

The Mistranslation of *Rhētorikē*: Rereading 462b to 466a of Plato's *Gorgias*

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Abstract

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This dissertation presents a close re-reading of Plato's *Gorgias*, 462b to 466a. Contrary to popular belief, the ancient Greeks never spoke of "rhetoric (n)." In the ancient world, *rhētorikos* (i.e., "rhetoric") functioned as an "-ic" suffixed adjective. The ancients described things and people as being "rhetoric (adj.)" in the way we call things "rhetorical," but they had no concept of "rhetoric (n.)" as an object unto itself. Translators often assume that *rhētorikē* was always a noun like it is today. This habit generally results in only a minor loss of meaning. Yet in one key passage—462b to 466a—this assumption is of paradigm-shifting significance. Generations of scholars have been told that, from 462b to 466a, the character Socrates calls "rhetoric" a knack-based species of flattery. Yet a close reading of the Greek text demonstrates that translators have been misreading Plato's nuanced use of the word *rhētorikē*. The dissertation proposes a revised reading of this passage, in alignment with a forgotten historical precedent. The classical world

appears to have read a version of the *Gorgias* rather different from the translations we have today. This study aims to show how this happened and why it matters.

The dissertation argues that a crucial instance of Plato's wordplay has been overlooked from 462b to 466a. Where English translators place the noun "rhetoric (n.)" there is truly wordplay occurring with the substantive use of the adjectival phrase *hē rhētorikē* (i.e., "the rhetorical"). Implicit to this phrase's usage within this passage is a dissociation between two nouns which this phrase might imply: *hē rhētorikē (technē)* vs. *hē rhētorikē (empeiria)*. Or, in English, "rhetorical (art)" vs. "rhetorical (practice)." Far beyond an interesting nuance added to our understanding of the *Gorgias*, this dissociation between a "rhetorical art" and a "rhetorical practice" allows us to see a consistent rhetorical theory developed between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* where before scholars often imagined a contradiction. The dissertation begins by considering the adjectival origin of the word "rhetoric" through the ancient Greek signifier *rhētorikos*. From here it presents evidence of the above wordplay and its significance before outlining the survey of readers throughout antiquity who observed this dissociation between *hē rhētorikē technē* and *hē rhētorikē empeiria*. The dissertation closes by considering a revised picture of Plato's place in the rhetorical tradition afforded by this more nuanced reading of 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias*.

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“Dear [dissertation reviewer (*Recensent*)!]! allow me but one sentence, one innocent parenthesis in order to express my gratitude for the solace I found in reading Plato. For where is one to find solace if not in that infinite calm wherein the Idea, during the stillness of the night, silently, gracefully, yet so mightily unfolds itself in the rhythm of the dialogue as if nothing else in the world existed, where each measured step is repeated slowly, solemnly, because the Ideas know, as it were, that there is time and playground enough for them all; and when should one have need of repose if not in our time when Ideas precipitate each other with insane haste, when they merely suggest their existence deep down in the soul by a bubble on the surface of the deep, when Ideas never blossom but are consumed as tender shoots, when they barely poke their heads into existence and immediately die of sorrow, like the child Abraham a Sancta Clara tells about, who, at the very instant it was born, was filled with so much anxiety for the world that it fled back into its mother’s womb.”

—From Søren Kierkegaard’s Dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*

“For words which now are old, once were new”

—Quintilian, *Institutio Oratio*

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rather than something both messier and broader. His willingness to help a fan of his podcast (*Why Theory*) went a long way in the final stages of my Ph.D. candidacy.

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So as not to be read as what the Greeks called a *kolax* (i.e., a flatterer)—let me say: the reviewers thanked above could fail this dissertation with the *lowest marks* and this would do nothing to change how much this study owes to them. Without their guidance during my time as a student, I would never have gained the courage to put pen to paper here.

I am also deeply indebted to William (Bill) Purcell. In the process of cleaning out books from his office he made a substantial donation to my personal library. Being able to own and annotate out-of-print books in the history of rhetoric was invaluable in the development of this project. Among these books was a rare copy (1 in 400) of *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking, in Honor of James Albert Winans* (1925), formerly owned by the rhetorician Lee Emerson Bassett. Being able to hold a relic of Speech Communication, cherished and passed on through the hands of decades of scholars, helped me gain an unparalleled appreciation for the history of this field which I will carry with me in my career as an aspiring rhetorician.

E. R. Dodds’ (1959) study of the *Gorgias* was a beacon of light in a desert of confusion. I don’t imagine I will live to see this meticulous study outdone. And, aside from finding it an

essential reference for this dissertation, I found myself in awe at the rigor and passion with which Dodds set to study his subject. I feel a further sense of solidarity with Dodds given our shared interest in both classical Greek and psychoanalysis. As Dodds (1977) tells us in his autobiography, *Missing Persons*, he may well have pursued a career in psychoanalysis were finances a non-issue (p. 100). Though I never considered becoming a psychoanalyst, had I not fallen into a reading of Plato in 2020, I might have remained within discussions of psychoanalytic rhetorical criticism. Dodds can't hear me—he's long dead—but I'd like to thank him regardless for the sense of nerdy comradery which his study afforded.

It is to my sincere dismay that George Kennedy passed away in 2022, just as the genesis of this project came into being. I would have very much loved to discuss any number of this work's findings with him. I hope that something of the spirit (what the Greeks called the *psychē*) of Kennedy's passion for rhetorical history might find new life in the pages of this dissertation—some small homage to the fact that the *soul* of his inquiry might thereby have an afterlife.

Edward Schiappa's pioneering efforts to synthesize rhetorical studies and philology was also a direct inspiration on this dissertation; Schiappa showed that a rhetorician's work could be of concern to a journal like *Mnemosyne*—a flagship of classical studies. This fed my hope to one day do the same with research of my own. Though I challenge his work on occasion, I am sincerely grateful that Schiappa took up effort of occupying a new interdisciplinary terrain.

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As the refrain goes: a bounty of credit is due to all the above.

All faults in the work are my own.

Preface

E. R. Dodds (1959) opens the Preface to his profound study on Plato's *Gorgias* with the following statement:

The notion of producing a commentary on the *Gorgias* took root in my mind when at the outbreak of the last war [i.e., World War II] I found myself lecturing on it to undergraduates who were soon to be soldiers. The circumstances of the time brought home both to me and to my audience the relevance of this dialogue to the central issues, moral and political, of our own day [...]. (p. v)

The dissertation I *wanted* to write would have foregrounded this political significance. The *Gorgias*, in my view, is just as applicable to the political issues of our day as it was to those Dodds'. The demos of the US is no less susceptible to rhetorical flatterers than the ancient Athenians. To help tease out the tragic overlap here was the real reason I set out to consider the rhetorically benign position which Plato's *Gorgias* seemed to me to occupy. Along the way, I realized the detail with which I would need to treat the problem of 462b to 466a were such a political reading to ever become palatable to rhetorical studies more broadly.

Dodds long ago noted the influence which the character Callicles seems to have had on a young philologist named Friedrich Nietzsche. And, among other things, I had hoped to show the interesting entry point which this view of Nietzsche afforded relative to the initial rejection of Plato among the famed French theorists of the 20th century. I had also hoped to meditate on the overlap between the nonviolent ethos adopted by the character Socrates when placed beside the nonviolent militancy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

King had, himself, experienced a kind of spiritual crisis at the hands of Nietzsche, as he recounts in his memoir on the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *Stride Towards Freedom*. And King's

comparison of his civil disobedience to Socrates' in the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is no small point. I had hoped to put the *Gorgias* in conversation with King, in conversation with Nietzsche, in conversation with French critical theory. I had hoped to consider the themes of nonviolent militancy immanent to the *Gorgias*, to consider Cicero's advocacy of "rhetorical idealism," and to consider the "Platonic realism" of the mathematician Kurt Gödel.

Yet, as one might expect, it became very clear that these were not ideas to be explored in a single dissertation but rather a full-length book. I take comfort in the petty thought that this saves more material for a future project. But if—heaven forbid—I am prevented from extending this project to consider the above themes, I hope the brief outline of them above might stand as a notice to any future reader: there are issues of profound political concern within this dialogue, *Gorgias*. Regardless of what tradition may hold, this work stands as a testament to those who hope for a just use of the rhetorical art—*come what may*. It stands as a literary companion to any non-violent militant. In a moment like ours, we are posed to need all the inspiration we can muster to justly resist injustice.

Introduction

The Case of Plato v. Rhetoric (n.)

“[...Plato] dreamed as he was on the point of death that, having turned into a swan, he was moving from tree to tree, and in this way was causing extreme toil for the hunters. Simmias the Socratic interpreted this dream as follows: that Plato would be difficult to grasp for those succeeding him who wished to explain him (*exêgeomai*): for the commentators (*exêgêtai*) who attempt to pursue the concepts (*ennoiai*) of the ancients are like bird-catchers, and Plato is difficult to grasp since it is possible to interpret his words on the level of natural philosophy (*phusikôs*), ethics (*êthikôs*), or theology (*theologikôs*) – in short, in many different senses – as is also the case with the [words] of Homer. For these two souls are said to have embraced every mode, which is why it is possible to take the words of both of them in all manner of ways.”

—Olympiodorus, *Life of Plato*

For generations, scholars have told and been told that in the *Gorgias*, from 462b to 466a specifically, the character Socrates argues that “rhetoric (n.)” is not an art but rather a knack-based species of flattery. The assumption is that within this passage, Socrates is speaking about “rhetoric (n.),” suggesting that “this sort of thing is a disgrace,” and that “it is not an art, but a habitude, since it has no account to give of the real nature of the things it applies, and so cannot tell the cause of any of them” (465a; Plato, 1925a, p. 319). According to this reading, Socrates here insinuates that rhetoric (n.) is a base branch of flattery *pretending* to be an art. Graduate student across the U.S., in disciplines across the university (English, Speech, Communication, Philosophy, Classics, etc.), have all been given this reading as a kind of axiom. Even those who have poured over the ancient Greek text itself have occasionally implied that this is what occurs from 462b-466a. This is no one’s fault. Not everyone can learn every language, and so we must trust that experts *generally* don’t misapply the axioms which guide their inquiry en masse. Yet, as with any form of scientific inquiry, these axioms are not immutable; occasionally, a shifting of disciplinary discourse is called for. I believe this is the case with how the modern world has come to read 462b-466a of Plato’s *Gorgias*.

The assumption among most scholars has been that the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* lie at odds with each other, proof that Plato changed his mind about “rhetoric.” Either way, between these two works the modern reader is led to believe that Plato contradicts himself. If the most famous dramatist of the most famous dialectician were to do so in such an obvious way, this would be quite ironic. This would be both humorous and worth pointing out because the so-called “early” dialogues are all but fixated upon exposing contradictions. Dialogues like the *Gorgias* do seem to exhibit what the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel once called a merely “negative dialectic” (1812/1998). That is, they expose contradictions immanent to popular opinions without giving a positive answer. Aristotle laid bare the rules of this game of critical truth-seeking in the *Topics*. Outlining the dynamic of a dialectic discussion, he suggests:

The function of the questioner is [...] to direct the discussion [so] as to make the answerer give the most [ridiculous] replies that necessarily result because of the thesis. The function of the answerer is to make it seem that the impossible or the [shocking result] is not his fault but is due to the thesis; for, possibly, to lay down the wrong thesis originally is a different kind of mistake from not maintaining it properly after one has laid it down (159a 20-25).

In the hands of Plato, this dialectic practice was directed towards issues of everyday political concern: how to educate the youth, what it means to be a friend, or how to become a true artisan. Thus, in dialogues like the *Laches*, *Lysis*, or *Ion*, the primary aim is to refute some belief which gives the appearance of truth. As the utilitarian John Stuart Mill (1859/1969) once observed, these dialogues:

were essentially a negative discussion of the great questions of philosophy and life, directed with consummate skill to the purpose of convincing any one who had merely

adopted the commonplaces of received opinion, that he did not understand the subject—that he as yet attached no definite meaning to the doctrines he professed; in order that, becoming aware of his ignorance, he might be put in the way to attain a stable belief, resting on a clear apprehension both of the meaning of doctrines and of their evidence. (p. 168)

It is generally recognized, then, that dialectically highlighting contradictions was part of the discursive engine for many of the Platonic dialogues.

We hear more on the curative aim of this refutative practice in Plato's *Sophist* and his *Meno*.¹ And it is dramatized clearly in both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. In both dialogues a figure grandly proclaiming the possession of some absolute wisdom is humbled, and, after being dialectically refuted, we find they actually become *invested* in Socrates' critical search for truth. The *Gorgias* begins with the famous rhetor proclaiming to be a true rhetor in possession of the rhetorical art. Yet it concludes with Gorgias encouraging Socrates to finish his demonstration; he becomes clearly interested in seeing Socrates' reasoning through (506b). In the *Republic*, Thrasymachus likewise starts his encounter with Socrates in an extremely aggressive and hostile manner. Yet, after being humbled by Socrates, Thrasymachus later counts himself among the company of those eagerly wishing him to *continue* reasoning.² The central concern with refutation, with this psychological power, makes the exposure of contradictions a key element in Plato's work. It is little wonder, then, that modern academia has so heavily emphasized the belief that in the *Gorgias* Plato says "rhetoric (n.) is not an art" while clearly saying otherwise

¹ See, for instance, the *Meno* 80a-d (Plato, 1924, p. 297-299) and the *Sophist* 230b-e (1921, p. 315-317).

² See 450a-b of the *Republic* (Plato, 2013, p. 449-450)

elsewhere. There seems to be some ironical fun to be had in giving Plato a taste of his own medicine. Yet, while I recognize the fun to be had, both in good humor and in resentment, I intend to demonstrate that this apparent contradiction is no *true* contradiction.

Review of Relevant Literature

As Chapter 3 attempts to show, the revised reading of 462b to 466a which this dissertation advocates has been buried in the dustbins of history. Still, it is not without its modern precedents. Before developing this dissertation's core argument, I believe it would prove fruitful to consider how modern scholarship in both philosophy and rhetorical studies has foreshadowed the possibility of a more nuanced reading of Plato's *Gorgias*. Beside this, it's also worth considering how the now dominant reading of the *Gorgias* inculcated a kind of anti-Platonic backlash within rhetorical studies. Given the scope of this dissertation's argument, this literature review will be inescapably incomplete. It would take an additional chapter—which I haven't the time to take up—to consider how the modern reading of the *Gorgias* made its way from the scholarship of classicist and philologists in the late 19th century into the journals, textbooks, and monographs of scholarship in philosophy. For my part, I will focus on how this reading found a home within rhetorical studies. And though even this account will likely prove incomplete, I hope it might lay some of the groundwork necessary to orient a general scholarly reader to the place of my argument within a broader academic discussion.

My aim in this literature review is to demonstrate: 1) that the dominant reading of the *Gorgias* frames it as an “anti-rhetorical” work incompatible with the *Phaedrus*, 2) that the revised reading I present is not unprecedented in modern scholarship, and 3) that a wholesale apprehension to Plato within rhetorical studies risks dismissing any further discussions of the *Gorgias* out of hand. This review of relevant literature begins by considering what I call the

“standard reading” of Plato’s *Gorgias*, which this dissertation will attempt to unsettle. I will then consider those scholars who have forwarded a more nuanced reading of the *Gorgias* which approaches the argument developed in Chapter 2. After observing those voices in rhetorical studies who challenged the anti-rhetorical reading of the dialogue, I consider the anti-Platonic backlash which ossified within what some scholars called the “Third Sophistic.”

In brief, the “standard reading” of Plato’s *Gorgias* frames the dialogue as a wholesale dismissal of “rhetoric.” Richard Toye’s (2013) *Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction*, for instance, suggests that Plato “overshot the mark” in the *Gorgias* by “denouncing *all* rhetoric” (p. 11-12). And Robin Waterfield’s (2023) recent biography of Plato, *Plato of Athens*, states that Plato saw “rhetoric” as inherently dangerous: “Rhetoric he saw as intrinsically harmful because it perpetuates corrupt values and works with belief rather than knowledge” (p. 136). Waterfield claims that the *Gorgias* is Plato’s “most sustained assault on rhetoric [...]” Yet this reading is not restricted to survey and introductory books in philosophy. It also lies in the foundations of rhetorical studies itself.

In an influential article from the early days of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Everett Lee Hunt (1920) suggests that within the *Gorgias*, and unlike the *Phaedrus*, “There is no contrast between a true and a false rhetoric. Rhetoric is condemned utterly [...]” (p. 45). This reading soon became the axiomatic reading of the *Gorgias* within rhetorical studies as it was in the rest of academia. Thus, when the next scholar to build on Hunt’s argument came forward, Edwin Black (1958) would note that, despite the diverse and dissonant ways one might interpret a dialogue like the *Gorgias*, “the only uniformity which crystallizes from this diversity of interpretation is the judgement that Plato disapproved of rhetoric, and was, in fact, rhetoric’s

most effective historical opponent” (p. 361).³ This reading has since become a premise baked into all existing textbooks on either rhetorical studies or the rhetorical tradition.

Histories, translations, and introductory texts more broadly often forward this view of the *Gorgias*. Donald Zeyl introduces his translation with the suggestion that we can see in this dialogue “Plato’s forceful denunciation of oratory” (Plato, 1987, p. ix). George Kennedy’s (1963) *The Art of Persuasion in Ancient Greece* suggests that in the *Gorgias* “Plato denies that rhetoric is an art and defines it as a species of flattery, a sham counterpart of justice” (p. 15). Kennedy suggests the oft repeated charge that here Plato is speaking in a hotheaded and biased manner: “Plato’s emotions are much involved in his rejection of rhetoric” and that “Because he is so prejudiced he appears to weigh the scales against rhetoric” (p. 15). Jennifer Richards

³ Some even go so far as to argue that the positive “rhetoric” spoken of in the *Phaedrus* was to be read ironically, as a deliberately and cruelly unattainable goal. Developing this suggestion, Hunt (1925) claims that “the ideal rhetoric sketched in the *Phaedrus* is as far from the possibilities of mankind as his Republic was from Athens” (p. 42). Hunt likely develops this position on the authority of the classicist Theodor Gomperz, who maintains a similar line in Volume 4 of his *Greek Thinkers* (p. 421). Brian McAdon (2004) has more recently suggested to the audience of *Rhetoric Review* that, against the general belief that the *Phaedrus* “advocated a dialectical or philosophical rhetoric,” this is a reading which “is not supported by the texts these scholars depend upon to support their views” (p. 37). And Lunsford et al. (2009), writing in *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, have argued that “While Plato does sketch what a noble rhetoric might look like toward the end of the *Phaedrus*, it is clear that he doesn’t expect such an art to be probable, or even possible” (p. xx).

(2008), in her survey book, *Rhetoric*, suggests that the *Gorgias* is Plato's "most anti-rhetorical of dialogues" and is "the foundational example of anti-rhetorical thinking" (p. 9; 23). The story of the utter denunciation of "rhetoric" here appears the same as it does according to the standard reading: "rhetoric as a mere knack and a branch of flattery that is concerned with suasion rather than the truth. Rhetoric aims to please and gratify its makers as well as influence its recipients, but the satisfactions it offers are closer to those provided by a good meal rather than philosophical enquiry" (p. 20). David Cohen (2004) suggests in *Blackwell's A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* that "Plato in his dialogue *Gorgias* completely rejects oratory and what he considers the pseudo-art of rhetoric" (p. 32). Rountree (1996) writing in the *Encyclopedia for Rhetoric & Composition* suggests that Plato had a clear "bias against rhetoric" (p. 682). Palczewski et al. (2016), in their textbook *Rhetoric and Civic Life*, suggest that we here see a sign of Plato's totalitarian disdain for both democracy and all rhetorical deliberation. They suggest that in the *Gorgias* "Socrates warned that rhetoric is a form of flattery and that people would misuse rhetoric for selfish or corrupt ends. In this dialogue, Plato argued that rhetoric, as practiced in a democracy, leads to poor decision making" (p. 14). Keeping with this pattern. Herrick's (2018) *The History and Theory of Rhetoric* claims that, at some level, Plato took a fundamental stand against the rhetor's art (p. 73). And although Herrick provides a more qualified reading of Plato's position (p. 72-3), his textbook poses Plato's rhetorical theory at odds with itself, calling Plato's use of rhetoric to attack rhetoricians "a profound irony [that] resides at the heart of *Gorgias*" (p. 72). Borchers and Hundley (2018), in their *Rhetorical Theory: An Introduction*, claim that "Plato had a generally negative view of oratory" and that he "softens his view toward rhetoric in *Phaedrus*" (p. 35). Within the *Gorgias*, they suggest that "Plato refused to call rhetoric an art; instead, he called it a knack." As per the standard reading,

they claim, “Plato argued that rhetoric was not a true art, rather a false art aimed at pleasure. Plato revised his position to say, in *Phaedrus*, that rhetoric was an art, but one that closely followed a prescription.” The *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (2001) entry for “Sophists” likewise suggests that “In the *Gorgias*, Plato denies rhetoric the status of *technē* (art), treating it instead as an irrational knack acquired by habit. [...] In the *Phaedrus*, however, Plato softens his tone as he makes allowances for a legitimate rhetoric” (Poulakos, p. 733). And Jasinski (2001) states in his *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, “As many scholars have noted, Plato’s critique of rhetoric has posed a continuing challenge for the tradition of rhetorical studies” (p. 216). This “challenge” lies on the basis of the standard reading as sketched in the scattered unison above.

The idea that Plato changes his mind, and thus that there is an irreconcilable position which lies between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* lies at the heart of this standard interpretation of the dialogue. The standard reading of the *Gorgias* does not always go so far as to say that the *Gorgias* is a complete condemnation of “rhetoric,” nor that Plato was once “anti-rhetorical,” though this is a common extreme. But even more nuanced approaches adhere to the secondary suggestion of the standard reading, that Plato significantly changed his mind between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, and thus that these dialogues develop *irreconcilable* and *contradictory* positions regarding “rhetoric.” Thus, Murphy et al. suggest that in the *Phaedrus* Socrates’ “views on rhetoric are softened” (p. 34). In this supposed change of heart, they claim that “Socrates allows that he has treated the study of rhetoric rather roughly in earlier dialogues. [...] Rhetoric is a neutral art, Socrates now concludes.” Bizzell et al., (2020) in their anthology, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, similarly record the structure of the standard reading, suggesting that between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* lies an instance of an instance of Plato’s “shifting view of rhetoric” (p. 98). They somewhat neutrally state that this transition “is frequently attributed to

chronology; his contentious view in the *Gorgias* (ca. 386) is generally regarded as characteristic of his ‘early’ work, while the more tempered view in the *Phaedrus* [...] is generally regarded as ‘mature’” (p. 99). And yet, as they rightly point out, “The notion that Plato condemns all rhetoric is an error” (p. 97).

Even if underemphasized, the fact that the *Gorgias* itself is not a wholesale attack on “rhetoric” has not gone completely unnoticed within rhetorical studies. Edwin Black (1958), for instance, writing within the pages of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, once suggested that:

we are bound to the conclusion that Plato did not intend his condemnation to apply to *all* rhetoric. At the risk of being repetitious, I shall reiterate that all we have a right to infer from the text of the *Gorgias* is that Plato opposed only a particular *view* of rhetoric unsuccessfully defended in the dialogue by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, and probably actually defended by leading Sophists and rhetoricians of Plato's time. (p. 366-367)

Even if Black advanced this interpretation on different terms than this dissertation, I nevertheless intend to show the fundamental *validity* of Black’s reading. Not long after, and in direct conversation with Black, Claud A. Thompson (1969) gave his own consideration of this “true or ideal rhetoric” mentioned in the *Gorgias* and developed in the *Phaedrus* (p. 358). And, several decades later, rhetorical historian James Kastely (1991) would again reiterate that a nuance immanent to the *Gorgias* had been missed by the rhetorical tradition itself. He thus suggests, in a work aptly titled, “In Defense of Plato's *Gorgias*:”

If the conventional histories of rhetoric have chosen what I believe is the wrong way to read the dialogue and to defend rhetoric, they have done so out of their love for both rhetoric and democracy and their deep commitment to a just discourse. I believe that the

dialogue shares a love for rhetoric, promotes the genuine meetings of persons that are essential for a democracy, and tries to do justice to the complexity that it sees. (p. 108)

Though Kennedy (1963) repeats some of the expected interpretations about the *Gorgias*, he was also clear to emphasize the oft neglected fact that already within the *Gorgias* we find the character Socrates acknowledging the existence of a true rhetorical art. As Kennedy puts it:

Although Plato denied that rhetoric as it existed was an art, he was, even in the *Gorgias*, prepared to admit the possibility of a true rhetoric (504d5 ff.) [...]. This possibility he developed years later in the *Phaedrus*, where rhetoric is less roughly treated than in the *Gorgias* and where its true nature as a faculty of persuasion is at last considered (260d4 ff.). (p. 16)

Even more recently, John J. Jasso (2019) has significantly called rhetoricians to reconsider Plato's supposed anti-rhetorical position in rhetorical studies. Writing within the journal *Rhetorica*, Jasso suggests that "'Plato-the-enemy-of-rhetoric' is a largely contemporary construct" (p. 352). Against this reading, Jasso's study attempts to show that, "with little exception, historical rhetors saw Plato at least as complementary to the study of rhetoric, if not necessary for it [...] they saw Plato not as enemy, but as friend and master" (p. 353).⁴ And even some textbooks in rhetorical studies forward a more nuanced reading of the *Gorgias*, suggesting that Plato here dissociated between two senses of the word "rhetoric." Foss et al.'s (2014)

⁴ Jasso outlines a formidable body of evidence for this suggestion. My study is in complete agreement with Jasso on this point and attempts to present an explanation for how and why the modern world came to adopt such a confused interpretation of how Plato sat relative to the rhetorical tradition.

Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric notes that “In the *Gorgias*, Plato set Gorgias and others against Socrates to distinguish false from true rhetoric” (p. 6). And with a similar level of nuance, Craig R. Smith’s *Rhetoric and Human Consciousness* observes that the *Gorgias* is no wholesale dismissal of “rhetoric,” suggesting that the *Phaedrus* is “where the noble rhetoric mentioned in the last part of the *Gorgias* is fully explored” (p. 58). Although this more nuanced reading is far from the dominant one in rhetorical studies, this is not to say that rhetoricians have not long taught a more nuanced picture of Plato’s rhetorical theory beyond the evidence which stands in our available textbooks. Yet, even so, the dominance with which the “standard reading” currently stands in our textbook tradition makes a few things clear. First, that the dominant reading of the dialogue suggests that the *Gorgias* is either completely anti-rhetorical or is incompatible with the arguments of the *Phaedrus*. And second, that despite the quasi-consensus of the standard reading, the field of rhetorical studies nevertheless lacks a clear consensus on how to best interpret Plato’s position towards “rhetoric.” Yet this is not to say that other fields have not, for their own part, also forwarded a more nuanced reading of Plato’s *Gorgias* in the face of the standard reading.

Several recent scholars in the history of philosophy have thoughtfully challenged the idea that the *Gorgias* is a dagger tossed at the very heart of “rhetoric.” As David Roochnik (1995) puts it, “The standard story is this: Plato the philosopher is the mortal enemy of rhetoric, which he condemns on both epistemic and ethical grounds” (p. 81). Yet, Roochnik argues, the common practice of decontextualizing Socrates’ refutation of Gorgias (“462a-466a”) is partly to blame for the work’s broad misrepresentation. The dominant reading, he suggests:

is flawed because the standard reading fails to take into account the fact that the *Gorgias*, like virtually all of Plato’s work, is a dialogue. If this passage is considered within the

larger framework of the dialogue as a whole, it can be shown that Plato's hostility to rhetoric is ambiguous, and the line drawn between rhetoric and philosophy is not nearly as sharp as most commentators think. (p. 82)

I would agree that certain of Plato's points regarding the rhetor's art are ambiguous. I will argue, however, that the *Gorgias* is unambiguously *not* denying the existence of a rhetorical art.

Henry Teloh (2008) has also suggested, in agreement with Spitzer (1975), that this standard reading is unfounded. As he puts it, "A number of interpreters believe that the *Gorgias* constitutes a condemnation of all rhetoric, and it is one of my aims to show that this position is mistaken" (p. 57). Teloh agrees with those who teasingly observe that Socrates' part in the dialogue is not without its rhetorical dimension. But, Teloh suggests, this isn't simply Plato engaging in self-contradiction. Instead, he posits: "Socrates recognizes that he uses rhetoric, and that he implies that the sort of rhetoric which he uses is a real art [...] of rhetoric." Christina H. Tarnopolsky (2010) has more recently developed this distinction at length in her book-length study of the *Gorgias*. She notes that, according to the traditional reading, the *Gorgias* "is often considered to be the dialogue that inaugurates the problematic binaries between rhetoric and philosophy, emotion and reason, and persuasion and argumentation [...]. In fact, the history of rhetoric has even been characterized as a response to Plato's attack upon it in the *Gorgias*" (p. 33; original emphasis). Yet, Tarnopolsky's attentive reading suggests "that these misinterpretations, or, more accurately, partial interpretations [...] arise out of an inadequate understanding of the full drama of the dialogue" among other things (p. 34). Thus:

Far from banishing all rhetoric from the best type of polis or confining philosophers to the Academy, Plato is concerned to distinguish his noble (*kalon*) and true (*alēthes*) brand of rhetoric from the rhetoric involved in flattery (*kolakeia*) and from the painful

(*lupēron/anairon*) but beneficial (*ōphelimōn*) rhetoric practiced by Socrates. (p. 34; original emphasis)

It may interest the above scholars to consider the long line of figures, from antiquity to the modern world, who have long observed the dissociation between a “true” and “false” notion of “rhetoric” which the above scholars attempted to highlight. This is the focus of Chapter 3. One other study bears mentioning on this front, as it explicitly recognized, at the level of the Greek text itself, the reading I forward here.

In 1959 E. R. Dodds published his edition of the *Gorgias*. His study painstakingly combed through all extant manuscripts, relevant scholarship within philology and the classics, and the long line of suggested emendations to the text proposed over the years. Dodds importantly draws his readers’ attention to Plato’s dissociated use of *hē rhētorikē* within the *Gorgias* (p. 224). And, in agreement with the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus (see Chapter 3), he draws his readers’ attention to the shift in meaning which we find between this usage and the usage we find within the *Phaedrus* (p. 227). Dodds’ insistence on using the modern noun “rhetoric (n.)” seems, in my view, to have prevented him from extending the implications of these points further, but I take solace in the fact that an authority like Dodds saw fit to follow the crux of the reading which I develop in Chapter 2. In light of the above studies, it is clear a more nuanced reading of Plato’s *Gorgias* is not foreign to the modern world, even if it tends to be either underemphasized or overlooked. A challenge to the standard reading of the *Gorgias* is no stranger to philosophical scholarship (Spitzer, 1975; Roochnik, 1995; Teloh, 2008; Tarnopolsky, 2010) and there has long been an echo of this reading within rhetorical studies itself (Black, 1958; Kastley, 1991; Foss, 2014; Smith, 2017). Such a nuanced reading has perhaps remained so submerged within the

rhetorical studies because a certain anti-Platonism dramatically emerged in a range of rhetorical scholarship in the late 20th century.

Already in the mid 1990s, rhetorical historian John Poulakos (1995) felt the need to give apologia to the very practice of reading Plato *at all*:

At least among students of rhetoric, the sophists' views are being given unprecedented attention, while Plato is being portrayed as 'a bigoted reactionary' who dedicated himself to the task of trivializing or dismissing whoever or whatever opposed his thinking. But if Plato's depiction of the sophists and their rhetoric has lost its appeal, and if Plato has fallen out of favor, why consider what he has to say about them? (p. 75)

And it is little wonder that Poulakos felt called to justify the very act of reading Plato. For, on the basis of the preceding decade of rhetorical scholarship, one would get the impression that Plato was some kind of proto-Nazi.

At some point between the 1980s and the early 2000s, scholarship within rhetorical studies took a turn which two rhetoricians, Victor Vitanza and Susan Jarrett, quite influentially imagined as a "Third Sophistic."⁵ Several books within rhetorical studies were produced during this period, which marked a renewed interest in the sophists of classical Greece. I am not interested in outlining how they did or did not repeat an inherited reading of the *Gorgias*. Instead, I would like to consider two brief examples of a kind of anti-Platonism which seems to have accompanied this so-called "Third Sophistic." Any study which will attempt to resurrect the palatability of Plato's *Gorgias* for an audience including rhetoricians themselves will have to, I

⁵ Vitanza has discussed the origin of this label in his discussions with Jarratt in various publications (see 1987, p. 45; 1991, p. 118 and p. 134, n. 1).

imagine, grapple at some point with this affective dimension—a gut level opposition handed down through generations of scholars.

Consider, for instance, the vitriolic position against Plato maintained by two rhetorical scholars: Vitanza and Diane Davis. Vitanza (1997), in his book *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*, suggests that Plato attempted to erase the genus of “sophist” from existence. Irreverently extending this suggestion to the modern world, he frames this position, which he describes as “genus-cide” as a precursor to the genocidal spirit of the Nazis. As he puts it:

Have not the Sophists always posed a problem, from Plato to the present? Has not the problem always been What to do with the Sophists? (I will anticipate: Has not the problem always been What to do with the Jews/“jews,” with the Gypsies, the Queers, the rootless; always been What to do with that-which-cannot-be-represented? The Others? The Waste? (p. 27)

And it was not merely Plato that Vitanza accused of such “genus-cide” but also Edward Schiappa, who was attempting to painstakingly re-read these classical Greek works anew. He thus suggests that “like Plato, Schiappa in our own century intellectually acts (thinks backward) so as to rekill off [...] anything Sophist(ic). If not rhetorical infanticide, Schiappa, again, like his predecessors, engages in Sophist-cide by way of Genus-cide” (p. 47). Nor was Vitanza alone in his use of this inflammatory language. Writing not long after, Diane Davis (2000) suggests, in allusion to the thought of Jean-François Lyotard, that “totalizing patterns of thought, from Plato on, led us straight to Auschwitz” (p. 263 n. 15) *Straight to Auschwitz?! Some claims don’t merit a refutation. And though this is not the place to defend Plato against any charges of proto-Nazisim (!), these passages hopefully make clear the ire with which Plato has often been framed within rhetorical studies.*

Not all criticisms of Plato from the “Third Sophistic” went so far as to call Plato a fascist. Bruce McComiskey (2002), for instance, posed criticisms which were nevertheless more metered. His *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric*, poses two interesting challenges for a rhetorician who would like to discuss Plato’s *Gorgias* without reducing it to a slander of all that is rhetorical. Among other things, McComiskey suggests that, within the *Gorgias*, “Plato misrepresents the Leontian sophist as having a foundational epistemology while retaining Gorgias’s *kairos*-governed methodology, making him appear contradictory and absurd” (p. 18).⁶ There is no doubt that the *Gorgias* sets to make the statements of Gorgias of Leonti “appear contradictory and absurd.” And yet, when seen as a work of satire, it becomes obvious that this reduces the need for absolute accuracy.⁷ A work from antiquity, the *Deipnosophists* of

⁶ In a similar vein, Murphy et al. (2014) suggest, in my view erroneously, that “Gorgias’ ideas are far more complex and original than Plato represents them” (p. 40). Yet is the aim of the *Gorgias* to seriously grapple with the ideas of Gorgias in a general sense? Is it not focused, rather, on the spotty rhetorical theory which Gorgias seems to be touting alongside emerging rhetoricians like Polus? We have no written record of Gorgias’ rhetorical theory, so we’re in no position to say that his rhetorical theory was “far more complex” than the one satirized in the *Gorgias*. And, in so far as this dialogue is not a meditation on Gorgias’ ontological skepticism, it’s a moot point to claim that his ideas aren’t treated seriously here. They aren’t considered at all! This reading seems to me to confuse the very exigence of the dialogue.

⁷ Gorgias is, for instance, compelled to say that he would teach justice to any man who was ignorant of it when they started his rhetorical instruction (459a). And it is because of this that Gorgias is led into a self-contradiction. The *Meno* itself tells us that Gorgias probably wouldn’t

Athenaeus, shows that the ancients could imagine Gorgias himself reading it in good humor. Athenaeus thus tells us of a supposed story wherein: “Gorgias himself, reading the dialogue named after him, remarked to his intimates, ‘What nice satire Plato knows how to write!’” (1933, 11.505d, p. 269). Gorgias himself may not have said this, but it helps us see the nuance of the point in question. A satire can be taken in good humor *and* based in valid criticisms.⁸

Imagine we were to satirize a public figure. Say, Joe Biden. Then imagine that, millennia from now, scholars find and analyze this satire. What if someone were to say, “These are clear absurdities! The historical record shows that Biden never said these things!” Besides being a

usually claim to teach virtue, and the character Meno *praises* Gorgias for not putting on the pretense of doing otherwise (95c). And yet, in the *Gorgias*, the character Gorgias says that he *can* teach virtue. Why? The answer lies immanent to the drama of the dialogue. For Polus, when he burst onto the scene to save Gorgias from his refutation, is all but explicit that this is not how Gorgias truly feels; he was simply too ashamed to say, before the company, that he would teach people how to speak for both justice and injustice as fluently as they’d like (461b-c). Gorgias, after all, opens with the claim that his is the noblest of all the arts (For more on the corrective use of “shame” in the dialogue, see Tarnopolsky, 2010). We thus find from Gorgias to Polus to Callicles, a series of speakers who are progressively less and less ashamed to speak on behalf of a Nietzschean ethic—*might makes right*. Yet all of this suggests that even if the Gorgias of this satire acts in a way that the real Gorgias of Leonti might not have, this is not to say that the basis of Plato’s satire is in itself unfounded.

⁸ See, e.g., D. S. Kaufer and C. M. Neuwrith’s (1982) suggestion that irony can be used to humorously regulate social norms in a non-cruel and sympathetic way (p. 35).

moot point, this would also overlook the fact that the satire may well have exaggerated things which were *worth criticizing*!⁹ I take this to be the point at issue within the *Gorgias*. And Chapter 4 will set to consider an account of how, in fact, rhetoricians like Gorgias and Polus did seem to advocate a habit of rhetorical flattery most of their contemporaries balked at; not just Plato, but Aristotle and Isocrates too.

I have presented the above literature in the hopes of making a few points clear. First, I am not alone in suggesting that the *Gorgias* is not a mere dismissal of “rhetoric.” Scholars both within and beyond rhetorical studies have long emphasized this point. Second, in forwarding a revised reading of Plato’s *Gorgias* I am going against an established status quo within rhetorical studies, though I am not doing so without precedent. Finally, I have attempted to show that certain affective hurdles lie in the path of any such resuscitation of Plato’s import for rhetorical studies. For some time, Plato has been loudly (and irreverently) framed as the arch nemesis of “rhetoric.” Jasso (2019) is right to diagnose this as a rather modern development, but the emotional barrier that this situation has created poses its own kind of challenges to a close re-reading of Plato’s work. Why should we read one accused of quasi-fascism?

⁹ And Plato surely was not alone in comedically taking Gorgias to task. In Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, for instance, produced when Plato was a 5-year-old boy, we find a comedy teasing flatterers (*kolax*) of the courtroom where we hear that “Phillipus,” a student of Gorgias, was rightly run out of town by the mob (415-420; p. 275). Because this comedy was produced when Plato was a mere child, the association between Gorgias and rhetorical flattery certainly cannot be pinned on Plato.

Contrary to the fireworks of the charges laid against Plato by Vitanza and Davis above, I believe that a decision to read the Platonic dialogues with an open mind quite naturally leads us to a different conclusion. The Platonic dialogues consistently endorse political virtues which I imagine any scholar—even Vitanza and Davis—would find themselves aligned with. These dialogues implore politicians to be quick to listen and slow to speak; to exercise epistemic humility; to study history and the arts and sciences; to not shy from philosophical discussions; and to seek to rule *themselves* before trying to rule over *others*. I’m not sure that any of these points are undesirable in a politician, even if they’re mostly lacking in the politicians of today. For my part, in a moment where people are brazenly compelled to seek office before some much-needed therapy, the reading of the Platonic dialogues provided me a much needed safe haven. The Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard noted a similar experience with the Platonic dialogues in his own dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*. I use this passage as one of the epigraphs for my own dissertation.¹⁰ None of this is liable to soften an apprehension to Plato which runs generations deep within rhetorical studies. But it is my firm conviction that the political exigence of the Platonic dialogues lies far closer to the problems of our modern democracies than rhetorical scholars are generally led to believe. I present the following study, in extension of a motif long dormant in generations of scholarship in the hope that a revised reading of the *Gorgias* might help it become easier for rhetoricians to imagine that this dialogue has something important to say about the just use of the rhetor’s art in a democracy threatened by flatterers. I now turn to a consideration of “method” as it pertains to the present study.

Where There Would Be Method

¹⁰ See Kierkegaard (1841/1965, p. 65).

Historiography within the rhetorical tradition has several exemplary studies, but no unique methodology of which I am aware. Several excellent works of rhetorical history—say James J. Murphey’s (1974) *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* or Wilbur S. Howell’s (1959) *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700*—provide the modern reader with a clear survey of the primary texts and movements which came to shape rhetorical instruction as it now exists. Yet there are few works to help a graduate student or beginning researcher orient themselves to this kind of inquiry. Rhetoricians are trained in rhetorical criticism, for instance, but not in how to engage in historical or philological research. Discussions of such methods remain within the Department of Classics. There are excellent works of rhetorical criticism within rhetorical studies and a rich body of scholarship meditating on “rhetorical criticism” and the vices and virtues of various critical methodologies. But there is little scholarship considering how to methodically undertake historical research on the rhetorical tradition (likely because of such work’s interdisciplinary nature). I say this to acknowledge what may otherwise seem like a glaring gap in this introduction. My discussion of “methods” is not as robust as I would like.

Still, I can make some preliminary comments on how the work within this dissertation was undertaken and the rationale for its overall approach. The final section of Chapter 4, for instance, attempts to recover a forgotten period of rhetorical history. In this section I have followed the model of scholars like George Kennedy. In his rhetorical research, Kennedy looks for ancient testimony supporting a historical claim and will footnote relevant discussions from classicists, historians, or philologists who help us see why we should, or perhaps should not, make certain historical conclusions. On the model of other studies like Charles Brittain’s (2001) *Philo of Larissa* and John Glucker’s (1978) *Antiochus and the Late Academy*, I have attempted to provide footnotes of potential aid to researchers looking to dive deeper. In places where a reader may

seek primary evidence, a discussion of relevant studies, or a response to a possible counterargument, I have tried to provide as much.

Chapter 4 introduces a series of claims which challenge certain assumptions regarding the history of rhetoric and philosophy alike. As the reader may be unsure of how such historical claims are developed, it would be fitting to here note the general method behind such historical reconstructions. Our understanding of the philosophical and rhetorical traditions of the ancient world rely upon fragments and ancient testimony. A rhetorician may be more familiar with citations to Cicero in consideration, for instance, of his theory of *style* or *arrangement*. But, for a historian interested in the history of Plato's Academy, the work of Cicero will serve far more of a *testimonial* role. Thus, rather than citing Cicero for the sake of reading Cicero himself, a study like Brittain's (2001) *Philo of Larissa* will frequently cite Cicero to help produce a historical reconstruction of Plato's Academy up to the first century BCE.¹¹ Ancient authorities like Cicero can therefore give us an idea of who was saying what, when, and why, particularly when the subjects in question either did not write or have no works which remain extant. When a textbook cites a classical historian, a philologist, or some other expert in the history of the classical world, they are citing works which are themselves reconstructive accounts stitched together using textual fragments and preserved testimony. Thus, while Chapter 4's use of ancient testimony to revise the early history of rhetoric may seem initially hard to believe, I have simply followed the methods—as I understand them—of the very historical studies on which we generally rely.

¹¹ Another wonderful study exemplifying the point is Herald Thorsund's (2009) *Ancient Scepticism*.

I would also like to note my disciplinary status as a researcher. I am neither a classicist nor a philologist. Yet, in the path of studies like Edward Schiappa's *Protagoras and Logos*, I have not assumed that a rhetorical historian cannot attempt to produce scholarship of classical or philological significance. I have studied as much classical Greek as I could while simultaneously researching and writing, and I have done my best to consult experts and grammar textbooks when necessary. Recognizing that my audience likely cannot read a Greek word written in the Greek alphabet (i.e., ῥητορικὴ) I have opted to transliterate all use of the Greek language (i.e., *rhētorikē*). I have also attempted to explain points regarding the syntax of the Greek language which a classicist may read as elementary. I have attempted to dive only into those details of syntax and usage which pertain to my argument, and I hope that they might help widen the accessibility of an argument which would otherwise be restricted to readers of classical Greek. Before concluding this introduction, I will turn to a consideration of the imagery from the opening epigraph of this introduction as it pertains to the present study.

That Tree-Jumping Swan

I open this introduction with a legend about Plato's death handed down by the 5th century Neoplatonist Olympiodorus. In this anecdote, Olympiodorus tells us that Plato, prior to his death, had a vision. He imagined himself as a swan jumping from tree to tree, perpetually eluding the grasp of countless hunters. Simmias of Thebes, a member of Socrates' inner circle allegedly interpreted the dream thus: that Plato's future interpreters were like the hunters and that the style of Plato's writing would ensure that they would be forever trying to interpretively pin him down without ever doing so definitively.

This anecdote is not unheard of in rhetorical studies. Richard Marback (1999), for one, organized an entire book length study around the imagery herein, *Plato's Dream of Sophistry*.

Yet, though he may well have introduced this anecdote to rhetorical studies, Marback's dream-reading seems to overlook the charming point which Olympiodorus likely intended. Marback suggests, for instance, that we can here imagine that:

the image of readers endlessly missing their target haunted Plato as he lay dying. [...] We could then go on to say that Plato may have recognized too late his own inability to prevent his dialogues slipping away into textual indeterminacy. His ultimate nightmare could have been that his own authority had undone the closure of his texts. In effect, he had failed to thwart a subsequent rhetorical tradition. (p. 1)

Upon a completed reading of this dissertation, I hope it will be clear enough that Plato never intended "to thwart a subsequent rhetorical tradition." His *Phaedrus* makes clear, rather, a desire to ethically orient such a "subsequent rhetorical tradition," but certainly not a desire to "thwart" it.¹² Still, though Marback does acknowledge the possibility of an alternative reading prior to

¹² Sonja Turner (2017), in her study *Plato's Laughter*, cautions any scholar from "the attribution to Plato of what Socrates (or other characters) says" (p. xix). She refers to this as the "'Plato says' fallacy." As she puts it:

It is a fallacy because, aside from the letters, Plato nowhere speaks for and as himself in the extant works. To assume that Socrates stands in as Plato's mouthpiece demands a compelling argument on which this reduction can occur and such an argument has not yet been given satisfactorily. (p. xix)

All of this is true, in a sense, and I entirely agree that we cannot unproblematically use the statements of Socrates (the character) or the Athenian foreigner in the *Laws* as a clean declaration of what Plato himself "said." At the same time, however, this correct point can be too

this, the reading he poses as probable seems, on closer consideration, all but entirely improbable. Olympiodorus, a committed Neoplatonist, certainly does not relay this story to convey some bittersweet deathbed realization.

Yet I find that this likely unintentional misreading of the dream assumes Plato as ignorant of the very thing which gave the dream its charm! As I read the dream, he seemingly *knew* that this style would protect his thought from any permanent interpretive capture. Marback takes this to be a dream which must have haunted Plato (who, in this metaphor, would have *wanted* to be cleanly shot by archers?). But what if Olympiodorus was rather, trying to say the opposite; what if Plato found a playful comfort in the indeterminacy his work would pose to all future readers? What if he knew, in other words, that people would try to pin him down so long as he had readers, never to do so definitively? And what if, contrary to Marback's reading, he found this a humorous comfort? Plato, in this reading, had a premonition that he was successfully leaving behind work which would induce responses and attacks from every possible angle, and yet still would live on to be attacked and reconsidered again.

easily taken to another unwarranted extreme; as though, because Plato's works are constructed with poetic ambiguity, we can draw *no conclusions* about what Plato probably *thought*. I have heard established scholars extend this "Plato says" fallacy into this additional "Plato thought" domain. But while we may not be able to say "Plato says," to bar all grounded speculation about what Plato probably "thought" seems silly. It ends up setting up a kind of skeptical-monopoly over all possible interpretations of the dialogues. Plato wouldn't have spent so much time writing about "virtue" if he wasn't concerned with it. Thus, while we can't say "Plato *says* that virtue matters," we can, I think, justifiably say "Plato *thought* that virtue matters."

Western scholars from the 1800s onwards have imagined that they have a nailed down understanding of what exactly Plato had to say about “rhetoric.”¹³ Yet, as I will attempt to demonstrate, where we thought we’d shot a swan, we’d truly hit a decoy. We thought we had pinned down Plato through a reading which, it turns out, was really a misreading; the phrase *hē rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* does not communicate what English translations have, for generations, suggested.

John Poulakos (1995) stated outright some time ago both that rhetoricians had long sought to hunt Plato down and that their hunger to do so could lead to a kind of pseudo-Plato to receive our critical floggings: “The pleasure rhetoricians seem to derive from [challenging Plato] on their way to self-affirmation is so great that, had Plato not existed, they would have found a way to necessarily invent him” (p. 76). Though rhetoricians did not, themselves, invent the strawman in question, this study will suggest that the Plato we love to hate, the arch-nemesis of rhetoric, is indeed a fabrication. Plato, that tree-jumping swan, has once more eluded the grasp of his

¹³ The misreading of a word (in our case *rhētorikē*) is certainly not the kind of reading which the Plato of this anecdote would have in mind. This interpretive slippage would lie, rather, in the fact that Plato never wrote like Aristotle. Plato did not write treatises with thesis statements. He never came right out to say, “And I, Plato, am of the mind that...” At those moments where we would most like an answer, the question is left open. And in those moments where we think we’ve come to a settled understanding, the dialogues are prone to unsettle things. The dialogue *Cleitophon* quite beautifully shows the very kind of response one might imagine from Plato’s reader: a sheer frustration that he will not simply *give us the answers*. We can imagine the Plato of Olympiodorus’ anecdote chuckling at this very thing.

interpreter's clutches. Having undertaken a review of relevant literature and situated this dissertation relative to the epigraph for this introduction, I now turn to a detailed chapter outline for the dissertation itself.

Chapter Overview

On two occasions in the work of Isocrates we find the following statement: "[...] those able to speak before a crowd are called 'rhetoric' [...]" (*rhētorikous men kaloumen tous en tō plēthei legein dunamenos*; my translation; see *Antidosis* 256 and *Nicocles* 8). How are we to make sense of such a puzzling statement? How could a person be called "rhetoric?" Chapter 1 sets to explain this puzzling statement through a grammatical history of the signifier "rhetoric." It demonstrates the adjectival origin of the word "rhetoric" and calls into question the presumption that this signifier had a noun-usage from its very first appearance. In fact, upon consideration of available evidence, it would seem that the Greek *rhētorikos* and the Latin *rhetoricus* (the grammatical origins for the English word "rhetoric"), were adjectives with a common substantive usage. The transformation of the signifier "rhetoric" from adjective to noun seems to have been a later development. This chapter presents several passages in the early pages of the *Gorgias* where careful attention to the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* can help clarify the dialogue's argumentative threads. The purpose of this first chapter is to outline some of the key grammatical concepts necessary to unpack an instance of wordplay implicit to Plato's use of *hē rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias*.

Chapter 2 then considers an instance where inattention to the adjectival role of *rhētorikos* has led to a significant loss of meaning. For generations, scholars in English, Speech, Philosophy, and the Classics have been under the impression that, in the *Gorgias*, Plato's Socrates calls "rhetoric (n.*)" something which is not an art but a knack-based species of flattery.

Yet, if this were truly Plato's position towards "rhetoric," why does the *Phaedrus* acknowledge a rhetorical art which the *Gorgias* did not? In an attempt to definitively resolve this longstanding puzzle, Chapter 2 refutes the suggestion that, from 462b to 466a, *hē rhētorikē* is intended to denote "rhetoric (n.)." It appears that the target of this passage's criticism is neither "rhetoric (n.)" nor "the rhetorical art" (*hē rhētorikē technē*). The problem lies in a playful ambiguity surrounding what noun the substantive phrase *hē rhētorikē* ("the rhetorical") can imply. At its core, the wordplay here dissociates between *hē rhētorikē (technē)* and *hē rhētorikē (empeiria)* and thus between a use of the phrase "the rhetorical" which denotes "the rhetorical art" and another which is reduced to the title of "rhetorical practice." The chapter considers evidence that this is in fact an instance of deliberate *wordplay* and then concludes by outlining the consistency between the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias* which this wordplay allows us to see—a consistency where tradition often imagined some glaring contradiction. In sum, this chapter suggests that it is a *mistranslation* to place the word "rhetoric (n.)" from 462b to 466a of any given translation of the *Gorgias*.

The claim forwarded in Chapter 2 is large. Overturning the status quo reading of this passage suggests a large burden of proof. Chapter 3 thus extends the argument of Chapter 2 by considering further evidence towards this end. It aims to resolve an additional puzzle. Cicero's discussion of the *Gorgias* never mentions the reading familiar to the modern world, that Plato therein slanders "rhetoric (n.)." The earliest rhetorician defending the *Gorgias* against this reading is, instead, Quintilian in Book II of his *Institutio Oratio*. Yet, if this reading is truly as central to the *Gorgias* as our modern translations suggest, why is Cicero completely silent on the subject? Chapter 3 presents evidence to suggest that the modern misinterpretation of the *Gorgias*, grounded in the mistranslation of *rhētorikē*, is a development which came after Cicero, who lived

before the *Gorgias* was ever translated. The earliest extant commentary of the *Gorgias*, written by the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus, acknowledges explicitly the dissociation developed in Chapter 2. And in fact, almost all the sources engaging with the *Gorgias* throughout antiquity (Apuleius, Aristides, Sextus Empiricus, Galen, Maximus of Tyre, Hermeias, and one Marcellinus) recognize, directly or indirectly, Plato's dissociation between two uses of *hē rhētorikē*. What's more, on the two instances in which the *Gorgias* was being newly translated, first in the 14th century Latin world and again in 19th century England, pioneering translators once again drew attention to a more nuanced reading of this passage. It thus appears that Quintilian is the first rhetorical theorist to respond to this reading because this misreading only bubbled forth upon the broader translation and dissemination of the text, where the nuance of Plato's playful use of *rhētorikē* was more easily *lost in translation*.

Finally, Chapter 4 suggests that a revised reading of the *Gorgias* can help us reimagine Plato's influence on the rhetorical theory of Aristotle and the Academy's influence on the early rhetorical tradition. Chapter 4 outlines how this revised reading of 462b to 466a can help resolve an additional puzzle in classical rhetorical theory. Namely, why does the Academy of Cicero's day seem so heavily integrated within rhetorical theorizing and instruction? Once alleviated of the presumption that Plato and his school were anti-rhetorical, it becomes clear that, from the time of Speusippus (Plato's nephew) to that of Philo of Larissa, there was a *consistent openness* to ethically oriented rhetorical instruction within Plato's Academy. There is, then, a novel and exciting chapter in the history of rhetoric which demands consideration from any researcher, historian, or educator concerned with either Plato or the history of the rhetor's art. The Conclusion surveys the historical findings of the dissertation and considers openings for future research.

Chapter One

The Adjectival Origin of the Word “Rhetoric”

“[...] those able to speak before a crowd are called ‘rhetoric’ [...]”

—Isocrates, *Antidosis*

According to rhetorical historian Edward Schiappa (1995), “the word ‘rhetoric’ is not found in the writings of Isocrates” (original emphasis; p. 37). And yet, on two occasions, we find evidence to the contrary. In his *Antidosis*, Isocrates suggests that “[...] those able to speak before a crowd are called ‘rhetoric’ [...]” (my translation; *rhētorikous men kaloumen tous en tō plēthei legein dunamenos*; 1929, 256, p. 327-329).¹⁴ Isocrates repeats this very statement in his *Nicocles or the Cyrians* (*rhētorikous men kaloumen tous ev tō plēthei dynamenous legein*; 1928, 8, p. 80-81). But, as Isocrates demonstrably *does* use the signifier “rhetoric,” why would Schiappa

¹⁴ As I note parenthetically above, this is my translation. George Norlin, in his translation of Isocrates’ works, renders both of these instances “we call eloquent those who are able to speak before a crowd” (Isocrates, 1929, *Antidosis*, p. 326-329; and 1928, *Nicocles*, p. 80-81). I have opted here for the most literal translation. As I will demonstrate in this Chapter, translators tend to replace the Greek use of the signifier “rhetoric” for another signifier entirely (e.g., “eloquent” or “rhetorician”) when *rhētorikos* syntactically functions as an adjective. Thus, when *rhētorikos* (the grammatical origin of the word “rhetoric”) is used, as it often was, adjectivally, translators replace this with a new word as the signifier “rhetoric” no longer has an adjectival function in English. This is surely done to make the text more convenient for the reader. Yet this is partly why the adjectival origin of the word “rhetoric,” which I will herein discuss, has remained so obscure.

suggest otherwise—especially when knowing, as he did, that these passages used the Greek word *rhētorikos*?¹⁵ And, more importantly, how are we supposed to interpret these statements? How can a *person* be called “rhetoric?” Wasn’t this a bound subject of study for the ancient Greeks? And didn’t Plato coin the word?¹⁶ This chapter aims to resolve this apparent puzzle. I believe we might begin to do so by considering the following question.

Where does the word “rhetoric” come from? In modern usage, “rhetoric” is a noun which means something like “empty and insincere speech.” Among those theorists and technicians who care for the history of this signifier, the word more conventionally meant something like “the art of the rhetor.” Since some time in the 1950s, U.S. scholars have taken concern with delimiting, expanding, and even overthrowing the boundaries by which we define “rhetoric (n.).”¹⁷ In some graduate seminars within rhetorical studies, students are called to write their own definitions of “rhetoric” as a graded assignment. In other words, within academia there are now innumerable definitions of “rhetoric (n.),” all of them framed as partaking in a conversation which goes back to ancient Greece. Michael Leff (2000), an established critic within rhetorical studies, once called this fetish for redefining “rhetoric” a long history of quibbling teachers.¹⁸ In all these

¹⁵ In his study, *Protagoras and Logos* (1991/2003), published a few years prior to this suggestion, he includes an “Appendix” which records these two instances in Isocrates (p. 220).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Schiappa (1990 and 1992) for the origin of this claim. Its refutation will be considered shortly.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Donald C. Bryant (1953), Robert Scott (1973), and Pomeroy (1986).

¹⁸ Technically speaking, Leff suggests this about the signifiers “rhetoric (n.)” and “dialectic (n.)” both. As he puts it:

discussions, scholars have imagined themselves as partaking in a definitional discussion running back to ancient Greece. We imagine, in other words, that the ancients started these discussions about “rhetoric (n.)” But what if we’re wrong?

Dominant usage of “*rethorik*” and “*rethorike*” in Middle English manuscripts suggests a noun-usage from the word’s very first appearance. We thus find Geoffrey Chaucer prefacing the “Franklin’s Tale” in the late 1390s speaking of “Marchus Tullius ne Cithero” and his “Colours of rethorike” (1868, p. 500). Similar usage appears during this period across the work of John Lydgate of Bury (c. 1370 – c. 1451).¹⁹ A medieval English poem entitled *The Court of Sapeience* similarly appears to use “rethoryke” as a noun, personifying “Dame rethoryke” in the manner of Martianus Capella’s *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*.²⁰ But it wasn’t always this way. It has since been lost, but according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “rhetoric” once had a

The historical record is one of almost constant change as the identity, function, structure, and mutual relationship of these arts become issues of argumentative contestation. The two are not fixed entities but evolving disciplines defined and redefined by generations of squabbling teachers [...]. (p. 243)

I believe, however, that it was not until Quintilian that we find such teachers squabbling about how to define “rhetoric (n.)” as a substantially existing *thing*. Thus, the history of such squabbling may not go as far back as most rhetoricians are generally taught to assume.

¹⁹ Flora Amos (1920), in her dissertation on “Early Theories of Translation” provides two examples of such usage in Lydgate’s work (p. 37).

²⁰ Though frequently attributed to Lydgate, recent scholarship suggests this attested authorship is unlikely (see Harvey, 1984, p. xxi)

healthy adjectival usage in English (Oxford, 2023). From 1450 and into the modern world, English speakers occasionally spoke of “the rhetoric art.” But since at least the 1560 publication of Thomas Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique*, the dominant use of the signifier “rhetoric” has been largely that of a noun. “Rhetoric” has been mentioned as a *thing* rather than a *quality*. Thus, for most of Western history, English scholars have assumed that figures like Plato and Aristotle used the signifier “rhetoric (n.)” in the same way that we do.²¹ And all English translations have suggested as much for the past two centuries. Scholars have been studying under the disciplinary banner of “rhetoric (n.)” within the U.S. for some time. But through all the scholarship that has thus far been produced, from the founding of “Rhetoric & Composition” journals like *College English* to the founding of “Speech” journals like *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, this belief

²¹ There are, of course, exceptions. Thus John S. Hart (1870/1897) states, at the outset of his textbook, *A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric for Use in Schools and Colleges*:

The Greek phrase “the rhetoric art” meant the art of the “rhetor” or public speaker.

Inasmuch as public speaking among the Greeks, and later among the Romans, was usually argumentative, the adjective ‘rhetoric,’ used as a noun, designated the art of argumentative discourse, *persuasion*. (p. 1; original emphasis)

As I will suggest shortly, it would be more technically correct to say that the Greeks used “rhetoric” as a “substantive adjective,” not a formal “noun.” But Hart has here observed two key points which rhetorical historians tend to overlook: first, that “rhetoric” was an adjective for the ancients, and second, that the classical title of the rhetor’s craft was “the rhetoric art,” not “rhetoric (n.)”

has remained unquestioned. This chapter argues that the practice of imagining a noun being used where it was not has led to a demonstrable loss of meaning in the translation of Plato's *Gorgias*.

This chapter begins by considering the development of what I call the "noun hypothesis" as it has existed within the work of both classicists and rhetoricians. The "noun hypothesis" suggests that "rhetoric" was a noun for the ancient Greeks. I then consider several passages in Plato's *Gorgias* where this presumption has led translators to mangle a grammatical layer of the dialogue's dialectic threads. I consider several examples where the adjectival use of the ancient Greek *rhētorikos* has been edited out of our translations, and a key passage 449d-450e, where the habit of placing the noun "rhetoric (n.)" has demonstrably mangled the argumentative point at issue. Chapter 2 considers a passage of far more significance, where this habit has led to a misreading of paradigm-shifting importance.

Relative to the core argument of this dissertation, Chapter 1 here attempts to lay the conceptual groundwork necessary to consider Plato's playful and dissociated use of the substantive phrase *hē rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a. This chapter will consider the adjectival status of the Greek signifier *rhētorikos*, the nature of "substantive adjectives," and the uniqueness of the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* throughout the *Gorgias*. This groundwork will then be built upon in Chapter 2 to outline, in detail, how we can see a crucial but thus far overlooked dissociation between *hē rhētorikē* (*technē*) and *hē rhētorikē* (*empeiria*), or, in English, between the "rhetorical art" and a "rhetorical practice."

The Noun Hypothesis: From *Rhētorikē* to *Rhētorikos*

In this section I challenge the presumption that "rhetoric" operated as a noun among the ancient Greeks. I consider the reasoning which tends to ground this belief, particularly as it appeared in the work of the classicist George Kennedy and the rhetorician Edward Schiappa.

After observing why so many have been led to imagine that “rhetoric” was a noun, I outline evidence in classical Latin usage suggesting that this signifier was likely not a definitive noun prior to the time of Quintilian. The following section considers evidence showing the harm this presumption does when placed in the hands of hasty translators.

From the time of John Stuart Mill to that of George Kennedy, an entire era of classicists, philologists, and philosophers have imagined that *rhētorikē* was a noun in Ancient Greece and that the ancients spoke of “rhetoric (n.)” in the same way that we do. George Kennedy states this presumption explicitly, that *rhētorikē* often functioned as an “abstract noun.” (p. 28 n. 1). Schiappa (1999) similarly cites the *Gorgias* as marking “The original appearance of the noun *rhētorikē*” (p. 24), a suggestion which Gisela Striker (2020) recently repeated (p. xii). And Schiappa outwardly follows Kennedy’s suggestion that *rhētorikē* was “used as an abstract noun” (1999, p. 158 and 169; also 1995, p. 42). In classical Greek, a noun could occasionally be paired with a definite article (i.e., “the”) in a manner somewhat foreign to English. Such use of an “abstract noun” could help emphasize the specificity, reality, or abstract nature of a subject; one thus might speak not simply of “knowledge,” as in English, but “*the* knowledge” to emphasize that the subject was being considered in it-self, or in the abstract. As definite articles are rarely paired with nouns in English, translators of classical Greek generally transform these “abstract nouns” into commonplace nouns (sans definite articles). On this basis, then, it would seem entirely reasonable to imagine that *hē rhētorikē* is in fact an abstract noun. As *hē* is a definite article (“the”), *rhētorikē* would seem to be a noun abstractly considered. This *assumes*, however, that *rhētorikē* was already a noun by the time of Plato’s *Gorgias*, a presumption for which no philological evidence has ever been provided. And neither is it technically correct to speak of *rhētorikē* in isolation. For, technically speaking, to consider the grammatical origin of the word

“rhetoric” it would be necessary to speak not of *rhētorikē*, as Kennedy and Schiappa tend to, but rather *rhētorikos*.

It is more conventional among philologists and classicists to discuss a signifier using its “lexical form” (singular, nominative, and masculine in the case of adjectives). Thus, we would consider *rhētorikos*, not *rhētorikē*, when contemplating the grammatical origins of the word “rhetoric.” Such a “lexical form” is sometimes also called a “lemma.” Just as a dictionary will use the lemma “skip” to discuss related verb forms like “skipped” and “skipping,” a lexicon of classical Greek would use the lemma “*rhētorikos*” to indicate all forms of the adjective *rhētorikos*, including the feminine form *rhētorikē* and the neuter *rhētorikon*. Schiappa and Kennedy’s reasoning for doing otherwise appears to lie on the *assumption* that *rhētorikē* was an abstract noun in attic Greek. But this chapter will set to show the baselessness of this presumption. Throughout Plato’s *Gorgias* we find *rhētorikos* used as an adjective with a common substantive form. As I will suggest in Chapter 2, great emphasis is placed on this substantive usage in service of a philosophical pun, deflating Gorgias’ claim to *hē rhētorikē (technē)* into a claim to *hē rhētorikē (empeiria)*. And beyond this, we have every reason to imagine that *rhetoricus*, the Latin derivative of *rhētorikos*, operated in just the same manner—as an adjective with a common substantive usage. The adjectival use of *rhētorikos* was not something which Kennedy and Schiappa were unaware of, even if, I argue, their conception of it was wrongly divorced from its feminine singular form, *rhētorikē*.

For instance, Schiappa (1990), in his *The Beginnings of Rhetorical Theory in Classical Greece*, observed some time ago that the signifier *rhētorikos* was an adjective for the Greeks. He notes, for instance, that *rhētorikos* could be used as an adjective in “assigning [...] the quality of

being ‘rhetorly’ or ‘rhetorical’ to someone or something” (p. 169; and also p. 158).²² For him, *rhētorikos* remains puzzlingly divorced from the signifier “rhetoric.” Yet *rhētorikos*, is, unquestionably, the origin for the signifier “rhetoric.” For the ancients, the equivalent signifier for our word “rhetoric” was broadly treated as an adjective. Scholars tend to overlook this point because its easily lost in translation. As modern English no longer has an adjectival use for the signifier “rhetoric,” translators rightly see a need to find an alternative signifier (e.g., “oratorical” or “rhetorical”) to help communicate the ancient adjectival use of “rhetoric.” Replacing an adjectival use of the signifier “rhetoric” with a word like “rhetorical” is an understandable kindness to readers who wouldn’t expect to see “rhetoric” working as an adjective. But this decision has one specific drawback: it severely obscures the broad extent to which the ancient Greeks used the signifier “rhetoric” in a decidedly adjectival sense. This point has perhaps also remained obscure for rhetorical studies because Schiappa has spent a great deal of time emphasizing the importance of the supposed “noun” *rhētorikē* in complete isolation from the signifier’s other grammatical uses.

Schiappa (1990 & 1992) rather influentially suggested that Plato coined the (abstract) noun we now call “rhetoric (n.),” a thesis which has since been throughout refuted. Yet Schiappa has somehow allowed rhetorical studies to continue imagining otherwise. In 1993, Neil O’Sullivan set to show the ease with which Schiappa’s ‘Plato coinage’ hypothesis could be

²² Schiappa here uses the feminine singular form of *rhētorikos* (i.e., *rhētorikē*), but, contextually, I take him to here intend the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* more broadly. That being so, it would again be best to draw on the lemma *rhētorikos* rather than one of its specific and contingent forms to avoid any such confusion.

refuted. The exchange occurred in the philology journal *Mnemosyne*. Over the course of two and a half brief but damning pages, O'Sullivan demonstrated that the sole 'textual support' Schiappa used to ground his speculation was, in fact, a mistranslation. Yet, while O'Sullivan's (1993) response to Schiappa strikes me as technically correct, it is also a bit rhetorically cruel.

O'Sullivan seems unable to demonstrate his argument without engaging in some sadistic commentary along the way. Schiappa speculates in his (1990) Plato-coinage article that, "Had the word [*rhētorikē*] been used by the Sophists or had it even been associated with them, Aristophanes would certainly have targeted it as one of the objects of his attack" (p. 459). Schiappa's reasoning here seems to be, if Aristophanes did not use the word, this *must* mean it had not yet been coined. O'Sullivan (1993) rightly diagnoses this as "the *argumentum ex silentio*," which, he suggests, "is never weaker than when it enters upon the ground of fifth-century rhetorical theory, so poorly preserved" (p. 89). Yet O'Sullivan needlessly adds the suggestion that Schiappa's use of Aristophanes builds "a fantasy worthy of the playwright himself" (p. 87). This was a jab Schiappa was not soon to forget (see 1994, p. 512; repeated in 1999, p. 17). It is little wonder that this elicited a defensive response from Schiappa (1994) in turn. Yet closer scrutiny of Schiappa's position suggests an inconsistency in his treatment of classical sources.

Schiappa suggests, for instance, that we ought not treat Plato's work "as a linguist's field guide to fifth-century usage" (p. 513). And yet he finds it of immense significance that Aristophanes never uses the signifier *rhētorikē*. But why shouldn't Schiappa's charge to Plato apply just as well to Schiappa's use of Aristophanes "as a linguist's field guide to fifth-century usage?" For noting that a word does *not* appear is just as linguistically significant as noting that it *does*. Schiappa's resistance to using Plato's work for philological inquiry does not seem to me to

hold up. One doesn't do philological work by picking out the classical sources that support one's hypothesis and manufacturing doubt about the sources that don't. In this way, and in others, Schiappa's Plato-coinage hypothesis did not hold water upon further scrutiny.

However, Schiappa's retrospective on this exchange (2016) seems to suggest that he either misunderstood the issue or has actively manufactured philological controversy where there is none to be had.²³ To clarify any lingering doubt, Maria Tanja Luzzatto (2020) has recently put

²³ His attempts to address counterarguments continuously relies upon more than shaky grounds.

He again attempts to defend his Aristophanes argument by suggesting that “here we are not talking about *an* important term—such as *epideiktikē* or *orthoepeia*—we are talking about *the* word that is often used to sum up the entire teachings of the Sophists” (1999, p. 17). The significance which this word will later take on, however, cannot be used as evidence for the weight it must have had during the time of Aristophanes. And, in fact, he all but throws up his hands after considering the counterarguments, as if to say: although this argument was started regarding the Plato-coinage hypothesis, it doesn't really matter if Plato actually coined the word! As he somewhat puzzlingly suggests “that the origins-of-*rhētorikē* thesis does not depend on the precise identification of the originator of the word *rhētorikē*. It does not matter if it was Plato, or Socrates, or Alcidamas, or whoever. The key questions concern when the term began to be used and, more important, how texts that use the term differ from those that do not” (p. 20). Yet, for the arguments in question, this was the entire point at issue! There would likely have been fewer critics balking at the more modest suggestion that the signifier *rhētorikē* entered popular use later than is generally imagined—even if the evidence for this similarly relies upon an argument from silence.

forward a damningly detailed refutation of the point which O’Sullivan thought could be addressed in a few pages. Luzzatto’s study is one which anyone interested in classical rhetorical theory would find worth their consideration. It is high time that textbooks in rhetorical studies abandon the now refuted suggestion that Plato coined *rhētorikē*.²⁴ He did not. Still, on one point in particular I believe Schiappa was fundamentally correct.

When recounting the exchange between himself and O’Sullivan, Schiappa (1999) notes that one puzzling point remained unchallenged in O’Sullivan’s criticism:

²⁴ Bizzell et al.’s (2020) *The Rhetorical Tradition* states, for instance, that, according to Schiappa “some evidence points to Plato’s having coined the term *rhetoric*” (p. 97; original emphasis). Herrick’s (2018) *The History and Theory of Rhetoric* states something neutral but similar. According to Herrick, the fact that *rhētorikē* appears nowhere before Plato’s *Gorgias* “led rhetoric scholar Edward Schiappa to conclude that Plato coined the term” (p. 65). This often-repeated point overlooks the fact that *rhētorikē* also appears in an extant fragment of Gorgias’ student Alcidas, which is at least *contemporary* with Plato’s *Gorgias*—but Schiappa seems to have downplayed this point too. In line with both Bizzell et al. and Herrick, James D. Williams’s (2000) *An Introduction to Classical Rhetoric* similarly observes that “Schiappa argued that Plato coined the term ‘rhetoric’” (p. 10). Unlike the above textbooks, Williams notes that “Not all scholars agree with the claim that Plato coined the term ‘rhetoric’” (p. 11). But even this frames the issue as more up for debate than it really is. None of the above textbooks seem aware that Schiappa’s hypothesis was long ago refuted. Luzzatto’s (2020) extensive discussion of this point can hopefully help clear the air on this point.

none of the critics of the origins-of-*rhētorikē* thesis deny my more general claim [...] that *kaloumenos* is used by Plato as a way of making clear that the use of a word is self-conscious. [...] Thus, the construction “that which is called rhetoric” hints that something unusual is going on. Since we can only guess what that something is, we must look outside of the text in order to form our judgments as to what sense of *kaloumenos* is being used. (p. 19)

Chapters 2 and 3 will attempt to suggest why Plato would have here put his use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē* in scare quotes through the use of the word *kaloumenos*. Though I do not find Schiappa’s solution to this puzzle tenable, I wholly acknowledge that he long ago recognized the puzzling significance of this passage. Setting all questions of “coinage” aside, what basis is there, truly, to imagine that *rhētorikos* had a noun form—*rhētorikē*—from the very beginning?

A bit of background on the classical Greek language and its usage in the ancient world might prove helpful before considering this grammatical origin story. Ancient Greek, specifically the attic dialect spoken by Plato and Aristotle, had three linguistic genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Nouns had a conventional gender. Some nouns, like the word for “man” (*anthrōpos*), appeared in what linguists call a masculine form. Others, like the word for “art” or “craft” (*technē*), had a feminine form. Unlike nouns, adjectives could appear in any gender: masculine, feminine, or neuter. It all depended on the noun they modified. If we were to say the phrase “a good man” in classical Greek, we would need to make the adjective for “good” (*kalos*) masculine in order to compliment the masculine noun for “man.” Thus “good man” would be *kalos anthropos*. But if we wanted the adjective for “good” (*kalos*) to modify the noun for “art” (*technē*), which is feminine, we would need to make the adjective *kalos* feminine to match the

gender of the noun *technē*. Thus “good art” would be *kalē technē*. All adjectives similarly bent changed their endings to meet the gender of the noun they modified.

When an adjective and a noun were frequently associated, colloquial usage allowed speakers to simply say the adjectives in the gender shared by the commonly associated noun. Thus, if we intended to concisely speak of “the wise men,” I could simply use a masculine plural form of the adjective for “wise” (*sophoi*) combined with the word for “the” (here, the definite article *hoi*). In this sense, the phrase “the wise” could be generally understood to mean “the wise men” when the gender and number of the adjective “wise” informed the listener that the masculine and plural noun “men” should be seen as implied. Thus, *hoi sophoi* (“the wise”) would be taken to imply the phrase *hoi sophoi anthropoi* (“the wise men”). This is what linguists and grammarians refer to as a “substantive adjective,” an adjective which syntactically acts like a thing, a quality which stands in for an associated substance. Such adjectives are described as “substantive” because they grammatically *act* like nouns, although they aren’t. If, for instance, someone were to speak of a “bottle of red,” we know, intuitively, that this conventionally denotes a “bottle of red *wine*.”²⁵ “Red” is not a substance or thing. Although it’s acting like a noun here, it’s generally known to be a quality denoted adjectivally. When this adjective is made into a quasi-substance as in the phrase “a bottle of red,” we conventionally recognize “red” as a linguistic placeholder. The substantive use of an adjective might also be used to consider a quality in the abstract as in phrases like “the beautiful” or “the good.” The presence of the definite article (“the”) often clues us into such substantive use of an adjective. Thus, calling something “ironic (adj.)” and abstractly considering “the ironic” are two distinct uses of the same

²⁵ I draw this very useful example from Höfler (2020, p. 183).

signifier, the former being an adjective proper and the latter a substantive adjective. Substantive adjectives are certainly not foreign to English, but they are less frequent in English than in a language like Classical Greek. Any reader who finds themselves confused by latter mentions of “substantive adjectives” will hopefully find some value in returning to the explanatory paragraphs above. I have thus far given a general discussion of the grammatical rules around adjectives and their substantive usage in classical Greek. I will now consider how this bears upon our understanding of the Ancient Greek word *rhētorikos*.

It was quite frequent in classical Greek for the “arts” and “sciences” to be denoted through commonly used substantive adjectives. *Technē*, for instance, the word for “art,” is, as mentioned above, feminine. Thus, when speakers used a standalone adjective which was commonly used to *describe* an art, and they did so in a feminine form, the noun for “art” would be seen as implied. The phrase, *hē grammatikē* (“the grammatic”) would thus be generally understood to mean *hē grammatikē technē* (“the grammatic art”). This kind of substantive usage was so common among the Greeks that the English language has inherited a wide body of words that have naturally transitioned from adjectives into bona fide nouns, in spite of their adjectival “-ic” suffixes. Thus we speak of “music” and “dialectic” as though they referred to essentially existing substances, rather than qualities given a substantial spin. In the ancient world, however, the equivalent signifiers were still adjectives with a common substantive usage (*mousikos* and *dialectikos*). The ancients thus spoke of “the music (adj.) arts” or “the dialectic (adj.) art” but not “music (n.)” or “dialectic (n.)” More commonly, we find linguistic recognition that these adjectives are now nouns through the addition of a characteristic suffix, “-s.” Words like “politics,” “mathematics,” and “ethics,” all operate as nouns today. But they also show the “-ic” birthmarks of their adjectival origin. The modern noun “rhetoric” is no different. Like countless other “-ic”

adjectives, it came from the combination of a noun stem with an adjectival suffix. When the noun for “speaker” (*rhētōr*) was combined with the ancient equivalent of the “-ic” suffix (*-ikos*), it formed an adjective (*rhētorikos*). This adjective was rather widely used in the 4th century BCE.²⁶ It was constructed similarly to an adjective like *mousikos*, which would have simply meant “of or pertaining to the Muses.” Similarly, *rhētorikos*, from which we get the signifier “rhetoric,” would have simply meant “of or pertaining to the rhetor,” akin to the modern word “rhetorical.” Upon closer examination, this is unsurprising. “Rhetor-ic” looks exactly how we might expect were it to mean “of or pertaining to the rhetor.” As I will suggest in the following section, the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* is evident throughout Plato’s *Gorgias*. But what about the Latin derivative, *rhetoricus*?

Kennedy, in his grand history of the rhetor’s art, observes: “Rhetoric in Latin is the Greek term *rhetorice*, or the more Latinized *rhetorica*” (1972, p. 7). The earliest record we have of this Latin form is a fragment from Ennius, “*alii rhetorica tongent*” (Warmington, 1935, p. 404). Warmington renders this “Others [conceive] well the rules of rhetoric” (p. 405). But is it warranted to assume, on this first appearance, that “*rhetorica*” is operating as a noun rather than a substantive adjective implying the phrase “*arte rhetorica*” (rhetoric (adj.) art)? If Latin had a definite article, this would make the question easier to answer. For we know that in the phrase “the ironic,” the latter word functions as a substantive adjective—the presence of the definite article “the” here helpfully clues us in. But Latin lacks a definite article. As another scholar puts it, Latin’s lack of the definite article meant “it had no means of distinguishing clearly the adjective proper from the adjective as a substantive” (Barry, 1926, p. 72). Thus, while “rhetoric”

²⁶ See the “Appendix” of Schiappa’s *Protagoras and Logos* (1991/2003).

may have, for a period, evoked an echo of the noun “art” in the ancient Latin world, the syntax of the Latin language would make it easier to overlook than in Greek usage of *rhētorikos*. Yet, even with this linguistic ambiguity, it seems that the adjectival use of *rhetorica* was far more common in the early Latin world than our existing translations would lead us to assume.

Fascinatingly, “rhetoric (n.)” had not yet stuck as a theoretical noun in the world of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*.²⁷ The word appears only eight times in the entirety of the work. Its first usage seems to be a substantive form implying a noun like “art” or “science,” both of which are mentioned immediately before ([Cicero], 1954, 2.15.44).²⁸ Book 3 provides support to infer that the previous instance was intended substantively, as the author here discusses the “rhetoric (adj.) art” (*rhetoricae artis*,” 3.1.1). The author thus seems to set a precedent for how to read what are likely substantive uses in the remainder of Book 3 (3.8.15; 3.16.28; 3.24.40). When the

²⁷ Throughout this section I use the Loeb numbering system to cite the relevant passages rather than page numbers. I provide the year of the relevant edition immediately prior. Most all modern translations place this numbering system beside their text. As a researcher, I find it far more helpful to have this coded information rather than a page number, since it can point the reader to the relevant material regardless of their edition or translation. If there are three numbers (#.#.#), the first is the Book number, the second the Chapter number, and the third the closest marked Line number. If there are only two numbers (#.#), the first is the Book number, and the latter the relevant Line number.

²⁸ In the above citation (and on the References page), the name [Cicero] is in brackets because this is how the text is catalogued by the Loeb Classical Library edition I draw on. The work was traditionally attributed to Cicero, but this attribution is no longer accepted by historians.

term reappears in Book 4, it is, contextually, within a two chapter stretch which meditates on problems concerning “art,” again giving a basis for a substantive reading for the remaining two instances in Book 4 (4.3.5; 4.43.56; 4.56.69).²⁹ And if all of the above examples leave doubt, the author concludes the *Rhetorica Ad Herenium* in a manner that evinces the adjectival usage of “*rhetoricus* (adj.)” at the time: “Thus, of the rhetoric (adj.) art there is nothing more” (“*Ergo emplius in arte rhetorica nihil est;*” my translation of 4.56.69). On this precedent, it should perhaps not be surprising that “rhetoric” served an adjective for Cicero as well.

Cicero’s famous work, often rendered *De Inventione* or *On Invention*, really bears the title *Rhetorici Libri Duo* or *Two Rhetoric (adj.) Books*. Any doubt about whether this was intended as an adjective dissipates when Quintilian describes these works as Cicero’s “rhetoric (adj.) books” (“*libris rhetoricis;*” 1949, 3.15.50). It is not uncommon for Cicero to speak of the rhetoric (adj.) art (*De Inv.* 1.5.7; *De Or.* 1.18.85; *Or.* 32.113). On the above precedent, those few other appearances of “*rhetorica*” in Cicero’s oeuvre should be read as most likely denoting “*arte* (n.) *rhetorica* (adj.)” rather than “*rhetorica* (n.)” As late as the 3rd century, the phrase “rhetoric (adj.) teacher” was still in the air. Thus Ammianus Marcellinus, in his history, *Rerum Gestarum*, speaks of a “*magister* (n.) *rhetoricus* (adj.)” (Marcellinus, 1939, p. 58). The Roman engineer Vitruvius also stands as an important example of usage between the time of Cicero and

²⁹ Caplan, in his translation of the *Rhetorica ad Herenium* sees these as so related that in a later paragraph he four times replaces the Latin word “art” with the noun “rhetoric (n.)” ([Cicero], 1954, 4.5.8). I find this translation unsupportable. However, I agree with Caplan’s implicit assumption that the author intends the signifiers “*rhetoricus* (adj.)” and “*ars*” to have a direct association.

Quintilian. It's thus worth noting the syntax of his mention of "*de arte vero rhetorica cum Cicerone*," which I would render as "the true rhetoric (adj.) art of Cicero" (Vitruvius, 1934, p. 210).

Quintilian also evinces this adjectival usage, appearing to partake in a linguistic paradigm. In his preface to the *Institutio* he notes that there are currently books of "rhetoric (adj.) art" ("*artis rhetoricae*") wrongly floating around under his name (Quintilian, 1921, 1.Pr.7). He calls the enthymeme something "which is a rhetoric (adj.) syllogism" ("*qui rhetoricus est syllogismus*;" 1.10.38), a form repeated again in Book 9 ("*rheticus syllogismus*;" 9.4.57). If we had any lingering doubts that this adjectival usage was not just in the air but the reigning *default*, Quintilian seems to put this to rest in his forecast of Book 2. He thus says he will later consider "that alone which is commonly called rhetoric (adj.) art" ("*illa quae sola vulgo vocature arte rhetorica*;" my translation; 2.15.1). In search of a grammatical history of the word "rhetoric," this passage deserves some pause. Quintilian seems to say, very clearly, this adjectival usage of "*rheticus*" was commonplace ("*vulgo vocature*") in the first-century Roman world. Thus, given the breadth of evidence suggesting that "rhetoric" was not yet treated as a noun in classical Latin, or was at least *transitioning* towards such usage, the burden of proof would appear to lie on any scholar who would like to move the presumption from "likely a substantive adjective" to "likely a noun." There appears, to my knowledge, to be no such evidence.

Thus far, this chapter has attempted to unsettle the presumption that, from its very first appearance, the Greek and Latin origins for the word "rhetoric" (i.e., *rhētorikos* and *rheticus*) had a noun usage. It seems that this is an unfounded presumption. The ancients did not always use this signifier in the way that modern speakers do. The linguistic record suggests that this presumption is unwarranted. Any scholar who would like to argue otherwise would appear to

now have the burden of proof. The evidence here considered suggests that, in both classical Greek and classical Latin, *rhētorikos* and *rhetoricus* were adjectives with a common substantive usage. The appearance of a formal noun usage thus seems to be a later offshoot from this earlier substantive tradition. The following section now turns to consider passages in Plato's *Gorgias* where the presumption that *rhētorikos* was always a noun has led to a demonstrable loss of meaning.

When "Rhetoric" Was an Adjective: The Grammatical Use of *Rhētorikos* in Plato's *Gorgias*

In this section I will suggest that careful attention to the adjectival usage of *rhētorikos* in the ancient Greek world can help clarify some of the puzzling statements made by Plato's Socrates in the early portions of the *Gorgias*. This section will thus attempt to demonstrate and discuss the broad adjectival use of *rhētorikos* on display throughout the *Gorgias*. The following section will show an example where the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* is of more obvious significance.

It is impossible for any reader of English translations to know this, but the historical record is quite clear: throughout Ancient Greece, *rhetorikos* was an adjective with a common substantive usage. Modern readers would not know this because translators almost universally replace this adjective or its substantive usage with a different word entirely. It might help to sift through a few examples of how translators have edited this usage out of all modern translations.

Consider, for instance, W. R. Lamb's translation of Plato's *Gorgias*.³⁰ At 455c of Lamb's translation, we find the character Socrates saying to Gorgias, "For as you claim to be an orator

³⁰ Lamb's translation is not an outlier. It keeps with a trend of the translations which both preceded and followed. I am simply using Lamb's translation as an exemplary instance. For my

yourself and to make orators of others, it is proper to inquire of you concerning your craft” (Plato, 1925a, p. 289). However, if the aim of our translation was to precisely recognize the adjectival usage of *rhētorikos* in this passage, we would have to revise the opening clause to say, “For you claim to be [a rhetor] and to make others [rhetoric (adj.)].” And, indeed, in ancient usage it was quite common to see “rhetoric (adj.)” used to describe both things and people alike.

At several points in the *Gorgias*, for instance, we find mention of a “rhetoric (adj.) man.” Translators almost universally replace this with the noun “rhetorician.” And though this gets at the same idea, it also obscures the grammatical history of how *rhētorikos* operated in ancient Greek. Thus, at 456c Lamb presents Gorgias as speaking of “a rhetorician” and a doctor when we might more technically render this as “a rhetoric (adj.) man and an iatric man.”³¹ Not long

purposes, Lamb’s translation is of particular significance because it is the translation which still appears in Bizzell et al.’s (2020) anthology *The Rhetorical Tradition*.

³¹ Within this passage (456a), *rhētorikos* is in fact used as an attributive adjective. In the phrase *rhētorikon andra*, we find *rhētorikos* in a singular masculine accusative form, modifying the singular masculine accusative noun *andra*. The phrase *would* literally mean, “rhetoric (adj.) man.” And at two points following this, we find *rhētorikos* used as a substantive adjective to similarly imply the phrase “rhetoric (adj.) man.” Again, at 460b we find that Socrates is asking Gorgias about what it would mean to “make someone rhetoric (adj.)” (*eanper rhētorikon sū tina poiēsēs*). Lamb works around this adjectival usage by rendering the passage “make a man a rhetorician” (Plato, 1925a, p. 303). In all these instances, relatively innocent modifications to the text collectively participate in an erasure of the demonstrably prevalent adjectival usage of *rhētorikos* during Plato’s lifetime.

after, Socrates again draws attention to the fact that this adjective could be attributed to a person in allusion to their artistic skill. Lamb's translation again overlooks the nuance at issue. He hastily places names like "builder" or "musician" where the text deliberately uses a series of "-ic" suffixed adjectives (e.g., "architectonic" or "music (adj.)"). Lamb thus renders the exchange at 460b:

SOC. Well now, a man who has learnt building is a builder, is he not?

GORG. Yes.

SOC. And he who has learnt music, a musician?

GORG. Yes.

SOC. Then he who has learnt medicine is a medical man, and so on with the rest on the same principle; anyone who has learnt a certain art has the qualification acquired by his particular knowledge?

Lamb's translation hints at the point at issue when speaking of a "medical man," but, as we will see, the point here is about describing artisans using the quality associated with their art. We might more carefully capture this point as it exists in the Greek, with a few modifications.

In my revised rendering of this passage, I use "the tectonic" as an archaic way of denoting "the architectural" and "the iatric" as a fancy way of saying "the medical."³² It is also worth noting that, much like "rhetoric (adj.)," the signifier "music" operated as an adjective in the ancient world. With all this in mind, we can attend to the adjectival signifiers at 460b by reading the discussion along the following lines:

³² In both instances I opt for the grammatical construction which gets at the same adjectival "-ic" suffix evinced analogously by ancient Greek "*-ikos*" adjectives.

SOC. Well now, a man who has learnt [the tectonic] is [tectonic], is he not?

GORG. Yes.

SOC. And he who has learnt [the music (adj.) is music (adj.)]?

GORG. Yes.

SOC. Then he who has learnt [the iatric] is [iatric], and so on with the rest on the same principle; anyone who has learnt a certain art has the qualification acquired by his particular knowledge?

While rendering the passage with careful attention to adjectives leaves us with a more cumbersome text, this better primes us to read the adjectival role which the signifier *rhētorikos* has to play within these early portions of the *Gorgias*. Before leaving this passage, it is worth considering the grammatical rule to which Socrates is here drawing the reader's attention.

Aristotle, for instance, in his *On Categories*, similarly meditates on the grammatical point at issue. Aristotle here suggests that many such “-ic” (*-ikos*) adjectives are to be taken as qualities, not substances. He suggests this in speaking of “all terms that denote any natural capacity” or of “any innate incapacity” (Aristotle, 1938, 8.9a.15).³³ The examples he gives, which are impossible to precisely translate, are “-ic” suffixed adjectives to denote one who is

³³ Smyth's (1920/1956) *Greek Grammar* has been a touchstone reference for countless generations of English classicists learning to navigate the nuances of classical Greek syntax. And, in alignment with the grammatical observation Aristotle here makes, Smyth also observes the association between “-ikos” suffixed adjectives and connotations of faculties or abilities (p. 237). See also p. 273 for Smyth's discussion of substantive adjectives. Note also that the definition Aristotle gives for the “rhetorical art” is presented as such a capacity (*dynamis*).

adept at running or boxing. The Greek adjective *dromikos* would mean something like “runner-ic” and *puktikos* something like “boxer-ic” (see 8.9a.15 and 8.10a.35). As he notes later, “each science, too, has its own name, such as boxing, for instance, or wrestling. And those who are that way disposed get their name from the name of the science” (8.10a.32). In other words, Aristotle here observes that, in ancient usage, adjectives would have been used to nominally designate an artisan and the art they qualitatively enact. Thus, the “music (adj.) man” practices the “music (adj.) art” and the “dialectic man” practices the “dialectic art.” These “-ic” suffixed adjectives would have thus been taken to denote qualities, not things in themselves.

Carefully attending to the role of adjectives in the above passage allows us to see that this is precisely the grammatical rule to which Socrates is alluding. He thus observes how the ancients spoke of the one who knew the rules of grammar as a “grammatic man” and one who knew the political art as a “politic (adj.) man.” Even if the ancients had no word for “adjectives” and their “substantive” variations, their usage suggests that they saw these “-ic” suffixed signifiers as qualities, not things.³⁴ Aristotle thus summarily observes regarding signifiers like “grammatic” and “music (adj.)” that “those branches of knowledge, in virtue of which we are sometimes described as of such and such nature, themselves must come under the category of quality” (1938, 8.11a.35).³⁵

³⁴ For a history of the linguistic categories of “adjective and “substantive adjective,” see Luca Alfieri (2014; 2015).

³⁵ It is also worth noting the frequency with which Aristotle used *grammatikos* as an example of a quality (see p. 18, 72, 76, and 78).

In this section I have introduced evidence and explanatory examples to outline how the signifier *rhētorikos* functioned as an adjective in the ancient world. The ancients would speak of things and people as being “rhetoric (adj.),” but they did not use the signifier “rhetoric” to denote a thing in itself as it does for modern speakers. The adjectival use of *rhētorikos* is generally edited out of most translations of the *Gorgias*. The real implications of this subtle point will only fully appear in later chapters, but this will eventually lead to a bigger “so what?” In the following section I will consider a small but significant example which shows the loss of meaning which occurs when the adjectival usage of *rhētorikos* is too loosely replaced with the modern noun “rhetoric (n.).”

Lost Grammatical Nuance: The Argumentative Thread from 449d to 450e

The previous section sought to provide passing examples of “rhetoric” being used as an adjective. This section will consider a passage within the *Gorgias* where inattention to the adjectival role of *rhētorikos* has muddled the argumentative threads of the dialogue, specifically 449d to 450e. After surveying, and attempting to translate, the deliberate use of “-ic” suffixed adjectives herein, I will attempt to clarify the argumentative point at issue. Contrary to the translation presented by W. R. Lamb, I show that the character Socrates is not here trying to pin down the noun “rhetoric (n.).” He is, instead, trying to understand on what conditions Gorgias will describe a given art as “rhetor-ic (adj.).” I conclude the section by suggesting that attention to this detail helps Socrates’ argument appear far more reasonable than Lamb’s translation is able to communicate.

From 449d to 450e, Socrates is trying to pin down why Gorgias would not describe arts like the “iatric art” or the “grammatic art” as “rhetoric (adj.).” At 449a Socrates asks Gorgias to explain “in what art” he claims himself to be both an expert and educator. Gorgias has suggested

that his art is “the rhetoric (adj.)” one, and that he is a “rhetor” who can make others “rhetoric (adj.)” like himself. The point is almost universally lost in English translations, but at this early point in the dialogue we find the character Socrates beginning to develop a grammatical argument which we will consider at length in the remainder of this dissertation.

For the time being, we can note that eight grammatically symmetrical substantive adjectives are introduced in this passage (449d to 450e). Socrates thus speaks of *hē huphantikē*, *hē mousikē*, *hē iatrikē*, *hē gymnastikē*, *hē arithmetikē*, *hē geōmetrikē*, *hē logistikē*, and *hē petteutikē*. Some of these can be given an English equivalent more easily than others. We could easily speak of “the gymnastic,” “the arithmetic,” and “the geometric,” so long as we recognize that in all these instances the word for “art” or “craft” is implied. Through mild grammatical bending, we could imagine “the music (adj.),” but taking this to refer to the “arts of the Muses,” not “music (n.)” in the modern melodic sense. Similarly, “the iatric” could be taken to mean something like “the medical art.” The remaining three are more troublesome: *hē huphantikē*, *hē logistikē*, and *hē petteutikē*. I’ll create ugly “-ic” adjectives for the sake of grammatical symmetry, but I acknowledge that they are clumsy constructions. As *hē huphantikē* is a substantive adjective used to denote the weaver’s art of the loom, I will call this “the loomic.” *Hē logistikē* would denote the art of calculation, as distinct from “the arithmetic,” so I will call this “the numeric,” taken to mean the art of number crunching. Finally, *hē petteutikē* would mean something like the art of strategic gaming, so I will render this “the strategic.” With that long winded preface out of the way, it should now be possible to see the subtle grammatical point the character Socrates is driving at from 449a to 453a.

When Socrates brings up this long chain of substantive adjectives (the gymnastic, the arithmetic, the geometric, the music, the iatric, the loomic, and the strategic) his intention is to

create an argumentative analogy. One could, he observes, describe a given art as “music (adj.)” because it dealt with what was of or pertaining to the Muses. One could call another the “grammatic” art because it dealt with grammar. The same was true for the rest of the adjectives used to describe associated arts. Lamb recognized, at some level, that the issue here was one of pinning down how exactly Gorgias used the adjective “rhetoric (adj.)” to describe and identify his art. Thus, at 450b, Lamb frames Socrates as asking Gorgias, “Then why, pray, do you not give the name ‘rhetorical’ to those other arts, when they are concerned with speech, if you call that ‘rhetoric’ which has to do with speech” (p. 271). In the first clause of this sentence, Lamb has recognized this point perfectly. Socrates is indeed asking why Gorgias calls a given art “rhetorical,” or, more technically speaking, “rhetoric (adj.).” Yet in the second clause of the sentence, Lamb changes how he renders this ancient adjective. He instead puzzlingly switches to the modern noun “rhetoric (n.).” If we arbitrarily take *rhētorikos* to be an adjective in one clause and a noun in another, as Lamb does, the result is that Socrates’ reasoning seems self-evidently sloppy. Yet notice how natural this passage appears when we treat *rhētorikos* consistently as an adjective. Socrates could thus be read as asking: “Then why, pray, do you not [call] those other arts [‘rhetoric (adj.)’] when they are concerned with speech, if you call that [...] which has to do with speech [‘rhetoric (adj.)’]” (p. 271). Lamb’s translation attributes a leap of logic which readers generally have to attribute to Plato’s inattention. Lamb may have thought this an innocent change, but, as I will show, Lamb overlooks an entire grammatical layer to the dialogue’s argument which will take on greater significance only later.

Consider an additional instance where Lamb replaces the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* with the noun “rhetoric (n.).” At 450e, Lamb’s translation reduces the discussion to an arbitrary application of the name “rhetoric (n.).” Lamb thus poses Socrates as saying to Gorgias:

But, mind you, I do not think it is any one of these that you mean to call rhetoric [n.]; though, so far as your expression went, you did say that the art which has its effects through speech is rhetoric [n.], and one might retort, if one cared to strain at mere words: So, Gorgias, you call numeration rhetoric [n.]. (Plato, 1925a, p. 273)

As the passage here attests, Socrates is aware that he is making a point which may appear “to strain at mere words,” but Lamb’s translation makes it look like more of a strain than it really is. For Socrates is not saying that, based on Gorgias’ statements, any “art which has its effect through speech” can be arbitrarily given the disciplinary label “rhetoric (n.).” This misses the grammatical point at issue. Replacing “rhetoric (n.)” with a more technically correct translation, “rhetoric (adj.),” allows this subtlety to stand out more clearly. I would thus revise Lamb’s translation to read:

“But, mind you, I do not think it is any one of these [i.e., the grammatic, the arithmetic, the geometric, the music, the iatric, the loomic, or the strategic arts] that you mean to call [rhetoric (adj.)]; though, so far as your expression went, you did say that the art which has its effect through speech is [rhetoric (adj.)], and one might retort, if one cared to strain at mere words: So, Gorgias, you call the arithmetic art [rhetoric (adj.)]! But I do not believe it is either [the arithmetic] or [the geometric] that you call [rhetoric (adj.)]” (450e, p. 273).

Socrates is here playfully choosing to “strain at mere words” so that Gorgias might clarify his use of the adjective “rhetoric (adj.).” But this is no more ridiculous than when Socrates presses for more specificity soon after Gorgias calls his art the one that deals with “The greatest of human affairs [...] and the best” (451d). In other words, Gorgias has again spoken ambiguously, and Socrates is pressing for clarification in a manner more reasonable than Lamb’s translation

imagines. In this instance, then, overlooking the deliberate use of parallel grammatical construction (see the eight other *-ikos* adjectives) and replacing the adjectival usage of *rhētorikos* with the modern noun “rhetoric (n.)” misses an entire layer of the argument.

In current translations, we find Socrates taking up an odd line of reasoning. As though Gorgias were implying that any practice dealing with words should be given the name “rhetoric (n.)” This surely does not follow from the previous admissions. We are thus left to presume either that the character Socrates is reasoning poorly or that Plato himself is doing so. Yet neither presumption is necessary. When we attend to the grammatical use of adjectives here, we see a far more nuanced, and far more reasonable, through line. There are any number of “arts” which would be denoted through some “-ic” suffixed adjective (e.g., the grammatic art, the music art, and so on). Gorgias initially says that he calls his art the “rhetor-ic” art because it pertains to words. Yet, as Socrates rightly observes, plenty of other arts pertain to words without being called “rhetor-ic.” If Gorgias were to faithfully follow his initial claim, describing any art which pertains to words as a “rhetoric (adj.) art,” then he would indeed have entailed the suggestion Socrates attributed to him. It would have been as though he believed that the arithmetic art could be justifiably described as “rhetor-ic.” Not that “arithmetic (n.) is rhetoric (n.)” but that “the arithmetic (adj.) art is rhetor-ic (adj.).” The former in no way follows from Gorgias’s admissions, while the latter quite naturally does.

As this was not what Gorgias intended to say, he later clarifies what he acknowledges to be an earlier ambiguity (452e). His subsequent answers clarify the conditions necessary for Gorgias to call a given art the “rhetor-ic” art. The details appended to this initial premise are well known among rhetoricians. We find that he calls his art “rhetor-ic” not only because it deals with words, but also because it seeks to persuade an audience on issues of right and wrong before those who

don't themselves know the answer (455a-456c). And yet if we overlook this grammatical subtlety, we also overlook the cumulative effect of Gorgias, the master speaker, consistently being led to realize his ambiguous use of language. This is a theme satirically present throughout these early stages of the dialogue.

When Polus first begins the discussion, Socrates observes his inability to directly answer the question posed to him (448d-e). Reading the subtle adjectival role of *rhētorikos* in these early portions of the dialogue allows us to see that it is Gorgias, not Socrates, who is here represented as the clumsy reasoner. It is for this reason that Socrates begins this cycle of the dialogue by observing what Gorgias will shortly cede himself: "Then the [rhetor-ic art] is not concerned with all kinds of speech" (449e). Socrates has to implore Gorgias to give another shot at his definition, and for this reason has to prod Gorgias into acknowledging the insufficiency of his earlier answer: "Come now, and do your part in finishing off the answer to my question" (451a). At 451d, we see once more the indication that Gorgias has spoken too ambiguously: "Come then and do your part, Gorgias." Shortly after we find Gorgias consistently falling into the same pattern as the coltish Polus. Gorgias thus praises his art when he means to describe it (451e). Socrates patiently points out that this is the most recent in a now established pattern of ambiguous responses: "But that also, Gorgias, is ambiguous, and still by no means clear" (451e). And several passages later, we still find Socrates complaining that the master rhetor, Gorgias, had again failed to give a definition of any theoretical substance: "Come then, let us see what actually is our account of [the rhetoric (adj.) art]: for I confess I am not yet able to distinguish what my own account of it is" (455b). In this section I have suggested that recognizing the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* makes Socrates' argument from 449d to 450e both more reasonable and easier to follow. It also helps tease out the subtle humor of Gorgias, that master speaker,

repeatedly providing painfully ambiguous definitions for the adjective “rhetor-ic.” I now conclude the chapter by returning to the opening statements of Isocrates, suggesting that, when seen as a commonplace adjective, his use of the signifier ‘rhetoric’ is not puzzling but rather expected given usage of the word in 4th century BCE Greece.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to challenge the presumption that the word “rhetoric” had a noun usage from its very first appearance. Upon closer consideration, it seems that this was only ever a presumption paradigmatically handed down but based on nothing. Up to the time of Quintilian, the Latin word *rhetoricus* played a largely adjectival and substantive role, just as *rhētorikos* did in Greek. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that *hē rhētorikē* was an abstract noun. I presented several examples within Plato’s *Gorgias* where we find “rhetoric” working in an adjectival sense. And I considered one passage in particular (449a to 453a), where attention to the adjectival role of *rhētorikos* can help us better grapple with the text. Doing so makes Socrates’ argument appear far more reasonable, and it shows the satirical humor in *Gorgias*’ consistent knack for ambiguous speech.

We now have grounds, in light of all this, to return to the opening puzzle. Isocrates suggests that “[...] those able to speak before a crowd are called ‘rhetoric’ [...]” (my translation; *rhētorikous men kaloumen tous en tō plēthei legein dunamenos*; 256, p. 327-329). How could this be? I have, in hindsight, baked into my translation the very habit which would be necessary to truly trace a grammatical history of the word “rhetoric,” namely, placing the signifier “rhetoric” in all those places where *rhētorikos* appears—regardless of whether the syntax is foreign to modern usage of the word. For only then can we see the linguistic transformation which has here occurred, from adjective to noun. This can also help explain, then, Schiappa’s

puzzling suggestion that “*the word ‘rhetoric’ is not found in the writings of Isocrates*” (original emphasis; p. 37). What Schiappa perhaps meant to say was that the word “rhetoric” does not appear in Isocrates in reference to “the rhetoric art” (i.e., *rhētorikos* does not appear in the feminine substantive form *hē rhētorikē*). But this is a fundamentally different claim. We cannot suggest that all adjectival uses of the word *rhētorikos* are somehow divorced from its feminine, singular form, *rhētorikē*. Nor can we imagine that our modern word “rhetoric” is entirely distinct from the ancient Greek word *rhētorikos*. To force, with no philological warrant, a dissociation between *rhētorikos* and *rhētorikē* is to overlook a chapter in the grammatical history of the signifier “rhetoric.”

Seen in this light, Isocrates’ statement is not surprising at all. He is using the signifier “rhetoric” just as we would imagine if it were used as an adjective; the noun “rhetor” gets the “-ic” suffix added on, and we get a word which simply means something like “of or pertaining to the rhetor.” It is little wonder, then, that Isocrates says “[...] those able to speak before a crowd are called ‘rhetoric.’” This was the commonsense definition of the adjective “rhetoric” in ancient Greece.

Having established the adjectival origin of the signifier *rhētorikos*, the following chapter will consider how attention to this detail affords a new paradigm of interpretation for how we read the 462b to 466a of Plato’s *Gorgias*. When *hē rhētorikē* is seen clearly as a substantive adjective, not a noun, we can see that Plato is here making a playful dissociation between a use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē* (the rhetor-ic) which denotes *hē rhētorikē technē* (the rhetor-ic art) and a use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē* (the rhetor-ic) which denotes *hē rhētorikē empeiria* (the rhetor-ic practice). I will also consider the importance this has for seeing the consistency of Plato’s rhetorical theory and its importance for how this passage can be justifiably translated.

Chapter Two

Platonic Wordplay & *Hē Rhētorikē*: The Mistranslation of *Rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a

“One must see, therefore, that ‘*hē rhētorikē*’ is twofold, and while one is true and artistic [*technikē*], the other is wrongly so-called [*pseudōnymos*] and is a practice [*empeiria*]”

—Olympiodorus, Commentary on the *Gorgias*

John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States (1825-1829) and first occupant of the Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric & Oratory at Harvard University (1806-1809), tells us of a “glaring” inconsistency in the Platonic corpus (p. 87).³⁶ This is “that inconsistency on the subject of rhetoric, which appears in the two dialogues of Plato” (p. 87). Those being, of course, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. Though the Boylston professorship remains to this day (albeit held more often by poets than rhetoricians), it would take nearly a century before U.S. scholars would begin to dedicate their own research efforts to the classical rhetorical tradition. Sporadic rhetoric textbooks and a sub-disciplinary interest among classicists and philologists ensured that the discussion of classical rhetorical theory would not completely vanish within the 18th century. One Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), for instance, while serving “as Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Basel” produced lectures on the rhetorical tradition of classical Greece sometime around 1874. And here again we find the suggestion—*from a reader of the*

³⁶ The lectures which compose this work were delivered at Harvard between 1806 and 1808. He was, in between the delivery of these lectures, serving as a US Senator for the state of Massachusetts. The lectures were published in 1810, just prior to Adams’ departure to St. Petersburg to serve as a US ambassador to Russia.

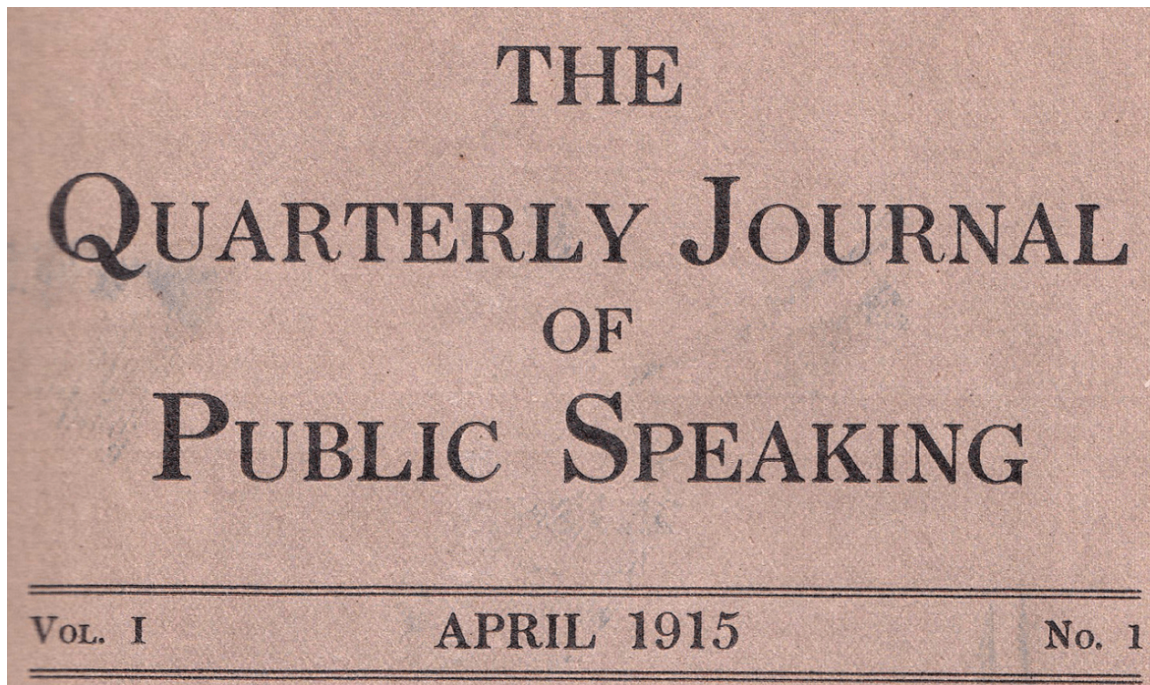


Figure 3 Snippet of the inaugural issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* (1915)

Greek!—that Plato’s *Gorgias* was a screed against “rhetoric (n).”³⁷ In 1914 a faction of speech teachers within the US, the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking (NAATPS), fatefully split from the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE). With the following year came the inaugural issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* (now the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*; see Figure 3), a public speaking journal which, alongside “speech” oriented research, provided the space for research efforts into the classical Greek rhetorical tradition. It was here that, for the first time, rhetoricians could present sustained

³⁷ He suggests there, for instance, that “Plato has a strong dislike for [rhetoric]; he labels it as a skill, *empeiria charitos tinos kai hēdonēs apergasias* [experience in a certain outward grace and pleasure in expression (making or producing)], and subordinates it to *kolakeia* [flattery], together with the art of cooking [*opsopoiitikē*], the art of embellishment [*kommōtikē*], and Sophistic” (courtesy of Carole Blair’s translation; 1989, p. 98; the bracketed additions are her own).

inquiry and discussion into the Western rhetorical tradition which had preceded for more than two millennia. And we find that here, in the very foundations of the field, the belief presented by Adams above had already taken root. On the authority of the classicists and philologists who had surveyed classical rhetoric thus far, Everette Lee Hunt introduced to his fellow speech teachers what should have been an authoritative account of Plato's place in the rhetorical tradition.

In 1920, Hunt produced an article, "Plato on Rhetoric and Rhetoricians," which appeared in the pages of the newly formed journal, then called the *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* (now the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*). Hunt here set the precedent for the classical and philological sources which would be invoked for the coming decades within rhetorical scholarship, whereby the anti-rhetorical reading of the *Gorgias* seemed to gain an air of authority. Hunt draws on the translations of E. M. Cope (Plato, 1864), W. H. Thompson (Plato, 1871b), and Benjamin Jowett (Plato, 1871a), all of which seem to have established themselves among American scholars. Hunt also draws on other classical studies of Greek philosophy, such as those produced by T. Gomperz's (1905) and W. Lutosławski (1897) to get a hold on the ancient world.³⁸ And he uses these sources to ground his suggestion that 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* was a wholesale attack on "rhetoric (n.);" (1920, p. 46). Donald C. Bryant (1953) writing in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 30 years later, notes that Hunt's work on classical Greece had already become "woven into the fabric of our scholarship" (p. 402). Bryant, on the authority of

³⁸ For an example of an influential classicist forwarding the now familiar reading of the *Gorgias*, see Gomperz (1905, p. 326, 329; and 1912, p. 420). Based on authorities like this, early rhetorical scholarship imagined that in the *Gorgias* Plato dismissed "rhetoric" and in the *Phaedrus* he changed his mind. This reading remains standard today.

Hunt and a generation of classical researchers, thus suggests, as a given fact, that “Plato first, and hundreds of critics since, have attacked rhetoric” (p. 406). As W. Scott Nobles (1957) observed shortly after, writing in the journal *Western Speech*:

One of the most persistently puzzling questions in the study of ancient Greek rhetoric has been that of Plato's true attitude toward rhetoric. In the fourth century B.C. the great Athenian philosopher penned dialogues which commented at length upon rhetoric and rhetoricians; today, some twenty-three centuries later, his attitude upon the subject is still partially shrouded in doubt and confusion. [...The] “seeming paradox” in Plato's treatment of rhetoric would appear to stem primarily from the divergent approaches in two dialogues, *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. (p. 206)³⁹

³⁹ Nobles here draws on the position set by Thonsen and Baird (1948) in their foundational study, *Speech Criticism*:

Plato's attitudes toward a technique of speechcraft present a seeming paradox; while satirizing and condemning the art as it appeared to him during his age, he also contributed to its development so materially as to lead such an eminent scholar as W. H. Thompson to call Aristotle's epochal *Rhetoric* in effect an expanded *Phaedrus*. (p. 50)

The classicist Paul Shorey (1922), writing within the pages of *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, put forward a similar position himself, hyperbolically suggesting that Aristotle:

evidently wrote with a card-catalogue of Plato's notable passages on his desk. The main body of the *Rhetoric*, the first two books, is a working out of Plato's idea that if rhetoric is to be more than a rule of thumb it must be a combination of logic and ethical psychology. (p. 118)

For generations of thinkers, then, 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* has been framed as a stumbling block to scholars' attempts to glean how exactly Plato felt about "rhetoric." This point has long bugged rhetoricians; some philosophers looked on and laughed, while others tried to "defend rhetoric."⁴⁰ But all these efforts have toiled under the above assumption. And, significantly, it serves as the backdrop which all modern translators bring to their interpretation of the text. It is seen as a kind of a priori, self-evident truth. But, as I argue, we need no longer see it that way.

Over the course of this and the following two chapters I aim to refute the modern interpretation of 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias*, suggesting that where we now see an attack on "rhetoric (n.*)" there is actually a nuanced dissociation between the true "rhetorical art" and a mere "rhetorical practice." According to the standard reading, from 462b to 466a, the character Socrates calls "rhetoric (n.*)" a knack-based species of flattery, refusing to grant it the status of "art." Even if the *Gorgias* does acknowledge the existence of a *true* rhetoric (517a), and even if the *Phaedrus* calls rhetoric an art in the face of all critics (260e), modern readers have been led to believe that 462b-466a is a puzzling passage with which all Plato's readers must reckon. This chapter will argue that we have missed a crucial piece of the puzzle. It is not that Plato changed his mind between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, but rather that the mistranslation of *rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* has obscured the consistent position maintained between these dialogues. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that *hē rhētorikē* has been mistranslated from 462b to 466a in all English renditions of the text.⁴¹ I will suggest that such mistranslations have

⁴⁰ See, for example, Brian Vickers (1988).

⁴¹ I do not mean to suggest that all translations of the *Gorgias* are flawed from cover to cover. Attentive translators have sought to creatively render this text into English for just over two

overlooked a subtle but deliberate instance of Plato's wordplay. The *Gorgias* sets up a clear dissociation between a true "rhetorical art" (*hē rhētorikē technē*) and a mere "rhetorical practice" (*hē rhētorikē empeiria*) which is undeniably present within the text, and which completely changes the terms of the argument as they now stand in our extant translations.

I begin this chapter by considering the line of reasoning translators use to place the noun use of "rhetoric" within their translations of the *Gorgias*. I then offer textual evidence which demonstrates that, on their own axioms of translation, it is impossible to imagine that from 462b to 466a, Socrates is discussing "rhetoric (n.)." From here I consider textual support which suggests that translators have been overlooking a crucial instance of Platonic word play. Chapter 3 will then present evidence suggesting that recognition of this wordplay was the dominant reading of the text up to the modern world. I then consider the importance of this dissociation between "art" (*technē*) and "practice" (*empeiria*) as imagined by both Plato and Aristotle alike. I claim that observing the presence of this dissociation as it exists within the *Gorgias* can help readers better grapple with the argument forwarded from 462b to 466a. What is more, it allows us to see that the argument developed within the *Gorgias* is actually *extended*, not overturned, from the *Gorgias* to the *Phaedrus*.

Not Rhetoric (n.): Overturning the Translation of 462b

In this section I suggest that the noun-paradigm of translation, by its own axioms, demonstrates that translators ought not place the noun "rhetoric (n.)" following a key transition

centuries. And there are certainly interpretive virtues to be found in all of them. I am suggesting, however, that regarding the use of one signifier in particular—*rhētorikē*—all extant English translations have rendered the text in a manner which I attempt to show is untenable.

at 462b. I thus here briefly attend to the syntactic rule of thumb translators use when deciding how to translate the feminine, singular form of *rhētorikos* (i.e., *rhētorikē*). I conclude this section by considering in what ways this crucially changes the architecture of the argument.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the general rule which most translators follow rests on the following line of reasoning. When we see *rhētorikos* used as a feminine, singular substantive adjective (i.e., *hē rhētorikē*), we can assume the noun “art” (*technē*) is implied. Thus, *hē rhētorikē* would be generally understood to denote the phrase *hē rhētorikē technē* (For a general discussion of substantive adjectives and Greek usage, see p. 52-55 above). We can justifiably do so for two reasons:

1. This construction (*rhētorikē*) and the noun for “art” (*technē*) share the same number and gender. Both are singular and feminine.
2. This substantive construction was *very common* in ancient usage to denote an “art” or “science.” One could use any number of “-ic” adjectives in a substantive way to denote some art or science: the grammatic (art), the physic (science), the music (arts), etc.

This rationale is frequently stated directly by scholars translating the dialogue. James H. Nichols, Jr. (1998), notes, for instance: “the adjective *rhētorikos* means skilled in speaking, rhetorical, or (designating a person) rhetorician; with the feminine singular *rhētorikē* one supplies *technē* (or perhaps in certain contexts *empistēmē*) to understand the rhetorical art (or science), rhetoric” (p. 28 n. 11). Irwin similarly observes this point, noting that, when Gorgias gives Socrates the name of his art, “Gorgias’ reply is literally ‘The rhetorical’ (*hē rhētorikē*), with ‘craft’ understood. Throughout rhetoric is referred to in this way [...]” (Plato, 1979, p. 113). Yunis (1996) similarly unpacks the loose logic translators use when transforming the adjectival *rhētorikē* into the

modern noun “rhetoric (n.):” “Since the word for rhetoric—*rhētorikē*—is originally an adjective implying *technē* as its noun, *rhētorikē* virtually means the ‘rhetorical *technē*’ or the ‘*rhetōr*’s *technē*’” (p. 124). As Chapter 1 argued, *rhētorikos* had an adjectival usage far beyond this substantive association. Thus, *rhētorikē* could easily be used in a manner which it would be unwarranted to read as “rhetoric (n.).”

How might a translator know *not* to translate *rhētorikē* as “rhetoric (n.)?” Consideration of an example may help unpack the axiom translators generally use here. At 502d, for instance, Socrates uses *rhētorikē* in a manner which several translators know should not be translated as “rhetoric (n.).” Why? In the phrase “*rhētorikē demegoria*,” *rhētorikē* is in the same feminine singular form whereby we can often assume that the noun *technē* (art) is implied. Here, however, it accompanies the feminine singular noun *dēmēgoria* (public speech) as an attributive adjective. Lamb thus recognizes this point by rendering the phrase: “rhetorical public speaking.” Nichols, Jr. (1988), for his part, follows Lamb in observing this adjectival usage, similarly rendering the phrase “rhetorical popular speaking” (p. 99). And yet a translator too eager to toss the anachronistic noun “rhetoric (n.)” wherever they see *rhētorikē* is likely to mangle their translation by replacing this adjective with an unwarranted noun. Translators like Terence Irwin, Donald Zeyl, and Hamilton and Emlyn-Jones all do so in their noun-happy translations. Irwin poses this phrase, in a puzzling split from the text, “public oratory is rhetoric” (Plato, 1979, p. 79). Zeyl describes it as “popular harangue would be oratory” (Plato, 1987, p. 81). And Hamilton and Emlyn-Jones similarly take Socrates to say that “public speaking” is “oratory” (Plato, 2004, p. 97-98). But these latter translations unnecessarily bend the text to imagine a noun which simply doesn’t exist in the phrase *rhētorikē demegoria*.

Importantly, then, we can observe here the following rule in action: when *rhētorikē* is used as an adjective to modify any noun other than *technē*, translators *generally* know it is unwarranted to read any reference to “rhetoric (n.)” in the modern sense. Or, at least, they would on careful consideration of *rhētorikē*’s syntactic function.⁴² Instead, we would render *rhētorikē* as an adjective. Thus, *rhētorikē* would be translated as “rhetorical.” This anachronistic noun is only placed in a translation when readers of a Greek manuscript see or can reasonably supply the phrase *hē rhētorikē technē* within the text. How, then, does the observation of this rule factor into the *Gorgias*?

It is perhaps first worth recapping the relevant drama which precedes 462b before breaking down the argument therein. From the very beginning, both Socrates and Gorgias colloquially use the substantive phrase “the rhetorical” (*hē rhētorikē*) to denote the generally understood phrase “the rhetorical art” (*hē rhētorikē technē*).⁴³ From 449a to 461b, we can reasonably assume that

⁴² In other words, I imagine that Irwin, Zeyl, and Hamilton and Emlyn-Jones would all acknowledge that their rendering of *rhētorikē demagoria* was not a translation technically grounded in the text itself.

⁴³ After much deliberation, I’ve decided in this Chapter to render *hē rhētorikē* as “the rhetorical” rather than “the rhetoric (adj.).” Though I see a theoretical value in re-normalizing the adjectival use of the signifier “rhetoric,” I also know that I am dealing with a complicated entanglement of Greek words, discussions of syntax, and discussions of interpretation. I imagine that reading “rhetoric” as an adjective in a phrase like “the rhetoric art” risks being a stumbling block for any reader unfamiliar with the adjectival usage of this signifier. As an attempted kindness to the reader, then, I have opted to soften this by replacing such adjectival usage of “rhetoric” with the

when we see the substantive phrase, “*hē rhētorikē*,” the noun *technē* is implied. For many years, commentators have observed this point. As Lodge (1890) puts it, in the first English commentary on the dialogue: “Socrates accepts tentatively the statement which has been so continually advanced, that ῥητορικὴ [*rhētorikē*] is a species of art, in order to proceed with the discussion. The correctness of this statement is brought under question later” (p. 39). Commenting on 462b, Dodds (1959) notes, “Polus has already declared that rhetoric is a τέχνη [*technē*] (448c 9), and the discussion with Gorgias was conducted on that assumption” (p. 223).⁴⁴

If a translator is insistent upon using “rhetoric” as a noun, then it is true that throughout this section (449a-461b) there is a warrant for placing the word “rhetoric (n.)” This is because, as Lodge and Dodds state outright, all instances of *hē rhētorikē* from 448e to 462b are used to denote the phrase *hē rhētorikē technē*. At 462b, however, a key transition occurs which constitutes a considerable *break* from the preceding usage. From this point forward, in fact, there is *no longer* a reasonable warrant for placing the noun “rhetoric (n.)” into any given translation. At 462b Polus bursts onto the scene to defend Gorgias’s honor. Just before, Socrates has justifiably observed that Gorgias has made contradictory statements. Gorgias has suggested both that one can misuse the rhetorical art *and* that the rhetorical art “could never be an unjust thing”

word “rhetorical.” I simply ask the reader to note that wherever they see the word “rhetorical,” they observe that I truly have in mind “rhetoric (adj.).”

⁴⁴ Harvey Yunis (1996), in his *Taming Democracy*, similarly suggests that in these early portions of the dialogue Socrates “is speaking on the assumption that, as Gorgias holds, rhetoric is, in some unspecified, conventional sense, a *technē*” (p. 124). Irwin also observes this point (Plato, 1979, p. 113).

(460d-e). These statements clearly do not align, and so Socrates attempts to dialectically demonstrate that “the rhetorical [thing]” which Gorgias proclaims to teach does in fact seem capable of injustice.⁴⁵

When Polus brusquely presses Socrates for *his* account of “*the rhetorical*,” he presumes, as they had at the outset, that they are still discussing “*the rhetorical art*.” Socrates thus teases out the implied use of language here. Polus asks for his definition of “the rhetorical,” and Socrates clarifies, “Are you asking *which art* I take it to be?” The premise of the initial discussion was that Gorgias define the nature of “the rhetorical art” (447c; 449a). And the feminine singular construction of *hē rhētorikē* was such that it could assume the *prestigious echo* of that which could rightly call itself *art*. But we here find Socrates stating, outright, that they never seemed to have truly gotten at “the rhetorical art.” Socrates thus playfully turns the tables of the discussion by flipping their use of “*hē rhētorikē*” on its head. Socrates says, in effect, “the rhetorical,” as they had thus far been using it, did not appear to denote “the rhetorical art” but rather some “rhetorical practice” appropriating the prestigious name of an “art” that it was not. In this turning of the tables, there is also an underlying grammatical play with words which helps better account for why this point is so easily lost in translation.

Socrates here suggests that “*hē rhētorikē*,” as Gorgias had outlined it thus far, appears to him *not* to justifiably denote a *technē* but rather a certain *empeiria* (practice) or *tribe* (knack).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The fact that Gorgias’ rhetorical practice is capable of injustice is the very reason he gives the infamous comparison between a rhetor and a boxer unjustly using their respective powers.

⁴⁶ Note also that Socrates does not *necessarily* charge Gorgias with touting the *rhētorikē empeiria* which he will proceed to challenge. Socrates says outright: “Yet indeed I do not know

Conveniently, the Greek words for both (*empeiria* and *tribē*) are in a feminine singular form. Thus, Socrates can continue using the feminine singular substantive “*hē rhētorikē*” while, from this point forward, intending the implied noun to no longer be art (*technē*) but rather practice (*empeiria*) or knack (*tribē*). 462b to 466a is thus not a criticism of either “rhetoric (n.)” or “the rhetorical art.” It is a challenge to those “rhetorical practices” and “rhetorical knacks” which try to *pass themselves off* as the “rhetorical art.” In seeming anticipation of any confusion here Socrates reiterates, explicitly and on several occasions, how exactly he intended his hearers to implicitly hear his playful use of the substantive phrase *hē rhētorikē* as he uses it after 462b (see 463a, 465a, and 500b). Again, the implicit conclusion is that Socrates was therein discussing *not hē rhētorikē technē* but rather some *hē rhētorikē empeiria*, some “rhetorical practice,” wrongly passing itself off as a “rhetorical art.” As I will reiterate later, this is *not* to deny the possible existence of a “rhetorical art,” and neither is it the same as suggesting that “rhetoric (n.)” is not an art but rather some knack-based species of flattery. The subject to which Socrates refers definitively shifts here, and any translation which overlooks this change in subject misses key beams in the architecture of the dialogue’s argument. This has serious implications for how any translator can reasonably render the argument within this passage (462b-466a). Whether

whether this [*touto*] is [‘the rhetorical’] which Gorgias practices, for from our [reasoning] just now we got no very clear view as to how he conceives it” (462e, p. 313). Dodds observes the deliberate use of the demonstrative determiner “this” (*touto*) here: “Plato [thus] leaves open the possibility (later developed in the *Phaedrus*) that there might be a kind of rhetoric to which his strictures do not apply” (p. 224).

classicist, philosopher, or rhetorician, we can no longer rely upon the authority of the old paradigm of translation for rendering the precise syntax of this passage.

Socrates is not saying “rhetoric (n.) is not an art,” nor is he saying “rhetoric (n.) is merely a practice or knack.” Both readings inject the word “rhetoric (n.)” into the argument without warrant. If Socrates demonstrably says at 462b that “*hē rhētorikē*,” as they had thus far considered it, seemed to him *not* to justifiably denote “*technē*” but rather a practice (*empeiria*) or knack (*tribē*), then this means that Socrates is demonstrably not speaking about either the rhetorical art (*hē rhētorikē technē*) or “rhetoric (n.)” He has playfully shifted the target of the discussion so as to humble Gorgias in a manner similar to his discussion with *Ion*. He has, secondly, tried to clear the way for an idealistic conception of “the rhetorical art,” as later lauded by rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian. Socrates’ challenge is thus directed to those who would appropriate the name “rhetorical art.” From this point forward, as the text later reiterates, Socrates uses this substantive form (*hē rhētorikē*) to playfully reference some “rhetorical practice” where before there was presumed reference to the one true “rhetorical art,” the existence of which Socrates explicitly acknowledges (517a).⁴⁷ This is no small point. For, within such a revised reading, it would seem that the critical target of the perplexing “flattery” section is not “rhetoric (n.)” but rather this “rhetorical practice” which Gorgias has described but which he may not himself have practiced. As I will suggest shortly, this helps resolve the apparent “puzzle” which has long appeared at the core of Plato’s *Gorgias*. But if, from 462b onward, Socrates is merely criticizing some “rhetorical practice,” then why was this nuanced point so

⁴⁷ Socrates notes explicitly at 517a the dissociation between the true *rhētorikē* (*tē alēthinē rhētorikē*) and its false form (*tē kolakikē*).

easily lost in translation? I will suggest that it was because from 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* lies a subtle but significant instance of Platonic wordplay.

The Wordplay of 462 to 466a: *Hē Rhētorikē (Empeiria) ≠ Hē Rhētorikē (Technē)*

The previous section endeavored to refute the basis upon which translators imagine that, from 462b to 466a, *hē rhētorikē* is used to imply *hē rhētorikē technē*. I therein demonstrated that this passage is actually a criticism of some *rhētorikē empeiria* (some “rhetorical practice”) which does not deserve to appropriate the name “rhetorical art.” In this section, I suggest that this core dissociation was easily lost in translation because the ambiguous use of *rhētorikē* here stands as a deliberate and emphasized instance of Platonic word play. I begin this section by considering the role of wordplay within the Platonic corpus more generally. I then consider textual evidence within the *Gorgias* which demonstrates that from 462b to 466a, Plato was having a bit of grammatical fun through his ambiguous play with substantive adjectives. I close the section by proposing alternative paths available to translators seeking to render this wordplay while avoiding the now dominant mistranslation of *rhētorikē* herein.

Dorothy Tarrant (1946) has convincingly argued that wordplay has a serious role within Plato’s work. As she puts it:

Plato’s instinct for word-play—or, more generally stated, for the precise application of language—is a strongly marked influence on his style. Its effect ranges from the merely obvious and intended pun (e.g. on a proper name) to assonance of various types, playful essays in etymology (cf. *Cratylus* passim), and a variety of suggestions of analogy, emphasis, contrast, and so forth, designed to bring out some special or some double equivalence of words to ideas. His word-play (like his use of figurative language in

general) is more often explicit, and in some way pointed and underlined, than merely passing and unemphatic. (p. 116)⁴⁸

Tarrant observes several patterns Plato used to emphatically mark out his word play. For our purposes, one pattern is of particular significance. In order to indicate a point of contrast in usage or implication, Tarrant notes Plato's tendency to clarify his intended meaning with the construction "*ouk...alla*" ("not...but"). As she puts it, Plato forwards "the use of οὐκ...ἀλλὰ [*ouk...alla*]] to mark a contrast between the more usual and the here applicable word or sense" (p. 116). The "*ouk...alla*" construction thus frequently appears in Plato's work to show a playful dissociation between how colloquial usage may take a word and how Plato is playfully twisting it (not X₁...but X₂). In Tarrant's preliminary article, she provides five such "*ouk...alla*" examples, and in a later work revisiting the theme, she provides one more (1946, p. 117; 1958, p. 160).⁴⁹ Tarrant also observes several instances of wordplay within the *Gorgias*, identifying five

⁴⁸ Jay Farness (1991) gives a more prolonged consideration of Platonic wordplay in his book, *Missing Socrates* (p. 21-23; 56-60; 70-72; 83-84; and 182-183). See Edmonds III (2020) for a more recent consideration of Platonic wordplay.

⁴⁹ The passages she considers are *Rep.* 487c, 521c, and 614b; *Tim.* 54a and 90a; and *Euthyd.* 285c-d. Perhaps the easiest example to give parenthetically here is *Rep.* 614b, where Socrates says to Plato's older brother Glaucon: "[...] I'm not going to give you an Alcinous' tale [...] but the story of a brave man" (**All ou mentoi soi, ēn d egō, Alkinou ge apologon erō, all alkimou men andros** p. 463). As Emlyn-Jones and Preddy (2013) observe, there is here "a pun on *Alkinou/alkimou*, the latter word [meaning] 'brave'" (p. 464 n.42). The former, *Alkinou*, is an allusion to "Alcinous' tale (*apologos Alkinou*)," which "was a traditional name for [9-12 of

“the gastronomic” (practice)	“the medical” (art)
<i>hē opsopoiikē</i> (<i>empeiria</i>)	<i>hē iatrikē</i> (<i>technē</i>)

Figure 1a: Socrates’ core example of his dissociated use of substantive adjectives

“the rhetorical” (practice)	“the rhetorical” (art)
<i>hē rhētorikē</i> (<i>empeiria</i>)	<i>hē rhētorikē</i> (<i>technē</i>)

Figure 1b: The ambiguity as it pertains to the substantive use of *rhētorikē*

examples across her two studies (see 1946, p. 116-117 and 1958, p. 160).⁵⁰ Tarrant has thus provided a useful account of the consistent presence of wordplay in Plato’s writing, the

Homer’s *Odyssey*], Odysseus’ tales to King Alcinous at the Phaeacian court, [and] also proverbial for a lengthy story.”

⁵⁰ Dodds (1959) similarly observes possible puns at three points in the dialogue (p. 226, p. 301, and p. 335). Translators unilaterally suggest that Polus’ name is a pun on the word for “colt,” in allusion to his young and hot-headed temperament (see e.g., Lamb in Plato, 1925a, p. 315 n. 2; Jowett in Plato, 1871a, p. 49 n. 1; and Hamilton and Emlyn-Jones in Plato, 2004, p. 141 n. 34). Yet if—as Plato’s *Phaedrus* and Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* seems to suggest—Polus was a real person, then Plato can only be said to have played a pun using the name, but not to have chosen the name for its linguistic affordances. There is also a commonly recognized use of parodically stylized language seen within the initial speech of Polus (Lamb in Plato, 1925a, p. 327 n. 1). As Dodds puts it, “The style [here] is in any case Gorgian to the point of grotesqueness” (p. 192).

consistent presence of such wordplay within the *Gorgias*, and seven instances of Plato marking out his wordplay using an “*ouk...alla*” sentence construction. As I suggest shortly, 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* appears to stand as a fascinating eighth example of this pattern.

Just as we might expect in an instance of wordplay, at three distinct points, Plato makes clear that he is using substantive adjectives in a unique way which calls for account, and he does so using the “*ouk...alla*” construction. When first pointing this out, Socrates observes that *hē opsopoiikē* (the gastronomic) is a phrase which may certainly *seem* to be constructed in a manner implying the noun for “art.” Yet by his account, in some instances a substantive adjective is warranted in implying this noun, while in others it is not. He thus suggests that *hē opsopoiikē* (the gastronomic) is a substantive construction which can only justifiably imply the noun “practice” (*empeiria*). The fact that both *technē* and *empeiria* are feminine means that one could

Hamilton and Emlyn-Jones similarly observe an additional pun at both 481d-e and 513b surrounding Callicles’ affection for one “Demos” (p. 64 and p. 144 n. 61). The pun lies in the two words *demos/Demus*. The former denoting the Athenian people and the latter denoting Plato’s half-brother Demus. It was apparently quite fashionable to publicly proclaim a “crush” on Demus, as we find that “Demus is cute” was a popular graffiti inscription (see 97 of the *Wasps*; Aristophanes, 1998b). The joke, then, would be that Callicles would say anything to stay in the good favor of his beloved Demus. At the same time, in insinuating that Callicles has a crush on “the people,” he would thus be taken to speak similarly in the assembly, only willing to say that which would keep him in the people’s favor. Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, when mentioning the popular Athenian crush on Demus, similarly represents a character who has a “crush” on the flatterers of the ballot box (see Aristophanes, 1998b, line 97).

ambiguously use the same substantive usage (*hē opsopoiikē*) to denote two entirely different phrases, both *hē opsopoiikē technē* and *hē opsopoiikē empeiria*. And Socrates proceeds to have a bit of grammatical fun teasing this point out. He thus playfully uses some substantives (*hē opsopoiikē*) to denote the noun *empeiria* and others (*hē iatrikē*) to denote the noun *technē*. And he points out this subtle but deliberate wordplay using the same “*ouk...alla*” construction identified by Tarrant. Socrates dissociates explicitly, then, between those substantives for which he intended to denote “*not art but practice or habit*” (***ouk esti technē, all empeiria kai tirbē***; 463a; my translation and emphasis).⁵¹ Thus, using the “*ouk...alla*” construction, Plato attempts to make clear that he is playing with certain ambiguities of language. To repeat the words of Tarrant, “His word-play (like his use of figurative language in general) is more often explicit, and in some way pointed and underlined, than merely passing and unemphatic” (p. 116). It should thus be little surprise that Socrates all but beats a dead horse using this construction to ensure the reader of the Greek has seen this subtle dissociation.

At 465a, when concluding the section which plays on this dissociation, he repeats the “*ouk...alla*” construction to explicitly draw attention to his ambiguously contrasted use of language (*technēn de autēn ou phēmi einai all empeirian*; Plato, 1925a, p. 319). And, again, when recapping this section of the dialogue, Socrates makes this dissociation explicit, observing

⁵¹ When presenting the Greek, I have **bolded** the relevant terms. It is common for either the final “*k*” in “*ouk*” or the final “*a*” in “*alla*” to be elided. Thus, a bolded “***ou***” can be taken as “***ouk***” and a bolded “***all***” can be taken as “***alla***.” A change in their order (e.g., “*alla...ouk*” versus “*ouk...alla*”) does not detract from their deliberate use to mark out a point of grammatical contrast.

that he was therein using these substantive adjectives in a cheeky way. While such substantives may well *appear* (grammatically) to denote arts, they really remain at the level of practice. He thus notes that he there said that “‘the gastronomic’ is a practice, but not an art” (*tēn megeirikēn empeirian alla ou technēn*; my translation; 500b). Again, we here find the “*ouk...alla*” construction used to demarcate this playful dissociation in usage. Thus, while he was using substantive phrases like “the gastronomic” alongside other substantive phrases like “the medical,” Socrates makes clear that in *some* instances he intended this substantive use to imply the noun “art,” while in *others* it would be unwarranted to imply anything beyond “practice” or “knack.” He thus intended to be heard as denoting, in a cheekily implicit manner, “the gastronomic (practice)” and “the medical (art).” A paragraph later the dissociation is made once more, and once more we see the “*ouk...alla*” construction used to mark out this word play. Socrates thus repeats “that [the gastronomic] seems to me not an art but a [practice]” (*hoti hē men opopoiikē ou moi dokei technē einai all empeiria*; 501a). This wordplay hinges upon the fact that conventional usage would take all feminine, singular “-ikos” substantives to denote either *technē* or *epistemē*. And Socrates does not deny that this convention is warranted in other instances.

He importantly distinguishes his casual use of substantives like “*hē iatrikē*” (i.e., “the medical”), for which he finds the noun art is justifiably implied.⁵² Contextually, when Plato uses the “*ouk...alla*” construction to mark out his wordplay with substantive adjectives like *opopoiikē* and *rhētorikē*, he uses the adjective *iatrikē* as his go-to point of contrast. Thus, he suggests that while his substantive use of *hē rhētorikē* was playfully intended to imply the phrase

⁵² For exemplary consideration of these constructions, see 464b and 501a but *especially* 500b.

of *hē rhētorikē empeiria* (turning the assumption of *hē rhētorikē technē* on its head), his use of substantives like *hē iatrikē* was, in contrast, meant to imply the commonly associated phrase *hē iatrikē technē* (see Figures 1a and 1b). Socrates thus uses *hē iatrikē* as a point of negative contrast to suggest that some substantives are not always warranted in denoting the nouns that convention takes them to imply.

Significantly, Socrates does not deny the possible existence of a “rhetorical art” in the *Gorgias*. And at both 503a and 517b, he cedes to Callicles the existence of such a *true* sense of *hē rhētorikē*. He merely suggests that, if there is a true “rhetorical art,” what Gorgias seems to teach ain’t it. As I will discuss shortly, even Aristotle said as much, in apparent agreement with this subtle dissociation in Plato’s *Gorgias*. Gorgias is thus here shown to be unwarranted in claiming to either possess or teach an art which he has neither understood nor mastered. As in the *Ion*, Socrates gives Gorgias a positive (albeit more humble) identity to adopt, but he no longer has a public basis upon which to call himself an artisan of an art he has ill conceived. Again, the “so what?” here lies in the nuance of the argument. In making this critical challenge to Gorgias, Socrates is not denying the existence of a true rhetorical art. In so far as the text of the *Gorgias* itself speaks counter to this (503a and 517a), scholars have always been in a somewhat awkward position in suggesting that the *Gorgias* is wholly and completely against all that is or could be called “rhetoric (n.)” And yet, if this rendering of *hē rhētorikē* is not, and never has been, warranted from 462b to 466a, then how might a translator attempt to capture the linguistic nuance of the wordplay at issue?

I will conclude this section by considering three interpretive possibilities. We might: 1.) continue using the noun “rhetoric (n.)” but render Socrates as *explicitly stating* a transition in meaning at 462b; 2.) create a dissociation between two senses of the word “rhetoric (n.);” or 3.)

consistently use substantive adjectives throughout the dialogue while footnoting this playful dissociation.

Option #1: Keeping “Rhetoric (n.)” but Changing Usage at 462b

If we are determined, for tradition’s sake, to keep the noun “rhetoric (n.)” in our interpretations of the *Gorgias*, we would need to inject a direct explanation into the text to account for the shift in meaning at 462b. When Polus asks for Socrates’ account of “rhetoric,” Socrates would have to effectively deny that they had ever been discussing “rhetoric”—if by “rhetoric” we mean *hē rhētorikē technē*. The suggestions below are a revision of Lamb’s rendering. Suggested emendations are italicized. All else is Lamb’s:

POL. Since you think Gorgias is at a loss about rhetoric, what is your own account of it?

SOC. *Are you asking whether I think we’ve been discussing “rhetoric” at all?*

POL. Yes.

SOC. *No*, I consider, Polus, if you would have the honest truth.

POL. *Then what do you think we’ve been discussing, if not “rhetoric?”*

SOC. *Something which was given the appearance of art—as I recently read in a treatise of yours.*⁵³

POL. What thing do you mean?

SOC. I mean a certain *rhetorical practice*.

⁵³ Dodds takes Socrates to here say: “Something of which you claim to have made an art in your treatise” (p. 223). Dodds further observes, “If, as is likely, the treatise was entitled Τέχνη ῥητορική [*Technē rhētorikē*] or Τέχνη τῶν λόγων [*Technē tōn logōn*], the claim would be implicit to the title.”,

POL. *Then you think we've been discussing a "rhetorical practice?"*

The above revision lacks the virtue of strict fidelity to the text, as Socrates does not technically state this dissociation either outright or in these exact terms. Yet, if we are to retain the noun form of "rhetoric," a deliberate stretching of the text would be necessary in this passage to explicitly account for the shift in meaning here. To avoid stretching the text in this way, I think it best to avoid the noun construction entirely. Yet, regardless of what approach we choose, it is unwarranted not to emphasize the key change in the usage of *hē rhētorikē* which occurs at 462b. Even if a translator prefers an option not listed here, we can no longer imagine that the current rendering of 462b can remain as is.

Option #2: Dissociating Between Rhetoric¹ and Rhetoric²

We might also consider distinguishing between the rhetoric¹ discussed by rhetoricians and the rhetoric² spoken of in the popular pejorative sense.⁵⁴ This again would require loose translation. In taking this approach, Socrates could be made to ambiguously pun on the two dominant meanings of "rhetoric (n.)" in the modern world. Thus, one rhetoric¹ would be that idealized art taught by speech teachers, philosophers, and ethically oriented persuaders for over two millennia of Western history. Another rhetoric², however, would be that slanderous and insincere artificer of persuasion held in ire by popular usage of the word. When people speak of "rhetoric" as empty and insincere speech, it would be this rhetoric², not the rhetorical art of rhetoricians, which would thus be decried. Such a revision might occur on the following lines:

POL. *Since you think Gorgias is at a loss about rhetoric, what is your own account of it?*

⁵⁴ I would like to thank Dylan Craig for drawing this possibility to my attention.

SOC. *Are you asking whether I think we've been discussing "rhetoric¹," as in "the rhetorical art?"*

POL. Yes.

SOC. *No, I consider, Polus, if you would have the honest truth.*

POL. *Then what do you think we've been discussing, if not "rhetoric¹?"*

SOC. *Something which was given the appearance of art—as I recently read in a treatise of yours.*

POL. What thing do you mean?

SOC. *That "rhetoric²" which is mere the practice of empty eloquence.*

POL. *Then you take this rhetoric² to be a practice?*

Such a translation should additionally emphasize, perhaps via emphasis or footnote, the importance of Socrates' explicit discussion of this dissociation at 463a, which is already present within Lamb's translation: "Yet I do not know whether *this* is the rhetoric which Gorgias practices" (emphasis added; p. 313). Such a dissociation is in my view too messy and takes too many liberties with the text. It does seem at least worth considering, though, that a dissociated use of "rhetoric (n.)" already exists within modern usage. Some utility might be found, then, in considering creative ways to coopt this dissociation into a revision of the text.

Option #3: The Consistent Use of Substantive Adjectives

I prefer this final option, which calls for consistent attention to the substantive adjectives deliberately used throughout the dialogue. Among other things, this option would allow the adjectival use of *rhētorikos* to stand more evidently within the text of the *Gorgias*. At the same time, this approach would make it easier to emphasize the deliberate and playful use of "-ic" suffixed adjectives as they appear across the dialogue (see Chapter 1). As I will consider briefly

in Chapter 3, the first English translation of the *Gorgias*—Thomas Taylor’s 1804 rendering—was rather deliberate in emphasizing this adjectival usage. Taylor thus uses “rhetoric” as an adjective, as in the phrase “the rhetoric art” (p. 353). And while occasionally lapsing into the noun “rhetoric (n.),” Taylor’s translation more commonly renders the phrase “the rhetorical art,” emphasizing too the other use of “-ic” adjectives commonly steamrolled by later translators, such as “the arithmetic, logistic, [and] pettutic” (p. 356). Taylor’s translation similarly seems aware that these early portions of the dialogue are not about defining “rhetoric (n.)” but, rather, in pinning down how and why Gorgias applies the adjective “rhetorical” to name and identify his art. Taylor thus renders Socrates as asking: “Do you therefore, Gorgias, say that the arithmetical is the rhetorical art? But I do not think that you call either the arithmetical, or the geometrical, the rhetorical art” (p. 356). I believe that, in many ways, Taylor’s translation stands as a proof of concept that this third and final option is a viable means of getting at the nuances in question.

On the authority of Olympiodorus’ commentary on the *Gorgias* (considered in Chapter 3), Taylor himself was aware of the dissociation made at 462b. Yet, while Taylor’s translation rather beautifully captures the nuance of these early passages, his translation of 462b’s transition strikes me as needlessly confusing the issue. Taylor puts the exchange thus:

POL. Since Gorgias appears to you to doubt respecting the rhetorical art, what do you say he is?

SOC. Do you ask me what his art is?

POL. I do.

SOC. It does not appear to me to be any art, that I may speak the truth to you.

POL. But what does the rhetorical art appear to you to be?

SOC. A thing which you say produces art, in the book which I just now read.⁵⁵

POL. What do you call this thing?

SOC. A certain skill.

POL. Does the rhetorical art, therefore, appear to you to be skill? (p. 371)

Despite Taylor's strength in parsing the implied use of *hē rhētorikē* elsewhere, his translation here trips up by using the very implied language which Socrates is calling into question. Taylor thus poses Socrates as calling "the rhetorical art" something which is "not an art" but rather a "skill." Taylor was not alone in seeing this puzzle, even if later translators similarly failed to resolve it. Harvey Yunis (1996), for instance, suggests in his study of classical Greek rhetorical theory that "Plato denies rhetoric is a *technē* and thus generates a mild paradox. Since the word for rhetoric—*rhētorikē*—is originally an adjective implying *technē* as its noun, *rhētorikē* virtually means the 'rhetorical *technē*' or the '*rhetor's technē*'" (p. 124).

Yet Yunis cries "paradox!" too swiftly. A translation which attends to the subtle argument being made by implied usage might show this point to be far more reasonable than is commonly assumed. If, from the very outset (448e), *hē rhētorikē* is rendered "the rhetorical art," then the transition at 462b might be accounted for on the following lines:

POL. Since you think Gorgias is at a loss about "*the rhetorical*," what is your own account of it?

SOC. *Are you asking what art I take "the rhetorical" to denote?*

POL. Yes.

⁵⁵ See n. 46 above for Dodds' challenge to the reading of this line which translators from Taylor onward have occasionally forwarded.

SOC. None at all, I consider, Polus, if you would have the honest truth.

POL. *But what thing does [this] “the rhetorical” seem to you to be?*⁵⁶

SOC. *Something which was given the appearance of art—as I recently read in a treatise of yours.*

POL. What thing do you mean?

SOC. I mean a certain *rhetorical practice*.

POL. *Then you take “the rhetorical” to refer to a practice?*

This approach is what I would pose as the best of the above possible paths for translating the transition in question. This chapter has thus far attempted to explore evidence of the mistranslation of 462b to 466a within the text of the *Gorgias* itself. I have considered a core axiom surrounding the translation of *rhētorikē*, that *hē rhētorikē* can only loosely be translated as “rhetoric (n.)” when the phrase *hē rhētorikē technē* is implied. In so far as *rhētorikē* is used as an adjective to modify a noun other than *technē*, the translation “rhetoric (n.)” is thereby both *impossible* and *unwarranted*. This exact error was shown to have resulted in the paradigmatic mistranslation of *rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a. I suggested that what we find here is actually an instance of Platonic wordplay, punning on the ambiguous appearance of substantive adjectives.

⁵⁶ This is quite literally what Polus appears to ask here (*Alla ti soi dokei hē rhētorikē enai;*). The “*ti*” here suggests he is asking what “thing,” if not *technē*, Socrates is intending to denote through his use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē*. I would add a bracketed [this] to emphasize that this is not the only use of “the rhetorical” which Socrates forwards in the dialogue. The passage should not be read as a universal statement suggesting that “the rhetorical” can only denote “the rhetorical practice” which Socrates will proceed to criticize.

The signifier which may well look like it is the *rhētorikē* of “the rhetorical art” is really the *rhētorikē* of some base “rhetorical practice” putting on airs. The following section will give extended consideration of this point, particularly as it helps resolve the “seeming paradox” between Plato’s *Gorgias* and his *Phaedrus*.

***Empeiria* ≠ *Technē* / Practice ≠ Art: Plato and Aristotle on the Pre-Rhetorical**

This section will suggest that the revised reading of 462b to 466a presented in the chapter thus far can help resolve the seeming contradiction which has long been imagined between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. This section will suggest that there is a *consistent*, not contradictory, consideration of *hē rhētorikē* between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. The dissociation between “art” (*technē*) and “practice” (*empeiria*) central to Socrates’ playful use of *hē rhētorikē* in the *Gorgias* appears to have been extended, not overturned, within the pages of the *Phaedrus*. The charge developed in the *Gorgias* and extended in the *Phaedrus* is that the rhetorical theories which had thus far developed in 4th century Greece, from Protagoras to Polus, struck Plato’s Socrates as the *preliminaries* of the “rhetorical art,” but not the “rhetorical art” proper. These “rhetorical practices” were, as Plato and Aristotle saw it, unjustified in appropriating the title “art.”

I begin this section by observing the dissociation Aristotle made between “art” and “practice” in direct conversation with the *Gorgias*. I present relevant passages in the *Gorgias* to demonstrate the shared terminology between Aristotle and Plato’s consideration of this dissociation and show how Aristotle’s extant statements of the subject can help illuminate comments which are later made in the *Phaedrus* regarding this same dissociation (*technē/empeiria*; art/practice). I suggest that this allows us to see a far more nuanced target intended within the pages of Plato’s *Gorgias*. Plato’s intention seems not to have been to claim

that “rhetoric (n.)” is not an “art” but rather that, the practice which both Gorgias and Polus stand for seems not to be a systematically theorized and teachable “art,” but rather the preliminaries of this very “art” based on practical experience.

When discussing the dissociation between *technē* and *empeiria* in his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle borrows the terms of Plato’s Socrates, just as they appear in the *Gorgias*. This theme is a major consideration at the outset of the *Metaphysics* and its development occurs with an explicit reference to the aforementioned dialogue. Before presenting the quote, I would also like to note that the Greek word *empeiria*, which I have uniformly translated as “practice” can also translated as “experience,” but both denote the same kind of preliminary experience of an apprentice which can be sharpened into the expertise of an artisan. With that in mind, Aristotle observes in the *Metaphysics* that:

other animals live by impressions and memories and have but a small share of experience [*empeirias*]; but the human race lives also by art [*technēi*] and reasoning. It is from memory that men acquire experience [*empeiria*], because the numerous memories of the same thing eventually produce the effect of a single experience [*empeirias*]. Experience [*hē empeiria*] seems very similar to science and art [*technēi*], but actually it is through experience [*empeirias*] that men acquire science and art [*technē*]; for as Polus rightly says, ‘experience [*empeiria*] produces art [*technēn*], but inexperience chance.’ (1933, 980b-981a, p. 2-5)

Aristotle is either directly quoting from a work by Polus, or he is directly quoting from the *Gorgias*. If the former, this would mean that Plato’s representation of figures like Polus and Gorgias was done with a greater degree of historical grounding than is commonly assumed. If, on the other hand, Aristotle is quoting a creative re-imagining of Polus’s position from Plato’s

writings, then this passage would still affirm, through Aristotle's direct allusion to the *Gorgias*, that this dissociation between *technē* and *empeiria* was seen by ancient readers as a core theme of the dialogue. Either way, this passage is of some significance.⁵⁷

Aristotle additionally suggests that the dissociation between a "practice" and an "art" lies in the fact that an artisan can account for the theoretical cause (the *aitia*) of their actions, while one operating out of practice does so merely out of habit and routine. And not only is Aristotle in direct conversation with the *Gorgias* through his citation of Polus, but his dissociation between *technē* and *empeiria* also draws on the language used by Socrates therein (*technē*, *empeiria*, and *aitia*). As Aristotle puts the dissociation:

⁵⁷ Dodds errs towards a conservative skepticism here. As he puts it:

That Aristotle attributes the doctrine of our passage to Polus need not, of course, mean that he found it elsewhere than in the *Gorgias*. Certainty is impossible; but my own feeling is that parody is more likely in Plato than *verbatim* quotation (I doubt if Lysias' speech in the *Phaedrus* is a speech of Lysias, and I am pretty sure that the myth in the *Protagoras* is not an excerpt from a work by Protagoras). The style is in any case Gorgian to the point of grotesqueness. (p. 192)

Yet it's certainly *possible* that both Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Plato's *Gorgias* contain direct quotes from Polus's handbook on the rhetorical art. At any rate, unless Aristotle can be shown to have habitually quoted Plato's characters, it would seem far more likely that Aristotle is here quoting a real person in a real work which he intends as a serious part of his preliminary survey on previous statements on the subject of "art" versus "practice."

we consider that knowledge and proficiency belong to art rather than to experience, and we assume that artists [*technitas*] are wiser than men of mere experience [*empeirōn*] (which implies that in all cases wisdom depends rather upon knowledge); and this is because the former know the cause [*tēn aitian*], whereas the latter do not. For the experienced know the fact, but not the wherefore; but the artists know the wherefore and the cause [*tēn aitian*]. For the same reason we consider that the master craftsmen in every profession are more estimable and know more and are wiser than the [handicraftsmen], because they know the reason [*tas aitias*] of the things which are done; but we think that the [handicraftsmen], like certain inanimate objects, do things, but without knowing what they are doing (as, for instance, fire burns); only whereas inanimate objects perform all their actions in virtue of a certain natural quality, [handicraftsmen] perform theirs through habit. Thus, the master craftsmen are superior in wisdom, not because they can do things, but because they possess a theory and know the causes [*tas aitias*]. (981a)⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Aristotle maintains an important dissociation between an *architektōn* and a *cheirotechnēs* (981a31) which is also observed in Liddell & Scott's (1843/1996) lexical entry for *cheirotechnēs* (p. 1986). I part with Tredennick's rendering of *cheirotechnēs* as "artisan" as this term would seem to be synonymous with one who has mastered the theory and practice of their art (Aristotle, 1933, p. 7). I prefer the alternate translation of "handicraftsman" provided by Liddell & Scott which better emphasizes the extent to which a *cheirotechnēs* is a practitioner who relies upon the rote routine of their hands, lacking a true grasp of the cause (the *aitia*) behind their artistic actions.

He thus suggests that while a “mastercraftsmen” is both a theoretician and a practitioner, a “handicraftsman” knows only the practices relevant to their art but not the theoretical justification for their use. And this seems to be all but an extension of the theme as it appears in both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*.

In the core “flattery” section of the *Gorgias*, for instance, Socrates reiterates how he frames his dissociation between an “art” and a “practice.” Socrates here says that he calls certain things a practice but not art, “since [a practice] has no account to give of the real nature of the things it applies, and so cannot tell the cause [*tēn aitian*] of them. I refuse to give the name of art to anything that is [unreasoning]” (465a; p. 319). Again, when later recapping this earlier section of the dialogue, Socrates reiterates this position:

I was saying, I think, that [‘the gastronomic’ seems not to be an ‘art’ (*technē*) but rather a ‘practice’ (*empeiria*), unlike ‘the medical’], which, I argued, has investigated the nature of the person whom she treats and the cause [*tēn aitian*] of her proceedings, and has some account to give of each of these things; so much for medicine; whereas the other, in respect of the pleasure to which her whole ministration is given, without having investigated at all either the nature or the cause [*tēn aitian*] of pleasure, and altogether [unreasoningly]—with no thought, one may say, of differentiation, relying on routine [*tribē*] and [practice (*empeiria*)] for merely preserving a memory of what is wont to result: and that is how she is enabled to provide her pleasures. (500e-501a; p. 445-447)

In the very same language as Aristotle, we here find Socrates lays claim to the dissociation that which will later be unpacked in the *Metaphysics*. One who relies upon *empeiria* and *tribē* (practice and routine) does their work without any idea of the reason (*alogos*) to the cause (the *aitia*) behind their actions. And on this very basis, Socrates refuses to call certain things “art.”

Yet it is not only within the *Gorgias* that the language of this dissociation appears. We find this very same position extended in Socrates' meditation on the rhetorical art within the *Phaedrus*.

The Socrates of the *Phaedrus* directly harkens back to this language from the *Gorgias*—not in contradiction with it, as is commonly assumed, but rather in direct conversation with it. He thus distinguishes one with mere 'preliminary experience' from a true artisan. Socrates says to Phaedrus:

Tell me; if anyone should go to your friend Eryximachus or to his father Acumenus and should say “I know how to apply various drugs to people, so as to make them warm or, if you wish, cold, and I can make their bowels move, and all that sort of thing; and because of this knowledge I claim that I am a [medical man (*iatrikos*)] and can make any other man a physician, to whom I impart the knowledge of these things”; what do you think they would say? (Plato, 1914, 268a-b, p. 541)

Phaedrus proceeds to call this kind of thing laughable. The idea that continued practice can lead to the status of a “true artisan” thus appears to have been a consistent position within Plato's thought.⁵⁹ As Socrates states soon after: “The method of [the medical art] is much the same as

⁵⁹ The *Philebus*, for instance, marks a similar observation. Socrates here observes to Protrarchus, were all things mathematical and metrical “taken away from all arts, what was left of any of them would be, so to speak, pretty worthless. [...] All that would be left for us would be conjecture and to drill the perceptions by [practice (*empeiria*) and routine (*tribē*), using the powers of guesswork which the many call ‘arts’ (*technas*), having worked out] their efficacy by practice and toil” (Plato, 1925b, 55e; p. 359). In other words, were arts and sciences deprived of the tools of mathematics, measurement, and weight, all would have to begin again to develop

that of [the rhetorical ...]. In both cases you must analyze a nature, in one that of the body, and in the other that of the soul, if you are to proceed in a scientific manner, not merely by practice [*empeiria*] and routine [*tirbē*...]" (270b).

The Socrates of the *Gorgias* is not forwarding the generally assumed (and puzzling) claim that "rhetoric (n.)" is a mere knack. Far more reasonably, he is suggesting that the practice described by Gorgias and promoted by Polus is something that has been prematurely given the lofty appearance of art. It is a practice putting on airs, as though this practice was familiar with justice and a unified theory of the rhetorical art.⁶⁰ It is a use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē* which implicitly claims that it is *hē rhētorikē (technē)* when it can truly only claim to being some *hē rhētorikē empeiria*. Herein lies the theoretical significance of the wordplay-dissociation highlighted in the sections above.

Developing this point further, the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* makes a clear dissociation between a man who could generously be said to have "medical experience," who too hastily presumes himself to be a medical artisan in possession of "the medical art." Yet a man who can use the medicine cabinet to create whatever effects he wants is not thereby in possession of an

their art through practice and routine, renewing, from the ground up, the theoretical and formulaic basis of their "efficacy." Here again, then, it would seem that Plato and Aristotle would not deny Polus' suggestion that the accumulation of experiences are a precondition for the establishment of a bona fide art.

⁶⁰ By "unreasoning" he appears to mean something like, 'that which is unable to give reasoned justification of its actions.' This is clearer in the Greek, where the term *alogos* simply means without *logos*.

“art” of medicine. Even if he proclaims to know the “medical art.” He may profess to wield “the medical art” because he knows what pills make someone shit, vomit, or feel warm. And he may well have an abundance of “experience” or “practice” in producing these effects, such that we can say he has a real “knack” for it. But, properly speaking, his practice was only “medical” in so

“the pre-medical” ≠ “the medical”

ta pro iatrikēs ≠ ta iatrika

“the pre-rhetorical” ≠ “the rhetorical art”

ta pro rhētorikēs ≠ hē rhētorikē technē

Figure 4: The dissociation between the “preliminaries” of an art and the art itself

far as it came from the medicine cabinet. To have a true grasp of the art he would need a theory of how and when to give different medicines, and an idea of why and to what medicinal end he would be doing so.⁶¹ The same holds true for “the rhetorical.” One is not a “rhetorician” in possession of “the rhetorical art” just because one can get whatever reactions out of an audience that one desires. To do this, one merely needs to pander to the passions and prejudices of one’s audience, as Aristotle also observes in Chapter 1 of his *Rhetorical Art*. To be a true rhetorician, however, one would need some grasp of the why and the wherefore of such activity. As Socrates outlines in the *Phaedrus*, and which Aristotle’s rhetorical treatise mirrors, one would need some idea of psychology (both individual and crowd), a theory of how the psyche is to be directed for best health, and an understanding of what kinds of speech produce conviction in the various possible shapes of the psyche (Plato, 1914, 271a-c).

⁶¹ Phaedrus states this point outright, suggesting that he would need to know “also whom he ought to cause to do these things, and when, and how much” (Plato, 1914, 268b, p. 541).

Yet, Socrates also notes, the fact that one had yet to graduate from “practice” to “art” is not a shameful thing in itself.⁶² And one who hastily boasts of becoming an artisan need not be harshly chastised by true artisans. Socrates notes this point by suggesting that such true artisans:

would not, I suppose, rebuke him harshly, but they would behave as a musician would, if he met a man who thought that he understood [“the harmonic”] because he could strike

⁶² Aristotle similarly suggests that there’s nothing inherently shameful about a practitioner relying on experience rather than a theoretical idea of their practice: “It would seem that for practical purposes experience is in no way inferior to art; indeed we see men of experience succeeding more than those who have theory without experience” (Aristotle, 1933, 981a, p. 4-5). He notes similarly in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that one who relies upon routine and practice is not thus barred from practical success simply because they lack a theoretical knowledge of the art they attempt to wield:

it is possible no doubt for a particular individual to be successfully treated by someone who is not a scientific expert, but has [experience (*empeirian*)] based on careful observation of the effects of various forms of treatment upon the person in question; just as some people appear to be their own best doctors, though they could not do any good to someone else. But nevertheless it would doubtless be agreed that anyone who wishes to make himself a professional and a man of science, must advance to general principles, and acquaint himself with these by the proper method: for science, as we said, deals with the universal. (Aristotle, 1926, 10.9.16, p. 637)

See 10.9.18-21 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* for an extended consideration of this theme (p. 638-641).

the highest and lowest notes. He would not say roughly, “You wretch, you are mad,” but being a [musical man], he would say in gentler tones, “My friend, he who is to be a [harmonic man] must know these things you mention, but nothing prevents one who is at your stage of knowledge from being quite ignorant of harmony. You know the necessary preliminaries of harmony, but not harmony itself.” (268e)

This point is reiterated throughout this passage (268b-269c). The preliminaries of harmony are dissociated from “the harmonic” itself; likewise, with “the preliminaries of the tragic” from “the tragic” proper, and “the preliminaries of the medical” from the “medical” (see Figure 2). And again, we find Plato using the “*ouk...alla*” dissociation from above to elucidate this point (268e and 269a). All of this is said by Socrates in order to set up the point which follows from 269b-c.

From 266d to 267d, Phaedrus and Socrates survey the accomplishments forwarded thus far from the early pioneers of the rhetorical tradition, including Theodorus of Byzantium, Evenus of Paria, Gorgias of Leonti, Tisias, Hippias of Elis, Polus, Licymnius, and Protagoras. And yet, for all their efforts, it would appear that these figures had left the Greeks with only stylistic strategies for the embellishment of speeches rather than a unified theory of the rhetorical art—or so the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* seems to suggest:

Well then, if the mellifluous Adrastus or Pericles heard of the excellent accomplishments which we just enumerated, brachiologies and figurative speech and all the other things we said we must bring to the light and examine, do we suppose they would, like you and me, be so illbred as to speak discourteously of those who have written and taught these things as [“the rhetorical art”]? Would they not, since they are wiser than we, censure us also and say, “Phaedrus and Socrates, we ought not be angry, but lenient, if certain persons who are ignorant of [discussion] have been unable to define the nature of [the rhetorical

art] and on this account have thought, when they possessed the knowledge that is a necessary preliminary to [the art], that they had discovered [“the rhetorical art” itself], and believe that by teaching these preliminaries to others they have taught them [the rhetorical art] completely, and that the persuasive use of these details and the composition of the whole discourse is a small matter which their pupils must supply of themselves in their writings or speeches. (Plato, 1914, 269a-c, p. 545).

Thus Socrates states outright that all that had thus far passed, from Corax to Gorgias, and from Polus to Protagoras, appeared not to be “the rhetorical art” proper, but rather the preliminaries of the rhetorical—the pre-rhetorical.⁶³ This explains why Socrates dissociates the preliminaries of “the harmonic” from “the harmonic” art, the preliminaries of “the tragic” from “the tragic” art, and the preliminaries of “the medical” from “the medical” art. He seems to be riffing off of, and expanding upon, his dissociation between the “rhetorical practice” criticized in the *Gorgias* and the “rhetorical art” theorized in the *Phaedrus*. Just as with the above examples, this “rhetorical practice” is posed as making up the essential preliminaries of “the rhetorical art” itself, while nevertheless unwarranted in appropriating its name.

In sum, within these dialogues, the character Socrates suggests that figures like Gorgias and Polus, lacking a robust rhetorical theory, were unjustifiably proclaiming themselves artisans of “the rhetorical art.” And though their practice pioneered the necessary preliminaries of this art,

⁶³ The Neoplatonist Hermias (c. 410-450 CE), in his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, also seemed to emphasize this “preliminary” emphasis relative to *Gorgias*’ rhetorical terminology. He suggests that Plato emphasize these practices as *necessary* preliminaries, yet still *preliminaries* (see Hermias, 2018, p. 52).

it was not the art itself. In apparent agreement with Plato's *Gorgias*, Aristotle insinuates that this was, in fact, the reason Gorgias was challenged by Plato in the former's eponymous dialogue. Aristotle himself thus criticizes Gorgias's manner of "teaching" alongside others who failed to prepare their students for proficiency in the rhetorical art. In his *On Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle writes:

For the training given by the paid teachers of contentious argument resembled the system of Gorgias. For some of them gave their pupils to learn by heart speeches which were either rhetorical or consisted of questions and answers, in which both sides thought that the rival arguments were for the most part included. Hence the teaching which they gave to their pupils was rapid but unsystematic; for they conceived that they could train their pupils by imparting to them not an art but the results of an art, just as if one should claim to be about to communicate knowledge for the prevention of pain in the feet and then were not to teach the cobbler's art and the means of providing suitable foot-gear, but were to offer a selection of various kinds of shoes; for he has helped to supply his need but has not imparted an art to him. (Aristotle, 1955, 183b 35)⁶⁴

Gorgias, Aristotle says, was a lack luster teacher of "the rhetorical." He could, in other words, give no theoretical account of the why and wherefore of the rhetorical practice that garnered his

⁶⁴ Isocrates similarly mocks this cookie-cutter approach to rhetorical instruction (see *Against the Sophists* 12; Isocrates, 1929, p. 170-171). If Aristotle is correct in attributing this practice to some version of Gorgias's teaching, then Isocrates may have broken with the approach of his old teacher and with the sophistic habit of proclaiming to teach the rhetorical art.

fame. When carefully considered, the nuance of this criticism shows a consistency, rather than a contradiction, between Plato's *Gorgias* and his *Phaedrus*. And, I suggest, the reading forwarded here can help definitively resolve the "seeming paradox" which has long been imagined lying between these two works.

Imagine a dissociation between a true "cosmetic art" and a "cosmetic practice" appropriating its name.⁶⁵ The true "cosmetic art" would mean something like, "the art of producing a healthy and beautiful condition of the face (pores, oils, skin, wrinkles, etc.)." The art proper would have some systematic and theoretical understanding of how to produce the desired effects with longevity. It would, in other words, help produce true and longform health in the flesh of the face. Yet, at the same time, it is not hard to imagine a certain practice (with associated practitioners) seeking only to produce an outwardly pleasing *appearance* of facial health, with no regard to effects. Thus, for example, a "skincare" company could create a serum which makes the skin *look* plump and healthy, but which, long-term, hurts the face's flesh. Such a serum would give the *appearance* of health but would not foster true health. The serum makers behind this practice could only be said to use guesswork in their efforts. They would have no theory or system to explain and justify their actions; and thus, their practice could not, on the above definitions, call itself an "art." It is for this reason that Socrates says:

the [practice (*empeiria*)] concerned with pleasure, which all its care aims at, goes after this entirely without [an art (*atechnōs*)], not at all considering the [cause (*aitia*)] or the explanation of the pleasure, and altogether without reason [*alogōs*], making practically no

⁶⁵ I draw this example from a passage from Galen's *Thrasybulus* considered in Chapter 3.

distinctions. By habit [*tribē*] and [practice (*empeiria*)] it keeps only memory of what usually happens, by which it produces pleasures. (501a; Irwin trans., p. 78)

This is not to say that all rhetors speak with such a pleasure-seeking habit. But who can deny that some rhetors do? Denying rhetorical flattery would be to overlook not only how the democracy of Athens fell but also how Western fascism rose. People can be persuaded by political panderers, whether deluded fanatics or deliberate flatterers. So long as a speaker puffs up the people (“You once were GREAT”), their speech serves the same flattering function. And, as this seems to be Plato’s political concern, what ground is there to disagree with it? Seen in its subtlety the rhetorical concern unifying the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* is not only consistent but also familiar to all rhetoricians, from Kenneth Burke to today.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ In a moment not unlike our own, Burke called on scholars not to imagine that fascism could be laughed away. Calling for a careful analysis of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, Burke (1939/1957) states:

If the reviewer [of *Mein Kampf*] but knocks off a few adverse attitudinalizings and calls it a day, with a guaranty in advance that this article will have a favorable reception among the decent members of our population, he is contributing more to our gratification than to our enlightenment. Here is the testament of a man who swung a great people into his wake. Let us watch it carefully; and let us watch it, not merely to discover some grounds for prophesying what political move is to follow Munich, and what move to follow that move, etc.: let us try also to discover what kind of ‘medicine’ this medicine-man has concocted, that we may know, with greater accuracy, exactly what to guard against, if we are to forestall the concocting of similar medicine in America. (p. 164)

When we abandon the belief that the *Gorgias* is a criticism of “rhetoric (n.),” and with it the presumption that Plato calls “rhetoric (n.)” a knack-based species of flattery, the dialogue’s apparent tension with the *Phaedrus* fades away. As is well known, the *Phaedrus* unquestioningly acknowledges the existence of a “rhetorical art” in the face of those critics who would suggest that “the rhetorical” is “not an art, but [an inartistic knack]” (Plato, 1914, 260e). Though this is commonly seen as Plato changing his tune, it can now be seen as a position in no way contradictory to the *Gorgias*.⁶⁷

This section has thus far attempted to resolve a long-standing puzzle regarding Plato’s *Phaedrus* and his *Gorgias*. I have suggested that a revised reading of 462b to 466a allows us to see a consistency between these two dialogues where before scholars imagined a tension. It seems, in retrospect, that Aristotle also saw the dissociation between *technē* and *empeiria* as an important theme within the dialogue. Aside from quoting Polus directly, the language he uses to unpack this dissociation is the same as Socrates in both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. Plato and Aristotle thus seemed to have a shared understanding of this dissociation. An art understood the systematic, theoretical, and teleological basis for its actions. It knew why it did what it did. But having practice or experience is not the same as being an expert. And, in this same sense, a “practice” was seen as distinct from an “art.” A practitioner uses guesswork, an artisan, theory.

Whether he knew it or not, this attempt to inoculate the people against a false rhetorical ‘medicine’ seems remarkably close to the political exigence of Plato’s *Gorgias*.

⁶⁷ To belabor the already repeated point, Socrates explicitly cedes at two points in the *Gorgias* that there may well be a true “rhetorical art,” even if the “rhetorical practice” in question is not it (see, e.g., 503a and 517b).

The primary charge against Gorgias of Leonti dramatized in the *Gorgias* was thus that he lacked a true theoretical understanding of the “art” he claimed to possess. Both Plato’s *Phaedrus* and Aristotle’s *Sophistic Elenchi* attest to this. A passage within Plato’s *Laws*—considered in Chapter 4—again reiterates that Plato saw this dissociation between *technē* (art) and *empeiria* (practice) as central to his rhetorical theory. And Chapter 3 will show that, far beyond Plato and Aristotle, a long line of readers from the ancient to the modern world saw a playful dissociation between two uses of *hē rhētorikē* on display within the *Gorgias*, a nuanced reading which has since been lost on the modern world.

Conclusion

This Chapter has suggested that 462b to 466a, a passage which has long puzzled Plato’s readers, is overdue for a reconsideration. On a broadly recognized axiom of translation, we can only supply the modern noun “rhetoric” when we can reasonably assume that the Greek text either states directly or substantively implies the phrase *hē rhētorikē technē*. And, though the early portions of the *Gorgias* do use *hē rhētorikē* to imply *hē rhētorikē technē*, at 462b Socrates quite literally changes the terms of the argument. Only, he does so in a grammatical playfully and implicit way. When Socrates shifts here to a discussion of a *hē rhētorikē* which he takes to be *hē rhētorikē empeiria* (rhetorical practice), we are not to take this to mean that there is no possibility for a *hē rhētorikē technē* (rhetorical art). Though Socrates grants the existence of such a *technē* throughout the discussion, he firmly maintains that the *hē rhētorikē* endorsed by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles is not it.

I have further argued that this point was thus far so overlooked because it stands as an instance of subtle but deliberate Platonic wordplay. Here the use of the substantive adjective *hē rhētorikē* is ambiguously changed from an implication of *hē rhētorikē (technē)* to one of *hē*

rhētorikē (empeiria). I have suggested several possibilities for translating the nuanced shift in meaning implicit to this wordplay. I strongly advocate that future translations of the dialogue pay careful attention to the role of “-ic” suffixed substantive adjectives herein; and, more importantly, I suggest that translations should carefully consider how to convey the nuanced shift in the use of *hē rhētorikē* at 462b. Whether this means changing the terms of the discussion from that of “rhetorical art” to that of a “rhetorical practice” or shifting the use of the substantive “the rhetorical” in a way that helps the reader see the significant change in implied meaning. I have also given extended consideration to the importance of this dissociation between *empeiria* (practice) and *technē* (art) as both Plato and Aristotle understood it. Thus, the paradigmatic habit of placing the noun “rhetoric (n.)” from 462b to 466a glosses over a nuanced dissociation between “rhetoric art” and “rhetorical practice” which is firmly emphasized within the text of the *Gorgias* itself. It seems that the character Socrates here denies Gorgias the right to claim possession of a “rhetorical art,” as he, and the other speech instructors of 4th century BCE Greece, seemed to lack the level of rhetorical theory which the *Phaedrus* frames as necessary. Socrates thus reduces the *hē rhētorikē* which figures like Polus tout to the status of a practice (*empeiria*) putting on airs. This practice may well let on that it is an art, using the substantive adjective *hē rhētorikē* (“the rhetorical”) in a grammatical fashion which *seems to imply technē* (“art”). But, Socrates suggests, sometimes a substantive is warranted in denoting “art” (as in the phrase *hē iatrikē*) while in other instances it is not (as in his use of the phrase *hē opsopoiikē*). The *Phaedrus* makes clear that, though denied the status of “art,” the stylistic taxonomies and tricks of the trade which rhetors like Gorgias and Polus had put forward were not without merit. They are, Socrates there suggests, the necessary *preliminaries* of the rhetorical art. Yet they are not warranted, themselves, in taking up this name, “rhetorical art.”

In sum, from 462b to 466a of Plato's *Gorgias* lies an instance of wordplay, a pun-based dissociation between a "rhetorical art" (*hē rhētorikē technē*) and a "rhetorical practice" (*hē rhētorikē empeiria*). The use of *hē rhētorikē* as a substantive adjective allows both senses to be playfully and ambiguously denoted using the same phrase. This very ambiguity led generations of translators to place the noun "rhetoric (n.)" anywhere they saw the phrase *hē rhētorikē*. But, as this chapter has demonstrated, not all instances of *hē rhētorikē* within the dialogue are intended to denote the phrase *hē rhētorikē technē*, and thus, on an axiom of translation outlined above, not all instances of *hē rhētorikē* can be justifiably translated using the anachronistic noun "rhetoric (n.)" (which is reserved only in reference to the "rhetorical art"). This dissociation between two uses of *hē rhētorikē* is no small point as it allows us to see a surprising continuity of themes and arguments extended across both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*.

The argument forwarded here is ambitious, to be sure. I recognize that any call for a new paradigm, especially regarding a text which has been painstakingly investigated by scholars for centuries, presents a serious burden of proof. To address any doubts the reader may have on the importance of the above argument, Chapters 3 and 4 will attempt to present a body of additional support. Apart from evidence immanent to the text, Chapter 3 will show that a dissociated reading of *hē rhētorikē* was actually the *dominant* reading of the *Gorgias* from the ancient world to today. Chapter 4 will then attempt to carefully unpack the broader implications for this argument relative to the history of the rhetorical tradition.

Chapter Three

Testimony for a Revised Reading of 462b to 466a

“[...] whatever ability I possess as an orator comes not from the workshops of the rhetoricians but from the spacious grounds of the Academy.”

—From Cicero’s *Orator*

Introduction: Cicero’s Silence, Quintilian’s Censorship

An additional puzzle, albeit subtle, lies dormant in the reception of the *Gorgias* presented by both Cicero and Quintilian. For if, as was traditionally assumed, the *Gorgias* was a screed against “rhetoric (n.),” then why does Cicero never bring up this charge? The only mentions of the *Gorgias* within Cicero’s corpus occur within his *De Oratore*. But the discussion here is not what we would expect. The Latin word “*rhetoricos*” appears only marginally after mention of the *Gorgias* is made, with passing reference to rhetorical teachers and their rhetorical books (Cicero, 1942a, 1.52; 1.55). But there is no sustained consideration of “rhetoric (n.),” no defense against a supposed charge of “flattery,” and no mention of an inconsistency between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. We would expect Cicero of all people to either respond to, or to outright refute, any suggestion from the hand of Plato that “rhetoric (n.)” is a knack-based species of flattery. And, given that the *Phaedrus* is mentioned at the outset of *De Oratore*, we would doubly expect Cicero to navigate any tension between this dialogue and the *Gorgias*. Yet in the two mentions of the *Gorgias* Cicero provides no such thing.⁶⁸ What are we to make of Cicero’s silence?⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See p. 117 and p. 118 n. 72 of this chapter for discussion of the relevant passages.

⁶⁹ Fantham (2004) is similarly puzzled by the fact that Cicero “passes over Socrates’ most powerful attack on political oratory” (p. 61). Hankins (1990a) reads this silence as an example of

Beyond the spotty fragments by the Epicurian Philodemus, Cicero's *De Oratore* is the earliest record of a source discussing the *Gorgias* at all.⁷⁰ And the interpretation we find here is puzzlingly quiet regarding "rhetoric (n.)" and any inconsistency between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. The character Crassus here tells us that, during a visit to Athens, he engaged in a close reading of the *Gorgias* under a famed Academic named Charmadas. He tells us that "what impressed me most deeply about Plato in that book was, that it was when making fun of orators that he himself seemed to me to be the consummate orator. In fact controversy about a word has long tormented those Greeklings, fonder as they are of argument than of truth" (1942a, 1.7, p.

Cicero deliberately softening, if not censoring, the edge of Plato's critique: "In Cicero's *De oratore*, Plato is made out to be not so much an opponent of rhetoric *simpliciter* [simply] as an opponent of the enlarged Isocratean ideal of a culture of eloquence. [...] the suggestion is clear that we cannot, quite, take Socrates *au pied de la lettre* [by the foot of the letter]" (p. 55). This chapter will suggest that the solution to this puzzle lies elsewhere.

⁷⁰ Fragments from a rhetorical treatise by Philodemus show he was in some kind of discussion with the *Gorgias* therein. The remains of his work are scattered and difficult to piece together. Still, consideration of how Philodemus' fragments may have been engaged with the *Gorgias* based on the terms of the revised reading of Chapter 2 merit some consideration. Philodemus is concerned, for instance, with the question of what kinds of things can and cannot be justifiably called "art" and the *Gorgias* is indeed mentioned and seemingly given summary (Philodemus, 1920, p. 342-344). The next mentions of the dialogue after Cicero don't appear until the start of the new millennia, through figures like Apuleius, Galen, Quintilian, and Aulus Gellius.

37).⁷¹ In the response to the *Gorgias* which follows, the character Crassus expresses concern with the disciplinary confines of oratory and acknowledges that an orator must understand the subjects about which they would speak eloquently.⁷² Echoing Plato's *Phaedrus*, we find Crassus

⁷¹ Scholars sometimes imagine that this is Cicero pointing out a self-contradiction in Plato: "Ha! Plato was rhetorically antirhetorical" (see, e.g., Höhle, 2008, p. 162). It seems, however, that Cicero is recording a subtle charm which has since been lost among Plato's readers; that in his criticism of problematic rhetors he proved himself to be, in the process, a superior rhetor himself. There is nothing self-contradictory about this once we are alleviated of the presumption that the *Gorgias* was anti-rhetorical. This also explains why Crassus would say that he "especially admired" (*maxime admirabar*) Plato for this fact (Cicero, 1942a, 1.47; p. 35). This reading is verified later in the dialogue, when Catulus harkens back to Crassus' statement at 1.47. Catulus here suggests that Gorgias was "an adversary who either in reality never was defeated by Socrates and Plato' famous dialogue is untrue, or if defeated he was, Socrates was more eloquent and fluent and, to use your own description [i.e., 1.47], a fuller and better orator [*copiosior et melior orator*]" (3.129; p. 101). If, as Hankins (1990a) maintains, there is a playful "satisfaction" which Cicero derives from this suggestion, it is likely to be attributed to the fact that Plato's eloquence stands as testament to Crassus' nuanced argument that the orator's studies should be synthesized with, rather than disciplinarily divorced from, philosophy (p. 55).

⁷² Crassus' focus on this disciplinary concern alone is again repeated in Book III, where we hear Crassus echoing his earlier suggestion (1.11.47) that the *Gorgias* is an instance of Plato teasing (*irridendis*) the rhetors of his day. And again, just as before, Crassus does not take the *Gorgias* to be a screed against "rhetoric (n.)," nor is any tension with the *Phaedrus* observed. Instead, we

stating things like “excellence in speaking cannot be made manifest unless the speaker fully comprehends the matter he speaks about” (1.48; p. 37). He similarly suggests, shortly thereafter that:

[speech (*oratio*)], if the underlying subject matter be not comprehended and mastered by the speaker, must inevitably be of no account or even become the sport of universal derision. For what so effectually proclaims the madman as the hollow thundering of words—be they never so choice and resplendent—which have no thought or knowledge behind them? (1.12.50-51)

Crassus thus *extends* Socrates’ challenge to Gorgias, specifically Gorgias’ suggestion that a rhetor need not speak in regard to probable truth (Plato, 1925a, 459b-c, p. 301).⁷³ And Crassus

find Crassus stating his earlier complaint, repeated throughout *De Oratore*, that the disciplines of philosophy and the study of oratory have been wrongly divorced into separate disciplines. He thus challenges:

persons who actually either [tease (*irridentes*)] and [satirize (*cavillantur*)] the orator after the manner of Socrates in Plato’s *Gorgias*, or else write a few little manuals of instruction in the art of oratory and label them with the title [‘Rhetorical’ (*rhetoricos*)]—just as if the province of the [rhetors (*rhetorum*)] did not include their pronouncements on the subjects of justice and duty and the constitution and government of states, in short, the entire field of practical philosophy. (3.31.122)

⁷³ The relevant argument from the *Gorgias* is that one cannot proclaim to possess a “rhetorical art” if one makes no effort to examine the probable truth of the subjects spoken on. Socrates thus pounces on Gorgias’ admission that “there is no need to know the truth of the actual matters, but

seems to do so *in conversation with the Phaedrus*. No mention is made about an inconsistency between these dialogues. Crassus, the character generally taken to be the mouthpiece for Cicero himself, is quite *ambivalent* about whether or not we grant the title of “art” (*ars*) to the orator’s efforts (1.23.107-109). And he reads the *Gorgias* as an instance of peculiarly Greek word-wrangling, centered on the terms “orator” and “art.” Yet, what of “rhetoric (n.)” and the charge of flattery? What of the inconsistency between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*? Why is the earliest sustained discussion of the *Gorgias* so silent on points which are paradigmatically assumed by all scholars today?

Cicero’s *De Oratore* was probably finished by 55 B.C.E., and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratio* was likely published a century and a half later around 95 C.E.⁷⁴ Yet, in the world of Quintilian the situation is definitively different. We here find Quintilian defending Plato against the charges all too familiar to the modern world. Quintilian tells us that, regarding readers of Plato’s work in 1st century Rome:

one merely needs to have discovered some device of persuasion which will make one appear to those who do not know better than those who know” (Plato, 1925a, 459b-c, p. 301). It is this more specific rhetorical practice which Plato will remain resistant to all the way down to the *Laws* (see p. 164-167 of Chapter 4 below). Cicero, too, and in his own voice, disdains this conception of oratorical praxis at the outset of his *De Inventione* (Cicero, 1949, 1.2.3-1.4.5, p. 8-13).

⁷⁴ On the dating of Cicero’s *De Oratore* see Sutton and Rackham (1942, p. ix). For the estimated publication of the *Institutio Oratio*, see Kennedy’s (1969) wonderful little book, *Quintilian* (p. 28)

the majority, content with reading a few passages from the *Gorgias* of Plato, unskillfully excerpted by earlier writers, refrain from studying that dialogue and the remainder of Plato's writings, and thereby fall into serious error. For they believe that in Plato's view rhetoric was not an art, but a certain *adroitness in the production of delight and gratification*, or with reference to another passage the *shadow of a small part of politics* and the *fourth department of flattery*. (1.15.24-25; p. 311)

What has happened here? If these charges are so common in the world of Quintilian, why did Cicero not see fit to address them in any of his published works?

Scholars tend to imagine that Quintilian is softening the true viciousness of the *Gorgias*, as though his love of Plato and "rhetoric (n.)" created such a cognitive dissonance that he was led to censor, or even *dishonestly misrepresent*, the arguments of the *Gorgias*.⁷⁵ Brian Vickers (1988) suggests, for instance, that Quintilian went out of his way to "misinterpret the *Gorgias*" (p. 168). As Vickers sees it, Quintilian can only forward his reading of the *Gorgias* "by knowingly distorting the sense of what Plato writes" (p. 169). Monfasani, following Vickers, suggests that Quintilian attempted "to sanitize rhetoric from the criticism, most effectively voiced by Plato's *Gorgias*, that rhetoric was the tool of amoral speakers" (p. 121-122). Scholars frequently assume, in this sense, that Quintilian was compromised by his Platonism, as though Quintilian were a Platonic partisan who deliberately sought to mask the true criticism lain at the temple of Rhetoric by his master. But what if it is *us modern readers* who have imbued our own

⁷⁵ As I will suggest shortly, a similar charge is frequently leveled against figures like Cicero and Apuleius.

kind of error onto Quintilian? What if, in other words, Quintilian was pointing to a more nuanced reading of the *Gorgias* which was observed throughout antiquity?

This chapter will build upon the findings of Chapter 2. If, as Chapter 2 argued, 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* is definitively not a criticism of “rhetoric (n.),” then we would expect early readers of the dialogue to discuss such a reading. This chapter will thus attempt to show the long line of testimony suggesting that historically readers discussed the *Gorgias* quite differently than we do today. In fact, the *dominant reading* of the dialogue throughout antiquity seems to have seen a dissociation between “rhetorical art” (*hē rhētorikē technē*) and “rhetorical practice” (*hē rhētorikē empeiria*) as immanent to the *Gorgias*. And, just as we might expect with a reading which can be lost in translation, on two points we find that the preliminary translations of the dialogue (both in Latin and in English) sought to draw attention to this dissociation within the Platonic corpus.

I begin this chapter by considering the oldest extant commentary of the *Gorgias* by the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus. I observe the extent to which Olympiodorus drew explicit attention to the wordplay and dissociation discussed in Chapter 2. I consider other bits of evidence which both directly and indirectly suggest that this dissociation was seen throughout the ancient world. Figures considered here include: Apuleius, Galen, Maximus of Tyre, Aristides, and Sextus Empiricus. Almost anywhere mention of the *Gorgias* is made in antiquity, it seems that we find recognition of this dissociation between a true *rhētorikē* and a form which appropriates its name. From here I consider the two points where this nuance was almost recovered before being once more lost in translation, both in 14th century Italy in 19th century England. I then close by considering how the reading of Chapter 2 and the context of its reception developed herein might help resolve the seeming puzzle of Cicero’s silence and Quintilian’s censorship.

“*Hē rhētorikē* appears in a twofold way:” The Reception of the *Gorgias* in Antiquity

In this section I will suggest that the dissociated reading of *hē rhētorikē* discussed in Chapter 2 was actually the *dominant* interpretation of the *Gorgias* from the ancient to the modern world. I begin by considering what I take to be the most direct piece of evidence. The Neoplatonist Olympiodorus, in the earliest extant commentary on the *Gorgias*, draws his readers attention to the very same dissociation considered at length in Chapter 2: *hē rhētorikē (technē) ≠ hē rhētorikē (empeiria)*. I then show that Olympiodorus’ reading did not come out of the blue. I consider a broad survey of voices from across the 2nd century CE (Apuleius, Galen, Maximus of Tyre, Aleius Aristides, and Sextus Empiricus) all of whom suggest that this nuanced reading of *hē rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a was widely recognized in the ancient world. I close by briefly considering an obscure work by one Marcellinus, perhaps from the 5th century. His similar observation of this dissociation suggests that readers of Plato’s *Gorgias*, free from the interpretive paradigm which now reigns, were able to spontaneously observe Plato’s deliberately nuanced use of *hē rhētorikē*.

Several commentaries on the *Gorgias* certainly preceded that of Olympiodorus, but the earliest commentary mentioned among the “middle Platonists,” as Dillon (1977) calls them, is a now lost commentary by Taurus of Beirut (see Fredrico M. Petrucci’s (2018) recent book-length study).⁷⁶ The commentary on the *Gorgias* by the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus the Younger (c. 500-570 CE) is the earliest of its kind.⁷⁷ Though lacking the language of “substantive adjectives”

⁷⁶ George Boys-Stones (2018) suggests evidence of *Gorgias* commentaries also by Eubulus and Plutarch of Athens (p. 67).

⁷⁷ The dating here is borrowed from Michael Griffin (2015, p. 1).

to unpack Plato's wordplay, Olympiodorus' commentary makes a central dissociation between two uses of *hē rhētorikē* within the *Gorgias* and Plato's corpus more broadly.⁷⁸ Olympiodorus thus suggests that: "One must see, therefore, that '*hē rhētorikē*' is twofold, and while one is true and artistic [*technikē*], the other is wrongly so-called [*pseudōnymos*] and is a practice [*empeiria*]."⁷⁹ This dissociation between the true "rhetorical art," which is the warranted use of *rhētorikē* and that use of *rhētorikē* which is wrongly so-called (*pseudōnymos*) is an essential dissociation to Olympiodorus' close-reading of the text. And, in fact, Olympiodorus' suggestion that *hē rhētorikē* is "twofold" is acknowledged by Socrates himself within the *Gorgias* (503a).⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Kennedy (1983) gives mention of Neoplatonists like Syrianus, Hermeias, and Olympiodorus, but without seeing anything particularly interesting in Olympiodorus' dissociation between two senses of *hē rhētorikē* within Plato's work (p. 131; see 126-132 for a brief discussion of Neoplatonism in general).

⁷⁹ My translation of "*istēon toinun oti hē rhētorikē dittē estin, hē men alēthēs kai teknikē, hē de pseudōnymos kai empeiria*" (Olympiodorus, 1970, p. 14). The point is repeated soon after (see Olympiodorus, 1970, p. 27 for the Greek; see also Olympiodorus, 1998, p. 71 for an alternate English translation).

⁸⁰ There is some debate about how to translate the sentence in question at 503a. I take it to be of some significance as this is the only point in Dodds' (1959) commentary where he imagines that Socrates is actually *skeptical* about the existence of a true rhetorical art. Yet, were this the case, it would create a puzzle both immanent to the *Gorgias* and immanent to Dodds' own commentary, which otherwise recognizes the presence of this dissociation between two senses of *rhētorikē*. Dodds pushes against the translations of Cope, Lamb, Jowett, and others, who read *kai* here as

As a repeated point of emphasis, Olympiodorus implores the reader to observe Plato creating a dissociation between a true *hē rhētorikē* and a false one appropriating its name. Regarding these

meaning “also.” As Dodds rightly observes, this translation is untenable (p. 326). Noting the “*ei...kai*” construction here, Dodds suggests reading this, instead, as “‘if there *really* are two sides to this question’ (which in practice Socrates doubts)” (p. 326). Yet, as Dodds himself has earlier observed, Plato has already created room for his dissociation between that *rhētorikē* which can rightly be called *technē* and that which can only be called *empeiria* (p. 224-225 and p. 227). We might thus resolve the tension within Dodds’ own reading by noting that here the word order could alter the warranted translation. Were the word order “*kai...ei*” (as Dodds’ proposed translation assumes), then it would indeed be more correct to read this as a skeptical “even if.” Yet, Liddell and Scott’s (1843/1996) *Greek-English Lexicon* suggests that the word order we find here (“*ei...kai*”) denotes an opposed reading of “*although*, [or] *notwithstanding that*, of a condition represented as immaterial even if fulfilled” (p. 858; original emphasis). Contextually, this fits quite nicely beside the statement which immediately precedes; *Exarkei* can be taken to mean something like “Good enough!” (Dodds, p. 326) or “That is enough for me” (Lamb’s translation in Plato, 1925a, p. 453). It would make sense, then—insofar as Socrates has just stated that Callicles has given a sufficient answer for Socrates to proceed with his argument—that Socrates would follow this statement by suggesting any such qualification “as immaterial even if fulfilled” (Liddell and Scott, 1843/1996, p. 858). We might thus take Socrates to say: “Good enough! For although this thing is twofold [...].” This helps remove the presumption of skepticism which Dodds needlessly reads into Socrates’ statement, against his earlier observations (p. 224-225 and p. 227).

two uses of *hē rhētorikē*, Olympiodorus reiterates soon after the same point from above “One must see, then, that there are two [*rhētorikē* (pl.)]. Their genus, telos, and manner are different. For while the genus of the true [one] is art [*(technē)*], the genus of the false is practice [*(empeiria)*].”⁸¹ And at 462b, the crucial turning point in the use of *hē rhētorikē*, Olympiodorus

⁸¹ My translation of “*isteon toinun oti duo eisin rhētorikai: toutōn de kai gene kai ta telē kai ai odoi diaphoroi. Tēs men gar alēthous genos hē technē, tēs de pseudous hē empeiria*”

(Olympiodorus, 1970, p. 14; see also Olympiodorus, 1998, p. 81 for an alternate English translation). Though the linguistic notion of a “substantive adjective” appears not to have solidified by the time of Olympiodorus, there is evidence in Aristotle’s *On Categories* that this “genus” language was related to earlier theories of substantive adjectives and their implied nouns. Aristotle thus speaks of “science” (*epistēmē*) as the “genus” (*genos*) of a particular use of phrases like “the grammatical” (*hē grammatikē*) and “the musical” (*hē mousikē*), phrases which are intended to denote not qualities but rather “particular branches of knowledge” (p. 79). Even if these scientific branches are denoted using words which are qualities themselves (see 8.30; p. 73), this science is not, itself, a quality but rather the thing by which “People are called such and such [i.e., “grammatic” or “music (adj.)”] from possessing these branches of knowledge” (Aristotle, 1938, p. 79). It seems reasonable, on this basis, to imagine that when Olympiodorus says that the “genus” of these two forms of *rhētorikē* is distinct, he means—in effect—that these substantive adjectives denote significantly different subjects. This “genus” language and its accompanying dissociation between two senses of *hē rhētorikē* will reappear in the introductions to the *Gorgias* by both Marsilio Ficino and Thomas Taylor below (see p. 149-151 and p. 155-156 below).

draws direct attention to the shift in meaning. Thus, in one sense *hē rhētorikē* is rightly taken to imply an art, while in another, it is not (Olympiodorus, 1998, p. 122). But this is because, as mentioned, Socrates has changed the referent which the substantive phrase *hē rhētorikē* denotes within the discussion. The dissociation is reiterated again shortly when Olympiodorus observes Socrates' decision (at 462e) to leave room for the possibility that his criticism may not apply to the *hē rhētorikē* of which Gorgias speaks. Olympiodorus puts Socrates' reasoning thus:

It is boorish to slander [*hē rhētorikē*] in Gorgias' presence, since I do not know what kind he professes, and he will think that I am making a mockery of his own field. So what he professes, I do not know. But there is a [*hē rhētorikē*] which is part of nothing that is fine, because it's base. (Olympiodorus, 1998, p. 127)⁸²

⁸² Though I rely on the translation of Jackson et al. (1998) here, I part ways with their suggestion that we read here *hē rhētorikē* as an error of the manuscript. They propose reading *tis rhētorikē* ("a certain rhetoric") presumably because they take *rhētorikē* to here be a noun (p. 127 n. 277). I believe, however, that *hē rhētorikē* is here used deliberately to suggest a dissociated use of this substantive adjective, one use justifiably denoting *technē*, another reduced by Socrates to only denoting *empeiria*. This would not, as they imagine, "allow this statement of Plato's about one kind of rhetoric to apply to rhetoric as a whole." Within the text of the *Gorgias* itself we find a use of language similar to Olympiodorus (*touto* [...] *hē rhētorikē*; 462e). Dodds (1959), in agreement with Olympiodorus, sees this emphasis in Socrates statements, particularly from his use of the qualifier "this" (*touto*) as suggesting that there is more than one use of *hē rhētorikē* which he intends (p. 224).

This is the core dissociation between a *hē rhētorikē* (*technē*) and a *hē rhētorikē* (*empeiria*) which Chapter 2 attempted to tease out as significantly implicit to the text. And Olympiodorus stands as testimony of its direct recognition by close readers of the dialogue in the ancient world.⁸³ Yet, while Olympiodorus is the strongest evidence that close readers of the Greek text of the *Gorgias* once saw this wordplay, there is a broad body of evidence which precedes him, suggesting that others were well aware of this dissociation between two uses of *hē rhētorikē* in Plato's thought. Apuleius, for one, explicitly observes this point.

S. J. Harrison (2000), in his study of Apuleius, suggests that we might reasonably place his birth some time in the mid-120s AD" (p. 3). This timeframe, Harrison observes:

makes him a contemporary of Aulus Gellius, whom he may have known personally, and of the Greek writers Galen, Lucian, and Aelius Aristides; thus his life falls at the height of the Greek intellectual revival of the Second Sophistic, when Greek writers famously sought to revive the past glories of their culture in the rich cities of the Greek Mediterranean under the protection of Roman rule. (p. 3)

Like one Marcus Tullius Cicero, Apuleius outwardly and frequently avowed himself to be a Platonic philosopher.⁸⁴ And he clearly had a broad familiarity with Plato's writings, whether he

⁸³ This dissociation is also directly attested to by the Neoplatonist Hermias in his commentary on the *Phaedrus*. Hermias sees Plato as clearly distinguishing the "true rhetorical art" from the popular use of *hē rhētorikē* (see Hermias, 2018, p. 47, 52, and 54). Hermias' son, Ammonius Hermiae, would become the teacher of Olympiodorus.

⁸⁴ In his *Apology*, for instance, he speaks of himself as part of the "Platonic family" (*Platonica familia*; Apuleius, 2017, p. 154)

studied directly under a Platonist or a Platonically versed tutor during his time in Athens.⁸⁵

Regardless, his reading of Plato's rhetorical theory is surprisingly resonant with Olympiodorus.

He suggests, in Book II of his *De Platone*:

Hence there are with him two [rhetorics]; one of which is the discipline, that contemplates what is good, (and is) tenacious of what is just, (and) fitted to, and agreeing with, the sect of that (philosopher), who wishes to appear a statesman; but the other is the science of flattering, the catcher at what is like the truth, (and) an experience brought together without any reason for so we express ἄλογον τριβὴν [*alogon tribēn*] (irrational exercise)—which wishes that to be received by persuasion, which it is unable to teach. Now this Plato has defined as δύναμιν τοῦ πείθειν ἄνευ τοῦ διδάσκειν [*dynamin tou peithein aneu tou didaskein*] (a power to persuade without teaching); (and) to which he has given the name of the shadow, that is, the image, 'of a portion of the Statesman's art.' (Apuleius, 1854, p. 354; all parentheticals are original to Burges' translation)

Just as with Quintilian, modern readers are quick to charge Apuleius with a partisan censorship of Plato's position. When Maeve O'Brien (1991) encounters Apuleius' dissociation, she claims that his reading "is perhaps disingenuous" (p. 43). S. J. Harrison (2000) responds similarly (p. 202),⁸⁶ as does Dillon (1977) in his suggestion that Apuleius, "exhibits the anxiety of many of

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Gerald Sandy, 1997, p. 23-29. Sandy follows Glucker's (1978) view that Apuleius studied under a private tutor (p. 28).

⁸⁶ In S. J. Harrison's (2000) study of Apuleius he suggests:

De Platone clearly draws on the discussion of different types of oratory in the *Gorgias* (463a-465d), but makes some interesting modifications. In particular, the Platonic attack

the rhetors of the Second Sophistic who wished to be considered philosophers to turn the edge of Plato's attack on rhetoric away from themselves" (p. 333).⁸⁷ But, again, what if it is actually we modern readers who are hallucinating a reading which was never really immanent to the text? For, though Apuleius most explicitly points out the dissociated use of *rhētorikē* between Plato's *Phaedrus* and his *Gorgias*, there is evidence from several other second century figures which suggests that this dissociation between two uses of *hē rhētorikē* was broadly seen. The famed doctor Galen and the Platonic orator Maximus of Tyre, both contemporaries of Apuleius, further attest to this reading's dominance in antiquity.

Galen is perhaps most famous for his longstanding contributions to Western medicine, a contribution which remained unmatched for much of Western history.⁸⁸ We know, from Galen's

on rhetoric as an art of flattery directed towards the judicial power is replaced by an attack on the *professio iuris*, expertise in the law (2. IX. 233), directed towards the legislative power. The exclusion of rhetoric as such from this context suggests that *De Platone* is not prepared to follow Plato in condemning it. (p. 202)

He sees this as an attempted "rescuing of rhetoric" from the real abuses given it by Plato. But, in the context of the revised reading, it makes more sense to read Apuleius as simply translating the target of Plato's critique into the language of his own day, challenging a rhetorical practice which Apuleius presumably saw in the "*professio iuris*" of the 2nd century (see also p. 165-175 below).

⁸⁷ For a more extended consideration of Apuleius' discussion here, see O'Brien (1991).

⁸⁸ Regarding, for instance, Galen's theory of the nervous system, Clarke and Jacyne (1987) note that:

own account, that he studied under two students of a “Middle Platonist” named Gaius.⁸⁹ One was an unnamed teacher under whom he studied while in Pergamum at the age of 14; the other was the more famous Platonist, Albinus under whom Galen studied in his twenties during his time in Smyrna (Dillon, 1977, p. 266). Among several of Galen’s medical treatises we find the *Thrasybulus*, a work considering where “hygiene” falls relative to the medical and gymnastic arts. And it is here, while both quoting and thematically engaging with the *Gorgias*, that we again find a classical source explicitly stating the dissociation from above. Just as Olympiodorus and the Neoplatonists will assert some two centuries later, Galen frames Plato’s *Gorgias* as marking out a core dissociation between base pursuits appropriating the name “art” and those arts which are rightly so called:

The base arts [*tais kakotechnias*] provide an apparent good in each of the things they exist for, whereas there are arts that are true in these. Following this let me say that, if the so-called [‘cosmetic’ (*hē kommōtikē kaloumenē*)] is productive of a counterfeit beauty, it would be a base art and a form of flattery, while some other art [i.e., the *true* ‘cosmetic’

The Galenic model of the nervous system continued to attract considerable support, especially in Britain, as late as the 1830s and, in isolated cases, even later. However, from the turn of the nineteenth century it had been subjected to criticism and revision on various grounds. (p. 30)

This is merely one area where Galen’s medical theories lasted into the modern world.

⁸⁹ For additional consideration of Platonic and other eclectic philosophical influences on Galen, see Hankinson (1992) and Lacy (1972).

art] will be contrived concerning legitimate and genuinely true beauty, which is a good complexion, good flesh, and proportion of the parts.⁹⁰ (822K; p. 257)

This theme returns when Galen dissociates between “the gymnastic art” and that which appropriates its name, a certain ‘gymnastic’ pursuit which prefers puffing up muscles to true betterment of the body. Galen here appears to follow Plato in dissociating the practice of bodybuilding from the true “gymnastic art.” In Galen’s sense, the true “gymnastic art” would pursue the kinds of exercise which one might get from a dedicated physical therapist who wants to help one’s body last, yet without fetishizing muscle building in-itself. Thus, Galen observes that Plato challenged “[‘the gymnastic’] of those training athletes, [seeing it as] a base art hiding under a [noble] name” (874K).⁹¹

The Socrates of the *Republic* thus notes to Glaucon “that when licentiousness and illness are rife in a state many law courts [*dikastēria*] and surgeries [*iatreia*] open, and law [*dikanikē*] and medicine [*iatrikē*] give themselves airs [*semnunontai*] whenever even free men in large numbers become excessively serious about these matters” (Plato, 2013, 405a). Socrates soon

⁹⁰ The discussion of a “so-called cosmetic art” is an echo of Socrates’ opening skepticism to that “so-called rhetorical art” (Plato, 1925a, 448e, p. 264). Again, not because Socrates doubts the existence of such an art, but because he doubts that what Gorgias and Polus present is truly it. Olympiodorus similarly sees this statement as a reference to the “practice” which is wrongly so-called (*pseudonymous*).

⁹¹ The second parenthetical insertion is the translator’s, the third is my own. I part ways with the translator’s suggestion that we should read *semnōi* as “pompous.” Contextually it seems far more reasonable that Galen would be saying these “gymnasts” are appropriating a noble name.

after marks out a kind of “gymnastic” which “goes beyond physical training” and into “excessive attention to the body” (407b). Yet, he suggests, such an “excessive bodily care is a complete hinderance; for it makes a person think that he is always ill and never lets him stop agonizing about his body” (407c). Socrates contrasts this, then, to what he would see as “the gymnastic” and “the medical,” rightly so-called, which would not overly pursue athletics into a hardening of the mind, nor overly rely upon medical supplements (410b). Socrates may well soon after make a direct allusion to the *Gorgias*. He thus says to Galucon, “it follows that those who established education in [music and gymnastic (*mousikē kai gymnastikē*)] didn’t do this for the reason that some think: to [attend (*therapeuointo*)] to the needs of the body on the one hand and the soul on the other [...]. It can well be that they prescribe both especially for the good of the soul” (410c).⁹² It thus seems *hē rhētorikē* was not the only phrase which Plato charged with substantive appropriation. The *hē gymnastikē* here, as Galen observes, is not like the true *hē gymnastikē technē*. It is, rather, some base practice assuming the form of this art by grammatically appropriating its name. This same observation reappears, again in direct conversation with the *Gorgias*, in the orations of Maximus of Tyre.

Compared to Galen, practically nothing is known about Maximus of Tyre except, according to three fragmentary remarks, that he lived during the second century. He would thus have lived around the same time as both Apuleius and Galen above. Several of Maximus’

⁹² Plato seems here to be referencing the division made by the Socrates of the *Gorgias* between those arts which attend (*therapeuō*) to the body and those which attend to the soul (464b). The implication here seems to be that the Socrates of the *Gorgias* gives voice to a conceptual division which Plato, at the time of the *Republic*, may no longer find valid.

“orations” have managed to survive thanks to a 9th century manuscript containing works of two other 2nd century Platonists, Alcinous and Albinus (see Race, 2023, p. xxix).⁹³ Though the details of Maximus’ life are unknown, his rhetorical persona, as Race observes, is consistently recorded throughout his orations: “He presents himself as a well-educated (πεπαιδευμένος) [pepaideumenos], earnest spokesman for the philosophical life of virtue, especially as exemplified in the career of Socrates and in the writings of Plato” (p. xiv). As Race observes, Maximus’:

audience is expected to know Plato’s entire oeuvre well and to appreciate the ways in which he alludes to, yet recasts, well-known Platonic passages. Although his adaptation of Platonic images, examples, and doctrines are evident throughout the corpus, verbatim quotations are surprisingly rare. He views his role as an assayer of Plato’s doctrinal gold for the purpose of making it useful to his audience. (p. xx-xxi).

Just as with Galen and Apuleius, Maximus’ “Oration 14,” an essay on flattery, presents comments which evoke the understating of the *Gorgias* in antiquity. And though Plato is not directly quoted here, Maximus clearly is building upon imagery of Plato’s *Gorgias*. Maximus thus suggests, in an “Oration 14:”

Forms of flattery can also be seen in [pursuits (*epitēdeumasin*)] and [arts (*technias*)], where they outwardly resemble [(*homoias*)] the [art (*technias*)], but differ [(*anomoious*)] in their [deeds (*erga*)]. Men were flattered by a [counterfeit ‘musical’ (*mousikē nothos*)], when Dorians abandoned their native music, which they used to play while guarding their

⁹³ Albinus, as mentioned above, was the middle Platonist under whom Galen studied in his twenties.

flocks and herds, and instead became enamored of pipe playing and dancing, thus corrupting their virtue along with their [musical art (*tē mousikē*)]. Men were flattered by a [counterfeit ‘medical’ (*iatrikē nothos*)] when they abandoned the cures of Asclepius and the Asclepiade and rendered the medical art no different from that of [the gastronomic art (*tēn technē opsopoiikēs*)], a debased flattery of debased bodies. The [sychophant (*sykophantēs*)] flatters the [rhetor (*rhētorā*)] by countering argument with argument and by fortifying injustice against justice and what is shameful against what is good. The sophist flatters the philosopher. [And while he] is the most famous flatterer of them all...⁹⁴

Directly engaging with themes of the *Gorgias*, Maximus observes that certain practices may well resemble (*homoias*) an art, appropriating its title, image and reputation. But in their products (*erga*) the practice and the art whose likeness it dons are entirely dissimilar (*anomoious*). The result is a counterfeit (*nothos*) form of the art in question.⁹⁵ Plato, Maximus, suggests,

⁹⁴ Socrates secondarily calls the “practices” and “routines” of his discipline “pursuits” (*epitēdeuma*) which is the same term Maximus uses to set up his discussion (see, e.g., 462e-463b and 474d-474e).

⁹⁵ When Maximus speaks of a “counterfeit ‘musical’” or a “counterfeit ‘medical’” in the above passage, he is using the “-ikos” suffixed adjectives *mouiskē* and *iatrikē*. One would logically be led to anticipate him to next turn to some consideration of a “counterfeit ‘rhetorical’” cloaking itself under the guise of the true “rhetorical art,” but the text breaks off here. As Race rightly observes, the construction of the final sentence suggests that the oration went on: “The μέν [*men*] (on the one hand) in the last sentence indicates that the oration continued” (p. 325 n. 1). This

dissociated between true arts and those forms of flattery which appropriated a (grammatical) *resemblance* to the arts. Though these forms of flattery may outwardly resemble these arts through their proclaimed title, they do not resemble them in their deeds. And just as in Galen's *Thrasybulus*, we find recognition that Plato also spoke of things like a "gymnastic" (*gymnastikē*) and a "medical" (*iatrikē*) which appropriated the *appearance* and *name* of their respective arts.

I have thus far suggested that the nuanced reading of *hē rhētorikē* within the *Gorgias* was visibly recognized by 2nd century thinkers like Apuleius, Galen, and Maximus of Tyre. It was also, as noted earlier, deliberately emphasized in the commentary on the *Gorgias* by Olympiodorus. I will now present additional evidence of this reading's dominance within the 2nd century world. Two figures contemporaneous to Apuleius, Galen, and Maximus would seem, on first glance, to serve as counter testimony. For Aelius Aristides, the famed Greek orator of the "Second Sophistic" and Sextus Empiricus, a Pyrrhonic skeptic, both initially seem to lend credence to the modern reading of the text. Both Aristides and Sextus Empiricus attempt to read Plato's *Gorgias* in a manner which seems, at first glance, to align with the modern understanding of the dialogue—the *Gorgias* as an anti-rhetorical text. Yet, in both instances we find these authors acknowledging a counterargument which they imagined their 2nd century audience was aware of. Both are aware that a close-reader of Plato may challenge their reading by observing

word was usually used as one half of a whole: *men* and *de*. The pair meant something like: "On the one hand...on the other." We thus appear to have here an incomplete sentence to an incomplete oration. We can only guess as to what remained. Yet the imagery here suggests that we would expect meditations which might further develop the understanding of the *Gorgias* in antiquity.

that *hē rhētorikē* plays a nuanced and dissociated role within the *Gorgias*. Both Aristides and Sextus engage with a clear strawman of Plato's argument. But, for the purposes of my argument, both provide indirect testimony to the dominance which this reading must have had in antiquity. The dissociation between *hē rhētorikē (technē)* and *hē rhētorikē (empeiria)* was broadly recognized by the statements of 2nd century figures like Apuleius, Galen, and Maximus of Tyre. And the proximity of these figures to middle Platonists like Albinus suggests that this reading was not foreign to readers of Plato prior to the second century. If the reading is already canon among the Neoplatonists of the 5th century, and if figures like Aristides and Sextus feel that they cannot call the *Gorgias* anti-rhetorical without acknowledging a more nuanced reading perhaps familiar to their audience, all of this seems to me to suggest that a more nuanced reading of *hē rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* was likely the dominant reading of the dialogue throughout antiquity. As with the figures above I will open with an attempt to briefly situate who each figure was before outlining textual support relevant for my argument.

Philostratus tells us in his *Lives of the Sophists* that Aristides (c. 117-180/185 CE) was born “in a town of no great size in Myria” (581, p. 215).⁹⁶ Similar to the tale of a Golden statue dedicated to Gorgias of Leonti, Philostratus recounts a story that “the people of [Smyrna] set up a bronze statue of [Aristides] in the market-place” (582, p. 215). He was, like Isocrates, fond of writing works which were intended more as essays than actual speeches, though tradition calls them “orations” regardless. Oration 2, “A Reply to Plato Concerning Rhetoric” is one such essay. As Trapp (2017) puts it, Aristides' aim here is to present a direct challenge to Plato through “the repeated demonstration of inconsistencies, both between the *Gorgias* and other

⁹⁶ I draw the estimated dating here from Trapp (2017, x-xv).

dialogues, and within the *Gorgias* itself: Plato is at odds with himself, and his better side, far from condemning oratory, in fact, concedes the truth of Aristides' position" (p. 327-328). Trapp here presents Aristides' argument as Aristides himself saw it. But, before doing so, it's worth considering how Aristides actually presents his case.

In his "A Reply to Plato Concerning Rhetoric," Aristides rails against what he frames as a slanderous charge made by Plato, namely the suggestion that *hē rhētorikē* is flattery (*hē rhētorikē kolakeia*; 330, p.560-561).⁹⁷ Yet, throughout his polemic, Aristides is surprisingly silent about the *Phaedrus*. It is not until the very end of his argument that the dialogue is mentioned, so that it would seem as if Plato, against his own wishes, would have to acknowledge the superiority of Aristides' argument. As Aristides boldly puts it in his conclusion, "The vote comes out in my favor in every way and on all counts. Plato himself votes for me, as the saying goes, first, middle, and last; and even if I give the impression of speaking against him, I may well in fact be doing nothing so much as pleading his cause" (p. 658-659). But what of Aristides' charge that Plato reduced *hē rhētorikē* to flattery? Is this too Aristides pleading Plato's case?

Seemingly aware that his 2nd century audience may balk at this very point, we find Aristides attempting to hastily acknowledge and dismiss an interesting counterargument here. He thus acknowledges a potential critic who might "take up the argument over Plato and say that there are two kinds of [*hē rhētorikē*], and that his abuse was directed not against the kind that I

⁹⁷ Ironically, Aristides here lapses into the very undifferentiated reading which Socrates will tease Polus for (466a, p. 321). Socrates' specific charge is that the rhetorical practice in question is a species (*morion*) of flattery, not that it is equivalent to it. Both Polus and Aristides thus overlook a genus/species dissociation which Socrates seeks to maintain.

am now discussing but the other one [...]” (446, p. 648-649). Is this not the very dissociation attested to by Apuleius, Galen, and Maximus of Tyre above? As it is unlikely that Aristides has any of these three in mind, the only reasonable conclusion is that this reading was rather broadly held in the 2nd century, at least enough that Aristides couldn’t conclude without acknowledging it. But Aristides’ response to this counterargument shows that he was, indeed, selectively reading Plato for the interest of his argument.⁹⁸ As Olympiodorus observes in his commentary on the *Gorgias*, “Aristides scores empty points against imaginary claims and repeats at great length what Plato himself had already said” (p. 217). And, as it turns out, Aristides is not the only source of this kind. The Pyrrhonic skeptic Sextus Empiricus similarly anticipates an audience of this kind.

Compared to Aristides, very little is known about Sextus.⁹⁹ Luciona Floridi (2002), in his study of Sextus, suggests that Sextus probably was a physician, but this is uncertain (p. 3; 7). He may have lived in Rome, Athens, or Alexandria; he may not have (p. 3). He may have lived in the second century CE; he may not have (p. 5-6). Floridi humorously notes it as “ironically appropriate that we should know almost nothing about the life of Sextus Empiricus, our chief source of information on ancient skepticism” (p. 3). Our only certainty is that Sextus saw himself

⁹⁸ In his only serious attempt to address this counterargument, Aristides suggests “that if this is true, then he ought to have distinguished the two kinds [of *hē rhētorikē*] and abused the one while praising the other [...]” (447, p. 649). Aristides conveniently forgets that the *Gorgias* does just this (e.g., CITE).

⁹⁹ For an example of a rhetorician considering Sextus’ argument relative to rhetorical theory, see George Pullman’s (1994) article in *Rhetoric Review* (p. 60-67).

as a philosophical skeptic, following and defending the tradition of the philosopher Phyrro. He defends this skepticism across several books. The most relevant work here is titled *Against the Professors* (*Adversus Mathematicos*), Book II being directed specifically “Against the Rhetoricians” (p. 189-243). Sextus’ primary aim in this work is to persuade the reader that there is no rhetorical art, and that we ought not even use *hē rhētorikē* in a manner which might suggest otherwise. In an attempt to make his case, he draws on several arguments from Plato’s Academy, specifically those leveled by two students of Carneades, Clitomachus and Charmadas (21, p. 199). And, just like Aristides, Sextus also pauses to address a potential counterargument to his use of these Academics:

But in reply to all this some assert that as [*rhētorikē* is twofold (*dittē*)], the one refined and in use among the wise, the other in use among inferior people, the accusation is not made against the refined kind but against the baser class. (43, p. 209)

This may well be indirect testimony that the aforementioned “men of the Academy” were *themselves* responsible for touting the dissociated use of *hē rhētorikē* (43, p. 209).

As Sextus has just mentioned the critical arguments of these Academics in the preceding sentence, it would make sense that he would downplay their authority in emphasizing this dissociation between a true *hē rhētorikē* and a false one appropriating its name. It is reasonable, given his sly manner of arguing, that Sextus would draw on the authorities of the Academy in their critique of what they saw as a false *hē rhētorikē*. Playing on the linguistic ambiguity here, Sextus could thus lay the basis for his claim that there is no rhetorical art at all whatsoever. It would be in his interest to *downplay* the counterargument which he anticipates his readers are familiar with. He similarly remains silent on Plato’s *Phaedrus* while strategically drawing on his *Gorgias*. There is no way to know, but I find it quite probable, on this basis, to imagine that this

dissociation was acknowledged within the Academy. In hindsight, then, both Sextus and Aristides shows that even *Greeks* could overlook the wordplay of the *Gorgias*, deliberately or otherwise. Yet, at the very same time, both stand as testimony to the breadth with which Plato's readers seemed to have seen his dissociated use of *hē rhētorikē*. Before moving on, it is worth considering an example which lies between this survey of second century figures and Olympiodorus' 6th century commentary. For an obscure figure named Marcellinus shows that this nuanced reading lived on long after the second century, and long before Neoplatonic thinkers would appear to once again flesh out this point.

In Hugo Rabe's (1931) *Prolegomenon Sylloge* we find a commentary on the rhetorical work of Hermogenes by one Marcellinus.¹⁰⁰ Although the name "Marcellinus" has been appended to this commentary on Hermogenes, historians are unclear of any other details surrounding the work's origin. D. A. Russell (1981) has suggested that the Marcellinus who authored *The Life of Thucydides* can "probably be identified with [this] fifth-century [commentary] on Hermogenes" (p. 197). But Kennedy (1983) has suggested that this is likely a different author, our Marcellinus perhaps writing before the sixth century (p. 112). Ambiguities of origin aside, it is fascinating to note that this Marcellinus—whoever and whenever he is—

¹⁰⁰ As Kennedy (1983, p. 118) also observes, Hugo Rabe, in the preface to his *Prolegomenon Sylloge*, picks up on the thematic dissociation between "art" and "experience" as it exists within several untranslated prolegomena from antiquity (see, e.g., Rabe, 1935, xli-xliii). A complete consideration of how this theme sits within Rabe's edited collection remains to be considered elsewhere. Though I imagine any scholar who can sift through Latin and Greek work will find a few nuggets of rhetorical interest in this collection.

again observes this dissociation between the true rhetorical art and those forms of rhetorical flattery which appropriate its name. Marcellinus thus rhetorically asks Plato: “Do you say there is one *rhētorikē* Plato, or many? [...For] if you speak of many [*rhētorikē* (pl.)] we also agree with you on this. For there is one true *rhētorikē*, which is also a science, and there is another *rhētorikē* which is pseudological, [and] which is called ‘sycophantic’ in the courts, ‘flattery’ in assemblies.”¹⁰¹ After a careful consideration of the matter, Marcellinus concludes that Plato’s attack on the signifier *rhētorikē* in the *Gorgias* was directed towards this latter form of pseudological and sycophantic flattery, and not the true rhetorical art. He thus notes: “Therefore, Plato’s arguments against *rhētorikē* do not apply to our *rhētorikē* but rather to the ‘sycophantic’ [one], as demonstrated by the eminent rhetor Demosthenes, who often spoke against flatterers, showing that he was not one of them.”¹⁰² Through a survey of sources ranging from the 2nd century to the 5th century CE, this section has suggested that the reading considered in Chapter 2 was actually the reading which dominated the ancient world. It appears that, from the time of Quintilian to the time of Olympiodorus, all mention of Plato’s *Gorgias* acknowledged a

¹⁰¹ My translation: “*mian, ō Platōn, legeis tēn rhētorikēn ē pollas; [...] ei de pollas legeis rhētorikas, kai hēmeis sunainoumen soi eis touto. esti gar hē alethēs rhētorikē, hētis kai epistemē estin: esti de kai allē rhētorikē pseudologikē, hētis en dikastēriois sykophantikē legetai, en de bouleutēriois kolakeia*” (Rabe, 1935, p. 281).

¹⁰² My translation: “*Ōste oi tou Platōnos logoi oi kata tēs rhētorikē sou pros tēn hēmeteran rhētorikēn armozdousin alla pros tēn sykophantikēn, ōs dēloi kai o koryphaios tōn rhētorōn Dēmostenēs, pollakis kata kolakōn legōn kai epiplēttōn tois akroatais, hoper <ouk> esti kolakos*” (Rabe, 1935, p. 283).

deliberate and dissociated use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē* within his work. The following section will set to consider the fate of the *Gorgias* from the Italian renaissance and into 19th century England.

First as Tragedy, Then as Farce: The Repeated Mistranslation of *Rhētorikē*

Karl Marx (1852/1978), in the opening to his “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte,” states cheekily: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as a tragedy, the second as a farce” (p. 594). This quote has been used to death, an afterlife to which I here shamelessly contribute. Still, there are few quotes which so succinctly surmise the ambivalence which the hindsight of history affords. And it is this very bittersweet, tragico-comical sentiment that I wish to show at play in the history of the *Gorgias*’ translation. This section will suggest that the nuance seen throughout antiquity was not forever lost on close readers of the *Gorgias*. In fact, in both of the earliest recorded instances of the *Gorgias*’ translation into Latin and English, pioneering translators drew their readers’ attention to the nuance of 462b to 466a. This section begins by considering the first recorded appearance of the *Gorgias* within the Latin world of 14th century Italy. It seems that we here find a microcosm of the reading and misreading which has plagued the dialogue throughout history. Thus early readers like George of Trebizond rail against what they see as an anti-rhetorical tome. Meanwhile early translators like Marsilio Ficino sought to point out a more nuanced reading. The same story reappears in 19th century England, when Thomas Taylor, on the authority of Olympiodorus, sought to similarly recover this dissociation.

As this section will survey a broad range of historical figures, it may help to preview the relevant cast of characters and their role within the story. In the 15th century Latin world, Plato’s

work remained untranslated and inaccessible to much of the West. Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) was one of the first figures to translate Plato into the Latin of the Italian Renaissance.¹⁰³ His was also the earliest recorded translation of Plato's *Gorgias* into the Latin language. Though he demonstrably softened some of the formal antagonism between figures like Callicles and Socrates therein, it seems that his translation, just like those so common today, saw 462b to 466a as a criticism of "rhetoric (n.)." Other scholars of his generation, for instance, George of Trebizond (c. 1395–c. 1472) similarly began to read the *Gorgias* as a screed against "rhetoric."¹⁰⁴ A rival of Trebizond's, Teodoro Gaza (c. 1400–1475) produced a series of lectures on the *Gorgias* which again imagined, as Trebizond did, that the *Gorgias* was anti-rhetorical (see, Monfasani, 2004a, p. 11).¹⁰⁵ It was not until Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) that Plato's entire corpus would find its way into the Latin speaking world.¹⁰⁶ Ficino's translation first appeared in print in 1484, and though Ficino's translation of the *Gorgias* similarly suggests that 462b to 466a is a criticism of "rhetoric (n.)," his introduction to the dialogue makes clear that the signifier is here being used in a manner which is tricky to translate. Just as Olympiodorus had before him, then, Ficino informs his readers that 462b to 466a is not a wholesale dismissal of "rhetoric" but rather a nuanced attempt to clear the way for a more philosophically inclined form. In short, in the first three major engagements with the *Gorgias* in the 15th century Renaissance, from Bruni, Trebizond, and Gaza, we find 462b to 466a was read as it is in the modern world. However, in

¹⁰³ Dating from Copenhaver and Schmitt (1992, p. 76).

¹⁰⁴ Dating from Monfasani (1976, p. 4, p. 234).

¹⁰⁵ Dating from Geanakopolis (1989, p. 67, p. 88).

¹⁰⁶ Dating from Copenhaver and Schmitt (1992, p. 438).

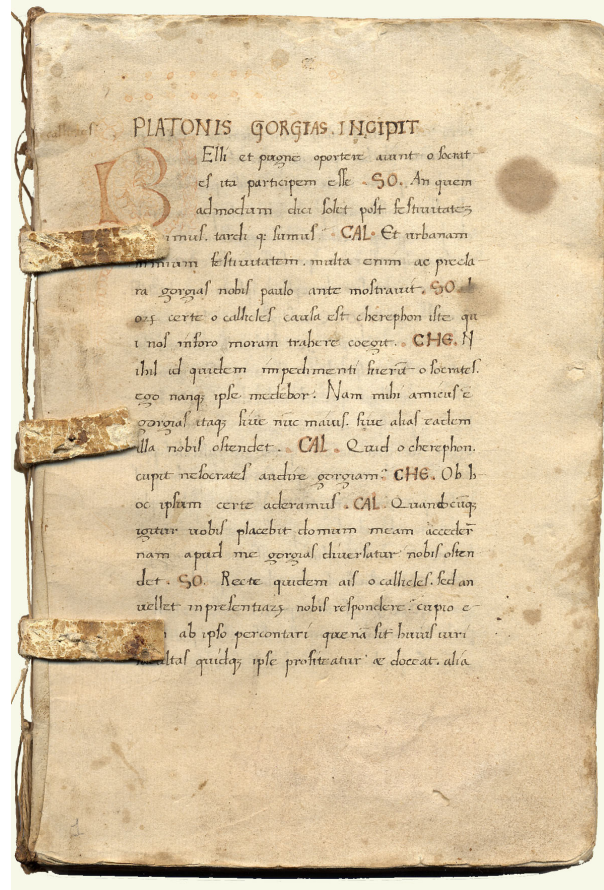


Figure 2: The first Latin translation of Plato's *Gorgias* (c. 1475-80) by Leonardo Bruni.

one important outlier, Marsilio Ficino, we find evidence that the dissociated reading of *hē rhētorikē* attested from the 2nd century Second Sophistic to the 5th century Neoplatonists, was not entirely forgotten, even if it was soon after buried.

After surveying the reception of the *Gorgias* in the 15th century Latin world, I outline the brief traces of the dialogue's reception in England up to the first English translation of the dialogue by Thomas Taylor (1758-1835). Taylor was sensitive to the adjectival role of *rhētorikē* within the early portions of the *Gorgias*, a point broadly overlooked by later translations (see also p. 94-96 of Chapter 2 above). And, on the authority of Olympiodorus' commentary, Taylor was aware that *hē rhētorikē* was playing a nuanced role from 462b to 466a, even if Taylor's translation failed to capture it. Yet, just as with Ficino's effort to recover a more nuanced

reading, Taylor's attempt was buried soon after. John Stuart Mill's translation of the *Gorgias*, the next to follow, failed to recognize anything important at issue within this passage, and the wave of 19th century English translations which followed similarly papered over this issue. In this way, the modern habit of reading solidified into a paradigm in the face of a more nuanced reading of the dialogue broadly recognized in antiquity. Having outlined the general contours and major figures of this section, I will now turn to the historical survey itself, beginning with the first recorded translation of Plato's *Gorgias*.

Hankins (1990a), in his magnificent study of Plato's reception of the Italian renaissance, tells us that the first modern translation of Plato's *Gorgias* appeared in Latin from the hand of Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444). Bruni, recalling his decision to take up the study of classical Greek in 1397, tells us that his line of thinking went thus:

For seven hundred years now, no one in Italy has been able to read Greek, and yet we admit that it is from the Greeks that we get all our systems of knowledge. What a contribution to your knowledge, then, and what an opportunity to establish your reputation, and what an abundance of pleasure will the knowledge of this language bring you! (Bruni quoted in Hankins, p. 29).

Upon this reasoning, Bruni set on to a study of Greek. As Copenhaver and Schmidt (1992) observe, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, reception of Plato's work was minimal at best:

The thin state of direct knowledge of Plato during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance may surprise modern observers accustomed to Plato's celebrity. Of the surviving dialogues and letters, only the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, some of the *Timaeus*, and a piece of the *Parmenides* were anywhere available in Latin translation. (p. 14)

The majority of Plato's dialogues, however, "were wholly unavailable until the fifteenth century, when all of the extant Platonic Corpus became a common property of the Latin-reading republic of letters" (p. 15). Bruni's first translation of Plato's work was probably the *Phaedo*, completed sometime before 1405. And, following Hankin's suggestion, we can assume that Bruni's translation of the *Gorgias*, the first to appear in Latin, was completed by the end of 1409 (1990, p. 53 and p. 379-382; see *Figure 2*). Bruni was highly sympathetic to the *Gorgias*, so much so that in a letter he frames Socrates' nonviolent ethos as a kind of moral precursor to Jesus of Nazareth (Hankins, 1990, p. 54). But Bruni's translation, like so many after, did indeed imagine that 462b to 466a was a criticism of "rhetoric (n.)" proper.

Within the next two decades, echoes of this reading also appeared among Bruni's peers, perhaps most dramatically between George of Trebizond (c. 1395–c. 1472) and Teodoro of Gaza (c. 1400–1475). George of Trebizond published his *Rhetoricum Libri V* somewhere between 1433 and 1434, a treatise which Monfasani (1976) suggests that was "the first complete *Rhetoric* of the humanist movement" (p. 26; 261). Trebizond's rhetorical textbook was of such an influence that the famed Erasmus once sought out a copy so as to cross-reference it with the work of Quintilian (Monfasani, 1976, p. 318).¹⁰⁷ And, in terms of sheer volume, Trebizond's translation of several Platonic works "exceeded the output of any Plato translator before Ficino" (Copenhaver and Schmitt, 1992, p. 85). Yet an interesting philosophical transition marked Trebizond's thought. For, though he started his career admirably quoting Plato, at a certain point

¹⁰⁷ For a prolonged consideration of the influence of Trebizond's *Rhetoricum libri V* see Monfasani (1976; p. 318-327).

he suddenly transitioned into a severe anti-Platonism (Monfasani, 1976, p. 18).¹⁰⁸ As Trebizond himself attests, this transition was in *direct response* to his reading of *Gorgias*, which caused him to rail against Plato in favor of Aristotle (p. 259). Trebizond could not align himself with one he came to see as an anti-rhetorical philosopher, and in the years before his death he became convinced that he was a prophet set to warn the Catholic world of a Platonic paganism soon to apocalyptically overtake the Christian world (see, e.g., Monfasani, 1976, p. 224-225). It was this conspiracy, he imagined, which had caused him so much strife in his early career.¹⁰⁹ The only other notable record of the *Gorgias*' reception within this period is tied to none other than one of these Platonic rivals of Trebizond's.

¹⁰⁸ On a related note, I have recently been made aware that Girolamo Cardano published, in 1566, a dialogue literally titled *Anti-Gorgias*. I came upon this point too late to situate this work here, but I would direct any interested reader to Guido Giglinoni's (2012) chapter (p. 173-194) in the edited collection *Rhetoric and Medicine in Early Modern Europe*.

¹⁰⁹ Among other things, Trebizond ended up in a boyish brawl with Poggio Bracciolini.

Reflecting upon the brawl later, Trebizond tells Poggio in a letter:

Rightly I could have bitten off the fingers you stuck in my mouth; I did not. Since I was seated and you were standing, I thought of squeezing your testicles with both hands [to] thus lay you out; I did not do it. I asked for a sword from the bystanders so that by fear of it I might drive you away. Nor was I mistaken. For like a Florentine woman, you took to flight. (Trebizond quoted in Monfasani, 1972, p. 110).

As Monfasani notes, "If not for the serious consequences, Trebizond's account of what happened [...] would be hilarious" (p. 110).

Perhaps somewhere around 1449, around the time Gaza had first moved to Rome, he interrupted Trebizond's lectures, at one point to charge him with a misunderstanding of rhetorical theory (p. Monfasani, 1972, p. 81-82). Around this time, Gaza began to lecture on Plato's *Gorgias*, and he translated enough of the dialogue within this course to present what Monfasani (2004a) suggests was practically a second translation following that of Bruni (p. 10).¹¹⁰ And, despite any disagreements with Trebizond about Plato and rhetorical theory, Gaza's lectures on the *Gorgias* apparently read Plato as an anti-rhetorical thinker (p. 11). It seems that the above three figures—Bruni, Trebizond, and Gaza—constitute the record of the *Gorgias*' reception within the early 15th century. And, just as in the modern world, we here find figures reading 462b to 466a of the dialogue as a wholesale attack on “rhetoric (n).” But this was not the only interpretation of the dialogue in the air of the Italian Renaissance.

Though Bruni once flirted with the idea of translating all of Plato's dialogues, it was not until Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) that the Platonic corpus proper—*Gorgias* included—was fully introduced to the Latin world. Despite the anti-rhetorical reading of the *Gorgias* which Trebizond and Gaza railed against, it was in Ficino that the dissociation between two senses of *hē rhētorikē* from antiquity once more gained recognition. Copenhaver and Schmitt (1992) are clear to point out in their *Renaissance Philosophy* that Marsilio Ficino was in large part

¹¹⁰ As Monfasani observed some time ago, Gaza's lectures on the *Gorgias* were not long ago discovered in the collections of the Folger Shakespear Library (V. a. 123) in Washington D.C. Monfasani has given them some consideration (see Monfasani, 2004a).

responsible for the broader uptake of Plato's work in the western world (p. 127).¹¹¹ As they put his influence elsewhere:

Leonardo Bruni and others Latinized a few dialogues early in the century, but the great accomplishment was Marsilio Ficino's, who by 1469 had translated or retranslated all of Plato's works and saw them printed for the first time in 1484. Through such efforts as Ficino's, it gradually became possible to take a broader view of philosophy than the traditional [Aristotelian] framework permitted. In 1400 almost no one in the West could have direct experience of Plato's dialogues, but within a century all of Plato was in print [...]. (p. 15)

And Ficino, in his retranslation of the *Gorgias*, made clear that in his view the dialogue was no true condemnation of "rhetoric (n.)." In doing so, Ficino ends up distinctly echoing themes from the reading which seemed to dominate throughout antiquity:

But there are two types of rhetoric: the first is philosophical, while the second is popular or sycophantic. The first is good, and the second is evil. The aim of the first is to guide the hearers to the common good through assured principles of things, words, and customs. This is the type to which he gives the most fulsome praise in the *Phaedrus*, the type composed of philosophy and serious poetry. The aim of the second type, however, is to produce whatever it fancies, through the plausible surmises of the masses and the passions of the heart. (p. 112-113)

¹¹¹ Prior to the first English translation of the *Gorgias* by Thomas Taylor (see p. 155-156 below), the next edition of the *Gorgias* seems to have simply been a scholarly revision of Ficino's Latin translation (see Findeisen's revision of Ficino's translation; Plato, 1796).

Here again lies recognition of a dissociated use of *hē rhētorikē* immanent to Plato's *Gorgias*.¹¹² Similar to Olympiodorus' commentary, Ficino unpacks this distinction in the language of *genus* (*genere*) and *species* (*speciebus*).¹¹³ And to both Olympiodorus and the Marcellinus mentioned above, we see this dissociation made in terms of a true "rhetoric" and a "sycophantic" one.

Engagement with the *Gorgias* in the 15th century Italian Renaissance was not entirely unlike that of the modern world at the start. The dialogue was initially seen as anti-rhetorical through and through. However, Ficino's translation, even if unable to capture the wordplay of 462b to 466a, still made clear to the Latin speaking world that this passage was not to be read as a complete condemnation of "rhetoric (n.)." Ficino's decision to emphasize this point seems not to have had much of a lasting impact. But it was not the last effort of its kind. For, as the *Gorgias* gradually found its way into the English-speaking world, this reading would once more, albeit finally, be foregrounded in the work of a pioneering translator, Thomas Taylor.

¹¹² Ficino's agreement with the reading taken up by Quintilian is also observed by Richard Marback (1999, p. 51).

¹¹³ Westerink (1968) speculates that Ficino owned, or was familiar with, Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Gorgias* (p. 352; see also Robichaud, 2018, p. 162). Regardless, Ficino was aware of the Neoplatonists and their reading of Plato. And at some point, Ficino translated Hermias' commentary on the *Phaedrus*. Allen (1980, p. 112) suggests a window of 1474-1489, which would suggest some proximity to his 1469 translation of the *Gorgias*. Hermias was the father of Ammonius Hermiae, Olympiodorus' instructor in Platonism. And in both Hermias' commentary and Ficino's translation there is a dissociation between a true "rhetorical art" and something appropriating its name.

Plato's *Gorgias* has been in English for less than two centuries. Knowledge of the dialogue's existence apparently began to trickle into the English-speaking world only gradually.¹¹⁴ Bruni's 1409 translation was responsible. John Capgrove (1392-1464), a Norfolk friar, acknowledges existence of Plato's "*Gorgialis*" in his *Chronicle of England* (c. 1462).¹¹⁵ Aside from marginal acknowledgements of the dialogue, it is not until Plato is fully integrated into the English educational system that Jayne notes the next major chapter in the dialogue's English history.¹¹⁶ It seems that "*Georgycke* (i.e., *Gorgias*)" was one of the several works of

¹¹⁴ This survey is reliant upon Sears Jayne's (1995) study, *Plato in Renaissance England*.

¹¹⁵ This is the publication date supposed by Jayne.

¹¹⁶ Jayne (1995) tells us that the Englishman Roger Ascham was compelled to read the *Gorgias* at the behest of his correspondence with the German pedagogue Johann Sturm (p. 93); that Francis Bacon had some familiarity with the dialogue (p. 128); and that Sir William Vaughn makes some mention of it in his 1600 work, *The Golden Grove* (p. 127). Jayne also draws our attention to an interesting passage in John Lydgate's *The Falle of Princis* "written between 1431 and 1439," which, itself, translated a French version of Giovanni Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum* (p. 35). The lines on Plato, which Jayne suggests Lydgate has sporadically added to the text interestingly reiterate Jasso's (2019) history of the former warmth imagined between rhetors and Plato. Lydgate writes:

A prognostic, like as books do tell
 Plato was be famed by his excellence
 of rhetoric the very source and well,
 his language, the mirror of eloquence.

Plato in circulation through the Tudor era (p. 135).¹¹⁷ Jayne's study concludes with the suggestion that "It was not until 1700 that a reaction against Plato finally closed the door on the Platonic revival," which was "not to revive again until the time of Thomas Taylor and Benjamin Jowett in the nineteenth century" (p. 139). And, while we will consider Taylor and Jowett's generation of translators shortly, it is worth noting one other English work which Jayne's study overlooks.

André Dacier (1651-1722) produced a selected translation of Plato's work into French (1699) which was translated into English not long after (1701). Although the *Gorgias* and "Rhetorick" are given only marginal mention therein, Dacier's (1701) scant statements on the *Gorgias* still observe the dissociation observed by readers throughout antiquity. Thus, in *The works of Plato abridg'd*, he argues emphatically against the idea that the "*Gorgias* was made to teach Rhetorick" (p. 71). He suggests "that on the contrary the design of it is to expose and overthrow the ill Principle by which Orators were conducted, who then governed all the Cities of

Yet Greeks record in many sentence

How Cicero both in part and all

Was unto Plato's rhetoric equal. (John Lydgate, 1923, p. 758; my translation)

Lydgate is correct to note that sources throughout antiquity, Cicero not excluded, often repeated the claim that Plato was a titan of eloquence. Frederic M. Pettruci (2018) notes, for instance, that "it is a well-established Middle Platonist idea that Plato's style is excellent" (p. 10).

¹¹⁷ It would be interesting to see whether such texts, if extant, could be tracked down, specifically to see how they frame the dialogue and their interpretation. Was it the Platonic apologia of Quintilian and Ficino or the anti-Platonism of Aristides and Trebizond?

Greece” (p. 71-2). Thus, rather than posing Plato as an enemy of “Rhetorick,” Dacier suggests, in alignment with the tradition above:

Never did anyone exceed Plato in shewing the use of true Rhetorick, of which he gives admirable precepts: To shew the difference between this and its Counterfeit, he compares the first to the Medical Art, and the other to skill in Cookery. The Physician seeks only such things as may conduce to the Health of the Body. Health being the thing he designs to procure: but the Cook is concern’d only for what may please the Taste, without troubling his Head, whether it is harmful or hurtful. In like manner, the true Orator, he says, seeks only to make those to whom he speaks better, and the counterfeit Orator has no other design than that of perfwading ’em, whatever damage they suffer by it. (p. 146-7)

It would seem, then, that neither Quintilian nor Apuleius were hallucinating their reading of Plato. From the 2nd century to the late 17th century, readers of Plato’s *Gorgias* saw a nuance which has since been thoroughly lost in translation. The distinction between a “true Rhetorick” and its “Counterfeit” (i.e., a *hē rhētorikē (empeiria)* vs. a *hē rhētorikē (technē)*), seems to have been the dominant reading of the *Gorgias* for some time. Dacier’s work appeared at the turn of the 18th century, and it would take another hundred years for the *Gorgias* itself to finally appear in English. And, just as with Ficino, we find that, freed from the modern paradigm of interpretation, the first English translation of the *Gorgias* makes several creative decisions, not only acknowledging Plato’s dissociated use of *hē rhētorikē*, but also attending to, preliminarily at least, the adjectival role of *rhētorikos* within the dialogue.

448e is the first appearance of the signifier *rhētorikos* in the text of Plato's *Gorgias*. Here we find the phrase "*tēn kaloumenēn rhētorikēn*."¹¹⁸ And it is worth noting how Taylor (1804/1994) renders this phrase in the first English translation ever published. Free from a paradigm which would prevent him from doing otherwise, Taylor translates this as: "what is called the rhetoric art" (p. 353). Taylor, in other words, recognized that *hē rhētorikē* was an instance of the signifier *rhētorikē* standing as a substantive adjective. Thus, no differently than Isocrates, Taylor here treats "rhetoric" as an adjective, rendering the phrase *hē rhētorikē technē* in its most literal sense. All English translators after Taylor will tragico-comically overlook this point in favor of the noun form of "rhetoric (n.)." And, as Chapter 2 has suggested, this point has real implications for how we conduct our close-reading of the text. Taylor seems to have been quite familiar with Olympiodorus' commentary, and even plagiarizes a few paragraphs from Olympiodorus to introduce the dialogue.¹¹⁹ And, again drawing on Olympiodorus, Taylor notes that the signifier "rhetoric" is functioning uniquely within the *Gorgias*. He thus observes in the first footnote of his translation: "Rhetoric, says Olympiodorus, is twofold; the one being art, and the other skill. [...] The rhetoric, therefore, which knows not how to assign the cause of what it asserts, but proceeds to both fides, i.e., to the true and the false, is not an art. [...] But true

¹¹⁸ On the syntactic construction of this appearance, "*tēn kaloumenēn rhētorikēn*," Schiappa attempted to erect the speculative claim that Plato was self-consciously coining the word *rhētorikē*. As discussed in Chapter 1, this reading has since proven untenable (see p. 47-51 above and Luzzatto, 2020)

¹¹⁹ See Taylor (1804/1984, p. 345-346) compared beside Olympiodorus (1998, p. 55-56). Taylor notes that he is in conversation with Olympiodorus here, but not that he is quoting him at length.

rhetoric, which subverts under the political character, is an art. [...] So that Plato reprobates false and not true rhetoric” (1804/1984, p. 351 n. 1). Though Taylor fails to read this argument immanent to Plato’s playful use of substantive adjectives, he follows Olympiodorus in seeing a distinction here between a “true rhetoric” and one “falsely so called” (p. 351 n. 1). And again, shortly after, Taylor repeats this point using the language of Olympiodorus, yet also echoing the phrasing of Ficino above: “There are two kinds of rhetoric, says Olympiodorus; but of these the genre, and the ends, and the ways are different. For the genus of true rhetoric is art; but of the false, skill. Again, the end of the true is good; but, of the false, persuasion, whether the thing persuaded to be done, or not, be good or bad. And again, the way of the true is to know the powers of the soul; but, of the false, not to know them” (p. 352 n. 1). In both instances, Ficino and Taylor introduce an audience largely unfamiliar with the *Gorgias* to a nuanced issue surrounding Plato’s use of the signifier “rhetoric.” And even if both are unable to capture the nuanced wordplay outlined in Chapter 2 above, both attempted to recover a lost reading of the text which seemed to dominate throughout antiquity. But in both instances, these preliminary findings were buried by the louder presumption that the *Gorgias* was anti-rhetorical. In the case of Taylor, this came as a direct result of the following generation of English translations. Most visibly, we see this in the translation to immediately follow, from the famed utilitarian John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), who was vocally dissatisfied with Taylor’s translations.

Mill’s father, James Mill, appears to have written book reviews deeply critical of Taylor’s translations.¹²⁰ And it is clear that John Stuart Mill (1834/1978) himself was quite

¹²⁰ For more see Whedbee (2007). It seems that while Mill’s 1834 translation of the *Gorgias* sought to break with the likes of Thomas Taylor, his translation followed the paradigm set by his

dissatisfied with them. Prefacing his translation of the *Protagoras* he observed: “Unhappily, the only complete translation which exists in our own language is full of faults, and often with difficulty understood even by those who can read the original” (p. 34). Contrasting himself to Taylor, Mill’s retranslations claim to “have no pretension to any other merit than that of fidelity.” Yet, in the case of the *Gorgias* and the role of the signifier *rhētorikē* it appears that part of the fidelity—only preliminarily explored in Taylor’s work—was lost. In Mill, “rhetoric” is a noun through and through. There is no meditation on either “the rhetoric art” nor the “rhetorical art.”

All of the early to mid-19th century translations to follow helped establish the *rhētorikē*-as-noun paradigm in interpreting this dialogue.¹²¹ Thus after Mill (Plato, 1834), we find that Henry Cary (Plato, 1854), E.M. Cope (Plato, 1864/1883), Benjamin Jowett (Plato, 1871a), W. H. Thompson (Plato, 1871b), and Ellen Francis Mason (Plato, 1887), all treat *rhētorikē* as cleanly equivalent to the modern noun “rhetoric (n.).” On the precedent of these translations, W. R. M. Lamb (Plato, 1925a) produced his translation for Harvard University Press’s *Loeb Classical Library* series, the translation which still appears within Bizzell et al.’s (2020) renowned anthology, *The Rhetorical Tradition*.

As I have attempted to show, Taylor was attempting to reiterate a point that, from Quintilian to Ficino, interpreters and translators of the *Gorgias* have struggled to communicate to

other translational predecessors in inserting the nominal form of “rhetoric (n.)” throughout the dialogue.

¹²¹ A very helpful archive of these 19th century translations can be found at <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Gorgias>.

non-Greek readers. And that Mill of all people—he who was drilled to recite Plato’s Greek by his father—would overlook this nuance while taking pride in his check to Taylor’s translations is *almost*, in historical hindsight, so *sad* it is *funny*. This section attempted to show that the dissociation between two uses of *hē rhētorikē* within Plato’s *Gorgias* definitively did not die in antiquity. On those occasions when the dialogue was first appearing in a second language, both in the 14th century Latin of Ficino and the 19th century English of Taylor, we find figures who attempted to revive this classically recognized nuance. In the following conclusion I will suggest that we might use the material considered thus far to resolve the puzzle introduced at the chapter’s outset.

Conclusion: Resolving the Cicero-Quintilian Puzzle

This chapter has attempted to suggest that the reading developed immanent to the text to the *Gorgias* in Chapter 2 did not go historically unnoticed. It seems, in fact, that the dissociation between a fraudulent *hē rhētorikē* appropriating the guise of the true *hē rhētorikē technē* was the reading of the *Gorgias* which dominated the 2nd century world. And it was marked out, explicitly in the earliest extant commentary on the *Gorgias* by Olympiodorus. Generations of readers seemed to follow, then, the same pattern. Some close readers recognized this dissociation and sought to inform their peers (Ficino/Taylor), while others propped up a Plato who was staunchly anti-rhetorical (Trebizon/Mill). We seem, then, to be in a position to return to the Cicero-Quintilian puzzle forwarded at the start of the chapter.

In the Roman world of the 1st century BCE, the works of Plato and Aristotle had yet to be translated into classical Latin. It is for this reason that Cicero opens his *De Finebus* by navigating the state of Greek-to-Latin translations of the day. It appears that the only Latin translations of Greek texts were those of drama. Two plays of Euripides, the *Medea* (translated by Ennius) and

the Antiope (translated by Marcus Pacuvius), were available and known to Cicero. But there is such a lack of Latin translations of philosophy that Cicero sees fit to defend the very possibility of such works. He thus anticipates that some “learned in Greek literature and contemptuous of Latin, will say that they prefer to spend their time in reading Greek” (Cicero, 1914, 1.1.1, p. 3). This includes, he suggests, even Latin speakers themselves who, prejudiced against the translation of Greek philosophy into Latin, would “object to having Plato’s discourses on morality and happiness set before the reader in Latin” (1.2.4-5, p. 5). Cicero responds to such critics by suggesting:

Yet even supposing I gave direct translation of Plato or Aristotle, exactly as our poets have done with the plays, would it not, pray, be a patriotic service to introduce those transcendent intellects to the acquaintance of my fellow-countrymen? (1.3.7, p. 9)

The implication appears to be that Plato and Aristotle were as yet untranslated in Cicero’s day.¹²² Though Cicero would go on to translate part of Plato’s *Timaeus*, and probably also his

¹²² Cicero advocated the translation of Greek texts into Latin as an exercise in rhetorical style (1942a, *De Or.* 1.155, p. 107). This point is reiterated by Quintilian in Book X of his *Institutio*:

Our earlier orators thought highly of translation from Greek into Latin. In the *de Oratore* of Cicero, Luculus Crassus says that he practiced this continually, while Cicero himself advocates it again and again, nay, he actually published translations of Xenophon and Plato, which were the result of this form of exercise. (10.5.2; p. 113)

Protagoras, both *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* appeared to remain untranslated during Cicero's lifetime.¹²³

It is not until the time of Quintilian that we see a rhetorical theorist grappling with the implications of the mistranslation of *rhētorikē* considered in Chapter 2; I would submit that this is because we here find a pattern which will appear repeatedly in the history of the dialogue's reception; the nuanced argument of 462b to 466a is quite easily *lost in translation*. Quintilian thus stands as the first instance of the text in *transition* or *translation*. As the text becomes more widely disseminated, the ease with which Plato's dissociative wordplay can become lost will proliferate. Even native Greeks like Aristides could strategically downplay the linguistic ambiguity of Plato's argument. My educated guess is that, in the time of Quintilian the *Gorgias* was first becoming accessible to a broader audience. And as it began to disseminate throughout

¹²³ Stephen Gersh (2002) tells us of testimony to Cicero's *Protagoras* translation in the works of theologian Jerome of Stridon and the grammarian Priscian (p. 5). Wynne (2019) also suggests the existence of fragments of this translation in the work of both Priscian and Donatus Magnus (p. 33 n. 85). Cicero's translation of the *Timaeus* was also apparently familiar to Jerome and broadly cited by Augustine of Hippo (Gersh, 2002, p. 5). This excerpted translation of the *Timeaus* is extant (for more on related testimony, see, e.g., Degraff, 1940). Hatzimichali (2013) takes the discovery of Platonic papyri in Egypt to suggest that Plato's Greek dialogues were widely disseminated in the Hellenistic world (p. 5 and n. 14; for more on these papyri see Turner, 1969, p. 108). Texts of Greek philosophy and literature were apparently available enough in the 1st c. BCE that they could be either pillaged or purchased from Roman encounters with the Greek world (p. 3).

the Latin world, the wordplay from 462b to 466a was being misread in the way that George of Trebizond would misread it relative to Marsilio Ficino and John Stuart Mill would misread it relative to Thomas Taylor. Thus, perhaps Quintilian was not a Platonic partisan wantonly censoring the *Gorgias*; nor was there some deep Platonic bias in the silence of Cicero. Perhaps there was, rather, a more nuanced reading of the *Gorgias* which has since been lost to the modern reader.

Over the course of the past three chapters, this dissertation has argued that *hē rhētorikē* has been mistranslated from 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias*. Chapter 1 laid the grammatical groundwork to unpack this mistranslation. Chapter 2 presented the refutation of the now dominant translation of this passage in modern English. It also unpacked the significant dissociation which Plato's *Gorgias* immanently emphasized between *hē rhētorikē (technē)* and *hē rhētorikē (empeiria)*. Chapter 3 has suggested that recognition of this wordplay-dissociation seemed to be the dominant default reading throughout antiquity, from the time of Cicero to the Neoplatonists of the 5th and 6th centuries. I have attempted to also narrate the history of how this reading was lost in translation, observing too those moments, in the translations of Marsilio Ficino and Thomas Taylor, where this nuanced reading was almost recovered. I have furthermore suggested that this can help account for why Cicero and Quintilian engage with the *Gorgias* in the distinct ways that they do. Cicero never acknowledges the modern interpretation of the dialogue presumably because 462b to 466a had yet to become lost in translation. Likewise, Quintilian defends Plato's *Gorgias* against what he sees as a misreading not because he is a biased Platonic partisan but, rather, because he saw a nuance immanent to this passage similarly observed by a long line of readers who came after him. The following chapter will argue that this

revised reading of the *Gorgias* can also help us reimagine the influence of Plato and his Academy in the early development of the rhetorical tradition.

Chapter Four

Resituating Plato and his Academy in the Rhetorical Tradition

“The rhetorical is counterpart to the dialectical.”

—Aristotle, *Rhetorical Art*¹²⁴

This chapter argues that the revised reading of *hē rhētorikē* from 462b to 466a proposed within this dissertation can resolve two additional puzzles in the history of the rhetorical tradition. First: Historians like George Kennedy have long suggested that Chapter 1 of Aristotle’s *Rhetorical Art* is disjointed from the remainder of the work. Why does Aristotle speak so much about courtroom speech? And why does he tell us not to use emotions while showing, shortly thereafter, how to do just this? Second: in Cicero’s day, the Academy is bursting with rhetors. Cicero attended the rhetorical lectures from then head of the Academy, Philo of Larissa. Throughout Cicero’s work we hear that the Academy was known for style and eloquence, Cicero speaks of a famed “Academic rhetor,” and Cicero attributes his own rhetorical theory directly to the Academy itself. Yet, if Plato’s Academy was always anti-rhetorical, as historians have long assumed, how could any of this be?

The first section of this chapter will suggest that Chapter 1 of Aristotle’s handbook is an extension of, not a rejoinder to, the arguments presented in Plato’s *Gorgias*. Read beside a passage in Plato’s *Laws*, it seems all but certain that the dissociation discussed between two senses of *hē rhētorikē* within the *Gorgias* was a reading Plato clearly assumed his readers were familiar with. Seen in this light, the dissociation between *hē rhētorikē technē* and *hē rhētorikē empeiria* would have been both observed and taught by readers of the dialogue in the Academy, which would account for the reading’s appearance among Platonists in the 2nd century. What’s

¹²⁴ My translation of *hē rhētorikē estin antistrophos tē dialektikē* (Aristotle, 2020, 1354a, p. 2).

more, read beside the works of Aristophanes, both the *Gorgias* and Plato's *Laws* can help us resituate Aristotle's opening Chapter of the *Rhetorical Art*. Where historians like George Kennedy have imagined a disjunction within Aristotle's treatise, there is instead evidence of the deep connection which historically existed between the early advent of rhetorical studies and the courtrooms of the Athenian justice system.

The second section of this chapter will then present a revised understanding of how Plato and his school might be situated within the early days of the rhetorical tradition. If George Kennedy is correct in assuming, as I think he is, that Aristotle lectured on the rhetorical art within Plato's Academy, wouldn't this pose a puzzle of its own? What's more, how could we account for the surprising influence of Plato's Academy on Cicero, one of Western history's most celebrated rhetors? This section suggests that the mistranslation of *rhētorikē* has significantly influenced how historians of Plato's Academy have considered these early days of the rhetorical tradition. There appears to be a broad body of evidence, from the doxography of Diogenes Laertius to the fragments of Philodemus, and from the testimony of Cicero to the writings of Aristotle himself, all of which suggest the Academy was far from anti-rhetorical. From Plato's death to the time of Cicero, it seems that Academics were speakers renowned for their copious discourse and eloquent style, speechwriters on political embassies, and figures unafraid to take up rhetorical instruction.

The Nail in the Coffin: 937d to 938a of the *Laws*

In what follows I will suggest that 937d to 938a of the *Laws* suggests Plato demonstrably imagined his readers saw his dissociated use of *hē rhētorikē*, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, in their reading of the *Gorgias*. Beyond this, I will suggest that attention to this passage can show a deeper influence of the *Gorgias* on Chapter 1 of Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art* than is generally

imagined. I begin by unpacking the passage from the *Laws* itself, showing what seems to be a clear allusion to the language used to interpret the *Gorgias* throughout antiquity. I then consider how this passage can help resolve a puzzle which scholars like George Kennedy imagine lies immanent to Chapter 1 of the *Rhetorical Art*. Why is Aristotle so concerned with courtroom pleading? Is this focus merely a careless disjunction? I place the *Rhetorical Art* beside relevant passages in the *Gorgias* and context from the Old Comedy of ancient Athens—specifically Aristophanes’ *Wasps* and *Knights*. Doing so allows us to see that, contrary to general belief, Chapter 1 of the *Rhetorical Art* is actually an *extension* of the *Gorgias*. And, beyond this, the discussion of “rhetorical flattery” and “demagogical cookery,” perhaps the most influential themes in the *Gorgias*, are demonstrable borrowings from the comedies of Aristophanes.

The passage in question comes from what is generally considered Plato’s final dialogue, in the penultimate book of the *Laws* (Book IX). Here we find three protagonists outlining the constitution to be enacted in a newly developing Greek state. In the context of Book IX, the characters are considering “justice” and its role within the courts. One of the men, an Athenian stranger, is quick to observe the trouble one finds when considering the precedent set for persuasive speech in existing Greek legal systems. Yet he does not decry the rhetorical practice of all lawyers, as the now dominant reading of the *Gorgias* would lead us to assume. The Athenian’s position is far more nuanced, seeming to suggest that the just lawyer is *of course* noble. The public had merely developed a prejudice against pleading given the prominence of those who sought to win by any means (whether pandering, lying, or misreasoning). As the Athenian puts it:

Although there are many fair things in human life, yet to most of them there clings a kind of canker which poisons and corrupts them. None would deny that justice between men is

a fair thing and that it has civilized all human affairs. And if Justice be fair, how can we deny that pleading [*syndikein*] is also a fair thing? But these fair things are in disrepute owing to [something base (*kakē*)], which, cloaking itself [*prostēsamenē*] under [the noble name “art” (*technē*)], claims [...] that there exists a device for dealing with lawsuits, and further, that it is the one which is able, by pleading and helping another to plead, to win the victory, whether the pleas be just or unjust. (Plato, 1926, 937e, p. 471)

The Athenian thus says, *of course* pleading in the courts is a noble thing, so long as one pleads on behalf of a just cause. Yet what of this language of something base (*kakē*) assuming the guise (*prostēsamenē*) of a more noble art? Just in case his reader remains unclear on the allusion here, the Athenian is sure to clarify: “This [thing]—whether it really be art [*technē*] or merely an artless [*atechnos*] trick got by habit [*tribē*] and practice [*empeiria*]—must never if possible, arise in our State” (Plato, 1926, 938a, p. 471).

To reiterate the story thus far, within the *Gorgias* Socrates dissociates between a true “*rhētorikē*” and a flattering version (e.g., 517a vs. 522d). While the former is noble, the latter he calls inartistic, relying only on practice and a knack for producing pleasures. This inartistic version, Socrates notes, is willing to speak on either side of an issue, regardless of the actual conditions in question (*ta pragmata*; Plato, 1925a, 459c; p. 300; see also 500a-500b, p. 442-443). In the *Laws* we are told that pleading justly in the court is obviously noble (Plato, 1926, 937e, p. 471). Yet noble practices like this have been the subject of public ire because something ignoble has cloaked itself (*prostēsamenē*) beneath the noble name art (*technē*). This ignoble, appropriative pursuit, “is able, by pleading and helping another to plead, to win the victory, whether the pleas concerned be just or unjust; [...] This [thing]—whether it really be an art [*technē*] or merely an artless [*atechnos*] trick got by habit [*tribē*] and practice [*empeiria*]—must

never, if possible, arise in our State” (937e-938a, p. 471). R. G. Bury, in his translation of this passage, takes Plato to be speaking here of both “rhetoric” and 463b of the *Gorgias* (p. 471 n. 1 and n. 2). And though I think he is fundamentally right to see this overlap, it is not for the reason he imagines. Plato is not claiming here that “rhetoric” is not an art. Chapter 2 has suggested that Plato self-consciously dissociated between two uses of *hē rhētorikē*, and Chapter 3 surveyed the long lineage of close readers who acknowledge the dissociation Plato seemed to have intentionally made. Here, then, in Book IX of the *Laws*, it seems that we find, from the horse’s mouth, a late dialogue which seems to demonstrate that this dissociated reading of *hē rhētorikē* was familiar to Plato’s readers. According to this reading, the inartistic, rhetorical practice of those willing to speak for injustice regardless of the facts, has brought a more noble art into disrepute—the true rhetorical art. The former is lampooned in the *Gorgias* while the latter is idealized in the *Phaedrus*. And yet, the counterargument may justly arise: isn’t this passage about *pleading in the courtroom*? There is, technically speaking, no mention of a false and true “rhetorical art.” Thus, an ardent critic might be led to say: “Yes, the resonance with both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* is clear, but how could we truly know that Plato has in mind here *hē rhētorikē technē*?” In response, I would propose consideration of none other than Aristotle’s *Rhetorical Art* itself. Doing so may help resolve yet another point which has puzzled historians of classical rhetorical theory.

George Kennedy (1991), in his modern translation of the *Rhetorical Art*, is at pains to demonstrate what he sees as a serious disjunction which exists between the start of the treatise and the material which follows. As Kennedy puts it: “Chapter 1 creates acute problems for the unity of the treatise” (p. 27). And, although “Some interpreters seek to force the point of view of chapter 1 into conformity with what follows,” Kennedy believes that “it is probably better to

acknowledge frankly that chapter 1 is inconsistent with what follows [...]” (p. 27; 28). The disjunction, as Kennedy sees it, lies in the fact that, among other things, “Aristotle here seems firmly to reject using the emotions” (p. 27). Do we need to follow Kennedy in seeing such a glaring disjunction?¹²⁵ It seems, rather, that read beside the above passage of Plato’s *Laws*, an interesting resonance and resolution to Kennedy’s concern, appears.

The Athenian courtrooms of the 4th century BCE apparently had no concept of what the U.S. court system now calls “relevance.” Within Chapter 1, we thus find Aristotle complaining, at length, that the Athenian legal system has no restrictions around what we now call “admissible evidence;” courtroom “pleaders,” as they were then called, were apparently free to say anything they pleased (1354a; p. 5). And, interesting, Aristotle here bemoans the fact that all handbook writers who precede him had been too much a party to this very issue; the promotion of courtroom pandering. He thus suggests that: “they chiefly devote their attention to matters outside the subject” and is keen to point out that:

the arousing of prejudice, compassion, anger, and similar emotions has no connection with the matter in hand, but is directed only to the [jury]. So if all trials were now carried on as they are in some states, especially those that are well administered, there would be nothing left for these rhetoricians to say. (1354a; p. 4-5)

In a seeming *echo* of the *Gorgias*, Aristotle notes how the jury members of the day had been taken by a habit of “listening to what they like to hear” (*pros charin akoōmenoi*; 134b, p. 9). This critique is similar to Socrates’, when he idealistically refused to speak in a manner merely

¹²⁵ Gisela Striker (2020) also suggests this to be a non-puzzle, but, in my view, without picking up on the main reasons why (p. xv).

“aimed at gratification” (*pros charin legōn*; 521d, p. 514-515).¹²⁶ Regarding these textbooks, Aristotle observes, “the only task to which their attention is devoted is how to put the judges into a certain frame of mind” (p. 7). And they had, in fact, focused upon speaking in the courtroom in all but complete exclusion of public speaking more generally:

although the method of public and [judicial speech] is the same, [...] they say nothing about the former, but without exception attempt to bring [everything judicial] under the rules of art, because in public speaking it is less worthwhile to talk of what is outside the subject. (p. 7)

Aristotle’s textbook on the “rhetorical art” is thus very clear: the rhetorical handbooks which preceded Aristotle’s focused solely on *pandering to jury members*, either pleasing them or enflaming their prejudices.

There is no shortage of classical figures attesting to the fact that the Athenians had endemically fallen prey to sweet-talking rhetors. Even *rhetors themselves*, from Demosthenes and Isocrates, are clear that this was the crisis then gripping the Athenian people.¹²⁷ Further attesting to Aristotle’s complaints about preceding handbooks, Isocrates, in his *On the Peace*, bemoans that his Athenian peers:

have caused the [rhetors (rhētoras)] to practice and study not what will be advantageous to the state, but how they may discourse in a manner pleasing to you. And it is to this

¹²⁶ This echo is also observed by Stricker (2020) in her recent translation (p. 8 n. 4).

¹²⁷ See, e.g., Demosthenes, in his third *Olynthiac*, (21-22); Thucydides, in his *The Peloponnesian War* (2.65; 3.37; and 3.40); and Isocrates in his *On the Peace*, (3-4; 9) and his *Panathenaius* (12-13; p. 381).

kind of discourse that the majority of them have resorted also at the present time [...]. (5, p. 9)

And this very suggestion, that rhetors, both in the courtroom and the assembly, had been driven into a habit of speaking to please, is a major theme within *Gorgias*.

It was rhetorical persuasion before *both* the crowd *and* the jury which the Socrates of the *Gorgias* was concerned with. Socrates thus asks Gorgias: “Now which kind of persuasion is it that [*hē rhētorikē*] creates in law courts [*dikastērios*] and any public meeting on matters of right [*dikaiōn*] and wrong [*adikōn*]?” (454e; p. 286-287). He shortly notes, based on Gorgias’ reply, “And so the [rhetor’s (*hō rhētōr*)] business is not to instruct a law court [*dikastēriōn*] or a public meeting in matters of right and wrong, but only to make them believe” (455a; p. 286-287). It is shortly thereafter that Gorgias assents to the very manner of public persuading which will again be called into question in the *Laws*, the idea “that there is no need to know the truth about the actual matters, but one merely needs to have discovered some device of persuasion which will make one appear to those who do not know better than those who know” (459b-c; p. 301).¹²⁸ When placed besides the work of Aristophanes, in fact, it becomes quickly clear that this very thing was a concern broadly held among the Ancient Greeks. And, what’s more, it becomes possible to read the *Gorgias* as a thematic extension of concerns first taken up in the Old Comedy of Aristophanes.

¹²⁸ Though I am unable to consider the theme further, courtroom persuasion remains a theme throughout the dialogue’s remainder (480b-481b, 486b, 508c-509c; 511c, 512a, 515e, and especially 526e-527e).

Raymond Rogers (1984) rightly argued some time ago that the seeming self-contradiction within Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art*, the disjunction which Kennedy seems to imagine between Chapter 1 and the remainder of the text, dissolves once we view this passage in its historical context. Read alongside a satirical work like Aristophanes' *Wasps*, we can see that Aristotle is bemoaning a very specific issue regarding a habit of rhetorical flattery, a critique which was not original to him. For here we find the satirical depiction of a man, Loveclean, who was so taken by the sweet-talking of the courtroom pleaders that he had become addicted to serving on the jury, so much so that the play starts with Loveclean's son, Loathecleon, locking him within his house so as to keep him from the courtrooms!¹²⁹ As another character puts it, Loveclean suffers from "addition to jury service, and the world's worst case! That's his passion, judging, and he groans if he can't sit on the front bench" (Aristophanes, 1998b, *Wasps*, p. 233). Loveclean, observing the pleasures he gets from being sweettalked as a paid jury member observes:

[...] after I've been supplicated and had my anger wiped away, I go inside and act on none of those promises I made. I just listen to them spouting every sort of alibi. Tell me, is there any brand of wheedling I don't hear in court? Some of them bewail their poverty and go on exaggerating their troubles until they somehow seem as bad as my own. Others crack jokes to make me laugh and put away my anger. And if none of this persuades us, he starts dragging his kids up there by the hand, daughters, and sons, and I listen while

¹²⁹ These characters are teasingly named after "Cleon," an Athenian general who Aristophanes frames as a military demagogue. Cleon is also framed as a rhetorical flatterer in the play *Knights*, discussed shortly.

they cringe and bleat in chorus, and then their father implores me for their sake,
trembling as if I were a god, to let him off in his audit [...]. (p. 293)

As one may glean from the above passage, Lovecleaon gets off on the ego-pandering that the rhetorical flattery of the courtroom affords him. Yet it is not solely the *Wasps* where we find evidence that sweet-talking pleaders are among the rhetors of concern to both Aristotle and the *Gorgias*. The same is true for Aristophanes' play *Knights*.

Knights was first performed in 424 B.C., when Plato, at three years old, was a mere toddler.¹³⁰ In the play, Aristophanes lampoons the tyrannical Cleon, a power-hungry and rhetorically capable general. In a move full of cheek, Cleon is depicted as a slave to the character Demos, a brutish symbol of the Athenian assembly. At the core of the drama, Cleon and a low-born sausage-seller must prove the superior speaker to win Demos' favor in the ecclesia. And they do so in grand displays of *rhetorical flattery*.

Knights opens as Cleon's fellow slaves tell us that he is the new favorite of their master, Demos. Upon entering the house, they say:

He threw himself down at our master's feet and began fawning, wheedling, flattering
[*ekolakeu*], buttering him up with tiny scraps of leather [*koskulmatois*...]. He makes sure
we keep our distance and will not allow anyone else to attend [*therapeuein*] on Demos.
When our master's eating dinner, he stands holding a leather thong and flicks away the
[rhetors; *rhētoras*]. (45; 55-60)

¹³⁰ On the dating of *Knights* see Henderson (1998, p. 220). On Plato's age, see Fowler (1914, iX).

Cleon's brand of rhetorical practice—*flattery*—out does all the other rhetors. Cleon's fellow slaves, eager to see him fail, discover a prophecy which foretells of a sausage-seller who will best Cleon by winning Demos' favor. Speaking to the sausage-seller, who then just happens to stroll in, they convince him that he has what it takes to fulfill the prophecy: "The very reason you'll be powerful is that you're a shameless market rascal—and impudent, as well" (180). One of their appeals, however, sounds almost like a deliberate precedent for a motif all too familiar in the *Gorgias*, the chef peddling pastries before an audience of children. Thus, the slave Demosthenes informs the sausage seller that his previous profession as a sausage-seller has actually *prepared* him for a life of politicking in the polis: "Keep doing what you're doing. Make a complete hash of public business, mix things together like sausage meat, and always win people to your side with well-cooked little phrases to sweeten them [*hypolykainōn rēmatiois mageirikois*]." (210-215). Seen in this light, in fact, it would seem that the "cookery" and "rhetorical flattery" motifs of the *Gorgias* were simply riffing on the *Knights*.

The cookery section might thus be valuably read as the deliberate variation on a theme from an "Old Comedy" which Plato surely was aware of. There can be little doubt that Plato's discussion of flattery is, too, a riff on the work of Aristophanes.¹³¹ It appears to be a rather

¹³¹ For consideration of the "flattery" theme in Aristophanes, see A. T. Edwards wonderful essay "Tyrants and Flatterers: *Kolakeia* in Aristophanes' *Knights* and *Wasps*," (p. 303-338) in *Allusion, Authority, and Truth* (ed. Mitis and Tsagalis, 2010). For consideration of Plato's tendency to play on themes from Aristophanes, see Charles Platter's "Plato's Aristophanes," (p. 132-166) in *Ancient Comedy and Reception* (ed. Olson, 2014). Consideration of this point would also merit

enduring trope of the ancient world. And like Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* nodding towards Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* playing on Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Plato's *Gorgias* was likely seen by the ancients as a satirical ode to themes of 'demagogical cookery' and 'political pandering' long since diagnosed as threats to Athens' precarious democracy. Such concerns are, tragically, no stranger to the US today. In sum, I take the material considered within this section to imply several probabilities:

- The rhetorical handbooks which had preceded Aristotle's were focused on drumming up prejudice and pandering to the passions of the court. They had almost entirely neglected public speaking.
- Chapter 1 of Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art*, likely written and lectured on during Aristotle's time in the Academy, is an extension of—rather than a challenge to—the *Gorgias*. It is for this reason that Aristotle chastises his peer 'rhetoricians' for teaching the practice of speaking to please.
- A concern with sweet-talking rhetorical flatterers would have been broadly acceptable to an audience of ethically minded rhetors, which explains why both Demosthenes and Isocrates pick up the same diagnosis of "rhetorical flattery" as the *Gorgias*.
- Finally, there is a greater degree of intertextuality between the *Gorgias* and other extant works of 4th century BCE Greece than is generally recognized. Concern with the democratic threat of rhetorical flatterers long preceded the composition of the *Gorgias*.

further attention to Plato's *Menexenus*—which is generally read as a satire of Athenian patriotism—and the mentions of Gorgias in the *Symposium*.

This section has suggested that an oft missed passage in Plato's *Laws* is all but explicit evidence that the reading considered in both Chapters 2 and 3 was the reading Plato imagined his readers would receive. Along the way, I have considered how this passage can help mutually illuminate the rhetorical exigence of Aristotle's handbook, *Rhetorical Art*. And, finally, I have suggested that there is something to be gained by reading all such works against the backdrop of other classical texts, from Isocrates' critique of flattering rhetors to Aristophanes' plays. Doing so helps us see both that the argument of the *Gorgias* was probably more broadly accepted than is generally assumed and that the dialogue was in a deep intertextual relationship with other extant works from the classical Greek world. The following section suggests that the revised reading of 462b to 466a also provides the basis for a complete reimagining of how Plato and his Academy influenced the early days of the rhetorical tradition. Contrary to the belief that Plato and his school was anti-rhetorical through and through, it seems that both were always receptive to an ethically oriented use of the rhetor's art.

The Influence of Plato and His School on the Early Rhetorical Tradition

What was the relationship between rhetorical praxis and Plato's Academy? Tradition would hold that, as Plato scorned "rhetoric (n.)," his school probably did too. And yet, this being so, why does Cicero attest, in his *Tusculan Disputations* to having taken up rhetorical instruction under a man who was then head of the Academy itself?¹³² Why do we find mention of several speakers of the Academy renowned for their eloquence and copious speech? Why does Cicero speak of an "Academic rhetor?" Why does Cicero suggest, in his *De Partitione Oratoria*, that his

¹³² As these points are all cited and discussed thoroughly below, I will leave the relevant textual support temporarily aside.

theory of oratory is derived from the “Middle Academy?” And, most puzzling of all, why does Cicero never suggest that these are novel additions to the Academy of his day? This section will suggest that a revised reading of 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* might also clear the way for a reimagining of how Plato’s Academy sits within the history of the rhetorical tradition. It would seem that for too long the misreading of *hē rhētorikē* in the *Gorgias* has colored scholars’ interpretation of the extant historical record. When available evidence is considered in full, the prominence of rhetorical theorists and practitioners within the Academy of Cicero’s day seems to be no puzzle at all. It is, rather, exactly what we would expect from a school which, from its very beginning, was open to an ethically oriented approach to rhetorical theory and instruction.

I begin this section by considering Plato’s influence on the rhetorical theory of Aristotle, particularly relative to a now lost dialogue of Aristotle’s, the *Gryllus*. I unpack how a revised reading of the *Gorgias* can help us reimagine the aim and tenor of this work, and likewise regarding Plato’s relationship to the famous Athenian rhetorician Isocrates. I then set to resolve the puzzle which this section opens with. I consider evidence dormant within the doxography of Diogenes Laertius, the fragments of the Epicurean Philodemus, and the writings of Cicero to present a historical reconstruction of how Plato’s Academy situated itself relative to rhetorical activity. It seems that from the time of Plato to the time of Cicero, the Academy produced master stylists, speech makers, and handbooks on both style and the art of speaking. I close by considering how this might help explain the Academy’s puzzling influence on Cicero.

To start, what was Plato’s influence on Aristotle’s rhetorical theory? For some time, historians of rhetoric like George Kennedy have maintained that Aristotle’s *Rhetorical Art* was written as a brutal challenge to the *Gorgias*. The suggestion is usually imagined as embodied in Aristotle’s opening line: “The rhetorical is counterpart to the dialectical.” For generations,

scholars have read this opening line in a manner similar to Kennedy's suggestion, that Aristotle is here "probably thinking of, and rejecting, the analogy of the true and false arts elaborated by Socrates in the *Gorgias*, where justice is said to be an *antistrophos* to medicine (462b8) and rhetoric, the false form of justice, is compared to cookery, the false form of medicine (465c1-3)" (1991, p. 29 n. 2).¹³³ Expanding upon this sentiment, Kennedy elsewhere suggests that Aristotle's rhetorical theory was, at least partially, a "ruthless" challenge to Plato (1963, p. 18). Kennedy, like others, sees Aristotle as remaining faithful to some of Plato's rhetorical theory, developing "a psychological rhetoric out of Plato's hints in the *Phaedrus*." Yet, as he sees it, "Whereas Plato had opposed rhetoric to dialectic, Aristotle compares the two [...]" (p. 19).

Yet how then could we situate the oft neglected testimony to the contrary which lies dormant in Cicero's *Academica*? For here Cicero tells us, through the mouth of one Marcus Terentius Varro, that even the conservative and traditionalist branch of Plato's Academy saw Plato as the source of the "counterpart" relation between the rhetorical and dialectical arts! Discussing the theories of the so-called "Old Academy," Varro observes:

They also gave approval to derivation of words, that is, the statement of the reason why each class of things bears the name that it does—the subject termed by them etymology

¹³³ Kennedy is doubtlessly right to see this line in conversation with the *Gorgias*, particularly Socrates' outright suggestion that "the rhetorical" is "the counterpart of ['the gastronomic'] in the soul, acting here as that does on the body" (465e). Yet, as per tradition, Kennedy's reading overlooks the fact that the rhetorical thing in question is not the art of "the rhetorical art" (i.e., "rhetoric (n.)") but rather the "practice" of rhetorical flattery which Polus and Callicles seem to endorse and even *exalt*.

and then they used derivations as ‘tokens’ or so to say marks of things, as guise for arriving at proofs or conclusions as to anything of which they desired an explanation; and under this head was imparted their whole doctrine of Dialectic, that is, speech cast in the form of logical argument; to this as a ‘counterpart’ was added the faculty of Rhetoric [*oratoria vis decendi*], which sets out a continuous speech adapted to the purpose of persuasion. This was their primary system, inherited from Plato; and if you wish I will expound the modifications of it that have reached me. (1.8.32-33; p. 441-443)

A discussion of the minor revisions to Plato’s system at the hands of Aristotle, Zeno of Citium, and later scholars of the Academy then follows. But the implication here is clear: the suggestion that “the rhetorical is counterpart to the dialectical” appears to have originated in Plato’s school. And, surprisingly, Cicero isn’t the only one to cite Plato as the origin of this dissociation.

We find a similar suggestion in Isidore of Seville’s (c. 560–636) *Etymologies* and in John of Salisbury’s (c. 1115-1180) *Metalogicon*. Isidore of Seville, writing around 615 CE, states that Plato was responsible for “dividing logic into rhetoric and dialectic” (2006, p. 79-80). Writing several centuries later (1159 CE), John of Salisbury similarly suggests that “Plato divided logic into dialectic and rhetoric” (p. 79). And the doxographer Diogenes similarly relays that for Plato, speech (i.e., *logos*) was divided into five parts, being “either political, or rhetorical [*rhētorikon*], or that of ordinary conversation, or dialectical [*dialektikon*], or technical” (3.87, p. 353). McKeon (1954), citing both Isidor and Salisbury on this point, suggests that this attribution “had wide currency in the Middle Ages,” though I have yet to identify sources beyond these two which make this suggestion (p. 10). McKeon also states a clear skepticism towards this attribution, seemingly unaware of the authority given to it by Cicero’s *Academica*. As McKeon

sees it, this attribution “is not supported by any text in Plato” (p. 10). Yet this suggestion fails, in my view, to consider that within the *Phaedrus*, both the rhetorical and the dialectical art are framed as essential companions for anyone engaging in the study of speech (277b-c). This study of an art of “logos” would eventually gain the title of “logic” (*logikē* being a similarly nominalized adjective like *rhētorikē*). It is thus quite reasonable to imagine that this was, in fact, a division made within Plato’s Academy.

Far beyond the suggestion that a consistency lies between the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, the above point strikes me as a historically significant finding. For centuries, scholars—philosophers and rhetoricians alike—have been told that the opening line to Aristotle’s *Rhetorical Art* was an instance of him flipping the bird to his former master. And yet, evidence to the contrary appears to have lain dormant in Cicero for some time.

There has long been a consensus among classicists and philologists that Aristotle began teaching and writing about the rhetorical art while still a student in Plato’s Academy.¹³⁴ Kennedy (1963) suggests as much in his famous study of classical Greek rhetoric. “It is likely,” he notes, that Aristotle taught rhetoric in the Academy with Plato’s approval before the latter’s death” (p. 18). This is because, as Philodemus, Cicero, and Quintilian attest, Aristotle framed his rhetorical instruction as a direct challenge to the concurrent teachings of Isocrates on the subject. In so far as Isocrates outwardly denied the existence of an art of speaking, and Aristotle maintained the opposite, this should come as no surprise.¹³⁵ Kennedy thus notes that, “the lectures were

¹³⁴ See Chroust (1964 & 1965) and Erickson (1976).

¹³⁵ Though Isocrates may have spoken otherwise in the privacy of his school. See p. 186 and n. 142 below.

motivated by opposition to Isocrates, who was dead before Aristotle established his own school in Athens.” Yet, if Aristotle began his rhetorical instruction while still a student of the Academy—if not within it—and if he did so with Plato’s knowledge, why would it be any surprise that the dramatic opening line of his treatise originated therein? Not as a challenge to, but as a *borrowing* from Plato! This would be shocking enough, but what of the rest of Aristotle’s rhetorical theory? Can his *Rhetorical Art* still, in light of all this, be read as a challenge to the *Gorgias* and extension of the *Phaedrus*, as is commonly assumed? Perhaps the easiest way to imagine the broader influence of Plato’s thought on Aristotle’s rhetorical theory lies in consideration of a now lost Aristotelian dialogue, the *Gryllus*.

It is unclear whether Quintilian engaged with Aristotle’s *Gryllus* itself or only a secondary discussion of the work. Regardless, his discussion suggests that within this dialogue Aristotle’s denies that “rhetoric (n.)” is an art, forwarding “some tentative arguments to the contrary, which are marked by characteristic ingenuity” (Quintilian, 1921, 2.17.14). Keith Erickson (1976), reviewing relevant philological research on the subject, observed the puzzling situation which Aristotle’s *Gryllus* appears to have maintained. He concludes, following others, that “The *Gryllus*, therefore, Platonically railed against the value of rhetoric” and that “Certainly the arguments of the *Gryllus*, abstracted from the *Gorgias*, asserted that rhetoric (or at least ubiquitous encomium) is inartistic” (p. 232; 236). As Erickson sees it, we can see the supposed difference between the *Gryllus* and the *Rhetorical Art* as an “extraordinary” transition serving to “distinguish the mature philosopher [Aristotle] from the young scholar subservient to Platonic idealism.” Kennedy (1963) similarly suggests that “In an early dialogue, the *Gryllos*, Aristotle apparently followed approximately the line of thought in the *Gorgias*” (p. 18). And yet, in so far as the above arguments of Chapters 2 and 3 provide a clearer idea of Plato’s treatment of *hē*

rhētorikē in the *Gorgias*, we are also in a better position to speculate about how, exactly, Aristotle's *Gryllus* might have considered and expanded upon these themes.

As historical reconstructions are obliged to say: "certainty is impossible" (e.g., Dodds, 1959, p. 192). Still, in so far as Plato's *Gorgias* was no true attack on the rhetorical art, we no longer have reason to imagine that Aristotle's *Gryllus* argued that "rhetoric" was not an art. It is far more likely that, following the nuanced dissociation between two sense of *hē rhētorikē* within the *Gorgias*, the *Gryllus* argued explicitly that certain claims to "the rhetorical" are unjustified in imagining themselves true possessors of "the rhetorical art." Aristotle's *Gryllus* was likely then some philosophical extension of the wordplay-dissociation which we find in the pages of the *Gorgias*.¹³⁶ Yet, even if we accept that Aristotle's *Gryllus* took up the dissociation between *hē rhētorikē (technē)* and *hē rhētorikē (empeiria)*, could we really imagine that Plato's Academy was the source of the belief that the rhetorical art and the dialectical art are counterparts? Wasn't Plato's Academy supposed to be staunchly anti-rhetorical? Generations of philosophers, philologists, and rhetoricians have been taught as much. Yet it seems this paradigm is founded solely on the mistranslation of *rhētorikē* in the *Gorgias*. The historical record tells a different story, and in surprising detail. Before considering the Academy itself, however, I believe it is worth noting, even in passing, the marked (and often downplayed) resonance which seemed to exist between the thought of Plato and that of Isocrates.

¹³⁶ Chroust (1965) marks a similar observation, suggesting that "In this composition he insisted that not every form of rhetoric is an « art » (τέχνη) [*technē*]" (p. 577).

The imagined rivalry between Isocrates and Plato seems to have been overblown.¹³⁷ A cursory glance at the overlapping thought between Isocrates and the *Gorgias* suggests a far more complex picture. Consider, for instance, the following points. Isocrates seems to be speaking in solidarity with Plato's Socrates when he suggests that there is a certain manliness (*psychēs andres*) to those who would study philosophy (*Ag. Soph.* 17). This seems to be a direct response to those who, like the character Callicles, charged philosophy with making one unmanly (*anandros*; 485d). When Isocrates speaks of the supposed "artisans" of speech, he uses the same subtle hedging as Plato, calling them "so-called" artisans in the way that Socrates speaks of the "so-called 'rhetorical art'" (*kaloumenos*; *Ag. Soph.* 19; *Antidosis* 256; *Grg.* 448e). Isocrates agrees that those who proclaim to teach the so-called "art" of speaking do so without warrant (*Ag. Soph.* 12). Isocrates seems to suggest that a speaker should have a handle on the actual conditions of their subject matter before speaking on it (*Ag. Soph.* 16; *Antidosis* 187). And he speaks highly of those aspiring "to speak the good" (*to legein eu*; *Antidosis* 275). As tradition would have it, this language was also how the second scholarch of the Academy, Xenocrates, would define the true rhetorical art (see p. 188 n. 145 below). Isocrates observes that one who strives to speak the good will thereby better themselves and will speak in pursuit of just causes (*Antidosis*, 275-278), which is the very position maintained by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (273d-274a). Isocrates suggests that young men should learn to rule (*archein*) themselves before seeking to rule (*archē*) Athens (*Antidosis*, 290). And this is the same position, using the same language, as Socrates in his challenge to Callicles (491d-e). Isocrates' defense of philosophy's political value against all detractors (*Antidosis*, 303-305) similarly mirrors Socrates' challenge to

¹³⁷ A common authority for this view is Howland (1937).

Callicles' prejudice against philosophy's broader merit (*Grg.* 484c-486d; 500c). Isocrates states outright, in either agreement with or foreshadowing of the *Gorgias*, that the Athenian demos had fallen prey to rhetorical flatterers, thus pushing rhetorical instruction to learn how to best *please* an audience rather than how to do right by them (*On the Peace*, 4-5, 10, 124-133; *Antidosis* 133, 148-149, 314-317, *Pan.* 12-15). Isocrates repeatedly speaks against those who appropriate honorable words to describe selfish pursuits (*Antidosis*, 283-285), which is also Plato's primary concern with *hē rhētorikē* in the *Gorgias*. Among these appropriated words, Isocrates repeatedly spoke against those who thought it an "advantage" (*pleonektēma*) to unjustly seize property and power (*Antidosis* 275, 280-283; *Nicocles*, 2; *Peace*, 28-35). And this very same appropriation of the word "advantage" (*pleonektēma*) is dramatically personified by Callicles (483c, 490c-491a)!

If this all weren't enough, Isocrates occasionally forwarded a position which echoed Socrates' spiritual imagery at the conclusion of the *Gorgias*—that those who seek to live justly and virtuously will have the *true* advantage both in this life and beyond (*On the Peace*, 33-35; *To Demonicus*, 39; *To Philip*, 134; *Antidosis*, 281-282). In my view, there is enough evidence here to suggest that Isocrates may well have been a kind of Socratic philosopher. Although I am not convinced, as Kennedy (1963) was, that Plato and Isocrates were on bad terms, I believe Kennedy was fundamentally correct to suggest that "Isocrates regarded himself as a follower of Socrates" (see p. 179-182 for consideration of this point). This would certainly account for why Plato's *Phaedrus* attests to Isocrates serving as a kind of "companion" or "comrade" (*hetairon*) of Socrates. When Socrates suggests that Isocrates is more noble than even Lysias, in both character and speech, and that there is a certain philosophical bent inborn within him (279a-b), it is far from certain that we should read this, as Howland (1937) proposes, as some kind of ironic

dig (p. 159). As with so many things here, the presumption that Plato scorned “rhetoric (n.)” seems to have weighed too heavily in such speculations.

Contrary to Howland’s (1937) speculation, it is worth noting Diogenes Laertius’ matter of fact suggestion that “Plato was a friend of Isocrates” (3.8, p. 283). And, in fact, Diogenes is familiar with a now lost dialogue between Plato hosting Isocrates as they set to “converse about the poets” (3.8, p. 283). This dialogue was written by a philosopher named Praxiphanes of Mytilene. Proclus suggests he was a friend of Theophrastus (370-324 BCE), the de facto successor of Aristotle (Proclus, 2006, p. 109).¹³⁸ And Dorandi (1999) observes that “Praxiphanes’ birth has been placed in the last quarter of the fourth century BC” (p. 36). Little else is known about him. Still, were Plato and Isocrates to be true enemies, we would expect a second-generation student of Aristotle’s school to suggest as much. For my part, I find it quite possible that they were, in fact, on good terms—regardless of what quarrels may have been taken up by Plato’s students. And though this is, itself, an interesting historical point, so too is the reconsideration of the Academy which opens to us once we abandon the presumption that his school was the arch nemesis of “rhetoric (n.).”

There is a silence regarding the role of Plato’s Academy within most all histories of rhetoric, textbooks on rhetorical theory, and studies of the rhetorical tradition; no mention is made of how Plato’s Academy fits within the rhetorical tradition.¹³⁹ Rhetoricians seem,

¹³⁸ Dating from Rusten and Cunningham (2002, p. 6).

¹³⁹ Kennedy (1963) makes only this passing mention, apparently in regard to Aristotle’s instruction of the rhetorical art within the Academy: “Not only the followers of Isocrates and the

implicitly, to follow the presumption of most historians: Plato's *Gorgias* suggests he hated rhetoric, so his school and followers must have also. When evidence to the contrary appears, as it does in Cicero, scholars treat this as a puzzle in need of resolution. I will suggest, however, that upon careful consideration it would seem that Plato's Academy and its followers were actually consistently receptive to ethically oriented rhetorical praxis. Seen in this light, then, the prominence of Academic rhetors in the time of Cicero is no puzzle—it is exactly what we would expect from a school with a long tradition of teaching and practicing a philosophically attuned rhetorical art. The Academy's consistent opposition to rhetorical flattery was in no way contradictory toward this.

The following reconstruction of the Academy's place in the rhetorical tradition is reliant upon the doxography of Diogenes Laertius. No writings of the Academy have survived. Philologists, historians, and classicists interested in Plato's school are thus entirely reliant upon the works of later writers like Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius, and Augustine of Hippo to reconstruct what exactly was written and taught in the Academy after the death of Plato. That said, it is generally agreed that the core of Diogenes' account of the Academic tradition seems to be factual. His interpretation of certain doctrines, and his clear disdain of certain Academics seems in no way to bear upon his account of who led the school in a given year, or what books historians attribute to them. What evidence is there, then, to suggest the place of the rhetorical art in Plato's school after his death?

sophistic tradition but most philosophical schools, among them the Academy, included rhetoric in the curriculum" (p. 20). Beyond this he is silent.

Plato died in 347 BCE (Waterfield, 2023, p. 221). Cicero recounts a story that he did so tranquilly, “pen in hand” (*On Old Age*, 5.14, p. 23). His immediate successor as head of the Academy (also sometimes called a “scholarch”) was his nephew Speusippus (c. 407-339 BCE).¹⁴⁰ Among other things, Speusippus published a criticism of rhetorical handbooks and an alternative rhetorical handbook of his own.¹⁴¹ He also apparently published “the so-called secrets” of Isocrates (*ta kaloumena aporēta*; Hicks, 1925; 4.2, p. 376).¹⁴² In addition, Speusippus

¹⁴⁰ Date from Hicks (1925, p. 375).

¹⁴¹ The former being his *Technōn elenchus* and the latter being his *Technikōn* (Hicks, 1925; 4.5, p. 378).

¹⁴²In so far as Kennedy imagines Aristotle had some access to unpublished teachings of Isocrates, I would follow others in suggesting that this is probably material made public by Speusippus. Hicks, for instance, takes this to mean Speusippus divulged “the secrets of [Isocrates’] art” (Diogenes Laertius, 1925, p. 377). Tarán’s (1981) skepticism of this connection fails, in my view, to account for the privacy Isocrates would have felt towards any teachings resembling an “art” of speech which he quite publicly denied the existence of (See *Ag. Soph.* 12; Isocrates, 1929, p. 171; see also Too, 1995, p. 169-170). This also helps account for why the rhetor Demonsthenes may have had to learn Isocrates’ teachings in a secretive manner (Plutarch, *Dem.* 5.5). Tarán overlooks this additional source in maintaining his skepticism that these “secrets” pertained to Isocrates’ rhetorical teaching (p. 181 n. 6). Note also that the widely attested suggestion that Demonsthenes was a student of Plato seems only to be refuted by scholars who imagine that Plato would have wanted nothing to do with a rhetor. Worthington

wrote a work titled *On Gryllus* (*Pros Gryllon*), which may have been in some engagement with Aristotle's dialogue of the same name (4.4, p. 378).

After eight years as scholarch, Speusippus fell ill. Xenocrates (369-314 BCE), who seems to have been in Plato's inner circle, took over as head of Plato's Academy.¹⁴³ And, just like Speusippus, Xenocrates was no stranger to the rhetorical. Ancient testimony suggests he both gave public orations and wrote an extensive book on *Style* (*Lexis*; 4.13). This was likely his second longest book, longer than his treatise on *Discussion* and second only to his work on

(2013), for instance, in his study of Demosthenes, dismisses this idea in passing: "The story that Plato taught Demosthenes appears unlikely, given the philosopher's dislike of rhetoric" (p. 19). As Worthington here observes, it is broadly attested throughout antiquity that Demosthenes was a pupil of Plato (see, e.g., Cicero, 1942a, p. 63; Plutarch, 1919, p. 13; and Philostratus & Eunapius, 1921, p. 61). In fact, Cicero's suggestion in *De Oratore* (1.88-89) insinuates that this genealogy was maintained within the Academy itself. Scholars like Worthington seem to only dismiss this possibility on the assumption that Plato hated "rhetoric (n.)." In so far as this dissertation calls this into question, there is strong reason to believe that Demosthenes may well, in fact, have gained some of his rhetorical acumen in association with Plato, his school or, at the very least, his writings.

¹⁴³ Diogenes tells us, for instance, that Xenocrates joined Plato on his trip to Sicily and he placed him beside Aristotle, presumably because they were both exceptional students, albeit with different temperaments (1925, 4.6, p. 381).

Theses (4.13). He also wrote a book *On Writing* and a work titled *Callicles*.¹⁴⁴ Philodemus, an Epicurian philosopher, tells us that Xenocrates was an experience speaker; Philodemus also attests to a lost rhetorical textbook by Demetrius of Phalerum, which apparently saw fit to discuss Xenocrates' rhetorical efforts (Philodemus, 1920, p. 335). There is reason to imagine, in fact, that Quintilian's famous definition of "rhetoric (n.)" as "the science of speaking the good" was actually derived from Xenocrates.¹⁴⁵ The next scholarch, Polemo, was the "favorite" of

¹⁴⁴ Philostratus suggests that Polus was a real historical figure (see Philostratus & Eunapius, 1921, p. 39). It is at least possible that Callicles was a historical figure. Regardless, Speusippus' Callicles likely extends in some sense on the Socratic challenge to Callicles dramatized within the *Gorgias*. We find in Isocrates evidence that Callicles personified an Athenian prejudice against philosophy which seems to have been rather broadly held (see p. 182-183 above). This work thus may have been a critical challenge to the same anti-philosophic prejudice railed against by both the *Gorgias* and Isocrates alike. It probably had a kind of protreptic aim, imploring the citizens of Athens to take up a life of self-exploration and philosophical inquiry.

¹⁴⁵ Sextus Empiricus tells us that Xenocrates defined "rhetoric" as the "science of speaking the good" (*epistēmēn tou eu legein*; *Against the Professors*, 2.6; p. 190; my translation). Sextus tells us that this definition was also forwarded by the Stoics. Zeno of Citium, the founder of "Stoic" philosophy, is said to have been a student of Crates, a later scholarch, and "to have attended the lectures of" other scholarchs of the Academy, like "Stilpo and Xenocrates for ten years [...] and Polemo as well" (DL. 7.1.1; p. 111). All this being true, Zeno would have borrowed this definition from Xenocrates. Quintilian states that, to his understanding, the definition he develops is of Stoic origin. Insofar as Cicero and Augustine both frame the Stoics as a polemical

Xenocrates and followed closely both his teachings and temperate manner (4.19). He was likely scholarch “from 314 to c. 276 BCE” (Hicks, 1972, p. 393). Polemo was, Diogenes tells us, a friend of the literary arts and a lover of Sophocles (4.19; we hear something similar of several other scholarchs). The following scholarch, Crates, took up his post somewhere in the third century BCE. He was likewise the “favorite” of Polemo and left behind speeches which he delivered either to the public or while serving as an ambassador (*logous dēmēgorikous kai presbeutikous*; 4.23). Polemo and Crates were said to have been of one mind, so much so that Diogenes relays a story of their common tomb after a lifetime of cohabitation (4.21). In so far as there was an openness to rhetorical efforts from Speusippus to Polemo, Crates’ rhetorical output seems to have maintained, not broken from, an established rhetorical tradition within the Academy.

Crantor (340-290 BC), the scholarch succeeding Crates “wrote poems” and was a lover of Homer and Euripides (4.26). Diogenes suggests that Arcesilaus (c. 318-242 BC), the scholarch who followed Crantor, was the founder of what he calls the “middle Academy,” though Cicero felt strongly that such dissociations between an “Old,” “Middle” and “New Academy” were too doctrinal (see *Academica* 1.13; Cicero, 1933, p. 423). Arcesilaus read Homer nightly and saw his favorite poet, Pindar, as “matchless for imparting fullness of diction

offshoot of Academic thought, it would seem that Xenocrates’ definition of the rhetorical science reached Quintilian by way of Stoics like Chryssipus and Cleanthes (Quintilian, 1921, 2.15.35). The appearance of a similar phrase in sentiment in the extant speeches of Isocrates suggests this definition may have been circulating more generally among Athenian philosophers and rhetoricians (See Isocrates, 1929, *Antidosis*, 275).

and for affording a copious store of words and phrases” (4.31). Perhaps thanks to this very passion for copious style, Arcesilaus became known as master of discursive invention (4.37, p. 415). Diogenes recounts that “In persuasion [*peistikos*] he had no equal, and thus all the more drew pupils to the school, although they were in terror of his pungent wit” (p. 414-415). Though Arcesilaus would step down from his position as scholarch—a move which Diogenes suggests had never been down before—it was not until Carneades that another scholarch of note arose.

Carneades (c. 213-129 BCE) was the primary influence on the generation of Academics with which Cicero was familiar with in his day. Diogenes tells us that his philosophical influence was such “that even the rhetoricians [*rhētoras*] would dismiss their classes and repair to him to hear him lecture” (4.62, p. 438-439). Cicero’s *De Oratore* suggests he, like Arcesilus, was widely renowned for his rhetorical ability. The character Crassus (140-91 BCE) thus suggests that “the illustrious Careneades” was “a speaker who, for spirited and copious [*copiosissimum*] oratory, surpassed, it was said, all other men” (1.43, p. 35).¹⁴⁶ This description is again reiterated in Books II and III (2.161, p. 315; 3.67, p. 55).¹⁴⁷ Among his pupils was an Academic named Charmadas (168/7 – 103/93 BCE) whose eloquence (*eloquentia*) almost matched that of his teacher (*Ac.* 2.16, p. 487).¹⁴⁸ During a visit to Athens, Crassus undertook a close reading of the Gorgias beneath Charmadas. And the grandfather of Mark Antony, Marcus Antonius (143-87

¹⁴⁶ Evidence for the date supplied by Kennedy (1972, p. 84). Crassus was Cicero’s rhetorical instructor from boyhood (Sutton and Rackham, 1942, p. xiii)

¹⁴⁷ Though I disagree with him elsewhere, Brittain (2001) also observes the lack of evidence to imagine that Carneades took up an anti-rhetorical position in his teaching (p. 311).

¹⁴⁸ Justification for these dates are considered by Brittain (2001, p. 46-47).

BCE)¹⁴⁹, also relays that he attended lectures of Charmadas on the subject of oratory (1.83-93, p. 59-67).¹⁵⁰ Metrodorus of Scepsis (c. 180 – c. 110 BCE), a famed Academic rhetor (*Academia rhetorem*), was also a “diligent disciple” of Carneades (3.75, p. 61; 1.45, p. 35).¹⁵¹ Both he and Charmadas are said to have possessed “superhuman powers of memory” (De Or. 3.360, p.

¹⁴⁹ See Kennedy (1972, p. 80) for the above dating.

¹⁵⁰ Though I lack the space to consider these lectures here, I heartily agree with Kennedy’s suggestion both that “Charmadas’ position is much less anti-oratorical when expounded than it initially seems” and that “Crassus [...] is really not too far from Charmadas’ position” (p. 219). I would also emphasize, his suggestion that “Cicero regarded Crassus’ position, and thus his own, as somewhat unique in emphasis, but as very close in substance to the views of Charmadas” (p. 220; see p. 219-220 for broader discussion). This runs counter to Glucker’s (1978) suggestion that, under Charmadas’ leadership, Crassus was “likely to have read the *Gorgias* with the eyes of a sceptic” (p. 50). As Kennedy rightly reminds us, regardless of the seemingly anti-rhetorical arguments attributed to Charmadas, “We are told ([*De Or.*] 1.84) that Charmadas as a sceptical Academic disputed the views of others, and thus he did not necessarily reveal his own” (p. 219). And, contextually, Antonius takes Charmadas to truly hold the very position which Crassus maintains (Cicero, 1942a, *De Oratore* 1.87, p. 63). Glucker’s position seems colored more by the fact that he is not persuaded by the *Gorgias* than it does by Cicero’s testimony.

¹⁵¹ Date conjectured by Brittain (2001, p. 47). Cicero’s *Academica* somewhat softens the former claim to speculation, suggesting that Metrodorus “was believed to have been well acquainted with Carneades” (Cicero, 1933, 2.17, p. 489).

471).¹⁵² Beyond his discussions with Charmadas, Crassus also studied rhetorical theory under Metrodorus during his time in Asia (2.365, p. 477; 3.75, p. 61).

Philo of Larissa (159/8- 84/3 BCE) likely studied under students of Carneades himself.¹⁵³ He was scholarch of the Academy “from 110 to c. 83 BCE” (Britain, 2001, p. 1). He was the last recognized scholarch to hold this position. After the death of Philo, the “Academy,” as a formal institution, seems to have ceased (p. 1). The Roman consul Sulla is said to have laid waste to both the Academy and the Lyceum, stripping their groves for wood.¹⁵⁴ Cicero tells us that around 89 BCE:

Philo, the head of the Academy, along with a group of loyal Athenians, had fled from Athens because of the Mythridatic war and had come to Rome. Filled with enthusiasm for the study of philosophy I gave myself up to his whole instruction. (Cicero, 1939, *Brutus* 306, p. 267)

Yet it was not merely “philosophy” which Cicero studied under this scholarch. For, as Cicero states in his *Tusculan Disputations*, Philo deliberately taught on both philosophical and rhetorical subjects: “Philo, however, as we remember, for we often heard him lecture, made a practice of teaching the rules of the rhetoricians [*rhetorum praecepta*] at one time, and those of the philosophers at another” (2.3.9, p. 154-155).

¹⁵² Metrodorus is here attributed with an early version of the ‘memory palace’ well known to speech makers today.

¹⁵³ Date borrowed from Brittain (2001, p. 41; for consideration of his proximity to Carneades, see p. 43).

¹⁵⁴ See Plutarch’s *Sulla*, 12.3 (Plutarch, 1916, p. 363).

There can be little doubt, in light of all this, that the Academy of Cicero's day was active in rhetorical theory, not simply in decrying "rhetoric (n.)" as a knack based species of flattery. Rather, Academics were taken with a concern to both instruct on the rules of the rhetor's art, while considering, too, the necessary ethical basis of anything which truly would be a rhetorical art as found in the *Phaedrus*. If we find any doubt about the Academy's influence on the rhetorical theory of Cicero, it is worth noting his suggestion, at the close of his *De Partitione Oratoria* that his rhetorical theory is *derived from the Academy itself*: "You now have set before you all the departments of oratory [*oratoriae partitiones*], that is those which have sprung from our famous school, the Middle Academy [*media Academia*]" (139, p. 418-419). Cicero's rhetorical theory is thus demonstrably Academic.

When Charles Brittain (2001) stumbled upon this material, he saw it as a puzzle in need of resolution. How could Plato's Academy be so bursting with rhetorical instruction? And yet, in his attempt to resolve this puzzle he presumed, at the outset, that the rhetorical praxis of Philo's day must have been a novelty, imagining "sufficient Platonic precedent to think that" those preceeding Philo would not have engaged in rhetorical instruction (p. 311). He thus sees Philo as an instance of a "novel teaching of rhetoric by [a] scholar of the Academy" (p. 297). And yet, is there really "sufficient Platonic precedent" to presume, at the outset, that rhetorical instruction would have been completely foreign to Plato's school?

In this section I have attempted to narrate an oft neglected story of how traces of rhetorical practice seem to have lingered within Plato's school from the time of Aristotle to the time of Cicero. We thus find the probability that Aristotle lectured on the *Rhetorical Art*, in agreement with both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, during his time in the Academy. Aristotle's famous claim that "the rhetorical is counterpart to the dialectical" seems to have originated from

within Plato's Academy itself. I then suggested the likely intertextual relationship between the *Gorgias* and Aristotle's lost dialogue *Gryllus* and observed the surprising overlap between the speeches of Isocrates and the Socratic themes of the *Gorgias*. From here I argued that the Academy played an overlooked role within the rhetorical tradition—establishing the basis for a philosophical rhetorical art which would later be developed in the hands of rhetors like Cicero and Quintilian. From Speusippus to Carneades we find a long line of speechmakers and stylists who were not as scorned by even rhetoricians as we might at first assume. Seen in this light, the mistranslation of *hē rhētorikē* has done too much interpretive lifting in our historical consideration of the Academy. When we presume, on the basis of the *Gorgias*, “sufficient Platonic precedent” that the Academy was anti-rhetorical, we forget to look for evidence to the contrary. In hindsight, then, it would seem that the prominence of Academic rhetors in Cicero's day is no real puzzle at all. It attests to a long genealogy of rhetorical praxis which likely occurred within the Academy itself. We have every reason to believe, then, that, from start to finish, from Plato to Philo, the Academy was always open to and, indeed contributed to, an ethically attuned and idealistic conception of the rhetor's art. This chapter has attempted to present a revised understanding of how Plato's Academy sits within the history of the rhetorical tradition. I have argued both that the *Gorgias* was a marked influence on Chapter 1 of Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art* and, furthermore, that Plato and his Academy likely had a broader influence on the early rhetorical tradition than is generally assumed. I now turn to a conclusion of the chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that a passage in the *Laws* stands as all but “smoking gun” evidence that Plato assumed his readers would see a dissociation between *hē rhētorikē* (*technē*) and *hē rhētorikē* (*empeiria*) as immanent to the *Gorgias*. I have shown that this passage can also

help illuminate a seeming puzzle regarding the very exigence of Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art*. And, additionally, I have suggested that placing these works besides texts which form their backdrop (e.g., Aristophanes *Wasps* and *Knights*) can help show a degree of intertextual alignment and influence which has thus far remained unrecognized within rhetorical theory.

I have also suggested that the revised reading of the *Gorgias* creates the space to reconsider the assumption that Plato's Academy was always anti-rhetorical. Were that the case, why does Cicero attest to a collection of Academic rhetors during his lifetime? Why does he attest to studying the rhetorical art under a scholarch? Why does he attribute his rhetorical theory to the Middle Academy? And why does he never suggest that "rhetorical instruction" is a novel occurrence within the Academy? I have suggested, in response to this apparent puzzle, that the misreading of *hē rhētorikē* within the *Gorgias* has weighed too heavily on historical speculations regarding Plato's Academy and its rhetorical activity. Considering a survey of evidence which no one, so far as I know, thought to look for, we actually have every reason to believe that Plato's Academy was *consistently receptive* to rhetorical instruction and theorizing, from the time of Speusippus to the time of Philo of Larissa. Throughout this time, the Academy was filled with speechmakers, renowned stylists, and lecturers admired even by *rhetors* themselves. I have also suggested that the most reasonable resolution to the above puzzle is that the Academy was receptive to an ethically oriented mode of rhetorical theorizing. I now turn to a conclusion of the dissertation itself, summarizing the work thus far, suggesting avenues for future research, and outlining options for educators seeking to update their materials relative to the history of "rhetoric."

Conclusion

Implications for Historians and Future Researchers

“Any scholar who has experienced it will recall the excitement which accompanied the first reading of a formerly lost work of Greek literature, or the finding of an answer to a much-discussed question. He may also perhaps have felt a certain glee at the overturning of established opinion. It is exhilarating to realize that the last word has not been said, that a new and immediate contact has been reopened with the ancient world. This is one side of the coin: turn it over and remember that the creation of new knowledge also carries responsibilities. To work on something new is to accept the possibility of making mistakes.”

—E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri*¹⁵⁵

I will begin this conclusion with a survey of the core historical findings outlined in Chapter 4 as made possible by the revised reading of the *Gorgias* presented in Chapters 2 and 3. I will also consider the openings for future research enabled by this dissertation.

A Historical Reconstruction: Plato, the Academy, and the Rhetorical Tradition

To start, it might prove helpful to provide a summary of the revised historical findings and speculations presented within this dissertation. My hope is that this might also prove helpful to any historian, researcher, or textbook writer seeking a quick summary of how this dissertation has resituated Plato’s Academy within the rhetorical tradition. A summary would fall along the following lines. Study of the classical world is notoriously spotty. It is thus perhaps best to say that such-and-such “*seems*” to be the case, or that one possibility is more *probable* than another. For convenience, however, this summary will skip all such hedging language and instead take it for granted that ancient historiography is spotty and open to revision. This summary will also forego all citations, as the relevant primary and secondary material has been considerably cited above.

¹⁵⁵ See Turner, 1968, p. 54.

During Plato's lifetime, a growing number of figures were claiming to both possess and teach an "art" of "the rhetorical." Whether or not Gorgias of Leonti proclaimed this himself, we know that his student, Alcidamas, did. Plato, and Aristotle soon after him, were both of the mind that these teachers had hubristically claimed possession of an art which they truly did not have. An "art," in their view, had both a systematic theory which could be taught and a familiarity with the why and wherefore of its praxis. According to both the *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art*, the previous generation of rhetorical educators had focused solely on style and the drumming up of passions and prejudice in the courtroom. The master of Old Comedy, Aristophanes, shows us the sad state of the Athenian court system in the 4th century BCE. Jury members were paid and pandered to enough that the play *Wasps* sees fit to mock a man addicted to the sweet-talking of the courtroom pleaders. Plato's *Gorgias* was written as a challenge to such rhetorical educators, those who thought it fine to persuade regardless of evidence or justice. The *Gorgias* posed these teachers as appropriators of the name "rhetorical art" and reduced their trade to the status of a "rhetorical knack" for the production of pleasure. Other figures, like Isocrates, were not entirely opposed to either this challenge or its diagnosis.

Aristotle's handbook, *Rhetorical Art*, sought to disrupt this trend. Building on the ideal of a true "rhetorical art" as imagined in the *Phaedrus*, Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art* presented a work synthesizing the study of style, social psychology, and the mastery of enthymemes to help produce a sense of trust (*pisteis*) between a speaker and their audience. Extending the charge of the *Gorgias*, this handbook again challenged those who would reduce their understanding of "rhetorical art" to courtroom pandering. Aristotle calls his audience towards a more noble path but reveals the tricks of the trade used by such persuaders so that the true rhetor might better defend against unjust persuasion. The *Rhetorical Art* was probably written and lectured on

during Aristotle's time in the Academy. The suggestion of its opening line—that the rhetorical art is counterpart to the dialectical—is stated in allusion to the *Phaedrus*, just as the challenge to rhetorical pandering is given in allusion to the *Gorgias*.

The immediate successors of Plato, Speusippus and Xenocrates, also wrote on style and the rhetorical art. From Xenocrates to Carneades, Academics gave speeches, read poetry, and were often renowned for their rhetorical style. We have no reason to imagine that the rhetorical instruction started by Aristotle within the Academy ended upon his departure. By the time of Cicero, we once more find record of the Academy's rhetorical activity, which Cicero never mentions as a novelty of his day. Cicero undertakes both philosophical and rhetorical instruction under a scholarch of the Academy, Philo of Larissa. And he tells us of a broad range of rhetorical activity within the Academy of his day, from eloquent rhetors to rhetorical theorists. Why, then, is this not rhetorical reading in every textbook?

The trouble arose when the critical but easily overlooked wordplay in the *Gorgias*—which implicitly dissociated between the true “rhetorical art” and mere “rhetorical knack”—was lost in translation. This explains why Cicero's reading of the dialogue is so distinct from that of the modern world, and why Quintilian is the first figure to take it up. During Cicero's lifetime the *Gorgias* was as yet untranslated, while by the time of Quintilian it is being “unskillfully excerpted” (2.15.24). Evidence in both Plato's *Laws* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* suggest this dissociation was seen by both Plato and his school. And by the 2nd century CE we find that most figures who had studied under Plato's close readers (the “Middle Platonists”) emphasized Plato's deliberately dissociated use of *hē rhētorikē*. This dissociation seems to have been somewhat widely recognized in the second century. The dissociation was remarked upon explicitly by the Neoplatonists of the 5th and 6th centuries (from Syrianus to Olympiodorus) and in clear reference

to both the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias*. And, on the basis of the text alone, figures like the obscure Marcellinus were likewise able to parse out this dissociated reading.

In the 15th century, Marsilio Ficino published his Latin translation of the *Gorgias*, alongside the rest of the Platonic corpus. His generation of renaissance thinkers were newly reading and translating the *Gorgias* into Latin for the first time since the ancient world. Others in Ficino's day, most notably George of Trebizond, were again disseminating an anti-Platonism grounded in their reductive reading of the *Gorgias*. But Ficino, perhaps on the authority of the Neoplatonists, sought to draw his readers' attention to Plato's more nuanced rhetorical theory. Ficino's translation, itself, failed to fully demarcate the significance of the wordplay in question, and his call for a nuanced reading seems to have fallen on deaf ears. But his would not be the last attempt to recover the since lost reading of the *Gorgias*. In 19th century England, the dialogue would once more be rendered in a novel way, through a new translation. Thus Thomas Taylor, translated the dialogue into English for the very first time in 1804, and he again sought to revive this lost reading. Drawing on Olympiodorus, Taylor gave rather careful attention to the adjectival role of the Greek word *rhētorikos*. And though Taylor did so somewhat inconsistently, and without fully teasing out the point at issue from 462b to 466a, Taylor still tried to draw his reader's attention to Olympiodorus, who observed the dissociated use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē* within the Platonic corpus. The famed Utilitarian John Stuart Mill produced the *Gorgias* translation which immediately followed, bowling over Taylor's preliminary efforts to read *rhētorikē* with nuance. The generation of translations which came after followed suit, and this nuanced reading was once again buried. E. R. Dodds (1959), in a rather magnificent study of the *Gorgias* unmatched in English scholarship, also observed, for his part, that Olympiodorus' dissociated reading of *rhētorikē* was warranted. Yet, aside from this blip, this forgotten nuance—

and its explanatory power—then went into hibernation for several decades. The aim of this dissertation has been to recover this nuance, outline the story of its burial, and assert the significance of its recovery.

As I understand the research I have undertaken here, this revised story of the Academy's role in the rhetorical tradition and the historical (mis)reception of the *Gorgias* could serve as a more calibrated compass than our previous studies for future historians and researchers interested in classical rhetorical theory, the eminent Plato, or the history of his school. I somewhat optimistically hope that the above considerations may one day find their way into handbooks and anthologies so that the philosophical status of the rhetor's art might be brought to the attention of a new generation of students. Having considered the re-orientation which this study may afford for the historical dimension of my argument, I now consider several openings for future research,

Openings for Future Research

I am doubtless unable to foresee or imagine all of the opportunities for scholarship afforded by the arguments proposed this dissertation. I would nevertheless like to conclude by observing a handful of the research opportunities which strike me as both exciting and pressing. I intend to follow several of these threads up myself—time and employment permitting. But the amount of research which could follow this work is far more than I am capable of following up.

Historians of Plato's Academy often draw on primary sources buried in obscure pieces of scholarship. Works like, for instance, Seigfreid Mekler's (1902) *Academicorum Philosophorum Index Herculanensis*, are often presented in a scholarly Latin, aside from being in a fragmentary Greek which requires the laborious task of speculative reconstructions of the text. In light of the

above research, it would be worth considering whether there is additional evidence or counterevidence to the arguments there.¹⁵⁶

I believe there is a broadly overlooked intertextual relationship between works of classical rhetorical theory (e.g., Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, and Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art*) and Aristophanes *Wasps* and *Knights*. Further research is called for to unpack their thematic, terminological, and political overlap. Beyond this, are there any other works which, like these plays, can help us situate the political exigence against which Plato and Aristotle set up their challenge to rhetorical flatterers of the people?

I have above suggested that there was a broad recognition that the people of 4th century BCE Athens had fallen prey to the sweet-talking of rhetorical flatterers. This is attested to by rhetors like Demosthenes and Isocrates themselves. And, if I may rattle off a few rapid-fire questions for future research:

- How might we consider Plato's *Gorgias* and Chapter 1 of Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art* relative to the history of rhetorical persuasion in the law courts of ancient Athens?
- I have suggested that core themes from the *Gorgias* are peppered throughout the works of Isocrates. If we suspend the assumption that Plato and Isocrates were at odds, do any other points or resonances emerge?

¹⁵⁶ I have discovered just days before submission of this final manuscript that these fragments were recently translated into English (see Philodemus, 2020). This will hopefully make it easier for a broader range of scholars to situate the history of Plato's Academy alongside the historical arguments developed within Chapter 4 above.

- How would Isocrates' common-sense definition of the signifier "rhetoric" intervene in the habit of "defining rhetoric" which has been such a fixture of rhetorical studies in the modern world?
- Are there other texts—or passages—where the tendency to edit out the adjectival use of the Greek *rhētorikos* has led to a general loss in meaning?

Among other things, a revised translation of the *Gorgias* is warranted; a commentary which attends to the use of the word *rhētorikos* therein may prove helpful until such a time as a revised translation can appear. I had initially intended to provide such a commentary as an "Appendix" but lacked sufficient time.

The aim of this dissertation has been to definitively unsettle the basis upon which the standard reading of the *Gorgias* ambiguously stands. There appears no longer to be any reason to imagine that 462b to 466a presents a criticism of either "rhetoric (n.)" or the "rhetorical art." It is a criticism of a certain "rhetorical practice" alluded to implicitly through Plato's deliberate wordplay. What's more, we no longer have a reason to imagine that Plato changed his mind, softened his tone, or revised some earlier bias against "rhetoric (n.)." What we see, in light of the above material, is that Plato maintained a consistent position throughout both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. Plato was not beyond changing his mind about the subjects that appeared in his dialogues. But his conception of the rhetorical art is not one of these changes. This dissertation thus presents an argument which contributes to our understanding of how Plato's thought developed. Across his written dialogues, Plato appears to have been consistently particular about what should and should not claim the title "rhetorical art." And this idealistic notion of how to properly demarcate this subject directly informed the rhetorical theories of both Aristotle and the early Academy. There is no reason to believe that Aristotle's *Rhetorical Art* was a challenge to

the *Gorgias*, nor that the Academy was anti-rhetorical from the time between Plato's composition of the *Gorgias* and his composition of the *Phaedrus*. Aside from a more nuanced conception of 462b to 466a, I believe that this revised idea of how Plato, Aristotle, and the early Academy situated themselves relative to the *Gorgias* is of some historical significance.

This dissertation has proposed a new paradigm for interpreting classical rhetorical theory awaits us were we to recognize, as Chapter 2 has argued, that 462b to 466a of the *Gorgias* is not a critique of “rhetoric (n.),” as generations of scholars have imagined. In rejecting this reading, we will not only be doing service to the text of the dialogue itself, but also to a subtle instance of Platonic wordplay which, as the *Laws* attests, Plato assumed his readers would recognize. And in doing so, we would definitively not be alone. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, a more nuanced reading of Plato's *Gorgias* once dominated the ancient world, trying time and time again to reemerge for the modern reader. Though this nuance—the distinction between a “rhetorical practice” and “rhetorical art”—has once again been lost in translation, it need no longer remain obscured and forgotten. The hope of this dissertation is rather that this misconception might begin to gradually resolve as the relic of an outmoded paradigm of interpretation.

In its place, perhaps, we might come to see a certain “rhetorical idealism” which was not only present across both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, but also the deciding influence on early rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian. Beyond this, a certain ethical richness lies immanent to the *Gorgias* with no lack of applicability to the trials and crises of our modern democracies. I have written this dissertation in the hope that it might make a new reading of the *Gorgias* imaginable to philosophy, the classics, and rhetorical studies itself. And, as the Preface mentions above, I have every intention of exploring, someday soon, the ethical takeaways of a dialogue which contains riches far beyond its playful use of the phrase *hē rhētorikē*.

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