



Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher

By *Gregory Vlastos*

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This long-awaited study of the most enigmatic figure of Greek philosophy reclaims Socrates' ground-breaking originality. Written by a leading historian of Greek thought, it argues for a Socrates who, though long overshadowed by his successors Plato and Aristotle, marked the true turning point in Greek philosophy, religion and ethics. The quest for the historical figure focuses on the Socrates of Plato's earlier dialogues, setting him in sharp contrast to that other Socrates of later dialogues, where he is used as a mouthpiece for Plato's often anti-Socratic doctrine. At the heart of the book is the paradoxical nature of Socratic thought. But the paradoxes are explained, not explained away. The book highlights the tensions in the Socratic search for the answer to the question 'How should we live?' Conceived as a divine mandate, the search is carried out through elenctic argument, and dominated by an uncompromising rationalism. The magnetic quality of Socrates' personality is allowed to emerge throughout the book. Clearly and forcefully written, philosophically sophisticated but entirely accessible to non-specialists, this book will be of major importance and interest to all those studying ancient philosophy and the history of Western thought.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Vlastos is the greatest living writer on Greek philosophy, and his book on the historical Socrates--many years in the making--has been eagerly awaited. Although the main arguments have appeared in previous articles, their synthesis produces a remarkably cohesive and original philosophical portrait. Vlastos illuminates Socrates' irony, elenchus (means of refutation), disavowal of knowledge, religion, moral radicalism, and eudaimonism (the theory that right actions produce happiness). The book displays the verve, lucidity, rigor, erudition, and imagination that have made Vlastos's work a model for several generations of scholars.

Indispensable for both academic and larger general collections.

- *Richard Hogan, Southeastern Massachusetts Univ., North Dartmouth*

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Review

"This is the best book available on its subject. No other book written by someone with such deep knowledge can speak with so much authority to scholars and still be so enjoyable for general readers. Philosophical writing now tends to be excessively technical and academic. *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* is not; it can take many different kinds of people to the heart of the most puzzling and important features of Socrates."?Julia Annas, *New York Times Book Review*

"Gregory Vlastos's book begins from the conviction that Socrates' strangeness is 'the key to his philosophy.' It is a marvelous book, in which no major aspect of Socrates' career is eclipsed. The rigor of his arguments, the depth of his moral commitment and understanding, his complex relationship to Athenian ethical traditions, his rational religion: all this comes to life in writing whose vigor and lucidity put the challenge of Socrates squarely before the reader. . . . It deserves as much honor as any work of scholarship in Greek philosophy in this century."?Martha C. Nussbaum, *The New Republic*

"What can be surmised about this extraordinary and arresting figure has been brilliantly presented and argued in this closely reasoned book, for which we are all greatly in Gregory Vlastos's debt."?Charles Taylor, *Times Literary Supplement*

From the Back Cover

Gregory's new book begins from the conviction that Socrates strangeness is the key to his philosophy. It is a marvelous book, in which no major aspect of Socrates career is eclipsed. The rigor of his arguments, the depth of his moral commitment and understanding, his complex relationship to Athenian ethical traditions, his rational religion: all this comes to life in writing whose vigor and lucidity put the challenge of Socrates squarely before the reader.

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