

Partiality and Embeddedness in Socratic Ethics

International workshop at the Department of Philosophy, University of Heidelberg

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Organizers: Philipp Brüllmann, Ian Campbell and Tue Søvsø

Confirmed participants: Claudia Marsico (University of Buenos Aires), Donald Morrison (Rice University), Chloe Balla (University of Crete), Santiago Chame (LMU, Munich) and Leo Catana (University of Copenhagen)

Based on what we are told about Socrates' life and teachings, he seems to have insisted quite emphatically on the legitimacy of partiality. Partiality – understood as a special sense of commitment towards a particular person, community, or group of people – appears to inform Socratic thought in various ways, but it surely finds its most striking expression in the deep commitment he professed towards serving the interests of his fellow Athenians even at the cost of his own life. Socrates' resolution on this point seems to be motivated, at least in part, by another central feature of his ethical thought, namely his interest in how human life is embedded in a greater (social, political, cosmic) framework. In ethics, this motif expresses itself in the conviction that the specific conditions in which we happen to be embedded and under which we operate place important constraints on how we should act. Together, these two ideas – that humans are embedded in a larger context, and that we feel a sense of partiality towards ourselves and others – clearly play an important role in Socratic thought which would seem to merit a more focused attention than they have so far received – not least because they offer an interesting alternative to the egoism / altruism contrast that has dominated so much of the recent debates on Socratic ethics.

This workshop aims to fill that need and achieve a deeper understanding of these two central features of Socratic ethics. We are interested in contributions that explore how ideas about partiality and embeddedness emerge and interconnect in Socratic thought, not only as it appears in the writings of Plato, Xenophon and other first-generation Socratics, but also in the later Socratic tradition. Some of the most fundamental ways that human beings experience a sense of being embedded spring from the fact that we are embodied and situated within a given natural environment, and so we would be particularly interested in papers which discuss how Socrates conceptualized these fundamental types of embeddedness and the feelings of partiality which they create. Other possible topics include, but is in no ways limited to, discussions of partiality as a source of normativity, the concept of care (*epimeleia*) for oneself and others, Socratic conceptions of interpersonal relations (friendship, love, pederasty), the relation between partiality and altruism, and the model(s) of practical deliberation presupposed in Socrates' ethics of partiality.

Please submit your abstract (max. 500 words) to tue.sovso@uni-heidelberg.de by 15 May 2024.

