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Author(s): Rod Jenks

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The Sounds of Silence: Rhetoric and Dialectic in the Refutation of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*

Rod Jenks

In his admirable book *Reason and Emotion*, John Cooper echoes a whole host of commentators to the effect that Socrates' attempt to refute Callicles in the *Gorgias* is obviously unsuccessful. Cooper speculates that Plato's motive for including what he, Plato, surely must have recognized as a woefully inadequate argument was to represent his gathering skepticism about Socratic ethics. Roughly, according to this picture, Plato represents Callicles' defense of a life spent maximizing pleasure as "undefeated" in order to suggest that there are rocks ahead for the Socratic representation of moral psychology. In this paper, I will try to show, contrary to Cooper, Santas, Irwin, Kahn, Grube et al., that Callicles is not a straw man, and that Socrates' argument against him is both complete and cogent. When we attend to the entire dialectical situation, I think, we can see not only that Callicles adopts the only position available to him, but also that that position really is refuted by Socrates. I will argue that the Compresence Argument at 495e–497d positively occludes the Benthamite escape route other scholars believe is left open to Callicles.¹

I. The Context of the Compresence Argument

Gorgias' answers Socrates' query as to the nature of rhetoric with the position that rhetoric is the cultivation of the art of persuasion. When pressed as to what kind of persuasion, Gorgias answers that rhetoric trains people in persuasion concerned with right and wrong, persuasion of the sort that is useful in law courts and in the assembly. But a rhetorician, Socrates worries, could persuade people who are ignorant about health on matters concerning health better than a doctor could. This would amount to the ignorant persuading the ignorant.

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Polus interrupts here. Already, at 458b6–c1, Gorgias tells Socrates that he is exhausted, having just given a long speech, and at 458e, he agrees only reluctantly to a dialogue to please the others present.² Rhetoric is later shown to aim at pleasure. That Gorgias is represented as having no enthusiasm for defending the moral acceptability of his profession is, I think, deliberately provocative. Plato is peeking through the text at this point, asking “How could anyone not care about *that*?”³ Cultivation of appearances manifests itself in Gorgian dialectical indifference. When Polus interrupts at 461b, then, Gorgias does not protest.

Polus demands to know what Socrates thinks rhetoric is. Socrates answers that it is a sort of flattery, a knack or routine, as opposed to being a genuine τέχνη. As the skill of cooking aims at the pleasure of the body, while the τέχναι of medicine and physical training aim at the health of the body, so rhetoric aims at the pleasure of the soul, but philosophy, which Socrates later characterizes as “the true political discipline” [ἡ ἀλεθρή πολιτικὴ τέχνη (521d6–7)], aims at the healthy condition of the soul. Polus protests that rhetoric yields power to do whatever one wishes, but Socrates thinks this is no power at all, since it may lead its possessor to do what is bad for the man himself. Wrongdoing is to be avoided at all costs, Socrates maintains. In this way, the central issue between Polus and Socrates, whether it is better to suffer or to inflict injustice, is generated. When Polus concedes that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, his defeat is thereby secured.⁴

Callicles now enters the fray, distinguishing in a way that the Young Mr. Many cannot between real values and conventional values. Real values involve the resolute pursuit of pleasure. But if some pleasures are bad, Socrates reasons, then pleasure cannot be the same as the good. As an example of a bad pleasure, Socrates cites the pleasures experienced by the κίναιδοι, passive partners in acts of sodomy (494e). As Kahn points out,⁵ the κίναιδοι were ubiquitously assumed to be prostitutes, and were accordingly denied the rights of citizenship. Kahn believes that this argument alone dispatches the Calliclean position, but it is evident that, though being sodomized might well have been politically expensive (and, obviously, personally distasteful to Callicles himself—the example draws an almost visceral reaction from him at 494e8–9⁶), it does not follow that the pleasure of the experience is bad.

An additional example of a pleasure of questionable value is the pleasure felt by a coward when the danger of battle has been removed. Since the coward does not feel less pleasure than does the brave man on such occasions, the brave man will not be the better man. But Callicles really does admire courage,⁷ or bloody-mindedness, at any rate, inasmuch as he believes that only shame and

squeamishness prevent us from pursuing pleasure courageously, i.e., with utter abandon. Because he admires courage, Callicles must count the coward's pleasure as a bad pleasure. The brave man/coward example shows that even if a pleasure is felt intensely, it may nevertheless not be an admirable pleasure. Pleasure, then, is not co-extensive with the good; there are other goods than pleasure.

Some scholars have taken to Callicles' defense here. They believe that Callicles has been maneuvered into representing himself as a shameless man. He is thus "a sitting duck for every shameful thesis that comes along," as Beversluis writes. "If it is shameful to assert that the scratcher lives a pleasant and happy life, [Callicles] will assert it."⁸ Socrates has thus "parodied his position beyond recognition."⁹ Callicles has been forced to identify pleasure with the good; ironically, he is "prevented from saying what he really believes."¹⁰ And what might that be? What does Callicles "really believe?" Beversluis maintains that Callicles' real belief is that the good and the pleasant are different, and that the scratcher is not happy. My own sense of things, however, is that if Callicles did not advocate unrestricted hedonism (according to which pleasure *is* the good), he would not *be* Callicles. To imagine Callicles without that particular albatross around his neck would be to imagine an entirely different character.

With the exception of Beversluis, most other commentators are agreed that, though this argument does refute Callicles *the man*, it does not refute *hedonism proper*; since a pure hedonist—one who did not independently admire brashness and boldness, but who sought only to maximize pleasure, however that might be achieved—could construe bad pleasure as less pleasant pleasure.

At this point in the dialogue (499b), Callicles shifts his position, without, however, admitting that he is doing so (of which more, shortly), maintaining now that he has always held some pleasures to be better and some to be worse.¹¹ He can now claim that the coward's pleasure is a worse pleasure than the courageous man's pleasure, and in this way, rescue his position. Socrates argues that, since Callicles has conceded that the good does not reduce to the pleasant (the brave man/coward argument shows this), some pleasures are good and some are not. The energy of the dialectic encounter is now spent. The dialogue has already begun to drift into casting images of leaky vessels (493de) and incontinent birds (494b), and it ends with a Socratic *plea* to Callicles to seek justice, even when it means seeking punishment for wrongdoing, in order that he might actively pursue the good for his own soul.

II. The Compresence Argument

But I believe that the argument that wins the day for Socrates is the Compresence Argument at 495e–497e. Socrates argues here that pleasure and pain can be compresent in us. For example, the pleasure of drinking is only a pleasure in relation to the relief of the pain of thirst. Thirst ordinarily comes to us before we drink, for otherwise, drinking would not be pleasant. If it were not for the compresence of the thirst with the pleasure of its quenching, drinking would not be pleasant. It would be neutral.

To be sure, the *Gorgias*' view that thirst and quenching are thoroughly simultaneous is reexamined at *Phaedo* 60b4.¹² In the latter dialogue, it is said that pleasure and pain, though they *never* come into being simultaneously, are nevertheless inseparably connected. Since this point is not exploited in the *Phaedo*, it appears to be an exaggerated corrective to the exaggerated compresence claim in the *Gorgias*. All Plato seems to require for the argument in the *Gorgias* to go through is that pleasure and pain are sometimes compresent, while good and bad (as moral qualities) are never so. Good and bad are genuine contraries.¹³ Their compresence in any single thing (at the same time, and in the same sense) is impossible. So, since good and bad are contraries, but pleasure and pain are not, it follows that the good is not the same as the pleasant, and equally, that the bad is not the same as the painful.

Some scholars have suggested that Callicles' concession that some pleasures are better and some worse provides too easy a target for Socrates. These commentators maintain that a stronger position than the one Callicles in fact adopts would be the kind of Benthamite hedonism¹⁴ suggested above, wherein better and worse pleasures would be cashed out as more and less pleasant pleasures. Some scholars have scolded Plato for having failed to include this more supple kind of hedonism as a possibility.¹⁵ But if the Compresence Argument is successful, it shows that "good" has a logical independence from "pleasant," and thus, "good pleasure" cannot be cashed out as being (merely) "more pleasant pleasure." "Good" and "bad" are contraries, but "pleasant" and "painful" are not, as is shown by the possibility of their compresence in the same thing at the same time.

Some commentators have argued that Plato's compresence position here in the *Gorgias* is flatly false. Irwin argues that "I can in some ways be well-off and in other ways, be badly off at the same time. Socrates does not show that having pleasure and [having] pain are different from being well-off and being badly off."¹⁶ But the qualifiers "in some ways" and "in other ways" in Irwin's text clearly imply that one's condition, one's "being well-off" or "being badly

off," is being characterized in different senses. For example, one can be well-off financially but badly off socially. Plato's Socrates never denies this. What he does deny is that one can experience specifically the pleasure of quenching thirst without experiencing the simultaneous pain of the thirst being quenched. The moment when thirst is quenched or orgasm achieved would be flat, neutral, were it not for the pain of thirst or sexual hunger at that very moment. Whereas in Irwin's putative counterexample, being well- or poorly off must be implicitly qualified in different ways (financially, socially), in Socrates' actual case, pain and pleasure are univocal—both are physical, and both are present in the same location, at the same moment.

But Irwin's objection might be developed in this way: It might be that some goods and bads can also be compresent. For example, one might be partly cured of a disease. If such a case were allowed to stand, it would be a serious challenge to the Socratic compresence argument, for that argument relies on the impossibility of the compresence of good and bad. What Socrates needs to maintain is that pleasures *depend on* pains in a way that goods do not *depend on* evils. Criticizing this line of thought, Aristotle remarks that the pleasure of a good smell is not necessarily the relief from a bad smell. (See *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 1173^b16–9.) To accommodate this example, Socrates' thesis would have to be modified: he could still maintain that *at least some* pleasures are compresent with their corresponding pains, while goods never are compresent with their corresponding evils.

To this modified Socratic position, it might be objected that the good of being partly cured of a disease *depends on* the evil of still being partly sick. Socrates might answer this by suggesting that, in this example, it is not *the same part* that is well and sick. Suppose I am given antibiotic pills to take over a ten-day period to fight a bronchial infection. Five days through the treatment, I begin to feel as if I am cured. My doctor, however, tells me to complete the course of the treatment, because I am still partly sick. Though I do feel better, I still have a serious infection. So in one respect, I am better, while in another, I am still sick. What Socrates denies is that I can be in a good and a bad condition *in the same respect at the same time*. Irwin thus does not leave Socrates without cover.

Beverluis marks the point that (some) pains diminish gradually. Immediately after taking aspirin, I may still feel a headache. The pain of the headache, to be sure, subsides, but it does so gradually. Unfortunately, Beverluis overgeneralizes the point: "There is always," he writes, "a temporal interval, however brief, between the administered remedy and the experienced relief."¹⁷ Phenomenologically speaking, this claim is plainly false. Sometimes, the ad-

ministration of the remedy and the experience of the relief are simultaneous. In jumping into a swimming pool on a hot August afternoon, or in drinking when one's throat is parched, etc., there simply is no discernable "interval" between the remedial action and the relief it brings. The upshot seems to be that whether pleasure and pain are compresent or are separated by an interval, "however brief," *depends on the kind of case you have in mind.*

As already indicated, Socrates' argument would have to be slightly modified to accommodate such counters, but I think it could be done. Socrates could claim that good and bad (as moral qualities) are never compresent—they are genuine contraries. They really do drive each other out. If an action is good in one sense, it may indeed be bad in some other sense—a criminal's being punished may be bad from the criminal's point of view, but socially, it may be a good thing. Moreover, what is immediately good may be bad long-term or bad all-things-considered, for example, getting drunk with friends. But in the same sense at the same time, an action may not be both good and bad. "Good" and "bad" are always genuine contraries. But pleasures and pains are at least sometimes compresent—and so they are not genuine contraries. The logic of pleasure and pain is importantly different from the logic of good and bad, and thus, pleasure cannot be the same as the good.

It is curious, particularly in relation to the continuing scholarly project of charting Plato's development, that he seems to have changed his mind about the compresence of pleasure and pain later in his career. At *Phaedo* 60bc, where Socrates massages the leg that has just been released from a chain, he says that "what people call the pleasant" [ὁ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἡδύ] and "what seems to be its opposite" [τὸ δοκοῦν ἐναντίον εἶναι], i.e. the painful, "refuse to visit a man together, yet if anybody pursues one of them and catches it, he's always pretty well bound to catch the other as well, as if the two of them were attached to a single head."¹⁸ Plato has apparently returned to the issue of whether pleasure and pain can be properly compresent, and has, in the *Phaedo*, adopted the opposite view from the one he had held earlier.

But in this passage, the phrase "what people call pleasure," or, as we might put it, "so-called pleasure," is also arresting. Is Plato suggesting here that the necessary rapid succession of what people call "pain" and "pleasure" implies that the sensations in questions (for instance, thirst and its quenching) are not, properly speaking, pains and pleasures at all? This is indeed the view he adopts in the middle period *Republic*, at 584c. The same point appears in the very late *Philebus*, at 43de. The possibility of the compresence of pain and pleasure, then, is an issue Plato seems to have turned over in his mind more than once during his career. The Socrates of the *Gorgias*, as I understand that fellow, would argue

that release from a chain is specifically relief of *that* pain. The pain precedes the pleasure, to be sure (as the *Phaedo* passage makes clear), but the pain and the pleasure of its removal must be compresent for its removal to count as pleasant. Were it not for the compresence of the pain with the pleasure at the instant of release, being released from a chain would be neutral.

Returning to the text of the *Gorgias*, it is argued that, if good and pleasant really are distinct, then “better pleasure,” or pleasure that produces more good, cannot be analyzed as “more pleasant pleasure.” The point is reinforced in the very next wave, the brave-man/coward argument, where it emerges that mere quantity of pleasure is not a viable measure of its quality. The alleged escape route, the Benthamite exit, is thus already blocked. Plato fails to suggest the line that “better pleasure” be cashed out as “more pleasant pleasure,” not because he is too craven to face a truly formidable opponent, nor because he is too unimaginative to conceive of such an opponent, but because he believes that he has already dispatched that very opponent by means of the Compresence Argument.

III. A New Worry

There is, however, a possible weakness in the Compresence Argument, a weakness that, I believe, Plato hints at in the dialogue itself. Because of this weakness, the *Gorgias*' critique of hedonism may appear finally inconclusive. The weakness to which I refer lies in the charge that the Compresence Argument is merely verbal. Thus, it might be complained that the fact that we happen to use the word “pleasure” (and its cognates) in a way that is different from the way in which we happen to use the word “good” (and its cognates) does not (all by itself) show that the hedonist position is false. Callicles could have responded to the Compresence Argument in the way many contemporary materialists have responded to ordinary-language critiques of materialism. He could have yawned and said, “Yes, that’s the way the language works. Now, what’s the truth?”

This worry is suggested in a number of ways in our text. At 497b7–8, Callicles complains to Gorgias that Socrates “asks and cross-examines or refutes [ἐξελέγχει] with petty and worthless questions” [σμικρὰ καὶ ὀλίγου ἄξια ἀνερωτᾷ]. At 489, Socrates is accused of playing with words. Callicles demands, “Are you not ashamed [οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ] to be chasing after or hunting names [θηρεύων ὀνόματα] at your age?” Almost immediately after Callicles' accusation, he has Socrates deny that he is trying to “catch or capture [Callicles] with

words” [οὐ ῥήματι θηρεύω] (490a4–5). He protests that his point is not merely verbal because he is worried that his point will be misconstrued in precisely this way. Again, at 489e6, Socrates charges that Callicles is just “saying names” [ὀνόματα λέγεις].¹⁹

Plato, then, is at least concerned that his arguments might be taken to be jejune points about the ordinary use of words. And it is ironic that, in a dialogue concerning the nature of rhetoric, which just *is* the use of words for persuasive purposes, the charge of wielding *merely* verbal arguments should be leveled so often. But the fear that the cogency of the Compresence Argument might be undermined by its (apparently) merely verbal character is dispatched by Callicles’ final refusal to speak. His silence, in fact, speaks volumes.²⁰ The only way he can salvage his position, remain true to himself, is by refusing to speak. And, as it turns out, he cannot salvage his position even by remaining silent, since Callicles himself will constantly disagree with Callicles. At 495e, Socrates says that Callicles does not agree with the identification of good with pleasure “whenever he views himself correctly” [ὅταν αὐτὸς αὐτὸν θεάσῃται ὀρθῶς]. Polus, too, at 466e, is said to disagree with himself. Still, at 497b3, rather than concede to the Compresence Argument, Callicles pretends that he does not understand: “I don’t know what you are saying.” Gorgias begs Callicles to answer. At 497b4, he positively pleads with Callicles: “Do not behave in this way, but answer for our sakes, too.”

There is present in Gorgias’ plea here just a hint of the communitarian impulses converging from within, as it were, on the sophistic defense of pleasure-seeking. Even Gorgias, who teaches only persuasion, sneering at moral instruction (see *Meno* 95c3–4), recognizes the indispensability of the moral community. Socrates’ adversaries know the truth deep down. And it is instructive to compare Gorgias’ unconscious appreciation of the merit of community to Euthyphro’s unconscious appreciation of the value of family at *Euthyphro* 3a7–8: “Why Socrates,” exclaims Euthyphro, “it appears to me that [Meletus] begins by harming the city at its very hearth [ἄφ’ ἐστίας] in prosecuting you on a charge of impiety.” Here is Euthyphro, of all people, appealing to the image of the hearth! The hearth is the source of light and warmth; it is where the family meals are shared, etc. The hearth is thus the very heart and soul of the Greek home. That a man who is busy trying to dispatch his own father is represented as appealing to the image of the hearth is certainly provocative. Yet the appeal is apt, because Plato believes that even Euthyphro knows the truth. And if even he knows, everybody knows! Just so, in spite of his cultivation of appearances, in spite of claiming to care only about persuasion, Gorgias, too, knows the truth, deep down.

Callicles, however, is stubborn, and, at 498d1, he pretends not to understand. At 499b, he pretends that he has always maintained some pleasures were good and some bad. He has been reduced to *lying* in order to save his thesis, and lying, it goes without saying, is a flagrant misuse of words. At 501c8–9, he tries again to withdraw from the discussion. At 489, Callicles abandons the position that the stronger are the superior, but refuses to admit that he ever held it to begin with.²¹ At 495a5, Callicles says, “In order not to make my argument inconsistent, I say [pleasure and the good] are . . . the same.” Socrates replies that Callicles is “destroying the *logos* and not searching for the truth” in saying things contrary to what he thinks. At 499c, Callicles pretends that his view all along was that some pleasures are better and some, worse, and Socrates exclaims, “What a scoundrel you are! You treat me like a child, saying at one time that things are this way, and at another time, that they are that way.” Socrates begs Callicles to answer honestly at 504c. But Callicles is recalcitrant, and Socrates must perform both parts in the elenchus. That is, he must both ask questions and answer them. (See 506c–507a.) By lying both to himself and to others, Callicles cuts himself off from dialogue. Callicles is eventually dragged back into the discussion, but he says repeatedly that he answers Socrates only to gratify him or to please him or to do a favor for him (510a1–2, 513e1, 514a4, and 516b4). At 501c9, he says he is answering “only as a favor” to Gorgias.”²² Now, all of this Calliclearn posturing is intended to convey the illusion of *wounded silence*, just as if Socrates had done Callicles some monstrous injustice. That the dialogue takes place before a crowd (see 458c) adds a *dramatic* dimension to Callicles’ complaints of Socratic injustice. Callicles is *performing*, *acting the role* of the wounded respondent. Of course, once Callicles countenances good and bad pleasures, *les jeux sont fait*. Rhetoric, however, is all about creating appearances, and so it is appropriate that its last defender try to camouflage his (and its) defeat, pretending that his defeat is, instead, a personal affront to him.

One of the issues Plato is exploring in the *Gorgias*, I am suggesting, is the right use of words. That the last defender of rhetoric falls silent is significant, I believe, since words are all he has to offer. But he cannot enter into dialogue with us. So he assumes a wounded silence, yet even that is illusory.²³ The communitarian dimension of human life, the dimension that even Gorgias respects, is reflected in our common language, which is moored to a common internal reality. Discourse is possible only because of community. When one cuts the ties that bind him to us, the price he pays is that he cannot talk to us any longer.²⁴ The Compresence Argument, if you like, is verbal, but it is not “merely verbal.” The ground of the difference between the logic of our word “pleasure” and the logic of our word “good” is the real difference between Pleasure and the Good.

Callicles can complain, if he likes, that Socrates is merely playing with words, but, once he opens his mouth to speak, he thereby invokes the very internal reality and the communal life that that reality sustains and supports, both of which he officially disdains.

Though he does try to dismiss the Compresence Argument as trivial (see 489, 490, 497), Callicles cannot finally do so. He cannot say, “Bah! What do I care about words?” First, he cannot say this because he is a politician in training, and aims to use words persuasively. He cannot dismiss an argument as “merely verbal” without thereby sawing off the limb he is sitting on. And second, he cannot reply in this way because, were he to do so, he would thereby cut himself off from any discussion whatsoever. He can seek to persuade us that using words for persuasion is valuable *only by using words*. His abandonment of words (again, at 489, 490, and 497) is thus a kind of logical foreshadowing of the dramatic element of his final silence.

“Very well,” it might be said. “Suppose you are right. Suppose the Compresence Argument really does deal a knock-out blow to hedonism. Why does Plato drop the argument? Why does Plato not have Socrates refer back to it later?”

And I allow that Plato’s abandonment of the argument is, at first blush, somewhat startling. But it can be accounted for, I think, in this way. The Compresence Argument has the logical consequence that “good pleasure” cannot be analyzed as “more pleasant pleasure,” and this implies that some pleasures, even very intense pleasures, may be bad, like the coward’s pleasure, or at least shameful, like the pleasure of the κίττιοι or of the pubic scratcher. In this way, pure hedonism is defeated. But, particularly in the early dialogues, the characters are people, human beings,²⁵ who often are won over more easily by appeal to their personal idiosyncrasies than by appeal to logic alone. Callicles is finally brought round to the conclusion that some pleasure are bad by means of examples of kinds of pleasure he himself finds distasteful and contemptible, e.g., the pleasure experienced by the κίττιοι while they are being sodomized, or the pleasure experienced by the coward at the retreat of the enemy. These kinds of counterexamples to hedonism bring the bankruptcy of that theory home to Callicles in a way that a formal, perfectly cogent argument alone cannot.

And it well may be concern for Callicles the man, as opposed to Callicles the obstreperous interlocutor, that leads Socrates to plead with him at the end. Beginning with the eschatological myth, Socrates exhorts Callicles in a speech that goes on for four Stephanus pages (523a–527e)—and this at the end of a dialogue that begins with a Socratic exhortation at 499bc for Gorgias to refrain from giving lengthy speeches!²⁶

Moreover, in the *Gorgias*, Plato uses extra-logical means of persuasion in addition to using argument. We find two myths in the middle, an impassioned plea, and then the long eschatological myth at the end—why not let argument suffice? Why appeal to these literary devices? When the philosopher returns to the cave at *Republic* 517ab, he cannot very well tell the prisoners what he really thinks. He cannot say, “You are all blind as bats, and you have no idea what you are missing.” That would just offend everyone. (If the philosopher were straightforward with the prisoners, maybe, Plato writes, they would become so angry that they would *kill* the philosopher [517a5–6].) So the philosopher refrains from saying what he really thinks, instead telling the prisoners stories. One such story begins, “I went down.” Another begins, “Can you tell me, o Socrates, if virtue is something that can be taught? Or is it acquired by practice?” Other stories the philosopher tells concern fools who constantly fill leaky vessels, and birds that constantly eat and defecate. Still others concern the reformatory punishment in the afterlife awaiting the souls of men who are like these fools and these birds. Narrative and dialectic are both needed to win over the cave men.

Rather than seeking after a philosophically satisfying justification for Socrates' breaking of his own rule against speech-making, some scholars take it to illustrate Socratic hypocrisy. But we can extract from the dialogue both a dramatic and a politico-philosophical justification for this unusual piece of Socratic prolixity. Toward the end, Callicles maintains, for the most part, wounded silence, and, when he does answer, he answers resentfully. The lengthy exhortation at the end of the dialogue is thus dramatically apt: one must speak at length when one's interlocutor refuses to respond. But I think the lengthy speech also reflects Socrates' concern over the kind of man Callicles is developing into. Of the three, Callicles is the Athenian, the homeboy, and, Beversluis to the contrary notwithstanding, Callicles is by far the worst of the lot.²⁷ Socrates' speech at the close of the dialogue can thus be seen as both personally and politically motivated. It is curious, though, that Socrates relies, in the end, not on argument, but on exhortation and myth-making. In other words, Socrates relies at the end not strictly on philosophy, but also (and even primarily) on rhetoric. And this suggests that Plato, as he writes the *Gorgias*, is beginning to have his doubts about some central Socratic themes. Rhetoric is not wholly useless, Plato is beginning to sense. Gorgias himself observes, without Socratic objection, that rhetoric can be used to persuade a patient to obey a doctor. (See *Gorgias* 456b.) Provided that it is directed toward the enlightenment of the soul, myth-making, story telling, persuasive speaking, can be rather useful.

The later *Phaedrus* 257–74 features a defense of the possibility of philosophical rhetoric. Rhetoric is the τέχνη of leading the soul with words. (In the

Gorgias, Plato had denied that it is a τέχνη at all, calling it rather a “knack” or “routine” at 462c.) But τέχναι are value-free. They do not include, in particular, knowledge of how and whether their objects should be used. (Plato appears to have adopted here in the *Phaedrus* Gorgias’ view that the rhetorician is not responsible for his students’ use of persuasive techniques, a view he had earlier dismissed [at *Gorgias* 502de] as being as irresponsible as it would be to give weapons to a child.) Rhetoric can be used to lead to truths or to falsehoods. Philosophical dialogue, which, by its nature, pursues truth, is thus the perfection of rhetoric, and not (at least not necessarily) its enemy.²⁸

In the *Gorgias*, it is evident that Plato is also beginning to doubt the Socratic thesis that no one does wrong willingly and for its consequence, that knowledge is sufficient for virtue.²⁹ Some souls may be sufficiently twisted that education alone will not cure them.³⁰ Some souls can be reached only by argument supplemented by rhetoric. The hortatory devices at the close of the dialogue represent, I think, a kind of philosophical rhetoric. If, as I have indicated, the theme of the *Gorgias* is the right use of words, then Plato may well be suggesting, by casting the philosopher as a hortatory speech-maker and a spinner of myths, that rhetoric, when philosophically driven toward the end of securing truth, and thereby, toward the end of improving of the souls of the inquirers, is just such a right use of words.³¹

Department of Philosophy
University of Portland

Notes

1. Kahn believes that in the early dialogues in general, and in the *Gorgias* in particular, Plato is preparing his readers for the *Republic*. Infelicities in the *Gorgias* are later ameliorated. Thus Kahn (1983). Cooper thinks Plato was, when he wrote the *Gorgias*, genuinely perplexed—still attracted by Socratic philosophy but beginning to sour on it (particularly, beginning to sour on its thesis that knowledge is sufficient for virtue)—and that Socrates’ argument against Callicles is unpersuasive because Plato himself was unpersuaded when he wrote it. “How splendidly well the dialogue genre serves Plato’s situation at this point in his own philosophical thinking!” exclaims Cooper. See Cooper (1999, 75). Irwin (1977, 121) and Santas (1979, 285) both think Plato’s failure to develop a Benthamite hedonism for Callicles reflects a failure of philosophical imagination. Rudebusch revises Socrates’ argument, holding that thirst is not the opposite of the pleasure of drinking, but rather its “requisite.” See Rudebusch (1999, 56). He thinks that, amended in this way, the argument successfully persuades Callicles that pleasure is not the good (60–1), but he also thinks the argument is unsound (58), echoing Irwin’s worry about doing well. See below, 204–5.

Beverluis thinks that Socrates’ argument depends on the thesis that pleasure and pain are never compossible being taken as a universal truth, when it is obviously true in some cases and false in others. Whatever cogency the argument seems to have, then, it possesses only owing to a “judicious selection of examples.” Socrates disingenuously selects examples that fit the moral he wants to extract, deliberately ignoring examples that would run contrary to that conclusion. See Beverluis (2000, 356).

2. There is an anonymous assembly of spectators occasionally referred to. For example, they encourage Gorgias to go on when he falters at 458c3.

3. It is true that Gorgias says he will teach “the just and the unjust, the fine and the shameful, the good and the bad” at 459cd. These phrases are the antecedents of “these things” in “If someone in fact does not know *these things*, he will learn them from me” (460a4–5). But *Meno* 95c3–4 represents Gorgias as *sneering* at those who claim to teach virtue, and if we are to make that text consistent with this one, we must take this resolution to teach virtue at *Gorgias* 459 to be a resolution to teach those who (incredibly!) do not know what most people consider to be just and unjust. This information is generally available. Hence, the suggestion of incredulity: “If anyone in fact does not know these things. . . .” Gorgias’ promise at 459cd, then, does not amount to promising to teach people virtue, but only promising to teach the sorts of things that are (considered) just and unjust, good and bad, etc., by most people. *What else is there* (for a sophist)? Irwin takes 459cd the way I do; see Irwin (1979, 125–6, n. on 460a).

4. Πῶλος means “colt,” and most commentators have taken the name to be indicative of the youth and inexperience of this character, as opposed to the older and more adept Callicles. Dodds points to 463e3, where Socrates calls him “young and fresh or keen” [νέος καὶ ὄξυς], a characterization Dodds renders as “coltish.” See Dodds (1959, 11).

But πολὺς means “many,” and the character Polus *does* represent the views of the many. A spokesperson for popular morality, he is appropriately represented as being highly confused. See Liddel et al. (1940, 2:1440 and 2:1560), entries under πῶλος and πολὺς, respectively. I think the character’s name suggests both words.

The characters Polus and Callicles are both probably invented by Plato, writes Emlyn-Jones, since their names are each plays on words, and since we know nothing about them outside of Plato’s *Gorgias*. Emlyn-Jones renders “Callicles” as “fine reputation,” presumably deriving it from καλλι-κλήσις, “fine name or appellation.” See Emlyn-Jones (2004, xxiii).

5. Kahn (1983, 106). Kahn cites Dover (1978, 103) for the legal claim.

6. As does also Socrates’ example of a scratcher of itches in the nether regions (494e1–3). Would Callicles count such a man as happy? (Such a man *is* satisfying intense desires.) Callicles replies that Socrates should be ashamed to speak of such things (494e7–8), yet Callicles is the very man who has recommended the resolute pursuit of pleasure *unmitigated by shame*.

7. As is pointed out by Dodds: “Callicles . . . measure[s] justice and self-control by hedonic standards, but courage and practical . . . wisdom are virtues [he] really respects. Th[is] argument serves to expose his inconsistency.” See Dodds (1959, 314).

8. Beversluis (2000, 351).

9. *Ibid.*, 352.

10. *Ibid.*, 353.

11. Beversluis implausibly takes Callicles at his word here. Beversluis (2000, 353).

12. See Archer-Hind (1988, 7n.7). Archer-Hind calls attention also to *Timaeus* 64c, where pleasure seems connected to returning a body to its original, healthy state. This may involve relief of pain, but it need not. See also Dodds (1959, 309, n. on 497a6).

13. In the Aristotelian sense of the term. Propositions are *contradictories* if they cannot be true together and cannot be false together. Propositions are *contraries* if they cannot be true together but can be false together. See Copi and Cohen (1998, 226–67). Terms are contraries if, when they are predicated of a single subject, the resulting sentences cannot be true together but can be false together.

14. Bentham (1998) lists several internal hedonistic criteria for measuring the relative value of a pleasure, including the intensity of a pleasure, its duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, and purity. See Bentham’s essay, reprinted in Cahn and Markie (1998, 319–43); his criteria of value for pleasures are listed on page 328 of that volume.

Mill, on the other hand, ranks some pleasures as “higher” and others as “lower,” assuring us (or perhaps reassuring himself) that it is “better to be Socrates dissatisfied” than it is to be “a pig satisfied.” See Mill (1979, 10). Bentham, presumably, would count a very satisfied pig as being better off. He bites the bullet, at any rate, in his paper, “Push-Pin and Poetry.” See Bowring (1962, 2:253–54).

15. Santas (1979, 285), writes: “What Callicles has just said is in fact consistent with hedonism if ‘better’ and ‘worse’ are interpreted hedonistically. . . . But Socrates proceeds to introduce the notion of good and bad pleasures and to give them non-hedonistic interpretations.” Irwin (1977, 121)

writes that “Socrates speaks as though he had refuted hedonism and shown that there are good and bad pleasures. . . . The remaining (unexplored) possibility is that pleasures are not bad or good in themselves, but only insofar as they cause more [or less] pleasure on the whole.” Kahn (1983, 105n.51) concurs: “What is omitted from consideration . . . is the possibility of grading pleasures as better or worse by measuring (with a . . . Benthamite calculus) their long-term contribution to overall pleasure and pain.” He goes on to speculate that this kind of “cold calculation” would be out of character for the “hot-blooded” Callicles.

16. Irwin (1979, 201–2).

17. Beversluis (2000, 356).

18. Translation by Gallop (1999, 4).

19. As noted by Kahn (1983, 99–100) and Irwin (1979, 186, n. on 489bc).

20. It certainly is remarkable that these talkers, one a well-known professional talker, the other two talkers-in-training, cannot talk to Socrates. What is it that they are selling? Thrasymachus, another sophist who tries to recommend injustice, is also driven to silence in *Republic* I. (See 350d & ff.) The man who thinks he can recommend that we live unjustly would in fact be recommending that we harm or injure ourselves; indeed, he would be recommending that we damage our souls. This simply cannot be recommended. It is appropriate, then, that the people who try to recommend immorality eventually fall silent. They have nothing at all to say to us.

21. As Irwin notes (1979, 186, n. on 489c).

22. Rhetoric, like the skill of cooking, aims at the gratification of the appetite. See 462d, 464d, and 502e.

23. When Meno, who has also been trained by Gorgias, compares Socrates unflatteringly to a stingray, Socrates refuses to draw an image of Meno in return, pretending that Meno is fishing for compliments. (Socrates will not say anything like, “O Meno, you are as beautiful as the sun.” See *Meno* 79–80.) But I think the real reason Socrates refuses to draw an image of Meno, who has not only studied with but also “particularly admires” Gorgias (95c), Meno, who has a marvelous memory for what other people say but has nothing to say in his own voice, is that *you cannot draw an image of what is not there*. Trained by Gorgias, who cannot summon the energy to defend the value of his profession, Callicles is a professional talker who cannot talk to Socrates, but who tries to preserve his position by refusing to allow it to be examined thoroughly. The professional talkers, the dynamic speakers, maintain stony silence. Compare Callicles also to the imaginary character “Protagoras” who, temporarily resurrected to defend his doctrine, “ducks back down and scurries away” to the underworld, clutching his *Truth*, in order to avoid facing refutation. See *Theaetetus* 171d4. The sophists and their minions are thus rather pitiful: they have nothing whatsoever to offer us. Professional talkers, they cannot even talk to us.

24. Because Socrates believes that philosophy is dialogical by nature, this is a terrible price to pay. Compare to Creon in Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Convinced that the state is everything and the family is nothing, Creon pays a terrible price for this belief: he ends up without a family.

25. Not so in many of the later dialogues. One gets to know Meno and Euthyphro and Callicles. Earlier characters have their own styles, their own unique personalities. One hardly gets the same sense of the personhood of characters when it comes to the later dialogues’ flat, two-dimensional spokespersons like the Strangers from Elea and Athens. These characters are not endowed with personalities.

26. Beversluis makes much of this piece of irony. See Beversluis (2000, 364–65).

27. For other negative assessments of Callicles, see Taylor (1956, 116), Dodds (1959, 14), Rutherford (1995, 161), Shorey (1965, 93–96), and Rankin (1983, 69).

28. Griswold’s chapter on philosophical rhetoric is useful. See Griswold (1986, 157–201).

29. In this sense, I agree with Cooper that the *Gorgias* features some Platonic nervousness about Socratic moral psychology. But I do maintain that Socrates’ anti-Calliclean argument is successful, while Cooper denies this.

30. In *Laws*, Plato says that some souls are so far gone that they can only be punished. At *Laws* 862b–863a, Plato demands execution for particularly recalcitrant blackguards. Even here in the *Gorgias*, Plato indicates that some people are so unjust that they cannot be cured. See 525c.

31. A later Plato is prepared to countenance properly motivated lies, “noble lies,” in relation to the myth of the metals, at *Republic* 414bc.

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