

Abstract

In Plato's *Theaetetus* (155d) Socrates famously says that philosophy begins in wonder (θαυμάζειν). Without explicitly ascribing it to Socrates, Plato or anybody else, Aristotle takes the view for granted and repeats it in his *Metaphysics* (A.2, 982b12-17). The idea has become a commonplace in the history of Western philosophy up to the present. But who was the first to express such a view? And what did it originally mean to convey?

The talk will explore the possibility that it was the historical Socrates, as distinct from Plato's character, who first gave voice to this view. In Xenophon's *Symposium* (7.1-5), Socrates dismisses as inappropriate for a banquet the feats of jugglery on a potter's wheel that a dancing girl is about to perform (θαυματουργήσκειν). The reason he provides for the dismissal is that the girl's performance may indeed be a wonder (θαῦμα), but wonder is to be found everywhere: if one sets one's mind on things immediately present at hand (τὰ παρόντα), such as a lamp and a bronze mirror, one will have plenty of wonders to be perplexed with (θαυμάζειν). In line with what we know from other sources about Socrates' exclusive preoccupation with moral issues, commentators usually take Socrates' dismissal of wonders to be an implicit rejection of natural science (physiologia).

A different interpretation of the passage will be suggested. On this interpretation, Socrates' point has nothing to do with natural science. Socrates dismisses human desire for the extraordinary as an escape from wondering at the ordinary. He also dismisses the easy but superficial way of wondering that intoxication may provide. Such an interpretation, it will be argued, tallies well with (i) the image of Socrates in Xenophon's *Symposium*, and (ii) the evidence about Socrates' understanding of wonder in Plato's dialogues. If Xenophon can hardly be the originator of the subtle view about the ubiquitous presence of wonder that we find explicitly announced by Socrates in his *Symposium* and implied by Socrates in Plato's *Theaetetus*, then either Plato was the originator or, more probably, both Xenophon and Plato are witnesses to a view originally held by Socrates himself.

Bio

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