

# interpretation

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# interpretation

Volume 14 numbers 2 & 3

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# Refutative Rhetoric as True Rhetoric in the *Gorgias*

THOMAS J. LEWIS

McMaster University

Plato explores the subject of rhetoric in a number of dialogues, but the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* contain the most extensive examinations of rhetoric. However, the differences between these two dialogues have led to a great deal of perplexity about Plato's view of rhetoric. As Edwin Black observes, in the *Gorgias* rhetoric is denounced in satirical, contentious, and refutative language, whereas, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato offers a constructive and affirmative judgment of rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> Black notes the usual two responses to these differences: That Plato changed his mind about rhetoric between the time he wrote the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, or ". . . that Plato did not mean by "rhetoric" in the *Gorgias* what he meant by "rhetoric" in the *Phaedrus*."<sup>2</sup> But Black rejects both responses. He presents the two dialogues as expressions of different, but complementary, aspects of Plato's understanding of rhetoric. He argues that the *Gorgias* is refutative, because Socrates is mainly concerned to define and to condemn false rhetoric; and that the *Phaedrus* is constructive, because Socrates is engaged in defining true rhetoric and in demonstrating at least one of its practical applications—the persuasion of a young man such as Phaedrus to commit himself to philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

I agree that the two different forms of rhetoric can be accounted for by the different dramatic circumstances. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates is alone with one able and inquisitive young man, who is readily attracted by an alluring image of philosophy. In contrast, in the *Gorgias* Socrates is confronted with three interlocutors defending Gorgias' art, and two of these, Polus and Callicles, are willing to go on the offensive—to impugn Socrates' character, and his way of life, if he challenges the propriety of Gorgias' art. Thus, Socrates' task in the *Gorgias* is to denounce and refute the defenders of the false rhetoric which serves as a competitor to philosophy. In both dialogues Socrates' rhetoric, be it constructive or refutative, is appropriate to the particular circumstances.

However, there appears to be one important fact that does not fit the view of the two forms of rhetoric as complementary. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates' rhetoric is successful; Phaedrus is drawn to philosophy; whereas, in the *Gorgias*, there is no evidence that Gorgias, Polus, or Callicles have been convinced by Socrates.

1. Edwin Black, "Plato's View of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 44 (1958), 361–74.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 374. Black's interpretation of the use of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias* has served as a basis for further work by Rollen Quimby and David Kaufer. See Quimby's "The Growth of Plato's Perception of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 7 (1974), 71–79; and Kaufer's "The Influence of Plato's Developing Psychology on his Views of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 64 (1978), 63–78.

At best each has been overpowered and silenced but not persuaded. Socrates' failure to persuade his interlocutors appears to lead to the conclusion that Plato is depicting the unsuccessful use of refutative rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, and it is difficult to see how unsuccessful refutative rhetoric can be the complement of constructive rhetoric. Indeed, Charles Kauffman's assessment of the extent of the failure of Socrates' rhetoric in the *Gorgias* appears to undermine Black's view that Socrates' use of refutative and constructive rhetoric are complementary.<sup>4</sup>

Socrates does fail to persuade his interlocutors in the *Gorgias*, however, I suggest that this fact is not itself evidence of the failure of his refutative rhetoric. It is not evidence of failure because I believe Plato does not portray Socrates as attempting to persuade them; rather, he portrays Socrates as manipulating Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles in order to persuade a very different audience—the group of young men who have assembled for Gorgias' display of words. In the *Phaedrus* it is appropriate to judge the success of Socrates' rhetoric by its impact on Phaedrus, because he is both the interlocutor and the audience. But the dramatic structure of the *Gorgias* is more complex. If the primary audience for Socrates' refutative rhetoric is this group of young men, then it may be sufficient for Socrates to only silence his interlocutors in order to persuade this audience.

I suggest that by silencing his interlocutors Socrates discredits Gorgias' rhetoric in the eyes of the primary audience, and that this discrediting is the initial step in attracting the audience to philosophy. Thus, his refutative rhetoric does serve as a complement of the constructive form of true rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*. In addition, his refutative rhetoric illustrates his prowess in a public forum, for despite Socrates' disclaimers, in the *Gorgias* Plato portrays him as more than able to hold his own in public debate.

To appreciate the intent and the force of Socrates' refutative rhetoric it is necessary to identify his primary audience; to articulate the shaming tactics Socrates uses to discredit Gorgias' art in front of this audience; and to explicate the way Socrates covers up his rhetoric by presenting himself as someone who speaks only the truth regardless of the consequences.

#### THE PRIMARY AUDIENCE IN THE *GORGIAS*

The *Gorgias* consists of three conversations and an exhortation in which Socrates urges Callicles to abandon rhetoric and to take up philosophy. There is also a brief exchange between Polus and Chaerephon, which provides a transition between the opening pleasantries surrounding the arrival of Socrates and Chaerephon and the initial conversation between Socrates and Gorgias.

The dialogue begins with the arrival of Socrates and Chaerephon in the inter-

4. Charles Kauffman, "Enactment as Argument in the *Gorgias*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 12 (1979), 114–29.

lude between Gorgias' formal demonstration of his art and the second part of his public display where he will take any questions from the audience. But the second part of Gorgias' demonstration does not take place. It is replaced by the conversations that make up the *Gorgias*, and these conversations take place before the same audience. The first part of the *Gorgias* provides good evidence that the presence of the audience is not incidental, but rather that Socrates wants the audience to be present. He wants a public conversation, and to get it he injects himself into the proceedings at the appropriate moment.<sup>5</sup>

Callicles acknowledges Socrates' arrival with the comment that Socrates has come as "they say you should take part in warfare" (447a).<sup>6</sup> Socrates allows that he has arrived late, and Callicles informs him that he has missed a feast of words by being late for Gorgias' display. Socrates does not comment on Callicles' depiction of Gorgias' speech as a feast, but he allows this evaluation to stand by blaming Chaerephon for his late arrival. Chaerephon accepts his culpability and offers a remedy. He claims that since he is a friend of Gorgias he can arrange another display either now or later, whichever best suits Socrates. Callicles expresses his surprise: "What, Chaerephon? Is Socrates anxious to hear Gorgias" (447b). Chaerephon responds: "This is the very reason why we are here" (447b). Clearly Callicles and Chaerephon have different views of Socrates' interest in Gorgias' feast of words. Callicles is surprised that Socrates would be interested; Chaerephon insists that Socrates is interested; Socrates does not commit himself either way.

Callicles then invites Socrates and Chaerephon to come to his home, where Gorgias is staying on this visit to Athens, and where they will be treated to a special display of rhetoric by Gorgias (447b). Socrates thanks Callicles for this offer, but he gently demurs. He asks whether Gorgias, instead of providing an exhibition, would be willing to converse with them about the nature of his art and just what it is that he teaches (447c). Callicles suggests that Socrates ask Gorgias himself, since Gorgias has just said he is open to all questions. Socrates is pleased to have his concerns raised with Gorgias, but he presses Chaerephon forward in his place: "Splendid! Chaerephon, ask him" (447c). Chaerephon does not know what to say and relies on Socrates to formulate the question (447d). When Chaerephon finally does manage three questions along the lines suggested by Socrates, Polus, who rudely injects himself into the conversation, answers in place of Gorgias (448a–c). Socrates, not Chaerephon, states that the answers are unsatisfactory and Gorgias asks for an explanation from Socrates for this conclu-

5. There has been disagreement about the location of the conversation. Some commentators have interpreted the text to indicate that the conversations take place at Callicles' home. There is now general agreement that this view was mistaken and that the conversations are at some public place. For a summary of this controversy and the basis for the current agreement on the text see E. R. Dodds, *Plato's Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), p. 188.

6. Citations from the *Gorgias* are from the translation by W. D. Woodhead in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, 1961).

sion. Socrates clarifies his criticism of Polus' answers and invites Gorgias to tell them what his art is and what it should be called. Gorgias says it is the art of rhetoric (449a), and the conversation between Socrates and Gorgias is underway.

What is to be made of this beginning? First, Socrates appears to have come to meet Gorgias for his own reasons; he has not, for example, come at the instigation or insistence of his companion Chaerephon. Second, Socrates has come late with the feeble excuse that Chaerephon detained him by insisting that they stay in the market. There seems to have been no real impediment to Socrates either coming alone or insisting that the obliging Chaerephon quit loitering.<sup>7</sup> We may conclude that Socrates has chosen to come late, which is entirely consistent with Callicles' expression of surprise at Chaerephon's presumption that Socrates would be anxious to hear Gorgias' exhibition. Choosing to come late indicates that Socrates wants a conversation about Gorgias' art. Socrates says this explicitly (447c), but what he does not say is that he wants the conversation to be in the presence of the audience that has just feasted on Gorgias' words. Notice that Callicles invites Socrates and Chaerephon to a relatively private exhibition by Gorgias at Callicles' home. Socrates raises the possibility of a conversation instead of an exhibition at Callicles' home, and it is with that possibility in mind that Callicles invites Socrates to question Gorgias. But the question that Socrates has Chaerephon ask Gorgias is not whether Gorgias will discuss his art with them in lieu of a second exhibition at Callicles' home; instead, it is a question about his art. The possibility of an exhibition or a discussion at Callicles' home is not raised again.

Socrates initially questions Gorgias about the art of rhetoric in a polite and inoffensive manner (449a–455a). He then briefly summarizes what they have covered and says that because he is not yet clear about the art of rhetoric they will have to go at the matter in more detail (455a–c). Then he suggests a way of thinking about his relationship to Gorgias and the audience.

And so, imagine that my interest is on your behalf, for perhaps some of those present are anxious to become your disciples—there are some, I know, quite a number in fact—who would be bashful perhaps about questioning you. And so, just imagine that when I inquire, they too are asking. What shall we gain, Gorgias, if we associate with you? On what subjects shall we be able to advise the city, about right and wrong alone, or the subjects just mentioned by Socrates? (455cd)

Socrates offers to serve as an agent who can, if Gorgias is willing to employ him, facilitate Gorgias' purpose. Gorgias wants to be questioned in order to display his ability. He may simply wish to bask in public acclaim, but Socrates suggests that he also wishes to recruit disciples or students. Socrates flatters Gorgias by suggesting that his exhibition has been so impressive as to risk being self-defeat-

7. Commentators have generally not remarked on the problematic nature of Socrates' late arrival. However, it is noted by Arlene W. Saxonhouse in her recent article "An Unspoken Theme in Plato's *Gorgias*: War," *Interpretation*, 11 (1983), p. 140.

ing. According to Socrates, Gorgias appears so grand that these young men are embarrassed to question him, and thus they may be denied the opportunity of fully appreciating the advantages of associating with him. Gorgias accepts this method of self display as a substitute for direct questions from the audience.<sup>8</sup>

Gorgias' audience is portrayed as young and ambitious. These young men are interested in prominent public positions, and Gorgias responds by holding out the achievements of Themistocles and Pericles as examples of what they can aspire to if they master his art (455c). To be sensitive to the potential persuasiveness of Socrates' refutative rhetoric, we must be aware that the primary motive for seeking public office was *φιλοτιμία*, "love of honour" the desire for recognition as a man who directs the city on the most important matters.<sup>9</sup> To "advise the city" a man must be able to prevail in a public forum, and Gorgias claims that his art provides the means to speak and to prevail.

Socrates' conversation with Gorgias produces agreement on a number of aspects of rhetoric: the scope of rhetoric is to persuade the soul of the listener (453); there are two forms of persuasion, one that produces conviction on the basis of knowledge, and another that produces conviction without knowledge; the latter is practiced in courts of law and assemblies because the combination of large numbers and shortness of time precludes the use of the former (454e, 455a). Socrates suggests that to the extent that rhetoric does not require a knowledge of the truth of its subject it is inferior to other arts and perhaps it is not an art at all (459bcd). He also suggests that since Gorgias teaches his pupils how to convince others about what is just and unjust and noble and base, a student must either have knowledge of the just and unjust and the noble and base before his instruction in rhetoric, or Gorgias must begin by instructing his students about such matters. Otherwise one who learns rhetoric from Gorgias would appear to have knowledge when he does not, and would appear to be a good man although he is not (459de). Gorgias allows that he does instruct his students in this manner and he agrees with Socrates that the true rhetorician must also be just (460c). But then Socrates reminds Gorgias that he previously allowed that, if a student of rhetoric were to misuse his skill, the teacher of rhetoric was not to be blamed for he had taught the skill only for good use (457bc). Socrates concludes that Gorgias seems to be saying that by his very nature the rhetorician must be just and do just actions, but also to be saying that the rhetorician may misuse his skill. Since there seems to be an inconsistency here Socrates suggests it will require a long discussion to determine the truth of the matter (461ab). Polus sees the inconsistency that arises from Gorgias' admission that knowledge is a necessary condition for becoming a student of rhetoric. He contends that Gorgias was simply

8. Socrates' role as an interviewer of Gorgias before a composite audience of the silent dramatic audience and the reader is noted by Steven Rendall, "Dialogue, Philosophy, and Rhetoric: The Example of Plato's *Gorgias*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 10 (1977), 165–79.

9. K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1974), 226–34.

ashamed to say otherwise, and that Socrates is tasteless to have taken advantage of Gorgias' sense of shame (461cd).

Socrates displays a somewhat skeptical tone throughout his conversation with Gorgias, but his irony is gentle and he adopts a tone of puzzlement and even a spirit of camaraderie. There is an underlying mockery in Socrates' words, but overall he speaks politely to Gorgias, and Gorgias maintains the gracious and dignified pose befitting a man of his age, experience, and reputation, who has given yet another impressive performance.

The dramatic setting provides the reason for Socrates' politeness. Socrates' part in the conversation is dependent on Gorgias' sufferance. Both by prior arrangement and by virtue of his impressive performance the audience belongs to Gorgias. He is free to decline further questions or to simply invite questions from someone else. Thus, if Socrates is not to lose access to the audience he needs Gorgias' auspices. If Gorgias is treated too roughly he may simply call it a day, and Polus has already provided an adequate excuse by explaining that Gorgias has had a long day and is tired (448a). After a fairly lengthy conversation with Gorgias, but still with no answer to the inquiry in sight, Socrates raises the possibility of ending their discussion. Gorgias' response is revealing. He says he is willing to go on but that he is concerned that the audience may not wish to hear more; they have already heard a long demonstration and may have other things to do (458b). Gorgias' concern for the audience seems exaggerated; he appears to be looking for a graceful way to end the discussion, but he does not succeed. Chaerephon indicates that the audience is eager to hear more (458c). The wording of Gorgias' agreement to continue indicates his waning enthusiasm. "It would be disgraceful of me to refuse, when I personally volunteered to meet any question that might be put" (458d). Gorgias' concern for his public reputation makes it possible for Socrates to oblige him to continue.<sup>10</sup> Socrates has first wheedled his way in front of Gorgias' audience and then by appealing to that audience he has made it difficult for Gorgias to dismiss him.

Socrates' effort to gain access to Gorgias' audience has a clear parallel in the

10. For a similar conclusion about Gorgias' character, see Adele Spitzer, "The Self-reference of the *Gorgias*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 8 (1975), 1–22. She contends that overweening concern about how he appears to others is at the core of Gorgias' character, and that his gentleness is only a result of his fear of offending his audience (7–9). Kauffman recognizes this aspect of Gorgias' character but he contends that it does not encompass Gorgias' later comments at 497 and 506 where Gorgias urges that the conversation be pressed on to a conclusion. According to Kauffman these passages provide evidence that Gorgias is interested in the truth as he had earlier claimed (458), even if the pursuit of truth reflects badly on his reputation. Gorgias does speak as Kauffman claims, and what he says appears to indicate a different aspect of his character. However, the truth-seeking Gorgias can be reconciled with Spitzer's position if, as I have argued, Gorgias is not only expert at knowing what pleases an audience, but also if he has a sufficient degree of self-control to put this knowledge to use by always appearing as pleasing as possible. Unlike Polus and Callicles he has the good sense not to make matters worse by appearing to be a poor loser. Furthermore, he is sensitive to the audience's desire to hear and so he gives them what they want, especially if he can extricate himself, as he does, from directly suffering Socrates' cross-examination.

first part of the *Phaedrus* (227–230c). Phaedrus has been impressed by Lysias' speech, just as the audience in the *Gorgias* has been impressed by Gorgias' display. As a friend of Socrates Phaedrus would normally welcome his company. But because Phaedrus wishes to practice the speech and then use it to display his own rhetorical ability, he does not entirely welcome Socrates' presence. Only after Socrates notices that Phaedrus is hiding a copy of the speech under his cloak and surmises what Phaedrus is up to does Phaedrus give up his intended deception. Socrates accosts Phaedrus, insists on hearing Lysias' speech, and to insure an uninterrupted conversation he suggests they leave the city and walk along the river to a quiet spot.

The importance Socrates attaches to influencing Phaedrus is soon made clear by Socrates' unfamiliarity with the terrain. He describes himself as a stranger to the area and refers to Phaedrus as his guide (230d). Phaedrus responds that Socrates is the oddest of men because he so seldom sets foot outside the walls, and Socrates jokes that with speeches such as Lysias' for bait Phaedrus could lead him all around Attica or anywhere else (230e). Knowing what Socrates really thinks of Lysias' speech we may conclude that in order to counter the effect of the speech on his friend, Socrates might be willing to be dragged around Attica. Nonetheless, given Phaedrus' interest in rhetoric, his friendship for Socrates, and the absence of any complicating third party, it is relatively easy for Socrates to capture Phaedrus' attention; whereas in the *Gorgias* Socrates cannot lead the audience away physically. If he is to counter Gorgias' effect on the audience, he must do so in the presence of, indeed, with the participation of, the defenders of rhetoric.

#### PORTRAYING RHETORIC AS INDECENT

To counter the effect of Gorgias' display Socrates manipulates the conversation to associate Gorgias' rhetoric with shamelessness or indecency. There are two stages to this manipulation. First, Socrates induces Polus and then Callicles to enter the conversation on behalf of Gorgias' rhetoric. Second, he provokes Callicles to say things, which appear to violate the city's sense of decency.

As this process of manipulation unfolds a further complication about the audience arises. I suggest that what Socrates says to each of the interlocutors is designed to influence the assembled audience—the primary audience. However, throughout the conversation with Gorgias there is a secondary audience of Polus and Callicles, and what is said by Socrates is in part calculated to draw Polus into the conversation. Similarly, Gorgias and Callicles are the secondary audience during the conversation with Polus. But it is clear that Socrates is playing mainly to Callicles rather than Gorgias, for it is Callicles who is so astonished and frustrated by what he hears that he thrusts himself into the conversation brushing Polus aside.

The process of drawing Polus into the conversation overlaps somewhat with Socrates' effort to establish himself in front of the primary audience. Earlier Polus displayed his eagerness to enter the conversation. But the unsatisfactory nature of his responses moved Gorgias to intervene. Now, however, Gorgias is looking for a way out and appears to welcome the chance to pass the conversation to Polus. The sequence of events is important. It is at 457e that Gorgias claims that he teaches rhetoric only for good use and so he is not to be blamed if it is misused by a student. Socrates suggests that there may be an inconsistency somewhere; at the very least it will require a lengthy cross-examination to clarify what Gorgias has said. But Socrates does not launch into the cross-examination. Instead, he suggests that Gorgias may not want to continue, prompting the primary audience as well as Chaerephon and Callicles to press for a continuation, and eliciting Gorgias' agreement to go on—for it would be disgraceful to do otherwise (458e). Only after he has this agreement can Socrates afford to press hard on the inconsistency, giving Gorgias a good reason to withdraw but now without the freedom to close the conversation down.

Although Gorgias is replaced by Polus as Socrates' main interlocutor, Socrates continues to treat Gorgias' presence as a constraint on what he can say. He invites Polus to question him about rhetoric but indicates that he is hesitant to give frank answers for fear of offending Gorgias, and he waits to obtain Gorgias' permission to proceed (463). Only then does Socrates present his analysis of rhetoric as part of a general typology of flattery. Rhetoric, he says, is the false form of justice just as medicine is impersonated by cooking, gymnastic by beautification, and legislation by sophistry (463–466). Finally Socrates obtains Polus' reluctant admission that the knack or technique of rhetoric can be of no use to any man except to accuse oneself and one's friends and relatives of wrongdoing in order to expose one's wickedness and ensure punishment. Also, if it were right to harm enemies, rhetoric could be used to protect one's enemies from being punished for their wickedness (480–481b).

These assertions provoke Callicles to ask Chaerephon whether Socrates is serious or simply joking (481b). Callicles' question expresses the same mixture of surprise and skepticism as in his initial question about whether Socrates really wished to hear Gorgias' demonstration (447b). As before, Chaerephon responds that Socrates is quite serious and he invites Callicles to confirm this by asking Socrates (481b). Socrates responds to Callicles' question with a long speech (481c–482c) affirming his radical assertions about rhetoric. This is too much for Callicles; he has run out of patience with Socrates, Gorgias, and Polus. Jokes and spoofs are one thing, but if Socrates persists in spouting nonsense and neither Gorgias nor Polus can expose it for what it is, then he, Callicles, will. Here, as at the beginning of the dialogue, Chaerephon takes Socrates' words literally. Socrates initially took advantage of Chaerephon's apparently guileless nature to make excuses for arriving late, but now Chaerephon's trusting and literal accep-

tance of Socrates' assertions about rhetoric further irritates Callicles and provokes him to set things straight.

Callicles agrees with Polus that Gorgias became entangled in inconsistencies because he was ashamed to assert what he really believed. However, Callicles contends that Polus has fallen into the same trap. He was obliged to agree with Socrates' ludicrous assertions about rhetoric only because he agreed to the premise that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it; and he agreed with this premise not because he believed it but because he was ashamed to deny it (348de). Callicles boasts that he cannot be ensnared by Socrates in this way because he has the courage to admit the consequences of his assertions. Callicles has finally taken the bait; he has been goaded into the conversation, and he has been induced to say what he thinks without concern for public decency. The stage is set for the association of rhetoric with shamelessness.

Callicles rightly understands Socrates' assertions about rhetoric to be extreme or radical. If true, “. . . then surely the life of us mortals must be turned upside down and apparently we are everywhere doing the opposite of what we should” (481c). Socrates' view of rhetoric rests on the radical notion that it is better to suffer wrong than to do it. Callicles feels obliged to match Socrates' radical assertion with an equally extreme assertion:

Anyone who is to live aright should suffer his appetites to grow to the greatest extent and not check them, and through courage and intelligence should be competent to minister to them at their greatest and to satisfy every appetite with what it craves (492).<sup>11</sup>

Any opposition to this way of living on the basis of justice or shamefulness is, according to Callicles, simply an attempt by the inferior to constrain the superior and to conceal their own inferiority (492bc). Callicles does not accuse Socrates of having to invoke a sense of shame to hide his inferiority. On the contrary, he says that Socrates is potentially a superior man who has been blinded to the right or natural form of human life by his preoccupation with philosophy (484cd). If Socrates would only abandon philosophy he would see the truth of Callicles' words, and he would allow his superior nature to develop fully. Indeed, if only Socrates would study and employ rhetoric he could become a useful and respected member of the community. Whereas, Callicles contends, without a

11. The views expressed by Callicles are closely related to those of Thrasymachus in the *Republic* (336b–354a). Both Callicles and Thrasymachus are frustrated and angered by what Socrates has obliged his previous interlocutors to agree to, and both thrust themselves into the conversation to set matters straight. Both are consciously provoked by Socrates to assert the benefits of radical hedonism and tyranny. In the *Gorgias* these views serve to associate rhetoric with political indecency for the benefit of the audience, whereas in the *Republic* Thrasymachus' speech serves to draw out Glaucon, who restates Thrasymachus' position in praise of the unjust life and insists that Socrates respond to it. Socrates triggers the reckless eloquence of Thrasymachus, which in turn provokes Glaucon to set out the basic position examined throughout the night by Socrates. But because there is no Glaucon present in the *Gorgias* there is no scope for a sustained examination of rhetoric.

knowledge of rhetoric Socrates can be of use to no one. He can not even protect himself from those who would drag him into court on false charges (486bc).

At the core of Callicles' assertion is the premise that pleasure is the satisfaction of appetites and that no distinctions can be drawn between pleasures that are good and pleasures that are evil. Callicles affirms this premise by allowing that he is thinking of appetites such as hunger and thirst and the pleasure that results from eating and drinking, and by analogy he extends this meaning to all other appetites (494bc). Socrates urges Callicles to hold to this position and not to falter through shame. He adds that he too will have to throw shame aside (494c). Socrates then asks whether someone suffering from an appetite such as an itch which never ceases and can be scratched forever can be said to be happy. The possibility of one such appetite as the basis of happiness is diminished as absurd by Callicles. However, having equated all appetites, Callicles is obliged to affirm that such a man would be happy (494d). Socrates presses Callicles still further:

SOCRATES If it was only his head that he wanted to scratch—or can I push the question further? Think what you will answer, Callicles, if anyone should ask all the questions that naturally follow. And as a climax of all such cases, the life of a catamite—is not that shocking and shameful and miserable? Will you dare to say that such people are happy, if they have what they desire in abundance?

CALLICLES Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to drag our discussion into such topics?

SOCRATES Is it I who do this, my noble friend, or the man who says so unequivocally that pleasure, whatever its nature, is the key to happiness, and does not distinguish between pleasures good and evil? But enlighten me further as to whether you say that the pleasant and the good are identical, or that there are some pleasures which are not good.

CALLICLES To avoid inconsistency if I say they are different, I assert they are the same.

SOCRATES Then you ruin your earlier statement, Callicles, and you can no longer properly investigate the truth with me, if you speak contrary to your opinions (494e, 495a).

Although Callicles is pressed to affirm his position that all pleasures are the same, he does so without conviction and only to avoid inconsistency. Callicles is repelled by his sense of shame from affirming the consequence of his assertion, and like any decent person he rebukes Socrates for dragging a polite conversation into indecency. Callicles knows that he has been trapped by Socrates. Both Gorgias and Polus managed to avoid the trap; they chose decency at what is for public purposes the small price of logical inconsistency. Callicles, on the other hand, distanced himself from Gorgias and Polus with the claim that he could not be shamed into inconsistency. Further, he claimed that not to be bound by shame was the mark of the superior man—the man who understood that the morality that gave rise to feelings of shame was simply an instrument of the inferior man.

According to Callicles, all conventional morality is a false morality, a protective device used by the impotent many to chain the energy of the superior man.

For a public man like Callicles, whom Socrates describes as “in love with the demos” because of his need to pander to it, the description of the demos as the home of a sheep morality is a very imprudent statement. The aspiring politician can seldom afford to make such views public whatever his private views. But Callicles’ anger and frustration have driven him to air these views. Further, although Callicles initially sides with Gorgias by criticizing Socrates, he finds himself indirectly attacking Gorgias by associating Gorgias’ polite and decent behaviour with a sheep morality. However, having staked out this ground in order to best Socrates, Callicles now finds that his rash claims about the life of the superior man have led him to affirm the happiness of the life of a catamite. He is doubly ashamed: First, like any decent and conventional Athenian for seeming to approve of such a way of life; second, because of his claim of being above conventional morality, he is also ashamed of being ashamed. He is humiliated.

To this point the conversations with the three defenders of rhetoric display a common element. In each case the defense of rhetoric is shown to require a premise that is shameful or indecent, a premise that offends the morality of the community, and each is offered a choice between rhetoric and decency. Both Gorgias and Polus instinctively chose decency and seemed to be largely unaware that they had undercut the type of rhetoric they had intended to defend. To his chagrin, Callicles, determined not to be beaten by Socrates, is goaded into choosing indecency.<sup>12</sup> Forcing this choice is a central part of Socrates’ attempt to dissuade Gorgias’ audience from following Gorgias. They see rhetoric as a route for able and ambitious men to take in order to gain access to public office and public acclaim (455d). But success in public life requires respectability; one must publicly embrace the community’s norms whatever they may be. Only then can a community entrust its decisions to a man and honour him for his services. If rhetoric is to be the route chosen by ambitious young men and their families it must appear respectable, otherwise it will not serve their purposes. Both analytically and dramatically Socrates has stripped off the respectable face of rhetoric.<sup>13</sup>

12. George Klosko, “The Refutation of Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias*,” *Greece and Rome*, xxxi, (1984), 126–39, argues that Callicles’ hedonism is far more extreme than is necessary to support his view of natural justice. Thus, he is more easily refuted than had he advanced the more moderate arguments suggested by Klosko. I concur with Klosko that Plato puts these extreme arguments into Callicles’ mouth in order to allow Socrates to deal effectively with hedonism. However, Klosko stops with the logical defeat of Callicles. He does not explore how the shaming tactics used on Gorgias and Polus are preliminary to the more ruthless use of these tactics on Callicles, leading to the dramatic defeat of Callicles.

13. The need for a foreign teacher to take care to appear acceptable to the community he visits is explained in the *Protagoras* (316c–317c). Protagoras also pats himself on the back for successfully managing this problem for so many years. In the *Euthydemus* Plato lampoons the “wordy warfare” of Euthydemus and his brother Dionysodorus in much the same manner as Aristophanes characterizes

Socrates has offered an analysis of rhetoric as indecent pandering, and through his questioning of Gorgias, Polus and Callicles he has associated rhetoric with ideas that violate the norms of political decency, but in so doing he has provoked the allegations that he is shameless (461c, 483e, 489b, 494c, 494e), that he speaks unfairly or deceptively, and that he harangues like a mob orator (482c, 483e, 489c, 489e, 494d, 519d). At first Socrates ignores the charges. However, when he eventually admits that there may be something to them, he claims that he is not at fault; he is obliged to speak like this by the ideas or behaviour of others (494c, 494e, 519d). The final part of the conversation with Callicles (521–522) and the concluding exhortation (523–527) serve to meet these charges by presenting Socrates as respectable and pious, and philosophy as a respectable alternative to rhetoric.

The conversation has been long and very difficult for Callicles. He has lost all enthusiasm for it, and he gives no sign of wishing to restate the reasons he had originally given in urging Socrates to abandon philosophy for rhetoric. But Socrates persists; he evokes Callicles' earlier advice and urges him to specify Socrates' role in the city and what need he will have for rhetoric.

SOCRATES Then distinguish for me what kind of care for the city you recommend to me, that of doing battle with the Athenians, like a doctor, to make them as good as possible, or to serve and minister to their pleasure? Tell me the truth, Callicles, for it is only fair that, as you spoke your mind frankly to me at first, you should continue to say what you think. And so speak up truly and bravely now.

CALLICLES I say then, to serve and minister.

SOCRATES Then you invite me, my noble friend, to play the flatterer?

CALLICLES Yes, if you prefer the most offensive term, for if you do not . . . (521).

Having pressed Callicles to reiterate his initial position, Socrates labels Callicles' advice with the "most offensive term," curtly interrupts Callicles, and goes on to summarize the dire consequences that Callicles had previously said would befall him. Then Socrates dramatically rejects rhetoric and claims that he is well aware that this leaves him helpless in defending himself in a court of law, and that if brought to court his trial would be like that of a doctor prosecuted by a pastry cook before a jury of children (521e, 522a). He claims that all he could do in court would be to tell the truth and as a result anything might happen to him. But he insists that he would rather meet his death than save his life through the use of flattering rhetoric (522d). Socrates concludes with a tale about the afterlife and an exhortation. He claims to believe the tale and he contends that it demonstrates the correctness of his decision to reject rhetoric. The tale also provides a basis for equating philosophy with piety and justice, for the assertion that philos-

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Socrates as a sophist in the *Clouds*. The *Euthydemus* also exhibits the contempt and disgust of respectable Athenians for sophistry when its practitioners fail to exercise the prudence of Protagoras (*Euthydemus* 304d–305b, 306d–307e).

ophy provides the only true qualification for public life (527d), and for the claim that philosophy is the way to happiness in this life and the life hereafter (526c, 527c).

In his original recommendation that Socrates abandon philosophy for rhetoric (484c–486e), Callicles emphasized the great difference between philosophy and rhetoric in order to show how misguided was Socrates' preoccupation with philosophy. Socrates does nothing to close this gap between philosophy and rhetoric; instead, he uses it to advantage. Socrates portrays rhetoric as indecent, allows Callicles' claim that there is virtually nothing in common between philosophy and rhetoric, and then embellishes the easy, although perhaps misleading, inference that philosophy as the antithesis of rhetoric must be respectable, decent, and at one with the community's sense of justice. Therefore, a man who chooses philosophy chooses the welfare of his fellow citizens and he finds favor with the Gods. Socrates' message to Gorgias' admirers is clear. Gorgias is really only Polus and Callicles wrapped in a veneer of respectability. Gorgias and his art are fundamentally disreputable; you follow him at your peril.

#### SOCRATES' REPUTATION FOR SPEAKING THE TRUTH

When accused by Callicles of employing the very techniques of mob oratory that he condemns, Socrates responds by depicting himself and philosophy as pious and respectable, and he emphasizes his courageous devotion to philosophy with the claim that he will not abandon it for pandering rhetoric even at the cost of his life.<sup>14</sup> But the anomaly pointed out by Callicles is now compounded. Socrates has wrapped himself in the cloak of public morality by using to good effect the manipulative techniques of persuasion in the sphere of opinion. He has used these techniques to portray himself as a man who speaks the truth and eschews such techniques. If refutative rhetoric is to be understood as part of true rhetoric, Socrates' use of manipulative speech to establish a reputation as a speaker of truth requires further analysis. The initial part of Socrates' conversation with Gorgias provides a way to approach this issue.

Early in the conversation Gorgias offered two examples to illustrate the power of rhetoric (456b–c). First, he recalled the many times he had employed rhetoric to convince patients to submit to the medical treatment prescribed by their physicians. In his second example, Gorgias considered the situation of an orator contending with a doctor before an audience. Gorgias held that the orator would always prevail over the doctor, or indeed, over the master of any other art or craft in a public forum. The second example is the one of interest to Gorgias' audi-

14. Aristotle remarks on the rhetorical force of being seen to choose the honourable as opposed to the expedient, and cites Achilles' decision to kill Hector as a powerful example, *Rhetoric* 1, 3, 1358b–1359a. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates makes his choice with no explicit reference to Achilles, whereas in the *Apology* (28cd) he does invoke the example of Achilles.

ence, for as Socrates has just indicated (455c–d), they are interested in Gorgias’ art as a means to a successful public career. Socrates characterizes the second use of rhetoric as ignorance prevailing over knowledge (459b), and throughout the dialogue he castigates Gorgias’ art as ignorance prevailing over knowledge by pandering to the ignorance of an audience. Socrates does not mention the fact that in Gorgias’ first example the techniques of rhetoric are in the service of knowledge—knowledge of the body. But for this very reason the example is worth examining. The use of the techniques of rhetoric to implant the conviction necessary to improve the body appears to be another example of the constructive rhetoric found in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates’ rhetoric implants the conviction necessary to lead Phaedrus to philosophy and to a healthier soul.

In Gorgias’ first example of the power of rhetoric the knowledge of the physician cannot be used for the welfare of his patient unless the patient is convinced that he should undergo the treatment. The physician’s conviction that the treatment should be administered rests on his knowledge *qua* physician, but the patient does not share this knowledge so he must be convinced on the basis of opinion or belief rather than knowledge. The physician is able to speak the “truth” within the scope of his art, but because of the patient’s lack of knowledge the physician is not capable of implanting the required conviction; thus, the need for the rhetorician. The rhetorician is assumed not to have the knowledge of the physician, and therefore he cannot speak the truth in the sphere of medical knowledge. The rhetorician, like the patient, is confined to the realm of opinion or ignorance, and the rhetorician must implant conviction on the basis not of his knowledge of “what is” but of “what seems to be,” or “appears to be” even though it “is not.” What then is the rhetorician to say? Presumably he emphasizes the seriousness of the patient’s condition and the bleakness of the prognosis if left untreated, minimizes the distasteful aspects of the treatment and the convalescence, and holds out the expectation of the best possible, and therefore somewhat unlikely, recovery. In addition the rhetorician can go beyond the areas of diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis, and pander to the patient’s particular appetites or desires. For example, he may appeal to the patient’s vanity by emphasizing the great improvement to be expected in his appearance, or to his desire for honour and wealth by showing how his successful treatment will enhance his ability to secure both. In short, the rhetorician’s persuasiveness is based on setting the prescribed treatment within the context of what the patient would like to avoid and/or obtain, and then showing the patient how the treatment would satisfy his desires.

In addition to the knowledge of the patient’s hopes, aspirations, and desires, and the knowledge of how to present the treatment to make it appear to satisfy these desires, the rhetorician must also know how to secure and maintain a reputation as a person who can be trusted to give concerned and helpful advice that can be relied upon. The rhetorician needs the reputation of being a man who can be trusted, a man who would not manipulate others through distortion and decep-

tion. Thus, Gorgias' example of the power of rhetoric in the service of knowledge indicates two somewhat different tasks for rhetoric: first, the persuasion of the patient, and second, the maintenance of the rhetorician's public reputation. Because the effectiveness of the persuasion of the patient is at least in part dependent on having a reputation as a man who would not resort to the use of the techniques of persuasion, the rhetorician must attempt to implant the conviction in others that he would not attempt to do what he in fact does do. He must appear to be other than he is in order to be an effective servant of knowledge.

In order to apply Gorgias' example of the use of rhetoric to Socrates' manner of speaking, one detail must be modified without changing the essential properties of the example. In Gorgias' example the role of rhetorician and physician are each assumed by a different person. Let us suppose that the two roles are assumed by one person who has mastered both the art of medicine and the "art" of implanting conviction in the realm of opinion. Thus, the doctor can function as both a practitioner of an art based on knowledge, and as a practitioner of the technique of implanting the necessary conviction in his patients to ensure they benefit from his knowledge, all the time taking care to polish his reputation as an honest and trustworthy person who would not deceive.

Now, despite his condemnation of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, Socrates does allow that there is a true art of rhetoric analogous to the art of medicine. The object of this art is the improvement of men's souls or characters, just as the object of the art of medicine is the improvement of their bodies. The true art of rhetoric uses words, not to gratify men, but to improve them (502e, 503a). The true art of rhetoric is the basis of statemanship, but according to Socrates it is seldom practiced (517a) and he suggests that he may be the sole practitioner (521de). Also, he claims that to practice this true rhetoric is comparable to "doing battle with the Athenians like a doctor to make them as good as possible" (521a). But he also claims that a commitment to this true rhetoric precludes the use of, or the knowledge of, the techniques of the flattering false rhetoric, thus, his fate at the hands of a jury of children prosecuted by a pastry cook.

If Socrates' commitment to a true rhetoric is analogous to medicine, then like the doctor he too is faced with the problem of convincing his patients (fellow citizens) to submit to the necessary treatment. Gorgias' presence and his attractiveness to the audience increases the difficulty of convincing these young men to undergo the requisite treatment, thus, the need for refutative rhetoric: a rhetoric which manipulates and then silences his three interlocutors. However, Socrates' manipulation of Callicles goes beyond the immediate purpose of weaning the audience away from Gorgias. Callicles sees a good deal of Socrates' persuasive technique and repeatedly accuses Socrates of engaging in mob oratory. This accusation forces Socrates to defend his reputation. Accordingly, he undertakes the task of defending his reputation for honest and plain speech regardless of the consequences. Callicles' astuteness and aggressiveness makes this defensive rhetoric necessary, for otherwise Socrates' persuasive effort may be undermined

by Callicles' exposure of Socrates' techniques of persuasion. However, Callicles also provides the raw material for Socrates' defense of his reputation. Socrates manages to associate the rhetoric of Gorgias with the shameless statements of Callicles and then to piously reject this pandering rhetoric.

Socrates uses refutative rhetoric to dissuade the audience from following Gorgias, and he continues to manipulate his interlocutors to polish his reputation as someone who has no use for rhetoric. By rejecting rhetoric Socrates claims the high ground of public morality—devotion to the commonweal—regardless of the personal costs. He wraps himself in the warm embrace of civic virtue; like Achilles, he will do the noble thing come what may.

## CONCLUSION

Refutative rhetoric and constructive rhetoric are complementary parts of true rhetoric. The refutative rhetoric of the *Gorgias* serves to dissuade the audience from the false rhetoric of Gorgias; whereas, the constructive rhetoric of the *Phaedrus* creates an alluring image which draws Phaedrus towards philosophy. The heavy reliance on refutative rhetoric in the *Gorgias* is necessary because of the sustained defense of false rhetoric mounted by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. Socrates arrives in the middle of Gorgias' demonstration and finds a way to insert himself between Gorgias and his audience. Socrates then uses Gorgias' presence to press his denunciation through to its conclusion. Callicles mounts a determined defense of rhetoric, but Socrates transforms this determination into recklessness, and then discredits Gorgias' art by associating it with Callicles' shameful hedonism. Although Callicles is eventually humiliated and silenced, he notices that Socrates is using the very techniques of persuasion that he claims to eschew, and Socrates finally does move to meet the charge of being a mob orator. To polish his reputation as a man who speaks only the truth no matter what, Socrates embellishes Callicles' distinction between rhetoric and philosophy, and portrays the philosopher as a man who would gladly face death rather than stoop to the deceptive techniques of false rhetoric.

There is no direct evidence of the effect of Socrates' refutative rhetoric on the audience, but there is a basis for inference. The desire for public honour has drawn the audience to Gorgias, from whom they hope to learn the art of prevailing in public debate. But due to Socrates' intervention they are treated to the spectacle of the defenders of the art shamed into silence by what they are pressed to say. Plato leaves us to draw our own conclusion about the impact of this spectacle on the audience.