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Review [of Marguerite Johnson, Harold Tarrant
(ed.) *Alcibiades and the Socratic Lover-Educator*]

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The present volume has its origin in a symposium: “Socrates, Alcibiades, and the Divine Lover/Educator” held at the University of Newcastle in December 2008. Most but not all of the papers have as their focus *Alcibiades I* (a dialogue whose attribution to Plato remains a matter of dispute); several others deal with other, post-Platonic texts that directly or indirectly bear on the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, antiquity’s most famous example of an eroticized relationship between teacher and student. While contemporary sensibilities are apt to condemn such a relationship as inappropriate at best, and predatory at worst, the author of the dialogue takes it to be fundamental to philosophical education.

In “The Role of Eros in Improving the Pupil, or What Socrates Learned from Sappho”, Marguerite Johnson develops the suggestion of Maximus of Tyre that Socrates and Sappho shared the same erotic pedagogy. Johnson thus sees the relationship of Platonic philosophical love as a development of the Greek poetic tradition. For both Sappho and Socrates, the art of love is taught through performing “the rites of Eros”; for both, the pursuer becomes the pursued. Socrates’ understanding of love has, however, moved beyond Sappho. For Socrates, unlike Sappho, the successful erotic performance involves restraint; only through moderation can the lover be protected from the wounds of which Sappho sings. Further, unlike the beloved of Sappho, the ultimate object of Socrates’ love is impersonal.

In “Socrates and Platonic Models of Love”, Dougal Blyth argues that in *Lysis*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus*, Socrates is never portrayed as an actual lover, since he is already wise, and as such is self-sufficient. Socrates rather play-acts at love, with an eye to inculcating wisdom in the other, not out of a personal desire for the beauty of the other. This is because, as Blyth interprets him, Plato believes that one at a higher level of love would be immune to the charms of the objects of lower levels of love. The texts however need not be read as making such strong claims. Blyth cites *Symp.* 210c-d as evidence that the lover of knowledge would feel no attraction to a particular beautiful body or practice (36-7), but the text rather says that such a lover would find it something “small” (*smikron ti*) which is not quite the same thing. Even within the *Phaedrus* (250b), the physical beauty of a particular is said to be such that the Form of Beauty is visible through it. This suggests that the philosopher may still be somewhat attracted to a particular beauty, even if he or she understands it as derivative and unstable.

Victoria Wohl’s “The Eye of the Beloved: Opsi and Eros in Socratic Pedagogy” contrasts the account of eros presented within *Alcibiades I* with that of Xenophon’s Socratic writings. *Alcibiades I* takes eros as fundamentally narcissistic; the eye of the lover, which represents the soul engaged in contemplation, ultimately comes to see itself in the beloved. The lover’s eye is active; the beloved is the instrument that makes this activity possible. For Xenophon, in contrast, the beloved is the crucial agent, and it is the beloved’s nature that determines whether the lover is injured or made beautiful through imitation of the beloved. (On this understanding, *Alcibiades* in *Symposium* expresses an account of eros closer to that of Xenophon than to that of Plato.) Wohl shows how these accounts of eros are in accordance with the their authors’ respective accounts of vision. For Plato, vision is extramissive; it occurs through the agency of the one seeing. Wohl draws attention to several crucial passages in Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.3, 3.11, *Symp.* 4.11-28) which take vision to be intromissive, taking in aspects of what is seen, and thereby being affected by them. Wohl’s original insights draw fruitful new connections; hers is the most interesting and important paper in the collection.

In “Plato’s Oblique Response to Issues of Socrates’ Influence on Alcibiades: An Examination of the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*”, Reuben Ramsey quite rightly remarks that, for many years after Socrates’ death, the story of Alcibiades was the prime example of how Socratic teaching can go wrong, and any defense of Socrates as a teacher needed to diagnose exactly what happened. Different Socratics did this differently. Protagoras and Gorgias present Socrates as a well-meaning teacher, who was simply unable to counterbalance the effects of other, sophistic, teachers, and of Athenian society as a whole.

In “Socratic Ignorance, or the Place of the *Alcibiades I* in Plato’s Early Works”, Yuji Kurihara makes a number of

epistemological distinctions in the service of arguing against Platonic authorship of *Alcibiades I*. Kurihara argues that within the recognized Platonic corpus, Socratic ignorance is never a matter of knowing what one does not know; it is rather a matter of not believing that one knows what one does not know. (Kurihara makes several -- to my mind -- ad hoc moves to deal with the apparent exception of *Charmides* 167a1-8.) *Alcibiades I*, however, is not clear on the distinction; Socrates insists that Alcibiades must come to know what it is that he does not know (118a15-b2). On this basis Kurihara concludes that the author cannot be Plato. There are troubles with Kurihara's analysis. If Plato does indeed make a distinction between not thinking one knows what one does not, and knowing what it is that one does not know, then he must think that it is possible to have no belief concerning whether one has an item of knowledge or not, or to believe that one does not have such knowledge, yet nonetheless have this knowledge. (Otherwise, being in this cognitive state would be sufficient evidence for knowing what one does not know.) So Plato on this account must hold that there is knowledge of which we are not aware. Plato explicitly recognizes unconscious knowledge only in the case of the implicit knowledge that all have but only some come to "recollect". But this cannot be the sort of knowledge that is at issue here, for since everyone has it, there would be neither cause nor opportunity to come to have a true belief that one does not have it.

Joe Mintoff devotes "Did Alcibiades Learn Justice from the Many?" to exploring whether Alcibiades could have defended his assertion in *Alcibiades I* that he learned what is just from society at large. The challenge is to counter Socrates' argument that because there is dispute about ethics (and there is not about linguistic practice), and because whenever there is dispute we seek guidance from the expertise of the few, in the realm of ethics one must heed only the opinion of a few. Against the objection that experts do not always agree, Mintoff defends the Socratic view by pointing out that in such cases the disagreement is unusual and does not concern foundational matters. Anthony Hooper's "The Dual-Role Philosophers: An Exploration of a Failed Relationship" takes Socrates at his word he asserts that both he and Alcibiades need to search for wisdom. It is Alcibiades' failure to appreciate the need within the lover that explains his failure in the role of the beloved student.

In "Authenticity, Experiment or Development: The *Alcibiades I* on Virtue and Courage", Eugenio Benitez ably counters an influential paper by Smith¹ that argued against the authenticity of *Alcibiades I* on the basis of multiple points of inconsistency with recognized early dialogues of Plato. Benitez suggests that there is no need to classify *Alcibiades I* as an early dialogue: it may well be transitional. Benitez focuses on the question of the unity of virtue. *Alcibiades I* distinguishes the knowledge of what to do in war with the courage by which one is willing to do what one ought. As such, it can be seen as a step on the way to the *Republic*'s account of courage as an affective state, not primarily a matter of knowledge.

In "Revaluing Megalopsuchia: Reflections on the *Alcibiades II*", Matthew Sharpe rejects the view that, in distinguishing between madness and ignorance, and in speaking ill of *megalopsuchia*, the author is mounting an attack against cynicism. Cynic views are nowhere suggested within the dialogue; the accounts of madness and *megalopsuchia* in question arise as specific points meant to address the sorts of misunderstandings and character flaws displayed by Alcibiades, not the Cynics.

A number of the preceding papers have focused on the question of what Socrates as teacher of Alcibiades does. Does Alcibiades learn wisdom and truth by seeing them in Socrates, or is his education simply that of an elenchus, questioning, and dialectical inquiry that could be provided by a teacher who is not also an object of love? Harold Tarrant's "Improvement by Love: From Aeschines to the Old Academy" squarely faces the issue. The first option was that advocated by Aeschines, and is also that of Olympiodorus in his commentary on *Alcibiades I*. Tarrant endorses Olympiodorus' interpretation. The elenchus has a preparatory role that precedes Alcibiades' truly learning: once a student like Alcibiades can see the divinity at the core of Socrates' being, there is no more need for such dialogue. Tarrant shows that such an understanding of the teacher/student relationship was common in the school culture of Plato's third successor Polemo. According to this understanding, reflected in both *Theages* and *Alcibiades I*, philosophical progress comes about by virtue of three elements: the physical proximity of student and teacher, joint engagement in philosophical inquiry, and the will of the gods. This is important evidence that the dialogue derives from the Academy of Polemo.

Fergus King's "Ice-Cold in Alex: Philo's Treatment of the Divine Lover in Hellenistic Pedagogy" takes a step away from considering literary and philosophical treatments of Alcibiades as such, and considers the nature of Philo's antipathy to male same-sex intimacy. Philo undertakes to justify Torah law as exemplifying Greek norms. This is why Philo's primary objection to male homosexual activity was its violation of Greek notions of masculine honor. In "Proclus' Reading of Plato's Sokratikoi Logoi: Proclus' Observations on Dialectic at *Alcibiades* 112d-114e and Elsewhere", Akitsugu Taki shows how Proclus gives us an example of a doctrinal reading of a dialogue that does not simply take Socrates to be a mouthpiece for Plato's thought. On Proclus' reading, when Alcibiades is engaging in philosophical discussion with Socrates, he comes to project *logoi* out of his own soul. On this interpretation, the true interlocutor of Alcibiades, and of anyone engaging in philosophical discussion, is oneself. François Renaud's "Socrates' Divine Sign: From the Alcibiades to Olympiodorus" defends the interpretation of Socrates's daimon as it is depicted in *Alcibiades I* offered in Olympiodorus' commentary. Socrates' daimon is the universal intellect as made apparent to the

individual. Neil Morpeth's "The Individual' in History and History 'in General': Alcibiades, Philosophical History and Ideas in Contest" considers Alcibiades as a problematic example of one who undertakes to bridge the private concern of philosophical understanding and the public concern of politics. He makes some loose associations with others in the history of the West who have similarly tried to bridge the two realms.

The volume concludes with two appendices concerned with the dating of the dialogue. One, by Elizabeth Baynham and Tarrant, looks to internal historical references which suggest that the dialogue dates from Plato's later years, or to the years after his death. The second considers the stylometric evidence, which again is inconclusive, but provides fairly strong evidence against attributing it to Plato early in his career.

Although the essays in this volume vary in interest and innovation, together they are evidence of the ongoing renewed interest in *Alcibiades I* and its relation to other dialogues dealing with similar themes. The insights of the best of these essays will no doubt invigorate and inform future study of the dialogue.

Notes:

1. A. N. D. Smith, "Did Plato Write the *Alcibiades I*?", *Apeiron* 37.2 (2004), 93-108.

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