of the same view: Penner (in this case working with Christopher Rowe [Penner and Rowe 1994]) argues against the version of the standard view defended by Gerasimos X. Santas (1979: 185–9), whose

<sup>2</sup> In earlier publications, we called the view we criticize in this book "the traditional view," but one of the many authors who has argued for that view has objected to this description (see Rowe 2007: 21 n. 9), though without explanation for why he finds it objectionable. By calling the view we criticize in this book "traditional," we meant only to indicate that it was the view that has been widely shared by scholars for decades now. Perhaps "standard view" will seem less objectionable – in any case, we only mean to indicate the extent to which this view has been accepted and promoted by scholars generally.

influence on us was very great. According to Santas, Socrates believes that everyone always desires what they think is good. Penner, by contrast, insists that it is not what is *thought* to be good that Socrates regards as the target of all desire, but rather what is *actually* good. In Chapter 2, we review the two ways of thinking about good as the object of desire and explain why we have been won over by Penner's formulation. What we defend here, however, is importantly different from Penner's position because we now reject a point that is at the heart of the standard conception of Socratic intellectualism.

Even as we completed our 1994 book, a few topics continued to puzzle us because they did not seem to square with the picture of Socratic philosophy we had developed over the years. One was particularly troubling: we found several passages in the early dialogues in which Socrates seemed to recognize at least some value in certain sorts of punishments that seemed to us to be poorly suited to changing beliefs in any direct way, as the standard view seemed to require. Not long after we began to take this problem more seriously, and attempted to formulate an explanation of how Socrates could accept a role for such punishments in his ethical philosophy, Devereux's paper appeared in print, and the view it presented and the texts it offered in support of that view were illuminating to us, to say the least. Suddenly, it seemed to us that the problem of punishment could have a clear and plausible solution. As we developed that solution in our first paper on this topic, we realized that the new picture Devereux had offered of Socratic moral psychology also allowed us to reveal and resolve several other inadequacies in the standard picture of Socratic moral psychology: we believed that we could now provide more adequate explanations of Socrates' recognition of what Penner has called "diachronic belief-akrasia," and of Socrates' claim that wrongdoing damages the soul, and of his claim that there could be ruined or incurable souls (even in the

afterlife), and of certain things he said about education (especially early education).

In our 1994 book, we argued against a view defended by several scholars that, in the discussion with Callicles, Plato puts a new and very different moral psychology into the mouth of Socrates without in any obvious way marking that new view off from the moral psychology that had been at work in his earlier discussions with Gorgias and Polus. The awkwardness of the view we criticized, from the point of view of the composition of the dialogue, had always troubled us and although we were not actually yet ready, as it turns out, to rebut all of the arguments that could be made in its favor, we never accepted it. Also troubling to us was the consequence of that view regarding whether the *Gorgias* was really appropriate for the study of Socrates, the research project to which we have been dedicated for so long. If Plato really were suddenly putting a new and decidedly different moral psychology into the mouth of Socrates in the final section of the *Gorgias*, then whatever else Socrates said in that section of the dialogue was now tainted as evidence for the philosophy of Socrates. It seemed to us that doubts about validity of one section of the dialogue would potentially cast doubt on other sections as well. In our own research, however, the *Gorgias* (especially the section including Callicles) was so rich in content that much of the philosophy we found in the other early dialogues would be more difficult to understand well without the insights we could gain from comparing what we found in these other dialogues to the lively discussions of the *Gorgias*. Needless to say, we were troubled by the threat of losing what seemed a rich resource for the philosophy of Socrates.

The threat became even more acute with the publication of Mark McPherran's important (1996) book on Socratic religion. Although not primarily concerned with Socratic moral psychology, McPherran

argued that the view of the afterlife presented in the last section of the *Gorgias* was distinctly un-Socratic. Because there was at least a trace of the same view expressed in the speech of the personified Laws in the *Crito*, McPherran's argument led him also to express doubts about whether the speech of the Laws should be understood to express Socrates' own opinions. Subsequent books on the *Apology* and *Crito* have hardened these doubts into doctrine. More recent books, by Roslyn Weiss (1998) and James Colaiaco (2001), flatly deny that Socrates accepted what he presents as the words of the Laws of Athens, and this denial leads to what we believe is an implausible interpretation of the rest of the dialogue and, most importantly, of Socrates' conception of the citizen's duty to obey civil law. These new trends in interpretation threatened to fragment what we had all along supposed was the basic unity of view within the dialogues appropriate to the research project of understanding the philosophy of Socrates.

Although we have rejected this understanding of the *Crito* elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> we provide a direct reply to McPherran's specific challenge in the appendix to this book. We note also that at least one of the two authors of this book has decided that the *Gorgias* does, in the end, provide one indication of being transitional. That evidence is to be found in its critique of poetry, though happily on grounds other than the picture of moral psychology given in that dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Even so, we both continue to think that the moral psychology in the *Gorgias* (and also in the *Meno*, which is also usually treated as transitional) is entirely consistent with what may be found in any of the so-called "early" or "Socratic" dialogues of Plato, and we hope the analyses and the many citations we make to other "early" or "Socratic" dialogues that we offer throughout the book make the case for this consistency compellingly. Indeed, we find (and cite)

<sup>3</sup> For which, see Brickhouse and Smith (forthcoming) and Brickhouse and Smith (2006).

<sup>4</sup> For this argument, see N. D. Smith (2006–2007).



sufficient evidence in dialogues other than the *Gorgias* and *Meno* to make the case we seek to make in this book.

Apart from these specific issues, in recent years there has been a dramatic rise in expressions of skepticism about the general approach to reading Plato's dialogues that we have shared with others in the study of Socrates. In 1996, Charles Kahn published a new form of the old "unitarian" approach to Plato's dialogues. According to Kahn, all of the so-called "Socratic dialogues" represent only Plato's thinking and should not in any way be taken as evidence for the thought of Socrates as a thinker independent of, and prior to, Plato. Moreover, Kahn held that all of the views expressed in the "Socratic dialogues" are not only consistent with the doctrines Plato develops in the great, so-called "middle period" dialogues; the questions explored in the "Socratic dialogues" intentionally point the reader to those "middle period" doctrines as the answers to those questions. At the same time, others were attacking other assumptions vital to Socratic studies, such as hypotheses about dating or grouping the dialogues, hypotheses about the appropriateness of interpreting material in one dialogue in the light of some passages in another dialogue, and so on.<sup>5</sup> As the magisterial but controversial work of Gregory Vlastos, which in many circles simply defined the study of Socrates, came under increasing criticism, some scholars concluded not just that Vlastos had failed adequately to answer the many questions his work addressed, but that the very questions he sought to answer were themselves senseless, because they were based upon the indefensible presumption that a "philosophy of Socrates" could be found in certain Platonic dialogues. As more and more influential scholars began to express similar views, we were forced to re-evaluate our own opposing position. As we looked carefully at

<sup>5</sup> For several discussions indicating such controversies, see Annas and Rowe (2002).

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the grounds for all the new skepticism about Socratic studies, however, we found the arguments of the skeptics ultimately unpersuasive. As a result of this study, then, we find ourselves again engaged in the research program of trying to understand and explain the philosophy of Socrates. We offer our defense for this reading of certain of the Platonic dialogues against some of its most recent critics in Chapter 1 of this book. This, then, is the brief history of what led us to write yet another book about Socrates.