

Language, Politics and Order in Plato's Political Thought: A Study of Four Platonic Works

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To every complex problem there is a simple solution; and it is wrong.

- H.L. Mencken

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of Plato's *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Republic I*, and the *Phaedrus*. The focus is on Plato's political thought and my aim is to examine politics and language within the context of Plato's belief in and desire for order. I try to show how he connects the way language is used with the political life of a community. I argue that he identifies a link between the stability of a political association and the uses, and users, of language. Given his fundamental belief in a metaphysical order, existing beyond and prior to human existence, I argue that Plato seeks to anchor language and politics, to rationalise them in accordance with the the universal harmony characterised by the Forms. In making this argument I try to show that, for Plato, the spread of order logically culminates in a harmonisation of the physical and metaphysical. So much is this so, I claim, that the stability of order in any sphere of human existence depends on the existence of order in all other spheres. Thus, an orderly political association, one organised in accordance with Platonic moral principles, simply cannot exist if the language its members share does not exhibit the very same order. Psychological order is the avenue through which the metaphysical order enters human affairs. Given the Greek assumption that life in the polis is the natural life for man, examination of the human psyche becomes for Plato also an examination of communal, or associative, living. The moral as intrinsically part of the political. Plato is concerned with both the quality of the association and the quality of its mode of interaction. Both politics and language must be harmonised to ensure a concordance between human existence and the metaphysical order in which Plato believes.

Acknowledgements

It is harder at this stage to determine who or what does *not* merit acknowledgment than to determine who or what should be acknowledged. It seems to me that even a minor change in circumstances or acquaintances would have resulted in a profoundly different thesis. Such a belief is impossible to validate, but I am able to see in these pages the influences of certain people and certain events that helped make it what it is.

A number of individuals have read parts of this work at various stages of completion. Professor Janet Coleman, my supervisor, has read it in its entirety at a time when it was all but complete. Throughout the exhilarating ordeal of writing the thesis, she has been the very picture of encouragement and support. If she can recognise herself in these pages, it will confirm how much I value her advice and friendship.

Matt Matravers, Vittorio Bufacchi and Duncan Iveson have been boon companions during the last four years. They have listened, read and argued they way only true friends can. I thank them for all they have done for me and for all I have learned from them. If that learning does not appear clearly in this work, I can only blame it on my failure to pay sufficiently close attention. It may be a mitigating factor that much of the learning occurred in the pubs around the LSE.

Finally, I must acknowledge the LSE itself. The Government Department at the LSE concentrates these days on contemporary political philosophy. My anomalous position as an historian of political thought has given me insights into the vast, but not unbridgeable, space existing between the ancients and the moderns. If anything, this has underscored for me the need to do history as part of a well-rounded approach to political theory. On the more practical side, I would specifically like to thank Anne Green of the British Library of Political and Economic Science for employing me during the last four years and for recognising the difficulty of balancing job and research. She allowed me to devise a flexible schedule and gave me the freedom I needed to get this finished. My colleagues at the BLPES also deserve thanks for keeping me laughing, especially as they noted the absurdity of my seemingly non-stop schedule of work, study and teaching.

During the past year, I have been employed by the Government Department as a Tutorial Fellow. I would like to thank my colleagues there for treating me with generosity and respect beyond my expectations.

Introduction

Summary

This thesis is an examination of Plato's *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Republic* I, and the *Phaedrus*.

Grube begins his examination of Plato's thought with an analysis of the theory of the Forms, on the grounds that everything else in Plato's philosophy follows from this.¹ We could add to this view a point that Cooper makes: Plato's chief interest is in the spread of rational order to the greatest extent possible.² The focus of this thesis is Plato's political thought and my aim is to examine politics and language within the context of Plato's belief in and desire for order. I try to show how he connects the way language is used with the political life of a community. I argue that he identifies a link between the stability of a political association and the uses, and users, of language. Given his fundamental belief in a metaphysical order, existing beyond and prior to human existence, I argue that Plato seeks to anchor language and politics, to rationalise them in accordance with the universal harmony characterised by the Forms. In making this argument I try to show that, for Plato, the spread of order logically culminates in a harmonisation of the physical and metaphysical. So much is

¹G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), ix.

²John M. Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice in Plato", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977), 155.

this so, I claim, that the stability of order in any sphere of human existence depends on the existence of order in all other spheres. Thus, an orderly political association, one organised in accordance with Platonic moral principles, simply cannot exist if the language its members share does not exhibit an analogous order. And, as we shall see, psychological order is the avenue through which the metaphysical order enters human affairs.

Plato's interest in language and politics is best seen as an outgrowth of his interest in contemporary Athenian politics. The rise of sophistry and the emergence of popular, direct democracy changed the nature of Athenian life, giving the average citizen an increased opportunity to participate in civic life as an equal with traditional political elites. Perhaps from the perspective of an aristocrat such as Plato, Athens had gone "down market" as the political character of the city became increasingly democratic (even though Plato's mature experience of his city was of post-Periclean decline and not of some aristocratic golden age). It is tempting, therefore, to see his political theory in terms of class bias. But Plato's ideas succeed in transcending the schisms of his time -- divisions that separated the Greek world into oligarchies and democracies. The dichotomy between oligarchy and democracy that dominated Greek political life did not entice Plato into taking sides, but into exploring the possibility of political stability. This is largely due to the unorthodox education in moral thought he acquired from Socrates and his own efforts to develop the political dimension of that thought. Plato could

transcend the schisms because his education transcended the typical. We can characterise the Socratic influence on Plato as an impetus to question the terms of contemporary debates.

In large measure, then, Plato's Socrates, like the historical figure, redirects interlocutors into examining whether they are in fact asking the right questions of themselves and each other.³ Socrates' admonition to the Athenians in the *Apology*, that their foremost concern should be the condition of their souls (*Apology* 29d-30b), sets the tone for the Socratic "mission" in Plato's other dialogues. In the context of my thesis, I try to show that this redirection takes the form of shifting the interlocutors' attention away from the particular toward an understanding of universal order. Combining this with the Socratic admonition to the Athenians, the question for Plato, as it was for his teacher, is, how should one live? The question can be misleading if we think in terms of individuals choosing to conduct themselves in one way or another. The Greek assumption that life in the polis is the natural life for man translates the question into an examination of communal, or associative, living. This is how we should read Plato's thought: the moral as intrinsically part of the political. In the political, furthermore, the conduit for interaction is the shared language of the community's members. Thus, Plato is concerned with both the quality of the association and the quality of its mode of interaction. Both politics and language

³Throughout this thesis, "Socrates" will refer to the character presented in a particular dialogue and not to the historical figure, unless otherwise stated.

must be harmonised to ensure a concordance between human existence and the metaphysical order in which Plato believes.

Method

For lack of a better label, my method can be called intensive textual exegesis. All of the analysis contained in this document began as detailed examinations of the Platonic works, paying particular attention to settings, *dramatis personae*, dramatic functions of arguments, and the broad objectives of each text. Each section attempts to make sense of one Platonic work as a whole and the method chosen best contributes to this objective. Plato wrote the works as distinct texts and, therefore, I have followed the method of saying something about the text first, and then saying something more general about the author's beliefs. At times, I have presented something like a running commentary.

The scholarly literature that has helped me develop my arguments has come from philosophers, historians, and classicists. All of these fields have helped shape this thesis, but the result is primarily a statement about Plato's political beliefs. The distinction between these fields and political theory, as I see it, is that the thesis has more to say about human community in Plato's thought than about analytical reconstructions of arguments or about specific historical events. Nevertheless, neither of these is excluded.

Scope

This thesis is a critical examination of four Platonic works that can loosely be grouped into Plato's middle period. I say loosely because the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* are not always considered middle period works, but are, I think, accepted to be from late in Plato's early period. Since it would be impossible to identify a definitive break between Plato's three periods⁴, I have felt justified in treating these two works as broadly contemporaneous with the concerns he pursues in his middle period. The other two works examined here are more certainly from the middle period, with the *Phaedrus* almost certainly being later than the *Republic* (and definitely later than Book I). The interpretation in the thesis, however, does not hinge on the dating of any specific work.⁵ My objective was to choose works that contain a decidedly Platonic political philosophy in order to say something firm about the author's thought. Without doubt, there is some Socratic influence in all

⁴Vlastos finds four Platonic "periods": early, transitional, middle, late. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 46-47. Vlastos adds the transitional period to buttress his claim that the philosophies of Plato and Socrates can be decisively differentiated by the former's concern with ethical *and* non-ethical issues (e.g., politics). I am not sympathetic to such a reading, but will not have scope here to examine this vexed issue. I follow Allen's dating of the dialogues. R.E. Allen, *The Dialogues of Plato, Vol. I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 13-15.

⁵For a useful discussion of dating techniques and past attempts to date Plato's works see Leonard Branchwood, "Stylometry and Chronology" in Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 90-120.

Plato's works. Nevertheless, the "Socratic Question" has not been my concern here and I have tried to avoid raising the issue. To hazard a guess, my suspicion is that at least some of my arguments would be applicable to dialogues in Plato's early and late periods. Specifically, we can note the manipulation of language in the *Euthydemus*; the examination of crafts in the *Ion*; the treatment of sophistry in the *Hippias Major*; the ambiguous treatment of knowledge in the *Hippias Minor*; the theory of language espoused in the *Cratylus*; and the emphasis on persuasion in the *Laws*.

In examining the four chosen works, I attempt to tell a complete story about politics, language and order in Plato's thought. Thus, the four sections examine the idea of order in Plato's thought (*Protagoras*); the use and misuse of language in the context of political order, broadly construed (*Gorgias*); language and order specifically in the context of political institutions (*Republic* I); politics, language and order in the context of psychic harmony (*Phaedrus*).

Plato wrote in the fourth century BC, but set his dialogues in the fifth century. The latter was a time of significant social upheaval. Internally, Athens acquired the cosmopolitan atmosphere that brought new ideas into the mainstream thought of its elite class. Simultaneously, the city, which had democratic institutions for some time, became a more fully participatory regime under Pericles' leadership. Externally, the growth of the Athenian empire produced a more conventional upheaval in the form of war. Thus, the latter half of the fifth

century was simultaneously a time of greatness and a time of crisis. That which made the ‘golden age’ golden also threatened its stability.

The dialogues chosen, then, offer a vivid description of Athens at the time Plato describes. They also offer vivid descriptions of colourful characters in Greek history. Because the Peloponnesian War (427-404 BC) dominates the latter half of the century, the coming clash of military powers can be heard rumbling in the distance beyond each dialogue. The significance of the Peloponnesian War cannot be underestimated. The social and political changes that occurred in Athens, the challenge to the city’s self-perception, and the intellectual role of sophistry all contribute to the conclusion that this was a watershed in the ancient world. Writing in the fourth century, Plato must have been aware that the dramatic settings he presents would have symbolic value for a generation to whom Athenian military supremacy was a story of the past. Plato uses the Athenian “Golden Age” as the model of self-defeating social beliefs and practices. In this sense, it is important to read Plato as addressing a contemporary audience who must be convinced that nostalgia for the supposed golden age is misplaced. This is not to say Plato believed in a more distant golden age that was undermined in the latter half of the fifth century. Nor can we say he believed in a coming golden age. Given the nature of Platonic formalism, perfection of any kind exists outside of time. True political reform for Plato would involve a decisive break with past human experience. He might say that there had not yet been an attempt to

produce a golden age because there had not been an attempt to harmonise politics with the objective moral order.

The possibility of reform, however, is always present in Plato. In redirecting the interlocutors in any particular dialogue to ask more fundamental questions of themselves, Plato is indicating that human society is not incorrigible. Plato's reform objectives are simply outside the political experiences of his day. I think we should take him at his word that instituting the ideal state is not strictly impossible.

My discussion of each work is somewhat self-contained and each could be read on its own. This is inevitable given my concentration on a single work in each section. Nevertheless, each forms part of a larger picture. Read together, each section supports the conclusion that Plato was concerned with the role of language in the construction of political stability, and that this was an aspect of his more general interest in the spread of rational order.

Section Summaries

- Section One: *Protagoras*

This section is a discussion of the concept of order in Plato's thought. Looking at the *Protagoras* I examine the creation of order from disorder. In particular, I try to show that language can be used as a tool in the construction of order. However, I try to show that it also has the power to produce a sham order

-- a seemingly coherent arrangement that gives only the appearance of order. I look mainly at three parts of the dialogue: the opening scene with Socrates and Hippocrates, Protagoras' 'Great Speech', and Socrates' facetious interpretation of Simonides poem.

The first part gives us numerous dramatic clues about the construction of order and the potentially harmful effects of a disorderly life. The second part identifies order in human society as something problematic, something that must be created. Incorporating mankind into the divinely created universe is a problem brought about by the method used to construct the cosmological order, as the Great Speech's myth of creation reveals. Mankind's needs are addressed last of all creatures. With his survival threatened, man is given attributes that will allow him to orchestrate his life and live safely, regardless of his physical inability to survive in the created universe. Bringing in the craft analogies that Socrates introduces early in the dialogue, I try to show that creating order is an exercise of man's rational powers. I argue that mankind's problematic relation to the rest of the universal plan does not mean that an ordered human society is impossible or unnatural. My point is that an ordered human society depends on the beliefs and actions of the members of that society. Unlike order amongst the beasts, order in human society is not a necessary outgrowth of creation. Whereas Protagoras and Socrates may agree on this point, they disagree on how to evaluate human ways of life. On the grounds that an orderly life is better than a disorderly one, Plato is trying to show that

it is in mankind's interest to create an organised political association that more closely resembles the natural order of the cosmos -- and, furthermore, that this order can be known.

Introducing an idea developed further in Section Two, I try to show how language can be used to promote either order or disorder. To do so, I turn in the third part to Socrates' analysis of Simonides poem. I describe how an apparent order can be fabricated and used to persuade those who do not grasp the fundamental connection between stability and natural harmony. For Socrates, the instability arises from the failure of the order to be grounded in any sort of knowledge of cosmic order. Its apparent orderliness rests on its ability to affect the appetites and provide a kind of pleasure. The reaction to Socrates' interpretation confirms this by showing that another "order", that offered by Hippias, could be just as "orderly".

- Section Two: *Gorgias*

The aim of this section is to examine the idea of political speech as an instrument of power. This dialogue contains Plato's most famous critique of rhetoric and those who both practice and teach it. I present the dialogue as a contest between differing conceptions of political power and human interests. The section is divided in three parts, each one devoted to a single interlocutor. Gorgias, I argue, represents the power of persuasion. His understanding of political power presents the rhetorician as the one most capable of swaying popular moods and opinions. Nevertheless, this power is limited in scope: the

rhetorician seeks to become a dominant personality amongst his fellow citizens. This fellowship is never sacrificed for the sake of dominance. The rhetorician strives for fairly conventional Greek ideals -- the praise and respect of his peers.

With Polus we begin to see a transition to a less benign interest in rhetoric. Gorgias has casually expressed some ideas that, if taken literally, show the rhetorician as essentially power-hungry. Polus does take these expressions literally. The language of tyranny, which Gorgias unreflectively introduces, becomes for Polus the expression of a fundamental human desire. Plato uses this character to show the progress of the rhetorician's teaching as it travels from teacher to student and, with Callicles, on to the practitioner. Polus' literal understanding of Gorgias' position illustrates, from Plato's perspective, an inherent flaw of rhetoric as conventionally taught and practiced. The transition Polus represents is from an unreflectively ethical use of power, one that presents no deliberate threat to an existing order, to a reflectively unethical use, one that seeks to destabilise the existing order.

Callicles perfects Polus and advances an argument for an extreme form of hedonism. In this section we see power praised as the supreme human desire, the thing that must be had to achieve all other ends. Callicles' hedonism requires that he value the power to fulfill desires above all else.

Running through the dialogue is a sub-theme about the misuse of power. Arguing that the misuse of rhetoric reflects the

individual's conception of interests as something distinct from the interests of the community, I try to show that Socrates wants to make individual and communal interests coextensive. This section sets the stage for the idea that the individual and the community are mutually supporting and that order in each is necessary for the spread of order generally. These ideas are developed further in Sections Three and Four.

The conclusion I draw in this section of the thesis is that Plato sees political language as a tool for gaining power and influencing popular belief. As a tool it can be used in a way analogous to more blatant forms of political manipulation, such as the public works projects that Socrates identifies in his discussion with Callicles. The issue is to discover how political language should be used, given the Platonic objectives of political stability and rational order.

- Section Three: *Republic* I

In the *Republic* I look at the idea of a moral vocabulary and its relationship to political order. My purpose is to show how beliefs are manifest in a moral language and how this influences the nature of a political association. I divide Book I into four parts: the opening scene on the road to Athens, Socrates' encounter with Cephalus, Polemarchus' attempt to rescue his father's argument, and Thrasymachus' intervention in the discussion.

In the first part of this section I talk about what will be called the pre-conventional setting that Plato describes. The scene contains some important ambiguities. There is a threat of force, a rejection of deliberation, but a collection of bonds existing between the characters in the scene. Those present are related as friends, fellow citizens, or brothers. I argue that Plato is saying something fundamental about the nature of all political associations that are not based on his moral principles. He is saying that beneath a façade of community, the association is wracked by conflict. Only in the ideal city will the façade reflect the underlying reality.

The next part of Book I is the discussion with Cephalus. In this part I deal with the operation of moral language in a community. Cephalus introduces (and uses) a moral language that provides a kind of order to the members of his community. However, this order lasts only so long as the beliefs supporting it are held unreflectively by the members of the community. Socrates' cross-examination demonstrates that Cephalus' type of ordered community is already an anachronism and prone to instability. The lack of reflection necessary to its maintenance has been superseded by a more critical method of analysis. Therefore, this supposed order on which Cephalus relies cannot be a true order from Plato's perspective.

Polemarchus' attempt to rescue his father's argument will also fail. In the third part I look at the way Cephalus' beliefs are transmitted to the next generation and how each generation

effectively reproduces itself through its moral language. However, what has been transmitted must adapt to changing intellectual circumstances, personified by Socrates. Cephalus fails because he cannot argue a particular way. Polemarchus tries to rescue his argument by maintaining the same beliefs, but adopting a more analytical approach in order to counter Socrates. Both Socrates and Polemarchus want to ground the language that is being used in order to provide a stable basis for moral belief. While Polemarchus desires this, he does not see how to do it. He tries to ground his views by an appeal to an authority, the poet, which is itself ungrounded. There is no basis for determining why the authority is better than unreflective belief. Socrates will not accept this and tries to have Polemarchus see that the stable ground for moral beliefs and the language that expresses them is a knowledge of moral truths. Polemarchus concludes his section having sacrificed the content of his inherited beliefs through an inability to defend them in a satisfactory way. With a vacuum created, the way is clear for a more serious challenge to Platonic principles.

Thrasymachus presents the real challenge to Socrates in Book I. My interpretation concentrates mainly on his first statement about justice, specifically, his statement that the strong effectively impose a moral framework by declaring what is just and unjust (I accept in this part the view that Thrasymachus' second statement is a more inclusive position and probably reflects his actual beliefs about justice. I treat the first statement as an important corollary to his later more inclusive explanation.). By doing so, they create a kind of order through

a willful act. This, however, jeopardises the value of the craft analogy that Socrates has been using. This is made explicit when Thrasymachus uses the craft analogy to arrive at conclusions opposite to those of Socrates. Socrates claims that the craftsman benefits only the object of his craft, not himself. Thrasymachus successfully responds with the example of the shepherd who, by doing his job well, works to the detriment of the sheep, the object of his craft.

I connect this to the point raised in Section Two that language is double-edged. It can be used for purposes antithetical to Plato's ethical views and, therefore, begs the question of what grounds moral beliefs. The correct ground for Plato is, again, knowledge of moral truths. Thus, the solution is found in the craft analogy that has been under threat. As a craft is based on knowledge, the role of knowledge in the foundation of a genuinely ordered political association becomes paramount. But this cannot be defended until Plato makes clear what he means by knowledge and how it differs from the Thrasymachan position. The aporetic ending, as in Plato's Socratic dialogues, confirms the relation Plato sees between knowledge and a virtuous (thus, orderly) life.

•Section Four: *Phaedrus*

In the final section of my thesis I return to the idea of language as an instrument of power introduced in the *Gorgias* section. My objective here is to show this power as it is misused and to try to describe its proper use according to Plato. I argue that to

achieve order, the human soul must grasp the fundamentally ordered nature of the universe. To do this, the psyche must recollect a vision of Beauty. My argument claims that this vision, which all souls have experienced to some degree, represents human moral intuitions and that Plato saw conscious reflection on these intuitions as necessary to creating an ordered psyche.

Also in this section, I try to show how language can distort or prevent the creation of this psychic order. I divide the dialogue into three parts: Phaedrus' delivery of Lysias' speech, Socrates' first speech, and Socrates' recantation. In the first section I explore the power of language to conceal truth, specifically the genuine beliefs of the speaker. I use Phaedrus' delivery of another person's speech to show how a person's identity can be concealed behind a persona. This will lead to my later claim that, before moral intuitions can be reflected upon, the agent must reveal a true identity. In other words, the individual must give up all attempts at both self- and interpersonal deception. This theme is carried into the second part of this section, where I examine Socrates' speech imitating Lysias' style. The final part of this section develops the claim that the order of the human soul depends on grasping the ordered nature of the universe. Socrates' myth of the disembodied soul provides most of the textual material I use to construct my argument.

- Conclusion

In my conclusion I summarise my findings from the four sections of the thesis. I try to bring the sections together to show that, in these middle period dialogues, we can see a concern about the possibility of an ordered political association and the role of language in its creation. I end with a brief afterthought about some implications arising from my analysis and how these might inform our reading of other Platonic dialogues.

THE CREATION OF ORDER IN THE *PROTAGORAS*

Summary

*In this section I look at the *Protagoras* in order to explore Plato's views of the creation of order from disorder. I try to show that political language can assist in the creation of order, but that it can also be used to produce a sham or false order. This, I argue, represents only an apparent order that is ungrounded in the kind of knowledge that Socrates indicates is necessary. The explicit argument of the dialogue is about order in the individual soul. However, the political theme of communal order is introduced through *Protagoras'* claim to teach the art of politics (politike techne). I look at three parts of the dialogue: The opening scene with Socrates and Hippocrates, *Protagoras'* 'Great Speech', and Socrates' facetious interpretation of Simonides' poem.*

Introduction

The *Protagoras* is most notable for Socrates' argument about the unity of the virtues and for what has come to be known as the "hedonic calculus" that he defends in the dialogue.⁶ The

⁶Gregory Vlastos' analysis of the unity of the virtues is still the best available. See "The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*" in Gregory Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Regarding pleasure and the hedonic calculus see J.C.B. Gosling and C.C.W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

latter, in particular, makes the dialogue puzzling, since Socrates is eager in the *Gorgias* to reject hedonism of any kind (this is discussed in Section Two), but apparently supports a contrary position here. Both of these aspects of the dialogue are philosophically challenging and invite us to find Plato's overall meaning through the issues they raise. It seems clear that the connection between the hedonic calculus and the unity of the virtues lies in the dual notion of rational understanding and unity. The hedonic calculus is a device that Socrates introduces to illustrate the need for some external standard which individuals can use to organise their lives. The unity of the virtues complements this by illustrating that those things that are most necessary to have are achieved through one thing, knowledge. The unity of the virtues, then, is the reduction of plurality to singularity. Both of these aspects of Socrates' argument are significant for the idea of creating order in the political association.

Scholars have not used this dialogue extensively to make overt political arguments -- and there seems to be negligible attention paid to the use of language in the dialogue. The philosophical challenges mentioned above have been the most

frequent points of departure in analysing the *Protagoras*.⁷ My analysis, however, sees the political issues as paramount, given Protagoras' claims about his own skill and given the historical time and place of the dialogue. As Martha Nussbaum notes, this dialogue, more than most, has an ominous sense of doom about it.⁸ The Peloponnesian War is looming and the political and moral complacency of the Athenians is about to be shattered. Moreover, the association of Protagoras with the Periclean era connects this work to the political events of the time (this is discussed further, below). The destruction of Athenian peace of mind brought on by the war only adds to the claim that political order can be merely a sham. The Athenians

1982). Also useful are Roslyn Weiss, "The Hedonic Calculus in the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedo*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989), 511-29; J.C.B. Gosling and C.C.W. Taylor, "The Hedonic Calculus in the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedo*: A Reply", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990), 115-6; Roslyn Weiss, "A Rejoinder to Professors Gosling and Taylor", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990), 117-8; Henry S. Richardson, "Measurement, Pleasure, and Practical Science in Plato's *Protagoras*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990), 7-32.

⁷This is true of the dialogue, but certainly not of any scholarly work on Protagoras himself. Protagoras was a highly politicised figure in Athens, if for no other reason than his association with Pericles. He is also mentioned in other Platonic works, most notably the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*. An interesting examination of Protagoras' political significance can be found in Cynthia Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Her chief concern is Protagoras' "man-measure" doctrine, which she uses to construct a strongly democratic theory which she feels can be attributed to Protagoras. Peter Nicholson argues that, at least in the current dialogue, we must be careful not to attribute a democratic theory to Protagoras. He also uses other known aspects of Protagoras' thought to support his claim that the Great Speech is not a defence of Athenian democracy. Peter P. Nicholson, "Protagoras and the Justification of Athenian Democracy", *Polis* 3 (1981), 14-24.

⁸Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 91.

are about to learn that present stability is no guarantee of the future.

In this section I will be exploring specifically the creation of political order as presented in the dialogue. My main claim is that Plato is trying to show how political language can be used to stabilise and order a political association. However, he is also careful to show how language can also be used to distort or prevent the creation of order. The dramatic action of this dialogue is especially significant. Plato clearly devoted a great deal of attention to the details of the work and that makes it incumbent on the reader to see the action as part of the argument. The dialogue form itself invites us to read each work as something more complex in its structure than a philosophical treatise. However, the *Protagoras* uses the dramatic detail to illustrate Plato's point. Part of my argument, therefore, will be an interpretation of how we should understand particular scenes in the dialogue.

A significant part of my analysis has to do with Socrates' use of the craft analogy. I attempt to show that the craft analogies raise important issues about the possibility of an ordered political association and the relationship between knowledge and the creation of that order. It is important to clarify that by an ordered political association is meant an arrangement organised around a rational principle. An element of the conflict between Socrates and Protagoras is the nature of rational principles. Protagoras finds the necessary organising principle in the existing practices and arrangements of a

community. Socrates, on the other hand, sees the correct principle for guiding a political association as existing outside and prior to that association. Because of this, he sees the possibility of false order -- something that arises from the failure to anchor the political association in something more stable than itself.

Also included here is an effort to justify the use of the craft analogy from Plato's perspective. I try to show that the existence of crafts in general indicates both the possibility and superiority of order. Crafts also exemplify an order that is grounded in a knowledge that is prior to the order created through the practice of the craft.

My analysis is in three parts. I look first at the opening scene with Socrates and Hippocrates, where the need for order is illustrated through the dramatic action. Secondly, I look at Protagoras' "Great Speech". Here I argue that the myth of creation treats order in human society as something problematic -- something that must be created through mankind's own powers. I try to show that Socrates is in fundamental agreement with many of the implications of this myth and that it can be used to describe what he indicates is necessary for an ordered political association. Thirdly, the examination turns to Socrates' interpretation of Simonides' poem. This part of the argument sets out to describe the creation of a merely apparent order through the manipulation of language. Protagoras believes that the interpretation of poetry is a necessary skill. Socrates practices this "skill" by

showing its groundless claims to truth and, thus, its tendency towards instability. Socrates constructs a plausible interpretation of the poem that seemingly makes sense of it as a whole. But, the interpretation is just one of many that are possible because the interpretation arises from the poem itself and not from an understanding of truth that is prior to the poem. I conclude with a summary of the claims put forth in this section and a review of the idea of political language as a tool that can be used either to promote or subvert political order.

Before turning to the dialogue itself, I first give some background to the idea of a craft and the use of analogies in argument. This seems to be necessary in order to understand the validity, from Plato's perspective, of using the craft analogy at all. It is important to show the complicated way he made use of this device for constructing his arguments in the dialogue.

Crafts and Analogies

Plato is obviously not the first to use analogical arguments, since it is reasonably certain that the analogies found in his earlier works reflect the sort of argumentative style Socrates employed. Since scholarly opinion accepts Plato's Socratic dialogues as faithful representations of what Socrates was like, we can say that the analogies I discuss in this section have roots extending at least as far back as Socrates. As I show below, they can be traced even farther back. Nevertheless, the

construction of a political analogy with crafts serves as both a powerful tool in arguing against an interlocutor and at the same time a suspect philosophical device to the mind of the reader. An interlocutor may feel compelled by the logical force of the craft analogies to concede that statesmanship is a craft, but the reader may feel that something has been slipped in that, if stated explicitly, would be questionable. The obvious question to ask is, what does politics produce that would allow one to see it as a craft? A simple way to answer this question is to say that politics does not produce anything tangible, but that there is a knowledge-based way of engaging in politics. My answer will claim this much and add that the political craft is knowledge-based and has a result that is analogous to a craft's output, without being identical to it in character. However, at this stage we are simply begging the question of what constitutes political knowledge and how its results are comparable to the product of a craft.

"If statecraft is an art that resembles rhetoric and sophistry in its lack of readily specifiable products," Sprague asks, "how is Plato able to regard statecraft as a genuine science...but rhetoric and sophistry as shams?"⁹ Is statesmanship directly comparable to, say, medicine? Does a shoemaker do with shoes essentially the same thing as what the virtuous man does in politics? Socrates' arguments certainly imply that this is what he means. When he says at *Republic* 489b-c that the man

⁹Rosamond Kent Sprague, *Plato's Philosopher King: A Study of the Theoretical Background*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina), 1976, xiv. I will be discussing crafts and products below.

whose body is sick should wait at the door of the doctor and the man whose soul is sick should wait at the door of the philosopher, we have little choice but to draw the conclusion that there is a direct correlation.

But the correlation may be more subtle than these direct comparisons would indicate. The common understanding of a craft is a series of techniques that are practiced to generate some given product. The craftsman does w , x , and y in order to produce z . And the knowledge requirement for a craft indicates that the steps are definitely done with the intention of arriving at the end product. The end product is the justification for following the steps indicated. Or, as Irwin writes, “If the product [of a craft] is an artefact, each step will be justified by its contribution to an object separate from any exercise of the craft.”¹⁰ When the steps are followed, the end result is always and inevitably z . A craft on this view is no more than the joining of method and objective and is analogically suited to the description of rule-based activities. No matter how many times the shoemaker performs his set tasks, he always ends up with the same sort of end product. I will refer to this as the “output oriented” view of crafts. This is certainly one way of regarding the craft analogy, but I want to claim that it is more misleading than helpful in understanding what Plato means by the craft analogy.¹¹

¹⁰Terence Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 73.

¹¹This appears to be the way that Irwin reads the craft analogy. In criticising this view I draw on several commentaries on Irwin: Nussbaum (1986); George Klosko, “The Technical Conception of Virtue”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981), 95-102; David L. Roochnik, “Terence Irwin's Reading of Plato” in Charles L. Griswold, ed., *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (London: Routledge, 1988). See also Terence Irwin, “Reply to David L. Roochnik” in Griswold, ed. (1988)

Beside this we can place what I will call the “practice oriented” view of crafts. In some cases, we call an activity a craft without being able to specify an artefact that is produced. I can see two ways of accounting for these activities as crafts. First, we can follow Irwin: “Some crafts, however, produce no artefact; an expert flute-player or chess-player produces nothing but good flute-playing or good play in chess. But he still produces a product which can be identified without reference to his particular movements.”¹² The existence of a product is crucial to Irwin’s argument.

Second, we can modify this to exclude the product as *external* to the activity and treat the thing that one is doing as the desired end result itself.¹³ The measurement of output is how well the practice is conducted and, thus, specifying the existence of a “product” is to miss the point. Irwin’s example of flute playing is, therefore, understood quite differently under this second interpretation. By its nature, good flute-playing requires a different sort of analytical method than the output-oriented view of crafts. Other types of crafts that seem to fit Irwin’s interpretation can also be seen as more problematic. Japanese flower arranging is another good example wherein the desired “output” is no more definite than well-arranged flowers. There are no associated steps in the doing of the craft because the craft cannot be defined or even described by the mechanical operations that produce the flower arrangement.

¹²Irwin (1977), 73.

¹³Martha Nussbaum offers an argument like this to counter Irwin’s. My analysis is indebted to her observations. See Nussbaum (1986), 97-99.

The output of the craft is the *quality* of the arrangement and this is what would have to be specified.

It is a trivial description to say that the arranger places cut flowers in a vase, moreover, because there is no associated knowledge with this activity (outside of the knowledge of "flowers" and "vase" and the purely mechanical activity involved). The difference between the output and practice-oriented crafts, then, has to do with what the craft does. In a way, we can reconcile these two views by accepting that both posit the existence of a product. We can then say that the difference does not really lie in the existence or non-existence of a product, but in the quality of the product to which the craft contributes. In an output-oriented craft, the product's relevant quality is its existence. In a practice-oriented craft the product's relevant quality is its impression on a subject who perceives it. It is the quality of the music or the aesthetic value of the flower arrangement that is being produced. In short, one product is susceptible to measurement and one is not.

In her analysis of the craft analogy in the *Protagoras*, Nussbaum's concern is to explain Socrates' craft of practical deliberation as something very much like the output-oriented view of crafts. Alternatively, she tries to explain Protagoras' craft as something like the practice-oriented view. Her criticism of Irwin is that his view of crafts must reject that Protagoras has any craft to offer at all. Her own analysis of Socrates, on the other hand, will take the hedonic calculus

literally and she will, thereby, attribute to Socrates a technocratic view of deliberation.¹⁴

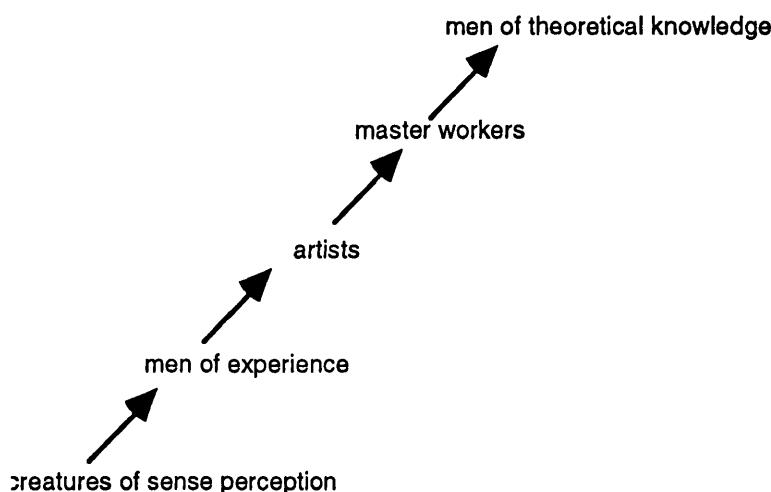
In the output-oriented crafts, the craftsman seeks merely to create something that is new to the world; it becomes one of the material artefacts that exists for us. Its quality as a particular type of thing, i.e., the degree to which it is a good example of that class of things, is not the issue. This is true simply because the steps of an output-oriented craft produce a product of the required quality by design. As Nussbaum's table above shows, this type of product's quality is measurable. Practice-oriented crafts, however, imply a more complex relationship between "consumers" and "product" -- one where the product is experienced more as an impression than as a practical artefact.

The intellectual background to these views may be illustrated with some examples from Aristotle. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle draws a distinction between experience and understanding. Both are related to and necessary for the existence of art. He says at 981a that "art arises when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgement about a class of objects is produced. But understanding surpasses experience in the power it gives a person to explain

¹⁴Nussbaum (1986), 97. Nussbaum's analysis of crafts is insightful, but I will later try to develop a different way of understanding Socrates' position in the dialogue. It is not necessary, I feel, to take his "science" of practical reasoning literally and, furthermore, to do so prevents us from appreciating his argument for the exercise of knowledge in human affairs.

causes.”¹⁵ Understanding allows us to theorise about experience.

He also describes two kinds of crafts: utilitarian and, what I term, intellectual crafts. The first crafts stemmed from the need to maintain our biological existence. And, he says, any man who could move beyond common perceptions about the world was considered wise. As life became more readily sustainable from the proliferation of utilitarian crafts, the intellectual crafts were soon developed. The inventors of these crafts were seen as the wisest men. They moved beyond the lessons of experience to pure theory about causes. Thus, if we were to place Aristotle’s categories of men on a scale it would look something like this:



The arrows indicate a movement to a higher level of intellectual development (not an inevitable progression).

¹⁵ Quotations are from Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Artists are treated in Aristotle as shop-floor workers who mechanically repeat the steps they have been taught. Master workers are those who can organise and manage the work of artists. The scale moves from experience to understanding. The wisest person is the one who is least controlled by others, but who controls others the most. As Aristotle says, "The wise man must not be ordered but must order, and he must not obey another, but the less wise must obey him" (982a).

Aristotle's analysis is applicable here. As in Aristotle, we find in Plato a distinction between productive crafts and those that use human intellectual potential to a greater extent. When looking for wisdom in the ideal city of the *Republic*, Socrates acknowledges that even the craftsmen are wise with respect to their crafts, but that the wisdom of the city resides with those who promote the good of the whole (428c-d). Thus, we can see an awareness that the *techne* analogy is more complex than a simple input-output model of human rational activity because there is an awareness that *techne* itself is a complex concept.

Nussbaum writes:

The word *techne* is translated in several ways: 'craft', 'art', and 'science' are the most frequent....The Greek word is more inclusive than any one of these English terms. It is also very closely associated with the word "*episteme*", usually translated 'knowledge', 'understanding'; or 'science', 'body of knowledge'.... In fact...there is, at least through Plato's time, no systematic or general distinction between *episteme* and *techne*. Even in some

of Aristotle's most important writings on this topic, the terms are used interchangeably. This situation obtains in the *Protagoras*.¹⁶

With this in mind, and Aristotle's distinction between experience and understanding, we can see the importance of the distinction between output and practice-oriented crafts that I have described. While both are kinds of crafts, it is only practice-oriented crafts that utilise the highest human capabilities -- and that will be more applicable to politics.

One could carry on with the argument that, in a logical sense, all crafts produce something that is distinguishable from the activity itself. Even if *techne* has a multi-layered meaning, it does not alter the fact that a craft produces. A flute player does, indeed, produce flute music and, as a logical category, that is the player's objective. This seems to be Irwin's contention: the "doing" always results in a "something", no matter how ephemeral or intangible that something is. It is possible to grant this point up to the moment that we identify the product with the craftsman's objective.

I said above that the "product" of practice-oriented crafts is fundamentally an experience had by a subject (or many subjects). Take for example, the playing of any musical instrument. This is a recognised craft and it results in the product called music; but the intended purpose of playing the instrument is to produce music of a particular kind. When the concert ends, there is nothing to take home besides, first, a

¹⁶Nussbaum (1986), 94.

memory of what was heard and, second, a *judgement about* what has been heard. The musician's objective is to produce a particular judgement and that is the reason a practice-oriented craft is not reducible to an output-oriented one. Only the latter defines its purpose as the production of an artefact that will directly alter the material make-up of the world.

Take as a further example Japanese flower arranging again. Because the product is tangible in this example it seems to pose a special challenge. Nevertheless, the art of arranging the flowers aims at an aesthetic experience, not simply the relocation of the flowers in the vase. Thus the product is the perception in the viewer of the particular arrangement, and both perception and arrangement could have been different. There is no requirement that *this* arrangement produce *this* perception, nor that *another* arrangement either *not* produce the same perception or produce the *opposite* perception. Therefore, the product is associated with the viewer's assessment of a particular artefact.

I have developed these outlines as background for the following analysis of the craft analogies, but this by itself will not be sufficient. The crafts are part of an analogical argument and we need to examine this type of argument before moving to the dialogue. At its most basic level, analogy depends on the recognition of similarities between two things. As Lloyd says, analogy is "any mode of reasoning in which one object or complex of objects is likened or assimilated to another (of the two particular instances between which a resemblance is

apprehended or suggested, one is generally unknown or incompletely known, while the other is, or is assumed to be, better known).¹⁷ Analogy is generally intended to make the incomprehensible more clear through comparison with something familiar and ordinary. As I said, Plato did not invent analogy and Lloyd describes the liberal use of analogies in Presocratic cosmologies. All the images used in the analogies, he says, are derived from normal features of society at that time and typical human experiences. "Three ideas," he says, "which are of great importance in the history of Greek cosmological theories are (1) the conception of the cosmic order as (or as like) a social or political order, (2) the conception of the world as (or as like) a living being, and (3) the conception of the world as (or as like) the product of intelligent, designing agencies."¹⁸ What this tells us is that arguments from analogy were the traditional tools of the earliest Greek thought and Plato was not breaking new ground by using analogies, but perhaps by making particular comparisons.¹⁹ There is one caution to be made. Making a comparison is not the same as establishing an identity. The purpose of an analogy (and what I take Lloyd to be saying) is to establish a way of

¹⁷G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 175.

¹⁸Lloyd (1966), 193.

¹⁹There is a possible problem with classifying the early cosmological theories with analogies. We may, for example, treat a theory of the origin of the world as an analogy between an artefact and the universe, but the original theorist may very well have seen this as establishing an identity. Is the world *like* an artefact or *is* it an artefact?

understanding what is obscure by using a set of relevant characteristics of the un-obscure as an analytical tool.

The analogy between politics and crafts, as I said above, can hide almost as much as it reveals and at the least may make us suspicious of Plato's methods. The reason for this is simply that the set of relevant characteristics to use in the comparison is never stated. On the one hand he compares the perfect politician to a craftsman and on the other he seems to have little use for the intellectual capacity of actual technicians. "None of the psychological aspects of technology appear to [Plato] valuable in human terms. He did not consider the concentration demanded by work as a special type of human effort, nor technical thought as playing a formative role in human reasoning."²⁰ If this is the case, why would he make the comparison between politics and crafts? It apparently throws us back to the idea that he intended to describe some political "product" that the statesman produces.

The answer, I think, lies in how we understand crafts themselves and what Plato believed they told us about the world. The crafts are more than the technical production of goods, as I have argued, but also a general organisation of knowledge into a coherent "discipline" or activity. While flute-playing is more than the systematic manipulation of the instrument, it is still a separate activity with its own relevant body of knowledge. So, playing the flute, practicing medicine,

²⁰Jean Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 243.

and shoemaking are all crafts (or arts), but all in different ways. Each in its own way reveals, also, that these spheres of human action are susceptible to such organisation. I want to claim that the set of relevant characteristics that Plato uses in comparing politics to a craft contains the craftsman's ability to organise and arrange. Additionally, it contains the craftsman's ability to achieve the sort of objective appropriate to the kind of craft (output or practice-oriented) he practices. The objective of some craftsmen is a material artefact. The objective of other craftsmen is a type of experience.

We can see the crafts are analogues to the divine creation of the universe -- just as Pre-Socratic cosmogonies saw divine creation in terms of human technical skills. Platonism must start from the assumption that the universe is ordered in the best possible way prior to the existence of human beings. Furthermore, we can say that order is always superior to disorder for Plato (a point that I will illustrate in my discussion of the opening scene, below). The *Timaeus*, Plato's own contribution to cosmology, makes these views clear. He writes at *Timaeus* 30, "God therefore, wishing that all things should be good, and so far as possible nothing be imperfect, and finding the visible universe in a state not of rest but of inharmonious and disorderly motion, reduced it to order from disorder, as he judged that order was in every way better." Therefore, without the imposition of divine reason, the visible world would have remained in flux. However, reason did impose order and that means that there is now a structure lying behind the shifting patterns of the visible world.

Plato is effectively arguing the following:

- (1) the universe has a rational pattern (assumed)
- (2) a *rational* pattern precludes conflict
- (3) humanity is a component of the universe

thus,

- (4) the natural (or teleological) pattern of human relations is orderly and conflict-free.

Anyone wishing to argue that (4) is false must show either that the rational order of the universe does not entail orderly human relations, i.e., that human relations are an exception to the universal rule, or show that the universal order is an illusion and that (4) is the logical conclusion of a false proposition. The burden of proof is either way on the dissenter. The interlocutor who would accept that the universe is orderly, but that human relations are an exception, must further explain why the god judged that order is better than disorder, but did not think this mattered for humanity. The interlocutor who would claim that there is no order to the universe must further explain why the god would prefer disorder to order. This is not to say that such arguments cannot be constructed, simply that there is at least *prima facie*

support for Plato's argument, accepting a model of divine creation.

The reason that Plato's argument is important to an analysis of the craft analogies is contained in the quotation from the *Timaeus* above. The universal order did not come about by itself; it was imposed by god. The universe is a product of a rational craftsman and, to varying degrees, human craftsmen do essentially the same thing as the god. Men take the disorganised material from the world of becoming and synthesise it into something organised with respect to human needs or desires.

Some of these crafts organise things that directly serve utilitarian ends. We can say that a craft's level of complexity is commensurate with the difficulty involved in ordering the material used (taking material in a broad sense to accommodate the sound-making capacities of a musical instrument, and so on). Politics, then, becomes a highly complex craft activity because it seeks to organise a type of material that, by its nature, is capable of organising in general. In other words, the straightforward utilitarian crafts use materials that have no say or opinion about their use. To organise human beings necessitates taking account of their capacity for self-direction that may militate against attempts at organisation.

By the time of the *Protagoras* Plato has started to distinguish firmly between those who are guided by appetitive desires and those who are guided by intellectual desires and the more sophisticated psychology of the *Republic* will describe just how complex Plato thinks the human mind is. At one level, all people are identical in that each has the same characteristics combined into its soul. At a higher level, the mixture is different for each person, and this is what makes the political craftsman's job difficult. Uniformity is not possible because the human soul is not uniform across all people. What may be possible is the orderly arrangement of existing souls within a stable system.

“Therefore [god] turned [the world] into a rounded spherical shape,” Plato writes regarding the creation of the universe, “with the extremes equidistant in all directions from the centre, a figure that has the greatest degree of completeness and uniformity, as he judged uniformity to be incalculably superior to its opposite” (*Timaeus* 33). This suits inanimate material well, but the same degree of uniformity cannot be achieved with men. The statesman must balance the elements of soul in men to eliminate disharmony. Unlike inanimate material, these elements of soul are vying with each other to gain control of the entire soul. By assigning each part a function appropriate to its nature, the whole is reduced “to order from disorder” and the state comes to resemble the order of the universe.

The point I am trying to argue is that we can understand the craft of statesmanship that Plato has in mind as a highly

complex form of practice-oriented craft. As I argue above, such a craft aims to produce a judgement about whatever passes for “output” in such a craft. The complexity arises from the fact that statesmanship uses as material the very thing that forms the judgement, namely human beings. The statesman is in the position of having to generate a perception within the members of the community that his efforts at creating order *for them* are good or desirable. In other words, the statesman persuades his subjects that he is arranging their lives to their benefit.

Regarding crafts, my argument thus far is that we can look at the craft analogies as Plato’s windows into the rational order of the universe. The existence of easily recognised crafts such as medicine, shoemaking, and the other examples that he so frequently uses, reveals that there is, indeed, a possibility of rationally organising human activity in accordance with a conception of knowledge. If an interlocutor were to argue that human relations are an exception to the universal order, these common crafts would prove to be stumbling blocks. Plato could reverse the argument by asking why *some* parts of human existence are rationalised, but not the most important part, politics? This is precisely what Socrates is made to ask through the craft analogies. Understood as something more than output-oriented crafts, we can see that Plato has constructed an analogy, not an identity, and that we will need a broader view of crafts to grasp his meaning.

Given the scheme of Plato's argument that I present above, we can describe two views of the craft analogies. The view that is critical of Plato treats the analogies as comparisons between familiar organised bodies of knowledge and politics. The crafts here are pockets of rational activity amidst the disorganisation that is either the norm in the universe or in human relations. The existence of these crafts is neither related to a harmonious cosmic order, nor are they in any way related to one another. This leaves us with the possibility that all human activity is not susceptible to rational ordering, but some activities are -- so order and disorder exist side by side naturally. Either disorder is unnatural or we cannot think in terms of an orderly universe.

Another view is that the crafts are aspects of the way the world is, i.e., a glimpse into its rational structure. They are not so much areas of human life that we have somehow managed to conquer and control, but the very principle of universal harmony that has been disclosed by means of theoretical reasoning. The creation of the crafts is a sign of the human mind's ability to contemplate reality and imitate its nature.

The orderliness of a craft becomes, then, quite significant, and its precision fundamentally necessary to Plato's task. A craft that does not yield orderly, predictable, and precise results is not revealing the order of the universe, but further obscuring it from our mind's gaze. The interlocutors I examine below offer themselves as believers in politics as a craft, but the ideas they put forth are shown to be incoherent. The characteristics of

their crafts would produce arts that are not sustainable because they result in self-defeating principles. In other words, their crafts are denials of art as such. Plato wants crafts that are like the rational structure at the macro level. The following sections will attempt to develop these themes through analyses of the opening scene with Hippocrates, Protagoras' Great Speech, and Socrates' poetic interpretation.

Protagoras

Before turning to the text, it is important to introduce the people who will come under analysis. The distinction between sophist and rhetorician becomes blurred in Plato's depiction of Protagoras.²¹ He claims that he can teach young men the art of managing their own affairs well and those of the city (characterised as *politike techne* ²² and later as *politike arete* and then simply *arete*), but he also has rhetorical skills that

²¹See E. L. Harrison, "Was Gorgias a Sophist?", *Phoenix* 18 (1964) 3. Harrison contends that we need to examine Plato's objective to discover why Gorgias is not described as a sophist, while Protagoras is. In the case of the *Gorgias*, he says, Plato is anxious to condemn Callicles, which requires an analysis of rhetoric more than sophism. Whereas, in the *Protagoras* he is attempting to display the shallow wisdom of those who billed themselves as sophists. I think we can add to this the lack of any technical distinction between teachers of rhetoric and sophists at the time -- and the relative unimportance of such a distinction. The distinction is not so much blurred, then, as irrelevant.

²²There may be some risk in treating these terms as synonyms. C. J. Rowe evaluates the various possible interpretations of "arete". This is part of the larger issue of defining what a sophist is (see above). C. J. Rowe, "Plato on the Sophists as Teachers of Virtue", *History of Political Thought*, 4 (1983), 409-27.

remind us of Gorgias. Hippocrates echoes the popular notion that a sophist is the "master of making people clever speakers" (312d)²³ and Protagoras certainly lends evidence to this view. He may have been the first to advertise himself as a sophist, in the sense in which we now understand it -- a professional, fee-charging teacher of virtue.²⁴ Plato attests that this occupation was quite lucrative (*Meno* 91d, *Hippias Major* 282d-e).²⁵

By the dramatic date of the dialogue, Protagoras is quite old (317c) and well-known throughout Greece (the Friend whom Socrates meets at the beginning of the dialogue has heard of him and, later, Hippocrates repeats the majority view that everyone speaks highly of Protagoras, saying that he is a clever speaker -- 310e). Surely, part of his reputation must be attributed to the novelty of sophistry in general and his early entrance into the profession.

Of his life and teaching we have several reports, but two ideas recur as the most important aspects of his thought. The first is the doctrine that "man is the measure of all things: of the

²³C. C. W. Taylor, *Plato: Protagoras* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). All references will be from this translation.

²⁴See Rosamond Kent Sprague, *The Older Sophists* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 4 (translation of Diels-Kranz frag. 80. Hereafter frag. 80) See G. B. Kerferd, "The First Greek Sophists", *The Classical Review*, 64 (1950), 8-10 for a discussion of the meaning and uses of "sophistes" prior to the classical period. See also *Hippias Major* 283c: [Socrates to Hippias] "What you're good at surely is improving the morals of those who come to you as students, isn't it?" Trans. Robin Waterfield.

²⁵Hippias claims to have earned more than any two sophists combined.

things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not" (*Theaetetus* 152a).²⁶ Secondly, we hear that he wrote a treatise entitled *On the Gods*, which opened with the statement, "Concerning the gods I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist, or what form they might have, for there is much to prevent one's knowing: the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of man's life" (frag. 80, B4).

Protagoras was also part of the political life of Periclean Athens, where he became a close advisor of that politician. Plutarch reports that when a spectator at the pentathlon was accidentally killed with a javelin, Pericles "spent the whole day with Protagoras trying to decide whether, according to the most correct judgement, one ought to regard as the cause of the mishap the javelin or the man who threw it rather than the directors of the games" (frag. 80, A10). He also wrote the laws for the Athenian colony at Thurii -- proof that he had close contacts with Athenian political elites and that he was a participant as much as an educator. It may also show that he was considered a good democrat, or, at least, a safe one. However, judging by his own man-measure principle, it may be difficult to attribute any particular political leanings to him.²⁷

²⁶Cf. *Cratylus* 386a.

²⁷It is tempting to say that the Great Speech of the *Protagoras* is the closest thing to a theory of democracy that we have from the Greeks. Unfortunately, we cannot move from that statement to the conclusion that Protagoras was a democrat. He could, as a clever speaker who adopts a quasi-relativist position, defend any political ideology if the need arose. See Peter P. Nicholson (1981).

My interest, of course, is in Protagoras as a craftsman and Plato's response to his claims to have a special skill or knowledge that he imparts to others. Protagoras says he knows something and is able to teach it to others. Socrates wants to know if the area in which Protagoras is wise is teachable. Both are trying to come to terms with the nature of the political craft. Protagoras has given us the barest outlines of what it must be: the proper management of personal affairs and those of the city. The craft resides somewhere in the undefined term "proper management". It implies the desire for rational control to replace both random causation and unreflective reaction to circumstances.²⁸ Clearly, both Socrates and Protagoras accept this as desirable. Thus, the different views that they will express reflect different "rationalisms" that are fundamentally incompatible. Plato will describe in both words and dramatic images the nature and consequences of each view. In the process, he will cast doubts on Protagoras as a teacher. However, what I want to show is that he will not reject the Protagorean objective of knowledge-based politics, but leads to a different understanding of how knowledge operates.

²⁸See Nussbaum (1986) for a discussion of the *techne-tuche* antithesis in Greek thought. She claims (e.g., p. 94) that traces of the antithesis are already apparent in Homer and that it is commonplace by the time of Thucydides and the Hippocratic writer.

The Opening Scene

This work serves well as a reminder that the dialogue form is important to understanding Plato. The opening sequence of events lacks any formal presentation of philosophical views and relies on dramatic action to convey certain ideas.

Consequently, we have to exercise additional interpretative skills to discover Plato's meaning. The dialogue opens with an unnamed character greeting Socrates with erotic banter about the latter's pursuit of the young Alcibiades. Socrates responds that he has just been with the boy, but hardly noticed his presence. He was captivated instead by Protagoras, whose "beauty" lies in his wisdom (the irony becomes clear when we see how Socrates deflates the sophist). The friend is intrigued and has Socrates relate the entire encounter. By the time the dialogue turns to the encounter with Protagoras, we will have seen a shift from the random pursuit of appetitive desires to a reflective stance with regard to such wants.

That shift is mirrored in the opening lines as Socrates moves the conversation away from his physical interest in Alcibiades to an intellectual interest in the nature of virtue. The first soul that is rescued from the enslaving power of appetite is Socrates' own. Nussbaum describes this exchange in terms that remind us of a Benthamite utility calculus.²⁹ She says that Socrates' placement of beauty and wisdom on the same scale foreshadows his hedonic calculus. Nussbaum seems to have

²⁹Nussbaum (1986), 106 ff.

put an interpretative gloss on this that requires us to ignore an important Platonic theme. I describe this scene as a move from appetite to intellect. But what seems obvious from the text is the move from appetitive to intellectual *desire*. Given the implicit division between appetite and reason in this scene, there emerges an idea of reason having its own peculiar desires. Therefore, Socrates is not saying that we can compare apples and oranges, as Nussbaum believes (and which is a common argument against utilitarianism³⁰). He is making a statement about the operation of the soul. In terms of priority, Socrates' statements clearly show that he thinks that the intellectual desires are either more legitimate or more compelling, but it is still open to the view that the desires differ qualitatively and not (or not just) quantitatively.

The story begins with Hippocrates calling before daybreak at Socrates' house with news that Protagoras is in town. Hippocrates intends to enrol with the sophist, but fears that he may need a "referral" from someone older and more experienced (310e). Socrates promises to go with him to see Protagoras as soon as it is light.

Hippocrates typifies the man with no science of living. He acts unreflectively. His agitation and excitement impel him to act, but provide no guidance in determining how he *should* act. It seems that the presence of a desire automatically provides a

³⁰An excellent recent discussion of contemporary utilitarianism can be found in Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Ch. 1.

reason for acting in a particular way. This sort of reason, however, inevitably reduces to an excuse to act in a particular way because it has more to do with contingent happenings than with rational assessment. Hippocrates will be unable to explain the relationship between what he wants and what he does in anything other than causal terms. That he wants something is his reason to act. Socrates' questioning implies that wanting something is insufficient. Prior to the desire is a method for determining what is a proper desire and, thus, what is proper action.

It is also clear that Hippocrates receives and accepts information uncritically. He admits that he has never even heard Protagoras utter a word (310e), but agrees with the general opinion that he is a clever speaker. This is an opinion based on hearsay and Hippocrates has assumed that a preponderance of witnesses for a particular view conclusively establishes its truth (cf. *Crito* 46c-47a). But, worse still, he is not even certain what he will acquire by associating with Protagoras. Hippocrates has a vague notion that Protagoras will make him "wise", but he has no clear understanding of what that may mean in practice. The general philosophical problem to which this passage alludes is presented in the *Meno*. There, Meno poses the riddle of how we recognise what we are looking for, when we don't know the nature of the thing we seek (*Meno* 80d ff.). This is not the precise difficulty in the *Protagoras*. Socrates wants Hippocrates to reflect upon wisdom with regard to activities that are (assumed) known or

understood. In other words, Protagoras must have an area of expertise with regard to which he is considered wise.

This is surely a peculiar concern for Socrates, since it is he who will make the philosopher in the *Republic* wise as such.³¹ But, at a second glance, this is not as peculiar as it seems. The demand that Socrates is making in the *Protagoras* is for a statement about what Protagoras knows. Hippocrates cannot answer, except to say that Protagoras is a clever speaker. Protagoras himself will later say that he has knowledge of virtue and that this is what he teaches. Protagoras' claim, then, is that he is precisely what Socrates will say the philosopher is in the *Republic*, namely one who knows ethical truths.

Nevertheless, the function of his questions at this stage is to reveal that Hippocrates is not so much misguided in his pursuits, but completely unguided. Interestingly, when Socrates confronts him with the idea that he is going to study to make himself into a sophist (a conclusion reached through the craft analogy - 311b ff.), Hippocrates is ashamed and blushes. All he wants is a liberal education befitting his social station. There is something dishonourable about sophistry that exists side by side with Protagoras' alleged wisdom. Nevertheless, Hippocrates' shame is puzzling.

³¹The philosopher is wise about something in the sense of being wise about the Forms. Since the Forms are, in fact, the realm of reality, the philosopher is simply wise about being. I take this to mean that he is wise as such.

At the time in which the dialogue is set, sophistry was still relatively new. Protagoras claims to have been teaching for a number of years, but as a phenomenon with serious social implications, sophistry was just beginning to emerge as an important part of the Athenian political scene.³² The 420s saw this rise begin to accelerate³³ and a significant cause of this is the patronage of Pericles himself.³⁴ But the puzzle of Hippocrates' shame has more to do with, first, his age and, second, his social class. Regarding the latter, we know that sophists drew their students mainly from a wealthy elite -- those who could afford to pay for further education. In this sense, the "fruits" of sophistry were distributed in a sufficiently undemocratic way to make it popularly suspect. But Hippocrates is an aristocrat and his suspicion of sophistry would not spring from its anti-democratic tendencies.

This brings us to a second characteristic of sophistry, namely the sort of education that was sold. As Protagoras will argue, he teaches the "political craft". The popular suspicion of sophistry has to do with the fact that sophists taught what any man would desire to know, but the fees put it out of reach for

³²See, e.g., G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), especially Ch. 3.

³³Ostwald charts the changes in Athens and the demand for sophists' services. Martin Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 237.

³⁴Kerferd argues this point, claiming that without this patronage from a prominent politician, sophism might not ever have gained the prominence it did in Athens. He uses this to show that the occasional intellectual backlash against sophists was simply an indirect means of attacking Pericles. Kerferd (1981), 21.

those who allegedly held the power in Athens. In other words, sophists taught aristocrats how to succeed in the democracy, and this was perceived as a threat to the *demos*.

Thus, we can understand Hippocrates' shame as a confession that he wants to join in the activities of the *demos* and become like them in the jury courts and the assembly -- the political institutions dear to the common citizen's heart. However, the specific assertion that makes him blush is that he is going to Protagoras to become a sophist, not simply for the education a sophist offers. Here, we can see him as reacting against those who effectively sell the ideals of democracy for profit. The sophist is a shameful professional because he trains *others* to behave like the *demos*. The sophist is basically a corrupter of the aristocracy. Thus, part of Hippocrates' shame is the product of a class bias against the practice of the Athenian democracy.³⁵

The second point to examine is Hippocrates' age. Given that the sophists drew their students from the wealthy elite, the best the city has to offer (cf. 326c), it is not clear why a young aristocrat would suddenly feel ashamed about his interest in

³⁵This, too, must be placed in its context. The period in question is that Golden Age of Periclean Athens. The democracy as we know it was itself relatively new. Despite the democratic "possibilities" inherent in the Cleisthenic reforms (510), it was undoubtedly Pericles who brought the democracy into being as a codified institutional arrangement. Hippocrates' shame need not be *the* aristocratic response to democracy. It may simply be a view about the contemporary political debate from a partisan individual.

sophistry. His initial excitement is the far more typical response. To understand this, we must remember the "generation gap" that was opening up in the 420s that Ostwald describes.³⁶ Sophistry was something for the younger generation, not the older aristocrats who could still recall the pre-democratic days. Because sophistry contributed to antagonisms between young and old, Socrates uses it to remind Hippocrates that his intended pursuit is a rebellious act. More than this, it is a rebellion against immediate family. Another reason that Hippocrates feels ashamed, then, is that sophistry contributes to the breakdown of traditional bonds of kinship. He is effectively siding against those to whom he owes the most respect. Socrates alludes to this when he reminds Hippocrates that he has decided on enrolling with Protagoras without consulting family or friends -- presumably the first allegiances of any young man.

A final point to make about Hippocrates' shame has to do with the way Socrates makes use of it. Having kindled the specific feeling, Socrates causes Hippocrates to pause momentarily and consider what he is about to undertake. It becomes the vehicle for introducing a reflective stance that Hippocrates hitherto lacked. In this sense, the specific object that causes shame is unimportant. It is only necessary for Socrates to bring about the feeling to show an awareness that there is a scale by which we can adjudicate between desires. In this instance it is a moral scale revealed by an intuitive sense of wrong conduct. With this scale present, the creation of order from disorder can

³⁶Ostwald (1986), 229 ff.

begin. Moreover, we see now that reflection is a process of remembering what one already knows. In this case, Hippocrates is made to recall who and what he is in his own community.

We need to return to examining Hippocrates' character to understand more fully the nature of the disorder. Hippocrates recounts his actions over the past day. First, he went after a runaway slave and was gone all day. He may have had an appointment with Socrates or been in regular contact with him because he says that he meant to tell Socrates where he was going, but something put it out of his head. He cannot remember what it was. Secondly, after returning with his slave, he learned that Protagoras had arrived. His immediate intention was to fetch Socrates and rush to Callias' house, where Protagoras was staying. He decided against it because of the late hour and his own fatigue. He slept for a few hours, just enough to feel reasonably rested, and rushed to Socrates' house where we find him now. Hippocrates may not have a science of life, but he has a manner of living. He responds to desires as quickly as his mind throws them up before him. He reacts to the runaway slave by pursuing him -- not an unreasonable action for a slave owner. However, the spontaneous reaction obliterates any awareness of competing obligations, effectively separating Hippocrates from everything that has occurred before this exact moment in his life. He has no awareness of himself except as the owner of Satyrus, a runaway slave.³⁷

³⁷It would not be surprising if Plato was having some fun at Hippocrates' expense. Chasing a slave named Satyrus makes it sound as

When he is aware of conflicting obligations or desires, he has no rational means for choosing between them. When he arrives home he is tired, but wants to see Protagoras. He not so much decides against going to Callias' house as he is physically incapacitated by his fatigue. Had the need for sleep been less severe, he would have rushed to get Socrates in the middle of the night for the visit to Protagoras. Hippocrates is clearly driven by appetites. Whichever desire turns out to be strongest is the desire he tries to satisfy. The only hierarchy of values that we could derive from Hippocrates is that appetites which serve our existence as physical beings demand the most immediate attention.

Hippocrates represents a life without "proper management". He is a suitable student for the type of training that Protagoras claims to offer. He has already shown that he is corrigible -- he is able to step back somewhat from his irrationally organised life. The opening scene establishes that the removal of this irrationality is the objective Hippocrates should be pursuing, even if he does not understand that this is what he needs.

As I said above, Hippocrates, at each moment that he decides to gratify some new desire, is completely divorced from any self-awareness and even from his own history. He has memories and is aware of decisions he has made before, but he is not influenced to act by either of these. The experiences he has are

if he spent the day in pursuit of a mythical woodland deity with a reputation as a trickster.

never synthesised into a more general knowledge that can be used in future deliberations. As a result, deliberation becomes a meaningless word in this context. Interestingly, this weakness in Hippocrates' character directs us more to Protagoras than to Socrates. Protagoras has an experience-based epistemology that is neatly captured in the quotation above from *On the Gods*. He cannot know the gods, he says, because the subject is obscure -- something gets in the way of his senses that prevents his mind from developing an impression or belief. Even without this obscurity, there is not enough time in a man's life to experience as much as is necessary in order to acquire knowledge of the gods.

Protagoras is careful, at least in the opening line of that treatise, not to make any claims from his *lack* of experience. In other words, a lack of experience is not a refutation of divine existence. Mind simply does not have direct contact with some immaterial reality. All knowledge is mediated through our bodies. Thus, to know is to know what we have encountered before. Knowledge is always attached to something that can be experienced and to learn is to experience anew.³⁸ This gives some insight into Socrates' use of the hedonic calculus later in

³⁸If this is so, we can construct some parallels between Plato and Protagoras. Plato's doctrine that all learning is recollection sounds like Protagoras' idea that we know what we have experienced. The key difference, of course, is that the objects of knowledge for Plato are immaterial Forms that are experienced after death/before birth (by the disembodied soul), while Protagoras is concerned with physical existence and sense perception. This difference is precisely about the ability of the mind to have direct contact with an immaterial reality.

the dialogue. Assuming an awareness, surely on Plato's part, of Protagoras' views, the hedonic calculus is the incorporation of experience-based knowledge into practical deliberation. It is problematic to say that Socrates accepts the hedonism expressed in this part of the dialogue. However, I believe we can say that the hedonic calculus in its dramatic context is intended to reveal the disordered and unsystematic understanding that Protagoras has of his own teaching. Had *he* developed the hedonic calculus, he could have used it to defend some version of the art of practical deliberation. That he does not have recourse to any such understanding of practical deliberation is meant to show Protagoras' own lack of wisdom -- the "commodity" for which Hippocrates admires him.

In certain respects, then, the dialogue is a competition to see who is more likely to bring benefits to Hippocrates' soul. Furthermore, the benefit in question is definitely order. We see it through its absence in the opening scene and we hear Protagoras offer it as his course of study (the ambiguous "proper management" of personal and public affairs -- 318e). Socrates and Protagoras are at odds with one another over how best to improve this young man.³⁹ Judging from Protagoras' view that knowledge and experience are inseparable, we would expect that he will teach some sort of critical self-awareness, giving the student the means of evaluating his experiences through a method of practical deliberation. Socrates agrees. Without this, Hippocrates will remain unable to deliberate --

³⁹The idea of a competition for Hippocrates' soul is found in Nussbaum (1986), 93.

the word will continue to be meaningless in the context of his life -- or even regulate his life in any way. He will pursue a slave one day and wisdom the next.

If the dialogue is a competition for Hippocrates' soul, then Socrates has a head start. Hippocrates is, after all, in his house and Socrates has the first opportunity to teach him something new. As I sketched out above, Hippocrates is agitated and directionless, except for the irresistible demands of desire. He personifies a disorderly life. Socrates begins immediately to impose order on this young man's soul. He asks a question which in normal circumstances is in no way extraordinary: what will Protagoras make of you? For Hippocrates, however, it is more than a question about his intentions. It is a jarring *reminder* that there are standards by which one can determine the value of actions.

Hippocrates is correct to want wisdom -- as Socrates says, he is probably more interested in a liberal education than sophistry as a profession (312a-b) -- but one has to examine the goods before handing over the money. Wisdom is a valuable commodity and Hippocrates asks that he is willing to sacrifice all the money he can find to acquire it (310e). The metaphor of wisdom as a commodity is interesting in the context of the craft analogies. Socrates characterises the sophists as peddlers in the market who "say that anything in their stock is good" (313d). But the peddler is not necessarily the producer; he need have no knowledge of how the commodity was produced. The point is that no genuine knowledge is required in order to

make the sale, simply an ability to persuade the buyer that the commodity is of high quality. Socrates' comparison leads us to believe that the sophists are wise at convincing people that they are wise. The profit motive, then, becomes the basis of their interaction with a student and the actual content of their wisdom becomes secondary. Protagoras is keen to establish the value of his wisdom. He says at 328b-c that any student who does not wish to pay the fee he charges may swear to what he thinks it is truly worth and pay that amount instead. Thus, he is saying that if he has failed to persuade a student that what he offers is of high quality, the student becomes the arbiter. While this shows Protagoras' self-confidence, it also confirms what I have just said. Throughout the course of study that he offers, he is engaged in a project to persuade the student that he, the teacher, is as wise as he claims to be. The course of study becomes the means for determining fee.

The risk of buying the sophists' goods that Socrates mentions is that the "commodity" must be carried away in the soul. The goods that the peddlers sell, however, can be placed in a container and taken away for later inspection (314b). It is as though the food one bought had to be eaten immediately after purchase without an examination of its quality. The trouble with sophistic teaching is that, being contained in the student's soul, it effectively corrupts the capacity to judge correctly. The part of the student that is sick and operating improperly must somehow diagnose its own disease. Yet, the corrupting influence of the sophist's teaching makes it incapable of doing so. We see in the opening scene that Hippocrates is unable to

bring himself under control and that he needs Socrates' mild scolding to make him pause and reflect. Nevertheless, as I argue above, Hippocrates' shame indicates that there *is* something within him around which can be constructed a principle for ordering his life. The higher ethical standard that his shame reveals is not simply imposed from without, but generated out of his own psyche and brought before his conscious mind with the help of an external agent.

The analysis of this opening scene has necessarily brought in elements from other parts of the dialogue. However, the point has been to characterise Hippocrates as the disordered soul in need of a cure. His essential character is clearly shown in his actions. It becomes apparent in Protagoras' Great Speech that the creation of order in the soul is a part of the creation of order in the *polis*. More accurately, these are mutually influencing and reinforcing levels of order. The Great Speech will show us the creation of order in human society as contingent upon the capacity for order in individual human souls.

The Great Speech

Protagoras' long response to Socrates' question about the teachability of the political craft is a free sample to advertise his skills. In it, Protagoras demonstrates his competence in different modes of argumentation, his ability to construct an argument in response to a challenge, and his ability to adapt an argument to a particular audience. Thus, we hear both a myth

and a more analytical argument; a rapidly devised response to Socrates' question; and a speech that seems to praise democracy from a person whose theories should be neutral between systems of belief.⁴⁰

In addition to his straightforward display of his skills, Protagoras tries to distinguish himself from other sophists.⁴¹ He says that he offers a less specialised curriculum than (it is implied) Hippias (318e). We get the impression that Protagoras is offering "well-roundedness" and not a collection of factual material. As he claims to teach proper management of one's personal affairs and those of the city, it is clear that the training has to do with generalisations about what is known. He assumes the availability of all the "data" and now what is

⁴⁰The ability to respond to such challenges was, certainly, one of the skills common to the teaching of sophists and rhetoricians. Protagoras is merely demonstrating that he is exceptionally able. Regarding the apparent democratic leanings of the Great Speech, I think it is important to read it as a speech addressed to a particular group of people. Socrates has made a point drawn from the popular beliefs of the Athenians and Protagoras tries to show that those beliefs are not inconsistent with what he has said. The result is that he does not reject that the Athenians are correct (making it sound as if he agrees with Athenian democratic sentiments), and does not retract his own assertion. He must adopt this strategy, furthermore, because he has to convince Hippocrates (and other students) that his wisdom has applications in their particular city. See comments above and Nicholson (1981).

⁴¹This is a classic advertising strategy, even in our own time. Protagoras sets out to show why a person would need what he has to sell and then tries to demonstrate the superiority of that product to "brand X".

needed is a rational organisation to place it at the command of the person in question.

Protagoras describes the social position of a sophist in fifth century Greece and shows that the pejorative sense of the word was already common currency.⁴² However, Protagoras rejects the pejorative sense, of course, by applying the term to himself. Part of his objective is to establish the justification for what he does. Without this, the quality of his goods will never be established. Thus, he claims at 316d-317c that the sophist's art is an old one to establish that he is not a dangerous new influence on the young. Sophists have been around for a long time and there is no reason to fear Protagoras. The sophists of the past, however, felt that it might be a dangerous trade to practice openly. He says at 316c-d, "A foreigner who comes to great cities and persuades the best of the young men to abandon the society of others, kinsmen or acquaintances, old or young, and associate with himself for their own improvement -- someone who does that has to be careful." Previous sophists found it useful to disguise themselves as poets, trainers, experts in music or literature, and religious figures. Thus, his profession is so far from novel as to become commonplace. He says that such subterfuge simply draws attention to oneself and, therefore, he has opted to declare his profession openly. Protagoras is being slightly coy here, since we know that he benefited from the patronage of Pericles. He is not simply being honest about what he does, but has the privilege of doing so because of his favoured position.

⁴²Ostwald, (1986), 238.

The concern in this section is his Great Speech and the importance it has for the creation of order. Socrates has heard him declare that he teaches the political art and challenges him with the common Athenian opinion that such knowledge cannot be taught. Socrates uses the example of crafts to show that where expert knowledge is available, the Athenians rely on it, but that their willingness to listen to anyone who wishes to speak in the Assembly is proof that political knowledge is a special case. Adding to this, he claims that some of Athens' most respected statesmen have raised sons of no political skill. If the political art could be taught, surely these "experts" would not have failed to impart their wisdom to their own sons.

So, the argument comes from two directions: it is not commonly believed to be possible and experience has shown that it is not. This blends nicely into Protagoras' self-advertisement in the Great Speech. He is going to have to convince the audience that what he has to sell is needed, thereby refuting the common opinion that it is not. Secondly, he is going to have to convince them that he can do what fathers have failed to do for their sons, thereby distinguishing himself from others who would normally be in a position to do what he claims as his special expertise. Regarding the first point, he will try to establish that he improves the universally shared natural abilities that would justify the Athenians' practice. Regarding the second point, he describes a teaching method that does not rely on formal rules, but on lived experience within a community. His argument that virtue can be taught consists of a story or myth about the

origin of political society (320c-324d) and a more analytical argument about the nature of teaching virtue (324d-328d).

In his commentary on the dialogue, Taylor reminds us that the Greeks had two conceptions of the origins of the world and mankind. The first is something like that of Protagoras' myth, which shows human progress from primitive beginnings. The second is the Hesiodic "paradise lost" view, which has it that there was somewhere in remote antiquity a golden age. That age was corrupted and we are its decadent offspring.⁴³ The former is an apparently more optimistic view and, indeed, Protagoras' myth seems confident about the prospects for human society. The dramatic date would surely have been a time of optimism for the Athenians. The city was assured of its position in the Greek world, wealthy, and dynamic. Ironically, the period was itself a golden age about to be shattered by war, pestilence, and uncertainty. Order is about to become disorder in the world the dialogue describes.

The language of the myth is revealing. In the beginning there were no mortal creatures, only the gods. When the time came to bring the mortals to light, Epimetheus and Prometheus drew the task of distributing powers to each. Each creature was given whatever was required for its survival as a species. Prometheus and Epimetheus are significant, of course, because their names translate as "forethought" and "afterthought". We would naturally associate an art of any kind with the former, and Socrates says that he admires Prometheus as a model for

⁴³See Taylor (1991), commentary, 77-8.

his own life (361d). Forethought is to deliberate over possible routes to a destination, but afterthought finds one already at the destination without a justification for the route taken.

Forethought, then, is the structure-creating tool. But structure is something that is implicit in the unformed being that Protagoras describes at the beginning of the myth. Before Epimetheus went to work the mortal creatures existed in some primordial state -- un-empowered and waiting for the appropriate time to emerge. Thus, at some conceptual level, perhaps, the *idea* of each kind of creature existed. Before the creation comes the thought of the creation; plan precedes reality. What was missing from this conceptual construction of the physical world was the mechanisms that would ensure balance and harmony. Without the powers, the mortal creatures would kill each other and the species would die out. If we assume that the gods intended to create a *cosmos*, an ordered whole, then the aspects of balancing and harmonious existence are necessary.⁴⁴ If each creature exists as little more than a unitary, isolated concept, balance is irrelevant. But once there is a need to bring the creatures into existence so that they roam the planet as physical manifestations of the

⁴⁴Nussbaum discusses the empowering of the creatures as the distribution of characteristics, not the allocation of defence mechanisms that would promote species survival. I think this can mislead us. The words Protagoras uses are logical couplets: strength without speed, speed without strength; claws or horns, defence against claws or horns; small size and wings or underground dwelling, imposingly large size providing safety for a surface dweller. Defence, or species survival, is the overriding concern. Nussbaum (1986), 100 ff.

concepts, the importance of a self-perpetuating system becomes paramount.

Therefore, the beginning of the myth reveals half a structure -- the pieces are cleverly designed, but they do not yet fit together. When the distribution that should unite them has been completed, all but mankind is assured survival.

Prometheus steals crafts and fire to give to mankind and the proto-humans are, thus, able to provide themselves with the material existence they need. This, however, proves insufficient because proto-humans are still prey to the other animals. They need an art of warfare, which is part of the art of statesmanship (322b), in order to survive. At this stage, humans have a unique problem in the myth. The one thing that can save them, establishing cities, is hindered by their own character. Humans are the only species that has to be concerned with creating balance and harmony between its own members. The problem of social arrangements does not arise for other creatures. Protagoras is effectively saying that these proto-humans lacked an art like that of the gods, which would allow them to devise an ordered arrangement for their own lives together. And this art is missing because of their own initial psychological makeup. They need to be changed from creatures who have no higher ethical concern than self-preservation (the primary reason they need cities at all) to beings who are other-regarding.

We see, then, what it is that distinguishes man from the "non-rational creatures" (321c). The peculiarly human frame of

mind can conceive of another creature as being fundamentally similar. With the gifts of *aidos* and *dike*⁴⁵ man can become the artificer of his own relations with other humans. We are dealing in the myth with the *cosmos* as an artefact; that is, as something conceived and brought into existence by an outside power. The power of logical "structuring" that the gods employ to produce the world is ultimately embodied in mankind, which becomes the earthly artificer, first, through the technical skills. Later this is complemented by the ability to form cities, which is analogous to the uniting of the disparate creatures into a self-sustaining order. With *aidos* and *dike* man can form a human *cosmos* as stable as the one he inhabits as a species.

The artificer, both divine and human, can compose in two senses: first, in the sense of giving order; but, secondly, in the sense of making calm or eliminating conflict. The system described in the myth represents the former sense. The creatures balance each other as predator and prey. However this system institutionalises conflict by making individual survival depend on harm caused to another creature. Applying this principle to human society, Protagoras' myth describes how stability was achieved through the transformation of intra-species violence. Human energies can now be directed towards self-defence in a system that is still a mechanism for containment. The myth thus attempts to describe the origin of

⁴⁵*Aidos* is variously translated. Taylor uses "conscience" and Guthrie uses "respect for others". W.K.C. Guthrie, *Plato: Protagoras and Meno* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956). The word seems to convey some notion of universalising from one's own position.

political society as the origin of human ethical conduct. Attempts at social organisation prior to this origin failed precisely because moral sentiments were absent. The presence of these sentiments, *aidos* and *dike*, do not dispel either the conflicts or the reasons for them. They simply allow men to live together in spite of their disagreements.

The myth does not describe the elimination of conflict because it does not describe the elimination of conflicting value systems. Socrates' hedonic calculus, on the other hand, describes the possible elimination of conflict through a single, shared scale by which value judgements are made. The critical component of the hedonic calculus is not its hedonistic weighting system, but the unity achieved through the use of a single weighting system.

Protagoras gives up the myth in favour of a demonstrative account to answer Socrates' second objection. He feels he has established that there is one thing that is necessary for the state to exist at all, which he characterises as human excellence (325a). He then states that it would be absurd for fathers to fail to teach their sons this one necessary thing when it is the most important part of human life. It becomes clear that *aidos* and *dike* are more like capacities than attributes. Protagoras maintains that they are developed and honed through an informal education process:

No, Socrates, you ought to realise that they begin when their children are small, and go on teaching and correcting them as

long as they live. For as soon as a child can understand what is said to him, his nurse and his mother and his teacher and his father himself strive to make him as good as possible, teaching and showing him by every word and deed that this is right, and that wrong, this praiseworthy and that shameful, this holy and that unholy, 'do this' and 'don't do that' (325c-d).

So, children are guided through a system of rewards and punishments to pursue the right things in life. Living virtuously becomes a concern of the whole community. Some are naturally endowed and excel and others are good enough to remain members of the city. This approach is generally a "hit and miss" attitude towards educating the young and it fits with Protagoras' broadly relativist approach identified in the "man is the measure" doctrine quoted above.⁴⁶ All that the community can teach is what the community currently values and Protagoras never specifies if the right, wrong, praiseworthy, shameful, holy, and unholy might, in reality, be something different from what the community inculcates. Through this method, though, a shared system of moral evaluation emerges. The young learn to value things according to the likes and dislikes of their elders. This would seem to satisfy the requirements that Socrates' hedonic calculus implies. However, the calculus is intended as a shared system that is grounded in

⁴⁶Importantly, Protagoras's famous doctrine is never explicitly mentioned in this dialogue (while it is in the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*). However, we have to note that the hedonic calculus is precisely *about* measurement as such and Socrates apparently wants to give it an objective character that the man-measure doctrine will not allow.

something unobjectionable. The pleasure-pain calculation is intended as a factual method of practical deliberation.

Nussbaum's Benthamite characterisation appears, then, to be right on the mark. Socrates is a straightforward utilitarian in these important passages. This is a serious charge to make against the author of the dialogue, since, as we know well, Plato is decidedly opposed to hedonism as we conventionally understand it. It is possible, of course, that the hedonism of the *Protagoras* is so enlightened as to be of an entirely different character from that of the Benthamite utility maximisation. But the text does not support this entirely. Socrates says in response to Protagoras' assertion that a good life consists of praiseworthy pleasures (and implicitly, not all pleasures):

Surely you don't go along with the majority in calling some pleasant things bad and some pleasant things good. What I say is, in so far as things are pleasant, are they not to that extent good, leaving their other consequences out of account? And again it's the same with painful things; in so far as they are painful, are they not bad? (351c)

While Protagoras is reluctant to agree with this, the Socratic position does not indicate anything other than a conventional understanding of pleasure and pain. Gosling and Taylor, similarly, conclude that there is no reason to deny Plato's acceptance of an enlightened hedonism and, therefore, these passages must be read literally. They arrive at this position

from two directions. First, they try to show that there is no reason to deny that Socrates accepted this enlightened hedonism. The evidence they use is from Xenophon and they find there no reason to contradict the picture of Socrates in the *Protagoras*. Secondly, they try to show there is no reason to reject Plato's acceptance of an enlightened hedonism. To do so they look at other dialogues that deal with pleasure and find that, of those dialogues that are earlier than the *Protagoras*, none makes it impossible to attribute the position to Plato. Critical to their argument is the later dating of the *Gorgias*, where hedonism is firmly rejected. Their evidence for this is the division between knowledge and belief that is lacking in the *Protagoras*, but present in the *Gorgias*. They also site the division of the soul into the appetitive and reasoning as absent from the *Protagoras*. Thus, at this stage, Plato could very well have accepted the hedonic calculus.⁴⁷

It is virtually impossible to refute enlightened hedonism, for the same reason that no moral theory could adequately do without some degree of consequentialism. Nevertheless, the hedonic calculus is part a dialogue -- and a dialogue where much of the argument is conducted through the action of the characters. The easy way to reject the hedonism as a fabrication is to attribute it to Socratic irony. This, however, does not get us far. It is not at all apparent why Plato would have Socrates seek agreement to a position that is intended ironically. The quotation above sounds clearly like an attempt

⁴⁷Gosling and Taylor (1982), 60-61, 65.

to establish pleasure as a logical category that can then be used as an analytic tool.

The view I would like to put forth is that the hedonic calculus is illustrative of what Socrates is trying to establish as necessary. The way to determine whether or not Socrates is meant to take seriously the hedonism is to examine other parts of this dialogue. Gosling and Taylor do not do this, even though there is some textual evidence that Socrates was more interested in an objective scale than in a specifically hedonistic scale. The particular evidence I have in mind is Hippocrates' shame, which I have talked about already. He feels shame because he feels that he is about to do something wrong -- the intended action has a shameful *character*. He has a moral aversion to some particular action because that action is immoral. Certainly, this could be described as a kind of pain, but it is pain brought about by a kind of knowledge. The scale used in deliberation used in this instance, therefore, has less to do with pleasure and pain, conventionally understood, than with a sense of right and wrong. If we want to continue using the hedonic language that Socrates himself employs, we can say that pleasure is associated with doing what is right and pain, in this case shame, is associated with doing wrong. However, it is not the pain that determines wrong, but the wrongness that brings about pain.

Taking this back to the political craft, the sort of knowledge that Socrates sees lacking in Protagoras' account (myth and demonstration) is a knowledge of right and wrong. The

hedonic calculus establishes the type of shared, but objective, method of practical deliberation that Socrates would prefer. The content of that method, I believe, is actually better illustrated by the dramatic action than in the defence of hedonism. Furthermore, this conclusion rests more comfortably with the typical picture of both Socrates and Plato. It is correct that nothing in either the external evidence about Socrates or the internal evidence of Plato's earlier dialogues would preclude either from accepting hedonism. However, it is in only in this dialogue that hedonism is expressly defended. It seems plain that the function of this defence in the dialogue is the genuine puzzle.

The hedonic calculus has taken the discussion somewhat beyond Protagoras' Great Speech. However, there is a purpose in the digression. The myth and the demonstrative account that Protagoras offers describe the creation and maintenance of political order through the containment of disorder. The implication of any system that merely contains conflict is that the conflict cannot be eliminated. The hedonic calculus undermines this implication. It gives us the possibility of constructing an order where practical deliberation takes place according to a fixed standard. However, I have tried to show above that it is at least problematic to treat that fixed standard as hedonism. The text supports the idea that the fixed standard is knowledge of moral truths. Furthermore, it is textually more appropriate for this to be the case, since it is moral knowledge that Protagoras claims to have.

Poetic Interpretation

The analysis of Simonides' poem seems like an over long interlude in the middle of the dialogue, but I think it can give us some valuable information concerning Plato's views on crafts and order. When we see this section performing in this way, the interpretation of the poem joins Plato's other attempts to mimic those whom he criticises. Take, for example, the *Menexenus*, where Plato gives perhaps his most sustained effort to demonstrate the vacuity of a particular genre of political speech.⁴⁸ Socrates lampoons the funeral orations typically heard in Athens. It is a lampoon achieved through its own formulaic construction and adherence to the "rules" of such a speech. The numerous technical manuals on rhetoric, with which Socrates must have had some acquaintance, *can* guide a person in the production of speeches. The question is whether or not this constitutes a *techne*.

In this section, it is not so important what Socrates says as what he is doing in saying it.⁴⁹ My argument is that Socrates' long exegesis demonstrates the possibility of creating a

⁴⁸For commentary on the *Menexenus* see Nicole Loreaux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 264-70 and Stephen G. Salkever, "Socrates' Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Menexenus*", *American Political Science Review* 87 (1993), 133-46. The former discusses the dream-like state that Socrates claims the funeral oration induces in an audience.

⁴⁹Gosling and Taylor characterise his interpretation of the poem as "transparently outrageous." Gosling and Taylor (1982), 59.

seemingly ordered whole that, in fact, is still fundamentally disordered. Socrates' ability to take aspects of the poem and compose them into an interpretative framework imitates the creation of order through the elimination of conflict. The interpretative structure, however, becomes simply one possible viewpoint. Thus, the conflict-free order supposedly created itself becomes an object of contention or conflict.

It is significant that poetic interpretation is introduced in the dialogue. In addition to poetry's role in the education of the young, the poets provided the value system that was the basis of conventional morality. In other words, the moral language that Protagoras thinks society constantly teaches the young grows out of the poetry he considers important.⁵⁰ As I read this section of the dialogue, Socrates is trying to accomplish three things. First, he is trying to show that no coherent evaluative system arises from poetry. Secondly, and related, the evaluative systems that are conventionally thought to arise are simply contentious interpretations with no grounding in knowledge of the subject matter. That is, the interpretations are ultimately about moral truths, but are not developed from a position of knowledge about those truths. They become interpretations of someone else's assumed knowledge of morality. This point is illustrated well in an early Socratic dialogue, the *Ion*. There, Socrates is talking to Ion, a rhapsode,

⁵⁰It is important to be clear on one textual point. Protagoras values *discourse* on poetry and, thus, the poem is a vehicle for improving one's rhetorical skills through disputation. This is significant later in my argument.

about this supposed craft. He has been facetiously praising the rhapsodes and adds:

And how enviable also to have to immerse yourself in a great many good poets, especially Homer, the best and most inspired of them, and to have to get up his thought and not just his lines! For if one didn't understand what the poet says, one would never become a good rhapsode, because a rhapsode has to be an interpreter of the poet's thought to the audience, and that is impossible for one to do properly if one does not understand what he is saying" (530b-c).⁵¹

The *Ion* is certainly much earlier than the *Protagoras*, but the quotation reveals an important point about poetic interpretation in general, which Plato does not modify in any later dialogues. Finally, Socrates is trying to emphasise that any political order towards which Protagoras' teaching contributes is no more than a containment of disorder. The methods he employs assume that disorder is the norm and is fundamentally irreducible.

The discussion prior to this section of the dialogue has allowed Socrates to deflate Protagoras somewhat. Protagoras has been

⁵¹Trevor J. Saunders, ed., *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). The conclusion of the dialogue is simply that rhapsodes have no skill. Instead, Socrates gets Ion to agree that whatever ability they have is from divine inspiration and not from a knowledge-based craft. Ion is reluctant to accept this, but eventually seems to accept it as almost a compliment.

coaxed by the others in the room to acquiesce to Socrates' method of question and answer, after being reluctant to abandon his own tendency to make long speeches. With the threat of Socrates' leaving, Protagoras gives in to the wishes of the spectators. He will now ask questions and will then submit to Socrates' questions and provide short answers. Protagoras introduces the topic of poetry as a way of regaining a certain amount of momentum that he lost in answering Socrates earlier. The persuasive power of the Great Speech was dissipated when Socrates took the initiative away from Protagoras. Now he feels that he can re-assert his argumentative strength with a different approach. We should note the competitiveness between the characters as a reminder that Protagoras assumes public deliberation to be a contest for the minds of the decision-makers.

It seems peculiar that Protagoras should maintain that poetry is critical to a man's education. He says at 338a, "I consider, Socrates, that the most important part of a man's education is being knowledgeable about poetry." He has said earlier (318d ff.) that the over-specialised curriculum of other sophists is a disservice to their students. This peculiarity is easily explained. In addition to the fact that the poets were the foundation of Greek moral (and practical) education, Protagoras uses poetry as a means of teaching skill in public debate. What he values is "the ability to grasp the good and bad points of a poem, to distinguish them and to give one's reasons in reply to questions" (339a). Thus, poetry is a convenient starting point in learning how to analyse something and to hold forth against

others who may disagree.⁵² Thus, rhetoric is a key component of the education he provides, which corresponds to the idea that the Great Speech is an advertisement in a quite conventional way.

Protagoras starts the discussion with an examination of Simonides' poem, which he claims is self-contradictory. The relevant lines are:

It is hard, rather, to become a truly good man,
Foursquare in hand and foot and mind, fashioned without fault.
(339b)

and

Nor do I hold as right the saying of Pittacus,
Wise though he was; he says it is hard to be noble. (339c)

Socrates says that he has studied the poem himself and cannot see the contradiction Protagoras finds. When Protagoras explains the point of contradiction (Simonides criticises Pittacus for a view which he himself has made), many in the audience

⁵²It is not necessary at this point that it be a competition as such. As we saw in the Great Speech, Protagoras values the ability to think on one's feet. Socrates' question may not have been expected, but Protagoras was able to respond using precisely the method he alludes to in this quotation. He divides the question, distinguishes the good and bad points Socrates makes, and tries to defend himself against further questions. Unfortunately, the questions seem too precise for the persuasive technique he uses.

shout their approval. The room has become an arena containing a competition. The competition, moreover, is simply about who is wise. Protagoras defines the ground rules when he says that knowledge of poetry is essential to a man's education. Thus, the standard by which the contest is to be adjudicated is knowledge of poetry. Insofar as this defines the scope of the conversation, it is important that Protagoras have the better interpretation of the poem. By the time we reach the end of this section, it will become clear that Socrates is capable of operating within this particular scope, but that he sees the standard for judging wisdom as something broader and more encompassing.

Socrates tries to reconcile the apparent contradiction in the most obvious way. He says the lines do not conflict because one refers to becoming and the other refers to being good. Since, as he has Prodicus confirm, being and becoming are not synonyms, the passages are not so much free of conflict as they are about two different things.⁵³

Protagoras rejects this out of hand. "It would show great stupidity on the poet's part," he claims, "if he says that it is so easy to keep excellence once you have it, when that's the most difficult thing of all, as everyone agrees" (340e). Protagoras is using a dual-approach in this contest. His first assertion is that the lines contradict each other. He does not say anything about the correctness of either view that he sees expressed in the

⁵³Prodicus is shown as having a speciality in fine distinctions between words. See 339e ff. for an example.

conflicting lines. Next, after hearing Socrates' response, he temporarily abandons the problem of self-contradiction to say that the argument implied by Socrates' interpretation is simply wrong. This should, in fact, be a different argument that Protagoras makes, according to the original claim he made about the poem. If he concedes that Socrates has reconciled the lines of the poem, it would be clear that Protagoras has lost the first "match". But the objective is not to analyse the poem. The competition ultimately has nothing to do with the poem, but with each individual's ability to gain the approval of the auditors.

The weight of popular opinion is important in this context. As Protagoras says, everyone agrees that keeping excellence is the hardest thing of all. The successful rhetorician appeals to the values held by his auditors in order to produce a particular deliberative outcome. The deliberation is not over what values to hold, but over what action is in accordance with one's current set of values.

Socrates' next attempt to respond is plainly intended as a joke. He says that Simonides faults Pittacus for saying that it is bad to be noble, on the grounds that Simonides' dialect might have used "hard" to mean "bad". If that is the case, the conflict between the poets is merely a confusion over language. The significant point is that the contested meaning of the poem may have to do with the contested meaning of particular words. Socrates has picked up on Protagoras' shift from the contradictory elements of the poem to its possibly incorrect

assertion. He tries to rescue Simonides with an appeal to linguistic differences in order to show that, if we take a particular word to mean something other than its generally understood definition, the conflict between Simonides and Pittacus disappears. Another way of putting it is to say that conflicts between interpretations of moral truth, which is the conflict between the poets, can be resolved through examination of the meanings that lie behind the words used. The standard used to adjudicate between conflicting views is something that necessarily exists prior to those views themselves. Socrates is obviously facetious in this exchange about the meaning of “hard”, and Prodicus is clearly enjoying a joke at Protagoras’ expense. What appears to be harmless fun is actually a description of the rhetorician’s power to persuade through the manipulation of the language. Protagoras responds that everyone knows Simonides had a conventional understanding of “hard” and, therefore, the meaning of the words is not the issue.

These half-hearted attempts that Socrates makes are merely the preface to his real effort in this section. He recognises the sort of interpretative skill Protagoras values and he accommodates him in a long speech about the poem. As I say above, the detail of his interpretation is hardly the issue here. It is the placement of this exegesis within its dramatic context that confirms the competitive nature of the whole event. Socrates shows that by using the poem as the entire scope of the discussion it is possible to construct a plausible account of its meaning. This, in a way, is like any practical craft that

simply sets out to produce some artefact. The materials with which the craftsman works are simply the lines of the poem, in this case.

Socrates' first attempts to reconcile the lines of the poem highlight the problem with this approach. It is possible to construct a plausible account of the poem by looking no farther than the poem itself. But the objective is to recapture the meaning of the lines, which is prior to the words Simonides wrote. As the quotation from the *Ion* makes clear, interpretation is getting to the ideas that the poet had before writing the words.

Socrates' long interpretation takes the poem as a closed system and shows how it can be understood simply through cross-referencing the lines. But there is no evidence offered as to why this interpretation is final. There is no standard other than the text for determining the truth of the account. Socrates tries to establish that the meaning is somehow prior to the poem with his word games at the start. Protagoras angrily rejects Prodicus' contribution about "hard" and "bad", implying that we do not need to examine anything other than the poem itself to grasp its meaning. The sense in which the words are used is self-evident because it is conventional.

Plato is trying to show that such interpretations will never be final. After Socrates finishes, he is praised for his interpretation. However, Hippias immediately offers to give an alternative interpretation that he also thinks is good (347a-b).

The question of whether or not Socrates' interpretation is correct is not a factor in this discussion. The "cleverness" of the account is more important than what the poem actually means.

We can see parallels between this and Protagoras' ideas about society's role in teaching excellence. The scope of this education, as he presents it, will never be more than the values currently held by the community. Just as the poem consists simply of its lines, excellence consists entirely of current beliefs about excellence. Protagoras says that he can refine one's understanding of these beliefs, but this amounts to no more than critically analysing a poem as a self-contained text.

Hippias' desire to contribute his own views shows that within this activity of deliberating over the poem disagreements must simply exist alongside one another because the "rules", the unwillingness or inability to look beyond the particular work, denies the participants access to some external standard with which to adjudicate between themselves. Once again, the hedonic calculus illustrates the idea of a standard that is not itself part of the circumstances to which it is applied. The poem, just like currently accepted values about right and wrong, is simultaneously the thing to be understood and the thing by which the understanding takes place. This method uses what is problematic as an unproblematic device.

The implication of this contest with the poem is that the disagreements between the participants are to be expected and, indeed, are irreducible. However, the forum within which

the disagreements takes place acts as a container for the conflicts and establishes rules by which disagreeing parties can co-exist. This container is constructed when Socrates threatens to abandon the group and a set of procedures is quickly introduced that will allow him and Protagoras to participate without acrimony.

A procedural system that contains conflict may not seem like a terrible thing, if we accept that conflict cannot be eliminated. However, this is not the position Plato develops in the dialogue. Dramatic details, such as Hippocrates' shame and Socrates' initial attempts at reconciling the poem's lines, and the explicit argument that results in the hedonic calculus point towards a view that there is a truth that lies outside the circumstances of deliberation and that this truth is the guide to arriving at the correct outcome. The aporetic conclusion of the dialogue brings this out clearly. If we had knowledge of excellence, it would enable us to deliberate correctly about whether or not it could be taught. As Socrates says at 361c, he is left with nothing but confusion because this single, external standard has not been achieved.

Conclusion

I have tried to argue in this section that the *Protagoras* explores the idea of establishing order in politics. Part of this argument has dealt with the need to acquire what amounts to an organising principle in the form of some external standard of value. In this regard, I look above at Socrates' use of the

hedonic calculus to show that this is an image of the type of standard he has in mind. I also try to show that the hedonism itself is not the point of the calculus, but the external nature of the scale used. My argument is that Plato indicates through the dramatic action a scale more sophisticated than hedonism. In conjunction with the aporetic ending, we can see that the scale becomes a knowledge of moral truths, which is the sort of knowledge Protagoras implicitly offers his students.

Nevertheless, we see by the end that he offers no more than a knowledge of the values they already have acquired through their upbringing in a community. I compare this to the analysis of a poem when the only terms of reference are the poem itself. The poetic interpretation becomes important for understanding how political order can be constructed out of the existing values held by the community. However, this order is simply one possible construct. The best possible order than can be arranged is simply a means of containing the various attempts at defining an order. At a practical level this may work, but it violates the objective of a *techne* that Nussbaum points out. Socrates perceives that there is a way of finding an objectively grounded political order that would eliminate the sorts of conflicts that the poetic interpretations point out. Since this is available, in his view, allowing conflict to persist is to choose *tuche* over *techne*. In short, it would be choosing uncertainty when certainty is possible.

SPEECH, TRUTH AND POWER IN THE *GORGIAS*

Summary

In this section of the thesis I will try to establish that there are two conceptions of power that the interlocutors in the Gorgias represent and against which Socrates argues. The first conception of power is the power of persuasion, exercised through speech. The second is the power of superior force, to which speech may contribute, but is basically direct control over other people. I claim that Socrates tries to redefine power and self-interest to exclude the latter and to connect the former with the search for truth. His effort is an attempt to stabilise the political language in order to stabilise the state. If the language can be used in ways he finds improper, then the interests of both state and citizens are neglected. Those who argue against the Socratic view he sees as undermining their own welfare. The progression of interlocutors coincides with the movement from the first to the second conception of power. Thus, Gorgias defends the power of persuasion, Polus modifies this to include a human desire for the power of superior force, and Callicles argues for the desirability of absolute despotism -- the logical extreme of superior force.

Introduction

Is there a necessary, or even desirable, limit to the content of political speech, beyond which it ceases to be political speech at all? Does political speech have a proper function that might

inform such a limit? When Socrates confronts these issues in the *Gorgias*⁵⁴ he faces three men who believe they know the role of political speech -- it is a tool that serves the interests of the speaker, not the state. Given this function, no limit on the content of speech can be imposed, except considerations of what is likely to be of greatest instrumental value in helping one gain power. In other words, evaluations of worth become evaluations of usefulness. The interlocutors represent three "character types" of fifth-century Athens: the famous teacher of oratory, the teacher's ambitious disciple, and the practicing orator. As sophistry became more and more prevalent, and more and more openly practiced,⁵⁵ these three types become especially important to any understanding of Athenian politics. Their presence demonstrates the important role of rhetoric at that time.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Terence Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). All references will be from this translation of the text.

⁵⁵A reference to this new development occurs at *Protagoras* 316c-317e, when Protagoras identifies several historical figures whom he claims were actually sophists, but hid their practice under the guise of more "respectable" professions. See also *Phaedrus* 257d where Phaedrus says, "And you yourself, Socrates, are perfectly aware, I'm sure, that those who occupy the positions of greatest power and dignity in our states are ashamed to write speeches or to leave written compositions behind them, because they are afraid that posterity may give them the name of sophists." Both references also point to the difficulty faced in establishing a workable definition of "sophist". Kerferd says that the sophists of the latter half of the fourth century were distinguished by their professionalism from any supposed predecessors. G. B. Kerferd (1981), 25.

⁵⁶Ostwald states the case succinctly, "Rhetoric came into its own in Athens in the 420s, because of the importance public speaking had come

The dialogue is an inquiry into the nature and value of rhetoric and the chief issue is the connection between political power and political speech. It is a prime example of what I claim is Plato's concern that controlling political speech is part of the battle to control the state. And by control we should understand Plato to be interested in stabilising the political community, not merely in running its affairs. He wants to promote orderliness and continuity. The fight over political speech is fought *with* political speech. The two sides of the debate are doing more than trying to win points in an argument. Both parties are trying to define what is and is not allowable for political speakers to say in general by using the language in particular ways. An interlocutor's concession to an argument effectively contracts or expands the scope of allowable political speech. Thus, each concession becomes crucial to winning the overall argument and gaining control of the political language. Socrates' fear is that the interlocutors allow the scope of political speech to become too broad, robbing us of any means of evaluating its moral content, and making joint political action and harmonious political associations impossible.

to assume in trying to sway Council, Assembly, and the juries, where power was exercised." Ostwald (1986) 237. See also Ober, who states, "Skill in public address was the *sine qua non* for the politician. This meant not only skill at putting words together but also in putting them across." Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 113.

The three character types mentioned above oppose Socrates with differing conceptions of power and self-interest. The problem is more than the meanings of these words because, for example, self-interest can be masked by an ostensible concern for the interests of the state. One must dissect the rhetoric by examining the rhetorician, thus, making the speaker's motives and personal morality central concerns. Plato, therefore, looks at the moral character and beliefs of the orators to discern the value of their speech (and also to find agreement with his own views).⁵⁷ If their beliefs and motivations prove questionable in any way, then the ideas they defend become suspect. This assumes that speech automatically reflects the mind of the speaker and a corollary to the debate is whether or not word and speaker are as indistinguishable as Plato seems to insist. If they are distinguishable, a speaker is freed from his own moral beliefs and may make arguments which he himself does not accept. Socrates will try to show that certain basic moral sentiments are shared and that these put logical limits on the use that can be made of language.

I have devoted a section below to Gorgias and Polus and will try to distinguish the two concepts of power that I see presented in the dialogue. Before this, however, I will briefly

⁵⁷This is not an idea peculiar to Plato or Socrates. Ober says, "The demos judged a politician's policy at least in part by reference to his character, to his worth as a citizen. Hence, if a politician hoped to have his policy suggestions greeted with sympathy by the demos, it was incumbent upon him to demonstrate to the demos his personal worth." Ober (1989), 126.

examine how I see the idea of power being used in the dialogue (and the relevance to the politics of Plato's Athens).⁵⁸

The Legitimate Use of Power

The modern world has a very simple way of expressing the idea of legitimate power: we usually call it authority.

Embedded within the concept of its legitimacy is the idea that power has proper and improper uses. Legitimacy can thus mean either that power has proper or improper *users* or that its users may *apply* it properly or improperly (though, these two meanings are not necessarily exclusive of one another). In this dialogue, the users of power, the power holders in question, are the rhetoricians and their possession of power is simply taken for granted. However, we can observe in Plato's treatment of the rhetoricians and the practice of rhetoric a subtle critique of the democratic institutions that allow them to thrive and maintain that power. Thus, running alongside the critique of rhetoric's use is a sub-theme that basically asks why rhetoricians should be allowed the power they have. This question will be addressed later in this section, where I try to show that the rhetoricians' power can be legitimated in Plato's terms through a knowledge of moral truths. This will become the sole means of legitimating power for Plato.

⁵⁸It may be relevant at this point to ask whether Socrates presents a third definition of power to counter the two I will examine below. In effect he does and it is the power of the true craftsman. Such a person actualises the innate moral beliefs or sense that Plato assumes all men possess. More will be said on this point in Sections Three and Four.

The dominant issue for the most part, though, is how should the power of rhetoric be applied, given the fact that public speakers have recourse to persuasive language and techniques, giving them disproportionate opportunities to achieve their ends. Plato's method is indirect, leaving us to piece together his thoughts on the legitimate use of power. This section is intended to examine some aspects of the concept that I think will be relevant to the following analysis of the characters of the dialogue. In brief, we can see Socrates as defining legitimate power as the promotion of the common good -- defined as the genuine interests of the community. In typical Platonic style, we should understand genuine interests as something distinct from preferences. A central argument of the dialogue has to do with the possible gap between these concepts.⁵⁹ The interlocutors, in opposition to Socrates, will present legitimate power as the advancement of particular interests, which they will define as preferences. I try to work out a rough schematic presentation of how these concepts differ in this section of my analysis.

As I said, legitimate power is another way of saying authority in the modern world, but this simply reflects that power is itself a contested term for us. Power and authority are related, but not identical. For Plato and his contemporaries the notion of power must have seemed rather straightforward. Power

⁵⁹This distinction is developed in Socrates' argument with Polus, who wants to argue that a man with power gets what he wants. Socrates tries to show that the wants Polus envisions are merely preferences. See 467a ff.

related to who had ultimate control. The democracies and oligarchies of the Greek world reflected the power of the “many”, and the “few”, respectively. Thus, the *Gorgias* does discuss power, as I will be describing below, but the concept is not scrutinised as it would be in the modern literature on the subject.⁶⁰ In other words, the ancient debate was about the distribution of influence over political outcomes.⁶¹ In Athens the arenas where these outcomes were produced, of course, were the Assembly, the Council, and the jury courts. Each reflects the Athenian concern to distribute widely the influence over outcomes⁶² The dialogue does not address these

⁶⁰Some important discussions of power and authority can be found in Stephen Lukes, ed., *Power* (New York: New York University Press, 1986); Stephen Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: MacMillan, 1974); Robert A. Dahl, “The Concept of Power” in Roderick Bell, David V. Edwards, R. Harrison Wagner, eds., *Political Power: A Reader in Theory and Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1969); Talcott Parsons, “On the Concept of Political Power” in Bell et. al., eds., (1969); Carl J. Friedrich, “Authority, Reason, and Discretion” in Richard E. Flathman, ed., *Concepts in Social and Political Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

⁶¹Not that such a debate was very evident in any theoretical texts, at least not in the terms I have used. We can read Aristotle’s and Plato’s descriptions of deviant constitutions more as moral assessments of certain institutions, rather than critiques of the distribution of power as such.

⁶²With regard to the Athenian democracy, we can think of this as procedural equality -- what Charles Beitz refers to as the “simple view” of political equality in contemporary political philosophy. Charles R. Beitz, *Political Equality: An Essay in Democratic Theory*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 4. The difficult concept to grasp with respect to the ancient world is the idea of *isonomia*. Whether or not this was synonymous with democracy is discussed thoroughly by Gregory Vlastos, “*Isonomia Politike*” in *Platonic Studies*, (Princeton: Princeton

constitutional matters. Instead, the scrutiny is cast upon the proper use of the rhetoricians' power and, specifically, how power is *misused* in the Athenian democratic institutions. It is essential to read the criticism of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* as related specifically to the practice of the democracy.

Persuasive speech was the fuel of Athenian democracy. To criticise the practice of rhetoric as Plato did was to criticise the institutions which nurtured it and which, in turn, it supported. Nevertheless, we should be aware that, for more conventional reasons (i.e., reasons not inspired by Plato's moral realism), the Athenian *demos* was also suspicious of the rhetoricians.⁶³

Looking at modern scholarship surrounding the idea of power, this suspicion would be considered unfounded. Beitz, for example, following Parsons, concludes that influence is not a form of power. He writes:

[E]ven if the desires of one agent are taken as fixed, and attention is directed at that agent's capacity to influence the desires of others, it would...be unilluminating to characterise this capacity as a form of power. The means by which it can be exercised consist of education and persuasion, and although it may be no

University Press, 1981), 2nd edition, 164-203. See also R.K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16; Ober (1989), 68-69, 74-75; Ostwald (1986), 27, 50. The last two deal specifically with *isonomia* as a part of the Cleisthenic reforms of 510.

⁶³See especially Ober (1989), 104-118. The rhetoricians were widely perceived as possessing the ability to mislead. Nevertheless, as Ober describes, the rhetoricians had a quasi-official duty to inform and lead the *demos* -- a duty which the *demos* itself expected to be performed.

abuse of ordinary language to describe these as kinds of power, it is enormously difficult, and perhaps impossible, to formulate any systematic analysis of power that would permit meaningful comparisons to be made among the capacities of different individuals to employ these means of influence.⁶⁴

I use this quotation simply to emphasise the enormous gulf that exists between contemporary political philosophy and the sorts of issues that occupied Plato and, indeed, Athenian democrats. Several points emerge from this passage. First, Beitz identifies a capacity to influence desires. Second, he says that influencing desires is done through education and persuasion. Third, it is virtually impossible to measure this capacity. Now my view is that the average Athenian would concede all three of these points, but would *still* characterise a capacity to influence desires as power (and would think it “illuminating” to do so). Why might this be so? The chief reason I can see is that this capacity was embodied in a practice that was becoming a quasi-technical subject of study, namely rhetoric. In other words, the capacity to influence desires was turned into a commodity that promised greater than normal opportunities to achieve one’s own ends. The result was that the capacity to influence desires came to be assessed somewhat systematically in terms of the effectiveness of particular rhetorical “strategies”.

⁶⁴Beitz (1989), 13.

Clearly, one important reason that a contemporary liberal such as Beitz would reject the idea that influencing desires is power arises from a belief that the agent is, by some definition of the word, free to form his desires *despite* the effort to influence him or her.⁶⁵ Socrates implicitly argues against this in the *Gorgias*. Rhetoric works because it clouds the individual's ability to judge and makes one more open to the suggestions of the rhetorician. It does this, according to Socrates, because it affects the emotions or appetites. Surely, however, there is some difficulty in calling the rhetorician's ability "power" in any straightforward sense because he is fundamentally offering *suggestions* that manipulatively draw on a body of shared symbols and values. Nonetheless, we can say that, in terms of Platonic moral psychology, rhetoric's success does equate somewhat with power.

Rhetoric's affective capacity derives from a *techne*'s rationalistic dominance over the irrational element of the soul. Because *techne* represents a higher intellectual level than the fundamental randomness of appetite, it is possible to see

⁶⁵How we are to understand that a person remains free to choose despite the efforts of a persuader is contentious. The issue is really about voluntary action and Socrates will later in the dialogue develop the distinction I have already mentioned between wants and preferences. I interpret his argument as relating to the idea that we voluntarily act when our action is directed towards a genuine want (or a preference that coincides with a genuine want). This links voluntarism to knowledge, since, he would claim, ignorance of our genuine wants allows us to form preferences that are contrary to such wants. This only works, of course, when one has a conception of the good that is prior to the individual.

rhetoric as the power of reason over unreason. A rather significant caveat must be inserted here. At issue in the dialogue is the status of rhetoric as a *techne*. Thus, we cannot say that the power of rhetoric is synonymous with the power of reason. It mimics reason by organising and using the shared symbols and values which ensure its effectiveness. Socrates' analogy with cookery is apt. Both are systematic, but not scientific in the sense of *techne*. Thus, *techne*, understood as an ability to order is problematic. As I try to show in Section One, order can be apparent without being real. For Plato the problem is making the appearance correspond to the reality, which is why the legitimate use of power becomes a concern.

Gorgias

The dramatic date of the dialogue is unclear, but Gorgias the sophist⁶⁶ is shown in the dialogue as roughly sixty years old, and Socrates about fifteen years his junior.⁶⁷ He must be an

⁶⁶Kerferd insists that Gorgias was a sophist, unless we excessively narrow the definition of the term. Kerferd (1981), 45. See also Dodds who insists that Gorgias neither was a sophist nor is portrayed as one in the dialogue. Plato *Gorgias*, revised text with introduction and commentary by E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5-6. Also, Harrison (1964).

⁶⁷Age is an important factor in understanding the dialogue in relation to Athenian political history. Ostwald notes, "Tension between the young and the old exists in all times; but the way it set in and dominated the internal social and political life of Athens in the course of the Archidamian War is so unprecedented in Athenian history that we are justified in treating it as a further feature of the polarisation of society we have been discussing." Ostwald (1986), 229. Ostwald is discussing the fissures that were emerging in the 420s.

old man if we judge by Polus, who is described as very much younger than both he and Socrates (for example, 463e and 466a), but old enough to have published a treatise on rhetoric (462c). Also, Gorgias' challenge to answer any question asked and his statement that "no one has asked me anything new for many years now" (448a) show that he has been practising his trade for quite some time.⁶⁸ We can also see Gorgias' assertion as implying that he is not speaking extemporaneously. He has set speeches that he delivers in response to the most common questions.

The dialogue also makes several references to Socrates' trial and execution (521a-522a gives a classic Platonic assessment of Socrates' trial and conviction). Allen sees these references as quite significant: "The *Gorgias* is a meditation on the meaning of Socrates' trial and death, and thereby on the moral foundations of law, politics, and human life."⁶⁹ Socrates also takes to the offensive more readily here than in the earlier dialogues and gladly consents to give his views when they are

⁶⁸It also shows the novelty of Socrates' questioning technique. Socrates asks a typical "what is *x*?" question and Gorgias delivers an inappropriate answer precisely because he has never been asked such a question before. It is common for interlocutors in the early aporetic dialogues to misunderstand the gist of the request for a definition, demonstrating that Socrates too was contributing to a new mode of speech. Richard Robinson notes that the *Gorgias* abandons "what is *x*?" in favour of a "is *x* *y*?" Richard Robinson, "Socratic Definition", in Gregory Vlastos, ed., *The Philosophy of Socrates: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

⁶⁹See Allen, (1984), 189-90. One could argue that this conclusion is not unique to the *Gorgias*.

requested of him. The *Gorgias* probably dates from late in Plato's early period or early in the middle period, not too distant in time from the *Protagoras*.

We have fragments from a number of Gorgias' works: *On the Non-existent* or *On Nature*, *Helen*, *Palamedes*, *Funeral Oration*, *Olympic Oration*, and *Encomium on Achilles*. Kerferd remarks that he also probably wrote a technical treatise on rhetoric and the *Onomastikon*.⁷⁰ If we accept the dialogue as a source, we also know that his family must have been somewhat prominent; Chaerephon refers to Gorgias' brother, Herodicus, a physician (448b) and Gorgias does so again when demonstrating the power he has even in comparison to experts in a field (456b). Untersteiner charts Gorgias' travels from Athens to Thessaly, Boeotia, and Argos. In the last there appears to have been some ban or punishment imposed for attending his lectures.⁷¹ Untersteiner also notes that he was reputed to have a strong personality and attracted several prominent Athenians as students, including Isocrates, Critias, Alcibiades, and Thucydides the politician.⁷² Originally from Leontini in Sicily, Gorgias made a famous embassy to Athens in 427 (his only attested visit) to persuade the Athenians to ally with Leontini against Syracuse, which he succeeded in doing.⁷³ From this biographical data we can see that Socrates is

⁷⁰Kerferd (1981), 45.

⁷¹Mario Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, trans. Kathleen Freeman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), 93. Also, Kerferd (1981), 45.

⁷²Untersteiner (1954), 94.

⁷³That agreement is invoked by the Egestaeans in trying to convince the Athenians to invade Sicily (*Thuc.* 6.6).

challenging a major figure in Greek intellectual life. In demonstrating Gorgias' failure to overcome the challenge, Plato is showing the insecurity of the alleged system of knowledge even when the master rhetorician leads the defence.

Gorgias represents the "first tier" of character types in the dialogue. He is not only the teacher of rhetoric, but the innovator. He has contributed to the establishment of rhetoric as a practice.⁷⁴ He fully appreciates that what he teaches is the means of acquiring power over other men within the polis:

It [rhetoric] is in reality the greatest good, Socrates, and is responsible for freedom for a man himself, and at the same time for rule over others in his own city....I say it is the power to persuade by speech jurymen in the jury-court, council-men in the Council Chamber, assembly-men in the Assembly, and in every other gathering, whatever political gathering there may be. And I tell you, with this power you will hold the doctor as your slave, the trainer as your slave -- and this money-maker here will turn out to make money for someone else -- not for himself, but for you with the power to speak and persuade the masses. (452d-e)

Thus, the power of persuasion can take away another man's freedom and put him under the control of a clever rhetorician. But, despite his choice of words, this could be described as tyrannical power only in a metaphorical sense; Gorgias does not

⁷⁴Rhetoric will be referred to as a practice, since "craft" and "art" have certain connotations that bring in Plato's own assessment of rhetoric.

mean that these other men will literally be the slaves of the clever speaker. In other words, given the Greek understanding of freedom as something essentially in contradistinction to legal slavery, reducing citizens to slavery is not Gorgias' literal meaning. He clearly refers to persuasion within the framework of existing political institutions. He teaches people to speak well in the established arenas of public debate. So what the accomplished speaker achieves is popular agreement with his own views. The members of the decision-making bodies deliberate and *choose* the recommendations of the man with the power to persuade. At some basic level, those who are persuaded act voluntarily because they are not strictly bound to follow the rhetorician's lead.⁷⁵ This is significant in comparing Gorgias to the other interlocutors. The institutional integrity of the state is not affected, nor is institutional change necessarily at issue. If Gorgias meant to deliver this "revolutionary" power to his students, he would need a broader vision of a successful rhetorician than the quoted passage indicates.

Rhetoric merely gives a person what everyone is assumed to want. The "greatest good" for a man is freedom for himself within the existing framework of the state. To achieve this good while remaining a participant in the city's affairs one must escape the power of others by becoming a leader of one's legally defined peers. Gorgias is playing to popular sentiments

⁷⁵Nevertheless, it is a thin psychological model that posits a theoretical possibility of acting as one chooses without explaining how deliberation works.

that stress the individual's desire to be admired by his fellow citizens.⁷⁶ And the criteria of approval are largely fixed or, at least, not questioned. As a public speaker he must employ concepts and values that are familiar to his listeners. He does not try to change views of accepted moral principles; he simply casts the particular issue in question in sharp relief against those principles and casts himself as the defender of those principles. In the *Meno*, for example, Plato gives the Gorgian definition of virtue: [Meno speaking] "First of all, if it is manly virtue you are after, it is easy to see that the virtue of a man consists in managing the city's affairs capably, so that he will help his friends and injure his foes while taking care to come to no harm himself" (71e). There is nothing uniquely Gorgian, let alone revolutionary, about this. As Segal says, "Gorgias' usage of *arete* simply follows the common practice of the fifth century before the redefinition of the word by Plato."⁷⁷ Assuming that this accurately reflects Gorgias' views and seeing it as part of what Plato would have known about the historical character, we can say that Gorgias' objectives are quite conventional. Certainly, they would not have struck a contemporary audience as either alien or audacious.

⁷⁶Dodds' description of a "shame culture" nicely captures these popular sentiments. Dodds (1985), 11 and E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

⁷⁷Charles P. Segal, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 66 (1962), 103.

Gorgias' brand of rhetoric is, nevertheless, not benign.⁷⁸ It is a form of power exercised over other men, influencing them in a unique way. Gorgias' psychological model is practically a physical model, emphasising outside forces operating on a largely passive subject. Segal says, "His [model of the] psyche...is in contact with physical phenomena and operates in a way analogous to theirs. In thus treating the emotions as real, almost physiological entities, Gorgias indicates a kinship with the scientific rationalism of Greek medicine...."⁷⁹ In the *Helen*, Gorgias describes plainly what he takes the force of rhetoric to be:

The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others

⁷⁸Dodds claims that Plato disapproved of Gorgias' teaching because it was "morally neutral", but this seems to be saying too much. His teaching reflects the popular morality of his day. See Dodds (1985), 10 and 15.

⁷⁹Segal (1962), 106. Segal would deny the passivity of the subject, since he sees Gorgias as supposing something more than a merely mechanical model of the psyche (107). But the implication of the dialogue does seem to support a passive "mob" of non-experts that can be swayed in any direction. Gorgias probably would claim that rhetoric, when practiced "scientifically", does more than influence people. In other words, it would be professionally expedient to bill rhetoric as dealing in something more than probabilities.

make the hearer bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion. (*Helen* 14)⁸⁰

Thus, for the historical Gorgias, of whom Plato would have had some knowledge in developing the dialogue's character, rhetoric acts like a drug, distorting one's normal emotional state in such a way that one's behaviour undergoes a marked change. The critical point is the use of the emotions as a motivational force. Rhetoric produces certain actions by inspiring particular emotions that normally promote the desired outcome. A general trying to lift the spirits of his troops, for example, will seek to implant anger and self-confidence in them.⁸¹ Many of the fighters will die and many would sooner run than fight, but the emotional "boost" produces a willingness to face danger. However, the desire to fight is purely voluntary once the appropriate emotional state has been achieved.⁸² It is as though the emotion shifts one's normal conceptual framework, allowing the person to view the world from a different perspective. The general might make allusions to unjust acts or heinous crimes committed by the enemy so the soldiers will see themselves as righteous men seeking just vindication. The result is that, within Gorgias'

⁸⁰Rosamond Kent Sprague, ed., *The Older Sophists* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 53, (translation of Gorgias frag. 82 Diels-Kranz by George Kennedy).

⁸¹Nicias achieves this by posing a sobering choice to his fighters in Sicily: conquer or die. *Thuc.* 6.68.

⁸²Plato stresses the voluntary nature of the act at *Philebus* 58a: "I often heard Gorgias say that the art of rhetoric differs from all other arts. Under its influence all things are willingly but not forcibly made slaves." Quoted from Sprague, ed., 39.

framework, the possibility of assigning responsibility emerges only when an actor commits himself to one course or another. Responsibility begins and ends with the person performing the act.

This entails, of course, a certain lack of responsibility for one's emotions. If the voluntary nature of the act is to be maintained, we could not assign blame for the emotion that inspired the action. The emotion simply happens. Dodds supports this as a popular view when he writes, "[The *thumos*] may be defined, roughly and generally, as the organ of feeling. But it enjoys an independence which the word 'organ' does not suggest to us...A man's *thumos* tells him that he must now eat or drink or slay an enemy, it advises him on his course of action, it puts words into his mouth...it commonly appears as an independent inner voice."⁸³

So, what is involuntary is the feeling that produces the action. That is the rhetorician's power over other men. He can make men have feelings that would normally be absent given a particular context or can actualise an intuitive moral sense in a particular way. Feelings that were previously inspired by some mysterious entity within us, or even by a god, are now brought about by the words of a speaker. More than some conjurer's trick, the successful speaker brings to mind in the listener some memory or vision of a situation where that

⁸³Dodds, (1951), 16. Dodds is commenting on *thumos* in Homeric man, but the general idea seems applicable to later Greeks, at least until Plato's rationalising influence.

emotion would be appropriate.⁸⁴ Perhaps, through the use of historical allusion or reference to the poetry and drama of the time, the speaker can make his audience experience the sensations of the actors in history or poetry or drama.⁸⁵ For Gorgias' psychology, and for Socrates' criticism of rhetoric, the significance is that an agent can be moved by rational argument or by his appetites. In fact, Gorgias' success at persuading where the rational exhortations of an expert have failed (456a ff.) confirms that a deliberative outcome is *more* likely to be influenced by emotions than by any reasoning capacity of the deliberator.⁸⁶ Gorgias understands the power of emotion and says at *Helen* 9:

I deem and define all poetry as speech with meter. Fearful shuddering and tearful pity and grievous longing come upon its hearers, and at the actions and physical sufferings of others in good fortunes and in evil fortunes, through the agency of words, the soul is wont to experience a suffering of its own.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Dodds claims, "[Gorgias'] art was in fact the art of verbal magic.", Dodds (1985), 8. This, I think, takes the analogy between speech and drugs too far. Speakers may try to cast their verbal spells, but they were wise to remain sensitive to the changing moods of the people. Cf. *Gorgias* 481d-482a.

⁸⁵Similarly, Aristotle writes at *Poetics* 1453b, "The plot [of a tragedy] should be so framed that, even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents..." Jonathan Barnes, ed. (1984).

⁸⁶Surely, Plato would agree that Gorgias' idea of rhetoric is conditional upon the ignorance of the audience.

⁸⁷Socrates makes a similar point that poetry stripped of melody, rhythm and metre is no more than speech at 502c. Neither addresses whether these poetic attributes are themselves somehow "persuasive".

While poetry can make a person feel what he otherwise would not, the political importance is that rhetoric can manipulate emotions to translate feelings into deeds. An example can be found in Thucydides when he is describing the Athenians' eagerness before and anger after the defeat at Sicily. He says:

[before]

All alike fell in love with the enterprise. The older men thought that they would either subdue the places against which they were to sail, or at all events, with so large a force, meet with no disaster; those in the prime of life felt a longing for foreign sites and spectacles, and had no doubt that they should come safe home again; and the idea of the common people and the soldiers was to earn wages at the moment, and make conquests that would supply a never-ending fund of pay for the future. (6.24)

[after]

When the news was brought to Athens, for a long while they disbelieved even the most respectable of soldiers who had themselves escaped from the scene of action and clearly reported the matter, a destruction so complete not being thought credible. When the conviction was forced upon them, they were angry with the orators, just as if they had not themselves voted it, and were enraged also with the reciters of oracles, and soothsayers, and all other omen-mongers of the time who had encouraged them to hope that they should conquer Sicily. (8.1)

There are obvious possibilities for abusing the power of persuasion (456c-457c). The craft that Gorgias has so far

described is liable to be used by an unjust person for unjust ends. Indeed, the same can be said about any craft in the hands of an unjust person.⁸⁸ The dialogue takes a decidedly Platonic turn once Socrates establishes power presents such risks. It is important to remind ourselves that Gorgias makes no other claim in this dialogue than to state he is a teacher of rhetoric. It might be reasonable, in a general sense, to ask Gorgias what action he takes when one of his students is ignorant of the justice that would prevent the misuse of rhetoric. It is questionable whether this is a fair question to ask, given that Gorgias has been silent about his own interest in teaching virtue. Moreover, if we rely on the historical accuracy of Meno's description of Gorgias, it makes this new Platonic twist seem irrelevant to Gorgias' claims about himself. Gorgias readily concedes that he will teach justice to a student needing instruction, but we have to understand him to mean virtue in the popular sense that Meno attributes to him. This is not how Plato has Socrates interpret him (459c-460a).

Clearly, Plato is constructing a character that complements his own objective in the dialogue. It is not clear that Plato's desire to show Gorgias succumbing to Socrates' philosophical skills is best achieved by presenting a straw-man. More may be indicated in this passage, though. The *possibility* of misinterpretation is the point. Gorgias treats the issue as trivial because the virtue he has in mind is no more than the conventional view quoted above. He seems mildly surprised that this should be a problem, since he would expect all his

⁸⁸Irwin (1977), 116. Cf. *Hippias Minor*.

students to arrive with the very same conception of virtue indicated in the *Meno*.⁸⁹ However, the casual, imprecise use of ethical terms is the hallmark of the interlocutors in the earlier Socratic dialogues and we see here that Socrates is trading on an ambiguity without seeking to clarify the imprecise term. By doing so, he can engage in the practice he criticises in order to defeat the master rhetorician with his own weapon.

Additionally, this shows that Gorgias has an understanding about the proper use of rhetoric that is distinguished from Polus' and Callicles'. Rhetoric is employed for the selfish purpose of gaining honour and prestige and it exerts some force over men in order to gain those things. But, as Gorgias practices it, the rhetorician achieves these things within bounds of a conventional moral framework. The rhetorician wants to be respected, not feared.

Nevertheless, the man who would rather be feared can find much to help him in Gorgias' teaching. The line I am sketching between the power of persuasion and the power of superior force is thin. What Gorgias' theory hopes to deliver is not what his students may take it to mean. The ambiguity of the concept of virtue re-emerges as an ambiguity about the proper exercise of power. Gorgias grasps this possibility when he delivers his speech on the responsibility of teachers (456c-457c). He argues that in such cases the student is to blame, not the

⁸⁹Meno is surprised that Socrates does not know the meaning of virtue, assuming that he should have learned it from Gorgias himself (*Meno* 71d-e).

teacher.⁹⁰ The teacher is fundamentally powerless to control how his thought will be interpreted and used by disciples with their own aims and ambitions. He can direct them towards some form of conduct, but he cannot make them follow.⁹¹ Moreover, the teacher's lack of responsibility is mirrored in the issue of responsibility for one's emotions. Just as the antecedents to action are outside the bounds of a discourse on responsibility, the antecedent to the misuse of rhetoric (instruction in its use) is not an event to which we can assign blame. However, it is precisely the assignment of responsibility that Socrates is after.

The debate with Gorgias also demonstrates what I described earlier as the battle to control political speech. At the end of this section (concluding with Polus' entrance at 461b) Gorgias capitulates on or concedes a number of points that have forced him narrowly to define his practice. The first instance of this

⁹⁰We can understand this in two ways. Plato could be having Gorgias foreshadow Socrates' coming encounter with Polus, Gorgias' own student, who, I will argue, is one of the teacher's misinterpreters. Gorgias could, in effect, be defending himself in advance from what he suspects Polus will be arguing. On the other hand, there was a tendency to blame the sophists for the sins of their students, evidenced by such cases as the alleged burning of Protagoras' works at Athens and the exiling of Anaxagoras.

⁹¹Comparisons can be made with Socrates at *Apology* 39c when he warns that the Athenians that those who will come to examine them after him will be more numerous, and possibly more hostile. Up until now Socrates has restrained them. Furthermore, Plato has Socrates express a similar concern at *Republic* 539 regarding the use of dialectic by the young. This does not, however, confirm the value neutrality of Gorgias' teaching as Dodds claims.

occurs at 448c when Polus describes Gorgias' trade (while not the words of Gorgias, I take them to express his opinions.). Asked for a definition, he gives a rhetorical display, which Socrates promptly rejects. It is, first, the wrong *kind* of answer, as initially occurs in all the aporetic dialogues. But, secondly, it is not so much an answer as a defence. Polus defends rhetoric against some criticism that has not even been made. His aim is to deploy a pre-emptive argument that puts his listener on the defensive. In rejecting this type of response Socrates is refusing to accept that political argument is a competition, rather than a joint quest for right answers. The scope of possible answers has been narrowed.

In the sections that follow Gorgias continues this pattern until he must reject his claim that teachers are not responsible for the actions of their students. Knowledge of the just and unjust are necessary components of practising rhetoric because rhetoric seeks to persuade people about the just and unjust (454b). If students do not know the just and unjust Gorgias will teach them (460a). If Gorgias does his job properly none of his students will use rhetoric unjustly (accepting the argument from analogy at 460b, which Gorgias does, that the man who has learned just things will be just). If they do use it unjustly Gorgias has failed in the execution of his supposed craft and is responsible for this (since he admits that he will, in fact, teach about the just and unjust). What this means for political speech is that the rhetorician is no longer able to say anything at all in order to persuade about the just and unjust; he can only express the truth, based on a knowledge of justice.

What it means for the rhetorician is that his ignorance of the subject is grounds for assigning responsibility to him, because he claims for himself a knowledge that he does not possess.

Polus

Little is known about the historical Polus other than what Plato tells us. He is thought to have written a handbook on rhetoric, which Socrates refers to having read at 461c (which may be parodied at 448c). The overall impression he makes in the dialogue is of someone eager to impress others and hungry for praise. We should remember that Polus is much younger than Gorgias and still only at the beginning of his career as a teacher of rhetoric. Whereas Gorgias is secure in his position as "expert", Polus still has to earn his credentials. His eagerness to answer Chaerephon's question indicates that he may even feel overshadowed by his teacher. "His manners are much inferior to his master's", as Dodds says, and he is "as innocent of dialectical method as Gorgias himself, but displays an unteachable stupidity beside which Gorgias looks quite intelligent."⁹² He represents the "second tier" of sophists -- those who have neither been ground-breaking theorists nor innovative practitioners, but who practice within the framework of an already established profession. He also represents the youth who had been captivated by the new "science" of rhetoric and sophistic argument and saw in them the means of political advancement. Hippocrates' enthusiasm in the *Protagoras* to enrol as the sophist's student is probably

⁹²Dodds (1985), 11. Here he also summarises what is known about Polus.

not far from the real excitement the young of Athens felt for the new style of learning (see Section One for a fuller discussion of Hippocrates).⁹³

In the discussion with Gorgias, Socrates has attempted to reclaim the content of political speech. The rhetorician must now say only what is true. The introduction of moral knowledge as a necessary component of teaching rhetoric is teased out more fully in this section. In the discussion with Polus, Socrates tries to reclaim both the content of political speech and the soul of the speaker. He does this by redefining what I said at the beginning are the core concepts of power and self-interest. Polus presents a somewhat more sophisticated challenge than Gorgias. The latter wants to bypass any examination of the moral content of speech by defending rhetoric as value-neutral (and the teacher of rhetoric as blameless for its misuse).⁹⁴ Polus is in effect defending a psychological model that, in Socrates' terms, necessitates unjust behaviour. By the end of this part of the debate, Socrates will have redefined what it means to do what one wants and, indeed, redefined the object of human desire in order to defeat Polus. Polus' assertions will no longer be "allowable" because

⁹³Notice, too, that Hippocrates is made to admit that he has no idea what he will learn. Ostwald discusses the interests of the young in sophistry. Ostwald (1986), 237-8.

⁹⁴I note above that, according to Dodds, Plato rejected rhetoric because it is morally neutral. I think we can see in the discussion with Polus that Plato sees a moral aspect of rhetoric that arises from its use in gaining political power. In other words, that it can be used at all implies for Plato a statement of fact about its proper use and, therefore, the supposedly value neutral tool acquires a moral character.

they will have been refuted through logical argument. And it is important to note at this point that his arguments have been refuted by a mode of discourse that he does not practice himself.

The treatment of Gorgias above tries to show that he recognised how words and speech can be used to persuade a group of non-experts. And I also try to show that he has not adopted this stance at the expense of conventional morality, but sees rhetoric being practiced within an *accepted* framework of established norms and values. The man who is "clever at approaching people" (463a) may have power over men because he can manipulate the psyche with rhetoric. In practice, though, he does this as a participant in the normal political institutions.⁹⁵ Gorgias still adheres to the conventional morality that Polus and Callicles reject in favour of the natural domination of the "best" man. Conventional morality precludes certain actions and desires while the natural law that only the strong survive only precludes the inexpedient. Gorgias is at the cutting edge of rhetoric as a practice, but he is behind the times in the *nomos-physis* debate. His moral sentiments have not begun to approach the ideas we find in Callicles. I think this at least partly confirms that the teacher is powerless to control

⁹⁵ Gorgias talks about power over other men, but he also talks about power to get things done. He says at 455d-e, "I take it you know these dockyards and the Athenians' walls and the harbour equipment have come from Themistocles' advice, some from Pericles', but not from the craftsmen." Themistocles and Pericles have won fame, honour, and power by doing some good for the city, even though they also served themselves in the process.

those who interpret his thought. As I said earlier, there is ample material in Gorgias' teaching to derive conclusions contrary to his implied wishes and we shall see that Polus has done so.

Polus, unlike Gorgias, is talking about controlling the state through force, not persuasion. His ideal person is the tyrant Archelaus who is described as seizing power "unjustly" (471a) and crushing any political opposition, down to the child who might some day lay claim to the throne (471c). He thinks that this is the archetypal instance of power exercised in pursuit of self-interest. To do whatever one wants is the sum of all desire. In this framework, the opinions that others hold about one's actions are unimportant because the person seeking power demands compliance, not approval. In fact, the majority will never approve of this person's ultimate objective simply because his success is at their expense.⁹⁶ Polus rejects Gorgias' qualifications about conventional morality and adopts a model of the psyche that is based on an insatiable appetite for power. He says at 461b-c that Socrates should not suppose he has defeated Gorgias just because the latter was *shamed* into admitting that he knows justice and will teach it. Polus asks what sensible person would *not* claim that he knows the just from the unjust. Gorgias was motivated by a feeling that Polus feels is either undesirable or unreasonable (which amounts to the same thing). Nevertheless, Polus is not saying that Gorgias

⁹⁶In the case of Archelaus, of course, the pursuit of power took place amongst those who already had access to power. Archelaus was a usurper who came into conflict with established authority.

believes what he is shamed into admitting. Everyone wants the power of the tyrant -- allegedly even Socrates (468e).⁹⁷ Thus, the clever speaker is not above a little mendacity to conceal his true ambitions. Polus gives Gorgias the benefit of the doubt by assuming that his shame was merely an act.

Polus is attempting to expand the scope of allowable speech at this point. His contention, which Irwin notes may be long overdue in the Platonic dialogues⁹⁸, is that shameful need not entail evil. Injustice may be shameful, but it might be better to act unjustly rather than be at the receiving end of someone else's injustice. Injustice is prudent, thus, everyone who wants the best for themselves wishes to be unjust. The structure of Polus' argument appears to be:

- (1) everyone has desires (interests) that they wish satisfied (served)

⁹⁷On Socrates' use of shame in arguing his point see Richard McKim, "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*", in Griswold, ed. (1988). McKim makes the point that Plato is not interested in logically proving his thesis that to suffer injustice is better than to do it. Instead, he claims, the dialogue is constructed to expose that everyone does, in fact, believe this, even if they currently think that they do not. McKim overlooks, I think, the fact that exposing this implicit agreement between Socrates and the interlocutors does prove for Socrates that a higher ethical standard exists, which will be the basis of any true order for Plato. See Section Four for a discussion of moral intuitions and political order.

⁹⁸Irwin (1977), 117. Of course, it *must* entail evil for Plato. Shame is like an intuitive signal to warn a person that some fundamental principle has been violated.

- (2) if there is a good that is necessary before any desires can be met, this good will be a superordinate desire⁹⁹
- (3) power to do what one wants is the superordinate desire because it is necessary before all other desires can be met.

With unlimited power one can gain unlimited satisfaction. Therefore, all men desire power most of all.¹⁰⁰ Without it, nothing follows and one has the choice of being victim or victimiser. Not everyone can do whatever they want simultaneously. But the person with power can ensure that he will not be thwarted by the desires of others. That is the lesson of Archelaus. Tyranny is no longer a metaphor for the rhetorician's objectives; it has become a synonym.

Rhetoricians, on this view, are once again liberated from the truth and are free to say anything that serves their desire for power. If the choice is as stark as I make out -- abuse or be abused -- politics has become a contest to achieve maximum power. The speaker who does act within the institutional framework that Gorgias takes for granted is either masking his self-interest with concern for the state or is himself deceived. When the power of the rhetorician has become all

⁹⁹Assuming that people will want what it is necessary for them to have. Socrates' argument hinges on a distinction between wants and preferences. Polus is not making this distinction and this is how Socrates will attempt to undermine his position.

¹⁰⁰It is necessary to assume at this point that Polus agrees with Callicles who says that the man with the most extensive and extreme appetites is the best person.

encompassing and he effectively becomes the only citizen, his interests and the state's will coincide. Until then, the interests of the state are secondary to the rhetorician's interest in power. This is no longer desire for prestige, but for tyrannical domination.

Once this motivating principle is established, the "moral" content of one's speech cannot be evaluated. If the moral content of speech has no significance, then the moral quality of the speaker is equally irrelevant. Word and speaker have been separated and the rhetorician's arguments, accounts, and claims are no longer reflections of an underlying moral condition.

Morals and politics have come unjoined and arguments are seen as expedient, not correct. Instead of ethical character, a basic *psychological* condition is assumed (desire for power) and speech is the morally neutral tool for satisfying an innate want. Like any tool, the worth of an argument is measured in terms of effectiveness and the test of worth is refutability.

Refutation has different implications for Socrates and Polus, since they practice different modes of discourse.¹⁰¹ Since Polus imagines politics to be a power struggle, a refuted opponent is

¹⁰¹Socrates establishes the mode he prefers at 461d. To some extent there is a conflict of modes in the dialogue and the outcome is double-edged. Socrates has shown that rhetoric cannot withstand the elenchus. But, surely, the fate of Socrates himself shows that the elenchus cannot withstand rhetoric when it is practiced in its intended context (e.g., the courts). In other words, Socrates does not prove that rhetoric fails to accomplish what Gorgias claims it can do. He probably fears that Gorgias is only too correct.

defeated and humiliated. The unrefuted participant is victorious, glorified, and more powerful. With the Socratic elenchus the person who successfully refutes is actually no better off, but the person who has been refuted is morally improved (458a). He has been disabused of his false beliefs. In making an analogy with disease, Socrates says that never having the sickness is better than falling ill, but once ill, it is better to be cured (478d-e).

The purpose of his argument is to rejoin word and speaker, which Polus has been trying to keep apart. Socrates insists that the interlocutors state what they really believe. If a belief is logically refuted he thinks that the person can no longer hold that belief; that is, once a person *understands* that they are in error about a certain point they will change their mind accordingly. They logically cannot and, thus, will not hold false opinions. At a very minimum, they will no longer claim to know anything about the subject. Thus, Socrates undertakes to prove to Polus that what is shameful is also evil and harmful to the actor (or convince Polus of what he supposedly already believes, as he says at 466e). If he succeeds in this, Polus will not be able to support unjust acts unless he also supports self-harm, which would be inconsistent with his praise of unbridled self-interest. He will not do this unless he rejects the earlier conclusion that everyone seeks the good (468b). Furthermore, assuming Polus continues to state what he believes, he can no longer say that injustice is beneficial. By dis-allowing such a claim, Socrates has shown that there is a proper use of rhetoric.

By preventing Polus from developing a defence for injustice, he restricts the possibility of teaching that belief.

Callicles

The argument with Callicles is the heart of the *Gorgias*, where all the implications of the previous discussions culminate in an ideology of power. Here we see disorder at the micro level -- the human psyche. Callicles' sentiments are compatible with Gorgias' statements about the power of rhetoric (see above) and at the same time represent a twisted version of his thought, extending ideas we encounter with Polus to the extreme. The power of speech becomes the power of force. Either because of this or in spite of it, Callicles is enigmatic. Modern scholars have examined his words to discover the nature of his political loyalties. His speeches in the dialogue cover the ancient political spectrum from committed democrat to single-minded tyrant. Dodds has even analysed him in terms of Nietzsche's thought.¹⁰² Actually, Callicles is a man of his own time, who has taken to heart the arguments for *physis* over *nomos*. His political loyalties, then, are to the tyrant within himself -- the man who is held in check by the conspiring minions of conventional morality. His moral code is domineering self-interest.

¹⁰²Kerferd argues that, to Plato's mind, Callicles is a democrat. Interestingly, he fails to note the close connection that Plato makes between tyranny and democracy at *Republic* 562, which makes the distinction less controversial. G. B. Kerferd, "Plato's Treatment of Callicles in the 'Gorgias'", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 200, n. s. 20, (1974), 48-52. See also Dodds (1985), 386-391.

No evidence has survived to give us any biographical information on Callicles beyond what Plato provides.¹⁰³ We should assume, though, that fictional or otherwise his ideas must have had some currency in Athens, giving Plato good cause to argue explicitly against them.¹⁰⁴ Plato is surely interested in him as somehow typical and he is probably a spokesman for the views of many at the time. The dramatic date of the dialogue is uncertain because of the obvious anachronisms in the text. Irwin lists six details that point to conflicting dramatic dates. These include a reference to the death of Pericles (503c) and a prediction about the political career of Alcibiades (519a).¹⁰⁵ These have particular significance for the enquiry into rhetoric and the true political craft.

It is possible to discern in these two cases a progression from almost benign ignorance to cunning deceitfulness. At that point the progression comes to a divide. We can either go the way of

¹⁰³Ostwald (1986), 245. Callicles is probably not a fictional person created for the purposes of this dialogue, judging from the details that Plato provides of his deme and friends. Dodds hypothesises that he may have died early in his career. Dodds (1985), 13.

¹⁰⁴Callicles and the Thrasymachus of *Republic* Book 1 are an interesting pair. While certainly not identical, we can see similarities, especially with regard to the acquisition of power.

¹⁰⁵Irwin, trans., (1979), 109-10. The other anachronisms are references to Socrates' actions during the trial of the generals after Arginusae, references to Archelaus the Macedonian tyrant, references to Euripides' *Antiope*, and the presence of Gorgias himself, who only made one documented visit to Athens.

Callicles or Socrates. Plato has given us a striking juxtaposition that in the dramatic context points to a choice between two opposing schools of thought and two opposing schools of political speech. This is the theme that I will develop in the following section. Before turning to Callicles I examine first the inclusion of Pericles and Alcibiades in the dialogue.

Pericles enjoyed immense popularity in his own time and modern scholarship still tends to venerate him as the symbol of the Athenian golden age.¹⁰⁶ He serves as the representative of the democratic ideal itself.¹⁰⁷ Thucydides attests to his eloquence as a public speaker:

Pericles indeed, by his rank, ability, and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude -- in short to lead them instead of being led by them; for as he

¹⁰⁶Hannah Arendt, for example, who tends to mythologise Athens in general, awards the Pericles of the Funeral Oration her particular respect. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 205-6.

¹⁰⁷Athenian democracy is enjoying something of a boom. The 2500th anniversary of the democracy was celebrated in a recent issue of *PS: Political Science and Politics*, which commissioned articles by Sheldon Wolin, J. Peter Euben, Josiah Ober, Arlene Saxonhouse, and Michael T. Clark. Each to some degree extols the virtues of Athens and instructs us on how much we could learn from its institutions. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, September 1993, 471-494. For a less flattering account, if not more realistic, see Blair Campbell, "Paradigms Lost: Classical Athenian Politics in Modern Myth", *History of Political Thought*, 10 (1989), 189-213. A detailed examination of Athenian public life, across classes and occupations, can be found in L.B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

never sought power by improper means, he was never compelled to flatter them, but, on the contrary, enjoyed so high an estimation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction. Whenever he saw them unreasonably and insolently elated, he would with a word reduce them to alarm; on the other hand, if they fell victims to a panic, he could at once restore them to confidence (*Thuc.* 2.65).

The passage indicates Pericles' ability as a statesman, but also the potential power of speech in general. If he can manipulate emotions as readily as Thucydides makes out, then the potential for misuse is obvious. It is the joining of this ability with Pericles' "known integrity" that Thucydides admires. In other words, behind his ability to speak persuasively is a moral sense that informs the use he makes of his own ability. What should follow from this is that Pericles will not (or did not) use his power to do wrong and that is the message Thucydides wishes to convey.¹⁰⁸ We discover from the *Meno* that it is the random occurrence of this integrity that disturbs Plato about Pericles, however. Pericles is criticised in that dialogue for lacking knowledge and being guided only by right opinion (*Meno* 99b-c). He behaves correctly, but cannot give an account of *why* it is right. It is doubtful that Plato would accept that Pericles' actions were right, especially in the *Gorgias*

¹⁰⁸This may be Thucydides' attempt to vindicate Pericles, given the historian's manifest dislike for Pericles' successors.

(515e). Not only did he fail to improve the citizens, according to Socrates, but he actually made them worse (502e ff.).¹⁰⁹

I try to show in my treatment of *Gorgias* above that he, too, falls short in his ability to give an account. But worse than that for Plato, what he does is only an imitation of what Pericles does imperfectly. At 465c, Socrates makes a connection between rhetoric and justice, on the one hand, and sophistry and legislation, on the other.¹¹⁰ *Gorgias* is effectively twice removed from knowledge of the art of statesmanship, aspiring to systematise the "knowledge" of Pericles which is no knowledge at all. Given that, he can never be expected to impart true understanding to his own students. He does no more than give them the weapon of rhetoric with only vague guidance for its use.

Alcibiades, on the other hand, is the unjoining of this fortuitous integrity and rhetorical skill. Pericles at least contributed to the image of Athenian success and, thereby, presents himself

¹⁰⁹Thucydides would surely reject this. The passage quoted implies that Pericles tempered the extreme moods of the demos. Plato seems to give Pericles some credit in the *Meno*, as well. It seems that right opinion is flawed by its instability, but when present is indistinguishable from genuine knowledge. Pericles may, indeed, have done some right things, but not consistently and not by design. See below for further discussion of improving the citizens. Regarding Plato's treatment of Athenian politicians in the *Meno* and the *Gorgias* see Brian Calvert, "The Politicians of Athens in the *Gorgias* and *Meno*", *History of Political Thought* 5 (1984), 1-15.

¹¹⁰This schema provides some support for the claim that *Gorgias* was not a sophist. See above. Nevertheless, it is Plato's schema and not necessarily the popularly accepted impression of sophists/rhetoricians.

as a civic-minded man. He helped provide those things that common wisdom valued as the signs of wealth and power. Alcibiades is more the egotist¹¹¹ who calculated his personal gain before speaking in favour or against any public proposal.¹¹² Thucydides certainly has his biases, but the words and beliefs that he attributes to Alcibiades must have a reasonable basis in reality. The presentation of his speech in favour of the Sicilian invasion, side-by-side with Nicias' cautious warnings, shows a man with a good measure of the attributes that Callicles admires (Thucydides 6.9-6.18). But they are concealed by clever speech about the needs of the city. He is not only greedy for himself, but believes that greed is the natural mode of behaviour for all men. He defends the pursuit of greater empire on the grounds that constant additions to Athenian holdings is necessary simply in order to retain what is already possessed. Such logic leads to an empire that expands indiscriminately, unable to determine what imperial adventures are actually worthwhile because each is equally necessary. The "system" of knowledge this implies is maximisation of one's material gain by all means available. We can find similar values in Polus' praise of Archelaus. While not described as having imperial ambitions, he is a microcosm of a war-mad imperial state. Alcibiades' recommendations are that Athens become like Archelaus.

¹¹¹Ehrenberg's term. Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates* (London: Methuen, 1968), 284.

¹¹²See *Protagoras* 336e where Critias expresses the same view.

The progression I have constructed from Pericles to Alcibiades leads to a choice. We can continue down the same road of Alcibiades' disguised self-interest, and find a full-blown defence of domination at the end. But, Plato offers an alternative in Socrates, who offers a different conception of self-interest and different style of political speech. The chief irony of the dialogue is Callicles' insistent claims that Socrates could never defend himself in court, while the debate with Callicles is no less than Socrates doing just that. Socrates recognises what Callicles is doing, but Callicles cannot see Socrates' behaviour for what it is.¹¹³

Like the *Protagoras*, hedonism has an important part to play in the discussion with Callicles. Similar to its treatment there, hedonism in the *Gorgias* invites a consideration of how best to live one's life. Whereas in the *Protagoras* hedonism is a symbolic marker for the rational life, in the *Gorgias* it becomes a symbolic marker for the opposite. The difference arises from Callicles' rejection of the hedonic *calculus* and forthright defence of hedonism as such. It is in the discussion with Callicles that Socrates also develops the theme of statesmanship as a craft -- and this is partly due to the eager defence of the hedonist's creed that Callicles launches. He combines this sentiment with a political outlook that necessitates the use of

¹¹³Socrates loses this trial as well. He does not appear to have convinced Polus. He does not convince Callicles. And, as in the *Apology*, he departs with a stark warning about what will follow. In the *Apology* he predicts that Athens will be plagued by Socratic imitators. In the *Gorgias* he offers the judgement myth that underwrites his defence of justice.

the craft analogies even more than the blatant admiration of hedonism would require. Callicles is a "naturalist" in the fifth-century way. He says at 483d that justice is simply the superior ruling over the weaker, which all but crystallises the political thought of those who defended *physis* over *nomos*. Plato has him deliver a clearer expression of this idea at 484a-b:

Our way is to mould the best and strongest among us, taking them from youth up, like lions, and tame them by spells and incantations over them, until we enslave them, telling them that they ought to have equal shares, and that this is the fine and the just. But I think that if a man is born with a strong enough nature, he will shake off and smash and escape all this. He will trample on all our writings, charms, incantations, all the rules contrary to nature. He rises up and shows himself master, this slave of ours, and there the justice of nature suddenly bursts into light.

These words are Callicles' definition of the ideal statesman and one that is intended to rival the version Socrates has been sketching in the previous pages (Callicles has already accused Socrates of turning the world upside down -- 481c). The problems that Socrates tries to expose in this conception are the ambiguity of the terms "better" and "stronger" and the accompanying rule that this type of person should get more. Note that the content of the rewards to be distributed is largely unspecified. Callicles insists that the best man should have

more of *whatever* he desires. The content of desire is left open, reducing need to preference.

Regarding the definition of superiority, Callicles has merely vague notions that can only be summarised as some character type that is free from conventional prejudices and is pre-eminently self-interested. But the superior man is also somehow politically effective in a rather conventional sense. He says at 491a-b, "First of all I say who the superior men are...they're whoever are wise in the city's affairs, about how to govern it well, and not only wise, but also brave, and capable of fulfilling what they intend -- and who don't slacken because of softness of soul." There is nothing extraordinary about this treatment of the superior man; we might even say that it fits the mould of a Homeric hero, Agamemnon, for example. Or we might even say Oedipus in Sophocles' tragic play. Wise and strong, Oedipus both saved his city and very nearly became its downfall. Until the end, though, he never slackened because of "softness of soul", insisting that the truth be revealed and that he learn what no man could want to know.

As Euben has says, "This man [Oedipus] of unparalleled intelligence is a creature of the wild. He organises, divides, and orders things, events, and eventually people, yet violates the most sacred boundaries, caught in a net woven jointly by his acts and Apollo."¹¹⁴ Oedipus is "standing outside and above the

¹¹⁴J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 102.

forces that constrain lesser men."¹¹⁵ Even as the truth becomes clear, he remains superior, selecting the punishment that he must endure rather than defer to the judgement of "inferiors". In a sense, Callicles is adopting the heroic ideal, but turning the hero into the sort of civil actor that the Homeric characters are not. The strong man tramples on convention, but still looks to the polis for a sense of self.

But almost immediately after this statement Callicles reverts to the "naturalist" viewpoint: "The fine and just according to nature is this...the man who is to live rightly should let his appetites grow as large as possible and not restrain them, and when these are as large as possible, he must have the power to serve them, because of his bravery and wisdom, and to fill them with whatever he has an appetite for at any time" (491e-492a). The best man is now seen as insatiable, acting for no purpose but his own satisfaction. The governing of the city is secondary. Thus, Callicles still harkens back also to archaic Greece and an "agonistic" approach to politics. "An exaltation of the values of struggle, competition, and rivalry was associated with the sense of belonging to the community, with its demands for social unity and cohesion. The spirit of *agon* that animated the *gene* of the nobility was manifest in every sphere."¹¹⁶ Callicles can be seen as part of a pre-Socratic tradition going back at least to Homer. He wants to be the best

¹¹⁵Euben (1990), 98.

¹¹⁶Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, (London: Methuen, 1982), 45-6.

man among his peers and surpass the others, achieving a type of virtuosity.

But Callicles is more than a throwback to a past age; he is heavily influenced by sophistic thought. Judging from the quotation of 484a-b he is an aristocrat who experiences frustration with the democratic regime. The political system is stacked against those who want to surpass others and there are no institutional means for gaining control and leading the state. One must acquire power by playing the established game better than everyone else, even though the game favours the equal distribution of power, at least in principle. The member of a phalanx has no means of glorifying himself as an individual, only as part of a group to which he must defer. The ambitious citizen who wants to establish publicly his unique identity may find himself at a loss and, like Callicles, resort to a rejection of the "social phalanx" that he sees holding him down.

There is an apparent incompatibility between these statements; the best man is simultaneously other-regarding in his outlook and self-centred. He wants what is good for the city and for himself, but these things do not appear to be identical from what Callicles says. The best man can be both interested in the city's affairs and extremely appetitive, seemingly to the extent of harming the city. To understand this we must fill in the content of the best man's appetites. There are presumably rewards attached to effective management of the city. Callicles apparently values that type of reward. It transcends material gains and becomes something intangible, such as honour,

prestige, respect, and so on. We can label these psychological gains. Accompanying these would surely be material gains, as well, but we would, I think, be mistaken in attributing to Callicles a purely materialistic outlook. If we do that, the only virtue that his superior man genuinely needs is the ability to muster superior force to take whatever it is that he wants. But he wants his superior man to be "wise in the city's affairs" *and* immensely appetitive. We, thus, need to find a type of appetite that is compatible with ruling well.

This need is basically the point of Socrates' examination of Callicles' loose rule-based system of distribution; that is, the stronger get more than the weaker. A component of superiority that Callicles mentions is wisdom and this allows Socrates some room to compare the best man to a craftsman. At 490b Socrates asks if the doctor should be given more food because he is wise about healthy eating. Following on this, he asks if the best cloak maker should have the biggest cloak and the shoemaker the biggest or most shoes. The point is that we need to determine the area of wisdom that is relevant to ruling the state and the nature of genuinely valuable rewards. Callicles' scoffing at these examples confirms that he imagines something more than material advantages. What Callicles' best man wants is respect and this is gained by running the city well. This man is the person who is needed the most, but who himself needs the least. He requires the city for the praise of its citizens -- his *arete* is real only when recognised by others. Reputation is not self-generating. It is the assessment other's make of one's value.

Socrates identifies skills that have recognised objectives and pushes Callicles into specifying the analogous objective for the statesman he has been trying to describe. His question is basically an attempt to have Callicles describe the purpose for which the political craft is practiced. Callicles initially claims that the pursuit of pleasure is the aim of all action (or rightly should be). But this will not do; some pleasures produce harm or are shameful. Pleasure cannot be good without further qualification.¹¹⁷ In fact, it can only be desirable when it contributes to the good. Thus, we read at 500a that we do pleasurable things for the sake of good things and not the good for the sake of pleasure.

Callicles is made to qualify his earlier statement that unlimited desire satisfaction is happiness and now concedes that some pleasures should be avoided for their consequences (499b).¹¹⁸ If the best man, the one who should rule the state, is not simply the person with the greatest appetite backed by the power to satisfy it, Callicles must redefine the character traits that qualify one for rule. He concedes that a craftsman is needed to distinguish good from bad pleasures (500a) and this

¹¹⁷Cf. Section One on the hedonic calculus and the discussion earlier in this section.

¹¹⁸Also, Plato constructs a proof that tries to demonstrate that the good cannot be something that is simultaneously present with evil and goes on to show that pleasure violates this principle. Using the example of drinking, he notes that the pleasure from drink is only present when the distress of thirst is also present. Once the distress is gone, the pleasure ends, as well (496c-e). This is an argument that we do not find in the *Protagoras*.

brings him and Socrates into a common pursuit of the political *techne*. Socrates has moved the discussion towards the eventual acceptance of the need for order, structure, and stability.

Socrates states more clearly at 501a what he takes to be the distinction between a craft and a "knack", the word he uses to describe rhetoric earlier in the dialogue. Medicine, for example, is a craft because it "has considered the nature of what it cares for and the explanation of what it does, and can give a rational account of each of these things." Later at 503e he says that "the good man who speaks with a view to the best...will be like other craftsmen; each of them selects and applies his efforts with a view to his own work, not at random, but so that what he produces will acquire some form." Each craftsman also "arranges in a structure" and "compels one thing to be fitting and suitable to another." Socrates is expressing the idea of the *cosmos* as an artefact. The components of the whole fit together because the artificer, the designing agent, envisions the whole.

A knack, however, is practice based on experience. The practitioner does not know why a certain technique works, but has a quasi-theoretical understanding of the causal relationship between particular events and outcomes. In making this distinction between knack and craft, Socrates is removing political order from the realm of chance and establishing it as a function of the statesman's own psychological make-up.

Introducing the idea of a craft will be Socrates' final attempt to establish the proper style of political speech. Rhetoric has been described as something that gratifies or provides pleasure (462c). The good has been identified as something other than pleasure (497d). Thus, rhetoric does not contribute to achieving the good.¹¹⁹ The political craft, on the other hand, looks to improve the soul and this sometimes means the denial of immediate gratification (503a-b), which Socrates' beliefs about rhetoric preclude. He is willing to countenance the possibility that rhetoric can be used properly, i.e., to improve the citizens. Despite this, he, in agreement with Callicles, can think of no current statesman who does so (though Callicles thinks that the great Athenian statesmen of the past did - 503b-c¹²⁰). A good rhetor will try to rid souls of injustice and instil temperance. Like the conclusion reached with Gorgias, the rhetor, as craftsman, is required to speak in a particular way. Unlike that earlier conclusion, he must now also speak to achieve a particular goal. Socrates has added a requirement for the moral improvement of the audience. The product of politics becomes ethically sound citizens.

¹¹⁹The correct use of rhetoric is discussed in the dialogue, as well as in the *Phaedrus*. Plato seems to be assuming the use of rhetoric within the democratic institutions of Athens, which might lead him to conclude that rhetoric is never used for the good. I do not think that he bars the idea that the true statesman will be persuasive, though.

¹²⁰This complicates matters for anyone wishing to treat Callicles as a Nietzschean. The statesmen whom he admires did not defy conventional morality. Rather, they sought the psychological gains that I describe above.

A craft *can* be conventionally described as the uniting of method and objective, but it also implies an ability to speak in a particular way.¹²¹ When Gorgias tries to describe rhetoric as the power to persuade (452e), Socrates rebuts that the teacher of any craft has the power to persuade when speaking about his subject (453d).¹²² The point is that persuasion does not distinguish rhetoric from any other craft and, thus, Gorgias has failed to establish rhetoric as a unique science. This is what singles out the true craftsman. The craftsman conveys the structure and order of his skill in speech and argument. We can say that the expert practitioner is distinguished by his ability, first, to give an account (*logos*) of the unique features that define his skill from all others and, second, to defend his statements in cross-examination. The idea of giving an account reinforces the status of *techne* as the solution to chance in the universe. *Techne* is the antithesis of randomness.¹²³ An account is necessarily ordered, composed, and presented as a comprehensive statement. This is what Socrates appears to believe will make a craftsman persuasive. Moreover, a student of the craft will *learn* in an orderly fashion, acquiring the basic skills before moving to the more complicated aspects. This is the significance of Socrates' remark to Callicles at 497c: "You're a happy man, Callicles; for you're an initiate of the greater mysteries before the lesser." Socrates is being ironic to indicate

¹²¹I discuss the craft analogy in Section One.

¹²²This is actually a difficult position to uphold, unless we assume, as Socrates appears to, that a rational account is by its very nature persuasive. As I note earlier, the dialogue dramatically confirms that this is not necessarily the case.

¹²³Cf. Nussbaum (1986), 89 ff.

that Callicles is not thinking methodically; he grasps at arguments and makes premature conclusions. For example, his long speech at the beginning of his section in the dialogue contains several references to the teachings of the poets. However, he has had only incomplete lessons (484b-485a). He has to paraphrase the relevant poetic passages because he cannot remember the exact wording of the poems. The same sort of thing can be found in Socrates' constant rebukes to Polus for skipping "dialectical steps". Thus, Polus wants to say rhetoric is good, having only been told that it is a knack which aims at gratification (462c-d).

The idea of orderliness is driving Socrates' criticism of rhetoric as a craft. The false statesman who gives the citizens whatever, in their ignorance, they want illustrates the dangers that he feels await a polis run on these lines. If the statesman is to improve the citizens, Socrates indicates that he must first restrict himself to giving the citizens what they objectively need. This implies knowledge of human needs and further implies that the statesman satisfies only those objective needs for himself, as well. Socrates is saying that no state can be harmonious and temperate if the person who authored its existence is not. So, the fabrication of this state begins internally, within the artificer himself. Structure is something he imposes on his own soul before he imposes it on the souls of others. The ruler should have an internal order that controls his desires and prevents him from pursuing what should be undesirable. Callicles says the opposite -- order is unimportant in comparison to pleasure-maximisation. The extent of desire

per se and the ability to satisfy it are the important criteria of superiority.

As the creation of order moves outwards the statesman's duty *qua* statesman translates into controlling the citizens' appetitive desires. He says at 503 c-d that if real virtue is not filling up appetites, our own or those of others, then the allegedly great Athenian statesmen of the past failed; they did not "fulfil those appetites which make a man better when they are fulfilled". Later at 517b-c he says of the same men:

[T]hey've proved to be better servants than the present people, and more capable of supplying the city with what it had an appetite for. But for forcing change in their appetites, not indulging them, persuading and forcing them towards what will make the citizens better -- here they were virtually no different from the people now -- and that's the only work for a good citizen.¹²⁴

But the statesman has a unique craft, confronting a problem that the practitioner of no other skill has to face. The statesman has to improve those who may wilfully resist improvement.¹²⁵ At 505c Callicles refuses to go along with the

¹²⁴It is important to Socrates' argument that false statesmen be seen as *servants* of the people. Just as Callicles bends to the whims of the demos, the false statesman is a leader only in name.

¹²⁵An argument could be made, and much of the dialogue's language supports the view, that Plato sees the objects of the statesman's craft as passive subjects. In other words, they are improved without taking part in their own improvement. This is the argument in Robert W. Hall

dialogue, refusing to answer more questions and protesting that Socrates should carry on by himself. Socrates exclaims that Callicles will not "abide being helped and tempered, and himself undergoing the thing our discussion is about -- being tempered." What can a statesman do if the subjects will not submit? The elenchus presupposes a willing participant, not a hostile adversary. The statesman cannot make a better state if the citizens prefer their old, corrupt ways.¹²⁶ In carrying on the dialogue as a monologue, Socrates is demonstrating that the only option left him is teaching through example.

So, the statesman-craftsman is singularly challenged. Unlike the other crafts, there is no mechanistic application of techniques to "raw materials". This would attribute to Socrates

"*Techne* and Morality in the *Gorgias*" in J.P. Anton and G.L. Kustas, eds., *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971). Similarly, Irwin writes in his notes for 517b, "Socrates' authoritarian views are clear when he says it is the politician's...or the good citizen's task to 'force change'...in people's desires with or without their consent." Irwin, trans. (1979), 236. Both writers, I believe, overlook the action of the dialogue and fail to note the interactive nature of the elenchus. What undermines the elenchus is either an interlocutor's deceitfulness, i.e., a failure to express a belief that he currently holds, or his abandonment of the argument. Barring these, he is engaged with Socrates in reforming or reconstructing his own soul. What the dramatic action confirms, however, is my claim that the statesman deals with the most recalcitrant material. See above.

¹²⁶If we accept the paradox that no one does wrong willingly, this statement would more accurately describe an unwillingness to examine what is right. I.e., one must be *anti-intellectual* to prefer corrupt ways, not merely ignorant.

some form of cognitivism.¹²⁷ The subject of statesmanship is not a passive or inanimate thing, but other beings who are fundamentally no different from the craftsman himself. When Socrates says that people need to be persuaded or *forced* to change their desires, we have to ask what sort of force will be effective. The dramatic action is pointing us in two directions. On the one hand, Socrates is himself shown as the persuader throughout the dialogue. On the other hand, persuasion fails to achieve his objectives, begging the question of whether persuasion was ever a viable alternative. Ultimately, Socrates must fall back on a claim about the afterlife in order to avoid sacrificing persuasion to force. The myth of judgement beginning at 523a is the persuader's last argument for choosing a just life. It takes the threat of force and places it beyond the political, leaving the statesman with the tools of persuasion. The implication is that worldly compulsion neglects the soul by addressing the body. The punishment of the afterlife works directly on the soul.

¹²⁷See also, for example, Wallace I. Matson and Adam Leite, "Socrates' Critique of Cognitivism", *Philosophy* 66 (1993), 145-167. They define cognitivism as a view of expert knowledge seen as context-free rules that can be articulated clearly by the expert. Socrates clearly did not adhere to a rule-based morality. In the *Euthyphro* he rejects that piety is rendering to the gods what is their due or prosecuting crimes regardless of one's relation to the culprit. In the *Republic* he rejects that justice is returning what is owed or helping friends and harming enemies. For the political craft, rule-based morality would subsume politics under the notion of a productive craft. I argue against this view in Section One.

Conclusion

I have been arguing in this Section that there are two conceptions of power that Socrates seeks to refute in the *Gorgias*. The power of persuasion and the power of superior force are both symptoms of the political language undergoing change and, to refute them, Socrates attempts to redefine power. He tries to show that power is not control over another for the benefit of oneself, but for the benefit of that which is controlled. Moreover, what is of benefit to the subjects is of benefit to the ruler. So, the power of persuasion that Gorgias describes cannot legitimately be used to gain prestige and honour, but only to persuade others to accept what is truly just. It is proper for rhetoric to persuade others about the just and the unjust, as Gorgias states, but for Socrates this objective requires firm knowledge of the subject.

Also, the supreme despotism of the "best" man that Callicles describes is not happiness for man because it violates the agreed principle that temperance is better than intemperance. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates plainly relies on a denial of incontinence in order to get the interlocutors to stop saying the things they defend. If they will only say what they believe and if he can make them see that they believe in the same moral truths he holds, then they will be unable to speak falsely. The ideas that the interlocutors defend would no longer be propagated. Socrates wants to deny them the means

of communicating these falsehoods -- and those means effectively rely on their own ignorance.

Socrates feels that everything is at stake if he loses the debate. First, political speech will no longer be political, meaning it will no longer be something which concerns itself with the welfare of the polis. If the polis exists for the welfare of the citizens, political speech is ultimately about their concerns. But the political speech that the interlocutors describe is speech about the welfare of the speaker, the single citizen. It is his needs that motivate him to speak. If this is aggregated, no one is speaking for the interests of the political association and its interests cannot be served by neglect. Secondly, and following from the first point, the unity and stability of the polis is threatened. The radical separation of word and speaker that allows knowingly false speech becomes a radical separation between citizens and polis. The polis becomes an object for exploitation, undermining its viability. By equating the good of the citizens with the good of the true statesman Socrates tries to show that the interlocutors harm their interests the more they pursue their false desires. In trying to reform the political language, Socrates is trying to rescue them.

POLITICAL ORDER AND COLLECTIVE MORALITY IN *REPUBLIC I*

Summary

In this Section I take a more precise look at the correspondence between individual and collective beliefs. I argue that order in the political association is fundamentally natural and try to show how this order can be subverted. In the first part I look at Polemarchus' playful threat of force in the opening scene. In the second part I examine Cephalus' use of poetry, myth and anecdotes to show that a language, or moral vocabulary, can contribute to order. Polemarchus has a vague awareness of this, as I try to show in the third part, and he tries to defend his father's beliefs in a more sophisticated way. The final part of this section is an examination of Thrasymachus' views. The discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus shows that knowledge is the issue fundamentally at stake. Unlike Polemarchus, Thrasymachus appears to understand this, a point especially revealed by his counter-deployment of the craft analogy. Thrasymachus also seems aware that language can be used as a tool by those seeking power. I look at his first statement about justice, which I accept as an important corollary to his more inclusive second statement. In it I find an awareness that language can be used to impose something like an orderly framework on the political association, but that, in Thrasymachus' view, this framework is designed to serve only the interests of the person who imposes it. Combining this with the problem of knowledge, we see that Thrasymachus has not furnished the means of stabilising such an order.

Introduction

Over fifty years ago, Jaeger observed that Plato turns the Socrates of the *Republic* into an architect of the psyche. “He makes Socrates move the whole state with one lever, the education which forms the soul.”¹²⁸ The implicit antecedent to this claim is that souls are something that can be built. Plato’s education system in the dialogue, like any education system, transforms the individual psyche into something it might not otherwise become. It is the fact that any education system performs this function which causes Plato to elaborate in such great detail his own preferred system. Following the building metaphor, if one wants to impart a particular sort of psychological structure, one must have a suitable “manufacturing process” to reach the objective. The authoritarian flavour of Plato’s system is legendary and there is no need to describe the lengths he is prepared to go in order to achieve his goal. Suffice it to say that nothing is left to chance. Nothing that could raise questions about the validity of Plato’s moral principles is allowed in the education system.

This strict exclusion easily leads to the view that Plato’s system is little more than the tyranny of moral philosophy. People are

¹²⁸Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, Vol. II*, trans. Gilbert Highet, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), 199. References to the *Republic* are from G.M.A. Grube, *Plato: Republic*, revised by C.D.C. Reeve, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993), unless otherwise stated.

forced to believe that certain ideas are correct and this compulsion takes the form of denying individuals the means of making their own decisions. Neither the essence nor the means of education is open to discussion, debate, or examination.¹²⁹

Is this view correct? Clearly, yes, in the sense that critical examination of anything is a minority privilege in the ideal city. The philosopher-rulers monopolise authority over the ideological and institutional structure of the city. In that capacity they ensure that the other members of the community simply live within the boundaries constructed for them. Nevertheless, this quite apparent feature of the dialogue is not sufficient to support the claim that the ideal city is held together by compulsion. In order to defend that claim we would have to show one of two things. First, it would be necessary to show that the members of the ideal city wish to reside in a fundamentally different sort of association, but are prevented from acting on this desire. Alternatively, it would be necessary to show that, while the active desire to associate in a different manner is not present, its absence is contrary to human nature or rational desire or something of the sort.¹³⁰ I

¹²⁹This is a typical liberal charge against Plato, driven by the observation that Plato has a conception of the good that is prior to the individual. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. I (London: Routledge, 1966). Also, Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), especially 79.

¹³⁰Perhaps one could try to show that living under a regime that is bad, but allows popular criticism of and participation in institutions is better than even a good regime which allows neither. This bears some resemblance to the Liberal argument, in that it places rights above the good.

think it is fairly clear that the police-state implications of the former alternative are false. The ideal city is obviously not held together simply through the philosophers' ability to bring force to bear.¹³¹ The latter alternative, however, is a claim about the extent to which the individual psyche is manipulated in the ideal city. Investigating this possibility means enquiring into the way beliefs come to be held. If, for example, any education system transforms the individual psyche, the charge against Plato fails; his education system performs the single function common to all such systems.

However, the charge against Plato extends to the structure of his entire political community. The entire project reflects a rejection of open enquiry and popular contribution to political deliberation. In short, Plato's ideal city works to the extent that those who should rule also possess the power to maintain their position.¹³² There are two implicit positions, therefore. Either the ideal city is the result of systematic psychological manipulation of the most sinister kind; or, the city is based on some less onerous means of instilling appropriate beliefs in the minds of the city's members. The argument of this Section is that we can find in the dialogue a rejection of the sort of psychological manipulation with which Plato is charged. In

¹³¹It is equally obvious that the philosophers *can* bring force to bear, but this is not the cement holding the city together.

¹³²Klosko sees the *Republic* as the marriage of philosophy and power. Such a marriage, he claims, is effectively Plato's divorce from the less sophisticated moral psychology of Socrates. George Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, (London: Methuen, 1986), 174.

rejecting it, Plato is indicating that the stability of the ideal city is guaranteed only by popular convictions that are not coerced.

This Section is an examination of *Republic* I. I try to show in my analysis that we can see there how Plato carefully undermines the ideas that a community can be maintained through psychological manipulation or that it can be maintained through force. Book I presents interesting difficulties because of its structure with regard to the rest of the dialogue and because of the controversy surrounding some its arguments. Considering the extensive attention this portion of the dialogue has received, my aims are somewhat modest. I want to offer an interpretation of what the interlocutors represent and why it is important for Socrates to refute them. The dramatic context and the characters' roles within that context are important parts of my analysis. The main contention I will try to support is that the interlocutors in Book I present views that are fundamentally opposed to persuading members of a community to hold particular beliefs. To varying degrees, they represent or argue for compulsion-based forms of belief formation. Following again Jaeger's building metaphor, we can say that Book I describes the construction of moral identity from different angles. Socrates will reject all proposals made, indicating that those who construct a suitable psychology for the ideal city will have to employ different techniques. While space does not allow a detailed examination of Plato's techniques, I will make some brief comments about the remainder of the dialogue in the conclusion.

I divide Book I into four major sections and describe what I see as the main point of contention between Socrates and the other characters. The sections correspond to each person with whom Socrates debates: Polemarchus in the opening scene, Cephalus, Polemarchus again, and Thrasymachus. I discuss each in turn, but give Thrasymachus the more detailed examination that his importance in the dialogue demands. Indeed, it is the alternative that Thrasymachus offers which informs the remainder of the dialogue. Nevertheless, Thrasymachus is part of the logical progression in Book I. By the time he begins to speak, the possibility of abstract philosophical discussion has become apparent, a possibility that was conspicuously absent when the proceedings began. Socrates' criticisms, though, demonstrate that genuine philosophical discussion is still more abstract than any of the interlocutors initially imagine.

Thus, each interlocutor represents some kind of advance on those who came before. Polemarchus effectively begins the dialogue in the opening scene when he detains Socrates and Glaucon as they set off for Athens. This scene emphasises the distinction between force and persuasion. This observation is often made, but the significance of this brief exchange is easily overlooked. In examining both the verbal exchange and the dramatic setting, I try to show that the opening scene says something obvious about force, but also says something more subtle about the existence of compulsive authority within a political association. Those who threaten force and those who are threatened are not strangers. They begin the dialogue as members of some kind (or several kinds) of association and,

therefore, bonds exist between them. Plato has juxtaposed unity and compulsion. I try to show that, for Plato, this situation is typical of all but the ideal city.

This argument is followed by an analysis of Cephalus. Polemarchus is an obvious symbol of force. Cephalus, however, appears to be nothing but a harmless introduction to the dialogue's main theme. In this section I try to show that Cephalus is not a symbol of benign ignorance. He simply takes force to a different level -- something we could more accurately identify as psychological manipulation. His method is to prevent philosophical examination of moral principles by adhering to a kind of dogma, which he can only repeat but never analyse. The result is that he forsakes the heavy hand of physical force for the lighter touch of controlling the scope of discourse. The catechism on which he relies is as inimical to persuasion as the plain use of force.

Cephalus is replaced by Polemarchus, now given a chance to redeem himself somewhat. Cephalus may function in a way analogous to force, yet without the onerous face of violence. The reintroduced Polemarchus shows how this can be improved. The improvement, though, merely relocates the problem. I try to show in this section that Polemarchus attempts to salvage his father's dogma by making it more "dynamic". His attempt is reflected in his willingness to seek the more abstract meaning of the opinions Cephalus has offered. Socrates' criticisms of this position may be unextraordinary, but they do drive Polemarchus to seek a stable

ground for his beliefs. Polemarchus fails because he looks for stable grounding in something that is itself ungrounded.

This outcome informs Thrasymachus' intervention. I try to show that a political association modelled on his ideas represents a combination of the force and psychological manipulation we see with Polemarchus and Cephalus, respectively. In addition, he grounds his views more effectively than Polemarchus could during his second contribution to the debate.

This summarises my arguments about each person's function in Book I. Running through this is a further discussion of the implications regarding the construction of moral identity, the building of souls to which Jaeger refers. I try to show that each character relies to some degree on an element of compulsion that is ultimately antithetical to persuasion. It is important to note that Socrates is not the only character who is interested in the construction of souls, as Jaeger's comment implies. The conflict in Book I has to do with the way in which such construction is carried out. In concluding my analysis I will have something to say about what I take Plato to regard as genuine persuasion and the reason that the approaches he rejects fall short of the mark.

Political Foundation and Constitutions

I describe above what I take Plato to regard as the guarantor of political stability. While I believe the argument I plan to

construct can be applied to the entire dialogue, I concentrate here on Book I. It seems that no one any longer seriously doubts that Book I is integral to the rest of the text. My purpose here is to draw out certain themes in Book I that have been neglected and that, when stated, demonstrate the power of the opening Book in illustrating the complex challenge Socrates faces.¹³³ I will try to show that Book I moves us toward the act of founding a political association. It does so by showing the inadequacy of several attempts to describe the basis of such an association. Thus, Plato has constructed Book I to represent the dialogue's larger theme of establishing a new political entity based on stable, objective moral principles. The interlocutors' failed arguments lead to an investigation of what an association is founded upon.

It might be useful at this point to recall that the Greek title of the work, *Politeia*, captures a different emphasis than our own

¹³³As is well known, *Republic* I has not always been seen as integral to the larger work. Vlastos gives a useful commentary on the controversy surrounding this part of the *Republic* and seems to think that, regardless of the date of composition, Book I stands alone as "a sterling example of an Elenctic Dialogue." Vlastos (1991), 249. The controversy drew mainly on stylometric evidence, which, as Vlastos notes, has itself been inconclusive. He alludes to what I think is of central importance: the juxtaposition of an elenctic dialogue and a decidedly Platonic (non-elenctic) work. Since the break is so patent, it reduces the value of Book I as a tacked-on introduction and necessitates an explanation. The answer, I believe, has something to do with the utility of the elenchus in certain situations. Annas makes a point similar to Vlastos' noted above. She says that even if Book I was composed earlier than the rest of the dialogue, "it forms an entirely suitable introduction to the main discussion." Annas (1981), 17.

Republic.¹³⁴ Our title, deriving from the Latin “res publica”, refers to politics as a public thing. This can be a problematic interpretation. “Public” things can be opposed to “private” things on some readings (typically liberal), indicating that there is an aspect of the community that is technically not political in any way. In this sense Plato would be talking about the “public sphere” where people step out of their private lives to engage in some activity that affects all members of the community.¹³⁵ On this liberal interpretation, because Plato is assumed to be writing about the public realm, it is easy to claim that the just polis violates the public/private divide and, thus, sacrifices much (if not all) of what a liberal regards as human freedom.¹³⁶ The just polis’ authoritarianism is legendary. Plato takes the public into the private, it is claimed, thereby abolishing “negative liberty.”

¹³⁴It is, of course, practically necessary to adhere to the traditional title when referring to the text. Cf. Rex Martin, “The Ideal State in Plato’s *Republic*”, *History of Political Thought* 2 (1981) 1-30.

¹³⁵While certainly not a classical liberal, Hannah Arendt’s description of the classical polis not only makes the public private distinction, but treats the public realm as the only arena where one is fully human. See Arendt (1958).

¹³⁶Fortunately, for the history of political thought, it is no longer considered acceptable to claim that a past thinker was “wrong” as some sort of definitive conclusion. Karl Popper has probably taken the most celebrated shot at Plato and, in so doing, commits precisely this error. A more sensitive, while still Liberal reading can be found in Annas (1981). See Popper (1966). For some criticisms of the liberal interpretation of Plato see Nicholas Dent, “Moral Autonomy in the *Republic*”, *Polis* 9 (1990) 52-77; Laszlo G. Versenyi, “Plato and His Liberal Opponents”, *Philosophy* 46 (1971) 222-36; C.C.W. Taylor, “Plato’s Totalitarianism”, *Polis* 5 (1986) 4-29; Robert W. Hall, “Plato and Totalitarianism”, *Polis* 7 (1988) 105-14.

However, Socrates and the other members of the dialogue set out to found a polis and we should ask, if this liberal interpretation is the best way to understand what is happening. Is this a conception of the political that can inform our reading of Plato? Such an examination will reinforce my argument later concerning the relationship between popular moral beliefs, political institutions and political order. The first thing to do is to refer again to the title of the work and note that Plato did not make a reference to “public things”, but to the *politeia*, or constitution. In a modern sense, “constitution” usually defines the institutional structure of a given political association. This, however, is a thin understanding of the idea. We can say that the word is shorthand for what it is that *constitutes* the political association. In other words, the Greek title of the work is a reference to every aspect that lends a political association its particular character.

We can then enquire what it is that allows Plato to distinguish his new, just polis. The answer can certainly include the polis’ institutional structure, but it implies that beliefs, traditions, and self-understanding are also somehow important. That is, the constitution of a political association is the conglomeration of all that its members take themselves to be as members of the association. The constitution is effectively a self-identity *manifest* in institutions, which themselves promote the

acceptance of that identity by this and future generations.¹³⁷ In this sense it is practically coextensive with the idea of *nomos*. In effect, the institutions reflect who or what the members take themselves to be and, through their normal operation, the institutions inculcate a system of values and beliefs. An illustration of this point occurs later in the dialogue (543a ff.) where Socrates describes corrupt constitutions: timarchy, oligarchy, democracy, tyranny. He tells us there both about the institutional features of these regimes and the psychological make-up of those who live by their rules. The two are self-reinforcing; the institutions and the psychology feed off of one another. Furthermore, political change occurs when the correspondence between psyche and institutions is broken.

What we see taking place in the dialogue is the foundation of both an institutional structure and, more importantly, the self-belief that corresponds to, supports and is supported by that structure. The beliefs make the institutions that remake the belief in future generations.¹³⁸ Political foundation becomes the definitive moment of self-identification. The founder, or lawgiver, establishes what it means to be a member of this particular association. He gives to the members a way of

¹³⁷Throughout this paper I will use phrases such as self-belief, self-understanding, and self-definition as rough synonyms. By these I mean how the individual conceptualises who and what sort of agent he is.

¹³⁸Later I will discuss situations where self-belief becomes uncoupled from the institutions. As I say above, self-belief can change causing a breakdown in the correspondence between how people view themselves and the manner in which they live together in the political association.

talking about who they are and thereby the means of acting together with a shared understanding of themselves. In short, the founder gives content to the idea of “us”. He establishes the political association by giving to its members an identity, a language through which to express it and institutions in which to actualise it.

Foundation, as I have described it, seems to presuppose some prior situation that the new political entity supersedes.

Throughout this section I will refer to that situation as the “pre-political.” I should immediately make clear that this is not meant to imply what we would call a state of nature, such as those found in the works of Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau. Plato nowhere posits abstract, asocial individuals.¹³⁹ Viewed from Plato’s perspective there is one true political association: the just polis. All others are frauds. The pre-political refers to these false associations, each of which might mimic aspects of the just polis (may, in the short term, provide a plausible façade of order), but none of which ultimately rests on rationally argued moral principles inculcated in a way acceptable to Plato. Pre-political associations, I will try to show, rest on physical or psychological force. I will be treating pre-political associations as quasi-political, in Plato’s terms, but lacking the stable basis of the just polis. They imperfectly manifest a natural human sense of justice without exhibiting an understanding of what justice is. I want to show that other *poleis* are associations that actually institutionalise and refine a

¹³⁹Even Protagoras' "Great Speech" contains the trappings of social beings.

straightforward kind of physical force, turning it into a new form of compulsion that prevents the subject's mind from developing a grounding for his beliefs. Plato would see these *poleis* as unstable because they are based on indefensible principles.

The situation before political foundation, then, lacks critical defining aspects of a political association. There is no shared identity based on logically defensible principles or a complimentary language through which to express it, i.e., there is no way for individuals to describe coherently what their community is predicated upon. Members of pre-political associations may have a shared identity and language, but it is the lack of rational arguments to justify them that is crucial.

My aim is to reconstruct Book I as a story about the pre-political and the psychological foundation of a political association. I also want to try to show how the pre-political, and its emphasis on compulsion, is never fully abandoned until the foundation of the just polis. I identify four stages through which Socrates passes before Book II begins the actual journey to the foundation of the just polis. The first stage is brief and occurs in the opening scene of the dialogue. I describe this scene as the rule of force because we see most clearly there the use of force in an ostensibly deliberative context. Civic discourse becomes a fiction. The second stage, represented by Cephalus, is different in that there is something like genuine civic discourse. There is a mode of expression that does not fall back on the use of force to win support. This discourse I call

mytho-poetry because it originates in the popular literature used to educate and to provide moral and practical guidance. However, I will try to argue that mytho-poetic beliefs about the self, the language used to express them, and, thus, the foundation of the association itself become a kind of dogma that can only be repeated, not defended. I try to argue that dogmatism is itself a type of compulsion because it is impervious to reason or persuasion -- thereby undermining its status as genuine civic discourse. In addition, I begin to show in this part the risks inherent in disconnecting belief and institutions.

The third stage sees Polemarchus re-enter the dialogue as the heir to Cephalus' argument. I claim that he tries to establish what amounts to a "dynamic" dogmatism that can be more than mere assertion and something approaching true civic discourse. If successful, it would also provide a stable ground for the political association, since the mytho-poetry that Polemarchus inherits *can* function as the basis of civic discourse under certain circumstances. However, these circumstances are fragile, relying on unquestioned and unreflective adherence to mytho-poetry as an authoritative source of wisdom. Thus, he tries to ground the mytho-poetic inheritance and definitively break with the pre-political. His failure indicates that the pre-political cannot be reconstituted into something more benign. If dogma is somehow an expression of force, then its presence confirms that compulsion is effectively incorporated into the political association. The final stage of Book I is Thrasymachus' intervention. Polemarchus' failure, I claim, invites sceptical

rejection of the mytho-poetic inheritance. This sceptical rejection reflects the way in which the mytho-poetic inheritance operates in argument, underscoring my claim that it reduces to unquestioned dogma. However, scepticism does not clearly establish what could replace the beliefs it rejects. Thrasymachus' argument is an attempt to revert to force, which he sees as an empirically defensible understanding of how any political association operates. My argument is that when the existing mode of civic discourse, the mytho-poetic inheritance, is shown to be both inadequate in itself and indefensible, the most obvious route to take is back to an association ruled by strength, not convictions shared by the members. In other words, when the bond provided by mythopoetry is shown to be merely a convention, it becomes easy to assume that there is no natural bond, or natural mode of bonding, between members of the association. Nevertheless, I argue that Thrasymachus represents an advance by emphasising the role of belief formation in a political association.

The foundation of the just polis will set out to do a number of things related to these four stages. It will first be an attempt to find a stable mode of civic discourse that can function as the mytho-poetic inheritance once did.¹⁴⁰ Second, it will establish a necessary bond between the members of an association by showing that the association is a constituent of human

¹⁴⁰The function I see as grounding the association and as providing a vehicle for communicating group identity to this and future generations.

flourishing.¹⁴¹ Finally, in accomplishing these things, the just polis will be the definitive rejection of force in either its pre-political form or in the pseudo-rationalised Thrasymachan form. Thus, each character whom Socrates confronts in Book I stands for an obstacle that must be overcome in founding the just polis. Thrasymachus, in particular, becomes the Socratic nemesis because he represents a superficially plausible alternative that can realistically compete with the foundation of the just polis.

My discussion of Book I is divided into the four stages that I describe above, which I call the rule of force, the rule of dogma, the mytho-poetic inheritance, and the flight from association.

The Rule of Force

The opening scene starkly presents the conflict between persuasion and force. This brief exchange between Socrates, Glaucon, and Polemarchus lasts just one page, but gives several important clues about the rest of Book I. Perhaps the first

¹⁴¹This is the significance of Socrates' desire to prove that the just man is happier than the unjust. Rather than talking in terms of happiness, however, I prefer to use the idea of flourishing, which, I think, better captures the idea of living and doing well. Richard Kraut discusses the importance Plato attaches to happiness, rather than rewards, in defending justice over injustice. Richard Kraut, "The Defence of Justice in Plato's *Republic*," in Richard Kraut, ed. (1992). See also Cooper (1977) 151-7; Rudolph H. Weingartner, "Vulgar Justice and Platonic Justice", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 25 (1964) 248-52; Jerome Schiller, "Just Men and Just Acts", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968) 1-13.

thing we should note is the opening line. I said earlier that the *Republic* is a story and that we should ask what happens in that story. The reason I call it a story is because Socrates is relating to an unnamed companion an event that occurred the day before. While the event is in the past, however, it is not in the distant past. Thus, it is remembered and retold by someone who was actually present. Socrates' story, then, is not secondhand information, but is a genuine account of something that happened to him. The interesting aspect is that this opening is found in a dialogue that will have much to say about myths and poetry. Socrates may be indicating that an account is itself a kind of story and that there should not be a firm line between *muthos* and *logos*.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, the main concern of the opening scene is to give us a description of the conflict that Plato finds inherent in the pre-political. Polemarchus has seen Socrates and Glaucon ahead of him on the road to Athens and has sent his slave on to get them to wait. When he catches up, he tells them that either they must prove themselves stronger than Polemarchus and those who are with him or return to the Piraeus with them (where Socrates and Glaucon had been attending the festival of Bendis). Socrates asks if they can be persuaded rather than forced and Polemarchus famously retorts that men who will not listen cannot be persuaded (327c). The emphasis on force

¹⁴²For useful discussions of this and related topics see Janet E. Smith, "Plato's Myths as 'Likely Accounts', Worthy of Belief", *Apeiron* 19 (1985) 24-42; Janet E. Smith, "Plato's Use of Myth in the Education of Philosophic Man", *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 20-34.

is obvious and it has not escaped the attention of commentators that this scene is more than stage-setting. Klosko finds here intimations of the need for a philosopher-king. He argues that this opening scene demonstrates Plato's rejection of the idea that rational persuasion alone is sufficient for political reform. He claims that we begin to see how Plato appreciated the need to join philosophy with political power in order to bring political change about.¹⁴³ Similarly, Sesonske sees a conflict between persuasion and force that makes the philosopher's position untenable: "Superior strength, if exerted, will prevail....Persuasion, or reason, can be effective only if all parties are reasonable, or agree to listen to reason."¹⁴⁴

Finally, Bloom's interpretation discovers in this scene the irresolvable conflict between philosophy and politics: "As in the *Apology* the city compels Socrates to speak and defend himself, so in the *Republic* a group of men compels Socrates to remain with them and finally give an account of himself. Apparently he does not wish to do so...but these men who accost him have power, and Socrates must adjust to them....He will only give as much of himself as is required to regain his freedom. This situation is a paradigm of the relation of the philosopher to the

¹⁴³Klosko (1986), 52. Klosko's interpretation is driven by his belief that Plato was concerned primarily with political reform and that the just polis outlined in the *Republic* is not intended as an unrealisable utopia.

¹⁴⁴Alexander Sesonske, "Plato's *Apology*: *Republic* I" in *Plato's Republic: Interpretation and Criticism* (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1966), 44-5.

city."¹⁴⁵ Klosko and Bloom appear to offer an interpretation of Plato's intended meaning that is decidedly un-Platonic. Both see political power as ultimately the power to compel. For Klosko, the philosopher-king forces men to be virtuous. For Bloom, the power to compel has no relation to the philosopher *qua* philosopher. Both ignore the possibility that Plato is trying to find a mode of political activity that precludes compulsion and that, at some level, persuades each person to accept the rule of the philosopher. At issue is the function and operation of persuasion.

For some commentators, however, the exchange with Polemarchus is either treated lightly or largely ignored. The opening scene is just the necessary dramatic vehicle to transport Socrates back to Polemarchus' house. Annas, for example, notes that Glaucon and Socrates are "jokingly forced"

¹⁴⁵ Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 310. Bloom, of course, is offering a well known Straussian interpretation that reads the just polis as a safe haven for philosophers in order to combat as much as possible the continuous threat that politics poses to philosophy. A highly unusual interpretation coming from, as I see it, a similar direction is that of John Sallis. His peculiar interpretation sees the *Republic* as the enactment of the descent into Hades described in the Myth of Er. Book I begins the descent with Socrates' failed ascent from the Piraeus -- failed because Polemarchus, as a shade, compels him to stay. I have some sympathy with this sort of attention to the dramatic action and language used in the dialogue, but it comes close to over-burdening every line with deep significance (the Straussian "logographic necessity") -- without giving us textual evidence that the significance is there. John Sallis, *Being and Logos: The Way of Platonic Dialogue* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1975).

back to the Piraeus and then moves on to discuss Cephalus.¹⁴⁶ This is certainly one of its functions (along with the importance of illustrating an obvious logical conflict between force and persuasion). There is, however, more than this. We need to examine why force should immediately make an appearance in the dialogue when the purpose of the coming discussion is to found a just polis. Even if one argued that the dialogue is not about politics at all, but about justice in the human soul, the abrupt introduction of force is incongruous.

We should begin by noting some dramatic details that make the conflict significant. First, the confrontation takes place on the road between the two main urban regions of Attica: Athens and the Piraeus. In other words, the meeting happens beyond any human settlements, a symbol of communal membership. Furthermore, we can find some significance in the two urban centres themselves. On the one hand, Athens represents the seat of government, of political association itself. On the other hand, the Piraeus, a port town and Athens' economic lifeline, represents commerce and merchant interests. Furthermore, the importance of the Piraeus in the restoration of democracy in 403 makes the venue interesting from the perspective of

¹⁴⁶Annas (1981), 18. Cross and Woozley are anxious to evaluate the central philosophical doctrines of Book I and, thus, ignore the opening exchange, take a cursory glance at Cephalus, and begin to discuss Polemarchus' claim about justice. R.C. Cross and A.D. Woozley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (London: MacMillan, 1964), 2-3. Except for his greater attention to Cephalus, shared with Annas, Reeve mirrors this approach. C.D.C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Plato's psychology. In being compelled to return to the centre of Athenian democratic sentiments, Socrates is returning to the rule of the appetites, which accords with his characterisation of democracy at 555b ff. Thus, the Piraeus has political and commercial significance from the perspective of the dialogue itself. It might appear, then, that Socrates is being dragged *away from* politics and back toward the narrow self-interests of commerce. However, the power of this dramatic detail lies in the choice of directions. Socrates can return to Athens where he engages in his characteristic philosophical activity. Or he can engage with the democrats, represented by the Piraeus itself. Polemarchus' statement that a good conversation is in store with the young men who will gather at his house indicates that the Socratic mode of rational argumentation need not be abandoned if one returns to the Piraeus. Socrates is not being called back to rule, but to participate. His return to the Piraeus, given its symbolic significance, is a statement about the possibility of political reform.

Finally, we should note the actual characters themselves. Polemarchus we know came to a violent death himself during the oligarchic revolt of 404. His threat of force is at least a little ironic. However, this same man who declares that those who will not listen cannot be persuaded is brother to one who is to become one of the most accomplished rhetoricians in Athens. Lysias, who is present at Polemarchus' house, does not speak in the dialogue.¹⁴⁷ However, just as there is a

¹⁴⁷ Lysias' first speech, "Against Eratosthenes", was his attempt to prosecute his brother's murderer.

relationship between the brothers, we will see later that there is a relationship between certain kinds of speech and force. Another set of brothers also becomes significant. Socrates, who wishes to persuade, is accompanied by Glaucon. Polemarchus, who wishes to force, is accompanied by Glaucon's brother, Adeimantus. Politics may provide a communal framework for human interaction, but the basic unit of human association is familial. The force that is threatened is simultaneously a threat to pit brother against brother and, thus, to subvert a fundamental natural bond. It is the natural harmony of the familial relationship that informs the institutions of the *just polis*. Nevertheless, the opening scene emphasises the inherent conflicts present in the pre-political, which violate natural harmony.

Now Polemarchus' threat *is* entirely playful; we have no reason to believe that he would actually harm Socrates and Glaucon (and we cannot reasonably expect that Adeimantus would harm his own brother. Cf. 362d). We are firmly in the pre-political, but dramatically there is some basic connection between the parties to the exchange, which they recognise and accept. This is not the *absence* of society. The community, membership in a community, is natural and Socrates will be extrapolating from this natural unity in constructing the *just polis*. We cannot understand the scene unless we already understand what is missing from it, namely the association that is implicitly indicated by the fraternal relations. Plato is trying to bring out the conflict embedded within all imperfect manifestations of the one true political association.

The playfulness also implies the sense of community. We could not treat as human a character that was entirely divorced from any kind of association. It is the juxtaposition of playfulness, friendship and brotherhood, and the threat of force that establishes both the possibility of association and the possibility of disharmony. The playfulness is especially important because the conflict between Polemarchus and Socrates is subsumed, but not eliminated, by the lack of seriousness. The playfulness masks the fact that there *is* a conflict, leading us to see the exchange as cheerful banter before the real philosophical work begins. Because we know that there are conventional bonds that cross between the two groups of men (friendship, citizenship, brotherhood), we can see how these apparently overriding concerns can mask fundamental conflicts and antagonisms.¹⁴⁸ The image Socrates starts constructing at 588c of the animal that is part man, part "varied and many-headed" beast, and part lion illustrates the point. The observer cannot see these parts because they are encased in a human "shell".¹⁴⁹ If the parts are in conflict, the exterior casing keeps it out of sight. Similarly, when Socrates describes the forms of corrupt constitutions his emphasis is on the internal strife inherent in each. We can note particularly democracy (562 ff.). While the democratic city is

¹⁴⁸Polemarchus, of course, is not a citizen of Athens, but he is bound to Socrates as a friend.

¹⁴⁹Cf. the *Phaedrus* chariot/soul myth. The movement of the chariot is the outcome of an internal struggle between the pilot and the "good" horse on one side, and the "appetitive" horse on the other. This is discussed in Section Four.

institutionally united, the subversion of “natural” bonds (father-son, alien-foreigner, teacher-student, slave-freeman) denies the façade of unity (562e-563b). In the pre-political, force is never entirely eliminated; it merely changes its face.

The playfulness is double-edged. It highlights the camaraderie of association, but it also masks the conflict that is present. The familial relations function differently. Fraternal bonds are based on the unity of origins, indicating sameness through blood relations. To harm a brother is to harm that which is one's own. It becomes the basis that allows the playfulness to “work” because it assumes a shared understanding, allowing one to distinguish threat from harmless teasing. Similarly, persuasion indicates a kind of sameness. It indicates similar values and a shared language. The possibility of interpersonal communication arises from this sharing. Civic discourse itself presupposes a civil bond that has its basis in associated living.

Thus, we see in this opening scene a “two-tiered” pre-political association. At the higher level all the parties in the opening exchange are united through the veneer of camaraderie that gives the scene its playful tone. At the lower level we see that this camaraderie is betrayed by conflict. Central to this conflict is the idea of difference masked by sameness. The pre-political association is stratified within itself, though it appears from the outside simply as a unitary, “flat” association. This stratification produces a tendency to “fictionalise” members. Socrates' position that the just city must share in pleasures and pains, just as the whole body suffers when one part is injured

(464b), is a response to this. The exterior of the association must hide nothing about the internal composition of the whole. In other words, the façade of unity must be a reflection of the reality below.

In summary, the opening scene is a brief synopsis of the problem that Socrates faces in the rest of the dialogue. But it is not merely, as many have pointed out, that the man who uses words will always succumb to the man who uses might. Rather, the situation is that the exercise of might can be hidden beneath a smooth façade of words. Polemarchus' threat, both as threat and as playfulness, shows us the coexistence of unity and disunity, and, thus, instability, in the pre-political association.

The Rule of Dogma

As should be clear, the opening lines of the dialogue are crucial to what follows. We are shown men in a community that is based simply on the superior ability of one member to control the others. However, the main difficulty to untangle is the encounter with Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. In characterising Book I as a story about pre-political associations, we need to discern the degree of sophistication such associations allow -- how their status as pre-political associations may be obscured. The rule of force, in its most obvious manifestation, is not purely about force as, say, the Hobbesian state of war. Plato shows us a scene that tells us something about force in order to illustrate the fundamental

incoherence of all pre-political associations. In other words, remove the exterior “playfulness”, i.e., camaraderie, and one will discover simply power.¹⁵⁰

There is an interesting parallel between Book I and the *Gorgias*. In the latter, as I discussed in that section, Socrates confronts three interlocutors who form a progression in argument. Gorgias defends the power of persuasive speech and conventional morality, Polus represents a transition that draws on Gorgias while foreshadowing Callicles, and Callicles defends the power of superior force. In Book I, Socrates also confronts three interlocutors who offer something similar. Cephalus will defend the sort of conventionalism that I associated with Gorgias. Polemarchus will be a somewhat ambiguous transitional figure, like Polus. Thrasymachus will mimic Callicles’ attempted replacement of conventional morality.¹⁵¹ In addition, we can see a similarity in that in both dialogues we find a Platonic concern with the use of language and the manipulation of shared symbols.

¹⁵⁰Implicit in Klosko’s analysis is that even the just polis ultimately rests on power. Annas, as well, in more condemnatory fashion, sees compulsion as the primary means of holding the Platonic enterprise together. Klosko (1986), especially 79.

¹⁵¹Callicles and Thrasymachus may function in similar ways within their respective dialogues, but they may not necessarily have identical ideas. Thrasymachus offers a somewhat sophisticated sociological analysis. Callicles, from the start, more directly addresses how best to live one’s life. In terms of the *nomos-physis* antithesis, Thrasymachus, at least at the beginning, is offering a description of what is “naturally” so. Callicles immediately begins by defending *physis* as providing moral guidance.

The latter in particular is significant in the encounter with Cephalus. Polemarchus' father as shown here is much older than Socrates and, therefore, the remark that he is at the "threshold" of old age (328e) is clearly a reference to Cephalus' impending death. He is a fairly transparent character. He has virtually no philosophical skills, yet he maintains that at his time of life "philosophy", in the sense of intelligent or serious conversation, is a pleasing pastime (328d). This reminds us of Socrates' characterisation of democratic man, who is constantly in pursuit of some new desire and even occasionally puts his mind to what he thinks is philosophy (561c-d). As Cephalus says, when the pull of more physical desires is weakened by age (or when the ability to gratify those desires is lost through age) the tug of more cerebral pursuits becomes stronger. What will become apparent, though, is that these latter pursuits reduce to the recitation of a kind of catechism. What I will try to show in this section is that Cephalus' moral complacency¹⁵² is not simply a demonstration of his lack of philosophical sophistication. The key point is the object of his complacency and how this is actualised in speech and action. We need, then, to examine the political significance of Cephalus' speech.

¹⁵²Moral complacency is the traditional charge made against Cephalus. See especially Annas (1981), 19. On the one hand we want to praise Socrates for exposing the unreflective manner with which certain beliefs are held, and for criticising this lack of reflection. On the other hand, we cannot let ourselves forget that the majority of those who will reside in the just polis are at least as complacent as Cephalus. Plato has no reason for an instinctive distrust of complacency as such, so long as the right sort of person is *not* complacent. The important difference, as I say, is the object of the majority's complacency.

Socrates begins the discussion by asking if old age is a difficult burden to bear. The charge that Cephalus is morally complacent stems largely from his age, I believe. He is portrayed as a man gently gliding through “retirement” on his way to a peaceful death. He has lived a life free from the sort of vice Socrates will later condemn and clearly has no regrets (and a fair amount of self-satisfaction).¹⁵³ The charge is a statement about both age and attitude. Cephalus first says that many of his acquaintances long for their youth. When they were young, goes the complaint, they had revelry, drink, feasts, sex, and so on -- all the things of which old age has deprived them.

Cephalus does not experience this sense of longing and ennui himself. He is reminded of something Sophocles once said about how old age meant freedom from the tyrannical rule of his passions and that he welcomed his old age as a time of

¹⁵³Reeve sees in Cephalus an important point related to the efficacy of the elenchus. He says that “ the elenctically examined life is not guaranteed to be any better or more virtuous than the life of a traditionally brought up gentleman of means.” Thus, the elenchus is not appropriate for Cephalus and this is why, Reeve claims, Plato has him depart so early. There is some merit in this interpretation, but I will try to show that it is more complex than this. Reeve (1988), 7., Annas’ reading is more sensitive to the historical period, I think. She says, “Plato was writing for an audience that knew that the security based on wealth which Cephalus had spent his life building up, and which is so much stressed here, was wholly illusory....” Annas (1981), 18. She notes that the family was ruined during the rule of the Thirty, Polemarchus was put to death and Lysias (hardly mentioned in this dialogue, but present) was exiled.

peace. The lesson Cephalus derives from this is that a man who is immoderate will find both youth and old age unbearable. If a man lives temperately, his old age will not be a burden. In other words, the problem is not that sex, drink, and parties are bad, but that living a life dedicated to such pleasures is a certain recipe for an unhappy old age. An intemperate youth will inevitably miss the opportunity and ability to be intemperate as he grows older. Cephalus' self-satisfaction is a product of his belief that he has lived a life of moderation.

Socrates goes on to raise a likely objection to what Cephalus has just said. Some would claim that it is not his lifestyle, but his wealth that allows Cephalus to bear old age gracefully. In typical fashion for Cephalus, he does not respond to this criticism directly with an argument, but finds another story that provides a convenient analogy: "When someone from Seriphus insulted [Themistocles] by saying that his high reputation was due to his city and not to himself, he replied that, had he been a Seropian, he wouldn't be famous, but neither would the other even if he had been an Athenian" (329e-330a). Cephalus draws from this the conclusion that poverty makes old age hard even for a good man, but wealth will not lessen the bad man's burden.

Socrates continues with the subject of wealth and asks Cephalus whether he made or inherited his fortune. Cephalus recounts how he is somewhere between his father and grandfather in this regard. His grandfather left to his heir roughly the amount that Cephalus has now, his father

diminished it to less than Cephalus' current fortune, and Cephalus built it back up to its current level (330b). Socrates says that Cephalus does not seem overly fond of money and this prompted his question (330c). Usually people who have inherited a great fortune are less money-loving than those who have created a fortune. Those who make themselves rich, on the other hand, love their money as something that they have made themselves. They identify with it as a result of their own efforts. As a result, they cannot say anything good unless it is about money.

Since Cephalus does not value money for its own sake, Socrates asks what is the greatest good that he has acquired from his wealth. Cephalus responds by noting that as one gets older all those stories about the afterlife become somewhat more plausible (or, at least, not so safe to disregard). He concludes by saying that the greatest benefit of wealth is that it allows us to make sacrifices to the gods, to appease them for any wrongdoing we may have committed, and allows us to pay back any debts we owe to men -- and that this is just (331b).

Moral complacency, indeed. Cephalus has discussed four topics with Socrates (the quality of life in old age, the value of temperate living , the source of his own wealth, and the benefits of riches). In each case, he has included in his account some story meant to illustrate a greater truth. Sophocles' remark shows that old age is not necessarily hard to bear; the story of Themistocles shows that wealth will not by itself bring peace to a man; the story of his inheritance is meant to

illustrate his own moderation; and the quotation from Pindar at 331a is meant to illustrate the peace of mind that wealth provides. His final remark about the prudence of believing the stories about the afterlife is simply an endorsement of his own mode of argumentation. More than just being morally complacent, Cephalus as a character illustrates the prevalent use of allegorical stories to convey a moral truth. Should we criticise Cephalus for his complacency? His views, after all, are not onerous to Socrates, who also thinks that we will be happier if we live a temperate life and that moderation is something we should strive for and that how we bear our circumstances depends in large measure on the type of character we have.

Cephalus functions in several ways in this section of the dialogue. First, we should bear in mind the importance in Greek education of the sorts of stories on which he draws. The poets especially provided the “textbooks” for Greek cultural values and the transmission of these values was through the memorisation of their works. While Cephalus is more inclined to use anecdotes than specific works of poetry to state his views, this is itself significant. Anecdotal evidence presupposes the existence of a shared moral framework which gives the anecdote its force. In other words, for anecdotal evidence to work it must be interpreted correctly by those who hear it because an anecdote leaves unstated the conclusion it is meant to prove. Cephalus relates stories that he knows will be meaningful to Socrates (and the others).

More importantly, and following on the first point, is the importance of the *repeating* of these stories. Cephalus has such a ready supply of anecdotal evidence that we can guess he has been reciting the same stories for some time (possibly when talking to his friends who miss the pleasures of youth). What conveniently functions as evidence when answering Socrates is simply dogma. It is not that Cephalus has a coherent set of beliefs that he *illustrates* with these anecdotes, but that these anecdotes *are* his beliefs. Their importance is almost reduced to their literal value as a collection of words and phrases. Cephalus can repeat the stories, but cannot defend their meaning. He fails to defend himself from Socrates' scrutinising questions because all dogma is impervious to cross-examination. Cephalus' stories do contain an allegorical meaning for him, but, first, he cannot articulate this cogently and, second, he collapses when his adherence to the literal word is exposed. Thus, when Socrates counters that returning what is owed to a madman who loaned us weapons is not just, Cephalus has to move away from the assumed shared understanding that allows him to cling to the literal story. But his need to move away psychologically is unrealisable because he lacks the intellectual power to argue more abstractly. The result is that he does move away, but away from the challenge -- he leaves the room.

Another aspect of this exchange we should note is what has been accomplished in driving Cephalus away from the discussion. As I have said, the anecdotes he delivers are hardly representative of something he believes, but are his

actual beliefs; he cannot articulate what they mean. When meaning becomes so self-evident to the person holding the beliefs, the anecdotal evidence becomes dogma. Once it becomes dogma it also becomes impervious to criticism, discussion, and analysis. Earlier I said that in the pre-political, regardless of the external appearance of unified association, what lies beneath is simply force. Dogma is simply force through language. It functions similarly to compulsion. Just as force is beyond reasoning, dogma is beyond rational defence. And, ultimately, a dogmatist cannot reside where belief is subject to critical scrutiny, hence Cephalus' departure. The time and place in which his dogma is appropriate are gone, and without the willingness or ability to force his case, the dogmatist must exit.

Yet Cephalus' dogma has a more complex role. Force is merely instrumental. A person exercises force in order to achieve something that he values, and at some level recognises as his value. The value is, therefore, necessary to establish the idea of his having an intention in acting forcefully (as opposed to an irrational striking out against another person). However, dogma expresses a value or system of values. Cephalus is making an assertion about what he believes. But this dogmatic assertion behaves just as force does; it allows for no enquiry or investigation or dissent. Like force it systematically excludes alternatives.

Thus, Cephalus' self-belief, his understanding of himself as a moral agent, is wrapped up in his dogmatic assertions; but the

very dogmatism he adheres to links him to the display of force we saw in the opening scene. It is important to recognise, though, that it is the way the belief is held and expressed, and not the actual content of belief that is identical to the rule of force. After all, Cephalus' moral beliefs actually point towards the ethical life Socrates will later defend. Dogma represents an improvement on the straightforward use of force and clarifies the implicit bonds between men we saw in the opening scene. The political superiority of dogma rests on its suitability as a shared language that conveys between the members of the association what they believe as members. It expresses who they are. Moreover, Cephalus' dogmatism is a transmittable language -- it can be taught to future generations. In this regard, too, it is at a higher stage than the rule of force itself. Dogmatic beliefs appear in the institutions that contribute to the self-formation of future generations. Thus, we see that Cephalus has memorised various stories that he can now use, not merely to assist him in understanding and expressing himself, but in ensuring that his sons come to understand themselves in the same way.

Given that the security of wealth was shown to be unstable just a few years later for Cephalus' heirs, we can go on to say that the security of a particular dogma can prove equally unstable. If the certainty of the dogmatist can be challenged, the system has already fallen. That is, the way in which Cephalus holds beliefs about himself is only appropriate to a particular time and place: an age of widespread dogmatic belief. Even if his beliefs must compete with other dogmas, i.e., in the event of

some ideological struggle, each system can be defended in the same way. The “rules of engagement” are dictated by the nature of dogmatism and these rules are that opposing dogmas live and die according to the power available to defend them. Dogmatic adversaries agree to disagree or simply fight. Thus, the sword defends the word, rather than the word defending itself through argumentation.

This has significance beyond Cephalus’ section. Socrates’ challenge about the nature of justice indicates that the rules of engagement have changed. Cephalus’ departure from the room is a concession that he cannot adapt himself to these new rules. If argumentation meant finding new ways to express the same dogma, he could carry on with the discussion. Socrates, however, demands more than that. Socrates represents a mode of interpersonal communication that is not merely the manipulation and rearrangement of familiar and accepted symbols. This, he will say later, is the plight of those who are chained in the cave. The symbols manipulated are shadows on the wall in front of them. Because they can only talk about what they see, their language is reduced to a vocalised manipulation of the same symbols (515b). Thus, when confronted by Socrates, Cephalus cannot do what he would normally do as a dogmatist, i.e., re-assert his position until the other party acquiesces. As Reeve says, Cephalus is an inappropriate subject for the elenchus, but for reasons other than Cephalus’ already moral life.¹⁵⁴ His dogma has become his

¹⁵⁴Reeve (1988), 7. Reeve’s position on Book I is that Plato is trying to show the inadequacy of the Socratic method. Cephalus raises the

self-identity and in order to discuss his belief abstractly he would simultaneously have to see himself abstractly. He would have to see himself as other, which itself presupposes freedom from dogma.

In summary, we can read Cephalus as a progression from the rule of force that I identify in the opening scene. He has a set of beliefs that are coextensive with his belief about himself as a moral agent. His only way of expressing these beliefs, and thus of expressing himself, is through assertion. This, I claim, is identical in character and function to the direct use of force that Polemarchus playfully threatens. What I am calling the rule of dogma is the rule of force with a shared language that the opening scene only implies. In this sense, dogma attempts to describe what is of value in an objective sense, rather than in a personal sense. In other words, Cephalus dogmatically holds beliefs about what is of value when considering how one should live his life. Cephalus, then, offers us a way of talking about the human self that Polemarchus initially cannot match.

The Mytho-Poetic Inheritance

Cephalus leaves the room when it becomes clear that he cannot defend himself against Socrates' examination.¹⁵⁵ His departure is also interesting in the respect that, had he stayed, he would have ultimately been humiliated by the cross-examination. His

problem of why Socrates should cross-examine those who already live properly.

¹⁵⁵It is actually his departure itself that makes this clear.

humiliation would have implicitly been a loss of face, a reduction of his personal worth and self-respect, since his dogma represents an absolute certainty in his own beliefs. Had he been so humiliated, though, he would have necessarily changed his perception of himself and this would mean acquiring a more abstract understanding of himself. Because he cannot win he must leave. The immediate event that gives him an opportunity to leave is Polemarchus' rush to his defence. When the former insists that his father is correct about what is just, Cephalus retreats to finish the sacrifice (331d). Clearly, this is just a convenient excuse, since he appears to have just finished the sacrifice when the party arrived (328c).¹⁵⁶ On leaving, Cephalus leaves the argument to Polemarchus, who, as the eldest son is also the heir to Cephalus' estate. There is a hint of doom in this exchange, since Polemarchus was later killed by the Tyrants.

But the doom is relevant to the entire world in which Cephalus has lived his life. The security of wealth may be unstable, but as I say above, the security of dogma is equally unsound. The security of belief, certainty about what is true, that underpinned Athens was soon to be shattered by the most devastating conflict prior to the dissolution of the democracy in 332. Polemarchus inherits this dogma that is his father's self-belief and with it, as we shall see, the instability. Cephalus has

¹⁵⁶In his note to this passage Waterfield makes the, apparently unsupported, claim that Cephalus "was probably a priest with a role to play in the day's proceedings". I am not aware of any evidence for this. Robin Waterfield, *Plato: Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 381.

been successful in reproducing himself in his son. But his success is not complete. In this section, I want to look at what I will call the mytho-poetic inheritance. The phrase is meant to emphasise the dogma we see in Cephalus as a specifically transmitted artefact. In doing so I hope to show that the foundation of a stable political association must include stability over time and this necessitates the stability of the members' psychological make-up. We need in this section to discover the cause of psychic instability, which will lead us to the instability of what has been transmitted from previous generations.

We should note, first, how Polemarchus functions in this part of Book I. Cephalus has described himself as somewhere between his father and grandfather. The latter earned great wealth, the former lost a significant portion of it, and Cephalus has recouped a certain amount of the loss. There is a parallel here between Cephalus' father and grandfather and Cephalus and his heir. Like his father, Cephalus has inherited something that, at its appropriate time, was of great value. Not only is that time now past, but what was a living belief for his ancestors is dogma for Cephalus. What he loses is the persuasive force and credibility that his beliefs had because he is not capable of defending them appropriately. It is not so much that he has actually lost something; the currency has merely been debased. The ancestors who put their beliefs into the mytho-poetic framework that Cephalus reduces to dogma held that framework to be an expression of what they had no other means of articulating. But the belief was in something

beyond the specific articulation. The use of allegorical stories serves to express the inexpressible. When Cephalus gets hold of it, the inexpressible disappears altogether to be replaced by the literal interpretation of the allegorical stories. The meaning is hardly intimated. The time may still be right for his particular beliefs, but the time has passed for the way in which they are held. This is why Cephalus is shown as collapsing under a fairly unsophisticated challenge from Socrates. The latter merely gives a likely example of a situation where Cephalus' views of justice would be inappropriate. Argument must take the place of dogma because, when allegory becomes dogma, it obscures what it originally set out to explain.

Like Cephalus, Polemarchus will take his father's inheritance and try to rebuild what has been lost. He seems to have an intuitive sense that *what* his father believes is not the core of the problem, but the way in which he holds the beliefs. We will see in Polemarchus a new interest in engaging in debate over beliefs. In this regard, Polemarchus is like his father who worked to rebuild what his own father had lost. Overall, we can see a progression in Book I away from force and towards an awareness of the need for rational argumentation. When I turn to examine Thrasymachus in the next section, I will try to show how this progression gets twisted and turned back on itself. For now, though, we need to look at Polemarchus and what he does with the mytho-poetic inheritance.

Before discussing this inheritance I want to go through Polemarchus' section in Book I to see why Socrates rejects the

views that grow out of the quotation from Simonides. Then I will turn to examine why this section is included between Cephalus and Thrasymachus.

The discussion with Polemarchus reminds us of the dangers of reducing allegory to dogma. As I said, the stories we have heard are supposed to be meaningful. Simonides is employed as a theorist of justice, but Socrates says that he does not know what Simonides means by the idea of giving what is owed (331e). If the stories are meaningful, one cannot assume that the meaning is self-evident. He concludes that Simonides was speaking in riddles because what he meant was that one should help friends and harm enemies, but he couched this in the language of paying what is owed. The point of this introductory clarification of Polemarchus' position is to revive the allegorical content of the beliefs Cephalus has passed on to his son. Giving what is owed, then, becomes a way of talking about appropriateness or desert (332b). But this understanding of desert assumes or fails to explain what its recipient should receive, i.e., it leaves unexplained the objective human needs of the Platonic system.

To show the emptiness of Simonides' words, Socrates introduces the craft analogy.¹⁵⁷ Medicine is the craft that

¹⁵⁷It is important to note that the craft analogy used at this point is strictly an analogy with *technical* crafts. This sort of analogy will resurface in the discussion with Thrasymachus with the implicit warning that technical crafts are subject to misuse by the unscrupulous practitioner (see below). Reeve tells us that this warning is intentional, which he sees as the reason that the craft analogy is not used again

treats the body. Cookery is the craft that seasons food to taste. Justice becomes the craft that helps friends and harms enemies. So, doctors are useful to the sick, a ship's captain is useful for ensuring safety at sea, and justice, to follow the analogy, must have a sphere of activity in which it is uniquely useful. Polemarchus says that justice is useful in wars and alliances. Socrates has not yet attempted to show that Polemarchus is looking for justice in behaviour and ignoring character. Instead, he has taken the specific defence that Polemarchus offers and works out its inconsistencies.

The emphasis that Polemarchus places on behaviour over character is the crux of the weakness in his argument. But the weakness does not stem simply from some inherent superiority in thinking about justice as an internal disposition. It stems, rather, from the failure of Polemarchus' account to explain adequately the motivation for acting in the manner that he thinks is just. Polemarchus starts from a pre-given set of conditions that determine how one should act. Thus, one should help friends and harm enemies and the content of these two categories is taken for granted. We simply have duties towards particular sorts of people, but we cannot say anything more about these people than that they exist as categories of persons. Within the context of political foundation, Polemarchus neglects the psychology of membership and apparently assumes the prior existence of a stable community where agreement is already present.

throughout the work. Reeve (1988), 19. I discuss the craft-analogy in Section One.

The possibility of being mistaken about who are our friends (334b-c) directs us to examine the role of knowledge in establishing the content of our duties toward others. Because knowledge is a question about a person's internal condition, looking at the role of knowledge in defining duties is also related to the issue of motivation. Both are essentially about the connection between an individual's cognitive state and the world in which he acts. On Polemarchus' account all just behaviour is successful actualisation of intentions (we help our friends who are really our friends and harm enemies who are really enemies), but we cannot ask how these intentions come about or at whom they should be directed.

Comparisons can be made with Polemarchus' initial appearance in the dialogue. My argument about the rule of force maintains that force is instrumental in achieving a pre-existing desire which, indeed, makes sense of the force employed. This places the desire beyond the reach of analysis and argumentation. Now we see that Polemarchus is talking about something other than the satisfaction of desires -- he is talking about fulfilling one's obligations. But just like his desires, these too are beyond examination.

Basically, then, Polemarchus has taken his father's dogmatism to a new level. He exhibits a methodological superiority because he can argue in a quasi-abstract manner about the same beliefs that his father holds. But this does not free him from dogmatically holding a set of unexamined assumptions,

which support his entire thesis. That is, he relocates the dogmatism from the way the beliefs are held to the actual content of the beliefs, because within his actual beliefs is a critical centre that is impervious to examination. We can see that the dogmatism remains and, in fact, that Polemarchus does not really argue his case at all. His superior method of defending himself is simply the citation of an authority, Simonides, as the final word on the matter. The invocation of Simonides substitutes for making an argument. Socrates' disagreement with Polemarchus is essentially no different from that with Cephalus. In both cases beliefs are held unreflectively, even though Polemarchus can give a reason for holding his belief (the authority of Simonides). More importantly, however, neither can address the psychology of justice that will connect the individual psyche in the just polis to its institutional structure. In Cephalus the psyche comes to match a certain set of institutions through rote memorisation of a certain body of beliefs. This process excludes investigation and enquiry. In Polemarchus' case a similar situation occurs. The individual has duties towards people about whom he must have knowledge as representatives of particular categories of persons. However, the necessary knowledge is assumed. The individual just is a particular person and just has a particular set of external relations.

We need to look at the reason Plato might have for giving Polemarchus a second opportunity to speak in Book I (given his silence throughout the remainder of the dialogue -- even Thrasymachus is allowed one more line after Book I at 450a).

It seems that he is necessary to complete the movement away from the rule of force and towards the founding of the just polis. If we think of Cephalus' dogmatic beliefs as a kind of faith, Polemarchus becomes the necessary immediate response that challenges to that faith inspire. When first confronted with a challenge to the faith, the most attractive response is to invoke authority of some sort for one's views.

Socrates, however, reveals that Simonides makes a curious authority. Polemarchus quotes him as having a particular statement about what is just. When this is clarified to the idea that justice is helping friends and harming enemies, Socrates accuses him (Simonides) of speaking in riddles. The poet has used allegory to say what he could have said more clearly in everyday language. If the mytho-poetic inheritance is supposed to be the remnants of what was once a particular articulation of an inexpressible belief, Polemarchus' use of Simonides denies that the belief is inexpressible at all. That is, the ancestors who bequeathed the mytho-poetic inheritance simply left their heirs a cumbersome vehicle for verbalising a straightforward idea. It is to replace one way of talking about a virtue with another, less effective way. The result, as we see with Polemarchus, is confusion.

More should be said about the role of knowledge in Polemarchus' argument. He concedes that we may be mistaken about who are our friends and enemies, which creates problems for a theory of justice that necessitates correct judgement (such as his own). Thus, our friends can become

enemies if our judgement changes or our information becomes more reliable.¹⁵⁸ When Polemarchus refines his definition to exclude the possibility of error, he has done three things. First, and most obviously, he has made explicit the connection between correct judgement and just action. This foreshadows Socrates' own arguments later that justice and cognitive disposition are connected, which he amply illustrates with the corrupt constitutions (543a ff.). Secondly, he has accepted that harm and benefit have to do with the excellence of a being or thing *qua* that being or thing (335b-c). This effectively eliminates the concentration on behaviour that has characterised Polemarchus' and Cephalus' treatment of justice. Instead, Socrates has shifted the emphasis to character state. This means that we can now begin to talk about the formation of character as a serious function of the beliefs transmitted from one generation to the next. Looked at another way, we have lost the idea of an individual as someone who simply has desires and duties before becoming a subject for "theorising". What we say and do to others has some bearing on their quality as moral agents. At this stage, however, we have not yet reached the point of saying that psyche is malleable and

¹⁵⁸This overlooks the possibility that friendship is itself an "institution" and has little directly to do with judgement or information. By friends, Polemarchus could mean something as broad as fellow members of deme, tribe, or phratry -- indicating that he has no choice in the selection of friends. This, however, reinforces what I am arguing above. If Polemarchus does mean this, he is simply saying that he has a certain set of relations with other people which he cannot question -- they just are the basic framework for action. For a discussion of friendship in the Greek polis see Horst Hutter, *Politics as Friendship* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978).

affected by external conditions. Socrates has been using the language of function (*ergon*) in talking about excellence (*arete*). Thus, the “character” that is formed (or deformed) is still a functional identity.¹⁵⁹

Finally, Polemarchus’ concession reveals a necessary correspondence between institutions and the agents who are subject to those institutions. The critical aspect of friendship is that it defines an individual’s relations to another person and in this we can see an analogy with institutions, or structures that mediate between individuals. False friendship joins together those who should be institutionally separated. According to the argument that Polemarchus develops out of the saying of Simonides, a friend is owed benefits and an enemy is owed harm. Thus, prior to the distribution of harm

¹⁵⁹ Reeve notes that the appeal to function (*ergon*) only works if Socrates can successfully show that justice is a craft. Socrates’ “proof” of this is that the craftsman never attempts to “outdo” other craftsmen. The unjust man, however, does try to outdo both just and unjust. Therefore, injustice is not a craft and not a virtue. Reeve (1988), 20-1. Reeve is not clear in his use of the craft analogy, I believe. He does not explore what Plato might be trying to convey with this device. On the translation of *techne* as craft see David L. Roochnik, “Socrates’ Use of the Techne-Analogy” in Hugh H. Benson, ed., *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Nevertheless, we can still talk about character in functional terms throughout the dialogue. Socrates will define justice as each part of the soul doing its own work and we can understand from this that a deformed soul is one in which functional boundaries are violated. What distinguishes this later definition from the current idea of function is that the functional view Polemarchus seems to accept is more closely related to a technical or productive craft. It is more difficult to talk of the psychic elements in these terms.

and benefit is the existence of those whom we call friends and enemies. Indeed, the distribution is defined by the existence of these two categories. This leaves us, however, unsure what is exactly meant by the term friend. The things distributed (harm and benefit) and those to whom they are distributed (enemies and friends) are self-referencing. A friend is one to whom we owe benefits and benefits are those things that are owed to friends. Socrates draws on the craft analogy at 332d to begin the argument that a just man does no harm (because to harm is to make something less excellent with respect to what it is). Therefore, if Polemarchus were to adhere to the distributional rule of harm and benefit, the just man would have no enemies, since he never harms (335d). We can say, then, that the structure that mediates between the just man and other men is friendship, with its distribution of benefit. The result is that friendship as an institution or structure requires a particular sort of character, that of the just man.¹⁶⁰ In order for the institution to operate properly, friends must be real friends and this necessitates justice. Without just character, the institution of friendship is either subverted or becomes meaningless.

To summarise what I have been arguing about Polemarchus, we can say that he is an advance on his father because he takes seriously the need to defend the system of beliefs that undergirds his self-conception. He ultimately fails to ground

¹⁶⁰The benefit that the just man bestows obviously has to do with the excellence of the soul. To the extent that a doctor, say, benefits his friends is the extent to which he is just.

that system in anything less unsure than his father's mythopoetry. Mainly, this is due to Polemarchus' initial reliance on the same dogma and his subsequent attempt to defend this through what he thinks is rational argument. As I try to show, all he does is relocate the weakness in his method to Simonides. Nevertheless, Polemarchus is a necessary stage before reaching Thrasymachus, who breaks with the method. We can draw an initial parallel with the arguments heard thus far and Socrates' construction of the divided line. As we move from Cephalus to Polemarchus we effectively move from the lower half of the line to the upper. That is, Cephalus shows us what it means to be in the lower realm of the visible and Polemarchus, though he fails in the ascent, shows us what it means to be in the upper section of the visible.

The weakness in Polemarchus' position emerges when we consider political foundation and self-formation. It becomes clear that the unexamined assumptions that support his ideas become a new dogma that is transmitted to future generations as a collection of ideas to memorise and accept (Simonides is authoritative, therefore, follow Simonides). Polemarchus is himself an indication of how unstable this form of transmission is. The faith that Cephalus exhibits has already been rejected and Polemarchus is open to the challenges that Cephalus cannot abide. What is dogmatically accepted today is subject to challenge tomorrow. Consequently, what is dogmatically held must ultimately rest on an understanding of its veracity. As we have seen, an intuitive understanding (Cephalus) is inadequate because explicit challenges call for explicit defence.

Also, appeals to authority (Polemarchus) cannot replace understanding because such appeals are simply an abandonment of the argument (not to mention that appeals to authority do not themselves explain why a particular authority is legitimate). What distinguishes Thrasymachus is his rejection of intuition and any authority outside his own intellectual powers. The argument that he advances is very much, then, an argument arising from his own character.

The Flight from Association

Thrasymachus is widely recognised as the philosophical core of Book I. In this section I want to treat him as both a spokesman for a particular understanding of justice and as the intellectual height of the pre-political. I will be describing Thrasymachus as a nominal advance on Cephalus and Polemarchus, but also as a throwback to the rule of force that we witness in the opening scene. Therefore, he represents what I am calling the flight from association because he attempts to undermine the bond between men that the mytho-poetic view takes for granted and re-describe it as an expression of power. Apparently seeing that the mytho-poetic bond between men cannot be grounded with arguments, Thrasymachus concludes that any bond between men ultimately rests on the commands of a stronger party. His anger at the way the discussion has proceeded thus far (336b-c) is a rejection of attempts to understand justice through the poets. His new approach is to see how justice operates and to derive from this what it must be. The result is a new way of actualising an innate sense of justice and

community that reverses the assumptions of the mytho-poetic inheritance. He leaves the natural bonds between men, revealed in the opening scene, but institutionalises these bonds to favour one party over another. The institutionalisation takes the form of a new language of justice, a new understanding of what it means to be just. For Thrasymachus, what most people take to be just action is simply action that benefits the party with power. To translate this crudely into Marxist language, we can say that most people live under false consciousness, according to Thrasymachus. In this section, I want to begin by rehearsing the various interpretations of Thrasymachus' apparently shifting position. The purpose in doing so is to challenge these interpretations for failing to connect Thrasymachus sufficiently with the rest of Book I or the remainder of the dialogue. It is my view that Thrasymachus is the next logical stage after Cephalus and Polemarchus and establishes the fundamental challenge to the founder of the just polis. That challenge I see as the need to establish a polis that is desirable in itself for all its members.

It is not easy to make sense of Thrasymachus or make sense of his inclusion in the dialogue. The dialogue is generally scathing towards sophists, but the evidence we have on Thrasymachus indicates that his main profession was in rhetoric.¹⁶¹ I commented when writing about Gorgias that perhaps the distinction between rhetorician and sophist was more fluid for the Greeks (or, at least, for Plato) than might be assumed. Possibly, we are meant to understand that sophistry is a way of

¹⁶¹Translations of surviving fragments can be found in Freeman, 141-2.

talking about philosophical issues that is persuasive through its seemingly logical proofs. This would correspond to our own understanding of sophistry as *apparently* logical argument. This is the Thrasymachus that appears in Book I. He has seemingly logical arguments about justice and its relation to self-identity and civic discourse. He will say that the stronger define the word, actualise a sense of justice, in accordance with their own interests, thereby, creating a discursive framework for talking about ethical conduct that is grounded in their own needs and desires. Thus, I will be looking at various treatments of Thrasymachus from the perspective of this discursive framework.

White's account is the briefest and offers a suitable starting point.¹⁶² He begins by noting that Thrasymachus is not included in order to provide us with information about the real person as such. "It is Plato's main interest here to present two opposing lines of thought in an illustrative manner," he writes.¹⁶³ We need, then, to discover what Plato means to illustrate. White's position sometimes sounds as if Plato wants us to conclude that people like Thrasymachus are not very good at stating their case. Thrasymachus would illustrate the unphilosophic mind attempting to reach beyond its station.

In his summary of 337d-339b White says, "He [Thrasymachus] maintains that governments always set up laws and practices

¹⁶²Nicholas P. White, *A Companion to Plato's Republic*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 65-73.

¹⁶³White (1979), 65.

to benefit those who govern, and apply the term 'just' to those laws and customs to persuade others to abide by them."¹⁶⁴ White goes on to say that "the prescriptions labelled by the term 'justice' are in some important sense arbitrary, that they are set up by the rulers to accommodate what happens to be their interests, and that they exhibit no significant common feature but this."¹⁶⁵ White's treatment is fairly straightforward and introduces what I see as the crux of the argument: those who rule have in some way established a set of prescriptions that they call just and that others abide by these prescriptions for reasons that go beyond the mere threat of punishment. Similarly, Reeve writes, "What [Thrasymachus' first statement] means, in effect, is that control of behaviour includes control of linguistic behaviour, and with it, a kind of thought control. The guardian controls the way in which the children will use the term 'just', how they will conceive of justice itself, how they will think about and evaluate both themselves and the world around them....The rulers, through their power to reward and punish, and through their control of education and the flow of information generally, have trained [the subjects] to praise as just the very behaviour that is to their -- the rulers' -- advantage."¹⁶⁶ Reeve is fundamentally correct. We can add that the rulers have succeeded in actualising the amorphous sense of justice that all men are assumed to possess. The signal ability required for ruling is persuasiveness. One must be able to persuade others that

¹⁶⁴White (1979), 65.

¹⁶⁵White (1979), 66.

¹⁶⁶Reeve (1988), 7.

particular actions or categories of actions accurately embody the general sense of justice one has.

In other words, people believe that what the rulers say is just actually *is* just and act “justly” because they see it as morally correct. The ensuing modification that finds Thrasymachus propounding a view of the expert ruler (340d-e), therefore, means that the Thrasymachan ruler-craftsman must expertly persuade others that the just principles are objectively so and are unrelated to his own selfish interests. We cannot, at least at this point, find more than a Thrasymachan description of what “naturally” occurs in politics.

The Thrasymachan ruler has the ability to establish a cognitive and discursive framework for understanding justice. What Thrasymachus describes is a situation analogous to the activities of the poets: the ruler establishes the bounds of morality in action by appealing to intuitions the subjects already possess. The difference, and it is crucial, is that Thrasymachus describes a ruler who is consciously aware that the bounds he establishes serve him alone. Unlike Homer, who presumably did not set out to establish a moral framework for the Greek world, Thrasymachus’ expert does so. Even if Homer did do so, it was not for his own benefit. This in itself is significant because the act of founding a polis is at the forefront of the dialogue. This is a sign showing how the founder creates a new set of institutions and corresponding beliefs -- how people think and talk about moral and ethical conduct. The founder founds a mind or human character that corresponds to

the institutions he creates. It emerges, though, that the correspondence is false under Thrasymachus' regime because the cognitive and discursive framework is expressly designed to harm the person who employs it (harm understood as a violation of a person's interests). That is, the more a person acts "justly", as Thrasymachus' ruler would have us do, the more that individual suffers at the hands of the leader. This is why self-interest becomes an important component of Socrates' later argument. The alternative, as he sees it, is a set of institutions that creates stability by undermining the well-being of those who live within them. White, as I note above, says that Plato wants to show two opposing lines of argument in an illustrative manner. The lines, we can now say, are Thrasymachus' justice, which incorporates the idea of self-harm and Socrates' justice, which will incorporate self-benefit. Between them they emphasise political foundation as the creation of men and institutions that complement, support, and promote the stability and well-being of each other -- and political foundation that does the opposite. The former, Socrates feels is the foundation of the just polis.

The comments I have made above assume away the basic controversy surrounding Thrasymachus, namely the extent to which he has a single, coherent doctrine of justice. The remarks thus far should indicate that I believe he does. Numerous attempts have been made to reconcile Thrasymachus' apparently contradictory assertions. He makes three statements that can be construed as theories of justice:

Justice is the advantage of the stronger (338c)

Justice is obedience to the laws (339b)

Justice is the advantage of another (343c)

We can begin by dispensing with the second statement and treating the first and last as the only possible options for Thrasymachus' true meaning. Only Hourani accepts the second statement as Thrasymachus' intended meaning.¹⁶⁷ Kerferd's reply to Hourani is conclusive, I believe, and it will, therefore, be unnecessary to examine Hourani's case.¹⁶⁸ A point worth mentioning, though, is a particular difficulty that Hourani's argument makes. Thrasymachus rejects Cleitephon's suggestion (340c) that the strong enact laws that they believe, perhaps mistakenly, to be in their interests. If Thrasymachus means that justice is obedience to the laws he could reasonably be expected to accept Cleitephon's idea. While I follow Kerferd and Nicholson in my reading of the text, finding Thrasymachus' true theory of justice does not tell us what that theory means. In order to examine his views, I want to look at an important and comprehensive treatment of Book I, the one found in Annas' introduction to the dialogue.¹⁶⁹ Julia Annas' position is

¹⁶⁷G.F. Hourani, "Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice in Plato's *Republic*", *Phronesis* 7 (1962).

¹⁶⁸See G.B. Kerferd, "The Doctrine of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*", *Durham University Journal* 19 (1947-8); G.B. Kerferd, "Thrasymachus and Justice: A Reply", *Phronesis* 9 (1964). Kerferd's position is that the last statement Thrasymachus makes is more inclusive, i.e., represents a general rule about justice. Nicholson lends further support to Kerferd's position. Peter Nicholson, "Unravelling Thrasymachus' Argument in the *Republic*", *Phronesis* 19 (1974).

¹⁶⁹Annas (1981).

that Thrasymachus is initially incoherent and is made to refine a bad argument to arrive at what she says is his real opinion. Thus, he does not shift on the essential elements of his argument, even though she admits that, as stated, his statements about justice do not add up to a unified view.¹⁷⁰ She begins by setting up a framework in which Thrasymachus may be doing one of two things. First, he may be making an argument for conventionalism (or legalism), which is the belief that justice is nothing more than obeying the laws. Second he may be making an argument for what she calls immoralism, meaning that Thrasymachus believes in some objective understanding of justice and injustice and favours injustice.¹⁷¹ She writes, "The conventionalist tells us that justice is not what we think it is. The immoralist tells us that it is exactly what we think it is, but that we are wrong to think it is a virtue; there is nothing admirable about it."¹⁷² She says that Thrasymachus' position is actually the immoralist one, but his initial statements appear to lead to conventionalism.

Looking first at Thrasymachus' initial statement that justice is nothing more than what is in the interests of the stronger (338c) we see what Annas means by conventionalism. Justice is not dependent on some essential attribute, but on the interests that rulers happen to have. Justice is doing what they prescribe in laws, which are the expression of their interests, or what Thrasymachus takes interests to mean. As she says,

¹⁷⁰Annas (1981) 37.

¹⁷¹Annas (1981), 36.

¹⁷²Annas (1981), 37.

justice here is “analysed in terms of the relationship of government to governed.”¹⁷³ Now it is not clear that Socrates understands Thrasymachus’ first statement as reducing precisely to conventionalism. She translates 339b7-8 as, “You say it’s just to obey the rulers?” This, however, may impose a particular interpretation on the line. It could mean that Socrates is seeking a clarification or confirmation of something that has already been said or implied. Others have translated and treated this line as an additional point Thrasymachus concedes.¹⁷⁴ The result in the latter case is that Socrates may not have understood Thrasymachus to be making a conventionalist argument, but may be inducing him to make further specifications that will establish the conventionalist position. Once this is made explicit, Thrasymachus can reject it and a more sophisticated argument can develop. Thus, Thrasymachus’ position does not terminate at justice as obeying the laws. This is something in addition to what he has already claimed about justice.

This may or may not be central to Annas’ argument, but we should be aware that it is problematic to conclude decisively that Thrasymachus is *understood* to be making a conventionalist argument at first. Until Thrasymachus explicitly rejects the offer of conventionalism that Cleitephon makes at 340b, we cannot be certain that anyone (other than Cleitephon) understands him to agree with the conventionalist

¹⁷³Annas (1981), 40.

¹⁷⁴Grube/Reeve write, “...don’t you also say that it is just to obey the rulers?”.

position.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Cleitephon's offer does indicate that conventionalism is one conclusion we could derive from Thrasymachus' first statement.

Annas continues by showing that Thrasymachus assumes, until Socrates effectively challenges him, that the ruler and the stronger are synonyms. Socrates' observation that the ruler may be mistaken about his interests and, thus, obeying the law may mean doing what is *not* in the interests of the stronger forces Thrasymachus to see "ruler" and "stronger" as, at least, potentially separate entities. It turns out that Thrasymachus is only interested in the stronger -- and in the ruler only insofar as he is also the stronger.¹⁷⁶

It will turn out that he is interested in the stronger only to the extent that this person correctly determines his own interests. The thrust of Thrasymachus' rejection at 340c is that conventionalism is the wrong conclusion to derive from the first statement and this means we must go on looking for what Thrasymachus does mean. Annas goes on to examine

¹⁷⁵It is important to note that Cleitephon's interpretation is in response to Socrates' obvious criticism that the stronger may promulgate laws that are accidentally against their interests. Cleitephon is allowing Thrasymachus to add a corollary about cognitive state by saying that it is just to obey the laws that the strong *believe* are in their interests. Thus, their actual interests are irrelevant, but their beliefs become central. This introduces the value of knowledge over belief.

¹⁷⁶Annas (1981), 40-1. Annas accepts that as a practical observation there is nothing wrong with assuming the identity of ruler and stronger, since those who rule typically have command of the resources of power that can be used to secure their own position.

Thrasymachus' claim that the ruler *qua* ruler does not make mistakes, which is the gist of Thrasymachus' rejection of Cleitephon. Her treatment misses an opportunity to add depth to the craft analogy that plays a role in Book I. She says of Thrasymachus' argument against error, "He is thinking of the obviously true point that the man who has the upper hand cannot afford to make mistakes, or he will soon cease to have the upper hand."¹⁷⁷ I read this point differently.

Thrasymachus is making a point about the grounds for calling a person an expert. He is saying at 340d that our calling a person a particular kind of expert is in accordance with a narrow criteria that precludes doing what anyone *without* that expertise could do. Anyone can mis-diagnose a patient, so misdiagnosis cannot be part of medical expertise. When a doctor makes a mistake, therefore, he is simply doing what anyone could have done and not what a doctor uniquely could have done.¹⁷⁸ This is an extension of according a superior position to knowledge (over belief) which the rejection of conventionalism entails.

A final point we should note about Annas' statement about the man who has the upper hand is that it does sound something like what Plato will say about the tyrant. Because he cannot afford to make mistakes (every mistake automatically works against his power, since he is the only one with power¹⁷⁹) he is

¹⁷⁷Annas (1981), 43.

¹⁷⁸For simplicity I ignore the possibility of laymen making lucky guesses.

¹⁷⁹It is useful to think of the tyrant's mistake as an action that works to someone else's interests.

ultimately the most miserable and least secure person in the community (578e-579b). However, given his false perception that his ultimate power and injustice are desirable to keep, he cannot, from his own perspective, afford to err. From Plato's perspective, every tyrannical action he commits is a mistake.

Annas continues with a discussion of Thrasymachus' second statement that justice is another's good. This statement follows 343a where he counter-employs the craft analogy with the example of the exploitative shepherd. Thrasymachus points out that the shepherd is a craftsman who does not care about the subject of his craft, because he appears to promote the interests of the sheep only to ensure their usefulness to himself.¹⁸⁰ Annas correctly says that Thrasymachus treats the unjust man as the one who successfully forwards his own interests.¹⁸¹ She also correctly says that Thrasymachus assumes that most people's interests will inevitably conflict, necessitating conflict between the unjust man (who forwards his own interests above all else) and others.¹⁸² We can derive

¹⁸⁰I note above the rejection of the craft analogy Reeve believes Plato is offering. It should be noted that Reeve believes the craft analogy is decisively undermined by the introduction of the wage-earning craft because craftsmanship is no longer a completely other-regarding psychological condition. Reeve (1988), 19. Reeve appears to neglect how Socrates has also introduced with this implausible craft the idea of self-benefit, which in Book II he sets out to show is a result of justice in the soul.

¹⁸¹Annas (1981), 44.

¹⁸²For a discussion of conflict in politics and a defence of Thrasymachus point in this regard see Ralf Dahrendorf, "In Praise of Thrasymachus" in *Essays in the Theory of Society* (London: Routledge

from this what must be Thrasymachus' views on the weak members of society. They effectively become a kind of object that must be manipulated in order to satisfy the ruler's wants. This follows directly from Thrasymachus' shepherd analogy.

Having delivered his second substantive statement about justice, we can see that it is initially inconsistent with his first. Annas writes:

This conflict need not worry us too much, however. For we can see 'justice is another's good' as an expansion of the original claim that justice is in the interest of the stronger, made by someone who has seen that the original claim was made in too limited a context....Under pressure Thrasymachus comes up with another formulation which applies to rulers as well as their subjects.¹⁸³

The point, then, is that it does not pay to be just. Furthermore, we can see how radical his statement is; justice does not pay under any circumstances. Justice always results in self-harm.¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, if it is correct that Thrasymachus views the weak as akin to objects worthy only of manipulation by the strong, justice entails extending equal value to others.

and Kegan Paul, 1968). In response see Robert W. Hall, "In Praise of Thrasymachus?", *Polis* 10 (1991), 22-39.

¹⁸³Annas (1981), 45-6. I see this as a reworking of the Kerferd/Nicholson thesis.

¹⁸⁴Returning to the shepherd analogy, we can see that short-term sacrifices, i.e., giving the sheep something they desire, are acceptable as long as the long-term gains are greater than the loss.

This seems anathema to him. In reconciling Thrasymachus' two statements, we should not simply conclude, with Annas, that Thrasymachus is an over-hasty arguer who "needs lessons in rigour from Socrates."¹⁸⁵ Thrasymachus represents a way of conceptualising oneself within the community. His is a community of conflict.

Annas' characterisation of Thrasymachus' positions (conventionalist vs. immoralist) appears fundamentally correct.¹⁸⁶ Thrasymachus clearly wants to say something about the value of justice. Additionally he wants to say something about the cognitive capacities of those who are just. Throughout, however, his view seems to be that the just are somehow irrational; they are not genuinely worthy of respect. They become the tools of desire satisfaction.

Thus, Thrasymachus' counter-use of the craft analogy is telling. As to his over-arching theory, Thrasymachus' belief is that justice is the advantage of another. That justice is the advantage of the stronger, the ruler, becomes a particular

¹⁸⁵ Annas (1981), 46.

¹⁸⁶ Annas offers three proofs that her account is correct. First, Thrasymachus says at 344c that his second statement is equivalent to what he originally said about justice. Second, Socrates says at 345b that he understands now what Thrasymachus meant by his original statement, indicating that the second statement is a clarification and not a change of argument. Third, Socrates' argument about craftsman not practising their craft for their own interests is a simple attempt to refute the idea that justice is in the interests of the stronger, before moving on to the more important point about whether or not justice pays. Annas (1981), 46-47.

instance of that theory. His first statement, then, is important for any analysis of the political association. Similarly, the craft analogy as he employs it, becomes the paradigm of Thrasymachan politics. The craft analogy has to do with the amount of respect a ruler-craftsman should afford his subjects. The result of Socrates' argument is that the craftsman must acknowledge and respect the interests of his subjects. Thrasymachus is agreeing that subjects have interests, but violation of those interests is necessary for the rulers to get what they want. The subjects' interests are marginally acknowledged and not respected at all. Thrasymachus' concern seems to be that Socrates' craftsman does not pursue his own interests. Socrates counters with the self-serving craft of wage earning, which serves to strike a balance between subject and ruler. The Socratic craftsman can help himself and others simultaneously (cf. Section One). Annas' argument is persuasive and it has clear affinities with the Kerferd/Nicholson position.

I conclude, with these three interpreters, that Thrasymachus' second statement is his definitive view of justice. In arriving at this conclusion, though, we run the risk of ignoring his first statement and, for a political theory, that statement is significant. As a moral theory his second statement is more inclusive than the first could be. However, I want to argue that the political implications of justice as the advantage of the stronger corresponds in tone to the arguments of Cephalus and Polemarchus.

I identify these two above as the representatives of an unstable mode of political discourse. Socrates is successful in showing the flawed content of their arguments. This success functions as a demonstration that a new mode of discourse is needed. Mytho-poetry is neither suitable as a tool for philosophical investigation nor is it redeemable. Socrates shows that a system of belief expressed through Cephalus' mytho-poetry collapses when challenged. That failure nevertheless reveals a success. For Cephalus, in particular, mytho-poetry provides a way of thinking about and conveying moral beliefs. Socrates may reject the specifics, but he recognises the necessity of the mytho-poetic *function*. Indeed, the analysis and reconstruction of the poetry used in education (377b ff.) transplants the function into a more coherent and stable vessel. In a way, then, mytho-poetry is redeemed by re-writing the entire traditional corpus that Cephalus tries to bequeath.

Socrates' efforts at redemption occur after the flaws are revealed. In between the revelation and redemption, we find Thrasymachus making a different attempt at constructing a moral language. In other words, the political argument of the dialogue draws on ideas first raised in Thrasymachus' initial statement about justice. As Socrates progresses through the construction of the just polis, it becomes clear that in addition to founding a set of institutions, he is also founding a complementary human psyche, which is logically prior to those institutions. The just polis succeeds because it contains citizens who are either just themselves (the Guardians) or are cognisant

of some advantage to be derived from deferring to the just (the Auxiliaries and producers).

Justice as the advantage of the stronger shares something with this Socratic construction. Thrasymachus says to Socrates:

Don't you know that some cities are ruled by a tyranny, some by a democracy, and some by an aristocracy?... And in each city this element is stronger, namely, the ruler?... And each makes laws to its own advantage. Democracy makes democratic laws, tyranny makes tyrannical laws, and so on with the others. And they declare what they have made -- what is to their own advantage -- to be just for their subjects, and they punish anyone who goes against this as lawless and unjust (338d-e).

The point at which Socrates' just polis and Thrasymachus' interpretation of politics coincide is that the rulers in both provide the moral framework within which actions are judged. The divergence, evident in the quotation, is that Thrasymachus appears to treat justice as entirely conventional. The things declared to be just are arbitrary, having no connection to either an objective moral truth, as in the Platonic system, or to any intuitive sense of justice that individuals may have. As a contribution to the *nomos-physis* debate, Thrasymachus appears to come down on the side of *nomos*. In addition, this would turn the strong, the rulers, into mere power-holders who are in a position to force their will upon others. This interpretation reduces all cities to master-slave communities.

This view is unlikely for a number of reasons. First, in defending his original statement and, thereby, generalising from it to derive his second statement, Thrasymachus makes the following points:

A just man always gets less than an unjust one. First, in their contracts with one another, you'll never find, when the partnership ends, that a just partner has got more than an unjust one, but less. Second, in matters relating to the city, when taxes are to be paid, a just man pays more on the same property, an unjust one less, but when the city is giving out refunds, a just man gets nothing, while an unjust one makes a large profit. Finally, when each of them holds a ruling position in some public office, a just person, even if he isn't penalised in other ways, finds that his private affairs deteriorate because he has to neglect them, that he gains no advantage from the public purse because of his justice, and that he's hated by his relatives and acquaintances when he's unwilling to do them an unjust favour (343d-e).

Therefore, according to Thrasymachus, in both public and private affairs injustice is the more profitable course (it is simply a Thrasymachan "fact" that injustice pays). But in none of the instances mentioned do we perceive anything like force or overwhelming power being employed. The unjust gain an advantage, apparently, by outwitting other people or by exercising a devious cunning that allows them to avoid costs that others incur. Thus, an important reason that the master-slave interpretation is wrong has to do with an assumed

communal relationship between the just and the unjust. Thrasymachus is saying that in the normal interactions between members of a pre-existing, and on-going, community those members who violate either the letter or the spirit of the rules that exist between the members will always come off better than those who don't do so. The sense of his argument here has to do with the avoidance of disadvantage and the exploitation of opportunities -- presented by the honesty of others.

After making these points, Thrasymachus tries to illustrate the superiority of injustice with the example of the tyrant. In this case it seems clear that Thrasymachus does have overwhelming force in mind. If the tyrant is the paradigm of injustice, then the master-slave metaphor becomes more apt. The tyrant Thrasymachus describes is entirely removed from the community that he exploits. Unlike the previous instances, the tyrant is not violating rules that legitimately apply to him because no rules apply to him.

The tyrant may be Thrasymachus' ideal man, but the passages in which this ideal are introduced do not support the master-slave interpretation. The introduction of the tyrant is a rhetorical device operating within the context of a longer speech in defence of injustice. Thrasymachus is presenting an extreme case to further illustrate the greater happiness one can derive from wrongdoing. The historical Thrasymachus was a professional rhetorician. His method of argument reflects this, as does his initial intervention at 336c, where he appears to

criticise the question and answer method Socrates had been using with Polemarchus. Thrasymachus wants to deliver a different kind of answer and, thus, a different kind of answering. Therefore, the example of the tyrant is not intended to describe Thrasymachus' view of all political associations. He is not saying that all ruling bodies behave in the openly exploitative way attributed to the tyrant. He is saying, however, that the truth of his position is revealed in its extreme manifestation. If his assertion holds for the most extreme case, it will also hold for the less extreme cases he identifies earlier (partnerships, tax payments, public office).

If we return to Thrasymachus' first statement about justice, we can begin to understand more precisely his view of politics. In cases where obedience is not forced, those with power must utilise other means of ensuring compliance with their self-serving laws. He says in his first statement that those who break the laws are declared to be unjust and are punished as lawless. The implication of this is that the strong are engaged in an effort to make people believe that the self-serving laws are objectively just. Through their declarations about disobedient conduct and the use of punishment, the strong attempt to bring about a general acceptance of the rules. People come to obey because they believe it is right to obey. Rather than forcing compliance, the strong have persuaded the weak to hold particular beliefs.

Within the framework of the political community, we can say that the strong, as Thrasymachus envisages them, attempt to

actualise in the form of rules a sense of justice that all men are assumed to have. The persuasive technique of declaring something to be unjust can work because there is a belief in justice at some level that all men possess. Thus, the strong are particularly adept at transforming inchoate sensations into principles for guiding action.

In essence, then, the strong occupy the same space as the mytho-poetry that Cephalus draws upon. They provide an ethical vocabulary and cognitive framework for understanding actions in moral terms. Where they differ lies in Thrasymachus' assumptions about the nature of the political association. Within such an association, he sees conflict. The nature of this conflict is an assumption about one's interests. In the Thrasymachan political association, the unjust individual, in both his public and private roles, imagines himself possessing interests that are violated by adherence to the rules of the community (or private transaction). The association becomes a formal mechanism for the unjust person. He sees that he can employ its conventions to further his own ends, but he does not see that adherence to those conventions can provide any benefit to him. The rules are effectively at odds with the unjust person's desires.

The implication is that the institutions of the political association are not complemented by a corresponding psychological makeup of the entire citizen body.

Thrasymachus treats the unjust as a pocket of resisters, who feed off the others. These others, furthermore, do have a

psychological make-up that corresponds to the institutions. Thus, within the single political association, there are at least two psychological types, one of which consistently falls to the predatory instincts of the other. Added to this is the fact that the just rules which the strong declare are believed to be just only by the weak. The ethical vocabulary and cognitive framework are not a characteristic of the association because they are not shared by all members. The association is not defined by its beliefs because there is not a single set of beliefs.

Again, we can see similarities with the earlier mytho-poetry. In the present case, there is no single set of beliefs because the moral language does not reflect a set of shared assumptions about justice. With mytho-poetry, as Socrates' refutation shows, there is no coherent set of beliefs than can be derived. The moral language is confused and self-contradictory, thus, it is impossible to say that the community shares a single set of beliefs. In both cases, conflict is implicit.

The argument with Thrasymachus is clearly the most important aspect of Book I and I have, therefore, thought it necessary to go through some standard textbook approaches to this section. White, Annas, and Cross and Woozley are not exhaustive in their arguments. They were chosen to represent a particular way of reading Thrasymachus, as much as for their specific content. It should be somewhat clear that I see Thrasymachus as making an important statement about the self and political foundation. The critical moment in Thrasymachus' argument occurs when he tries to explain his

first definition of justice. He observes that every regime makes laws that are advantageous to those who rule within that regime (338d-339a). Anyone who violates the rules that the strong set down is punished. We see here that there is a two-pronged approach that the strong follow. First, they declare that certain things are just and unjust. By categorising actions they establish a language with which to talk about those actions. Without the categorisation, the actions have no moral character. Secondly, the strong use their strength to harm those who commit the wrong sorts of actions. This they call punishment. The effect of this approach is to establish what I have called a cognitive and discursive framework for justice. Thrasymachus is saying that the strong impart ways of thinking and talking about morality. And the strong succeed because humans naturally respond to the existence of right and wrong; they are appropriate recipients of a moral framework.

This in itself may not be an extraordinary statement to make. However, Thrasymachus the rhetorician leaves a massive gap in our understanding because of his ambiguous treatment of the concept of strength. The gap is simply the unexplained mechanism that transforms law from arbitrary declaration into popular belief. His assumption seems to be that, through punishment, the weak are conditioned to accept that certain things are just and unjust, given that they are already in a position to accept the *possibility* of any particular action having one or the other character. Either by experiencing punishment or through the force of example they do accept that some actions are wrong. The wrongness, though, is simply an

extension of one's natural aversion to self-harm. There is no moral sense that supports the understanding of justice with regard to particular acts that the strong establish.

The conclusion that follows is that the basis of the Thrasymachan association is a shared system of rewards and punishments; people are united around their aversion to pain. The only thing that maintains the association is, of course, the continuing ability of the strong to inflict pain through their system of punishment. It is precisely this assumption that allows Thrasymachus to argue that injustice is more profitable than justice. The strong are not motivated continually by an aversion to pain because *qua* strong the possibility of experiencing pain is somewhat remote. The strong inflict pain, but it is their immunity to the efforts of others to harm them that defines them as the stronger.

This brings me to what I see as the critical aspect of Thrasymachus' argument for the idea of political foundation. In describing the actions of the strong he is, in fact, talking about the foundation of communities. The laws and customs are founded to promote the interests of those who found them. There is no other basis and that is why he says justice is the same everywhere. But, just as we saw with Cephalus and Polemarchus, the association rests ultimately on force. The strong are successful in creating a new dogma and this is effectively forced on the subjects through negative reinforcement. Because only the subjects are so conditioned, the association consists of two categories: the free and the un-

free. This is an association in only the most formal sense of the word, but it is politically no more than an arbitrary collection of individuals.

It is important, then, to see Thrasymachus as representing a flight from association. The power of the arguments we hear from Cephalus and Polemarchus is the emphasis on shared moral beliefs. These beliefs serve as a cognitive and discursive framework for talking about human conduct, but the framework has deep significance for the individual who employs it. In fact, the individual does not see himself as employing a framework, but as living in accordance with objective norms. Polemarchus is confused by Socrates' style of argumentation. The greater risk, however, lies in the fact that he cannot confidently determine how to live if Socrates successfully refutes him. He loses some of what it means to be Polemarchus if he loses the argument. That Cephalus and Polemarchus vanish from the dialogue after Book I indicates that their loss of identity is complete.

Thrasymachus avoids this trauma by rejecting that moral beliefs are deeply held as such. Moral beliefs are beliefs about self-harm and it is an aversion to the latter that is ingrained in the human psyche. In other words, moral beliefs can be reduced to fears or expectations regarding pleasure and pain. However, while Thrasymachus thinks moral beliefs can be reduced to such fears and expectations, all but the strong understand, or interpret, their moral beliefs as expressions of right and wrong. For the subjects, this aversion to pain is the

motivation behind all action, even though they do not recognise it. For the strong, an appreciation of this motivation allows them to develop moral prescriptions that are acceptable to the subjects. The flight from association, then, has to do with the struggle to maintain a dominant position over the subjects by playing on *their* understanding of human motivation. The individual, according to the strong, is neither formed nor supported in his self-understanding through membership in the association. The question of who one is becomes detached from the question of membership. It falls to Socrates in the coming arguments to establish a stable foundation between the individual self and the community of which he is a member. Political foundation is about forming an identity and the association is held together by its belief about this identity. This is Socrates' mission in defining the education system and the institutional structure of the just polis.

Conclusion

Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus each contribute to the discussion of moral identity that dominates the development of the just polis. I have tried to show that the otherwise insignificant threat of force found in the opening scene actually sets the tone for the remainder of Book I. The movement in the opening scene towards increasingly substantive debate provides an increasingly sophisticated treatment of force. In the first instance, the opening scene shows force in its most basic form: a device for controlling behaviour. Later, force becomes a means for producing a

particular type of person -- albeit a person who is defined by certain modes of action. The result of this increased sophistication is that force is called upon to perform a psychological function which is more within the realm of persuasion. While the use of force becomes more sophisticated, it also becomes more difficult to recognise. We must remind ourselves that force is the closing off of alternatives, the prevention of choice. However, we see that these functions are performed to a significant extent by Cephalus' mytho-poetic stories, Polemarchus' appeal to authority, and Thrasymachus' theory of justice. In each case, a system of rules is promoted by the exclusion of any competing rules. Cephalus' tales work so long as there is no alternative mode of argumentation; Polemarchus' appeal to authority works so long as authority is not questioned; Thrasymachus' theory of justice works so long as the threat of punishment remains. Each of these closes off discussion about what particular beliefs should be held (Cephalus takes this for granted), how one is persuaded to hold particular beliefs (Polemarchus takes this for granted), and how man's innate moral sense is to be understood (Thrasymachus takes this for granted).

Given the legendary authoritarianism of Plato's just polis, it would be fair to ask if he too follows this pattern. My conclusion is that the remainder of the dialogue encourages us to conclude otherwise. Particularly regarding his belief in the existence of innate ideas, Plato is more readily able to explain why persuasion works. The persuader appeals to some intuitive sense that the individual already possess. The ruler

activates a sense of justice that simply needs coherent principles to give it voice. As his theory of education clearly states, enlightenment is turning the soul in a new direction, not imparting new information (518d). Similarly, we can say that the ideal rulers Plato constructs do not force a particular view on the members of the association; they bring forth an awareness of a particular view that is naturally possessed by all. Granted, the hierarchical system of the just polis reflects a belief that this awareness can be held to a greater or lesser extent.

Thus, Jaeger's characterisation of Socrates in this dialogue is correct, but perhaps misleading. Socrates is an architect with a preordained structure which the "psychological material" must be made to fit. Nonetheless, the conclusion remains: none of the other characters in Book I can explain how a system of rules moves from expression to belief. They must explain the construction or redirection of moral identity as behaviour control. Plato recognises that a coherent psychological model is required to move beyond this stage and in so doing can posit an ideal of human justice that encompasses more than just acts.

Order and Self-Revelation in the *Phaedrus*

Summary

*In this section of the thesis I look at the *Phaedrus* and the connection between order in the polis and order in the psyche. As I have argued throughout the thesis, language can potentially be misused and in this section I try to show how Plato envisages that it should be used. Here we see a more complete Platonic statement of what it means for the human mind to grasp the basic order of the universe. In Socrates' descriptions of love and beauty we see that the rational element must transcend its human casing and recreate within the entire soul a harmonisation of parts. We see finally that the order of the universe must penetrate to the deepest level of human life, the individual psyche, if there is to be order in the political association.*

Introduction

A recent commentator has said that the *Phaedrus* “is about madness, or *mania*.¹⁸⁷ This is half right. The dialogue is about madness, but madness is about the self. The *Phaedrus* is about what it means to be one’s self.

¹⁸⁷Nussbaum (1986) 203.

The *Phaedrus* is Plato's second excursion into the theory and practice of rhetoric. The first excursion, the *Gorgias*, contains some of Plato's most memorable denunciations of Athenian politicians and their methods. Read on its own, the *Gorgias* seals the fate of rhetoric as conventionally practiced. Socrates makes it out to be beyond redemption and its adherents to be incorrigibly dishonest.¹⁸⁸ Redemption may be an apt notion; the central moral doctrine of the *Gorgias* (it is better to suffer than to commit injustice) rings of an attempt to redirect the energies of the interlocutors towards a concern for their souls. It is the dialogue most often cited to demonstrate Plato's impatience, anger, and distrust of the whole enterprise of persuasive speech.¹⁸⁹ This is an oversimplification, since Socrates is made to present his own speeches and not simply to ridicule the rhetoricians. Nevertheless, rhetoric is given little credit as a skill and in my view this lends something of a dogmatic tone to the dialogue.

If not strictly dogmatic, then certainly one-sided. By the time we reach the *Phaedrus* Plato has clearly undergone some sort of conversion.¹⁹⁰ Rhetoric the nemesis has become rhetoric the

¹⁸⁸This is perhaps too strong, as I try to show in Section Two, but accurately captures a typical reading of the *Gorgias*. See below.

¹⁸⁹See especially Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) Ch. 2.

¹⁹⁰The *Gorgias* is certainly earlier than the *Phaedrus*. Adhering to the common, if somewhat misleading, dating that places the *Republic* at the centre of Plato's literary career the *Gorgias* is decidedly pre-*Republic* and the *Phaedrus* is post-*Republic*. I find this dating scheme misleading because it encourages us to think that all pre-*Republic* dialogues are inexorably moving toward the comprehensive philosophy of that work.

companion of dialectic. Rhetoric has an explicitly legitimate role now. The *Phaedrus* is more sophisticated than the *Gorgias* in this respect. Moreover, it is necessarily a more complicated dialogue. Socrates' objective is less critical (of rhetoric as a theoretical practice, *techne*) and more constructive. Building always entails more complications than tearing down. To belittle rhetoric in the *Gorgias* Socrates never has to do more than refute the interlocutors' positions. To create a true rhetoric he must establish an irrefutable position of his own.¹⁹¹ His theoretical enterprise must decisively replace the image of rhetoric as an intoxicating mixture of eloquent speech -- an image that implicitly condones the rhetorician's power to drug his listeners by bestowing on it a quasi-medical status. This enterprise will carry Socrates into discussions of his dialectical method, language, the written word, and the power of emotion.

Similarly, post-*Republic* dialogues can all too easily be seen as milestones on the road to the *Laws* (particularly the works of the "later" period).

¹⁹¹Any good salesman knows that the customer should start the bidding when discussing price. When the customer states a price he is willing to pay, the salesman knows that he does not have to go lower than that value. Likewise, once the interlocutors state their positions, Socrates never has to examine or refute any principles other than those offered. It is sufficient to show the incoherence of the positions explicitly put forth. This does, though, tell us something about the function of the dialogue form. The dialogue form demonstrates how one should philosophise, but does not set out to answer every possible objection. In other words, the interlocutors are not supposed to represent "every man", but the particular men whom they are. See Steven Rendall, "Dialogue, Philosophy, and Rhetoric: The Example of Plato's *Gorgias*", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 10 (1977), 165-179.

But not least, as I indicate at the beginning, it will carry him into a discussion of the self.

The dialogue does not have an explicitly political theme. The speeches that Socrates and Phaedrus share concern the nature of love and of lovers. But these are not fortuitous details. In progressing from a criticism of rhetoric as a sham science or verbal snake oil, Plato remains conscious of his own stringent definition of *techne*. The subjects of love and lovers are poignant indicators that *techne* is not merely rule-following. Rhetoric will not qualify as a skill just because certain procedures tend to yield certain results. The craftsman's motive and temperament are equally significant.

The *Phaedrus* is Plato's double testimony that any craft is necessarily practiced for the improvement of the craft's subject matter (cf. *Republic* 346e) and, secondly, that this entails an other-regarding concern for that subject matter. What is true for other crafts is most true for the political craft. The skilled statesman, according to my argument, has a unique emotional attachment to the objects of his craft -- the citizens. His other-regarding concern is for other human beings, like himself. That emotional attachment he experiences we may characterise as love and it explains the significance of this subject in the *Phaedrus*. It also allows the reformulation of the dialogue as a more explicitly political statement. In my argument I will assign political roles to the characters described in each of the speeches on love. The purpose is to show that Lysias' speech advocates a sham science that promotes instability, harms the

citizens, and injures the supposed craftsman. In other words, he achieves the exact opposite of Socrates' conditions for a true art of politics.

In conflict are two opposing bases for political association. Lysias' speech states that love is dangerous (lovers are insane) and seeks to replace this emotion with rational calculation in an almost Benthamite sense (which is equated with sanity). He replaces the lover with the non-lover. His idea is that the non-lover has more to offer than the lover in terms of moral improvement and social respectability. Granting his premises about the nature of love, the conclusion seems to follow easily. Examples of mad political leaders come too readily to mind.

Socrates will shift his ground in the dialogue. First, he will echo the Lysian ideas in his initial speech to Phaedrus. Second, he will repent his offence against the god and express a conception of true love. In his first speech he accepts both the Lysian description and judgement of love. In his second speech he accepts only the description and reverses the judgement. Love is indeed a kind of mania -- Lysias' description -- but a divine mania and, therefore, a blessed state. The description Lysias offers is more like a mad craving or irrational desiring. We could easily modernise the description by re-characterising this lover as a "wanton", to use Harry Frankfurt's terminology.¹⁹²

¹⁹²Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" in Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). Frankfurt is, of course, a liberal theorist and is used here to illustrate a point. However, the higher and lower order division desires is not anathema to the Platonic scheme. Frankfurt seems merely to

In Frankfurt's scheme a person can have first order desires, which is simply desiring as we commonly understand it. A person can further have second-order desires, which are desires about what desires to have. Finally, a person (and for Frankfurt this is what defines a person) can have second-order volitions, which occur when a person wants a particular desire to be his will. A being who lacks this last attribute Frankfurt calls a "wanton".

Such "wantonness" is not unheard of in Plato's dialogues. Hippocrates in the *Protagoras* perhaps exhibits the key trait (cf. Section One). He has numerous desires, but he blindly pursues each as it arises, completely without reflection. Callicles in the *Gorgias* borders, as well, on such "wantonness" by expressing his rather extreme hedonism. Interestingly (and problematically for Frankfurt) Callicles' second-order volition is to have all his desires as his will (cf. Section Two). He is the sum of Hippocrates plus the self-awareness of a wanton in this sense. Nevertheless, we can informally use the concept of a "wanton" when describing the Lysian lover. The man in love is out of his mind, almost literally, and when he returns to his "true" self the beloved finds that he is now rejected and despised. The lover's offers that he valued most, social respectability and moral tutelage, will never be his. These were promises made by someone other than the now-recovered lover. One's self is something that can be either abandoned or lost and this is called madness.

have purged them of their moral overtones (which would be anathema to Plato).

Socrates has a difficult task. He must defend the value of “madness” against “common sense”. The utilitarian argument that Lysias’ speech puts forth has *prima facie* appeal, especially if placed beside some form of emotivism. But this is to restrict the dialogue to its literal statements and ignore the political ramifications. Socrates is not saying that all we need is love or that we should let our feelings rule. He never sacrifices the conception of knowledge that informs the other dialogues, though the same epistemology is couched in highly poetical language. So, Socrates is *not* making an argument for emotivism over utilitarian rationalism (to distinguish it from his own rationalism). The second Socratic description of love and lovers, along with the analysis of rhetoric, more directly establishes that Plato has a political objective in view. While Socrates is shown to defend divine madness, I will try to show that this can be harnessed to his argument for politics as a craft.

The true statesman needs a touch of this madness to propel him beyond *techne* conceived of as a set of rules. Furthermore, he must have more than pride in craftsmanship, which is the core emotion accompanying the productive arts (there does not appear to be any other convenient term to describe the feelings of expert shoemakers, shipbuilders, and so on) and he must have more than a desire to relieve suffering, which might characterise the medical art. The political craftsman wants to make the object of his craft a better example of human nature. The divergence from the harsh criticism of rhetoric in the

Gorgias becomes most apparent when we approach the *Phaedrus* in this way. The latter dialogue's concentration on the power of words continues the Gorgian belief that speech can sway men's souls. In the *Gorgias* that power to sway becomes almost exclusively a power to corrupt.¹⁹³ In this respect Plato seems to have adopted a more sophisticated psychology than the cleanly divided tripartite soul in the *Republic*.

There is some difficulty in maintaining rigid boundaries between reason, spirit, and appetite, though there is a tendency to read Plato as establishing such boundaries. Even if we grant that reason, spirit, and appetite operate independently we have a problem in accounting for certain desires that Plato identifies as belonging to each part of the soul. For example, at *Republic* 440b a man called Leontius is described as having an "appetite" to look at some corpses beside the road and he is compelled by this appetite to do so. It is not immediately clear how this can be treated as an appetite, but it is equally unclear whether it should rightly be a desire of either spirit or reason. Even more confusing is Plato's treatment of democratic man who is characterised as giving free and equal scope to his desires. Some of his desires are for political activity and what he takes to be philosophy -- hardly the desires that spring to mind when discussing one's appetite.

¹⁹³I say almost exclusively because we glimpse a "proto-Phaedran" argument at 503a-b where Socrates talks about the possibility of a morally correct rhetoric.

It is no doubt possible to accommodate these difficulties if we wish to keep the three parts of the soul within separate spheres. Philosophy and political activity may give a kind of pleasure that is not exclusively intellectual. But perhaps a more rewarding treatment would treat the soul as a unity and see each action as containing the simultaneous movement of each “soul-part”. This would yield, I think, something like what we see in the Simile of the Cave. The process of education is not imparting new information, but turning the soul’s gaze. Thus, as the soul turns to see the Form of the Good a harmony is established within the soul such that each component does operate in unison. Prior to that harmonisation, however, the language of the divided soul is appropriate.¹⁹⁴ The prisoner who is released is simultaneously pulled away from the pain-causing light, showing that the soul-parts propel the individual's internal disposition in different directions. It may

¹⁹⁴Richard Norman takes the view that there are rigid boundaries between the three components of the soul: “[Plato] believes that, for the proper inner harmony to be achieved, reason, in alliance with spirit, must exercise a strict control over the desires, inhibiting some, and eliminating others.” Richard Norman, *The Moral Philosophers: An Introduction to Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 27. A similar perspective can be found in James Petrik, “Incontinence and Desire in Plato’s Tripartite Psychology”, *Dialogos* 60 (1992), 43-57. An examination of the various problems associated with specifying the diverse desires of appetite can be found in John M. Cooper, “Plato’s Theory of Human Motivation,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1 (1984), 3-21. Charles Taylor has recently argued that the direction of the soul’s gaze is critical to understanding Plato’s view of the self. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Ch. 6.

be useful to see in the *Phaedrus* an interest in breathing life into the extreme rationalism of the philosopher-king.

Earlier I noted that the dialogue addresses a number of issues that complicate the discussion of rhetoric -- and love -- including language and the written word. These factors, I believe, contribute to the dialogue's political statement. Lysias' speech is supposed to be the words of a non-loving older man directed to a youth. He is trying to persuade the youth that a non-lover is less risky than a lover, if one were to choose on correct criteria. The young man must make a decision and presumably wants what will be genuinely best for himself. The central issue, therefore, is choosing between exclusive options, both of which promise genuine benefits. Politically speaking, we have speakers who are offering us proposals for action. In a deliberative assembly each speaker would be attempting to establish himself as the "wise one" who can effectively lead the people to true benefits. Plato is asking us to choose what sort of person we would have lead us.¹⁹⁵ The non-lover promises genuine rewards with low risk. The Socratic lover promises us genuine rewards, but first wants us to understand what genuine rewards would look like. Both speakers are necessarily using the language to convey a message (and both say that we will be amply rewarded by their respective policies). But the meaning of these messages is more than the definition of words. Interpretation of meaning

¹⁹⁵Both the Lysian and the Socratic lover are basically promising good leadership to someone who is young, inexperienced, and in need of guidance.

will entail discovering the speaker's cognitive state and intentions, bringing us in the dialogue to the discussion of the spoken and written word.

Lysias' speech is a written text. Socrates speaks extemporaneously. Lysias' words are codified; once written they are immune to any wish he might have to amend them. Socrates speaks, rejects his own words, and speaks again. He may also be spoken to, unlike the text. He has reserved for himself the opportunity to clarify his meaning. Phaedrus' wish to possess Lysias' speech in writing reflects an assumption that meaning is transparent, that by knowing the words we know their meaning. The dialogue contains Plato's most explicit treatment of the written word and complements his treatment of language in the *Cratylus*. His criticisms should come as no surprise and represent a somewhat common, if undefined, theme in his work. We often hear Socrates dismiss the value of debating the meaning of the written word (or the remembered tale -- see below), e.g., in the *Protagoras* where he calls this the pastime of ignorant men (*Protagoras* 347c-d). Similar intimations can be found, for example, in Socrates' discussion with Polemarchus in *Republic* Book I. There we see the authoritative poet, Simonides, reduced to a double-speaking riddler, casting doubt on the whole enterprise of poetic interpretation.

The criticism of the written word has important implications for the analysis of political discourse. There are also certain implications for our understanding of Greek society. As Eric

Havelock has argued, the "preface to Plato" is precisely a shift from an oral to a literate society.¹⁹⁶ The idea of a text operating as a vehicle to convey meaning, replacing the central importance of the actual expounder of that meaning, creates a raft of philosophical problems. Not least among these is the problem of reconciling word and meaning. The ambiguity of a word, codified in a text, blossoms into the need for an interpretative art.¹⁹⁷ Writing necessitates a science of understanding and this is part of Plato's discussion of writing in the dialogue.

This will, in turn, complement the overall discussion of *techne* in the dialogue. An art of rhetoric (now that Plato is willing to contemplate such a possibility) contains within it the craftsman's desire to convey true meaning, or simply the truth. If this is Plato's conception of rhetoric as a genuine craft, then

¹⁹⁶Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963). On a similar theme see Tony M. Lentz, *Orality and Literacy in Hellenic Greece* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

¹⁹⁷Perhaps a modern echo of this can be found in the works of such theorists as J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Pocock writes, "The historian's first problem, then, is to identify the 'language' or 'vocabulary' with and within which the author operated, and to show how it functioned paradigmatically to prescribe what he might say and how he might say it." J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 25. Skinner writes, criticising Pocock to some degree "I am suggesting that what is needed...is not merely to indicate the tradition of discourse to which a given writer may be appealing, but also to ask what he may be *doing* when he appeals to the language of these particular traditions". James Tully, ed., *Meaning and context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (London: Polity, 1988), 107.

the rhetorician's objective is the improvement of the listening audience. The meaning of the rhetorician's words *is* the truth and that truth will improve all those who take it into their souls. Plato's suspicions about the written word become readily apparent. A text is more susceptible to misinterpretation because of the necessary distance between the meaning intended and the reader's interpretative act. The author does not control how the text is read and can only hope that his intended meaning is conveyed.¹⁹⁸

This is symbolically represented in the dramatic action of the *Phaedrus*. The first speech we hear is *read* out loud because Phaedrus has a written copy.¹⁹⁹ He does not deny Socrates' charge that he made Lysias repeat the speech again and again in order to capture the exact wording. Literacy was probably restricted somewhat and we should not exaggerate the availability of written material, but the possibility of making another's thoughts your own property became more possible with the spread of literacy.²⁰⁰ The written word was becoming

¹⁹⁸More Pocockian echoes can be heard: "But if the author of a political utterance cannot wholly control the levels on which his utterance may be taken to have meaning, or...the levels of abstraction on which it may be discussed, it follows, first, that...he is not fully in command of the 'meaning' of his own utterance...." Pocock (1989), 24.

¹⁹⁹This may seem paradoxical (the speech being both written and spoken), but the Greeks did not read silently. Besides, Phaedrus' intention was to practice delivering the speech himself.

²⁰⁰A basic literacy was probably fairly widespread by the end of the fourth century. Of course, the dialogue is set in the fifth century. See, for example R. K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 194. Note also Socrates'

or had become a serious alternative to the spoken word for mass communication, though it was far from achieving its full political potential.

For Plato the relevance is epistemological. Meaning for him is pre-lingual. Language is the conventional rule-system that points *towards* a meaning, but words do not directly correspond to things. This is the circuitous argument of the *Cratylus* where Hermogenes argues that language is pure convention. His claim is that words are labels that we have arbitrarily attached to things and ideas in the phenomenal world. There is no transcendent significance to the words themselves. This might seem like an intuitively appealing proposition. If we consider material objects of any kind the names we attach to them seem to have no significance other than as convenient labels to distinguish them from other objects. Even if we work out complex etymologies we will never come across a reason why something is called by one name and not another. Other sorts of examples present more fundamental problems. An obvious example comes from the *Republic*. In Book 2 Adeimantus and Glaucon re-engage Socrates over the basic treatment of justice he offered to refute Thrasymachus. In a more cogent manner they are allowed to repeat the gist of the Thrasymachan argument, which is that justice is a particular sort of interpersonal relationship where one party seeks to gain predominant power over another party.

reference to the sale of Anaxagoras' works in the marketplace at *Apology* 26d-e.

Glaucon and Adeimantus rework this to show that “justice” originates in the control of the undesirable consequences (being the loser in the struggle) of that interpersonal relationship.

Justice is obedience to conventional rules and these rules promote one form of behaviour over another. This is effectively what Hermogenes means by his theory of language in the *Cratylus*. Empirically we can identify a thing, a temporal reality or event, which becomes the origin of the concept of justice. Another example can be taken from the *Euthyphro* where Socrates is seeking a definition of piety. At one point Euthyphro wants to maintain that piety is what the gods love. Socrates asks if the gods love what is pious or if what they love becomes pious by virtue of their loving it (*Euthyphro* 10d).

The argument reflects the conventionalist argument Hermogenes offers. If the gods love things that are pious then piety clearly refers to something separate from the gods' existence or attitudes. If the act of loving something makes it pious, on the other hand, then once again the word refers to a temporal reality and not to something fundamentally beyond both the language and the phenomenal world.

The opposing extreme of such a position would be a reference theory of language and this is Cratylus' argument. He maintains that words refer directly to things (which is why he denies that "Hermogenes" is the other interlocutor's name, since he is not the son of Hermes -- the direct referent of the name, *onamata*). Given the theory of the forms we might expect to find Plato agreeing with this, at least in a general outline. He does argue that there is Justice, Beauty, and Piety behind our

language as it were, giving it meaning. In the *Cratylus*, however, Socrates strikes a middle course. His position is that our words refer to a higher reality, but only to point towards that reality, not to name it directly. The word itself is a conventional label, but not of some temporal phenomenon. The “things” to which words refer are beyond spatio-temporal categories. Socrates’ detailed etymologies in the *Cratylus* are his argument that the meanings of words represent true being and are themselves pre-lingual.²⁰¹

This framework will have some bearing on the *Phaedrus*. With the Platonic “third way” between conventionalism and realism we can make a more sophisticated distinction between an utterance and the meaning of that utterance (more sophisticated, that is, than the theories of Cratylus and Hermogenes). The meaning of the utterance now has no linguistic base and comprehension of meaning takes the listener out of the framework of the immediate communicative act. In other words, there is an almost imperceptible moment between word and meaning and that moment is filled by the listener’s interpretation of the word. Given this situation, we can further distinguish between meaning *intended* and

²⁰¹This position creates problems of its own, of course. If meaning is pre-lingual then any definition relying on language will be imprecise at best. Meaning cannot be spoken (or written) because the very language is already at a distance from the meanings it can be used to convey. Language, by its nature, can mislead. In its broadest sense, the problem becomes one with the need to specify the manner in which the world of becoming “participates” in the world of being.

meaning *received*.²⁰² Just as a side note at this point, observe that the possibility of interpreting language, i.e., having a degree of awareness that something *is* meant by the words we hear, may contribute to Plato's beliefs in an immortal soul and education as recollection.

The relationship between medium and message connects the Platonic theory with the *Phaedrus*. The dialogue's central question becomes, can there be a method of communication that somehow gets the correct meaning across given the various media available for its transmission? What conveys meaning -- how is it "taken into the soul" if meaning is pre-lingual? The layer of sophistication that Plato adds to his criticism of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* has to do with the interlocutors' inability to address the substance of this issue. The *Gorgias* assumes, however, that all communication is oral and Socrates is concerned to defend a particular form of speech. At least, there is no acknowledgement that the written word presents any special problem by its very nature. Socrates wants oral communication to involve a joint pursuit of truth through an honest exchange of questions and answers. The *Phaedrus* makes no such assumption. Long passages are devoted to the nature of the written word as a rival means of communication. The written word increases the gap between meaning intended and meaning received by virtue of the increased physical gap between the participants in the

²⁰²All of this is now common to the study of language. My concern, though, is to examine how this becomes especially a political problem in the *Phaedrus*.

communicative enterprise. A text written now may be read later, often much later, and not in the presence of the author. The reader's interpretative skills turn from an examination of the person communicating to an examination of the codified product of communication. In short, a written text creates the problem of recovering the author's intentions, a problem that does not arise with the same urgency in the assumed framework of the *Gorgias*.²⁰³

The quest for truth necessitates the recovery of the author's intended meaning. On the premise that interlocutors do, in fact, want to discover the truth of the matter under discussion, Socrates tries to get behind the language used to uncover the person who holds the thoughts that have been formalised into text (or speech). The premise is not unequivocally true. Whether ironically or naively, Socrates does not acknowledge alternative purposes of communication. He almost entirely disallows the possibility that an interlocutor could *legitimately* want simply to win an argument or simply produce some reaction in an audience rather than discover the truth.²⁰⁴ Both of these objectives are overridden by the need to promote knowledge or morally sound behaviour. Recall that he attempts to manoeuvre Gorgias into admitting, first, that he

²⁰³The problem is not allowed to arise by Socrates' conscious unwillingness to hear long prepared speeches, which can be analogues to the written text.

²⁰⁴Of course, for Plato convincing someone of the truth *is* to produce a certain reaction in that person's soul and this is precisely his desire. The question becomes, as I note earlier, how is the truth taken into the soul?

will teach virtue to any student who lacks such knowledge and, second, that such knowledge is sufficient for producing virtuous behaviour. Once the latter point is conceded the motive to deceive is disallowed because Gorgias' alleged knowledge of virtue precludes him from doing so.

The first concession ensures that students will not accidentally deceive through ignorance. An example of Plato's desire to produce a particular reaction can be found in the preamble to the laws that the Athenian stranger recites beginning at *Laws* 726a. Plato only allows the Athenian Stranger to speak from what appears to be a position of knowledge, which represents a major advance on interlocutors' speeches in early and middle dialogues. On the other side of the equation we see in the *Euthydemus* a sustained instance of Socrates allowing a sophist full rein. Though technically not an example of rhetorical displays, it is a case of an interlocutor *not* seeking the truth. Perhaps more to the point is Protagoras' first major speech at *Protagoras* 316c-317c. Socrates readily acknowledges here that Protagoras wishes to show off. The central issue surrounding these examples is that desires to show off, win arguments, and so on are illegitimate motives. They are illegitimate precisely because they allow the speaker to escape from having to defend his viewpoint. This is the visible side of the issue. Motives for Plato have to do with character or, more correctly, cognitive state. Trying to recover what a person/author intended is trying to recover who the person/author is (or was). Interpreting meaning involves excavating the "meaner". Socrates will implicitly argue in the

Phaedrus that if we can assess the correctness of one's motives, we can assess the intrinsic value of one's speech.

Thus, these issues come together in the *Phaedrus*. The discovery of meaning involves us in the extra-lingual character of Platonic understanding -- a discovery of intended meaning -- as well as the diversity of motivations giving rise to communication -- a discovery of character. The political implications of the dialogue emerge through an examination of these points. The speeches presented are each speaker's invitation to follow him along a certain path. Like all persuasive speech they promote one course over another. But the subject of these speeches is literally an invitation to acquiesce to the leadership of the speaker. I will be recalling my treatment of the statesman's craft to show how the subject of love is significant within this context.

The recovery of authorial intentions and character becomes a pronounced problem as the dialogue moves forward. The written word implies spatial and temporal distance between writer and reader. But the *Phaedrus* compounds the difficulty when we see that the written text can acquire a new owner who puts on the mask of the author and poses as the person with the character and intentions we wish to explore. Phaedrus reads a speech that is not his own; Socrates extemporisises a speech that does not belong to his true self. Identity and persona become part of the equation: who we are, who we think we are, and who we pretend to be.

The remainder of this section will be an analysis of the dialogue in some detail to develop the themes I have been discussing thus far.

The Dramatic Setting (227a-230e)

The *Phaedrus* is unique in its dramatic setting. Socrates is shown walking beyond the walls of the city and the overall atmosphere is calm, keeping with the still heat of the summer day. The *Phaedrus* appears so un-hurried and non-confrontational that the mood complements the subject matter. No Platonic dialogue is about one thing (nor is any dialogue about everything), but the transition between the various subjects discussed here is virtually seamless. Compared with, for example, the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedrus* moves with quiet self assurance. In the former dialogue each interlocutor moves the dramatic action forward with a violent thrust -- though, the symbolism of this is significant²⁰⁵ -- while the *Phaedrus* more nearly resembles a naturally progressing conversation. Like any such conversation there is a superficial lack of unity. The dialogue ranges over the topics of love, lovers, madness, writing, rhetoric, "current affairs", and the human soul. In comparison even to the much longer *Republic*, the dialogue covers an extraordinary range of topics.

²⁰⁵The purpose of the abrupt shifts in the *Gorgias* have to do with the gradual movement away from persuasion towards violent force. Each interlocutor moves the action forward with a shove and then defends the art of shoving.

Despite a superficial disunity, the *Phaedrus* is a coherent whole.²⁰⁶ The diverse topics are ordered under the treatment of intentions and the nature of the self. The subject of intentions follows from the treatment of media and message. The subject of the self follows from the treatment of motivation and love. Phaedrus has been to hear a speech. The speech has been heard, is committed to “paper”, and is in his possession. This establishes the central tension of the dialogue. Phaedrus is on his way outside the walls of the city for a walk. Socrates meets him and asks where he has been and Phaedrus says that he has been listening to Lysias’ eloquence. He does not yet admit to having a written transcript of the speech. When he offers to relate what Lysias has been saying Socrates responds in mock exclamation that he would rather do nothing else and that listening to such an account takes precedence over business. This is heavy irony judging from the common picture of Socrates in other dialogues of the early and middle period. Listening to accounts is his business and what other people call “business” is no such thing. All Socrates ever does is engage in conversation (cf. *Apology* 23b). White comments:

The subtle presence of opposition should be noted, since exploring the boundaries of opposition as a metaphysical notion

²⁰⁶This is not widely contested. Indeed, it has become almost a scholarly trend to demonstrate how unified and self-referencing the *Phaedrus* is. But the limit is reached, I think, when a commentator senses the presence of Plato himself at the riverside setting, “The word for ‘shade tree’ in Greek is *platanos*, practically a homonym for Plato!” John C. Koritansky, “Socratic Rhetoric and Socratic Wisdom in Plato’s *Phaedrus*”, *Interpretation*, 15 (1987), 34.

will become one of the controlling concerns in the dialogue. In this case, however, business (*ascolias*) is not an opposite to leisure (*scolia*), although it may appear to Athenian business people that Socrates' business was leisure, since all he did was talk about matters of scant practicality. If Socrates temporarily gives up his business to hear a report of a discussion between Lysias and Phaedrus, then this report promises to be serious business.²⁰⁷

But what Socrates is never willing to do is listen to speeches without claiming the right to cross-examine the speaker. He will gladly hear an account, but will not submit that the account is perfectly adequate as related. Phaedrus says that the subject of the speech was love, adding the qualifying phrase "after a fashion". We can anticipate that there will be some space for a Socratic inquisition. Lysias' speech is some innovative twist on an otherwise well-known subject. It will turn out that the speech is not so much about love as about "prudent acquiescence" to the wishes of a seducer.

Prudence is critical to understanding the nature of the proposal in Lysias' speech. Unlike the Aristotelian idea of moral insight, Lysias is putting forward a pseudo-utilitarian argument for maximising happiness and minimising pain.²⁰⁸ And unlike

²⁰⁷David A. White, *Rhetoric and Reality in Plato's Phaedrus* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 12.

²⁰⁸I have already referred to the Benthamite leanings of Lysias' speech. I do not, however, wish to overstate the similarity. I use the concept of utilitarianism more as an economist would than a philosopher. Lysias assumes a framework where agents want to

Aristotelian ethics where appropriate feeling is part of the equation, the message here is that feeling heightens the risk of making the wrong choice. The rational criteria, according to the argument, concern, first, immediate material gains and, second, others' perceptions of the choice made. Certain cultural factors may have made this sort of argument persuasive to a Greek audience. Homosexual relationships between young and old were not merely sexual in nature. An aspiring young man would be concerned to ensure that the older man with whom he associated could provide him with certain "social goods." To some extent, the older man would be expected to initiate the young man into the mainstream world of politics.²⁰⁹ As much mentor as sexual partner, the older man offered coat-tails on which the young man could ride. Nussbaum tries to capture the mood of this convention when she sketches the analogous situation of a young woman entering a male-dominated profession in our own society. Such a woman, she says, will be "more or less surrounded by potential 'suitors' who are more powerful and more established" and she "would want to live a full personal life; but she would be seriously concerned, at the same time, to protect her clarity and autonomy..."²¹⁰ The

maximise their "satisfaction" (utility), and various "market decisions" are measured against this criteria. This preserves the idea that the young man to whom the speech is addressed is choosing between options. We could say he is shopping for a suitor.

²⁰⁹Hutter (1978), 72 ff. Hutter discusses the educational purposes behind *paidikon eros*. See also K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978).

²¹⁰Nussbaum (1986), 207. Nussbaum's reading of this dialogue is unusual in places. See especially 212-3. While I feel she fails to capture

language of the *Symposium* gives some idea of the calculative aspect of these inter-generational relationships. Alcibiades' speech in that dialogue (or his recounted humiliation at the hands of Socrates) describes the night that he chose to give himself to Socrates. He says, "Believing [Socrates] was earnestly pursuing my youthful beauty, I thought it was a stroke of luck and my wonderful good fortune, because by gratifying Socrates I could learn everything he knew..."

(*Symposium* 217a)²¹¹

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to divorce this from feelings of love or passion. When Socrates glances under the cloak of the handsome youth Charmides we see that he is overcome with passion (*Charmides* 155d). Above all others, Socrates would be the ideal mentor for this young man. But even this man we consider to be of high ethical standing felt himself almost overpowered by physical beauty.²¹² Glaucon is

the mood in the dialogue here, it is important to note a fundamental cultural difference: the young man under examination in the dialogue is *searching* for a partner as part of his education. He is not trying to protect his "autonomy" or "clarity", as these are, to some extent, the objects of his desire. Presumably, a young woman entering a male dominated profession is not there for such a purpose or, at least, does not set out to achieve it by the same means.

²¹¹R. E. Allen, *Plato: The Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

²¹²Actually, Socrates would be a disastrous mentor for a young man with conventional ambitions, since he offered such unconventional guidance. But Athenian democracy could have benefited if this particular conventional young man had been kept out of politics, since both he and Critias, the other interlocutor, were members of the Thirty

characterised as a lover of young men who rationalises even physical defects into some aspect of perfect beauty. We would expect, therefore, that an older man with such feelings would express them in order to induce reciprocal feelings in the youth. Affection would be the seducer's bait.

Lysias turns the conventional seduction scene on its head in this respect. The Lysian seducer has no affection and *confesses* as much to the young man he hopes to seduce. In fact, his lack of feeling is supposed to give him an edge over the competition. As Phaedrus says, "Lysias has written a speech designed to win the favour of a handsome boy for someone who is not in love with him. That is the clever thing about it; he claims that an admirer who is not in love is to be preferred to one who is" (227c). The absence of either passion or affection is not extraordinary in itself, but indicates something about the issue of identity and what I will refer to as persona. The speaker (call him the non-lover) admits to what should be a disadvantage. This is brazen honesty. The non-lover reveals himself, refusing to adopt any sort of mask to win the affection of the young man. Instead of treating his non-love as a liability, however, he defends it as the best that could be offered to the youth whom he wishes to seduce.

This picture is more complicated than it first seems. The unmasking of passion to reveal utilitarian calculation leaves the *writer* still securely masked. Phaedrus as speaker is the mask

Tyrants (and Plato's relatives). It is hardly subtle irony that the *Charmides* is about *sophrosune*, usually translated as "temperance".

for Lysias the writer and the words uttered cannot thus stand as an expression of true identity. The words may be possessed, but the ownership of the sentiments contained in them remains undefined. We can find some parallels in the life of the historical Lysias. As a metic, a resident alien, he occupied an ambiguous position between citizen and foreigner. He could reside in the city at the pleasure of the citizens, but could never claim the privileges of a citizen himself. The precariousness of this position is revealed in the destruction of his family's fortunes during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants in 304.²¹³ Not that citizens necessarily escaped brutal treatment, but it is hard to separate Lysias' family's treatment from their status as successful foreign "entrepreneurs."

So, Lysias historically had a shadowy political identity within Athens and his new profession as a speech-writer (Phaedrus calls Lysias the best writer living at 228a) paralleled and institutionalised the vague status he occupied as a metic.²¹⁴ He has (or had) wealth without security; he has domicile without rights. As a writer he is also both there and not there. The speech that Phaedrus clutches contain Lysias' words. The speech is discussed as the work of Lysias. Nevertheless, Lysias is little more than a hypothetical reality because his physical absence means that he appears to be no more than the words

²¹³The conversation of the *Republic* takes place in Lysias' family home. Present are his brother Polemarchus, put to death by the Thirty, and his father Cephalus. The family fortune had been built on arms manufacturing.

²¹⁴Lysias' first public address was to charge his brother's murderer, Eratosthenes, after the restoration of the democracy.

Phaedrus has in his possession. His intentions, beliefs, and self-understanding are unrecoverable. His text is an artefact from which only hypotheses can be derived. Socrates wants certainty.

The written speech was a relatively new phenomenon. Typically, teachers of rhetoric would require their students to memorise set speeches containing examples of various techniques.²¹⁵ Gorgias' *Defence of Palamedes* is such a speech, for example, and was meant to give general guidance in constructing courtroom pieces. As the democracy "matured" professional speech-writing became less unusual and speeches more frequently custom-written for a particular occasion. As the law courts became the arena where inter-class rivalries were carried out, those who could afford it commissioned defence speeches.²¹⁶

²¹⁵George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (London: Routledge, 1963), 52. Thomas Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 74 ff. on "demonstration texts" used by professional rhetoricians.

²¹⁶Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 194-5. In a paper delivered at the London School of Economics James Fishkin developed a notion of a "self-reflective" society, which he claimed was best exhibited in the Athenian democratic institutions. There is a tendency to impose on Athenian institutions a kind of Aristotelian revisionism that sees the democracy as simultaneously tolerant and educative because of its apparent emphasis on deliberation. While we are free to develop all the theories about Athenian democracy that we wish, it is important to note that the Athenians themselves did not have a "political theory" to support their institutions. M. I. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), 28. Even the alleged "defence of democracy" in the *Protagoras* has been shown to be neither such a

Phaedrus is using the text for the purposes just outlined. Socrates gets him to admit that he was not really just taking a walk. He was in fact going outside the city walls so he could practice reciting the speech for himself. The independent *identity* of Lysias is becoming further removed from the *words* of Lysias. The text has been reclaimed by another speaker who lacks the intentions, beliefs, and understanding of the writer. Phaedrus has made the words his own, but in doing so he has only grafted them on to himself, as it were. Instead of a speaker he is a character reading from a script. He too loses an identity and replaces it with a fictitious persona.

The speech itself has gained some sort of status as an object through Phaedrus' actions. It has shed any traces of the subjectivity we associate with the expression of personal belief or sentiment. It no longer has an adherent in the sense that someone somewhere is known to believe what it says.²¹⁷ It has become a piece of text that can fulfil any number of self-serving motives that a speaker may have. Within this framework we can understand why Socrates rejects Phaedrus' offer to summarise the speech as best as he can remember it.

defence nor the common theoretical framework. See Section One. James Fishkin, "The Dialogue of Justice", paper delivered at the London School of Economics, 11 March 1993. The paper draws on James Fishkin *The Dialogue of Justice: Towards a Self-Reflective Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

²¹⁷Of course, the situation that the speech describes is fictitious from the start. There is no such non-lover making the speech, but Lysias the speech-writer. Even if Lysias spoke in the dialogue, Socrates would surely reject examining the text when the author is present.

Socrates will not let him rehearse and insists that Phaedrus read the speech out loud. As Socrates says, “I have no intention of letting you use me to rehearse on when I might have Lysias himself (228c-d).” Initially, then, Socrates wants to reconstruct the identity of the *author*. We will see later that he moves away from the text and its writer and on to the subject matter of the speech. The text is ultimately sterile and cannot be interrogated to yield the truth.

The rejection of textual analysis is reflected at 229c-e and Socrates gives a brief sample of what he intends to argue in the coming sections. The river along which they walk has mythological significance. Phaedrus asks Socrates if he believes the tale about the abduction of Oreithyia from the banks of the Ilissus, the event for which the dramatic location is famous. Socrates says that if he did reject it he would be in good company. Many “pundits” think it is false. But he does not reject it because of what the pundits say. As we know from the *Crito* truth is not simply what the majority of people believe to be true (*Crito* 48a). Agreement is never an adequate substitute for a reasoned account. Even if one could devise a perfectly logical explanation of how the tale arose, we would be no nearer the truth. We would still be working with hypothesis. Even if the story of the abduction was fabricated out of some perfectly natural event this is not the point. What of value can be learned from such inquiries? The stories are like texts and in themselves are, at best, neutral with regard to the truth and, at worst, misleading. Socrates says the man who has sufficient leisure to construct explanations of the myths

will never be free from the need to continue his efforts and explain such things as centaurs (half man, half horse), the Chimaera (head of a lion, body of a goat, and the tail of a snake), and a host of other such creatures. The sceptic who tackles these problems has no end of labours ahead of him.²¹⁸ White makes a crucial point in this regard:

The supposed explanation of the Boreas myth replaced a supernatural tale with a clear (although rare) instance of natural cause and effect. If the requisite explanations run parallel in principle, then the accounts of the living things should also identify their origins in nature....But the Centaur is half-man half-horse. How then will it be possible to explain this polymorphous being in terms of its natural origin?²¹⁹

Socrates insists that such efforts are a waste of time. The Delphic Oracle has instructed each man to know himself. The symbolism of this command is important to the argument of the dialogue. As White's question implies, are the mythologists searching in the right place for answers? To know oneself is to achieve understanding of one's true identity. It means refusing to treat the scripted character as the actual man. And, as Socrates says, until he has succeeded in fulfilling this command it seems absurd to consider the problems of other beings. This unwillingness to speculate about the truth of

²¹⁸Socrates specifically addresses himself to debunkers of myths who seek natural explanations to replace mythical accounts. We can also read this passage as a rejection of seeking truth in the material world.

²¹⁹White (1993), 19.

such myths complements Socrates' normal unwillingness to spend time analysing written texts. Just as the writer is unavailable for cross-examination, leaving us trapped amid competing interpretations, the "myth-maker" does not reveal the meaning of the myth. The myth becomes a story about which men may debate, while they allow truth to elude them forever. This is a fascinating and perplexing rejection by a man (Plato at least) who was only too willing to employ symbolic myths. It may be the symbolic meaning that Socrates is rejecting here. Lysias' speech is about the prudence of acquiescing to a seducer. The myth is about abduction and rape of a young girl. This may be a subtle reference to the implicit power of Lysias' speech to "remove" us from ourselves and the violence implied by this theft of one's identity.²²⁰

Socrates' poetic description of the countryside through which they are walking shows that he has not dedicated himself to interpreting myths. Phaedrus says that he sounds more like a tourist coming upon the scene for the first time, rather than a native of the city. There is some significance in this. Coming to know oneself immediately implies self-reflection and a degree of self-abstraction. But in coming to know himself, Socrates has not isolated himself from the other citizens (he does not live a private life). Self-knowledge is not a lonely road, but requires the presence and assistance of others. It is acquired through and connected to the community. One reason is that knowing oneself means knowing oneself as a human being for Plato. To

²²⁰Cf. *Republic* 413a-b where Socrates says that taking a true belief away from someone is similar to committing an act of violence.

know your psyche is to know *human* psyche. Self knowledge has less to do with declaring or willing oneself and more to do with discovery of human essence. Once this self is known it can be revealed in a way that Lysias' "honest" non-lover can only imitate or point us toward. Thus, Socrates says that his quest for knowledge can only be carried out amongst the citizens of Athens, not out in the country by himself.

Socrates' approach to self-knowledge offers an interesting contrast to Phaedrus, who intended to wander outside the walls so that he could practice the speech. Insofar as he sought to master the written speech of someone else, Phaedrus has not only left the environment where he could acquire self-knowledge, but has not even come into the countryside with his own identity. He has left the city under the guise of the anonymous non-lover of the speech. He is not Phaedrus so long as he does not speak what he believes. In fact, he is brought to the level of a rhapsode, reading a text and embellishing it with his own dramatic skills. This is why he is initially uninterested in reading the speech to Socrates. Phaedrus wants Socrates to sit passively and listen to the recitation while Phaedrus contorts himself into the guise of the speaker. This is the only kind of audience a speech-maker can tolerate. Interactive examination of a subject defeats the purpose of a persuasive speech. The sceptic is an unwelcome listener, just as a heckling and jeering audience undermines a rhapsode's performance (cf. *Ion* 535e).

The speech's "performance value" seems to interest Socrates at first, but he will not allow Phaedrus to adopt the speaker's mantle in the speech. Socrates will not converse with him if Phaedrus plans to hide behind someone else. The discussion must take place with the person behind whom he hides. But, as we will see, it cannot. The person is the absent author of the speech. Socrates will have to move away from what is actually said in the text towards its essential subject matter. Phaedrus will have to move away from persona to identity and, ultimately, genuine "selfhood", where he is revealed as neither the scripted character nor the conventional person called Phaedrus. He must become a self-knowing, self-revealing human essence.

Lysias' Speech

The speech sets out to defend the non-lover's position and undermine the lover's. I refer to seduction earlier in this section because it is not clear that the speech is about love. Nor is it clearly about lust, though we must assume that the non-lover is simply after sexual gratification. He has base motives that he promises will produce honourable gains for the youth. A number of rationales are offered to discredit the lover and strengthen the non-lover's case. The most significant of these is the characterisation of love as a kind of mania. Love is madness.

To appreciate the force of this argument we need to return to some points I raised in the discussion of the *Gorgias* in Section

Two. In that section I noted that speech can act like a drug that drives men out of their normal reasonable state. As I noted earlier, Gorgias explicitly states as much in the *Helen*. Considering this with regard to the *Phaedrus* we can see that Lysias is saying something similar. The man in love is like the man who has been intoxicated by speech; he does not act as his reason dictates. Love inspires mad pursuit of its object. The man in love will offer any gift and make any promise to the beloved. But this madness is transitory and when the fog lifts from the lover's mind, he will regret his rash behaviour, the gifts he has given, and, ultimately, the young man himself. Meanwhile the youth will have lost any honourable reputation he may have had and his prospects in respectable society will be ruined.

Men who are not in love never regret the kindnesses they bestow because they never bestow more than an appropriate amount (being rational and in control from the start). Because they have no intense, but dissipating, passion their perception of the young man and of their own actions does not alter. They give what their means allow, acquire what they set out to gain, and protect the youth from humiliation. There is a correspondence between the characterisations in the speech and the idea of discovering identity. The non-lover represents the man who believes he has discovered his own identity; he knows himself and his own best interests. The lover has only a persona and this he cannot even control. The irrationality of love is like an affliction and one can neither consciously acquire it nor will it away. The mask takes control of its wearer.

It may be useful to examine the identity that the non-lover claims as his true self. In form, the non-lover resembles what Socrates urges us to be, namely concerned to promote our genuine best interests. In content the non-lover is as deceived as other interlocutors tend to be. His calculation of self-interest does not fundamentally differ from that of Polus, Callicles, or Thrasymachus.

The speech echoes some Platonic sentiments, namely that a man should act in accordance with his true interests. The message Lysias delivers tells us not to be deceived about what we genuinely need. This, of course, is an aspect of the conflict in the *Republic*. Book I of that work revolves around differing conceptions of self-interest. The remaining nine books are Socrates' attempt to prove that justice is the sum total of our interests. Similarly, the claim is also made in the *Gorgias*. There is an ostensible concern in Lysias' speech with the interests of others. The young man is supposed to derive greater benefit from a non-lover than from a lover and this is the defining difference between the two character types. The non-lover never states, but we may assume, the benefits he will derive from the relationship.²²¹

²²¹It is important for the political element of the dialogue that we notice the public nature of the goods in store for the youth. What we consider as a private relationship was overwhelmingly public in character for the Greeks.

As I said earlier, love is called insanity and lovers even admit that they are mad. They will do anything for their beloved. Lysias is not inventing this view for the purposes of his speech. The power of Eros to drive a man out of his mind was part of the Greeks' stock of cultural goods.²²² Like the intoxicating words of a persuasive speaker, Eros is a force outside the self that temporarily resides in a man's soul, driving him onto previously uncontemplated actions. Thus, *eros* is not within the man, but something that reason keeps in check. It is literally a force that attacks his reason from without.²²³ Associating with such a person is dangerous even for those experienced in such matters. The main point for my discussion here is the idea that the madness of love represents an "unselfness". It is a temporary loss of who one is. A man in love effectively becomes a "wanton".

When Eros lifts the siege on a man's psyche the youth will no longer be desired. In fact, he will be resented and despised because he now represents unwanted obligations. When blinded by love, the man made all sorts of promises that, if he keeps, will ruin him or, if he breaks, humiliate him. While the love lasts the lover will undermine the youth's interests. The lover will brag widely about his sexual exploits and the youth's reputation will be ruined. Everytime people see the lover and his beloved together, they will assume that they are about to

²²²See, for example, Dodds (1951), 41.

²²³Cf. *Republic* 572b where Socrates says that all men have evil impulses.

gratify their passion. The non-lover claims that he provides security against these dangers.

As Hackforth comments, Lysias' speech is a "tedious piece of rhetoric."²²⁴ Its attractiveness for Phaedrus has to do with the unusual theme. Nevertheless, Lysias' speech is an interesting argument as a foil to Socrates' views. Lysias argues that a man who has no feeling for a youth will be of greater benefit to him than someone who does have feeling for him. Part of this flows from the common treatment of love as madness (and it would be hard to understand madness as beneficial, though Socrates will describe such a madness in his second speech). Another aspect has to do with a particular conception of interests, which has political implications. The non-lover is supposedly only interested in *true* interests and will make the young man better. Politics, by analogy, was also seen as having an educative affect. The laws, Meletus tells us at *Apology* 24e, make the young better, as do the other citizens. The non-lover is the disinterested law-giver who wants to promote harmony and order. The proposed relationship, then, is a microcosm of a political ideal and the youth is in a position to choose a leader.

In examining the content of the speeches in the dialogue it is easy to overlook the central importance of persuasive speech in Athenian public life. A persuasive speaker would be seen as a leader of the people, a demagogue. Originally, the word did not

²²⁴R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), trans., 31. All references are from this translation unless otherwise stated.

have the negative connotations that it has come to have for us (though Plato seems to give it a negative twist and the current meaning of the word is equally unflattering²²⁵). The older man in the speech is presenting himself as such a leader. We can imagine him addressing himself to an audience of fellow citizens rather than an individual young man. He would in that case be saying that he will be a better political leader. The true interests of the city will be better looked after under his care than under the control of someone else. The reason -- and this especially emphasises the peculiarity of Lysias' speech -- is that he is completely motivated by concern for *himself*. The non-lover's characterisation of the lover as someone who acts against his own best interests inevitably leads to the conclusion that the non-lover is supremely motivated by self-awareness. The non-lover confesses that he has no genuine affection for the young man. In a political context the confession is more radical than this. He admits that he sees his own interests as fundamentally distinct from the interests of the city. The other citizens are a separate entity from himself even though he is technically united with them in citizenship. As a law-giver he is both citizen and higher authority. Furthermore, in seeing this separation of interests, he claims that as a result of his own self-interest (i.e. desires distinct from the citizens') the city will benefit. Thus, their interests basically diverge, but coincide at the point of acquiescence to the non-lover. This is the point to which both parties are guided by rational calculation of their true needs. If private vice does not lead to public virtue, it can at least lead to mutual advantage on a more modest scale.

²²⁵See Finley (1985), 38-75.

The counterpoint to the non-loving politician at first seems a bit more shadowy. Who in political life corresponds to a man driven mad with love? Socrates has already provided an answer in at least two other places. In the *Republic* we read that a sophist is no more than someone who has calculated what will please the demos, sets it down as an art or science, and teaches it to others (493a ff.). In the *Gorgias* we are shown Callicles who is accused of being madly in love with the demos -- so much so that he shifts his ground from moment to moment so as not to anger the crowd with his speech (481a ff.).²²⁶ Both of these characters, sophist and rhetorician, *mirror* the passions and desire of the crowd. The lover will give to the people whatever *they* think they need. This is the law-giver bestowing anarchy. Such a person can have no political status -- he becomes the truly apolitical man, becoming the voice of the crowd and sacrificing his status as leader and improver of the people.

The non-loving politician is keenly aware of his own interests. The loving politician, on the other hand, fails on two points. First, he either has no interests of his own or is unaware of them and cannot act in accordance with them. Second, he is incapable of assessing the interests of others and determining what is or is not appropriate for them. He cannot make the

²²⁶Interestingly, Socrates describes Callicles' love for a boy named Demos and the Athenian demos. The pun captures the sort of political implications that I am trying to describe in this dialogue.

citizens better, which is exactly what the non-loving politician promises, because he cannot *make* them anything at all.

The lover has no self about which he can be deceived, according to the non-lover. His chief failure is precisely his inability to abstract himself from the citizens and see himself separately. The non-lover has an identity that he values before the citizens' needs and this, he claims, is his strength. Lysias' speech draws the lines for the political message of the dialogue. The remainder becomes Socrates' attempt to salvage some argument for a kind of madness that will both improve the citizens through the statesman and reunite the leader with the subjects. In other words, he will try to close the gap Lysias has opened between leader and people, while preserving the concern for one's best interests.

The First Interlude (234c-237b)

There is a short interlude in the dialogue before Socrates begins his first speech, introduced by Phaedrus asking Socrates' opinion of the foregoing presentation. Phaedrus is asking for Socrates' true feelings -- an expression of the genuine Socrates. In effect it is a plea for an un-ironic response (one whose meaning is uncontested). He implores Socrates "in the name of friendship" (Hamilton), as "one friend to another" (Hackforth). Friendship is a significant clue to what Plato is attempting to describe. Friendship is that special bond between people that precludes any form of deception. It is not merely that friends do not keep secrets from one another. Nor is it that friends do

not withhold their assistance when a friend requires something of them. What friends never withhold is *themselves* .

Friendship is social intercourse without masks. It is the model for interpersonal relations and is based on honesty and forthrightness. Thus, this brief exchange after Lysias' speech tells us that a correlate to knowing oneself is revealing oneself. We have seen already that there is a theme of disclosed *versus* undisclosed identity running through the Lysian speech. This will become more explicit as the dialogue progresses, specifically in Socrates' restatement of Lysias' main premise about love.

Phaedrus' request for an honest opinion is rebuffed. Socrates wants to make a statement about rhetoric in general at this point. The invitation to comment gives him the opportunity to parody the intoxicating effects of persuasive speech. As I noted when discussing the *Gorgias*, words and speech become the magic potion exercising a quasi-physiological force over the psyche. Gorgias claims that rhetoric will make a person powerful and we can find similarities between the words Plato puts in the character's mouth and the words the historical Gorgias has left us. Specifically, as I quote in Section Two, Gorgias' *Helen* shows just how seriously he took the physiological model. Socrates has the same idea in mind at 242d-e where Socrates asks Phaedrus if he holds Love to be a god. The latter concurs and Socrates says, "But not according to Lysias, and not according to that discourse of yours which you caused my lips to utter by putting a spell on them". This is more than a passing reference to the power of speech and more

than Socratic playfulness. The very concept of intoxication, of being somehow drugged by words, carries with it implicitly the notion that we become who or what we are not.²²⁷ Return to Gorgias' words. He says that rhetoric will turn a whole host of otherwise powerful men into the slaves of the clever speaker (*Gorgias* 542d-e. See above for commentary). Socrates' playful response indicates that he has been reduced to that level. If Phaedrus wants the real Socrates he should not have shared this powerful potion with him. We shall see how Socrates releases himself from the false bondage of the insincere speaker.

Though Socrates initially refuses, or claims to be unable, to take the lead, he does actually begin the commentary on the speech. This is the introduction to his own pronouncement on the virtues of the non-lover. He says that Lysias' speech is repetitive and unimaginative (234e-235a). The line of argument is obvious and the essential point is simply restated several times in different words.

The interlude is, I think, beautifully conversational. Phaedrus and Socrates playfully interact, contributing to the relaxed setting beside the river. It turns out, though, that Socrates is the playful one; Phaedrus is eager and serious. He has a passion for speeches like Glaucon has for young men or like

²²⁷The words that drug in this case are Phaedrus' threat to withhold a particular form of pleasure that Socrates pursues in a, albeit facetiously, pathological way. It is as if Socrates is a "word addict" and needs his drug in regular doses.

any lover of beautiful things has for such objects (cf. *Republic* 474d ff.). He cannot stand to have any example of his love-object mocked or treated lightly. At least one commentator has found in Phaedrus a model of erotic madness and sees the playful banter with Socrates as a self-referencing dramatic ploy.²²⁸ Socrates and Phaedrus are the older and younger man, respectively. There is something to this interpretation, but it is not the core of the dialogue. It complements what I have just described regarding friendship and its demand to remove all masks and reveal the person beneath.

Phaedrus seems wounded by the irony and is only calmed by the half-jesting offer to deliver a better speech on the same topic. Phaedrus seizes on this excitedly at 236b. He uses the carrot and the stick to get Socrates to deliver a speech. The carrot, a promise to erect a life-sized gold statue of Socrates at Olympia (236b), has no effect. The stick is what ultimately succeeds. Phaedrus vows never to share another speech with him unless he delivers his own. “How clever of you to discover the means of compelling a lover of discourse to do your bidding,” Socrates exclaims (236e). Socrates is more than a victim of the drug of speech; he is an addict. Dramatically, this statement reflects the love-madness theme of the dialogue. Phaedrus is, in fact, the discourse-mad participant and Socrates the more sober analyst of meaning. Note, however, the further point that Socrates has still not dropped his mask. He has actually put on his “Phaedrus disguise” and is now masquerading as the young man himself. This technique of

²²⁸I have Nussbaum specifically in mind.

imitating the interlocutor emphasises two things. First, we ourselves have to try to find the real Socrates beneath a multi-layered ironic structure that both conceals and reveals through self-reference. Second, the technique tells us something about Phaedrus himself. Socrates' imitation holds a mirror up to Phaedrus, but the latter seems wholly unaware that he is gazing at his own outward appearance. In order for Phaedrus to progress towards a revelation of his true self he must first recognise that what he takes as himself is merely a persona. He cannot yet do this.

Self-knowledge is a precondition for self-revelation because Plato has ensured that self-revelation is not merely honesty or sincerity (the Lysias non-lover is "honest" and "sincere"). It is not sufficient that a person speak what he thinks is the truth or act in accordance with a moral code. Interpersonal deception stems from self-deception, for Plato, and any statement made or action performed in the absence of self-knowledge cannot be called self-revelation. Fundamentally, what is revealed *is* one's self-knowledge and Phaedrus can thus be said to have completely deceived himself.

This might help explain Socrates' apparent unwillingness to assess Lysias' speech. Even the cursory assessment that is made largely misses the mark, focusing on the speech's technical qualities. Moral evaluation has not yet been touched upon in speech because Phaedrus -- the absent, un-self-recognized Phaedrus -- is not ready for it. Not until the second interlude dividing Socrates' first and second speeches will we

even begin to see that there may be serious problems with the non-lover's self-defence. Socrates' claim that the god has been insulted is the first intimation that a moral crisis has been underway since Lysias' speech was read.

This first interlude is a convenient method for momentarily ignoring the implications of the non-lover's speech. It reinforces the fundamental separation between author and text and leaves Socrates and Phaedrus to comment on those aspects of the speech that can be analysed in the absence of the actual speaker. These aspects are ultimately trivial, further reinforcing that the discovery of meaning demands the presence of the person who *intends* a particular meaning (as well as the interpreter of that meaning). Similarly, knowing oneself is not a solitary task. Socrates is not interested in analysing the mythical tales that occupy others' minds because he has not yet come to know himself (229c-230a). Additionally, he has no interest in wandering in the countryside because he is a lover of learning. The trees and fields can teach him nothing, but the men of the town can (230d). They can teach him about the human mind.²²⁹

²²⁹ Yet, this merely reinforces the mystery surrounding Socrates' willingness to wander away from the city. Can he come to understand the human mind when surrounded by the sensual distractions of the countryside? Phaedrus is walking beyond the walls because he is taking the advice of Acumenus, who has said that walking on the rural roads is less fatiguing, i.e., more healthy, than walking the city streets (227a). Phaedrus is promoting his health by treating his body well. Socrates, on the other hand, is after a different kind of health, that of the soul. Usually, to promote the soul's health, he violates the advice of his friend (and Phaedrus' -- 227a), Acumenus, and remains in the city.

In other words, the desire to achieve knowledge of one's self is necessarily to achieve knowledge of one's true self. As the correctly ordered human soul is one thing (i.e., all correctly ordered souls, those that are ruled by the reason within them, are identical) we can say that the true self is the universal human self. The cognitive attribute of that self is knowledge, so to satisfy the desire for self-knowledge is to *become* the only self of which knowledge is possible. Thus, to know oneself is to know the human soul and cross-examination of others is like a dialogue with your self.

The problem with textual exegesis, while contributing to the problem of recovering intended meaning, relates to the dual problem of self-knowledge and self-revelation. Only in the absence of self-knowledge can a person employ the subterfuge of adopting a persona, a mask. All expressions of oneself, in the absence of self-knowledge, amount to a masquerade, with the important complication that the masked individual is unaware of his own disguise -- precisely because he lacks knowledge. Hence, we see Phaedrus failing to see his own reflection in Socrates' irony. Moreover, only through the desire for self-knowledge can friendship exist. Friendship resists all subterfuge and tolerates no false appearance. To befriend someone in these terms is to engage in a joint search for

The health of the body is made secondary, though Socrates knows what would be beneficial to it (227b). To ensure the health of the soul, he follows those who may have something to teach him and this gives him sufficient reason for following Phaedrus.

identity; it is the progressive stripping away of falsehood from the soul. This means that it is reciprocal. Friends are looking for the genuine self in each other. Moreover, friendship thus becomes limited to those who are engaged in this sort of search. It is achieved when both see their own reflection in the unclouded and unironic mirror of the other's soul. Consider also Phaedrus' playful threat that coaxes a speech out of Socrates. This is the antithesis of friendship. Phaedrus' willingness to commit "violence" against Socrates to get what *he* wants foreshadows the kind of violence against the soul that Socrates will describe in his first speech. The themes of hidden identity and violent power will dominate Socrates' first speech.

At 237a Socrates prepares himself to deliver the speech. He says that he will speak with his face covered so that he will not catch Phaedrus' eye and feel ashamed for anything he says. This is a symbolic representation of what I have been arguing. First, we can see this as somehow reflecting the separation between author and text. Socrates' speech is no more than a disembodied voice, as the text is a disembodied collection of statements. Second, Socrates has very literally put on a mask, leading us to question to what extent the words are an expression of his true self. At 235c Socrates has already warned us that something seems to be possessing him and making him think that he could outdo Lysias' speech. The mask he wears refers us back to the idea of possession as the replacement of true self with the identity of some other entity. The man possessed is not himself and is only in a technical sense responsible for his actions.

Additionally, by hiding his face, Socrates is stepping out of the public space where he, the person who supposedly holds the beliefs contained in the speech, can be seen and judged both for his words and for his character. In covering his face he underscores the text's deceptive efficacy. If even the Athenians based the worth of a man's speech on the worth of the man, any disguise that gave the impression of virtue had practical advantages.²³⁰ So, identity can be hidden by an unbridgeable gap between word and speaker/writer or by an impenetrable shield between speaker and audience. Both, as I have been claiming, reduce to a lack of self-knowledge.

Socrates' First Speech (237b-241d)

At least one thing immediately distinguishes Socrates' speech from Lysias'. Before speaking Socrates identifies what he takes to be the appropriate method for proceeding. One must begin by defining the topic under consideration. Lysias fails by constructing his speech backwards, beginning where he should

²³⁰Ober (1989), 126. That the mere guise of virtue may have practical consequences underscores the remarks above about friendship. It also reminds us of certain themes raised in the *Republic*. As Adeimantus asserts in Book II, young men are taught that the appearance of virtue is all that is desirable. In addition, as Socrates constructs his ideas on imitation and dramatic representation, it becomes clear that the *appearance* is all that most men *can* judge, which is why he ensures that virtuous character is all that they are allowed to see. It is not merely that most men do not engage in the sort of self examination that characterises true friendship; most men cannot engage in such an examination.

have ended (264a). Interestingly, the speech even reads as if the speaker is continuing an on-going discussion. Lysias alludes to the young man's awareness of how things stand between them (230e). The non-lover's argument is the midpoint of a larger whole. Charles Griswold finds Socrates' "second-level talk about talk" to be significant regarding the later discussion of *techne*.²³¹ At the level of political context it does more than this. It also connects this second speech of the dialogue with the first. The background to Lysias' speech is precisely the numerous technical manuals on rhetoric that provide him with a system of rules for proceeding. Socrates' "little *techne*" is a nod in the direction of the would be theorists of rhetoric. Its emptiness as a guide mimics the worthlessness of those manuals.²³²

Socrates' first speech immediately raises an interesting problem. After establishing that love is a kind of desiring, but a base kind that pursues only physical beauty, we are given the background to the speech (left unstated in Lysias'). The young man to whom it is addressed is now shown as being surrounded by a flock of suitors who say they love him. The

²³¹Charles Griswold, Jr., *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 58. Griswold will go one to show that this "techne" is shallow and finally overthrown by the later discussion.

²³²Socrates' insistence on definition reminds us of the familiar aporetic dialogues where definitions are sought, but never found. It is not unusual for him to claim that we cannot proceed without determining what we are talking about (cf. *Meno* 80d), but, as Griswold points out, Socrates is here too loose with his own terminology for us to take this as an example of Socratic technique. Griswold (1986), 59 ff.

non-lover in this speech is a member of the flock, but persuades the young man that he is not actually in love with him. Here, the non-lover openly lies. He pretends to be something he is not in order to win the young man over to him and does this by trying to show that the character represented by his adopted persona has definite advantages. The non-lover *sees* himself as a lover. But his self-perception and his disguise to mask what he takes to be his true self reflect the philosophical tail-chasing behind the lack of self knowledge. He oscillates between believing he is something that he is not and pretending to be something else that he is not. There is no mechanism within his deceptive scheme that will allow him to discover or ascend to his true identity. His lack of self-knowledge allows him to display a false identity. But the lack of knowledge prevents him from seeing what truly being himself means. While this will come out as the conception of love changes in the dialogue, at this stage we can read the opening lines of the speech as re-emphasising the idea of false identity.²³³

²³³The sort of concealment that Socrates visibly employs here is mirrored in other dialogues. For example, we see in the *Hippias Major* that Socrates puts his questions to Hippias through the imaginary persona of an unnamed friend (who we know is Socrates in this case). Again, we see a similar ploy used in the *Protagoras*, where Socrates adopts the guise of a person accusing Protagoras and Socrates of making no sense. While these examples are similar, it is important to note that the concealment in each differs fundamentally from the case in the *Phaedrus*. In this case, Socrates attempts to disappear; his self is no longer present. In these examples, however, he adopts a hypothetical stance, asking how an interlocutor would answer *if* someone were to put this or that question.

Lysias' speech developed the inherent superiority of the non-lover over the lover. The lover is shown to be a madman and the non-lover as perfectly rational. The lover causes a young man harm and the non-lover brings him genuine benefits.

Socrates' speech advances the description of the almost perverse irrationality of the man in love. The madness of love utterly distorts one's judgement. Love paradoxically contains its own opposite, hate. A man who is in love *hates* the sight of equality or superiority in his beloved. He wants either to convince the beloved that he is inferior to his admirer or hinder the development of higher physical and mental qualities. This will lock the beloved into a position of inferiority (238e-239b). Lysias' lover could not judge what would harm or benefit the young man. He harmed him through a combination of neglect and over-zealousness. Socrates' lover has malicious intentions. His love has not so much made him mad as made him evil. Thus the harmful effects of associating with such a person are calculated to occur. The lover has not misjudged what will actually improve the youth; he *tries to harm* the youth. Socrates seems to be saying that Lysias was too gentle with the lover and should have shown that such a madman is also a scoundrel.

Two things should be stressed. First, the speaker is a false non-lover. He is, in fact, a lover and, thus, his words apply to himself. He is saying that his own nature as lover is to harm. Given the chance, according to his own words, he will commit violence against the young man's soul. Second, the speaker

does not believe his own words. How do we know? Let us say that he can be one of two kinds of lover: a Lysian lover or a Platonic lover (momentarily leaping forward in the dialogue). The Lysian lover is mad and this causes harm to the young man. But he has no intention to do so and actually believes that he does the young man some good (he gives him gifts and makes all sorts of promises; surely these things are “good” or the young man would never consider them desirable in the first place). So, the Lysian lover cannot believe what the speaker here is saying. At most he can acknowledge that he does not care whether or not he brings genuine benefits, since he is just out to satisfy his own desires with whatever means are required. He cannot admit to an intention to harm.

The Platonic lover very clearly cannot believe these words because Plato has constructed the scope of love to exclude even the possibility of harm. Indeed, we do not need to jump ahead in the dialogue. We already know that interpersonal harm is self-harm.²³⁴ Furthermore, we can look to the craft analogies to see why he could not, as a Platonic lover, believe his own words. As a “maker” the Platonic lover necessarily has an other-regarding concern for the beloved, which prevents him from making his “subject matter” worse than it already is. So, unless this lover is a different sort of lover not mentioned in

²³⁴See *Apology* 25c-d where Socrates makes the point that only a fool would make someone evil, since evil people do evil things to those around them. Socrates makes effectively the same point to Thrasymachus in *Republic* I.

the dialogue we should conclude that he does not believe in his description of himself.

The critical point is that the characterisation of the lover between the Lysian and first Socratic speeches has undergone a gradual change. In the Lysian speech the lover is a mirror held up to the young man reflecting whatever is already there. The first Socratic lover, however, possesses the possibility of self-reflection. He can say something about himself *qua* lover -- something other than "I am mad." If madness in the sense treated by Lysias and Socrates means that a man is not being his actual self, then the "I" in that statement is an ambiguous term.

More than the possibility of self-reflection, though, the first Socratic lover has a two-level motivation system. At one level he wants to win the young man -- corresponding to his desire for physical beauty, as defined at the start of the speech. At the other level he wants to dominate the young man -- and this corresponds to his desire for power, which the Lysian lover wholly lacks. The Lysian lover wants to keep his prize; the Socratic lover wants to enslave his.

Returning now to the two points I just made about self-reference of the non-lover's statements and his own incredulity towards them. Because the non-lover is really a lover, his words technically apply to himself. He is saying that the sort of person he is will inevitably cause harm. The "law-giver" he represents is the kind who promotes faction and strife by

design. He commits violence against the soul of the young man and, as law-giver, commits violence against the citizens. But, as he does not believe this we could say that it is not so, or that we are actually no wiser about the lover's nature because of this deception. However, this conclusion is invalid. His deception is itself an act of violence against the soul of the young man and potentially against the citizens. He is already committing the acts he warns us the lover will commit. If the truth of the speaker's words, when taken into the soul, improves the audience, the false speaker's words cause damage (cf. Section Two). The non-lover in this speech, while ostensibly revealing no information about the nature of lovers, has revealed all we need to know through his duplicitous actions as a concealed lover. He is engaged in an enterprise to satisfy his own desire for power.

The purpose of the first Socratic speech might appear as somewhat of a mystery. As far as rhetoric goes it is a better example than Lysias' speech.²³⁵ Perhaps Socrates is simply demonstrating the ease with which anyone can construct a pleasant-sounding, vacuous speech. Therefore, this middle speech of the dialogue may be a parody of the rhetoricians. It is just Socrates' usual ironic stance. Alternatively, some have claimed the speech represents a subtle contribution to the

²³⁵ Griswold, for example, says that it is an improvement over Lysias' speech because of its beginning interest in definition and its overall organisation. Griswold (1986), 58.

intellectual feud between Plato and Isocrates.²³⁶ This would make the significance of the speech lie outside the dialogue (unless we wanted to say that the dialogue itself sets out to make such an attack). This argument does have a certain appeal if for no other reason than that it gives some purchase on Plato's intentions and on the contemporary controversy surrounding rhetoricians. Finally, the speech may be a necessary "half-way house" between the offensive Lysian speech and the redemptive final speech of the dialogue. It has no intrinsic function other than to bridge together the beginning and the end of the dialogue (with a modicum of comic mockery thrown in).²³⁷

The analysis I have tried to construct indicates that all of these interpretations miss the mark. While each may still be part of the picture, none is the central message I see unfolding in the dialogue. In Socrates first speech, the central speech of the dialogue, a pivotal transition is underway. The non-lover in Lysias' speech casts himself in the role of self-knower and self-revealer. In this central speech the non-lover has been unmasked and shown to be the lover he denounces. Even as he tries to hide behind a disbelief in his own words, his actions

²³⁶Malcom Brown and James Coulter, "The Middle Speech in Plato's *Phaedrus*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971), 405-424. See their references for further arguments along similar lines.

²³⁷Hackforth implies such a view in his commentary, noting that several ideas are foreshadowed in the first Socratic speech and that the speaker "shows a real concern for the welfare, especially the moral welfare, of the boy." Hackforth, 40. I have tried to show above that this is incorrect.

show that his assessment is correct. There is an emotional state that calls itself love, but it is a counterintuitive love -- a love that hates. It is a grasping, greedy, power-hungry love that detests all rivals. This love is tyranny.

I said at the beginning of this section that it would be useful to assign political identities to the character types in the speeches. More than useful, I think the consideration of love and rhetoric in the dialogue is an invitation to do so. We cannot divorce rhetoric from public discourse; persuasive speech needs an audience. We have, then, a Lysian lover who has no political status because he only reflects the passions of the citizens without assessing them. The Lysian non-lover wants to be our law-giver because of his heightened self-awareness. But, I have tried to show that the self that he sees is only a persona. Finally, we have the dual-characterised Socratic lover/non-lover. Where others are merely ignorant, this person is evil. He has a cunning deceitfulness that tells us he is more than a typical individual lacking knowledge. He seems, somewhere along the line, to have become twisted and malicious. His words conceal him, but his actions betray him.²³⁸ As the dialogue proceeds we shall see how this situation is resolved.

²³⁸A couple of analogues to this character come to mind. First, we see the philosopher-rogue described at *Republic* 494b ff. Seduced by the promise of easy gain, this would-be philosopher ends up as the best criminal. Second, we see the expert craftsman who is best at doing wrong in the *Hippias Minor*. Socrates will ultimately claim in that dialogue, according to the argument he has been making, that the just man will be supremely capable of evil.

The Second Interlude (241d-243c)

The second interlude is brief, as will be my comments. More than the first interlude, it appears to be a dramatic pause to allow us to observe the coming philosophical storm where Socrates will develop a new conception of love and rhetoric. Nevertheless, a number of points stand out. First, in referring to his just completed speech, Socrates says that there is no point in wasting words. Every point he has just made about the lover can be counterbalanced with an observation about the non-lover. "And that being so, my story can be left to the fate appropriate to it..." he says (241e). It is interesting to note that Socrates has reversed the errors of Lysias' speech. The former began in the middle with an assumed background of shared knowledge. Socrates' ends in the middle with an assumption that the rest is derivative. In other words, speeches constructed according to the "rules", the *technai* that form the background to Lysias' speech and Socrates' "little *techne*", are purely mechanical. If rhetoric is like cookery (as described in the Gorgias) then the handbooks of style are simply cookery books. Furthermore, the fate to which Socrates leaves his speech resembles the author's abandonment of the text. The words have been spoken and they are now simply part of the "environment," a piece of material reality having no connection with the man who spoke them.

The reference to Stesichorus' recantation (243a-b) has obvious parallels with the argument I have tried to develop about self-knowledge. Stesichorus the poet wrote that Helen had *willingly*

run away to Troy, causing the most famous war in Greek history. For this slander he was struck blind. Sensing that it was his offending verse that angered the gods, he immediately penned new lines stating the error of thinking Helen had even gone to Troy, let alone voluntarily. He immediately regained his sight.²³⁹ The second speech that Socrates will shortly deliver is more than a similar recantation. It points towards the rejection of falsehood and the subsequent achievement of one's self-vision. When we try to say what is true, we begin to see ourselves.

This is reflected in Socrates' removal of his face covering (243b) under which he delivered his first speech.

Commentators normally acknowledge the significance of this device Plato has Socrates employ, treating it as a reference to the embarrassment his first speech causes him.²⁴⁰ More than this, however, it is a symbolic stripping away of what hides the true self. It is not only the embarrassment that drives Socrates under cover. His entire motivational framework is distorted in the first speech. He speaks to "win high renown from men" (quotation from Ibucus at 242d), though he sins in the sight of God. The speech was an imitation of Lysian style, and also of the warped Lysian perspective on what is right and proper for a speaker to set out to achieve.

²³⁹A dramatic counterpart to Stesichorus' blindness is Socrates' covering his face. The latter effectively blinds himself in advance of his blasphemy. I discuss this dramatic device further in this section.

²⁴⁰Hackforth (1952), 34, n. 4.

Socrates get Phaedrus to agree that Eros has been insulted and this sin must be atoned. Socrates offers some advice to the (absent) Lysias to the effect that he too should avoid insulting the god. Phaedrus says, “Rest assured that will be done. When you have delivered your encomium of the lover, I shall most certainly make Lysias compose a new speech to the same purport.” Socrates responds, “I’m sure of that, so long as you continue to be the man you are” 243d-e). Hackforth’s footnote to this passage says that Lysias will be unable to resist Phaedrus so long as the latter maintains his enthusiasm for rhetoric. This, it seems, misses the point. As long as Phaedrus remains unable to see the message through the medium, to hear the meaning not the words, Lysias the *logographos* and professional orator will have an audience. The existence of the unreflective and un-self-revealing “art” of rhetoric follows from the availability of an unreflective and un-self-knowing audience who praise form over content. Unless Phaedrus can begin to see his own reflection in the mirror held before him, he will forever be running back and forth between the rhetors looking for what he cannot recognise.

The theme of identity is reinforced in the closing lines of the second interlude. Before he begins, Socrates asks where is the young man to whom he had been speaking (i.e., the intermission is over and the audience should return to their seats). Phaedrus says, “He is here, quite close beside you, whenever you want him” (243e). Nussbaum says that this is “among the most haunting and splendid moments in

philosophy.”²⁴¹ Hackforth quotes Friedlander as noting that the second speech is unmistakably addressed to Phaedrus. Hackforth himself disagrees and feels that the exchange is simple playfulness.²⁴² The reference is, I think, sufficiently multi-layered to allow for Nussbaum’s haunted feeling, Friedlander’s discovery of an erotic sub-theme, and Hackforth’s scepticism. We can also find in the passage an antidote to Phaedrus’ continuing to be the man he is, referred to at 243d-e. If Phaedrus is not doomed to a constant pursuit of the most beautiful or pleasing speech, if he can turn away from the pleasant and look to see his own true self, Socrates is here to help him.²⁴³ If Socrates’ second speech and the conversation that follows it are successful, Phaedrus will not return to the rhetors in search of a new speech on love (or any other topic presumably).

Like the familiar aporetic dialogues, there is a sense in this dialogue that Socrates is concerned to change the outlook of the character immediately present. We find a similar statement at *Gorgias* 475e where Socrates says that he will be satisfied if he can only get Polus to change his views. It is, as I said at the beginning, part of that dialogue’s theme of redemption. The same theme is not foreign to the *Phaedrus*. Thus, Socrates will be doing more than developing his own art of rhetoric; he will develop a science of persuasiveness. His science addresses the

²⁴¹Nussbaum (1986), 211.

²⁴²Hackforth (1952), 53, n. 1.

²⁴³It is not only in this dialogue that Phaedrus is addicted to speeches. He is the, admittedly indirect, instigator behind the discussion of love in the *Symposium* (177a-c)

fundamental issue of how to get the message out of the speech and into the soul. We will see as the dialogue continues just how important the speaker's own achievement of true identity (and his self-revelation through speech) is to that science.

Socrates' Second Speech

The third and final "speech" of the dialogue is hard to compare to those that went before. We should note that Socrates attributes his first speech to the inspiration brought on by Phaedrus. His second speech he says is inspired by Stesichorus the repentant poet. The second speech contains some of Plato's best mythical writing and, indeed, the myth of the soul's ascent dominates the speech. Socrates begins by distinguishing the various types of madness. It was wrong, he says, to shy away from love because people call lovers mad. We must see how madness can be a good thing brought to us by a god. Love is the highest form of madness and brings the person possessed by it the greatest bliss. As he develops his argument, the lover will turn out to be a philosopher, who is called mad by those who cannot imagine the vision of Being that he observes.

After identifying the different ways in which one can be mad, Socrates begins his "proof" and he starts by showing that the soul is immortal. His proof of this rests on the related assumptions that the soul is self-moving and whatever is self-moving cannot die. If that which is self-moving were to die, i.e., cease moving, then everything else in the universe would slowly grind to a halt, since there must be an unmoved mover

to get the entire causal process going. The soul is considered self-moving because we can identify no external source of its motion (perhaps an even more basic assumption at work is that the soul is in motion. At 245e Socrates implies that the very definition of soul *is* self-motion). Thus, since the soul is perpetually in motion -- and all other human attributes derive their motion from this movement -- we can say that to know the soul is to know all else that is human. All human characteristics that derive their motion from the soul are epiphenomenal for Socrates. To know these epiphenomena is to know nothing about what is essentially human. Human-ness is simply human soul.

Moreover, to know human soul is to know the essential character of *every* human soul. The myth will show that different souls achieve different cognitive heights, but the human soul, at its point of perfection, is essentially one thing. Thus, as I have said earlier, the process of discovering one's own self is the process of discovering the human soul. Lying within this is the bond of friendship, which becomes the act of looking upon one's own image in the soul of another. Implicit within this is the idea that to know the human soul at all is to know it at its point of perfection, and to know this is to become such a perfected soul.

Socrates compares the soul to a chariot with two winged horses, one good and the other bad. The good horse strives to ascend

to glimpse a vision of true Being beyond the heavens.²⁴⁴ The bad horse impels the whole chariot downwards towards objects of earthly beauty. The horseman must reign in the bad horse and somehow get the two steeds to operate in unison. This is the structure of the human soul. The soul of a god is different, however. Having no bad horse to pull it down, the soul of a god ascends easily and breaks completely free of the phenomenal world. “And now there awaits the soul the extreme of her toil and struggling. For the souls that are called immortal [the souls of gods], so soon as they are at that summit come forth and stand upon the back of the world: and straightaway the revolving heaven carries them round, and they look upon the regions without” (247b-c).²⁴⁵ This is the privilege of the gods. Human souls basically get to stick their heads above water for a short while, see some of Being, and get pulled back under by the bad horse. The vast majority of souls (non-human souls) never even achieve that height; they remain below the surface, as it were. While each soul by its nature strives to behold the Truth, most find themselves incapable and are constantly trying to reign in the bad horse in order to ascend to whatever height they can. In the meantime, they are trampling upon one another and breaking off the horses’ wings (defeating the attempted ascent).

²⁴⁴In this cosmological sketch Socrates treats the phenomenal world as encased in some sort of permeable shell. Within the shell is all that can be sensed. Beyond the shell is the realm of true being.

²⁴⁵Hackforth’s translation of this speech is a bit cumbersome and archaic, as he tries to capture the poetic flavour of the original Greek.

To understand this we must understand that Plato treats all animate creatures as having a soul. We can see this in the hierarchy of fallen souls that he constructs beginning at 248d. “For only the soul that has beheld Truth may enter into this our human form...,” he says (249b). As in the Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* there is an idea that every soul has seen what is eternal and unchanging. This vision, indeed, is what ensures that a soul will be re-embodied as a human agent rather than as a lower animal in the *Phaedrus*. As a result, what is missing from this myth of the returning soul is the remarkable conception of choice that is so intriguing in the Myth of Er. Here, depending on the extent of one’s prenatal vision of Being, one will come to inhabit a particular sort of human and this does not appear to have any relation to what one may choose.²⁴⁶ The souls that beheld the most will come to earth as philosophers. They have the best recollection of the Forms (having seen the most and having constantly attended to recovering that vision). Socrates subtly brings this sort of person under the rubric of lover who is now considered to be the most fortunate “madman.” He is characterised by a love of beauty. When he sees earthly beauty he is reminded of the Form of Beauty and “his wings begin to grow” (249c). Other souls that cannot remember as well as the lover/philosopher

²⁴⁶In the Myth of Er, choice plays a double role. One chooses a new life, but also chooses how much to forget of what has been seen. The requirement to drink from the River of Forgetfulness is a requirement to drink a minimum amount, but some are overwhelmed by thirst and drink a greater quantity. It appears in that myth that Socrates wants to hold these imprudent people accountable. Such accountability is not plainly seen in the *Phaedrus*.

never make the connection between earthly and heavenly beauty. These souls never turn away from the world of becoming and dwell upon the appearance of truth throughout their human lives.

The very presence of the myth of the soul underscores the issue of recovering or discovering the meaning hidden beneath the medium. There is always a risk with Platonic myths that the message will become lost in the ingenious imagery. While it is possible to decipher the symbolic meaning of each image, we should try to treat the myth as a whole and attempt to understand what overarching idea is being presented. It is well known that Plato's theory of knowledge relies heavily on a belief that all understanding is recollection. And, as he writes in the *Republic*, education is a process of turning the pupil's soul in the direction of Being and away from the mere images of the phenomenal world (518d ff.). The passages comprising the myths found both here and in other dialogues, then, are supposed to tell us something about the nature of the human mind. Because the language of "soul" and immortality strike us as unusual (not being part of our normal philosophical vocabulary) it will be useful to remind ourselves that Socrates is speaking about a common modern issue, namely the existence, source and function of our moral intuitions.²⁴⁷

The source of these intuitions for Plato is the vision of the Forms glimpsed by the disembodied soul, which becomes the

²⁴⁷The presumed existence of moral intuitions is not an issue for Plato or probably any Greek contemporary.

foundation for the agent's entire moral framework. Through the process of forgetting, whatever the particular mechanics of this within each myth Plato offers,²⁴⁸ this vision is relegated from conscious apprehension to intuitive perception. What matters most, though, is that the vision each disembodied soul has is of the same perfect and unchanging reality. Our intuitions, then, while based on different degrees of obscured vision, are fundamentally identical.

This helps us understand an interesting detail that seems to crop up in a number of dialogues, particularly if the main interlocutor is a sophist. Socrates seems to have an uncanny ability to inspire feelings of shame in this sort of person. In the debate with Thrasymachus, Socrates says that he sees him blush. Protagoras feels a degree of humiliation. Gorgias and Polus are ashamed to speak what they say they believe. Callicles has no shame, but is then made to experience what he denies (494e). The pervasiveness of shame indicates to us that moral intuition is not something created or developed from the fact of social existence for Plato. Our intuitions represent an *a priori* set of cognitive faculties. Because we have these intuitions we have the faculty for rational thought that lower animals lack. Intuitions ultimately become translated into the motivational factors behind rational action.

²⁴⁸A useful discussion can be found in Julia Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement", *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 119-43. She discusses such myths as found in the *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*.

It returns us, then, to the notion that to know the soul is to know the essence of what a human is. Because the vision of Being is of the same thing for each soul, but to varying degrees of clarity, recollection becomes the central component in reaching into any given soul. The more one remembers of the vision of Being the more one remembers one's self as the disembodied perceiver of that vision. The more one comes to know this the more one comes to know the essential similarity of every particular soul. Coming to know one's self is coming to remember one's self, *qua* soul, and coming to understand one's self as simultaneously distinct and identical to others.

This has direct bearing on Socrates' science of persuasiveness in the dialogue. I did not comment on this phrase when using it earlier, but it seems appropriate and necessary to do so now. The concept of an art of rhetoric is overburdened in this context with images of handbooks on rhetoric. Consequently, it is too easy to think that Socrates is doing *something like* producing the equivalent of a manual of rhetorical style, but with philosophical rigour. The concept of rhetoric itself, however, presents us with a special problem -- forcing us to revise our view of Socrates' actions. If rhetoric is persuasive speech, what does it mean to be persuasive? What makes something so? The question reveals what the myth of the chariot-soul points towards: a conception of human understanding, the nature of conviction, and the mental process of "seeing" the universal in the particular. An art of rhetoric only touches the surface of what Plato is trying to construct. Rhetoric is the great unexamined practice that can only be

approached through Plato's philosophy of mind. It is not simply that rhetorical techniques as conventionally understood have nothing to do with the truth (the almost knee-jerk characterisation of Socrates' "true rhetoric"). Nor is it the companion assertion that rhetoricians do not speak from knowledge. These points are quite correct, but, like Lysias' speech, "vulgar rhetoricians" begin from what needs to be explained, taking for granted the mechanics of persuasion. Somewhere between the speaker's attempt to persuade and the auditor's conviction there is an indeterminacy, a "something" that happens in order to produce the conviction. We need to examine what might reside in that gap between speech and conviction. As I have just said, this demands an exploration of Plato's philosophy of mind.

We can think of the intuitions in Plato's scheme as residing somewhere between a conscious and subconscious mental state (though this is anachronistic and somewhat misleading terminology, it will be useful for the moment). They are not something we could call fully conscious ideas or perceptions because, by definition, they are inarticulable (maybe undefinable as principles) sources of thought and action (I am abusing the concept of consciousness a bit). Nor are they fully sub-conscious because we are aware of having them and acting upon them. They are motivational. The myth is designed to give some insight into this ambiguous status. Persuasiveness, I want to claim, is a result of somehow reaching into the soul and "animating" a person's intuitions. Persuasive speech gives the particular the flavour of the universal. It leads the mind from

this momentary set of experiences up towards the motivating intuitive perceptions that, with varying degrees of awareness, we use to organise, understand, and explain our own actions.²⁴⁹

Returning to the myth, the characterisation of the lover/philosopher supports the view I am constructing. It is not exactly correct to say that the lover is a philosopher. All philosophers are lovers, but a lover is just a potential philosopher. In the myth the souls that see most of Being are travelling in the train of a god. Different gods, basically, give different journeys. Those who follow Zeus are predisposed to being lovers of wisdom and leaders of men. They seek and are

²⁴⁹Because of much modern work around intuitions the vocabulary I am using is hard to manage. I say intuitive “perceptions” because I want to distinguish intuitions from Platonic knowledge, since, insofar as intuitions are intuitive, they cannot be such a cognitive state yet. Secondly, I want to avoid the modern sense of the term in which a person can have intuitive “principles.” In the framework I am using here, the idea of a principle gives intuitions too much determinacy for us to appreciate Plato’s argument. Some modern uses of “intuitions” might explain what I do not mean. R.M. Hare uses the idea of intuitive principles as part of a two-level scheme for establishing noncontradictory principles of justice (we have intuitive principles that we then reflect upon and choose between with “critical thinking”). See R.M. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). To different, i.e., anti-utilitarian, ends John Rawls develops an idea of “reflective equilibrium.” If I understand this correctly, this is the outcome of a process in which intuitive principles are examined under the light of prevailing social values. Some sort of revision and reconceptualisation occurs resulting in a balance between the two. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), especially 48-51.

drawn to similar souls. When this other soul is encountered, the embodied soul begins its journey away from the particulars and towards the universal. "And if they have not aforetime trodden this path, they now set out upon, learning the way from any source that may offer or finding it for themselves..." (252e). The distinguishing feature of this person is the speed with which he moves from perception of the particular to a desire to see the universal. This indicates a highly developed intuitive recollection of Being. He did not, as a disembodied soul, achieve the perfect vision that a god achieves, but he saw and remembers more than the typical human. We can add that he remembers because he struggled to recollect.

Like any human soul, his is attracted to eternal and unchanging Beauty. When the embodied soul encounters or perceives earthly beauty, it rapidly shifts its gaze from the particular instance before it and begins to recollect the prenatal vision of perfect Beauty.

[T]he fourth kind of madness...causes him to be regarded as mad, who, when he sees the beauty on earth, remembering the true beauty, feels his wings growing and longs to stretch them for an upward flight, but cannot do so, and, like a bird, gazes upward and neglects the things below" (249e).²⁵⁰

250I use Fowler's translation here to avoid Hackforth's unwieldy rendering of the passage. H.N. Fowler, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914). Hackforth writes:

Such an one [the lover], as soon as he beholds the beauty of this world, is reminded of true Beauty, and his wings begin to grow; then he is fain to lift his wings and fly upward; yet he has not the

Beauty, Socrates will go on to say, is the part of Being that all human souls witnessed in all its brightness. Furthermore, the earthly images of beauty, unlike the images of “justice and temperance and all other prized possessions”, is most similar to the original -- and our visual perception of it is most like our prenatal vision (250b-d).

Thus, the lover/philosopher finds that his intuitive awareness of a higher reality is stimulated by the perception of physical beauty (cf. *Phaedo*). The particular thing or person that stimulates that perception becomes effectively marginalised because he recognises that his affection is actually for something outside the material world. All souls residing in human bodies have had some vision of Being (a point Socrates repeats at 249e), and the reclamation of their mind's eyesight is difficult. Most give up the struggle. In other words, most are seduced into thinking that earthly beauty is the genuine article because they cannot easily move from the particular to the universal. Nevertheless, having had the appropriate soul-vision at some point, even these souls are impelled towards beautiful things. They simply find it impossible to make the connection between them in order to recognise their essential unity under perfect Beauty.

power, but inasmuch as he gazes upward like a bird, and cares nothing for the world beneath, men charge it upon him that he is demented.

The chief assumption still at work in the dialogue is that an older man will fall in love with a younger. Every lover, Socrates says, wants his beloved to resemble the god who lead him round the heavens. The lover will try to mould the character of the beloved to resemble as closely as possible the divine image of that god.

[Lovers] go out and seek for their beloved a youth whose nature accords with that of the god, and when they have gained his affection, by imitating the god themselves and by persuasion and education they lead the beloved to the conduct and nature of the god, so far as each of them can do so; they exhibit no jealousy or meanness toward the loved one, but endeavour by every means in their power to lead him to the likeness of the god whom they honour (253b-c).²⁵¹

The impression is clearly of an older man, as in the preceding speeches, contributing to some sort of moral and intellectual redirection, perhaps regeneration, in a boy. Of course, in the two earlier speeches the lover produces harmful changes, utterly debasing whatever mental virtues the boy might have

²⁵¹Fowler, trans. Hackforth writes:

Every lover is fain that his beloved should be of a nature like to his own god; and when he has won him, he leads him on to walk in the ways of their god, and after his likeness, patterning himself thereupon and giving counsel, and discipline to the boy. There is no jealousy nor petty spitefulness in his dealings, but his every act is aimed at bringing the beloved to be every whit like unto himself and unto the god of their worship.

(and physical virtues, as well, according to Socrates' first speech).

This new approach to describing the lover is significant for my characterisation of the lover and non-lover as rival law-givers. In the two earlier speeches the non-lover presents himself as having an ability to make the young man better, an ability based on supposed self-knowledge. He says that the lover will corrupt, not improve, precisely for the opposite reason. Now Socrates is reversing this. The lover seems to have an intuitive sense of who he is -- a follower of Zeus -- and effectively falls in love with that same image in another person. Eventually, the beloved finds himself drawn towards the lover (the stream of beauty that pulled the lover towards the beloved is returned and the beloved finds himself drawn to the other), but is still unable to understand what he loves. He cannot account for his feelings and does not understand that his lover is like a mirror held up to the beloved's soul (255d).

Earlier the point was made that Socrates had put on a "Phaedrus mask" to show the younger man the appearance he presented to others. We have here a different sort of mirror, one that reflects soul, not persona. The lover, by virtue of what it is that makes him such, is able to show his beloved the nature of the self. In turning from the young man whom he loves and seeing the eternal and unchanging Form of Beauty, the lover sees himself as soul. In turning back to the image of beauty in the young man, he reveals what his soul perceives in the heavens -- and reveals it as the essential "matter" that

attracts him to the beloved. The beloved is also intuitively drawn towards this, but cannot yet recognise what it is. The craftsmanship of the lover/philosopher, however, will ensure that the young man continues to progress towards a mature appreciation of the soul's vision.

Thus, as Socrates concludes at 256e-257a:

He who is not a lover can offer a mere acquaintance flavoured with worldly wisdom, dispensing a niggardly measure of worldly goods; in the soul to which he is attached he will engender an ignoble quality extolled by the multitude as virtue, and condemn it to float for nine thousand years hither and thither, around the earth and beneath it, bereft of understanding.²⁵²

He then goes on to say a prayer for the souls of Phaedrus and Lysias, especially that the latter be turned towards the love of wisdom.

This is the point in the dialogue where discontinuity seems most apparent. Socrates has finished his speech on the virtues of love, correctly understood, and now the discussion turns to other matters. I hope that by this point one can see that whatever follows will draw heavily on the discussion of love and self-knowledge that has gone before. Perceptions of discontinuity stem from a literal reading of the foregoing speeches, rather than seeing the speeches as part of a broader subject.

²⁵²Hackforth, trans.

An End to Speeches - Dialectic, Rhetoric and Soul

The speeches are over. The lover has been vilified, the non-lover praised, and the true lover hailed as the most fortunate, divinely mad creature. We have learned that all souls currently residing in human forms have seen some part of true Being. This is the source of our moral intuitions. Because Being is eternal and unchanging, each soul saw the same thing and, therefore, all moral intuitions are fundamentally the same. We each have an intuitive sense of justice, beauty, temperance, and so on. These intuitions are the motivating force behind human action. A decision to act in a particular way reflects a belief that the chosen course somehow actualises one's intuitions. In other words, it appears to be the *right* course to follow. The memories that comprise our intuitions are, by their very nature, formal and, thus, not specifically related to how we act in the world. The point for Plato is the need to mentally recover the universal, to regenerate the knowledge of the universal from the particular. The regeneration of that knowledge becomes the activity of love and is a kind of self-knowing. For the beloved, the true lover is the man who helps him regain the vision of Being. The true lover benefits the beloved by bringing this vision to the front of his mind, displaying it to him by displaying himself. Not all go through this process. While we all have intuitions *of* the same things, the residual vision of Being varies in degree between people. Some people are more likely to recover a clear vision of Being,

corresponding to the small number of souls that managed to see the most a man can see when disembodied.

Taking this image back to the level of politics, we can find that there is room for an implied space occupied by the rhetorician. Inside every deliberative institution or framework is a small hollow where the person who is best at actualising intuitions takes a seat of honour. Any man can express an opinion reflecting his best judgement, but the rhetorician's pronouncements are authoritative. In both his vulgar and Platonic form, this man says the things that just *sound* right -- he *seems* to give voice to a host of inchoate sensations. We are convinced that what he says is correct because it appeals to us as a cogent expression of something we always knew, but could never verbalise. We are persuaded because our imprecise intuitions are made concrete and displayed before our eyes. What was once a "perhaps" becomes an "of course", closing the gap between intention to persuade and conviction. This, it must be stated, occurs in both the pseudo-rational appeals heard in Lysias' speech and in Platonic rhetoric. What distinguishes them is the persuader's desire to direct the auditors' mental gaze toward the universal, to the extent possible. Analogous to the true lover, the true rhetorician seeks the improvement of others. Importantly, the true lover undertakes this with one who can, and eventually does, become like him. The true rhetorician cannot, because of the varying levels of cognitive capacity, bring all of his auditors to his own level. Nevertheless, without understanding the source and role

of moral intuitions described in the dialogue Socrates' statements about rhetoric are all but incomprehensible.

In his first speech Socrates advocates the “little-*techne*” of defining the subject under discussion at the start of the speech. It turns out this is necessary because people disagree about the meaning of certain words (263a). Now he wants to expand on this. His first speech supposedly relied on a definition, but this still lead him to the wrong conclusion. Something more is needed prior to definition: a dialectical method. This involves the twin procedures of collection and division that will reveal the constituents composing the subject. Socrates describes the processes thus:

The first [procedure] is that in which we bring a dispersed plurality under a single form, seeing it all together.... [The second procedure is] the reverse of the other, whereby we are enabled to divide into forms, following the objective articulation... (265d).

Before we can define anything, or say anything about it, we need to see it as a unitary thing that operates as a complete whole. We must then analyse its micro structure to observe the movements and relations between its parts. This movement is entirely contained within the structural facade of the whole and is not normally what we have in mind when referring to the subject. Thus, we see in Socrates' second speech that madness is identified as a complex entity that could be divided “following the objective articulation” (Socrates

does not give much guidance for identifying how natural dividing points are to be found). Once the complex is made simple, the subject of the speech can be more narrowly specified. It is no good saying that love is madness, thus, bad, unless we can be sure that madness is a unitary thing. Since it is not, and some kinds of madness are good, we must see if love is of the good sort or the bad. True love is divinely inspired madness (a subset of the complex we simply refer to as madness) and, therefore, is good for the lover and the beloved.

This is how one practices dialectic.²⁵³ It is a method of ensuring that the words and concepts we use are precise and not misunderstood. At this level, though, it is simply technique and we cannot take Socrates as having given us the full picture. Words are themselves only signifiers, not signified (and what they signify is transcendental). In fractionalising the concept of madness we are still contending with language and ignoring meaning. The methods of collection and division, when applied to words, do not address the central issue of *understanding* language. At this point, we could simply say that Socrates has refined the work of the sophist Prodicus, who concerned himself with the precise definitions of words. His careful

²⁵³The relationship between this dialectical method and that alluded to in the *Republic* is unclear. It may be the case that by the time he wrote the *Phaedrus* Plato had, or wished to present, a more coherent picture of dialectic. The discussion of dialectic in the *Republic* starts as a concern with achieving a vision of Being. Nevertheless, its power is as a type of reasoning that separates itself from the material world. Plato does not specify there with much clarity how one undertakes such reasoning, while the *Phaedrus* seems to offer a method.

distinctions are parodied in the *Protagoras*. Surely Socrates intends more.

He has told us at the start that the pursuit of knowledge begins with knowledge of the self. In discovering the nature of our own souls we will discover what and how the soul understands. This discovery is the discovery of what is signified by language. Collection and division are methods for understanding who we are. Socrates says at the start of the dialogue that he spends no time analysing and explaining popular myths because he does not yet know himself. Further, he has not yet found out if he is a “complex creature and more puffed up with pride than Typhon, or a simpler, gentler being whom heaven has blessed with a quiet, un-Typhonic nature” (230a). In light of the analysis of soul in his second speech, we know that this is an ironic reference to the dialectical method and not literally what Socrates seeks to know about himself (though we could not have known this when first reading 230a). The soul is composed of a rational and irrational part, making it into a complex whole that needs to be assessed as such.

The chariot-soul myth shows clearly what he intends by collection and division. As a whole the chariot behaves as a unit; it can only do one thing at once (chase after an object of beauty, reel back in awe, etc.). Bound together into a composite structure, neither the horses nor the driver can plot a separate course. As individual parts, however, each contends against the others, struggling to assert their peculiar desires as the soul’s will (the external expression of which is the behaviour of

the chariot as a whole). The outcome of this internal struggle is the soul's behaviour, but it may represent a mixture of desires and, in cases, a forced compromise. The soul's vision of Being is limited and brief because the evil horse is pulling downwards away from the heavens. The good horse is pulling up to see even more. The soul's will inevitably reflects the inability of either horse to assert completely its desires to the exclusion of others. The good horse's inability to triumph decisively is the tragedy of the human soul. Under the façade of any human action is the hidden struggle between our highest and lowest desires. Is this reflected in our political actions?

Take the following as a convenient sketch of political deliberation. Political deliberation is about courses of action, each of which is within the realm of possibility for the deliberators. No one deliberates about what necessarily must be. We might add that no one chooses a course of action that he perceives as manifestly impossible. And what is contingent or possible is not open to scientific demonstration. So, given a finite set of possibilities, the choice of one alternative presupposes political argument, deliberation. The choice will reflect what, on the considered judgement of the deliberators, is plausibly considered to be the best course of action. Thus, political argument is concerned with establishing plausible accounts of what is best. The person who puts forth the most plausible account will persuade the rest (defining plausibility as persuasiveness). This is what Phaedrus and Socrates would recognise as political deliberation. It is not too far removed

from the first and second speeches of the dialogue.²⁵⁴ This is what Phaedrus has heard, at least. The good rhetorician is successful because his arguments are plausible and plausibility has a high correlation with public acceptability. Investigations to answer questions of fact (did John assault James) follow this prescription. Questions of fact can be determined with a degree of certainty that deliberations over proposed future action cannot. Nevertheless, no one is likely to be convinced that some act actually occurred in the past that seems highly improbable, as Socrates mockingly notes when referring to the rhetorical techniques and teachings of Tisias (273b-c). A small man is unlikely to assault a large man. In this case, the facts should be suppressed because no one will find them convincing. It is implausible that it should have happened that way.

If the human soul has the basic make-up and operations Socrates describes it is not altogether obvious what this could have to do with political argument. Would knowing that the soul contains a rational and irrational component and that human action is a compromise between perfect rationality and the animal pursuit of physical gratification, in any way help a

²⁵⁴ It is also admirably demonstrated in the dialogues such as the *Euthyphro* and the *Crito*, where alternative courses of action are available and the decision is seen to bear a relationship to what is objectively right. In the former dialogue, the investigation into piety relates to Euthyphro's decision to prosecute his own father, an action he may or may not undertake, depending on how one construes piety. Euthyphro cites some of his own relatives as saying he is wrong to bring charges. In the latter, Socrates has a very specific choice to make and asserts that he will act in accordance with the best argument.

rhetorician persuade his auditors? It seems that a careful study of human responses to various stimuli would give us sufficient, if not complete, knowledge to persuade. This is the view Socrates describes at *Republic* 493a-b when he says the sophist has simply discovered what will tame or enrage the wild beast, *demos*, and thinks this is adequate for setting up a school. This is presumably what he means by equating rhetoric with cookery and flattery in the *Gorgias*. We hear the same idea in the *Phaedrus* when Socrates asks if anyone who induces vomiting is qualified necessarily to teach medicine. Or, he contends, is the man who can write long or short passages that contain strong emotion capable necessarily of writing tragedy? By analogy, is the ability to bring forth in an audience one sort of emotion or another sufficient to be called a true rhetor?

To answer these questions, we must see persuasive speeches as comparisons between particulars and universals. Any rhetorician is trying to establish the plausibility of whatever he is recommending and this means showing its greater intuitive appeal. Intuitive appeal is an outcome of close correspondence between a particular and universal in the sense that the rhetorician must promote the idea that a particular alternative more closely corresponds to a broader concept, such as justice. The more convincing person will more readily make present to the auditors the inchoate intuitive sensations that normally guide their conduct. Two sorts of person will have this rhetorical success: the “observant” and the knowledgeable. The former, we can say, sees how to direct behaviour. The latter, on the other hand, sees the true ends sought through action

and wants to do direct behaviour accordingly. The “observant” have a technique: a quick eye for recognising and measuring responses to their words. They have calculated what sorts of words, expressions, tones of voice, structures of speech will promote various emotions. Their speeches produce these emotions with considerable regularity. If the response inexplicably takes an unforeseen turn, they can quickly change direction themselves. Whatever response they *do* want, it goes without saying that they *do not* want to become objects of contempt or derision. Callicles shifts his ground to please the crowd (*Gorgias* 481d). Socrates jokingly offers to dance naked to gratify his audience, Menexenus (*Menexenus* 236d). The activity of the “observant” is not foreign to some contemporary thinking on rhetoric. As one theorist has put it:

To make his discourse effective, a speaker must adapt to his audience. What constitutes this adaptation, which is a specific requisite for argumentation? It amounts essentially to this: the speaker can choose as his points of departure only the theses accepted by those he addresses. In fact, the aim of argumentation is not, like demonstration, to prove the truth of the conclusion from the premises, but to transfer to the conclusion the *adherence* accorded to the premises.²⁵⁵

In other words, success in political argument is about probable outcomes and probability is just another way of saying that, with luck, the unexpected will not occur. This sort of speaker is

²⁵⁵Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 21.

lucky because what he wants to happen usually does. He has no theory of why his technique works, just ample empirical evidence that it gets results. Over time he may even win a reputation as an able speaker and, indeed, will be called wise by those who are consistently persuaded by his arguments. His admirers will be of the "I-wish-I-had-said-that" variety and will imitate his style, thinking that there is something intrinsically significant about every detail of his speaking technique.

Assuming with Plato that this person does not have knowledge in the strict sense that he demands -- and accepting that such a person rejects the need for such knowledge -- we can say that he may unknowingly mislead his audience regarding the truth of the matter he proposes. He may say that the truth is unknowable (cf. Gorgias, *On Not-Being*), but this is not a rejection of the existence of an objectively true condition. He may even, as Protagoras implicitly does, accept the existence of an objective reality.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he is still possibly guilty of leading people away from truth. He may very well lead them towards truth, but this is as unintentional as its opposite.

Socrates' argument that the true rhetorician must have genuine knowledge, in the Platonic sense, hinges on a particular point

²⁵⁶Implicitly at *Protagoras* 351c when he rejects that pleasure is good, saying that pleasure in noble things is good. More to the point, in the *Theaetetus*, his thesis that knowledge is perception assumes the objective existence of that which is perceived. One may, for example, have a perception of the wind's temperature, but it is assumed that the wind is actually there.

left unexamined in the dialogue. He says at 262a that "anyone who intends to mislead another, *without being mislead himself*, must discern precisely the degree of resemblance and dissimilarity between this and that."²⁵⁷ Central, but almost unobserved, is the idea of self-deception. An intentional deceiver, as we would normally understand him, knows or believes that what he is recommending is not the case. His deception would be accidental if this were not so. Why, then, is there a possibility of *self-deception* if one intends to deceive others? What is the intentional deceiver deceived about -- the same thing about which he intends to deceive?

We need, first, to specify a little more carefully how intentionality fits into this. The quotation above follows a discussion of how the man with the "art" of rhetoric can make things appear just and unjust to the same audience at will (261c-d). Socrates then goes on to describe under what circumstances we are misled, namely when the difference between two things is narrow (261e). Quite without warning he begins to assume in the next lines that the person with the "art" of rhetoric *sets out* to mislead and does so by shifting his ground a little at a time. This is how deception can occur. Then in the lines quoted from 262a, he fully assumes that misleading the audience is intentional. The intention to deceive is meaningless, however, unless we understand why a person might set out to do so. Given the practice of rhetoric in Athens, it is reasonable that Socrates would imagine a misleading speech as one among a number of speeches and as something

²⁵⁷ Italics mine.

addressed to a large audience. The rhetorical "space" is the public arena -- and arena may be an apt concept. The emphasis in such settings is on competition. We can see that this is what Socrates has in mind at 261d-e:

So contending with words is a practice found not only in lawsuits and public harangues but, it seems, wherever men speak we find this single art, which enables people to make out everything to be like everything else, within the limits of possible comparison, and to expose the corresponding attempts of others who disguise what they are doing.

The purpose of deception -- the motivation to deceive -- arises from the competitive framework within which the speaking takes place. The intention is not to deceive as such, but to win the argument. The background intention to that desire is the desire to win praise or respect -- the only prize legitimately on offer during deliberation (although we can easily imagine numerous illegitimate prizes). Given this, we can understand why Socrates constructs an intended deceiver as his main target.

He reveals something else that we should note. Insofar as rhetoric is practiced in all interpersonal communication, Socrates seems to be saying that all interpersonal communication is competitive. One is contending with words whenever one speaks. If this is so then it seems the desire for praise will always win out over a desire to persuade people of

the truth. If competition breeds the intention to deceive, the intention to deceive will be very common, if not ubiquitous.

We can now return to see how this works out in the idea of self-deception. The intending deceiver cannot logically be misled over the same things about which he intends to mislead. It is nonsense to say that he intentionally misleads without supposing that he also knows what is the case. Thus, he proposes as true something he knows or believes to be false. Perhaps we could say that a person can intentionally mislead without his knowing the case at all. However, it would not be correct to say he is misled about the same things of which he tries to mislead others, which appears to be Socrates' meaning at 262a. For example, if I tell you that the dog is outside, but I do not know where the dog is, and I know that I do not know, one might say I mislead intentionally without knowing the case. But I am not intending to mislead about the specific proposition "the dog is outside." I mislead about my knowledge of what is the case.

This reveals immediately the essential nature of the deception Socrates has in mind. The rhetorician who sets out to deceive is trying to persuade people that a) what he says is true and b) that he knows what is the case, at least with respect to this issue. He is like the unknowing dog-owner who simply wants us to think he has the right answer. An argument is persuasive because it makes present to us our moral intuitions. A persuasive speaker is considered persuasive because he is able to present such arguments. The more successful he becomes in

persuading, the more he is considered to have knowledge of the matters that are discussed. By intentionally setting out to mislead about the specific proposals under consideration, he has unintentionally misled about his own cognitive state. He has created, without his being aware of it, a false persona of the wise man. Thus, his pronouncements become authoritative; he has established his authority as a knowledgeable expert. This persona is reflected back to him *via* the acclaim and approval of those whom he set out to persuade. The image he has of himself, the only image he is ever shown is of a man who has knowledge and this becomes his self-image. His success in deceiving others has resulted in his own self-deception.

In this respect, the man who sets out to deceive must be deceived himself, unless he fails in his attempt to deceive. Ironically, in failing to deceive, the image reflected back to him is the image of the man who does not know what he is talking about -- a man with no knowledge, as Socrates claims to be himself.

The man who does not want to be deceived himself -- and we now know that this means being deceived about one's own cognitive state -- must begin from a position of knowledge. The implication is that he is not simply knowledgeable about what is the case, but knows his own level of knowledge. He is self-knowing. Socrates tells us at 271a-b that, since rhetoric aims to plant conviction in the soul, the scientific rhetorician will have to specify precisely the nature of the soul. He will

also have to describe what capacities it has and how it is acted upon. Finally, the scientific rhetorician must define the various types of discourse and the corresponding types of soul upon which they are affective. At 271d-272b he says that there is a determinate number of soul-types and an equal number of types of discourse. The artful speaker will never fail in "speaking or teaching or writing."

There may be a literal significance to what Socrates is saying about the types of soul. He may have in mind something like the tripartite division in the *Republic* or the apparent rational/irrational dichotomy in this dialogue.²⁵⁸ We can, I think rule these out as Socrates' meaning. The souls that interest us in persuading others are human souls. The required qualification for a soul inhabiting a human body, to follow the metaphor, is that it had some vision of Being when disembodied. In this respect, every human soul is identical, even though not all souls were equally successful in achieving that vision. Some saw less because of the dominance of the

²⁵⁸See Hackforth's comment on this: "Plato is simply thinking of an unspecified number of types of mind to which an unspecified number of types of discourse will be respectively appropriate: unspecified, yet determinate." Hackforth (1952), 147, n. 1. This is uncertain, mainly because Plato does not give any clear indication. The relationship between the soul/chariot metaphor and descriptions of the soul found elsewhere is equally unclear. The clean division between the rational and irrational parts of the soul appears to be characteristic of Plato's earlier thinking on the subject. I think that, beginning with the tripartite division in the *Republic*, we begin to see a more complex analysis of human motivation and that the soul/chariot reflects this complexity, with its emphasis on struggle, without plainly relating the structure of the soul to anything Plato has argued in other dialogues.

downward-pulling horse and, thus, face a more difficult struggle to recover any vision of Being. That vision of being is, nevertheless, what provided human moral intuitions, in which all men share. What is persuasive to a human agent is whatever "animates" or makes present those intuitions. In other words, as a category of discourse, the same type of speech is persuasive to all souls -- the kind that turns the soul away from the particular to the universal.²⁵⁹

This is where the possibility of differentiating discourse occurs. The behavioural aspect of moving from particulars to universal is primarily the speed with which it occurs (since it occurs to some extent in all humans). The secret to speaking persuasively is knowing, or anticipating, how quickly the audience will make the connection between particular and universal. In other words, the rhetorician will want to know how prone any given individual is to abstract thinking. And this is when the appetite, or the irrational part of soul becomes important.

Appetite is concerned, not only with the things of this world, but with particular things of this world. Appetite does not conceptualise a broad preference for a category of things (speeches, say). Appetite seeks gratification as such, and this is exhibited in a pursuit of numerous and randomly occurring

²⁵⁹As a category of discourse, this may be true. We may still assimilate this to the division of the soul into its rational and appetitive elements. Some speeches should, in these terms, be addressed to the appetites initially. Whether a speech must at some stage affect the rational faculty is unclear.

particulars. Take, for example, Hippocrates in the *Protagoras*, the epitome of the appetitive man. He is completely unreflective about his desires, or as unreflective as a man can be. He is something like a wanton, as I said. We can place him at the bottom of human souls, having a very slow "particular-to-universal" response time. Socrates has to lead him through a very elementary series of questions simply in order to create some sort of framework from which he can proceed to interrogate Protagoras later. He basically says, "If X turns things into X', what will you become by associating with X?" He then has X stand for several types of skilled craftsmen and leads Hippocrates to conclude that Protagoras will make him a sophist.

Compare him to someone like Phaedrus, who is also quite appetitive. Nevertheless, he is not in random pursuit of gratification. He has a very specific fancy for eloquent speech. Above the disorganised and unpredictable mass of desires he may have, he has established a somewhat general category of thing that he finds especially gratifying. This demonstrates a certain ability for abstract thought and we can perceive the difference in the more abstract speeches Socrates delivers to him. Also, the rather abstract content of the entire dialogue, considering the presence of only one other character, indicates that Phaedrus is somehow capable of grappling with all the material discussed.²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰If we were looking for dramatic clues about Phaedrus' nature, we could note that he is leaving the city to practice Lysias' speech, i.e., removing himself from the world of particularity. We could also note

The artful rhetorician, then, begins from a position of self-knowledge, which is a knowledge of himself as an embodied perceiver of Being. He knows that he has a moral sense.²⁶¹ He knows what these intuitions refer to, since he himself has an ability to move quickly from particular to universal. He can speak in a way that reminds people that they too have moral intuitions that have definite points of reference. His persuasive speech seeks to pull people up to his own level of understanding. Speaking persuasively with self-knowledge is about turning the souls of the auditors inwards towards those very same souls he seeks to affect. He wants to promote self-knowledge and this becomes his personal act of self-revelation. In making others self-knowing he recreates himself *qua* self-knower within their souls.

Running alongside this, tangent to self-knowledge and self-revelation, is Socrates' criticism of writing. As I have been arguing, the persuasive speaker is instrumental in bringing forward in our minds our moral intuitions. It is well-known that Plato saw all learning as recollection of the disembodied soul's vision of Being. We are now well-positioned to see how writing fits in with this. Socrates tells a story set in Egypt about the invention of writing. The god, Theuth presented to

how Socrates, like the true lover of his speech, is pulled towards the object of beauty, Phaedrus, and in being so pulled is himself carried beyond particularity.

²⁶¹This is reminiscent of the "moral sentiments" one finds in Eighteenth-Century thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Hume. Of course, their epistemologies are incompatible with Plato's.

Thamus, the king, this novel art with the promise that it would aid the memory. Thamus rejects the art calling it a "recipe not for memory, but for reminder" (275a). He says that people will stop looking for memories within themselves, but will rely instead on what has been written. As their "knowledge" remains text-based, what is not written will, ultimately, be forgotten. They will cease to enquire into themselves.

Clearly, an aid to recollection would suit Socrates well, especially in this dialogue. We should note that he does not mention writing as an aid to interpersonal communication; writing here is an analogue to persuasive speech. It is something used to promote a keen awareness of our moral intuitions, which are the only genuine memories we have.²⁶² It should be fairly clear why writing fails to accomplish what persuasive speech can do. The author's text represents one possible method of address that would be suitable for a particular sort of person. Its persuasive power, though, is contingent upon it reaching that audience and no other. The appropriate audience will be reminded of the vision of Being that is meant to be conjured up by the words. The inappropriate person will be baffled and will try to develop some interpretation that will make the text meaningful to him. If the writer wrote with self-knowledge, we know that his text is analogous to the sort of speech he would make, encouraging an upward gaze away from particularity. If he wrote without

²⁶²Genuine in the sense that they point towards Being and away from the experiences of the embodied soul.

self-knowledge, there is no objectively appropriate audience because there is no correct audience for misleading words.

Speech becomes the tool of the science of persuasiveness. Speech can be tailored to meet the needs of the particular soul. We can imagine Hippocrates' puzzlement if he picked up and read the *Phaedrus*. We can imagine Phaedrus' annoyance if Socrates questioned him as he does Hippocrates. The text, by virtue of the spatio-temporal separation from the author, cannot be an act of self-revelation. The self-revelation occurs through the act of turning the auditors to examine their own souls. With some of the texts, "auditors" may be so turned, but others are baffled or thrown back upon their own intellectual resources to reconstruct the intended meaning.

Furthermore, we can see in the Egyptian myth, that the recollections which writing excels in producing tend to be about the world of particulars. It gives men the semblance of wisdom and will make them conceited about what they take to be their own wisdom (275a-b). In referring us to the semblance of wisdom, we can see Socrates making a point about the risk of embedding language in the world of particulars. Language treated as a particular is denied a role in leading the soul to a contemplation of universals. Written language tries to make concrete what is too ephemeral to be captured within human communication. The marks on the paper easily become confused with the words, which are already easily confused for the signified. If words are embedded in particularity, written words are the logical

extreme of this condition. Language has become an artefact detached, in the minds of its users, from Being.²⁶³

²⁶³An interesting comparison can be made with the *Cratylus*. Socrates' etymologies which occupy a large middle section of the dialogue often rely on the sensation that a particular sound causes -- a word may give the sense of motion or smoothness, and so on. This is the sort of thing that I think he is saying written language sacrifices. Conveying this sense allows language to act as a springboard to understanding.

Conclusion

This section has covered a great deal of ground in trying to develop a coherent picture of the *Phaedrus*. I have tried to show that the dialogue centres on a conception of self-knowledge that entails self-revelation through speech. The purpose of this self-revelatory act is to promote self-knowledge in the auditors, that they may become better examples of an ideal of the human soul by living according to what is true and right, to the extent they are able. I have tried to show the link between being one's self and showing one's self and found that there is a tension in the dialogue between true identity and persona. Through dramatic details and arguments, we see Socrates trying to show Phaedrus his own reflection, the disconnectedness between false speech and identity, and the necessity of self-knowledge if one is to persuade others. Finally, I have tried to show the link between the madness of love and true self through an examination of the disembodied soul's vision of Being and the embodied soul's moral intuitions.

Conclusion

In the four sections of this thesis I have attempted to show that in Plato's political thought we can find a concern with the relationship between politics, language and order. This relationship arises both from Plato's belief in an orderly universe, characterised by the Theory of the Forms, and from his desire for the creation of order in human affairs to the greatest extent possible.

We have to understand Plato's concern with order in human affairs not as a personal bias, but as an intellectual commitment to improving human life through the rationalisation of the political association. Just as life in the polis is the natural life for man, order in the polis is the natural condition for that association. The universe is naturally well-ordered, thus, disorder in any aspect of the universe is an anomaly, something in need of correction. It is because man has a greater ability than any other creature to manipulate the character of his communal life that disorder can even emerge. Through his rational element, his psychic attribute that resembles the divine, man can create a way of life for himself. Through those aspects of character that are animal rather than divine, man's creations can deviate from the harmonious pattern of the universe. Reason in man, unlike in god, must struggle for mastery of the creature in which it resides. Order in human society is a problem because the order appropriate to man can be subverted. Man, in effect, has the capacity to

subvert his own destiny. Man's condition is potentially tragic, therefore.

The four works I have examined in this thesis contribute to our understanding of order in Plato's thought. I have chosen to examine four aspects of order to demonstrate its importance to Plato: the concept itself; the use of language and its relationship to order; language and political order specifically; psychic harmony and order in human society.

My examination of the *Protagoras* is designed to show that order is, indeed, a fundamental concern in Plato's thought. The opening scene where Socrates encounters the over-anxious Hippocrates is intended as a graphic depiction of a life without order. The latter has a steady stream of desires which he is unable to evaluate in any terms other than the strength of each. In fact, it seems that he pursues his desires immediately upon the initial experience of a need. Hippocrates confesses that he has not considered the consequences of his desire to enrol with Protagoras. In bringing this confession out, Plato makes clear that disorder is not merely unnatural, but harmful. Hippocrates is putting himself at risk -- the risk of making himself a worse human being.

In the second part of this section, I look at Protagoras' 'Great Speech' and try to show the problematic nature of order in human society. The myth of creation, which dominates the Great Speech, is the story of man's need to construct order in the political association. Man has certain divine gifts,

intellectual attributes and moral instincts, that allow him to glimpse at some level the orderly pattern of the universe. These gifts are opportunities that must be seized; man has the capacity to order the political association, but must strive to grasp the nature of cosmic order to recreate it in his own life.

In the third part I try to show how difficult the creation of order can be. Socrates' facetious analysis of Simonides poem is a game to show that something which looks like a coherent order can be invented. However, this appearance may not reflect reality. It becomes a clever speech to convince those who have not considered the nature of order and, therefore, cannot pronounce upon its manifestation in human life. Hippias' offer to give an equally worthy account of the poem confirms that imitations of order are not only possible, but a risk associated with man's failure to understand order itself.

Section Two carries these themes further, developing them specifically in the direction of how language can be used in a political association. The emphasis in this section is language and power and I try to show that clever speech, intended to persuade the ignorant, can become a tool of the unscrupulous. In the first part of this section, I examine Gorgias and the statements he makes in defence of his own profession. I try to demonstrate that, while he recognises rhetoric as an instrument for gaining power, that power is never intended to become despotic. Gorgias always assumes that existing conventions which contribute to political order are both in place and desirable.

On this point he differs from Polus and Callicles. The former, I claim, serves as a transition in the dialogue. He gives us a glimpse of language used to undermine the existing order, thus revealing how even an order based on principles other than those of Plato depends on the beliefs and values of the association's members. The content of language expresses the values of its users, but the beliefs of those users may be at variance with those values. In that case language is cynically manipulated to achieve what one (mistakenly) takes to be his own personal ends.

Callicles completes the view in the final part of this section. Here I have tried to show that the extreme pursuit of power he represents fully expresses the threat to stability and order when the existing values of a community are not held by all of that community's members. In other words, some of the members see the values of the community as something to be used in order to control those who cannot grasp what those values require of them.

In Section Three I take a more precise look at the correspondence between individual and collective beliefs. I argue that order in the political association is fundamentally natural and try to show how this order can be subverted. In the first part I look at Polemarchus' playful threat of force in the opening scene. I find there a number of clues about bonds between men and how these bonds may act as merely a façade which covers fundamental conflicts.

In the second part I examine Cephalus' use of poetry, myth and anecdotes to show that a language, or moral vocabulary, can contribute to order. However, the stability of this order, I claim, requires a grounding in objective moral principles -- which is Plato's aim in the dialogue. Cephalus' moral language cannot survive because it has become a dogma at a time when critical examination has become the dominant mode of argument.

Polemarchus has a vague awareness of this, as I try to show in the third part. He accepts the content of his father's beliefs, but goes about trying to defend them in a more sophisticated way. He recognises that the objective is to ground his father's beliefs. Nevertheless, he cannot conceive of a way to do this without arbitrarily invoking some authority for his views. He misses the crucial point Socrates is making that knowledge of moral principles is the only stable grounding.

The final part of this section is an examination of Thrasymachus' views. The discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus shows that knowledge is the issue fundamentally at stake. Unlike Polemarchus, Thrasymachus appears to understand this, a point especially revealed by his counter-deployment of the craft analogy. Thrasymachus also seems aware that language can be used as a tool by those seeking power. I look at his first statement about justice, which I accept as an important corollary to his more inclusive second statement. In it I find an awareness that language can

be used to impose something like an orderly framework on the political association, but that, in Thrasymachus' view, this framework is designed to serve only the interests of the person who imposes it. Combining this with the problem of knowledge, we see that Thrasymachus has not furnished the means of stabilising such an order.

In the final section of the thesis I look at the *Phaedrus* and the connection between order in the polis and order in the psyche. As I have argued throughout the thesis, language can potentially be misused and in this section I try to show how Plato envisages that it should be used. Here we see a more complete Platonic statement of what it means for the human mind to grasp the basic order of the universe. In Socrates' descriptions of love and beauty we see that the rational element must transcend its human casing and recreate within the entire soul a harmonisation of parts. We see finally, that the order of the universe must penetrate to the deepest level of human life, the individual psyche, if there is to be order in the political association.

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If the foregoing analysis has any merit, it is to show us Plato's sensitive conception of the human mind. The attributes of the psyche are described as problematically related to one another, leading us to see human actors as complexly motivated. It is this appreciation of complexity that we can use in examining other dialogues and this gives us some startling insights into

what Plato may have believed about motivation and responsibility. The message running through the dialogues examined here is that those who (mistakenly) believe in their own knowledge persist in asking the wrong questions of themselves. The difficulty is not simply to establish what motivates a person to act, but to establish the motivational forces at work when individuals conceptualise the problems or circumstances to which their actions relate. Plato would appear to be arguing that asking oneself the wrong questions is not something for which one may be held responsible; the possibility of achieving true knowledge seems determined. However, in the dialogues I have chosen, we have some interesting evidence that this might not be the case. One may not be responsible for asking the wrong questions, but one may be so responsible if one *persists* in the face of offered alternatives. Protagoras, Callicles and Thrasymachus remove themselves from the investigation, by “playing along” with Socrates, which is a choice they make. The Socratic offer to redirect the conversation into more fundamental issues is effectively rebuked. These individuals *will not* ask questions different from their own -- as opposed to being *unable* to do so. We do, though, see characters who seemingly lack the cognitive capacity to proceed as Socrates would wish. Here we can identify Gorgias, Polus, Cephalus and Polemarchus. Hippocrates’ and Phaedrus’ positions in this framework are unclear. Like Glaucon, perhaps, they are willing and possesses the relevant capacity, yet this is undeveloped.

The framework of unwilling vs. unable, however, may not be sustainable or may not be the only significant division. The great antithesis we see in these works is between those who will listen and participate and those who will not. Those who will not, relieve themselves of the burden through ridicule, obstinacy and indifference. Those who do, are shown to have begun a process of reflection upon fundamental philosophical questions and upon themselves. The *success* of their new investigations is marginalised, while their willingness to undertake them at all is moved to the centre. Thus, the simple inability to reason effectively, while crucially important for Plato, is not the entire story. Unwillingness to make the effort and, thereby, be improved, completes the idea of motivation and responsibility that he wants to convey. The question of how to live one's life implies responsibility for the choices made. But am I even asking myself that question if I do not take a critical stance toward myself now? Polemarchus' unwillingness to listen becomes more profound than it already appears to be in the context of the *Republic*.

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