

## REVIEW OF BOOKS

JOHNSON (D.M.) **Xenophon's Socratic Works** (Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies). Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xii + 330. £130. 9780367472047.  
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It is probably fair to say that modern interest in Xenophon has been unevenly spread across his oeuvre, with the history-oriented (*Hellenica*, *Anabasis*) and literary works (*Cyropaedia*) garnering more attention than his philosophical output. Recent research has, however, served on the one hand to de-marginalize Xenophon vis-à-vis Plato and, on the other, to undermine traditional boundaries between his own writings, complicating the whole question of genre classification. Dave Johnson's latest contribution to the continuously expanding field of Xenophontic studies is set against the background of this dynamic literary landscape. With concentration on the (conventional) Socratic works, he sets out to demonstrate that Xenophon is an indispensable source for our understanding of the life and philosophy of Socrates.

It bears mention that for Xenophon's original readership, and for audiences through most of antiquity, the exercise would have been unnecessary. Hellenistic philosophers in the main valued Xenophon as a vital Socratic witness, while, in his *Lives*, Diogenes foregrounds the relationship between the two men, even placing Xenophon's *Life* immediately after Socrates' in his biographies of the philosophers. As Johnson points out, a major cause of our author's relative neglect in the 20th century as a source for Socrates is the prominence of Plato, whose brilliant portraits of the great philosopher in his dialogues speak more to the tastes of the modern academy. The pathways that underlie Johnson's thesis navigate Xenophon's overtly philosophical works, starting with the most prominent of these, the *Memorabilia*, the author's recollections of Socrates. Characteristically, Johnson carefully situates this in meaningful philosophical and literary contexts, allowing us to appreciate Xenophon's objectives and craft more fully. Subsequent chapters explore the *Apologia*, *Symposium* and *Oeconomicus*, and interspersed among these are thematic chapters on the defence and moral psychology of Socrates, respectively.

In a book full of thoughtful analyses, one of Johnson's most important contributions is his emphasis on the collaborative nature of Xenophon's portrait of Socrates. Instead of setting up a choice between the versions of Xenophon and Plato, as the Socratic Question prompts us to do, a more revealing approach, he argues, is to take Xenophon's representation as subtly complementary to his counterpart's, indeed to the versions painted by all of the Socratics:

Xenophon does not, I maintain, present us with a free-standing, rival portrait of Socrates, but rather aims to add to his readers' knowledge of Socrates. He does not reject what others have said about Socrates, but shows Socrates discussing different things, or at least taking a different approach to shared topics, sometimes by correcting or critiquing what others had said. And often ... those corrections are more a matter of emphasis and presentation than substance. (4)

Amongst other important contributions is Johnson's challenging of the prevailing view about the chronology of Xenophon's Socratic writings. Most commentators, including myself and David Thomas, my co-editor on *The Landmark Xenophon's Anabasis* (New York

2021), have considered that the *Apologia* preceded *Memorabilia*, but Johnson presents a strong case for the opposite on the basis of an implied reading order:

If we read *Apology* first ... there is no need for the opening question posed by the *Memorabilia*—what arguments enabled the prosecution to persuade the Athenians to execute Socrates—because Socrates had already all but executed himself with his boasting in the *Apology*. Thus, the *Memorabilia* ends by addressing the question, and the audience, that the *Apology* began with. (62)

A further strong argument is that the dialogue in *Oeconomicus* features an embedded structure in which Socrates' reporting of his conversation with Ischomachus to Critobulus is intended as a lesson for the latter, so revealing the book as a philosophical dialogue, 'not a book on farming with certain Socratic trappings' (231).

Given the title of Johnson's work, readers might have expected a more sustained attempt to evaluate some of Xenophon's other writings in Socratic terms. History-oriented texts such as the *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*, it could be argued, complement Xenophon's image of the philosopher and indeed are needed if we are to have the complete version of his Socrates. Johnson notes features of the Socratic writings, such as the tendency toward connectivity or continuity in many of their openings (27), and in the case of *Memorabilia*, an indebtedness to literary apologia (30–31), that in fact find parallels in the aforementioned historical-type works, a circumstance which in turn points to a more organic texture to the oeuvre. As remarked in the opening of this review, it is also the case that recent studies have served to undermine traditional boundaries between Xenophon's writings. But I do not think Johnson would necessarily dispute this perspective, even if he is not (yet) persuaded that, say, *Anabasis* is more than a war memoir with certain Socratic trappings. I came away from his book feeling that I had been exposed to an enormous amount of learning, but that it had been delivered in an easy and measured way, just as Socrates would have done.

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