for our basic question of whether Socratic method is constructive philosophically. Representing the 'continental' approach, Gonzalez uses the (possibly spurious) *Clitophon* and the *Euthydemus* to argue that Socratic method is 'essentially protreptic', while in a discussion of the *Lysis*, Renaud suggests that, along with its logical function, the elenchus aims to humble the individual. Heavily influenced by the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, P. Christopher Smith argues that the *Philebus*' real theme is philosophical method. Gerson's comments on all three essays raise salient objections on behalf of a standard developmentalist view of the Platonic dialogues.

Like the essays in the third section, three pieces on the *Charmides* (by Schmid, Press, and Carhvalho, followed by a critical response by Waugh) suggest that Socratic method is not constructive of moral doctrine in the way that Vlastos claimed. Carvalho could be said to speak for all three when he concludes that 'the formation of [a] virtuous character, not the formation of a positive moral doctrine, is the constructive effect of the Socratic method' (p. 267). It seems to me that our authors stand in danger of drawing a false distinction, and of misunderstanding the nature of Vlastos's position. Vlastos took Socrates to be attempting to prove moral truths, but this search for moral truths is compatible with an attempt to reform his interlocutors' character. Why must examining his interlocutor's moral beliefs and making some progress toward constructing a moral view exclude Socrates' reforming their character? Moreover, if we are to do full justice to the repeated suggestion in Plato's early dialogues that the arguments give Socrates, and not only his interlocutor, good reason to accept the conclusions and act on them, we may do well to take seriously the suggestion that Vlastos's work has demonstrated the current philosophic significance of the Socratic elenchus as 'our best hope for moral justification in an imperfect world' (M. Nussbaum, *Journal of Philosophy* XCIV [1997], p. 37).

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## *CRATYLUS*

D. SEDLEY: *Plato's* Cratylus. Pp. xii + 190. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Cased, £40, US$60. ISBN: 0-521-58492-2.

Sedley begins by posing a question—'Why did Plato write dialogues?'—and suggesting an answer: because of a growing belief that conversation, in the form of question and answer, is the structure of thought. Philosophical questioning and answering may take place internally, in a single individual's mind, or in conversation between individuals; Platonic question-and-answer sequences may be taken as dramatizations of Plato's own thinking. S.'s reading of the *Cratylus* illustrates this view of Platonic dialectic in detail. More particularly, S. shows how the *Cratylus* may be taken to dramatize Plato's sorting out mentally the two major components in his intellectual make-up: the views of Cratylus, the first major influence on Plato, and those of Socrates.

S. also asks himself where the *Cratylus* fits into the overall chronology of Plato's career, answering 'not in any one place' (p. 7). S. places the 'hard core of the dialogue as we have it' (p. 14) not later than the middle of Plato's middle period, but argues that there are traces of later revision, perhaps from about the time of composition of the *Sophist*. Except for two passages which S. considers to belong properly to the original

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composition rather than our version (the passage at 437d10–438a2 preserved only in part of the manuscript tradition, and 385b2–d1), he finds it impossible to know whether any single sentence belongs to the original composition or not (p. 16). He imagines some Platonic scholars finding this conclusion disconcerting, but responds that it is 'enormously liberating': 'Here, for once, we have a Platonic text which is debarred from forcing chronological or developmental questions on us, instead leaving us to free to enjoy the *Cratylus* for what it is: an intriguing and challenging display of Plato's mind at work'.

There is presumably irony in the implication that one could not consider a Platonic dialogue in this way unless questions of chronology and development could be dismissed as largely unanswerable—especially as the book inaugurates a series, entitled Cambridge Studies in the Dialogues of Plato, each volume of which 'will aim to throw light on such questions as why its chosen dialogue is composed in the complex way that it is, and what makes this unified whole more than the sum of its parts' (back cover). True to this conception, and although he broaches the question of chronology early on, what S. offers is an interpretative account of the *Cratylus*. He refers frequently to other Platonic dialogues, as well as to Aristotle or Presocratics, but not to trace Plato's development of particular ideas as much as to shed possible light on points of difficulty in the *Cratylus* or to demonstrate that Plato took seriously elsewhere ideas that surface in the *Cratylus* but have not generally been taken there as serious Platonic thoughts.

Nearly two-thirds of the dialogue is taken up with the construction of etymologies. Many of these seem to us ridiculous, and there are indications within the dialogue that Socrates does not take himself entirely seriously here; Platonic scholars have generally held the suggestions of irony to be directed at the etymologies themselves. It is key to S.'s reading that the etymologies are *not* meant as a joke or satire, but form the 'true heart of the dialogue' (p. 24), a thesis S. had already argued in *JHS* 118 (1998), 140–54, and which receives more detailed treatment in this book.

As well as arguing that Plato intended even the etymologies that seem fanciful to us to be taken seriously, S. suggests how the seemingly more outrageous instances might have been fostered:

> We would do well to treat the discipline explored by Plato as more closely analogous to modern literary criticism than to modern etymology. As in literary criticism, an interpretation which detects a complex web of meanings may well earn higher praise than one which settles for a relatively transparent reading. (p. 37)

By contrast with the etymological decipherments of the *Cratylus*, S.'s interpretation of the dialogue is remarkably straightforward. The etymologies are taken at face value, as meant by and large to be 'exegetically correct': they uncover the ideas about the nominata held by our forebears who coined the words. In addition, S. argues that the forebears are given credit for a great deal of 'philosophical correctness' too: their views about the natures of the nominata were often insightful, especially in the field of cosmology. Although etymology of words is ultimately put in its place as not the most reliable guide to the nature of things, it retains a more limited value for uncovering views of forebears who were often right about things (more in cosmology than in ethics), and therefore for giving clues that may point us in the right direction about things. S. defends this straightforward reading against suggestions that the whole etymological enterprise is undermined within the dialogue, either by the

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ridiculous nature of the etymologizing generally or at more specific points (e.g. the discussion of σκληρότης at 434c–435b; see pp. 138–46).

Since my interest in the *Cratylus* is linguistic rather than philosophical, I leave philosophers to debate S.'s interpretation and its philosophical implications. Perhaps I may dwell instead on the fact that if the etymologies are indeed meant seriously, they provide far clearer insight into the etymological science of Plato's day than they do if satirical and unquantifiably exaggerated. Questions, and the possibility of answers, arise. If, as S. argues, Plato thought words were coined by specific individuals, and that etymological decoding was 'cognitive archaeology' (p. 32), does this conception of the point of etymology survive into later tradition, or did it disappear? It is often said that ancient etymologies aim to uncover synchronic relationships between words, not the historical origins of words (e.g. J. Lallot in *Revue de philologie* 3rd series, 65 [1991], 143; P. H. Matthews in G. Lepschy [ed.], *History of Linguistics*, ii [London and New York: Longman], 25); does this idea need rethinking or did etymology become synchronically conceived at some point after Plato? Furthermore, S.'s interpretation opens the possibility that serious study of the *Cratylus* etymologies may yield insights into the alterations early etymologists allowed words to undergo: is it really the case that 'anything goes', or are there any restrictions or at least preferences, such as one may find in at least some Hellenistic and later etymologists' conceptions of alterations or πάθη?

The book is lucidly written and masterfully combines accessibility to readers without Greek with close attention to questions of language and text. Platonic scholars will welcome this careful and learnedly documented exposition of S.'s view on a controversial subject. More general readers will find here a book that well complements reading of the *Cratylus* itself and provides a way into its appreciation.

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## *THEAETETUS*

D. SEDLEY: *The Midwife of Platonism. Text and Subtext in Plato's* Theaetetus. Pp. x + 201. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. Cased, £30. ISBN: 0-19-926703-0.

In this important new book on Plato's *Theaetetus*, David Sedley offers a subtle and original interpretation of the dialogue. Instead of treating it as an aporetic, critical dialogue in which Plato rejects, or at least re-evaluates, his middle-period metaphysical and epistemological doctrines, especially those of the *Republic*, S. proposes to read the *Theaetetus* as furthering the same agenda. His reading offers a story about what we are supposed to learn from puzzling through the hard problems and arguments of the *Theaetetus*. It thus stands in contrast with some of the most important recent commentaries on the *Theaetetus*, such as those by Cooper, McDowell, Burnyeat, and Bostock,[1] which are methodologically less confident about what conclusions we should draw from the dialogue as a whole.

[1]J. M. Cooper, *Plato's Theaetetus* (PhD Dissertation Thesis, Harvard, 1967; New York and London, 1990); J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973); M. F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis, 1990); D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1988).

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