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DID SOCRATES WRITE? THE EVIDENCE OF DION OF PRUSA (*OR.* 54.4, 55.12–13) AND EPICTETUS (*DISS.* 2.1.32).

*Ancient doxography and modern scholars generally agree that Socrates did not engage in any literary activity throughout his lifetime. However, remarks by Dion of Prusa (*Or.* 54.4, 55.12–13) and Epictetus (*Diss.* 2.1.32), two authors writing roughly during the same period and holding Socrates in high esteem, could suggest that Socrates did write. Since the testimonies of Dion and Epictetus are often overlooked by Socratic scholarship, presumably because they represent minority opinion, the purpose of this paper is to analyze these comments and evaluate their relevance for our interpretation of historical Socrates and his activities as an author.*

Keywords: Historical Socrates; Philosophical Writings; Dion of Prusa; Epictetus; Doxography.

I

One of the very few things modern scholars dealing with Socrates will unequivocally agree upon is the fact that the man wrote nothing.¹ This is hardly surprising. We do not have any extant works by Socrates (apart from a collection of spurious letters),² not even any specific allusions to the titles he might have written. In fact, most of Greek and Roman doxography explicitly states that Socrates did not leave any works behind. This

¹ This statement can be found *passim* in the large majority of texts dealing with historical Socrates and it is only symptomatic that authors usually feel no obligation to present any sources or further comments on it. GUTHRIE (1971: 6) mentions hymn to Apollo and versified fables from Plato's *Phaedo*; DORION (2011: 1) qualifies the statement about Socrates' literary silence with a simple and instructive "as we know".

² *Viz Socratis et socraticorum reliquiae* I F 1–7.

factor alone should count as very convincing evidence, given the general obsession of ancient doxographers to attribute at least a title or two to each and every philosopher they happen to be discussing – an obsession just as strong as the one linking philosophers in interlocking teacher – student patterns. The testimonia include:

- Diogenes Laertius (οἱ δ' ὅλως οὐ συνέγραψαν, ὥσπερ κατὰ τινὰς Σωκράτης),³
- Aelius Aristides (καὶ Σωκράτης μὲν καὶ Πυθαγόρας οὐδ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς λόγους ἐν οἷς ἔζων συνέγραψαν, ἀλλ' ἐφ' αὐτῶν ἐφιλοσόφουν),⁴
- Plutarchus (οὐδὲ Πυθαγόρας ἔγραψεν οὐδὲν οὐδὲ Σωκράτης),⁵
- Hippolytus (αὐτὸς [*sc.* Σωκράτης] μὲν μηδὲ<v> σύγγραμμα καταλιπὼν),⁶
- Cicero (“cum ipse litteram Socrates nullam reliquisset”),⁷
- *Suda* (ἔγγραφον οὐδὲν καταλιπὼν [*sc.* Σωκράτης]).⁸

The case seems clear enough and ready to be dismissed. Nevertheless, I will start with the testimony provided by Plato’s *Phaedo* (for the sake of completeness) and argue that, depending on our attitude toward the historical plausibility of this dialogue, we might be bound to reformulate the question from a general “Has Socrates written anything?” to a more specific “Has Socrates written anything philosophically relevant?”. The main focus will then stay with the analysis of the testimonia by Dio Chrysostom and Epictetus.

II

In the discussion of Socrates as an author, Plato deserves a brief mention, as we read in his *Phaedo* that Socrates did in fact write something. Continuously haunted by a dream in which a god commands him to serve the Muses (μουσικὴν ποίει καὶ ἐργάζου),⁹ Socrates strove to abide by the divine calling in his own specific way – the highest art of the Muses surely is philosophy

³ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 1.16.

⁴ Aelius Aristides, Πρὸς Πλάτωνα ὑπὲρ τῶν τετάρων 298 Jebb.

⁵ Plutarchus, *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute* 328a Stephanus.

⁶ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium = Philosophoumena* 1.18.

⁷ Cic., *De orat.* 3.16.60.

⁸ *Suda*, s.v. Σωκράτης.

⁹ PLATO, *Phd.* 60e6–7.

(φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὔσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς).¹⁰ If this is the case, Socrates served the Muses unlike anyone else before (or after) him, pursuing his “divine mission” until the very end and refusing to accept a life devoid of philosophical inquiry. The worm of conscience had however been nagging, and to make sure the command of the god is fulfilled in a more literal sense, while in prison, Socrates composed a hymn to Apollo and versified some of Aesop’s fables (τῶν ποιημάτων ὧν πεποίηκας ἐντείνας τοὺς τοῦ Αἰσώπου λόγους καὶ τὸ εἰς τὸν Ἀπόλλω προοίμιον).¹¹

Of course, this portrayal of Socrates by Plato is only as persuasive as our own personal preference for treating *Phaedo* as a relevant source of our knowledge of historical Socrates –which in turn is a corollary of the many possible answers to the perennial “Socratic problem” which cannot be discussed here in any detail.¹² Those who accept *Phaedo* as historically accurate can reframe the main thesis by denying Socrates the authorship of any *philosophically relevant* writings (tentative discussion of the contents of the hymn to Apollo would be an exercise in fruitless speculation); those who do not accept the dialogue as historically relevant can simply disregard its implications for the depiction of Socrates. Yet it would be advisable to keep in mind the fact that Plato does portray Socrates as composing some (albeit minor) works and the possibility of this passage having further influence on doxographers discussing Socrates as an author.¹³ After this small digression, I turn to the remarks by Dion of Prusa.

¹⁰ Plato, *Phd.* 61a3–4.

¹¹ Plato, *Phd.* 60c9–d1.

¹² PATZER (1987) and MONTUORI (1992) are among the best collections of material pertaining to the “Socratic problem”. The authenticity of Plato’s depiction of Socrates in *Phaedo* has been vigorously vindicated in the early twentieth century by BURNET (1911: x), who claims that this dialogue “gives us a truthful record on the subjects on which Socrates discoursed on the last day of his life” and TAYLOR (1932: 155), who considers *Phaedo* “substantially what Plato regarded as historical fact.” We would be much more careful in judgment today. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a general tendency to locate the philosophy of historical Socrates in the early works of Plato, which culminated in the treatment of the problem by VLASTOS (1991: 45–106) and eventually became “general scholarly consensus” (SMITH 2001: 11), in spite of the fact that the possibility of drawing a line between Socratic and Platonic thought in Plato’s dialogues has been repeatedly denied, viz EDELSTEIN (1935: 21–22), THESLEFF (1982: 24) and more recently KAHN (1996: 39–40). I am inclined to agree with sceptical voices expressed by DUPRÉEL (1922) and GIGON (1947).

¹³ This is evident from the passage in *Suda* quoted above, which reads in full as “ἔγγραφον οὐδὲν καταλιπὼν ἢ, ὡς τινες βούλονται, ὕμνον εἰς Ἀπόλλωνα καὶ Ἄρτεμιν, καὶ μῦθον Αἰσώπειον δι’ ἐπῶν”.

III

In a recently published article, Spanish scholar Javier Campos Daroca cites the oration *On Homer and Socrates* (Περὶ Ὅμηρου καὶ Σωκράτους) by Dion of Prusa in what seems to be a suggestion that Socrates might have written some notably philosophical works – namely, Plato’s early dialogues.¹⁴ The text in question runs as follows:

οὐ τοίνυν οὐδὲ τοὺς περὶ Γοργίαν ἢ Πῶλον ἢ Θρασύμαχον ἢ Πρόδικον ἢ Μένωνα ἢ Εὐθύφωνα ἢ Ἄνυτον ἢ Ἀλκιβιάδην ἢ Λάχητα μάτην ἐποίει λέγοντας [*sc.* Σωκράτης], ἐξὸν ἀφελεῖν τὰ ὀνόματα· ἀλλὰ ἦδει τούτῳ καὶ μάλιστα ὀνήσων τοὺς ἀκούοντας, εἰ πως ζυνεῖεν· ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν λόγων τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τοὺς λόγους ζυνοῦραν οὐ ῥάδιον ἄλλοις ἢ τοῖς φιλοσόφοις καὶ τοῖς πεπαιδευμένοις. οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ μάτην οἴονται τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγεσθαι καὶ ὄχλον ἄλλως καὶ φλυαρίαν ἡγοῦνται. Σωκράτης δὲ ἐνόμιζεν, ὅσακις μὲν ἀλαζόνα ἀνθρώπων εἰσάγει, περὶ ἀλαζονείας λέγειν· ὅποτε δὲ ἀναίσχυντον καὶ βδελυρὸν, περὶ ἀναιδείας καὶ βδελυρίας· ὅποτε δὲ ἀγνώμονα καὶ ὀργίλον, ἀγνωμοσύνης καὶ ὀργῆς ἀποτρέπειν. καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁμοίως τὰ πάθη καὶ τὰ νοσήματα ἐπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἐχομένων τοῖς πάθεσιν ἢ τοῖς νοσήμασι σαφέστερον ἐδείκνυεν ὅποιά ἐστιν ἢ εἰ τοὺς λόγους ψιλοῦς ἔλεγε.¹⁵

According to Campos Daroca, key indication for the literary activity of Socrates is provided by the expression “ἐποίει λέγοντας” in conjunction with what seems to be a clear reference to some of Plato’s dialogues of early and middle period. This argument could be further supplemented by another passage in Dion (not discussed by the Spanish scholar) that could allow for a possibility of ascribing some form of literary activity to Socrates.

In his rather short oration *On Socrates* (Περὶ Σωκράτους), Dion builds up – what in his time was already topical commonplace – the juxtaposition of Socrates and the Sophists. Hippias, Gorgias, Polus, and Prodicus are pictured as greedy sellouts enjoying their (entirely undeserved) fame in high circles of Greek society. On the other side of the barricade stands Socrates as a lone hero. He is poor, overlooked by leading figures and famous orators of his day, but ready (even eager) to discuss philosophical topics with anyone, free of charge.¹⁶ After this brief and almost stereotypical exposition,

¹⁴ CAMPOS DAROCA (2006: 138–139). Campos Daroca seems to be accepting the authenticity of the second pseudo-platonic letter, viz Plato, *Epistulae* 314c14: οὐδὲν πόποτ’ ἐγὼ περὶ τούτων γέγραφα, οὐδ’ ἔστιν σύγγραμμα Πλάτωνος οὐδὲν οὐδ’ ἔσται, τὰ δὲ νῦν λεγόμενα Σωκράτους ἐστὶν καλοῦ καὶ νέου γεγονότος.

¹⁵ Dio Prusaensis, *Orationes* 55.12–14.

¹⁶ In Hellenism and beyond, Socrates is (few exceptions notwithstanding) treated consistently as the role model of a philosopher, sage, and moral authority, viz ERLER (2001: 203); GOURINAT (2001: 161). For Scepticism viz ANNAS (1994: 310) and SHIELDS (1994: 341); for Stoicism viz STRIKER (1994: 241); ERLER (2001: 205);

Dion turns from the contemplation of the past to the present day and to the evaluation of the second life of their λόγοι:

ἀλλὰ δὴ τῶν μὲν θαυματομένων ἐκείνων σοφιστῶν ἐκλελοίπασιν οἱ λόγοι καὶ οὐδὲν ἢ τὰ ὀνόματα μόνον ἔστιν· οἱ δὲ τοῦ Σωκράτους οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως διαμένουσι καὶ διαμενοῦσι τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον, *τούτου δὲ αὐτοῦ γράψαντος ἢ καταλιπόντος οὔτε σύγγραμμα οὔτε διαθήκας, ἔτελεύτα γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ἀδιάθετος τὴν τε σοφίαν καὶ τὰ χρήματα. ἀλλὰ οὐσίαν μὲν οὐκ εἶχεν, ὥστε δημευθῆναι, καθάπερ εἶωθε γίγνεσθαι <ἐπι> τῶν καταδικασθέντων· οἱ λόγοι δὲ τῷ ὄντι ἐδημεύθησαν μὰ Δί' οὐχ ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ τῶν φίλων· οὐδὲν μέντοι ἦττον καὶ νῦν φανερῶν τε ὄντων καὶ τιμωμένων ὀλίγοι ξυνηῖσι καὶ μετέχουσιν.¹⁷

On the face of it, it would seem that the text of Dion quoted above could accommodate an interpretation suggesting the possibility of Socrates having written something. The translation of “λόγοι” is not crucial in this case, since the possibility of “Socrates the author” could be, in principle, implied by the genitive absolute “τούτου δὲ αὐτοῦ γράψαντος ἢ καταλιπόντος οὔτε σύγγραμμα οὔτε διαθήκας”, which could translate to “whether he wrote something, or did not leave any writings or (philosophical) testament.” Hans von Armin, the editor of the text given above, indicated a corruption in “τούτου δὲ αὐτοῦ γράψαντος” and this section gave rise to the following emendations:

- τοῦ δι' αὐτοῦ γράψαντος (Geel)
- <καί> ταῦτ' οὐδὲ αὐτοῦ γράψαντος (von Arnim)
- <καί> τοῦτ' οὐδὲ αὐτοῦ γράψαντος (Sonny)
- οὐδὲν δ' αὐτοῦ / καὶ τοῦτο οὐδὲν αὐτοῦ γράψαντος (Stich).¹⁸

These emendations could be addressing two distinct problems. One is grammatical, constituted by the highly unusual use of the particle “δέ” present in the genitive absolute, yet this use is attested in Plato¹⁹ and some editors (viz Stich’s emendation above and Amato’s reading below) do retain the particle while introducing the negation. This would point out to the second problem which at least some of these proposed emendations could be addressing – namely the possibility that the text could, under a specific interpretation, mean that Socrates wrote something. It could be of course

GÖRLER (2001: 240); in the Epicurean school of thought, however, as LONG (1988: 155) notes, we find a “tradition of hostility toward Socrates”.

¹⁷ Dio Prusaensis, *Orationes* 54.4.

¹⁸ AMATO in NESSELRATH (2009: 115).

¹⁹ PLATO, *Lg.* 864b8: τούτου δὲ αὐτοῦ τρία διχῆ τμηθέντος πέντε εἶδη γέγονεν. More instances of this use are presented in AMATO (2007: 168, n. 29).

immediately objected that “σύγγραμμα” and “διαθήκας” can be constructed as objects of both verbs, which would rule this interpretation out, but it has to be pointed out that this reading is only a possibility, not a necessity, since “γράψαντος” surely can be thought of as intransitive.

Latest editor of the text given above, Eugenio Amato, proposed yet another solution.²⁰ He accepts the reading of the manuscripts of the third class,²¹ which actually includes a negation and the text then reads as “τούτου δὲ αὐτοῦ μηδὲν γράψαντος”. This reading satisfies our expectations in the denial of the existence of any writings by Socrates, but presents us with a different issue of linguistic provenience (which is probably the reason why this reading is not accepted in most editions). The contaminated sequence of negations “μηδὲν ... οὔτε ... οὔτε” does not fully conform to the expected use in Ancient Greek, since two main classes of negations are generally used in different contexts and express different intentions of the speakers.²² Normally, we would expect congruence in the form of either “μηδὲν ... μήτε ... μήτε” or “οὐδὲν ... οὔτε ... οὔτε”, yet Amato succeeded in providing examples of the contaminated sequence of negations in Pseudo-Justin Martyr (λέγων τελείαν εἶναι τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ θεοῦ, τὴν μηδὲν οὔτε τῷ ὄλῳ οὔτε τῷ μέρει τελέσασαν),²³ and – in case we treat the participle in the genitive absolute as elided – in Lucian (οὐδὲν γὰρ ὑμεῖς δεῖσθε αὐτοῦ μήτε ῥιγούντες μήτε ἔψοντες τὴν ἀμβροσίαν μήτε φωτὸς ἐπιτεχνητοῦ δεόμενοι).²⁴

If one finds the parallels provided by Amato compelling enough for accepting the reading “τούτου δὲ αὐτοῦ μηδὲν γράψαντος”,²⁵ this passage clearly does not support the hypothesis that Dion could be pointing out to any literary activity by Socrates. Quite to the contrary, it indicates that the man did not write. If one accepts the “traditional” rendering of this section

²⁰ AMATO (2007: 168–169).

²¹ C = *Par. gr.* 3009, XV, H = *Vat. gr.* 91, P = *Vat. Palat. gr.* 117.

²² The main differences in the use of both basic Greek negations (οὐ and μή) are conveniently summarized in CRESPO – CONTI – MAQUIEIRA (2003: 223).

²³ Pseudo-Justinus Martyr, *Quaestiones Christianorum ad gentiles* 172a Morel.

²⁴ LUCIANUS, *Prom.* 18.

²⁵ In addition to the examples provided by Amato, ADRADOS (1992: 712) cites “οὐδαμῆ οὐδαμῶς μηδεμίαν κοινωνίαν ἔχει;”, but this is a false positive and a double mistake. Adrados quotes this line as “*Prm.* 116a”, whereas Plato’s *Parmenides* starts at Stephanus page 126, so the attribution cannot be correct (most likely, it is only a typographical error, the correct attribution is 166a1–2). The greater problem is the fact that the actual text in Plato’s *Parmenides* (in Burnet’s edition) has “οὐδαμῆ οὐδαμῶς οὐδεμίαν κοινωνίαν ἔχει;” without any contamination of the negations or any hints about it in the *apparatus criticus*. This passage from *Parmenides* is also quoted by SCHWYZER – DEBRUNNER (1950: 598), correctly and with appropriate paging.

without a negation, the plausibility of the hypothesis is marginally higher. Yet there are two even stronger indications that the two passages from Dion quoted above cannot suggest that Socrates wrote anything.

Firstly, it can be pointed out that Dion in his oration *On Homer and Socrates* tends to simply conflate historical Socrates with his portrayal in Plato's dialogues.²⁶ Aldo Brancacci notes in a similar manner that “in the eyes of Dion, the literary production of Socratics reflects faithfully the λόγοι of Socrates, who, in his turn, is the same as the protagonist of this literature: the distinction between “historical” and “literary” Socrates, which for the modern scholars represents difficult hermeneutic and historiographic problem, is absent from the literature of the antiquity, where it resurfaces only episodically and exceptionally”²⁷

Secondly – and I believe that this point constitutes the final refutation of any possibility of crediting Dion with the suggestion that Socrates wrote anything –, a section in the very same oration which Campos Daroca uses to tentatively establish his thesis states that Socrates did not write and that his philosophy has been recorded and entrusted to the posterity by others:

τελευταῖον δὲ οὐδὲ τοὺς λόγους αὐτὸς κατέλιπε γράψας [sc. Σωκράτης], καὶ ταύτη γὰρ ὑπερέβαλε τὸν Ὅμηρον. ὡσπερ γὰρ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ἐκείνου παρ' ἑτέρων ἀκούοντες ἴσμεν, οὕτω καὶ τοὺς λόγους τοὺς Σωκράτους ἄλλων καταλιπόντων.²⁸

Dion uses the same verbs as in his oration *On Socrates* (viz γράψαντος ἢ καταλιπόντος in *Or.* 54.4; κατέλιπε γράψας in *Or.* 55.8), but this time

²⁶ DÖRING (1979: 99).

²⁷ BRANCACCI (2001: 169). The virtual non-existence of the “Socratic problem” in the antiquity is noted by other authors too, viz ERLER (2001: 209) and LONG (1988: 152). While this thesis is generally true, some ancient authorities clearly try to make a difference between historical Socrates and authors writing about Socrates. Aristotle (*Metaphysica* 1078b27–31) makes a distinction between the teachings of historical Socrates and Plato (δύο γὰρ ἐστὶν ἃ τις ἂν ἀποδοίη Σωκράτει δικαίως [...] ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν Σωκράτης τὰ καθόλου οὐ χωριστὰ ἐποίει οὐδὲ τοὺς ὀρισμούς); Epictetus (*Dissertationes* 4.11.21) weighs the testimony of Aristophanes against other Socratics (ἐπεὶ τοὶ πάντες οἱ γεγραφότες περὶ Σωκράτους πάντα τὰναντία αὐτῷ προσμαρτυροῦσιν); in Cicero's *De republica* (1.10.16), Tubero wonders how is it possible that there are so many dialogues where Socrates is discussing so many different topics, such as numbers, harmony or geometry “more Pythagorae” and Scipio replies: “Itaque, cum Socratem unice dilexisset [sc. Plato], eique omnia tribuere voluisset, leporem Socraticum subtilitatemque sermonis cum obscuritate Pythagorae et cum illa plurimarum artium gravitate contexuit.”; finally, Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae philosophorum* 3.35) relates an anecdote, in which Socrates, after reading Plato's *Lysis*, complains that much of it is made up (οὐκ ὀλίγα γὰρ ὧν οὐκ εἴρηκε Σωκράτης γέγραφεν ἀνήρ).

²⁸ Dio Prusaensis, *Orationes* 55.8.

the meaning of the passage is completely unequivocal. Just as the name of the author of *Ilias* and *Odyssea* is known only because others preserved it (since it is not found in the poems themselves), we know the “λόγοι” of Socrates only because other authors have preserved their content and form in their writings. In spite of some superficial indications to the contrary, Dion does not suggest that Socrates wrote anything. He clearly denies it.

IV

If the analysis and interpretation of Dion proposed above is correct, we are still left with another statement that presents (at least *prima facie*) Socrates as literary author. Not only that, the text of Epictetus seems to suggest that the Athenian philosopher had been extraordinarily productive in this respect. The text from the second book of *Dissertationes* runs as follows:

Τί οὖν; Σωκράτης οὐκ ἔγραφεν; {—} Καὶ τίς τοσαῦτα; ἀλλὰ πῶς; ἐπεὶ μὴ ἐδύνατο ἔχειν αἰετὸν τὸν ἐλέγχοντα αὐτοῦ τὰ δόγματα ἢ ἐλεγχθησόμενον ἐν τῷ μέρει, αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν ἤλεγχεν καὶ ἐξήταζεν καὶ αἰετὴν μίαν γέ τινα πρόληψιν ἐγύμναζεν χρηστικῶς. ταῦτα γράφει φιλόσοφος· λεξιεῖδία δὲ καὶ ἡ ὁδός, ἣν λέγω, ἄλλοις ἀφήσι, τοῖς ἀναισθήτοις ἢ τοῖς μακαρίοις, τοῖς σχολῆν ἄγουσιν ὑπὸ ἀταραξίας ἢ τοῖς μηδὲν τῶν ἐξῆς ὑπολογιζομένοις διὰ μωρίαν.²⁹

As we have seen in the case of Dion, when a reading of the text advocates a view that is completely at odds with what we have come to know and expect (based on other numerous and independent testimonia), there is a tendency to get rid of the contradicting evidence – and the critical apparatus complementing this passage bears witness to this statement. There have been attempts to reject the line as textually corrupt,³⁰ as well as proposals for emendations,³¹ – a term sometimes serving as a euphemism for manipulation in order to bring the text in line with our expected or desired presuppositions and idiosyncrasies. I certainly do not wish to dispute the

²⁹ Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 2.1.32–33.

³⁰ Wolf suggested that “Σωκράτης” in the text must be a corruption, presumably due to the fact that we know full well from other sources that Socrates did not write anything. The context of the passage clearly shows that this cannot be true, since there are multiple allusions to the man immediately following the quoted passage (2.1.35–36): φέρε θάνατον καὶ γνώση· φέρε πόνους, φέρε δεσμωτήριον, φέρε ἀδοξίαν, φέρε καταδίκην.

³¹ Olearius replaced the negation (οὐκ) with a particle οὖν, thereby replacing a rhetorical question implying positive answer with a question implying negative answer. “Τί οὖν; Σωκράτης οὐκ ἔγραφεν;” should then read as “Τί οὖν; Σωκράτης οὖν ἔγραφεν;”.

fact that many of the ancient texts came down to us in manuscripts of very dubious quality and that emendations and other invasive means of trying to cope with a text are necessary and justified, but it seems clear to me that these measures should be applied only as a last resort in cases where all other interpretations have failed. Let us see whether we can find a plausible interpretation of the text based on what is actually present in the text itself.

Some authors³² suggested that Epictetus is simply mistaken about the literary output of Socrates and could have been led astray by other doxographers, such as Diogenes Laertius, who is thought to have suggested that there were some ancient sources acknowledging Socrates as an author. There are two major problems with this proposal, the chronological one and the interpretative one.

In regard to chronology, it is generally agreed that Arrianus, who wrote down Epictetus' *Dissertationes*, was born in the late first century ad and the *Vitae* of Diogenes are usually dated in the middle of the third century AD. Unless Arrianus or Epictetus possessed prophetic powers or blueprints for a time machine, it is impossible for them to have been influenced by anything Diogenes wrote. It can however be argued that, because Diogenes based his work on other compilations, some of these earlier authors might have been contemporary with Epictetus or Arrianus. Yet the more serious issue lies with the interpretation of what Diogenes actually has to say.

A closer examination of Diogenes' text does not provide us with any grounds for thinking that there might have been other ancient sources suggesting that Socrates did indeed write. The passage in question is given in full below:

Τῶν δὲ φιλοσόφων οἱ μὲν γέγονασι δογματικοί, οἱ δ' ἔφεκτικοί· δογματικοὶ μὲν ὅσοι περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀποφαίνονται ὡς καταληπτῶν· ἐφεκτικοὶ δὲ ὅσοι ἐπέχουσι περὶ αὐτῶν ὡς ἀκαταλήπτων. καὶ οἱ μὲν αὐτῶν κατέλιπον ὑπομνήματα, οἱ δ' ὄλως οὐ συνέγραψαν, ὥσπερ κατὰ τινὰς Σωκράτης, Στίλπων, Φίλιππος, Μενέδημος, Πύρρων, Θεόδωρος, Καρνεάδης, Βρύσων· κατὰ τινὰς Πυθαγόρας, Ἀρίστων ὁ Χίος, πλὴν ἐπιστολῶν ὀλίγων· οἱ δὲ ἀνὰ ἓν σύγγραμμα· Μέλισσος, Παρμενίδης, Αναξαγόρας· πολλὰ δὲ Ζήνων, πλείω Ξενοφάνης, πλείω Δημόκριτος, πλείω Ἀριστοτέλης, πλείω Ἐπίκουρος, πλείω Χρῦσιππος.³³

According to the scholars who try to use this bit of Diogenes as an explanation for Epictetus' statement, lines three and four (οἱ δ' ὄλως οὐ συνέγραψαν, ὥσπερ κατὰ τινὰς Σωκράτης) amount to saying roughly this:

³² I have been unable to identify who these authors are. This interpretation is mentioned by both DÖRING (1974: 218) and GOURINAT (2001: 142), but neither cites any sources, neither endorsing it nor presenting any relevant reasons for not endorsing it.

³³ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 1.16.

There are *some* ancient authors, in whose opinion Socrates belonged to the set of philosophers who did not write at all. This would suggest that there are *some other* ancient authors who conversely see Socrates as an author. The core of this argumentation is the reading of “κατά τινας” as an existential quantification (“there are *some* doxographers that say this”). If all ancient sources would agree on the fact that Socrates did not write anything, there would be no need for using existential quantification (or we would use a universal one, which amounts to the same thing in this particular case). The text then seems to identify two subsets of ancient sources – those claiming that Socrates did not write (explicitly mentioned) and those claiming that Socrates did write (implicitly assumed).

However, this solution to the problem is deeply flawed and the reason is the failure to factor in a second complementary “κατά τινας” in the fourth line. As it turns out, this completely changes the subsets denoted by “κατά τινας”: *Some* and *some others* among ancient sources do not differ in their attitude toward the literary activity of Socrates, but in regard to the literary activity of Pythagoras and Ariston of Chios. The first subset (first “κατά τινας”) of ancient authors then claim that the philosophers who did not write anything were Socrates, Stilpon, Philippus, Menedemus, Pyrrhon, Theodorus, Carneades and Bryson. The second subset (second “κατά τινας”) essentially agrees, but adds Pythagoras and Ariston to the list by virtue of disregarding some of their letters (which are presumably not to be included as philosophical works *sensu stricto*).³⁴ This interpretation is further strengthened by the fact that Diogenes goes on mentioning authors who wrote just one single work (ἀνὰ ἓν σύγγραμμα) and then authors who wrote much more. Thus, nothing of what Diogenes says suggests there have been ancient sources crediting Socrates with any writings.

Other scholars proposed different (and more sophisticated) interpretations. Andreas Graeser,³⁵ one of the very few scholars to actually acknowledge and discuss (however briefly and in the footnote) the testimony of Epictetus within the framework of a more general discussion of Socrates (most of the papers discussing this topic are variations on a theme of “Socrates in the works of Epictetus”), proposes the following solution: Epictetus might have misinterpreted some passages in Aristotle, where the Stagirite uses expressions like “τοὺς Σωκρατικὸς λόγους”³⁶ or “οἱ τοῦ

³⁴ Recent Italian translation of the text confirms this, viz REALE – GRIGENTI – RAMELLI (2005: 21) who translate double “κατά τινας” with “secondo alcuni [...] secondo altri, poi [...]”.

³⁵ GRAESER (2000: 111), who also quotes LACEY (1971: 22) in this context (*non vidi*).

³⁶ ARISTOTELES, *Po.* 1447b11.

Σωκράτους λόγοι”.³⁷ These are used by Aristotle as technical terms denoting a literary genre or style, which is perfectly clear from the passage in *Poetics*, where he mentions these λόγοι jointly with the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus. Yet, as Graeser argues, Epictetus might have taken them literally, which would explain why he seems to be indicating that Socrates was a prolific writer. However, I find Graeser’s solution unpersuasive for two reasons. Firstly, it can be concluded that Epictetus was familiar with much of the “Socratic writings”,³⁸ therefore it seems unlikely that he would mistake some of these works for the works of Socrates himself. Secondly, Epictetus himself uses the expression τὰ Σωκρατικά with meaning akin to the expressions in Aristotle quoted above,³⁹ which would render the interpretation implausible.

Another solution to the problem has been proposed recently by Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, who assumes that Epictetus’ words about the excessive literary activity of Socrates can be understood as a corollary of the widespread practice of writing down argumentative essays or exercises.⁴⁰ The issue with this suggestion lies in the very nature of the “Socratic method”.⁴¹ The core of the Socratic method of doing philosophy is what Aristotle calls “peirastic” argumentation, which amounts to arguing from the opinions of the partner in the dialogue (πειραστικοὶ δ’ οἱ ἐκ τῶν δοκούντων τῷ ἀποκρινομένῳ καὶ ἀναγκαίων εἶδέναι τῷ προσποιουμένῳ ἔχειν τὴν ἐπιστήμην).⁴² Since Socrates constantly claims that he has no knowledge, he can “do philosophy” only with a partner. But if Socrates carries out philosophical argumentation exclusively in interaction with the beliefs of his dialogical partners

³⁷ ARISTOTELES, *Pol.* 1265a11–12.

³⁸ LONG (2002: 69) notes that “Epictetus quotes or paraphrases or alludes to around 100 passages from sixteen of Plato’s dialogues, nearly all of which are spoken there by Socrates.” GOURINAT (2001: 145) assumes that the corpus of texts about Socrates available to Epictetus has been “quite similar to ours”. DÖRING (1974: 199), on the other hand, is much more reserved in his judgment and thinks that Epictetus gained much of his knowledge from secondary sources and not from Plato’s dialogues.

³⁹ Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 3.23.20 (ἰδοῦ ἀκηκοῦς ἄνθρωπος λόγου, ἀνεγνωκῶς τὰ Σωκρατικά ὡς Σωκρατικά, οὐχὶ δ’ ὡς Λυσίου καὶ Ἰσοκράτους). Epictetus goes on quoting the *Apology* of Plato in the next few lines.

⁴⁰ GOURINAT (2001: 142).

⁴¹ As with the “Socratic problem” mentioned in earlier, “Socratic method” is another hot scholarly topic and there is no room for thorough discussion within the limitations of this paper. The exposition by VLASTOS (1982) has exerted profound influence and the collection of papers found in SCOTT (2002) is devoted to many facets of the Socratic method. For the *elenchos* in Epictetus, viz LONG (2002: 74–86) and BRENNAN (2006: 286–287).

⁴² ARISTOTELES, *SE.* 165b4–6.

(that he does so is clear from early dialogues of Plato, which are generally thought to convey the best idea of the philosophical method of historical Socrates), it would be hardly possible for him to prepare in advance for his philosophical encounters by means of some pre-constructed argumentative exercises.

There is one common element in the interpretations of Graeser and Gourinat, namely the fact that they both seem to take “ἔγραφεν” quite literally. I am inclined to read “ἔγραφεν” metaphorically and I hope to show that the immediate context of the passage will provide compelling justification for doing so.⁴³ Anthony Long notes that Epictetus “regularly exhorts his students to ‘reveal’ themselves, not in the sense of parading or showing off, but of publicly revealing their progress and education, exemplifying and witnessing to their Stoic commitments”.⁴⁴ The preceding and succeeding lines of the text quoted in full above demonstrate this procedure as follows: One of Epictetus’ students boasts that he has been doing some writing lately, but his teacher is not particularly happy about that and immediately counters: ἔχε σου τὰ λεξεΐδια· δεΐξον, πῶς ἔχεις πρὸς ὄρεξιν καὶ ἔκκλισιν, εἰ μὴ ἀποτυγχάνεις ὧν θέλεις, εἰ μὴ περιπίπτεις οἷς οὐ θέλεις. ἐκεῖνα δὲ τὰ περιόδια, ἂν νοῦν ἔχης, ἄρας πού ποτε ἀπαλείνεις.⁴⁵ The use of diminutives with pejorative force (λεξεΐδια, περιόδια) only further emphasizes Epictetus’ disapproval with what he thinks to be a waste of time for his student. The text then continues with the passage explicitly mentioning Socrates, only to be followed by yet another interaction between Epictetus and one of his students. This time the student is happy to announce that he is composing dialogues (πῶς διαλόγους συντίθημι) and once again, Epictetus will have none of that: μὴ, ἄνθρωπε, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνα μᾶλλον ἴδοῦ, πῶς ὀρεγόμενος οὐκ ἀποτυγχάνω. ἴδοῦ, πῶς ἐκκλίνων οὐ περιπίπτω. φέρε θάνατον καὶ γνώση· φέρε πόνους, φέρε δεσμωτήριον, φέρε ἀδοξίαν, φέρε καταδίκην.⁴⁶ Clear allusions to Socrates in “death”, “prison”, “infamy” or “judicial sentence” can hardly go unnoticed.

As it turns out, the passage on the presumed extensive literary activity of Socrates is embedded within a diatribe *against* writing as a proper way of

⁴³ I am of course not the first one to suggest the metaphorical reading of the passage. It is found also in LONG (2004: 14) and Long’s metaphorical reading is further accepted by CAMPOS DAROCA (2006: 138, n. 20), which is laudable, since, as we have seen, the Spanish scholar seems to be suggesting that Socrates *did* write and this passage could have been easily usurped as a cheap piece of evidence.

⁴⁴ LONG (2002: 242). He quotes our passage as one of these instances.

⁴⁵ Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 2.1.31–32.

⁴⁶ Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 2.1.35–36.

“doing philosophy”. If we take into consideration the reverential status of Socrates in Epictetus, we are, in my opinion, bound to read “ἔγραφεν” metaphorically. Epictetus counters his students by contrasting their own efforts with Socrates who arguably “wrote” the most, but only if we understand how a good philosopher should “write” – by living one’s own philosophy.

This is my preferred reading of the passage by Epictetus, but other non-literal interpretations are possible as well. As Long notes,⁴⁷ in Plato’s *Philebus* Socrates is speaking about solitary contemplation as “writing in one’s soul” (Ἡ μνήμη ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι συμπίπτουσα εἰς ταῦτόν κάκεινα ἃ περὶ ταῦτ’ ἐστὶ τὰ παθήματα φαίνονται μοι σχεδὸν οἷον γράφειν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τότε λόγους)⁴⁸ and Epictetus could have alluded to this passage. Another, chronologically more distant, but no less pertinent parallel can be found in the letters of Ficino, who notes that “Pythagoram Socratemque, preceptores divinos, non libri sed discipuli illustrarunt, immo vero libri, sed vivi: liber est discipulus carens anima, discipulus est liber vivens”.⁴⁹ If the number and literary output of the “students” of Socrates is any indication, Ficino is making a good point. Be as it may, neither of these interpretations takes the passage in Epictetus literally and there is thus no reason to consider the text corrupt or to manipulate it by emendations.

V

To conclude, closer examination of *Oratio* 54.4 and 55.12–13 by Dion of Prusa and *Dissertationes* 2.1.32 by Epictetus shows that these passages do not suggest that Socrates was literarily active. Dion sometimes tends to conflate historical Socrates with the writings of Socratics and juxtaposes the literary output of the Sophists coupled with their intellectual insignificance in the eyes of posterity with the nonexistent literary output of Socrates coupled with his everlasting relevance, while explicitly stating that Socrates did not write elsewhere (*Or.* 55.8), thereby confirming the status quo that denies Socrates the authorship of any philosophical works. Epictetus uses “ἔγραφεν” metaphorically and tries to show that the “true” writing of the philosopher is mirrored in his ability to become a master of his passions, not in ink on papyrus or parchment.

⁴⁷ LONG (2002: 73), although he credits David Sedley for this particular allusion.

⁴⁸ PLATO, *Phlb.* 39a1–3.

⁴⁹ Marsilio Ficino, *Epistolarum Familiarum liber I*, Ep. 109 [*Ratio docendi, laudandi, vituperandi*].

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