



was produced ‘during Thales’ life’, and so is evidence for his knowledge of the Acheloios cult. True, Thales was still alive in 547 BCE (Herodotus i 75). But he had the reputation of having predicted the eclipse of 585 BCE, when—to be taken seriously—he cannot have been very young. Apollodorus dated his birth in 640 BCE (probably a mistake for 624 BCE), and Demetrius of Phalerum dated the canonisation of the Seven Sages, who included Thales, to the archonship of Damasias (582-581 BCE). But what this means is that the Acheloios stater, if it was produced during Thales’ life, was probably produced long after his main period of intellectually creative activity.

Molinari goes even further, arguing that the Acheloios stater ‘was probably designed by Thales’ (x). In doing so he quotes Fischer Bossaert on both the development of coin-minting as ‘quick (explosive like the invention of book-print)’ and on the large number both of electrum (i.e., the earliest) coin series and of city-states in Asia Minor issuing electrum coins. Quite so. It is coined money (beginning in the late seventh century), with its unprecedentedly all-pervasive societal power to underly all goods and reduce them to a single thing, and not the cult of Acheloios (one cult among many others), that we know to have been part of the everyday lived experience of the presocratic thinkers.

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Socrates on Self-Improvement. Knowledge, Virtue, and Happiness. By Nicholas D. Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 216. \$99.99 (hardback). ISBN 9781316515532.

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In *Socrates on Self-Improvement*, Smith argues for a new epistemology of virtue that puts self-improvement at the core of the Socratic project. When Socrates urges us to become ‘as wise as possible’ (*Euthyd.* 282a), Smith explains, he wants us to become *better* at virtue or living well (i.e., at doing what is truly best for us). Smith argues that Socrates’ mission has important implications for his epistemology of virtue: since virtue consists in knowledge, and since we can become better at virtue, the kind of knowledge that constitutes virtue must also be improvable. Such knowledge, Smith argues, can only be ‘craft knowledge’ (knowing *how*), not ‘fact knowledge’ (knowing *that*). According to Smith, virtue, like other crafts, is acquired gradually—in degrees—and improved by practice. When we become better at knowing how to live well, we become happier. In

arguing that virtue, knowledge, and happiness are gradable and that we can achieve a certain (albeit small) degree of happiness, Smith argues against the view that humans inevitably fall short of even minimal happiness (Jones 2013 and 2016).

With over seven authored books and more than one hundred articles on Plato and Socrates, Smith has contributed significantly to our understanding of Socratic philosophy, often challenging standard readings (most famously, perhaps, in Brickhouse and Smith 2010). The present book draws from Smith's earlier work (xvii-xviii), tying together his views—some of which he revises in light of the idea that virtue knowledge is acquired in degrees—around the core idea of self-improvement. Methodologically, Smith continues to take a developmentalist approach and to focus on Plato's early dialogues (xvi). Below, I summarize Smith's main argument and share some interpretative questions.

Smith explains that traditionally, interpreters (including Smith himself in Brickhouse and Smith 1994, as he notes, ix) have understood the knowledge at stake in Socrates' account of virtue to be 'knowing that', that is, 'informational knowledge—knowledge of *facts*' (ix), 'with propositional (or at least propositionalizable) content' (24). According to this interpretation, virtue knowledge is an "'all-or-nothing" achievement'—one either has or does not have it (24)—with a high threshold, meaning that it requires an 'expert' level of knowledge that makes its possessor 'inerrant' and that is evidenced by definitional knowledge of the relevant virtue (ix); for such an interpretation, Smith cites McPartland 2013, 135 among others.

Smith argues that this understanding of Socratic virtue knowledge has created exegetical 'misapprehension[s]' (15) and done 'real damage to the plausibility of the Socratic view' (165). If virtue were an all-or-nothing achievement with a very high threshold, Smith explains, 'becoming wise *at all* would not be an option for any of us' (19). Socrates' mission, Smith argues, only becomes plausible if we can achieve wisdom and virtue 'to some meaningful degree' (151). Further, the traditional understanding of virtue knowledge has led to the following trilemma (2):

- (i) 'Socrates is an exemplar of virtue' (see, e.g., *Charm.* 155b-156d; *Apol.* 23b; *Symp.* 219e-221c; *Lach.* 180b-d).
- (ii) 'Virtue is a kind of knowledge' (i.e., Socratic virtue intellectualism). (*Prot.* 361a-b).
- (iii) 'Socrates lacks the knowledge in which virtue consists' (i.e., Socrates' disavowal of knowledge, see, e.g., *Apol.* 20c, 21d, 23b; *Charm.* 166c-d; *Euthypr.* 15e-16a; *Lach.* 186d-e).

If we accept (ii) and (iii), it seems that we must reject (i). If we accept (i) and (ii), it seems that we must reject (iii). If we accept (i) and (iii), it seems that we must reject (ii). As Smith notes (2n3), this trilemma is not new (see, e.g., Prior 2006, 158), but Smith's diagnosis—that the trilemma arises because we understand knowledge as knowing that—is new. Smith argues that the three claims are in fact fully consistent and that the trilemma can be resolved if we accept the fol-

lowing:

- (a) Virtue knowledge is craft knowledge (knowing *how* to live well), and such knowledge comes in degrees (i.e., virtue knowledge is not an all-or-nothing achievement).
- (b) Socrates has a certain degree of virtue knowledge (i.e., one does not have to be an inerrant expert to have any virtue knowledge at all) (18).

If we accept these two claims, Smith argues, we can solve the trilemma as follows: (i) Socrates is an example of virtue in that he has achieved a degree of virtue that is high for humans but ‘worthless’ compared to the degree of virtue achieved by the gods (20); (ii) virtue is a kind of knowledge (knowing how) that is improvable and achieved in degrees; (iii) since Socrates ‘regarded his own achievements [in virtue] as being quite modest...he continues to make his disavowals of knowledge’ (28).

In Smith’s interpretation, ‘knowing *how*’ is central, or essential, to virtue (16), while ‘knowing *that*’ is peripheral but not absent. ‘Some knowledge—that may be symptomatic of knowing how, or even a necessary condition of it’ (16), Smith argues, e.g., knowing *that* it is evil to disobey one’s superior (*Apol.* 29b; 16n37). Further, Smith notes that definitional knowledge is required to become a master of virtue.

At the level of perfect mastery, virtue requires an extremely high level of knowing that (specifically, definitional knowledge) and knowing how (specifically, the ‘craft of measuring what is good and bad’) (122). However, this is not required for a lower, sub-expert degree of virtue (15). Taking seriously Socrates’ testimony in the *Gorgias* that he is the only one among his contemporaries to take up and practice the true political craft (*Gorg.* 521d6-e1) because he always ‘speak[s] in ways that do not aim at gratification, but at what’s best’ (27), Smith argues that ‘just following this mandate is enough to count as practicing the “true political craft”’ (153), that is, the craft of virtue (34-35). Socrates thus qualifies as an ‘apprentice of virtue’, who has acquired some degree of virtue. Here, Smith departs from Brickhouse and Smith 1994; 2010, as he explicitly notes (4).

Socrates’ apprentice level of virtue, Smith argues, secures him some degree of happiness—at least as long as he is spared from terrible misfortune. Smith argues that virtue is necessary for happiness (chapter 6), in the sense that one must achieve at least a minimal degree of virtue to be minimally happy. In arguing that virtue is necessary for happiness, Smith departs from Brickhouse and Smith 2010. But Smith continues to reject the idea that virtue is sufficient for happiness (chapter 5). The degree of virtue that one has achieved ‘covar[ies]’ (111) with one’s degree of happiness: ‘To the degree that one is virtuous, one will thereby achieve that same degree of happiness, *all other things being equal*’, but factors outside of our control—bodily sickness, becoming the victim of injustice—‘may make a considerable difference to whether any happiness is actually achieved or achievable in that circumstance’ (129, my italics).

Chapters 3 and 4 explain how we can improve ourselves. Chapter 3 argues that we must first improve our *conative* condition by bringing our appetites under

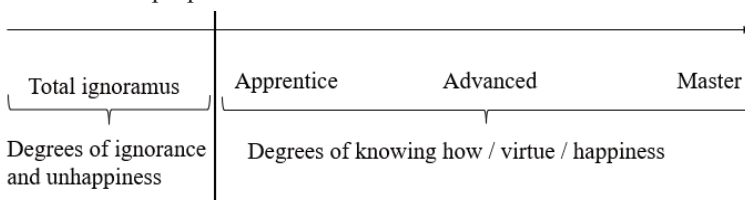
control ('having one's appetites under control is...a necessary precondition to being virtuous at all', 49). Smith here relies on his earlier interpretation of Socratic motivational intellectualism (Brickhouse and Smith 2010 and 2015), according to which our appetites can incline us to believe falsely that certain things are best for us to do (55-56). Chapter 4 argues that we can improve our *epistemic* condition by practicing virtue in two ways: 'leading the examined life' by engaging in *elenctic* conversations and '[a]cting on the basis of the best reasons that one has for making choices and decisions' (105-106).

Smith succeeds in presenting Socratic philosophy in a new light. He convincingly argues that self-improvement is at the core of the Socratic project and that this observation changes our understanding of several Socratic key ideas (e.g., Socratic virtue intellectualism, Socrates' disavowal of knowledge) and thus of Socratic philosophy as a whole. The reader will appreciate that Smith argues for his far-reaching interpretation in a very accessible way. His presentation of the trilemma at the heart of his project, as well as his solution to this trilemma, is remarkably clear. He very economically informs the reader of decades-long debates (e.g., on whether virtue is sufficient for happiness, 108-110). This is a book that scholars and advanced students interested in Plato's Socrates will enjoy reading and learning from.

Below I share a few remaining questions about the details of Smith's account of virtue—specifically, about what exactly the craft of virtue is and how we can practice it and thereby improve ourselves.

Smith's main argument is straightforward: virtue knowledge is modeled on craft knowledge, that is, on knowing how, which comes in degrees and thereby differs from knowing that. However, some of the details of the craft analogy remain ambiguous. *Is* virtue knowing how (12, 17), or is knowing how merely 'a much better approximation' of Socratic virtue knowledge (26)? Is knowing how equivalent to skill (11-12, 17), or is there a difference between know-how and skill (12n31)? Note also that there is an interesting discussion in contemporary philosophy about whether knowing how actually differs from knowing that and whether the purported difference is due to know-how's gradability. Those who argue that knowing how is a species of knowing that (so-called intellectualists about knowing how) reject the idea that gradability distinguishes knowing how from knowing that (see, e.g., Pavese 2017).

We need achieve only a minimal degree of virtue knowledge, Smith's argument continues, to count as minimally virtuous and happy. I take it that we can visualize Smith's proposal as follows.



My question concerns the threshold one must reach to become minimally virtuous. I take it that we reach this threshold when we start practicing virtue—Smith says that taking up the craft of virtue by becoming an apprentice is ‘good enough...to be at least minimally happy’ (35). The question is, then, what qualifies one as practicing the craft of virtue? There seems to be an ambiguity among the following four options:

- (a) Speaking in ways that aim at what is best is sufficient to qualify as practicing virtue (27, 153).
- (b) Practicing at least one of the two ‘subcrafts’ of politics—justice or legislation—is necessary and sufficient to qualify as practicing true politics, that is, virtue (32).
- (c) A combination of engaging in *elenctic* conversations and acting on the basis of the best reasons one has ‘promises to bring the best results for self-improvement’ (105). These two practices seem to map onto the two subcrafts of virtue above, justice and legislation, but Smith connects only *elenchus* and justice explicitly (33).
- (d) Being able to account for both the nature of the thing the craft serves and the explanation for what it does, *and* practicing the craft successfully, at least to some degree, are necessary conditions for practicing any craft (148-149). Smith applies these two criteria to medicine (149) but not explicitly to virtue.

Relatedly, a question arises about the product of the craft of virtue. Do the two subcrafts of virtue—legislation and justice—produce two subproducts? Does justice (specifically, perhaps, the *elenchus*) produce what Smith calls the ‘inner condition’ (i.e., having skill, wisdom), while legislation (specifically, perhaps, acting on the best reasons one has) produces the ‘outer activities’ (i.e., ‘engaging in the practices and producing the products of that craft’, 28-29)?

Regardless of these questions, Smith’s contribution emphasizes a critical feature of Socratic philosophy that some modern-day interpreters forget. Socratic philosophy is a practice: it is something done or, rather, lived. Socrates is on a mission to live well, and while acquiring some knowledge—that is part of that mission, Socrates is not simply on a quest to accumulate true propositions. True propositions are important: living well means acting well and, according to Socratic motivational intellectualism, I act well if I act on true beliefs or knowledge about what is best for me to do. But such beliefs must be formed anew in each situation; they cannot be accumulated and stored. Knowing how to live well is something we practice throughout our lives. We all live and act based on what we think is best, but some do not know how to live well at all, while others, like Socrates, are better at it.

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The Historiography of Philosophy. By Michael Frede. Edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xx + 234. \$70.00. ISBN 9780198840725.

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Michael Frede was one of the most prominent scholars of ancient philosophy of the last half century. Since his death in 2007, his presence in the field continues to be felt through his students, and through a series of posthumous publications, the most recent of which is this volume on the historiography of philosophy, edited by Katerina Ierodiakonou. The volume consists of a series of previously unpublished lectures that Frede delivered in the 1989-90 academic year at Oxford (the Nellie Wallace lectures), three of his previously published essays on the historiography of philosophy (one of which is translated for the first time into English), a preface by Katerina Ierodiakonou, and a critical postface by Jonathan Barnes. Here I will focus on the main part of the book, the lectures (which, anyway, overlap significantly with the previously published essays).

The aim of the lectures is both theoretical and practical: Frede wishes to clarify what it is the historian of philosophy does, how this project relates to other intellectual enterprises, and on this basis to contribute to resolving some controversies surrounding what the historiography of philosophy should be. These controversies arise, in part, because there are at least three different projects, each of which is concerned with the history of philosophy. One, which Frede deems 'doxographical' (Lecture 3), treats the history of philosophy as a repository of views and arguments to be drawn from in our own philosophical investigations. Hence, the doxographical historian approaches the philosophy of the past with a focus on the philosophy of the present. In this respect the doxographical approach is similar to the second type, which Frede calls the 'philosophical history of philosophy'