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Technique and Teleology in Plato's Rhetoric

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ABSTRACT *This paper is an investigation of the place of rhetoric in Plato's judgement that philosophers must rule. The possibility that rhetoric could facilitate the rule of philosophy raises the question of whether rhetoric could also be used to undermine the governance of philosophy. It is my thesis that Plato argues for understanding rhetoric as limited in its ability to function at cross-purposes to those of philosophy because of a basic and direct relationship between the effectiveness of rhetoric and its ability to promote the ends of its audience. In the Phaedrus, we are told that persuasion requires rhetors to comprehend the nature of their audience so that appropriate methods of persuasion may be employed. This dependence on the nature of its subject is extended to include that subject's ends, an understanding of which is the province of philosophy. Since philosophy as it is put forward in the dialogues is interested in determining and promoting proper human fulfilment, then ultimately constraining the effectiveness of rhetoric in terms of the nature of its object ties rhetoric to the philosophic agenda.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The impact of philosophy on the culture of the polis is a rich field of interest for philosophers of the classical world. Plato puts the political soundness of the city hand in hand with the health of philosophy within it. In the *Republic*, Socrates goes so far as to say that there will be no end of troubles for the community unless philosophy coincides with rule (473c-e). The same point is made regarding the place of philosophy within the individual: the love of wisdom should be a deciding factor in the healthy individual's determination of conduct (618b-e). Plato's dialogues often delve into problems of class structure and harmony that might seemingly arise from such a conclusion. One possible means of facilitating the relationship between the ruling and the ruled elements of society is rhetoric.[1] Rhetoric, as the art of persuasion, might be used to convince the non-philosophic portion of society to follow the course set out by philosophers.[2] A similar conclusion can be drawn on a more personal level. However, if we can distinguish rhetoric from philosophy in this way, then it is also possible that rhetoric can subvert the rule of philosophy in society and in the individual. If rhetoric really is just a tool or technique, then its use, like that of other techniques or arts, is open to all sorts of purposes. We could assert that rhetoric is not necessarily connected to the agendas put

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forward by philosophers, and that rhetoric could be used against philosophy.[3] This line of reasoning naturally leads to the question for Plato of how dangerous rhetoric is to philosophy, especially regarding the leadership function. Here I hope to show that the Phaedrus answers this question by explaining rhetoric's technical effectiveness as ultimately dependent upon the purpose to which rhetoric is put.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato portrays Socrates conducting a wide-ranging discussion with one of his regular interlocutors, Phaedrus, and their discussion eventually turns to rhetoric. The text elucidates both a personal and a social facet to the problem rhetoric may pose to philosophic rule.[4] On the personal front, the intimate portrait of Socrates shows him trying to persuade Phaedrus to join the ranks of philosophy. Phaedrus begins the dialogue by expounding a rhetorical exercise by a famous speechwriter, Lysias, and part of Socrates' task in the text seems to be to convert Phaedrus away trom this attitude and to follow Socrates' own philosophically grounded position. Socrates, by engaging in a struggle for Phaedrus' soul, is committed to defending philosophy trom losing any of its future adherents. Socrates opens the dialogue with the pregnant phrase, "O friend Phaedrus, where are you going, and where are you coming from?" (227a), and this introduction concentrates the reader's attention on the progress of Phaedrus. Socrates cues us to consider how Phaedrus has been influenced before this meeting with Socrates, and how he will behave afterwards; we are left wondering what impact Socrates will have on the life of Phaedrus. We are told that Phaedrus is coming from having spent the morning listening to and poring over a rhetorical exercise composed by Lysias, the ablest speechwriter of his generation (227a; 228a). To clarify one answer to Socrates' question, we can reply that Phaedrus has come from a meeting with a great rhetorician and he is about to have a discussion with a great philosopher.[5] Plato sets up the dialogue to depict a competition for the allegiance of Phaedrus between Socrates and Lysias. Indeed, this "competition" exactly explains the dramatic arc of the Phaedrus. Phaedrus begins the dialogue being utterly enamoured of Lysias and the Lysianic speech (228a; 234c; 234e; 235b). Socrates shows himself willing to engage in a competition with Lysias, stating that "there is something welling up inside my breast, which makes me feel that I could find something different, and something better, to say"(235c). During the course of the dialogue, readers are given the opportunity to compare and indeed to choose between Lysias and Socrates on two fronts. First, Socrates gives what he considers to be an improvement on Lysias' speech. The drama seems to be saying that philosophy is even better at persuasion than rhetoric itself, and we shall have to pursue this paradoxical inference in our assessment of the competition between philosophy and rhetoric for Phaedrus' allegiance. Second, in the palinode Socrates proceeds to defend a course of action completely antithetical to the one proposed by Lysias, and thus suggests that there are substantive reasons for choosing a life decided by philosophy rather than rhetoric. In all of this, Phaedrus starts off as a follower ofLysias, but by the end is clearJy convinced of the superiority of Socrates' position (257b-c; c.f 279c).[6]

Socrates' personal interest in Phaedrus can be explained by the realization that philosophy provides care for the soul. In the rousing conclusion to the palinode, Socrates summarizes that it is through philosophy that the soul comes to its rightful and fulfrlling end. The true lovers are those who convert the ones they love to the study of philosophy. In the struggle for controlling the conduct of the romantic affair, Socrates states that "if the victory be won by the higher elements of mind guiding them into the ordered rule

of the philosophic life, their days on earth will be blessed with happiness and concord. For the power of evil in the soul has been subjected, and the power of goodness liberated" (256a-b). On the other hand, the position that Lysias is extolling offers "a mere acquaintance flavoured with worldly wisdom, dispensing a niggardly measure of worldly goods; in the soul to which he is attached he will engender an ignoble quality extolled by the multitude as virtue" (256e). Even having laid out the opposition in this way, Socrates still recognizes that he is in a competition with Lysias over the allegiance of Phaedrus. The final sentence of the palinode emphasizes this. Socrates completes the votive function of his speech by asking the god Eros to turn Lysias "to philosophy, so that his lover here may no longer waver as he does now between two choices, but may simply direct his mind towards love accompanied by talk of a philosophic kind" (257b). This characterization reinforces the picture of a competition between philosophy and rhetoric for the devotion of Phaedrus, and here the danger from rhetoric seems very real, for if Lysias and rhetoric generally cannot be converted to the service of philosophy, then the struggle over Phaedrus' soul must continue.

On the social tront, Socrates and Phaedrus speculate about a community that falls under the spell of rhetoric, and the conditions they describe in their analysis seem to indicate an ineffectual philosophic presence. In this analysis Socrates is more culturally focused, contemplating a society in which rhetoric has usurped the natural role of philosophy, if his statements in the Republic and elsewhere are to be taken seriously. In this more social vein Socrates' examination shows a concern over rhetoric's becoming a phenomenon that, because of its ability to exploit the natural inclinations of'its audience, threatens the continued existence of the community. At 260c-d, Plato has Socrates and Phaedrus summarize their analysis of rhetoric in the following way:

> SOCRATES: Then when a master of oratory, who is ignorant of good and evil, employs his power of persuasion on a community as ignorant as himself, not by extolling a miserable donkey as being really a horse, but by extolling evil as being really good: and when by studying the beliefs of the masses he persuades them to do evil instead of good, what kind of crop do you think his oratory is likely to reap from the seed thus sown?
> PHAEDRUS: A pretty poor one.

Here Socrates considers the case of a community not ruled by philosophy, but swayed by the force of rhetoric, and he emphasizes the level of ignorance present on both sides of the relationship: neither the rhetor nor the rhetor's audience has knowledge of good and evil. Afterwards Socrates will make knowledge of the truth a conspicuous element in his definition of a philosopher (278c-d), and this may lead us to the conclusion that rhetoric is only effective in contexts where ignorance predominates. We might even go so far as to say that the reason things go so poorly lies in the fact that philosophy is not there to lead the community into a healthy state that depends on goodness. But we must remember that Socrates also uses ignorance as a defining feature of the many, especially in comparison to the knowledge of the expert.[7] That being the case, rhetoric may still be able to effectively dominate the community, even when competing with alternatives presented by philosophers. As Phaedrus states, rhetors need not know the truth about the topics they are discoursing on, but only "what will be thought so; since it is on the latter, not the former, that persuasion depends" (260a).

II. RHETORIC AS *TECHNĒ*

From these two perspectives, then, rhetoric seems at least to present the possibility of undermining the establishment and maintenance of philosophical rule, both on an individual and community-wide basis. But in order to carry out this threat, rhetoric must be shown to be capable of serving a variety of interests; in other words, it must show itself to be a *technē* or art that is at least to some extent neutral regarding the purposes of its usage.[8] And although Socrates will later come to doubt this characterization, he refers to rhetoric as a *technē* at various points in our dialogue: at 260d the personified "art [*technē*] of speech" claims that without itself, no one will come close to mastering the "art" (*technē*) of persuasion (*peithein*). Later Socrates asks, "must not the art (*technē*) of rhetoric, taken as a whole, be a kind of influencing of the mind by means of words, not only in courts of law and other public gatherings, but private places also?" (261a). These musings, combined with the example cited earlier of rhetors who convince their audiences of pursuing an evil course, portray rhetoric as a tool that can be implemented to advance contrasting goals. Moral neutrality is in fact a hallmark of the technical arts, and if rhetoric is capable of threatening philosophy in the ways outlined here, then rhetoric must be shown to be an art of this kind. In attempting to come to an understanding of the threat rhetoric can pose to philosophy we need to confront the question of whether and in what sense rhetoric is an art.

To this question Socrates provides a conflicted answer. On the one hand, rhetoric clearly is some kind of teachable skill, complete with a set of manuals that make explicit the accumulated knowledge of the field. Socrates and Phaedrus spend a portion of the dialogue summarizing the manuals (266d-268a), and Socrates appears willing to concede that this body of knowledge does give rhetoric some claim to being an art. Socrates speculates, "Can there really be anything of value that admits of scientific acquisition [*technē lambanetai*] despite the lack of that procedure [the philosophically rigorous dialectic method they have just discussed]? If so, you and I should certainly not disdain it, but should explain what this residuum of rhetoric actually consists in" (266d). This statement at the same time both casts doubt on and validates the technical standing of rhetoric stripped of philosophical grounding. The manuals Socrates and Phaedrus look at most certainly do outline various components of an oration, such as preambles, expositions, proofs, supplementary proofs, covert allusions, and indirect compliments (266d-267d). To the extent that good rhetoric requires such components, a study of them as they are examined in the manuals is not at all out of place, and they would appear to lend some legitimacy to rhetoric's claim to *technē* status. Following up on this realization, we might assert that anyone, non-philosophers included, could come to an understanding of these manuals and use the knowledge contained therein for any purpose. Socrates does not deny the effectiveness of these rhetorical techniques per se, and this implies that such techniques could indeed be used to undermine or supplant the programme put forward by philosophy.

However, at the end of the brief survey of the manuals, Socrates wonders whether there might not be "some holes" (268a) in the fabric of the rhetoric they have so far constructed. Specifically, he gets Phaedrus to admit that all of the matters set out in the manuals require the further knowledge of when such techniques should be used in order to effect persuasion, as well as a knowledge of which techniques would be most effective

with different people (268b). Socrates presents a series of three examples that are governed by concerns of this type. First, Socrates and Phaedrus look at people who know how to induce warmth, coolness, vomiting and stool in the body, but have no idea as to when such procedures should be applied (268b-c). Phaedrus concedes that such people cannot claim to be practitioners of the art of medicine, and the same type of concern is pointed out in the context of music and poetry (268c-e). Finally, they return to rhetoric, and Socrates explains that the success of Pericles rests on Pericles' knowledge of this very thing, namely, the ability to discern when and where a particular rhetorical technique is appropriate (269a-c).

But should knowledge of how and when to apply an art be considered a part of that art itself? We might object here that this distinction between knowledge of the techniques involved and knowledge of their appropriate application lies at the heart of our definition of an art. In other words, technical knowledge is technical in virtue of its teleological neutrality; questions concerning whether one should apply the art of healing to a sick person, for example, lie outside the scope of medicine as an art. In lieu of this definition, we can interpret Socrates' concern in two different ways. Socrates could be invoking a weak version of his objection concerning the extent of technical knowledge, in effect asserting that questions of proper application be restricted to the technical facets of the case at hand. On this view, if we were to ask doctors when it is appropriate to apply the technique of "cooling" to the body, one viable response would be, "when the body has a fever." This knowledge of appropriate application remains neutral in the sense that the force of saying one "should" apply cooling extends only in so far as this application is done in order to counteract the fever. That one might also be morally obligated to apply the technique (say, simply because humans deserve such treatment) does not enter into this kind of objection. Seeing Socrates' analysis of rhetoric according to the weak version of his criticism forces us to understand rhetoric as lacking in this purely technical fashion. Thus the problem Socrates is pointing out is an inability on the rhetor's part to recognize a fever as such, precluding the option of moving on to apply the appropriate technique for reducing that fever.

If this is Socrates' meaning, then his reason for discounting rhetoric from the ranks of the arts is suspect. On the face of it, his analysis seems to indicate that rhetoric should be counted as an art, since he concedes that rhetoric can point to a body of knowledge through which it has expertise, albeit of a limited sort. And our weak understanding of Socrates' criticism implies that this knowledge can be expanded to defuse the objection Socrates makes. After all, he does not say that it is impossible to gain the knowledge of appropriate application. Such knowledge is possible, even if only to be found through the study of philosophy (271c-272b). There is nothing in principle denying rhetoric from coming to incorporate such knowledge, especially if we see the matter as a question of practicality, as outlined in our use of the medical example. We could argue that every art is faced with this very same problem to some lesser or greater degree, and as the arts mature, they become ever better at technically discriminating appropriate application. At the point in history when medicine first arose, it may well have been the case that a technique for cooling the body was swiftly formulated, even though the formulators were not able to discern some of the conditions in which its application was appropriate (an odd fever, say). However, in time, such a deduction was made, and the art of medicine progressed. A similar

argument could be made for the case of rhetoric. Possibly most rhetors in Socrates' era did not know exactly when it was appropriate to apply the techniques they were developing, but it is reasonable to assume that in time they came to gain knowledge in this area, especially considering that such knowledge is, as Socrates grants, entirely possible.[9]

Indeed, the case of Pericles stands out as a counter-example to Socrates' own objection. Pericles is described as a rhetor who goes through the very process Socrates is recommending - namely, getting the necessary training in philosophy so as to have the knowledge of when to apply his rhetorical skills (26ge-270e). Pursuant to this reasoning, that a well developed rhetoric that has come to incorporate knowledge of appropriate application would be a powerful force operating in both the public and the private spheres, and its potential use as a tool in displacing the role of philosophy would be considerable. It might be protested at this point that the knowledge rhetoric requires in order to exercise such a force can be gained only through philosophy, and so its usage would not conflict with the agenda of philosophy. But we are operating with the weak version of the objection here, and the knowledge we are considering must be neutral regarding its purpose. This being the case, the usage of such an empowered rhetoric is by no means restricted to the service of philosophy.

There is much in Socrates' analysis that recommends our understanding him as employing this weak form of his objection. The matters of the manuals are first put down as the mere "antecedents" that must be known prior to learning the art of rhetoric (269b), and the same conclusion is given concerning the various skills that are mistakenly put forward as comprising the whole of the crafts of medicine, poetry, and music (268e, 269a). When it comes time to state what the actual art of rhetoric would consist of, Socrates seems to fall back on technical considerations. In chastising current teachers of rhetoric, he complains that "they teach these antecedents to their pupils, and believe that that constitutes a complete instruction in rhetoric; they don't bother about employing the various artifices in such a way that they will be persuasive, or about organizing a work as a whole" (269c). Here we see Socrates deciding the issue of appropriate usage in terms of effectiveness, and this seems to validate our interpretation of the weak objection.[10] Skill or knowledge that leads to the desired result constitutes a *technē*. Appropriate application in this context can mean nothing more than an ability to technically achieve ends, and that Socrates is working with the morally neutral conception of a *technē*. His comment is silent regarding the appropriateness of those ends themselves. Understanding Socrates' analysis in this light leads us to question whether rhetoric really does deserve to be considered an art, since the knowledge of appropriate application remains available through further study.

However, Socrates does rely on the conclusion that persuasion's dependence on a philosophical background proves that rhetoric cannot be counted as an art in itself, and it is worthwhile examining why he might hold this, especially in light of the ramifications of the weak objection. The preceding analysis has shown that if we restrict ourselves to the technical aspect of the knowledge necessary to effect persuasion, we have little reason to think that rhetoric could not be used to subvert the role of philosophy in the lives of both the society and the individual. On this view, the knowledge that the adept rhetorician such as Pericles gains from philosophy in order to finish the task of persuasion is itself of a neutral teleological nature, having arisen through philosophical investigation

and subsequently being put to rhetorical use. What Socrates seems to object to is the notion that such knowledge really is technical in this non-moral sense.

The portrait of Pericles in the Phaedrus raises the question of how sincere Socrates' praise of Pericles' rhetorical ability really is.[11] There is a temptation to interpret Socrates' words as ironic, especially considering the far harsher picture of Pericles we receive at Gorgias 515b-516d. Further to this, Socrates' flattery of Pericles has an interesting analogue in the praise of Isocrates given at the end of the dialogue.[12] Isocrates was a highly regarded rhetorician in his day, as was Pericles, and the general impression is that of Socrates engaging in some sarcasm in his compliment to Isocrates.[13] The conflicting facets of Socrates' comments concerning Pericles and possibly Isocrates as well can be distinguished according to the objection to the art of rhetoric that we are here considering. In so far as Pericles is able to transfer his philosophic education concerning the nature of the soul to the practice of rhetoric, he shows himself to be a technically finished rhetor.[14] In this way we can consider Socrates' words as actually constituting praise. On the surface Socrates seems to state as much; when supplying the corrective course to rhetoric through the addition of philosophy, he states that "All the great arts need supplementing by a study of nature: your artist must cultivate garrulity and high-flown speculation; from that source alone can come the mental elevation and thoroughly finished execution of which you are thinking; and that is what Pericles acquired to supplement his inborn capacity" (26ge-270a).

But as Pericles disengages himself from the pursuit of philosophy, he loses the insight into the nature of the soul gained through further philosophical analysis, and so limits his ability as a rhetor. He also distances himself from the understanding of goals and policies that philosophy provides, an understanding the dialogues put forward as crucial to the health of the polis. It is in this latter sense that Socrates' words can be taken as a criticism of Pericles, who thus appears not to have used his rhetorical abilities in the service of philosophy. This understanding wins further support from arguments in the Gorgias. It is important to realize that Socrates' criticism of Pericles in the Gorgias is based on the great orator's bad effect on citizens. Pericles does not persuade the citizenry of policies leading to the proper ends of humanity-instead, Pericles convinces the people to do things that will make them worse. Socrates comments, for example, that Pericles and other statesmen are adept at providing the city with what it desires, such as ships, walls, and dockyards. "But as to giving these desires a different direction instead of allowing them free scope, by persuading and compelling citizens to adopt courses that would improve them" (*Gorgias* 517b), such statesmen are inept. This latter function is a true case of "persuasion," whereas what Pericles does is in fact pandering to the desires already latent in the city (518e-519a). Socrates' description of Pericles in the Gorgias as having made the citizens "wilder" and "more unjust and worse" (516c) can be seen as a result of Pericles' not having paid full attention to a more fundamental application of philosophy.

Bringing the two texts together, we note that Pericles has assimilated some technical benefits that philosophy can provide and is thereby able to persuade with greater ability than any other rhetor in the public eye. Socrates' words leave open the inference that Pericles has not become a philosopher in the full sense, promoting the rule of philosophy within the individual and the polis.[15] Pericles has mastered the art of rhetoric in so far as it is a technical skill disconnected fi:om moral concerns. But to the extent that true rhetorical competence is dependent on broader questions about the right and wrong

paths to convince audiences of, Pericles falls short. We could hypothesize that this is the reason that Alkibiades can describe Socrates as an orator of skill superior to that of Pericles (Symposium 215e). Socrates truly has our best interests at heart because of his philosophical insight as to ends, and he is better able to persuade because of that insight. On this account the praise of Pericles in the Phaedrus is faint, as he turns out to be effective in the sense that he is persuasive to some extent, but damaging when considered in light of the poor circumstances in which Athens finds itself by the end of Pericles' reign.

III. THE ENDS OF TECHNIQUE

For Socrates to show that rhetoric will not escape its philosophical origins and possibly have this damaging impact on the individual and the polis, a stronger version of the objection to rhetoric being considered a techne is necessary. An alternative reading would see Socrates' criticism as invoking a broader sense of knowing when to apply a technique, a sense that would incorporate moral concerns. An example of this line of thinking would be the case of rhetors persuading an audience to accept a certain policy because that policy is the right thing to do. Conversely, the same rhetors would not attempt to persuade their audience to act in certain other ways because such behaviour is the wrong thing to do. This too is a meaning of appropriate application, but it seems to go far beyond what Socrates initially states. On this view rhetoric would not qualify as an art because in itself it cannot discriminate when it would be appropriate to persuade an audience of a certain course of action, and this condition would be necessary somehow to effect persuasion. The discipline that is particularly focused on questions of this broader type is philosophy. If this concern of application is justified, then we can see how rhetoric requires a basis in philosophy in a second, non-technical sense, and in a way that cannot be divorced from philosophy. Without such a connection, the example of Pericles must point to the conclusion that philosophy may be studied by a rhetorician with the sole aim of learning the appropriate timing and application of rhetorical techniques, and that this is all that an effective art of persuasion consists in. Once this technical understanding is mastered, we have reason to think that the rhetorician might turn away from the philosophical programme and use the knowledge gained to subvert the policies and agendas put forward by philosophers. What Socrates needs in order for the strong version of his criticism to carry through is to show that the refined development of the technical side of rhetoric that comes from training in philosophy cannot be gained without a corresponding advance in these broader, moral concerns of philosophy.

Socrates evinces a belief that truly accomplished rhetors will in fact first be philosophers, and will use their rhetorical prowess in a philosophically responsible manner. To elucidate this point, we can make use of what Socrates emphasizes at both the beginning (257d-e) and the end (272b, 274a) of his discussion of rhetoric. Socrates states that the process of truly gaining rhetorical skill will be a long procedure, far longer than those who wish to become rhetoricians will want to engage in. At the beginning of their analysis of rhetoric, Phaedrus suggests that some will shy away fi-om writing speeches because of a fear of being labelled a sophist (257 d). To this Socrates replies, "Phaedrus, you are unaware that the expression 'Pleasant Bend' comes fi-om the long bend in the Nile," and he then proceeds to remark that the people to whom Phaedrus refers all

secretly "have the strongest desire to write speeches" (257e). While the comment concerning the secret desires of contemporary politicians is obviously germane to Phaedrus' comment, the point about the Nile is not - in fact it seems so abrupt and misplaced that some commentators have argued for its removal from the accepted text of the Phaedrus.[16] But this passage should be understood as consistent with other parts of the dialogue, all of which support the argument that a truly capable rhetorician must first and foremost be a philosopher.

Prima facie, the comment about the Nile would appear to suggest that sometimes it is more pleasant or "sweeter" to take a long, circuitous path to one's goal rather than the direct route. Hackforth, relying on the ancient commentator Hermeias, discounts this interpretation, substituting an ironic reading that is more consistent with Socrates' following point about the secret desires of politicians. As Hackforth writes: "The gist of Plato's explanation, and of his intention in quoting it, is clearly that given by Hermeias: a bend in the river, which considerably lengthened the voyage between two points, had come to be called the Pleasant Bend, κατ'ἀντίΦρασιν : which shows that people sometimes mean just the opposite of what they say. That, suggests Socrates, is the case with Phaedrus' abusive politician."[17] We can agree that Hackforth has provided a good explanation of Socrates' words from the point of view of the politicians. But from the perspective of the potential philosopher, the longer route is in this case to be preferred, and the non-ironic or surface meaning of the Nile-phrase captures this perspective. The difference between the politician and the philosopher is easily understandable according to the respective goals in mind. For politicians, becoming an effective rhetor is a means to "succeed in acquiring the power of a Lycurgus, a Solon, or a Darius, and so win immortality among their people" (258b-c). Philosophers, on the other hand, are those who "seriously pursue" (278c-d) lessons in "justice, honor, and goodness" because of a concern for the instruction of the soul (278a). Rhetorical prowess results from a prior concern with an analysis of the nature of the soul (271 c-272b), an analysis that is more directly the focus of philosophers. Ability at rhetoric is a tertiary result for philosophers, fallout from their concern with the nature and nurture of the souL Skill at rhetoric is not a primary motivation for the philosopher's behaviour, while it remains paramount for the politician's. In speaking of those seeking to become a finished orator, Socrates states:

> They will surely never acquire such competence without considerable diligence, which the wise should exert not for the sake of speaking to and dealing with his fellow-men, but that he may be able to speak what is pleasing to the gods, and in all his dealings to do their pleasure to the best of his ability. For you see, Tisias, what we are told by those wiser than ourselves is true, that a man of sense ought never to study the gratification of his fellow-slaves, save as a minor consideration, but of his most excellent masters (273e-274a).

There is a reference here back to the desire on the part of politicians to become famous in the eyes of their peers, and this is contrasted with the goal of the philosophers, who seek to speak what is "pleasing to the gods." But what is it that keeps philosophers from applying their knowledge in the attempt to achieve the "gratification of their fellow-slaves?" Throughout the discussion, Socrates and Phaedrus compare two ways of achieving facility at rhetoric, what Socrates will end up calling the "long" and the "short" paths (259e-260a; 272b-d; 274a). On the one hand, there is the "scientific"

method, by which Socrates means that skill at rhetoric only follows a long period of study in philosophy, particularly in dialectic and the nature of the soul. This is the "Pleasant Bend" that Socrates refers to at the beginning of the discussion. It is pleasant for some, namely philosophers, because it is exactly what philosophers want to do, which is to examine the nature of things and then determine the course of action that best facilitates the fulfilment of that nature. It is arduous or unpleasant for others (and hence Hackforth's reading), like the politicians Phaedrus mentions, because it provides an extremely circuitous and indirect route to the goal that they have, which is power. On the other hand, there exists the "shorter" and "easier" route, which is much more acceptable to those wishing to become rhetors in the first instance, for it appears to provide a more direct path to that goal. As Phaedrus says, "what I have heard is that the intending orator is under no necessity of understanding what is truly just, but only what is likely to be thought just by the body of men who are to give judgement" (259e-260a). Thus the probable is substituted for the true, presumably making the job of the rhetor much easier than that of the person who follows the process that Socrates lays out. Unfortunately, the analysis that Socrates and Phaedrus conduct shows that this supposition of the easier route is incoherent (262b-c), and so those wishing to become rhetors are forced to take the (un)Pleasant Bend.

In doing so, it seems that these future rhetoricians must face the realization that the technical ability they desire is dependent upon knowledge of ends in the broader, moral sense that comes with the study of philosophy. Socrates states that the accomplished rhetor must first know the nature of the soul "precisely" (270e), and this involves knowing "what its action is and toward what it is directed, or how it is acted upon and by what" (271a).[18] One typically Socratic extension of this condition would be the conclusion that having such knowledge in turn creates its own obligation to see that the proper ends of the soul, once recognized, be brought about. As Plato's Socrates asserts in other dialogues, one never does wrong knowingly.[19] That being the case, if one gains the precise knowledge of the nature of the soul such that the proper ends for the soul are discerned, then one will feel the obligation to use persuasion in order to effect that end. Using persuasion for any other purpose would amount to causing harm. But importing the Socratic principle here seems to beg the question in some way. We are trying to show that rhetors will not use their talents to accomplish ends that do not promote the public good or the good of the soul. Relying on the statement that people never knowingly do harm at this point forces us to assume on a grander scale the conclusion of the argument we are seeking to provide in the case of rhetoric. If anything, our analysis of rhetoric should help to provide some justification for the broader principle.

Still, the realization that the finished rhetor must know the proper ends towards which the soul is directed opens the way for other arguments that limit the scope of the use of rhetoric. The precise knowledge of the soul that the rhetor must gain places that rhetor under certain restrictions. As Socrates states, orations must be constructed with these limitations in mind, as certain techniques will only work on certain kinds of souls (272a). Socrates could be operating with an unfettered conception of rhetoric, such that the limitations he works over at 271e-272b only have methodological import, and rhetoric is understood to be able to persuade its audience to follow any course. Thus the limitations that Socrates mentions might be meant merely to circumscribe the way in which people are convinced, as some people will not be persuaded by certain techniques,

but will be persuaded by others. Here I would argue that this interpretation should be modified because of the nature of the limitations that Socrates places on rhetoric. As has been noted, persuasion is possible only in matters where the audience is ignorant, and this cancels the effectiveness of rhetoric on a great number of issues.[20] This implies that a completely ignorant person could be persuaded of anything, that a completely knowledgeable person could be persuaded of nothing, and that most human intellects sit on a continuum somewhere between these two abstract poles.

Granting that Socrates is operating with a fettered rhetoric, we can move on to explore why he links technical effectiveness to the nature of the soul. Socrates especially connects rhetorical effectiveness to knowledge of human ends. As pointed out above, at 271a Socrates mentions considerations about what the soul is directed towards, and this repeats a position he had given earlier.[21] In contemplating rhetoric as an art, Socrates states that learning the nature of the soul is necessary if by "words and rules of conduct" rhetors are "to implant such conviction and virtue [*aretē*] as desired" (270b). This is compared to the doctor who will "apply medicine and diet to induce health and strength" (270b). Importing the *aretē* of the subject into the definition of rhetoric connects the artifice of rhetoric to the promotion of some end in the subject. This is supported by the comparison to medicine, which is here described as a technical art whose aim is the health or proper functioning of the body. Tying philosophy's concentration on ends to rhetorical effectiveness also recalls the remark concerning Socrates' care for the progress of Phaedrus' soul mentioned in Section I of this paper: Socrates and Lysias are engaged in a competition for Phaedrus' allegiance. Socrates wins that contest because of a better grasp both of the nature of Phaedrus' soul and of the ends toward which it is directed. But Socrates reverses himself in his rhetorical performance, and we can now appreciate more fully the success of the palinode precisely in light of its more profound explication of the soul and the ends towards which human love is directed. Due to Phaedrus' initial ignorance concerning the nature of the soul, he is capable of being persuaded of the behaviour advocated by the Lysianic speech. However, as the palinode provides greater profundity of analysis, so too does it gain a persuasive force far greater than that of the speeches that preceded it.[22] And the source of this persuasive power of the palinode lies in the enlightenment concerning ends that it arouses in its audience. Phaedrus' growing understanding of his own soul and its natural tendencies increases his knowledge of what he should do, and this causes him to discount the motivation of behaviour propounded in the previous two speeches. We might speculate that Phaedrus' opinion could be modified yet again, but one would then have to invalidate the force of the analysis of the human psyche that Socrates has provided. Only a better exposition of the soul and its ends than that given by the palinode could achieve such a modification. It further seems likely that Socrates would be happy to follow the dictates of such a new speech, for such a treatment would reveal a better understanding of the nature of the soul and its ends, and yield an understanding that philosophers would embrace as the proper course to follow.[23]

Bearing this characterization in mind, we can hypothesize that Socrates makes his connection between philosophy and technical excellence in rhetoric through the conclusion that knowing the proper ends of the soul must have an impact on knowing what the soul may be persuaded of. Ultimately these considerations lead to the conclusion that the soul can be convinced to behave in ways that will lead to the achievement

of certain ends that are discernable only through philosophical investigation-but the utility of this condition has to rest on the knowledge level of the audience. To put it another way, philosophers are limited in what can be accomplished rhetorically by the moral imperatives discovered by philosophy, since philosophical investigation makes clearer what the proper ends of the soul are and hence, ultimately, that of which it can be convinced. But again, all of this is itself bound by the knowledge quotient of the audience, especially regarding human ends. An audience with a specific conception of what the human good is can only be persuaded of conduct that either coheres with that preconception or that at least enlightens it in some way. This shows from an epistemological perspective why rhetoric can be so destructive, given the right circumstances. Although an extremely ignorant audience can be convinced of much (and Socrates seems to lampoon this type of process at 260b-d), as the knowledge quotient of the audience increases, so too do the limits on what that audience may be convinced of increase.[24] Ignorance of the nature of the soul on the audience's part leaves great room for manipulation on this front, but as an audience comes to understand its own aims, desires, and indeed, its own nature, the degree to which a rhetor can work against these tendencies is lessened.[25] No real audience is so utterly ignorant of human ends that it is completely pliable to the rhetor's will. And so we can finally appreciate how it is that Socrates can characterize the rhetorical process not so much as rhetors powerfully manipulating public opinion as they so desire, but rather as giving an audience what it wants (as for example in the passage cited earlier, Gorgias 517b-c).

IV. CONCLUSION

As long as philosophy maintains its pre-eminence in an understanding of human ends, it should be able to maintain a position of rhetorical superiority. If technical effectiveness in rhetoric ultimately rests upon knowledge of human ends revealed by philosophy, then philosophy will dominate rhetoric, to the point where rhetoric cannot effectively distance itself from philosophy. It is for this reason that Socrates can question the validity of rhetoric's claim to be an art unto itself - and, by extension, he implies questions as to the limits of all the technical arts. In this paper I have tried to show what impact the development of rhetoric might mean to philosophy's role in the political context. Although I have concentrated on dealing with the threat rhetoric might pose to philosophy, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of the potential benefit that rhetoric extends. Good rhetoric can be used to gain acceptance of the philosophic programme.[26] Even more promising is the fact that this seems to be accomplished through education.

Broadening our perspective, we might ask how Plato's analyses affect our own speculations concerning the underlying forces at play in polis culture generally. In Plato's Republic philosophers rule, but we can go beyond Plato and observe that philosophy and public debate have an important role to play in the polis, albeit a role not of the grandeur that Plato envisions.[27] Bearing in mind the perspective that ancient Greek culture does make demands on argumentation to facilitate the health of the polis, we can also observe that this function is threatened by rhetoric. A suspicion of rhetoric can develop into a mistrust of the benefits of public argumentation, where debate is regarded solely as a matter of persuasive technique rather than honest contention over good policy.

Plato's arguments concerning the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric serve to reinvigorate a public discourse confronted with the challenge of rhetoric. His writings on rhetoric in the Phaedrus and elsewhere can be understood as part of a continuing project on the part of philosophers to preserve the role of debate in the policy-making process and the relevance of philosophy as a necessary grounding for that debate.

NOTES

1. The opening scene of the *Republic* dramatizes Socrates speculating over this possibility. As Socrates and Glaucon are about to leave the Piraeus, others force the two men to remain: "Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here," says Polemarchus (327c). Thus we are presented with a microcosm of a possible class conflict that can arise in the polis. Socrates the philosopher attempts to disengage from the ensuing pleasures that the evening's festivities will bring, and he is accompanied by Glaucon, his friend and auxiliary support in the following conflict with the other interlocutors. Polemarchus, Adeimantus, and the rest are representatives of the artisan class in society, and this opening scene provides a terse example of differing interests in the community. Faced with Polemarchus' challenge, Socrates replies, "Isn't there another alternative, namely, that we persuade you to let us go?" (327c). Polemarchus asserts that he will not be persuaded of such action, but this may only be a restriction on the bounds of effective rhetoric. While Polemarchus will not be convinced of allowing the dissolution of the group, his words leave open the possibility that Socrates might be able to convince him of other policies.
2. It should be noted here that Plato's attitude towards the usefulness of rhetoric to the philosophic programme is a contentious issue. Since Rollin W. Quimby, "The Growth of Plato's Perception of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 7 (1974): 71-9, opinion generally supports the interpretation that Plato sees rhetoric as a valuable tool for philosophy. In 1974 Quimby could pronounce that "the majority of writers have believed that Plato disdained it [rhetoric] throughout his life" (71; see accompanying footnotes for references). Since then, articles have tended to focus on how Socrates uses rhetoric to further his own philosophic goals in the dialogues. By 1988, James Murray, "Disputation, Deception, and Dialectic: Plato on the True Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 21 (1988): 279-89, could pronounce that "some students of Plato's rhetorical theory have been moving more or less steadily in another direction. There has been an increasing tendency to treat seriously the Platonic theory of a true rhetoric have status as a bona fide and philosophically significant art" (279), and gives the appropriate references. Since Murray's article, this trend has continued. For example, see Livio Rossetti, "The Rhetoric of Socrates," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22 (1989): 225-32; Jane Curran, "The Rhetorical Technique of Plato's Phaedrus," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 19 (1986): 66-72; and Joseph Vincenzo, "Socrates and Rhetoric: The Problem of Nietzsche's Socrates," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25 (1992): 162-82. All of these authors accept that Socrates is a philosopher who practices rhetoric.
3. Thomas J. Lewis, "Refutative Rhetoric as True Rhetoric in the Gorgias," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 14 (1986): 195-210, looks at the Gorgias and confronts a similar problem to the one being canvassed here. "Socrates' task in the Gorgias is to denounce and refute the false rhetoric which serves as a competitor to philosophy" (195). It should be noted that Lewis too is in favour of understanding the dialogues as putting forward a positive version of rhetoric that aids in the dissemination of philosophy.
4. Bernard K. DuffY, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16 (1983): 79-92, argues a case similar to the functions of rhetoric that are pointed to here, and expands it to include the Menexenus: "The Menexenus conflffils the importance of epideictic rhetoric as a tool not only of statecraft, but of popular philosophy" (79).

5. Other commentators have noticed that the plot of the dialogue revolves around the question of Phaedrus' conversion from being a devotee of Lysias to Socrates. See R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus: Translated, with Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 13; G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4-9, 20, 72-3, 227-9.
6. In explaining the choice of Phaedrus as the sole interlocutor of the dialogue, Michael Stoeber, "Phaedrus of the Phaedrus: The Impassioned Soul," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25 (1992): 271-80, makes reference to this dramatic arc as well. By using Phaedrus, Plato forces us to recall his role in the *Symposium*. Phaedrus is the one who suggests that Eros be the topic of discussion, and he presents a view of Eros whereby life is greatly enriched by the presence of the lover. However, in the *Phaedrus* we see Phaedrus, under the sway of Lysias, extolling the virtues of the non-lover. Thus a reference back to the Symposium helps solidity our view ofPhaedrus as malleable in opinion, a perfect audience for a contest in persuasive ability between rhetoric and philosophy: "In his initial disregard for truth, Phaedrus proves to be the ideal character for illustrating the power and danger of the Sophist" (275).
7. Duffy is prompted to consider what the proper role of rhetoric is because of the placement of rhetorical speeches in the dialogues themselves, and even coming out of the mouth of Socrates. As Duffy states, "the mere existence of these speeches tells us little. Rather we must ask what functions they show epideictic rhetoric performing within the context of political and philosophic life" (Duffy, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric," 83).
8. The case is admirably stated in Charles L. Griswold Jr, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 198: "In the *Phaedrus*, techne is a rule-governed, precise, comprehensive, and rigorous method of analysis that is teachable and that allows one to know whatever one wishes. It requires that one follow a series of determinate steps in a set sequence and it operates on determinate forms. It is not concerned with the uses to which its results are put, and in that sense it is value free; techne is a means to a goal, not a science of ends."
9. At 271c Socrates even seems to indicate that there in fact are rhetoricians (aside from the case of Pericles) who have gone through the necessary dialectical training and have gained insight into the application of their techniques. He states that "the present-day authors of manuals of rhetoric, of whom you have heard, are cunning folk *who know all about the soul* but keep their knowledge out of sight" (italics added).
10. Socrates' complaint about the inability of rhetors to teach skill at creating unity speaks to the heart of the divergence from philosophy that rhetoric is capable of. As becomes clear throughout the dialogues, it is the special task of philosophy to create unity within the polis and the individual. If rhetoric is a danger to philosophy, then it must ultimately undermine this unity, sowing dissent.
11. For the view that the passage may be ironic, see Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, 281, n. 35: "One should add that Socrates may also be indirectly criticizing Pericles. Not only is it doubtful that Pericles really could define rhetoric in the required manner, Anaxagoras is criticized by Socrates in the Pho. and is associated in the Apol. (26d) with demythologizing, that is, with the kind of 'boorish wisdom' rejected in the Phr. (22ge3). Perhaps Pericles is thus tarnished by association." Conversely, in considering the presentation of Pericles in the Menexenus, DuffY writes, "Plato's compliment to Pericles is undoubtedly sincere" (Duffy, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric," 83). This follows because "In the *Phaedrus* he tells us that Pericles' ability in rhetoric was the result of philosophical instruction - of 'star gazing.' If Socrates' oration [in the Menexenus] is modeled upon Pericles', we expect it, then, to exhibit a philosophical basis" (83).
12. For the standard interpretation of the Isocrates passage as ironic, see R. L. Howland, "The Attack On Isocrates in the *Phaedrus*," *Classical Quarterly* 31 (1937): 151-9; G. J. De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), 15-8; Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, 286, n. 18. The case is summarized by Ferrari thus: "My speculation is that Isocrates (as rival beloved, so to speak) represents for Plato how a worthy concern for what exceeds articulation by rules in ethical and intellectual practice can

degenerate into mere conservatism and hostility to the virtues of reflection" (Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, 159).

13. However, the understanding of the comments on Isocrates as being purely negative has also come under attack. Curran puts the case thus: "Others, doubtless also with the Gorgias's negative stance in mind, pay excessive attention to the eulogy of Isocrates at the end of the dialogue. Claiming it to be ironic, they view the whole dialogue as an attack on Isocrates, or try to detect Isocrates' style in one or other of the speeches" (Curran, "The Rhetorical Technique of Plato's *Phaedrus*," 67). There is a call here to carry though with our re-evaluation of the place of rhetoric in Platonic philosophy. Since we are to balance our assessment of the art of persuasion, so too do we need to take a closer look at the comments on its practitioners, namely Pericles and Isocrates. Ronna Burger, Plato's *Phaedrus*: *A Defence of the Philosophic Art if Writing* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 114-26, gives an interesting example of this re-assessment, and concludes that "Isocrates' defence for his own activity of writing is grounded on its power to preserve the prudence of reasonable insight into political affairs and the persuasiveness of true opinion artfully presented" (125).
14. This interpretation follows somewhat the analysis offered by Hackforth: "The question is sometimes raised, whether Plato is here reversing (or mitigating) the adverse judgment passed on Pericles in the *Gorgias* is misplaced, for he was there regarded as a bad statesman whereas here it is merely his oratorical excellence, which neither Socrates nor Plato would deny, that is affirmed" (Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus*, 149).
15. Here it may be telling that Socrates does not call Pericles a philosopher, even though Pericles has studied with Anaxagoras (270a). Following up on Griswold's point, we notice that when in the Phaedo Socrates discusses the work of Anaxagoras in more detail, he faults it because of a failure to deal with moral ends, instead substituting material explanations. "It never entered my head that a man who asserted that the ordering of things is due to mind would offer any other explanation for them than that it is best for them to be as they are. I thought that. . . he would make perfectly clear what is best for each and what is the universal good" (98a-b).
16. Specifically, Heindorf has argued thus, and he is followed by Robin, Shanz, and Burnet. For an excellent summary of these opinions presented previous to his own commentary, see De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato*, 184-7, with accompanying notes and references. More recent translators have accepted the passage; see for example, Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, trans. *Plato Phaedrus* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishi
19. Socrates describes the principle at Meno 77b-e, Hippias Major 296c, *Gorgias* 468b, *Protagoras* 345d. See also the Laws 731c.
20. C.f. the discussion from 263a-c.
21. The idea is also expressed at Gorgias 503a, where Socrates considers two sides of rhetoric, one of which "is something fine - the effort to perfect as far as possible the souls of citizens and the struggle to say always what is best."
22. As Stoeber puts it, "Socrates gives Phaedrus a contrasting image of love that is more powerful than Lysias' speech and this contrast stimulates Phaedrus' previously latent faculty of reason. He sees Socrates' second speech over and against Lysias', becomes intellectually aroused, and begins to appreciate the theoretical principles that establish the formal superiority of Socrates' effort" (Stoeber, "Phaedrus of the *Phaedrus,"* 279).
23. In this way, the current analysis stays consistent with views of commentators who see in Plato the attempt to resist dogmatic philosophy while still attempting to reveal some level of truth in his work. For an exegesis of this project as it relates to rhetoric in the Platonic dialogues, see Kenneth Dorter, "Three Disappearing Ladders in Plato," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 29 (1996): 279-99. "But philosophers for whom the formulation even of that limited truth can only be provisional, require a rhetoric that functions in both a positive and negative way. Positively, it must lead the reader to experience the insights that they want

to communicate; negatively, it must somehow convey that the formulations by which it does so are only functional, not foundational" (279).

24. In a different context, William G. Kelly Jr, "Rhetoric as Seduction," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6 (1973): 69-80, compares this passage with Pausanius' conclusion in the Symposium at 180c of the one who loves solely in hopes of "getting something done." For Kelly, "the men chose the poorer course because they did not know or chose not to distinguish the best from the worst; they acted randomly" (74).
25. Kelly goes on to conclude that "For Plato, the baseness of rhetoric grows out of its inherent randomness; in it there is no abiding affection for Truth" (Kelly, "Rhetoric as Seduction," 79). We can agree with this attitude while asserting that there is another side to the analysis of rhetoric that Plato gives us. While rhetoric has its baser side, it could be added that the nobility of rhetoric lies in its connection to truth and an ability to promote proper ends.
26. DuffY writes that "In the *Menexenus* Plato presents epideictic as a means of publicly celebrating the values recognized to underlie the noble deeds of previous generations, values, as I said, which are at the core of future deliberation and action" (Duffy, "The Platonic Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric," 90). What I have tried to show here is how a discussion and awareness of those values on the part of the philosopher can doyminate the rhetorical context.
27. In a seminal work, Jean-Pierre Vernant, The Origins of Greek Thought (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), writes of the role of public discourse in the workings of the polis. "All questions of general concern that the sovereign had to settle, and which marked out the domain of arche [sovereignty], were now submitted to the art of oratory and had to be resolved at the conclusion of a debate. They therefore had to be formulated as a discourse, poured into the mold of antithetical demonstrations and opposing arguments" (50). But if rhetoric can effect persuasion and subvert real debate over the merits of policy, then the fundamental role of dialogue in city-politics that Vernant points out is threatened. What I have tried to do here is outline a Platonic response to the phenomenon of rhetoric that defuses this danger to the traditional foundations of the polis.