

The Social World(s) of the Platonic Dialogues Preliminary Considerations for a Research Project

Gábor Molnár*

Abstract The article proposes a research project to reconstruct Socratic philosophical activity as embedded in its social (basically micro-social) environment. As research in the sociology of philosophical activities, it can prepare the way for a subsequent analysis of Socratic philosophy in terms of the sociology of philosophical knowledge. After arguing for the necessity of this research for a proper understanding of Socratic philosophy, the paper surveys some of the epistemological and methodological problems and tasks to be faced if one wants to realize the program. It distinguishes the notion of historical sociological fidelity from that of historical factual fidelity. It also distinguishes between different senses of the opposition of internal and external factors in the field of inquiry (different but not unrelated senses, one could say senses nested in one another): ideas (ideal sense-formations) vs. the real activities in which they are instantiated, mental vs. bodily activities, individual vs. social activities, foreground vs. background activities, activities central vs. peripheral to the philosophical thinking processes, and, finally, activities and ideas internal vs. external to the field of philosophy. In all cases, it is stated, the demarcating activities and the border-crossing phenomena are the most important subjects of investigation. As for the units of sociological analysis, from a micro-sociological perspective they can be classified in three levels: the individual, the interactional, and the supra-interactional. The most important units to be analyzed at the individual level are the individuals' life-history, way of life, personality, social roles, ego-network and capitals. At the supra-interactional level, the dyadic relationships, social groups, organizations, networks, milieus, and local communities are to be investigated.

Keywords Socrates, Socratic Problem, Platonic Dialogues, sociology of philosophy

* Kaposvár University Faculty of Pedagogy, Hungary
e-mail: molnar.gabor@ke.hu

The Socratic Problem – why a micro-sociological approach?

Paradoxical as it may seem, Socrates, who allegedly did not write down a word in and about philosophy throughout his life, is the ancient Greek philosopher whose life and activity is the most abundantly documented by contemporary, or near contemporary, literary evidence. This is not a real paradox, however. This fortunate state of affairs is due to three interconnected facts. Firstly, it is due to the emphasis he laid in his philosophy on “examining life,” that is, on the moral reflections on the way we lead our lives. Secondly, it is due to two of his pupils, Plato and Xenophon, whose writings came down to us in an exceptionally complete state and, thirdly, who chose their teacher as an exemplary figure to illustrate what, in their view, a philosophical way of life is like. These latter two facts, though, have resulted in another paradox, the so-called “Socratic problem”: the best documented life turns out to be the most enigmatic one, since we cannot gather from the extant texts a consistent picture of Socrates’ life-history, his philosophical development, achievements, or the position he occupied in the philosophical debates of the time.

Socrates’ life and work and the history of the movement he initiated have been subjected to endless analysis throughout the history of philosophy, especially during the modern historiography of philosophy. Let us disregard the innumerable works that treat Socrates purely as a literary character in the Platonic dialogues (or in Xenophon or Aristophanes) as well as the schoolbook histories of philosophy that take for granted, uncritically, what Plato or others report about him, and let us concentrate on those works that try to discover “the historical Socrates.”¹ This can still mean more than one thing. The quest for the historical Socrates has mostly been oriented towards his “real doctrines” or “true philosophy,” or towards his intellectual development – not a surprising fact, given that he was a philosopher. As compared with his intellectual biography, much less effort has been devoted to explore Socrates’ factual, everyday life. And even those attempting such an investigation have rarely undertaken to go beyond merely uncovering the historical “facts” and reconstructing the surface social settings of his life. They rarely go into deeper and more systematic sociological analysis.

Perhaps neither the need for such an investigation is clearly felt, nor is its possibility seen.² As for the first problem, one can reproach many interpreters of Platonic dialogues with the charge that – to paraphrase Marx’s famous dictum – it has not occurred to them to inquire into the connection of Greek philosophy with Greek reality. Marxist approaches to the history of philosophy, on the other hand, are classically macro-sociological in character. They explain philosophical positions and changes in the history of philosophy with reference to the economically grounded social structure and its transformations, respectively.³ Without going into details, let us note that in the last decades of the twentieth century there emerged a definite tendency even within Marxism itself to cash the hypostatized macro-sociological entities such as ‘class,’ ‘class interest,’ or ‘class struggle’ in empirically more

¹ See e. g. the papers in the collection of essays *Der historische Sokrates* (Patzer 1987).

² Even such an erudite scholar with a wide intellectual horizon as Charles Kahn can fall prey to this kind of defeatism, see Kahn 1994, 87: „Since the question of historicity eludes us, we may most profitably pursue this topic [Socratic eros] as a theme in the philosophical literature of the early fourth century.”

³ See classically Thomson 1955.

accessible micro-phenomena. This so-called Analytical or Rational Choice Marxism is, however, only one version of a wider branch of theoretical approaches that have this same starting point: methodological individualism. Methodological individualism states that higher level social phenomena cannot be explained satisfactorily without reference to individuals and their actions; that is, the ultimate explanatory levels in the social sciences are always the micro-levels of the individuals, their actions, and the interactions between them.⁴

Recently Randall Collins has made an attempt in his monumental *Sociology of Philosophies* at a theoretically reflected micro-sociological analysis of the whole history of philosophy, including, of course, the Socratic movement.⁵ The main concepts utilized by him in these analyses (such concepts as the interactional ritual chain, cultural capital, or emotional energy) and the theories he expounds (e.g. “the intellectual law of small numbers”) combine into an interesting and promising model. But his ambition to give an all-embracing account of the history of philosophy – in spite of the prominence he gave to the micro-level of sociality – prevents him from going into piecemeal historical-sociological analyses. Therefore he cannot reach into the very depths where the real events of philosophy are taking place: into the historically concrete interactions that shape philosophers’ thoughts.

Furthermore, Collins has mainly analyzed the relations between the major and minor philosophers. That is, even his analyses have remained within the confines of the traditional approach that separates philosophy from the wider social life around it.⁶ Behind his research program a twofold presupposition seems to be at work, both moments of which are, I think, false. First, it presupposes that the separation of some kind of “philosophical field” from the rest of social life is a universal, trans-historical phenomenon (or at least that it antedates, or coincides with, the earliest beginnings of Greek philosophy). Secondly, it presupposes that when such a separation has been accomplished, no influence from outside can seriously affect, let alone determine, the events inside this field. And thus we fall back again behind the Marxian postulate that one should theoretically connect every philosophy to the concrete social life in which it was conceived.

The moment we have given up these presuppositions, the scope and task of the sociology of philosophies change dramatically. Now we have to resolve on carrying out what has been lacking so far: a consistently micro-sociological analysis of philosophy that takes into consideration the whole social environment of the philosophers. This is what the following research project wants to fulfill in the case of Socrates.

Historical vs. sociological fidelity

As to the possibility of sociological researches of this kind into long-extinct societies, I suggest that we should draw a distinction between two kinds of fidelity that can be aimed at: *historical* and *sociological fidelity*. Both concepts formulate a

⁴ The classical statement of methodological individualism comes, of course, from Max Weber. For an overview of its history and exposition, see Udehn, 2001, for the Marxist version, see Elster 1982.

⁵ Collins 1998, esp. 80–102.

⁶ For a similar critique see Fuller 2000, 248ff.

norm regarding the verbal, pictorial etc. representation of a definite historical social fact, action, event, or state. However, whereas the former claims that the description is true literally, in its full concreteness (“It did happen as it is stated”), sociological fidelity means only that the depicted thing is in accordance with the social norms, habits and possibilities characteristic of the particular place and time (“It could happen” or “It could have happened”). Take, for example, the famous scenario of the *Parmenides*. Whether or not Parmenides and Zeno of Elea really visited Athens in ca. 450 BCE and met young Socrates to discuss certain issues expounded in Zeno’s book, especially the intricate philosophical problems of one and many (this is a question of historical fidelity, and can most probably be answered negatively), it may very well be an interesting question whether, and how, such visitations of important intellectual figures took place at that time in Greek cities, and specifically in Athens.

Sociological fidelity is, of course, just a version of historical fidelity taken more broadly, insofar as it seeks to reveal norms and habits existing historically in a given society; as such, it could better be termed *historical sociological fidelity*. What then is the purpose of this distinction? What can we gain by demarcating this sociological version of historical fidelity from other forms?

This distinction first appears rather similar to how Aristotle distinguishes in *Poetics* between the historian’s and the poet’s tasks, the former being to describe “the thing that has happened,” whereas the latter is to describe “a kind of thing that might happen” (*Poet* 9 1451b1–18). According to Steiger, this Aristotelian distinction had a disastrous effect on the later, Hellenistic historiography of early Greek philosophy (in many cases our best chance to know anything about this period of intellectual history) since it served as a paradigm for the Peripatetic and Alexandrian biographers. They regarded the philosophers’ lives as representations of their (mostly ethical) doctrines. Therefore they thought it legitimate to infer a philosopher’s life history from his teachings. This led to the unfortunate practice of inventing fictitious biographical facts on the basis of the philosophers’ teachings or other pieces of information.⁷ Does the same danger not threaten our distinction between historical and sociological fidelity? Will it not lead to unfounded constructions, to inferences from “how it might as well have happened” to “how it must have happened”?

I do not think so. I conceive this search for sociological fidelity as an attempt to reconstruct social norms and habits effective in the society in question on admittedly probabilistic grounds: from more or less established singular historical events and/or texts. And one of the reasons for such a reconstruction is that it can help us to estimate the probability of other singular historical events. I think this is what the good historian is always doing – either in a methodologically conscious way or not – whenever he or she judges the probability of a historical hypothesis by his or her knowledge of how things usually went, or were supposed to go, in that particular time and place.

It goes without saying that an attempt to appraise the sociological fidelity of a presentation has its own hard methodological problems – perhaps no less than the search for factual historical fidelity. For example, it has to avoid pitfalls such as the hasty reification of social norms accepted by “society.”⁸ In other words, it has to devise methods to adequately distil social norms from historical sources, or to dis-

⁷ Cf. Steiger 1999: 88ff.

⁸ Here I can only allude to the ethnomethodological critique of normative objectivism, see e. g. Cicourel 1964, 199–209.

tinguish between normative and habitual expectations in a certain case (that is, between ideas as to “how someone should behave” and those as to “how he or she can be expected to behave”) – even though, let us note, both expectations are of equal interest for a sociological analysis. These and many other problems must be faced and handled in order to legitimately use the concept of sociological fidelity for deepening and widening our historical understanding of an epoch.

Internal vs. external factors

The plan I am suggesting here is to conduct research on the narrower social environment of Socrates and the Socratic movement in terms of the sociology of knowledge, or, more specifically, in terms of the sociology of philosophy. We can distinguish, however, between two kinds or parts of the sociology of philosophy. One is the sociology of *philosophical knowledge* (SPK) as a special field of research within the sociology of knowledge in the narrower sense,⁹ and the other is the sociology of *philosophical activity* (SPA) as a special case of the sociology of knowledge-cultivating activities. This latter can comprise several things, from activities such as generating and transmitting ideas *via* establishing schools and academies as concrete social organizations, including political lobbying or fund-raising for these organizations, to the activities of legal permission or prohibition, making regulations, lending political support to, or persecuting, certain ideas or thinkers.

For classical history of philosophy or history of ideas, the primary targets of investigation are the ideas of those specialized in philosophical activities of some kind. These ideas are the “message,” the content proper of the books and other “authentic” texts produced by the philosophers. Ideology critique and the classical approaches in the sociology of knowledge (most importantly Émile Durkheim’s and Karl Mannheim’s versions of the latter) concentrate on the same points, although from a very different point of view and with very different intention: they try to uncover the “deeper,” concealed meaning of these texts related to the broader social reality in which they were conceived. Classical, Mertonian sociology of science, on the other hand, restricts itself to the investigation of the social setting (the organization, norms, rewarding mechanisms etc.) of scientific activity, in the conviction that the content of thinking is impenetrable to sociological analysis. The so-called “strong programme” in the sociology of knowledge and the several quarrelling approaches to which it has given rise returns again to the original, unrestricted program of researching the essential influences of social factors on thinking processes and categories. More precisely, they radicalize this program by extending it to the sphere of scientific knowledge – a taboo for Durkheim and Mannheim, the primary object of interest for the new representatives of the program.¹⁰ This approach had veered back to the sphere of philosophy by the end of the nineties under the name the sociology of philosophical knowledge,¹¹ and this is the general approach within which I position the present research program (disregarding my reservations, not to be expounded

⁹ See Kusch 2000.

¹⁰ For the “strong programme,” see Bloor 1991 [1976]. See, further, Barnes, Bloor and Henry 1996. 110: „The objective of the sociology of science is to describe scientific research as action, and to understand scientific knowledge as implicated in and produced by that action.”

¹¹ See Kusch op. cit.

here, concerning certain philosophical presuppositions of its representatives). This means that we have to analyze both the knowledge and ideas *and* the activities of the philosophers; that is, we have to embrace both approaches, SPK as well as SPA.

In this way, we can distinguish between two pairs of opposites, both of which can be regarded as an opposition of internal and external factors in connection with philosophy. On the one hand, this opposition obtains between thoughts or ideas and the activities that produce them (external to them, localized in space and time, determined by psychic factors, social factors, etc.). On the other hand, we can distinguish between the thoughts and activities internal to the “field of philosophy” *and* those external to it. My contention then is that a sociology of philosophy must respect neither of these borders unless by studying precisely the demarcating activities and the border crossing phenomena.

Within the category of activity, we have to make further distinctions. First of all, between mental activities (Husserlian “noeses”), in which the ideas (the Husserlian “noemata”) are constituted, and outward, bodily activities interconnected with mental ones in several possible ways. We can also distinguish between nonsocial and social activities (e.g. pursuing a question by oneself, self-motivatedly vs. discussing it with a partner), between front stage and backstage activities (a public debate vs. the private, possibly secret preparations for it), and between outward activities central to the philosophical thinking processes and more or less peripheral ones (writing a book vs. doing the housekeeping for an organized school). All these distinctions can be regarded as oppositions of internal vs. external, although not in the same sense. From the viewpoint of the sociology of philosophy, the most important ones are presumably the social activities (either front stage or backstage) of central significance to philosophizing. However, it would not be wise to exclude *ab ovo* the other kinds either.

As for the second major pair of opposites (internal vs. external to the field of philosophy) there is a special medial case. From the ideas and activities *within* the field we must distinguish the ideas and activities that concern the reasonability, utility, valuability, legitimacy etc. of the whole field (let us use the last one, legitimacy, as the generic term). This is the borderland where the structured character of the mass of non-expert people connected to the philosophical field also becomes visible: experts in the related disciplines, political, administrative, or economic decision-makers as well as laypeople can have different significance for the field and different influences on it. These groups themselves can be divided internally: cognate-field experts, decision-makers and laypeople can equally have different attitudes (sympathetic, hostile, ambivalent or neutral), different degrees of involvement, different (possibly contradictory) interests etc. in relation to philosophy. In principle they all can harbor ideas and perform activities interesting to an analysis of the social context of philosophy.

Levels and units of analysis

From the above discussion it must have become clear that although the final aim and ambition of the present research project is to understand *the content* of Socratic philosophy from the social factors influencing or determining it (SPK), the first major problem to be solved for this end is to understand the philosophical *activities* that produced this intellectual content by reconstructing the social environment in which it

took place (SPA). Let us survey now the tasks necessary for this reconstruction. From a methodological point of view, this reconstruction can only be accomplished by means of careful and ramifying sociological analysis of the extant texts related to Socrates and the Socratic philosophy.

We can distinguish the following levels and units of analysis without, however, suggesting that $[\alpha]$ they constitute a simple linear order in such a way that the lower levels are in every case capable of being analyzed without the higher ones, or that $[\beta]$ this slightly annotated taxonomy is exhaustive and given once and for all. Its aim is instead to shed some light on the immense complexity of the social life to be taken into account when investigating philosophical ideas and activities from a micro-sociological perspective.

(1) The interactional level. The most important for at least three reasons is the level of *social interactions*. Firstly, Platonic dialogues are dramatic representations of social interactions (mostly but not exclusively of intellectual discourses) so they are the most conspicuous and most easily accessible social phenomena that can be investigated through the Platonic corpus. Secondly, quite apart from this somewhat incidental fact, intellectual intercourse constitutes one of the fundamental layers, perhaps the single most important layer, of the historicity of philosophy. This is particularly visible if we go beyond the ancient Platonic wisdom that “thinking is the unuttered conversation of the soul with herself” (*Soph* 263e3-4) towards the modern, Meadian insight that the attitudes of the “soul” that step into interaction with one another during this conversation originate in earlier interactions with real persons and groups (or in one-way influences mediated by, say, written texts).¹² And thirdly, besides being the “place of events,” social interaction is also the “place of manifestation” of other social phenomena (e.g. of networks, groups, capitals, or personality traits). If these are to be investigated, we have again to take social interaction as our starting point.

At this level an investigation of the types and styles of social interactions between Socrates and the people in his environment are of eminent importance as well as an investigation of the norms regulating interactions, the typical interactive roles, the interpretive schemes in use for understanding the partner’s behavior, etc.

(2) The individual level. From the level of interaction we can turn towards the individuals taking part in it. Here we can enquire into

(a) the individual’s *life-history* in which his or her interactions are embedded. This is an essentially historical investigation,¹³ but it constitutes the basis for several sociological and social-psychological ones, most importantly for the research into

(b) the individual’s *way of life* (the patterns of his or her activities) either as a concrete particular life-form, or – at a higher level of generalization – as a typical form of life. A most promising direction of research here is the time-budget survey of the people appearing in Socrates’ milieu, a research purporting to reconstruct the places, times and occasions of their actions and interactions. Another research should be directed towards

¹² Collins (*op. cit.* 19) speaks of “coalitions in the mind.”

¹³ The basic work for any historical reconstruction of Socrates’ personal surroundings according to the Platonic dialogues is *The People of Plato* by Debra Nails (2002), an excellent prosopography, which collects and analyzes the most important source materials.

(c) *the social constituents of the personalities* of those in question. Taking personality in the broad sociological sense, it comprises not only the pattern of a person's dispositions to behave characteristically in specific situations, but also the factors behind these dispositions, that is, the beliefs, values and norms accepted by him or her as well as his or her intellectual and physical abilities – all acquired through the process of socialization. At this point our investigations in the field of the historical sociology of philosophy partly overlap the problematic of historical psychology.¹⁴

Without pretending to be exhaustive, three further constituents of social life can be mentioned as being of special interest.

(d) *The social roles*, specific configurations of norms and values attached to a social position in some kind of social unit (see the levels listed in 3), or, in a more-or-less institutionalized interaction, performing the greatest part of the function of their social regulation.

(e) *The ego-network*, the specific configuration of social ties around the person as characteristic of him or her (a unique “profile” of the social network mentioned later), and

(f) The different kinds of *capital* (economic, social, cultural etc.) possessed by the individuals in different proportions, contributing to both the motivations and the success of their activities.¹⁵

(3) The supra-interactional levels. Social formations temporally more enduring than, and built up from, interactions belong here.

(a) Its simplest form is the *dyadic relationship* (between e.g. teacher and pupil, or between friends, lovers, etc.) either as a closed pair “over against the whole world,” or as a relationship embedded into larger social units.

(b) *Social groups*, that is, more-or-less closed bundles of social relationships between more than two people at different possible degrees of organization (ranging from rarely and casually gathering informal companies to highly institutionalized formal groups). The most important question here is how the inner dynamics and the outer relations of different groups around Socrates might have influenced the teachings of individual philosophers (Socrates himself and his pupils or rivals) as well as the differentiation of their standpoints.

(c) *Social organizations*, either involuntary associations (such as the demes or the fictive kinship groups called *phratryai*) or voluntary ones (e.g. political clubs, *hetairiai*; religious associations etc.) made up of smaller social groups.

(d) *Social networks*, that is, open-ended social relationships, comprising as elements, but typically overextending, the previous three levels as well. The central question at this level is how the different kinds of social ties and networks contributed to the establishment of teacher–disciple relationships, to the formation of philosophical circles and schools, and to the spreading of philosophical ideas.

¹⁴ For a recent program of historical psychology see e. g. Theißen 2007.

¹⁵ Here again Collins' general theory seems to be in need of correction since he only takes into account the role of cultural capital (CC) in the dynamic of intellectual relationships. However, one of the most important insights behind the generalized concept of capital (e. g. in Bourdieu) is the possibility of the conversion of one form of capital into another.

Other even more “meso-sociological” entities such as (e) *social milieus* and (f) *local communities* can also be of interest. At this point I suggest that we leave the list open-ended with one reservation: the largest (macro-)levels of sociality such as (g) *social large groups* and *strata*, (h) social *subsystems* or spheres and finally (i) the whole *social structure* can only appear in the horizon of the narrower research program outlined here. This constitutes the subject matter of a subsequent research program built upon the results of the present one.

At the levels 3a to 3f, most importantly at 3d, I also suggest that we should adopt the following methodological principle: we have to bracket the philosophical-historical importance of the individuals (e.g. of Socrates’ pupils) as a feature of secondary importance from the point of view of analyzing the group or network dynamics. In other words, it cannot be taken for granted that those pupils who later became very significant philosophers in their own right were originally the most important, let alone the only, figures contributing to the “working” of philosophy. In this question we have to be more radical than Collins, who also takes into account minor philosophers in his reconstructions. Not only philosophers, but other interested people (relatives, friends, sympathetic deme-members etc.) around Socrates may have played important roles in the promotion or hindrance of philosophical activities, in the spreading or losing of space, of philosophical ideas. For the time being, let it suffice to mention the frame of several Platonic dialogues, (e. g. the *Parmenides* or *The Symposium*) where many different kinds of people with different aims and commitments show up around the philosophers proper.

Of special interest is the topography of each and all of these levels: an investigation as to how the individuals’ ways of life combine to make up a specific spatial pattern of communal life. Individual ways of life, more-or-less institutionalized social interactions, the recruitment and activities of particular groups, social organizations, and social networks all have their own specific topographical patterns, the significance of which for the intellectual, specifically philosophical accomplishments cannot be excluded on *a priori* grounds. Moreover, they also gain fundamental methodological importance when we want to complement and verify the written testimonies with archeological evidence.

The methods of reconstructive analysis

The previous considerations make it reasonable to divide the research into two sub-projects. Not two temporarily separated stages but rather two phases to be distinguished at every level and in the case of every unit of analysis without, at the same time, separating them artificially.

The first one, which can be entitled ‘The social world(s) of the Platonic dialogues,’ concentrates basically on our main source about Socrates’ life and teaching, Plato. This sub-project tries to reconstruct what Socrates’ social world(s) looks like through the lens of the dialogues, using sociological terminology and theories, without, however, applying source-critical considerations. In addition to Plato, Xenophon’s Socratic writings and Aristophanes’ *Clouds* will also be taken into consideration. Here, one of the central tasks is to determine the extent to which a consistent and coherent picture can be derived from the various sources, that is, to what extent they show a single social world. For it is an open question whether this reconstruction, after having gone through the Platonic corpus (Xenophon and

Aristophanes now apart), yields a single unitary world, or whether it leads to two or more different, more-or-less incompatible worlds. The plural in brackets in the title reflects this initial indeterminateness.

The extant writings of the other, “minor” Socratics (Antisthenes, Aeschines etc.),¹⁶ because of their highly fragmentary character, and later sources are not suitable for the intense and extensive interpretive analysis proposed above. They – together with our whole bulk of knowledge about late fifth century Athenian society – can be used as source materials for critically evaluating the historical validity of the previous analyses. This will be the task of the second sub-project called ‘The micro-sociology of the Socratic world.’

The first, interpretative approach can be regarded as a “close micro-sociological reading” of the texts, through which even the macro-social relations can and must become visible and understandable. It can utilize both the technique of Geertzian “thick description” to unfold meanings implicit in the texts and more objectivistic (deep structural) sociological analyses employing concepts, theories and approaches of present-day sociology and social theory such as social role, habitus, social and cultural capital, or social network (with ceaseless self-critical awareness, however, of the threats of anachronism). Both methods are needed for the reconstruction of the social world(s) revealed in and by the text. The task of the second phase of investigation is to filter the results of the first one through the cordon of modern critical cultural and human sciences (e.g. historical-philological source critique, critical discourse analysis, sociological ideology critique, etc.) in order to obtain a more trustworthy, though perhaps less rich, picture of the examined reality.

From another angle, the whole investigation can be regarded as a kind of “negative reading” (in the photographic sense of the word). Whereas the usual, traditional way of approaching the Platonic dialogues tries to distil their philosophical contents from the characters’ dramatic performances in front of scenery regarded as unimportant, ornamental, or, at best, symbolic in character, here the case is the reverse. The topic of the philosophical discussion is treated as the background in front of which a social drama takes place. This social drama is inevitably of philosophical importance, but the exploration of its philosophical import becomes possible only at a later point, after the critical reconstruction of the drama itself and its social scenery – the objective of the present research program – has been accomplished. This critical reconstruction requires moving first from the singular dramas of the individual dialogues towards the (possibly fragmentary and incoherent) picture that emerges from the Platonic corpus together with Xenophon and Aristophanes and then from the literary representation(s) to the historical reality behind them. Only after we have gained deeper insights into the doing or “working” of philosophy in fifth century Athens will we be able to pose the more interesting question of what effects this socially embedded activity had on the contents of philosophical thinking, on the tenets of the individual philosophers, on the philosophical schools or movements of the time and, most importantly, on Socratic philosophy.

¹⁶ They are collected in Giannantoni 1990.

References

- Alexander, J. et al. (eds.) 1987.** *The Micro-Macro Link*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press.
- Barnes, B., Bloor, D. and Henry, J. 1996.** *Scientific Knowledge: A Sociological Analysis*. London: Athlone Press.
- Bloor, D. 1991 [1976].** *Knowledge and Social Imagery*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cicourel, A. V. 1964.** *Method and Measurement in Sociology*. London: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Collins, R. 1998.** *The Sociology of Philosophies. A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, Cambridge, Ma.: The Belknap Press.
- Elster, J. 1982.** “Marxism, Functionalism, and Game Theory. The Case for Methodological Individualism,” *Theory and Society*, 11:453–482.
- Fuller, S. 2000.** “In Search of an Alternative Sociology of Philosophy: Reinstating the Primacy of Value Theory in Light of Randall Collins’s »Reflexivity and Embeddedness in the History of Ethical Philosophies«”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 30:246-256.
- Giannantoni, G. (ed.) 1990.** *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*. Vol. I-II. Bibliopolis.
- Kahn, Ch. H. 1994.** “Aeschines on Socratic Eros”, in: Paul A. Vander Waerdt (ed.): *The Socratic Movement*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 87–106.
- Kahn, Ch. H. 1996.** *Plato and the Socratic dialogue. The philosophical use of a literary form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kusch, M. (ed.) 2000.** *The Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge*, Dordrecht-Boston-London: Kluwer Academic Publisher.
- Nails, D. 2002.** *The People of Plato. A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Patzer, A. (ed.) 1987.** *Der historische Sokrates*. Darmstadt.
- Steiger, K. 1999.** *A lappangó örökség. Fejezetek a preszókratikus filozófia antik hagyományozásának történetéből* [The latent heritage. Chapters in the history of the ancient bequeathing of Presocratic philosophy; in Hungarian], Budapest: Józsvöveg Press.
- Theißen, G. 2007.** *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen. Eine Psychologie des Urchristentums*. München: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Thomson, G. 1955.** *The First Philosophers* (Studies in Ancient Greek Society, Vol. 2), London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Udehn, L. 2001.** *Methodological Individualism. Background, history and meaning*, London and New York: Routledge.