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Paideutikos eros: Aspasia as an ‘alter Socrates’

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the figure and the role of Aspasia in Aeschines’ eponymous dialogue, with special regard to the Milesian’s ‘paideutic’ activity and the double bond connecting it to Socrates’ teaching, namely the elenctic method and a particular application of Σωκρατικὸς ἔρωϛ. The study aims to highlight some crucial traits of Aeschines’ Aspasia by examining three key texts, all numbered among the testimonies on the *Aspasia*: Cicero’s account in

De inventione 1.31.51-53 and two fundamental passages from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.3.36) and *Oeconomicus* (3.14). After analysing a set of ancient sources which repeatedly mention the close and personal association between Socrates and Aspasia (Plato, Maximus of Tyre, Plutarch, Theodoret of Cyrus), I will try to reconstruct the dialogical context of Xenophon's testimonies and to combine them with Cicero's account. My final aim is to clarify the role of Aspasia in Aeschines' presentation of the Socratic theory of ἔρωϛ. In pursuing this main objective, in the concluding section I will address two further issues: (1) Aspasia's connection with the figure of Diotima, as depicted in the same ancient sources and (2) the relationship between Aspasias' pedagogical use of ἔρωϛ and that made by Socrates in the *Alcibiades*.

Keywords: Aeschines' *Aspasia*, Socrates, Socratic method, *eros*, *paideia*.

Introduction

Aeschines' *Aspasia* was first defined as a "weblicher Sokrates" by Rudolf Hirzel (1895, vol. 1, p. 80), and since then the depiction of the Milesian as a "female Socrates" has been taken up by several scholars.¹ Such a definition is basically drawn from Cicero's account in *De inventione* 1.31.51-53, which reports a conversation between Aspasia, Xenophon and his wife.

The aim of this study is to investigate the association between these two figures in depth, by paying special attention to their respective teaching activity, both in terms of the methodology adopted and of the content conveyed. In order to do so, in the first section I shall proceed to examine the main sources mentioning a personal association between Socrates and Aspasia, namely: Plato

¹ The definition is adopted both by Kahn (1994, p. 101) and by Döring (2011, p. 31).

(*Mx.* 235e), Maximus of Tyre (*Philosoph.* 38.4), Plutarch (*Per.* 24.3) and Theodoret of Cyrus (*Graec. aff. cur.* 1.17). As we will see in a short while, some of these sources directly touch on the issue of the connection between the two figures of Aspasia and Diotima, to which I shall return in the final section.

After having dealt with these portrayals of the Socrates-Aspasia relationship from a 'biographical' standpoint, I will outline some crucial traits of the figure and the teaching of Aspasia as portrayed in Aeschines' eponymous dialogue. In this regard, less attention will be paid to testimonies on the Milesian's role as an expert and a teacher of rhetoric. Important as they may be, both for the reconstruction of the content of the *Aspasia* and for their connections with Plato's *Menexenus*, they don't leave room for a direct comparison with the paideutic activity carried out by Socrates himself (at least as depicted by Aeschines in the *Alcibiades*).² The analysis will thus be focused on two fundamental passages from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.3.36) and *Oeconomicus* (3.14): a preliminary examination of such passages may enrich our understanding of Cicero's testimony. In this section of the paper, I will attempt to draw some conclusions about the method, content, and aim of Aspasia's 'paideutic intervention', so as to proceed – in the concluding section – to compare it with the depiction of Socratic παιδεία Aeschines provides in the *Alcibiades*, and thus to investigate the *double bond* connecting Aspasia's and Socrates' teaching: the elenctic method and the (different) recourse to a παιδευτικὸς ἔρωσ.

² We know of testimonies on Socrates' activity (and even teaching) in the field of rhetoric: Diogenes Laertius (quoting Favorinus' *Miscellaneous History*) says that "Socrates and his pupil Aeschines were the first to teach rhetoric" (2.20). In the same passage, Diogenes refers to some information we find in Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.2.31), according to which the Thirty forbade Socrates "to teach the art of words" (τέχνας διδάσκειν λόγων).

Aspasia and Socrates

The ancient testimony on Socrates' relationship with Aspasia which scholars are most familiar with is perhaps that by Plato in the *Menexenus* (235e), where Socrates himself declares Aspasia to be his "instructor" (διδάσκαλος) and "by no means weak in the art of rhetoric" (οὐ πάνυ φαύλη περὶ ῥητορικῆς; transl. by Lamb, 1925). Plato's passage clearly makes reference to Aspasia's expertise in the τέχνη ῥητορικῆ. As is well-known, in the following lines he then mentions the case of Pericles, one of the "many fine orators" she has turned out. Both aspects find confirmation in the *scholium* to the dialogue³ according to which Aspasia not only made Pericles into an effective political orator,⁴ but succeeded in the same task with the sheep-merchant Lysicles. It may be argued⁵ that Lysicles' political career (see Th. 3.19.1) offers even stronger evidence of Aspasia's expertise as a teacher of rhetoric: while Pericles' political success might be said to depend on his natural gifts and previous education, Aspasia's influence on Lysicles – a man of humble origins and of no talent – would be undeniable.

If we move beyond the testimonies dealing with Aspasia's expertise in rhetoric, we find that the list of ancient sources mentioning a close and personal association between Socrates and Aspasia is much longer. According to Maximus of Tyre (*Philosoph.* 38.4 = VI A 66 SSR = 101 P.), not only did Socrates regularly visit Aspasia himself, but he also exhorted others to send her their sons:

³ Schol. in *Pl. Mx.* 235e: τὸν Λυσικλέα ῥήτορα δεινότατον κατεσκευάσατο, καθάπερ καὶ Περικλέα δημηγορεῖν παρεσκεύασεν. It is particularly telling that Aeschines' *Aspasia* is mentioned among the sources of this information (VI A 66 SSR = 100 P.). The double numbering of the testimonies on Aeschines refers to the collections *Socratis and Socraticorum Reliquiae* (Giannantoni, 1990 = SSR) and *Eschine di Sfetto. Tutte le testimonianze* (Pentassuglio, 2017 = P.).

⁴ Cf. Philostr. *Ep.* 73 (VI A 65 SSR = 98 P.). As far as the relationship with Pericles is concerned, a fundamental testimony is provided by Plutarch, who inserts a long *excursus* on Aspasia (24.1 ff.) within the *bios* of Pericles.

⁵ This hypothesis has been put forward by Kahn (1994, p. 98-99; 1996, p. 25-26).

We often hear you insisting, Socrates, that you honour knowledge more than anything else, as you recommend the young each to a different teacher. After all, you encourage Callias to send his son to Milesian Aspasia's, a man to an establishment run by a woman (εις γυναικὸς ἄνδρα); and you yourself, at your advanced age, go to her as a pupil. Nor is she enough for you: you assemble together expertise in love (τὰ ἐρωτικά) from Diotima, in music (τὰ μουσικά) from Connus, in poetry (τὰ ποιητικά) from Evenus, in farming (τὰ γεωργικά) from Ischomachus, and in geometry (τὰ γεωμετρικά) from Theodorus (transl. by Trapp, 1997).

The passage hints at a well-known Socratic principle on education, stating that the most effective learning method is to associate with someone who is an expert in a specific field of knowledge (the idea can be found in Pl. *La.* 180 ff., in *Ly.* 209c ff. and particularly in X. *Oec.* 2.19; 3.16; 4.13 ff.).⁶ Now, within the list of 'experts' provided by Maximus of Tyre the name of Aspasia stands out,⁷ whose teachings Socrates recommended to Callias for his son Hipponicus. The passage is probably to be read in parallel with Atheneus' testimony (5.220a-b = VI A 61 SSR = 92 P.), which seems to refer to the same context: Callias, as a rich man, is determined to provide his son with a good education and seeks advice from Socrates, who suggests he turn to Aspasia.

Socrates' familiarity with Aspasia is also mentioned by Plutarch, who in his *Vita Periclis* reports that "Socrates sometimes came to see her with his disciples (μετὰ τῶν γνωρίμων ἐφοίτα), and his intimate friends brought their wives to her to listen to her discourse" (24.3; transl. by Perrin, 1916, modified). Theodoret of Cyrus (*Graec. aff.*

⁶ Cf. Pl. *Smp.* 206b; 207c. See also Pl. *Ap.* 21c and 22b-c on the polemics against illusory knowledge; *Ap.* 24d; *Cri.* 44c-d; 46e; 47a; 48a on the criticism about the δόξα τῶν πολλῶν; *Alc.* 1 110e and *La.* 184e-185a on the opposition between δόξα and ἀλήθεια.

⁷ The reference can be connected to a passage from Lucian's *De saltatione* (25), where it is said that Socrates "could stoop to learn wisdom from the mouth of an hetaira, Aspasia" (παρ' ἑταίρας γυναικὸς οὐκ ἀπηξίου σπουδαῖόν τι ἀκούειν, τῆς Ασπασίας).

cur. 1.17) confirms the same: Socrates, the best of philosopher, did not consider it shameful to learn something helpful also from women (οὐδὲ παρὰ γυναικῶν μαθεῖν τι χρήσιμον ὑπέλαβε φιλοσοφίας ἀνάξιον); so he wasn't ashamed of choosing Diotima as his teacher, and besides this he continued to associate with Aspasia (παρὰ τὴν Ἀσπασίαν διετέλει θαμίζων).⁸ What we can infer from this set of sources is (1) that Socrates held Aspasia's teachings in the highest regard⁹ and (2) that some authors connect the two figures of Aspasia and Diotima as Socrates' 'teachers'.

Now, the latter point may evidently have some important consequences for the theory of ἔρωσ. In this regard, it should be said in advance that there are no explicit textual connections between Aspasia's teaching and the issue of ἔρωσ, nor does Socrates ever assert that he is Aspasia's 'pupil' in the matter of τὰ ἐρωτικά:¹⁰ based on the testimonies just examined, the teaching on erotic matters is exclusively associated with the name of Diotima (by Maximus of Tyre, in particular; cf. *Pl. Smp.* 201d). We can thus only rely on indirect references;¹¹ nonetheless, taken as a whole, they seem to suggest that the figure of Aspasia was depicted in Aeschines' dialogue as a proponent of (Socratic) pedagogical ἔρωσ.

a) First, some sources attest that the *Aspasia* contained a speech on the (perhaps legendary) figure of Thargelia (Philostr. *Ep.* 73 = VI A 65 SSR = 98 P.),¹² a Milesian hetaira who married a Thessalian

⁸ See also Clem. Al. *Strom.* 4, c. 19, 121-122: Ἀσπασία τῆς Μιλησίας - Σωκράτης μὲν ἀπέλαυσεν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν. The joint mention of the two 'teachers' of Socrates may be connected, on the one hand, to the autoschediasm of Plato's *Menexenus* (235d ss.: καὶ ἄμα οὐδὲ αὐτοσχεδιάζειν τά γε τοιαῦτα χαλεπὸν κτλ.) and, on the other hand, to the discourse on ἔρωσ that Socrates heard from Diotima and reported "in his own way" in the *Symposium* (201d ff.).

⁹ On this aspect see also Lucian. *Imag.* 17 (VI A 60 SSR = 91 P.).

¹⁰ Already Hirzel (1895, p. 80) touches on this issue; see also Dittmar (1912, p. 51); Ehlers (1966, p. 97); Döring (1984, p. 24; 2001, p. 31) and Kahn (1994, p. 96).

¹¹ This is why Döring's statement that "Socrates in the dialogue calls himself a student of the famous courtesan Aspasia especially with respect to matters of love (*ta erotika*)" is slightly imprecise (Döring, 1984, p. 30).

¹² It is noteworthy that Philostratus provides a quotation of the speech which is in clear Gorgianic style, and that he says in the same passage that Aspasia made

ταγός (Anonym. *De mulier.* 11 = VI 64 SSR = 97 P.),¹³ and “stealthily sowed the seeds of Persian sympathy in the cities of Greece by means of these lovers of hers, who were men of the greatest power and influence” (Plu. *Per.* 24.3 = VI A 64 SSR = 97 P.; transl. by Perrin, 1916). As Plutarch himself seems to suggest, Aspasia may have been compared to Thargelia for making “her onslaughts upon the most influential men” and particularly for her relationship with Pericles (cf. Hesych. Alex. s.v. Θαρρηλία). The introduction of this λόγος περὶ Θαρρηλίας¹⁴ in the dialogue may be explained by taking into account the information provided by Atheneus (5.220a-b = 92 P.), namely that in Aeschines’ *Aspasia* malevolent judgment was passed on all the women from Ionia, defined as “adulterous and opportunist” (μοιχάδας καὶ κερδαλέας). As both the Ionian women named in the dialogue seem to contradict this opinion – at least according to Aeschines’ presentation – we may argue that the speech on Thargelia was pronounced (or reported: see note 14) by Socrates to persuade his interlocutor that not *all* the women from Ionia were adulterous and opportunist, the two Milesians Aspasia and Thargelia representing an exception. Moreover, the Thessalian sovereign is praised for her beauty and σοφία (Hesych. Alex. s.v. Θαρρηλία:

Pericles into a powerful orator by “sharpening his tongue according to the style of Gorgias” (τὴν τοῦ Περικλέους γλῶτταν κατὰ τὸν Γοργίαν θῆξαι). Indeed, this claim can be read against the backdrop not only of the tradition about Aspasia as a teacher of rhetoric (mentioned above), but also of the testimonies about Aeschines’ imitation of Gorgias’ style (D.L. 2.63 = 20 P.).

¹³ According to the anonymous author, Thargelia ruled over the Thessalians for thirty years after Antiochus’ death: ταύτην φασὶν [...] γῆμασθαι Ἀντιόχῳ καὶ ἀποθανόντος ἐκείνου βασιλεῦσαι Θετταλίας ἔτη λ’. The same information can be found in the *Souda* (s.v. Θαρρηλία): βασιλεύσασα Θετταλῶν λ’ ἔτη (= *Ethym. Magn.* s.v. Θαρρηλία).

¹⁴ It has been conjectured that the λόγος on Thargelia was composed by Aspasia and *reported* by Socrates, just as in the case of the funeral oration recited in the *Menexenus*: see Hermann (1850, p. 18); Natorp (1892, p. 495, n. 8); Dittmar (1912, p. 26) and Kahn (1996, p. 25). A different position is held by Hirzel (1895, p. 140, n. 2).

εὐπρεπῆς δὲ τὴν ὄψιν, καὶ τᾶλλα σοφῆ),¹⁵ thereby becoming a sort of ‘double’ of Aspasia. We may thus argue that she was introduced into the dialogue for the twofold purpose of dismissing the charges against the “women from Ionia” and of serving as Aspasia’s model or *Doppelgänger*.

b) Besides the above-mentioned passages by Maximus of Tyre and Theodoret of Cyrus – where the figure of Aspasia is named in conjunction with Diotima (Socrates’ teacher in τὰ ἐρωτικά) – we may recall two further testimonies attesting to a later tradition about Aspasia as Socrates’ ἐρωτοδιδάσκαλος. The first comes from the *bios* provided by Synesius (*Dio* 1.18, 59a), where it is clearly stated: Σωκράτης Ἀσπασία προσεφοίτα κατὰ χάριν τοῦ τὰ ἐρωτικά παιδευθῆναι;¹⁶ the other is a fragment from Herodicus, transmitted via Athenaeus (5.219d: Σωκράτης ἐρωτοδιδάσκαλον ἔχων τὴν Μιλησίαν).

In the light of the above considerations, we can dig a little deeper into the content of the Milesian’s expertise and teaching. If, indeed, in the case of Pericles and Lysicles Aspasiads’ teaching essentially had to do with the τέχνη πολιτική and the τέχνη ῥητορική, the point now is to understand what Socrates sought to learn by visiting Aspasia with his pupils and closest friends, who in turn, as we read in *Plu. Per.* 24.3, “brought their wives to her to listen to her discourse”.

This can be investigated by turning to Xenophon’s testimonies, which not only contribute to shed light on the relationship between Socrates and the Milesian, but allow us get closer to the issue of ἔρωσ and its ‘pedagogical’ use.

¹⁵ The same traits are highlighted by Plutarch (*Per.* 24.3): “This Thargelia came to be a great beauty (εἶδος εὐπρεπῆς) and was endowed with grace of manners as well as clever wits” (καὶ χάριν ἔχουσα μετὰ δεινότητος; transl. by Perrin, 1916).

¹⁶ In the same passage we also read: τὰ κατὰ Ἀσπασίαν τε καὶ Σωκράτην ἐρωτικά (see Dittmar, 1912, p. 68).

Aeschines' *Aspasia* and the Socratic method

The central role of the problem of παιδεία in the *Aspasia* – that Cicero's account makes explicit – can be grasped through Xenophon's two references to the work.¹⁷ Interestingly, it is Socrates himself who quotes Aspasia's words in both cases: in the first passage, the philosopher refers to Aspasia's expertise in matchmaking (X. *Mem.* 2.3.36 = VI A 72 SSR = 112 P.); in the second one, he mentions Aspasia within the framework of a discussion on the education of women in marital relationships (X. *Oec.* 3.14 = VI A 71 SSR = 111 P.), again presenting the woman as an expert in this field.

As far as the *Memorabilia* passage is concerned, we shall focus on a section of the conversation between Socrates and Critobulos reported in book 2, by paying special attention to the dialogical context. Socrates quotes Aspasia's words when Critobulos asks to teach him the best way to win good friends:

She once told me that good matchmakers (τὰς ἀγαθὰς προμνηστρίδας) are successful in making marriages only when the good reports they carry to and from are true; false reports she would not recommend, for the victims of deception hate one another and the matchmaker too (τὴν προμνησαμένην; transl. by Marchant, 1923).

The previous exchange between Socrates and Critobulos is fundamental for understanding the reference: earlier on in the text, Critobulos asks Socrates to teach him a “good plan for making friends” (2.6.32). Socrates agrees to intercede for him, and to praise him in the presence of those whose friendship he covets, while making it clear that he will not produce *false* reports about him (2.6.

¹⁷ Already Hermann (1850, p. 28, n. 90) had listed the passage from the *Oecomomicus* among the testimonies on Aeschines' *Aspasia*, and connected it to *Mem.* 2.6.36.

33-36).¹⁸ Only at this point does he quote Aspasia's principle, which contrasts 'good' (i.e. *true*) προμνήστρια to false (ψευδομένη) προμνήστρια. He then ends his speech with a moral exhortation:

Nay, Critobulos, if you want to be thought good at anything (ἄν βούλη δοκεῖν ἀγαθὸς εἶναι) *you must try to be so* (γενέσθαι ἀγαθὸν πειρᾶσθαι); that is the quickest, the surest, the best way. You will find on reflection that every kind of virtue (ἀρεταί) named among men is increased by study and practice. Such is the view I take of our duty, Critobulos (2.6.39; transl. by Marchant, 1923).

What we can infer from the passage is that a *good* art of matchmaking implies that one should report the ἀγαθόν of someone else only in accordance with the truth. More specifically: genuine matchmakers exalt people's good qualities only if these are actually to be found. According to this perspective, therefore, whoever wants to become ἀγαθός must behave in such a way that a good matchmaker would say positive things about him or her in accordance with the truth.¹⁹

The issue of ἀγαθὸν γίνεσθαι (or βελτίον γίνεσθαι)²⁰ also occurs in the *Oeconomicus*, once again within a conversation between Socrates and Critobulos. The topic is dealt with here within the framework of a discussion on the education of women in marital relationships, and in this case too Socrates makes a reference to Aspasia: when Critobulos asks whether husbands who have good

¹⁸ In the *Lysis* (206c), too, Hippothales asks Socrates for useful advice he might give "as to what conversation or conduct will help to endear one to one's favourite" (συμβούλευε τίνα ἄν τις λόγον διαλεγόμενος ἢ τί πράττων προσφιλῆς παιδικοῖς γένοιτο; transl. by Lamb, 1955). The similarities to the question addressed by Critobulos in *Mem.* 2.6.32 are quite evident. It is also possible to draw a parallel with Socrates' depiction of the art of μαστροπεία in Xenophon's *Symposium* (4.57-64).

¹⁹ A striking parallel can be found in *Cyr.* 1.6.22.

²⁰ In Xenophon's Socratic writings we find a complete equivalence between the notion of βελτίον γίνεσθαι and that of ὠφελεῖν, the ὠφέλεια being a chief trait of Socrates' teaching (especially in the *Memorabilia*: see 1.2.61; 1.3.1; 2.7.1; 3.1.1; 4.1.1; 4.8.10).

wives (ἀγαθὰς γυναῖκας) have trained them themselves, Socrates replies “I will introduce Aspasia to you, and she will explain the whole matter to you with more knowledge than I possess” (3.14; transl. by Todd, 1979), thereby presenting the Milesian courtesan as an expert on the moral education of women.

By combining both sources, we can single out some points. First, the art of matchmaking was especially applied to marital relationships and was related to the issue of marital ἀριστεία. Second, in her pedagogical activity Aspasia not only practised the τέχνη προμνηστική herself, but probably also instructed others on the nature of a true προμνήστρια. Now, if Xenophon actually had the dialogue *Aspasia* in mind, we may infer that Aeschines too made room in his work for the theme of προμνηστική τέχνη. Therefore, this is another issue with which Aspasia’s teaching must have been associated in the dialogue: that art of mediating in marital relationships on account of which Socrates arguably introduced his friends and their wives to Aspasia.

It is now possible to investigate more in depth the method of Aspasia’s teaching activity, which brings us to the issue of erotic παιδεία. Both aspects can be tackled by focusing on Cicero’s testimony in *De inventione* 1.31.51-53 (VI A 70 SSR = 108 P.), which represents one of the richest sources for reconstructing the philosophical content of this lost work, as it preserves the largest surviving section of the dialogue.²¹

The quotation of the passage from the *Aspasia* is placed at the beginning of a section on the different types of argumentation (1.31.51-77), which is divided into a first part devoted to the *inductio* (1.31.51-56) and a second part devoted to the deductive method

²¹ I had the opportunity to tackle Cicero’s account on the Aeschinean Socrates’ method (with a special focus on the so-called ‘Socratic ἐπαγωγή’ and the argument by analogy) in [*omissis*].

(*ratiocinatio*: 1.31.57-75).²² Before quoting a portion of Aeschines' dialogue,²³ then, Cicero provides a definition of *inductio*:

Induction is a form of argument which leads the person with whom one is arguing to give assent to certain undisputed facts; through this assent it wins his approval of a doubtful proposition because this resembles the facts to which he has assented.²⁴

To illustrate a case of induction, thus, Cicero reports a conversation between Aspasia, Xenophon and his wife,²⁵ which he explicitly says to have found *apud Socraticum Aeschinen*.²⁶ The passage – that is worth quoting at length – presents Aspasia as

²² The book ends with some final considerations about the importance of *variatio* (76) and a discussion about the difference between philosophy and rhetoric; on the structure of book 1 see Raschieri (2013, p. 135-317).

²³ The whole of book 1 is rich in quotations from literary works (mostly in verse), which Cicero inserts for the sake of exemplification. The quoting of an extensive portion of Aeschines' dialogue must be related to the use of translations from Greek as an exercise in Latin schools of rhetoric, a practise which is well documented in Cicero's *De oratore* (1.155), in Suetonius' *De grammaticis et rhetoribus* (25.4), and in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* (10.5. 2-4).

²⁴ All the English translations of Cicero's *De inventione* are by Hubbell (1949, slightly modified). It is noteworthy that, when Cicero goes back to the issue of *ἐπαγωγή* in the *Topica*, he again cites Socrates with regard to the *locus ex similitudine* (42). Also Aristotle, when dealing in the *Rhetoric* (2.20 1393b) with the *παράδειγμα* (defined as “similar to induction”: ὅμοιον ἐπαγωγῆ), puts forward as an example of comparison the “sayings of Socrates” (παραβολὴ δὲ τὰ Σωκρατικά).

²⁵ Other versions of the same conversation are reported by Quintilian (*Inst. orat.* 5.11.27-29 = VI A 70 SSR = 109 P.), who only quotes the first part, and by Victorinus (*In rhet.* 1.31 p. 240, 20-241, 15 = VI A 70 SSR = 110 P.). They both depend on Cicero and thus cannot be considered independent sources (see already Hermann, 1850, p. 16). The same anecdote (in Cicero's version) features in Albin. *Rhet.* p. 540 Halm, where it is reported in an anonymous form and referred to a *philosophus quidam*. In Quintilian's version it crops up again in Iul. Vict. *Rhet.* p. 408 Halm.

²⁶ As Dittmar (1912, p. 33) pointed out, the context of the conversation suggests that the quotation is drawn from the *Aspasia*. Krauss (1911, p. 71) had already argued for this attribution, but had noted that, in all likelihood, Cicero's version does not represent a literal translation of Aeschines' text (p. 43). In the absence of the original Greek text, we cannot analyse the translation technique (see Raschieri, 2013, p. 312, n. 11), nor can we assess the degree of ‘fidelity’ to the Greek model.

mediating between the two spouses, thereby once again connecting the Milesian's teaching to the theme of marital ἀριστεία:

Socrates reveals that Aspasia reasoned thus with Xenophon's wife and with Xenophon himself: 'Please tell me, madam, if your neighbour had a better gold ornament than you have, would you prefer that one or your own?' 'That one,' she replied. 'Now, if she had dresses and other feminine finery more expensive than you have, would you prefer that one or hers?' 'Hers, of course,' she replied. 'Well now, if she had a better husband than you have, would you prefer your husband or hers?' At this the woman blushed. But Aspasia then began to speak to Xenophon. 'I wish you would tell me, Xenophon,' she said, 'if your neighbour had a better horse than yours, would you prefer yours or his?' 'His,' was his answer. 'And if he had a better farm than you have, which farm would you prefer to have?' 'The better farm, naturally', he said. 'Now, if he had a better wife than you have, would you prefer yours or his?' At this Xenophon, too, himself was silent. Then Aspasia: 'Since both of you have failed to tell me the only thing I wished to hear, I myself will tell what both of you are thinking: that you, madam, wish to have the best husband, and you, Xenophon, desire above all things to have the finest wife. Therefore unless you can contrive that there be no better man or finer woman on earth, you will certainly always be in dire want of what you consider best, namely, that you be the husband of the very best of wives, and that she be wedded to the very best of men'. In this instance, because assent has been given to undisputed statements, the result is that the point which would appear doubtful if asked by itself is through analogy conceded as certain, and this is due to the method employed in putting the question.

Before dealing with the philosophical and ethical themes raised by this conversation, it is worth focusing on the dialogical method employed here by Aspasia. In general terms, the way she addresses both partners with pressing questions, to the point of leading them into an *aporia* which prevents any further answer, suggests a proximity between Aspasia's method and Socrates' elenctic

procedure (as described by Plato in many dialogues). In the following lines, Cicero himself is quite explicit in this sense:

Socrates used this conversational method a good deal, because he wished to present no arguments himself, but preferred to get a result from the material which the interlocutor had given him – a result which the interlocutor was bound to approve as following necessarily from what he had already granted.

The section ends with an explanation of the Socratic method. Before providing examples of inductive reasoning drawn from civil cases (55 ff.), Cicero tackles the issue from a theoretical point of view, in the form of a commentary on Aeschines' passage. As pointed out in the following lines, Cicero deems it necessary for the argument which one brings forward by way of simile to be such that "its truth must be granted" (53). He thus believes that the consequence in view of which one resorts to an inductive reasoning must bear a close similarity to the premises proposed as not doubtful.

The outcome of this method is described in the *Aspasia* example: the interlocutor (in this case Xenophon and his wife) can either (1) decline to give an answer, or (2) admit the validity of the thesis proposed or (3) deny it. Now, if the proposition is denied, one should either show its resemblance to those things which have been already admitted, or resort to some other induction, while, if the thesis is granted, the argumentation can be brought to a close. If, instead, the interlocutor keeps silent, then "he must be lured into giving an answer" (*elicienda responsio est*), or – since silence can be seen as a form of reply – one may also bring the discussion to a close, taking the silence to be equivalent to an admission.

As Raschieri (2013, p. 317) has pointed out, Cicero's use of a philosophical 'insertion' is far from being an accessory element or a mere exemplification of concepts already expounded in an abstract form. On the contrary, the quotation from Aeschines' *Aspasia* plays such a central role that it lends structure to the overall argument and does not require any further addition except some brief introductory and conclusive comments.

Now, not only does the whole passage have the structure of the Socratic ἐπαγωγή, but – as already noted (Döring, 2011, p. 31-32) – Aspasia uses another of Socrates' famous methodological tools: the argument by analogy.²⁷ Döring convincingly points out what Aspasia's goals in doing this might be, namely: 1) to make Xenophon and his wife aware that they are caught in an inconsistency (between their belief that they love no one else as much as each other, and the admission that they would favour a superior spouse, should one come along); 2) to make them realise that they are capable of ending this inconsistency by trying to become as virtuous as possible. Moreover, it should be noted that Cicero presents the whole conversation as being reported by Socrates himself within Aeschines' dialogue (“*demonstrat Socrates cum Xenophontis uxore [...]*”).²⁸

The ‘form’ of the dialogue is not the only trait common to both Socrates' and Aspasia's teaching. As far as the content of the discussion goes, it focuses on the idea that the search for a better husband or wife is vain unless both partners aim to be ἄριστοι. Therefore, one major theme of the *Aspasia* seems to be the crucial role love plays in promoting moral improvement.

The theme of *optimum esse* may be regarded as correlated to that of βελτίον γίνεσθαι (see Stavru, 2011, p. 316), which occurs – as is well known – in several works within Socratic literature. In Plato's *Apology* (25b), Socrates ironically observes that “it would be a great state of blessedness in the case of the youth if one alone corrupts them, and the others do them good (βελτίους ποιοῦντες)”. As far as

²⁷ In its use of analogies the passage can be compared to Aeschines' *Miltiades* (*POxy.* 2890 verso = VI A 80 SSR = 121 P.); on this parallel see Rossetti-Lausdei (1979, p. 50-51). On the logical structure and validity of a specific type of the argument by analogy, namely the Expert-Analysis, see Sandstad (2018). For a more detailed account and the relevant bibliography see [omissis].

²⁸ According to Mársico (2014, p. 404, n. 85), Aeschines may have included in the *Aspasia* a conversation similar to that between Socrates and Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, as shown by the several references in the sources to the dialogical form of the discussion. Such an analogy has led certain scholars to conjecture that the Socrates-Diotima exchange in the *Symposium* represents Plato's ‘response’ to Aeschines' *Aspasia* (see Gaiser, 1969, and Kahn, 1994, p. 100-101).

Aeschines is concerned, Döring (1984, 17-27) argued that the complementary themes of *Besser-Werden* and *Besser-Machen* represent the *Leitmotiv* of all his dialogues. This applies not only to the *Aspasia*, but also to the *Alcibiades*, which seemingly ends with the very expression βελτίω ποιῆσαι (see Ael. Aristid. *De rhet.* 1.74 = VI A 53 SSR = 82 P.).²⁹

The conversation quoted by Cicero also sheds light on the peculiar role played by ἔρωσ in this process of self-improvement. As Kahn (1996, p. 27) noted, “Aspasia is appealing to the *love* which Xenophon and his wife have for one another in order to urge them on to a mutual effort of self-improvement”.³⁰ If this reading is correct, Aeschines establishes at the core of the dialogue Aspasia’s ability to help others and improve them both through an elenctic-protreptic discussion and through a particular recourse to ἔρωσ. As we will see in the concluding section, this is exactly what he does in the *Alcibiades*, where Socrates displays the same ability.

Before moving on to examine these two (different) applications of the Σωκρατικὸς ἔρωσ, it is possible to put forward an hypothesis about the place of the passage quoted by Cicero in Aeschines’ dialogue, also in relation to the other testimonies examined in the previous section. In all likelihood, this conversation was prefaced by Socrates’ claim that he occasionally visited Aspasia himself, together with his friends and their wives (Plu. *Per.* 24.3). Indeed, it may be argued that Socrates resorts to this dialogue-within-the dialogue in order to respond to Callias’ perplexity about his advice to have Hipponicus educated by Aspasia (cf. Athen. 5.220a-b = VI A 61 SSR = 92 P.): by this eloquent example, Socrates probably aimed to illustrate Aspasia’s outstanding talent as a teacher.

²⁹ The theme is also widely present in Xenophon’s Socratic writings: see *supra*, note 20.

³⁰ It is worth highlighting the mutual nature of this process: as Natorp (1892, p. 499) pointed out, love is to be understood here as an impulse to knowledge and to moral improvement, but especially as the sharing of this impulse and its ‘propagation’ to others.

Conclusions

The vast majority of testimonies on the *Alcibiades* directly refer to a paideutic context and the dialogue, along with the *Aspasia*, provides a fundamental account of Socratic ἔρωσ. An in-depth analysis of the work, or even of the most significant testimonies, falls beyond the scope of this paper. What is relevant for our purposes is the depiction of Socrates' παιδευτικός ἔρωσ provided by three fragments that Aelius Aristides preserves in his *De rhetorica* (VI A 53 SSR = 81-82 P.).

The focus of this testimony is on Socrates' denial that he possesses any art (τέχνη) or science (μάθημα) to benefit other people: if he can help others, it is only by divine dispensation and – in this case – by his love for Alcibiades, so that he believes he can improve the young man διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶν, “through love”. Against the backdrop of the issue of βελτίον γίνεσθαι, we find here a sharp distinction between two ways by which one can make other people better: through μαθήματα and by awakening, *via* ἔρωσ, the desire (ἐπιθυμία) to pursue virtue.³¹ Socrates, we are told, follows the latter method.

In brief, what emerges here is a conception of παιδεία which consists in improving other people primarily by means of ‘association’ (ξυνὼν), and which is deeply related to a form of ‘desire’ that only ἔρωσ can awake. By combining the three fragments with Plutarch's account (*Alc.* 4.193c-e = VI A 54 SSR = 83 P.) – where the paideutic relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades is also framed according to the dynamics of ἔρωσ – we can conclude that Socratic education aims to awaken in others the impulse to achieve virtue which is necessary for self-improvement. This process, in the *Alcibiades*, also entails an extensive use of Socratic ἔλεγχος (see in particular VI A 51-52 SSR = 78-80 P.).

³¹ This aspect has been particularly highlighted by Giannantoni (1990, p. 590-591; 1997, p. 362-363); on the distinction between two ways of achieving moral improvement, see also Döring (1984, p. 17-18).

In the *Aspasia* too, as we have seen, the goal of the Milesian's intervention is to engender – starting from the initial sense of loss caused by ἔλεγχος³² – a desire which leads to self-improvement. In this respect, Aspasia's teaching has been said (Kahn, 1996, p. 27) to be a generalization of the principle that Socrates expounds at the end of the *Alcibiades*: to make others better διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶν. It may be added that such a 'generalisation' is twofold:

1. When Socrates in the *Alcibiades* states that he would improve the young man “through love”, he is referring to *his own* ἔρωσ (the love he feels for Alcibiades). This implies that in the paideutic relationship he establishes with Alcibiades, as well as in the process of moral improvement he produces, he acts as a *lover*. Aspasia – unlike Socrates – stimulates a desire for self-improvement in others without being personally involved in the erotic relationship: she engenders the ἐπιθυμία to pursue virtue by appealing to the love two individuals feel for each other.

2. On a different level, Aeschines generalises the Σωκρατικὸς ἔρωσ by showing, through the figure of Aspasia, another possible application of it: Socratic ἔρωσ, understood as an impulse to self-improvement, can be applied not only to male pederastic relationships (the συμφιλοσοφεῖν), but also to conjugal relationships and to the pursuit of marital ἀριστεία.

Ultimately, even though Aeschines' Socrates does not explicitly state that he was instructed by Aspasia in matters of love, we might argue that Aeschines projects onto the Milesian the Socratic theory of ἔρωσ, or at least some crucial principles underpinning it and abstracted from the concrete, personal ἐραστῆς-ἐρώμενος relationship: a set of indirect references suggests that in the dialogue Aspasia was depicted as a proponent of that Σωκρατικὸς ἔρωσ which had the power to foster moral improvement in others.

³² On the analogies between Alcibiades' ἔλεγχος in the *Alcibiades* and that of Xenophon and his wife in the *Aspasia*, see Döring (1984, p. 25).

As is well known, in Plato's *Symposium* (201d5), Socrates also claims to have been instructed in matters of love by a woman (see Halperin, 1990). The woman in question, unlike Aspasia, is a priestess: Diotima of Mantinea. At a surface level, both women are designated by Socrates as his 'teachers', and both are presented (albeit in different ways) as experts in τὰ ἐρωτικά.³³ Nonetheless, Diotima's knowledge of ἔρωσ is a sapiential one, connected to her status and to mystery initiations; the erotic doctrine she expounds directly leads to the Forms and its implications are primarily ontological and epistemological.³⁴ Differently, Aspasia's expertise in τὰ ἐρωτικά has to do with the art of matchmaking and the education of women (Xenophon, probably depending on Aeschines); it also regards the mediation between wife and husband and the pursuit of mutual virtue within marital relationships (Aeschines); its outcome is rather moral and political. In this regard, I shall recall the deep-rooted tradition (which includes Aeschines' *Aspasia*) about the Milesian's renowned expertise in politics and rhetoric (see Cataldi, 2011).

To conclude, Aeschines undeniably projects some Socratic aspects onto Aspasia. According to Cicero's account, they share both the same dialogical method (based on the ἐπαγωγή and the argument by analogy) and the same view of the aim of teaching, which consists in making others better "through love" (albeit with some differences).

Now, Hirzel's definition of the Milesian as a "female Socrates" may perhaps be seen to ascribe to the teacher the characteristics of her 'pupil', through a process of back-projection. Yet, we can still

³³ According to Dittmar (1912, p. 68), we can infer from Maximus of Tyre's testimony (*Philosoph.* 38.4) that Aeschines projects the Socratic theory of ἔρωσ onto Aspasia just as Plato projects it onto Diotima. A similar interpretation had already been provided by Natorp (1892, p. 490) and has recently been re-examined by Thomsen (2001, p. 142).

³⁴ By comparing the treatment of ἔρωσ in Aeschines (particularly in the *Alcibiades*) and in Plato's *Symposium*, Mársico (2018, p. 210) argues that Aeschines seems not to be worried about strictly theoretical issues; by contrast, Diotima's "main concern is to define *erôs*", her argument being based on ontological assumptions that depend on the theory of Forms.

conclude that Aeschines assigns Aspasia a role that makes her an ‘alter Socrates’, whose pupil is the whole Athens.

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