

BOOK REVIEW

Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy. By LORRAINE SMITH PANGLE. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 276. Hardcover, \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-226-13654-7.

This book provides readings of Plato's *Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Protagoras*, and *Laws*. The introduction usefully outlines a number of different ways in which the relations between knowledge, virtue, and happiness may be understood in these works and argues that there is textual evidence to support *all* of them. Virtue may be a means to happiness, the core of happiness, or supremely good, even if not leading to happiness. Further, knowledge may be necessary but not sufficient for virtue, sufficient for virtue but not necessary, both necessary and sufficient, or of a kind that involves both intellectual and practical ability.

Chapter 1 explores the question of the relation between virtue and happiness in the *Apology*. Smith Pangle shows that Socrates here presents a whole variety of attitudes to virtue, which are incompatible with one another. Yet, far from resolving existing tensions, Socrates essentially highlights them, and the reader is invited to engage with them.

Chapter 2 turns to the *Gorgias*, which Smith Pangle sees as refining the claims of the *Apology*. Here too the author brings out, rather than explaining away, the tension between the various approaches to virtue. Socrates' first defense of virtue to Polus, for example, shows how knowledge of the good is required in order to benefit oneself, whereas later on in the dialogue the praise of virtue is no longer based on purely selfish reasons. A discussion of the Callicles section would have been useful here, since this too has much to contribute to the question of the relation between virtue and happiness.

Chapter 3 argues that the *Meno* shows the limitations of the view that virtue is knowledge: if virtue were plainly a body of knowledge, it would be easy to bestow it on another; but in fact knowledge is opposed by the passions. Smith Pangle goes on to suggest multiple competing interpretations of the main project of the dialogue: one could argue that Socrates realizes that Meno is unfit for philosophy and so "gives him a pious story" about the acquisition of virtue (128); or

that a clear conclusion is lacking so that Meno may be left to think for himself; or, finally, that the work serves as Plato's indictment of Socrates for not taking the character of his interlocutor into account. But Smith Pangle does not favor or elaborate on any one of these accounts.

Chapter 4 turns to the *Protagoras*. Like the *Meno*, here too we find the suggestion that the passions affect us by clouding our judgment at least temporarily. Smith Pangle argues that Socrates is justified in suggesting that ignorance is the cause of what the many call "being overcome by passion," on condition that what is good can be identified and weighed correctly. She shows how the subrational aspects of, say, the virtue of courage, may be seen as aspects of wisdom. On this understanding of courage, wisdom is not just cognitive, but includes non-cognitive elements, such as strength of soul. This view finds me very much in agreement, but it is not new.¹

The final chapter turns to the *Laws*, in which Smith Pangle identifies the view that virtue is the highest good and a means to other goods, as well as the view that virtue is sufficient for happiness. Further, there is an acknowledgment that legislation will not succeed in making citizens fully virtuous, but that it can at least consistently remind them of the value of virtue. Smith Pangle discusses Plato's views on restorative—rather than retributive—justice at some length, and finds them impracticable.

The book is missing a conclusion, which would tie together the various strands of interpretation and clarify the author's position. Resisting the temptation to impose on the texts a resolution of existing tensions is an attractive methodological approach. The study could be enhanced by at least some discussion of preexisting debates and scholarly interpretations, and a more consistent focus on the ways in which the various interpretations of the claim that virtue is knowledge, as outlined in the introduction, are brought out in the dialogues.

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¹ See, for example, Segvic, H. (2000) "No One Errs Willingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism," *OSAPh* 19: 1-45.