

Virtual Socrates Colloquium Fall 2023

Thursday, November 9

William H. F. Altman

Keeping Socrates Alive: The Invention of Literary Irony in Xenophon and Plato

Thanks primarily to Plato and Xenophon, Socrates has achieved immortality, not least of all by baffling those who have continued to read their accounts of him. There is no good reason to assume that he was any less baffling in person, and he may well have been considerably more so, particularly by means of irony, and thus the dissimulation of his own views. Literary evidence that Socrates baffled his interlocutors has been preserved, and young Theaetetus asks the right question when he wonders if Socrates has been expressing his own views through the subtler Protagoreans or whether, by advancing them as though he did, he is instead testing Theaetetus himself. Since it seems pretty obvious that the latter is the case, keeping Socrates alive required his most gifted students to administer this kind of test to their readers as well as to the merely literary simulacra of living interlocutors they depicted in their writings. Could the dead Socrates, embalmed as a merely literary simulacrum of himself, yet retain the power to make a reader blush for shame or feel degraded to the level of a self-preening but ignorant slave? My paper explores how Xenophon and Plato managed to achieve this remarkable goal—essential to keeping Socrates alive—by encouraging their readers to regard them as expressing their own views when they were not in fact doing so, and so to make late-learners, chastened of certainty by shame, of their best and most Socratic readers.

The colloquium will begin at 11:00 AM Central Standard Time. The colloquium will last 1.5 hours. Dr. Altman will present his talk, followed by discussion.

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Registration is required.

The Zoom link to register is [here](#).

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Socrates Colloquia, see
[https://socraticstudies.org/virtual-socrates-
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If you have questions or comments, please send them to society@socraticstudies.org