

From the Socratics to the Socratic Schools

Classical Ethics, Metaphysics and
Epistemology

Edited by Ugo Zilioli

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Epigraph

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
To arrive there is your final destination.
But do not rush the voyage in the least.
Better it last for many years;
and once you're old, cast anchor on the isle,
rich with all you've gained along the way,
expecting not that Ithaca will give you wealth.

Ithaca gave you the wondrous voyage:
Without her you'd never have set out.
But she has nothing to give you any more.

If then you find her poor, Ithaca has nor deceived you.
As wise as you've become, with such experience, by now
You will have come to know what Ithaca really means.

C.P. Cavafy (1911)

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5 Phaedo's *Zopyrus* (and Socrates' Confidences)

Livio Rossetti

1. SOME PRELIMINARIES

The figure of Phaedo, the Socratic from Elis, has been drowned out by the success, over the centuries, of the Platonic dialogue named after him. A significant reawakening of interest in him as an author, in the period 1970–1990, and some more recent studies (in particular Kahn 1996, Sellars 2003, Boys-Stones 2004, Boys-Stones 2007), have hardly saved him from his traditional banishment to the corner. He remains little more than the beautiful youth whose hair Socrates strokes, at *Phaedo* 89b-c; a colourful but secondary figure in the context of the death of the great man himself.

If nothing much has changed in relation to our sources of information about Phaedo, a change has certainly occurred in the way we think of the so-called 'Minor Socratics.' Recent years have witnessed a complete rediscovery of Xenophon and his *Socratica*,¹ and the beginnings of a treatment of the Socratic circle not as Plato's little brothers but rather as his travelling companions, friends or erstwhile friends, and of an appreciation of the fact that each one of them contributed both to the building of the posthumous image of Socrates and to the immediate fate of Socraticism.² It was Gabriele Giannantoni who first suggested that the first-generation needed to be studied independently of the formation of philosophical schools inspired by their teachings, so "giving back to Euclides, to Phaedo, to Aristippus and to Antisthenes their true character as authentic Socratics"; it was a mistake, he proposed, "to interpret their thought in light of the later history of their so-called schools."³ His propensity for cutting the "umbilical cord" tying each Socratic to the school he would go on to found has continued to create the conditions for starting to recognise the Socratics of the first generation as a relatively homogeneous and close-knit group, though one that would very soon split apart.

Notwithstanding some promising developments in this direction, the tendency has continued of treating the severer form of Socraticism found in Antisthenes and its hedonistic counterpart in Aristippus as the two extremes on a scale of values with which to measure the positions taken by the other Socratics; so too of devoting close attention to the few remaining fragments

of certain dialogues of Aeschines' and Phaedo's while leaving aside all the highly informative testimonia we have about them, thus failing to see what invaluable evidence these provide, certainly in relation to Socrates. It is this that explains the way scholars persist in talking of a supposed incommensurability between testimonies, the impossibility of arriving at the real, historical Socrates, and so on, and end up once more taking refuge in the familiar Platonic account. But it is hard to contest, and properly speaking needs no proof, (1) that Aeschines and Phaedo give well articulated and unequivocal testimony on the subject of Socrates—a testimony which, besides not depending either on Plato or on Xenophon (and even less on Aristotle or Aristophanes), has the great merit of revealing Socrates' inner self, to an extent that other sources do not; and (2) that their evidence allows just the kind of confrontation between different testimonies, and the kind of opportunity for independent confirmation, that modern interpreters insist on treating as “unfortunately impossible.” A renewed attention to the dialogues of these two authors, along with the external evidence, will be sufficient, I suggest, to prompt a comprehensive re-thinking of the figure of Socrates—and equally a rethinking, even more overdue, of the so-called “Socratic question.”⁴

2. THE SOCRATES OF THE ZOPYRUS

Those who have paused on the story of Zopyrus have generally treated the Socrates-Zopyrus episode as an excuse for trying to extract an impression of Phaedo's own supposed philosophy. My own view, however, is that we need to ask ourselves what we learn from *Zopyrus* about *Socrates*. As it happens, there is a well connected set of testimonia that allows us to form a quite precise idea of the story as narrated in the dialogue. Let me then outline this story, assuming that a reliable enough account of what happens is available. Socrates' companions come face to face with Zopyrus, who professes to be able to read off people's characters from their facial features. They show him a portrait of Socrates, perhaps to put his claim to the test. In the person represented in the portrait Zopyrus finds an essentially stupid individual who is also lustful, and possibly a pederast, all of which arouses indignation in the Socratics. But Zopyrus insists that his diagnosis is no hasty one, and asks for a personal meeting with Socrates. The meeting happens, and he immediately confirms his diagnosis: he has perfectly understood the kind of person Socrates is. Socrates' friends become even angrier with him, but at this point the master intervenes with the words “Stay calm, my friends! For I really am the kind of man he found in me; but I control myself” (that is, I control myself so effectively that none of you, for all the time you have been with me, has ever noticed).

Although certainty on the matter is impossible, it is at least probable that the plot ended with a eulogy of philosophy as capable of improving

even those who cannot boast a good character or education. In his *On Fate*, Alexander of Aphrodisias concludes his short re-evocation of the Zopyrus story with the words “Socrates did not contradict Zopyrus; he said that that *was* what he was like, so far as his nature was concerned, unless through the *askêsis* that comes from philosophy he had become better than his own nature.”⁵

This declaration is important from many points of view. To begin with, Socrates says he will not contradict Zopyrus, admitting that his nature is exactly as it has just been described, but then going on to say that he would have remained such, and the vices identified by Zopyrus would have revealed themselves, except for the fact that he has become a better person thanks to *askêsis* and, ultimately, thanks to philosophy. Thus Alexander’s report presents a Socrates (1) who admits he is not, by nature and instinct, as his disciples know him, and (2) who assigns his present condition (of an intellectual who is both respectable and respected) to philosophy, or more precisely to the kind of *askêsis* offered by philosophy: that is—or so we may suppose—to the results obtained from exercise, labour, effort, and a commitment to improve himself under the impulse and guidance of philosophy.

With Alexander’s report we may link the testimony provided by the Emperor Julian in one of his letters (*SSR* III A 2): “Phaedo of Elis . . . thought there was nothing that was incurable by philosophy, and that thanks to philosophy it is possible for all to purify themselves of any kind of life, habit, passion, and other things of that sort. For if it was useful only to those with a good character and education, there would be nothing exceptional in it; but if it enlightens even those who are in such a condition (. . .), then it is something truly prodigious.” According to Boys-Stones (2004, 9) and others “There is no way of telling upon which of Phaedo’s works Julian based his assessment,” but there is more than enough in it to give us reason to disagree: the sentiment reported by Julian comes from the *Zopyrus*. There is, after all, considerable conceptual proximity between “becoming better thanks to philosophy” and “being purified by philosophy,” as there is between the unattractive initial dispositions Socrates admits to having had and the similarly unattractive initial conditions of which some are said to be “purified” by philosophy. This agreement between Alexander and Julian also fits well with the fact that Socrates’ admissions about his character will very likely have given rise to further comment; indeed, it is virtually impossible that the meeting concluded with Socrates’ unexpected confession. It seems probable that Julian is in fact alluding to a concluding statement, in *Zopyrus*, about the benefits that can come from philosophy, as in Socrates’ own case, which functions as it were as the moral of the story.

Support for this conjecture, which of course remains speculative, can be found in the analogous concluding reflections in the *Alcibiades* of Aeschines of Sphettus (fr. 11 Dittmar = *SSR* VI A 53), insofar as the sentence reported by Julian too seems clearly to represent the crowning of the narrative. It is thus reasonable to suppose that the *Zopyrus* emphasized the power of

philosophy, as capable of purifying and offering redemption even in the most desperate cases; and it is not only possible but probable that with his phrase “to people who are in such a condition” Julian intended an allusion to the supposedly bad natural dispositions of Socrates.⁶ The convergence of the evidence is so clear as not to leave room for reasonable doubt.

With all this in mind, I propose now to focus briefly on another detail, the *portrait* of Socrates that figures in the story of the *Zopyrus*. There are only three texts, all from the Arabic world (numbers 20–22 R., not in *SSR*), that have anything to say about this portrait; but it fits well in the setting of the story, usefully heightening the tension before the arrival of Socrates himself. In fact, without the splitting of the story into two stages (first a diagnosis based on the portrait, then a diagnosis based on direct observation), the whole is exceedingly banal. In particular, the surprise and indignation of Socrates' pupils would be hard to understand: if Socrates had been present from the beginning, we would have to ask ourselves what he would be doing while the disciples were getting upset—would he have waited, cruelly, until misunderstanding provoked a physical confrontation before intervening? I note, in passing, that our other sources offer an abstract of the story reduced to the minimum, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that one of its two phases will have been suppressed in the interests of brevity. As for the likelihood that a portrait of Socrates would have been made when he was alive, I limit myself to the observation that there could be some foundation to the report, even in the absence of any known parallel, in view both of the notoriety of the person in question, and of his ties with wealthy people.

When it comes to the identification of the defining traits of the Socratic *ethos*, Boys-Stones (2007, 23) has rightly pointed out that the information given by fragment 6 R. (Cicero, *On Fate*, using the terms *stupidus* and *bardus*) is not in conflict with the generality of our other sources, which, depending on the case, speak of *vitia* (fr. 7 R., from Cicero), Socrates as *libidosus* (fr. 8 R., from pseudo-Plutarch), strange things (*atopa*) (fr. 10 R., from Alexander of Aphrodisias), pederasty (fr. 11 R., from John Casian), Socrates as full of eros (fr. 12 R. from Adamantius), *amator* (fr. 15 R., from an anonymous *On Physiognomy*), *amans coitum* (fr. 16 R., from Polemon), *lascivior* (fr. 20 R., from the Constantinopolitan epitome), *fraudolentus*, *deceptor*, *amans coitum* (fr. 21 R., from the *Secret of Secrets*), *luxoriosus*, *deceptor*, *amans coitum* (fr.22 R., from another version of the *Secret of Secrets*). The discrepancy is easily resolved as soon as we understand that a thick neck is supposed to indicate stupidity, the set of the eyes traits of a sexual nature. So, while the observation of what may be indicated by a thick neck gives us clear reason for saying that Zopyrus was capable of being analytical, and noting non-convergent indications, the other group of attributions points unequivocally in the direction of a supposed hypersensitivity on Socrates' part to the allures of sex. These indications find their confirmation in a range of texts, from the discourse of Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*, and a well known passage in the *Charmides* (154b-d), to the

topic of the “kissing of the beautiful” in Xenophon’s *Symposium* (4.23–27; cf. *Mem.* II 6.28; see also I 3.8–14, I 6.13); and one should recall in this context a recent book by Gabriel Danzig which concludes from a reconsideration of the testimonia that the Socratics felt the need to present the sexual life of their master in a more favourable light, making every effort particularly, in the face of the charge that Socrates corrupted young men, to avoid any appearance that he indulged in unlicensed sexual intercourse.⁷ There is also, of course, that report that Socrates might have come across Phaedo in a brothel. In general, there is plenty to reassure us of the reality of the “unmentionable inclinations” that Zopyrus in all probability saw in Socrates, to the surprise and indignation of his friends.

Some attention deserves to be paid to the implicit conclusion of the story. Socrates might have added “so well do I control, *contineo*, what you have not noticed at all.” His disciples, in their turn, might on the one hand have commented “True, but now we begin to understand a whole series of details and episodes,” and on the other have congratulated themselves along with Zopyrus, acknowledging that he was right, “though we never would have suspected,” and so on. This detail is quite significant, insofar as it allows us a glimpse of a kind of hoping for the best on the part of Socratics, who suspect nothing, cannot believe it, and so on.

There are many aspects that may help us to understand such an attitude. In the first place, I observe that such attitudes may also reflect a new emphasis on respectability, observable in the behaviour of Athenians of the time: while during the long years of the Peloponnesian War sexuality was experienced and represented in the most exotic variety of forms, in the first half of the fourth century we seem to find an increasing sensitivity to the idea that the diffusion of reports about some example or other of excessive sexual “licence” could endanger one’s respectability.⁸ Thus, behind the chorus of indignation of Socrates’ friends at what Zopyrus says, we can see not so much the models of behaviour belonging to the end of the fifth century as those of a time some decades later.⁹

This brings us to the story of the liberation of Phaedo, according to which he found himself a prisoner of war, then a slave in a brothel; while he was still there, so the story continues, somehow or other Socrates himself discovered him, recognized his worth, fell in love with him, then ransomed him (or arranged to have him ransomed). It has often been thought that this story was told by Phaedo himself, and that the references to the redeeming power of philosophy were intended to allude to his own personal experiences. But this is doubtful on many grounds. Phaedo could not have been introducing such an autobiographical note into the *Zopyrus*: there is an obvious contrast, in the tale about Zopyrus, between the surprise that greets the report of Socrates’ weakness for dubious pleasures and the essential presupposition of the story about the ransoming of Phaedo, namely that Socrates and his friends were regular visitors to the brothel, so that they could get to know the young slave and appreciate his qualities. Such a story does credit to

Socrates, but only at the cost of throwing a less than reassuring shadow not only on Phaedo but on other Socratics who would apparently be frequenting the brothel along with their master. It is thus hardly likely that the story was brought into the open by the very person most implicated in it, namely Phaedo, at least in the contest of *Zopyrus*. Other alternative hypotheses are available: it is possible, for instance, that the story—too ugly, surely, not to have originated as a slander—was first reported by Aristoxenus, for example, or by Phaenias of Eresus. There are in fact analogies between the adventures of Phaedo and other romanticised fictions that were given credit around the same time by authors such as Theopompus.

It thus seems appropriate to dissociate these biographical (and scandalous) reports clearly from the dialogue presently under examination.

3. SOCRATES' CONFIDENCES IN THE ZOPYRUS

The observations and inferences offered in the preceding section have already contributed towards establishing certain aspects of the *Zopyrus* and, in particular, in the matter of the image of Socrates that the *Zopyrus* intended to project. However, I believe we have not yet addressed the essential and defining aspect of the dialogue. As I have already indicated, the primary contribution of the *Zopyrus*—as of the *Alcibiades* of Aeschines of Sphettus—is its attempt to reveal something of Socrates' inner self. To all appearance, this is no mere detail.¹⁰ To establish the point one needs only to recall how Plato, for example, tends to give us a Socrates that sets up and guides a relationship, a Socrates caught as he acts, speaks, creatively moulds his interlocutors, in other words a Socrates observed in action, understood through the logic of his actions: a Socrates seen, observed, scrutinised, studied by someone who wants to discover his secret while remaining other—in short, a Socrates that is an object of observation, not a subject prone to lift the veil on his inner self. This is particularly evident in Socratic dialogues like those of a Plato with Socrates as narrator: he tells us what he has said, heard or done, not what he wanted or the goal he had in mind; he does not say things like “I am glad that” / “what a pity that”; he is given no opportunity to pronounce on the meaning, for him, of what has just happened. Again, as narrator, he gives no opinion on the person, or people, he has met and talked to for long periods.

What fails to happen in Plato's dialogues (we will see later one or two small exceptions in Xenophon) does, however, occur in that wonderful ending to Aeschines' *Alcibiades*, in which Socrates directly expresses his amazement at the emotions he has succeeded in evoking. He asks himself “how could this happen?,” and offers the following answer:

“If I thought that I could be of any help through some art (*technê*), I would convict myself of very great stupidity. As it is, I thought this had

been granted me, in respect to Alcibiades, by divine gift . . . The genuine love that I had for Alcibiades made me no different from the Bacchantes. For whenever the Bacchantes become inspired, sources from which others cannot even draw water allow *them* to draw honey and milk. Just so I have no knowledge of any subject that I can benefit a person by teaching him, and yet I thought that by being with him I would make him better, through my loving him.”¹¹

The striking feature of these declarations is that Socrates does not just re-live the event and set out to interpret it, trying to understand what really happened and ending by asking himself how on earth the proud Alcibiades could ever have dissolved into tears. He has no hesitation in admitting that it all happened by virtue of a special emotional tension, a tension which—as he explicitly says—transcends the sphere of expertise, even the art of communication, rhetoric, itself; he even admits that he himself felt it as much as did Alcibiades. This admission clearly is not tinged with any *eirōneia*, because there is no affectation in it, only an intensity of felt emotion; it marks a virtually unique moment of tranquillity, in which Socrates is not proving something (and indeed no longer has any need to prove anything), but can instead allow himself some confidences, insisting that what has happened owes nothing to his presumed cleverness. All of which is quite unusual, from many points of view. But since the focus of the present notes is not Aeschines’ *Alcibiades* but Phaedo’s *Zopyrus*, I shall here limit myself to registering the word “confidences,” observing that the *Zopyrus* too ends with, and is characterized by, certain important “confidences.”

As I have already said, the whole situation in the *Zopyrus* is conceived in such a way as to make Socrates able to say words to the effect of “My friends, stay calm, and stop being angry, because this foreigner, Zopyrus, is quite right. I am in fact the kind of man he says, only I contain myself.”¹² That is, the situation is designed to prepare for a revelation, building up to the unexpected moment when Socrates reveals his cards and says who really he is. For the reasons indicated above, we may suppose that, in revealing his cards, he used the opportunity to mention the battles he fought to achieve this *epechein*, this keeping under control (or—as we might say—repression) of instinctive impulses—impulses that he does not deny he not only has had but has, and that Zopyrus has identified by carefully observing his face, and, given his impartiality, could call by their name.¹³ As Cristiana Caserta has recently written, “The topic of the encounter with Zopyrus also confirms that the problem of self-knowledge was one that Socrates put to himself, not just to his interlocutors.”¹⁴ This is a good observation, and I record that it is not so much Xenophon or Plato that allows us to make it as Phaedo and his *Zopyrus*.

Phaedo in fact starts from a well known aspect of Socrates’ lifestyle, his *enkrateia*, to allow us to deduce, as George Boys-Stones says, that “Zopyrus’ diagnosis must be wrong. The whole episode is a typical example of a

sophist stopped in his tracks; of a false pretence of knowledge that crumbles. But there is a surprise in store.”¹⁵ This is the way Phaedo prepares the way for the memorable moment when Socrates confesses and makes the admission he does, when his friends' anger threatens to degenerate into an actual beating.

This confession—we may call it a confidence—serves not just to relax the tension or round off the narrative: it allows us at the same time to understand Socrates from his own point of view, and to see that while he controls himself, and cares about controlling himself, he is very aware that he is keeping in check a set of instincts that—we are invited to suppose—continue to cause him trouble. I speak of “confidences” in this context because the Socratics are not represented as knowing already, for themselves, what impulses Socrates was engaged in governing or repressing, particularly since, as the story encourages us to suppose, they had noticed no dissonant aspects in the personality, or the behaviour, of the master. Thus what we have is a frank confidence, one that clarifies but also, in a certain way, embarrasses: this, at least, is the logic that seems to guide the course of events described in the *Zopyrus*.

That it allows us access to a confidence of Socrates' potentially makes the dialogue a document of the highest value, indeed a unique value, in comparison with those most comparable to it. While Plato offers us, at most, Alcibiades' confidences *on* Socrates,¹⁶ Xenophon in his *Symposium* finds a way of having Socrates admit that he was shoulder to shoulder with Critobulus, and “it was as if I had been bitten by a wild animal—my shoulder smarted for more than five days . . . So now, Critobulus, before all these witnesses I warn you not to lay a finger on me until you have as much hair on your chin as you have on your head” (4.27–8). This too is not an admission that has been solicited, and so constitutes a confidence, but in comparison with what we find in the *Zopyrus* it is much more filtered and circumspect. What makes the difference is that, in Xenophon's *Symposium*, the discussion prevents any special emphasis on the story of two bare shoulders touching. Similarly, in the Platonic *Charmides* (155e), Socrates tells he was seriously disconcerted by the sight of the young man's nudity. But once more the impact of the incident is immediately lessened by the fact that is treated as a mere detail in the context of a discussion that far transcends it, so disconnecting itself from the revealing confidence. The *Zopyrus*, by contrast, far from treating its moment of revelation as a mere detail, puts it at the very centre of the whole narrative.¹⁷

One deduces from this that the “confidences” in the *Zopyrus*, and in Aeschines' *Alcibiades*, are given much greater emphasis, and bear all the marks of telling the truth about Socrates. Both authors, to say what sort of man Socrates is, resort to using his own confidences. So, if some tens of Socratic dialogues, Platonic or otherwise, show us a Socrates acting in recognizable ways (even if new differences of detail are understandably always bursting through), while other dialogues present doctrines often reflecting

the author's thoughts much more than they do the thoughts of the main character, the *Zopyrus* gives us a Socrates who, for once, does not take the situation in hand except at the end, and only for a moment, but does so in a highly revealing way.

Even the discontinuity between these confidences and everything we know of the literature of the time is worth noting: does the world of embarrassing confidences perhaps originate with Socrates, and most particularly with these two dialogues? It is possible that these two Socratic dialogues, Phaedo and Aeschines, invented a new model for communication—and why else if not to evoke situations that were deeply impressed in their memories? Since our other testimonia make it impossible to treat these “confessions” as mere narrative fictions, what they contain comes with the highest grade of authenticity.

Some reflections on the general importance of this conclusion will be in place here. If out of the maelstrom of our supposedly chaotic and incommensurable sources on Socrates two turn out to be more than reliable, and capable of adding significantly to our understanding of who Socrates really was, then the terms of the dispute about the so-called “Socratic question” are immediately changed. The idea that the sources were irreducibly diverse took hold in the course of the twentieth century, when it became the standard view, especially in the form proposed by Dorion, who claimed that it is simply impossible to reconstruct the thought—the philosophy—of Socrates because there exists no workable criterion to help us resolve the impasse.¹⁸ But this is simply not the case.

I do not of course mean to maintain that Phaedo and Aeschines give us the quintessence of truth; I have pointed out myself the signs of a certain re-reading of the figure of Socrates aimed, for example, at removing any impression that he indulged in unlicensed sex. My claim is simply (1) that it is useful to *begin* by comparing the image of Socrates offered by Plato and Xenophon with what emerges from Phaedo and Aeschines, and (2) that, if this is possible, and practicable, the decision to pronounce on the subject of Socrates without making these and other comparisons is neither justified nor justifiable.

4. COMMUNICATING AND INSPIRING WITHOUT TEACHING

A further and important point is that Socrates was immersed in a culture in which, even among *sophoi* and *sophistai*, a confirmed aversion to elaborating and expounding a fixed corpus of doctrines was widely shared: that is to say, intellectuals practised authorial withholding in the same way as poets and writers for the theatre. From Zeno to Plato, including especially those authors of discourses of an unequivocally antilogical character (Protagoras, Antiphon, Prodicus, Gorgias, Antisthenes himself), Greece went through a long period characterized by a passion for intellectual provocation. The

opposite tendency—the effort to assemble systematic and connected sets of answers: theory, wisdom, doctrines, philosophies and a corresponding concern to assert one's paternity of them—preceded and postdated this phase (from Anaximander to Democritus, then from Aristotle on). One may ask how it could be that scholars should have failed to notice such an important oscillation;¹⁹ not to take it into account is in any case rather dangerous, because it leads interpreters to busy themselves with trying to discover the *doctrines* of Socrates (or of Plato, of Gorgias . . .) and, once they have failed to find such things, systematised *more Aristotelico*, to maintain that we are just not in a position to acquire such knowledge of Socrates (or Plato, or Gorgias . . .).

Socrates was, however, one of those intellectuals, active between the middle of the fifth and the middle of the fourth centuries, who did nothing at all to expound and establish any doctrines, and it is therefore quite possible that to search for them is to labour in vain. This is because he communicated in other registers, for example through his behaviour and by promoting an innovative idea of excellence. A particular idea of excellence can be transformed into a doctrine, but it can also arise and establish itself as a way of being and a style of living without immediately becoming a doctrine in the process. It is no accident that our sources frequently, and in my view unequivocally, converge on just these points.²⁰ Consequently, what we need is not to give up trying to say who the real Socrates was, but rather to give up searching for what he did not care to leave to us, namely well worked doctrines.

One needs to be clear that to adopt, or to represent, a way of behaving behind which one can detect a rule of life inspired by *enkrateia* is not the same thing as offering a theory, or at least contains only a germ of a theory (of the kind that there is, for example, in the claim that the soul of a harmonious person is *sôphrôn* and courageous, whereas the soul of a person lacking in harmony is bad, even savage: Plato, *Republic* IV 411a). As opposed to an illustration of correct behaviour, in the first case, the second proposes permanent relationships between concepts, relationships that aspire to be universal. Again, in the first case, ideas are suggested without being developed (though they *could* be developed), while the second sets aside the present, contingent event and proceeds to connect notions already subject to generalization. The difference between the two cases is clear enough to make it easy to conclude that while Plato may have devoted himself to establishing permanent relationships between concepts, and so too some other Socratics, Phaedo (and Aeschines) did not—and neither did Socrates.

If then the Socrates of the *Zopyrus* proposes and values a style of life without giving any teaching or occupying himself with generalizations, it is up to us to make specific comparisons within this same field, without slipping into that of conceptual elaboration. That is easy enough, given the great variety of statements and anecdotes pointing in this direction:²¹ the *logos proteptikos* in Plato's *Apology* (29d-30a), the *Clitophon*, the

Symposium, with its narrative of Alcibiades' confusion and shame, and so on. There are many occasions on which Socrates seems occupied with inculcating a style of life that generates self-esteem (or what we have come to call self-esteem) through the experience of shame. Alcibiades, for instance, is induced to despise himself and feel shame for being the person he is, but this psychological pressure is brought into play on the assumption that if he decided to change his life (that is, if he succeeded in controlling his instinctive impulses), then he would be content to live in a different way. Here Socrates is used exactly as a living example of success in the control of emotions and passions.

We may further compare the fragment in which Antisthenes ends by declaring that he would willingly kill Aphrodite, if he could, when he thinks of the many girls from good families that she has corrupted and ruined, and goes on to declare that he would prefer madness to the enjoyment of eros.²² The most intuitive interpretation of this is that Socrates knew how neutralize Eros very well, even to the point of immunizing himself (and without any real fight). Also worth mentioning are the dozens of anecdotes connected with the name of Aristippus,²³ because this whole collection of witticisms serves to justify his behaviour by attributing to him an unexpected *freedom from* passions, pleasures and luxury even if he does not abstain from them. They strongly suggest that Aristippus too practises *epechein*, i.e. *enkrateia*, but without emphasizing the fact, and above all without denying himself many ways of gratifying his desires (within certain limits and under certain conditions). Thus his aphorisms too contribute towards establishing the exemplary nature of the Socratic commitment to *epechein*. The comparison with Aristippus also serves to bring out the point that Socrates is never said himself to have set a positive value on the idea of *ponos* or that of *hêdonê*. Rather, his behaviour always speaks to us of *enkrateia*, manifestly a quite different notion. It is exactly on this latter that the *Zopyrus* turns the spotlight, while at the same time suggesting intuitive connections with other texts on Socrates' style of life. The dialogue thus contributes towards an outline of an idea of Socrates that is rock solid, not least because the sources are in perfect agreement about it.

I observe, moreover, that from this connected set of testimonies there emerges a picture of a style and a life, and a proposal for living, that are profoundly innovative; indeed it would be vain to search for precedents.²⁴ And obviously the lack of precedents itself offers some reassurance that we are indeed in a position to know something about Socrates.

5. THE ZOPYRUS AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

The time has come to ask ourselves whether perhaps we learn something else from the *Zopyrus*—or more precisely, from the story we have been discussing up to this point. One might have the impression that, in light of the

preceding, the answer must in the nature of things be no, but as always, the reality is little more complicated. Let us try then to ask whether, in the case of the *Zopyrus*, the representation of the rule of life by which Socrates lives is positively connected with any more or less embryonic theoretical elaboration. For this purpose we need to review the relevant sources.

Fr. 7 R. In *Tusculans* IV 80 Cicero observes that, when Zopyrus recognised in Socrates a combination of many vices, the philosopher declared that they were “innate in him, but kept down by him through reason” (*illa sibi insita, sed ratione a se deiecta*). We may hypothesise here that the reference was to vices innate in Socrates, not necessarily in man as a species; and that the idea of vices being “kept down” by the intervention of reason is linked to what Zopyrus claims about Socrates. It is thus doubtful whether there is any room here for a theory about the nature and function of reason, even apart from the fact that we have no means of judging the authenticity or otherwise of the term used (i.e., *deicere*).

Fr. 6 R. In Cicero, *On Fate* 10, the narrative introduces the figure of Zopyrus who, having found in Socrates the signs of obtuseness, “added that he was a lover of women, at which Alcibiades broke into hollow laughter” (*addidit etiam mulierosum, in quo Alcibiades cachinnum dicitur sustulisse*). Then Cicero observes “But these vices can be born in us from natural causes; as for extirpating them and getting rid of them altogether, so that they very person prone to them is steered away from such great failings, that is not within the realm of natural causes, but in that of will, application and discipline” (*Sed haec ex naturalibus causis vitia nasci possunt; extirpari autem et funditus tolli, ut is ipse qui ad ea propensus fuerit a tantis vitiis avocetur, non est id positum in naturalibus causis, sed in voluntate, studio, disciplina*). The trio of will, application and discipline is thoroughly Ciceronian, and it seems fairly unlikely that Phaedo could have been moving towards the kind of generalisation Cicero is making, not least because the Greek equivalent of *vitia* (that is, in the plural) is for the most part absent from pre-Aristotelian literature, and rare even in Aristotle himself.

Fr. 8 R. Scholium to Persius, *Satires* 4.80: “It is for me/in my power to defeat pleasure itself” (*meum est ipsam libidinem vincere*). That Phaedo could have spoken about the possibility of, or the need for, defeating, controlling or overcoming eros is obviously possible.

Fr. 9 R. The Syriac text of pseudo-Plutarch does not say anything about the end of the story but, before relating the anecdote, it observes that Socrates showed that desires can be defeated if one takes appropriate care. Again, it is not impossible that Phaedo said something of the sort.

Fr. 10 R. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Fate* 6 (already cited): Socrates acknowledges he is by nature as Zopyrus says he is, “unless through the *askêsis* that comes from philosophy he had become better than his own nature.” There is certainly here the germ of a theory about the connection between *askêsis* (exercise or practice) and philosophy, to the effect that philosophy functions as a kind of motor for *askêsis*. Thus there is here an

embryonic idea of a non-generic connection between two potentially universal notions, although it must be stressed that there are no indications to show that the sentence in question is in fact closely related to Phaedo's text. At the same time there is a noticeable proximity between "through the *askêsis* that comes from philosophy" and "kept down by him through reason" (fr. 7 R.).

And that is all. Unless I am mistaken, the documentation available on the *Zopyrus* offers no other useful clue that would enable us to sketch a *doctrine* of Phaedo's own. Thus in my view the conditions do not exist for to inferring, from the above that

[T]he evidence . . . attributes the following claims to Phaedo: (1) that each person has a 'nature' which encompasses their irrational impulses; (2) that this "nature" is related to the body in such a way that an expert in the matter could deduce the former from the appearance of the latter; and (3) that one's "nature" does not determine behaviour.²⁵

In fact, from what we know of the *Zopyrus* there emerge no systematic theories, only premises that *might* have been developed into the form of a systematic doctrine. Something is potentially stirring, but no actual theory is documented in our texts. There is proof of this, if proof were necessary, in the doubts surrounding the precise significance of the "*askêsis* that comes from philosophy" (or more generally, guided by reason): it is not clear if this kind of action produces a mere containment, or repression inspired by the aim of a complete uprooting. The available testimonia do not permit us, then, to say whether Phaedo wished and was able to express a specific teaching on the subject of erotic impulses and how to restrain them, or, if so, what that teaching was. Boys-Stones is particularly concerned to extract from the story a precise and articulated theoretical construct, but it has to be admitted that any such thing is present, if at all, only in a virtual sense, even if, in the abstract, it is quite compatible with what little we know of the *Zopyrus*. But was the purpose of the story to give us a better understanding of Socrates and of his value to us, or was it to impart a doctrine? Nothing by way of a *theory*, so far as we can tell, actually takes shape in the dialogue.²⁶

For the same reasons, I suggest that it would not make any sense to talk of an "Antisthenising" Phaedo. That Phaedo shows a propensity for a fundamental distrust of the passions, and in favour of their containment, however this is understood, is undeniable. But for it to be possible to deduce that he sympathises with Antisthenes' moralizing, we would have to suppose that he had just two alternatives: i.e., taking inspiration either from Antisthenes, or from Aristippus. But in this case *tertium datur*: Phaedo could have focussed on what he remembered of the real Socrates.

6. THE ZOPYRUS AND PHILOSOPHY

We need still to ask what the *Zopyrus* leaves us to understand, or to conjecture, about philosophy. It is no mere secondary matter to discover that documentation of the use of word “philosophy” in the first decades of the fourth century BC extends beyond occurrences of the term itself and its derivatives in Plato, Xenophon and Isocrates: it extends to Phaedo too. There is no shortage of indications that other Socratics too are to be considered as philosophers but, unless I am mistaken, documentary proof is available only for Phaedo, and the nature of that documentation makes the fact highly significant.

We should note too the connection which seems to be made between philosophy and Socrates. If in the concluding parts of the *Zopyrus* Phaedo really did write of the beneficial effects of philosophy (and I have examined the evidence for this above), it would follow that, in his view, the beneficial effects of philosophy were apparent above all in the person of the master. In that case Socrates would have been presented as a living and paradigmatic example of a person improved—or better, profoundly altered—by philosophy.

As for the idea of philosophy Phaedo favours, the indications are that he had developed an essentially therapeutic conception. We find him representing philosophy as able to release positive energies whatever a person's natural leanings may be. Socrates is the living example of the way in which one can conduct a more than respectable life even if one's starting conditions are not in the least favourable. This emphasis, for all that we know, seems to be original, only we have no basis for conjectures about the frame in which it was set, or to guess at the justifications Phaedo might have introduced in support of his eulogy of philosophy.

We might, all the same, risk the proposal that the *Zopyrus* could have offered Phaedo an excellent opportunity to dissent from Plato, when the latter makes Socrates say, in the case that we need to find young men to make fit for governmental, that we must prefer “those specimens who are the most stable and the most courageous, so far as possible the best looking, and so on. But we need to add to this list: the people we're looking for mustn't just be upstanding and enterprising characters, they'll also need to possess the natural traits that are conducive to the kind of education we're talking about” (*Republic* VII 535a-b, tr. Rowe). However, we do not know if there was disagreement on the subject (there is no indication of it), and it would be fruitless to try to imagine a way in which Phaedo might have constructed arguments against Plato.

More significant is the sense that Phaedo has sympathy for a philosophy that helps us to live better (in fact, a philosophy that heals). One would therefore like to know whether he had any idea of philosophy as wisdom, and as a set of theories, and if so what he thought of it; but we lack the

evidence to enable us to offer any useful answers. We do know that the school he founded had a short life and no great success, and it would be interesting to know if his particular idea of philosophy contributed to the limited vitality of what we call the school of Elis.

We would like to know. Considering the many things we do *not* know about him, it seems to me appropriate to recognise in those “confidences” of Socrates—and in the idea itself, of a character who gives such confidences—one of the most conspicuous legacies of Phaedo (and of Aeschines of Sphettus).

7. CONCLUSION

I conclude, as I must, by returning to the theme of philosophical importance. Limiting myself, on this occasion, to the *Zopyrus* alone, I would claim to have adduced arguments for saying that on this particular dialogue we know too much of importance to continue to show so little interest in it. It is not true that we know nothing of value about Phaedo. I have tried to demonstrate that from his *Zopyrus* we learn important things—indeed, things of first importance—both about Socrates’ personality and about the beginnings of philosophy in Greece. Phaedo’s *Zopyrus* offers us key testimony on both points. First, his Socrates dares to speak about himself, and to reveal an aspect of his nature that Phaedo presumes to have gone completely unseen even by the master’s habitual followers. Second, here and at the end of Aeschines’ *Alcibiades* we find the earliest evidence of a person giving confidences, and of confidences treated as revealing of, and as revealing very important things about, the person who gives them. Thirdly and finally, one observes that, other than Plato and Xenophon, only Phaedo among the Socratics seems to have written anything on the subject of philosophy (neither Aristippus and Antisthenes do so, for example). We are dealing here with affirmations that are anything but negligible, insofar as we witness here taking shape an idea of philosophy the value of which is made to depend on its potentiality for affecting our life and our actions, and not (also) on certain doctrines, or on the value of such doctrines. Its novelty is such as to require us to rethink our views about the different ideas of philosophy that took shape among the Socratics, before the advent of Aristotle.

NOTES

1. Xenophon has been the object of intense study in every issue of *Socratica* (see www.socratica.eu); see also Nancy and Tordesillas 2008, Hobden and Tuplin 2012, various books by Vivienne Gray, and a penetrating article by David O’Connor in Morrison 2011; also Dorion 2013.
2. See Rossetti 2008.
3. SSR IV, p.14.

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4. Hence the fact that although its main focus is on Phaedo's *Zopyrus*, there will be plenty of references in the present paper also the final part of Aeschines' *Alcibiades*.
5. Fragment 10 Rossetti (henceforward 'R. '; the fragment is not found in *SSR*).
6. I shall discuss in a moment the alternative view, adopted by many, that the statements in question referred to Phaedo's own obscure personal history.
7. Danzig 2010, esp. chapters IV-V.
8. Practically nothing has been written about this change in taste. Its clearest expression is in Aristophanes, that is, in the difference between *Wealth* and the comedies preceding it; also in the changed political-cultural climate. Could the brazen arrogance of an Alcibiades have manifested itself after Aegospotami? Plato and other Socratics certainly describe such instances, but only in the context of a projection into the past, when there was a more relaxed attitude towards such behaviour.
9. Cf. Danzig's conclusions (Danzig 2010) about the careful way Plato and Xenophon appear to distract attention away from allegations against Socrates of a sexual nature.
10. This appears to me an aspect almost totally neglected in the literature, and I myself have struggled to take proper account of it. I confess, with regret, that I failed to pay proper attention to the subject either in my 2010 or in my 2011.
11. Aelius Aristides, *In Defence of Oratory* 61 and 74 (= *SSR* VI A 53).
12. *Quiescite, o sodales: etenim sum, sed contineo*: John Cassian, *Conferences* XIII 5.3 (= fr. 11 R., missing in *SSR*).
13. In our own times, we readily recognise that our fundamental traits have a tendency to express themselves whether we wish it or not, thanks to the way certain types of emotion involve the body.
14. Caserta 2013, 301–2.
15. Boys-Stones 2007, 23.
16. Such a comparison weakens the presumption that Alcibiades in this context is not to be taken seriously (as proposed in Narcy 2008).
17. In the case of Aeschines' *Alcibiades* too, attention is notoriously focused on the moment of crisis that gives rise to the philosopher's confidences, with the result that these acquire a paradigmatic value.
18. See most recently Dorion 2010. It will suffice to cite his p. 19: "we must abandon the project of faithfully reconstructing the historical Socrates' ideas, so desperately out of reach."
19. In fact I seem to be the only one to have drawn attention to it (most recently in Rossetti 2013, 307–8, n.4), but I remain convinced that my position is well founded.
20. See my arguments in Rossetti 2010.
21. Note the iterative aspect of this passage (29d6); for testimonia of a similar kind, see Capizzi 1971.
22. Theodoret, *Cure for Greek Maladies* III 53 (= *SSR* V A 123).
23. See especially *SSR* IV A 35–100.
24. See further Rossetti 2010.
25. Boys-Stones 2007, 27 (also Boys-Stones 2004, 13).
26. "There is, of course, no reason at all to suppose that Phaedo ascribed to Zopyrus a theoretical view of the soul's relationship with the body, or that this is what Socrates was supposed to be in agreement with him about. In fact the dynamic of the dialogue would be better explained if Zopyrus had no *theory* at all" (Boys-Stones 2007, 25). In my view it is not just the figure of Zopyrus, but the dialogue as a whole that fails to give us a theory of the option for *enkrateia* that is floated before us.

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