Spel bij Plato (1949, 20) in which I argued that Plato to some extent could appreciate the gambols of the sophists as demonstrating (at a very low level) the freedom of play—this is not “the pedagogical importance of play” (which is stressed in Laws). One would like to know whether H. at 305 e 5 prefers to read ὅτως or ὅτως. From 306 c 6 H. concludes that “Plato’s antipathy towards Isocrates is plainly far less than his dislike of the sophists”. In my opinion, the condescension of συγγινώσκειν ... αὐτοῖς χρή will have hit Isocrates more than any taunt could do.


The author of this impressive study presents himself as a follower of the modern school of hermeneutic philosophy, in which emphasis is laid on the thoroughly historical character of reality and human existence. Thereby the claim of many earlier philosophical theories—that they can set out from an absolute, universally valid and timeless starting point, from the perspective of a supra-individual Archimedean point—is dismissed as merely wishful thinking. Verhaeghe is convinced that “no matter how much ... we would wish to encounter man in his uncorrupted, primordial state, we shall never catch a glimpse of him (11)”. Philosophical theorizing on man and his activity always has as its basis a “spontaneous reflectivity” (11), serving as the origin of presuppositions which exert a decisive influence on the unfolding of philosophical ideas. Thus V. rejects all traditional forms of rationalist and idealist thinking. He is not interested primarily in the conception of man which Aristotle develops with the discursive methods of philosophical thought, but rather in the conception of man which lies behind that, namely the self-evident, unsystematized and thus implicit presuppositions of Aristotle’s practical philosophy (11).

The enthusiasm which this approach might kindle in the reader is likely to turn to disappointment when he perceives that V. does no more than outline his alternative method in the first pages of his Introduction and does not dwell further on its implications. Not a
word is spoken on the nature of those implicit 'presuppositions',
nor on the possibility of gaining a methodologically sound perception
of them. At the very least the author should have taken into
account the possibility that an investigator only detects those im-

clicit presuppositions of another thinker which he himself regards
as objectionable. It might be the case that his own 'spontaneous
reflectivity' in as much as it coincides with that of the philosopher
under investigation, eclipses the ideas which it influences, with the
result that they are not recognized as being philosophically (and
ideologically) coloured. The reader would also like to know what
the interrelationship is between all the (pre-reflective) conceptions
of man which have been held from the past to the present. Too easi-
ely the author safeguards himself from such questions by presenting
his study as 'merely a contribution to a broader study of Aristotle's
doctrine of man' (13).

The author undertakes to fulfil his aim in a sequence of three
'rounds'. In the first he analyses a number of modern interpreta-
tions of Aristotle's views on man and his activity. A second chapter
describes the structures within which human activity, in Aristotle's
view, is to be placed. Finally he investigates in what way man
achieves the meaning of his existence within the framework of the
above-mentioned structures.

The description of the status quaestionis in nine parts in Ch. I is
an overture in the true sense of the word. For the diverse methods
of approach and accentuation of modern scholars which are ana-
lysed there are put to a balanced and fruitful use in the treatment
of the Aristotelian texts in the following two chapters. V. indicates
his preference for the interpretative approaches developed by H. G.
Gadamer and P. Aubenque. It is the particular merit of the Ger-
man scholar, in V.'s view, that he has shown that the specific
method of Aristotle's ethics, which is not syllogistic-demonstrative
but rather dialectical, can also in our time lead to inspiring results,
especially in the struggle against the tyranny of rationalism and
positivism (cf. 62-63). In order to reach his aim V. must make a
careful and highly detailed analysis of Aristotle's praxeological
views. The resultant harvest of anthropological presuppositions is,
in contrast, rather thin. For example we are given only one page
(100-1) as conclusion to the discussion of the place of man within
the physis as a whole. It hardly comes as a surprise to read: 'Man
emerges as the highest being of the sub-lunary realm, related
through his reason to the divine realm, but at the same time retain-
ing his roots in the lower sphere of reality'. One is struck by the