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Author(s): George KLOSKO

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PERSUASION AND MORAL REFORM IN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

George KLOSKO

The overall relationship between Plato's and Aristotle's views of rhetoric is well known. Plato discusses rhetoric mainly in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. In the former he is quite critical, viewing rhetoric as a persuasive device (*mēchanēn de tina peithous*, 459b8-c1), which produces only belief, not knowledge, is effective before large crowds, and does not require knowledge on the part of the practitioner. The political implications of rhetoric are discussed at length, as Plato rails against its effects upon Athens and against its most successful practitioners, Themistocles, Miltiades, Pericles, and Cimon.

The view in the *Phaedrus* is more benign. According to the discussion here, the successful rhetor must have specific knowledge of his subject matter, and of important principles of composition. In addition he must know about the human soul, about different kinds of souls, and the kinds of arguments that are effective with each. Though Plato believes that the most important uses of rhetoric are in political contexts, he does not dwell upon its moral or political implications. What he does say is less critical, as is seen in his less condemnatory attitude towards Pericles (*Phdr.* 269a-70a).

There can be little doubt that the view of rhetoric that Aristotle develops in the *Rhetoric*, is strongly influenced by Plato's discussions. His debt to the *Phaedrus* is apparent and has been noted by influential scholars ⁽¹⁾. My main contention in this paper is that the

(1) E.g., W.H. THOMPSON, *The Phaedrus of Plato* (London, 1868), p. xx ; P. SHOREY, *What Plato Said* (Chicago, 1933), p. 555 ; M. DUFOUR, *Aristote : Rhétorique*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1967), I, 11.

relationship between Plato's views of persuasion as presented in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* are in certain respects closer to one another — and so the view in the *Gorgias* is closer to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* — than is generally realized. There is an additional side to the relationship between rhetoric and politics in both Plato's and Aristotle's views that is not often recognized. In the *Gorgias*, in addition to criticizing the art of rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias and other similar figures, Plato criticizes another form of persuasion, which was practiced by Socrates (the historical Socrates, who in this respect is also the Socrates of the early dialogues) (2). Though this is an important theme in the *Gorgias*, and a major theme in the development of Plato's political thought, it is often overlooked, because, rather than presenting his views directly, Plato *depicts* this theme in the dramatic action of the *Gorgias*, and other related dialogues. It will also be seen that a criticism of Socratic persuasion similar to Plato's is presented by Aristotle in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and clearly influenced his political theory as well.

I

Though the close relationship between the *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* can be exaggerated it undoubtedly exists. While scholars view the *Rhetoric* as the completion of the program of scientific rhetoric noted at *Phaedrus* 271c (3), there are significant differences between the works, which scholars have also pointed out. For instance, George Kennedy notes Aristotle's "increased interest in the nature of existing practice and much less desire to impose an ideal system upon contemporary life as Plato had tried to do in the *Phaedrus*" (4).

(2) For discussion of the Socratic problem along lines taken in this paper, see W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1962-81), Vol. III ; my position is briefly defended in G. KOSKO, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* (New York, 1986), Chap. 2.

(3) W. JAEGER, *Paideia*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1939-45), III, pp. 185-86 ; T. GOMPERZ, *The Greek Thinkers*, 4 vols. (London, 1901-12), IV, 421 ; for additional references, see above, n. 1.

(4) G. KENNEDY, *The Arts of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, 1963), p. 85 ; a good discussion of the relationship between the treatments of rhetoric in the

This particular difference shows up clearly in relationship to Plato's political theory in his brief discussion of rhetoric in the *Statesman*. In this work Plato demonstrates increased interest in the actual practice of political affairs in Greek cities. Noting the slight possibility of scientific rulers who would be able to rule without restraint of law, Plato turns his attention to political systems based upon the rule of law (297d ff.). He presents a familiar classification of *poleis* according to the number and quality of their rulers (302b ff.) — rule by one (monarchy, tyranny), rule by the few (aristocracy, oligarchy), and rule by the many (good and bad forms of democracy) — depending on whether the rulers follow or disobey the law. But the ideal of the scientific ruler is not banished from Plato's thought. Alongside the six other *poleis*, he places a seventh and superior form, centering upon direct rule by scientific intelligence (300e-301a, 303b ff.).

The subject of rhetoric is raised when Plato sets out to distinguish the true rhetor who possesses scientific intelligence from three pretenders to his title: the general, the orator, and the judge. In all three cases the statesman is distinguished from practitioners of these lesser arts in possessing knowledge of the ends to which arts should be applied. The general knows how to fight a war, but only the statesman knows whether to make war and so should control the general's art (304e). Similarly, the orator knows how to persuade, but only the statesman knows "whether some action, no matter what, should be taken, either by persuasion or by some exercise of force in relation to any person" (304c-d). Though the discussion of rhetoric is brief, the standpoint here is closely related to that in the *Phaedrus*. Because Plato has been discussing realistic cities that are ruled by law, he has the opportunity to discuss political rhetoric as practiced in actual cities. However, he confines discussion to an ideal rhetoric as it would be employed by an ideal ruler. As Kennedy says of Plato's discussion of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*: "no consideration is taken of the fact that most speeches, especially political speeches, have to be addressed to a varied audience of largely unknown individuals; Plato seems to think only of the man-to-man relationship

Gorgias and *Phaedrus* bearing on this contrast is given by H. VON ARNIM, *Platos Judendialoge und die Entstehungszeit des Phaidros* (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 186-88.

of dialectic" (5). Aristotle's account of the political implications of rhetoric is, as one would expect, more in keeping with actual political practice, though the subject of rhetoric is hardly mentioned in his *Politics*.

Despite the important differences between Aristotle's rhetoric and that of the *Phaedrus*, the two accounts are similar in recognizing the crucial role of the emotions in matters of persuasion. Similarly, despite the strong, apparent differences between the treatments of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*, these accounts also share recognition of the central role of emotional appeals.

This subject receives unfavorable attention in the *Gorgias*. Rhetoric is of course described as a form of "flattery" (*kolakeia*) (*Grg.* 463a-b). Ignoring what is good, it "dangles what is most pleasant for the moment as a bait for folly", and so deceives its hearers into thinking it is good (464d). Rhetoric is contrasted with teaching in being directed at large, public audiences, and producing belief rather than knowledge (454b-455a). Because of these characteristics, in attempting to persuade an audience, the rhetorician has a great advantage over the dialectician: he is as a confectioner contending with a physician before a jury of children (464d-65a). Though the distinction between appealing to emotion and to reason is not explicitly presented in the *Gorgias*, it is implicit in Plato's overall account of rhetoric. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the beginnings of the doctrine of the multipartite soul appear in this work — as also the distinction between knowledge and true and false belief (454c-e) — and so clear intimations of the moral psychology of the middle dialogues (6).

In recognizing the persuasive force of emotional appeals, the *Gorgias* is similar to the *Phaedrus* and *Rhetoric*, in spite of their other differences. In addition, this similarity brings into view another side of Plato's examination of persuasion in the *Gorgias*. Plato reveals great interest in the shortcomings of Socrates' view of

(5) KENNEDY, *Art of Persuasion in Greece*, p. 5.

(6) T. IRWIN, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford, 1979) is good on the moral psychology of the *Gorgias*; see his notes on 491d 4, 493a, 499e-500a, 505b-c, 507a-b. It should be noted that if Plato's first voyage to Sicily, in 487, is taken to divide the early and middle dialogues, then because influential scholars date the *Gorgias* after the voyage, it should be considered a middle work; see E.R. DODDS, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 26-7; GUTHRIE, *History*, IV, pp. 284-85.

persuasion, and consequent problems with his political theory. It will be seen that the inadequacy of Socratic persuasion is a central theme of the *Gorgias*. Plato's recognition of the role of the emotions in persuasion places all three works we have noted in sharp opposition to the Socratic view of persuasion that dominates the early dialogues.

II

The "Socratic" conception of persuasion is bound up with the mission of moral reform undertaken by Socrates that is described in the *Apology* and in the pursuit of which Plato depicts him in many of the Socratic dialogues (7). In the *Apology*, Socrates describes his activity as "exhorting" (*parakeleuomenos*) and "urging" (*peithōn*) the Athenians to care for their souls (29d-30a). He says that he takes the Athenians aside "individually like a father or an elder brother" (31b) in order to convince them to care for virtue. Though this activity is conducted in remove from the city's political institutions (*Ap.* 31c-32a), there can be no doubt that Socrates views it as "political". In the *Gorgias* Plato describes politics as the art that cares for the soul (*Grg.* 464b-c), and Socrates says that his activity is the "only true political art" (*tē hōs alēthōs politikē technē*), because he aims at what is best instead of most pleasant (521d). It is not surprising that Plato depicts Socrates in the pursuit of his mission of moral reform in a series of dialogues. It was the major activity of Socrates' life, in the practice of which he probably spent as least thirty years (8).

Though Socrates' activity must strike us as an unpromising way to reform his fellow citizens, his mission must be understood in the light of his intellectualistic moral psychology. Very briefly, Socrates believed that persuasion and exhortation alone could make men virtuous, because he believed that knowledge is a sufficient condition for virtue. This is indicated in the so-called "Socratic paradoxes" that "virtue is knowledge" and "all wrongdoing is caused by igno-

(7) For the Socratic problem, see above, n. 2.

(8) J. BURNET, "The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 7 (1915-16), pp. 238-240.

rance". Socrates argues forcefully for his view in the final argument of the *Protagoras*, where he attempts to prove that "knowledge (*epistēmē*) is something noble and able to govern man, and that whoever learns what is good and what is bad will never be swayed by anything to act otherwise than as knowledge bids, and that wisdom (*phronēsin*) is a sufficient safeguard for mankind" (352b-c) (9).

It should be noted that Aristotle attributes an intellectualistic moral view to Socrates, alluding to *Protagoras* 352b-c in his discussion of moral weakness in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (10). The thrust of Aristotle's account is given in the (probably pseudo-Aristotelian) *Magna Moralia* :

According to Socrates, all the virtues arise in the reasoning part of the soul, from which it follows that in making the various virtues branches of knowledge, he ignores the irrational part of the soul and thus ignores passion and the moral character (1182a 18-23).

Similar views are expressed in the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* (11).

If Socrates' method of moral reform rested upon his distinctive psychological views, then it seems that Plato would have been forced to discard this when he criticized and moved away from Socrates' moral psychology. Plato's arguments for the tripartite soul, in *Republic* IV, which depend upon the phenomenon of psychological conflict, should be viewed as the decisive rejection of the Socratic psychology of the *Protagoras*. The political theory of the *Republic* centers upon an intensive program of education and conditioning that is required to tame the appetites and harmonize the different parts of the soul, while the individuals is still young and unable properly to reason (esp. *Rep.* 401c-02a). In assessing the political theory of the *Republic* it is well to bear in mind Plato's view in the *Laws* that, in order for an individual to be properly educated,

(9) On this argument, see KLOSKO, "On the Analysis of *Protagoras* 351B-60E", *Phoenix*, 34 (1980); brief discussion of Socrates' intellectualism, with further references, is found in KLOSKO, "Plato's Utopianism: The Political Content of the Early Dialogues", *Review of Politics*, 45 (1983), pp. 487-90, 488 n. 14.

(10) *EN* 1145b 23-24; cf. *Prt.* 358b 8-c 2.

(11) The relevant passages are collected, translated into French, and judiciously discussed by T. DEMAN, *Le témoignage d'Aristote sur Socrate* (Paris, 1942).

this process of conditioning must begin before he is born (*Laws* 789a-b).

From the perspective of the moral and political theories of the *Republic*, Plato realized that, if Socrates addressed his moral arguments to hearers who had not been properly prepared, they could not be expected properly to respond. As Plato argues in Book VI of the *Republic*, an individual's psychic condition is decisively influenced by the environment in which he is raised (491b-92e). Because a corrupt environment will corrupt even the finest natural disposition, the philosopher is powerless. Like a traveler who seeks refuge from a storm, he should avoid political activity — including, by implication, a Socratic-style mission of moral reform (496d-e). Indeed, in *Republic* VII, in describing the fate of the prisoner freed from the Cave who returns to aid his fellows, Plato notes their lack of receptiveness: “if they could somehow lay their hands on him and kill him, they would do so” (517a). Thus the isolated philosophic reformer gives way to the philosopher-king, who is able to support his message of reform with the just city's program of intensive education.

Because Plato is concerned with Socrates' mission of moral reform in a series of the dialogues, examining these works should tell us a good deal about Plato's opinion of its prospects. In particular, since Socrates is frequently *depicted* in the course of this activity, Plato's dramatic depiction provides an important source of information about his view of rational argument as a mean of moral reform.

If one turns to the Socratic dialogues with this concern in mind, one notices a striking feature of many works: Socrates' activity is frequently depicted as unseccessful. In a series of dialogues, Socrates' interlocutors are depicted as either not interested in or unable to follow his arguments, and so walk away unaffected. Striking instances include Euthyphro, Ion, and Philebus, in the works that bear their names, and Anytus in the *Meno* ⁽¹²⁾. As Friedlander notes,

(12) This theme is explored at greater length in KLOSKO, “Rational Persuasion in Plato's Political Theory”, in M. GOLDSMITH and T. HORNE, eds., *The Politics of Fallen Man, History of Political Thought*, 7 (1986). For another reason why Socrates appears to be unsuccessful in a series of works, see KLOSKO, “Plato and the Morality of Fallacy”, *American Journal of Philology*, 108 (1987).

the only work in which Socrates dramatically succeeds, in that his interlocutor is depicted as undergoing a moral conversion, is the *Alcibiades I* ⁽¹³⁾. But the victory that Socrates wins in this work is withdrawn by Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. Some eighteen years have passed between the times depicted in the *Alcibiades I* and *Symposium* ⁽¹⁴⁾, and during this period Alcibiades has moved away from Socrates' moral views. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades says that because he is unable to counter Socrates' arguments, he refuses to listen to them: "I withhold my ears perforce as from the Sirens, and make off as fast as I can, for fear I should go on sitting beside him till old age was upon me" (*Symp.* 216a). In clear defiance of Socrates' belief that knowledge is sufficient for virtue, Alcibiades resists his awareness that Socrates is correct. He feels ashamed in Socrates' presence and therefore seeks to avoid him (216a-c).

The theme of the limits of persuasion is also worked into the opening of the *Republic*. Having turned homeward from the Piraeus, Socrates and Glaucon are accosted by Polemarchos and some companions. When Polemarchos tells Socrates that they will not let him leave, the following exchange ensues:

... you must either be stronger than we are, or you must stay here [says Polemarchos].

Is there not another alternative, said I, namely that we may persuade you to let us go?

Could you, said he, persuade men who do not listen?

Not possibly, said Glaucon.

Well, you can take it that we are certainly not going to listen. (327c)

With that the party returns to the house of Cephalus. In view of the plight of the philosophic reformer in the *Republic*, as noted above, the message that this exchange conveys is clear.

(13) I assume that the *Alcibiades I* is genuine; this position is held by many scholars. For a brief discussion, with numerous references, see P. FRIEDLANDER, *Plato*, 3 vols. (Princeton, 1958-69), Vol. II, Chap. 17.

(14) See GUTHRIE, *History*, IV, pp. 356-66; FRIEDLANDER, *Plato*, II, 232.

III

A similar concern with the limits of persuasion is a prominent feature of the *Gorgias*. Throughout the work Plato takes great pains to contrast dialectic and rhetoric (esp. 471e-72c, 474a-b). As noted above, the latter is directed at large audiences and intended to persuade rather than teach. Dialectic, in contrast, is intended to secure the agreement of the single individual to whom its arguments are directed. Relying upon patient examination of the points under discussion, in remove from all considerations but the views of the discussants, dialectic attempts to penetrate beneath appearance and mere opinion (471e-72a; cf. 454c-55a). While rhetoric is judged successful if it can secure the assent of a majority of those present (473de-74b), dialectic has a simpler standard of success. As Socrates says to Polus :

... if on my part I fail to produce yourself as my one witness to confirm what I say, I consider I have achieved nothing of any account towards the matter of our discussion, whatever it may be (472b-c).

But in this dialogue, in which Socrates is explicitly said to speak not only for himself but for Philosophy as well (482a), and the matters under discussion are declared to be of great significance (500b-c), Socrates is left talking to an interlocutor who disagrees with him — in large part because he refuses to engage in dialectical discussion.

The failure of dialectical discussion is a central theme of the *Gorgias*, as is perhaps most clearly seen in the amount of attention Plato accords it. To illustrate this, I will summarize portions of the dramatic action of the work, quoting some of the more telling passages⁽¹⁵⁾. The message Plato conveys is clear, while the depth of his concern constitutes strong if indirect evidence in support of the account of Socrates' mission of reform presented in the previous section.

(15) This aspect of the *Gorgias* is discussed in KLOSKO, "The Insufficiency of Reason in Plato's *Gorgias*", *Western Political Quarterly*, 36 (1983); much of the discussion of the debate between Calicles and Socrates in this section is drawn from that article, where it is discussed in greater detail.

Throughout the *Gorgias* Plato pays great attention to the necessary conditions for rational persuasion and the fact that they are not met in the discussions at hand. This is a recurrent theme in the debates between Socrates and Gorgias and Polus, and assumes even greater significance in Socrates' discussion with Callicles, which is the centerpiece of the work. Though it is not possible neatly to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for successful dialectical persuasion, these clearly include the requirement that the interlocutor stand in a certain relationship to Socrates, characterized by mutual good will and trust. For want of a better term, we can refer to that relationship possessing the necessary characteristics in question as the "dialectical relationship".

Because interpreting the dramatic aspects of Plato's dialogues is an imprecise business, it is difficult to say in any given case if the necessary conditions have been met and so moral persuasion can succeed. However, this problem can be dealt with through the identification of certain factors that *cannot* be present in a specific discussion in the dialectical relationship is to exist. It should be noted that the dialectical relationship does not necessarily contain all the sufficient conditions for successful persuasion. In addition to standing in the appropriate relationship to Socrates, the interlocutor — or perhaps Socrates' arguments — might require additional characteristics if persuasion is to succeed. However, for our purposes it is not necessary to identify these additional sufficient conditions. We can confine our attention to necessary conditions, for if these can be shown *not* to be present, successful persuasion is not possible. In order for the dialectical relationship to exist, at minimum, the mechanics of dialectical discussion must be observed. The interlocutor must be willing to respond to Socrates' questions, to respect elementary rules of reasoning, and to say what he actually believes. The final condition is obvious, but the others are also necessary for successful moral persuasion⁽¹⁶⁾. It follows, then, that if in a given discussion these minimal necessary conditions are *not* adhered to, the necessary conditions for moral persuasion do not exist and Socratic moral reform cannot succeed. What is more, in circum-

(16) Cf. G. VLASTOS, "The Socratic Elenchus", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), who notes only the requirements that the subject "refrain from speechifying" and say what he thinks (p. 35).

stances such as these, we confront a paradox. Faced with a situation in which the necessary conditions do not exist, Socrates cannot convince his interlocutor to enter into the appropriate relationship. For the lack of the necessary conditions makes Socrates' attempts to *persuade* his interlocutor to accept them futile. Thus in the *Gorgias* Callicles remains unreachable in spite of all Socrates' dialectical — and rhetorical — efforts.

Callicles' entry into the discussion immediately reveals problems Socrates faces in attempting to win him over. As he shows in his famous speech, Callicles is aware of the advantages dialecticians enjoy in dialectical discussion. Accordingly, he says, "when public men engage in your studies and discussions they are quite ridiculous" (484d-e). Callicles does not expect to win the debate. He distinguishes the philosopher's realm of argument from the wider world of affairs, and what happens in the former does not interest him greatly. Indeed, as he continues his speech he advises Socrates to pay less attention to dialectic and more to the world of affairs (485e-86d).

Apparently aware of his difficult row to hoe, Socrates makes a lengthy speech of his own in response, in which he outlines at length the ground rules of their discussion. Any point upon which he and Callicles can be brought to agree can be taken as established. There is no need for examining it further, beyond the purview of the discussion (487e). Because both he and Callicles are committed to the results of the discussion, they must abide by these conclusions in their future conduct. Thus Socrates says that if Callicles should ever find him "in agreement with [him] now, and afterward failing to do what I agreed to", Callicles should view him as a "complete idiot" (*hēgou blaka*) (488a). By implication, Callicles too is committed to live according to the *logoi* that emerge. Socrates remarks upon his good fortune in having found in Callicles a rare interlocutor. Callicles possesses the unusual combination of characteristics that render him suitable for dialectical discussion: knowledge, goodwill, and frankness. Thus he will be willing to engage in discussion with the proper spirit, able to follow the arguments Socrates puts forth, and willing to state his actual beliefs, so that Socrates' arguments can have their proper effects (486e-88a). In the light of the proceedings from this point on, one must view Socrates' assessment of Callicles' qualities as ironic, though Socrates' remarks serve to highlight essential qualities that Callicles will be found to lack. On

the whole, it seems that Plato devotes so much attention to the ground rules of the discussion in order to prepare his readers for exactly how it will fall short.

Once the discussion begins, Callicles causes Socrates little trouble, from a philosophical point of view. Within a handful of questions, he is driven to contradict himself (488b-89b). But his reaction is explosive anger : “What an inveterate driveller the man is ! Socrates, are you not ashamed to be wordcatching at your age, and if one makes a verbal slip, to take that as a great stroke of luck ?” (489b-c) Callicles shifts his ground (as he will do repeatedly) ⁽¹⁷⁾ and the discussion resumes. But a pattern has been set : Callicles lacks the philosophical integrity to state a position, argue it out, and accept its implications.

To illustrate the overall nature of the discussion, we need not recount it in detail. We can concentrate on a few highlights. First is the exchange when Socrates begins to demolish the extreme version of hedonism that Callicles puts forth :

CALLICLES : I cannot follow these subtleties of yours, Socrates.

SOCRATES : You can, but you play the innocent, Callicles. Just go on a little further...

CALLICLES : I cannot tell what you mean (497a-b)

At this point it is only the intervention of the onlookers that enables the discussion to continue.

GORGIAS : No, no Callicles, you must answer him, for our sake also, that the argument may be brought to a conclusion.

CALLICLES : But Socrates is always like this, Gorgias ; he keeps on asking petty, unimportant questions until he refutes one.

GORGIAS : Why, what does that matter to you ? It is not for you to estimate their value ⁽¹⁸⁾ ; so just permit Socrates to refute you in the manner as he chooses.

CALLICLES : Well, then, proceed with those cramped questions of yours, since Gorgias is so minded. (497b-c)

(17) See 481d-82a ; note esp. 499b, which Guthrie calls a “shameless *volte face*” (*History*, IV, 291).

(18) I incorporate Dodds’ revision of the text into the translation here ; see *Gorgias*, ad loc.

As this exchange clearly shows, Callicles has no commitment to the discussion or its results. He continues to participate only to please Gorgias and the other onlookers. Thus it is not surprising that he eventually withdraws altogether :

CALLICLES : Why not name it yourself, Socrates ?

SOCRATES : Well, if you prefer it, I will ; and if I seem to name it rightly say so ; if not, you must refute me and not let me have my way (504c).

After compliantly but almost monosyllabically responding to a series of questions (504c-505c), Callicles tires of even this degree of participation : “I have no idea what you are referring to, Socrates ; do ask someone else” (505c).

Once Callicles has removed himself from the discussion, Socrates is powerless to persuade him to continue :

SOCRATES : Very good. So now, what shall we do ? Break off our argument midway ?

CALLICLES : You must decide that for yourself.

SOCRATES : Why, they say one does wrong to leave off even stories in the middle ; one should set a head on the thing, that it might not go about headless. So proceed with the rest of your answers, that our argument may pick up a head. (505c-d)

But Callicles has had enough : “How overbearing you are, Socrates. Take my advice and let this argument drop, or find someone else to argue with” (505d).

Given his present audience, there is only one person to answer Socrates’ questions : Socrates himself. He is forced to continue the argument alone, responding to his own questions. Socrates attempts to establish a new framework for the discussion, and so once again the commitments of dialectical argument are presented (505e-06a). But though Gorgias again expresses a wish that the discussion proceed (506a-b), because no one present is willing to respond to Socrates’ questions, there is little chance that anyone will be persuaded by his arguments.

Thus the dramatic centerpiece of the *Gorgias* is the breakdown of dialectical discussion, made all the more apparent by Socrates’ repeated statement of the method’s procedures and preconditions.

At one point, surprisingly, Callicles does begin to give way: “It seems to me, I cannot tell how, that your statement is right, Socrates, but I share the common feeling; I do not quite believe you” (513c). Socrates knows why Callicles holds back: “Because the love of Demos, Callicles, is there in your soul to resist me: ...” (513c). However, though Socrates’ faith in his method is unshakeable, (513c) Callicles’ weakening proves to be temporary and the discussion proceeds to its close, with Socrates attempting to reach him with an impassioned rhetorical plea, and the first of the great myths of the afterlife presented in the middle dialogues.

There can be little doubt that Plato knows the precise source of Socrates’ problems with Callicles. Socrates realizes that his arguments are defeated by the “love of Demos”, which dominates Callicles’ soul. By implication, Callicles is like the democratic man in *Republic* VIII, the citadel of whose soul is occupied by unnecessary desires, which refuse to listen to conflicting opinions (*Rep.* 560c-d, 561b-c). It is not surprising, therefore, that the remedy for unruly appetite proposed in the *Gorgias* is similar to what is seen in the *Republic*. Socrates declares that the role of the true rhetor is to harmonize souls, to restrain base desires, and encourage good ones to grow (*Grg.* 503c-d, 504d-e). Like other craftsmen, his task is to impose order — in his case virtue — upon his material, the citizens’ souls (503e).

Plato’s manipulation of the dramatic action of the *Gorgias* signals a change in his overall philosophical program. In the middle dialogues, Plato obviously becomes less interested in presenting the character and teaching of Socrates. The Socratic *elenchos* gives way to involved presentation of philosophical material by a knowing Socrates, who speaks with authority. Rather than questioning the views of others, he begins to provide answers. The abandonment of the *elenchos* as the centerpiece of the dialogues is signalled by its breakdown in the works we have noted, especially the *Gorgias*, which requires that Socrates present a positive teaching, in a developed form. Though the refutation of Gorgias has much about it of the traditional *elenchos*, the discussions with Polus and Callicles are quite different, as Socrates must repeatedly apologize for making speeches (465e-66a, 519d). Not only does the content of these speeches clearly foreshadow the political theory of the *Republic* —

of which one could view the *Gorgias* as an outline⁽¹⁹⁾ — but for lengthy passages the discussion between Callicles and Socrates foreshadows the literary form of *Republic* II-X, in regard to which Cornford felt that the interlocutor's role was so peripheral that it could be largely edited out⁽²⁰⁾.

As we have also seen, the breakdown of the *elenchos* communicates a more specific message in regard to Socrates' political views and the method of moral persuasion upon which they turned. In a work that abounds in dramatic irony⁽²¹⁾, the ironic message of Socrates' defeat — the defeat of philosophy itself — is clear. Reasoned argument can be effective only upon those who are willing to listen to reason. If some interlocutor is not willing to listen, then reason cannot reach him. The failure of dialectical persuasion is a political problem. Individuals will respond properly only when they have been *conditioned* to do so. Successful dialectic presupposes political reform.

IV

As noted in the last section, the job of harmonizing the citizens' souls in the *Gorgias* is given to the true rhetor. In view of this task and the fact that the true rhetor is explicitly contrasted with traditional Athenian politicians — Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles (503c, 515b-17c) — it is natural to interpret the true rhetor as the true political leader, i.e., as akin to the philosopher-king in the *Republic*⁽²²⁾.

Questions remain concerning the role of traditional rhetoric, i.e., persuasive speech, within Plato's new political view. As is indicated by the dramatic action of the dialogues, Plato believes in the futility of a Socratic style mission of reform, addressed to his fellow citizens in general. But this does not rule out attempts to use moral persuasion upon carefully selected individuals (*Rep.* 496a-c). Of

(19) E. BARKER, *Greek Political Theory* (London, 1918, rpt. 1947), pp. 165-67; IRWIN, *Gorgias*, p. 215; DODDS, *Gorgias*, p. 328.

(20) F.M. CORNFORD, *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford, 1941), p. vii.

(21) KŁOSKO, "Insufficiency of Reason", pp. 585-87.

(22) IRWIN, *Gorgias*, p. 216; DODDS, *Gorgias*, p. 328.

course, Plato must assume that these individuals have well-ordered souls and so can respond properly to moral arguments. As far as more traditional, public rhetoric is concerned, this too could have a role, albeit a limited one, in the new political systems that Plato envisions. The political institutions in the *Republic's* just city leave little room for traditional rhetoric. Plato does not appear to envision different policy preferences being publicly debated. This does not mean that the philosophers will not discuss policy questions, though I imagine such discussions would be more in the way of rational argument than persuasive speech. But there is undoubtedly a role for public persuasion in the just city, in the rulers' attempts to communicate with their subjects in order to facilitate the willing acquiescence of the lower classes that is necessary for the political virtue of temperance (430d-32b). The rhetoric to be employed here is along the lines of the rhetoric discussed in the *Statesman*, which is at the disposal of the science of ruling. Something similar is seen in the *Laws*, in the preambles attached to the laws, which are intended to secure the subjects' assent to specific laws (23). Because the just city described in the *Laws* possesses somewhat democratic political institutions and all citizens are eligible to participate, some role for traditional deliberative and forensic rhetoric can probably be assumed as well.

In all these cases, Plato can be taken to know that effective rhetoric must be addressed to individuals whose souls have been properly conditioned. His view seems similar to that of Aristotle, as expressed in a well known passage in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle, people cannot be instructed in ethics unless they have received proper moral training and acquired good habits (*En* 1095b 4-6). Though in the *Gorgias* the job of conditioning souls is assigned to the true rhetor, by the time of the *Republic*, Plato argues that the tools required for this task go far beyond persuasive speech (24). To the extent, then, that rhetoric has a role in the political theory of Plato's middle and late dialogues, this is far removed from concerns of moral reform. An important development in Plato's view of persuasion, from early to middle and late dialogues, is a separation

(23) For discussion, see KLOSKO, *Development*, pp. 227-29.

(24) For discussion of Plato's view of moral education in the middle dialogues, see KLOSKO, *Development*, Chaps. 7-8.

between the concerns of persuasion and of moral reform that Socrates had intermixed.

A view similar to Plato's mature position is elaborated by Aristotle at the close of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in the transition to the *Politics* (25). Having discussed the nature of virtue, Aristotle turns to the means through which people can be made virtuous. He begins by considering the opinions of previous thinkers. First is the view we have attributed to Socrates, that people can be made virtuous through arguments alone. Aristotle rejects this, because it conflicts with obvious facts :

Now if arguments were sufficient by themselves to make people decent, the rewards they would command would justifiably have been many and large, as Theognis says, and rightly bestowed. In fact, however, arguments seem to have enough influence to stimulate and encourage the civilized ones among the young people, and perhaps to make virtue take possession of a well-born character that truly loves what is fine ; but they seem unable to stimulate the many towards being fine and good. (*EN* 1179b 4-10)

As is clear throughout the *Ethics*, Aristotle believes that the many's lives are governed by passion and the pursuit of pleasure. They are not, therefore, suited to moral persuasion :

What arguments could reform people like these ? For it is impossible, or not easy, to alter by argument what has long been absorbed by habit ; ... (1179b 16-18).

Aristotle's view is like Plato's. People are not made good through arguments or teaching alone, but through a combination of arguments and habituation. Arguments cannot work on those who have not been raised properly, and so these people must be reformed through other means (1179b 23 ff.).

Aristotle believes that good habits and character take hold best when they are inculcated from an early age. From a practical point of view, this requires that the young be brought up according to good laws in a properly governed *polis* (1179b 31 ff.). Aristotle therefore holds that the inculcation of virtue is a job best left to

(25) Though Socrates is not mentioned by name, it is likely that he is the target of Aristotle's remarks ; see N. GULLEY, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (London, 1968), pp. 135-38.

the *polis* (1180a 5 ff.). Put very briefly, if people are to be receptive to moral reasoning, they must be made receptive. This requires proper habituation, which in turn requires compulsion, and so the *polis*. If these concerns are neglected by the *polis*, the individual must attempt to do whatever he can (1180a 24-31). However, in view of his moral psychology, Aristotle believes that the individual will be most effective if he makes himself skilled in legislation (see 1180a 32-34). Arguments alone cannot work, and so there must be resort to other means.

I believe that by the time of the middle dialogues Plato came to hold views on the possibility of rational persuasion similar to Aristotle's and that this is central to the development of his political theory from the early to middle dialogues. Points similar to those explicitly made by Aristotle at the close of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are illustrated by Plato in his depiction of Socrates' mission in the *Gorgias* and the other dialogues noted above.

Plato's view of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* is also predicated upon the rejection of the Socratic view of persuasion. In the *Phaedrus* Plato argues that the true rhetor must know the truth about his subject matter. While it is commonly said that rhetoricians need not be concerned with truth but only with what a given audience will find convincing (*Phdr.* 272d-e), Plato argues that the rhetor will not be able to promote the interests of his hearers unless he knows the truth about his subject (260c-d). Moreover, since the art of persuasion requires successful manipulation of appearances, the speaker who knows the truth will be best situated to discover likenesses (273d, 262a). But knowing the truth is not enough. In view of what we have seen of Plato's view of the Socratic mode of persuasion, it is not surprising that he believes it is necessary to know one's audience. In addition to studying one's subject matter, one must examine the nature of the soul, especially what sorts of speeches will be effective upon what sorts of souls (270b-72b).

The case is of course similar with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle believes that the importance of emotional appeals had not been ignored by previous authors of "Arts of Rhetoric". On the contrary, these authors focused all but exclusively on how to evoke appropriate emotional responses, virtually ignoring logical and philosophical considerations. It is of course in regard to the philosophical side of rhetoric that Aristotle makes his greatest contributions. But the

emotional side of rhetoric is not lost and Aristotle devotes lengthy portions of the work to detailed examination of the psychological effects of different kinds of speeches.

In conclusion, despite the significant differences between the *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *Rhetoric*, all three works represent significant advances over the Socratic view of persuasion. All three are in accord with the obvious fact that successful persuasion requires more than command of reasoned arguments alone ⁽²⁶⁾.

University of Virginia

(26) Plato and Aristotle are quoted from Oxford Classical Texts. Translations generally follow Loeb Classics Library editions, occasionally with slight modifications. For the *Republic*, I use the translation of G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, 1974); for the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I use the translation of Irwin (Indianapolis, 1985).

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