

The Doctor and the Pastry Chef: Pleasure and Persuasion in Plato's *Gorgias*

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The *Gorgias*' ostensible subject is rhetoric, which it defines as a “producer of persuasion.”¹ But the dialogue is also centrally concerned with another kind of persuasion: Socrates' attempts to persuade his interlocutors to pursue the life of justice and philosophy. Socrates tells his interlocutors that the subject at issue between them is the most important one of all: “in what way one should live.”² And he tries to persuade them to reject their own answers to this question and accept his own instead, not only attacking their views and making positive arguments for his own, but also saying outright and repeatedly that such persuasion is his goal: “I want...to persuade you to change your mind...Am I persuading you at all...?” (493c4-d1; cf. 494a3-5, 513c8-d1 and 527c5-6).

The *Gorgias* not only emphasizes that Socrates wants to persuade people to choose the right life, however; it also emphasizes that he very often fails. This is dramatized in the progression of the dialogue: Gorgias is polite if uncomfortable; Polus is openly incredulous about Socrates' claims even when his own have been formally refuted (480e1-2); Callicles ends by being so annoyed that he drops out of the conversation altogether, leaving Socrates to converse with himself in a parody of his failure to engage others (505d4 ff.). The dialogue offers explicit comments on Socrates' lack of

¹ Πειθῆς δημιουργός, 453a2. Translations are mine except where otherwise noted.

² 500c3-4; compare the equivalent formulations “Who is happy and who is not” (472c6-d1), and “What a man should be like and what he should do” (487e8-488a1).

persuasiveness as well: Polus says that no one will believe Socrates' strange views;³ Callicles accuses him of being so inept with words that he “couldn't put a speech together correctly before councils of justice or utter any plausible or persuasive sound” (486a1-b2)⁴, and later says not only that he himself is not persuaded by Socrates but that this is “what happens to most people” (τὸ τῶν πᾶλλῶν πάθος) (513c5-6). Of course, Socrates falls short of persuading his interlocutors in many other dialogues, and sometimes they even remark on the fact. No other dialogue, however, draws so much attention to Socrates' failures to persuade.

Most significantly, the dialogue emphasizes Socrates' persuasive failures by pitting him against three orators, and pitting philosophy against rhetoric. For rhetoric is presented as a persuader *extraordinaire*,⁵ with particular emphasis on its ability to persuade *crowds*, i.e. the ignorant many.⁶ This makes for a sharp contrast with Socrates,

³ “Couldn't even a child refute you, and show that the things you say aren't true?” (470c4-5); compare Polus' remarks throughout the conversation.

⁴ Trans. D. J. Zeyl.

⁵ Plato chooses as its first proponent the famous orator and teacher Gorgias, notorious for extolling the power of verbal persuasion in his *Encomium of Helen*; when Gorgias and Socrates search for a definition of rhetoric they agree that it is “a producer of persuasion, and that's the long and short of it,” the ability to “instill persuasion in the souls of those who hear it” (453a2-5).

⁶ Gorgias boasts that rhetoric gives one the ability to persuade “judges in the law court and councilors in the council and assemblymen in the assembly, and to persuade in any other gathering” (452e1-3), the ability “to speak and persuade the crowds (τὰ πλῆθη)” (452e7-8); he also claims that the orator will be more persuasive than any other craftsman “in a crowd” (456c6).

who admits to being hopeless in front of crowds⁷ and to holding views that most people find absurd,⁸ and aspires at best to produce for his views “one witness, the person with whom I’m arguing” (474b5-6).

The *Gorgias*’ critique of Socratic persuasion has received attention in good discussions by Klosko, Scott, and Woolf.⁹ They argue that by emphasizing Socrates’ failures to persuade others through argument, and in particular by pitting Socrates against the passionate and intransigent Callicles, the dialogue implies that rational argument alone cannot sway someone in whom non-rational forces – *erôs*, or non-rational desires in general – are strong.

I want to add to and in some ways revise this picture by showing that Plato illuminates the subject of persuasion through an aspect of the dialogue that has not received sufficient attention, one that may seem on its surface to be a mere literary flourish. This is the allegory of the doctor and the pastry chef, who vie for the citizens’ trust.

1. Socrates and the Doctor

Toward the end of the dialogue, in a passage rich with allusions to Socrates’ trial and conviction as described in the *Apology*, Socrates himself addresses his failures to

Socrates gives his own interpretation of these claims at 459a3-4: “Doesn’t ‘in front of a crowd’ mean ‘in front of those who lack knowledge?’”

⁷ 473e6 ff.; cf. 521e ff.

⁸ 471e ff.

⁹ Klosko 1986, 1993; Scott 1999; Woolf 2000.

persuade. Callicles has said that Socrates could not speak persuasively enough to defend himself if he were brought into court on false charges by someone who *could* speak persuasively; Socrates agrees with him, saying: “I won’t have anything to say in court...For I will be judged as a doctor would be judged if a pastry chef accused him in front of a jury of children” (521e2-4). He goes on to spin out the analogy in detail; we will return to this passage below. But this is not the first time in the dialogue that Socrates has compared himself to a doctor, and his brand of conversation to medical practice. Earlier he has exhorted Polus to answer his questions by saying “Answer, submitting yourself nobly to the argument as to a doctor” (475d7). And he has asked whether he should “struggle with the Athenians so that they will become as good as possible, like a doctor, or be servile and associate with them for their gratification” (521a2-5), clearly implying that he in fact does the former.

This analogy between Socrates and the doctor is far from innocuous. Looking at the dialogue’s characterization of medicine, we will see that it serves two major purposes. First, it allows Plato to present Socrates’ practice, and indeed philosophy in general, as beneficial – as a valuable and vital art that looks to the wellbeing of the soul.¹⁰ Second, it provides an account of why Socrates is often unsuccessful in his efforts to persuade people to value justice and philosophy. For there are many people who find what Socrates does *unpleasant*, and these people will refuse to submit to his arguments, just as some people refuse to submit to the doctor’s painful cures.

To understand the dialogue’s view of medicine, and thus its interest in comparing Socrates to the doctor, we must start with the fourfold division of 464a-465e. Here

¹⁰ This point has been well recognized: see e.g. Anton 1980.

Socrates distinguishes between crafts (τέχναι), which benefit body or soul and are based on knowledge of their subjects, and knacks (ἐμπειρίαι), which imitate crafts, provide pleasure instead of benefit, and are based on experience and guessing instead of knowledge. The crafts that care for the body are medicine and gymnastics; those that care for the soul – together constituting “the political craft” – are justice and legislation. Justice is the counterpart (ἀντίστροφον) of medicine, legislation of gymnastics (464b7-8). The knack that imitates medicine is pastry-baking, while cosmetics imitates gymnastics, sophistry legislation, and rhetoric justice (463b2-465c5). Each knack is a form of κλάκεια, pandering or flattery.

| | Body | | Soul | |
|-------------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Beneficial Craft | Medicine | Gymnastics | Justice | Legislation |
| Flattering Knack | Pastry-baking | Cosmetics | Rhetoric | Sophistry |

Here medicine is brought in as the bodily analogue not of Socratic dialectic, but of something on the face of it quite different: the craft of justice. Let us examine what medicine and justice have in common, and then ask how this bears on the comparisons between the doctor and Socrates.

The fourfold division does not reveal much about medicine or justice beyond the fact that they are beneficial. Later in the conversation with Polus, however, at 476a-479d, Socrates offers us an analysis of these crafts that shows why they are counterparts, explains what he means by the craft of justice, and makes clear its supreme importance. Medicine and justice, says Socrates, both benefit by removing a bad condition – that is, we might say, they are crafts of correction. By submitting to medical treatment one frees one’s body from its characteristic evil, sickness. To submit to justice, meanwhile, is to “pay the penalty” for one’s wrongs, to be *disciplined* (κλάζεσθαι);¹¹ discipline frees one’s soul from its characteristic evil, vice.¹² Furthermore, vice is the greatest evil of all (477e4-6), and therefore justice is the most beneficial craft.

This passage makes clear how we are to understand the craft of justice: it is the craft of removing injustice from souls. But does Socrates really think that submitting to the punishments prescribed in Athenian courts will free one’s soul from vice, just as submitting to a doctors’ cures will free one’s body from sickness? He mentions flogging, fines, prison, exile and the death penalty (480c8-d3), but it is quite mysterious how such

¹¹ 476a7-8. Κλάζειν can mean to prune, retrench, hold in check, keep in, confine, chastise, correct, or punish. Plato clearly has several of these senses in mind (see below); I choose ‘discipline’ as the broadest translation.

¹² The person who submits to discipline, paying the penalty for his wrongs, is benefited (ὠφελεῖται, 477a3); the benefit in question is the improvement of his soul (477a5-6), for by submitting to discipline one “gets free of some badness of soul” (κακίας ἄρα ψυχῆς ἀπαλλάττεται, 477a7-8).

punishments might remove vice from the soul, and Plato offers no hints.¹³ Furthermore, the idea that the genuine craft of justice is practiced in law courts clashes with the characterization of the courts elsewhere in the dialogue: in the courts an innocent man may be unjustly accused and unable to defend himself, while a person who knows how to speak well will escape punishment for his crime.¹⁴ The courts are the domain not of genuine justice, but of the worthless knack that imitates it, rhetoric.

As we have seen, however, Socrates repeatedly compares the doctor not to a traditional judge but to himself. Moreover, later in the dialogue, he describes his own practice of questioning his interlocutors as “discipline”: when Callicles refuses to answer his questions, Socrates says, “This man won’t tolerate being benefited and undergoing what our discussion is about, being disciplined (κλάζόμενος)” (505c3-4). Submitting one’s beliefs to Socrates’ scrutiny, he suggests here, is like paying the penalty for one’s

¹³ Compare Mackenzie 1981: 181. The only attempt I know to show how physical punishment could improve the soul is Brickhouse and Smith 2002: they argue that the pain of such punishment will “sever the connection wrongdoers make between wrongdoing and the benefit they anticipate” (cf. Brickhouse and Smith 1999: 219-220). The view is intriguing, but not clearly supported by the text, and seems to downplay the perhaps deliberate oddity of Plato’s mentions of physical punishment. Perhaps the conditional nature of the claims about physical punishment at 480c-d (“*if* his unjust acts merit whipping, he should submit to being beaten...”) indicate that Socrates is not committed to physical punishment ever being a genuine cure. I offer an alternative suggestion at the end of section 2 below.

¹⁴ 472a1-2, 486a6-b4, 521b1-522e1. Only in the afterlife court of the final myth is real justice delivered; only there will those whose souls are diseased be compelled to pay the penalty, and be cured.

wrongdoings to a judge. The implication is that Socrates himself is the psychic counterpart to the doctor: he himself is (or aspires to be) the true practitioner of justice.

But how are we to understand this claim? In what sense is submitting to Socrates' questions like submitting one's body to a doctor's cures (457d7), or to a judge's punishments (503c3-4)? The answer is suggested by a speech Socrates makes to Gorgias early in the dialogue, about the benefit (and pleasure) of refutation.¹⁵

What kind of man am I? One of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say anything untrue...For I regard it [being refuted] a greater good [than refuting someone else], insofar as it is a greater good to get free of (ἀπαλλαγῆναι) the greatest evil oneself than to free someone else from it. For I don't suppose there's anything so bad for a person as false belief about the things we're discussing right now. (458a2-b1)

There are several important parallels between this passage and Socrates' description of the corrective powers of medicine and justice in his conversation with Polus (475d-481b). First, here Socrates says that to be refuted is to get free of (ἀπαλλαγῆναι) a great harm, using the same verb he will use in the conversation with Polus: one who is disciplined gets free of (ἀπαλλάττεται) an evil of the soul (477a2-8), and one who submits to the doctor gets free of sickness (477e7-8). The implication is that refutation is a craft of discipline. By being refuted, one gets free of a bad thing in one's soul – namely, a false belief.¹⁶

¹⁵ For a similar interpretation of this speech, see Sedley, forthcoming.

¹⁶ For refutation as beneficial, see also 461a3 and 506c1-3.

Second, both passages mention “the greatest evil” (κακὸν τὸν μέγιστον). In the first passage this refers to false belief about “the things we’re discussing right now” (458b1). What subject does Socrates have in mind? Clearly the subject about which he claims he is going to refute Gorgias, as follows:

It was said in our earlier conversation, Gorgias, that rhetoric concerned speeches not about the odd and even, but about the just and unjust....So I supposed that in saying those things you meant that rhetoric would never be an unjust thing....But when a little later you said that an orator might use rhetoric unjustly, that’s why I was surprised, and thought that the things you said didn’t harmonize...

(460e2-461a4)¹⁷

The “false belief” Socrates wants to refute – the belief whose possession he calls “the greatest evil” – is the belief that one can have knowledge of justice without being just. More generally, it is a belief about the nature of justice.

In the conversation with Polus, the phrase “the greatest evil” recurs. This time it refers not to false belief, but to vice. “Injustice, therefore, and intemperance (ἀκλυσία), and the rest of wretchedness of the soul is the greatest evil of the things that are (μέγιστον τῶν ὄντων κακόν ἐστιν)” (477e4-6).¹⁸ Has Socrates contradicted himself, first saying that the greatest evil is false belief about justice, and then that it is

¹⁷ The refutation depends on Gorgias’ concession, at 460b7, that one who “has learned just things” is necessarily just.

¹⁸ Cf. 478d5, 479c2, 479c8, and 480d6.

injustice itself (along with other vices)? No: the implication is that false belief about justice is the same thing as injustice itself.

Socrates has already told us at 460b7 that someone with knowledge of justice is just; now he is implying that someone with false beliefs about justice is unjust. These claims are a particular instance of Socrates' "intellectualism" familiar from other dialogues: virtue is knowledge, vice ignorance (or false belief).¹⁹ The *Gorgias* demonstrates an important consequence of this equation. Socrates, through the elenchus, aims to expose and remove the false beliefs people have about justice. If he can do so, then – given the equation between cognitive states and moral states – he will remove injustice itself from their souls. Socrates is thus claiming that dialectic *is* the craft of justice. In trying to rid people of false beliefs about justice and the other virtues, Socrates aims to rid them of "the greatest evil" of the soul – injustice, and more generally vice.

A third correlation between the two passages confirms this suggestion. Socrates tells Gorgias at 458a that it is a greater good to be refuted than to refute someone else. This clearly runs counter to popular opinion, and in particular counter to the practice of rhetoric: if being refuted when wrong is a greater good than refuting another, the orator's power to persuade others of his views – instead of letting his own views be changed, if he is wrong – is worthless. Compare this to Socrates' counter-commonsense statements to

¹⁹ The *Gorgias* does not seem to work with *Republic V*'s implied distinction between false belief and ignorance (*Republic* 477a-d), but rather with a tacit (and commonsense) assumption that one with false beliefs about a subject is ignorant about that subject. Compare *Protagoras* 358c4-5: "Is it not this that you call ignorance (ἀμαθίαν): having false belief and being mistaken about things of great importance?"

Polus that it is better to suffer punishment, if one has done something unjust, than to avoid it (472e, 478e, 480b). Here Socrates explicitly points out that it follows from his claim that rhetoric's power to avoid punishment is useless or even harmful (480b6 ff.). Now we can see these two paradoxical claims as amounting to the same claim. To have a false belief about justice, or to have done an unjust act, is to have an unhealthy soul. In either case, one must submit oneself to discipline – to a judge's punishments, or rather (more promisingly, given the account we now have) to refutation. In this way, the injustice will be removed, and the soul will be cured.

Thus Socratic dialectic, although not named in the division of knacks and crafts at 464b ff., is characterized as aspiring to be a craft of soul-correction, and in fact to be the craft of justice itself. This interpretation, although surprising, is confirmed by a comment Socrates makes late in the dialogue: that he himself

takes up the true political craft (ἐπιχειρεῖν τῆ ὡς ἀληθῶς πᾶλιτικῆ τέχνη),
and I alone of people today practice politics. This is because the things I say on
each occasion do not aim at gratification, but at what's best, not at what's most
pleasant. (521d6-e1)

The “political craft” was defined in the four-fold division as the care of the soul, embracing both legislation and justice (464b3-4). Socrates thus here tells us explicitly that he aims, through his usual practice of conversation, to practice this craft – to care for and cure his interlocutors' souls.²⁰

²⁰ The *Gorgias* discusses justice at length but leaves the topic of legislation to other dialogues, and in keeping with this focus I am discussing only Socrates' practice of justice, the corrective,

The *Gorgias*' comparisons between Socrates and the doctor serve in part, then, as an encomium of Socrates' philosophical method and goals. But the dialogue is not concerned only to praise Socrates: as we noted in the introduction, it also draws attention to his failures. It implies that dialectic *could* free people of the greatest of evils if they would submit to it, but it also points out that they often refuse. Many people are not persuaded by Socrates – do not relinquish the beliefs he refutes, do not leave off valuing less important things in favor of justice and philosophy – and therefore get no real discipline and no real benefit from his “cures.” Notably, the dialogue makes a closely parallel point about the art of bodily correction, medicine. The doctor *could* benefit sick people if they would accept his cures, but he is often unable to persuade them to submit. Plato brings out this limitation of medicine by contrasting it with two species of flattery: rhetoric and pastry-baking. Here is Gorgias, boasting of rhetoric's persuasive power:

Many times already I have gone with my brother and with other doctors to the house of some sick person who refused to take a drug or submit to surgery or cauterization by the doctor, and though the doctor was unable to persuade him, I persuaded him, by means of no other craft than rhetoric. (456b1-5)

disciplinary part of the political craft. 521d may imply that he also aims to practice legislation, the positive part of the political craft – that is, that he aims to instill or maintain virtue in people's souls, in addition to removing vice. Possibly the idea is that in removing false belief (and thereby vice), one thereby instills knowledge (and thereby virtue). The *Gorgias* does not, however, investigate the relation between knowledge and belief, and these questions are perhaps better left to discussions of the *Meno* and *Republic*.

Gorgias goes on to claim that orators are so much more persuasive than doctors that if an orator and a doctor were to compete for the job of city doctor, the orator would win (456b6-c2). Socrates echoes (and undercuts) these claims when he pits the doctor against a pastry chef:

If a doctor and pastry chef had to compete in front of children, or men just as foolish as children, over which one understands about wholesome and harmful foods, the doctor or the pastry chef, the doctor would die of hunger. (464d5-e2)

He comes back to this theme in the trial allegory of 521e ff., where he has the pastry chef persuade the children of the doctor's guilt. I quote this passage at length, since its details will be important for us:

I won't have anything to say in court [if I'm brought in on false charges]...For I will be judged as a doctor would be judged if a pastry chef accused him in front of a jury of children (ἐν παιδίῳ). For think, what could that kind of man say in his defense, held on charges before those people, if someone were to accuse him, saying, 'Children, this man here has worked many evils on you, yes you. He ruins (διαφθείρει) the youngest of you, by cutting and burning [surgery and cauterization], and confuses you (ἀπῶρειν πῶει) by starving and stifling you, giving you the bitterest potions and forcing you to be hungry and thirsty. He doesn't feast you on many and varied pleasant things like I do.' What do you think a doctor caught in this evil situation would have to say? Or if he were to say the truth, that 'I did all these things, children, in the interest of health,' how great an uproar do you think judges like that would make?...And I know that I'd

suffer something like that in coming into court. For I won't be able to tell of any pleasures that I've provided for them, ones they consider to be services and benefits...And if someone charges that I corrupt (διαφθείρειν) younger people by confusing them (ἀπὸρρεῖν πικρῶν) or slander the older people, speaking sharp words in private or in public, neither will I be able to say the truth, that 'I say and do all these things in the interest of justice...'...nor anything else.

(521e2-522c2)

In all these passages Plato is emphasizing that the flattering knacks of pastry-baking and rhetoric are far better at *persuading* most people (the crowds, the ignorant many) than are their beneficial rivals: medicine, and, in the last passage, Socratic dialectic as well. Although the doctor could provide great benefit, many people do not trust him, believing instead in the purveyor of worthless but gratifying pastries. And although Socrates could provide great benefit, many people are not persuaded by his arguments, being persuaded instead by worthless rhetoric.

Why does the pastry chef succeed where the doctor fails? The trial allegory suggests an obvious answer: the ignorant trust and believe those who give them tasty treats rather than those who subject them to painful procedures. If we bear in mind the four-fold division of knacks and crafts, this implies a more general claim: flattery of all kinds is persuasive *because* it gratifies people's appetites, causing pleasure; correction of all kinds is unpersuasive *because* it frustrates people's appetites, and causes pain. In the next sections, I show that this suggestion is supported by the dialogue as a whole.

2. Pleasing Flattery, Painful Correction

Socrates characterizes the various forms of flattery – rhetoric, pastry-baking, sophistry and cosmetics – as “knack[s] of producing a certain gratification and pleasure” (462c7, 462d9-e1), practices devoted to “filling up the appetites” (503c5-6), “servants and procurers to the appetites” (518c3-4). They “aim at what is pleasant” with no thought of what is best (465a2, 464d1-2); in fact their entire concern is to gratify (χαρίζεσθαι), i.e. to provide pleasure (501a-501e). As for medicine and justice, on the other hand, Socrates is careful to emphasize that they are *not* pleasant:

- Is being treated by a doctor pleasant, and do those undergoing treatment enjoy doing so?

- I don't think so.

- But it is beneficial....For [the one who undergoes treatment] gets free of a great evil, so that it profits him to undergo the pain and to become healthy. (478b7-c1)

[To avoid justice is like] if someone suffering from the greatest illnesses were to contrive not to pay the penalty to the doctors for his bodily wrongs nor to be healed, fearing the cautery and the surgery just like a child, because they are painful. (479a6-b1)

[A wrongdoer should] bring his injustice to light in order that he may pay the penalty, and should force both himself and others not to be cowardly but to submit [to punishment]...not taking into account the pain... (480c4-8)

[For] those who are benefited and pay the penalty...benefit comes to them through pains and suffering, both here and in Hades. For it is not possible to get free of injustice in any other way. (525b4-c1)

Eating pastries or listening to an orator is pleasant and gratifying; undergoing surgery or flogging hurts. The unpleasantness of correction may seem to us obvious but incidental – surely there could be medical treatments that cause no pain, even if the Greeks had not discovered them, or gentle forms of justice – but later in the dialogue Plato offers an account on which both justice and (at least one form of) medicine are *essentially* enemies of the appetites, and on which it is this very feature that explains their power to benefit.

Correction removes sickness or vice and restores health or virtue. In the conversation with Polus, Socrates defines sickness simply as the bad condition of the body, vice as the bad condition of the soul. In the conversation with Callicles, however, he refines these definitions: sickness and vice are the result of disorganization and disorder in the body or soul, health and virtue the result of organization and order (504b-d). The disordered state of the soul includes not only injustice but also ἀκλᾶσία (504e2). This last word literally means lack of κόλασις, discipline – the condition that discipline removes. Idiomatically, however, ἀκλᾶσία means intemperance. Here as elsewhere it is contrasted with σωφροσύνη, temperance or self-control, which Socrates has defined as the state in which a person “rules the pleasures and appetites within himself” (491d11-e1). The implication is that the undisciplined, disordered state of the soul is a state in which the appetites are unruly and strong. This is borne out by the fable of the jars at 493d-e: vicious people are unhappy because their appetites are strong and

unruly, while the good and happy state of the soul is one in which the appetites are tempered and controlled. Moreover, this interpretation is immediately confirmed – and extended to the bodily case – by the passage following the mention of ἀκπλασία:

Don't doctors usually allow a healthy person to fill up his appetites...as much as he wants to, but they practically never allow a sick person to fill himself with what he has an appetite for?...And isn't it the same way with the soul? So long as it's corrupt, being foolish and intemperate (ἀκόλαστῆς) and unjust and impious, one should restrain it from its appetites (εἴργειν αὐτὴν δεῖ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν) and not allow it to do anything else other than what will make it better...Therefore to restrain it from the things it has an appetite for is to discipline it (τὸ εἴργειν ἐστὶν ἀφ' ὧν ἐπιθυμεῖ κπλαζειν)? (505a6-b9)

This passage brings out another sense of the word κπλαζειν (discipline): it means not only to punish or correct, but also to prune or restrain. Indeed, the passage suggests that in the *Gorgias*' usage these senses converge: correction must proceed by way of restraint. Earlier we learned that to correct the body or soul is to free it from its characteristic harmful state; now we learn that these harmful states include strong, unhealthy appetites, so that correction must involve appetite-moderation; furthermore, we are told that the way to moderate appetites is to *refuse them gratification*. This is the converse of another idea we find in the *Gorgias*: that to indulge appetites is to strengthen them. As Callicles puts it, in his description of the life he thinks best,

The man who wants to live rightly should allow his appetites to be as big as possible and not discipline (κτλάζειν) them, and when they are as big as possible should be capable of serving them through his courage and wisdom, and of filling them up with whatever an appetite arises for at the moment. (491e8-492a3)

By not disciplining the appetites (indulging them), one lets them grow “as big as possible;” only by disciplining them, then (refusing them gratification), can one make them moderate.²¹ The explanation for both claims would seem to lie in the dialogue’s claim that unhealthy appetites are *insatiable* (493b-494a). To fill them is to make them want more, so the only chance of weakening them is to starve them.

How does medicine frustrate the appetites? Surgery, cauterization and bitter potions are painful; in this sense they are enemies of the desire for pleasure. After defining bodily as well as psychic health as dependent on organization and order, however, Plato chooses in the passage we have seen (505a) to emphasize another very common form of medical treatment: the enforcing of regimens.²² A doctor would try to cure a sick patient by dictating what foods and drinks he should take or avoid (as well as what exercise he should do, when he should take baths, and so on); often the main method of treatment would be to deny the patient his ordinary food and drink and feed him instead on barley gruel. This form of medical treatment is most clearly suited to play

²¹ Plato repeats both claims elsewhere, perhaps most explicitly in the *Laws*: the impulse toward pleasure, “which is very strong and grows by being fed, can be *starved*,” in the case of the desire for sex, for example, “infrequent indulgence would make the desire less compulsive” (*Laws* 841a6-b2, trans. T. J. Saunders).

²² The Greek word is δίαίττα, the origin of our ‘diet’.

the role that Plato assigns to medicine in the division of knacks and crafts, that of being the genuine craft of which pastry baking is an imitation: the doctor prescribes foods that will benefit and forbids those that will harm, while the pastry chef provides foods that will please, with no thought to benefit or harm (464d). Moreover, this form of medicine is directly opposed to pastry-baking in its effects on the appetites: where the pastry chef indulges and gratifies appetites for tasty foods, the regimen-enforcing doctor frustrates them. I suggest, then, that Plato means us to focus here on regimens as the closest analogue to justice, and that he does so because he wants to emphasize the necessity of appetite-restraint in the psychic case.²³

What about justice itself: in what way does it frustrate appetites, as it must, according to 505b, in order to cure souls? If we think of punishment as purely physical,

²³ It is worth noting that Plato perhaps deliberately exaggerates the appetite-restraining aspect of medical treatment with the claim that doctors “practically never” allow a sick patient to satisfy his appetites. Some doctors preferred regimen as the primary or even only means of treatment (for an extreme case see *Ancient Medicine* 7), but others rejected it: Hippocratic *Aphorisms* II 38 says that “Food and drink which, though slightly inferior, is more pleasant, is preferable to that which is better but less pleasant,” and some Hippocratic texts mention regimen not at all. At 505a Plato implies that sick patients nearly always have unhealthy appetites, and so surgery, medications and cauterization will be ineffective on their own: the doctor must prescribe a diet too, for if the patient’s appetites are indulged, she will remain sick. This thought is expressed even more strongly in the *Republic*, where Socrates criticizes sick people who, though submitting to medical treatment, “accomplish nothing except to make their illnesses more varied and greater...because until they leave off drinking and overeating and indulging their lechery and idleness neither drugs nor cauterization nor surgery...will benefit them at all” (*Republic* 426a2-b2).

then the unpleasantness involved in justice will be much like the unpleasantness of submitting to surgery: brute physical pain. But the example of tyrants as people in need of discipline suggests that soul-correction also involves appetite-frustration. If a wildly intemperate tyrant like Archelaus submits his soul to discipline – pays the penalty for his crimes – he will in so doing have to give up the pleasures that made his life so enviable to people like Polus. He will no longer take whatever he wants, sleep with whomever he wants, and do all the other things that Polus calls “having great power” (466b-c). For the vicious person, then, just as for the physically ill people mentioned at 505a, submitting to correction means forgoing the pleasures he craves.

We have seen, however, that the dialogue presents Socrates as the true practitioner of justice, the true doctor of souls. If this is right, then the dialogue’s analysis of medicine and justice indicates that Socrates too must somehow restrain people’s appetites – and thus that in attempting to benefit people, must somehow displease them. We will examine in the next section how the dialogue develops this suggestion.

3. The Pleasures of Rhetoric, the Pains of Dialectic

In the trial allegory, as we saw above, Socrates compares himself to a doctor who chokes, stifles, starves and confuses his patients, and says that at his own trial the jurors will not be persuaded by him “because I won’t be able to tell them of any pleasures I’ve provided, pleasures which they regard as services and benefits” (522b4-6). Dialectic, then, provides no pleasures (or none recognizable to the many), and many pains. Other passages confirm this charge. In the conversation with Gorgias, Socrates claims that he

himself “would be *pleased* to be refuted (ἡδέως μὲν ἂν ἐλεγχθέντων) if I say anything untrue...[and] wouldn’t be any less pleased to be refuted than to refute” (458a3-5), contrasting himself with ordinary people who respond to refutation with irritation (457d1-3). Callicles links Socrates’ failure to persuade with failure to please, saying that the philosopher “lack[s] experience...of the speeches one must use to have dealings with people in both public and private intercourse, and also of human pleasures and appetites” (484d3-6). And, most significantly for the contrast between dialectic as a species of discipline and rhetoric as a species of flattery, Socrates himself contrasts his own kind of λόγῳι with those that aim to give people pleasure: “The things I say on each occasion *do not aim at gratification* but at what’s best, *not at what’s most pleasant*” (521d8-e1, emphasis mine).²⁴

It is not news that Socrates’ interlocutors often find his questions and refutations annoying, embarrassing, vexing, and otherwise in a very broad sense unpleasant. But the *Gorgias*’ system of analogies between medicine, dialectic, and justice suggest that Socratic refutation quite literally thwarts people’s appetites for certain kinds of pleasure, just as medically enforced regimens frustrate people’s appetite for unwholesome food and drink. Moreover, these same analogies can show us what sort of appetites Plato has in mind, as follows.

²⁴ Compare another passage quoted above: “Distinguish for me to which type of service to the city you are calling me. Is it that of struggling with the Athenians so that they will become as good as possible, like a doctor, or is it being servile and associating with them for their gratification (χάρῳι)?” (521a2-5).

The pastry chef imitates and overthrows the doctor by causing pleasure where the doctor offers beneficial pains. He does so by gratifying the very appetites that the doctor restrains: where the doctor prescribes a strict regimen, denying the patient the foods he craves and offering him bitter medicines and bland barley gruel instead, the pastry chef “feasts [him] on many and varied pleasant things” (522a3). Socrates’ description of his own rivalry with the orators as closely paralleling the doctor’s rivalry with the pastry chef thus implies that the appetites Socrates frustrates are the very appetites rhetoric gratifies. This suggests that we can determine what appetites Socrates frustrates by examining the pleasures rhetoric provides, and then looking for some way in which Socrates’ λόγοι are the converse of the orators’, as the doctor’s treatments are the converse of the pastry chef’s treats.

What pleasures, then, does rhetoric provide? The dialogue defines rhetoric as a producer of pleasure and gratification (462c7), an art devoted to “filling up the appetites” (503c5-6), but it never tells us explicitly how rhetoric provides pleasure and gratification, or what appetites it fulfills. Various answers are suggested by the characterization of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* (and confirmed by examples of contemporary rhetoric): the orator pleases the audience with his dazzling display of skill, or with the promise of future pleasures, or with outright flattery, in the narrow sense of excessive praise. But it is notable that none of these methods provide much contrast with the *Gorgias*’ Socrates: Plato chooses to give Socrates long and eloquent speeches in this dialogue, to have him promise his interlocutors afterlife pleasures if they are just (and threaten them with afterlife pains if they are not), and even to engage in excessive praise of his

interlocutors.²⁵ What we need to find is a marked contrast between rhetorical and Socratic λόγοι, one that can make sense of Socrates' distinction between using λόγοι “like a doctor” on the one hand and “for gratification” on the other (521a, quoted above).

We find the key in a feature of rhetoric that Plato emphasizes from the very beginning of the dialogue. Socrates asks for a definition of rhetoric; Polus responds with a speech in which he calls it the best and finest (καλλίστη) of the crafts. Socrates declares this speech evidence that Polus has

practiced what is called rhetoric more than dialectic...[because] when Chaerephon asked what craft Gorgias is an expert in, you *praise* his craft as if someone were censuring it, but you didn't answer *what it is*.

(448d7-e4, emphasis mine; cf. 462c8-d2)

While dialectic is in the business of seeking knowledge, then, rhetoric is in the business of dispensing *praise* – and censure. This is consistent with the portrayal of rhetoric throughout the dialogue: Gorgias praises rhetoric's persuasive powers, Polus boasts that it secures great power, and both Polus and Callicles heap scorn on Socrates' arguments and the life of justice and philosophy.

But how is praise a tool of gratifying flattery? Certainly Plato does not pretend that all rhetoric engages in direct praise of the audience, so he must think that praise causes pleasure in other ways. We find a clue when Socrates tells Callicles that one gains power with a ruler by becoming his friend (ἑταῖρος) (510a10), “*censuring and praising*

²⁵ For Socrates praising his interlocutors, see 449d5-6, 453a8-b3, 461c5-8, 487a2-3, 487d5, and 492d1-2.

the same things (ταὐτὰ ψέγων καὶ ἐπαινῶν)” the ruler does (510c8, emphasis mine).

In a democracy like Athens, Socrates adds, a person with political ambitions must befriend the masses – precisely, he implies, by praising and censuring the same things they do.

For the most part, then, the orator uses praise as a tool for *affirming his audience’s judgments about what is good and what bad* – his audience’s judgments of value. The orator trades in talk about good and bad, but he does so not in order to teach people what is really valuable but rather to win their trust (to persuade them) by agreeing with their own ignorant judgments. This is the implication of Socrates’ claim that the orator is ignorant, but *seems* to have knowledge, about matters of value:

not knowing these things, what is good or bad, or fine or shameful or just or unjust, but having contrived persuasion concerning them so that he, not knowing, seems to know more than a knower does to those who themselves don’t know.

(459d1-e1)

Without any knowledge of the true value of the things he discusses (a planned war, dockyards, a new city wall), the orator is good at guessing what the audience admires and what it does not.²⁶ He plays on these value judgments to please them and get his way.

²⁶ This interpretation is confirmed by the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates argues that orator and audience are both ignorant about what is good, fine and just, but the orator knows what the audience *believes* to be good, fine and just, and exploits these beliefs to his own ends: “Suppose I were trying to persuade you that you should fight your enemies on horseback, and neither one of us knew what a horse is, but I happened to know this much about you, that Phaedrus believes a

He “guesses at what is pleasant without [concern for, or knowledge of] the best” (465a2). By pandering to the audience’s uninformed opinions about value, he gains the appearance of expertise, and with it the power of persuasion.

This means that the orator can say nothing that goes against popular morality. What seems bad to people he must call bad, what seems good he must call good; his power depends on his “censuring and praising the same things they do.” As Socrates says to Callicles,

Whatever your beloveds [a boy named Demos, and the Athenian *dêmos*] say, and however they say things are, *you are unable to contradict them*, but keep shifting back and forth. In the assembly, if you say something and the Athenian people

horse is the tame animal with the longest ears....[And suppose] I seriously tried to persuade you, having composed a speech in praise of the donkey in which I called it a horse and claimed that having such an animal is of immense value....[This would be just like] when an orator who does not know good from bad addresses a city which knows no better and attempts to sway it, not praising a miserable donkey as if it were a horse, but bad as if it were good, and, *having studied what the people believe*, persuades them to do something bad instead of good...” (*Phaedrus* 260b1-c10, Trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, emphasis mine). The *Republic* makes similar remarks about both sophists and tragedians (*Republic* 493a9-c3, 602b1-4), artists the *Gorgias* classifies alongside orators as soul-flatterers (463b-465c, 502b-d).

say that it is not so, you shift over and say what the people want. (481d6-e3, emphasis mine)²⁷

As to Socrates, he stands in stark and obstinate opposition to many popular judgments of value – most centrally, in his insistence on the supreme importance of virtue for happiness – and this is emphasized nowhere more than in the *Gorgias*. When he argues that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it, he admits that “most men” will disagree with him (482c1), while “almost every Athenian and foreigner” will side with Polus as “witnesses” against him (472a2-5; cf. 475e8-476a1). Throughout the dialogue, moreover, we see him refusing to endorse the values of his interlocutors – refusing to “censure and praise the same things they do.” He questions the worth of the skills of which Gorgias is so proud, implicitly questioning Gorgias’ whole way of life; he denies and refutes Polus’ belief that happiness comes from the kind of power orators and tyrants have; he denies and refutes Callicles’ belief that the best life is devoted to increasing and gratifying one’s appetites. When Callicles has had his fill of Socrates’ dictates about justice and punishment, he announces his astonishment at Socrates’ defiance of common sense:

Tell me, Socrates, whether we are to suppose that you’re serious now or joking?

For if you’re serious and the things you say are true, won’t it be the case that

²⁷ Compare Ober’s argument that the Athenian orator relied on “persuading his audience that a vote in his favor was consistent with their existing values” (Ober 1990: 151), and Dover’s argument that forensic orators could not afford to contradict popular morality (Dover 1974: 5).

human life is turned upside down, and that we do utterly the opposite, as it seems, of what we should do? (481b10-c4)

This amounts to the complaint that Socrates questions and criticizes not only his interlocutors' values and ways of life, but nearly everyone else's as well.²⁸

This, then, is the sharpest contrast Plato draws between rhetoric and Socratic dialectic: Socrates challenges values where the orators confirm them, questions and criticizes popular morality where orators reinforce it. And therefore Socrates causes distress where rhetoric provides pleasure. The appetites Socrates frustrates are appetites to be confirmed in one's values.²⁹

We may still wish for a more precise specification of these appetites that are gratified by rhetoric and frustrated by dialectic. That is, *why* is it pleasing to have one's beliefs about value affirmed, and painful to have them challenged? After all, Socrates does not directly deny people pleasures like power or money, or tasty treats. Here we are left to do some speculation. I suspect that Plato has in mind two distinct kinds of pleasure and pain.

²⁸ He does so, of course, not simply for the sake of being contrary, but because he wants to persuade them to seek what is truly worth pursuing; because – as he puts it in the *Apology*, where he declares such questioning and criticizing to be his life's work – the unexamined life is not worth living (*Apology* 38a2-6).

²⁹ Note that even when an interlocutor does not truly accept Socrates' refutations – does not revise his formally refuted beliefs, or reject his disparaged pursuits – he suffers the pain of having his desires for confirmation thwarted.

First, criticizing values frustrates a set of desires Plato assigns, in the *Republic*, to the spirited part of the soul: desires for honor and self-esteem.³⁰ It is pleasant to believe that you are right about how to live, what is important, what is valuable, what makes for human excellence and flourishing; it is unpleasant to be told that you are wrong. It is pleasant to believe that you are virtuous and wise, unpleasant to be told that you are not.

Second, criticizing people's values discourages them from pursuing whatever it is that they value and want. This is not to say that Socrates outright prevents people from satisfying their desires, but that he indirectly threatens these desires. One might refuse a medical regimen on the grounds that submission *would* mean forgoing one's favorite food and drink; likewise, one might refuse Socratic refutation on the grounds that real submission – being persuaded to relinquish one's old pursuits in favor of virtue and wisdom – *would* mean forgoing one's favorite pleasures. This means that Socrates also runs afoul of desires for ordinary pleasures like wealth, sensory indulgence, luxuries – desires the *Republic* will attribute to the appetitive part of the soul. (Meanwhile the orator, in confirming people's value-judgments, will often have to praise such pleasures, and thereby to gratify (indirectly) their appetites for them.)

Indeed, the *Gorgias* shows that in challenging his interlocutors' conceptions of what is good and of how they should live, Socrates often in effect tells them not to pursue

³⁰ Even in the *Republic* Plato sometimes uses 'appetite' (ἐπιθυμία) as a generic term for desire (see 580d), and while the "appetites" of the *Gorgias* have much in common with the desires of the *Republic*'s ἐπιθυμητικόν, appetitive part, we should not assume that Plato uses the word here in a technical sense in which appetites are opposed to spirited desires, nor even that the psychology of the *Republic* is implicit in the *Gorgias*.

the things they find pleasant. We see him doing this explicitly when he tries to persuade Callicles that “the orderly life is better than the undisciplined one,” i.e. the life of unlimited appetite-gratification (494a3-5) – and more generally that the pleasant is not identical with the good – and implicitly in many of his failed encounters, as when he discourages Polus from admiring and emulating the powerful, sybaritic tyrant.

This interpretation of the pains of dialectic, although speculative, provides a good account of why Socrates should practice discipline. The doctor’s regimen frustrates appetites for unwholesome food and drink. It does so in order to discipline them, because these are the desires which, when strong, render the body unhealthy. On the present interpretation Socratic dialectic, by criticizing and questioning values, frustrates desires for what the *Republic* will call thumoeidic and appetitive pleasures, pleasures that can conflict with virtue and wisdom. It does so in order to discipline them, because these are the very desires which, when strong, render the soul unhealthy – vicious, “undisciplined.”³¹

4. Pleasure and Persuasion

We have seen that the *Gorgias* draws a polar opposition between flattery, which is both persuasive and pleasant, and correction – including dialectic – which is both unpersuasive and unpleasant. But *why* are people persuaded by those who provide pleasure, and

³¹ The interpretation also entails that, just as we should expect – and just as Klosko, Scott and Woolf argue, for reasons different from the ones offered here – the desires that stand in the way of Socratic persuasion in the *Gorgias* are those that the *Republic* will attribute to the non-rational parts of the soul.

resistant to those who refuse it? The *Gorgias* suggests a simple answer: most people fail to distinguish between what is pleasant and what is good for them.

This comes out in Socrates' definition of flattery, where he characterizes flattering knacks not only as producing pleasure and gratification, but also as producing the "seeming good condition" (δῆκλῦσα εὐεξία) of body or soul. A careful look reveals these to be two descriptions of the same product. While medicine and physical training produce health, the good condition (εὐεξία, 464a2) of the body, and justice and legislation produce virtue, the good condition of the soul, the four flattering knacks merely *pretend* to offer benefit by offering what people mistake for benefit: pleasure. It is in this sense that knacks imitate crafts (463d2, 464c7-d1, and *passim*). Pastry-baking "pretends to know what foods are best for the body" (464d4-5). How? Simply by offering foods that *taste* good, i.e. are pleasant. And likewise each of the other knacks "lures folly with what is pleasantest at the moment and deceives it, so as to seem to be of the greatest worth" (464d3-4).³²

In saying that the knacks produce a condition that *seems* good, then, and in extolling the power of flattery to deceive, Plato is charging that ignorant people fail to distinguish between what pleases them and what is good for them. When they experience

³² Cosmetics makes one appear to be physically fit (465b), and does so precisely by giving one a pleasing appearance: a rosy glow, for example. A careful discussion of sophistry would take us too far afield here, but Plato argues elsewhere that the sophist knows how to appear wise (a central aspect of good psychic condition) without being wise (*Sophist* 223c); the *Gorgias*' characterization of sophistry as a form of flattery implies that he does so by providing some kind of pleasure, presumably by presenting a pleasing façade.

pleasure, they believe that they are being benefited. Early in the dialogue Socrates has said that orator is able to persuade people about things of which he has no knowledge because he “has discovered a mechanism of persuasion so that he appears, to non-knowers, to know more than someone who does know” (459b7-c2; cf. 459d1-e1); we have seen that the mechanism in question is pleasure. When Socrates in the trial allegory implies that most people trust only those who provide them “pleasures...which they regard as services and benefits” (522b4-6), he is making the same point. Flattery persuades them – gains their trust, makes them believe that the flatterer has knowledge about what is good for them and provides it – precisely by giving them pleasure, for they confuse the state of being pleased with the state of being in good condition.

Meanwhile, in saying that the doctor would “die of hunger” if forced to compete with the pastry chef over who knows more about health, and would be readily convicted of harming children with his treatments, Plato implies that foolish people not only confuse pleasure with benefit, but also confuse pain with harm. The children trust that the pastry chef knows what is good for them because his foods gratify their desires for pleasure; they mistrust the doctor because he refuses them the foods they most enjoy and gives them unpleasant foods and medicines and painful procedures instead.

The *Gorgias*, then, like the *Protagoras* (353c ff), the *Republic* (505b), and the *Laws* (653a ff and 732e-733d), accuses most people of hedonist tendencies, and suggests a particular explanation for these tendencies: people desire pleasure because they mistake it for benefit.³³ The *Gorgias*, unlike these other dialogues, emphasizes that hedonism

³³ Compare *Laws* 657c6-7: “whenever we are pleased, we think that we are faring well.” For fuller discussion of Plato’s treatment of pleasure as appearing good, see Moss 2006.

poses a problem for those who offer benefit in place of worthless pleasures – in particular, for those who, like Socrates, strive to improve others’ souls.

5. Sweetening the pill?

Thus far, tracing the analogies of the doctor and the pastry chef has yielded a rather grim reading of the dialogue. Socrates aspires to cure vicious souls by ridding them of false value-beliefs, but vicious souls have strong appetites for unhealthy pleasures, including appetites to be confirmed in their value-beliefs. Thus the people who stand to benefit most from Socratic persuasion – those with unruly appetites and dangerously false beliefs about value – are the least willing to submit to it, the least likely to be persuaded. But is the lesson of the doctor and the pastry chef wholly pessimistic? If Socratic persuasion fails because it runs afoul of people’s appetites, is there no way of ridding people of their false values?

Early in the dialogue, Gorgias makes a boast about his persuasive prowess (one that we have seen in another context) that may seem to suggest a solution. “Many times,” when his brother or other doctors could not persuade a patient to accept a drug, or surgery, or cauterization, Gorgias himself has persuaded the patient, “by means of no other craft than rhetoric” (456b1-5). Here the orator is not the doctor’s rival, as in the passage that immediately follows, but his ally and aide. If Socrates aspires to be the doctor of the soul, could not rhetoric aid Socrates in effecting his cures just as it here aids the doctor in effecting his? Presumably Gorgias persuades the patients in part by making vivid the pleasures of health and pains of illness; perhaps there could be a way of

persuading people to pursue virtue by presenting virtue as *pleasant*, and vice as painful – a way of using appetites as a tool of moral persuasion.³⁴

A careful reading of the doctor/pastry chef analogies indicates that although the dialogue does raise this suggestion, it in the end rejects it. Gorgias' persuasion of the doctors' patients proceeds, despite its noble end, by the usual means: perhaps he convinces the patients that they will suffer terrible pains if they avoid the treatment, and be able to enjoy great pleasures if they accept it; perhaps he gratifies them and wins their trust by saying they are too wise or too brave to resist. The trouble with such persuasion is that it will indulge and thereby further strengthen unhealthy appetites, the very appetites that soul-curing needs to moderate. Just as our system of analogies implies, then, for Socrates to seek help from an orator would be equivalent to a doctor seeking help not from an orator, but from a pastry chef – an unpromising prospect indeed. The pastry chef might be able to sweeten some bitter medicine, but in doing so he would strengthen unhealthy appetites and thereby undermine the cure; likewise, an orator might flatter someone into undergoing Socratic refutation, or even try to paint the life of virtue as a means to greater appetite-gratification, but in doing so he would strengthen his hearer's unhealthy appetites and thereby make her more vicious instead of less.

Worse, we have seen that flattering rhetoric persuades in large part by gratifying one particular kind of appetite: desires to be confirmed in one's beliefs about value.

³⁴ Recent writings on the *Gorgias*, drawing on considerations rather different from those I have presented here, offer versions of this optimistic reading of the dialogue, on which Socrates is proposing a collaboration between philosophy and Gorgianic rhetoric: see Weiss 2003 and Stauffer 2006.

There may be ways to persuade people to submit to physically painful medical treatment by means of arguments that they are wise, virtuous, and living just as they should, but surely there are no ways to persuade people by such arguments that they are dangerously wrong about how to live, that the things they most value are worthless, that the things they should be doing are “utterly the opposite” of what they actually do (481c, quoted above). The orator can aid the doctor without undermining his own power: he can exploit the patients’ values – including their attachment to pleasure – in order to persuade them to submit to physical pain, which is to say that he can persuade them that such submission is in keeping with their values. To aid Socrates, however, he would have to persuade people to value things radically different from what they currently value, and this, the dialogue suggests, is beyond the ken of flattering rhetoric.³⁵

This is not to say that there could not be an art of persuading people to value and pursue beneficial things: Socrates mentions the possibility of “redirecting appetites and not giving in to them, *persuading* or forcing them toward what will make the citizens be better” (517b5-7, emphasis mine), and it is natural to align this kind of persuasion with the “true” rhetoric he mentions at 503a-b and 517a (and returns to in much more detail in the *Phaedrus*).³⁶ But the *Gorgias* speaks of true rhetoric as an unrealized ideal (503a-b). The kind that Gorgias and his followers practice is the kind that Socrates contrasts with it: flattering rhetoric, which persuades by pandering to existing appetites. The *Gorgias*

³⁵ See again the passages on Callicles’ inability to contradict the *dêmos* (581d-e, quoted above).

³⁶ Arguably some of Socrates’ own rhetoric in the dialogue – his use of shame as a tool of persuasion, the fable and myth of the jars, the afterlife myth, perhaps even the allegory of the doctor and the pastry-chef itself – are meant as examples of true rhetoric, appetite-redirection.

suggests that there may be an art of persuasion fit to aid philosophy, one that redirects desires toward the good, but it leaves the investigation of this art – and of the psychology of desire that must guide it – to other dialogues.

6. The Doctor and the Pastry chef

We have seen that Plato uses rhetoric's faults to emphasize the benefits of Socrates' methods, and also uses rhetoric's strengths to examine the psychological forces that make it so difficult for Socrates to persuade people to embrace justice and philosophy. On the interpretation that has emerged, the dialogue emphasizes appetites for pleasure as the chief obstacle to Socratic persuasion, and shows that Socrates' persuasive limitations stem from the very benefits he tries to provide. Let us review what we have achieved by returning to the culmination of the *Gorgias*' analogies, the trial allegory of 521e ff, where Socrates compares his own possible fate to that of doctor accused by a pastry chef before a jury of children.

The doctor aims to benefit his patients by curing their bodies of sickness (section 1), but in doing so he runs afoul of their excessive, unhealthy appetites (section 2). It is these very appetites that the pastry chef gratifies with his tasty treats. Because he causes them pleasure, the children trust that the pastry chef is out for their good; because he causes them pain, they believe that the doctor's cures have harmed them (section 4).

Now we can infer a precisely parallel account of Socrates' trial before the Athenians, on charges brought by crowd-pleasing orators.³⁷ Socrates aims to benefit his

³⁷ Socrates begins in the *Apology* by calling his accusers orators (17b6), and dwelling on their persuasive rhetoric. Of his accusers, one is a professional orator, another a politician and the

interlocutors by removing their false beliefs about value, which amounts on his view to curing their souls of vice (section 1). But vice, like bodily illness, involves strong appetites for unhealthy pleasures, and Socrates' cures run afoul of these appetites by frustrating them (section 2). Socrates will be brought into court because in challenging and refuting his interlocutors' beliefs he pains them by frustrating their appetites to be told what they want to hear – their desires to be assured that what they think good is good, that they are living as they should, and that they may continue pursuing the pleasures they crave (section 3). It is these very appetites that the orator gratifies. Because he causes them pleasure, the ignorant members of the jury believe that the orator is out for their good: they trust him, they are persuaded by him. Because he causes them pain, they believe that Socrates is out to harm them (section 4). He fails to persuade them that there is benefit in questioning their own values and seeking instead to live as he thinks they should.³⁸

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third a poet: the *Gorgias* includes as orators people like Callicles who use rhetoric for political power, and defines poetry as a form of rhetoric (at 502b-d). Therefore we may safely say that the doctor's trial is directly analogous to Socrates' as depicted in the *Apology*.

³⁸ I owe thanks to many people for very helpful discussion of this material and patient advice on earlier drafts: in particular, I thank Sarah Broadie, John Cooper, Cian Dorr, Alexander Nehamas, Ron Polansky, and the referees for this journal.

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