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Le dialogue socratique. By Livio Rossetti. Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, Collection 'Encre Marine', 2011. Pp. 292. €35.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-2-35088-041-9.

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This collection of eight previously published essays forms a well-chosen introduction to the highly original approach to Socratic studies of Livio Rossetti. Five of these recent papers were originally issued in French, while the others are now translated from Italian. Often developing his own earlier work, Rossetti proposes provocative hypotheses on several fronts: the origin and nature of the Socratic dialogue; Socrates the historical personage; the origin of 'philosophy' as a profession; the workings of Socrates' (and Plato's) macro-rhetorical strategy, especially its destructive side.¹

1. 'Le dialogue socratique *in statu nascendi*.' Seeking to reconstruct the matrix out of which the Socratic Dialogue emerged, Rossetti first tackles *quantity*. Counting single titles attributed to upwards of fourteen followers of Socrates, plus other 'dialogical unities' within larger works like Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Rossetti arrives at 300 or more—an average of *a new Socratic dialogue every month for a quarter century* (32, Rossetti's emphasis). We have evidence of Socrates as a character in only eleven works of 'minor Socratics' (33), but Rossetti infers the existence of other, unknown Socratic dialogues from stories that crop up after the fourth century. He wisely cautions that we may infer a lost Socratic dialogue behind such material only if the story is a) about Socrates, b) independent of known dialogues, and c) not likely to be a later fabrication (34-37). Granting Rossetti's assumptions, his total is plausible, although we still do not know how widely these works circulated.

About *origin*, Rossetti proposes the radical hypothesis that the Socratic Dialogue developed, not out of comedy or mime, from which genres it presents important differences, but out of two tendencies within the Socratic circle. First, Socrates had standardized his protreptic and elenctic modes of discourse, so that followers could and did imitate them. Second, Socrates enjoyed recounting some of his notable conversations (*Pl. Prt.* 310a5-7), which his followers rehashed with him and even wrote up (*Tht.* 142a-143c). Assuming that the shock of Socrates' execution gave his followers motives to write, their postulated practice of learning and recounting those conversations (cf. e.g. *Smp.* 172-173) becomes Rossetti's 'missing link' in the causal chain behind the Socratic Dialogue (49). This hypothesis is attractive but not sufficient, for 1) desire to impart verisimilitude can explain Plato's delineation of his narrator's 'sources' (as it does also for the *Parmenides*); 2) Plato's brilliant fiction interacts with various literary genres. Rossetti may be right about the very first dialogues, though, if we can believe that Simon the Cobbler took notes (Diogenes Laertius ii 122).

2. 'L' *Euthydème* de Xénophon.' Socrates does little with micro-rhetoric, or adornment of discourse. He is however a master of macro-rhetoric, i.e. an overall strategy of shaping

communication to make it persuasive. Applying communication theory to *Memorabilia* iv 2, Rossetti shows how Socrates' destruction of Euthydemus' false conceit of knowledge serves as a paradigm of Socrates' 'acting like Socrates' (93). The first procedure of Socrates' macro-rhetoric is *formatting*: preparing the listener by weakening initial reluctance and implanting the idea that certain (oppositional) responses are objectionable. Socrates 'formats' Euthydemus by criticizing the goal of reading for wisdom and later by asking friendly questions, which give the youth the illusion of control of the conversation. The second procedure of Socrates' macro-rhetoric is *saturation*: breaking down the recipient's critical distance with a flood of communication. Socrates effects saturation by analogies and counterexamples that use up his interlocutor's mental capacity. The saturation of Euthydemus is *undeserved* because Socrates prevails by superior communicational knowledge, not by good arguments, trading on distinctions that are second nature to him but unfamiliar to interlocutors (80). Our 'horizon of expectation' prevents us from noticing Socrates' deceptive and dominant sides (81). Nevertheless, against Vlastos, Rossetti also accents the 'doing-good' in Socrates' rhetoric, which aims at Euthydemus' conversion (91). He concludes that Xenophon, as also often Plato, has a *metacognitive* objective, i.e. to promote, not a doctrine, but complex reflection—here on traps that can lie behind statements (99).

3. 'Savoir imiter c'est connaître: le cas de *Mémorables* III 8.' Rossetti's explication of Aristippus' attempt to beat Socrates at his own elenctic game has two aims: to defend Xenophon as a writer of philosophy and to enhance our understanding of Socrates' 'standard' elenctic procedure. For Rossetti, this mini-dialogue accommodates both aims because it expressly claims to describe Socrates' way of refuting, providing evidence about the historical personage (106-107). Features that Rossetti extracts as typical of Socrates' 'standard' procedure are: seizing control via questions and pronouncements; counterexamples that exploit the *secundum quid*; refusal to 'play by the rules' when refusal suits his purpose. Rossetti adds that modern 'hagiography' errs by ignoring the 'remarkable authority' that Socrates wields in the dialogues (116 n. 2). When the narrative veers onto the topic of urban buildings (iii 8.8-10), Rossetti admits that this insertion of what he takes as Xenophon's own views washes out Socrates' usual traits, giving us the 'banal' Xenophon on the heels of the 'lively, original, and penetrating' Xenophon we have just been reading (117-118). Still, Xenophon's skill in portraying someone as imitating Socrates' methods is not negligible (119).

4. 'L' *Euthyphron* comme événement communicationnel.' Rossetti argues convincingly that Socrates' procedure of eliciting Euthyphro's interest and confidence, then challenging his beliefs, and finally blocking him in *aporia* through analogies and counterexamples was standard for the historical philosopher, for we see it in all extant Socratic writers. Search for the well-calibrated definition, on the other hand, appears almost exclusively in Plato. Rossetti concludes that Socrates had used the 'What is X?' question when challenging someone's values, but Plato made it a leading theme and honed its attendant logical apparatus (137-140).

Rossetti's analysis of the conversation shows Socrates—and Plato behind him—applying communicational procedures (cf. above on 2. and 3.) in a way that verges on eristic. For example, he notes that in 10a-11b, Socrates' argument is a *non sequitur* because his analogies do not

establish the conclusion (174); a ‘carried thing’ does not have an intrinsic quality that attracts carriers, but a ‘loved thing’ has an intrinsic quality that attracts lovers. Rejecting the popular expedient of explaining away flaws as Plato’s invitations to us to reflect more deeply, Rossetti deems it probable that here the ‘falsely reassuring effect of the ensemble’ of communication has masked these lapses, not only from readers—whose reactions Plato manipulates—but from ‘Plato *himself!*’ (177, his emphasis). I do not agree, however, that Socrates at 6d1-4 misrepresents Euthyphro’s first definition as merely a singular case, or that this matter has gone unnoticed (173; cf. A. Nehamas, ‘Confusing Universals and Particulars in Plato’s Early Dialogues’, *RMeta* 29 [1975] 287-306 at 291-293). Conversely, Rossetti could have confronted Socrates’ equivocation on ‘because’ (he does not cite S. Marc Cohen, ‘Socrates on the Definition of Piety: *Euthyphro* 10A-11B’ *JHPH* 9 [1971] 1-13).

5. ‘Le ridicule comme arme entre les mains de Socrate et de ses élèves.’ Rossetti argues that by making an interlocutor look and feel foolish, Socrates seeks to destroy his convictions in order to make way for new ones. He credits this element of irony to the historical Socrates, since we see it in Aeschines of Sphettos and Xenophon as well as early Plato, while it disappears from Plato when he diverges from ‘the mental universe of his master’ (198). Rossetti makes insightful observations about the combination in Socrates of verbal aggression, typical of Greece’s competitive culture, *and* desire to bring others to improve their lives (210). He calls for more research into verbal aggression in drama and orators as well as Socratic dialogues, since the dialogue effectively replaced tragedy as an active genre and replaced comedy’s naming of individuals (212). I note only that individuals in Socratic dialogues are generally no longer living; unlike in Old Comedy, ridicule is wholly *portrayed*.

6. ‘La rhétorique de Socrate.’ Rossetti effectively restates his long-standing contention that Socrates’ discourse counts as rhetoric, for with self-effacement, Socrates does the job of rhetoric without being noticed, setting up and dominating the flow of communication (222). The study of macro-rhetorical procedures like *formatting* and *saturation* (cf. 2. above), which we see in Aeschines of Sphettos, Plato, and Xenophon, opens an unjustly neglected route to the historical Socrates. Rossetti compares and contrasts to good effect Gorgias’ and Socrates’ ways of achieving saturation: both string together units of communication—paradoxical arguments vs. counterexamples—too fast for audiences to catch their flaws, but Gorgias wins at most intellectual admiration, while Socrates addresses the whole person and his moral beliefs (239).

Rossetti points out that Socrates’ rhetoric entails that of the Socratic writers, especially Plato. I would have welcomed discussion of the puzzle, why Plato portrays Socrates acting ‘like Socrates’ with uncomprehending or recalcitrant interlocutors but does not portray the conversion of any lasting follower of Socrates.

7. ‘La côté inauthentique du dialoguer platonicien.’ Rossetti sets out the principles that he sees in Plato’s macro-rhetoric, which we saw him apply to the *Euthyphro* in 4. above. He contends that when we read a Platonic dialogue, we play in a gamed system in which almost every statement is qualified on several levels by its contextualization. Although he faults the dialogical, analytic and esotericist approaches for focusing on only one level—admittedly, different ones—Rossetti hails today’s spreading recognition of what he terms the

'communicational filter' within the Platonic text, which envelops a mix of messages in a subtle and insidious communicational flux (263). Rossetti seeks to unmask how Plato's macro-structures lead us to receive the arguments with biases already instilled by features of presentation that we do not notice: e.g. qualified assent or, often, ready assent by interlocutors; formulae of transition (including the proleptic 'this'); authorization for Socrates to leave out elaboration; qualifications like 'to the best of our ability'; the implicit and flattering suggestion that we are Socrates' collaborators. As a result, the weakness of some of Socrates' moves eludes even specialists, let alone his interlocutor. Rossetti urges us to *mistrust* Plato (259) and work on methods for distilling his thought from his very refractory material (263). I only wish Rossetti had also grappled with how, or whether, we can distill *any* Platonic views from what we must acknowledge as fiction. For Rossetti's take on why weak arguments occur, cf. above on 4.

8. 'Les socratiques "premiers philosophes" et Socrate "premier philosophe".' Pointing out rightly that the 'Pre-Socratics' would not have recognized themselves as 'philosophers', Rossetti identifies Socrates and his followers as the first to use 'philosophy' to designate a discipline or profession, and the first to identify themselves as 'philosophers'. In my view, this is the weak essay in the collection. Rossetti dismisses the Hippocratic *De Vetere Medicina* 20, where 'philosophy' refers to a discipline practiced by Empedocles and others and distinct from medicine, merely because it is a singular occurrence. Mark J. Schiefsky, who dates *VM* to the late fifth century BCE or early fourth, notes that this passage 'testifies to a crucial moment in the *invention* (his emphasis) of philosophy as a distinct kind of intellectual activity' (*Hippocrates. On Ancient Medicine*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, 300). Rossetti does acknowledge Schiefsky elsewhere (*Anais de filosofia clássica* 51 [2010] 41-59 at 47-48) but reaches different conclusions. Did *Socrates* come across the usage in Ionia? Ion of Chios said he went there with Archelaus (D.L. ii 23). Further, disagreeing with Burkert's contention that these usages were coined in Plato's Academy, Theodor Ebert argues from Socrates' calling Evenus a philosopher that Pythagoreans were already applying the term to themselves ('Why Is Evenus Called a Philosopher at *Phaedo* 61c?' *CQ* 51 [2001] 423-434). As Rossetti says, more work is needed on the birth of philosophy in Greece (277).

This attractively bound book contains few typos. A foreword by François Roustang summarizes the contents and their impact, and a bibliography and index of names close the volume. Specialists of different theoretical orientations will discover in these essays valuable perspectives for their own work on Socratic studies.

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¹ Much of Rossetti's work can be accessed at <http://www.rossettiweb.it/livio/>.