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WAS PLATO A LOVER OF ΛΟΓΟΣ?

PLATON MIŁOŚNIKIEM LOGOSU?

ABSTRACT:

This paper focuses on the concept of *logos* in the writings of Plato. After preliminary methodological considerations, it proceeds to attempt a provisional definition of the term. It then examines the philosopher's capacity to be *philologos*. This ability, the paper shows, is closely connected with the philosophical dimension of music. This eventually leads to a novel and complex definition of *logos*. Contextualised in the historical event of Socrates' trial as recounted in the *Apology*, it argues for the capital importance of the dialectical search for *logos* in Plato's philosophical work.

Poniższy artykuł koncentruje się na pojęciu *logosu* w pismach Platona. Dokonawszy wstępnych uwag metodologicznych, próbuje się określić pole znaczeniowe analizowanego terminu. Wskazuje się również na doniosłość zdolności poznawczej filozofa, który ma stać się również filologiem. Owa umiejętność, jak się wykazuje, jest ściśle połączona z filozoficznym wymiarem muzyki. To wszystko prowadzi do nowej i pogłębionej definicji *logosu*. W kontekście historycznego procesu Sokratesa odczytanego z kart *Obrony* poniższy artykuł ukazuje niepomierną wagę dla całego programu filozoficznego Platona dialektycznego poszukiwania *logosu*.

Λόγος, one of the most intensely discussed ideas in ancient philosophy, and later theology, is the subject of this paper. Its multivalence as a concept and its centrality in the thought of the ancients causes even contemporary scholars to ponder its multi-dimensional and far-reaching implications. Its rich history began with Heraclitus in the 5th century BC, before reaching its climax a century later. If we move on a couple of hundred years the term surfaces in the text of the Gospels, becoming both universal and noteworthy as it signifies the very person of God.

In this paper I will be analysing λόγος in Plato's multi-layered system. It is not by chance that the whole Western philosophical tradition was once characterised as 'a series of footnotes to Plato,'¹ since anyone who claimed to be a philosopher simply could not ignore his teaching. I use the word 'system' in relation to Platonic doctrine, yet I do so with hesitation. Even though one may be tempted, like the third century Platonists, to read the dialogues as if Plato had this 'system'

¹ See A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*, (1979), p. 39.

in mind,² it is more reasonable to adopt the more modest stance proposed by John Dillon.³ In his view, ‘it was not Plato’s purpose to leave to his successors a fixed body of doctrine [...]. What he hoped to teach was a method of enquiry which he inherited from his master Socrates. This method of enquiry, if correctly practised, would lead them to the truth’.⁴

I shall begin by outlining some basic steps: first, to be able to undertake a fruitful inquiry one needs to acquire the ‘bigger picture’ – what Plato himself defines as σύνοψις. Second, one needs to attempt to find the one (τό ἓν)⁵ in the underlying structure of Platonic writings. For what matters to Plato is what Charles Kahn calls ‘the deep structure’.⁶ I fully agree with Kahn. On the surface the dialogues differ in many ways, but ‘philosophical interpretation must seek for the underlying unity of thought’, since ‘philosophy for Plato means the pursuit of a unified view’.⁷ Therefore, I intend to leave the term λόγος untranslated so as not to lose its multi-dimensional character. I am going to look for the deeper sense of the term in spite of the seemingly different meanings of λόγος / λόγοι found in particular contexts.

Plato uses a form of dialogue to present his philosophical reflections. This has far-reaching implications. For him, a conversation, *i.e.* the art of asking and answering questions, is the most fitting and also the most fruitful forum for intellectual activity. Conversation functions for Plato as the proper model for the process of thinking (διανοεῖσθαι), which he defines as ‘λόγος that the soul carries on with itself about those issues it is considering (σκοπῆ)’.⁸ The fact that the term διαλέγεσθαι (conversing), which in this case turns into διαλεκτική, is chosen by the philosopher to describe the highest level of cognition should not escape our notice; διαλέγεσθαι will also imply the art of eliciting the deeper sense of a given reality. This sense can be rendered provisionally by λόγος. Thus we can claim, and this is what I shall argue: that what Plato points to, and what pervades his works, is a dialectical search for λόγος.

² See M. Edwards, *Culture and Philosophy in the Age of Plotinus*, (2006), pp. 40-41. Among many traditions of reading Plato I am most in agreement with the unitarian interpretation in its subtle version presented over the years by Charles Kahn. In terms of different approaches to Plato’s legacy, see an excellent account of it by Eugène Tigerstedt: E.G. Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato*, (1977).

³ See J. Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato*, (2003), p. 16. Compare the last part of the accusation from the *Apology*: ‘[...] [Socrates] teaches the same things to others’ (19b).

⁴ We find an instructive comment in Kahn: ‘A coherent life of inquiry implies a commitment to finding the truth; one may or may not succeed, but inquiry means *trying* to find the truth.’ C.H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue. The Philosophical Use of Literary Form*, (1996), p. 383.

⁵ Cf. e.g. *Laws* 965c-d; see also *Phaedrus* 265 d.

⁶ See C.H. Kahn, *The Philosophical Importance of the Dialogue Form for Plato*, “Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal”, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2005), p. 15.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Thaetetus* 189e-190a. A subtler version of this is presented in *Sophist* (263e), where λόγος is also an act of externalisation of an internal διάλογος, that is called ‘διὰ νοῦα’.

Let us then begin *our* search for Platonic λόγος. What Plato does over the pages of his writings is endeavour to learn about beings (τά ὄντα). This is clearly seen in the telling conclusion to Socrates' intellectual journey, where he shows how important λόγοι are in this undertaking: 'I thought I must take refuge in λόγοι and by means of them investigate (σκοπεῖν) the truth about the beings (τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν).'⁹ However inconsistent he may be, he does repeatedly perform this through language, despite the inadequacies of this medium.

I should first ask: what is λόγος? Plato, in *Thaetetus* and *The Sophist*, teaches us that it is a combination (συμπλοκή) of names¹⁰ and words.¹¹ As names/words are the constituents of any λόγος, one must be careful about their use and proper understanding, given the inadequacies of language itself. However, there is a further layer in the constitution of the λόγος. Not only are words intertwined, they also enter into a harmonious arrangement: 'And so, just as some things fit together (ἤρμοσταν), some not so; so with the signs of speech (τῆς φωνῆς), some do not fit, but those that do fit (ἀρμόττοντα) make a λόγος.'¹² Moreover, as we read in the *Statesman* the principle of objectivity must be preserved so that the truest conclusion (τάληθέστατον) can be reached.¹³ This is intimated by Plato, who says that 'the smallest cannot be routinely disregarded in favour of the greatest'. This should not surprise us, since philosophers are believed to be lovers of gazing at the truth.¹⁴ In this context it is not unreasonable to ask to what extent the search for λόγος is connected with Platonic ἀνάμνησις,¹⁵ since the truth about beings (τά ὄντα) is always in the soul¹⁶ and we are meant 'to endeavour to seek and recollect [it]'.¹⁷

Who then is capable of judging the results of an attempt to find such a combination and its conformity with the truth? The philosopher, as presented by Plato in *The Republic* (582), is equipped with three necessary criteria to execute such a judgment: experience (ἐμπειρία), φρόνησις and λόγος.¹⁸ The discussion in this passage revolves primarily around the concept of pleasure (ἡδονή), but, in particular, of cherishing real beings (τά ὄντα), and in this context we are given the following suggestions. First of all, experience is highlighted, which, as for beings (τά ὄντα), is exclusively reserved for those who devote their life to philosophy. This statement sits comfortably with the well-attested scholarly theory regarding the practical di-

⁹ *Phaedo* 99e.

¹⁰ *Thaet.* 202b. Properly, συμπλοκή should be rendered by entanglement or intertwining, which better shows an inter-relationship between the names.

¹¹ *Soph.* 262c.

¹² *Soph.* 262d. I intend to leave λόγος untranslated so as not to lose its multi-dimensional character. Bearing in mind the rule of a single concept, different remarks concerning λόγος / λόγοι should be applied to it regardless of their apparent different uses.

¹³ *Statesman* 266d.

¹⁴ *Rep.* 475e.

¹⁵ Cf. *Meno* 81d.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibidem* 86b.

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸ *Rep.* 582a ff.

mension of a philosophical way of life.¹⁹ After experience, φρόνησις is next on the list. I leave it un-translated, as its traditional renderings (both ‘intelligence’ and ‘wisdom’) are not fully satisfactory. I shall cite the following passage from the *Phaedo* at length: ‘When it [the soul] investigates (σκοπῆ) by itself, it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer, but remains, in that realm of the absolute, constant and invariable, through contact with beings of a similar nature. And this condition (πάθημα) of the soul we call φρόνησις.’²⁰ What we have here is an extraordinary²¹ disposition of the soul, which allows human beings to reach what is truest and has a salutary influence upon them.²² Having established the crucial role of this attitude in the process of discernment, we move to the third element – λόγος. In fact, Plato uses the plural form, *i.e.* λόγοι, which he holds to be the most suitable instruments of judgment.²³ Therefore, a philosopher simply cannot do without this critical device. The significance of λόγος in Plato’s *modus operandi* can be clearly seen. What happens at the climax of this argument is quite exceptional: a new name is attributed to the philosopher, *i.e.* the lover of λόγος, φιλόλογος. It is in the power of the φιλόλογος to judge whether the results of this process agree with the truth. Incidentally, Plotinus, arguably the greatest interpreter of Plato, is reported to have dismissed the value of the philologist, as in no way matching the role of the philosopher. He is reported to have said, ‘a philologist, no philosopher at all’, supposedly with regard to his contemporary, Longinus.²⁴

Are there more instances of φιλόλογος in Plato’s writings? There are few literal mentions, yet there are other passages which indirectly show the reader this profile.²⁵ For instance, in his youth, Socrates supposedly heard the following from Parmenides, who was senior to him: ‘Oh Socrates, how worthy of admiration you are because of your impulse toward the λόγοι’,²⁶ or ‘noble and divine, you know well, is a passion you have for the λόγοι.’²⁷ To proceed further in our reflection and

¹⁹ See e.g. P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, (1995); Kahn, (1996), p. 383.

²⁰ *Phaed.* 79d. Earlier in this dialogue there is a most telling passage (66b-67b) regarding the real lovers of learning and how they should embark upon this kind of inquiry within their souls in order to contemplate the things themselves (αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα).

²¹ Plato labels φρόνησις and νοῦς as ‘the most honourable names’ (*Philebus* 59d).

²² See e.g. *Men.* 88c, where φρόνησις is described as an excellence (ἀρετή) leading to happiness, or *Protagoras* 352c, where it is said to help (βοηθεῖν) a man.

²³ ‘Λόγοι δὲ τούτου μάλιστα ὄργανον’ (*Rep.* 582d).

²⁴ He is reported to have said this regarding his contemporary, Longinus; see Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 14. I may very well exaggerate in my assessment of what Plotinus said and its consequences. About this, see Edwards, *op.cit.*, p. 41. It is striking that Plotinus is himself described as the one who paid attention ‘only to the sense’ (VP 8), which, as we shall see, is in my view a principal motive of Socratic-Platonic inquiry.

²⁵ *Lach.* 188c; *Rep.* 582b; *Phaedrus* 236e; *Thaet.* 146a, 161a.

²⁶ *Parmenides* 130b.

²⁷ *Parm.* 135d.

to shed new light upon the figure of the one who might have regarded himself as a φιλόλογος, we can quote at length an interesting passage from *Laches*, where the title character makes this very point: ‘I have but one feeling, Nicias, or shall I say two feelings concerning λόγοι? Some would think that I am a φιλόλογος, and to others I may seem to be a hater of λόγος (μισόλογος). For when I hear a man discussing virtue (διαλεγόμενου περὶ ἀρετῆς),²⁸ or any sort of wisdom, then, if he truly (ἀληθῶς) is a man and worthy τῶν λόγων he utters (ὃν λέγει), I am delighted beyond measure, observing at the same time the speaker and his words (τόν τε λέγοντα καὶ τὰ λεγόμενα), how they fit and harmonize (ἀρμόττοντα) with each other. And such a one seems to me genuinely a musician – he has tuned himself with the fairest harmony, not that of a lyre or other pleasant instrument, but has made a true concord (σύμφωνον) of his own life between his words and his deeds, not in the Ionian, no, nor in the Phrygian nor in the Lydian, but simply in the Dorian mode, which is the sole Hellenic harmony. Such a man makes me rejoice with his utterance, and anyone would judge me then a φιλόλογος, so eagerly do I take in what he says.’²⁹

What Laches is particularly attracted to is, firstly, another striking example of harmony in the picture of this man, and secondly, the man’s being a musician. As regards the latter, it is clear that in this passage Plato presents a different understanding from ours of what a musician is.³⁰ He does not point to the popular performative notion of music; he implies sounds of a different sort, the powerful voice that comes from a symphony of words and deeds. What then a φιλόλογος enjoys is the interplay of harmony on the notes of λόγος within the framework of διά-λογος. Through a piercing experience, a φιλόλογος takes real pleasure in the music of λόγος, which is being born before him or her. Not only can we observe here how precious and worthy of respect λόγοι were to Plato; we can also see to what extent coherence in one’s life is to be preserved in this field. In this sense, a musician’s mode of life should be characterised by total integrity. We can juxtapose the above passage with the statement taken from *Protagoras*: ‘All of human life requires a high degree of rhythm and harmony.’³¹ This leads us to, arguably, Plato’s favourite god, Apollo, whose name he uses in *Cratylus*³² as representing

²⁸ Cf. Socrates’ words from *Apology* (38a): ‘It is the greatest good for a man to discuss excellence (περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιῆσθαι) every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing (διαλεγόμενου) and testing (ἐξετάζοντος) myself and others’, which apparently was not so convincing to the company present on the occasion. But to be able to embark upon this two-fold examination one must first obey the other of Socrates’ statements, not given without his peculiar irony: ‘I can’t as yet “know myself” (γνῶναι ἑμαυτόν), as the inscription at Delphi enjoins, and so long as that ignorance remains it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters (τὰ ἀλλότρια σκοπεῖν).’

²⁹ *Lach.* 188c-e.

³⁰ It can be instructive also to quote an ancient definition of a μουσικός found in the Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon. According to that tradition, a μουσικός was to be ‘a man of letters, scholar, accomplished person’.

³¹ *Protag.* 326b.

³² *Crat.* 405a.

harmony (εὐάρμοστον), Apollo being the god of music.³³ It is also noteworthy that ‘the names of the Muses and all of music seem to be derived from μῶσθαι, that is enquiry (τῆς ζητήσεώς) and philosophy.’³⁴

In this context, the image of someone on the opposite extreme may be useful: what happens with someone who does not cling to music and philosophy and has no contact with the Muses whatsoever? We read in the *Republic*: ‘Is not the result that even if he was a kind of φιλομαθῆς in his soul, since he samples no instruction (μαθήματος) nor inquiry (ζητήματος) and has no share in λόγος or any other form of music/culture (ἄλλης μουσικῆς), he becomes feeble, deaf and blind [...]? Such a man then, I think, becomes a μισόλογος and a-musical (ἄμουσος). He no longer exerts any influence through the λόγοι, nor uses them, but achieves all his ends like a beast, by violence and savagery, and in his brute ignorance (ἀμαθία) and ineptitude lives an arrhythmic (ἄρρυθμία) and graceless life.’³⁵ Thus we come to grasp a distinctive feature of the real musician, which is πρᾶος. This we can derive from *Cratylus*, as Leto, mentioned by Plato immediately after Apollo and the Muses, stands for divine ‘gentleness’ (πραότης).³⁶ Plato states clearly: What befits a musician is dealing gently with other people.³⁷

Interestingly, Socrates was himself exhorted in a dream to seek to become a true musician, as we read in *Phaedo*: ‘ὦ Σώκρατες, μουσικὴν ποίει καὶ ἐργάζου’.³⁸ Plato presents another aspect of being a musician in the passage from *Phaedrus*: to be really skilled in music (ἁρμονικός), it is not enough to know how to perform a variety of single notes; the real challenge is to be able to combine them harmoniously.³⁹

³³ We can add that Apollo’s name suggests to Plato that he is a purifier (Απολούων), which is of the utmost importance in terms of any inquiry within the soul. Also, Απολούων refers to his truth and simplicity, which can be linked to coherence.

³⁴ Cf. *ibidem* 406a. Μῶσθαι itself according to Liddell-Scott means ‘to seek after, covet, meditate, purpose’.

³⁵ *Rep.* 411c-e.

³⁶ *Crat.* 406a.

³⁷ *Phaedr.* 268d-e. Plato makes another striking point in the *Laws* (644e-645a): We are to yield to the golden and holy guidance (ἀγωγή – its ‘leading-string’ as it is usually rendered) of λόγισμος of the law of the πόλις. This ἀγωγή turns out to be μαλακή (gentle, mild, soft and with a tendency to pacify) and ‘rather gentle (πρᾶου) more than forceful’. This chimes well with the figure of Apollo, given that Apollo is said to be the first of the law-givers and the laws’ excellent exegete (cf. *Rep.* 427b-c). Lawfulness will be reflected by a *symphonic* way of life.

³⁸ *Phaed.* 60e.

³⁹ This can be illustrated with a musical simile. When playing the violin, just one single note includes, in addition to the fundamental tone, a series of overtones, which, though often not perceived, add colour to the timbre of the fundamental tone; the more ‘on pitch’ the note is played, the more these overtones will contribute to a truly resonant sound. If one adds another note at an interval of a third or a sixth, and both of them are played excellently, both separately and in relation to each other, then a third, lower, note (called a resultant tone) will appear – as it were out of nowhere – though perhaps not consciously intended by a performer. I owe this discovery to my former teacher, Prof. Szymon Krzeszowiec of the Academy of Music in Katowice.

Earlier in the same dialogue, Plato points to the need to see a given λόγος in its totality, discerning its one form (μία ιδέα), preserving at the same time an optimal relational structure.⁴⁰ As for the latter, Plato sketches an intriguing picture of λόγος as ‘a living creature (ζῷον), with its own body, as it were; it must not lack either head or feet; it must have a middle and extremities so composed as to suit each other and the whole work’.⁴¹

Thus, we have arrived to the crucial point of my paper. At the end of his life, Socrates was charged with the following crimes in a famous series of allegations: ‘Socrates does wrong (ἀδικεῖ)⁴² and busies himself⁴³ (περιεργάζεται) in that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky and makes the weaker λόγος the stronger, and teaches others these same things’.⁴⁴ We will focus on the second of these, as it is the critical point in reflecting on Plato in terms of his λόγος. What I want to argue is that this charge, which was left unanswered, is key to understanding the *logic* behind Plato’s philosophical project.⁴⁵

So far, we have seen the lengths to which Plato went in order to establish a better structure for any definition, explication, speech or form of discussion – all of which are different representations of λόγος. His quest was for what was truly meaningful; and through on-going examination and reflective reckoning, he sought to get a real sense of each element analysed.⁴⁶ We can look at another passage to support this argument. In *Crito* we have the words of Socrates: ‘I am not only now but always a man who follows (πείθεσθαι) nothing but λόγος, which on reflection (μοι λογιζομένῳ) seems to me the best.’⁴⁷ It turns out then, that what had been intended as a charge during Socrates’ trial, may have been a methodological programme penned afterwards by Plato. What had been an insult in the eyes of Socrates’ accusers, aimed at likening him to the Sophists, was, through the penetrating lens of Plato, transformed into the rationale for Socrates’ and Plato’s philosophical

⁴⁰ This is a required ability to ‘bring a dispersed plurality into a single form (εἰς μίαν ιδέαν), seeing it all together (συνορῶντα)’, *Phaedr.* 265c-d.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 264c.

⁴² The description of Socrates as a wrongdoer can seem puzzling, since he himself would resolutely advise his pupils as follows: ‘Only I beg that you will observe this condition: do not be unjust (μὴ ἀδικεῖν) in your questions. It is the height of unreasonableness that a person who professes to care for moral goodness should be consistently ἀδικοῦντα ἐν λόγοις’, (*Theat.* 167 d-e).

⁴³ Or in a ‘good sense’ as Liddell-Scott suggests, ‘to investigate thoroughly, seek diligently’.

⁴⁴ *Ap.* 19b.

⁴⁵ Thereby, supposing the overwhelming plausibility of this ‘charge’, I take issue with Alexander Sesonske, who calls it ‘absurd’ and claims that as ‘the other charges, though perhaps false, may be seriously meant, this one could not be believed by any man’. See A. Sesonske, *To Make the Weaker Argument Defeat the Stronger*, “Journal of the History of Philosophy”, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1968), p. 222.

⁴⁶ Assuming the soundness of our understanding of λόγος, all operations embracing either λογίζεσθαι or λόγισμοι should be understood in a much broader sense than merely calculating/reasoning.

⁴⁷ *Crito* 46b.

enterprise.⁴⁸ Thus, I cannot agree with Kahn that both the *Apology* and *Crito* have nothing to do with the other dialogues as far as ‘definitional’ inquiry is concerned.⁴⁹ There is a long-established theory which defines a group of the dialogues as the so-called ‘dialogues of definition’. I would not limit the ‘definition’ of what is actually a λόγος solely to this group. My argument is that Plato never abandons his search for λόγος. This quest is present throughout all of his works.

So, to ask *what-is-X?* is part of the bigger project present in the Platonic *Dialogues*, which was already initiated with the Socratic ‘τί ποτε λέγει’ (what does it say/mean?) in the case of the Delphic Oracle.⁵⁰ This can be described as a continuous search for meaning, which can take the shape of a real *malaise* – as described by Ricoeur.⁵¹

To conclude, Platonic λόγος is a multi-layered structure through which sense can be reached. The better and more coherently it is built up, the stronger, more meaningful and more powerful it will be. Ultimately, this was the goal of the Socratic-Platonic project: to establish as compelling as possible a λόγος by formulating a definition-explication of a thing within the most harmonious and coherent structure.

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 Słowa kluczowe: logos, harmonia, filolog, muzyka, badanie

⁴⁸ In my interpretation I assume Plato takes up Socrates’ way of doing philosophy.

⁴⁹ Kahn analyses the issue in the context of Aristotle ascribing to Socrates the ‘three principles’ of which one is ‘the pursuit of universal definitions or essences’; he then firmly claims that the famed question *what-is-X?* should be regarded as a Platonic innovation, see Kahn (1996), p. 93.

⁵⁰ *Ap.* 21b

⁵¹ Ricoeur refers specifically to the question ‘*what-is-X?*’ He cites, however, the *nomen omen* ‘essence’ of Platonic inquiry within which ‘the mind is no longer satisfied by responses that take the form of enumerating examples’, but looks for ‘a dominant character’ or ‘a sovereign kind’ of any such definition. See P. Ricoeur, *Being, Essence, and Substance in Plato and Aristotle*, (2013), p. 8.