

THE AGE OF THE ACADEMY

The “publication” and circulation of the Dialogues

Very little is known about the reproduction and the dissemination of the *Dialogues* while Plato was still alive. It seems that Hermodorus from Syracuse, one of Plato's oldest companions and disciples, was the first to take the initiative of publishing and circulating his mentor's *Dialogues* in book form. These books were disseminated to various regions of the Hellenic world, in East and West, with Sicily holding precedence. The possibility that the tyrant Dionysius I played a pivotal role in their circulation, on account of his amicable relations with Plato, cannot be ruled out. This applies also to the philosopher and mathematician Archytas, through whom Plato met members of the “new” Pythagorean School. The information regarding Hermodorus is given by Zenobius (2nd century AD) and is obviously based on earlier testimony, as Cicero was aware of the matter and indeed commented on it. It fills out the picture of an unrestricted publishing process

Zenobius V, 6

ad Att.
XIII, 21a

for the *Dialogues*, by members of the Academy, which is confirmed by two of Plato's students, Panaetius and Euphorion, who attest that they came across copies of the *Republic* which had essential differences in their introductory notes (εἰρήκασι πολάκις ἔστραμεν ἑρῶσθαι τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς Πολιτείας = the beginning of the *Republic* was found several times revised and rewritten).

172c-176c

Apart from the introductions, there were other kinds of texts that are considered to be interpolations in the *Dialogues*, such as the description of the "philosophical life" in *Theaetetus*, or the famed "Myth of Atlantis" in *Timaeus*. Nonetheless, it should be considered certain that the *Dialogues* of Plato were already circulating in book form during his lifetime.

What interests us most here, however, is detecting the mechanisms of publication of these *Dialogues* by the Academy, a process that will lead us to the major issue that has arisen regarding the so-called spurious dialogues, which were branded as fakes already in the time of Plato's successors.

232d

Plato himself had dictated a publishing mechanism in the framework of the Academy's activities, following rather a Socratic reading procedure: that is, he considered as essential prerequisite of a publication the public reading aloud of the text. Only then did he regard a treatise as "publishable" and ready to circulate in the marketplace, as is surmised also from the Stranger's deposition to the *Sophist*, that there are published views and theories on all

arts [and therefore on dialectics too]. Almost nothing is known about this publishing procedure, beyond the position and the role of the *anagnostes* (reader, lector). However, it is reasonable to assume that at the public reading aloud a work was open to all manner of criticism – pragmatological, philological and linguistic – by the select audience of Academy members. Plato had entrusted the role of *anagnostes* to none other than Aristotle, from the moment the latter joined the student body in the Academy.

Staikos, *Plato*,
15-18

This publishing procedure not only represents a mechanism without precedent, but also has another parameter: obviously, not all the *Dialogues* submitted to the control of a public reading were considered completed and so remained works in progress. After all, in many of the *Dialogues* purported to be authentic, the exploratory discussions ended at a negative conclusion, as in *Theaetetus*.

210b-d

Comment: Throughout the long operation of the Academy, Plato employed the dialectical method of teaching and classed his lectures in various thematic units on purely epistemic criteria: logic, ethics, the role of the soul as pre-existing knowledge, the special characteristics of art, valour and friendship, rhetoric, politics and, of course, legislation, were discussed in intimate detail. His ultimate objective was to chart the pathways that would lead his student audience steadily towards the conquest of true knowledge, as opposed to sophistry, which knowledge

would, in its turn, underpin the course towards the virtuous life and would prepare the ground for approaching and identifying with the *agathos* (good). In this sense, Plato's *Dialogues* do not represent a philosophical system, that is, as a recipe for happiness, but "rules" or "commands" which should be followed by whoever aims, through individual intellectual creation or empirical expression, to attain virtue, by living in absolute harmony in an ideal State that has no need of "guardians".

Returning to the publishing procedure, it is reasonable to assume that after the public reading aloud a scribe undertook to pen on papyrus the final text. This must have been the academic copy with the expressed concepts and theories of Plato, and therefore a standard text to which one could refer. In all probability, this academic edition was kept in the Academy library and was accessible to every interested Academy member.

Was there an Academic edition of the Dialogues?

The conjectured existence of an "academic" edition is reinforced more than anyone else by Aristotle, who in his teaching treatises makes frequent references to certain passages from the *Dialogues*, which presupposes the existence of a standard text. An important source on relevant cases is his *Topics*, and for the additional reason that it is the sole treatise of the so-called internal unity, which was

Hambruch,
Topik

"published" by Aristotle himself or presents an advanced pre-publication picture.

Topics must have circulated in the wider book market, both in Greece and in Alexandria, and therefore in the circle of the Library of the Ptolemies. We should not preclude the possibility that this publication is referred to by Cicero, who during his visit to the library of Lucullus found works by Aristotle, for which he uses the qualificatory term *commentarios*. Aristotle's *Topics* is a treatise dealing with the definition of words and the formulation of correct terms and concepts which are commonly accepted in the philosophical schools, from the perspective of practising dialectics, something that is exclusively his own invention: οὐδὲν ἔχομεν παραδεδομένον ὑπ' ἄλλων (inasmuch, then, as we have no tradition bequeathed to us by others).

So, Aristotle's references to theories, words and phrases which are contained in Plato's *Dialogues* are not outside the character of scientific ethics, they are citations. "My intention [Aristotle admits] is to find a method by which we shall be in the position to draw conclusion on a given proposal-[hypothesis] starting from generally accepted views. Because this is mainly the work of dialectics but also of scientific examination." For example, Aristotle criticizes in *Topics* the "proponents of forms", censuring Plato's theory of transcendent forms.

In the first book of the treatise *On the Parts of Animals* (initially an autonomous essay on the problems of scien-

Cic. *de fin.*,
III, 7

Topics,
VIII 5, 159a 36

Düring,
Aristoteles,
70-71

147a 5-11

Cherniss,
Criticism, 1-27

Topics,
VI 14, 151 b 19

tific method), the Stagirite raises issues of epistemic method and essentially levels criticism against the diairetic method of Plato and Speusippus, and against the more general sense they gave to the definition of *episteme*. According to Aristotle, only the specialist can penetrate deeply into the problems, whereas the merely educated man must suffice with a general overview, which nonetheless enables him to pass judgement even on problems he is confronting for the first time.

Baudry,
Origine

Düring,
Aristoteles,
216

389 a

At a linguistic level, a striking example is the longstanding philological discussion in philosophical circles – between Aristotle and Xenocrates – regarding the meaning of the word “*γένεσθαι*” (= the world was born, *Timaeus*). Aristotle notes that, according to Plato, the world did not exist but “was born”, a position he strongly disapproves, as with this word “*γεννήθηκε*” Aristotle interprets the event. Plato also gave a different meaning from Aristotle to the word “*αἰδιος*”; he meant the eternal essence – eternity, whereas the Stagirite gave it the meaning of perpetual! However, the attributing a different meaning to the same words used by Plato and Aristotle may be related also to the fact that the first considered that there exists a system of words with fixed meanings, which were created by the *onomatopoeists* (coiner of the word), the *onomatourgos* (name-creator) who is described in *Cratylus*.

This rather justifies also the reason why there is a different conception between Plato and Aristotle regarding the “semasiological” essence of a word: Plato seeks its

“literal” meaning, whereas Aristotle the understanding of the meaning of a term.

Aristotle’s scholia, like many other of his observations and objections, on Platonic theories, as well as on other works by Presocratic philosophers and tragic poets, would have had little or no scientific credence and value had they not referred to published Platonic *Dialogues* and indeed to a specific passage.

This view is bolstered by the fact that Aristotle’s comments on Plato’s theories and ideas were written down in the margin of his didactic works, not necessarily with logical continuity – in other words, disordered and unprocessed material! However, if there were no correspondence between Aristotle’s annotations and observations and specific excerpts from Platonic *Dialogues*, then the work of Andronicus Rhodius, who undertook to publish the Stagirite’s teaching treatises in the first century BC, would have collapsed completely. Of course, it could be argued that in the period when Aristotle was studying in the Academy he had not yet begun to process and to classify his studies by thematic units. In this case, we should consider that he had, necessarily, in his possession the entire “Platonic corpus”, so as to peruse it and to refer to it as appropriate. However, what should be considered certain is that Andronicus had in his hands the publication of the *Complete Works* of Plato.

Littig,
Andronikos

Comment: Here we should say a few words about the publication of the Aristotelian corpus by Andronicus and the enormous philological and cognitive difficulties he faced. We shall not speak of the order and the titles of the works, which too are due to his initiative – he placed first the treatises on Logic, as Porphyry relates –, but of the fact that Aristotle had recorded in his esoteric works different views from those he had expressed in his published treatises, the so-called exoteric works. Furthermore, beyond the picture of the cohesion of the treatises, as we emphasized above, Aristotle's theories and opinions were written in a language and style totally alien to people of Andronicus' day (1st century BC) and therefore largely incomprehensible to them. So, in order for Aristotle's deeper thought to become more widely appreciated, the texts had to be classified thematically –by *episteme*–, so as to make his teaching clearer and readily comprehensible in a period when the interest of men of letters was turned towards understanding the content of the philosophy, mainly, and not towards the way it was written, that is, the language and the method employed. This fact leads us to the following impasse: on the one hand the identical theories of Plato and Aristotle are frequently expressed with different terminology, and on the other Andronicus interprets Aristotle's thoughts and theories using terminology and words that had different significance and meaning at the time the publication of the Aristotelian corpus was being processed.

Düring,
Aristoteles,
245-253

*“Do not insist on being dependent
on names”*

In general, another essential parameter, purely linguistic and literary in character, should be borne in mind, which even today plays a decisive role in the confrontation between those who point out the divisive differences between Plato and Aristotle with regard to the terminology the two philosophers use to describe the same ideas and situations. Plato does not have a set terminology and indeed is derogatory about those who are fixated on the meaning of the word and do not comprehend the deeper meaning of the object of discussion: τὸ μὴ σπουδάζειν ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασι (Do not insist on being dependent on names). This stance, indirect rejection of written discourse in relation to oral teaching and dialogue, is not an obstacle when he describes clearly the relationship between ideas / forms and sensed things.

Plato repeatedly casts doubt on the efficacy of written discourse and stresses the inadequacy of words and phrases, and of figures of speech generally, to express more profound meanings and ideas: in *Phaedrus* he raises the problem of the inability of written discourse to contribute to a creative discussion – the “unwritten doctrines” to which Aristotle refers. On the other hand, complementarily, we have the express testimony of Plato, from his *Seventh Letter*, that he never wrote down his innermost thoughts relating to the essence of philosophy. All these indications,

Statesman,
261e

276d

and others lead rather to the conclusion that Plato was aware that man's conquest of truth and good was unfeasible – and even moreso its description with words!

Comment: In summarizing the aforesaid, we would go so far as to contend that the “anchorite” or the “stylite” and the followers of Pyrrhon are in a position to conquer, through their inertia, some ultimate good, perhaps theosis. But these extreme life stances do not support societies and the creative evolution and reproduction of the human species.

Last, also indicative of Plato's position vis-à-vis the written text is his famous lecture to the Athenian public “On the Good” and the scathing and often sarcastic comments that accompanied it, primarily in theatrical circles. Proclus, in his *Commentary on Timaeus*, mentions situations connected with Athenians' views on the interpretation of the “Myth of Atlantis” and the paternity of the *Republic*.

On Timaeus. In the course of Plato's Dialogues down the ages, *Timaeus* holds a special place as the Teacher's work *par excellence* that was commented on and translated by academics and intellectuals in West and East, until the end of the sixteenth century, and was the starting point of “Platonic theology”. It is also the sole Platonic work that was translated into another language already by the first century BC. Concurrently, *Timaeus*, together with

the wider scholia and annotations of Platonists and Neoplatonists, was the unique cosmological treatise until the period of the late Italian Renaissance.

This dialogue deals not only with issues of physics and metaphysics, but also with subjects pertaining to astronomy, biology, mathematics and the function of human organs in general, in relation to perceived representations, and even the rationalization of myth, and so on. We have the feeling that it is an “academic” publication on cosmology, which is based on views and theories of Plato, as well as of other intellectuals, which Plato himself had espoused, such as of Philistion, Leucippus and Eudoxus.

However, let us cite here what Vasilis Kalfas has characteristically pointed out.

Comment: Kalfas, who has published the *Timaeus* with detailed introductory texts and notes (in Greek), writes: “its survival and its influence from antiquity to the present day is of itself a labyrinthine chapter in the history of philosophy. No other Platonic dialogue – and perhaps no other philosophical text – has been read or commented on as much as the *Timaeus*”. And he continues: “it was the refuge of the mystic and the mathematician, the manifesto of the teleological view of the universe, the strongest link connecting Christianity to ancient Greek thought”. In the course of our research, we shall endeavour to verify, as far as possible, Kalfas's opinions.

Aristoxenus,
Harmon.,
col. II, 1

Kalfas,
Timaeus,
32-33

In de Caelo
(CIAG, VII,
379.16)

It seems that already from the years when Plato was teaching in the Academy, Aristotle was compiling theses, *inter alia*, relating to the subject matter of his teacher's *Dialogues*, which were circulating in the Agora: the so-called "exoteric discourses". Their titles are recorded in Diogenes Laertius' *Catalogue of Works*, included among which is the essay *Extracts from the Timaeus and from the Works of Archytas*, an essay with which Simplicius was apparently familiar (*On the Heavens*: ὅς καὶ σύνοψιν ἢ ἐπιτομὴν τοῦ Τιμαίου γράφειν οὐκ ἀπηξίωσεν). This is the first commentary known to have been compiled on *Timaeus*. Characteristically too, Aristotle refers to *Timaeus* at least 43 times in his esoteric treatises, but in no case does he comment on or even mention the "introduction" to the *Dialogue*, namely the "Myth of Atlantis".

Aim of these notes and remarks is to reinforce the view that an Academic edition of Plato's *Dialogues* existed already from the time of his public teaching in the Academy and, furthermore, that the *Dialogues* were distributed in tetralogies already from the time of Speusippus, as we shall see in due course.

The "dialogue" as literary genre and teaching tool of philosophy

Gundert,
Dialog

In speaking about the publishing mechanisms in the Academy, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the fact that Plato chose the "dialogue" as literary form to express

his philosophical precepts and his worldview. It should be noted here that Plato's choice had two parameters: the prehistory of the "dialogue" as a literary genre and the importance of dialectics as an agent of monitoring epistemonik knowledge.

Plato is not of course the creator of the Socratic dialogues! According to an unconfirmed snippet of information (indeed from elsewhere), Diogenes Laertius attributes the devising of this literary genre to Protagoras. Aristotle, on the other hand, who classes the specific dialogue as comic poetry (*On Poets*), mentions someone entirely unknown from elsewhere, Alexamenos from Teos, as the first to have written dialogues of philosophical content prior to Socrates. This information, which Aristotle passes on without having cross-checked it, may even be a Sophist fabrication, ultimate aim of which was to attribute the style of the "Socratic dialogue" to a literary genre born outside Athens and Socrates' circle.

Common trait of the "dialogues" is the crosstalk between two or more persons, during the conduct of which the "reader" is simultaneously a spectator, but may additionally play an active role in the procedure. Similarities with the Platonic *Dialogues* can be seen in the *Comedies* of Aristophanes, in which the heroes of the plays are identifiable with persons in Plato's *Dialogues*: eponymous political and intellectual figures in the life of Athens converse and dispute with ordinary working folk and imagined *personae*.

Frag. 72R

Kalfas,
Comedy

Dittmar,
Aischines

Whatever the case, the choice of the dialogue as path for seeking the truth, in various aspects of intellectual life, without aspiring to transmit a certain knowledge or to describe a particular art, but mainly to guide his audience towards awareness of ignorance, is not a primary literary genre of Socratic invention. This idea must come from highbrows of an earlier period, who kept their distance from and had misgivings about the omniscience of the Sophists. We refer here to Critias, Plato's uncle, whose many writings included works in dialogue form, such as the *Aphorisms*, which bear a resemblance to the Socratic dialogues. The first of Socrates' students to compose "Socratic dialogues" is said to have been Aeschines of Sphettos, surnamed *Socraticus* (c. 430-360 BC), who was also a witness at his mentor's trial.

Levi,
Megara

Tradition accredits him with assiduously saving Socrates' teaching, through seven *Dialogues* attributed to him, which legend has it were entrusted to him by the Mentor himself or by Xanthippe. Be that as it may, in essence the dialogues *Miltiades*, *Callias*, *Axiochus*, *Aspasias*, *Alcibiades*, *Rhinon* and *Telauges* do indeed reflect the staged image of Socrates' teaching. It is certain that other students of Socrates compiled works in the form of dialogues, such as Euclid of Megara (*Alcibiades*, *Criton*, *Eroticus*, et al.).

Plato's *Dialogues* have a pronounced theatricality and they may well be influenced by the tragedies he had written in his youth. Although referring to scenes of everyday

life, they are distinguished by brio and an impeccable linguistic style, a mélange of Plato's own devising.

It is quite possible that Plato was led "compulsorily" to choosing "dialogues" as an educational tool, if we bear in mind that the Sophists with their famous diatribes had classified thematically almost all sectors of knowledge as prerequisite for the conquest of truth, even at the level of mathematics and astronomy. Moreover, this choice may be due to the fact that the "dialogue" as a literary genre was closer than any other to the history of Athenian education. The Sophists provided explanations of just about everything: precision in the use of language, the art of disputation, antinomies, conceptually affined words, philosophical principles of the Ionian School, the truth about the gods and agnosticism, the laws and justice. This is borne out by the titles of their books: *On the Non-Existent* (Gorgias), *On Truth or Refutations* (Protagoras), *On the Nature of Man* (Prodicus), *Areopagiticus* (Damon), *On Truth* (Antiphon). However, Plato did not follow suit, but, as a rule, entitled his *Dialogues* with the names of the protagonists of each dialogical discussion, or according to its setting, for example *Symposium*, with the exception of *Republic* and *Laws*.