of Coriolanus's distaste for politics in suggesting that he is "[i]n effect a moral idealist" who "has no concern for prudence or calculation" (131). Is Coriolanus's putative idealism "moral" primarily by virtue of its refusal of calculation or prudence (and politics) or in its positive concern for nobility? Blits mentions the possibility that Coriolanus's spirited interest in punitive justice may interfere with his love of nobility (131). Is there in spirit a more general tension between the pursuit of justice and that of nobility? An extended discussion of the ambiguous alliance between moral idealism and spirit (and the defeat of that alliance in the fifth act of the play) would have been welcome in this context. The range of topics Blits covers throughout the book, however, is so extensive that one can hardly complain.

Overall, this book offers a model of how to read Shakespeare that should serve as a subtle reproach to less careful readers of *Coriolanus* and an invitation to those who wish to consider in depth the philosophic and political questions that the play poses in all their stubborn complexity.

–Suzanne Smith

## SILENCING XANTHIPPE

Lisa Pace Vetter: *"Women's Work" as Political Art: Weaving and Dialectical Politics in Homer, Aristophanes, and Plato* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005. Pp. x, 178. $60.00, cloth)

DOI: 10.1017/S0034670507000782

In *"Women's Work" as Political Art*, Lisa Pace Vetter pursues a theory of a deliberative democratic practice that is attentive to feminist concerns. To this end, Vetter produces an original interpretation of Socratic dialectic. She finds Socratic dialectic to be more compatible with feminist accounts of deliberative democratic practice than previously thought.

Vetter arrives at an expansive conception of Socratic dialectic through a dramatic reading of Plato's *Phaedo.* She places her interpretation of Socratic dialectic as weaving alongside three equally novel interpretations of earlier conceptions of weaving found in ancient Greek literature. Vetter argues that Socratic dialectic builds upon and improves the characterizations of dialectic offered by Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey,* Lysistrata in Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, and the Stranger in Plato's *Statesman.* Vetter portrays Penelope and Lysistrata as thoughtful individuals who are catalysts for action and change, and actors themselves. Their forms of dialectic do not, however, avoid tyranny and homogeneity. Even worse, the Stranger's excessively abstract understanding of dialectic stifles human striving, according to Vetter. In contrast, Socratic dialectic, as a mode of philosophic inquiry practiced in the *Phaedo*, harmoniously weaves together human plurality, human limitation, subjectivity, and particularity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000782 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Vetter overturns the view of Socratic dialectic as a formal inquiry that starts from a hypothesis, moves to higher hypotheses, and eventually reaches the Form of the Good. She persuasively shows Socrates approaching inquiry quite informally and conversationally. Socratic dialectic includes diverse interlocutors and incorporates their subjective, worldly concerns.

Vetter also sees in Socratic dialectic an alternative to antifoundationalist accounts of democratic deliberation because the former aims (but never arrives) at complete, universal knowledge of foundational tensions. For this reason, Vetter claims Socratic dialectic does not foster nihilistic despair. It promotes philosophic courage as political and social virtues. Interlocutors strive for a coherent whole, but their conversations convey the tensions between particular elements and the whole. Socratic dialectic accommodates philosophy yet avoids essentialism and stagnation because it is an on-going conversation that aspires to greater, albeit incomplete, knowledge of fundamental tensions.

Fundamental tensions, Vetter argues, are the stuff of politics, and they are what philosophical inquiry should take up. These tensions include the objective and the subjective, philosophy and politics, the transcendent and the human, the community and the individual, and theory and practice. In her view, to ignore these tensions or to subsume one of them under another results in a nonphilosophic way of life and a tyrannical approach to politics.

Vetter persuasively articulates how Socratic dialectic meets some challenges set out by feminism and discursive democratic theory. However, her analysis fails to engage with significant incompatibilities between Socratic dialectic and key feminist accounts of deliberative democratic practice.

Like many feminist, critical theorists, Iris Marion Young (1949–2006) urged democratic deliberation toward praxis, not philosophy (*Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). She argued that participants should discuss present problems and that these discussions would foster self-development and independence. Participants may appeal to universal principles, but they make these appeals to "solve" present problems justly from across situated positions. Socratic dialectic, by contrast, ultimately remains activity geared toward philosophy. It prioritizes the striving for greater knowledge of tensions over conversations that seek to determine what should be done. Vetter would have done well to address squarely how the aims of Socratic dialectic differ from the aims of critical feminist theorists, such as Young.

The legitimacy of the outcome of any democratic discussion depends on whether the discussion includes the expression and criticism of all significantly affected, argued Young. Vetter claims that diverse opinions find expression in the *Phaedo*. But Vetter's dramatic reading fails to consider adequately why Socrates forces his wife Xantippe to leave. Crying and excessively emotional, Xantippe does not engage in Socrates' final conversation about his life and his death (and life and death more generally). Surely,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000782 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Socrates' wife is significantly affected by this death and should, therefore, participate. Vetter's failure to account adequately for the silencing of Xanthippe in the body of her text is troubling.

Democratic deliberation requires individuals to engage with one another on equal terms. Each participant has something to teach and learn, and each participant struggles to persuade others. Young, however, noted that individuals located in superior structural positions frequently retained unequal privilege and authority within conversations, thereby undermining equality. Their biased accounts of fundamental tensions, the best life, or human nature remain unchallenged. Vetter's account of Socratic dialectic does not squarely address the undeniable inequality that exists between Socrates and his interlocutors. One does not get the sense from Vetter's account that Socrates learns anything from his interlocutors. Instead, Socrates remains the supreme interlocutor. He ultimately gives his inferiors knowledge about death and the good life, however incomplete.

And, the *Phaedo* hardly represents a struggle between interlocutors. Usually, we find Socrates' interlocutors deferentially responding to contradictory and perhaps even specious arguments with statements like "Yes, Socrates, I agree," "I think what you say is entirely true," or "Of course, Socrates." We might conclude with Vetter that Socrates' interlocutors are forgetful, or have a lot to learn. Nevertheless, given the unequal structural relation between Socrates and his interlocutors, it is fair to ask, as Young probably would have, whether these statements truly reflect what Socrates' interlocutors were thinking. They might tell a story about structural disempowerment or deference.

Finally, Young maintained that discursive democratic theory privileges logical and moderate speech. In the *Phaedo*, Vetter interestingly shows that Socrates uses diverse styles of expression. But once again, Vetter omits where Socrates rejects "immoderate" or highly emotional speech. As Socrates drinks the poison, his male interlocutors weep. "What is this strange outcry?" asks Socrates, "I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not offend in this way." With this reprimand, Socrates' interlocutors refrain from tears. Socrates does not accommodate this speech, and Vetter would have done well to discuss this adequately.

Lisa Pace Vetter's refreshing argument in *"Women's Work" As Political Art* would have been even richer if it more squarely addressed the dramatic details in the *Phaedo* that undermine the compatibility between Socratic dialectic and contemporary feminist accounts of deliberative democratic practice. The inclusion of these disturbing details in the body of her text would have better enabled readers to reflect upon the capacity of Socratic dialectic to improve contemporary debates.

–Monicka Patterson-Tutschka

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670507000782 Published online by Cambridge University Press