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Introduction

I.

This book explores how Plato separates the philosopher from the sophist through the dramatic opposition of Socrates to rhetoricians and sophists. In one way, its thesis is simple. Plato distinguishes Socrates from the sophists by differences in character and moral intention. In the broadest terms, Plato might agree with Aristotle's claim in the *Rhetoric* that what defines a sophist is "not his faculty, but his moral purpose" (1355b 17–18). In another way, the problem is difficult, for the philosopher and the sophist share many characteristics in how they speak and act; these similarities are not superficial but go to the very heart of what Plato presents as philosophy, sophistry, and rhetoric. The tendency of contemporary scholarship has been to emphasize the distinctiveness of Socratic or Platonic philosophy in terms of a technical method separable from rhetoric.[1]

[1] Commentators who have emphasized a technical method in Socrates' or Plato's thought in distinction from sophistry include Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Terence Irwin, *Plato's Gorgias*, translated with notes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Jacques Bailly, "What You Say, What You Believe, and What You Mean," *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999): 65–76; Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); and W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Volume IV: Plato the Man and His Dialogues, Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Guthrie emphasizes the difference between eristic and dialectic in Socrates' thought but admits that Socrates often uses eristics to best his opponents. See Guthrie, *History*, 275–283. See also Frank D. Walters, "Gorgias as a Philosopher of Being: Epistemic Foundationalism in Sophistic Thought," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 27 (2) 145. G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), argues that what distinguishes Plato's conception of philosophy from the sophists is the use of dialectic and its relation to forms, although Kerferd sees antilogic as the first stage of

One reason for this assumption is that Socrates seems to point toward the possibility of such a method in the *Gorgias* in his contrast between the political art and merely imitative rhetoric (*Gorgias* 464b–466a). However, when one turns to other dialogues, the relationship among philosophy, rhetoric, and sophistry becomes murkier. The *Phaedrus* seems to show philosophy and rhetoric as compatible, while Book One of the *Republic* presents a sophist with an intellectual position about justice alongside Socrates, with arguments that can seem sophistical. Plato's *Sophist* defines the sophist but, at one point in the dialogue, the Stranger equates "noble sophistry" with a practice that sounds much like Socrates' questioning activity (*Sophist* 230b–c). Plato's *Apology* opens with Socrates' claim that he is not a clever speaker, but he then goes on to rely upon numerous forensic and rhetorical techniques. Even in the *Gorgias*, Plato's voice must be distinguished from Socrates' voice as Plato uses the *Gorgias* in order to raise as many questions about philosophy and its value as he does about sophistry and rhetoric. The relation of philosophy to rhetoric and sophistry is complex.

Additionally, the contrast between philosophy and sophistry is a theme that permeates many Platonic dialogues. If one considers the number of dialogues in which Socrates finds himself conversing with a sophist, a professional rhetorician, or one of their followers (e.g., *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Republic*); in which Socrates discusses sophists or a particular sophist (e.g., *Apology*, *Theaetetus*); or in which the definition of the sophist is abstractly compared with other related enterprises (e.g., *Sophist*, *Statesman*), the list is long. If one notes that the term *rhetor* was commonly used to refer to any speaker in the Athenian Assembly – adding political works to the debate – then few dialogues would seem *not* to contribute to a discussion of the issue.[2] Still, there is no unified account in the dialogues of a specific set of characteristics that define either the sophist or the rhetorician. The *Sophist* itself claims that the philosopher and the sophist are difficult to distinguish (*Sophist* 216c), and the variety of definitions given – as well as the dramatic contrast between the Eleatic Stranger's method of philosophizing and that of Socrates, now silent at his feet – illustrates its difficulty as well.[3] The

dialectic. As Kerferd, *Sophistic Movement*, 4–14, shows, many interpreters have treated the sophists as either subjectivists or as not being intellectuals at all, but such an interpretation is not borne out by a careful examination of the historical sophists.

[2] See Harvey Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens* (Ithaca and London Cornell University Press, 1996), 10.

[3] Socrates says of philosophers: "And in the opinion of some they are worth nothing and of some everything, and at times they take on the apparitions of statesmen, and at times

lack of a clear definition of philosophy in the dialogues makes a clean and easy separation of philosopher from sophist all the more difficult. Plato seems less concerned with offering definitions of the philosopher and sophist than with opposing through dramatic conflict the *person* of the philosopher, Socrates, to a number of different sophists and rhetoricians.

In this book, I examine the distinction between the philosopher and the sophist in six of Plato's dialogues, with particular attention to the differences between philosophical and sophistical rhetoric. My argument focuses on three interrelated theses. First, I argue that Plato's treatment of Socrates in conversation with sophists and rhetoricians indicates that he thought that the distinction between philosopher and sophist was difficult to make. There is no single method or mode of discourse that separates the philosopher from the sophist. One cannot simply say that the philosopher is logical while the sophist is illogical, that the philosopher uses pure reason with no attention to rhetoric while the sophist persuades apart from reason, or that the philosopher has a successful method of speaking while the sophist lacks one. Nor are the sophists consistently presented as disinterested in knowledge or as morally corrupt. The meanings of the terms *philosopher* and *sophist* are disputed at the time that Plato is writing; for Plato, the claim that Socrates is a philosopher rather than a sophist is a normative rather than merely a descriptive claim. At times, Plato's dialogues even express some ambivalence as to whether the distinction can be made as clearly as the character Socrates himself wishes to make it. Careful attention to the multiple layers of Plato's dialogues reveals a Socrates who sometimes looks more like his opponents than he would like to admit and vice versa.

Second, I argue that philosophy, as Plato understands it, includes important rhetorical dimensions. While at times Plato associates the sophist with the rhetorician, he also presents Socrates' philosophical practice as rhetorical.[4] While the term *rhetorikê* was a relatively new term at the time Plato wrote, and its meaning shifts from dialogue to dialogue, when I use the term *rhetoric* here, I mean its broad, contemporary sense of "the means used to persuade through words." My definition of *rhetoric* here is deliberately general, for Socrates does not limit his use of rhetoric to one or two devices; his rhetoric is guided by the particular needs of the soul of

of sophists, and there are times when they might give some the impression that they are altogether crazy" (*Sophist* 216c). Again later, the Stranger claims that it is no easy work to distinguish the sophist, statesman, and philosopher (217b).

[4] See Yunis, *Taming Democracy*, who argues that Plato is "a rhetorical theorist of the first order," 16.

the person with whom he is speaking. Socrates is interested in persuading his audience and not always or exclusively through affecting the intellects of his interlocutors. For example, Socrates often attempts to affect others' senses of shame, anger, confusion, happiness, pleasure, and displeasure. In the *Republic*, Socrates seems as interested in making Thrasymachus feel flustered and ashamed as in disproving his claims about the nature of justice.[5] This is because the goal of Socrates' argument is to affect a person as well as to prove a thesis. Socrates also uses techniques common to sophists and rhetoricians such as *eikos* (probability argument), *êthopoiia* (portrayal of character), antithesis, cross-examination, and parallelism. In addition, he is ready to use myths, poetic interpretations, images, and other devices in order to affect his audience.

To an extent, Socrates' philosophical practice is continuous with the rhetoric of others whom Socrates would not consider philosophical. For this reason, a single definition of philosophical rhetoric that distinguishes it from sophistical rhetoric is not possible. The rhetoric that a philosopher must use is determined not only by the content of his subject matter but also by the audience to whom he speaks. While later philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine took pains to distinguish and to separate the rhetorical elements of speech from dialectic or philosophical discovery, we find no such clean separation in the Platonic dialogues. Instead, we find a close connection between philosophical practice and rhetoric. At times, Socrates' questions seem to be designed to refute or to defend the content of some specific thesis but, more often than not, we find that something else is also going on: for example, Socrates examines the soul of the person whom he is questioning or hopes to affect the *thumos* of his interlocutor rather than his intellect alone. I argue here that Socrates' rhetorical practice, and his very concept of philosophy, relies more upon *phronêsis* and *kairos* than upon a technical approach to philosophical method. Plato, too, exhibits this sort of rhetorical attentiveness to the particulars. As author of the dialogues, Plato separates Socrates from the sophists by dramatically juxtaposing them in different circumstances. Plato uses elements of forensic speech, tragedy, comedy, sophistical set pieces, and other Greek genres in his

[5] See Jill Gordon, *Turning Towards Philosophy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 25. Gordon argues persuasively that dialectic is not only about logical consistency but also about affecting the emotional responses of the audience. While her focus is on how the literary elements of Plato's dialogues turn the audience toward philosophy, my emphasis here is on how Socrates and Plato use rhetorical strategies that are in continuity with a longer tradition of rhetoric.

dialogues in a way that affects our own perception as readers of Socrates and his opponents.[6] One cannot offer a comprehensive definition of "Socratic rhetoric" or "Platonic rhetoric" because what constitutes good philosophical and rhetorical practice changes, depending on the topic and audience. Philosophy and rhetoric are closely interrelated. The content of thought and its discovery and formal expression in speech are intertwined.

Third, I argue that Plato differentiates the philosopher from the sophist primarily through the virtues of the philosopher's soul. One consistent thread in Plato's differentiation of Socrates from the sophists is how Socrates embodies moral virtues. The difference between the philosopher and the rhetorician is not to be found in a distinctive technique or method, in the absence or presence of rhetoric, or in some sort of foundational knowledge. Instead, Plato's ultimate defense of philosophy is to be found in the philosopher's person – that is, in his character and the orientation of his soul to the forms. Dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus* contain extensive descriptions of the virtues of the philosopher, but these accounts have too often been ignored as secondary to questions of method. However, for Plato, these virtues are closely connected to the proper expression of ideas in speech. For example, the *Gorgias* focuses on not only knowledge but also goodwill (*eunoia*) and frankness (*parrhesia*) as central to the evaluation of what constitutes good *logos*. The *Phaedrus* distinguishes between different types of souls, each oriented toward different goods, some of which are higher than others; good rhetoric is connected to loving the forms and one's partner in conversation. The middle books of the *Republic* focus overwhelmingly on the soul of the philosopher and the characteristics that both separate and make him apparently close to the sophist. Above all, Socrates' questioning is guided by his love of and his desire to care for the souls of those to whom he speaks.

A central defining characteristic of the philosopher is his desire for the forms. However, this theoretical commitment to the forms should not be understood primarily as a matter of having the correct metaphysics or as a positive epistemological state. That is, it would be a mistake simply to say that the philosopher knows the forms while the sophist does not. Instead, these dialogues emphasize the philosopher's desire for the forms as his primary connection to them; his quest for better knowledge

[6] See Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

of them stems from his love. This love of the forms has consequences for the philosopher's character. Plato closely connects moral virtues such as wisdom, courage, openness to criticism, and self-knowledge to the love of a transcendent good outside of oneself. Moreover, the philosopher's love of the forms affects how he speaks to others – ultimately, in order to guide others to love and to seek the forms as well. In this sense, the philosopher's theoretical stance ought to be understood in terms of the more primary meaning of the Greek term *theoria* as a kind of a vision of the world and oneself in relation to that world. His theoretical commitments are part of his character and identity as a person. However paradoxical it may seem, the philosopher is characterized by a love of the forms that precedes his knowledge of them. In other words, the philosopher is someone who is "turned toward" the forms as the object of his love; his stance is a moral rather than simply an intellectual position. Such a position helps to explain the inseparability of rhetoric and philosophy, moral virtue and intellectual virtue. Plato suggests that the understanding of our own desires grounds our theoretical outlook on the world and, in turn, our rhetoric is guided by our moral-theoretical vision.

While Plato evaluates rhetorical practice on the basis of these virtues of character, character is difficult to discern from the outside. To put it simply, who we are determines how we speak, but it is difficult to discern the character and motive of a speaker from his words alone. For example, Socrates might be genuinely concerned with improving his interlocutor but seem to others only to be interested in winning the argument. It is especially difficult to show intellectuals who already reject the philosopher's commitments that the philosopher's intentions are really the best. For these reasons, Socrates at times appears to be sophistical and the sophists at times appear to be philosophical.

Plato's dialogues do not sweep aside these complexities but rather present with care the problems inherent in distinguishing philosophical from sophistical practice. Plato is not only aware of the potential confusion of the philosopher and the sophist: at times he also even heightens the difficulty, instead of resolving it, in order to further explore the nature of philosophy. Plato's dialogues do not always present a clear and decisive victory for philosophy over rhetoric or sophistry from the point of view of the sophists themselves. More often than not, figures such as Protagoras, Gorgias, and Polus walk away from conversation with Socrates not at all persuaded that the life he advocates is better than their own. The sophists and rhetoricians with whom Socrates argues do not even seem

to understand what Socrates' real aims are: Callicles in the *Gorgias* calls Socrates a "demagogue" (*dêmêgoros*) (*Gorg.* 482c); Polus says that Socrates takes delight into leading others into inconsistency (*Gorg.* 461c); and Thrasymachus says that Socrates refutes others out of a love of honor (*Rep.* 336c). Protagoras more generously suggests that someday Socrates will become famous for his wisdom (*Prot.* 361e), but his implication is that Socrates is above all striving for a good reputation. If Socrates' opponents in the dialogues all too often have a hazy sense of what he is doing in his discussions with them, Plato as author does not immediately and decisively clear up the problem for us. Instead, the dialogues force us to consider the value of philosophy in contrast to sophistry in a more nuanced way. In this sense, Plato as dramatist acts as a philosopher as well, using rhetoric to draw his own readers into questioning the value of philosophy, so to encourage the development of virtue in his readers.

II.

Before beginning an inquiry into how Plato understands philosophy, rhetoric, and sophistry, it is worth considering how his contemporaries approached the problem. Some commentators have argued that Plato was so concerned to separate the sort of rhetoric associated with sophistry from that associated with philosophy that he invented a vocabulary in order to assist him in this enterprise. Although modern readers often associate the term *sophist* with something along the lines of a clever argumentative individual with no concern for the truth, the reality is that the meaning of the term *sophist* (*sophistes*) was rather fluid in the fifth and fourth centuries. As Kerferd has argued,[7] the term *sophist* was originally applied to poets, musicians, rhapsodes, Pre-Socratic philosophers, and traveling teachers of "excellence" (*aretê*). Aristophanes' *Clouds* groups Socrates together with the sophists, while Plato's *Apology* attempts to separate him from them. Socrates himself, without a hint of irony, calls Diotima the ultimate sophist (*hoi teleoi sophistai*) in the *Symposium* (*Symp.* 208c).[8] The term *sophist* was used to describe, more narrowly, teachers of excellence who took fees for their services as they traveled; and, more widely, intellectuals who put a priority on the value of speeches for living

[7] See Kerferd, *Sophistic Movement*, chapter 4.

[8] Similarly, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* suggests that the term *sophist* would be too high praise when he claims that those who speak with knowledge ought to be called philosophers (278d); this implies that *sophist* need not be a wholly derogatory term.

well; or, most broadly of all, a "wise person." The shift from the broader and more positive sense of the term to a more negative and limited one seems to have taken place gradually over the course of the fifth century.

Schiappa has argued that Plato most likely coined the term *rhetorikê*, a term found in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* (although, surprisingly, not in the *Protagoras* or *Sophist*), while the fragments of the historical sophists contain only more general terms such as *rhetor*, or *logos* and *legein*. He suggests that Plato may also have invented the terms *eristikê*, *dialektikê*, and *antilogikê* as part of this endeavor to distinguish philosophy from sophistry.[9] While Schiappa is right that Plato played a formative role in developing the terms *philosophia* and *rhetorikê*, he was not alone in his attempts to use such language to defend a particular rhetorical practice vis-à-vis other rhetorical practices in Athens at the time. Not only Plato but also Isocrates and Alcidamas lay claim to the title of philosophy and criticize sophistry. All three compare and contrast philosophy to rhetoric and sophistry. Alcidamas even uses the term *rhetorikê* in his essay, "On Those Who Write Written Speeches," a speech roughly contemporaneous with Plato's writing.[10] However, what each author intends by the term *philosophia* is quite different and, in some cases, perhaps not even identifiable as philosophy from the standpoint of a modern reader.[11] Alcidamas writes an extensive defense of the greater value of the spoken word over written speeches, associating philosophy with those who devote themselves to becoming good speakers and sophistry with those who pursue writing. For Alcidamas, both *rhetorikê* and *philosophia* are terms that apply to a life devoted to learning to become a better speaker; written speeches only distract or impede a person from pursuing this life of excellence. In contrast, Isocrates disagrees openly with both Alcidamas and Plato about the best rhetorical activities. Isocrates is not only a leading competitor of Plato's in offering a distinct kind of moral and political education. He is also a competitor for the very title of philosopher and repeatedly makes

[9] See Edward Schiappa, "Did Plato Coin *Rhetorikê*?" *The American Journal of Philology* 111 (4) (winter 1990): 457–470.

[10] J. V. Muir dates the composition of Alcidamas' "On Those Who Write Written Speeches" as approximately 390 BCE, about the same year as Isocrates' "Against the Sophist." But Muir admits its purely speculative nature. See Muir, *Alcidamas: The Works and Fragments* (London: Bristol Classic Press, 2001), xv. My own view is that dating Plato's dialogues is notoriously difficult and perhaps impossible in light of his continual revision of them. Still, commentators have often dated the *Phaedrus* at around the same time. See, e.g., Debra Nails, "Plato's Middle Cluster," *Phoenix* 48 (1)] (spring 1994): 62–67; and Spiro Panagiotou, "Lysias and the Date of Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Mnemosyne* 28 (1975): 388–398.

[11] See Nightingale, *Genres*, chapter 1.

normative claims about the true nature of philosophy, which he associates with his own rhetorical practice. For Isocrates, the practice of *philosophia* is something more akin to being a steward of culture, being well educated in cultural traditions and then using those traditions in writing and in speech to contribute back to the *polis*.[12] For Isocrates, *philosophia* is concerned not with abstract ideas but rather with speeches oriented toward making others act in concrete and specific political situations. Philosophy ought to concern itself with "noble" projects, while sophistry is overly concerned with abstract arguments over useless matters. Good rhetoric presents a clear course of action to follow and preferably addresses those with the power to effect change. One finds no role for the transcendent in Isocrates' conception of philosophy.[13] Plato's attention to the forms as objects of knowledge and his concern with general and abstract truths, not always connected to historically located political concerns, separate Isocrates and Plato.[14] But if Plato does not always treat *rhetorikê* as a political practice, he is the exception to the rule: for most Greeks, a *rhetor* would have called to mind a speaker in the Athenian Assembly, and the practice of oratory automatically would have been taken to mean public discourse.[15] When Socrates suggests to Phaedrus that the domain of *rhetorikê* includes both public and private discourse, Phaedrus is puzzled, for this is the first time he has ever heard of such a thing (*Phaedrus* 261a–b). For the ancient Athenians, rhetoric is understood primarily as a civic art.[16]

Nonetheless, Plato and Isocrates share more in common with each other than with their predecessors. Like Plato, Isocrates was a follower of Socrates, although Isocrates also studied with Gorgias. As is true in Plato's case, Isocrates is known primarily as the author of written works rather than as a speaker; yet, both write works in close imitation or adaptation

[12] See, e.g., Isocrates' descriptions of philosophy in *Panegyricus* 47 or *Against the Sophists*. For elaborations on Isocrates' understanding of philosophy, see Takis Poulakos, *Speaking for the Polis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997); and Ekaterina Haskins, *Logos and Power in Isocrates and Aristotle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

[13] See, e.g., David Timmerman, "Isocrates' Competing Conceptualization of Philosophy," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 31 (2) (1998): 145–159; and Haskins, *Logos and Power*.

[14] However, Isocrates sees the difference as a reason to make Plato and Socrates as useless as the sophists. At the beginning of Isocrates' *Encomium to Helen*, he disparages both those who say that courage, wisdom, and justice are all the same thing and those who like to make contradictions about unimportant matters for their own sake.

[15] See Yunis, *Taming Democracy*, chapter 1.

[16] See George Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

of dramatic or oratorical forms. Isocrates goes out of his way to deny that he is a "*rhetor*" (*To Philip* 1; *To the Rulers of the Mytilenaens* 7.5). He also distinguishes himself from the sophists, whom he sees as concerned with useless and abstract matters such as "deposits" or "humble bees and salt" (*Panegyricus* 188–189; *Encomium to Helen* 12). Isocrates wants his philosophical education to help others to become better citizens or leaders; Plato in the *Republic* sets out a similar role for philosophers of the best city.[17]

Moreover, there is a moral core to both Isocrates' and Plato's visions of education, even if their understandings of how we discover justice are different. Isocrates argues that speeches ought to help us to become more just, and he does not view justice as completely relative to opinion. While we must rely upon opinion (*doxa*) rather than knowledge (*epistêmê*) – since *epistêmê* is beyond human beings to acquire in political matters – Isocrates also links speech to practical wisdom (*Antidosis* 255; *Nicocles* 7).[18] Wisdom is not the mere ability to persuade a crowd but must include intelligence and good judgment as well. A good speaker must possess experience as well as have a natural talent for speech and good training; he must understand the past well enough to aid him in good deliberation.[19] While typically Plato has been seen as holding knowledge far above opinion, Socrates' reliance on his interlocutors' opinions as the starting point of inquiry (e.g., in the *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and *Charmides*) and his reluctance to make knowledge claims (e.g., denying that he is a teacher) suggest the importance of opinion in good argument in Plato's thinking as well.[20] Isocrates sees philosophy as linked to everyday affairs, but the dramatic form of Plato's dialogues also consistently connects philosophical argument to dramatic and political events contemporary with the characters – for example, the setting of the *Gorgias* is Gorgias' visit to Athens to persuade the Assembly to send troops to protect his *polis*. Isocrates' and Plato's rhetorical practices overlap in important ways, but they are competing with one another for the title of philosopher rather than rhetor or sophist.

[17] E.g., Isocrates makes some of the same suggestions that Socrates makes about good education in the *Republic*, as when Isocrates claims that astronomy and mathematics have protreptic value for philosophy; see Isocrates' *Antidosis* 266 and Plato's *Republic* 522c–531c.

[18] See Poulakos, *Speaking*, chapter 5.

[19] See Poulakos, *Speaking*, 87.

[20] See Alexander Nehamas, "What Did Socrates Teach and to Whom Did He Teach It?," *Review of Metaphysics* 46 (December 1992): 279–306.