

Abstract:

Socrates is represented by the doxographers as the central figure of a single circle of intimate companions summarily called ‘the Socratics’ and including Plato as well as the thinkers standardly referred to as Minor Socratics. The doxographical sources often characterise these Socratics as friends (*philoî*) of Socrates or of each other, and it is strongly suggested that these friendships (*philiai*) were mainly philosophical: they consisted in the joint engagement of the parties in philosophical investigation. Nonetheless, it has largely escaped notice that, in Plato’s so-called early and middle dialogues, Socrates conducts dialectical enquiries about virtue and, directly or indirectly, education, *not* with the *philosophers* of his intimate circle, but, typically, with members of the Athenian elite, upper class youths in need of pedagogy, or experts in various fields. Something similar holds for Xenophon’s Socrates as well.

There is, then, an important and unexplored issue that this paper raises and discusses: how to explain the friendships obtaining within the Socratic circle, and how are they comparable to the relationships that Socrates is represented as having with characters normally not included among the so-called Socratics. I propose to examine Socrates’ friendships and those holding among his closest followers, not by looking for some sort of metaphysical or psychological core, but by attending to the particularities of the context, the characters, and the circumstances depicted in the texts. I discuss the relative closeness, intensity, and degree of these relationships, the different sorts of benefits deriving from them, the pleasures they afford, the conflict and grief that some of them brought, and the deep impact that they had on the life of the parties involved. It will emerge, among other things, that there was not one but several, partly overlapping Socratic circles; that not all of Socrates’ friends were intellectuals and not all of them were men; and that, in fact, there is no inconsistency between the different representations of Socratic friendships by Plato, Xenophon, and the doxographical sources. I conclude with a brief reflection on the kind of friend that Socrates was, given his unwavering commitment to truth and virtue.

Bio:

Voula Tsouna is Distinguished Professor in the Philosophy Department, University of California (Santa Barbara). She is President of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, member of the Scientific Committee of the Fondation Hardt, and co-editor of the CUP series Key Themes in Ancient

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