The figure of Socrates has become so indissolubly linked to Plato that The Bluffer’s Guide to the Classics recommends that to wrong-foot anyone holding forth about the former, you need simply say: ‘Do you mean Plato?’. The joke would hardly be as effective were the name Xenophon substituted for Plato (while it might take bluffing to unprecedented levels). In any event Xenophon’s Symposium, though long obscured by Plato’s celebrated account, deserves attention in its own right. Xenophon’s Socrates shares much with his Platonic counterpart, and both writers aim to clear their old teacher’s name in the wake of his execution. At the same time, Xenophon here and in his Apology and Memorabilia presents us with a palpably, though not radically, different Socrates from the intensely cerebral, aloof personage we sometimes find in the Platonic dialogues. For instance, the attacker of painting and poetry in Republic 10 is, in Xenophon, the same person who amiably drops by, inter alios, the famed painter Parrhasius (Memorabilia 3.10.1-5), and points out the virtues of painting for depicting moral character (ethos)—an idea taken up elsewhere by Aristotle (Poetics 1448a1-6; cf. Politics 1340a31-8).

In his preface A.J. Bowen (hereafter B) aptly notes the importance of Xenophon’s Symposium for giving us a different angle on Socrates and his milieu. Rightly, he does not claim that Xenophon’s account gives us the authentic Socrates any more than do Plato’s artful portrayals. But he sees in Xenophon’s depictions of Socrates a ‘refreshing’ and ‘useful’ contrast to the Platonic accounts. This makes this recent edition of Xenophon’s Symposium welcome—in fact, all the more so, given the neglect suffered by Xenophon’s Socratic writings for the past 100 years or more. As B himself is quick to point out, his is the first annotated edition of the Symposium in English since 1881. Another reason B gives for working on Xenophon’s Symposium is the relative difficulty of its Greek. Specifically he sees here pedagogical value for students who have a year of University Greek under their belts, and can benefit from a text such as this which will enable them to consolidate their grasp of Attic prose before moving onto more difficult authors. The text,
presented by B without apparatus, is based on E.C. Marchant’s OCT edition of 1901, with minor emendations made after consulting other texts such as those of T. Thalheim (1915), O.J. Todd (1923) and F. Ollier (1961). While B is aware that there is more on linguistic points than usual in his commentary, he notes that reading the *Symposium* can ‘enlarge the sense of Greek culture’, and has thus prepared his edition for the Greekless reader as well. B’s consideration of students—especially those at an intermediate level of Greek language studies, for whom a vocabulary is also included—is admirable; but it tends to dominate the tenor and approach of the commentary, which, while valuable on a number of points, is rather limited on others of some import.

B’s introduction gives a useful, though necessarily brief, overview of Xenophon’s life and literary output, and makes some suggestive insights. He rightly draws attention to the variety of subjects covered in his writings, e.g., from military histories, to handbooks on horsemanship, household management, and, of course his Socratic writings and their apologetic nature. Interestingly, B compares Xenophon to a sophist for such a range of literary activity, and one has only to think of such self-professed polymaths as Hippias to get the point. B sees other contemporary developments as exercising some possible influence on the text, and speculates plausibly that the apologetic Socratic writings (some also written by Aeschines and Antisthenes) came in response to pamphlets such as the *Accusation against Socrates* written by Polycrates soon after the philosopher’s death. The most important contemporary comparanda are, of course, Plato’s works, especially his own *Symposium*. Accepting the arguments of H. Thesleff (*Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 25 [1978], 157-70), B tends to think that Xenophon’s came first, influenced Plato to write one of his own, which in turn led Xenophon to revise his text, which has come down to us relatively well-preserved. Such a view is necessarily speculative, and B is probably wise in not pushing it, although it does at times crop up as an issue in the commentary. After a discussion of the general historical plausibility of Xenophon’s account, the *dramatis personae*, and aspects of the author’s style, the reader is well-placed to move onto text, translation and commentary.

The translation as a whole is well-handled and very readable. One qualm I have is B’s translation of that difficult but important term
καλοκάγαθία as 'essence of gentleman' (3.4, etc.). This sounds rather dated to say the least, and does not seem an advance on Hugh Tredennick's 'all-round excellence' for the same term. Another minor quirk is B's consistent rendering of ψυχή as 'heart' which to my mind is no better than the usual translation of 'soul'. But in general, there is very little to complain about in his treatment of Xenophon's Greek. As noted, the commentary will be welcomed by students for its valuable elucidation of grammatical points; but, while it makes some useful observations about literary parallels and the social context of the work, it could have shown more depth on occasions. For instance, Xenophon's opening statement (1.1) that he wishes to record men and what they do in their 'serious moments ... and lighter moments' (μετὰ σπουδῆς ... καὶ ... ἐν ταῖς παλῶια ἰς) draws comment from B, who lists instances of the lighter touch elsewhere in Xenophon. This, however, could have been amplified. The combination of the serious and comic is not only eminently suitable for a symposium, and underscores much in the playful exposition of ideas that follows, but is specifically mentioned by Agathon to describe the tenor of his speech about Eros in Plato's Symposium (197e). The presence of humour or playfulness for its philosophical value occurs a number of times in Plato, as W.K.C. Guthrie has well shown in his History of Greek Philosophy (Cambridge, 1962-81) vol. iv, 59-63; and it is worth noting that Gorgias, whose name crops up more than once in Xenophon's Symposium, could call at least one of his own works a παίγνιον ('amusement' or 'diversion') (Helen 21). Fuller acknowledgement of the serio-comic nature of Xenophon's approach could cast some light on the tenor of the piece as a whole.

More parallels and various points could have been included, which would draw attention to the structure and possible allusions in Xenophon's work. The arrival of the uninvited Philippos (1.11), self-professed laughter-maker, who proves singularly unable to live up to his title, recalls on some level the gate-crashing by Alcibiades in the Platonic Symposium (212c-222b); but this latter intruder at least does retain his charisma and eloquence, despite, or more likely because of, his drunkenness. Here might be an instance of Xenophon's revision of his text (rather dully, perhaps) in the light of Plato's, but B makes no comparison between the episodes here. Another series of parallels given scant treatment revolves around Nikeratos' boast to be able to recite all of
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the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (3.5-6). This naturally brings in the idea of rhapsodes, men pilloried by Plato in his *Ion*, who implicitly get similar treatment here in Xenophon's text, albeit allusively. B notes the parallel with *Ion* in only the most general and vague terms, and does not explore exactly why these reciters of Homer might have been considered vain and silly. At the same time Xenophon refers to Stesimbrotus as an interpreter of Homer, and apparent teacher of Niceratos, which raises the issue of allegorical and other readings of Homeric epic. This feature of intellectual life in Greek culture goes back at least far as Theagenes in the sixth century BC, and recurs later in Xenophon's text here when Socrates etymologises the name of Ganymede from some Homeric half-lines (8.30). Socrates' reasoning is as specious as anything normally attributed to the sophists, but continues a trend of reading Homer obliquely, as well as reminding one of the etymologies in Plato's *Cratylus*, and the interest in the meaning of words associated with sophists like Prodicus (mentioned in Xenophon's *Symposium* at 1.5 and 4.62). None of the possible significance of this occurs in B's commentary.

B also seems hastily dismissive of Niceratos' claim to have learnt about generalship and politics from Homer (4.5-6). Again this taps into a broader idea of the early poets—above all Homer—as teachers, which can be found in Xenophanes in the sixth century (B10 D-K), Herodotus (2.53) and especially Plato, who inveighs against this in many important writings (e.g., *Republic* 376e-398b, 595a-608b). Whatever Xenophon might have felt about Niceratos' claim (and arguments against the authority of such figures as Homer are as old as Xenophanes, e.g., B11, 12 D-K) it is not so clear that Niceratos is being 'tongue in cheek' in making this and other related claims about Homer, as B says. Further contemporary elements may have played a significant role in the motives and structure behind Xenophon's text, particularly in the series of encomia on such implausible themes as poverty, given by Charmides (4.29-33). This paradoxical choice makes his speech comparable, at least in choice of topic, to other unlikely subjects such as death, mice, salt, prostitutes, *inter alia*, that were fair game for sophistic encomia by Polycrates and others active at this time. Elsewhere, in Socrates' speech on the value of spiritual *ιρώς*, as opposed to that based solely on physical desire, one of the more startling ideas is that rape is a lesser evil than seduction (8.20). This view—so alien to modern
sensibilities—could have done with some explication, and surely warranted some discussion of Lysias (1.32-3), where the same notion is invoked by a man defending himself on a charge of murdering an adulterer. But such comparative material is unfortunately left begging, and would have been worth incorporating into B’s commentary to illustrate more thoroughly his own view that familiarity with Xenophon’s *Symposium* can ‘enlarge the sense of Greek culture’.

None of these omissions, however, seriously undermines what is in many ways a serviceable and valuable tool for approaching an underrated and often interesting text; and it might be remarked that the exploration of the sort of issues I’ve outlined is not the role of a commentary. But it seems to me that at least some of these areas could have been broached, thereby stimulating further interest amongst students and others, as well as more clearly opening possibilities for future work (it will be interesting to see how Bernhard Huss treats the same text in his commentary, just published in the Teubner series). In any event, though somewhat perfunctory in certain areas, there are many merits to B’s edition, not least of which is the making of this text accessible to English speakers with updated notes and many useful comments, combined with a reliable, fluent translation; for this students and teachers will be grateful. Yet I also believe that students of all levels—as well as more advanced readers—could have been better served with a commentary that attempted to situate Xenophon’s *Symposium* more fully in its cultural and literary context.

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