

SOCRATIC THERAPY: THE ROLE OF SOCRATES¹

The therapeutic approach to reading Socratic literature of the 4th century BC is based on the assumption that the Socrates appearing in Socratic dialogues is not only a tireless inquirer (similarly to the way he appears in the early Plato) or an example of ethical behaviour, as in Xenophon's Socratic works, but also a healer capable of healing souls². Naturally, this therapeutic layer should not be sought in all «Socratic speeches» (λόγοι Σωκρατικοί). However, several of them make references to *therapeia* either directly or indirectly, associating Socrates with an ability to heal, *i.e.* to help himself and his associates take care of themselves.

Although a major part of the contemporary interpretations of Socratic literature dating back to the 4th century BC focuses on analysing individual issues, the interpreters almost never raise the question to what extent their analytical approach to reading these texts is actually justified. They do not ask if it is at all possible to separate issues concerning justice, courage, piety, *anamnesis*, erotic love, education, *akrasia*, or others from the dialogues involving specific participants these issues are related to. If we accept the therapeutic assumption, however, analysing the issues exemplified above will not be a goal unto itself; instead, it will become part of a wider examination that we can only understand if we consider the narrative layer of the texts in question, *i.e.* if we allow ourselves to be more receptive of the dramatic structure of the individual dialogues³.

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2. Understood here in a narrower sense, the term «Socratic literature» is meant to embrace the texts written by Socratic philosophers who were active in the 4th century BC (Antisthenes, Aristippus, Euclid, Phaedo, Aeschines, Xenophon, etc.), including Plato's early dialogues and, in a broader sense, texts written by Ancient authors who were influenced by the writings by the first generation of Socrates' followers (Greek and Roman Cynics, early Stoics, academic Sceptics, Dion of Prusa, Libanius, Maximus of Tyre, etc.). For more details, see C. KAHN's specification of the first circle of Socratic authors in his *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 1-35. My references to the fragments of Socratic philosophers are made in accordance with G. GIANNANTONI, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1990, vols I and II (abbrev. SSR).

3. Cf. K. LAMPE, «Socratic Therapy» from Aeschines of Sphettus to Lacan, *Classical Antiquity*, 29, 2010, pp. 181-221.

In this paper, I seek to put to the test the assumption based on the therapeutic function of the Socratic dialogues. Given how difficult this task is in general, I only focus on selected topics related to Socratic therapy without making any efforts to present them systematically. The paper pays attention to several passages from the Socratic dialogues in which Socrates explains his role in dialogues, associating it –as shall be seen– with therapy.

If we raise the question of what the various representations of Socrates appearing in the Socratic literature of the 4th century BC have in common, we will, sooner or later, feel the need to justify the criteria we applied in our attempts to reconstruct our portrait of Socrates in the first place. We will come to realise that what is called the Socratic Problem does not only concern «the historical Socrates», but also those who ask questions about him, as well as the ways in which these questions are asked. Socrates' character manifests itself in different ways – in as many different ways, in fact, as the number of different approaches we have taken in reading the texts referring to the character's activity.

If we raise the question of what the various texts pertaining to the *corpus* of Socratic writings have in common, however, we will find ourselves in an entirely different situation. Regardless of the differences related to the issues, circumstances and situations that the characters in the writings find themselves in, and regardless of the differences among them which have to do with their character features, temperament types and education backgrounds, it is safe to say that all the writings pertain to the question of how an individual should live their life. However, the problematisations of life do not concern people in general, but specific individuals, namely those who participate in the dialogues with Socrates. Those who get engaged in a dialogue with Socrates and remain involved in it for a sufficient amount of time come to understand that they can give their individual lives a certain direction. Socrates helps them seek and find the strength they need in order to change themselves. Socrates thus plays the role of a soul therapist or, more precisely, a therapist for kindred spirits. Socrates is not always referred to as a «healer», though.

Socrates as a midwife

Nowadays, there is probably nobody who would have doubts about the fact that the Athenians considered Socrates a teacher and an instructor – one that was similar to sophists of his time, as suggested by the caricature of Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds* or the efforts made by Socrates' disciples to differentiate between Socratic teaching and Sophist teaching⁴. It all becomes

4. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates defends himself against being categorised as a sophist (PLAT., *Apol.*, 19d, 20c, 21b). In Socratic literature, however, there are several ways of

understandable once we consider that one of the two points contained in the charges against Socrates was that he had a malign influence on young men living in Athens⁵. Plato's Socrates uses various ways to prove that he is a «teacher» neither in the traditional (poetic) sense of the term, nor in the more recent (sophistic) sense⁶. However, this does not mean that he did not consider his activity –indulging in discussions with young men– to be a specific form of teaching⁷.

In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes his educational mission using the metaphor of midwife (*Theaet.*, 149a-151d)⁸. The central question of the dialogue between Socrates and Theaetetus concerns knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), *i.e.* an issue that does not appear to be directly related to Socratic teaching. Appearances can be deceptive, though – as frequently shown by Plato's Socrates, revealing the realm of appearances (δόξα) beyond people's opinions. When Theaetetus admits that he has previously examined knowledge on a number of occasions, but to no avail, Socrates describes his helplessness as a painful state that is similar to gravity⁹. In other words, Socrates refuses to examine opinions (δόξα) that lead to wrong understandings of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and does not start explaining to Theaetetus the steps that he has to take if he wants to find true knowledge; instead, he focuses on his helplessness, indicating that he wants to take care of it. Being compared to a midwife does not seem to be related to the issue of knowledge, but it turns out it is actually relevant – with regard to Theaetetus, who longs for knowledge, but does not know what knowledge is.

distinguishing between Socratic and Sophist teaching methods: Socrates is not interested in foreign cultures, his mission being to help the Athenian community (cf. PLAT., *Apol.*, 23b, 29b); Socrates does not teach for money (cf. PLAT., *Apol.*, 20a, 33a-b; *Soph.*, 233d, 224e; XENOPH., *Cynegeticus*, 13.9; ANTISTHENES, *SSRV* A 62 from ATHEN. XIV 656 F); Socrates disapproves of the «long speeches» given by Sophists, promoting a dialogue based on questions and short answers instead (cf. PLAT., *Prot.*, 334c-338c, *Grg.*, 449b, 461e-462a); Socrates refuses (Gorgian) rhetoric because it is not based on knowing the truth (cf. PLAT., *Grg.*, 459b-e; *Phdr.*, 259e, 260e, 261a-c; XENOPH., *Cynegeticus*, 13.5-6), etc.

5. Cf. DIOG. LAERT., II 40 (full wording of the charge).

6. Socrates uses the argument that he has never been a teacher (διδάσκαλος) as a major argument in Plato's *Apology* (*Apol.* 33a-b). At the same time, he refers to the sons of the wealthiest citizens as people who follow him voluntarily (αὐτόματα, 23c). However, Socrates' emphasis on the fact that he has never been part of any traditional school (διδασκαλείον) need not be understood literally, because it is part of his defence against the charge that he has a malign influence on young men.

7. It should be noted that in Plato's *Apology*, in which Socrates explains his activity in a direct confrontation with the plaintiffs, he refuses to live his life in peace, *i.e.* an unexamined life (ἀνεξέταστος βίος, 38a 5).

8. Socrates refers to his own explanation as too detailed (*Theaet.*, 151b 7), but necessary to define the role it plays in conversations.

9. Comparing it to gravity is not coincidental because Socrates considers himself a midwife engaging in an art that is similar to the one performed by Phaenarete, his own mother (*Theaet.*, 149a). Cf. PLAT., *Euthyd.*, 297e; *Alc.*, I, 131e; DIOG. LAERT., II 18.

At first, Socrates admits that he hides his craft from other people because he would be considered the greatest of all strangers (ἀτοπώτατος) – a person who makes his fellow debaters feel helpless (ἀπορείν, *Theaet.*, 149a 9) on purpose. Inconspicuous though it may be, Socrates' remark suggests that some people may interpret an activity as confusing and harmful, but others might actually consider the same activity useful. Here it seems that Socrates might in fact be alluding to the ambiguous nature of all opinions, or a possible relationship between mere opinions and true knowledge: although Socrates seems to be a person who makes people feel uncertain, he actually helps those who are closest to him get rid of their uncertainty. Socrates, then, seems to be referring to something of great significance: the goal of his conversations is not to make his fellow debaters feel helpless or amazed, but rather encourage them to seek a greater certainty in decision-making. In compliance with the discussions of his time, he characterises his activity as an art (τέχνη) – or, more precisely, midwifery art (μαιευτική τέχνη, *Theaet.*, 161e 5, 184b 1)¹⁰.

The subsequent description of what a midwife actually does is meant to clarify the differences between conventional midwifery and Socratic midwifery (*Theaet.*, 150b-c): rather than helping women, Socrates' midwifery helps men give birth and seeks to look after their nascent souls, not their bodies. The most significant difference between a conventional midwife and Socrates lies in the ability to detect whether a young man will give birth to a phantom or a fertile truth¹¹. Although Socrates cannot give birth to knowledge, because it is not in him in the first place, he can identify knowledge in other people's souls (*Theaet.*, 150c 7-8): «God compels me to be a midwife, but has prevented me from giving birth» (μαιεύεσθαι με ὁ θεὸς ἀναγκάζει, γεννᾶν δὲ ἀπεκάλυπεν).

Plato's Socrates puts great emphasis on the fact that he does not teach anything – similarly to the way a midwife does not give birth. Nonetheless, those who meet Socrates make considerable progress because they can give birth to a lot of beautiful things. Not all of them, though. Young men who are confident of their self-reliance but left Socrates much earlier than they should

10. This description of Socrates' activity is serious (τέχνη is related to a certain form of knowledge, experience and, most of all, the ability to teach) and ironic at the same time, because no man would ever call himself a «midwife». A similarly ironic tone is used by Xenophon's Socrates, who refers to himself as a «panderer» (cf. *μαστροπεία, προαγωγεία*, XENOPH., *Symp.*, 4, 61-64).

11. The way Plato operates with the images of a midwife, child-birth, and miscarriage is odd in relation to his culture, which made it possible for a new-born to be killed within 5 days of its childbirth, *i.e.* to be disposed of before ἀμφιδρόμια, a ritual by which the father welcomes his offspring to his house. For more details, cf. J. M. RIDDLE, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 10-18.

have ended up losing their foetuses (their true ideas) and replacing them with delusions (untrue statements). They turned into unknowledgeable individuals by engaging in improper association, although they never got to know their ignorance themselves. That is exactly what might happen to Theaetetus, which is why it is necessary that his helplessness is taken care of.

Plato's *Theaetetus* portrays Socrates –in dramatic fashion– as a person who does not subscribe to any specific school of thought¹². In his educational activity, Socrates does not refer to knowledge – more often than not, he resembles the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues, who was characterised by the fact that he could not tell what excellent conduct meant more than any of his fellow debaters. The only difference between Socrates and his fellows was that he was aware of his own ignorance.

What is important to us is that, in *Theaetetus*, Socrates does not discuss his activity in general terms, but prefers to speak of his own experience instead. For instance, he provides an example involving Aristides, a former student of his who left him later on, as a result of which he lost everything he had once given birth to within his soul (*Theaet.*, 150e)¹³. If we aim to grasp Socrates' example fully, we have to keep in mind Aristides' dramatic character: Aristides comes from a wealthy aristocratic family that expects him to carry the torch of their famous tradition. Plato's *Laches* tells the story of how Lysimachos, Aristides' father, took Aristides to Socrates so as to enable his son to become as distinguished as Aristides' grandfather. Plato's *Laches* ends in Socrates' decision to take Aristides under his wing (*Lach.*, 200c-201c). The dialogue is set in the year 424 BC. Dramatically set in 399 BC, *Theaetetus* reveals what happened in the meantime: Aristides quits meeting Socrates and the effects of

12. Cf. *Theaet.*, 179b 2-3. Socrates' ignorance would also be reflected in the overall structure of *Theaetetus*, in which three possible answers are formulated but actually none of them is exhaustive, so the question of knowledge remains open in the end. Nonetheless, some commentators claim that Socrates' ignorance is to be understood ironically because, with no knowledge (or no partial knowledge) at all, he would not be able to make the right decisions. This interpretation can actually be corroborated by Socrates' own words: «I am not in any sense a wise man» (ὄν πάνυ τι σοφός, *Theaet.*, 150d 1); for more details, cf. D. SEDLEY, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004, pp. 31-32. What remains open, however, is the issue that is related to the justifiability of the perspective we read *Theaetetus* from – either as a text that is about an epistemological problem, or a text that also serves a certain therapeutic function. If we read it dramatically, the dialogue is not primarily established on the power of its arguments but the ways in which Socrates guides his companions to search for their individual methods of decision-making. Just as he stresses at the beginning of the discussion, Socrates does not aim to teach, *i.e.* he is not interested in knowledge that can be communicated to a person.

13. Cf. *Theaet.*, 151a; *Theag.*, 130a-e. In *Laches*, Aristides is one of the participants in the discussion – his father brings him to Socrates, asking him to teach Aristides to act excellently (*Lach.*, 179 a-b), *i.e.* so that he becomes a worthy member of his family, καλὸς κάγαθός (cf. *Lach.*, 179b 2, 186c 4, 187a 8).

his teacher's art of midwifery gradually fade away. In this connection, Socrates formulates a hypothesis, stating that the effects of his art fade away if young men fail to stay in close contact with him for a sufficient period of time. If this contact is broken, it may be impossible to restore it in some cases – as though it was not just up to Socrates whether or not he can take care of the young men who have not seen him for an extended period of time (*Theaet.*, 151a-b):

«Sometimes they come back, wanting my company again, and ready to move heaven and earth to get it. When that happens, in some cases the divine sign that visits me forbids me to associate with them; in others, it permits me, and then they begin again to make progress. There is another point also in which those who associate with me are like women in child-birth. They suffer the pains of labor, and are filled day and night with distress; indeed they suffer far more than women. And this pain my art is able to bring on, and also to allay»¹⁴.

Socrates claims that the reason why Aristides' education failed was that the immediate contact between the two of them was broken. But what kind of contact was it really? A teacher meeting a pupil, or a lover meeting his beloved¹⁵? *Theaetetus* does not provide any clarification –similarly to Plato's early dialogues– as to the nature of the relationship between Socrates and Aristides. In the context of the discussion in *Theaetetus*, however, it is obvious that knowledge cannot be gained without working on one's self, which requires a very specific kind of association with Socrates, or, alternatively, with someone whose mission is similar to Socrates'.

Socrates as a lover

Plato's *Theaetetus* does not reveal the nature of the relationship between Socrates and Aristides. In the *corpus* of Socratic literature, however, one of

14. PLATO, *Theaetetus*, in: Plato: *Complete Works*, edited by J. COOPER, translated by M. J. Levett, rev. by M. Burnyeat, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1997, pp. 157-234.

15. In connection with the Greek institution of pederasty, it could be said that both types of relationship are mutually interrelated: in Ancient Athens, the relationship between an adult man («with a beard») and a young man («with no beard») was characterised by an intimate relationship between a mature lover (ἐραστής) and a beloved boy (ἐρώμενος). However, there were also strict rules so as to ensure that the relationship between an adult man and a juvenile boy always performed an educational and initiatory function. Rather than to justify homosexual relationships, the point of pederasty was to prepare young men for the life of a soldier and a citizen. It means that one of the essential tasks of every ἐραστής was to take care of his ἐρώμενος' upbringing, *i.e.* to secure the young man's physical and intellectual training in the spirit of the aristocratic ideal of the perfect man (καλὸς κἀγαθός). For more details on the Socratic understanding of pederasty, cf. K. J. DOVER, *Greek Homosexuality*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 153-170.

the preserved texts gets back to this issue, namely *Theages*¹⁶. The dialogue thematises the issue of «what it means to be with Socrates»¹⁷. The starting point of Pseudo-Plato's *Theages* –similarly to Plato's *Laches*– are the concerns of a father about his son's upbringing. Demodocus' son Theages wants to be wise and asks his father to get it sorted, *i.e.* to pay a sophist to teach him (*Thg.*, 121a-d)¹⁸. In the circumstances, Demodocus turns to Socrates and asks him for help.

The debate starts with an examination (*Thg.*, 122e-127a) of what the actual goal of Theages' desire for wisdom is – could it be the knowledge of politics? If so, he needs a suitable teacher – an educated sophist or a perfect politician. The latter should be given preference, but Theages remembers Socrates' discussions in which he showed that the sons of perfect politicians are not any better than the sons of shoemakers¹⁹. If Theages is to be taught by a perfect man whose conduct is sound (*καλὸς κάγαθός*), why can he not be taught by Socrates²⁰? When Theages expresses his wish to be taught by Socrates,

16. A majority of Ancient writers (Albinus, Stobaeus, Proclus) claimed that *Theages* was written by Plato. Doubts about Plato's authorship appeared as late as in the 19th century, as a result of which the dialogue was eventually labelled «pseudo-Platonic». For more details, cf. J. PAVLU, *Der Pseudoplatonische Dialog Theages*, *Wiener Studien*, 31, 1909, pp. 14-15. Some philologists (C. W. Mueller, K. Steinhardt) also came to the conclusion that *Theages* might have actually been written by several authors – or that the passage between 128d 7 and 130e 4 might have been written by Plato himself. Historians do not agree with one another as far as the dating of the dialogue is concerned, but a number of them lean towards the period between 365 and 330 BC. If we consider the fact that the author of *Theages* knew the text of *Alcibiades I*, then the dialogue may have been written between 345 and 335 BC. As for its dramatic dating, the dialogue could be dated to 410 BC. For more details, cf. M. JOYAL, *The Platonic Theages: An Introduction, Commentary and Critical Edition*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000, pp. 121-134, 154-155.

17. Cf. *Thg.*, 129e 2: τὰς συνουσίας τῶν μετ' ἐμοῦ. The expression συνουσία («to be with someone») can also be used to refer to either sexual or social forms of intercourse; cf. PLAT., *Prot.*, 318a2-4; *Symp.*, 206c; *Phd.*, 68a; XENOPH., *Mem.*, I, 2, 14 etc. Cf. also XENOPH., *Mem.*, IV, 1, where Xenophon mentions how beneficial (ὠφέλιμος) Socrates was to his friends.

18. Theages wants to be σοφός, to assert himself in his community, *i.e.* to be able to control others (*Thg.*, 124a) – similarly to Alcibiades in Pseudo-Plato's *Alcibiades I*. The motif of a young aristocrat who wants to assert himself in his community appears in Socratic literature relatively frequently, *e.g.* in Antisthenes' treatise entitled *Menexenus, or On Government* (here, Socrates seems to reprimand Menexenus for his desire to stand out among others and control them, ἄρχειν). In similar fashion, Socrates lectures Glaucon in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (*Mem.*, III, 6, 1), and an analogous theme also appears in Plato's *Menexenus*, where Menexenus is introduced as an overly ambitious young man yearning to rule people (cf. PLAT., *Menex.*, 234a-b).

19. Cf. PLAT., *Prot.*, 319d-320b; PS.-PLAT., *Alcib. I*, 118d-e (about the upbringing of Pericles' sons). The inability of other significant Athenian politicians to bring up their sons in such a way as to make them virtuous is an issue that is also discussed in Plato's *Meno* (93b-94e).

20. It should be noted that when Theages asks Socrates if he is willing to teach him, he

Demodocus agrees because he is worried about inappropriate teachers (*Thg.*, 127b-c)²¹. Socrates tries to resist their request, naming several famous Sophists who, in his opinion, are better suited to the role of a teacher than him. Here is what he has to say to explain why he is so hesitant (*Thg.*, 128b): «I know none of these magnificent and splendid subjects. I wish I did! I am always saying, indeed, that I know virtually nothing, except a certain small subject – love (τὰ ἐρωτικά), although on this subject, I'm thought to be amazing, better than anyone else, past or present»²².

Theages is disappointed – he thinks that Socrates can make him the perfect man he wants to be. However, Socrates explains to him that it is not just a matter of his will, his ability to teach young men being held back by his *daimonion*, a divine voice that speaks to him (*Thg.*, 128d). He gives several examples (*Thg.*, 128d-129e), which are meant to demonstrate that not all of Socrates' followers have benefited from his upbringing. Some have, but the effects were not lasting (*Thg.*, 129e)²³. As soon as they stopped meeting with Socrates, they became the same they had been before. These included Aristides, for example (*Thg.*, 130a): he made great progress at the beginning, but then he had to leave Athens to go on a military mission, and when he returned, he admitted that he had lost his ability to discuss things that he had previously discussed with Socrates (*Thg.*, 130a-e). Early on, he was equal to the most educated debaters, but his ability gradually faded away and, eventually, he chose to avoid everyone with any education. Socrates wants to know if Aristides has lost something that he learnt from him, but Aristides' answer is negative (*Thg.*, 130d-e): «By the gods, Socrates, [...] I've never learned anything from you, as you know. But I made progress whenever I was with you... [...]. And I made by far the most and greatest progress when I sat right beside you, and physically held on to you or touched you»²⁴.

does not actually use the term διδάσκαλος, *i.e.* «teacher» (which would have been appropriate in relation to traditional teachers or Sophists), but, instead, asks Socrates if he is a perfect man (*Thg.*, 127a 8-10).

21. This is an obvious reference to Sophists, who are proud to be teachers of «political excellence». Cf. Plato's image of Protagoras' education (*Prot.*, 319a).

22. PLATO, *Theages*, in: Plato: *Complete Works*, edited by J. COOPER, translated by N. D. Smith, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1997, pp. 627-638. Socrates puts himself in the humble position of an ignorant person but, at the same time, he wants to be different from famous Sophists, because he adds ironically: «...although on this subject, I'm thought to be amazing (δαινός), better than anyone else, past or present». In this context, the term τὰ ἐρωτικά (literally, «things concerning love») could be translated as «lovemaking», «being a lover», *i.e.* an art that is different from all other arts (sculpture, rhetoric, politics, etc.). Socrates uses almost the same words in Plato's *Symposium* (177d). Cf. also *Lys.*, 204c; *Phdr.*, 257a, etc.

23. Cf. XENOPH., *Mem.*, I, 2, 12 ff., where Xenophon argues (apparently against Polycrates' *Accusation of Socrates*) that even the two most controversial of Socrates' disciples – Critias and Alcibiades – lived a life of moderation as long as they kept company with Socrates.

24. Translated by N. D. Smith, *op. cit.*

Socrates reminds Theages of Aristides' words to make him realise that he cannot provide him with wisdom of the sort that he desires (*Thg.*, 130e). Whether or not a close association between Socrates and Theages is made is up to the gods²⁵. If we were to express this using the diction of the discussions at the time about the nature of τέχνη, we would have to say that Socratic education is unlike all other arts because Socrates cannot ensure that the result will be successful²⁶. Going back to the metaphor of a midwife found in *Theaetetus*, we could say that Socrates does not know what will come out of his relationship with Theages, *i.e.* whether it will be a fertile truth or an ugly phantom²⁷. In the context of *Theages*, then, it seems that Socrates is not just an intellectual midwife, but also someone who knows a lot about love – he teaches love to those he loves. It is this attribute that makes Socratic education different from all other forms of education (παιδεία) in the period in question: Socrates can only take care of the education of young men that he loves.

Socratic education as *therapeia*

If we look it up in Greek monolingual dictionaries, the term *θεραπεία* can have several meanings: «service», «care», «ability to take care of someone/ something», or «treatment»²⁸. In Plato's *Euthyphro*, the title character says that people take care of the gods (*θεραπείαν τῶν θεῶν*) similarly to the way servants take care of their masters, which is what defines piety (*Euthyphr.*, 13d)²⁹. *Θεραπεία* can also mean taking care of parents or children³⁰. Nevertheless, it can also encompass the ways in which we take care of our body – or, alternatively, our soul³¹. Another group of meanings is associated with medical care – or, more precisely, to treatment and medical attention – here, *θεραπεία* can be used to refer to the process of treatment or

25. An analogous argumentation can also be found in Aeschines' *Alcibiades*. Cf. AESCHINES, *SSR*, VI A 53 [AELIUS ARISTIDES, *De rhet.*, I.61].

26. Cf. the argumentation in Aeschines' *Alcibiades* (*SSR*, VI A 53 [AELIUS ARISTIDES, *De rhet.*, I.62]): while doctors treat the ill (ὕγιεις) thanks to a human art (ἀνθρωπίνη τέχνη), Socrates is beneficial to those who need what he has to offer thanks to a gift from the gods (θεῖα μοίρα). Cf. also XENOPH., *Mem.*, 1, 6, 13-14; 1, 4, 2, 40; 1, 4, 3, 1, etc.

27. With a bit of irony, we could say that Socrates' art of love includes both attracting young men and putting off those who are unsuitable partners; cf. PLAT., *Apol.*, 37d.

28. Cf. H. G. LIDDELL, R. SCOTT, H. S. JONES (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996.

29. Cf. EUR., *Ion*, 187: the worship of the god (ἀγνιάτιδες *θεραπείαι*); ARIST., *Pol.*, 1329a 3, etc.

30. PLAT., *Leg.*, 886c; cf. GORG., *fr.* 6 D; LYS., 13, 45; cf. XENOPH., *Mem.*, 3, 11, 4.

31. Cf. PLAT., *Gorg.*, 464b-c. Cf. also *Lach.*, 185e: here, the discussion focuses on a specialist in cultivating the soul.

a specific medical intervention³². However, it is not necessarily related only to human beings as it is also used in relation to animals or plants³³.

The term *θεραπεία* thus generally refers to care, *i.e.* the activity we engage in to keep things in good condition. In Socratic literature, however, the term is used more specifically to refer to working on oneself on a continual basis. It is not a purpose-oriented activity to maintain something that we consider good or to dispose of something we consider bad. Instead, Socratic *θεραπεία* is an expression of the essential interest an individual takes in themselves, as well as other people who enter their lives. Socrates applies *θεραπεία* not only when it suits him, but at all times. Socratic *θεραπεία* means a permanent interest in oneself, and that is why it can be interpreted as a «care of oneself and others».

The conventional understanding of care can be found in the introductory part of Plato's *Theages*, in which Demodocus reveals to Socrates that he is concerned about his son's upbringing (121b): «Socrates, all living things tend to follow the same course – particularly man, but also the other animals and the plants that grow in the earth. It's an easy thing, for us farmers, to prepare the ground for planting, and the planting is easy, too. But after the plants come up, there's a great deal of hard and difficult work in tending to them [*θεραπεία τοῦ φύντος*, 121b 7]. It seems the same goes for people... I found the planting, or procreation –whatever you're supposed to call it– of this son of mine the easiest thing in the world. But his upbringing has been difficult...»³⁴. Socrates agrees with Demodocus but, at the same time, he reinterprets the conventional understanding of *therapeia* (122b): «There's nothing more divine for a man to take advice about than the education of himself and his family» (*περὶ παιδείας καὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ οἰκείων*, 122b 6). There is a slight difference between Demodocus' and Socrates' expressions, though: Socrates associates therapeutic care primarily with oneself, and only subsequently does he extend it to other people. Being a person who takes care of other people is not something that can be taken for granted – taking care of others involves taking care of oneself and vice versa. For Socrates, *θεραπεία* means *παιδεία* – or, more precisely, *παιδεία* means *θεραπεία*. This way, Socrates gives education a new meaning – continuing care of oneself and close relatives.

In *Theages*, Socrates is portrayed as the opposite to the traditional teacher (*διδάσκαλος*; cf. *Thg.*, 122e) or the «new teacher» of the Protagorean/Gorgian type (*σοφιστής*). Socrates has meetings with his beloved pupils, and it is this very association –compared to an erotic relationship between a man and a

32. Cf. PLAT., *Prot.*, 354a (which successful activity makes a doctor good? – teaching how to treat the sick?); cf. ARIST., *Pol.*, 1287a 40, GAL., 1, 400, etc.

33. Taking care of animals; cf. PLAT., *Euthyphr.*, 13a; ARIST., *Hist. Anim.*, 578a 7 (pl.). About plants – cultivating, tending plants; cf. PLAT., *Theaet.*, 149e; THEOPHR., *HP*, 2.2.12.

34. Translated by N. D. Smith, *op. cit.*.

young man— that makes both Socrates and his pupils better³⁵. In *Theages*, a significant role is played by the *daimonion* motif that appears also in *Theaetetus*, namely when Socrates explains why he stopped associating with some of his young men. Τὸ δαιμόνιον (literally, «daimonic thing») gives Socrates advice as to which young men he is to maintain relationships with by putting him off associating with unsuitable young men. Socrates does not know why the divine voice advises him in this way. Perhaps he wants to suggest that his *daimonion* cannot be identified with wisdom, although it puts him off unreasonable ways of life.

When he meets his young men, Socrates asks questions and examines their answers, *i.e.* he frees their minds of phantoms and helps them give birth to true opinions (*Theaet.*, 151b-d). The ultimate goals of his conversations are not pieces of knowledge (μαθήματα) of the sort that are passed on from teachers to pupils in the form of ready-made answers.

Rather than provide any answers, Socrates aims to encourage his companions in their search for answers³⁶. In this sense, the central question of *Theaetetus* –*i.e.* «What is knowledge?», to which we expect an answer in the form of «knowledge»– plays a role that is just as crucial as the process of examination itself. In other words, the journey towards the answer is as important as the answer that is sought. Without the journey, the answer would be of no value. It is this journey that we could see as «Socratic therapy», Socrates himself being a «soul therapist» – a therapist who cannot guarantee that the treatment will be successful, a lover who cannot guarantee that the love story will have a happy ending.

As a person who wants to help his beloved young man in his effort to achieve excellence, Socrates does not know excellence – he does not know what effects his refutation (ἔλεγχος) will have in the end. Socrates is a «lover», *i.e.* a person who helps his beloved partner overcome obstacles thanks to his love for the partner. Love (ἔρω) cannot be reduced to an ability to persuade a person using better arguments. Rather than an activity, love is an effort that cannot be reduced to a technical skill. If there are any therapeutic effects in love, they are achieved through means that cannot be grasped rationally. The relationship between a lover and their beloved person is always unique, and

35. A traditional teacher teaches boys how to write and count – the teaching process is based on repetition and practice (cf. *PLAT., Prot.*, 326c). Therefore, the traditional teacher is what we might call a «repetitor» or «trainer».

36. Cf. the final part of *Theaetetus*, where Socrates gets back to the meaning of his art of midwifery (*Theaet.*, 210c-d). Cf. the argumentation in Aeschines' *Alcibiades*, *SSR*, VI A 53 [AELIUS ARISTIDES, *De rhet.*, I.74]: «Just so I have no knowledge (μάθημα) 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». Cf. G. BOYS-STONES, C. ROWE, *The Circle of Socrates: Readings in the First-Generation Socratics*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co., 2013, p. 187.

only the uniqueness of their mutual relationship can give rise to what seems like medical care on the outside. Socrates helps young men seek and find the power they need to transform themselves. At the same time, he undergoes a change himself. Their mutual transformation can only take place thanks to love.

Conclusion

The assumption that Socratic dialogues have, among other things, a certain therapeutic layer to them is based on the way Socrates assumes his role in conversation. Socrates often stresses that he is not a teacher as he does not provide any knowledge. Despite this, however, it is evident that he helps his fellow debaters find better ways of living their lives. In his own words, he helps them thanks to mutual love. Eros serves as a metaphor of intimate friendship, which makes Socrates' educational mission different from other educational methods. In contrast to conventional teachers or his contemporary Sophists, Socrates educates not only his associates, but also himself. In the process, Eros gives each and every participant in the debate a chance to undergo a transformation. In this sense, Socrates' activity is therapeutic rather than pedagogic. Socrates acts as a soul healer who does not offer any generally applicable solutions to problems; instead, he encourages the people he values most to take care of their souls on a continual basis.

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Η ΣΩΚΡΑΤΙΚΗ ΘΕΡΑΠΕΙΑ: Ο ΡΟΛΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΣΩΚΡΑΤΟΥΣ

Περίληψη

Ἡ θεραπευτικὴ προσέγγιση στὴ μελέτη τῆς σωκρατικῆς λογοτεχνίας τοῦ 4ου αἰ. π.Χ. βασίζεται στὴν ὑπόθεση ὅτι ὁ Σωκράτης, ὅπως ἐμφανίζεται στοὺς σωκρατικοὺς διαλόγους, δὲν εἶναι μόνον ἓνας ἀκούραστος ἀναζητητὴς τῆς ἀλήθειας ἢ ὑπόδειγμα ἠθικῆς συμπεριφορᾶς ἀλλὰ καὶ ἓνας δεινὸς θεραπευτὴς ψυχῶν. Τὸ ἄρθρο αὐτὸ ἐστιάζει σὲ ἀρκετὰ χωρία ἀπὸ τοὺς σωκρατικοὺς διαλόγους σὰ ὅποια ὁ Σωκράτης ἐξηγεῖ τὸν ρόλο του στοὺς διαλόγους συνδέοντάς τον μὲ τὴν θεραπείαν.

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