

Zafiroopoulos, Christos A.

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CHRISTOS A. ZAFIROPOULOS (UNIVERSITY OF IOANNINA)

SOCRATES AND AESOP: A FEW NOTES ON PLATO'S PORTRAIT OF THE ARCH-PHILOSOPHER

The description in the Phaedo of the last day of Socrates opens with the philosopher recounting a fable on pain and pleasure which is soon followed by the surprising reference to an obscure literary heritage, of which nothing is heard in the rest of the platonic corpus. Socrates composed the night before a hymn to Apollo and versified some Aesopic fables as a response to a dream that he had. The paper discusses the similarities and the suggestive differences between the literary portraits of these two unconventional wise men. This is a necessary first methodological step in the attempt to decipher the platonic assimilation of the fabulist Aesop into his portrayal of Socrates.

Key words: Aesop; *Life of Aesop*; *Phaedo*; *pharmakos*; Plato; Socrates.

My contribution follows a recent flow in Platonic studies, namely Plato's interweaving of various traditions in order to form the literary portrait of his Socrates. Since Andrea Nightingale's groundbreaking *Genres in Dialogue* we are familiar with Plato's handling of traditional genres in order to define and introduce in their place his own field of discourse, his *philosophia*. Recently, however, a number of works, such as those by Todd Compton and Emily Wilson, try in different ways to inscribe Socrates' platonic portrayal in a framework of narratives regarding the cultural category of the poet, the ποιητής, as a heroic figure which often brought together the seemingly inconsistent attributes of the defender of the community and the *pharmakos*, the human scapegoat. It is in this respect that scholars have noted the many and surprising similarities between Socrates' portrayal by Plato and that of the legendary fabulist Aesop. As part of this rather intriguing novel discussion, I will attempt in this paper to draw a map of the affinities and differences in the literary portraits of these two unconventional wise men.¹

¹ See, for example, COMPTON, TODD. 2006. Victim of the Muses Poet as Scapegoat,

Any such study should start with the *Phaedo*, which recounts Socrates' final discourse. In the opening scene (59c–61b), which is often programmatic in Plato and therefore deserves special attention, we hear that the previous day the holy ship *Paralos* had returned from its *theoria* at the *Delia*, Apollo's festival at Delos, thus signaling the end of the postponement of Socrates' execution. Socrates has just been released after 30 days in fetters.² With a very realistic move, he bents his leg and as he rubs it to relieve the painful numbness from the long-standing fetters,³ he comments that he experiences a bizarre blend of pain with pleasure. Similar discordant mixtures as well as the switch to contradictory feelings, further discussed in the *Philebus*,⁴ turn to be a leitmotiv in the *Phaedo* as Socrates' friends often fall from laughter to tears or experience mixed emotions (e.g., 59a, 117c–d). Socrates then notes that opposed feelings and situations rotate in human life, a statement that brings to mind another key issue in the *Phaedo*, the unity of the opposites.⁵

Socrates turns to his usual parodic formula “if X saw this he would have said Y”, where Y is usually some passage from an established genre. To our

Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History. Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies; WILSON, EMILY. 2007. *The Death of Socrates*. Hero, Villain, Chatterbox, Saint. London: Profile Books. For a different – and more precise in my view – definition of the ‘poet’ see LEFKOWITZ, MARY R. 1981. *The Lives of the Greek Poets*. London: Duckworth. The first attempt for such a map was the “*Äsop und Sokrates*” by MARKUS SCHAUER and STEFAN MERKLE of the University of Munich in the pioneering volume edited by NIKLAS HOLZBERG. 1992. *Der Äsop-Roman: Motivgeschichte und Erzählstruktur*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 85–96.

2 Commentaries on the *Phaedo* (e.g., ROWE, BURNET) are not particularly illuminating on this passage, especially as regards the Aesopic references. On the passage see SCHEFFER, CHRISTINA. 1996. *Platon und Apollon: Vom Logos zurück zum Mythos*. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 137–142; CHVATÍK, IVAN. 2001. „*Aisopou ti geloion*. Erster Beitrag zu einem Kommentar von Platons *Phaidon*.“ In HAVLÍČEK, A. – KARFÍK, F. [EDS.] *Plato's Phaedo*. Proceedings of the Second Symposium Platonicum Pragense. Prague: Oikúmené, 2001, 174–192; CLAYTON, EDWARD W. 2008. „The Death of Socrates and the Life of Aesop.“ *Ancient Philosophy*, 28, 311–328; KURKE, LESLIE. 2011. *Aesopic Conversations: Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose*. Princeton: University Press.

3 Cf. Alcidas fr. 1.102–105 AVEZZÙ.

4 *Phlb.* 45b, 46c–d.

5 This in turn will lead his interlocutors to consider life as a continuous circle of reincarnations; then follows the consequent immortality of the soul, a perspective that will liberate them from the fear of death. The leitmotiv reappears at the end of the dialogue, thus forming a ring composition: the hemlock turns the warm feet of Socrates to cold, as death approaches, yet this time as a welcomed condition.

surprise however, this time it is not some Homer or Herodotus who shows up, but Aesop!⁶ The passage in question is 60c1–7:⁷

“And it seems to me that if Aesop had thought on these two [i.e. pleasure and pain], he would have composed a fable, saying that god wanted to reconcile these two that fought each other and since he could not achieve this, he fastened their heads and therefore [since then] whenever one of them appears to someone the other follows after. This is exactly the case with me, because first I felt the pain from the fetters after my release from them, but now it seems that pleasure has followed.”

So here stands the master at his very last moments, when his pupils are anxious to grasp every word he utters, and he thinks of Aesop and conceives an aetiological fable to explicate his feelings, starring a surreal creature that reminds us of Aristophanes' androgynon in the Symposium.⁸ As for its generic references, Socrates' fable meets perfectly both the narrative patterns of Aesopic fables as we know them from ancient literature and fable collections and their paradigmatic application to our empirical data.⁹ The implied message here is that being a philosopher, Socrates can overcome such sentimental turbulences, contrary to the common man who listened to Aesop's fables.

But that's not all. Cebes intervenes:

“Oh yes, thanks Zeus, Socrates, for reminding me! Now, regarding the poems that you composed by versifying¹⁰ Aesop's fables [logoi] and your hymn to Apollo, several others had asked me already and so did Evenus a little earlier, what came into your mind anyway and you decided to compose them, as soon as you came here, since never before had you composed anything. So, please tell me what should I say ...” (60c8–d7).

⁶ For fables and allusions to fables in the platonic corpus see VAN DIJK, GERT-JAN. 1997. *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*. Leiden: Brill, 324–336, 349–350, 667–671.

⁷ My translations of the Phaedo passages are very close to HAROLD FOWLER's translation for the Loeb.

⁸ The tying up of the two heads may also allude to his above-mentioned own fettering as well as to the 'tying' of the common man's soul to his body later in the dialogue.

⁹ See G.-J. VAN DIJK (1997).

¹⁰ The translation of ἐντρέψας here is much debated. I prefer “setting to verse”, which is adopted, among others, by CHRISTOPHER ROWE, GERT-JAN VAN DIJK and PENELOPE MURRAY, on the basis that classical fables were written in prose, that ποιήματα implies compositions in verse and Plutarch's interpretation of this passage in *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat* (*Mor.* 16c). However, neither am I convinced that some classical fables did not circulate orally in short poems like those mentioned in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, a form that would facilitate memorization for such a popular genre, nor do I exclude the alternative translation “setting to music” (as in Prtg. 326b1) the versified fable.

Aesop and his fables reemerge in the most peculiar and unexpected context and Socrates' reply obscures things even more: he admits that he did compose them

“in an effort to interpret certain dreams that I had and to show reverence in case that what these repeated dreams commanded me to do was to make music. For, these dreams were something like this. Many times before in my life the same dream visited me, in different forms yet uttering the same phrase, «O Socrates, it said, do compose and practice mousike»¹¹. And all these times I thought that it urged and encouraged me to do just what I was already doing ... that is, to make mousike [in the wider sense of the Muses' arts], because philosophy is the greatest kind of mousike and this was exactly what I was doing. But now, after the trial was over and Apollo's festival still impeded my death, it came to me that, if what the dream urged me to do was to make mousike in the popular sense [i.e., fictitious poetry],¹² I should not disobey it and I ought to compose such mousike. ...So, first I composed a hymn to the god [Apollo] whose festival it was. Then, after the hymn to the god, I thought that a poet, if he is really to be a poet, must compose muthoi¹³ and not logoi and since I was not muthologikos,¹⁴ from those Aesopic fables that I knew well and had at hand, I adapted [i.e., versified] the first that I came upon.”

This would be an unforeseen novelty both for the ancient audience of the dialogue and its modern (and ancient) readership, namely to find out that Socrates who had famously not written anything, is reported to have eventually changed his mind at the very end of his life and this thanks to a dream, one of Apollo's prophetic terrains, to whom Socrates is famously a servant, a *therapon*. If this report were true, it would leave a written heritage, however small and rather bizarre in respect to philosophical content, which would contest the paradox on which the new genre of Socratic *logoi*

¹¹ The translation of this term should not be restricted to 'music' as it refers to the fields of excellence of all the Muses, thus including philosophy.

¹² G.-J. VAN DIJK (1997: 40).

¹³ There seems to be confusion as regards fable terminology in the *Phaedo*. Cebes labels them *logoi*, Socrates speaks of *muthoi* and it seems that Plato gives an ironic twist to the combinative term *muthologikos*. Socrates' choice of term might intend to stress the fictitiousness often associated with *muthos* for fable in the sources, while *logos* was the commonest term for fable in classical times. See G.-J. VAN DIJK (1997: 79–114, esp. 82–88).

¹⁴ This is not true and it creates a sort of textual irony. Not only has he just composed an Aesopic *muthos* (60c), but soon after in the *Phaedo* (61e), Socrates confesses that he finds it fitting to *muthologein* on the afterlife and the journeys of the soul after death (as in 70c and 107c onwards). See MURRAY, PENELOPE. 2002. „Plato's Muses: The Goddesses that Endure.“ In *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature*. Oxford: University Press, 39–40, and G.-J. VAN DIJK (1997: 324–325). On the use of terminology here see also ROWE, CHRISTOPHER [ED.]. 1993. *Plato. Phaedo*. Cambridge: University Press, 122.

is based, that is the recording of the master's *verba* because he himself did not write anything, or in fact deliberately refused to do given the critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. A few late sources support the historicity of this account and even some modern scholars accept this tardy and unique information on Socrates the fabulist, but we have many reasons to reject it.¹⁵ We hear nothing relevant to such important information in the rest of the Platonic work, or in the Socratic corpus in general and in contemporary sources, a rather suspicious omission that argues *ex silentio* against the truth of this platonic passage. Besides, the far too many apollonian connotations that this passage includes (dreams and their interpretation, music and the Muses, the Delia, the hymn to Apollo), which are characteristic of the dialogue as a whole,¹⁶ and Socrates' unprecedented familiarity with fables point to an episode *invented* by Plato. But why would Plato choose Aesop and his fables at this most dramatic point and what would such a decision imply? Fifth and fourth century Greeks were familiar with the Phrygian or Thracian slave Aesop as the *euretes*, the inventor of fables. As regards his life and particular details that Plato would have known and may allude to in the *Phaedo* passage, classical sources focus on his unjust death at Delphi under the false accusation of sacrilege by the Delphians.¹⁷ However these sources provide only a short and fragmentary piece of information. For the full version of Aesop's life that might aid the decipherment of his platonic linkage with Socrates one must look at the later novel-like *Life of Aesop*, of which I will use the older and fuller text which is preserved in the version known as G, first edited by Ben Edwin Perry in 1936.¹⁸

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- 15 See Plu. Mor. 16c; Aug. Cons. Evang. 1.12; Avian. Praef.; Psel. Orat. 25.169–174 LITTLEWOOD. Diogenes Laertius 2.42–43 gives the first verse of the paean and the beginning of the versified aesopic fable, according to which “Aesop once advised the Corinthian demos not to judge virtue accordingly to the verdicts of the courts”. I agree with Van Dijk on the rejection of the historicity of this Socratic fable, who also presents a list of the scholars' views on the historicity of Socrates as a fabulist in the *Phaedo*, G.-J. VAN DIJK (1997: 317–319).
- 16 See BACON, HELEN. 1990. „The Poetry of *Phaedo*.” In GRIFFITH, M. – MASTRONARDE, D. [EDS.] *Cabinet of the Muses. Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990, 147–162; CH. SCHEFFER (1996: 125–175).
- 17 Hdt. 2.134, Ar. V. 1446–1448, Heraclid. Pont. 2.219 FHG, Arist. Fr. 487 ROSE. See L. KURKE (2011: 6–7, 61–62, 91–92).
- 18 *Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop*. Haverford, Penn.: American Philological Association. Ben Edwin Perry and Elinor Husselman discovered this manuscript in the Pierpont Morgan Library and identified it with a lost manuscript that existed in the monastery of Grottaferrata, further on known as G. Its archetype was

The *Life* can be divided in three parts. The first (chs. 1–100) narrates the adventures of the slave *Αἴσωπος* (which could be translated as “dark faced”, as opposed to his master Xanthos, “the blonde”).¹⁹ The *Life* begins *in medias res*, with a mute and monstrously deformed yet smart, virtuous and pious Aesop who serves somewhere in Ionia.²⁰ One day, without knowing her identity, he offers hospitality to a priestess of Isis. As a result he is rewarded by Isis herself and her followers, the Muses, with the gift of speech and the charisma to compose fables.²¹ Armed with this talent, he doesn’t hold his tongue anymore against injustice and vice. He triumphs over his malicious opponents, unmasks, ridicules and squashes them with his witty comments. Aesop the foul-mouthed becomes a threat for the corrupt and the vicious, who are the major group in the *Life*. In reaction they unite against him, driven by humiliation and the threat of more blame from him in the future. This often results into verbal and physical violence against the aesthetically and verbally irritating Aesop. He is then taken to the island of Samos and sold there to Xanthos, a local philosopher and owner of a philosophical school. Soon the roles of master and slave are reversed and the world turns comically upside-down; the ugly slave proves to be the truly *agathos* and wise and the educator becomes the educated. Aesop ridicules and exposes the stupidity, shallowness and hypocrisy of the elite which turns out to be intellectually and ethically inferior to a slave. Finally, after a public demonstration of his wit and his fable discourse in the form of political advice to the Samians and performance of his wisdom to king Croesus he gains his freedom. In a problematic display of his piety, he honours for this fortunate turn of events the Muses but forgets to do so for their patron, Apollo, whom he therefore insults; this crucial generated the god’s vengeful rage.²² The

probably composed some time between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. See L. KURKE (2011: 4–6, 16–19, 42).

19 PAPADEMETRIOU, JOHN – THEOPHANIS. 1997. Aesop as an Archetypal Hero. Athens, 10–11, 14–20.

20 His unprecedented ugliness functions as a unifying theme in the *Life*. J.-TH. PAPADEMETRIOU (1997: 10–11).

21 For some scholars the presence of Isis, together with the “Ahiqar section” and some linguistic and ideological elements in the *Life* argue for the composition of its archetype in Egypt. See DILLERY, JOHN. 1999. „Aesop, Isis, and the Heliconian Muses.“ *Classical Philology*, 94, 268–280. The choice of Isis is in line with the portrait of Aesop in the *Life*. Isis, among many of her attributes, was the personification of wisdom and philosophy, the friend of slaves, full of compassion and concern for the suffering. See WITT, REGINALD. 1997². *Isis in the Ancient World*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 20–23, 95, 286 n. 61.

22 I follow here FRANCO FERRARI’s edition of the *Life* (G ch. 100), 2002. *Romanzo di*

second part of the *Life* (chs. 101–123) is an inserted version of the Assyrian story of Ahiqar, where Aesop echoes the oriental wise man or the archaic Greek *sophos* in the service of a strong king. Although a break from the main narrative, it includes an imprisonment of Aesop and his near death there and thus prefigures the final and most renowned part of the work (chs. 124–142), Aesop's fatal visit at Delphi.

He arrives there during a triumphant tour of Greek cities where he publicly demonstrates his wisdom. The people of Delphi, however, turn out to be the worst hosts of *sophia* among the Greeks (or of *this* particular kind of wisdom) and do not reward him at all for his performance (ch. 124). So Aesop chastises this breach of theirs of reciprocal obligations. First he ridicules their looks and status, quite an oxymoron coming from him, a heinous former slave; then he castigates their stinginess as the product of their slave ancestry, which is once again a peculiar statement coming from a freedman (124–126). His discourse of blame turns against him and as a result of their public slander the Delphians, assisted by Apollo who now sets in motion his vengeance, unite under the threat of Aesop discrediting them all over Greece and plot against him. They take a golden bowl from the god's shrine, hide it in the personal belongings that Aesop carried with him and then falsely accuse him of sacrilege (127–128). Here lies the main parallelism between Aesop and Socrates and seemingly the one that Plato had in mind in the *Phaedo*. Aesop too is falsely accused of religious crimes, in his case of the worst possible, and he is therefore unjustly tried and condemned to death.²³ Like Socrates, he too declares his innocence and delivers his arguments during his apology, in the form of fables, but he also fails to dissuade the court (132–141). His formerly persuading form of *logos* now fails him at the most crucial moment of his life, which is also what happens to Socrates.²⁴ In the end, he voluntarily throws himself off a cliff and dies

Esopo. Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, which keeps Papathomopoulos' reading of $\mu\eta\mu\acute{\iota}\omicron\sigma\sigma\upsilon\nu\omicron\nu$ instead of $M\eta\mu\iota\omicron\sigma\sigma\upsilon\nu\eta\nu$. The passage in question is much debated and corrected by scholars, who disagree on whether we should read that Aesop set up a shrine to the Muses and in the midst of their statues he placed his own and not Apollo's, their leader (Ferrari, Papathomopoulos, Holzberg, Kurke and others), which would anyway constitute a hubristic act, or he did set up in their midst a statue of Mnemosyne, their mother, and not of Apollo, who was known as the *mousagetes* (Perry, Papademetriou, Karla). However, despite which reading one chooses, the common fact is that Apollo is not honoured. See, most recently, L. KURKE (2011: 175).

23 M. SCHAUER & ST. MERKLE (1992: 85–86).

24 M. SCHAUER & ST. MERKLE (1992: 91). Thus there is a sort of ring composition, for the mute Aesop of the first chapters seems to return at the closing section. HOLZBERG, NIKLAS. 1993. „A Lesser Known ‘Picaresque’ Novel of Greek Origin: The Aesop

(142), an act that can be paralleled to Socrates' drinking of the conium at the end of the *Phaedo*.

His tragic end is soon avenged; plague that falls upon the Delphians. Quite ironically they seek for an oracular solution to their sufferings, but from Zeus (of Dodona?), not Apollo, who prompts them to expiate for Aesop's death. Soon after, though, Zeus' oracle and the crime that led to it are heard throughout Greece and a coalition of Greek cities invades Delphi and avenges Aesop's murder (142 – presumably an aetiological narrative for the origins of the First Sacred War, which is however doubted).²⁵ The Westermaniana or W version of the *Life* (W 142), inserts the interesting detail that as part of their expiation the Delphians built a temple in his honour and set up a *stèle* for him, thus adding an intense cultic parameter to the anyway religious background of his death.²⁶ Finally, it is reported that posthumously Aesop was honoured with a statue, possibly a mark of recompense and evidence of his heroization at a symbolic level; a similar heroic honour was reserved for Socrates.²⁷

Romance and Its Influence.“ In HOFMANN, H. [ED.] Groningen Colloquia on the Novel. Vol. 5, Groningen: Egbert Foster, 1993, 10. Cf. L. KURKE (2011: 185–189). In contrast to the introduction, the hospitable slave will die a freedman at Delphi, victim to the Delphians' breach of xenia.

²⁵ L. KURKE (2011: 30, 70–71, 75–77).

²⁶ Aesop receives hero cult in the 2nd century A.D. papyrus fragment of the *Life*, known as P.Oxy. 1800, edited by BERNARD GRENFELL and ARTHUR HUNT in 1922, they built an altar where he fell and offered sacrifices to him as a hero. A similar, real or figurative, cultic background seems to lie behind later narratives that speak of Aesop's post-mortem return to life. The Scholiast to Aristophanes' *Birds* 471 reports that the comic poet Plato (5th – 4th BC) in his *Laonians* or *Poets* (fr. 68 Kock) had Aesop come back to life. The third century BC historian Hermippus mentions an otherwise unknown Pataikos who claimed to have the soul of Aesop, 3.39 FHG (ap. Plu. Sol. 6). In Photius (Bibl. 152b11–13) we even read that after his murder by the Delphians, Aesop came to life again and fought at the side of the Greeks at Thermopylae! Cf. L. KURKE (2011: 93, 189–190).

²⁷ For Aesop's statue see the fabulist Phaedrus 2.9.1–4, Agathias in AP 16.332 (a work of Lysippus, it stood in front of the statues of the seven sages) and Tatianus *Oratio ad Graecos* 34 (a work by Aristodemus). On a surviving bust of Aesop found in Villa Albani see BERNOULLI, JOHN JACOB. 1901. *Griechische Ikonographie*. Vol. 1. München: Bruckmann, 54–6 (no. 964). According to Diogenes Laertius (2.43) the Athenians assigned the famous sculptor Lysippus to create a statue of Socrates which they set up at the Pompeion, out of remorse for his death (this is later repeated by Tertullian, *Apol.* 14.8). Both the sculptor and the motivation, which is reminiscent of W 142 and the Delphians' setting up of a temple and a *stèle* for Aesop, provide another point of affinity between Socrates and Aesop. L. KURKE (2011: 131–2).

Scholars have noted the parallels between the deaths of Aesop and Neoptolemus at Delphi. A papyrus from the late 2nd A.D., *P.Oxy.* 1800 singles out as the cause of Aesop's death his scoffing of the Delphians' greed and their parasitic living over sacrificial offers by visitors.²⁸ It was a similar strife over sacrificial meat that brought the end of Neoptolemus and these and other details inscribe the two stories, according to scholars, in the same tradition of narratives that pointed to the protagonist's heroic symbiosis in cult with the Delphic god which is juxtaposed to their mythological conflict. In fact, the greedy breach of *xenia* and the rapacious activity of the Delphians was proverbial and it is richly attested in the sources.²⁹ Yet, the ritual that has been more widely associated with Aesop is that of the Ionian *pharmakos*, which has also been proposed as a ritual background for the platonic description of Socrates' death and thus forms a field of convergence for the two. The ritual was part of the festival of the Thargelia, the first day of which, the 6th of month Thargelion, was a day of city purifications and supposedly Socrates' birthday too.³⁰ During the ritual two marginal figures of the community, overly ugly and poor, were abused with derogatory words and then they were processed around the city wearing a garland made of figs; then they were beaten, sometimes stoned and finally expelled from the city, thus carrying away the years' sins like human scapegoats.³¹

Socrates has famously been paralleled with the *pharmakos* first by Derrida, who has pointed to the mechanism of seclusion and the following exclusion by the community of what is defined as 'the other', the threatening outsider, in order to regain its cohesion. This view of Socrates has recently been espoused by many scholars. As regards Aesop, Anton Wiechers was the first to point to the now widely accepted view that the *pharmakos* constitutes the ritual background for the *Life*, whose protagonist follows

²⁸ For Aesop, a former slave, who knew at first hand what it meant to be deprived of the product of your labour, such parasitic dependence would have been outrageous. See G 126, 140.

²⁹ For the relevant sources see L. KURKE (2011: 56–57, 67–68, 73–74). On Aesop and Neoptolemus see WIECHERS, ANTON. 1961. *Aesop in Delphi*. Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 15–17, 43–49; NAGY, GREGORY. 1979. *The Best of the Achaeans*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 123–126. The most recent critical survey is in L. KURKE (2011: 75–86, 211–212).

³⁰ As well as the birthday of Apollo's twin sister, Artemis, and the day of many historical dissuasions of evil (the battles at Marathon and Plataea). D.L. 2.44 and BREMMER, JOHN. 2002. *Plato and the Founding of the Academy*. Lanham: University Press of America, 319.

³¹ See BREMMER, JAN. 1983. „Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece.“ *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 87, 299–320.

the pattern of the ritual more closely than Socrates: he is much uglier, he is called with most of the ritual epithets, processed through Delphi and throws himself off a cliff.³² So the *pharmakos* framework might explain Aesop's permeation in the narrative on Socrates' last day. But there is still a lot of guesswork in the aforementioned connections to allow any definite resolutions, while things are complicated regarding our sources on the particular ritual. For instance, our evidence is quite late and the ritual killing was most probably figurative.³³ In addition, quite recently Noel Robertson has brought to our attention the Delphic festival of Charila which combined the themes of problematic food distribution, unjust death, plague, ritual beating and a figurative throwing off a cliff, an *apokremnismos*. This festival could be another candidate for the ritual background to Aesop's death.³⁴ Besides, there is no revenge and punishment for the murder in the *pharmakos* ritual, but it is there for Aesop, and maybe it lies hidden in the *Apology*, in Socrates' prophecy that many will follow him and continue his work with less tact against Athens.³⁵ Finally, and most important in my view, scholars have argued for another, wider framework behind Aesop's (and to a lesser extent Socrates') death, namely a sort of biographical tradition that was common for Greek poets (e.g., Archilochus, Hesiod, Homer) which emphasized the special relation of the poet with the gods, especially with Apollo and the Muses; this relation was particularly expressed on the poet's way of death (often a product of punitive reaction to his offending and threatening blame poetry) and his following consecration which was occasionally accompanied by cult. This association often resulted from the poets' ambivalent relation to their patron god, usually Apollo or the Muses.³⁶

Therefore, an effective analytical framework to decode Plato's association of Socrates with Aesop should rather involve a combined consideration of the above substrata, the *pharmakos*, the Charila, the poet's consecration,

³² A. WIECHERS (1961: 31–42); DERRIDA, JACQUES. 1972. La pharmacie de Platon. Paris: Seuil; G. NAGY (1979: 279–288); T. COMPTON (2006: 19–40, 154–165 – he calls Socrates “the new Aesop”); L. KURKE (2011: 29–31, 75–94 – with some persuasive and thought-provoking criticism). The Athenian Thargelia was a festival in the name of Apollo Delios, the same Apollo who postponed Socrates' execution.

³³ J. BREMMER (1983: 304, 315–318).

³⁴ ROBERTSON, NOEL. 2003. „Aesop's Encounter with Isis and the Muses, and the Origins of the Life of Aesop.“ In CSAPO, E. – MILLER, M. C. [EDS.] Poetry, theory, praxis, Oxford: University Press, 2003, 256–258

³⁵ Ap. 38c–d.

³⁶ See, for example, G. NAGY (1979); CLAY, DISKIN. 2004. Archilochos Heros: The Cult of Poets in the Greek Polis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; T. COMPTON (2006); L. KURKE (2011: 98–109, 125–130).

instead of a single explanation. This should be accompanied by a detailed account of other similarities and the differences of their portraits. To begin with, both are *atopoi*, uncategorized and out of this world, very or extremely ugly, even with zoomorphic looks like Marsyas, the notorious Phrygian satyr and rival to Apollo, to whom they are both likened.³⁷ Their disfigurement is matched by their public discourse, equally scary and traumatic to anyone who faces it. Their provocative words and appearance cause a defensive reaction and both are reproached for their verbal and physical distinctiveness. Once again, Aesop's condition is much worse, for he is often abused and beaten. Nevertheless, in both there proves to be a sharp contrast between their appearances and their inner qualities.³⁸ As regards the latter, both are devoted servants to the gods, although both are charged as impious.³⁹ Their piety grants them their exclusive *logos* and launches a new start in their new lives. Socrates refuses that Apollo might lie and thus he discovers the elenchus and his divine mission during his attempts to decipher the Delphic oracle given to Chaerephon, while Aesop (literally) gains speech and the art of composing fables as a gift from the gods in a scene of divine epiphany (chs. 6–7) and starts his adventures from there.⁴⁰

Both fight false beliefs in public, manifest and chastise immorality and injustice, expose the ignorant and the pretentious, shatter their opponents in arguments and humiliate them.⁴¹ They both know how to solve what puzzles others,⁴² they use irony or mock ignorance⁴³ and they often em-

³⁷ On Aesop's ugliness see T. COMPTON (2006: 20–21); E. W. CLAYTON (2008: 318–319); L. KURKE (2011: 329–330, 333–337). On Socrates' see ZANKER, PAUL. 1995. *The Mask of Socrates. The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*. Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 32–39; MCLEAN, DANIEL R. 2007. „The Socratic Corpus: Socrates in the History of Physiognomy.“ In TRAPP, M. B. [ED.] *Socrates from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, 65–68. Comparison to Marsyas: Pl. Smp. 215b–c; G 100.

³⁸ E.g., G 7, 19, 37, 88. J-TH. PAPADEMETRIOU (1997: 25–26, 35); M. SCHAUER & ST. MERKLE (1992: 91–92). The antithesis between body and soul is also an issue in the *Phaedo*.

³⁹ M. SCHAUER & ST. MERKLE (1992: 85–86, 91).

⁴⁰ See Ap. 21a ff. Cf. P. MURRAY (2002: 37).

⁴¹ J-TH. PAPADEMETRIOU (1997: 8–9); M. SCHAUER & ST. MERKLE (1992: 91–92).

⁴² Both are interpreters of dreams and of omens, signs etc., a detail that emulates the archaic *sophoi*. See BUSSANICH, JOHN. 2009. „Socrates and Religious Experience.“ In AHBEL-RAPPE, S. – KAMTEKAR, R. [EDS.] *A Companion to Socrates*. Oxford: Wiley – Blackwell, 2009, 202–203. See also L. KURKE (2011: 66–67, 168–172).

⁴³ Aesop even converses comically with the Socratic *ouk oida* in chs. 24–25.

ploy a rather sophistic manipulation words and their meanings.⁴⁴ They both contradict the established and popular interpretation of divine will and action. Socrates rejects the reciprocal demands of Greek religious practice and Aesop ridicules the Delphians as social parasites in god's name.⁴⁵ Their caustic remarks united their recipients in anger, hate, *phthonos* and similar negative emotions against Socrates' and Aesop's *logoi* (note the similarity of the two generic terms, *σωκρατικοί λόγοι* and *αἰσώπων λόγοι*). Now these accumulated negative emotions erupted and led to their condemnation to death, under the pressure of a hostile crowd.⁴⁶ There are similarities as regards the narrative framework of their last moments: in the *Phaedo*, Socrates is still in prison thanks to the Delia, Apollo's festival that has postponed his execution, falsely accused and condemned for impiety and delivers Aesop's fables, while Aesop finds himself imprisoned and then condemned at Delphi, Apollo's sacred city, falsely accused and condemned for sacrilege. During their trial they both employed animal images to strengthen their arguments.⁴⁷ In prison, they are both visited by friends.⁴⁸ After the verdict, they both foretell evils for the cities of their accusers and both are somewhat vindicated posthumously and their prophecies fulfilled.⁴⁹

However it is their last moments and their reaction to the approaching death that set them apart. At the hearing of the sentence Aesop does not display any calmness or magnanimity, contrary to Socrates: he curses the Delphians, he narrates derisive fables against them and shouts abuse. He does not submit voluntarily to unjust common will, but seeks refuge at the

⁴⁴ E.g., G 51–55. On Socrates see, for example, the “complex irony” in VLASTOS, GREGORY. 1991. *Socrates. Ironist and Moral philosopher*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 31.

⁴⁵ As in P.Oxy. 1800. For Socrates see GIORDANO-ZECHARYA, MANUELA. 2005. „As Socrates Shows, the Athenians Did not Believe in Their Gods.“ *Numen*, 52, 325–355; MEIJER, P. A. 1981. „Philosopher, intellectuals and Religion in Hellas.“ In VERSNEL, H. S. [ED.] *Faith, Hope and Worship*, Leiden: Brill, 1981, 216–263, esp. 241–242, 246–249; MCPHERRAN, M. L. 2000. „Does Piety Pay? Socrates and Plato on Prayer and Sacrifice.“ In SMITH, N. D. – WOODRUFF, P. [EDS.] *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*. Oxford: University Press, 2000, 89–100.

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that Socrates is similarly accused of stealing an oinochoe at Eupolis fr. 361 Kock. Aesop's case is described more dramatically and in detail, possibly because of its stronger context of the *pharmakos* ritual.

⁴⁷ In the *Apology*, Socrates famously parallels himself and his work to that of a gadfly (30e–31a).

⁴⁸ See G 129. However, Aesop is imprisoned before and Socrates after his trial. For comparison of the prison scenes see M. SCHAUER & ST. MERKLE (1992: 93–96).

⁴⁹ G 133, 145. Cf. Ap. 38c–d: in this respect, Socrates' vindication is represented by the work of his pupils.

Muses' sanctuary, from where he is violently dragged out.⁵⁰ On the contrary, there is no malice against his accuser and condemners in Socrates' final speech in the *Apology* or anywhere in the corpus; he seeks neither revenge nor to harm the Athenians. Besides, Socrates and Aesop may both be servants to the divine, but where Socrates is slave, in a metaphorical sense, to notions such as the *polis* or the *laws* (as in the *Apology* and most famously in *Crito*), Aesop is truly a slave to various human masters, a difference of status that markedly shapes his behaviour and contrasts him to Socrates, the free citizen of Athenian democracy. As regards their ethics, Aesop seeks pleasure in any form and in every way, contrary to the philosopher's moderation and indifference to the material world. Furthermore, against Socrates' contempt for wealth, Aesop once freed seeks recompense for his cleverness and seems to chase after what he once scorned, power and wealth, even becoming a master himself.⁵¹ Besides, there is no metaphysics in Aesop's attitude to life, only a 'here and now' satisfaction of his physical needs which is adjusted to conditions in the name of survival, contrary to Socrates' disinterested life and self-sacrifice in the name of external ethical demands. In the face of death, Aesop holds no views on the immortality of the soul, as Socrates does in the *Phaedo*, and he wants to live and enjoy the pleasures of the good material life that he has only recently discovered.⁵²

Aesop is no philosopher. He has no theory, no teaching or method, no propositions to offer to his audience on what the good life consists of. He does not seek to improve his listeners and lead them to the philosophical life or to any higher truth. When he reproaches someone, he rather seems to act in the tradition of comedy and iambus than in the name of ethical amelioration.⁵³ The routes that Aesop and Socrates follow from the offset of their divinely sanctioned lives are almost opposite: that of the protégé of Isis and the Muses is a constant movement, usually against his will, to different lands, environments and situations, which turns into a *tour de sagesse* that ends in Delphi. Socrates' route *starts* in Delphi with the oracle to Chaerephon, but Socrates deliberately restricts himself to Athens where he continuously strolls and wanders, limiting himself in a specific space. He

⁵⁰ M. SCHAUER & ST. MERKLE (1992: 86–87, 90–92); E. W. CLAYTON (2008: 321).

⁵¹ See CHITWOOD, AVA. 2004. *Death by Philosophy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 7–11.

⁵² E. W. CLAYTON (2008: 320). In the end of the *Apology*, Socrates too changes his mind and proposes a counter penalty, thus seemingly preferring survival over death, but his overall stance during the trial and especially in the *Crito* and the *Phaedo* strongly differentiates him from Aesop's agonizing efforts to escape death.

⁵³ E. W. CLAYTON (2008: 314, 319–20).

has devoted his life to the service of his fellow citizens, in public, in and around the agora or in private visits; he is law-abiding and has served his city whenever asked. Aesop stands at the other end of the ‘heroic’ spectrum; he follows a lonely, tragic road, outside the *polis* frameworks and looks for loopholes to evade the rules. Being a slave, he is confined to the harsh material realities of life. He is a manual worker that he has no leisure, no free time. This is sharply contrasted in the *Life* to the lazy and with no social value living of false philosophers. Although after he is set free he has enough time to spend in tours around the world, receiving gifts and fame, it soon turns out that this was just a happy break before his death. On the other hand, leisure plays an important role in Plato’s portrait of Socrates. But although he is seemingly full of it, he declares (in the *Apology* and the *Theaetetus*) that in fact, like Aesop one might say, he has no time at all because he devotes his whole life to the service of god and to his fellow citizens.⁵⁴

To conclude, it seems that in the *Phaedo* Plato deliberately compared Socrates to Aesop not only to insinuate their similarities, but also to further stress their differences. These elevate Socrates to the truly philosophical, the truly political and virtuous and the true servant of the god in both life and before death. Therefore it is not a coincidence that the narrative framework for Socrates’ association with Aesop involves a dream and a hymn to Apollo. If one takes into account that Aesop had questioned the prognostic power of dreams and the oracular power of Apollo (G 33), as well as his negative attitude towards the god,⁵⁵ and given Aesop’s post-mortal popularity and heroization then this might hint at Plato’s calculated emphasis upon a form of common divine mechanism, a theodicy, that *did* lead Aesop and *will* lead Socrates to vindication and glorification, although Aesop will never rise to Socrates’ grandeur. Or, to see it from Socrates’ perspective, Plato tries to ensure through the associations with Aesop and at the same time to declare that his own charter myth of the arch-philosopher will be more concretely cemented upon a paradigmatic life and, therefore, it will last longer.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See ZAFIROPOULOS, CHRISTOS. 2009. „Socrates and leisure.“ In CLOSE, ELIZABETH – COUVALIS, GEORGE et al. [EDS.] Proceedings of the 7th Biennial International Conference of Greek Studies. Adelaide: Flinders University, 2009, 31–38.

⁵⁵ L. KURKE (2011: 60–69). See also G.-J. VAN DIJK (1997: 319n.38).

⁵⁶ T. COMPTON (2006: 165).