

# From *Dialogos* to Dialogue: The Use of the Term from Plato to the Second Century CE

*Katarzyna Jazdzewska*

THE ORIGINS OF DIALOGUE as a literary form have received considerable attention in recent years.<sup>1</sup> As has been observed, the literary genre, which originated in Socratic circles in the fourth century, was not from the beginning called *διάλογος*. Aristotle in his extant writings refers to literary production of the Socratics as *σωκρατικοὶ λόγοι*, and though the first instances of the use of the term *διάλογος* in reference to a literary work might have come from the second half of the fourth century, the word seems to have gained currency only in the Hellenistic period. Dionysios of Halikarnassos is the first extant Greek author who repeatedly uses the term in reference to literary texts; around the same time, Cicero repeatedly refers to dialogical texts as *dialogi* or *διάλογοι*, evidence that the term was well established by then in the language of literary studies.

My contribution examines the meaning and usage of the term *διάλογος* in ancient literature from its first appearances in the fourth century down to the writings of the Second Sophistic authors. Though LSJ explain the word as “a conversation, dia-

<sup>1</sup> See D. Clay, “The Origins of the Socratic Dialogue,” in P. A. Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca 1994) 23–47; R. B. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1995) 10–15; A. Ford, “The Beginnings of Dialogue. Socratic Discourses and Fourth-Century Prose,” in S. Goldhill (ed.), *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity* (Cambridge 2008) 29–44; N. G. Charalabopoulos, *Platonic Drama and its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge 2012) 32–56.

logue,” *διάλογος* was not a standard term for conversation in the period examined. As I will demonstrate, the noun is very rare in texts from the classical period, even those originating in Socratic circles. It is Plato, as far as extant texts allow us to judge, who introduces the term into literature, though it remains of rather infrequent occurrence in his dialogues. In Plato’s works the term seems to be consistently applied to Socrates-style conversations, proceeding by means of questions and answers, and the connection between *διάλογος* and the semi-technical verb *διαλέγεσθαι* is maintained; hence in later tradition we find authors using *διάλογος* for ‘dialectical argumentation’. The term’s popularity in subsequent literature must have been due above all to literary scholars of the Hellenistic period, who used it as a name for the relatively new genre of dialogue. This meaning of *διάλογος* is the predominant one in the Roman period, though occasionally it is also used in other senses.

1. *διαλέγεσθαι* and *διάλογος* in fifth- and fourth-century prose

The noun *διάλογος* is cognate with *διαλέγεσθαι*, ‘to converse, discuss’. The verb is not frequent in prose of the fifth century: for example, there are nine instances in Herodotos (in two cases meaning ‘to speak in a dialect’, in the other seven ‘talk to, converse with’),<sup>2</sup> and only three instances in Thucydides.<sup>3</sup> It also appears a few times in Antiphon’s *On the choreutes*, where it is usually paired with some form of the verb *συνεῖναι*,<sup>4</sup> and in Lysias’ speeches. It is more frequent in Isocrates and the orators of the fourth century such as Demosthenes and Aischines, but acquires a real popularity in the writings of the Socratics, where it is associated with a particular

<sup>2</sup> ‘To speak in a dialect’: Hdt. 1.142.11, 1.142.18; ‘to converse’: four times in the story of Periander’s son Lycophron (3.50–3.52) and three times afterwards (3.121.8, 7.231.4, 9.112.2). There is also the compound *προσ-διαλέγεσθαι* in Lycophron’s story (3.52.3).

<sup>3</sup> Thuc. 5.59.5, 6.57.2, 8.93.2.

<sup>4</sup> Antiph. *De chor.* 34, 39, 40, 46, 48. The speech is dated to 419/8.

conversational style of Socrates: there are about one hundred instances of the verb in Xenophon, and more than two hundred in Plato's dialogues. As A. Ford observes, the popularity of the verb might have been influenced by the activity of the sophists, who described their relationship with associates in the language of conversation rather than of formal instruction.<sup>5</sup> It is also in the fourth century that derivatives of διαλέγεσθαι are coined and popularized, such as the adjective διαλεκτικός and the noun ἡ διαλεκτική.<sup>6</sup>

The deverbative noun διάλογος in the fifth and fourth centuries is significantly less frequent than the verb διαλέγεσθαι. In fact, the noun makes no appearance in extant literature of the fifth century at all. It is also curiously rare in the fourth century. The first extant author who uses the noun is Plato,<sup>7</sup> yet it is by no means frequent in his dialogues: there are only eight instances (nine if we consider *Alcibiades I* as genuine), a scanty number when compared with over two hundred instances of διαλέγεσθαι. Xenophon never makes use of the noun. Isocrates uses it only once, in his *Panathenaiikos*, a late work finished shortly before his death, where he lists “the so-called eristic

<sup>5</sup> Ford, in *The End of Dialogue* 36. See e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.6, where Socrates is said to have criticized those who took money “for their society” (τῆς ὀμιλίας) and who were therefore bound “to converse” (διαλέγεσθαι) with the people they took the money from; also Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.61, 1.6.5; Pl. *Ap.* 33B, *Th.* 178E.

<sup>6</sup> Xenophon uses διαλεκτικός twice, in *Mem.* 4.5.12 and 4.6.1, where it means ‘skilled in discussion’. Socrates in Pl. *Cra.* 390C–D characterizes a man who is διαλεκτικός as one skilled in asking and answering questions. Diogenes Laertios 3.24 claims that Plato coined, among other words, the term διαλεκτική. See W. Müri, “Das Wort Dialektik bei Platon,” *MusHelv* 1 (1944) 152–168; C. H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge 1996) 292–328; G. Giannantoni, *Dialogo socratico e nascita della dialettica nella filosofia di Platone* (Naples 2005). For the relationship between dialogue and dialectic in Plato see C. Rowe, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge 2007) 9–15.

<sup>7</sup> As observed by Müri, *MusHelv* 1 (1944) 152, who suggests that this is an accident of transmission.

διάλογοι” (τοὺς διαλόγους τοὺς ἐριστικούς καλουμένους) together with geometry and astronomy as a part of modern educational practice (*Panath.* 26). The passage, it has been suggested, refers to the educational program of the Academy. The expression “eristic διάλογοι” seems to have been used here as a technical term denoting a novel (and, in Isocrates’ view, controversial) educational practice, presumably dialectical argumentation.<sup>8</sup> Other orators of the fourth century never use the term. It also does not appear in the pseudo-platonic dialogues, some of which probably originated in the fourth century, apart from *Alcibiades I*, which I discuss below. In Aristotle’s extant works it makes only one appearance, in *Posterior Analytics* 78a, where it means “a dialectical argument,” as opposed to a mathematical one.<sup>9</sup> This meaning is fairly close to the one in Isocrates’ *Panathenaikos*.

Besides eight appearances of the term in Plato, one in *Alcibiades I*, one in Isocrates, and one in Aristotle, there are two other possible, though problematic, instances. One is a fragment of Aristotle’s *On Poets* quoted by Athenaios (11.505c) and referred to by two other texts: Diogenes Laertios 3.48 and a papyrus fragment of the second century CE.<sup>10</sup> The second is a passage from Theopompos’ *Against the Teachings of Plato*, also quoted by Athenaios (11.508c–d; *FGrHist* 115 F 259).

The fragment of Aristotle’s *On Poets* (fr.72 R.) is particularly problematic: according to Athenaios, Aristotle claimed that one Alexamenos of Teos composed Socratic dialogues (σωκρατικοὶ διάλογοι) before Plato. Although Athenaios’ wording indicates that he is quoting Aristotle verbatim, scholars are usually

<sup>8</sup> D. J. Murphy, “Isocrates and the Dialogue,” *CW* 106 (2013) 311–353, at 316.

<sup>9</sup> But see J. Barnes, *Aristotle. Posterior Analytics*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1993) 154 (ad 78a12), who seems to consider emending the text by replacing ἐν τοῖς διαλόγοις with ἐν τοῖς λόγοις.

<sup>10</sup> M. Haslam, “Plato, Sophron, and the Dramatic Dialogue,” *BICS* 19 (1972) 17–38.

hesitant to accept the passage as accurate quotation.<sup>11</sup> Some, for contextual reasons, have argued that Athenaios' text is corrupt and requires emendation, and proposed to replace *διάλογοι* with *λόγοι*.<sup>12</sup> Even if one accepts the *lectio* *διάλογοι*, it does not necessarily follow that Aristotle himself used the term in the passage quoted in the *Deipnosophists*. Athenaios' quotations sometimes distort the source text considerably,<sup>13</sup> besides, it is possible that Athenaios drew the Aristotelian passage from some later work which misquoted it, and which he mined for the material for the antiplatonic tirade in Book 11 (504E–509E).<sup>14</sup> The evidence of Diogenes Laertios and of the papyrus fragment does not corroborate Athenaios' quotation, as neither text implies that the term *διάλογος* appeared in Aristotle.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See P. Natorp, "Alexamenos (2)," *RE* 1 (1894) 1375; Ford, *The End of Dialogue* 35 n.24, 41, and "ΣΩΚΡΑΤΙΚΟΙ ΛΟΓΟΙ in Aristotle and Fourth-Century Theories of Genre," *CP* 105 (2010) 221–235, at 224–227. Athenaios' quotation is accepted as accurate by Murphy, *CW* 106 (2013) 315–317. The statements of J. L. Fink, "How Did Aristotle Read a Platonic Dialogue?" in J. L. Fink (ed.), *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle* (Cambridge 2012) 174–196, at 175, apparently based on Athenaios' passage, that Aristotle "refers to the dialogue as a more or less well-defined form" and that he "seems to have distinguished between the dialogue form as such and a special instance of it for which he apparently coined the term οἱ σωκρατικοὶ λόγοι" in my view overinterpret the evidence.

<sup>12</sup> F. Susemihl, "Die Abfassungszeit des platonischen Phaidros," *NJbb* 27 (1881) 657–670, at 668 n.37, proposes *λόγων*; Natorp, *RE* 1 (1894) 1375, suggests *λόγους*. See also Ford, *CP* 105 (2010) 225–226.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. e.g. 364B and Pl. *Symp.* 172B; 505D and Pl. *Resp.* 562C–D; 506E and Pl. *Ti.* 19B. For Athenaios' misquotations see e.g. R. W. Sharples and D. W. Minter, "Theophrastus on Fungi: Inaccurate Citations in Athenaeus," *JHS* 103 (1983) 154–156; on Athenaios' citation techniques see also D. Lenfant (ed.), *Athénée et les fragments d'historiens* (Paris 2007).

<sup>14</sup> I. Düring, *Herodikus the Crateteian: A Study in Anti-Platonic Tradition* (Stockholm 1941), suggests that Athenaios' source is a work of Herodikos of Babylon.

<sup>15</sup> Neither text includes a direct quotation from Aristotle. In Diogenes Laertios *διάλογος* appears in the preceding sentence, where he says that "they say" that Zeno was the first to write dialogues. The author of the

To conclude, while it is possible that Aristotle referred to dialogic texts of Plato and the Socratics as ‘dialogues’, it seems unlikely given the absence of the term in reference to Platonic texts throughout his *corpus*. Athenaios’ quotation of the passage from Theopompos’ antiplatonic work, in which he was said to claim that many of Plato’s dialogues were “useless and filled with lies” (τοὺς πολλοὺς, φησί, τῶν διαλόγων αὐτοῦ ἀχρείους καὶ ψευδεῖς ἄν τις εὔροι), raises fewer difficulties than Athenaios’ quotation from Aristotle, though still we should approach it with some circumspection. It is noteworthy, however, that Theopompos in Athenaios’ passage uses the term *διάλογοι* in reference to Plato’s works specifically. As I will suggest below, the term *διάλογος*, which appears for the first time in Plato’s writings, might have been subsequently applied by philosophers of the Academy to dialogic compositions of Plato and the like, and then extended to other works of related nature.

## 2. *Plato’s use of διάλογος*

The term *διάλογος*, then, was not a common word denoting a conversation or a discussion in the fourth century; in fact, it was very unusual. Plato uses other words in the meaning ‘conversation’ such as οἱ λόγοι and ἡ διατριβή (e.g. *Phd.* 59C, τίνες ἦσαν οἱ λόγοι; *Phdr.* 227B, τίς οὖν δὴ ἦν ἡ διατριβή; *Ap.* 37D, τὰς ἐμὰς διατριβὰς καὶ τοὺς λόγους); the noun *συνουσία* has a broader sense of ‘being together’, but at times should be rather translated as ‘conversation’ (e.g. *Prt.* 335B, καὶ ἐν μακρολογίᾳ καὶ ἐν βραχυλογίᾳ οἷός τ’ εἶ *συνουσίας ποιεῖσθαι*; *Soph.* 217D–E, κατὰ μικρὸν ἔπος πρὸς ἔπος ποιεῖσθαι τὴν *συνουσίαν*),<sup>16</sup>

Before I discuss Plato’s use of *διάλογος*, a short notice on his and Xenophon’s use of the verb *διαλέγεσθαι* will be useful.

---

papyrus fragment is clearly paraphrasing Aristotle (one should also notice that the text is corrupt and *διαλόγους* is a philological reconstruction).

<sup>16</sup> On Plato’s terms denoting a conversation see also Müri, *MusHelv* 1 (1944) 153–154.

While in both Plato and Xenophon the verb is frequent in its common sense ‘to converse with somebody’ (with the interlocutor indicated either by the dative or by *πρός* with accusative), there is also a manifest shift in the meaning of the verb towards a sense ‘to inquire’. Thus in Xenophon there are instances in which the verb is used with a participle of *σκοπέω* (*Mem.* 1.1.11, 1.1.16, *διελέγετο σκοπῶν*) in the sense ‘to inquire’. In both Plato and Xenophon we observe a frequent use of the verb without the indirect object of person, but with emphasis on the subject of discussion. In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* Socrates is explicitly said to have reflected on the meaning of τὸ *διαλέγεσθαι* (4.5.12):

ἔφη δὲ καὶ τὸ διαλέγεσθαι ὀνομασθῆναι ἐκ τοῦ συνιόντας κοινῇ βουλευέσθαι διαλέγοντας κατὰ γένη τὰ πράγματα.

The very word *discussion*, according to him, owes its name to the practice of meeting together for common deliberation and sorting things after their kind. (transl. Marchant, adapted)

By drawing the connection between *διαλέγεσθαι* ‘to discuss’ and *διαλέγω* ‘to sort out’, Xenophon’s Socrates emphasizes the shift in the verb’s meaning from ‘a conversation’ to ‘an inquiry’.

In Plato’s dialogues the reformulation of the verb’s meaning—which becomes associated with a particular type of intellectual investigation, namely the dialectical inquiry—is still more pronounced.<sup>17</sup> In several dialogues the proper manner of discussing, *διαλέγεσθαι*, becomes a topic of an investigation. In *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, *διαλέγεσθαι* is contrasted with rhetorical speeches; in both works, Socrates insists on practicing a very particular type of discussion, namely one that consists of questions and answers (*Gorg.* 448D–449B, 471D, *Prt.* 335B–336B). In *Euthydemus* 295E, Socrates talks about “understanding what discussion is” (*ἐπίστασαι διαλέγεσθαι*) and claims that he himself has only a layman’s understanding of this art (*τέχνην ἔχων*

<sup>17</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the meaning of *διαλέγεσθαι* and its association with dialectic see Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* 292–328.

ιδιώτου ἀνθρώπου). In *Theaitetos* 161E, Socrates says that, if Protagoras' relativism is valid, then "the whole business of discussion" (σύμπασα ἢ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι πραγματεία) is laughable; the next sentence explains that by "discussion" he means examination and refutation of each other's conceptions and opinions (τὸ ἐπισκοπεῖν καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖν ἐλέγχειν τὰς ἀλλήλων φαντασίας τε καὶ δόξας). In the *Republic*, *Philebus*, and *Parmenides*, Plato uses the expression ἢ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμις, the sense of which is usually rendered by translators as "the power of dialectic," and ἢ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι ἐπιστήμη ("the science of discussion").<sup>18</sup> Besides the common meaning 'to converse', the verb acquires in Plato a new semi-technical meaning: 'to inquire', closely associated with the art of dialectic.

It is with this shift in the meaning of the verb διαλέγεσθαι in mind that I wish to discuss the eight appearances of the noun διάλογος in Plato. They come from four dialogues: *Protagoras*, *Laches*, *Republic*, and *Sophist*.<sup>19</sup>

In *Protagoras*, the noun appears four times; all instances come from paragraphs 335D–338D. Socrates, frustrated by Protagoras' unwillingness to provide short answers to his questions, is about to leave when Kallias grabs him by the hand and says (335D):

οὐκ ἀφήσομέν σε, ὦ Σώκρατες· ἐὰν γὰρ σὺ ἐξέλθῃς, οὐχ ὁμοίως ἡμῖν ἔσονται οἱ διάλογοι. δέομαι οὖν σου παραμεῖναι ἡμῖν.

We shan't let you go, Socrates; for if you leave, our *discussion* won't be the same. So I beg you to stay with us. (transl. Taylor)<sup>20</sup>

Kallias, in whose house the gathering of sophists and their ad-

<sup>18</sup> ἢ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμις: *Resp.* 511B, 532D, 533A, 537D, *Phil.* 57E, *Parm.* 135C; ἢ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι ἐπιστήμη: *Resp.* 511C.

<sup>19</sup> The use of the term in the *Republic*, *Protagoras*, and *Sophist* was briefly discussed by R. Hirzel, *Der Dialog. Ein literarhistorischer Versuch I* (Leipzig 1895) 4 n.1; the use in the *Protagoras* by Ford, *The End of Dialogue* 36–37.

<sup>20</sup> For all Plato's dialogues I follow the edition of J. Burnet. I have modified the translations by, *inter alia*, consistently translating διάλογοι and διάλογος as 'discussion(s)'; if there is no indication of a translator, the translation is mine.

mirers takes place, and who was characterized by both Plato and Xenophon as a man of intellectual ambitions,<sup>21</sup> uses this rather novel and unusual term, *διάλογοι*, in reference to the conversations conducted by those gathered. Socrates does not fail to notice it. He insists that if Kallias and others wish to hear him and Protagoras in discussion, they must ask the sophist to answer Socrates' questions briefly. Then he adds (336B):

εἰ δὲ μή, τίς ὁ τρόπος ἔσται τῶν διαλόγων; χωρὶς γὰρ ἔγωγ' ὄμην εἶναι τὸ συνεῖναί τε ἀλλήλοις διαλεγόμενους καὶ τὸ δημηγορεῖν.

If not, what sort of *discussion* will we have? I thought that *discussing things together* was something quite different from giving a public speech.

Socrates emphasizes the connection of *διάλογοι* with the verb *διαλέγεσθαι*, as if correcting Kallias' use of the term. After Kallias, Alcibiades, and Prodikos express their opinion on how to proceed, Hippias proposes a compromise: Protagoras should shorten his answers, while Socrates should be more flexible and accept longer responses than he might have liked (338A):

καὶ μήτε σὲ τὸ ἀκριβὲς τοῦτο εἶδος τῶν διαλόγων ζητεῖν τὸ κατὰ βραχὺ λίαν, εἰ μὴ ἡδὺν Πρωταγόρα, ἀλλ' ἐφεῖναι καὶ χαλάσαι τὰς ἡνίας τοῖς λόγοις...

You, Socrates, must not insist on that precise, excessively brief form of *discussion* if it does not suit Protagoras, but rather allow free rein to the speeches... (transl. Lombardo, Bell)

Socrates agrees to continue the discussion with Protagoras, but insists that it proceed as an interchange of questions and answers (338C–D):

ἀλλ' οὕτως ἐθέλω ποιῆσαι, ἵν' ὁ προθυμείσθε συνουσία τε καὶ διάλογοι ἡμῖν γίνωνται· εἰ μὴ βούλεται Πρωταγόρας ἀποκρίνεσθαι, οὗτος μὲν ἐρωτάτω, ἐγὼ δὲ ἀποκρινοῦμαι, καὶ ἅμα πειράσομαι αὐτῷ δεῖξαι ὡς ἐγὼ φημι χρῆναι τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

<sup>21</sup> Pl. *Ap.* 20A, Xen. *Symp.* 1.4–6.

But here's what I am willing to do, so that we can have a conversation and a *discussion* as you are anxious to do. If Protagoras is not willing to answer, let him put the questions, and I shall answer, and at the same time I shall try to show him how, in my opinion, one ought to answer questions. (transl. Taylor, modified)

We can observe that in all instances Plato employs the plural *διάλογοι*, possibly on analogy with *λόγοι*, which was often used in the plural in the sense 'a conversation'. That the word is used first by Kallias may suggest that it was used in sophistic circles before, rather than coined by Plato himself, though this is merely a speculation. Socrates insists on calling *διάλογοι* a particular type of conversation—one that proceeds by questions and answers, and which he contrasts with speeches. If Protagoras refuses to answer questions, how would the exchange count as *διάλογοι*, he asks in 336B.

I turn now to *Laches* and the *Republic*. In both the context of the term is similar. By the end of *Laches* Socrates says (200E):

εἰ μὲν οὖν ἐν τοῖς διαλόγοις τοῖς ἄρτι ἐγὼ μὲν ἐφάνην εἰδώς, τώδε δὲ μὴ εἰδότε, δίκαιον ἂν ἦν ἐμὲ μάλιστα ἐπὶ τοῦτο τὸ ἔργον παρακαλεῖν, νῦν δ' ὁμοίως γὰρ πάντες ἐν ἀπορίᾳ ἐγενόμεθα.

If in the *discussions* we have just had I had seemed to be knowing and the other two not, then it would be right to issue a special invitation to me to perform this task; but as the matter stands, we are all in the same difficulty. (transl. Kent Sprague, modified)

Similarly, at the end of the first book of the *Republic*, after discussion with Thrasymachos, Socrates expresses his dissatisfaction with its results and states (354B):

ὥστε μοι νυνὶ γέγονεν ἐκ τοῦ διαλόγου μηδὲν εἰδέναι.

so that now as a result of the *discussion* I know nothing (transl. Bloom)

As Socrates refers to the discussions with Laches, Nikias, and Thrasymachos as *διάλογοι* or *διάλογος*, he is faithful to the meaning of the word he insisted upon in *Protagoras*: the discussions with Laches and Nikias as well as with Thrasymachos were inquiries proceeding by means of questions and answers. In *Laches*, Socrates uses the plural form of the term, in the *Re-*

*public* the singular. The reasons for the plural in *Laches* are difficult to determine—Plato might have chosen the plural because Socrates refers to two exchanges, one with Laches and one with Nicias; or he might have used the plural as an analogy with λόγοι, as I suggested above in the case of *Protagoras*. The form in the *Republic* is, however, noteworthy, as this is the first extant instance of the word in the singular.

In the *Sophist*, probably one of Plato's late works,<sup>22</sup> the term διάλογος—again in the singular—appears twice. In 263E, the Visitor from Elea defines thought (διάνοια):

οὐκοῦν διάνοια μὲν καὶ λόγος ταυτόν· πλὴν ὁ μὲν ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς αὐτὴν διάλογος ἄνευ φωνῆς γινόμενος τοῦτ' αὐτὸ ἡμῖν ἐπωνομάσθη, διάνοια;

Aren't thought and speech the same, except that what we call thought is speech that occurs without the voice, inside the soul in *discussion* with itself? (transl. White, modified)

The same definition is repeated at 264A–B. There is certainly a word-play here, as *dianoia* is defined as *dialogos*. But in the light of the former uses of the term, it is possible that Plato wishes to emphasize the connection between thought and inquiry, i.e. a search for truth by means of questions and answers, rather than to characterize it vaguely as an interior conversation. This, in fact, is suggested by a passage in *Theaitetos* (189E–190A), in which Socrates says that τὸ διανοεῖσθαι is

λόγον ὃν αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἢ ψυχὴ διεξέρχεται περὶ ὧν ἂν σκοπῇ ... τοῦτο γὰρ μοι ἰνδάλλεται διανοοῦμένη οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ διαλέγεσθαι, αὐτὴ ἑαυτὴν ἐρωτῶσα καὶ ἀποκρινομένη, καὶ φάσκουσα καὶ οὐ φάσκουσα.

a talk which the soul has with itself about the objects under its consideration ... it seems to me that the soul when it thinks is simply carrying on a *discussion* in which it asks itself questions

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of scholarly efforts to establish the chronology of the Platonic dialogues see L. Brandwood, *The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge 1990); Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* 42–48.

and answers them itself, affirms and denies (transl. Levett, rev. Burnyeat)

‘Thinking’ is here explicitly defined as a discussion in the form of questions and answers; therefore, we can suspect that the term *διάλογος* is loaded with the same associations in the *Sophist*.

As noted above, in dialogues of uncertain authenticity *διάλογος* appears only once, in *Alcibiades I*.<sup>23</sup> In 110A, Socrates asks of Alcibiades:

καὶ τᾶληθῆ ἀποκρίνου, ἵνα μὴ μάτην οἱ διάλογοι γίνωνται.

Answer me truthfully, so that our *discussion* is not a waste of time.

The plural troubled C. G. Cobet who suggested that one should read *λόγοι* instead of *διάλογοι*,<sup>24</sup> but we have seen the plural in similar use in *Protagoras*. Socrates’ request comes just after a short exchange in which Alcibiades, afraid that Socrates is not treating him seriously (109D, *σκόπτεις, ὦ Σώκκρατες*), ceases to cooperate. Socrates’ words echo those in *Alc. I* 105E–106A, where he told Alcibiades why he had not talked to him before: the god had not allowed him because it would be useless (*οὐκ εἶα ὁ θεὸς διαλέγεσθαι, ἵνα μὴ μάτην διαλεγοίμην*). The next paragraph makes it clear how Socrates envisages the discussion: as an interchange of questions and answers (106B), and this sort of discussion Socrates seems to refer to as *διάλογοι*.

We can conclude, then, that in Plato’s dialogues there is a tendency to associate the term *διάλογοι* or *διάλογος* with a discussion proceeding through interchange of questions and answers, the aim of which is to acquire knowledge. Plato’s

<sup>23</sup> On the question of authenticity of the *Alcibiades I* see e.g. N. Denyer, *Plato: Alcibiades* (Cambridge 2001) 14–26; N. D. Smith, “Did Plato Write the ‘Alcibiades I?’” *Apeiron* 37 (2004) 93–108, with references to previous literature.

<sup>24</sup> C. G. Cobet, “Platonica. Ad Platonis qui fertur Alcibiadem priorem,” *Mnemosyne* II.4 (1874) 365–389, at 377: “Scribendum οἱ λόγοι. Unum tantum est inter Socratem et Alcibiadem colloquium (*διάλογος*), sed omnia quae inter se loquuntur de more οἱ λόγοι apellantur.”

usage of the word, then, is close to Isocrates' and Aristotle's, who used it for 'dialectical argumentation'. Still, it should be emphasized, the word appears infrequently in Plato and does not achieve the status of a technical term as, for example, ἡ διαλεκτική does.

### 3. *From the Hellenistic period to the second century CE*

The disappearance of much of Hellenistic literature makes it impossible to trace changes in the meaning of διάλογος in this period. This certainly was the time when the term gained currency and became the name of a literary genre practiced by Plato and other authors. In what circumstances it gained this meaning is far from clear. It might have been first applied by philosophers of the Academy to dialogic compositions—of Plato and others—of dialectical character, in keeping with Plato's use of the term, and then taken over by Hellenistic literary scholars who expanded its meaning to include all sorts of dialogic texts. This meaning—'a literary dialogue'—remains the main one in the literature of the imperial period.

Apart from the above-mentioned fragments of Theopompos and Aristotle, probably the earliest evidence for the use of διάλογος in reference to literary dialogues is a passage in Demetrios' *On Style*. The dating of the text is notoriously problematic, ranging from the third century to the first century BCE. The passage relevant to my inquiry is in ch. 223, where Demetrios refers to Artemon, an editor of Aristotle's *Letters*, according to whom letters should be written in the same manner as dialogues: a letter is like one side of a dialogue.<sup>25</sup> We do

<sup>25</sup> That Artemon means a written dialogue and not a conversation is made clear by Demetrios' wording (223–224; ed. D. Innes): δεῖ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ διάλογόν τε γράφειν καὶ ἐπιστολάς· εἶναι γὰρ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν οἷον τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ διαλόγου ... δεῖ γὰρ ὑποκατεσκευάσθαι πῶς μᾶλλον τοῦ διαλόγου τὴν ἐπιστολήν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ μιμεῖται αὐτοσχεδιάζοντα, ἡ δὲ γράφεται καὶ δῶρον πέμπεται τρόπον τινά. In late antique definitions of letter-writing, however, a letter is defined as a written conversation with an absent person: so Ps.-Libanios in *De epistulis* 2 (ed. R. Foerster), ἐπιστολή μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ὁμιλία τις ἐγγράμματος ἀπόντος πρὸς ἀπόντα γινομένη καὶ χρειώδη

not know when exactly Artemon edited Aristotle's *Letters*; he seems to have lived in the third or the second century.<sup>26</sup> The characterization of the letter as "one side of a dialogue" indicates that Artemon used the term *διάλογος* in the sense we encounter in authors of the Roman period: a literary work representing a conversation of two or more interlocutors; the sense is clearly not limited to dialogues consisting of series of questions and answers, but encompasses all sorts of literary dialogues. In fact, dialogues in which interlocutors speak in longer utterances and short speeches (rather than in short questions and answers) provide a better parallel for letters. In particular, Artemon, as an editor of Aristotle's letters, might have had the philosopher's dialogues in mind, which, so far as we know, were built of longer speeches presented by interlocutors and included the author among the speakers. In this case the presence of the author's *persona* in Aristotelian dialogues would provide another parallel with a letter.

Our next evidence for the use of the word is in the works of Cicero and Dionysios of Halikarnassos in the first century BCE. Cicero refers to his own dialogues and those by other Roman authors as *dialogus/dialogi* or *διάλογος/διάλογοι*.<sup>27</sup> In two passages the term is used in reference to real-life conversations, though in both cases Cicero probably wishes the addressee to make a connection between the conversation and a literary dialogue.<sup>28</sup> Dionysios of Halikarnassos uses the word repeatedly to refer to dialogues of Plato and the Socratics. This meaning is also the prevalent one in Plutarch, Lucian, Ath-

---

σκοπὸν ἐκπληροῦσα, ἐρεῖ δέ τις ἐν αὐτῇ ὥσπερ παρών τις πρὸς παρόντα.

<sup>26</sup> For discussion of Artemon's dating see J. M. Rist, "Demetrius the Stylist and Artemon the Compiler," *Phoenix* 18 (1964) 2–8; G. M. A. Grube, "The Date of Demetrius *On Style*," *Phoenix* 18 (1964) 294–302.

<sup>27</sup> *Brut.* 218.9; *Orat.* 151.6; *Fam.* 1.9.23, 9.8.2; *Att.* 2.9.1, 4.16.2, 13.14.1, 13.19.3, 15.13.3.

<sup>28</sup> *Att.* 5.5.2, *nos Tarenti quos cum Pompeio διαλόγουσ de re publica habuerimus ad te perscribemus*; 13.42.1, *hic dialogus sic conclusus est*, after having reported a short conversation with young Quintus.

enaios, Galen, and Aelius Aristides. In Latin literature, we find the term *dialogus* used in the sense ‘a literary dialogue’ in Seneca, Quintilian, Fronto, Apuleius, and Gellius.<sup>29</sup>

There are, however, traces of other uses of the term in the Roman period. Dionysios of Halikarnassos occasionally refers to dialogical exchanges embedded in historical narratives as *διάλογοι*. This is how he calls the conversation between Gyges and Kandaules in Herodotos, the exchange between the Plataeans and Archidamos in Thucydides, and the Melian dialogue in the same author.<sup>30</sup> That there was a reaction against this extension of meaning of *διάλογος*, at least among Platonists, we can infer from the *Prologos* of Albinos (fl. ca. 150 CE), who insists that an interchange of questions and answers should be considered an essential feature of *διάλογος* (2).<sup>31</sup> Consequently, Albinos says, verbal exchanges in Thucydides should not be called *διάλογοι* but *δύο δημηγορίαὶ κατ’ ἐνθύμησιν ἀλλήλαις ἀντιγεγραμμέναι*, “two speeches set against each other.” Albinos’ association of *διάλογος* with question-and-answer format is, we can suspect, influenced by Plato’s use of the term in the *Protagoras*.<sup>32</sup> In the *Prologos* two senses of the word coalesce: its association with a dialectical inquiry, which we saw in Plato’s works, and the sense ‘a literary dialogue’,

<sup>29</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 100.9; Quint. *Inst.* 5.7.28, 10.1.108; Apul. *Fl.* 9.87, 18.130, 20.12; Fronto *Fer. Als.* 3.6 (ed. van den Hout); Gell. *NA* 3.17.5, 17.5.1; Suet. *Aug.* 89.3, *Tib.* 42.2. *Dialogi* may have been Seneca’s own title for his philosophical works; this is how Quintilian refers to them in *Inst.* 10.1.129. The title probably reflects Seneca’s frequent inclusion of imaginary interchanges with either addressee or indefinite interlocutor (see M. T. Griffin, *Seneca. A Philosopher in Politics* [Oxford 1976] 412–415). This interpretation of the title is supported by Seneca’s *Ben.* 5.19.8, where he speaks of *dialogorum altercatio*, referring to a dialogic exchange with an imaginary interlocutor.

<sup>30</sup> *Comp.* 3 on Hdt. 1.8–10; *Thuc.* 16 on Thuc. 2.72–4; *Thuc.* 37–38, 41, on Thuc. 5.86–113.

<sup>31</sup> For commentary on Albinos’ definition see O. Nüsser, *Albins Prolog und die Dialogtheorie des Platonismus* (Stuttgart 1991) (55–58 on Albinos’ comment on Thucydides); Charalabopoulos, *Platonic Drama* 25–26.

<sup>32</sup> Ford, in *The End of Dialogue* 36.

which was popularized in the Hellenistic period. As a consequence, Albinos understands *διάλογος* as a philosophical dialogue of a dialectical character. This is a problematic merger: one of the problems with Albinos' definition is that it excludes texts such as Plato's *Symposium* or *Timaeus*, which are dominated by longer speeches. Quintilian seems to have in mind the same tradition when he speaks in one breath of *dialogi et dialecticae disputationes* which are held by "learned men seeking for truth among men of learning; consequently they subject everything to a minute and scrupulous inquiry with a view to arriving at clear and convincing truths, and they claim for themselves the tasks of invention and judgment" (transl. Butler).<sup>33</sup>

Dialogical exchanges in other genres are also sometimes referred to as *διαλόγοι*, though these are isolated instances. Maximos of Tyre says that Aesop wrote "dialogues and conversations of animals" (*Diss.* 32.1, Αἰσώπῳ τῷ Φρυγί πεποίηνται διάλογοί τε θηρίων καὶ ξυνουσίαι). There are also a few instances in which tragic passages are referred to as dialogues. This is how Galen refers to an exchange between Heracles and Admetos in Euripides' *Alcestis*.<sup>34</sup> In Lucian's *Runaways*, a line φεῦ τῶν κακῶν, ὅτοτοί, παππαπαιιάξ is characterized as belonging to a "tragic dialogue" (*Fug.* 33, τῶν τραγικῶν διαλόγων).

Although in the Roman period the term *διάλογος* is used predominantly in reference to written texts, it is also sometimes applied to a conversation depicted in a dialogue. Athenaios calls thus the conversation related in Plato's *Protagoras* (5.218B and D). Lucian in the *Soloecista* plays with this double meaning—'a literary dialogue' and 'a conversation depicted in a literary dialogue'—as he makes the character 'Lucian' twice refer to the conversation in which he takes part as *διάλογος*

<sup>33</sup> *Inst.* 5.14.27–28, *homines docti et inter doctos verum quaerentes minutius et scrupulosius scrutantur omnia, et ad liquidum confessumque perducunt.*

<sup>34</sup> *De plac. Hipp. et Pl.* 4.6.38 (ed. De Lacy), τὸν Εὐριπίδη γεγραμμένον Ἡρακλέους πρὸς Ἄδμητον διάλογον. Galen is discussing here a passage from Chrysippos.

(*Sol.* 10, μακρὸν γὰρ ἂν ποιήσαιμεν τὸν διάλογον; 12, νῦν δὲ διαλύσωμεν τὸν διάλογον). Aelius Aristides in the *Sacred Tales* recommends that a reader interested in the full story of his illness and Asklepios' interventions consult his parchment books which contain more detailed accounts of his dreams, where will be found (48.8 Keil)

ἰάματα παντὸς εἴδους καὶ διαλόγους τινὰς ... καὶ λόγους ἐν μήκει καὶ φάσματα παντοῖα καὶ προρρήσεις ἀπάσας καὶ χρησμοφδίας περὶ παντοδαπῶν πραγμάτων, τὰς μὲν καταλογάδην, τὰς δὲ ἐν μέτροις γεγνουῖας...

cures of all kinds and some *dialogoi* ... and full scale orations and various visions, and all prophecies and oracles about every kind of matter, some in prose, some in verse... (transl. Behr, modified)

Aristides' parchment books are lost, but from the context we can infer that he uses the term *διαλόγοι* not so much in reference to artful literary compositions but to reports of conversations or simply conversations.

In fact, we find sometimes, though very rarely, the term used in the sense 'a conversation' with no association with a literary composition. Josephus refers to a conversation held by Antipater and a guard as "a dialogue" (*AJ* 17.185). Plutarch uses the term three times in this sense (*Pelop.* 22.1, *Lys.* 23.8, *Demetr.* 15.3). Lucian talks about "dialogues in narrow streets" (*Nigr.* 29), though his word choice might have been dictated by the fact that Nigrinos, the hero of the narrative, is a Platonic philosopher. Philo of Alexandria speaks of the soul being engaged in "dialogues with herself" (*Inebr.* 56, τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτῆς διαλόγοις ὁμολογούσης); similarly Justin Martyr uses the phrase "a dialogue with myself" (*Dial. Tryph.* 3.2, ὁ διάλογος πρὸς ἑμαυτόν). Both Philo and Justin were familiar with Plato's writings and the two passages might be inspired by the definition of thought in the *Sophist*, discussed above. Galen calls discussions—usually polemical or outright hostile—between

physicians *διάλογοι*,<sup>35</sup> and we can presume that he preserves for us a use of the term current in his milieu. Somewhat similarly, Origen quotes a passage from the second-century CE philosopher Celsus, who used the term in reference to quarrels between Jews and Christians (*C. Cels.* 3.1). There are also four ephebic inscriptions from the second century CE mentioning an event called “*διάλογος* at Plataia,” which, as scholars believe, was a cyclical ceremony during which Athens and Sparta competed by presenting epideictic speeches over who will lead the procession at the next celebration of the Eleutheria. It has been argued that in this context the term *διάλογος* means “an arbitration,” with emphasis on “discussion of rival claims.”<sup>36</sup> A similar meaning of *διάλογος*—an arbitration—seems to occur in a passage of Ps.-Herodes.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. *Conclusion*

As far as extant literary sources allow us to judge, the story of the term *διάλογος* begins in the fourth century, when it was coined as a derivative of the verb *διαλέγεσθαι*, rapidly gaining popularity on account of the activity of sophists and Socrates. Plato is the first known author to use the term, though it might have circulated—maybe in sophistic circles—before he wrote his dialogues. In Plato’s works the word is associated with a particular type of conversation—an inquiry carried out by two interlocutors, shaped as an interchange of questions and answers. The connection of the term *διάλογος* with question-and-answer format, and therefore with dialectical argumentation, can be observed in the use of the word by Isocrates and Aristotle, as well as in the later Platonic tradition, as evidenced by Albinos’ *Prologos* and a passage in Quintilian. In the Hellenistic period the term became a label for the genre of literary

<sup>35</sup> Gal. *De meth. med.* X 110 and 113 K.; *De ven. sect. adv. Eras.* XI 194 K.

<sup>36</sup> N. Robertson, “A Point of Precedence at Plataia: The Dispute between Athens and Sparta over Leading the Procession,” *Hesperia* 55 (1986) 88–102. The ceremony seems to have been introduced sometime after the year 146.

<sup>37</sup> Robertson, *Hesperia* 55 (1986) 95.

dialogue—prose works representing conversations between two or more characters—and this remained its main meaning in the Second Sophistic literature. Only occasionally is the term used in the broader sense of a dialogical exchange recorded in other genres or a real-life conversation.

The question that naturally emerges is to what extent the use of the term in literature mirrors its use in everyday speech. The scarcity of sources of non-literary character, the disappearance of much of Hellenistic literature, and the growing gap between the literary and the colloquial use of the Greek language make an answer difficult. It seems possible, however, that after the term gained popularity as the name of the genre of dialogue, it gradually extended its meaning. In particular, it is possible that in the Roman period it was more frequently used in the sense ‘a conversation’ than literary sources would suggest. The infrequency of the term in this meaning may be a result of classicizing tendency of the period’s literature, recommending Attic texts of the classical past as models for word-choice and word-meaning.<sup>38</sup> The few instances from Plutarch, Josephus, Galen, and Celsus in which the term has its non-classical meaning may reflect everyday usage. In Galen and Celsus the term appears in the context of polemical disputes; similarly, the “διάλογος at Plataia,” if its scholarly reconstruction is correct, was structured as a polemical debate. The examination of the meaning of the term in the Christian texts of late antiquity and in the Byzantine period would require a separate study, but we can observe that the sense ‘a conversation’ appears frequently in Prokopios, who uses διάλογος several times in *On Buildings* and in the *History of Wars*,<sup>39</sup> where it refers both to informal

<sup>38</sup> Though, of course, one must observe that the wide-spread use of the term as a label for the dialogic genre in the imperial period is also not classical. On Atticism see e.g. J. Wisse, “Greeks, Romans, and the Rise of Atticism,” in J. G. J. Abbenes et al. (eds.), *Greek Literary Theory after Aristotle. A Collection of Papers in Honour of D. M. Schenkveld* (Amsterdam 1995) 65–82; S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire* (Oxford 1996) 17–64.

<sup>39</sup> *Aed.* 1.1.64, 1.11.4, 2.3.9, 5.7.3; *Bell.* 1.5.23, 6.6.13, 7.32.33, 8.31.22.

exchanges between private men and to more formal debates or conferences in which emperors and generals take part.<sup>40</sup>

*November, 2013*

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński Univ.  
Warsaw, Poland  
kjazdzewska@gmail.com

<sup>40</sup> This paper is a part of a project financed by a research grant from the Foundation for Polish Science. I would like to thank Anthony Kaldellis for reading an earlier draft and for his comments. Christopher Brown and Anthony Kaldellis have also helped me gain access to several publications cited in this paper, for which I am truly grateful.