
REVIEWS

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Socrates, Pleasure, and Value

By GEORGE RUDEBUSCH

Oxford University Press, 1999. xviii + 170 pp. £25.00

The various views to which the Socrates of Plato's Socratic dialogues commits himself are, on the face of it, not all consistent with one another, and it is one of the tasks of Platonic scholarship to consider how best to respond to these apparent inconsistencies. On the assumption that a coherent moral theory is to be found in the Socratic dialogues, there are two possible lines of response: either we accept the apparent inconsistencies as real inconsistencies and argue that they are to be explained developmentally or we hold that the appearance of inconsistency is misleading and that, properly understood, the apparently inconsistent views are really consistent. *Socrates, Pleasure, and Value* focuses on three apparently conflicting Socratic views about the value of pleasure: Socrates's endorsement of hedonism in the *Protagoras*, his vigorous rejection of hedonism in the *Gorgias* (assumed without comment by Rudebusch to be a Socratic dialogue), and the insistence elsewhere (for example, in the *Apology*) that it is not pleasure, but virtue that is the supreme good. Rudebusch maintains that, properly understood, these three views are not inconsistent. The hedonism rejected in the *Gorgias*—Calliclean or 'sensate' hedonism—is not the hedonism recommended in the *Protagoras*—'modal' hedonism. Further, since 'modal' hedonism does not conceive of the pleasure of enjoyed activities as something distinct from the enjoyed activities themselves, Socrates's commitment to this form of hedonism need not conflict with his insistence on the supreme value of virtue, since the activities which are 'modally' most pleasant may turn out to be virtuous activities. This reconciliation of Socrates's apparently inconsistent views about the value of pleasure is, however, only part of Rudebusch's project. His book aims to show not merely that Socrates's position is coherent but, more ambitiously, that it is worthy of our acceptance, and that many of the arguments which Socrates offers in its support and of which commentators have despaired are in fact sound. Thus Ch. 6 gives particular attention to the famous 'death is one of two things' argument (*Apology* 40c–d) by which Socrates attempts to justify his confidence in the face of death, and Ch. 8 to the argument in *Republic* I (352b–354a) which purports to show that the virtuous are happy and the unvirtuous miserable.

Despite the great interest of its subject matter this is a disappointing book. Rudebusch's attempted reconciliation of Socrates's apparently inconsistent

views about the value of pleasure bristles with difficulties, and his arguments in support of his interpretation of Socrates are often weak.

Much of the book's unsatisfactoriness has its source in the extremely casual articulation of the philosophical infrastructure upon which Rudebusch builds his account of Socrates's position, and the consequential pervasive lack of clarity about the book's central distinction between 'sensate' and 'modal' pleasure. This distinction derives, as Rudebusch acknowledges (pp. 68–69), from the distinction, to be found in, for instance, the work of Gilbert Ryle, between those accounts of pleasure—'sensate' accounts—which take enjoying an activity to be a matter of deriving pleasant feelings or sensations from the activity, and those accounts—'modal' accounts—which take enjoying an activity to be a matter of the way in which we engage in the activity—wholeheartedly, with enthusiasm, with all our attention focused on it, etc. Rudebusch construes these different philosophical accounts of pleasure as accounts of different kinds of pleasure—'sensate' pleasure and 'modal' pleasure—and distinguishes, correspondingly, between 'sensate' hedonism, which urges the pursuit of those pleasures that consist in the experience of pleasant sensations, and 'modal' hedonism, which urges the pursuit of those pleasures that take the form of effortless and wholehearted engagement in activity. Unfortunately, however, this essentially phenomenological characterisation of the two kinds of pleasure is complicated by Rudebusch's equation of the 'modal' account with the Aristotelian account of pleasure as the unimpeded exercise of our natural capacities, which in turn is understood to be an account of pleasure as the satisfaction of our 'true' desires. This yields a contrast between 'modal' pleasures, as the satisfaction of our 'true' desires, and 'sensate' pleasures, as the satisfaction of our 'merely felt' desires—and a correspondingly different contrast between 'modal' hedonism and 'sensate' hedonism. The relationship between these two ways of characterising 'sensate' and 'modal' pleasures clearly needs careful exploration: it is far from obvious that what we have are merely two different ways of characterising a single distinction—not least because we can surely engage enthusiastically in pleasures which are not satisfactions of our 'true' desires.

But none of this appears to trouble Rudebusch, who switches from one conception of the distinction to the other as best suits his purposes. What he wishes to ascribe to Socrates is a 'modal' hedonism which recommends the pursuit of those pleasures that are the satisfaction of our 'true' desires, but in arguing for the ascription of this view to Socrates he often relies on the alternative way of understanding the distinction between 'modal' and 'sensate' hedonism. What is more, and rather differently, both characterisations of the distinction are left extremely rough and impressionistic. Rudebusch seems, for example, to allow himself considerable latitude with regard to the phenomenological criteria of 'modal' pleasures, as becomes apparent in his discussion of *Apology* (40c–d)—so far as I can see, the only passage in which he finds a Socratic commitment to 'modal' pleasure. Commenting on Socrates's assertion that if death is nothingness, it is like a dreamless sleep, than which few things are "better and pleasanter" (40d6), he argues that while dreamless sleep, being a complete absence of consciousness, cannot be a 'sensate' pleasure,

it may well be a 'modal' pleasure, since it meets "three well-accepted criteria of modal pleasure" (p. 69)—(1) it can "happen effortlessly and without boredom", (2) it "can be approached with great anticipation", and (3) it "can be valued for its ability to release us from worry and pain". Rudebusch does not notice that these criteria of 'modal' pleasure are different from the criteria originally given on p. 5, let alone the fact that dreamless sleep cannot possibly meet at least one of the 'Rylean' criteria for 'modal' pleasure listed on p. 5, viz., that it "absorbs one's attention without effort".

It is true that not all of Rudebusch's book is affected by the carelessness and confusion on which I have concentrated, but most of it is, and the quality of the work in the parts which are not does not redeem the book as a whole. I am afraid that this is not a book I can recommend.

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Insight and Inference: Descartes's Founding Principle and Modern Philosophy

By MURRAY MILES

University of Toronto Press, 1999. xviii + 564 pp. US\$120.00

Miles's long but very lucid book begins with a startling claim: "The present volume is the first book-length study devoted specifically to Descartes's founding principle, *cogito, ergo sum*" (p. xv). Whether or not this claim is true in the strictest sense (it crucially depends on the three terms 'book-length', 'specifically', and 'founding'), the book pursues with historical breadth and philosophic intensity the meaning of the *cogito*, which is said to have become the basis of a "critical rationalism" (p. 227) and a metaphysics that is "*the* leading philosophy of transcendence in the modern era and the principal target of all broadly 'naturalistic' philosophies from neo-Scholasticism to the latest forms of empiricism" (p. xvii).

In the introduction and conclusion Miles explains how most existing narratives have misapprehended Descartes's fundamental intentions in decisive ways. Miles argues that we—a 'we' that includes the major French-, English-, and German-language interpreters—have come to understand Descartes too much in light of Humean and (neo)Kantian approaches, and that even most major alternatives to them labour under typical misconceptions: that Descartes believes we do not perceive extra-mental reality immediately, that the things of sense cannot be known with certainty, and that sensible things cannot be said to exist in their own right apart from mind. Miles argues that none of these positions was true of Descartes. He was not an idealist but in almost all crucial senses a realist—a *representational* realist, therefore not a representationalist who would understand perception to be a veil between mind and matter. He was not primarily an epistemologist but a metaphysician. And he was no proponent of a merely subjective truth. It makes more sense to recognise continuities of Descartes's thought with Aristotelianism-Scholasticism. But—and for Miles this is the crucial point—Descartes decisively broke with the Aristotelian notion of *experience*. Since Descartes always thought of Aristotle as formalised common sense, this means that he rejected the everyday, pre-

philosophical conception of experience as well, and also the modern scientific notion, both of which conceive it as directed primarily toward things in the (external) world. In the last analysis, the deepest, most authoritative experience for Descartes was the inner experience of one's own thinking.

The central argument of the book lays the groundwork for these historical conclusions by explaining what *thinking* was for Descartes. This would seem to be *the* decisive question for Descartes scholarship, at least if it takes the *cogito*, the 'I think', as fundamental—although it is surprising that so many scholars take this to be self-evident. Miles contends that what is distinctive about Descartes is that he understood thinking as intrinsically capable of a reflexive analysis of itself and that such analysis produces a metaphysics of mind that founds certainty and science. Miles is no slave to any particular interpretative school, but he agrees with Husserl and Heidegger that Descartes was in essence a phenomenologist before the fact, in particular in understanding consciousness and its reflexivity as an inherent *structure* of all thinking. That is, consciousness is not an act subsequent upon previous acts of thinking (as it is in Leibniz) but an intrinsic reflexivity that recognises the self as part of the original thought. Nor is it adequately rendered by the 'I think' of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception. Consciousness is not a production but a copresence; and the difference between the thought 'I am thinking' and 'I am aware that I am thinking' is only one of degree and focus.

Miles deploys this understanding of the inherent reflexivity of thought to resolve, or at least clarify, a host of 'Cartesian' questions. For example, the much-belaboured question of whether 'ergo' in *cogito ergo sum* marks a logical deduction is answered, according to Miles, by recognising that at the foundation of Descartes's science is a type of analysis of ideas that combines intuition and deduction (to speak with the Descartes of the early, unfinished *Regulae*), the inference of an insight (to speak with Miles) that cashes out what is implicit in thought. "The vital point is therefore that deduction cannot be equated with (though it does not exclude) logical inference, being primarily a matter of focusing one's attention selectively on all that is contained implicitly within a single intuition, thus rendering explicit what is first known only implicitly" (p. 255). In interpreting the *Meditations*, then, we must realise that up through the Third Meditation's proof of God's existence we have to deal not with *scientia*, which is possible only once we have the Fifth Meditation's divine guarantee of memory with respect to what we have previously perceived clearly and distinctly, but rather with an even more fundamental and more immediately certain and true *persuasio*. Miles's accompanying discussion of the leading interpretations of truth in Descartes is masterly.

This book has riches well beyond what a brief review can mention. Though it is impossible for any study of the *cogito* to be exhaustive, Miles can make a plausible claim to comprehensiveness. Anyone who disagrees with him will usually discover, in the next footnote, paragraph, or chapter, a plausible response to, or at least an awareness of, the reader's objection.

I do think Miles has underestimated the importance of Descartes's mathematics and physics for grasping his approach to thought. His earliest independent practice of systematic cogitation was in the realm of mathematical

and physical problem solving. By looking to his early notebooks and physico-mathematics Miles would have found the lessons of insight and inference *in action*. In mathematics and physics Descartes learned how to isolate ideationally the aspects and dimensions of problems, how to interrelate these aspects within a systematic framework, and how to recognise when the framework was sufficiently large to ensure a solution. This led him to conceive of the proper object of physico-mathematical problems as the total, limitless spatiality of rigorous mathematical imagination (see Ch. 6 of *Le Monde*). Given the author's appreciation for Husserl's phenomenology, it is surprising that he does not wonder whether for Descartes the proper object of thought per se is the totality of experiential 'space', the space of consciousness—which would therefore be the intellectual analogue of Descartes's physico-mathematical space—and that the *Meditations* is the reflexively analytic (= meditative) exploration of this space and all its ramifications. This would in no way undermine Miles's case but make it even stronger.

Still, I judge this book to be one of the best studies of Descartes of the past half-century (that means I rank it with the work of people like Gueroult and Marion). Will it have a commensurate influence in Cartesian studies and the history of philosophy? Perhaps not immediately. The price of the book by itself will greatly restrict the initial readership. And then there is the more basic problem of the prejudices of philosophers, who almost all have a ready-made place for Descartes in their implicit and explicit narratives of the history of philosophy. *Insight and Inference* challenges the existing narratives. It is certainly worth reading, and worth thinking through.

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La Biblioteca di Samuel Pufendorf

By FIAMMETTA PALLADINI

Harrassowitz, 1999. 660 pp. DM198.00

What regard is due to past philosophers? None from reverence for age, because, as Hobbes remarked in the third last paragraph of the *Leviathan*, the present age is the oldest. But he acknowledged that there were other good reasons for studying past authors, and those are reasons why we should now study him, and others of his era. Hobbes is receiving due attention, but others from his time less so. Among them is Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694), whose works on the law of nature and nations (1672) and on the duty of man and citizen (1673) were probably more widely read during the following hundred years than those of any other author on ethics and politics.

There are, however, a number of researchers who over the last three decades have done much excellent research on Pufendorf. Names like Denzer and Döring spring to mind, but Palladini is certainly a leading contender for a top place in this league, with her *Discussioni seicentesche . . .* (1978) and *Samuel Pufendorf, discepolo di Hobbes* (1990), and many articles and reviews on related topics.

The work that has gone into preparing this volume is immense, and has yielded a magnificent result. It is not a philosophical book in the strict sense.

It is a catalogue: one that gives information about each of the close to 2000 books listed in the 1697 auction catalogue of Pufendorf's library. But the manner in which the material is presented makes this work useful both to those doing specialised work on Pufendorf's thought, and to those whose research into the history of philosophy, or intellectual history generally, touches on that historical period. What is offered is, in effect, a guide to a significant portion of the seventeenth-century world of learning.

The wide-ranging and comprehensive introduction surveys the extent to which various branches of learning are represented, places and dates of publication, provenance, publishers, and much else. One of the findings, of great interest for the historian of ideas, is that the proportion of books dealing with medical subjects is quite large. This is a surprise, considering that Pufendorf, in contrast to Locke, never engaged in medical pursuits. His main writings were in the areas of ethics, politics (secular and ecclesiastical), and history.

The catalogue is enhanced by a considerable number of indexes, which together take up 100 pages: authors and names, subjects, publishers and printers, places of publication, provenance, library holdings, anonymous works, illustrations, and a concordance. There is also a comprehensive list of secondary literature relating to the works in the main catalogue.

The work is most handsomely presented. The cover, typography, illustrations, layout, all make consulting it an exquisite pleasure, and when not in use, this beautiful volume will indeed be eligible for the coffee-table or the display case. The price tag seems modest, especially when considering what certain other publishers (we know who) would have charged. And the content matches the attractive appearance.

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