

SOCRATICA III

A Conference on Socrates, the Socratics, and Ancient Socratic Literature

An International Symposium
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per gli Studi Filosofici and the International Plato Society

www.socratica.eu

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Socratica III is part of a process that began in 2003 with a conference held in Aix-en-Provence, that went on in 2005 and 2008 with the previous *Socratica* sessions held in Senigallia and Naples, and that is likely to continue with further comparable conferences. Their *ratio* is to be found in the developments of the research on the complex world serving as a context for Plato and his dialogues.

Beyond the State of the Art

The young history of these lines of research is centered on Giannantoni's *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* (1990), since this sylloge concluded a period devoted to re-collect and re-edit the fragments of the 'other' Socratics and the so-called 'Socratic schools'. Then a rather long period of rumination followed, which the scientific community needed to become familiar with such a great an amount of textual units. Interestingly enough, Giannantoni's collection of the Socratic fragments is now being reorganized, translated and commented in Spanish, French, and English, while other equipes working on the Socratics have been formed in Slovakia and Russia. In the meanwhile, substantial advancements have been reached on the *Socratica* of Xenophon. Equally worth mentioning is the fact that in few years two *Companions to Socrates* and a remarkable survey on "the people of Plato" have been published in the United States.

This revival is not merely quantitative. It entails a new consciousness in studying Socrates and the Socratics, and an approach to the 'Socratic question' which radically departs from widely held lines of interpretation. The focus of the present studies is not, as it used to be in previous times, on the 'formal order' of the Socratics, that is on their 'schools' and the doctrines peculiar to each. It is instead on the theoretical issues that these thinkers were able to develop in a fierce struggle among themselves. Or, more precisely, on the dynamic *context* in which these issues were posed, discussed, and eventually fixed in 'dogmatic' theories.

Importance of the Present Socratic Studies for Plato

What seems to emerge is, indeed, a comprehensive new trend which provides powerful magnifying lenses for exploring the world lying around Plato.

Some aspects of this trend can be singled out:

1. A strong distinction is being established between studying the Socratics, i.e. the direct pupils of Socrates and their work, and the so-called 'Socratic schools', since the first were not just contemporaries of Plato, but his travelling companions and primary interlocutors, while the schools pertain to the times of Aristotle or later.

2. The whole flux of the *Sokratikoi logoi* is being studied as such, as the output of a dozen of direct pupils of Socrates.

3. The ‘other’ Socratics are no more considered ‘minor’ by definition, but are becoming the object of a multifarious research. Especially Xenophon has been largely redeemed from his widely shared condemnation as a stupid or at least a much less talented cousin of Plato. As a consequence, his Socratic works are being increasingly reconsidered and even, in some scholars, studied *per se* for the first time, instead of being analysed only in order to clarify up to which point they were indebted to Plato.

4. As a consequence, the ‘other’ Socratic writers are now being taken into careful account;

a) Aeschines and Phaedo, because they happen to offer a testimony on Socrates independent from Plato’s despite the reduced amount of textual evidence;

b) Euclides and Antisthenes, because they happen to play a more important role as interlocutors both of the late Plato and the young Aristotle, than as an independent evidence about Socrates.

This approach may be of great help for understanding Plato. Recent studies have shown the importance of looking around the *Corpus Platonicum*, that is to provide the framework within which its issues can be contextualized. It is a well-known fact that when Plato started writing his dialogues, presumably shortly after the death of Socrates, his elder companions enjoyed a far better status. Fifty years later the situation had completely changed, as Plato’s position was undisputed. To understand this abrupt change it is necessary to suppose that a process took place in which Plato gradually established himself as the leading Socratic. It is very likely that in this period of time his ideas challenged those of his companions, bringing about a powerful philosophical struggle. Understanding the core of these ideas, that is their genesis, development, and doctrinal outcome means therefore acknowledging the context in which they emerged and eventually succeeded to be acknowledged as the most prominent. This means that a closer look at the theoretical issues of the Socratics around Plato is useful for a true and full understanding of Plato’s own ideas. Or, to put it in another way, that the ultimate value of these ideas can be better appreciated if Plato’s antagonists are as well acknowledged in their philosophical height. Thus a proper study of Plato’s context is likely to tell us much about Plato himself, both influencing and enriching our way of looking at his philosophical issues. We can learn a lot if we stop isolating his dialogues from the testimonies of all the other Socratics.

But not only this. Dealing with Socratic literature from a ‘holistic’ perspective entails extending research on other major literary phenomena of the time which are also helpful for providing an enlightening framework for a better understanding of the whole of which Plato was so prominent a portion.

Aims of the Conference

Socratica III is meant to mirror and, at the same time, to enhance the new trend I have just outlined. This should happen:

1. by analysing the literary context in which the texts of the Socratics are framed. This entails opening the perspective to all the literary genres of the second half of the fifth century and of the first half of the fourth century which have direct or indirect connections with the Socratic literature:

a) the speculative and interpretative issues posed by the multifaceted representations of Socrates by the Comics and by the problems arising from the texts of the Sophists, with special attention to Aristophanes and Isocrates (a whole session will be devoted to the latter).

b) the literary phenomena arising from such representations, in polemic or in adherence to the “protophilosopher” Socrates.

2. by examining the ‘intellectual movement’ around Socrates, the focus being mainly on Plato, Xenophon, Antisthenes, and Aeschines (moreover, a whole talk will be devoted to a Socratic we know little about, that is Chaerephon). Many issues will be studied in a cross-cutting perspective, i.e. looking at how they gradually developed within and outside the Socratic circle. Among them the following ones:

a) Apologetics (in Gorgias, Euripides, Xenophon, Plato)

- b) Politics (in Xenophon, Plato, Isocrates)
- c) Tyranny (in Xenophon, Plato)
- d) Nomos (in Aristophanes, Plato)
- e) Misology (in Sophists, Plato)
- f) Eudaimonia (in Xenophon)
- g) Eusebeia (in Xenophon, Plato)
- h) Eros (in Xenophon, Aeschines, Plato)
- i) Enthousiasmos (in Aeschines, Plato)
- j) Parrhesia (in Antisthenes, Aeschines, Plato)
- k) Protreptics (in Xenophon, Aeschines, Plato)
- l) Spoudaiogeloion (in Comedy, Plato)
- m) Teleology (in Xenophon, Plato).

3. by tackling the further development of major ‘Socratic’ issues in Late Antiquity, from Aristotle up to the Stoic, Neoplatonic and Arab traditions:

- a) Dialectics (in Antisthenes, Aristotle)
- b) Virtue (in Aristotle and Aristotelian doxography)
- c) Language theory (in the Cyrenaics, opposed to Aristotle)
- d) Epistemology (in the Stoics, opposed to Plato)
- e) Wisdom (in the Neoplatonics)
- f) Law and Kingship (in Medieval Arab literature).

4. by focusing on the major publications which appeared on Socrates and the Socratics between 2010 and 2011. These works play a crucial role in subverting many commonplaces of the ‘Socratic question’, and to comment rather extensively upon them is, at the same time, an opportunity for assessing the state of the art of the present studies.

The objective of this conference is far more than a desideratum. It is the attempt to establish a new way of dealing with the philosophical and non-philosophical Greek literature of the V and IV centuries B.C. Its scope is to shed light on Socrates and the Socratics from different angles, in order to provide the broad context within which Plato’s ideas originated and developed.

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