

A NEW TREND IN SOCRATIC STUDIES

Socratica III is part of a process that began in 2003 with a conference held in Aix-en-Provence, developed in 2005 and 2008 into *Socratica* sessions in Senigallia and Naples, and will likely continue with further comparable conferences. The *ratio* of each is 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 lines of research pursued at these conferences come, directly and indirectly, out of Giannantoni's *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* (1990). This collection concluded a period devoted to re-collecting and re-editing the fragments of the 'other' Socratics and the so-called 'Socratic schools'. A long period of rumination followed during which the research community became familiar with so much material. Giannantoni's collection of the Socratic fragments is now being reorganized, translated and commented upon in Spanish, French, and English, and other teams working on the Socratics have been formed in Slovakia and Russia. Substantial advancement has been attained on the *Socratica* of Xenophon. Equally worth mentioning is the fact that in only a 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' that departs radically from once widely held lines of interpretation. The focus of the present studies is not, as it has been, 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 the 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 'Looking Around Plato'

What seems to emerge is, indeed, a comprehensive new trend that provides a powerful magnifying lens for exploring the world 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'. The first were not just contemporaries of Plato, but his traveling 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 around a dozen direct pupils of Socrates.
3. The 'other' Socratics are no longer defined as 'minor', becoming the object of multifarious research. Xenophon especially has been largely redeemed from his widely shared condemnation as Plato's stupid or at least much less talented cousin. 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 what 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, despite how little of their work remains, they offer Socratic testimony independent of Plato's;
 - b) Euclides and Antisthenes, because they play a more important role as interlocutors both of the late Plato and the young Aristotle, even if they have little value as independent evidence about Socrates.

This approach may be of great help for understanding everything around Plato. Recent studies

have shown the importance of looking outside the *Corpus Platonicum* 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 changed completely, Plato's position now 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 during this period his ideas challenged those of his companions, bringing about a powerful philosophical struggle. Understanding the core of these ideas—their genesis, development, and doctrinal outcome—means therefore acknowledging the context in which they emerged and eventually succeeded in being acknowledged as the most prominent. This in turn 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, the ultimate value of these ideas can be better appreciated if Plato's antagonists, at their philosophical height, are equally well acknowledged. 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 contemporaneous literary phenomena. Doing so is helpful for providing an enlightening framework from which to gain 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 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 fifty years on either side of Socrates' death that have direct or indirect connections with the Socratic literature:

a) the speculative and interpretative issues posed by the multifaceted representations of Socrates by the Comedians and by the texts of the Sophists, with special attention to Aristophanes and Isocrates (on whom an entire session will be devoted).

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 (but also, in one talk, on the little-known Socratic 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:

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 that appeared on Socrates and the Socratics between 2010 and 2011: Louis-André Dorion's and Fiorenza Bevilacqua's editions of the *Memorabilia*, Vivienne Gray's and Gabriel Danzig's works on Xenophon, and Donald Morrison's *Companion*. 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 their ideas originated and developed.

[A.S.]