

David M. Johnson
Socrates and Theodote: *Memorabilia* 3.11

Why, in the course of defending Socrates, does Xenophon show him in conversation with the hetaira Theodote? Commentators ancient (Athenaeus 5.220ff.) and modern (Delatte, commentary on *Memorabilia* 3) have been troubled for Socrates' morals. But Xenophon, a man of the world, meant the passage to be humorous (Breitenbach, *RE*) in a way more characteristic of his *Symposium* (see Huss, *Symposium* commentary and in *AJP* 1999). Is it anything more than that? The most telling part of the joke is that Theodote is in many ways comparable to Socrates, as both of them are in the same business: seduction (cf. Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 85ff.). Of course Socrates' seductions are intellectual, while Theodote's have a healthy corporeal element. But I will suggest that the comparison with Theodote teaches us at least one thing we might not otherwise know: Socrates, like Theodote, makes sparing use of his charms in order to increase his companions' desire for what he has to offer.

Neither Plato nor Xenophon ever explicitly compares Socrates to an hetaira, but both make free use of erotic language to describe Socrates, and speak in positive terms of the most famous hetaira of them all, Aspasia (Plato, *Menexenus*; Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.6.36, *Oec.* 3.14; cf. the *Aspasia* of Aeschines, with Ehlers 1966, 107ff.). Plato's Socrates several times claims that his specialty is *ta erotika* (*Symposium* 177d; cf. *Lysis* 211e, *Theages* 123b). Xenophon's Socrates is also erotic (*Mem.* 2.6.28, 4.1.2ff.), and in Xenophon's *Symposium* he prides himself on his procuring or pimping (*mastropeia*: 4.56ff.), and is said to ply the art not only for others but also on his own behalf (8.5).

In our passage Socrates charmingly strips Theodote of the various conceits that maintain her status as an hetaira rather than a *porne*, a common prostitute (cf. Davidson, *Courtesans & Fishcakes*, 120ff.). By the end of our passage it is not Socrates who wants to visit Theodote but Theodote who wants to visit Socrates: as Socrates elsewhere begins as the lover but becomes the beloved, so here he starts as the would-be customer but ends up as the hetaira, with his own suite of *philai*, his companions, whom he attracts with various love charms. Unlike Theodote, however, Socrates teaches his friends how to attract friends of their own: this is one important respect in which he is her superior.

Theodote consorts with those who persuade her to do so, and not, as a common prostitute, with anyone who can pay her price. Rather similarly Socrates, unlike the mercenary sophists, picks and chooses his companions (*Mem.* 1.6.3). Theodote lives in high style but without traditional means of support: she relies on her *philois*. Socrates, of course, prides himself on his poverty, but he too lacks any observable means of support, and can count upon the generosity of his friends (*Oec.* 2.8; Plato, *Apology* 38b).

Much of Socrates' advice to Theodote closely parallels the advice he gave about winning friends to Critobulus earlier in the *Memorabilia* (2.6). But certain elements are most closely paralleled by Socrates' own practice. Theodote should act differently in different cases: those who are full of themselves she should lock out, but those who truly care for

her she should favor with all her soul. Above all, she must be careful to allow her friends to fulfill their desire for her only when their desires are at a peak.

Socrates too went after different sorts of would-be companions through different means (*Mem.* 4.1.3-4.2.1), depending upon whether they prided themselves on their natures, wealth, or learning. His students needed to be good learners, but also to possess a great desire for learning (*Mem.* 4.1.2; Morrison 1994). In *Memorabilia* 4.2, Xenophon shows us Socrates' intellectual seduction of Euthydemus; only after first teasing, enticing, and humiliating Euthydemus does Socrates reveal himself to him. He thus first ensures that Euthydemus has a deep and lasting desire for what he has to teach before he gives him the goods. Xenophon clearly enough shows that many questioned Socrates' willingness to reveal himself by saying that Socrates did not hide what he thought (*Mem.* 4.4.1 cf. 4.2.40; 4.7.1; Plato, *Symposium* 215bff.).

When Socrates and his companions arrived, Theodote was revealing only as much as is fine to the painter doing her portrait. Does Xenophon do the same in his portrait of Socrates? The subtlety of his portrayal of Socrates' encounter with Theodote ought to suggest to us that his Socrates may have hidden depths Xenophon thought it improper to call our attention to in an apologetic work. Thus Xenophon's Socrates, who is so often thought to be the essence of banality, may have more to him than meets the eye. One such depth is Socrates' hiddenness itself, which Xenophon does reveal, but only under the veil of Theodote. Morrison, Donald. 1994. "Xenophon's Socrates as a Teacher." 181-208 in *The Socratic Movement*, Paul A. Vander Waerdt, ed. Ithaca.

Ehlers, Barbara. 1966. *Eine vorplatonische Deutung des Sokratischen Eros: Der Dialog Aspasia des Sokratikers Aischines*. Zetemata 41. Munich.

David M. Johnson
Classics Section, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
SIU Carbondale
mjohnson@siu.edu

<http://www.siu.edu/~dfl/classics/Johnson/HTML/dmj.htm>