

SOCRATIC RHETORIC: ELENCHUS, MYTH AND SELF-DISCLOSURE IN PLATO'S GORGIAS

KEVIN M. KAMBO

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. The art of rhetoric. 3. The elenchus and its limits. 4. The truth in myth.

1. INTRODUCTION

PLATO'S *Gorgias* presents the vivid encounter between Socrates and three interlocutors whose lives are submitted to elenctic examination. The outcome is striking in that two of these, Gorgias and Polus, have their accounts refuted, but the third, Callicles, while espousing a morality contradicting that of Socrates, seems to survive the interrogation, or at least appears immune to its persuasive force. The dialogue then moves to its conclusion with a myth that Socrates recounts. During these conversations Socrates observes he cannot name any noble rhetoricians (*Gorg* 503b), *i.e.*, rhetoricians who aim at improving the souls of their listeners (504d-e), in the past or in the present. I nonetheless argue (a) that Socrates' performance in the dialogue is actually an instance of such noble rhetoric, exemplified by the two principal types of speech that he employs, *viz.*, elenchus and myth; (b) that these two forms of speech provide reasons for concluding that the *Gorgias* is a reflection on philosophical and rhetorical speech, and their role in the city; and (c) that the compatibility of elenchus and myth relies in part on how Socrates utilises the latter to ground his own use of the former.

This essay focuses especially on the interrogations of Gorgias and Polus (447d-481b) in Sections I and II, and the Socratic account of the afterlife (523a-527a) in Section III. I shall proceed mainly by articulating how elenchus and myth are employed in the dialogue, and from that draw out their natures and limits as activities carried out in speech. In the first section (I), I shall explain the importance of beliefs for personal identity and rational or deliberative action, and connect this to Socrates' perspective on rhetoric as an art. In the second section (II), I shall treat the elenchus as it is presented in the dialogue, on how it is a means for making manifest who one is and for purifying the beliefs that one lives by. I shall be there looking chiefly at the refutations of Gorgias

kambo@hope.edu, Hope College, 126 East 10th Street, Holland, MI 49423, USA.

and Polus. I shall also discuss the relationship of the *elenchus* to the truth of claims Socrates takes to be established in his exchanges with his interlocutors. Finally, in the third section (III), I suggest an interpretation of the myth as an attempt by Socrates to offer or at least point to some of the justifications necessary to take some of his claims about the moral life, justice and happiness as true. I argue that the account in the myth complements the conclusions from the *elenchi* by offering a sketch of the moral psychology necessary for Socrates' ethical claims to be convincing.

2. THE ART OF RHETORIC

In trying to identify what the *Gorgias* is about, I look to the first question aimed at Gorgias by Socrates. The query seems innocuous but turns out to be the spark that lights the fuse of the debate between the principal speakers of the dialogue. It occurs when Socrates directs Chaerephon to ask of Gorgias, "Who he is" (447d).¹ Socrates desires a definition of rhetoric; he wants Gorgias to explain his art or expertise. The question is also an allusion to Socrates' typical procedure in the early dialogues when he seeks an answer to the question "What is *F*?" where *F* might be friendship, piety, virtue, etc. Peculiar in this instance is that we have a personal pronoun as the subject.² This peculiarity appears to be noted, since Chaerephon's response is to ask for a clarification: "How are you speaking?" To this request Socrates supplies, "Well . . . if he happened to be a craftsman of shoes, he would presumably answer you that he was a shoemaker." But if that was all that Socrates intended by the question, why the confusing way of starting? It highlights that a driving theme in the dialogue is the relationship between what we are and what we do. The rhetorician's life is about to be submitted to scrutiny by Socrates, but Plato is inviting us also to look at our own lives: how might the things we do, the kinds of lives we are living, be influencing or shaping the kinds of persons we are or are becoming? And we may yet ask: why should Plato situate this investigation in a discussion about rhetoric.

Part of the answer has to do with finding out the principles or causes of intelligent, human activity.³ As rational agents who deliberate about different means to achieve our desired purposes, our thoughts have significant influence over what we do. We act from reasons, conclusions, beliefs and opinions.

¹ PLATO, *Gorgias*, T. Irwin (trad.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1979. This is the translation on which I am generally relying, with occasional modifications.

² Compare, for instance, the "ὅστις ἐστίν" directed to Gorgias at 447d and the "αὐτὸ δ' ἐστὶ" used to explain what a Form is in *Phaedo* 75d; the main difference is between the personal and impersonal pronouns.

³ That is, we are interested in what, in later philosophical tradition, come to be called human acts, rather than mere acts of man (e.g., autonomic respiration, blinking, etc.).

Each person has his own set of beliefs $\{x_1, x_2, x_3 \dots\}$, and his self-understanding or self-conception is shaped by it in important ways. How things appear to him, what he thinks is important or valuable, how he judges, deliberates and acts, all depend significantly on what he believes as a significant principle or cause. These beliefs, of course, are not static; they can and do change in response to various experiences. And furthermore, there is the possibility that not everything in one's belief-set harmonises; different propositions one holds might be in tension or even contradiction with each other, a condition one might be unaware of because one never really attends to the full scope of one's beliefs and opinions as a whole, all at once.

Thus the importance of rhetoric in life, whether personal or political (as societies founded in reason or *logos*, even political communities can have belief-sets): rhetoric has the power of persuasion, *i.e.*, the power to shape and perhaps manipulate beliefs. And control over belief-sets grants, in the case of rational agents, some control over action. This much Gorgias understands since he describes rhetoric as "responsible . . . for rule over others in [one's] own city" (452d); as the art of "those who prevail with their opinions about things [to be chosen]", that which "practically captures all powers and keeps them under its control" (456a); and as the art of persuading people to choose (456b-c). Rhetoric, then, has an important place in ethical life. But not all kinds of rhetoric are born equal. And before we look at Gorgias', Polus' and Callicles' approach(es) to the activity, allow me to establish some points about what I call noble or Socratic rhetoric.

Perhaps the defining characteristic of noble rhetoric, in Socrates' eyes, is that it is performed for the good of souls. He describes it as "trying to make the souls of the citizens as good as possible, and working hard in saying what is best, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant to the audience" (503a). The practitioner of such rhetoric "[speaks] with an eye to what is best, and [aims] to make the citizens as good as possible by [his] speech" (502e). But what, precisely, is the good of the soul that the rhetorician seeks or pursues *qua* rhetorician? To arrive at an adequate answer to that question we need to broaden our scope and consider Socrates' general theory of arts or *technai*.

What defines an art is the intelligible good that its practitioner aims at, that "in view of [which]" he acts (468a-b). Such a good is the end or goal that determines whether or not any particular agent is a legitimate practitioner of the art, and, indeed, it is also the measure by which we judge any legitimate practitioner to be competent or successful. Gymnastics and medicine are examples of noble arts in the *Gorgias* (464b), defined by their pursuit of the right-functioning and rightly-proportioned body. So, what good defines rhetoric?

As an activity carried out in speech (449e), rhetoric is to be evaluated from the perspective of what Socrates considers the goal of speech: truth. Throughout the *Gorgias*, Socrates' person and activity are identified, both by himself

and by others, with the pursuit of truth (482a, 492c, 495a, 505e). This, I note, is consistent with the *Apology* where Socrates explicitly says that the “virtue” or excellence of a speaker or rhetorician “lies in telling the truth” (18a).⁴ But, admittedly, it is not entirely clear what seeking to tell the truth means. In this regard two subordinate values are important for specification and clarification: self-disclosure and objectivity.

Self-disclosure is the requirement that each interlocutor at least speak his mind. Lack of self-disclosure in speech, wherein one speaker hides from the other what he thinks, damages the chances for fruitful conversation, undermining the collaborative pursuit of truth. Thus, Socrates explains to Callicles, “You’d no longer be properly searching for the truth with me if you speak contrary to what you think” (495a). The self-concealing speaker cannot be trusted *qua* speaker; one cannot engage in speech with him. A self-concealing physician, such as one who overcharged his patients, might still function as a physician and aim at health. The self-concealing speaker, however, is necessarily disqualified as an interlocutor since by his intentions and actions he removes himself from participating in the shared activity that is dialogue. He is only *apparently present* in the conversation, but *actually absent* from it; the words coming out of his mouth might use his voice, but they are not his words. Self-concealment contradicts and frustrates the ‘grammar’ or logic of dialogue.

Objectivity is the requirement that speech is about what is in some way public, a *presence* available to both speakers; it appeals to a measure beyond mere personal belief or subjective feeling. As Socrates observes to Callicles, “If one of us had some private affection quite different from other people’s, it would not be easy for anyone to indicate his own affection to another” (481c-d). What is purely subjective cannot be spoken of; we speak about what others have some access to or experience of. Thus, Socrates talks about “understanding the *things* [people] speak about” (449e).⁵ In Socrates’ search for truth, the measure lies in the things or objects discussed. The things are the truth-makers, and speech is supposed to conform to them. On account of this appeal to what is accessible to his interlocutors, Socrates’ activity can be collaborative and not just an exercise of his power to control the mind of his audience. Since the things discussed are presences independent of the beliefs or feelings of the speakers, the truth about them can be shared by all the speakers as a “common good” (505e) that is not diminished in being shared. Thus, for Socrates, discussion is a feast and not a fight;⁶ as he puts it, “I search in

⁴ ἀρετὴ ῥήτορος δὲ τᾷ ληθῆ λέγειν.

⁵ The emphasis is my own. This crucial point is reiterated at 453b, 457e and 505e.

⁶ In contrast with the beginning of the dialogue, where Callicles remarks that Socrates is entering a battle or contest (447a). For a valuable discussion on this initial framing, see

common with you; and so if my opponent is clearly saying something [true], I will be the first to concede it" (506a).

Truth, self-disclosure, objectivity, and collaboration are therefore the hallmarks of the noble rhetorician who speaks to improve the souls of his interlocutors. This rhetoric is characterised in the *Phaedrus* as the art of passing on to another "whatever conviction you wish, along with excellence, by applying words and practices in conformance with law and custom" (270b).⁷ It is persuasion in view of the truth, contrasted with those who do not care "in the slightest for the truth . . . but only for what is convincing," i.e., a rhetoric of truth-indifferent persuasion (272d),⁸ which exploits the ignorant listener's sympathies, biases and prejudices (cf. *Apol* 35a, *Gorg* 513c, *Rep* 590b, *Phaidr* 260b) for unspecified – usually self-interested – purposes. And because rhetoric is interested in persuasion, i.e., at communicating truth, it must also fit the soul of the listener, knowing what form of speech is suitable to a particular kind of character (*Phaidr* 271b), in the same way that gymnastic training or medical therapy should fit the body of a particular patient. Speaking truths in and out of season still requires speaking them in a manner intelligible to one's audience. The noble rhetorician therefore has his eye on two foci – the truth of his subject matter and the soul of his interlocutor – in the performance of his art.

But Socrates in the *Gorgias* says, "I don't know who this [noble rhetorician] is" (503b); he cannot find any concrete examples that capture his ideal. Nevertheless, he also refers to himself as "one of a few Athenians . . . who undertake the real political craft and practise politics" (521d) by aiming to improve citizen's souls. So, while he might not be able to name anyone else as a model, his actions in the *Gorgias* make him a candidate for the noble rhetorician, specifically in his use of elenchus to purify belief-sets in the soul and of myth to inform them. Let us then look more closely at how each of these elements is employed.

3. THE ELENCHUS AND ITS LIMITS

The elenchus as a part of noble rhetoric exists (1) to reveal the truth about the person under interrogation and, subsequently, (2) to improve the person by

J. DOYLE, *On the First Eight Lines of Plato's Gorgias*, «The Classical Quarterly», 56/02 (2006), pp. 599-602.

⁷ PLATO, *Phaedrus*, C. Rowe (trad.), Penguin Classics, New York 2005.

⁸ Per Harry Frankfurt, such an attitude is characteristic of a specific kind of orator: "The fact about himself that the bullshitter hides . . . is that the truth-values of his statements are of no central interest to him; . . . This does not mean his speech is anarchically impulsive, but that the motive guiding and controlling it is unconcerned with how the things about which he speaks truly are. . . . He does not really care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, so suit his purpose", H. G. FRANKFURT, *On Bullshit*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2009, pp. 55-56.

identifying (and eliminating) the harmful beliefs he holds which are inconsistent with how he ought to live. The elenchus operates primarily on a person's belief-set by bringing to his mind the 'truths' and opinions that define "who he is" in a bid to help him live a good life, as Socrates understands it. In this section I am interested primarily in the refutations of Gorgias and Polus.

I contend that the elenchus proceeds by engaging someone's belief-set, highlighting contradiction within someone's beliefs or between an opinion held and the person the examinee understands himself to be. The elenchus therefore reveals the examinee to himself; it is a form of self-disclosure, bringing to light what the examinee could not or would not see about himself. Hence the importance of saying what one actually believes, of self-disclosure.

Socrates' refutation of Gorgias occurs when the rhetorician has been led to propose both (*g*₁) that a rhetorician teaches justice and produces just men who use rhetoric justly (460b) and (*g*₂) that a rhetorician's student might use rhetoric unjustly and, if so, that that is not the teacher's fault (460e). Gorgias' belief-set {*g*₁, *g*₂, ...}, therefore, is shown to be incoherent. The rhetorician cannot claim both to know justice and produce just disciples while at the same time refuse any responsibility if his students in fact use the rhetoric they learned unjustly. But an obvious question arises for Gorgias: which of these incompatible beliefs is the claim to jettison? We can see the problem more clearly if we utilise Richard Robinson's distinction between direct and indirect refutation.

According to Robinson,

To refute a thesis indirectly is to deduce a falsehood from that thesis; ... to show that the thesis entails a consequence which is so repugnant that you would rather abandon the thesis than keep it and the consequence along with it.

An example of such an argument is the *reductio ad absurdum*. A direct refutation, on the other hand, "is best defined as any refutation that reaches the contradictory of the refutand without at any time or in any way assuming the refutand."⁹ In Gorgias' case, Socrates does not draw out any unacceptable or necessarily false consequences from either *g*₁ or *g*₂ that would lead Gorgias – or us – to abandon either one of the premises. The trouble comes from holding both premises in conjunction; each one leads to the contradictory of the other without assuming the other (*i.e.*, holding *g*₁ leads one to hold not-*g*₂, and believing *g*₂ entails not-*g*₁). As such, the refutation of Gorgias is, in Robinson's terms, direct rather than indirect.¹⁰ And because the refutation is direct, we are in fact unsure, in this context, about whether the refutand is *g*₁ or *g*₂. Is it the case that the rhetorician does not teach justice and does not produce students who use rhetoric justly (not-*g*₁) or that he is to be held responsible if his

⁹ R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1985, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

students do not employ rhetoric justly (not-g₂)? An indirect refutation would have shown us which claim to give up; as things stand, a direct refutation cannot do that for us here.

Let us ask why Gorgias holds g₁ and g₂. Claim g₂ he offers spontaneously, noting that "if someone acquires the rhetorical craft and then does injustice with this power and craft, we should not detest his teacher and expel him from the city" (457b). Claim g₁ is more complicated; Socrates leads Gorgias into confessing it, but Polus thinks it was conceded out of shame (461b-c). Commentators are split on the issue. One may agree with Polus, grant that g₁ is not really Gorgias, position, and accept that it was conceded principally out of the desire to save face. Perhaps, as Kahn diagnoses, Gorgias opted for g₁ out of fear for his security; he could not afford to go around advertising he was teaching an art of persuasion indifferent to morality, thereby exposing the vulnerable young to (likely) corruption.¹¹ Alternatively, one may read Gorgias, with Cooper, as more or less earnestly believing that he knows what justice is and that it is his place as a teacher of rhetoric – a political art – to teach this justice.¹² A third approach-vector, carved out by Doyle, may yet conclude that "Gorgias has no beliefs whatever about whether right and wrong belong to the subject-matter of rhetoric," on account of the rhetorician's incoherent statements being proof that he was no carefully considered philosophy of rhetoric.¹³

This third way is too extreme since Gorgias and Socrates recognise that (part of) the goal or object of rhetoric is persuasion. The second, however, does not seem to account adequately for Callicles' (482d) and Socrates' (487b, 508c) apparent endorsements of Polus' diagnosis that the rhetorician was trying to avoid humiliation. Indeed, in another, briefer elenchus, Gorgias shows he is susceptible to shame. At one point during his cross-examination, when (g₃) he decides to abandon the discussion with Socrates, he notes that it would be "shameful" to break off the conversation having claimed (g₄) that "anyone could ask me whatever he wanted" and therefore tells Socrates (g₅) that he may as well "go on with the dialogue," and ask whatever he wants (458c-e). There is contradiction between g₃ and g₄, between desiring the interrogation to stop and stating that he would answer any questions, and because of the shame involved in failing to meet public expectations (which he cultivated) he gives up g₃ and takes up g₅. Claim g₁ seems a similar case where Gorgias takes up a position to meet conventional expectations out of shame, though not

¹¹ C. KAHN, *Drama and Dialectic in Plato's Gorgias*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 1 (1983), pp. 79-80.

¹² J. M. COOPER, *Socrates and Plato in Plato's Gorgias*, in ID., *Reason and Emotion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1999, p. 35.

¹³ J. DOYLE, *Socrates and Gorgias*, «Phronesis», 55/1 (2010), pp. 20, 24.

because of the special fears mentioned above (*viz.*, being a prominent alien and thus fearing for his life and liberty) but rather because of the more generic embarrassment anyone would have about seeming ignorant of or insensitive to moral values while styling himself as something of a life-coach. In any case, a clear picture of Gorgias is difficult to obtain since the examination – and therefore self-disclosure – is interrupted, and thus Socrates observes to Polus “in fact nothing was made clear for us in our recent discussion just about what [Gorgias] thinks” (463a), which partly explains the exegetical enigma. But where does that leave us with regard to g_1 and g_2 ?

I propose, instead, to focus on Socrates. Whatever Gorgias believes, in Socrates’ eyes g_1 is the superior claim. The proposition g_1 is, after all, the one that he worked hardest to elicit from the rhetorician. Socrates’ point is that Gorgias would not count as a legitimate practitioner if the latter did not at least seek to improve the souls of his listeners: the quality of his disciples is a (partial) disclosure of his quality as a teacher, analogous to how chosen actions are self-disclosures about the soul of the agent. The elenchus would therefore be aimed at showing Gorgias that he does not meet the standard of the noble rhetorician and, hopefully, at occasioning his rehabilitation.

We do not need to go over all the points of Polus’ examination to draw out insights on the nature of the elenchus. Polus is committed to fighting in the arena of speech. He falls when Socrates leads him to assert both (p_1) that doing injustice is shameful and evil, and (p_2) that he would choose to do injustice rather than suffer it (475d-e). Because Polus cannot give up on p_1 he is ultimately forced to abandon p_2 and concede (p_3) that doing injustice is indeed worse than suffering it and thus (not- p_2) he would not choose it. What is important is that whereas Gorgias’ refutation is interrupted, Polus’ treatment runs its full course. Appealing once again to Robinson’s scheme, we can see that Polus’ refutation is also a direct refutation; p_1 leads Polus to hold p_3 , which in turn compels him to agree to the position not- p_2 .

The contest between Socrates and Polus is the main clash between the elenchus and illegitimate or counterfeit rhetoric. Each speaker, intriguingly, makes the same claim about the other’s self-concealment. Polus accuses Socrates, “You don’t want to agree, though you think as I say” (471e); Socrates counters, “I think that you and other men believe that doing injustice is worse than suffering it [but will not say it]” (474b). Both claim to know what the other ultimately and privately believes, regardless of what is initially and publicly claimed. Thus, each undertakes to unmask the sincerely held beliefs of his interlocutor, to compel self-disclosure. Polus endeavours to unveil the true Socrates through appeals to popular opinion, fear and shame (472c, 473c) – appeals to authorities other than Socrates. Socrates on the other hand invokes only Polus: “If I cannot produce you, all alone by yourself, as a witness agreeing on the things I’m talking about, I think I have achieved nothing of

any account in what our discussion is about" (472b-c). It is here that we see, most clearly, the dependence of the Socratic elenchus upon one's own beliefs. Socrates says that his method makes the man present and forgets the many (474a). His is an art of self-disclosure. The technique is not concerned with weighing doctrines not just theoretically but also personally, with testing the souls of the examined. Thus Socrates says of one interlocutor in the *Protagoras*, "I wanted to see what Hippocrates was made of, so I started to examine him with a few questions" (311b); in the *Apology* he says, if he should meet an Athenian who claims to care for his own soul, "I shall question him, examine him and test him, and if I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has, I shall reproach him" (29e); and as Nicias reflects in the *Laches*, the one under interrogation will "keep on being led about by [Socrates'] arguments until he submits to answering about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto" (187e).¹⁴ The same obtains in the *Gorgias*: the elenchus follows from self-disclosure analogously to how a physician's treatment follows from the disclosures of patient's body. It is Polus' words that lead to Polus' refutation – despite all his attempts to the contrary – because he cannot bring himself to abandon *p*₁, on account of the kind of person he is.

Polus cannot distance himself from his critical weakness because he too is a conventional soul. Whereas Gorgias probably recognises his dependence on convention, Polus, like many who are chronically opinionated, is conventional while unaware of his condition; he does not see himself. He might project a persona of swagger and independence, but the instruments he marshals against Socrates – popular opinion, threats and ridicule – are the very things to which he himself is susceptible. After all, one often tries to convince others with appeals to what one finds persuasive, judging them against the same criteria by which one measures oneself. Polus is in thrall to popular opinion, and therefore cannot bring himself to praise as admirable what the people think is shameful, *i.e.*, injustice, even though he might lust after the 'benefits' of that injustice. And so, he is vanquished in the arena of debate, and he admits defeat – even though it is clear he has not been convinced (475e). What is important with regard to Socrates' method is that he dislodges Polus from *p*₂ by leading him to concede, if not quite accept, *p*₁. Again, as with Gorgias, Polus' motivations and beliefs matter less than that Socrates endorses *p*₁.

These considerations bring up an important limitation about the elenchus: it is a rather modest truth-finder. Socrates is correct in believing that "what is true is never refuted" (473b), at least not soundly. But the knowledge that if a claim is true then it cannot be refuted entails neither that if a claim is not

¹⁴ J. M. COOPER, D. S. HUTCHINSON (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis, IN 2011.

true, then it will be refuted, nor that if a claim is not refuted, then it is true. The elenchus reveals the inconsistency between contradictory opinions, but that does not automatically show which opinion is true and which is false.¹⁵ Why pick g_1 over g_2 ? or p_1 over p_2 ? Socrates certainly favours g_1 and p_1 , but he cannot be said to have shown their veracity – or the errors of g_2 and p_2 .¹⁶ Vlastos argues that Socrates believes that it is enough to seek consistency in one's moral beliefs because he, Socrates, assumes that "[A] whoever has a false moral belief will always have at the same time true beliefs entailing the negation of that false belief" and that "[B] the set of elenctically tested moral beliefs held by Socrates at any given time is consistent."¹⁷ From [B] we would say that Socrates thinks g_1 and p_1 are true because he has tested them with the rest of the moral beliefs in his own – harmonious and consistent – belief-set. And if Gorgias and Polus had denied those doctrines then Socrates believes he would have been able to find some other true claims, g_x and p_y , that Gorgias and Polus would have accepted, and on account of which he would have refuted g_2 and p_2 . Similarly, Kahn argues that the elenchus can successfully eliminate pernicious beliefs from people's belief-sets because of a Platonic/Socratic claim that "all human beings desire the good and pursue it in all of their actions"; thus "the deposit of truth on which the elenchus relies will be some recognition in all of us of what is truly good".¹⁸ Through this deposit of truth each rational agent has some knowledge of the moral life which Socrates' elenchus would use to purify him of wrong beliefs. These insights might well be true, but I argue that even if Socrates has these assumptions, he still needs to show how g_1 and p_1 correspond to the reality of the world. While Kahn's proposal does track with Socrates' claims about man's intrinsic capacity and desire for truth (cf. *Rep* 518c, *Phil* 58d), those claims do not go as far as establishing an innate measure of truth in the soul. *Pace* Vlastos, coherence and consistency might be reasons to favour a claim as true, but they are not what make it so. Enter Callicles.

Straightaway his intervention narrows in on the main problem, *viz.*, that

¹⁵ The elenchus unveils a narrow, negative truth: it reveals that something is wrong within my set or horizon of opinions. But it does not disclose where the error lies and does not reveal or establish any truth that would allow us to work out what is wrong.

¹⁶ Claim p_1 , of course, echoes one of Socrates' few knowledge claims in the Platonic corpus. Socrates says, at *Apology* 29b, that he *knows* that doing injustice is shameful and evil (τὸ δὲ ἀδικεῖν καὶ ἀπειθεῖν τῷ βελτίονι καὶ θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, ὅτι κακὸν καὶ αἰσχρὸν ἐστὶν οἶδαι). Nevertheless, how does he know this?

¹⁷ G. VLASTOS, *The Socratic Elenchus*, «Journal of Philosophy», 79/11 (1982), pp. 711–714. Vlastos' position, however, seems to beg the question. How does Socrates know that the harmony or coherence of the majority of his moral beliefs can be parlayed into guaranteeing their veracity?

¹⁸ C. KAHN, *Drama and Dialectic in Plato's Gorgias*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 1 (1983), p. 113.

the truth of g_1 and p_1 has not been shown. He chastises Gorgias for failing to admit that "he couldn't teach about just things" and calls Polus to task "for his concession . . . that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it" (482d). He does not see why these claims are true, and is not afraid to say so. Socrates seems to admit that the truth of the propositions is yet to be determined when he says, "I know well that if you agree with what my soul believes, these very beliefs are the true ones" (486e). Yet this is just more of the same: agreement does not establish truth. So even after having refuted Callicles on a number of points and saying that the claims p_1 , "that doing injustice is as much worse than suffering it as it is more shameful," and g_1 , that "someone who is going to be a rhetorician in the right way should be a just man, one who knows about just things" (508c), are "held firm and bound down . . . by iron and adamant arguments,"¹⁹ Socrates still qualifies his position by adding, "at least it appears so far" (508e-509a). Refuting Callicles merely through the elenchus, through identifying and correcting contradictions in his belief-set is not enough.²⁰ Callicles, as far as ethical theory is concerned, is willing to take an almost indiscriminately hedonistic moral stance, defending the appropriateness of satisfying any and every appetite (494c), but is tripped up because he regards the pleasures of a catamite beneath him (494e, 499b). This reveals an inconsistency not so much within his belief-set, as between his beliefs and his moral intuition. Being a certain kind of man, he is repulsed by some behaviours. This phenomenon suggests a new kind of incoherence within the soul, between its feeling and its thinking, which might indicate there is still

¹⁹ The language of holding fast and binding (*κατέχεται καὶ δέδεσται*) once again echoes a knowledge claim. In *Meno* 98a Socrates says true opinions do not count as knowledge "until one ties them down (*ἕως ἄν τις . . . δῇσῃ*)" by giving an account of the reason why." Socrates therefore almost seems to be saying that he knows g_1 and p_1 to be true, except he still will not say why.

²⁰ Part of the difficulty with Callicles is his refusal to respect or defer to the rules of engagement of discourse and disputation. As Raphael Woolf (R. WOOLF, *Callicles and Socrates: Psychic (Dis)harmony in the Gorgias*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 18 (2000), pp. 1-40) explains, "It is necessary that the interlocutor have a prior commitment to having his beliefs bound by logical rules" (p. 29) and again, "Though the elenchus can expose inconsistency, it cannot make one a lover of consistency" (p. 32). In G. KLOSKE, *The Refutation of Callicles in Plato's Gorgias*, «Greece & Rome», 31/2 (1984), pp. 126-139, we find a related point: "Socrates is able to refute people in either two ways. He is able to focus on inconsistencies in the opinions they hold; or he is able to draw consequences from their views that are otherwise unacceptable, generally because they seem obviously absurd" (p. 136). But Callicles appears ready to live with the inconsistencies and absurdities – or at least not to be willing to face them. Thus J. DOYLE, *The Fundamental Conflict in Plato's Gorgias*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 30 (2006), pp. 87-100: "Socrates and Callicles cannot in the end make dialectical contact: . . . their views are so fundamentally opposed that, unlike Socrates and Gorgias, or Socrates and Polus, they end up unable to take part in the same discussion" (p. 97).

more complexity within the soul than simply within its beliefs and opinions. In any event, that is not the focus of the *Gorgias* – it is more an anticipation of the *Republic* – and our main concern at the moment is the truth of claims g_1 and p_1 . Speech, as we said, is about things; we need an account of the objects that verify (or falsify) g_1 and p_1 .²¹ The object or reality in question is the human soul. And the account of it we need is to be sought – up to a point – in Socrates' concluding myth.

4. THE TRUTH IN MYTH

Like the elenchus, myth is a phenomenon in speech. But what kind of speech is *muthos*? Socrates refers to it as an "account" but concedes that it will likely be taken as a "tale" (523a). How does it measure up to the criteria of objectivity and self-disclosure? With regard to the latter, Socrates emphasises that he relates it "in the belief that it's true" (*ibidem*), meaning that he takes responsibility for what it discloses. And after relating the myth the first thing he does is reemphasise that he believes it "to be true" (524a). We may therefore at least take him as describing things the way he sees them.

The condition of objectivity is more difficult to ascertain. Myths are typically instantiations of the belief-set of a people. As Brisson observes, "A myth never relates an actual or recent experience. Instead, it always evokes a recollection preserved in the memory of an entire community, which has orally transmitted it from generation to generation, over a long period of time."²² A myth is thus 'beyond' experience in two ways: it does not originate in what the relater has witnessed, and it speaks of realities that the hearer cannot go out and perceive for himself. It is not surprising, then, that Socrates does not claim to be the author of the myth. Instead he is passing on "what I have heard" (524b), and offers it to Callicles and the rest with an exhortation: "Hear-ken" (523a). The emphasis on hearing highlights that the truth of the myth is something received – inherited rather than invented – and is grounded in an authority above or prior to the teller. In this sense, at least, it is objective. But this also means that what is given and received in the myth is neither falsifiable nor demonstrable, as it can neither be argued for nor empirically verified in the here and now. What, then, are we to make of it?

A useful place to start is with Socrates' explanation that from the accounts

²¹ H. H. BENSON, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato's Early Dialogues*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, pp. 33-35 also notes that premises that the premises (here g_1 and p_1) that are supposed to refute the refutands (here g_2 and p_2) do not have, as far as the elenchus is concerned, sufficient "alethic status" to demonstrate the wrongness of the refutand. Per Benson, "Socrates neither can nor does conclude as a result of an individual elenctic episode the falsehood of the apparent refutand."

²² L. BRISSON, *Plato the Myth Maker*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998, p. 17.

in the myth he has to "infer" some conclusions (524b). The myth is not necessarily to be taken literally. This is an obvious point but it bears noting: the myth needs to be interpreted if it is to be received appropriately. With that in mind I shall approach it alongside some recent interpretations it has inspired.

The story tells of how the procedure for judging men at the end of their earthly lives changes between the reigns of Cronus and Zeus. The motive is to improve observance of the law that whoever in this life lives justly and piously should, when he dies, go on to the Isles of the Blessed and live happily ever after, while whoever lives unjustly and impiously here should, after death, suffer retribution and punishment. In the time of Cronus souls often failed to arrive at their appropriate destinations because "men were judged while they were still living, by judges still living, judging them on the day they were to die" (523b). When Zeus comes into power he condemns this procedure (1) because, since those being judged are still alive, the defendants are judged "with clothes on . . . covered in fine bodies, noble birth and riches; . . . [with] many witnesses come to support them" (523c), thereby distracting the judges; (2) because the judges themselves are alive they judge "with clothes on, obstructed by eyes and ears and their whole body in front of their soul" (523d); and (3) because those being judged know the day of judgement in advance (*ibidem*). To correct these deficiencies Zeus decrees that judgement is to occur after death and to be performed by dead judges, so that both judges and judged are stripped of bodily ornament. Then the judge will "look with his soul by itself on the soul by itself of each man when he has died without warning, without covering, bereft of all kinsfolk, after leaving all that adornment behind on earth, so that the judgement will be just" (523e).

Let that suffice for a summary. What it means is more difficult to unravel. Annas believes that the change in judgement procedures serves "to stress the idea of a final rectification."²³ On her reading, Socrates is claiming that the wicked cannot outrun ultimate retribution and, therefore, we are offered "a consequentialist reason to be just," viz., "that justice pays *in the end*."²⁴ Inwood, reading the myths in the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* together, takes the lesson to be "that one should be punished for misdeeds, not for vice," since the dead appear to be judged solely for what they do and, not for the characters they have.²⁵ For Inwood's Plato, one chooses one's deeds but not one's character. Stauffer attempts something of a middle way, holding both that what is weighed is one's character and that the account is ultimately

²³ J. ANNAS, *Plato's Myths of Judgement*, «Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy», 27/2 (1982), p. 122.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

²⁵ M. INWOOD, *Plato's Eschatological Myths*, in C. PARTENIE (ed.), *Plato's Myths*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, pp. 29, 39.

retributive.²⁶ Sedley, however, has a more figurative reading, taking the regimes of Cronus and Zeus to stand for the rhetoric of Plato's Athens and that of Socrates.²⁷ Thus "being examined by Socrates . . . is analogous to the hearings instituted by Zeus."²⁸ Sedley therefore reads the myth 'back' into the dialogue as an allegory for the method of examination that Socrates applied to Gorgias, Polus and Callicles. This reading of the myth is closest to my own, but I wish to emphasise that the myth has a 'forward' or positive contribution to the drama of the dialogue. I shall say more about these different interpretations by way of contrast with my own.

The first point of interest concerns the myth's fulcrum: the act of judgement. Even though there is mention of rewards and punishments, very little is said about the particulars of those different outcomes. Thus Inwood is able to speculate that a tyrant like Agamemnon "might be punished by being made to read philosophy books for eternity, or at least until he acquired a taste for the subject."²⁹ Such a reading would lend credence to Annas' and Stauffer's theories of final rectification, where the wicked would get 'what's coming to them', i.e., they would be forced to suffer something that would cause them pain, whatever form it might take. But if we look at the myth itself there is little evidence that such a reading is correct: we are not told that those going in Tartarus will find beatings, tortures, lakes of fire, or Latin prose composition; nor are we told of any enticing delights that are to be found in the Isles of the Blessed. Even the classification of Tartarus as a "prison" (523b) is not terribly descriptive; it cannot simply mean restriction of movement, since there does not seem to be any possibility of the virtuous dead ever leaving the Isles of the Blessed. In fact, what seems to characterise the Isles of the Blessed and Tartarus respectively is simply the presence of the good and the wicked – which would at least explain the interest in keeping both populations separate. It is unlikely, then, that Socrates takes the reason to be virtuous now to be desire of future enjoyments or fear of future evils – i.e., that virtue is merely instrumental, of consequential value – since we are not told what those motivational enjoyments and evils of the future are. Rather it is when we treat the myth from the perspective of what hap-

²⁶ D. STAUFFER, *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 171-172.

²⁷ D. SEDLEY, *Myth, Punishment and Politics in the Gorgias*, in C. PARTENIE (ed.), *Plato's Myths*, cit., p. 67.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 58. Nevertheless, the challenge of allegorizing the myth as a dramatization of the reform of Athenian society is in trying to figure out which elements of the myth map onto the reform process. Thus, Sedley does not show what physical, permanent punishment is an image for in the political process. Likewise, he entirely omits explaining what would be the analogue of the Isles of the Blessed in reformed society.

²⁹ M. INWOOD, *Plato's Eschatological Myths*, cit., p. 31.

pens *at* judgement, instead of what happens *after* judgement, that we can get at Socrates' intent.

Three major changes occur in the judgements between the reigns of Cronus and Zeus: (1) those being judged are stripped; (2) those judging are stripped; (3) those being judged cannot anticipate the day of death (and, therefore, of judgement). Those being judged are to be stripped of their bodies, of their kin, of their wealth, and of other character witnesses. The implication is that these are all insignificant attributes that get in the way of knowing someone's true condition, impediments to self-disclosure. It is difficult to get to know who someone is if we are not able to see beyond or through the many possessions that are tangential to his character, these occasions for self-concealment. By presenting this point in language of covering and stripping, Socrates emphasises the difference between seeming and being, the apparent and the true: how someone is presented (by himself or by others) and how he is could be quite different. Likewise, the judges, being divested of their bodies (and the body's wants), are also without the handicap of appraising people mediately through externals. And not knowing the day that one will die is yet another way to reinforce the point that one will not have an opportunity to manipulate the 'optics' of one's life and will be judged according to the reality of how one has lived. As Fussi remarks, "I can manipulate appearance, while I cannot manipulate truth."³⁰ But if one has lived in such a way that one is always prepared for death (and, consequently, judgement), so much the better.³¹ The improved judgement of the myth therefore makes the soul itself to be present as its only witness in the evaluation of its own moral character. There are here clear parallels with the Socratic elenchus which also examines a person's way of life and, as Socrates demonstrates with his interlocutors, is only concerned with one witness, the person under examination, in making that person's moral and intellectual character known. Sedley's reading of the myth, then, is to be recommended. For my part, I would like to add to it: not only does the myth mirror the elenchus, it also provides (1) grounding for the propositions that Socrates favoured in his exchanges with Gorgias and Polus, *g1* and *p1*, as well as (2) a framework that explains why Socratic elenchus is an appropriate method of psychic purification. To appreciate these points we need to look more closely at the myth and its context.

The centrality of judgement in the myth leads us to ask: just what is being judged? The answer is simple: the character of the human soul. When Calicles entered into debate with Socrates, he offered what he thought were the appropriate criteria by which the moral condition of a man may be ap-

³⁰ A. FUSSI, *The Myth of the Last Judgment in Plato's Gorgias*, «The Review of Metaphysics», 54/3 (2001), p. 536.

³¹ The practice of philosophy, we remember, is preparation for death. Cf. *Phaedo*, 67e.

praised, distinguishing between judging by convention and judging by nature. He claimed that by nature “it is just for the better man to have more than the worse, and the more powerful than the less powerful” and took as his paradigms the relations “among other animals, and between whole cities and races of men” where “the superior rules over the weaker and has more” (483d). He condemned those who enslave the superior by “writings, charms, incantations, all the rules contrary to nature” (484a) as rebels against the natural order. Callicles therefore rejects norms agreed upon by society, viz., law and custom, in favour of norms from ‘nature’. Socrates’ genius is that in the myth of judgement he both appropriates and restructures this approach. Like Callicles, he disqualifies realities whose value is conventional, i.e., one’s attractiveness, one’s wealth, one’s connections, the influence of one’s family, etc., but, at the same time, he reframes the question by making also irrelevant the imperial and bestial paradigms that Callicles invokes, thereby homing in on the crucial questions: what is the nature of the human soul? what makes a good human soul? and, absent of discussing it directly, is there a paradigm for understanding the human soul?

Seeking to answer these questions, Socrates’ own exegesis of the myth appeals to an analogy between somatic and psychic life, between the characteristics of the body and those of the soul. On the face of it, this appeal to the body to explain the soul is surprising, even, we might be tempted to say, ‘un-Platonic’. But perhaps this is a useful reminder that for Plato’s Socrates (and Plato) the body is not always and everywhere evil, or necessarily to be eyed with suspicion.³² In any case, the move is quite consistent with the rest of the *Gorgias*.

With regard to the body, Socrates explains that after death it “keeps its nature, the ways it has been cared for, what has happened to it – all clear to see. For instance, if someone’s body was large by nature, or by nurture, or by both when he was alive, this man’s corpse is also large when he dies” (524b-c). There are two senses of nature operative here: first, what something is originally and second, what it becomes through activity. And, naturally, what something becomes is a function of both what it is originally and its nurture, i.e., its rearing, education or way of life. Thus, the human body can come to be in many different ways, e.g., tall, plump or long-haired (524c), depending on its starting condition and the kind of life one lives. So, a competitive swimmer develops a wedge shape, a marathon runner attains the slim frame appropriate to that task, and so on with sumo-wrestlers and the like: our bodies are configured to our physical regimens. But the body can also undergo experiences that are not perfective of it and thus a person who is harmed bodily bears “traces of blows

³² Plato thus anticipates Wittgenstein’s remark that “the human body is the best picture of the human soul”.

in scars on his body from whips and other wounds when he was live . . . or if someone's limbs were broken or twisted when he was alive, when he is dead also these same things are clear to see" (524c-d). Different ways of life shape the body variedly and those life experiences incompatible with the health of the body scar and deform it, ultimately frustrating its right functioning.

With that perspective explained, Socrates proceeds, "I think the same is true about the soul as well"; as with the body, if we can look at the soul itself we can see "what belongs by nature and what has happened to it, all that the man acquired in the soul from each of his practices" (524d). Like the body, the soul is an entity that can be shaped or moulded and here Socrates explicitly identifies our individual actions as the principal causes giving shape to the soul. What Socrates is presenting is a theory of self-determination, wherein what we do make us who or what we become. And to understand this better it is useful to have recourse to a concept from biology, that of the 'life-form'.

A life-form is defined as "the body form that characterises a kind of organism (as a species) at maturity"³³ or "the characteristic morphology of a mature organism."³⁴ As the proper, mature shape that an organism ought to achieve, the life-form of any species is the standard that defines when a member of the species has completed its development; it is an important aspect of the end or good of the organism's life. Healthy or flourishing members of the species have a morphology that matches their kind's life-form; defective members of the species are identified by their deviation from it.

Socrates utilises the idea of a somatic life-form when he talks about the different shapes, healthy and unhealthy, the human body can take. And he relies on an analogous concept, that of a psychic life-form, when discussing the different shapes possible for the human soul, shapes that are the outcome of the different life-styles that one could lead. Someone with a morally unhealthy life-style, a life of vice, Socrates describes poignantly as having a soul that "was thoroughly whip-marked and full of scars . . . [in which] everything was crooked . . . nothing straight, . . . full of disproportion and shamefulness" (525a).³⁵ While such a person is still human, he nevertheless fails at achieving the psychic life-form appropriate to man on account of having performed deeds incompatible with it, thus disfiguring his soul and putting himself out of harmony with his own humanity. Such a life Socrates diagnoses as "being brought up without truth" (525a) and it is here that we see why proposition *g*₁ (that "someone who is going to be a rhetorician in the right way should be

³³ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1979.

³⁴ American Heritage College Dictionary, Third Edition, 1993.

³⁵ This is a striking image, one that vividly draws the connection between one's history and one's character. As Alejandra reflects in Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*, "Scars have the strange power to remind us that our past is real".

a just man, one who knows about just things”) is true; a rhetorician who is unconcerned about or ignorant of just things is not a person to listen to; he will very likely ruin people’s lives. A rhetorician has a crucial role in the city; he has influence over what we choose and so has a hand in who or what we become. He is an educator and for Plato, as Rist explains, “in a sense we are or we become the education we receive.”³⁶ As we do not trust physicians who have the wrong conception of man’s physical health, or trainers who do not understand man’s physical life-form, we should not trust rhetoricians who do not at least aim to achieve psychic health or the psychic life-form in their audiences.

The concept of the life-form is also helpful because it is an instance of ‘one-over-many’. The moral life-form of man, per Socrates’ myth, is a broad category, more like a genus than a species. Different kinds of lives or life-styles are compatible with it. One could be a king (Aristeides), a private citizen, or a philosopher (Socrates) and still successfully achieve man’s moral life-form (525e-526c). Not everyone needs to be a formal philosopher to be happy; after all, Plato’s political philosophy requires different arts to be practised in the city. The tyrannical life-style, however, is one that is incompatible with the moral life-form (525d), and is thus a failed life. So, the truth of claim *p*₁ (“that doing injustice is as much worse than suffering it as it is more shameful”) is grounded in the nature of man, which thus provides the grounding centre for the coherency and consistency of a life well lived. Nature is itself a disclosure about how to live.

The myth therefore does more than dramatically recapitulate the elenchus, as Sedley suggests. It is making positive moral claims, a performance which the elenchus cannot achieve. With the myth we see that a life that prefers doing injustice to suffering it is tyrannical. The question first asked of Gorgias, “Who he is” is a question also directed to Plato’s readers. What kind of life-style does each of us have? And how does it measure against humanity’s life-form? Thus, Annas is unconvincing in claiming that “in the *Gorgias* Plato insists flatly that justice will bring rewards to the agent in the end, though without giving us any good reason to believe this.”³⁷ Such a view does not do justice to the details of the myth and instead reduces it to a *Deus ex machina* device employed to redeem Plato’s hero.

The rewards and punishments of the myth, rather, appear to be nothing other than the lives our actions and decisions produce. The “fitting sufferings”

³⁶ J. M. RIST, *Plato Says That We Have Tripartite Souls. If He Is Right, What Can We Do about It?*, in ID., *Man, Soul and Body: Essays in Ancient Thought from Plato to Dionysius*, Ashgate Publishing, Hampshire 1996, p. 113.

³⁷ J. ANNAS, *Plato’s Myths of Judgement*, cit., p. 138.

that Stauffer worries about are not, as he sees them,³⁸ external to the lives of the virtuous and the vicious but, rather, internal to them, as form and foliage to the tree. And by their shape, salutary or spoiled, you shall know the value of the varied lives. A virtuous life is a happy life, attaining and preserving the integrity and harmony between one's life-style and man's life-form; a vicious life is a failed life, a condition of strife where one's life-style and man's life-form are opposed in conflict. The former may rightly be termed a 'blessed' condition, and the latter is to be imprisoned in contradiction between one's life and one's being or nature – though Socrates does think that some people this category can be cured. On my reading, Inwood is wrong to claim that the myth separates a person's misdeeds from his vices, and his choices from his character. On the contrary, Socrates takes pains to stress the unity and dependence between what one does and who one is. My reading also does not interpret the myth as hope or faith in future, unseen justice as Annas does. Socrates' point is that one's destiny is contemporaneous with one's history; his is an exhortation to happiness "both in life and in death" (527a). We flourish or we perish in the now; we are living out our doom. And to what extent is such a position consequentialist, as Annas claims? Not in her strict sense. What Socrates is articulating is, in Sedley's words, "the intrinsic desirability of virtue."³⁹ It is true that Socrates is trying to motivate his interlocutors, and wishes to achieve a certain outcome, but that only makes his reasons for the virtuous life consequentialist in a trivial sense: his justification for living virtuously is the virtuous life itself. Nevertheless, the myth's part in shaping desire allows to inquire into a similar role for the elenchus.

Socrates' use of elenchus, I argued, did not establish the truth of the moral propositions that he used to refute Gorgias and Polus. But if we ask why Socrates uses elenchus at all, part of the reason has to be, to borrow Benson's apt phrase, "epistemic improvement."⁴⁰ In the aporetic dialogues, Socrates the gadfly deploys the elenchus so as to lead his interlocutors to discover their own ignorance so as to inspire them to pursue the knowledge they lack.⁴¹ The paradigmatic case of this therapy is the slave boy of the *Meno*, whom Socrates first disabuses of his presumptions about geometry before leading him to the solution of the geometric problem they were considering. Socrates refuted the slave boy in order to move him from a condition of not knowing that he did not know to one of perplexity, of knowing that he did not know (*Men* 84a-b). Socrates views eliciting this psychic transformation a critical step because only when someone recognises his ignorance can he desire to know (84c); it is bet-

³⁸ D. STAUFFER, *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias*, cit., p. 172.

³⁹ D. SEDLEY, *Myth, Punishment and Politics in the Gorgias*, cit., p. 67.

⁴⁰ H. H. BENSON, *Clitophon's Challenge: Dialectic in Plato's Meno, Phaedo, and Republic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, p. 21.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 29, 47.

ter to be perplexed than to be unknowingly in error. Whether or not Socrates succeeds in drawing out the desire to know through the elenchus, of course, depends on many factors outside his control, such as the characters of his interlocutors. Thus, he fails in the cases of Meno and, in the *Gorgias*, of Callicles. But a question nonetheless remains: why does Socrates even think he can use the elenchus in such a manner? The myth of the *Gorgias* perhaps supplies an answer.

The myth, we have seen, is where Socrates in the *Gorgias* presents his most developed psychology. Importantly, he tells us that it is destructive or harmful for the soul to be “brought up without truth” (525a), which is the only place in the dialogue where we have a near explicit statement that truth is a natural good – perhaps the most important one – of the soul. One natural inference from this is that falsehood is bad for the soul and that we should do what we can to eliminate it, *i.e.*, to remove error from the soul is to purify it of corruptive or damaging elements. It is the myth, therefore, that provides the horizon within which we can say the elenchus is a mode of psychic purification; without the end of eliminating false opinions, the elenchus is merely eristic. Socrates does not refute for the sake of refutation; he does it because he recognises truth as a good of the soul. The elenchus allows him to reawaken the desire for this good among those who have fallen, for whatever reason, into error. But the elenchus itself is not automatically purification oriented; it can be misused or abused. Perhaps the best examples of such truth-indifferent abuse are the sophists of the *Euthydemus* who are said to be able “to refute any proposition, whether true or false” (272a-b).⁴² It is the myth that allows us to see that Socrates’ use of elenchus is therapeutic, which once again takes us beyond Sedley’s claim that the myth re-presents Socratic interrogation or Annas’ view that the myth is largely a form of Platonic consequentialism. The myth is a vehicle for an important, if undeveloped, moral psychology.

Still, Annas’ insistence that the message of the myth is that justice pays *in the end* elicits (at least) two more comments. First, what does ‘in the end’ mean, relative to death? Even though I have offered a fairly ‘demythologised’ reading of the myth this does not mean that I deny that Socrates believes there is an afterlife. On this point, I am somewhere between being noncommittal and thinking he believes in the immortality of the soul, *i.e.*, I read *Gorgias* as in the vicinity of the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*. What I want to stress is that the myth is not as simplistic as some commentators have assumed, that it is of a piece with the movements that precede it in the dialogue and that it goes beyond recapitulation and makes its own contribution to the discussion. But there is a second sense in which ‘in the end’ might also be approached. An important element in the myth is that judgement of men is ultimately the prerogative of

⁴² οὕτω δεινὸν γέγονατον ἐν τοῖς λόγοις μάχεσθαι τε καὶ ἐξελέγχειν τὸ αἰεὶ λεγόμενον, ὁμοίως ἕαντε ψεῦδος ἕαντε ἀληθὲς ᾗ.

the gods. From this we might draw two points: first, that we should be careful about our judgements of other people, since we lack the kind of divine insight available to gods; and second, that it is outside the power of men to right all offences – if indeed there is to be final and universal justice, it will not be by human hands. These inferences seem to me to be in keeping with Platonic sobriety on moral questions as they relate to political contexts and vision.

I close with a final consideration: is *muthos* appropriate for truth-seeking and truth-telling? The moral psychology that it develops depends on an analogy, elements of which can perhaps be confirmed by experience. But why does Socrates have recourse to a myth in the first place? In answer to this question – why he did not use a different account – Socrates says, “Certainly it wouldn’t be at all surprising to despise [the myth and my interpretation], if we could search and somehow manage to find something better and truer” (527a). The key in this explanation is his saying that we need to seek what is “better and truer” as opposed to what is simply good and true. This is an indication that Socrates considers the myth as possessing some goodness and truth, just not what is best and truest. Such language is curious, perhaps dubious, for one who takes propositions and accounts to be simply true or false; the binary, true-false model does not sit well with the comparative and superlative language Socrates employs, with its degrees of depth or purity. And then there is the fact that the myth is an account in images, which seems a far cry from the (supposedly) philosophical ideal of abstract discourse.

To address these issues, I have two very brief points. The first is a reminder that our philosophical speech is objective, *i.e.*, about things independent of us. This means that our speech needs to meet the measure of the things and, to be sure, it is probably impossible that even true speech will ever exhaustively capture the reality of the things themselves. As philosophers we are constantly refining and improving what has been said in a bid to be more accurate, to be truer, and, in the end, there is likely a degree or kind of understanding which (our) words cannot articulate. My second point is another reminder about the nature of rhetoric: speech is public, persuasive speech especially so; therefore, a speaker must use words appropriate to his listeners. Plato recognises the importance of different kinds of speech, and the ‘eikastic’ form is one such kind. Socrates’ myth is appropriate to Gorgias, Polus and Callicles; it gives them a vivid picture of how the different kinds of lives being considered stand with respect to happiness and relative to each other. The myth employing rhetorician therefore is not a “meaning-monger” or pure rationalist only interested in naked propositions; he may trade in fictions, so long as they are “formative fictions.”⁴³ The myth,

⁴³ These two phrases are courtesy of J. LANDY, *How to Do Things with Fictions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p. 8. While Landy and I diverge on some aspects of interpre-

then, far from being the final word is an anticipation of doctrines that will be developed in the *Republic*: it provides in abbreviated form the moral psychology that Plato develops there in greater detail and it looks forward to the Divided Line by giving an example of how imagery can be used philosophically, *i.e.*, in the pursuit of truth. Interestingly, the *Republic* employs its own, different image for the soul, *viz.*, that of the city, so as to work out the relationship between the internal elements of the soul. But it is quite compatible with the myth of the *Gorgias*, where the soul is imagined as the human body, which has its own constitution. Grasping the myth together with the elenchus, we have a fuller picture of Socratic rhetoric, a rhetoric that purifies and informs belief-sets with the goal of motivating Socrates' interlocutors to take up a life-style consistent with human nature, the human life-form.

In summary and conclusion: Socratic rhetoric is an art of persuasion that aims at improving the souls of interlocutors by orienting their belief-sets, the sum of their beliefs and opinions, to the truth of human nature and thereby affecting how they live. Its aim is to direct men 'to live truth', an aim that is pursued in the *Gorgias* by means of elenchus and myth, activities connected by the idea of self-disclosure. Elenchus reveals the examinee to himself, but for Plato true consistency goes beyond harmony of opinions (consistency of thought), but, more importantly is found in harmony with nature (consistency in being). The virtuous life discloses unity of thought, desire and nature. In the Socratic elenchus we have purification; it is aimed at identifying and eliminating beliefs incompatible with the human life-form. And in the myth, we have the beginnings or the outline of an account of the human soul that justifies the belief that the life of wisdom and virtue is to be pursued.

ABSTRACT · This paper argues that Socrates' performance in the *Gorgias* is an example of noble rhetoric, particularly as evidenced in Socrates' use of elenchus as a mode of psychic purification to lead Gorgias and Polus to accept certain moral claims, and his use of myth to sketch the moral psychology justifying those claims. Elenchus and myth, therefore, are interpreted as complementary means towards the unified objective of moral education.

KEYWORDS · Myth, Elenchus, Moral Psychology, Plato, Gorgias.

tation of the *Gorgias* – for one thing, he thinks that Socrates' premises against Gorgias are significantly flawed and, for another, that "[Socrates'] key posit, that doing injustice is bad for the doer, depends on a belief in a life after death" – I am convinced that he is correct that Plato is not merely proposing information to be memorised and parroted, but is offering the dialogue as an exercise to form how we ought to think maturely.