This paper argues that we can only have a just appreciation of the rise and early development of philosophic dialogue in Greece by bracketing the immense influence that the Platonic version of the form has exerted and turning instead to tracing how “Socratic logoi” came to be recognized as a new prose genre in fourth-century Athens. A consideration of the early terms used to name the form suggests that dialogue should not be derived from fifth-century mime or drama but should be understood in the context of the burgeoning rhetorical literature of the period; in particular, dialogue will be shown to be one of many innovative kinds of fictional speech-texts that were proclaiming new and special powers for written prose.

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From “Socratic logoi” to “dialogues”

Dialogue in Fourth-century Genre Theory

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν δὴποι πρέποι, ὁ ἀνδρες, τῇδε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ
ζωσπερ μειρακίω πλάττοντι λόγους εἰς ύμᾶς εἰσέναι.

Nor would it be seemly for one of my age to come before you
making up speeches like a schoolboy.

Plato Apology

The question of why Plato wrote dialogues is an irresistible one that I shall resist in this essay. Part of what makes the question irresistible is that Plato himself posed it as a paradox: it by no means escaped the ancients that, as a character in Athenaeus indignantly puts it, Plato “threw Homer and mimetic poetry out of the city in his Republic, when he himself wrote mimetic dialogues!”1 The question of genre is also irresistible because it can seem fundamental for interpreting Plato: it will make a great deal of difference if we take the dialogue form as expressing a philosophical position, a way of avoiding dogmatism for example,2 or as a pedagogical device to model

1 Athenaeus 505b-c (αὐτός δὲ τοὺς διαλόγους μιμητικῶς γράψας), discussed below. Cf. Proclus’ commentary on the Republic (§§ 161-3).
philosophy as a cooperative enterprise (and one quite different from passively taking in
sophistic epideixis). For these and other reasons, readers of Plato may well wonder why
he did not, for example, deliver himself of his views on excellence by writing Peri aretés
at the top of a page and then filling up the rest with what he thought.

But two problems deter me from approaching this question directly. The first is
that I am not sure there is a single answer. Obviously Plato may have had a number of
reasons for choosing the form, and these reasons may have changed along with the
considerable changes in his writing over a long career (to say nothing of possible changes
in his philosophical views). The second problem is that I do not see how this question
can be isolated from the fact that many other writers also elected the dialogue form—not
only Xenophon but a host of Socratics including Aeschines and Antisthenes of Athens,
Euclides of Megara, Phaedo of Elis, and the genre’s alleged inventor, Alexamenus of
Teos (on whom more below). Now I willingly grant the possibility that Plato, genius that

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of the sophists and demonstrates that knowledge is not merely transferred but acquired by each individual
for himself.” Among recent discussions, R. Blondell, The Play of Character in Plato’s Dialogues
(Cambridge 2003) argues that in order to draw his readers in to participate in philosophic thought Plato
composed dialogues as “scripts” for enactment, with each interlocutor modeling a distinct way of
responding to Socratic interrogation. A further issue, pressing for some, is how the dialogue form
compromises attempts to reconstruct Socrates’ philosophy, on which see Charles Kahn, “Did Plato write
(Paris 2004) stresses that it is not clear that we can assume that such a varied corpus falls under a single literary formula.
the title is the thesis, though I think its clear-cut and hierarchized distinction between philosophy and
literature begs the question. Ch. 1 presents a good, albeit somewhat skeptical review of the Socratics. On
their works, collected in Gabriele Giannantoni’s Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae (1983 Second edition,
Naples 1990), see P. Vander Waerdt, ed., The Socratic Movement (Ithaca 1994). On Phaedo, see Cf. L.
Rosetti, “‘Socratica’ in Fedone di Elide,” Studi Urbinati n.s. 47 (1973) 364-381.
he was, transformed the genre when he took it up. But that does not make these other
writers—some his predecessors—irrelevant in considering why he did so. Understanding
why Plato wrote dialogues involves understanding why the Socratics did.

The usual explanation for the rise of the Socratic dialogue is to say that Socrates’
students invented the form as a way of preserving and disseminating the master’s unique
mode of philosophizing.6 Herwig Görgemans, for example, goes from the observation
that “dialogue as a genre was a creation of the first generation of Socrates’ pupils” to the
inference that “Undoubtedly, the main motivation for their creation was the visualization
of Socrates’ personality and his teachings as a holistic entity.”7 Those who take thus view
must concede that the alleged effort to capture Socrates’ distinctive style in writing
produced some rather different Socrates’s in Plato and Xenophon. But we have good
evidence from contemporary comedy that Socrates was an unusual and striking figure, in
particular for his “prattling” (Frogs 1492: ἡλεῖν). And the case of Jesus of Nazareth, so
often adduced as a parallel to Socrates, confirms the possibility that an historical
personality could inspire a new literary genre, and that the genre could by strongly
marked by his particular style of teaching. But even the most striking personality cannot
account, by itself, for the development of a new literary kind. The assumption that
dialogue was the obvious choice for representing Socratic teaching is rather pat, given
that prose dialogues had apparently never been written in Greece. To redress this

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On the agora shoemaker’s house sometimes ascribed to Simon (see DL 000), see D. Thompson in
Archaeology 13.3 (1960): 234-40, The American School volumes (Agora 14), and 000, "Living and
Working around the Agora" in Greek Houses and Households Nevett & Ault 2005). Cf. too Hock, "Simon
the Shoemaker as an Ideal Cynic" GRBS 1976(?) and Sellars, "Simon the Shoemaker and the Problem of
Socrates" CP 2003. Thanks to Rob Sobak for these references.

6 So R. Hirzel, Der Dialog (Hildesheim 1895) I esp. 68 ff., and A. Hermann, “Dialog,” in Reallexikon für
Antike und Christentum 3, cols. 928-955, esp. 929.
7 Görgemans (n. 000 above) pp. 351-2.
imbalance, I propose in this essay to consider the rise and early spread of philosophical
dialogue in formal terms, not tying the texts to Socrates’ personality or Plato’s literary
genius. I shall consider what the terms were used to name and characterize Sôkratikoi
logoi when the form was pioneered in the period ca. 400-350 BCE. This will draw our
attention to “Socratic logoi” as the genre’s original name. Carefully parsing the meaning
of this phrase in its earliest occurrences will direct us to the lively experiments in prose at
the time, and to specify how the development of Socratic dialogue was influenced by
some of these literary dynamics, as well as by the personality of the master. If I sidestep
the question “Why dialogue?” I hope that giving a more precise answer to the question
“What was a dialogue?” can clarify the challenges and possibilities Socratics faced, and
the company they kept and warded off, when they took up their pens.

**Defining Dialogue: dialegesthai**

The word dialogos appears in the fourth century as a deverbative noun, not much
used at first, from dialegesthai, “to talk together, converse.” dialegesthai is a very
common term, almost a vox propria for what goes on in such texts as Plato’s and
Xenophon’s Socratics, but in itself it is very much a word for “conversation,” less a form
of philosophizing than a mode of gentlemanly “association” (sunousia) at leisure.⁸ The
prefix dia- characterizes the speech as an exchange between two or more persons, but
does not imply that the exchange is particularly “dialectical” or “dialogical.” Fourth-
century uses of dialegesthai define a social rather than intellectual action. As a way to

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⁸ Hirzel p. 6 regards “conversation” as a decline of dialogue’s form. Walter Müri, “Das Wort Dialektik bei
Platon,” *MH* 1 (1944) 152-168 traces the evolution of the “dialectical” meaning of dialegesthai, dialektikê
and (what is probably Plato’s coinage) dialektikos to the Republic and some later dialogues. See too David
describe a Socratic encounter, “conversation” connoted a casual and leisurely discussion, conducted among those who were, if not precise social equals, equally free to pass their time this way. The sophists had already put a number of such terms into circulation to avoid undesirable suggestions of inequality in the teacher-pupil terminology. Sophists in Plato and Xenophon describe their services euphemistically as “associating” or “spending time together” (suneinai, diatribein) with their students, and indeed of “talking together” (homilein, dialegesthai). A young man who was of the age (and economic class) to attend a sophist would have rather been spoken of as one of that wise man’s “companions” or “associates” (hetairoi, sunontes) than as his “pupil” (mathêtês). Socrates, then, But Socratic “conversations” had this crucial difference: no fees were attached. The Socratics insulted sophists as at once elitist, in picking and choosing those with whom they would condescend to speak, and as slavish, in selling such a thing as intercourse to the highest bidder (e.g. Xen. Mem. 1.2.7). Socrates, by contrast, was a “popular” sort (dêmotikos, 1.2.60-61) who would talk with anyone for free.

“Conversation” is thus usually the best way to render dialogos in Plato, which seems to refer to a less formal interchange than, e.g. dialogismos, a “counting up.” The word could be given a “dialectical” coloring by Socratics. Semantically, it derives from the middle meaning of dialegesthai, but a connection could be asserted with the active dialegein, “to sort into classes.” The Xenophontic Socrates does so on one occasion to explain why so much of his conversation was involved with definition. The passage

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9 Very revealing is Protagoras’ opposition between his own tuition and the “compulsory” education of grammar school (Prot. 326a, cf. 318d-e = 80 A 5 DK).


is a pendant to a defense of self-control, which counts among its benefits the ability to analyze things into their natural kinds (*kata genê*), “sorting them out” (*dialegein*) into the good and bad so as to choose appropriately. This ability is not, however, purely analytic: it makes men “not only extremely happy but also outstandingly good conversationalists” (*dialégeštais diuanatotátous*). The connection is cemented with a Socratic etymology deriving *dialegesthai*, “conversing,” “from people coming together to deliberate about how to divide things (*dialegein*) into their natural kinds.” Here then, dialogue comes close to dialectic, but without losing its connection to conversation as a non-technical, non-disciplinary, social activity. Xenophon’s down-to-earth Socrates is not insensitive to the social advantages that philosophic training can bring: assiduously pursued, this activity produces men who are “the best, the most influential and the most skilled in discussion” (*ἀρίστους τε καὶ ἠγεμονικωτάτους καὶ διαλεκτικωτάτους*).

**Plato’s dialogos: an art of conversation**

*Dialogos* is never used by Plato as a name for his genre. There is no passage in his corpus where *dialogos* or *dialegesthai* needs to mean anything more formal or technical than conversation among friends. A few times a stretch of argument is called a “dialogue” (e.g. *Laches* 200e, cf. *Rep*. 354b), but with no noticeable generic force. Plato takes the heart of verb *dialegesthai* to be “discuss” when he concocts an etymologizing

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definition of *dia-noia* ("thought"): a thought is defined as a kind of logos, specifically a "conversation" in the soul without audible sound (*phônê*, *Sophist* 263e, cf. 264a).^{13}

Two passages in the dialogues have been taken as programmatic for the genre. The most self-referential occurs in the frame to *Theaetetus* (143b-c, cf. Cic. *Tusc. disp.* 1.4.8) in which Euclides the narrator explains how he has composed the book at hand (τὸ βιβλίον τουτί). He has written it down not as it was "narrated" (διηγεῖτο) to him by Socrates, but as a "conversation" (διαλεγόμενον), dropping the tiresome "narrative parts between the speeches" (αἱ μεταξὺ τῶν λόγων διηγήσεις), things like "I said" or "he replied." This entire framing prologue has fascinating implications for Plato’s readership,^{14} but it strikes me as rather ad hoc and I would not infer from it any general theory of dialogic writing.^{15}

Another seemingly relevant passage is *Protagoras* 338a in which Socrates is said to insist on a "form of conversing" (εἴδος τῶν διαλόγων) that proceeds by short question and answer, one way of describing dialogue. But in context, this "short talk" (*brakhulogia*) is simply one mode of conversing among others; it is a mode Socrates undoubtedly prefers, and one that may be pointedly opposed to long sophistical

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^{13} Οὐκοῦν διάνοια μὲν καὶ λόγος ταὐτόν· πλὴν ὁ μὲν ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς αὐτὴν διάλογος ἄνευ φωνῆς γιγνόμενος τοῦτ’ εὐτὸ ἡμῖν ἐπονομάσθη, διάνοια. Cf. μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θομὸς II.11.407.

^{14} Harold Tarrant, “Chronology and narrative apparatus in Plato’s dialogue,” *Electronic Antiquity* (1994) (http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ElAnt/V1N8/tarrant.html) has inferred from this passage that the pure dramatic dialogue (with no narrative frame) was not previously familiar to Plato’s readership, and this passage announces what is Plato’s own modification of the genre. On Tarrant’s view, the narrative dialogues of the early-middle period (i.e. *Charmides*, *Erastae* (if genuine), *Euthydemos*, *Lysis*, *Parmenides* (to 137), *Phaedo*, *Protagoras*, *Republic*, and *Symposium*) were written to be published, while the purely dramatic ones, without explanatory frames, were at first confined to private readings in the school.

^{15} One Platonic discussion of *dramatic* dialogue seems applicable to his texts: in the famous "tripod of the Muses" passage (*Laws* 719c) the poet is out of his wits and, “since his art is representation [i.e. it requires characters] he will necessarily produce differing sorts who will say things contradicting one another, without knowing which one is speaking the truth” (καὶ τῆς τέχνης οὐδῆς μμῆσσις ἀναγκάζεται, ἐναντίος ἀλλήλως ἀνθρώπως ποιῶν διατιθέμενοις, ἐναντία λέγειν αὐτῷ πολλάξις, οἴδεν δὲ οὔτ’ εἰ ταῦτα οὔτ’ εἰ θάτερα ἄληθη τῶν λεγομένων).
epideixes, but it is by no means the exclusive concern of Socrates: in fact, he fancifully derives the practice of brachylogy from the Laconic utterances of the Seven Sages, and he presents it, with no apparent irony, as among Protagoras’ professed skills: “you are able, on your own account and as your reputation goes, to practice either macrylogy or brachylogy in associating with people.” In the work as a whole, the passage on short answers is not a definition of dialogue (which, as Protagoras itself shows, can include long speeches) as much as one among many discursive modes that are competing for center stage in the work. That a variety of speaking styles will be on display is clear at the start of the conversation when Protagoras offered to prove virtue is teachable either by a story (muthos) or a formal epideixis. Socrates then requests he turn from “fine long speeches” and exhibit the rarer skill of answering “shortly” (κατὰ βραχχύ). Protagoras consents, though cannot long suppress the need to break out into an applause-winning speech. Socrates repeats his request that Protagoras “converse” (διαλέξεσθαι) via brachylogy (334E), acridly adding, “I thought there was a difference between having a

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17 Prot. 342b-343b. The idealization of Laconic brevity can be paralleled in a Peloponnesian tradition in Herodotus 4.77 (Anacharsis: Ἐλληνας πάντας ἀσχόλους εἶναι ἐξ πάσης σοφῆς πλήν Λακεδαιμονίων, τούτους δὲ εἶναι μουνίους σωφρόνους δούναι τε καὶ δέξασθαι λόγον).

18 335B-C: σὺ μὲν γὰρ, ὡς λέγεται περὶ σοῦ, φῆς δὲ καὶ αὐτῶς, καὶ ἐν μακρολογίᾳ καὶ ἐν βραχυλογίᾳ οἶδος τ’ εἶ συνουσίας ποιεῖσθαι—σοφὸς γὰρ εἰ—ἐγὼ δέ τὰ μακρὰ ταῦτα ἀδύνατος. This passage may be he basis for the claim in DL (9.53) that Protagoras “was the first to develop the Socratic form of discussion [eidos logon].” Gorgias has the same double competence in Gorgias (447c, 449b-c) which he and Tisias are said to have “invented” in Phdr. 266.

19 Simon Goldhill, The Invention of Prose (Oxford 2002) 80 notes how often Plato’s text constitutes itself by “humiliating” important civic discourses, poetry obviously, but also prose genres such as the funeral oration (Menexenus) and “rhetoric and sophistry.” A pioneering study of such dynamics is Andrea Wilson Nightingale, Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the construct of philosophy (Cambridge 1995).

20 320C: μῦθον λέγων ἐπιδείξῃ ἢ λόγον διεξελθῶν;

21 329B: Πρωταγόρας δὲ ὁ δὲ ἢκανὸς μὲν μακρόν λόγους καὶ καλοὺς εἴπειν, ὡς αὐτὰ δηλοῖ, ἢκανὸς δὲ καὶ ἐρωτηθεὶς ἀποκρίνεσθαι κατὰ βραχχύ καὶ ἐρόμενος περιείμαινε τε καὶ ἀποδέξασθαι τὴν ἀπόκρισιν, ἃ ὀλγοὺς ἐστὶ παρασκευασμένα.

22 335A: ἐμοὶ διαλέξεσθαι, τῷ ἐτέρῳ χρῷ τρόπῳ πρὸς με, τῇ βραχυλογίᾳ. Socrates claims to
conversation together and demagoguery” (336B: χωρὶς γὰρ ἔγωγ ὀμην εἶναι τὸ συνεϊναί τε ἀλλήλοις διαλεγομένους καὶ τὸ δημηγορεῖν). \(^{23}\) It is when things threaten to fall apart over the question of “What is to be the mode of our conversation?” (336b: τίς ὁ τρόπος ἔσται τῶν διαλόγων;) that Callias tells Socrates not to insist too closely on “this kind of conversation consisting in very short answers” (μήτε σὲ τὸ ἀκριβὲς τοῦτο ἐξὸς τῶν διαλόγων ζητεῖν τὸ κατὰ βραχὺ λίαν); but he also advises Protagoras to trim his rhetorical sails (338a). Throughout, “conversing” is what they both do together (335d: σοῦ τὲ καὶ Πρωταγόρου διαλεγομένων).

The foregoing suggests, and the next section will confirm, that what we call Socratic or Platonic “dialogues” were not called dialogoi when they were being written and published. Indeed, I have found but two possible fourth-century uses of logos as a genre term, one an Isocratean slur and the other a dubious reading in a fragment from Aristotle (72 Rose, see below). It remains true of course that Xenophon as well as Plato thought that Socrates practiced a special kind of conversation, in some respects a dialectical one. But readers eager to get instructions in a certain kind of argument, what some called “dialectic” and others called “antilogic” or “eristic,” would seem to be directed to other texts. \(^{24}\) The examples that come to mind are not dialogues but paired antithetical speeches, such as Protagoras’ “Knockdown speeches” (Kataballontes logos), the dual logō stored up in Socrates’ Thinkery (Aristophanes Clouds 114), the dissoi logos of around 403-401, and the paired pairs of speeches constituting Antiphon’s

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\(^{23}\) Dissoi logos 8.1. §§ 27: <τῶν αὐτῶν> ἀνδρὸς καὶ τὰς αὐτὰς τέχνας νομίζω κατὰ βραχὺ τε δύνασθαι διαλέγεσθαι, καὶ <τῶν> ἀλάθειαν τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπίστασθαι, καὶ δικάζειν ἐπίστασθαι ὁρθῶς, καὶ διαμαγώρειν οἴδαν τ᾽ ἤμεν, καὶ λόγων τέχνας ἐπίστασθαι, καὶ περὶ φύσιος τῶν ἀπάντων ὡς τε ἔχει καὶ ὡς ἔγνετο, διδάσκειν.

\(^{24}\) Plato’s insistence that dialegesthai is not erizein: e.g. Rep. 454a (cf. 511c), Tht. 167ε.
Tetralogies.\textsuperscript{25} To move beyond “conversation” in the direction of a conception of “dialogue” as a literary form we shall have to turn from Plato and the Socratics to Aristotle, and turn as well from dialogoi to Sokratikoi logoi.

The logoi in Socratic logoi

The final step in this study may be described as asking just what the logoi signifies in Sôkratikoi logoi. Obviously the word is polyvalent and in most passages is sufficiently underdetermined to refer to Socratic “discourse” “argument” or “conversation.” In addition, the logoi in the phrase could sometimes designate the genre as a form of “prose” as opposed to poetry. Nor can one exclude the concrete sense of “a body of writings” (as in mathêmatikoi logoi), for the need to name a genre becomes acuter the more a growing body of texts makes that genre noticeable to the culture. My purpose in this rather brisk section, however, is not to give one answer to the question as much as to call attention to how open it must remain as we try to specify some forces that impinged on the definition and development of Socratic dialogue in the first half of the fourth century.

The dialogues emerged at a time of unprecedented expansion in writing prose, that is, a time when new forms of un-poetic speech were thought worth preserving. This shift began in the fifth century and is illustrated by contrasting Herodotus’ presentation of his history as an apodeideixis, a long oral performance,\textsuperscript{26} with Thucydides’ pointed

\textsuperscript{25} On eristic literature and the dialogue, Jean Laborde, Le dialogue Platonicien de la maturité (Paris 1978) 27-40.
\textsuperscript{26} E.g. Bruno Gentili and Giovanni Cerri, History and Biography in Ancient Thought, tr. D. Murray and L. Murray (Amsterdam, 1988) Ch. 1; R. Thomas, 260-1.
rejection of “display pieces designed to win competitions” (1.22) in favor of the “possession for all time” that he had “written” (1.1). It is well to recall that Thucydides could have been writing not much earlier than our first Socratics.

In fact, the period from 420-320 was one unparalleled in the production of written prose texts on or concerting the topic of making speeches. Gagarin describes Antiphon as helping to “open the way for the public performance of oratory to replace drama as the dominant Athenian cultural institution fo the 4th century”27. This may exaggerate—performing dramatic rhêseis was still a popular pastime—but points to the wide appetite this literature fed.

Among the forms of discourse that were being written down for the first time were what the Greeks called logoi, speeches. In Socrates’ home town, this is said to have begun with the courtroom speeches and exercises of Antiphon (obit. 411). A direct connection between this rhetorical literature and the Socratics is provided by Antisthenes—some 20 years Plato’s senior and the author not only of Socratic logoi but of the demonstration speeches Odysseus and Ajax.28

Previously, some elder sophists had written out model speeches on imagined legal situations and circulated them among pupils as “playthings,” treating mythological subjects or defending paradoxical or trivial theses.29 Such texts were never the primary vehicle for sophistic teaching and, with a very few exceptions, did not survive.30 But by the time of Isocrates and Plato, this trend was still going strong, and some professors of

27 Antiphon: The Speeches (Cambridge 000) 3.
28 But U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Platon 2nd ed. (Berlin 1920) vol. 2, 26-27 is skeptical that Antisthenes can be credited with Socratic dialogues.
rhetoric, whom they agree in calling “sophists,” were producing texts on such topics as
the virtues of salt or encomia of figures from myth. It is also clear that such literature had
a passionate following among the young, and the controversies surrounding it can be seen
in that trio of speeches condemning the “written speeches” of “sophists” by Alcidamas,
Isocrates, and Plato.31

As great as was the popularity of this literature, so was the disapproval to which it
exposed its authors.32 In Parmenides Plato represents Zeno as half apologizing for his
book of eristic paradoxes as the fruit of a youthful love of contentiousness that was
published surreptitiously without his consent (Parm. 128).33 Ambitious prose authors of
Plato’s day were stimulated to present their texts as something quite different from what
some spurned as “sophistic” practice speeches. They were moved to innovate prose forms
in order to proffer what they insisted was a valuable logos but which was decidedly not a
rhetorical tekhnê, just as they were something other than “sophists.” Isocrates affords an
type. His persona is the paradoxical one of a self-declared “weak-voiced” orator; he
composes speeches he can’t deliver, and yet these logoi (“speeches,” here used for non-
speeches, texts) are worth circulating and studying repeatedly (Busiris § 34, Antidosis §
78, Evag. § 74).34 Such is his determination to distinguish himself from common rhetors
that on one occasion he invents a new form of prose, as he assures us: Isocrates presents
his Evagoras as the first prose eulogy for a contemporary (§ 5). Although “philosophical
purveyors of logos have essayed practically every other theme, none has tried to an

31 More at Ford, Origins of Criticism, Ch. 12.
32 H. Ll. Hudson-Williams, “Political Speeches in Athens” CQ NS 1 (1951) 68-73.
33 Cf. A 14 DK, Wilamowitz (1920) 28.
encomium of a man in prose (dia logôn)."\textsuperscript{35} We have only Isocrates’ word that this was
the first prose encomium by a contemporary,\textsuperscript{36} and it was a topos of the epitaphios to say
that the speaker was handicapped by an audience’s reluctance to be impressed with the
excellence of their contemporaries.\textsuperscript{37} But Evagoras is a typical example of a willingness
to try new blends of form and function to take the task of encomium over from poets like
Simonides and Pindar and to outdo the old prose encomia of fictional figures like Helen,
Busiris or Heracles.

Even good old Xenophon was open to experiment. Among his varied writings, his
putative “memoirs” of Socrates have no direct precedent, and Agesilaus follows the
revolutionary footsteps of Isocrates in composing a prose eulogy for a contemporary. The
Cyropaideia is something of a proto-novel. Xenophon attributes his Memorabilia and
Apology to a pious desire to preserve the truth about Socrates. This fits current aetiologies
for dialogue, and we need not doubt his sincerity. But a glance at Plato’s own foray into
Apology literature shows that proclaiming one had captured the “real” Socrates was one
of the earmarks of the form. Loyal Socratic though he was, Xenophon was not averse to
trying his hand at one of the popular rhetorical sub-genres.

\textsuperscript{35} Evag. 8: Οἶδα μὲν οὖν ὅτι χαλεπόν ἔστιν ὁ μέλλων ποιεῖν, ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴν διὰ λόγων ἐγκωμιάζειν.
Σημεῖον δὲ μέγιστον· περὶ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλων πολλῶν καὶ παντοδαπῶν λέγειν τολμῶσιν οἱ περὶ τὴν
φιλοσοφίαν ὄντες, περὶ δὲ τὼν τοιούτων οὐδὲς πότε πόσει αὐτῶν συγγράφεισιν επεχείρησιν. For my
gloss “philosophical purveyors of logos,” cf. § 9 τοῖς δὲ περὶ τοὺς λόγους, in opposition to the encomia
by poets mentioned in § 4: οἱ δὲ περὶ τὴν μουσικὴν καὶ τὰς άλλας ἀγωνίας ὄντες, itself opposed to ὃ
dὲ λόγος.

\textsuperscript{36} U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, “Lesefrüchte” Hermes (1900) detects an implicit refutation of
Isocrates’ boast in Aristotle’s Rhet. 1368a17 (on an encomium to Hippolochus of Thessaly). But Aristotle
routinely praises the speech at 1399a6. More on Evagoras in Arnaldo Momigliano, The Development of
of forms of encomia at the time, 94-104. On Isocrates’ claim see the essays by Sykutris (“Isokrates’
Evagoras”), Münscher (“Isokrates’ Evagoras”) and G. Misch (“Isokrates’ Autobiographie”) in Isokrates,
Wege der Forschung 351, ed. F. Seck (Darmstadt 1976)

\textsuperscript{37} Cf. Thuc. 2.35.2, 45.1, with a saying in Socrates’ epitaphios: Menex. 235d, cf. Rhet. 1415b31. See Race
(1987) 133-5 for Pindaric precedents, including the reluctance to praise the living.
I use the term sub-genre because “Apology” literature continued to generate new forms, such as Isocrates’ *Antidosis*, whose “novelty” (§1) consists in its being a “mixed *logos*” (§12), but we should not be too systematic about terminology here. What people’s ways of talking suggest is that there were a number of specific *logoi* genres—rule-bound speeches: An important part of the meaning of Socratic logoi was to distinguish this form of writing from others on offer. Wilamowitz mentions “Simonidean *logoi*” and “Aesopic *logoi*” (Rhet. 2. 1393a30). Each form of discourse promised a certain ethos (wise and controversial for Simonides, tricky and table-turning for Aesop). These are not so much genres as brand names, and Plato let’s us notice many other such genres and sometimes their names. Such as “love speeches,” such as Lysias’ text that Phaedrus is studying; the terms were not iron clad. We have noted *erôtikoi logoi* (Pol. 1262b11) and (Rhet. 1415b31) *epitaphioi*. There were countless other discourses that Plato is modeling such as *protreptikoi logoi* or *encomia*. Consider the two speeches in *Laches* of Nicias and Laches for and against the teaching of fighting in armor (*hoplomakhia*).

I suspect there were Socratic logoi too: I take *ta Sôkratika* at Rhet. 1393b5 to be Socratic sayings, abounding in analogies between parallels between humans and animals. Perhaps there was even a sort of *chreia* literature about Socrates—memorable sayings of his in memorable circumstances could perhaps be the common source of Socrates’ exchange with Meletus at Plato *Apol.* 127c and Aristotle *Rhet.* 1419a8.

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39 Cf. Gigon and N. Rynearson.
41 Cf. Hirzel p. 84.
But “Socratic literature also included apologies, memorabilia, symposia and so forth. Plato played a main role (perhaps the main role) in making Socratic logos equivalent to dialogue.

The numerous Defense Speeches for Socrates (including, in the fourth century, Plato, Xenophon, Lysias, Theodectes, and Demetrius of Phalerum) are another sign of the involvement of Socratic literature with rhetoric. This is not to say that the popular genre of Apologies was the typical or the source of Socratic speeches (though Socratic apologies began early: Polycrates’ Accusation is reckoned among the earliest Socratic texts). Comparing the prologues of Xenophon and Plato also shows that part of the competition was in coming up with an explanation of how Socrates, that supreme talker, failed to secure his own acquittal (cf. Mem. 4.8.5, 8). Writing the defense speech for the most unexpected loser in court history has something in common with Gorgias’ defense of Helen or Palamedes.

And here the most obvious difference between such speeches and the Apology of Socrates reveals, I think, a basic contribution that forensic fictions made to Socratic literature. Unlike Helen, Socrates was a contemporary. To write Socratic literature, then, meant accepting certain constraints of plausibility. This was no war to recover the authentic man (and became ever less so as eye-witnesses dwindled from the audience—Aristotle was born in 384). The very multiplicity of Apologies (or for that matter, of

42 Thucydides (8.68.3) measures Antiphon’s defense as “the best defense speech on a capital charge that I know.” Cf. Olof Gigon, “Xenophons Apologie des Sokrates,” MH 3 (1946) 210-45
Alcibiades’s, or Menexenus’s) made the game about something else. And in the process of writers finding out what that “else” could be, the blend of fictitious speech and historical personage endowed this eponymous figure of the genre with a quasi-real / quasi-mythological status.

From a formal point of view the greatest step the Socratics took may be thought to be question and answer format. But of course one might rather ask, who would not write dialogues after Homer’s heroic “speakers of words,” after the agons of tragedy and comedy, and the antilogies of the sophists and the speech-riddled historians? The uncanny a-historicity of dialogue, its willful if subtle denials of its own credibility, must be traced to this source, to the fictitious orations behind the Apology.

[So in general, Socratic literature might be described as a by-product of the writing down of eristic.]< 10 Minute]

To derive Socratic dialogue from fourth-century sophistic oratory may be surprising because literary historians, beginning with Aristotle, have been thrown off by suggestions of these texts that their true rivals were the poets and the great credence they commanded. But it is another aspect of the self-presentation of these gentlemanly prose writers that they would rather be seen as assaulting the citadel of poetry than squabbling over logoi. Both Plato and Isocrates may seem to write prose that raids the Muses’ arsenal: we have seen that Aristotle found the Socratic logoi to be like poetry in

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44 Apart from Plato’s Alcibiades I (and Alcibiades’ speech in Plato’s Symposium), we know of pseudo-Plato Alcibiades II, and Alcibiades’s by Aeschines of Sphettus and Antisthenes.

45 One can compare Dissoi logoi 1.12-14 below.

46 Good remarks on this in Herman, Momigliano, Kahn (on Xenophon).

47 On predecessors, see Schmidt-Stahlin 3.1 219-21, Laborderie 13-42, Hirzel 1.2-67.

48 On dialogue and poetry see Laborderie, 53-66.
important respects, and that he judged Plato’s style “half poetic” is well known (fr. 73 Rose = DL 3.37). This appraisal is not simply due to Plato’s beautiful writing, but reflects the fact that these speech-writers often would assert the merits of their works against poetry. Who said: “If you took the meter away from the most admired poems, leaving only their thought [dianoia] and words, they would have a far inferior reputation than they now enjoy”? Isocrates did in Evagoras, but so did Plato (Gorgias 505c). The sought-out antagonism is expressed in nuce in the paradoxical locution that courses through contemporary prose writers: people who lavished great care on their texts are dismissed as mere “poets of speeches” (ποιητής λόγων). So Isocrates was ever aspiring to a “more poetic and more embroidered style” (Antid. § 47), and boasted that his Evagoras, even forgoing the advantages of poetry, would make his subject “always-remembered” (ἀείμνηστον, Evag. § 4) as poets long had promised.

These heroic wars on poetry were actually dressed battles among prose genres for prestige: this emerges from a passage in which Isocrates gives us his own diaeresis of

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49 DL 3.37 (= Fr. 73 Rose): “the form of Plato’s writings half way between poetry and prose” φησὶ δ’<Λυκιογένης> τὴν τῶν λόγων ἰδέαν αὐτοῦ (Πλάτωνος) μεταξὺ ποιήματος εἶναι καὶ πεζοῦ λόγου.) See Else (1957) 42-3, rightly arguing that this passage has nothing to do with the mimetic status of Platonic dialogues. For a collection of ancient attestations to Plato’s “poetic” qualities, see Gudeman on 1447b11.

50 Evag. 11: ἢ γὰρ τις τῶν ποιημάτων τῶν εὐδοκιμοῦντων τὰ μὲν ὀνόματα καὶ τὰς διανοιὰς καταλίπῃ, τὸ δὲ μέτρον διαλύσῃ, φανήσεται πολύ καταδείκτηρα τῆς δόξης ἣς νῦν ἠχομεν περὶ αὐτῶν. Ὅμως δὲ καίπερ τοσοῦτον πλεονεκτούσης τῆς ποίησεως, οὐκ ὄνειρεν, ἀλλ’ ἀπο-πειρατέον τῶν λόγων ἄστιν, εἰ καὶ τοῦτο δυνήσεται, τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἀνδρας εὐλογεῖν μηδὲν χείρον τῶν ἐν ταῖς ὑδαῖς καὶ τοῖς μέτροις ἐγκομιαζόντων.

51 Alcidamas Soph. § 34; cf. Plato, Euthyd. 305b, Phaedr. 234e, Isocrates Soph. § 15, Antid. § 192.

52 Cf. Panathenaic Oration §§ 2, 135, 271.

prose genres. The passage is in another of his genre-stretchers, the Antidosis or Apologia of Isocrates in which he imagines himself facing a charge that his writings have corrupted the youth of Athens (§ 56). Isocrates’ defense includes a passage vindicating the honor of prose, which he insists has as many genres (τρόποι τῶν λόγων, ἰδέαι τῶν λόγων) as poetry, and starts naming them. It is an odd and admittedly an incomplete list, and is included mainly as a foil to Isocrates’ own specialty, the Panhellenic faux-oration, but still it is interesting as a list: antiquarian genealogies, scholarly inquiry into poets, history; finally comes a revealing genre, “those who have occupied themselves with questioning and answering, which they call ‘antilogistics’.” Surely this is the place that Isocrates would have classified the Socratic logoi, including Plato’s prose, for he was never one

54 Nightingale 29.
55 For this sense of ideai see A. E. Taylor, Varia Socratica (Oxford 1911) 208.

Aristotle possibly composed a similar sunkrisis in On Poets Fr. 70 (= DL 8.57) when comparing Empedocles to Homer “in his expression, use of metaphor and other poetic devices”: ἐν δὲ τῷ Περὶ ποιητῶν φίλῳ ὅτι καὶ ὘μηρικὸς ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ δεινὸς περὶ τὴν φράσιν γέγονεν, μεταφορητικὸς τε ὃν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοις περὶ ποιητικῶν ἐπιτεύγμασι γραμμένος. The topos comparing the advantages of prose and poetry is continued in Cicero Orat. 67-8.

57 Antidosis §§ 45-47: Πρῶτον μὲν οὐν ἐκείνο δε μαθεῖν υμᾶς, ὅτι τρόποι τῶν λόγων εἰσὶν οὐκ ἑλάττος ή τῶν μετὰ μέτρου ποιημάτων. Οἱ μὲν γὰρ τὰ γένη τὰ τῶν ἰδέας ἀναζητοῦντες τὸν βίον τῶν αὐτῶν κατέτημαν. οἱ δὲ περὶ τούς ποιητὰς ἐφιλοσοφήσαν, ἔτεροι δὲ τὰς πράξεις τὰς ἐν τοῖς πολεμίοις συναγαγεῖν ἐβουλήσαν, ἄλλοι δὲ τινες περὶ τὰς ἐρωτήσεις καὶ τὰς ἀποκρίσεις γεγόνασιν, οὐς ἀντιλογικοὺς καλοῦσιν. Εἴη δ’ οὖν συμφωνον ἐπὶ πάντα τις τὰς ἰδέας τῶν λόγων ἐξαριθμῆσαι ἐπιχείρησεν· ἢς δ’ οὖν ἐμοί προσχέι, τεῦτης μνησθεὶς ἐᾶσω τὰς ἄλλας.
58 Antid 46: “For there are men who, albeit they are not strangers to the branches which I have mentioned, have chosen rather to write discourses, not for private disputes, but which deal with the world of Hellas, with affairs of state, and are appropriate to be delivered at the Pan-Hellenic assemblies—discourses which, as everyone will agree, are more akin to works composed in rhythm and set to music than to the speeches which are made in court.”

60 Taylor (1911) 208-9; Blass Vol. 2, 23. Cf. Sophists 1-3; Helen 2 (tracing contemporary eristic back to Protagoras), 6; Antid. 265.
to make a fine distinction between Socratic *logoi* and eristic. The one time Isocrates uses the term *dialogos* it refers to “eristic dialogues” that have become a part of contemporary education but which older people find intolerable. So Isocrates sets up a system of genres in which his own serious, ambitious pan-hellenic compositions, more like works of poetry than forensic rhetoric (*Antid* § 46).

How many genres of prose there were, then, was an active, and quite loaded subject of discussion before Aristotle, and I conclude with a masterful diaeresis from Plato. To be precise, this is a list not of prose genres but of genres of writing, part of the discussion in *Phaedrus* of what makes a text worth keeping. The *envoi* to *Phaedrus* is a message that the only worthwhile texts are the ones composed with knowledge, and it is interesting to note to whom Plato has it sent (278b-c): “Go tell Lysias,” he begins, “and anyone else who writes prose works (συντίθησι λόγους), and Homer, and anyone who has composed poetry, either bare or in song form (τις ἄλλος αὐτοίς ψιλήν ἢ ἐν χώδῃ συντέθηκε), and thirdly Solon and anyone who has written political prose, all the while calling his writings ‘laws’” (ὅστις ἐν πολιτικοῖς λόγοις νόμους ὀνομάζων συγγράμματα ἔγραψεν)…. Plato begins with Lysias, who, as author of the rhetorical

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61 See Norlin p. xxi. The Platonic texts are such as *Phaedo* 90b-91a, *Sophist* 216b, and *Euthydemus*.

62 *Panath*. 26: Τῆς μὲν οὖν παιδείας τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν προγόνων καταλειφθείσης τοσούτου δέω καταφρονεῖν ὧστε καὶ τὴν ἐφ’ ἡμῶν κατασταθείσην ἐπαινῶ, λέγω δὲ τὴν τε γεωμετρίαν καὶ τὴν ἀστρολογίαν καὶ τοὺς διαλόγους τοὺς ἐριστικοὺς καλομένους, αἱ οἱ μὲν νεώτεροι μᾶλλον χαίρουσι τοῦ δεόντος, τῶν δὲ πρεσβυτέρων οὐδεὶς ἐστιν ὅστις ἄνεκτος αὐτοὺς εἶναι φήσειν.

63 “[278c] and heard words which they told us to repeat to Lysias and anyone else who composed speeches, and to Homer or any other who has composed poetry with or without musical accompaniment, and third to Solon and whoever has written political compositions which he calls laws: If he has composed his writings with knowledge of the truth, and is able to support them by discussion of that which he has written, and has the power to show by his own speech that the written words are of little worth, such a man ought not to derive his title from such writings, but from the serious pursuit which underlies them.”

64 *Phdr*. 278b-c: Λυσίᾳ τε καὶ εἰς τὰς ἄλλος συντίθημα λόγους, καὶ Ὀμήρῳ καὶ εἰς τὰς ἄλλος αὐτοῖς ψιλήν ἢ ἐν ὑδή συντέθηκε, τρίτον δὲ Σόλωνι καὶ ὅστις ἐν πολιτικοῖς λόγοις νόμους ὀνομάξων συγγράμματα ἔγραψεν. Cf. the comparison of Homer and Tyrtaeus with Solon and others who have
speech on love, has sparked the dialogue; but here he represents the class of writers of prose (logoi), for the next class Plato addresses is poets: these are broken down in a way very prophetic (reminiscent?) of the Poetics, distinguishing “bare” poetry without melody from “song.” To the prose-poetry dyad is added Solon, an eponymous figure, as are Lysias and Homer, representing law writing. Adding law-writers may seem to make for a funny ensemble, but Plato is pointing out that lawmaking is decidedly also a matter of writing, of setting words in stone. As such, it is an art that may have intercourse with other writings—prose or verse—that give ideas about the way people ought to live. The parallelism between this text and Aristotle continues when, having collected this list of writers in prose and in poetry, Plato proposes his own revision of generic terminology: writers who write with proper understanding, they can call themselves “philosophers” and drop whatever title (ἐπωνυμίαν, 278c7) they may have from their writings. But if, on the other hand, they are merely good at cutting and pasting, they can keep the (now degraded) titles of poet, prose-writer, or law-writer (ποιητὴν ἢ λόγων συγγραφέα ἢ νομογράφον, 278e). Plato’s attempt to re-name writers by the knowledge with which they write rather than on the basis of the form their writings take is very close to Aristotle’s attempt to defy current terminology to re-define poetry as kinds of mimesis. There is a great deal in a name, even an ill-fitting generic term. And both Plato and
Aristotle go at these terms to show that the nature of prose writing is ill understood in their time, as is its relation to poetry.

Prose dialogues first appeared in Greece among Socrates’ followers not long after his death, and he surely inspired their composers. But the new form also had to make sense in its own time, and interest a public with its own ideas about the various literary forms and their various functions. More particularly, a good part of the public, and especially the young had become avid consumers of rhetorical speeches, and in sheer numbers probably the majority of new prose texts that were produced were *logoi*, speeches, of one sort or another. While many of these speeches were composed by writers who found it desirable to adopt personae that were unserious or ironic, some writers sought to use speech (*logoi*) to engage the mind of the city more directly; they were “political” writers in the broad sense that encompassed ethics and encomium as well as lawmaking. Among these writers, the Socratics found that conversations (*logoi*) offered opportunities to address the issues they wanted while avoiding offensive personas.\(^{68}\) Socrates, of course, can still be given credit in the larger sense that, as he brought philosophy down from the heavens to the agora, he made some of his associates passionate about writing and reading on topics in ethics and social relations that had not been recorded in prose before. But that was just to pose the problem to which dialogue emerged as the answer. Without going further into the ways that different Socratics used the form to produce different personas, I think it fair to say that Socratic dialogue should be regarded more as a product of fourth-century experiments in written prose than as some organic outgrowth of the dead Classical Civilization of the fifth century. In tracking

\(^{68}\) Nightingale raises the question of the author’s status in dialogue: 165
that emergence, we should keep our eyes fixed, as Aristotle knew, on the powers of

*logos.*