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PHILOSOPHICAL SYNOSIA AND PEDAGOGICAL EROS
On Socrates’ reshaping of paideia
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Résumé. Divers portraits de l’éducation socratique, quoique apparemment contradictoires sur certains points, témoignent d’une conception de la παιδεία qui ne consiste pas à proprement parler dans l’enseignement mais d’abord et avant tout dans la fréquentation de Socrate. Cette étude entend examiner la conception originale de l’éducation défendue par Socrate dans ses divers portraits, et en particulier en ce qui concerne les modes de transmission de la vertu et du savoir au sein du rapport enseignant-élève. À cette fin, j’analyserai la profonde révision de la παιδεία opérée par l’enseignement socratique en me concentrant sur la notion de συνουσία et donc aussi sur la théorie de l’έρως que certaines sources, notamment Eschine et Platon, assignent à Socrate. Cette étude, divisée en quatre parties, se penche sur certains passages tirés de (1) l’Alcibiade d’Eschine, en rapport avec d’autres dialogues de l’auteur ; (2) le Banquet de Platon, en parallèle avec une section du Théétète ; (3) le Théagès et le Premier Alcibiade ; (4) les Mémorables de Xénophon.

Summary. Various accounts of Socrates’ education, conflicting as they may appear as regards specific aspects, attest to an idea of παιδεία which does not consist properly in teaching, but first and foremost in improving others by means of an association with Socrates. This paper aims to investigate the original view on education expounded by Socrates in his various portrayals, with special regard to the modes of transmission of virtue and knowledge within the teacher-pupil relationship. To this end, the deep reshaping of παιδεία brought about by the Socratic way of teaching is examined through a special focus on the notion of συνουσία, and thus also in the light of the erotic theory that some sources – notably Aeschines and Plato – ascribe to Socrates. The study, organised into four sections, focuses on selected passages from (1) Aeschines’ Alcibiades, whose analysis is integrated with the examination of other Aeschinean dialogues; (2) Plato’s Symposium, examined in parallel to a section of the Theaetetus; (3) the Theages and the Alcibiades I; (4) Xenophon’s Memorabilia.

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In a very well-known passage of the *Apology* (33a), Plato's Socrates claims that he “was never anyone’s teacher” (διδάσκαλος μὲν οὐδένος). Differently, his Xenophontic counterpart presents himself indirectly in the *Apology* (20), although as “supreme (βέλτιστος) in what is man’s greatest blessing”, namely education (περὶ παιδείας). Aeschines’ Socrates, similarly to Plato’s, states instead: “I knew no study by which I might usefully educate a man” (Aelius Aristides, *Or.* Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.74).

Conflicting as they may appear, these utterances confirm – if there ever was any need to – the crucial role played by the problem of παιδεία (and related issues) within first-generation Socratic literature and, before that, in Socrates’ philosophy. This paper aims to investigate the original view on education expounded by Socrates in his various portrayals, with special regard to the *modes of transmission* of virtue and knowledge within the teacher-pupil relationship. To this end, the deep reshaping of παιδεία brought about by the Socratic way of “teaching” will be examined through a special focus on the notion of συνουσία, and thus by understanding it also in the light of the erotic theory that some sources – notably Aeschines and Plato – ascribe to Socrates.

Such a study, of course, may be carried out on the basis of a large set of texts. For reasons of space, I will only select some works and passages that prove particularly useful to frame and explore the issue of παιδεία from this particular point of view. The analysis, organised into four sections, will thus focus on (1) Aeschines’ *Alcibiades*, whose study will be integrated with the examination of some fundamental passages from other Aeschinean dialogues; (2) Plato’s *Symposium*, which I will examine in parallel to some passages from the *Theaetetus*; (3) the *Theages* and the *Alcibiades I*; (4) Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*.

1. The English translations of Plato’s *Apology* are by H. N. Fowler; those of Xenophon’s *Apology* are by O. J. Todd; those of Aelius Aristides’ *De rhetorica* are by C. A. Behr.
In the first and largest section, I will tackle Aeschines’ account by dealing with:
(a) Aelius Aristides’ testimony on the *Alcibiades* (Or. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.61-2; 1.74), according to which Socrates denies in the dialogue that he possesses any art (τέχνη) or science (μάθημα) that may be of benefit to other people, since he is only able to help others by divine dispensation (θείᾳ μοίρᾳ) and “through love” (διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶν);
(b) Plutarch’s testimony in *Alc.* 4.193c-e (also traced back to Aeschines’ *Alcibiades*), where it is stated that Alcibiades, thanks to his συνουσία with Socrates, has an “image of love” (εἴδωλον ἔρωτος);
(c) two testimonies on Aeschines’ *Miltiades* and *Aspasia* (respectively, *POxy.* 2890 recto and verso and Plutarch, *Per.* 24.5-6), which specifically mention the notion of συνουσία and thus help us better understand Aeschines’ treatment of this theme.

In the second section, I will focus on Plato’s *Symposium*, with special regard to:
(a) Socrates’ claims in 175d-e, where we find the famous comparison between the transmission of wisdom and that of the water which flows “through wool from the fuller cup into the emptier” (175d);\(^2\)
(b) a specific aspect of the theory of ἔρως expounded by Diotima (209b ff.), where a sort of “philosophical συνουσία” is outlined. This will be read in the light of some claims made by Alcibiades in his praise of Socrates (216e-217a; 217c; 218c-d; 219c; 222a-b) and of the famous passage from the *Theaetetus* on maieutics (150b-c).

In the third section, some parallels will be drawn with two works whose Platonic authorship is called into question or rejected:
(a) the *Theages*, where Socrates directly connects the δαιμόνιον to his pedagogical activity, again depicted as a συνουσία (129e; 130e);
(b) the *Alcibiades I*, which provides some important indications about Socrates’ interpretation of his own pedagogical activity: here, too, he connects his educational intervention on Alcibiades to the “divine will”, by saying that what allowed him to seek out Alcibiades and encourage the young man to pursue virtue was the end of “divine opposition” (δαιμόνιον ἐναντίωμα).

In the fourth section of the paper, I will further explore Socrates’ view on teaching by analysing some passages from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, namely:
(a) Xenophon’s presentation of Socrates’ teaching activity in 1.2.2-3, where it is stated that Socrates’ disciples were led to attain excellence “through imitation of him”;

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\(^2\) All the English translations of Plato’s *Symposium* are by W. R. M. Lamb.
(b) a set of references drawn from the first two chapters of book 1, where Xenophon is replying to the formal charges against Socrates, and where the philosopher’s disciples are repeatedly defined as οἱ Σωκράτει συνόντες;
(c) Xenophon’s words in defence of Socrates’ teaching in 1.4.1, where a direct association can be found between the notion of συνουσία and that of βελτίων γίγνεσθαι.

As a final conclusion to these analyses, I will argue that what emerges from the different accounts we have is a peculiar and “alternative” idea of παιδεία, which does not consist properly in teaching, but first and foremost in improving others by means of an association (συνουσία) between “teacher” and “pupil”.

I. Aeschines’s Alcibiades

The Alcibiades is one of the seven dialogues that Aeschines of Sphettus devoted to the figure of Socrates, and (along with the Aspasia) it is the best-preserved work by this Socratic author. The vast majority of testimonies on this dialogue directly refer to a paideutic context and, as is well known, the work gives a fundamental account of both Socratic ἔρως and its pedagogical role.

Regarding the modes of transmission of virtue and knowledge within Socratic teaching, a fundamental testimony is provided by Aelius Aristides, who in his Orationes preserves three fragments (VI A 53 SSR = fr. 81-2 P.) presumably belonging to the last section of the dialogue:

If I thought that I could be helpful through my art (τινὶ τέχνῃ), I should find myself guilty of much stupidity. But as it is, I thought that this had been granted to me by a divine portion in respect to Alcibiades (θείᾳ μοίρᾳ ᾤμην μοι τοῦτο δεδόσθαι ἐπ’ Ἀλκιβιάδην). And none of this should be wondered at. […] For many of the sick become well, some by human art, some by a divine portion (θείᾳ μοίρᾳ). Those by human art, cured by doctors; those by a divine portion, desire leads to what will profit them. (Aelius Aristides, Or. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.61-2.)

3. See D. L. 2.61
4. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Plutarch (De lib. educ. 15 p. 11e-f = VI A 38 SSR = fr. 63 P.) includes Aeschines within “that whole band of men who sanctioned affection between men (ἐκεῖνον τῶν ἄνδρων οὗ τοὺς ἄμελες ἔδοκιμασαν ἔρωτις), and thus guided the youth onward to learning, leadership, and virtuous conduct (ἐπὶ τε παιδείαν καὶ δημαγωγίαν καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν τῶν τρόπων)” (transl. by F. C. Babbitt).
5. The double numbering of the testimonies on Aeschines refers to the collection Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae (Giannantoni 1990) and to the edition Eschine di Sfetto. Tutte le testimonianze (Pentassuglio 2017).
Through the love which I had for Alcibiades (διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα ὃν ἐτύγχανον ἐρῶν Ἀλκιβιάδου) I had felt no different from the Bacchants. For whenever the Bacchants become inspired, they draw milk and honey from sources where others cannot even draw water. And though I knew no study by which I might usefully educate a man (οὐδὲν μάθημα ἐπιστάμενος ὃ διδάξας ἄνθρωπον ὑφελάσασθαι ἄν), still I thought that by associating with him I would improve him through love (ἐρων ὃν ἐκείνῳ διὰ τὸ ἔρων βελτίω ποιῆσαι). (Ibid. 1.74.)

From a general perspective, Aelius Aristides’ testimony confirms the central role of the notion of βελτίον γίγνεσθαι, particularly stressed by Döring, who argued that the complementary themes of “Besser-Werden” and “Besser-Machen” represent the Leitmotiv of all of Aeschines’ dialogues.7 This seems to apply particularly to the Alcibiades, which ended – according to the rhetor – with the very expression βελτίω ποιῆσαι.8

The first fragment (Or. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.61) draws an essential distinction between two ways in which one can “be helpful” (ὑφελάσασθαι) to others, opposing to τέχνη an ability which is granted θείᾳ μοίρᾳ, by “divine dispensation”. Such an opposition is exemplified in the following fragment (Or. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.62), where the act of making other people better is compared to healing from sickness: indeed, among the sick, some are treated by doctors and recover thanks to an ἀνθρωπιτική τέχνη; others heal θείᾳ μοίρᾳ, thanks to a divine dispensation by which their desire (ἐπιθυμία) directly leads them to what can improve their condition and cure them. In the third fragment (Or. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.74) the above-traced distinction is explicitly referred to Alcibiades, and the ability to improve others is directly associated with ἔρως: Socrates denies that he possesses any art (τέχνη) or science (μάθημα) to benefit other people; nonetheless, he thought he could improve Alcibiades διὰ τὸ ἔρων, “through love”.9 This ἔρως that he happened to be feeling (ἐτύγχανον ἐρῶν) for the young man put him in a condition similar to that of the Bacchants, who – filled with the god – can “draw milk and honey from sources where others cannot even draw water”.

7. See Döring 1984, p. 17-27. He distinguishes and analyses three different variations of the theme of “Besser Werden” in the Alcibiades: 1) the moral improvement whose result is shown through the example of Themistocles in Aristides, Or. Quatt. 348-9 (VI A 50 SSR = fr. 76 P.); 2) Alcibiades’ plea that Socrates teach him virtue in Cicero, Tusc. 3.32.77-8 (VI A 52 SSR = fr. 80 P.); 3) Socrates’ claim to improve Alcibiades through love in Aristides, Or. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.74 (VI A 53 SSR = fr. 82 P.). On this distinction see Döring 1984, p. 19-22 and Döring 2011, p. 29-30. For a discussion of these issues see also Müller 1975, p. 232-3 and Scholtz 2007, p. 121.


9. The ambiguous syntax of the expression διὰ τὸ ἔρων – noted by Kahn 1994, p. 94 – makes it difficult to draw any conclusions: it seems to mean “because of my love for Alcibiades”, but it might also mean the reverse (see also Kahn 1996, p. 22-3).
Before focusing on the philosophical content of the three fragments, it is worth hinting at the problem of their order within Aeschines’ dialogue. While scholars have usually taken for granted that the sequence of quotations followed by Aristides corresponds to their actual order of appearance in Aeschines’ work, Joyal has convincingly proposed a different interpretation. While preserving the position of the last fragment, which Aristides himself presents as the conclusion of the dialogue, Joyal suggests we reverse the order of the first two excerpts, arguing that the passage on the two “ways” of healing from sickness preceded the claims by Socrates reported as the first fragment. It is noteworthy that, if we accept this different order, Socrates turns out to adopt an argument by analogy: he would first be presenting some examples drawn from human experience (sickness and healing) where it is possible to benefit from both ἄνθρωπινη τέχνη and θεία μοίρα (2); then, he would be applying this opposition to his personal experience with Alcibiades, expressing his conviction that he could improve the young man θείᾳ μοίρᾳ and not τέχνη (1). According to this order, Socrates employs a deductive reasoning that is attested elsewhere in Aeschines’ works, namely in the Miltiades, where we find the analogy of the banausic arts (POxy. 2890 verso = VI A 80 SSR = fr. 121 P.), and in the Aspasia, where Aspasia adopts a similar method in her conversation with Xenophon and his wife (Cicero, Inv. rhet. 1.31.51-3 = VI A 70 SSR = fr. 108 P.).

Secondly, the development of the theme of βελτίον γίγνεσθαι would be more linear and consistent according to the order proposed by Joyal (2, 1, 3): while in the second fragment Socrates speaks of “improvement” (τὸ ὄνῆσον) at the general level of certain human activities, the references to this issue in the first fragment (ὡφελῆσαι) and in the third one (ὡφελῆσαι ἂν, βελτίω ποιῆσαι) are directly applied to Alcibiades. Instead, if we keep the passage about the moral improvement of Alcibiades at the beginning of the sequence, we should suppose a sort of “détour” from the point that Aeschines aimed to highlight, with a minor emphasis on a topic that – as we have seen – had to be crucial. More generally, the new sequence of arguments seems to lead more naturally to the third fragment, where Socrates mentions again his relationship with Alcibiades. Given, then, the relevance of the character of Alcibiades in the dialogue, it is unlikely that he was mentioned only in view of wider discussions of the concepts of θεία μοίρα and τέχνη; it seems far more plausible that Aeschines introduced the theme of θεία μοίρα to give an account of the effects on Alcibiades of the συνουσία with Socrates and of his ἔρως.11

11. It is also to be noted that the order of the fragments proposed by Aristides contributed to his narrative build-up, which aimed to defend ῥητορική against the attacks carried out by Plato, especially in the Gorgias and the Phaedrus. Aristides argues, in particular, against Plato’s
However, even independently of their actual order in Aeschines’ works, these fragments make a crucial point, insofar as they draw a distinction between two ways of making other people better: by imparting μαθήματα, and by awakening the desire (ἐπιθυμία) to pursue virtue through ἔρως.12

Now, Socrates’ claim not to possess any τέχνη or μάθημα to impart13 may also be read in the light of Socrates’ statement in Apology 33a that he “was never anyone’s teacher” (not even Alcibiades’),14 and – by extension – in the light of the charge of corrupting the youth directed against the philosopher, with regard to which Socrates had adopted the position described in the Apology (33a-b).15 In this respect, the conversation between Socrates and Alcibiades was also intended to provide an example of Socrates’ relationship with the Athenian youth: a relationship based not on παιδεία, but only on συνουσία.16 What emerges here is the idea of a παιδεία which does not consist in “teaching” (διδάξας), but in improving other people by means of simple “association” (ζυνόν). It is therefore a form of education closely related to ἐπιθυμία and to ἔρως, as the very notion of ξυνεῖναι immediately lends an erotic connotation to the educational relationship.

Moreover, the Alcibiades fragments allow us to glimpse a connection between ἔρως, the divine and chance, which come together to define Socratic παιδεία in Aeschines’ account. Indeed, not only does Socrates specify that his educational skills originate from a θεία μοῖρα, a “divine portion”, but the very expression διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα ὃν ἐτύγχανον ἐρῶν Ἀλκιβιάδου, with the choice

12. This aspect has been particularly highlighted by Giannantoni 1990, p. 590-1 (see also Giannantoni 1997, p. 362-3); on the distinction between two ways of achieving moral improvement see also Döring 1984, p. 17-8.

13. On the apparent contradiction between Socrates’ claim that he does not possess any ἐπιστήμη and the fact that he encourages others to pursue an ἀρετή based on ἐπιστήμη, see Natorp 1892, p. 499.

14. See Socrates’ words in the pseudo-Platonic Axiouchus (366b).


16. The expression ὁι συνόντες also frequently occurs in Isocrates’ writings, where it designates his pupils: see Antid. 86; 92; 96; 101; 199; 219; 224; 239; 287; 313; C. Soph. 9; Hel. 5; Bus. 47. It is worth mentioning that this expression is used in the Antidosis (86-8) within a “Socratic” context, in which Isocrates defends himself against the charge of corrupting his disciples.
of the verb τυγχάνω, suggests that this pedagogical ἔρως is eo ipso a form of τύχη. In other words, Socrates happened to feel love for Alcibiades (the same love that enables him to educate the young man): as the comparison with the Bacchants makes clearer, both the feeling of ἔρως and its pedagogical effect are said to depend on a divine “dispensation” (or “chance”, as I. 74 seems to suggest).

Some fundamental aspects of this point of view on παιδεία find confirmation in Plutarch’s account (Alc. 4.193c-e = VI A 54 SSR = fr. 83 P.):

And he came to think that the work of Socrates was really a kind of provision of the gods for the care and salvation of youth (θεῶν ὑπηρεσίαν εἰς νέων ἐπιμέλειαν εἶναι καὶ σωτηρίαν). Thus, by despising himself, admiring his friend, loving that friend’s kindly solicitude and revering his excellence (αισχυνόμενος δὲ τὴν ἀρετήν), he acquired an “image of love” (εἴδωλον ἔρωτος), as Plato says, “to match love” (ἀντέρωτα), and all were amazed to see him eating, exercising, and tenting with Socrates, while he was harsh and stubborn with the rest of his lovers. Some of these he actually treated with the greatest insolence, as, for example, Anytus, the son of Anthemion. (Transl. B. Perrin.)

At least three aspects can be highlighted:

1. Socrates’ educational activity is depicted here as a “provision of the gods” for the youth, something which could be related to Socrates’ claim that he can improve Alcibiades only by “divine dispensation”.

2. Plutarch suggests the idea that Alcibiades’ moral improvement is due to a sort of “response” to Socratic virtue, which is at the same time a paradigm for the young man and the source of his feelings of inadequacy. The “effects” of Socrates’ education do not pertain to the transmission of μαθήματα. Disdain for oneself (καταφρονῶν δ’ αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ), admiration for Socrates (θαυμάζων δ’ ἐκεῖνον), and a sense of shame when confronted with Socrates’ virtue (αισχυνόμενος δὲ τὴν ἀρετήν): these are the immediate outcomes of Alcibiades’ συνουσία with Socrates.

3. The paideutic relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades is framed once again according to the dynamics of ἔρως: what the young man achieves is an “image of love” (εἴδωλον ἔρωτος), which seems to be understood as the kind of love (ἀντέρως) which reciprocates the ἔρως of the lover towards the beloved.

17. See Stavru 2011, p. 315. He clearly points out that, in Aeschines, what can improve others is ἱδρύ “in its anepistemic acceptation”, through the external help of θεία μοίρα.


19. Cf. Plato, Phdr. 255d. Interestingly, the verb ἀντεράω is found in Xenophon’s Symposium (8.3), as is the idea of admiration (ἀγαματι occurs six times in chapter eight). Also the εἴδωλον is mentioned in Critobulus’ speech (4.22).
In the light of this we can also read the third fragment reported by Aelius Aristides (Or. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.74): Socrates is not only attached to Alcibiades by the ἔρως he feels for him, but is in turn “transformed” by his association with the young man, through which, like a Bacchant, he becomes able to attain unexpected (educational) results.

Before moving on to Plato’s account, it is worth examining two testimonies on Aeschines’ Miltiades and Aspasia where a significant mention of the notion of συνουσία can be found.

As regards the Miltiades, we can infer from the scanty testimonies we have that Socrates was a crucial figure in this dialogue, which centred on the praise of a character called Miltiades.20 Interestingly, the theme of παιδεία was also the core of the Miltiades, where presumably different educational models were compared and discussed within the conversation led by Socrates.21

In a papyrus fragment attributed to the dialogue (P.Oxy. 2890 verso) the following issue seems to be addressed: whom should Miltiades turn to in order to be wisely advised about education? Within this context, Socrates asks what kinds of artisans Miltiades should “associate with” (ξυνών) in order to learn the banausic arts (he then suggests that the same question could all the more be applied to the “teachers of virtue”):

[... θαυμαστῶν γὰρ ἄν εἴη, εἰ μὲν ἡρόμην Εὐριπί-
[δὸν δῆμουργόν] ὅτει ξυνὸν ἄν Μιλ-
[τιάδης ἄριστα βουλεύοιτο ὅπως χρῆ
[ὑποδήματα] ποιεῖν, εἰ[ξα]ἰν ἄν μοι λέ-
[γειν ὧτι τοῖς σκυτοτόμοις ἢ ὧτι ἄν
[ξυνὸν ἄριστα βουλεύοιτο ὅπως
[χρῆς] ἀνώτατον] ὀικοδομεῖν, καὶ τούτ’ εἰ-
[κα]ν ἄν λέγειν ὧτι τοῖς τέκτοσιν [...].

The other fragment of the dialogue preserved in the same papyrus (P.Oxy. 2890 recto) also refers to the issue of παιδεία, by dealing with the topic of the long sea journeys (πλούν μέγαν πεπλεύκασιν) that some people undertake in search of “teachers of wisdom”. With regard to this, Socrates states that he would not be surprised if those ξένοι who came to Athens looking for

21. See, in particular, Stobaeus’ testimony (2.31.23 = VI A 77 SSR = fr. 118 P.), where an opposition between ἐπιμέλεια τοῦ σώματος and ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς seems to be at work. For some parallels in Socratic literature see Plato, Ap. 30a8-b2; Clit. 407c5-8; Alloc. 1 132c1-5.
someone "esteemed among the Greeks for his wisdom" (ἐπὶ σοφίας τετιμένος ἐν τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν) then sought to associate with him who is the wisest of the Greeks when it comes to educating people (τῶι σοφωτάτωι τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῶν νῦν παιδεύσαι ἄνθρωπον). Both fragments show the significance that the concept of συνουσία acquires with regard to paideutic relationships, and hence the idea that these relationships primarily consist in being with or associating with a “teacher”.

Finally, it is worth mentioning another reference to the notion of συνουσία in Aeschines’ Aspasia. Interestingly, this dialogue too tackles the theme of erotic παιδεία – although not in the same terms as the Alcibiades – and in all likelihood also developed the issue of βελτίον γίγνεσθαι. The portion of the work preserved by Cicero (Inv. rhet. 1.31.51-3 = VI A 70 SSR = fr. 108 P.) clearly attests to a discussion about the related theme of optimum esse: the reported conversation between Aspasia, Xenophon and his wife focuses on the idea that the search for a better husband or wife is vain unless both partners aim to be ἄριστοι. Moreover, as in the Alcibiades, the teaching activity aims to engender a desire which leads to self-improvement. In this respect, Aspasia’s teaching seems to follow (and generalise) the principle that Socrates expounds at the end of the Alcibiades: to improve others ὑπὸ τὸ ἔραν.

As concerns, more particularly, the notion of συνουσία, we find some textual evidence in the bios of Aspasia included in the Vita Periclis (24), where Plutarch reports that Lysicles “the sheep-dealer, a man of low birth and nature, came to be the first man at Athens by living with Aspasia (Ἀσπασίᾳ συνόντα) after the death of Pericles” (Per. 24.5-6; transl. by B. Perrin). This testimony can be read in parallel with a scholium to Plato’s Menexenus (235e = VI A 66 SSR = fr. 100 P.), according to which Aspasia not only made Pericles into an effective political orator, but succeeded in the same task with the sheep-merchant Lysicles.

Now, even though the reference here is to rhetorical education, and the “association” does not take place within a (male) teacher-pupil relationship – or involve Socrates himself – it can be noted that in Aeschines Aspasia and Socrates share some crucial traits, precisely as far as their teaching activity...
is concerned. Plutarch’s passage thus seems to confirm that, according to Aeschines’ portrayal, the transmission of knowledge (like that of virtue) primarily occurs through συνουσία, within Socratic teaching – of course – but also in more general Socratic contexts.

II. Plato’s Symposium

As Socrates enters the scene of the symposium, with some delay (for he had been standing in the neighbours’ porch: 175a), Agathon immediately invites him to sit by his side:

Here, Socrates, come sit by me, so that by contact with you (ὑπότομονός σου) I may have some benefit from that piece of wisdom that occurred to you there in the porch. Clearly you have made the discovery and got hold of it for you would not have come away before (175c-d).

Socrates’ reply, albeit through the lens of irony, gets at the heart of the problem of the transmission of wisdom:

How fine it would be, Agathon, he said, if wisdom were a sort of thing that could flow out of the one of us who is fuller into him who is emptier, by our mere contact with each other (ἐὰν ἁπτώμεθα ἀλλήλων), as water will flow through wool from the fuller cup into the emptier. If such is indeed the case with wisdom, I set a great value on my sitting next to you: I look to be filled with excellent wisdom drawn in abundance out of you (οἶμαι γάρ με παρὰ σοῦ πολλῆς καὶ καλῆς σοφίας πληρωθήσεσθαι, 175d-e).

Plato’s Socrates touches on a crucial point, which also sheds light on his view of συνουσία: wisdom cannot be transmitted by simple contact with a wise man, nor does it flow “mechanically” from the fuller (of σοφία) to the emptier, as water does through a thread of wool. This carries at least two implications. First, on a general level, wisdom is understood as the result of a hard and extended course of research that one has to choose to undertake. Second, while the passage confirms that Socratic teaching does not consist in a one-way and “vertical” transmission of wisdom on the part of the wiser, it also suggests that the “association” and “being with” that underpin Socratic παιδεία cannot be reduced to a mere contact between a disciple and his teacher (lato sensu). In the Platonic Socrates’ view on education, this means that the disciple cannot expect to achieve wisdom (or virtue, or knowledge) by adopting a passive attitude in the paideutic relationship.

This becomes clearer when we consider a specific aspect of the theory of ἔρως later expounded by Diotima. After drawing a distinction between “those who are teeming in body” and those who are pregnant in their souls, i. e. “who in their souls still more than in their bodies conceive those things which are proper for soul to conceive and bring forth” (208e-209a), the

priestess of Mantinea states that when a lover finds “a soul that is fair and noble and well-endowed” (209b6), his beloved acts in this συνουσία as a midwife, allowing the lover to beget what he was pregnant with “from his youth” (209b).

It is worth noting that συνουσία is described here as an educational activity. In 209b-c we read that the lover “in addressing such a person is resourceful in discoursing of virtue and of what should be the good man’s character and what his pursuits; and so he takes in hand the other’s education (καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖ παιδεύειν)”. Education is described here as the result of the ἔρως that first moves the lover. Those who are such as to spiritually beget seek beauty, and when they find it in the body and the soul of another individual they start giving birth to discourses whose core is virtue, and feel the urge to educate their beloved.

Now, in this section of the Symposium the role of the ἐρώμενος is not described in detail like that of the ἐραστής; nonetheless, in one passage Diotima states that the lover shares “the nurturing of what is begotten” (209c) with the beloved. This seems to refer to a common and shared activity of the two, which can be taken to imply some active role for the beloved. This is interestingly suggested by Edmonds, who connects erotic mutuality with the maieutic activity depicted by Plato in the Theaetetus and the Symposium, and thus points out the error of those scholars who ascribe to Socrates only the role of the lover who, pregnant in his soul, seeks “the beautiful object whereon he may do his begetting” (209b; cf. 206d), thereby confining the ἐρώμενος to a purely passive role.

This reshaping of the erotic roles is exemplarily illustrated by Alcibiades’ words after the round of speeches, when he takes the floor and decides to praise Socrates instead of Eros (214d). Particularly telling is, first, the warning addressed to Agathon regarding Socrates’ behaviour towards young men: Socrates – says Alcibiades – always presents himself as an ἐραστής, but in the end proves to be the ἐρώμενος rather than the lover (222a-b). The reasons of this remark can be found in Alcibiades’ claims about his relationship with Socrates, earlier in his speech: just before describing his attempt to seduce him, Alcibiades refers that Socrates seems to be interested in handsome young men, with whom “he is always busy and enraptured”, but that actually “all the beauty a man may have is nothing to him” (216d). Even more so, after failing in this attempt, Alcibiades comments: “he showed such superiority and contempt, laughing my youthful charms to scorn” (219c).

Now, Alcibiades’ deception is due to the fact that he had primarily seen

28. See the role of Beauty as presiding “over birth as Fate and Lady of Travail” (206d2-3).
Socrates as a lover: someone who, according to Diotima’s speech, is attracted to handsome young men and is able to make them better (210c). He then offers Socrates a kind of exchange similar to that outlined by Pausanias: adopting the traditional model for pederastic relationships, Alcibiades believes it “sheer folly not to gratify” Socrates, because – he declares – “to me nothing is more important than the attainment of the highest possible excellence, and in this aim I believe I can find no abler ally than you” (218c-d). Ultimately, this is why Alcibiades has chosen Socrates as his ἐραστής.

Nonetheless, when the young man – who describes himself as the perfect ἐρώμενος – realises that his renowned beauty does not impress the philosopher, he changes, with respect to Socrates, from ἐρώμενος into ἐραστής (217c). Also the well-known comparison between Socrates and Silenus figures can be read against this backdrop: like the latter, Socrates is grotesque on the outside (leaving the simile aside: he feigns to be “amorously inclined” towards handsome young men, like a typical ἐραστής: 216d). Just like these Silenus figures, moreover, Socrates has images within him which are so “divine and golden, so perfectly fair and wondrous” (216e-217a) that, once discovered, they become an object of ἔρως, thereby reversing his appearance as a lover.

Thus, Alcibiades’ persistence in conceiving homoerotic relationships in traditional terms, i.e. as a mutual exchange of favours, reveals his misunderstanding of the real nature of Socratic ἔρως: in particular, he fails to understand the role played by the breaking of the paradigm of roles and by the redefinition of the hierarchical lover/beloved distinction on the basis of the opposition between activity and passivity.

Socrates’ reshaped erotic παιδεία entails that he is not only the lover – poor, “far from tender or beautiful”, always needy and deficient – but also the beloved, namely the “beautiful soul” with which young men like Alcibiades fall in love once they discover its inner beauty. It is contact with such a soul that enables these young men to bring forth what they were pregnant with. According to this view, therefore, the beloved too actively takes part in this mutual relationship, which represents a model for philosophical conversation – indeed, for the very practice of philosophy. By taking on the role of the

30. Pausanias had stated that according one’s favours to a lover is not shameful if the beloved acts for the sake of wisdom and virtue, that is: “in the belief that his friend will make him better” (184c).


32. See Steiner 1996.

33. It is precisely a misunderstanding of the real nature of Socratic erotics that leads Alcibiades to interpret Socrates’ behaviour as ὑβριστής (215b; 217c; 219c).
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ἐρόμενος, Socrates (as a midwife) attends to his interlocutors so that they can give birth to their ideas.

In this regard, the chief text to refer to is of course the famous passage of the Theaetetus where Socrates compares maieutics to the τέχνη προμνηστική, from which his art differs “in being practised upon men, not women, and in tending their souls in labor (τὰς ψυχὰς τικτούσας), not their bodies” (150b). And the greatest thing about the τέχνη τῆς μαιεύσεως, continues Socrates, is that

it can test in every way whether the mind of the young man is bringing forth a mere image, an imposture, or a real and genuine offspring. For I have this in common with the midwives: I am sterile in point of wisdom (ἀγονός εἶμι σοφίας), and the reproach which has often been brought against me, that I question others but make no reply myself about anything, because I have no wisdom in me (διὰ τὸ μηδὲν ἔχειν σοφόν), is a true reproach; and the reason of it is this: the god compels me to act as midwife, but has never allowed me to bring forth (μαιεύεσθαι με ὁ θεὸς ἀναγκάζει, γεννᾶν δὲ ἀπεκώλυσεν, 150c).

What emerges here is a view on education that can be profitably combined with the conception of παιδεία outlined in the above-mentioned passages from the Symposium: “sterile in point of wisdom” and unable to bring forth, Socrates can only attend to others through the “generation” of their ideas and, as a midwife, help his interlocutors to bring them forth. Now, as we have seen, in the Symposium this implies that Socrates plays the role of both the lover and the beloved in these relationships, indirectly compelling his “partners” to do the same. Socrates’ role reversal, therefore, turns out to be bound up with the image of the midwife, “the one who aids in bringing to light the products of philosophical eros”. From this viewpoint, there is no contradiction between these two dialogues as far as the image of midwifery is concerned. According to the proposed interpretation of the Symposium passage, Socrates is not depicted as “the begetter of ideas” for beautiful youths, but rather as the beloved who assists them in their labour; and this proves compatible with his claim in the Theaetetus that he is a barren midwife who merely brings to light the offspring of young men, thereby denying his own “fertility”.

Ultimately, in both dialogues midwifery is an image of the educational (and philosophical) activity, a process whereby Socrates draws out his interlocutors’ thoughts: far from “indoctrinating” them with specific teachings, Socrates’ presence serves “as a stimulus for these youths to bring forth their own ideas, while he uses his philosophic skills to help them

34. The English translations of Plato’s Theaetetus are by H. N. Fowler.
37. For what follows see Edmonds 2000, p. 264-6.
If, then, we consider that Socrates plays the midwife in the *Symposium* by reversing expected erotic roles, the educational value of Socratic association turns out to involve two key elements: the transformation of traditional pederastic dynamics and midwifery, which proved to be closely related.

Bearing all this in mind – “Socrates generating desire with words, Socrates combining seduction and instruction” – one is tempted, with Thomsen, 40 to turn to the passage in the *Republic* (403a4-c3) about the ὀρθὸς ἔρως in the ideal city, where the notion of συνουσία is mentioned again with regard to the lover-beloved relationship: “the lover may kiss and pass the time (συνεῖναι) with and touch the beloved as a father would a son” (transl. by P. Shorey). The reason adduced is noteworthy: this ἔρως is allowed “for honorable ends”, literally for the sake of what-is-beautiful (τῶν καλῶν χάριν).

A major issue that is to be taken into account to further enrich our analysis is the relationship between ἔρως and the divine, which I already briefly touched upon when dealing with Aeschines’ *Alcibiades*.

In this regard too, Plato’s *Symposium* offers a fundamental account. 41 The deep connection between ἔρως and the divine is shown by a somewhat neglected passage from this work (202e-203a) that was recently re-considered by Sheffield, 42 a passage where ἔρως is explicitly said to structure all relations between men and gods (διὰ τούτου πᾶσα ἔστιν ἡ ὀμιλία καὶ ἡ διάλεξις) in general: “many and multifarious are these spirits, and one of them is Love” (203a). Now, ἔρως’ function as a mediator with the divine carries deeper implications in the following developments of Diotima’s speech: it plays a crucial role in relation to the mortal aspiration towards εὐδαιμονία (which is the aim of ἔρως and amounts to an aspiration towards the divine: 205d1; cf. 202c7), and it entails important consequences as regards the ascent to the form of beauty. 43 The breadth and complexity of the issue, however, makes it unfeasible to explore it in all its aspects within the limits of this paper. The problem will thus be addressed with a special focus

39. From this perspective, Agathon’s invitation in 175c8-d1 can also be seen – as Bacon suggested – as a ‘dramatic anticipation of the theme of the first five speeches’ (Bacon 1959, p. 423), which would mean that the education of the beloved by the lover is a standard aspect of the traditional erotic relationship.
41. On the connection between ἔρως and the divine, see also Plato, *Phdr.* 244b-246d; 252c-253c.
42. Sheffield 2017, particularly p. 41-4. I owe this observation to the anonymous referee.
43. Ibid. p. 41-2. Sheffield argues that the scala amoris passage recalls the language used in 202c-203a (e.g. in 210a1 and in 202e8).
on the connection between Socrates’ view of (erotic) παιδεία and divine will, a topic which we can start exploring by going back to the Theaetetus.

Indeed, in the above-mentioned passage, the maieutic art itself – the core of Socrates’ philosophical activity in Plato – is traced back to the divine will, which prevented Socrates from “begetting” and so compelled him to act as a midwife. In the concrete exercising of his teaching, the intervention of the divine sign has resulted for Socrates in an impossibility to express his own position on any matter, and to transmit ideas or doctrines to others (and particularly to the youth) in a “vertical” way.

As Jedrkiewicz points out in a recent contribution, here and in the following passage of the Theaetetus (150b6-151d6) Socrates explains how his educational “midwifery” may be directly affected by the δαιμόνιον and connects all progress achieved by his young interlocutors to the help of the god (ὁ θεός: 150c7, d4, d8). Socrates’ words are quite clear:

those who associate with me (οἱ δ᾽ ἐμοὶ συγγιγνόμενοι), although at first some of them seem very ignorant, yet, as our acquaintance advances (προϊούσης τῆς συνουσίας), all of them to whom the god is gracious (οἵσπερ ἂν ὁ θεὸς παρείκῃ) make wonderful progress (150d);

even more sharply, he states further on that “the delivery is due to the god and me” (τῆς μέντοι μαιείας ὁ θεός τε καὶ ἐγὼ αἴτιος, 150d-e).

The daemonic sign plays a crucial role in the particular case of those who quit Socrates’ company (συνουσία) sooner than they ought to and, after having gone away, because of evil companionship, end up losing “the offspring which they had brought forth” through Socrates’ assistance. Indeed, when they eventually ask for readmission into the “Socratic circle”, they are taken back only if the daemonic sign does not prevent Socrates from assenting. This implies – observes Jedrkiewicz – that when a daemonic rejection occurs, the case is hopeless: “to take back that young man would be a mere waste of time and toil”. On the other hand, the absence of daemonic opposition means that the young man “is certified by divinity as being ‘able to deliver’”, and thus “the ‘midwife’ has no other choice than to toil, once again, until ‘delivery’ is achieved”.

The above passage is of great relevance not only because it clarifies how the daemonic manifestation (or the lack of it) merges with Socrates’ own decisions, but also because it suggests that the results of Socrates’ παιδεία, precisely inasmuch as it is conceived as a συνουσία, might not be long-lasting. Such a consequence seems to be confirmed – as we will see (in section IV) – by Xenophon’s account.

Plato’s corpus, of course, would offer further material to explore this

45. Ibid. p. 308.
issue. To give only one example, in the Lysis Socrates himself connects his expertise in τὰ ἐρωτικὰ46 to divine will when he states: “there is one gift that I have somehow from heaven (τοῦτο δὲ μοὶ πως ἐκ θεοῦ δέδοται), to be able to recognize quickly a lover or a beloved” (204c; transl. by W. R. M. Lamb). Nonetheless, for the purpose of our analysis the Theages and the Alcibiades I turn out to be all the more instructive.47

III. The Theages and the Alcibiades I

The authenticity of the Theages – that, as far as we know, appears never to have been questioned in antiquity48 – has been systematically rejected since the first years of the nineteenth century.49 A detailed discussion about the problem of the authorship of the dialogue falls of course beyond the scope of this paper.50 Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the theme of the work most debated among scholars is precisely the description, at the end of the dialogue, of the nature and the effects of the divine sign. The entire dialogue seems to be conceived as a celebration of Socrates’ beneficial influence over those who associate with him, and to be focused – in particular – on the relationship between such an influence and the δαιμόνιον.

It is, indeed, Socrates himself who directly relates the manifestation of a divine sign to his συνουσία with those who decide to follow him and spend their time with him:

this spiritual power (ἡ δύναμις αὕτη τοῦ δαίμονίου τούτου) that attends me also exerts itself to the full in my intercourse with those who spend their time with me (τὰς συνουσίας τῶν μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ συνδιατριβόντων τὸ ἅπαν δύναται, 129c).51

In what follows we find a striking similarity with the position expressed in the Theaetetus (150d): here, too, Socrates affirms that it is impossible “to get any good” for those to which the δαιμόνιον is adverse, and that he is unable to spend his time in conversing with them. Conversely, “those who are

47. I am leaving aside Antisthenes’ treatment of the theme of ἀνθρώπως συνεῖναι, which in his writings seems to carry a peculiar meaning, different from the meaning it has in Plato’s dialogues (where it is essentially connected to διαλέγεσθαι): cf. Plato, *Prt.* 336a-b; 347c-348a; *Ap.* 41b-c; *Smp.* 176e; *Resp.* I, 328a8. On this issue see Brancacci 1990, p. 158-64.
48. According to Albinius (Intr. 149.5) the Theages was the first dialogue to be read by some of Plato’s students (cf. D. L. 2.62).
49. For a literature review on this topic and relevant bibliographical references see Centrone 1997, p. 16 ff. and Joyal 2000, p. 121-3.
51. All the English translations of the Theages and the Alcibiades I are by W. R. M. Lamb.
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assisted in their intercourse by that spiritual power” (οἷς δ᾽ ἂν συλλάβηται τῆς συνουσίας ἢ τοῦ δαιμονίου δύναμις) make rapid progress there and then (129e).

Moreover, the same consequences follow from this “lack of control” over the outcomes of his teaching activity: many of those who make progress, Socrates warns, remain in this condition as long as they are with him, but as soon as they part from Socrates, they relapse and lose everything they have learnt.

A vivid description of Socrates’ teaching in terms of συνουσία and of these “modes of transmission” is to be found in the words of Theages himself:

I will tell you, Socrates, he said, what is incredible, upon my soul, yet true. For I never yet learnt anything from you (ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔμαθον μὲν παρά σου οὐδὲν πώποτε), as you know yourself: but I made progress, whenever I was with you (ὅπότε σοι συνείην), if I was merely in the same house, without being in the same room, but more progress, when I was in the same room. And it seemed to me to be much more when I was in the same room and looked at you as you were speaking, than when I turned my eyes elsewhere: but my progress was far the greatest and most marked whenever I sat beside you and held and touched you (σου καὶ ἁπτόμενος). Now, however, he said, that condition has all oozed away (130d-e).

One cannot help noting a flat contradiction with Socrates’ reply to Agathon in Plato’s Symposium (175c-d), where he ironically comments on (and hence distances himself from) the idea that wisdom may flow “by contact” from the one who is fuller to the one who is emptier (175c-d). Theages’ claim, which is not contradicted by Socrates, seems to imply that sitting next to Socrates is enough to allow him to benefit from the latter’s wisdom. Without dismissing the disagreement between the two accounts, one may attempt to explain it not only by invoking the non-Platonic authorship of the work, but also by arguing that Theages – just like Agathon, Alcibiades, and the majority of Socrates’ interlocutors in Plato’s dialogues – is expressing a partial, incomplete and misleading view on Socratic παιδεία. Socrates’ position, however, remains unexpressed in this case, and this undoubtedly makes the Theages passage problematic.

Nonetheless, there is no shortage of further points of interest that suggest we should include this dialogue among the sources on Socratic συνουσία. While Socrates does not contradict Theages, he responds to him by once

52. In the Theages, just as in Plato’s authentic dialogues, the action of the divine sign is largely negative and prohibitive. Nonetheless, just as in other works, this does not prevent Socrates from interpreting the lack of daimonic intervention “positively”, that is: as an implicit sign that he should act in a certain way (see, for instance, Ap. 31d). This is not, therefore, at odds with Socrates’ productive “daimonic work” here, nor with the art of midwifery as depicted in the Theaetetus, which, incidentally, does not entail that any positive teaching is imparted by Socrates (150c).
again tracing back the results of such philosophical συνουσία to the divine will, this time by referring to his personal relationship with the young man: “such then, Theages, is the intercourse you would have with me (τοιαύτη ή ήμετέρα συνουσία): if God so wills (ἐὰν μὲν τῷ θεῷ φιλον ή), you will make very great and rapid progress, but otherwise, you will not” (130e).

Now, besides the Theaetetus and the Symposium, a close parallel with Aeschines’ Alcibiades can be found in the following passage, where Socrates states that the benefits he brings to others are the result of τύχη and thus are not in his power. Most significantly, Socrates here distinguishes his own pedagogical activity from the παιδεύεσθαι of those who are in control of the benefits of their teaching:

Consider, therefore, if it is not safer for you to be educated by one of those persons who have command themselves of the benefit which they bestow on mankind (παρ᾽ ἐκείνων τινὰ παιδεύεσθαι οἷ ἐγκρατεῖς αὐτοί εἰσιν τῆς ὑφέλιας ἢν ὑφέλιον τοὺς ἀνθρώπως) rather than follow the course on which you may chance with me (ἐὰν παρ᾽ ἐμού οἄτι ἃν τύχῃ τοῦτο πρᾶξαι). (Ibid.)

Other relevant traits of Socrates’ view (and practice) of παιδεία, which emerged from Aeschines’ Alcibiades and Plato’s Symposium, can be found in the Alcibiades I. Most of this evidence is provided in the opening section of the dialogue, where Socrates explains to Alcibiades the reason why he has sought him out (103a-b):

Son of Cleinias, I think it must surprise you that I, the first of all your lovers (πρῶτος ἐραστῆς σου), am the only one of them who has not given up his suit and thrown you over, and whereas they have all pestered you with their conversation I have not spoken one word to you for so many years. The cause of this has been nothing human (αἴτιον οὐκ ἀνθρώπειον), but a certain spiritual opposition (τι δαιμόνιον ἐναντίωμα), of whose power you shall be informed at some later time. However, it now opposes me no longer, so I have accordingly come to you; and I am in good hopes that it will not oppose me again in the future. Now I have been observing you all this time, and have formed a pretty good notion of your behavior to your lovers (πρὸς τοὺς ἑραστάς): for although they were many and high-spirited, everyone of them has found your spirit too strong for him and has run away (οὐδεὶς οὔς οὐχ ὑπερβληθεῖς τῷ φρονήματι ὑπὸ σοῦ πέφευγεν). Let me explain the reason of your spirit being too much for them.

The passage makes some crucial points for our analysis. First, also in this case Socrates ascribes his educational influence on Alcibiades to a “divine will”: while in Aeschines’ Alcibiades he finds himself in love with the young man for a “divine portion” (and so in the position of improving him διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶν), in Alcibiades I what allows Socrates to seek Alcibiades is the end of divine opposition (δαιμόνιον ἐναντίωμα). Even though the deity here manifests itself in a negative way – by ceasing to oppose Socrates – in both texts the cause of the Socratic educational mission “has been nothing
human”. This is emphasised by the last reference to the deity at the end of the dialogue (135d), where Socrates – echoing the claims in the *Theaetetus* and the *Theages* – says that ὁ θεός will decide whether Alcibiades’ education will be successful or not (ἐὰν θεὸς ἔθελη).

Second, here too Socrates’ educational intent arises from his ἔρως for Alcibiades. Indeed, Socrates immediately introduces himself as Alcibiades’ ἔραστής at the beginning of his speech and, a little further on, he states: “if I saw you, Alcibiades, content with the things I set forth just now, and minded to pass your life in enjoying them, I should long ago have put away my love (πάλαι ἂν ἀπηλλάγμην τοῦ ἔρωτος; 104e)”. Once again, Socrates connects his ἔρως for Alcibiades to the possibility of a moral improvement on the part of the young man.

Third, also in *Alcibiades I* Socratic παιδεία seems to challenge traditional erotic roles, although the text is not that explicit in this regard. It can be inferred from the final section of the dialogue, where Alcibiades – finally open to moral exhortations and willing to achieve ἀρετή – states:

> And yet I say this besides, that we are like to make a change in our parts (μεταβαλεῖν τὸ σχῆμα), Socrates, so that I shall have yours and you mine. For from this day onward it must be the case that I am your attendant, and you have me always in attendance on you. (135d.)

Before moving on to Xenophon’s account, it should be pointed out that the parallels and similarities across the *logoi sokratikoi*, close as they may be, should not lead us to overlook the variances among the texts. Even though, for example, in the *Alcibiades I* Socrates links his paideutic activity to divine will, only in Aeschines’ *Alcibiades* does this explicitly entail the idea that Socrates transmits virtue without resorting to any τέχνη or ἐπιστήμη. In other words, the dialogue seems to attest to an idea of παιδεία which leads to moral improvement through συνουσία alone, but in a much more general sense compared to other sources: rather than an actual means for the transmission of virtue (as in Aeschines), ἔρως represents here the driving force behind Socrates’ educational action and what provides its framework.

**IV. Xenophon’s *Memorabilia***

“I think I ought to say something also about intimacy with boys (περὶ τῶν παιδικῶν ἔρωτων), since this matter also has a bearing on education (πρὸς παιδείαν)” (*Lac*. 2.12). In dealing with the customs of Sparta, Xenophon stresses the role played by male love in the field of education. The essential link between παιδεία and παιδεραστεία is reaffirmed within the presenta-

53. See also Socrates’ answer in 135e: “So my love (ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως) will be just like a stork; for after hatching a winged love in you it is to be cherished in return by its nestling (ὑπὸ τούτου πάλαι θεραπεύσεται).” I had the occasion to comment on these passages in Pentassuglio 2014, p. 73-4.
tion of the rules established by Lycurgus, who is said to have believed “in the excellence of this kind of training (καλλίστην παιδείαν ταύτην ἐνόμιζεν)”, but only if the lover “admired a boy’s soul and tried to make of him an ideal friend without reproach and to associate with him (καὶ συνεῖναι)” (2.13; transl. by E. C. Marchant and G. W. Bowersock).

Here we find an opposition between admiration for the beloved’s soul and desire for his body that closely resembles the distinction between love of the body and love of the soul expounded within Socrates’ speech on ἔρως in the Symposium (8.12 ff.). These passages, of course, are rich in information as regards Xenophon’s Socrates view of male love. Nonetheless, in order to keep a sharper focus on the depiction of Socrates’ teaching as a συνουσία, I shall focus on some sections of Memorabilia 1 (without, of course, any claim to be exhaustive).

The first chapters of book 1, where Xenophon more directly defends Socrates against the formal charges levelled against him (1.1-2), are of particular interest, as Xenophon immediately goes through a defence of Socrates’ education. In 1.2.2-3, when responding to the charge of corrupting the youth brought against Socrates, he states:

On the contrary, he cured these vices in many, by putting into them a desire for goodness (ἀρετῆς ποιήσας ἐπιθυμεῖν) and by giving them confidence that self-discipline would make them gentlemen. To be sure he never professed to teach this (οὐδεπώποτε ὑπέσχετο διδάσκαλος εἶναι τούτον); but, by letting his own light shine, he led his disciples to hope that they through imitation of him (ἑαυτῷ μιμουμένοις) would attain to such excellence.

According to this depiction, too, Socrates did not present himself as a διδάσκαλος, but rather improved his disciples by engendering an impulse to imitate him. In this regard, it is particularly telling that in these two chapters, where Xenophon illustrates the cornerstones of Socratic teaching, he almost exclusively employs the expression οἱ συνόντες to refer to Socrates’ disciples. As in Aeschines’ Alcibiades, moreover, the συνουσία with Socrates is

54. Equally interesting is a comparison between this view and that expressed in Xenophon’s non-Socratic writings. On this see Hindley 1994, 1999 and 2004.


56. All the English translations of Xenophon’s Memorabilia are by E. C. Marchant.

57. Note that also Antiphon, when criticising Socrates for the refusal to take money for his teaching, defines it as a συνουσία: “Socrates, I for my part believe you to be a just, but by no means a wise man. And I think you realise it yourself. Anyhow, you decline to take money for your society” (οὐδένα γοῦν τῆς συνουσίας ἀργύριον πράττῃ, 1.6.11).

58. Note that the same term is used to indicate the “cohabitation” of fathers and sons (1.2.27: ἀλλ’ οἱ γε πατέρες αὐτοὶ συνόντες τοῖς υἱέσι, τῶν παιδῶν πλημμελούντων, οὐκ αἰτίαν ἔχουσιν, ἐὰν αὐτοί σωφρονῶσιν)’.

59. Cf. Mem. 1.1.4 (καὶ πολλοὶς τῶν συνόντων προηγήρευε τά μὲν ποιέν κτλ.); 1.1.5 (οἱ δὲ ποιέν κτλ.); 1.2.5 (οὐ μὴν οὐδ’ ἐρασιχρημάτως γε τοὺς συνόντας ἐποίει); 1.2.8
bound up with the theme of βελτίων γίγνεσθαι. Against those who “hold the opinion expressed in some written and spoken criticisms of Socrates that are based on inference” and who think therefore that Socrates, while exhorting men to virtue, was unable to guide them to it, Xenophon mentions both the “searching cross-examination with which he chastised those who thought themselves omniscient”, and his daily talks with his closest friends; both prove that “he was capable of improving his companions” (ἐκανός ἦν βελτίους ποιεῖν τοὺς συνόντας, 1.4.1).

As far as the theme of moral improvement is concerned, it can be noted en passant that Xenophon’s Socratic writings appear to equate the notion of βελτίων γίγνεσθαι and that of ὠφελεῖν, ὠφέλεια being a chief trait of Socrates’ teaching (especially in the Memorabilia).60

A further trait of Socrates’ παιδεία – that we have already found in the Theaetetus (150e-151a) and the Theages (129c) – emerges from Xenophon’s account in Memorabilia 1.1-2: the temporary nature of the benefits acquired through Socrates’ teaching. This aspect, that in the above-mentioned dialogues was resulted from the role played by the divine sign (or the divine will), here takes on an immediate apologetic connotation. It is not by chance that it is specifically called into question in relation to the case of Critias and Alcibiades, compared to whom “none wrought so many evils to the state” (1.2.12). Indeed, Xenophon’s defensive strategy61 consists in showing that Critias and Alcibiades, compared to whom “none wrought so many evils to the state” (1.2.12). Indeed, Xenophon’s defensive strategy consists in showing that Critias and Alcibiades sought Socrates’ company to pursue their own political purposes; Alcibiades, in particular, aimed to get ready to πράττειν τὰ πολιτικά (1.2.15; cf. 39; 40) and to become a leader of the city (προεστάναι τῆς πόλεως; 1.2.39). This is why, as soon as they reached their objectives, they parted from Socrates (1.2.12-6). Only after this break, having forgotten his teachings, they became arrogant, corrupt, and – lacking ἀσκησις τῆς ἀρετῆς (1.2.19 ff.) – relapsed into wicked behaviour (1.2.24-8). The implicit underlying principle, which Xenophon’s Socrates hold dear, is that any virtue acquired can be lost as soon as the ἀσκησις ceases (1.2.9).

We can thus infer from the passage that, in Xenophon too, a possible consequence of this model of παιδεία is that the resulting acquisitions are of a fleeting sort. This would appear to confirm, if only in an indirect way, the view of Socratic education as a “being with”.

60. Cf. 1.2.61; 1.3.1; 2.7.1; 3.1.1; 4.1.1; 4.8.10.
61. See Giannantoni 1997, p. 373.
IV. Conclusions

As far as the theme of philosophical συνουσία and its connection with the pedagogical function of ἔρως are concerned, a series of common traits have emerged from the analysis of the various accounts. The resulting portrayal, of course, is not unitary; yet it is possible to point out certain aspects which appear to be shared by two or more sources.

They can be efficaciously introduced by Socrates’ ironic reply to Alcibiades in Plato’s Symposium, which evokes a view of Socratic παιδεία also depicted in Aeschines’ Alcibiades and in the Theages: “My dear Alcibiades” – says Socrates to the young man who aims to acquire virtue and wisdom with his help – “I dare say you are not really a dolt, if what you say of me is the actual truth, and there is a certain power in me that could help you to be better (τις ἔστ᾽ ἐν ἐμοὶ δύναμις δι᾽ ἧς ἂν σὺ γένοιο ἀμείνων; 218d-e).”

As a general and first conclusion, I would like to highlight all these authors’ insistence on the concept of συνουσία (and their use of related terms) in order to describe the specific nature of Socrates’ teaching. All accounts seem to share a view of (Socratic) wisdom as something that cannot actually be “taught”, as well as a conception of virtue as something that cannot be imparted by means of μαθήματα.

According to the majority of sources (particularly Aeschines’ Alcibiades, Plato’s Symposium and the Alcibiades I) this view of education presents a direct connection with ἔρως. In all these accounts, the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades is characterised as a form of erotic education and framed as a lover-beloved relation. Socrates, moved by his ἔρως towards Alcibiades, presents himself as his lover and then transforms his beloved Alcibiades into an ἐραστής through his educational work. In Aeschines’ dialogue this transformation takes place – according to Plutarch – by engendering in Alcibiades a “reflection of love” or ἀντέρως, while in Plato’s Symposium and in Alcibiades I Socrates makes the young man undergo an out-and-out role reversal.

More particularly, Plato’s Socrates, by presenting himself as an ἐραστής, and then by taking on the role of the ἐρώμενος, aims to activate a process that starts with ἐπιθυμία and ends with βελτίων γίγνεσθαι, the moral improvement which represents the core of Socratic παιδεία. On the other hand – unlike Plato and the author of the Alcibiades I – Aeschines not only makes Socrates explicitly state that he transmits virtue without resorting to any τέχνη or ἐπιστήμη, but makes a clearer reference to a kind of paideutic activity διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶν on Socrates’ part, which seems to entail the idea that ἔρως is the actual...

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62. This parallel between these passages and Aeschines’ Alcibiades has already been drawn by Krauss 1911, p. 22-3.
means for the transmission of virtue.\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, the added specification ὃν ἔτυγχαν ἐρῶν (Aristides, \textit{Or}. Πρὸς Πλάτωνα 1.74), especially if connected to the previous claim that Socrates’ educational skills originate from a θεία μοίρα (1.61), suggests that the ἔρως itself (with its pedagogical implications) depends on a form of τύχη.

This leads us to a further element that some of these accounts attest to, namely the direct and deep connection not only between ἔρως and the divine, but more particularly between Socrates’ teaching activity and the divine will: his συνουσία with those who decide to follow him (\textit{Theages}), his ability to benefit or help others (Aeschines’ \textit{Alcibiades}), the timing and the “object” of the paideutic intervention (\textit{Alcibiades I}), as well as the method employed (\textit{Theaetetus}), are said to be subject to a divine will, dispensation, or direct manifestation (which can take either a positive or negative form). Most significantly, also the progress made by the “disciples” (\textit{Theaetetus, Theages}) and thus the success of the education (\textit{Alcibiades I}) do not depend – at least not entirely – on Socrates.

One of the main consequences of this is that Socrates is not in control of the benefits (or, more generally, of the results) of his teaching. This is particularly explicit in the \textit{Theaetetus} (150d-e) and the \textit{Theages} (129e; 130c), but it is also true in some sense for Plato’s \textit{Symposium} and Xenophon’s \textit{Memorabilia}, where Alcibiades’ failure implies (to different extents) that Socrates was not responsible for the final outcomes of his education.

This leads, in turn, to some problematic conclusions and raises further questions. One is the wider issue of agency and responsibility,\textsuperscript{64} which has been extensively debated, for example, with regard to the \textit{Phaedrus}\textsuperscript{65} as far as the compatibility between divine inspiration and rational activity is concerned. Without getting into the details of this thorny problem, what can be noted here are the likely apologetic purposes behind the various references to Socrates’ not being fully “in control” of the outcomes of his teaching.

A further implication is that the achievements and benefits stemming from “association” with Socrates – arguably precisely because it does not entail any μάθημα – might be a non-lasting acquisition. Such a feature, attested by the \textit{Theaetetus} (150e-151a), the \textit{Theages} (129c) and the \textit{Memorabilia} (1.2.24-8), could be seen as problematic or even as a weakness of Socrates’ παιδεία. However, as Xenophon’s account shows, this idea too could be turned into an apologetic argument.

\textsuperscript{63} This raises the problem of the controversial relationship between ἔρως and virtue in Aeschines, on which see Ehlers 1966, p. 93-4; Gaiser 1969, p. 203-4 and Giannantoni 1990, p. 595.

\textsuperscript{64} See at least Kennett 2001, especially p. 73-6 on Plato and Aristotle.

\textsuperscript{65} Cf. particularly \textit{Phdr. 238d}. For a first overview see Rowe 1986, p. 117-20 and Yunis 2011, p. 16-7.
Now, the resulting picture of Socratic education raises a crucial problem, namely the difficulty to determine the actual content of Socrates’ teaching, particularly in those sources (such as Aeschines) where this aspect remains largely unspecified. In this study, however, I have rather sought to focus on Socrates’ reshaping of παιδεία from the point of view of the method and modes of transmission of such content. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that some final observations can be made concerning the Socratic “model” of education as an innovation or an alternative to other (past or contemporary) views.

One may think, of course, first and foremost of the Sophists, of their method based on μακρολογία and on long ἐπιδείξεις, of their rhetoric lessons, and – more generally – of their educational program designed to train the future politicians of a city. It is also possible, however, to see Socrates’ παιδεία as an alternative to the “institutionalised” education which was imparted in “schools,” and which was heir to ancient aristocratic παιδεία. Socrates’ education, therefore, also represented a break with ἡ ἀρχαία παιδεία, based on the practice of gymnastics and on the teaching of music and poetry, which the philosopher of course also reshaped in terms of its content and object, with a new focus on the ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς.

This study can be concluded with a quotation from Karl Jaspers’ Psychologie der Weltanschauungen, where Socrates is included – together with Kant and Kierkegaard – among “die Propheten indirekter Mitteilung”, as opposed to “die Lehrer bestimmter Prinzipien” and “die Lehrer der Totalität des Lebens”. Unlike the other kinds of teachers, these “prophets of indirect communication” actually refuse to be prophets; they merely exhort others, capture their attention, make them restless and problematise things, but do not give any rules:

_Die Propheten indirekter Mitteilung, d. h. solche Lehrer, die es ablehnen, Propheten zu sein, die nur reizen, aufmerksam machen, in Unruhe versetzen, die nur die Sachen problematisch machen, aber keine Vorschriften geben, nicht lehren, wie zu leben ist; die also dem Scheine nach einreißen, in Verzweiflung_
bring, Schwierigkeiten machen, und doch nichts “Positives” geben. Sie haben den stärksten Drang zur Kommunikation, jedoch immer in Gegenseitigkeit. [...] Die Philosophen indirekter Mitteilung drängen sich innerlich als Einzelne zum einzelnen Menschen, appellieren an das Leben, das im Anderen ist, dem sie durch Reize und durch Entwicklung des Mediums unendlicher Reflexion zum Wachstum helfen, das sie aber nicht als imperative Lehre selbst geben wollen. Sie stoßen zurück, wenn man anbetend in Gefolgschaft treten will, sie lieben die Freiheit im Anderen. Sie sind der Idee nach nie – wenn auch noch so sehr faktisch – überlegen, sondern leben selbst in der Kommunikation indirekter Mitteilung so gut vom Schüler, wie sie ihm helfen, ohne etwas Direktes, das das Wesentliche wäre, zu geben.74

Jaspers’ words, although distant in time, cannot but bring to our mind what we read in the works of the first-generation Socrates, where Socratic teaching is repeatedly presented as a “being with”, “associating with” or “following” Socrates, who does not teach in terms of παιδευσις. According to Plato, in particular, Socrates rather plays the role of the beloved, becomes a midwife, and thereby helps the souls of young men to beget.75

74. Jaspers 1919, p. 332-3 (my emphasis).
75. One is tempted to read also the words from the Seventh Letter (341c5-d2) in this light: ὅτι δὲν γὰρ οὖν ἡμῶν ἄλλα μαθήματα, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ πολλῆς συνουσίας γεγονομένης περὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ συζῆν ἐξαίφνης, οἰον ἄπο τυρός πιθήκοις ἐξαφθέν ἄμφος, ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γενόμενον αὐτὸ ἐκατό ἣδι τρέφει. Cf. Edmonds 2000, p. 283.
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