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The Ideal Philosopher as "Fabulator": Socratic-Platonic Variations on Aesop in the *Phaedo*

Abstract: My contribution intends to corroborate the thesis that the reference to Aesop in the Platonic *Phaedo* (60a–61b) is not random. This non-randomness can be demonstrated on at least three levels: first, in terms of the profound intellectual and methodological similarities that exist between Socrates and Aesop. Secondly, it can be shown that citing Aesop plays a fundamental role not only in the opening scene of the *Phaedo*, but within the argumentative and dramaturgical structure of the whole dialogue. Thirdly, and in line with Plato's urge to elevate the figure of his master Socrates into a paradigm of philosophical theory and practice, the staging of an improvisation on an Aesopic pattern allows Plato to create a new, common literary genre that can synthesize both λόγος and μῦθος.

> ἃ μὲν οὖν τυγχάνω ἀκηκοὼς φθόνος οὐδεὶς λέγειν.
> καὶ γὰρ ἴσως καὶ μάλιστα πρέπει μέλλοντα ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ
> μυθολογεῖν περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ, ποίαν τινὰ αὐτὴν οἰόμεθα εἶναι·
> τί γὰρ ἄν τις καὶ ποιοῖ ἄλλο ἐν τῷ μέχρι ἡλίου δυσμῶν χρόνῳ;
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 61d9–62e4)[1]

1 Introduction

In the famous opening of Plato's *Phaedo* (60a9–61b7) Socrates, imprisoned in Athens awaiting the execution of his death sentence, has been freed from his chains to allow him to entertain himself with his friends for the last time. The first words addressed to them turn out to be a fable on the hybrid nature of psychic and

I sincerely thank the editors for their suggestions, which have been a source of inspiration as well as motivation for me to pursue a line of research, to paraphrase Plato, just as beautiful as it is difficult.

1 "The things that I have heard, nothing can restrain me from telling them to you. And indeed, to one who is about to embark on his journey through the world beyond, nothing seems to me to suit better than pondering and fabulating about his journey and dwelling in the world beyond, of what nature we may think it is. And after all, what else could be done in the meantime until the sun sets?" (Transl. C.L.).

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physical pleasure, which arises from its opposite, pain, and again fades into it, in a continuous alternation that does not allow the two to exist simultaneously in man. Taking inspiration from the surprising nature, the atopy (ἄτοπον, 60b3), represented by the mixture of pleasure and pain, Socrates, remarkably, mentions a literary heritage of which nothing is heard in the whole rest of the Platonic corpus: he explicitly mentions Aesop, starting in 60c1, imagining the fable (μῦθος, c2) that the poet would have written to tell the wonder of the relationship between these two beings: wishing to reconcile them, in order to prevent them from fighting each other relentlessly, the God decided *to unite them by the head*, producing a two-headed prodigy.

Asked by his friends why he had made the sudden decision to write poetry, "putting Aesop's fables into verse and music" (60d1), Socrates replies that he wanted to follow in this way the instructions of the God (Apollo), who, through a recurring dream (60e4–61b1), incited him to compose music. To avoid any doubt that philosophy, the "highest music" and poietic activity (μεγίστη μουσική, 61a3–4), did not completely exhaust the desire of the God, and even though Socrates considered himself an author of reasoning (λόγος) rather than a fable-teller (μυθολογικός), and since he remembered the fables of Aesop by heart, he therefore decided to create poetry out of them.

The purpose of my contribution is twofold: on the one hand, moving from a hypothesis already supported by few scholars, I endorse the thesis that the reference to Aesop in the *Phaedo* is not random, and I hope to do so with arguments that are not lacking in originality. In pursuing this goal, I will move on from the conviction that Plato chose Aesop due to the existence of some *essential* similarities with Socrates, and plausibly with Plato himself, considered as the philosophical writer behind the curtain.

On the other hand, I will attempt to show, at a first level, how the Socratic improvisation on the Aesopic material constitutes an indispensable component of the dramaturgical and speculative development of the *Phaedo*. At a second level, I will try to shed light on Plato's intentions, which are not, in my opinion, to produce a genre antagonistic to fable, with his philosophical λόγος — of which he would thus wrongly be claiming the absolute paternity. Plato's aim is rather to create, within the genre of philosophical discourse, a *new kind* of philosophical λόγος tailored to his master Socrates; this genre would be as maieutic as Socrates himself, assimilating patterns of the literary genre of fable and thus able to *synthesize* both logical and mythical instances.

Lastly, while always drawing from a Platonic perspective, I shall end by outlining some preliminary conclusions on the overarching topic of genres, addressing the question of the interplay between philosophical writing and fable.

2 Socrates and Aesop in the mirror

If we start looking at the resemblances between Aesop and Socrates, the first to leap out are those that emerge from a comparison of their biographies, including those elements of likeness related to common intellectual features. The large number of parallels between Aesop and Socrates, both in outward appearance and in their fates in life and death, have already been the subject of much detailed research drawing on the *Life of Aesop* and, for Socrates, mainly on the first Platonic tetralogy (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*) and the *Symposium*.[2]

However, to be able to discern the possible existence of a more substantial kinship between Aesop and Socrates, we must look at the only source available to us, the passage in the *Phaedo* which reports Socrates' improvisation:

> ὁ δὲ Σωκράτης ἀνακαθιζόμενος εἰς τὴν κλίνην συνέκαμψέ τε τὸ σκέλος καὶ ἐξέτριψε τῇ χειρί, καὶ τρίβων ἅμα, "Ὡς ἄτοπον", ἔφη, "ὦ ἄνδρες, ἔοικέ τι εἶναι τοῦτο ὃ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἡδύ· ὡς θαυμασίως πέφυκε πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν ἐναντίον εἶναι, τὸ λυπηρόν, τὸ ἅμα μὲν αὐτὼ μὴ ἐθέλειν παραγίγνεσθαι τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ἐὰν δέ τις διώκῃ τὸ ἕτερον καὶ λαμβάνῃ, σχεδόν τι ἀναγκάζεσθαι ἀεὶ λαμβάνειν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον, ὥσπερ ἐκ μιᾶς κορυφῆς ἡμμένω δύ' ὄντε. καί μοι δοκεῖ, ἔφη, εἰ ἐνενόησεν αὐτὰ Αἴσωπος, μῦθον ἂν συνθεῖναι ὡς ὁ θεὸς βουλόμενος αὐτὰ διαλλάξαι πολεμοῦντα, ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἐδύνατο, συνῆψεν εἰς ταὐτὸν αὐτοῖς τὰς κορυφάς, καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ᾧ ἂν τὸ ἕτερον παραγένηται ἐπακολουθεῖ ὕστερον καὶ τὸ ἕτερον. ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ μοι ἔοικεν· ἐπειδὴ ὑπὸ τοῦ δεσμοῦ ἦν ἐν τῷ σκέλει τὸ ἀλγεινόν, ἥκειν δὴ φαίνεται ἐπακολουθοῦν τὸ ἡδύ."
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 60b1–c7)

> Socrates, who had already risen to sit up on the bed, bent his leg over and rubbed it hard with his hand; and so, while he was rubbing it, "What an extraordinary thing," he said, "O friends, this seems to be what men call pleasure, and what a marvellous nature it is in relation to what might be thought to be its opposite, pain! For they do not wish to be both simultaneously in the human being, but then, if one pursues either and captures it, he in a certain way always finds himself compelled to seize the other as well, as if they were joined by one head, although being two. And it seems to me," he said, "that if Aesop had been thinking of them, he would have composed a fable about them: that is, how the God, wishing to reconcile these two beings at war against each other and not succeeding, tied their heads to the same point; and so, to anyone who gets close to one of them, the other one follows after him. As it seems to have

2 McPherran 2012; Kurke 2006; 2011; Zafiropoulos 2011; 2015. For the evidence that Aesop's vicissitudes were well known at the time Plato was composing his writings, see McPherran 2012, 2. A word on methodology: although it is intriguing to compare Socrates and Aesop on the basis of the Aesop novel, it must be borne in mind that there are around 600–700 years between the Platonic writings and the *Vita Aesopi*.

> happened to me: for whereas before, under the weight of the chain, there was pain in my leg, pleasure, following closely, appears to come immediately after it."
>
> (Transl. C.L.)

In this passage, Plato lets the imprisoned Socrates indirectly recount an Aesopic fable by having him wonder what story Aesop would have imagined to illustrate the unique mixture of pleasure and pain that he experiences. The image of the two emotions bound together by the head, while not constituting a full narrative in itself as represented by other comparable fables (see below), is clearly connected to the Aesopic tradition by the mention of Aesop directly following it. As such, it is noteworthy that in this passage, Socrates is presented as directly interpreting the 'fabulistic' image, applying and comparing it to his present situation; thus, one might see Socrates as demonstrating the imagined process of reception of fable literature — he appears as a prototypical reader, interpreter, and creator of fables.

The mere fact that Plato, in a dialogue that more than any other can be viewed as a monument to the memory of Socrates, chooses to portray his master in the act of versifying, drawing inspiration from Aesopic fables, not only gives a clear indication that this choice is not fortuitous, but is also a sign that Aesop is recognized as an intellectual of the highest calibre: feeling himself obliged to the God who appeared in his dream not only to compose music philosophically, but also to set music in verse, Socrates, in choosing Aesop, chooses that material which in his memory is most *congenial* to him, as bearing a core of wisdom, which in turn is the fruit of an inclination to *philosophical* reflection of its author, considered by Socrates *equal* to his own.

If, reading between the lines as it were, I am correctly interpreting Plato's intention of not only comparing, but also setting at the same level two heavyweights of Greek culture — where 'culture' is used here in deliberately general terms to avoid placing too rigid boundaries on Aesopic and Socratic literary genres[3] — by assimilating them in their common philosophical attitude, we should expect, from the *ad hoc* μῦθος created in *Phaedo* 60b1–c7, the emergence of a deep structural affinity in the narrative content, which would justify Plato's *coup de théâtre* of attributing to the fable in question this double Aesopic-Socratic paternity.

3 Such a demarcation presupposes upstream a sharp contrast between λόγος and μῦθος, and between being a λογικός rather than a μυθολογικός; in my opinion, in a Socratic-Platonic view, this demarcation has no foundation, as I shall show in the second section of this contribution.

3 Glimpses of convergences in the Aesopic and Socratic mindsets

Though a careful analysis of the broad Aesopic material in search of the possible candidates for Socratic improvisational storytelling is always open to the risk of over-interpretation of even the most promising results,[4] there is a conspicuous number of fables that have both conceptual and narrative affinities with the phenomenon reworked in mythical guise on an Aesopic template in the *Phaedo*.[5] In the following I will compare instances of Platonic-Socratic thought with examples from the *Collectio Augustana* and the fables of Babrius; while both of these collections are works of the Imperial period (2nd–3rd century CE) and are not of a pre-Platonic origin *stricto sensu*, they will serve as a basis to suppose a link — or, at least, a common frame of reference — between ideas expressed in Plato's writings and the ancient fable tradition more generally, bearing all the methodological caveats of

4 The risk of over-interpretation in terms of content is certainly not the only one facing those who wish to sound out the affinities between Socrates and Aesop. It is well-known that all the fables that Perry collected under 'Aesopica' require meticulous differentiation to clarify exactly which authors are involved, whether Phaedrus, Babrius, or even Ademar. Perry's work shows to some extent where the fable first appears. In this regard, a legitimate methodological question is how far one is justified in treating the Aesopic material as a whole and alternately speaking of either a Platonic-Socratic influence or, conversely, that Socrates/Plato could have drawn on certain fables. This matter demands further investigation, which is beyond my scope here, but I assume as a working hypothesis that even fables that are documented only by later authors are related to the older 'Aesopic' fables, at least in their basic structure, and can therefore be included in the comparison, albeit with strong reservations. On the relationship between Plato and Babrius in particular, see Hawkins 2014 and 2015. For the discussion of λόγος and μῦθος in Babrius, with reference to Plato, see also the contribution of Bottini in this volume.

5 As far as I can ascertain, no one apart from McPherran 2012, 4–11, has attempted such a project, namely to scour the Aesopic fable material systematically seeking out possible Socratic-Platonic sources of inspiration. In his selection of fables, McPherran focuses on themes like the injustice suffered by Socrates from the Athenians, the opposition between injustice and virtue: "The Wolf and the Lamb" (Aesop. 155 P. [= 160 Hsr.; 222 Ch.]); "The Farmer and the Stork" (Aesop. 194 P. [= 208 Hsr.; 285 Ch.]; cf. Babr. 13); "Dr. Heron's Fee" (Aesop. 156 P. [= 161 Hsr.; 225 Ch.]; cf. Babr. 94); "The Mouse and the Frog" (Aesop. 384 P. [= *Vit. Aesop*. 133 G]), or on a few of Socrates' distinguishing features, such as his δαίμων ("The Fir Tree and the Bramble" [Aesop. 304 P. [= Babr. 64]]), or his exterior appearance, which he shared with Aesop ("The Butcher and the Ape" [Aesop. 496 P. [= Phaed. 3.4 Z. [= G.]]), on his polemic against sophistry ("From Cobbler to Physician" [Aesop. 475 P. [= Phaed. 1.14 Z. [= G.]]]), and on his tendency to experience the divine manifesting itself in visions and dreams: "A Statue of Hermes on Sale" (Aesop. 99 P. [= 101 Hsr.; 2 Ch.]). Further works of reference on the poetic background of the *Apology* are Compton 2006, and for Aesop's ethical conception Zafiropoulos 2001.

this approach in mind. It also has to be noted that there is no exact equivalent to the fable told by Socrates in the ancient fable collections of 'Aesopica'.

A specific connection with the overall thematic and dramaturgical context of the *Phaedo* can be acknowledged in fables possibly by referring to the necessity, for Socrates' friends and disciples after his death, to follow the path of philosophical inquiry on their own and always to rely first on the power of reasoning and of judging through *reason*, instead of falling victim to the illusions generated in the human soul by sense perceptions. This could be the case of "Heracles and the Ox-Driver" (Aesop. 291 P. [= Babr. 20]), which could reveal both Socrates' privileged relation to the Gods through *divination*, and his basic conviction that the best way to serve the Gods is to help ourselves by *taking care* of ourselves (scil.: of our ψυχή/νοῦς); in "The North Wind and the Sun" (Aesop. 46 P. [= Hsr.; 73 Ch.]), we could have an allusion to the power of persuasion exerted through reason, a fundamental principle to be considered valid not only for the interlocutors of Socrates in the *Phaedo*, but first and foremost for Socrates himself, who declares he is always persuaded only and exclusively by the λόγος that, subject to all the necessary examination and proof (ἐξετάζειν, ἔλεγχος), is revealed to be *the best*, whatever issue it may concern, and regardless of the listener's or reader's attachment to the speaker and reasoner, because of its *irrefutability* (cf. *Phaedo*, 89d1–91c5; *Crito*, 46b1–47a6).

The absolute necessity to give priority to rational judgment, and to give the highest importance to the goods of the soul, disregarding the apparent goods of the body, is a *leitmotif* of numerous fables, among which I limit myself to references to "Aesop at a Shipyard" (Aesop. 8 P. [= Hsr.; 19 Ch.]), "The Fox and the Leopard" (Aesop. 12 P. [= Hsr.; 37 Ch.]), "A Fox to a Sculpture" (Aesop. 27 P. [= Hsr.; 43 Ch.]), "The Swallow and the other Birds" (Aesop. 39 P. [= Hsr.; 350 Ch.]), and "The Rhetor Demades" (Aesop. 63 P. [= Hsr.; 96 Ch.]).

Much more challenging is the search for fable(s) that may have specifically inspired Socrates in his improvisation, which in the passage of the *Phaedo* culminates in the image of pleasure and pain transformed by the God into a two-headed being. My conjecture is that the material for Socrates' μῦθος could stem from four fables:

The first is "The Man and the Satyr" (Aesop. 35 P. [= Hsr.; 60 Ch.]),[6] which alludes to the presence in man of opposite behaviours, which can therefore hardly be

6 A man is said to have once befriended a satyr, and when winter came and it got cold, the man held his hands in front of his mouth and breathed on them. When the satyr asked him why he was doing this, he replied that he was warming his hands because of the cold. Later, however, a table was set out for them with a very hot meal. The man took it in his hand, brought it to his mouth in small bites and blew on it. When the satyr asked again why he was doing this, he said that he was letting the food cool down because it was very hot. Then the satyr said to him: "Unfortunately, I can no longer maintain

reconciled in the eyes of a satyr; and perhaps it is no coincidence that Socrates is identified with precisely a *Silenus* in the *Symposium* (221d1–222a6), a being who, beyond his insolent and anti-aesthetic appearance, is the only true bearer of λόγοι of divine beauty, which stand out above all other λόγοι for their stringent internal *consistency*. The fable of the encounter between the man and the satyr has thematic parallels with a twofold Socratic *leitmotif*, which pervades literally all the Platonic dialogues in which Socrates is the figure leading the discussion: first, the wholly 'atypical' character of Socrates, to which I will return later, and second, Socrates' art of confronting his interlocutor with his own inconsistency in thinking, speaking, and acting. With specific reference to the *Phaedo*, it is exactly the lack of coherence between speaking and acting that is one of the focal points of the whole 'dramaturgical prologue' of the dialogue: to speak as genuine philosophers do, also implies that one behaves as such, without fearing evils that are only apparent (cf. *Phd.* 61b8–68b6).[7]

The second relevant fable is "The Father and his Daughters" (Aesop. 94 P. [= 96 Hsr.; 300 Ch.]):[8] this fable, showing the impossibility of a *simultaneous* realization of contrary human desires, could be interpreted as a warning to accept the natural alternation of opposite conditions (as in the case of the alternation of seasons), which, according to a rational order that *unifies* them, allows the realization of both wishes, although at different times. In this second case, a very poignant parallel can be found in Plato's conception of the Good in the *Republic*, where τὸ ἀγαθόν is considered not only the ultimate source of knowledge and truth, but also the origin of beauty, virtue, and happiness, thus representing that supreme rational order that governs the alternation of opposites; it is emblematic that the sun is conceived as an ἀνάλογον of the good (all through the famous simile of the sun and the myth of the

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my friendship with you, my dear, because you let the hot and the cold come out of the same mouth." We too must avoid friendship with those whose attitude is ambiguous. (Transl. C.L.).

7 Between the lines, a seemingly 'aporetic' dialogue such as the *Lysis* considers friendship as only possible between like-minded people who are bound together by a desire for the good and the beautiful, i.e. in the ideal case, and in line with the *Phaedo*, those who are virtuous and lovers of wisdom (cf. 217a2–220b5).

8 A father had two daughters, one of whom he gave in marriage to a farmer and the other to a potter. After some time, he came to the farmer's wife and asked her how she was and how things were going for them. She replied that they had everything, she only prayed for one thing to the gods, that it would be winter and that it would start raining so that the vegetables could be watered. Not much later, he also came to the potter's wife and asked her how she was doing. She also said that she didn't really lack anything, she just prayed that the weather would stay good and that the sun would shine so that the clay would dry. So he said to her: "If you ask for good weather and your sister asks for winter rain, which one of you should I pray with?" It is the same with those who do unreconcilable things at the same time, they will of course be harmed in any case. (Transl. C.L.).

cave), being the cause of the alternation of the seasons (cf. 516b4–c2 and 517a8–c4). Shifting from this ethical-cosmological level to the anthropological one, another significant connection with the *Phaedo* surfaces: the pursuit of some expectation or other, some desire or aversion, relying on an opinion of what is best or worst without really knowing it, drags man into a condition of instability and ignorance of the reality of things, and so condemns him to unhappiness; only he who, availing himself of reason, clings to those things that are *not transitory* — again, these are knowledge and virtue — can escape from this abject condition (cf. *Phd*. 79c2–d7).

The third comparable fable is "Preposterous Leadership" (Aesop. 362 P. [= Babr. 134]):[9] the tale of the snake whose tail wants to replace the head in governing the animal, causing only misfortune, is emblematic of the need to leave the guidance of the human being to reason, the only component capable of safeguarding the unity of the whole and of orienting even the irrational components of character towards the good. This fable echoes another Socratic-Platonic *leitmotif*, that of ἀκρασία, i.e. the inner conflict between the desiring or appetitive (ἐπιθυμετικόν), the spirited (θυμοειδές), and the rational (λογιστικόν) aspects of the ψυχή: in the ideal case of the just soul, in which each of its parts practises the virtue that is proper to it under the aegis of reason, we have a perfect ἁρμονία, akin to that of a musical instrument; but when irrational elements predominate, the soul slips into an abyss of ignorance, injustice, and unhappiness (cf. *Resp*. 443b5–444e2; 588b1–592b7).

The fourth and last tale, "War and His Bride" (Aesop. 367 P. [= Babr. 70]),[10] is intriguing, because it refers to marriages that take place by *divine will*, the last in the series being the one between War and Insolence. Although these two natures are not opposite to each other, as in the case of pleasure and pain in our passage in

9 Once a snake's tail decided that the head ought no longer to go first and refused to follow its lead in creeping along. "Let it be my turn now", it said, "to lead the way." "Keep still", said the other members, "how can you lead us, poor wretch, without any eyes or nose, the means by which all living creatures move on their way and guide each limb?" However, they could not dissuade the tail from its purpose, and the rational part of the body succumbed to the irrational. Thereafter, the hinder parts ruled the foremost ones; the tail became the leader, dragging the whole body along in blind motion. When it fell into a hollow pit and bruised its spine on the sharp rocks, the tail, which had been so self-willed before, became submissive and turned to supplication saying: "Mistress head, save us, if you will. It was an evil strife that I ventured on, and evil has been the consequence. If you'll put me where I was at first I'll be more obedient and you'll not worry about getting into trouble again under my leadership." (Transl. Perry).

10 When the gods were marrying and each had been joined with a mate, after all the others came War, whose turn to choose was last in the drawing of the lots. He married Insolence, who alone was left for him to take. The love he felt for her was most unusual, so they say, and even now he follows everywhere she goes. Thus, let not Insolence ever come among the nations or cities of men, finding favor with the crowd; for after her, straightaway War will be at hand. (Transl. Perry).

the *Phaedo*, the *divine* nature of their *bond* implies that none of the two ever appears without also bringing the other along. While the link to the inseparability of pleasure and pain here is striking, the reference to the fact that their union is the result of a 'divine act' is much less obvious: on closer inspection, God intervenes to bind pleasure and pain together by the head, without being able to reconcile them, just as war and insolence are bound in a divine marriage without being annihilated; one might detect here a resonance with the relationship between reason and necessity, between νοῦς and ἀνάγκη, central to the Platonic cosmology of the *Timaeus*, and which at the microcosmic level, returning to the *Phaedo*, translates into reliance on the divine — in itself and in us — as that which has the power to raise man above the incessant play of opposites, by understanding their causes (cf. *Phd.* 62b1–63c7 for the conception that we are an ownership of the Gods, κτῆμα θεῶν).

It is obvious, though, that to bring out all the affinities of these fables with the Socratic-Platonic myth of the *Phaedo* in content and argumentation would require a detailed and systematic analysis of the Aesopic fable material, which, for the sake of brevity, I have only been able to mention here. But I would like to offer a few more words on a further, in my opinion even deeper layer, at which the essential similarities between Aesop and Socrates emerge, a layer that may reasonably have prompted Plato *to stage* the Socratic versification episode: this is the *meta-poetic* and *meta-dialogical* dimension of the impact exerted by Aesop and Socrates on their audience, meaning by 'audience' both the readership of the two authors and, in the case of the Platonic dialogues, the audience of figures present at the discussion and Socrates' dialogue partners.

If I am not mistaken, what the λόγοι and μῦθοι[11] of Aesop and Socrates have fundamentally in common is, in their reception, *the mixture of pleasure and pain*: the pleasure of listening to them, which attracts and enchants by binding its audience to them, is inseparably linked to the pain one feels in seeing oneself discovered, laid bare, in one's contradictions, which feed on vice, the fruit of ignorance.[12]

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11 I intentionally attribute here the use of both λόγοι and μῦθοι to both Socrates and Aesop, to avoid surreptitious splits that would go against Plato's intention to assimilate mythical-fable components into his philosophy, and would also collide with the ethical-intellectual message immanent to the Aesopic fable material. I refer to Bottini's chapter in this volume both for the terminological interchangeability of λόγος and μῦθος in the ancient tradition, and at the same time for their possible differentiation in terms of "semantic content" and the transposition of this into "literary narrative", respectively, as well as for the status of μῦθος as "quasi-λόγος", thus also capable of becoming a bearer of truth.

12 This *elenctic* undressing of one's interlocutor is a distinctive feature of Socratic διαλέγεσθαι, especially in the *Euthyphro*, the two *Hippias*, the *First Alcibiades*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Gorgias*. An exemplary case of the *coexistence* of the *pleasure* derived from the communion with Socratic λόγοι and

In this perspective, both Aesop and Socrates offer themselves to us, primarily, as two very lucid *anthropologists*, who put their finger right on the sore spot of human weaknesses. These inconsistencies of ours, as physiological manifestations of mortal human nature, are the source of incessant inner conflicts, just like the two beings in perpetual struggle in the tale told in the *Phaedo*. Secondly, the fact that these internal oppositions are subsequently "united by the head" through *divine intervention*, may mean that the Aesopic and Socratic λόγοι and μῦθοι, in the first instance, are capable of bringing these same contradictions up to the level of *consciousness* of a listener-reader who has even a minimal willingness to absorb and ponder them. In the second instance, "union by the head" may be suggestive of the fact that the human being is not without hope of recovery: a resolving of contradictions is possible, in the highly *intellectualistic* Aesopic-Socratic perspective, but only by definitively relinquishing the illusions generated by false opinions and leading a life oriented towards the attainment of virtue under the guidance of reason (ἀρετὴ μετὰ φρονήσεως; cf. *Phd.* 68b8–69d2).

However, one might ask: "Why, though, does Socrates improvise on Aesop nowhere other than in the *Phaedo*, whereas his argumentative style and method and its effects run through all the dialogues in which he is the protagonist like an Ariadne's thread?" I would guess that this happens because the link between pleasure and pain becomes emblematic of the *deepest contradiction* intrinsic to human nature: the pleasure of living and the pain of having to die, the love of life and the fear of death. And in a *pamphlet*, such as the *Phaedo*, in defence of philosophy and of the man who, in Plato's eyes, practised it in the most sublime way, Socrates, it becomes even more urgent to show that love of wisdom and fear of death cannot and must not go hand in hand, if one wants to behave as a true philosopher (*Phd.* 66b2).

4 Socrates' λέγειν in the *Phaedo* at the crossroads of μῦθος and λόγος

This second section of my paper has two closely interconnected goals, which I will therefore attempt to pursue at the same time: the first objective is to show that the recourse to Aesopic imagery plays a fundamental role not only at the very beginning of the *Phaedo*, but within the argumentative and dramaturgical structure of the whole dialogue. The second aim is to clarify that, contrary to the first impression

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the intolerable *pain* produced by listening to these same λόγοι in those who have betrayed themselves to chase only apparent goods is that of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (215a3–222b7).

conveyed by Socrates' claim that he does not consider himself a μυθολογικός, Plato here does not intend to draw a clear-cut demarcation between rational discourse and the narration of verisimilar fables, nor does he attempt to devalue the literary genre of fables as regards its potential to capture the core of philosophical truth.[13]

Plato's aim, in line with his urge to raise the figure of his master Socrates to an absolute *paradigm* of philosophical theory and practice, is rather to create, out of love for his philosophical life-master, *a new, common genre* that can synthesize both λόγος and μῦθος.[14]

To achieve this twofold purpose, I will focus, within the Platonic conception of λόγος in general, on the peculiarities of Socrates' λόγος in the *Phaedo*. A consideration of the poignancy of the Socratic λόγος in this context, observing it from a metadialogical perspective, will allow, on the one hand, to acknowledge Plato's complete assimilation as a philosophical writer of a fable template of Aesopic origin, and to highlight both its central role within the creation of the dramaturgical framework of the *Phaedo*, and its double significance within the rhetorical strategy adopted in the dialogue: on the one hand, the intensification of the effect of Socrates' discourse on those present and on the reader; in this very constellation, the Socratic λόγος reveals the possession of the rare gift of communicating both in the form of philosophical discourse or argumentation and in the form of mythical fable. On the other hand, the adaptation of the Aesopic-inspired μῦθος contributes to the production of a literary apology of Socrates as philosopher and as man, destined to remind us of his greatness and coherence for generations to come.

"What is it that the man said before his death? And how did he die?" (Τί οὖν δή ἐστιν ἅττα εἶπεν ὁ ἀνὴρ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; καὶ πῶς ἐτελεύτα, *Phd.* 57a5–6). With this question of Echecrates to Phaedo begins a part of the 'action', which will later lead, in the narrated dialogue, to the detailed account of the events that occurred in prison in Athens on the day of Socrates' death. To ask about the λόγος of Socrates, is to ask about the *central issue* of the dialogue, of even greater importance than its well-known theoretical contents, namely the proofs of the immortality of the soul and the even more popular Platonic theory of ideas.

Right before Socrates' death at the end of the dialogue, plenty of space and emphasis is given to two of his fundamental principles: the absolute necessity of the

13 Some of the reflections in this section are a further elaboration of Luchetti 2020, in which the analysis of the Socratic λόγοι in the *Phaedo* was, however, geared towards showing its connection to the idea of the Good and self-knowledge in the context of Platonic thought.

14 I find myself in perfect agreement with the methodological reflections and the overall approach of Zafiropoulos 2015. For a similarly non-conflicting approach to the relationship between λόγος and μῦθος, see also Dorter's commentary to the *Phaedo* 1982.

care of the soul, of the ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς (115b5–8);[15] and the identity, in the act of one's own dialoguing and bringing order into speeches, of the self with the dialogant/dialoguing-soul, not with the body that will soon be lifeless:[16]

> Γελάσας δὲ ἅμα ἡσυχῇ καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀποβλέψας εἶπεν· "Οὐ πείθω, ὦ ἄνδρες, Κρίτωνα, ὡς ἐγώ εἰμι οὗτος Σωκράτης, ὁ νυνὶ διαλεγόμενος καὶ διατάττων ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων, ἀλλ' οἴεταί με ἐκεῖνον εἶναι ὃν ὄψεται ὀλίγον ὕστερον νεκρόν, καὶ ἐρωτᾷ δὴ πῶς με θάπτῃ".
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 115c5–d2)

> Smiling quietly, and simultaneously turning his gaze to us, he said: "I cannot convince Crito, friends, that I am this Socrates who is now talking to you, putting each of the discourses in order, but he believes that I am the one he will shortly after see dead, and asks me how he should bury me."
>
> (Transl. C.L.)

In a much less conscious manner, it is Phaedo, at the very beginning of the dialogue, who reports to Echecrates the quite surprising (ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος, 58e1) and out-of-the-ordinary state of mind (ἀτεχνῶς ἄτοπόν τί μοι πάθος παρῆν, 59a4–5) generated in him by the presence of Socrates, who, though aware of his imminent death, not only did not show any sign of disturbance, but even appeared to be happy (εὐδαίμων). And in this disposition, his *character* and his λόγος are an inseparable *unity*:

> εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα, ὥστε μοι ἐκεῖνον παρίστασθαι μηδ' εἰς Ἅιδου ἰόντα ἄνευ θείας μοίρας ἰέναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενον εὖ πράξειν εἴπερ τις πώποτε καὶ ἄλλος.
>
> (Pl. *Phd.* 58e3–59a1)

> He appeared to me a happy man, O Echecrates, both in behaviour and in words, so serenely and nobly did he die; such that it aroused in me the vision of one who, though going to Hades, would not go there without a divine destiny, and that once he arrived there, he would be well, as never any other.
>
> (Transl. C.L.)

As we can see, what matters from the beginning to the end of the *Phaedo* is the inner condition of Socrates, which is inseparable from the dimension of his διαλέγεσθαι.

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15 For the crucial importance of the theme of soul-care, see especially *Ap.* 29d7–42a5 and *Alc. I* 127d9–129a1.

16 The separation, dissolution, and purification (χωρισμός, λύσις, κάθαρσις) of the soul from the body is the precondition of a right philosophizing in *Phd.* 64b7–c8 and especially 67c5–68b4. For the identification of the true self with the soul, cf. *Alc. I* 130c1–e6.

Therefore, repeatedly asking what Socrates said — Τί [...] ἐστιν ἄττα εἶπεν and πῶς ἐτελεύτα (57a5–6), and also further on in 58c6–7 τί ἦν τὰ λεχθέντα καὶ πραχθέντα [...]; and again in 59c7 τίνες φῂς ἦσαν οἱ λόγοι; — does not simply represent a literary *escamotage*, but rather responds to a precise communicative requirement of Plato: to catalyse attention from the very beginning of the *Phaedo* on the essential link between the *man* Socrates and his λέγειν.[17] It is a speech around which the entire dramaturgical and argumentative structure of the *Phaedo* is built and revolves.

To understand the scope of the operation carried out in the *Phaedo* — that is the fusion in Socrates, so to speak, of man and λόγος as an exemplary manifestation of the unity of philosophical theory and praxis — it is useful to carry out a brief reflection by conceptually taking a step backwards, as it were.

In the Platonic dialogues we are faced with at least two possible ways of considering λόγος in its relationship with reality: first we have a λόγος-image, capable at best of approximating a faithful representation of the nature of things, but still destined to establish with it no more than a relationship of similarity and dissimilarity.[18]

However, there is also a second dimension of λόγος, an 'ideal' dimension, so to speak, that of the λόγος-paradigm, which is an essential trait and the very structure of that nature that the λόγος-image attempts to reproduce.[19] This second vision, which has so far been given too little consideration among modern scholars, is attested in the emblematic case of the theorization of true rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, grounded both in the vision of λόγος as a living organism (cf. 264c2–5), and in the immense knowledge of the human soul that the philosopher-dialectician has at his disposal. The *ideal rhetor* cannot but coincide with the φιλόσοφος-διαλεκτικός: his λόγοι presuppose knowledge of the truth of what they express.

In cases such as these, λόγος ceases to be a mere "reproduction of [...]", to be mimetic, as it were, in a trivial sense, and becomes, while maintaining its discursive structure, an immediate interpretation of the intelligible order, acting as a creative force, as a *poiesis*, originating directly from its own source.

This λόγος-paradigm finds its highest expression in the Socratic λόγοι and διαλέγεσθαι, as Plato portrays them in his dialogues. The reason for this is that Socrates

17 See also Abricka 1982, 191–195.

18 Of this first conception we have the well-known examples in the *Cratylus* (cf. 388b13–391b7 and 431a7–433a2), in Book 5 of the *Republic* (cf. 479c3–5), and in the *Sophist* (cf. 262d2–263d4).

19 For the existence of divine as well as human λόγοι, see also *Phdr*. 259b5–d9. – To the best of my knowledge, the only modern interpreter who has investigated the Platonic conception of an ideal λόγος, with special regard to the link between language and dialectic in the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist*, is Mikecin 2016, 99–101, 110–113.

embodies the philosopher *par excellence*, not understood abstractly as a purely conceptual model, but as a *unity* of philosophy and life, ideal and concrete at the same time, a unity that Plato conveys to us in its unfolding. From my viewpoint, the most significant material in terms of an ability to present us Socrates' paradigmatic λόγος in its deep complexity and completeness is precisely the *Phaedo*.[20]

In the *Phaedo*, it is the imminent death of Socrates that amplifies the power of his λόγος, enhancing its emblematic character, which makes it different from any other, *unique*, and profoundly *atypical*. The clues of this radical otherness are to be found scattered throughout the dialogue.[21]

The first clue in chronological order, and the most significant due to its connection with the reference to Aesop, concerns the *effect* of the unity of Socrates with his λόγος on the audience: Phaedo (58e1), and with him all the co-participants in the event (59a1–b1), are seized by an astonishing and atypical feeling, by a θαῦμα and an ἀτοπία that become manifest precisely in that *mixture of pleasure and pain* that constitute the material of the fable of the two beings bound by the God by the head, recounted in an Aesopic context (58e1–59b4).[22]

We know from other dialogical contexts that the rare ability to amaze (θαυμάζειν) and be out of the ordinary, ἄτοπος, are essential traits of the man Socrates that are immediately reflected in his φιλοσοφεῖν, and that his λόγοι act so profoundly as to generate in his listeners exactly the same kind of extraordinary and marvellous state, which is the precondition for awakening in themselves a true

20 For the dialogues prior to the *Phaedo*, I wish to recall the latest work, published posthumously, of my first Maestro, Gabriele Giannantoni 2005. For a wide-ranging and stimulating analysis of the Socratic dialogue, which highlights its character as a philosophical practice par excellence, I limit myself here, among the most recent research, to a reference to Sassi 2015 and Napolitano Valditara 2018, both providing a rich and up-to-date bibliography.

21 The peculiar depth of the Socratic λογός in the *Phaedo* is further corroborated if we consider that, in terms of the dramaturgical framework of the dialogues in which Socrates is the protagonist or still plays a pivotal role, the *Phaedo*, precisely because of the events it narrates, is the last.

22 While most modern interpreters of the Platonic dialogues, and of the *Phaedo* in particular, focus their full attention on their theoretical core, it is marginalia such as these that give the measure of the philosophical and human splendour diffused by Socrates' presence, allowing the theoretical sections of the dialogues to be read at an even deeper level. – On the value in Platonic writings of seemingly insignificant details, see Schleiermacher's *Einleitung* with its famous thesis of the identity between form and content in the dialogues 1855, 5–36. For a divergent perspective on the overall interpretation of Platonic thought, but akin to this in terms of the emphasis on the dramaturgical framework of the dialogue for an accurate understanding of its philosophical content, see Szlezák 1985. – Zafiropoulos 2015, 13–22, likewise, makes these marginalia one of the cornerstones of his hermeneutic approach to the *Phaedo*.

'inner Socrates', a daimonic consciousness (δαίμων), which a genuine lover of wisdom cannot do without.[23]

If we carefully consider the condition of Phaedo and everyone present, the unusual mixture of pleasure and pain, the pleasure of listening to Socrates and talking philosophy with him as usual, and the pain that anticipates the imminent loss of the friend, a pain that hides within itself a good dose of self-pity (cf. 117c3–d1), we realize how much this attitude affects the course of the dialogue, due to its dangerously anti-philosophical character.

The death of the philosopher, experienced as an irreversible event, not only raises, both theoretically and practically, and both generally and individually, the question of the end of what is ordinarily called "life", constituting the premise of the question about the soul's immortality. Above all, it evokes a long line of personal fears and uncertainties that culminate dramatically in the conviction that, once Socrates is dead, no one will be able to soothe them (cf. 78a1–2) to prevent them from being projected onto λόγοι as the privileged instrument of the search for truth. The result of this is that, doubting the existence of a λόγος that is stable and true, the potential genuine philosophers run the risk of turning inexorably into "misologists" (μισόλογοι, 89d1 and cf. 89d1–90d7). The very high risk is therefore that the death of Socrates will turn into the death of philosophy itself.

Socrates' therapeutic action, the way in which he puts the principle of self-care into practice (θεραπεία ψυχῆς, 62d4, 64e6; ἐπιμέλεια ψυχῆς, 62b7, d2, d7, 107c2, 115b6), intervenes immediately: first in reflecting on the reciprocal implication of pleasure and pain at the bodily level, with the aim of emphasizing their transitoriness and scaling down their sphere of influence (cf. 60b3–c7); then, in showing their dangerousness insofar as they induce the soul to believe true what the body tells it to be true, distracting it, and, by making it a lover of the corporeal, estranging it from philosophy (cf. 83b2–e3).

Therefore, at a deeper level, the Aesopic template of which Socrates offers us a variation goes far beyond the limits of the reference with which the *Phaedo* began, being instead part of the *argumentative strategy* that pervades the dialogue *as a whole*. Socrates provides first and foremost an account of the immortality of λόγοι, and not only in the obvious sense in which the philosophical dialogue of those present and the interested reader is of course able to continue after his death.

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23 I have already mentioned the description of Socrates and its effects in Alcibiades' exemplary speech in the *Symposium*. For the famous daimonic sign, see the *Apology* (cf. 27b9–28a1; 31c4–32a3; 39e1–40c3) and *Hippias Major* (cf. 292c3–293e7). – On the 'daimonic consciousness' and its relevance for a systematic inquiry on the bond between Socrates and Aesop, see Zafiropoulos 2015, 66–73. On Socrates' eccentricity as an essential trait of the true philosopher, see Sassi 2015, 3–13.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates embodies, in first person, through his διάλογος, the defence of philosophy itself, with the aim of providing his audience and the reader with the tools to access it in turn. From a *protreptic* perspective, the path clearly indicated in the *Phaedo* is that of the mimesis of Socrates' paradigmatic λόγος, which means of the μίμησις Σωκράτους.[24] We can understand this very well by bearing in mind that the therapeutic aim of Socrates' λόγος in the *Phaedo* is primarily to generate the conditions for a διαλέγεσθαι that the soul can conduct itself with itself. The result of this λόγος is the unfolding for the psyche of the only perspective in life — both earthly life and the afterlife — that is in accordance with its nature: the life pursued according to virtue accompanied by intelligence (ἀρετὴ μετὰ φρονήσεως; 69a10, b3, b6, c2; 111b4; 114c7). Only Socrates' λόγοι are endowed with the power to lead the soul to its goal, to virtue that arises from intelligence, and thus to happiness, εὐδαιμονία (58e3; 81a6; 82a10, b4; 111a3, c3; 115d4).[25]

As a philosophical writer, Plato skilfully interweaves the literary genres of fable and philosophy, presenting us with a Socrates who, in his Aesopic-inspired improvisation in the *Phaedo* 60b1–c7, not only embodies the prototype of the philosopher who interprets fables and creates them in turn, but, on a dramaturgical level, literally *embodies* the very content of his own improvisation: it is precisely the psychological attitude of Socrates and his argumentative style, like a bridge astride literary genres, that produce the mixture of pleasure and pain which disorients and challenges his listeners (and readers), confronting them with their own human weakness, which in the *Phaedo* is expressed in the tension between an 'ordinary' life and a philosophical life.

5 Socratic λόγος as a synthesis of λόγος and μῦθος

But what kind of λόγος is Socrates' λόγος? The answer in the *Phaedo* is crystal clear: in pursuing his therapeutic aim, Socrates uses λόγος in all its semantic breadth: he

24 Ultimately, this is the fusion of Socratic διαλέγεσθαι and φιλοσοφεῖν that had already been announced in the *Apology*, in Socrates' wish to continue both of them even 'after death' (cf. 40e4–41c7; 37e3–38a8), and which here in the *Phaedo* is grasped in all its literary and theoretical depth. This is a point on which I find I distance myself from the overall thesis of Kurke 2006. There are indeed some contexts, such as the familiar one in the *Republic*, in which specific forms of mimesis are subjected to harsh criticism by Plato. In the constellation of the *Phaedo*, however, according to the *meta-dialogical* approach I have adopted here, it seems to me that the genre of μῦθος is perfectly in tune with Plato's main literary and philosophical concern, i.e. *the mimesis of Socrates*.

25 See also Blößner 2001.

speaks both as λογικός, using demonstrative arguments and outlining scientific methods of investigation (such as the hypothetical method, cf. 101c9–e3), and as μυθολογικός (although he initially declares that he is not, cf. 61a4–b8), narrating a beautiful myth "worthy of being heard" at the end of the dialogue (110b1, c4), and finally as a good enchanter, ἀγαθὸς ἐπῳδός (78a1 and cf. 114d6–7).

Even though Socrates himself, in his full awareness of the distinction between the two communicative modalities of λόγος and μῦθος (60c–d; 61b4), points out how inappropriate it would be for those in possession of insight (νοῦς) to take 'the whole' content (i.e. every single detail) of the great final eschatological myth literally (cf. 114d1–7), it seems clear that he in no way intends to argue for a clear-cut demarcation between the two forms of communication in terms of the superiority or inferiority of one over the other, as regards the ability of both to convey the core of philosophical *truth* (cf. 70b5–7; 77c6–78a9; 94d6–e1). The fact that Socrates had in mind from the outset both a scientific investigation and the narration of myths is made clear in 61e1–2, where he plans both to *inquire* and to *tell stories* about the journey and the sojourn (of the soul) in the beyond (διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ.).[26]

A marked separation, on the one hand between short discourse, logical-dialectical and scientific argumentation (βραχυλογία, διαλεκτική-ἐπιστήμη, σκέψις, λόγος), and on the other hand between long discourse, rhetorical argumentation, and mythical narration (μακρολογία, ῥητορική, μῦθος), is only marginally recognizable in the *Phaedo*. Far more evident and incisive are the overlaps, not to say exact coincidences, between the logical and mythological forms of communication. Therefore, it is more realistic and more correct to see in the Socratic discourse a higher communicative structure, an *ideal*, *eidetic* λόγος that stands above the differentiation μῦθος-λόγος as a higher *unity* and a *unifying narrative principle*.

As far as I can see, Plato creates a *new* genre, which is not that of philosophy as opposed to poetry or storytelling, nor does he intend to mark the definitive

26 Certainly, it would be necessary and desirable if one could succeed in establishing a clear distinction, within the recourse Plato makes of μῦθος, between species of it, so as to be able to verify which of them present elements of greater affinity with the Aesopic fable material, both in terms of form and content. Since I cannot go into the subject in depth here, my considerations here are of a general kind, and referring to the great final eschatological myth of the *Phaedo*, I am thinking of the interconnection between the fable-like character of its content and the ethical-intellectual message that Socrates' rhetorical art in narrating it conveys. An interconnection that in my opinion is very close to the intentions of Aesop's fables. For the extensive bibliography on λόγος and μῦθος in the Platonic dialogues, see Cerri 1991; Cürsgen 2002; Janka/Schäfer 2002. For their complementarity and the philosophical relevance of myth, among others, Gaiser 1984, 125–152. On the *Phaedo* in particular, see Krummen 2012.

overcoming of myth in rational reasoning, nor does this new genre set out to establish itself as a genre in competition with Aesop as a possible forerunner of Plato's mimetic prose.[27]

Like in the *Phaedrus* (cf. 259e1–260d9), we have, in the unfolding of the διαλέγεσθαι of the true philosopher Socrates, the most genuine expression of the *true art of rhetoric*, which only he who has oriented his life to the perennial search for truth and the Good is capable of exercising. In this kind of λόγος, logical argumentation, ἀπόδειξις, science, and μῦθος meet and mutually complement each other. Socrates, as the generative force of this highly productive λόγος, *poietic and mimetic* in the most sublime sense of the word, considers in each phase of the dialogue the dynamics of interaction with his interlocutors and their reactions, and establishes when and in what specific form to transmit the core of his philosophical message.

Socrates is a good fear-enchanter, an ἀγαθὸς ἐπῳδός (for the beautiful image of the "little child" in the soul in need of reassurance, cf. *Phd*. 77d5–78a9), because his διαλέγεσθαι is a perpetual bewitchment,[28] an ἐπῳδή that, *transcending* the distinction between logical and mythical narrative form, is simultaneously immanent to both his speaking as λογικός and as μυθολογικός.

Socrates's λόγος, therefore, overcomes that lower level of mimesis, that of the λόγος-image, irremediably dissimilar from what it wants to signify and therefore potentially susceptible to incessant variations. This kind of λόγος, in fact, is still *detached* from the soul that generates it, while the paradigmatic λόγος of Socrates, elevated by Plato to the only true ποιητής, springs directly — and herein lies its power of persuasion and enchantment — from a soul that understands and constantly practises in first person what it considers to be the highest Good, μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, φιλοσοφία as the highest music (μεγίστη μουσική, 61a3–4), showing us all, I would say, the way to attain it ourselves.

Plato, as we can see, consequently resorts to the Socratic improvisation on an Aesopic fable pattern as a *leitmotif* that runs through the entire *Phaedo*, which enables him to let Socrates pronounce, in first person, the core message of the dialogue: the need to think and act in accordance with intelligence as the only possible dimension of overcoming human contradictions.

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27 Let us not forget that the *Phaedo* is one of the three dialogues, alongside the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, in which Plato makes massive use of Orphic-Dionysian and, above all, Eleusinian religious content, hinging core theoretical themes precisely on their respective foundation myths. For this background in mystery religion, impressive in the *Phaedo*, see especially Graf 1974, Alt 1982, Kingsley 1995, and Lavecchia 1999.

28 For Socrates as Asclepiades, cf. in addition to *Phd*. 118a6–8, also *Phdr*. 270c1–e5 and *Chrm*. 155e5–157d7.

I would be tempted to read, in this heartfelt invitation to give an ethical orientation to human life, conveyed through a discursive and narrative structure in which the philosophical and fable genre come together, the Platonic equivalent of the *fabula docet*.

6 Conclusion

To conclude this analysis, I wish, while continuing to hold a Platonic viewpoint, to draw on the overarching topic of genre, addressing more explicitly the question of the interplay between philosophical writing and fable. This issue can be approached by raising two questions, the first of which concerns the influence of philosophical writing on fable, and the second the functions that fable fulfils in philosophical writing.

Starting with the first question and contextualizing it in the *Phaedo*, we can follow the path from an initial juxtaposition between λόγος and μῦθος (*Phd*. 61b3–5) to their interchangeability, resulting from the assimilation of the Aesopic-inspired pattern of the bond between pleasure and pain within the dramaturgical framework of the dialogue, up to the overlapping of μῦθος into λόγος, stigmatized by a Socrates speaking simultaneously as λογικός and μυθολογικός. I would therefore be inclined to think, on the one hand, that Plato attributes to the fable genre the same capacity of *truth-telling* characteristic of λόγος — more exactly, that he credits it with possessing a λόγος of its own — and, on the other hand, that he resorts to mythical fictionalization to transpose the philosophical conceptual core into a narrative form not only didactically more accessible, but also more incisive in its psychological effect on the listener/reader. If my cursory reconstruction is correct, it is reasonable to assume an influence from Platonic philosophy, especially in relation to its communicative modalities, on the literary genre of fable.[29]

As for the second question, it seems to me to emerge clearly from the *Phaedo* how the philosophical genre benefited from the fable genre: from a *meta-dialogical*

29 I agree here completely with Bottini, who in his analysis of the λόγος-μῦθος relationship in Babrius, in connection with the myth of Cronos' era in Plato's *Statesman*, highlights the presence of λόγος, with which Babrius'μῦθοι would be imbued, even beyond the limits of the *fabula docet*, thus bringing to light a process of mythification of λόγος itself. An issue that would merit further investigation is the Platonic use of μῦθος as representative of the highest manifestation — both in form and content — of rational knowledge (λόγος), namely intuitive, noetic knowledge (νόησις-νοῦς). I have begun to analyse this phenomenon in a philosophical setting in a study of the *Phaedrus* (Luchetti 2023).

perspective, the recourse to mythical-fable as a communicative tool of Aesopic provenance enabled Plato to enhance the *depth* and *impact* of his philosophical message by embedding it in an *apologetic-didactic* context, tailor-made to honour the Master Socrates.[30]

To conclude: in offering to those present and to his readers a charming variation on fable patterns inspired by the Aesopic tradition, Socrates 'practises' from the very beginning of the *Phaedo* his διαλέγεσθαι as the privileged instrument of the ἐπιμέλεια and θεραπεία ψυχῆς. By setting before our eyes the image of the two serpents tied by the head, the head clearly becomes the symbol of the Socratic διάλογος, performed in the *Phaedo*, as the only practice able *to unify* the oppositions that drive the soul into conflict with itself, reconciling it with itself, and to quell the fears that, by dominating it, draw it away from philosophy.

If I am right, this shows us that Aesop in the *Phaedo* does not represent a purely literary device, condemned to be annihilated in Plato's creation of the genre of philosophy understood as superior to and purified of mythical issues. If I have correctly interpreted the Platonic intention to create, out of love for Socrates, a *new kind* of λόγος, an *ideal* λόγος, *synthesizing* λόγος and μῦθος, the presence of Aesop must rather suggest a complete *assimilation* of the narrative models of his fables, such as those that Socrates claimed to have had at hand, with the aim of making them a fundamental, structural component of Socrates' paradigmatic λόγος.[31]

In line with Plato's wish to gift us the *Phaedo* as a literary monument in memory of Socrates and, simultaneously, a defence of philosophy, it also becomes clear that, just as in the *Phaedrus* the ideal rhetor is revealed to be the philosopher-dialectician, so in the *Phaedo* it is the *true* philosopher, λογικός and μυθολογικός at once, who reveals himself to be the true "fabulator".

30 In this contribution, for the sake of brevity, I have mainly focused on the influence of the Aesopic-inspired mythologeme on the *Phaedo*'s dramaturgical framework and contents, considering these in Plato's meta-dialogical perspective as a philosophical writer. It is my conviction, however, that a broader investigation of the *Phaedo* would reveal how the significance of the μῦθος — which takes its cue from the link between the opposites of pleasure and pain — also strongly affects what at a superficial glance would appear to be the least mythical and by far the most logical part of the dialogue, dedicated to the famous demonstrations supporting the soul's immortality; these, without exception, all unfold around the relationship between opposites (ἐναντία).

31 Of course, it would be interesting to systematically sound out the Platonic dialogues and Socratic literature (Xenophon, the Minor Socratics), to ascertain to what extent Socrates or other characters employ fables, anecdotes, or similar in their argumentation. A striking, but still to be investigated recourse to an image of a fable-like being is one to which I have referred before, namely the chimera as an image of the human soul in Book 9 of the *Republic* (cf. 588b1–592b7).

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