

The Common Origins of Philosophical and Political Power in Plato's *Gorgias*

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ABSTRACT

Plato's *Gorgias* concerns the tension between political and philosophical power. In it, Socrates and Gorgias discuss rhetoric's power, which Gorgias claims is universal, containing all powers, enabling the rhetorician to rule over others politically. Polus and Callicles then develop Gorgias's understanding of rhetoric's universal power. Scholars addressing power's central focus rightly distinguish Socrates' notion of philosophical power from Gorgias's. However, these authors make this distinction too severe, overlooking the kinship between philosophy and politics. This paper argues that Socrates' notion of power parallels Gorgias's, but philosophy prioritizes self-persuasion, whereas rhetoric primarily aims to persuade others.

Keywords: Plato, Socrates, political philosophy, rhetoric, sophistry, δύναμις.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Plato's *Gorgias* concerns the tension between philosophy and politics, and the power (δύναμις)¹ each wields. Socrates converses successively with three interlocutors — Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles — with the stated intention of discovering what rhetoric's δύναμις is, and what its object is (447c). While much of the dialogue attends to the second question, identifying political persuasion as rhetoric's object, Gorgias's initial answer to the first question concerning rhetoric's δύναμις underlies all three discussions. As each interlocutor develops the previous account of rhetoric's δύναμις, Socrates develops his own through his challenges to their claims. Scholars including George Duke, Rachel Barney, and James Stuart Murray have begun the work of distinguishing Socrates' notion of δύναμις from those of his interlocutors. Doing so has enabled these authors to find the dialogue's central question, which is ultimately whether politics and philosophy can be reconciled. However, these authors distinguish politics from philosophy too absolutely, overlooking their common origins, and thus tend to read Socrates as utterly critical of rhetoric and therefore politics. I contend that Socrates' notion of philosophical δύναμις parallels Gorgias's notion of rhetorical δύναμις and that both even share persuasion as its object. However, while rhetoric's δύναμις aims primarily at persuading others, Socrates' philosophical δύναμις aims first at self-persuasion. Because Polus and Callicles develop Gorgias's notion of rhetorical δύναμις into an account of tyranny, the concluding section of this paper will briefly consider what the commonalities between rhetorical and philosophical δύναμις suggests about the relationship between philosophy and tyranny. Through this, I intend to understand politics and philosophy as unifiable and to illu-

minate Socrates' claim that he is one of a few Athenians who tries his hand at the political art and the only one to act politically (521d).

In what follows, I will confine my examination to the initial exchange between Gorgias and Socrates, in order to indicate how Socratic δύναμις develops from the dialogue's earliest account of rhetorical δύναμις. For Gorgias, rhetorical δύναμις consists in the ability to persuade others, resulting in the rhetor's freedom and rule over others. I will then indicate how Socrates' account of δύναμις, which develops throughout the battle rounds with the succeeding interlocutors, parallels Gorgias's original formulation. For Socrates, we will find, true δύναμις involves knowledge of the virtues (in a political context, especially justice) and the intellect to hit upon what it wishes.² Socrates and Gorgias both consider δύναμις to involve persuasion, rule, and to have a universal scope (λόγος). However, Socrates' notion of δύναμις will turn Gorgias's desire to rule over others inward.

II. GORGIAS & SOCRATES ON RHETORIC'S POWER

Socrates' question regarding rhetoric's δύναμις³ is its first mention in the dialogue: "For I wish to inquire from [Gorgias] what the δύναμις of the man's art (τέχνη) is, and what it is that he professes and teaches..." (447c).⁴ Anticipating Socrates' later claim that rhetoric is a mere knack (ἐμπειρία) (462c), I follow David Roochnik's formulation of the conventional understanding of a τέχνη as involving: "...a determinate body of authoritative knowledge" (Roochnik, 1994, 129). If this understanding of τέχνη holds, Roochnik continues, then objects of technical knowledge would also need to be determinate. As George Duke notes, Socrates' second inquiry into what Gorgias professes and

teaches, indeed, constrains a τέχνη to a defined domain by presupposing it has specific objects (2018, 3). This, in turn, presupposes rhetoric is a τέχνη, expecting it to fulfill the associated criteria.

But rhetoric's status as a τέχνη quickly becomes dubious once Gorgias reaches a definition of rhetoric with a view to its δύναμις. Gorgias identifies rhetoric's object as "That which is in truth, Socrates, the greatest good (μέγιστον ἀγαθόν) and the cause both of freedom for human beings themselves and at the same time of rule over others in each man's own city" (452d). Gorgias here joins the freedom of the human being herself who wields rhetoric with her ability to rule over others who are subject to that rhetoric, anticipating the connection between rhetorical δύναμις and political rule that Polus and Callicles will establish explicitly. Socrates teases Gorgias for claiming, like all craftsmen, to provide the greatest good, remarking that many take their own profession to do so, and asks Gorgias once again to specify what his rhetoric offers, or indeed, what he understands the greatest good to be. In response, Gorgias paints a picture that would tempt any ambitious listener:

I, indeed, say it is being of a sort to persuade with speeches judges in a courtroom and councilors in a council and assembly members in an assembly and in every other meeting, whichever comes to be a political meeting. And you know with this δύναμις, you will hold the healer as a slave on the one hand, on the other hand the gymnastic trainer as a slave: and this man, the money-maker will appear [as one] making money for another and not for himself, but for you as the one being able (δυναμένω) to speak and to persuade the multitudes.⁵

Gorgias resists restraining rhetorical δύναμις to a specified field and, instead, presents rhetorical δύναμις as closely tied to, if not identical to, political δύναμις. Duke rightly interprets Gorgias to identify δύναμις itself as the greatest good in this passage (2018, 7). For the δύναμις to persuade the multitudes by speeches in a political context, Gorgias proposes, immediately results in the greatest good: human freedom and rule over others. But while Duke wants to characterize Socrates' (and thereby Plato's) critique of Gorgias as "ultimately informed by a confused commitment to power and pleasure as the greatest goods" (Duke, 2018, 17), I propose that Socrates' critique will reform Gorgias's notion of δύναμις as the greatest good rather than merely dismiss it.

The interluding discussion before the dialogue's next explicit mention of δύναμις signal two potential distinctions between rhetorical and philosophical δύναμις. First, Socrates leads Gorgias to claim rhetoric concerns justice, foreshadowing Socrates' developing account of δύναμις. Having ascertained that rhetoric is a τέχνη of persuasion, Socrates now seeks to distinguish it from other τέχναι, which also involve persuasion and thus to limit it once more to a specific domain:

SOC.: ...[W]e might *justly* ask the speaker further, "Of what sort of persuasion, and of persuasion about what, is rhetoric the art?" Or doesn't it seem to you *just* to ask further?

GOR.: It does to me, at any rate.

SOC.: Answer then, Gorgias, since it seems so to you.

GOR.: I say, then, Socrates, persuasion in law courts and in other mobs, as I was saying just a moment ago, and about those things that are *just* and *unjust* (454b, my emphases).

Socrates' questions provide Gorgias his answer: rhetoric, as an art of political persuasion, concerns the just and the unjust. This foreshadows Socrates' revision to Gorgias's notion of δύναμις, as Socrates' critique of Gorgias's account will suggest that δύναμις, properly understood, always entails justice.

Second, Socrates and Gorgias go on to distinguish two kinds of persuasion, arguing that rhetoric deals with persuasion in belief, but not in knowledge:

SOC.: Do you wish us then to set down two kinds (δύο εἶδη) of persuasion, one that provides belief without knowing, and one that provides knowledge?

GOR.: Certainly.

SOC.: Which persuasion, then, does rhetoric produce in law courts and the other mobs, about just and unjust things? The one from which believing comes into being without knowing, or the one from which knowing comes?

GOR.: It's clear, I suppose, Socrates, that it's the one from which believing comes.

SOC. Rhetoric, then, as seems likely, is a craftsman of belief-inspiring but not didactic persuasion about the just and the unjust (454e–455a).⁶

Socrates here points out a limitation to rhetoric's δύναμις. The rhetorician can only persuade one to believe her; she would be unable (οὐ δύναίτο) to persuade one to know what she says is true didactically (455a). Presumably, by contrast, Socratic philosophical persuasion would be didactic, involving the kind (εἶδος) of persuasion that leads to true belief, provided enough time to carry out its instruction. As Nichols indicates in the notes to his translation, *Gorgias* 455a echoes the *Apology* 37a–b, where Socrates admits that he fails to persuade

the judges given the insufficient time he has to make his defense (1998, 37n28). A question I will raise later in this paper is to what extent this didactic persuasion of another is the primary aim of philosophy, or whether, indeed, even philosophy has this power. Instead, I will propose, philosophy primarily seeks to persuade the philosopher herself and, secondarily, to inspire similar self-persuasion in others.

Gorgias seems to disregard Socrates' limitation to rhetoric's δύναμις in what follows, once again shirking its confinement to a specific object, preferring to suggest its universal scope and, thus, threatening rhetoric's status as a τέχνη. Socrates occasions Gorgias's expansion of rhetoric's δύναμις by observing that rhetoricians often persuade others about affairs of other craftsmen, to which Gorgias replies: "I shall try, Socrates, clearly to uncover for you *all* the power (τὴν δύναμιν ἅπασαν) of rhetoric; for you yourself have beautifully led the way" (455d).⁷ If rhetoric's full δύναμις only becomes clear when it is stripped of any specific object, then, as Socrates next question will imply, rhetoric is no τέχνη at all: "I wonder at these things, Gorgias, and I am long asking whatever the δύναμις of rhetoric is. For it appears to me to be a certain divinity (δαίμονία τις) when considering its magnitude in this way" (456a).⁸ Rhetoric's newly discovered magnitude leads it to transcend a mere τέχνη and become, instead, something manifestly divine, a δύναμις that is universal in scope. Of course, there may well be irony in Socrates' praise here, recalling his mockery of orators' divine inspiration in the *Ion*. However, the *Gorgias* seems to identify divinity and unrestricted δύναμις, suggesting some seriousness to Socrates' claim that rhetoric would be divine if its claim to such a δύναμις were justified.

Gorgias's illustration of rhetoric's unrestricted δύναμις will lead him into an apparent

conflict between rhetoric's all-powerful ability to persuade and the rhetor's responsibility to act justly. This tension becomes the source of what is typically understood to be Socrates' critique. As if to further rhetoric's claim to divinity, Gorgias claims that rhetoric "...gathers together and holds under itself all powers (ἀπάσας τὰς δυνάμεις)..." (456a). Gorgias here suggests rhetoric is not only unlimited in scope with respect to its particular power, but all-powerful and containing all powers in itself. The suggestion seems to be that rhetoric is not only capable of persuading anyone about anything, but also of accomplishing anything. In support of rhetoric's unlimited scope, Gorgias recalls: "On many occasions now I have gone in with my brother and with other doctors to one of the sick who was unwilling either to drink a drug or to submit himself to the doctor for surgery or cautery; the doctor being unable (οὐ δυναμένον) to persuade him, I persuaded him, by no other art than rhetoric" (456b). The successful rhetor does not only speak well about justice, but about all matters of human affairs. But here, Gorgias wields his δύναμις justly: technical knowledge alone lacks the power to affect change in others, so Gorgias uses his δύναμις on his brother's behalf. Rhetoric here appears as a para-τέχνη that assists the one who knows in persuading others to submit to the knower's rule. Politically, in order to rule according to technical knowledge, experts will require the rhetor's service to persuade others to submit to their rule. But this hardly fits the picture Gorgias painted at 452b, where the rhetor convinces all others to serve her interests rather than their own, or, indeed, his most recent expansion of rhetoric's power. Here, it is the rhetor who submits his service to the one who knows.

Gorgias's attempt to demonstrate rhetoric's divine power, while simultaneously censuring its unjust use, leads him to lure that rhetoric

can be used for any purpose whatsoever (including unjust purposes), which is in conflict with his insistence that rhetoric *ought* not be used unjustly. Gorgias quickly explains that the rhetor's δύναμις is not limited to persuading others to follow the craftsman's knowledge. She can also persuade others that she herself knows more about the particular craft than the expert who truly knows: "And if he should contest against any other craftsman whatsoever, the rhetorician rather than anyone else would persuade them to choose himself. For there is nothing about which the rhetorician would not speak more persuasively than any other of the craftsmen in a multitude. The δύναμις of the art, then, is so great" (456c). Here then, we get a sense of rhetoric's full δύναμις. The rhetor need not align herself with experts; she can persuade the multitudes to recognize her as master over anything, effectively becoming anyone she wishes in their estimation. The rhetor, like a god, can seem to be anyone at all. But Gorgias immediately afterwards admonishes such an unjust use of rhetoric's δύναμις:

For the rhetor has power (δυνατός) to speak against all men and about everything, so as to be more persuasive in multitudes about, in brief, whatever he wishes (βούληται); but it nonetheless does not follow that one must on this account deprive the doctors of reputation—for he would be able (δύναιτο) to do this—nor the other craftsmen, but one must use rhetoric justly too, just as any other competitive skill (457a–b).⁹

Rhetoric is, in principle, an unrestricted δύναμις to conquer all opponents about all things. But Gorgias's attempt to defend rhetoric confines the rhetor to act justly. He concludes that when it is used unjustly, the

individual and not the practice (nor indeed, the teacher) should be blamed. Rachel Barney provides a helpful analysis of these two conflicting treatments of rhetoric, naming them the “Advertisement” and the “Defense,” respectively (2010, 102–106). Using Barney’s distinction, what is crucial here is that Gorgias’s advertisement that rhetoric is in principle all-powerful conflicts with his defense that limits it to serving experts in persuading others to submit to their rule.

While the tension between Gorgias’s advertisement and defense is clear, Gorgias’s description of the resulting dangers of rhetoric pose a parallel to Socrates’ own biography as described in the *Apology*. Gorgias concludes his account by claiming that if rhetorical δύναμις is wielded unjustly, it is the individual and not the practice, or the individual’s teacher, who should be blamed: “And, I think, if someone has become a rhetorician and then does injustice with this power and art, one must not hate the man who taught him and expel him from the cities. For that man imparted it for just use, and the other used it in the opposite way. It is just, then, to hate, expel, and kill the one who uses it not correctly, but not the one who taught it” (457b–c). Given that exile was a potential alternative to the death penalty Socrates faced in the *Apology* for his alleged crime of corrupting the youth, this passage suggests a potential parallel between rhetoric and philosophy. Given their unrestricted δύναμις, the reputation of both activities and their practitioners are vulnerable. The philosopher who questions others unjustly becomes a sophist and the rhetor who persuades others unjustly becomes a tyrant. Because of that, the true philosopher and rhetor risk appearing to others like their counterfeit. Given sophistry’s close association to oratory, the lines that Gorgias draws here yoke

himself and Socrates even closer together. If ‘rhetor’ is a synonym for ‘sophist,’ then the philosopher who acts unjustly becomes a sophist, who risks becoming a tyrant.

Socrates himself seems aware of such a risk when he sets out to critique Gorgias’s account: “[N]ow you seem to me to be saying things not quite consequent upon or consistent with what you were saying at first about rhetoric. So I’m afraid to refute you, lest you suppose that I speak from love of victory, not in regard to the subject’s becoming manifest, but in regard to you” (457e–458a). Socrates fears that his critique runs the risk of appearing like an unjust (and sophistic) pursuit of victory over Gorgias, rather than an earnest inquiry into the matter at hand. It is to avoid this very threat that leads Socrates to insist that the rhetor (and the philosopher) must act justly.

While commentators often interpret Socrates’ following questions utterly to refute Gorgias’s notion of rhetoric’s δύναμις, in the following section, I will argue that Socrates revitalizes Gorgias’s notion of δύναμις as the greatest good, by insisting that the rhetor’s δύναμις consists in acting justly and by inverting the rhetor’s ambition to persuade others such that the proper aim becomes self-persuasion. In short, Socrates provides a vehicle towards unifying philosophical and political ambitions by reimagining δύναμις as well as the freedom and rulership that δύναμις affords.

II. SOCRATES’ REFUTATION

After acknowledging that he risks appearing simply to love victory, Socrates claims that his true motivation is to seek the truth about the matter at hand, giving the first indication that one of his own primary motivations in the discussion is self-persuasion.

Now, then, if you too are one of the human beings of whom I am also one, I would with pleasure question you further; and if not, I would let it drop. And of what men am I one? Those who are refuted with pleasure if I say something not true, and who refute with pleasure if someone should say something not true—and indeed not less pleasure to be refuted than to refute. For I consider it a greater good, to the extent that it is a greater good to be released oneself from the greatest evil than to release another. For I think that nothing is so great an evil for a human being as false opinions about the things that our argument now happens to be about (458a–b).

Instead of supplying his own notion of the greatest good, Socrates identifies a greatest evil: to hold a false opinion about the things they are now discussing.¹⁰ He does not specify which of the things under discussion are so important, so it may be assumed that the nature of δύναιμι be included. But crucially, Socrates judges the good of being released from a false opinion as better than releasing another, claiming that it is just as pleasant to him (if not more so) to be refuted than to refute. This implies that Socrates, given his recognition of the great danger holding a false belief poses, would rather come to be persuaded to change his opinion than to persuade another to change hers. One question that remains unanswered in the dialogue is whether this reveals a selfishness to Socrates' philosophizing or, perhaps, whether there is something about the nature of refutation and persuasion that makes being refuted better than refuting another.¹¹ Socrates continues to signal that he cares for his soul with the attending effect that the souls of others are attended. One possible answer is that without proper care for

one's own soul, one cannot ensure that he or she may properly care for another. Rather than pursuing this thought further, at Gorgias's assent that he too would like to inquire into the truth of the matter, Socrates begins to challenge Gorgias's claim to rhetoric's absolute δύναιμι by introducing another limitation to it.

Socrates adds to the first limitation, that rhetoric can only persuade without knowledge, that rhetoric can only persuade non-knowers, subtly indicating another parallel between philosophy and rhetoric. Socrates first revises their earlier distinction between persuading without knowledge and persuading with knowledge (454e–455a) by recasting it as a distinction between persuasion and teaching. He asks Gorgias if he makes someone a rhetor “so as to be persuasive in a mob about all things, not by teaching but by persuading” (458e), to which Gorgias assents. Socrates then pushes Gorgias to define “in a mob” as “among those who do not know” (459a). The rhetor is more able than the doctor to persuade the mob, despite the fact that the rhetor is a non-knower while the doctor is a knower, leading Socrates to the unflattering conclusion:

The one who does not know, therefore, will be more persuasive than the one who knows among those who don't know, whenever the rhetor is more persuasive than the doctor... [Rhetoric] does not at all need to know how the matters themselves stand, but to have discovered a certain device of persuasion so as to appear to know more than those who know, to those who don't know (459b–c).

If the earlier distinction that rhetoric persuades without knowledge was meant to imply that philosophy will persuade with knowledge, now it seems that the distinction is made more

severe. Rhetoric merely persuades, while philosophy teaches, and the two activities no longer share a common gene. However, the further, unflattering claim that rhetoric is the practice of a non-knower persuading the mob of non-knowers and appearing to know more than the knower shares certain parallels with philosophy. This description is rather similar to the explanation of the hatred his philosophizing incurs, which Socrates outlines in the *Apology*, although with the notable exception that Socrates, unlike the rhetor, does know more than the non-knowers in recognizing that he does not know.¹² But while Socrates seeks to inquire whether he *is* wiser than others with the consequence that he appears wiser, he intimates that the rhetor aims merely to appear wiser. Moreover, the attending implication, that whereas rhetoric persuades non-knowers philosophy teaches knowers does not seem simply true. Philosophy, too, requires the humility to seek knowledge. Those studying philosophy must be in some position of ignorance for their inquiry to be genuine. Socrates here seems to be complicating, rather than altogether shirking, the parallel between philosophy and rhetoric.

Socrates then indicates the tension between Gorgias's advertisement and defense of rhetoric and asks whether those who practice rhetoric must also know justice and injustice, leading Gorgias to claim that his students who do not already know these things will learn them from him (459e–460a). Socrates argues that knowledge of justice leads to just practice, to which Gorgias assents (460b). Socrates concludes: "...[T]he rhetorician is unable (ἀδύνατον) to use rhetoric unjustly and to want (ἐθέλειν) to do injustice" (461a).¹³ Both Gorgias's advertisement and defense hinge on the word βούλομαι or 'wish.' If she *wishes*, the rhetor can persuade over any affair whatsoever and rule over any sphere. How-

ever, Socrates' claim that knowledge of justice involves just practice tempers such a desire. The one who knows what justice is would not *wish* (ἐθέλειν) to act unjustly. Socrates switches terms here to signal a shift in the kind of desire under discussion. While Socrates does not formally introduce the distinction, ἐθέλω has the connotation of an internal urge or drive and often held a connection to φύσις, suggesting that it is contrary to the nature of one who knows justice to desire to act unjustly. Βούλομαι, on the other hand, has the sense of intention or purpose, something that is chosen or decided on.¹⁴ Socrates, therefore, leaves open the possibility that the rhetor may wish to act unjustly (βούλομαι) but such a wish runs contrary to their internal desire to act justly (ἐθέλω). Presumably, if the rhetor comes to be aware of this tension, the rhetor would give up her inconsistent wish to act unjustly. This criterion for philosophical δύναμις, intellect to hit upon what one truly wishes, comes to be more fully developed in Socrates' exchange with Polus, but it is already at play in Socrates' early exchange with Gorgias. Moreover, in order to act with purpose on this internal desire, the rhetor, presumably, would have to reflect on the inconsistency between her wish (βούλομαι) to do injustice and persuade herself to give up that wish in the service of her inmost desire (ἐθέλω) for justice. The rhetor who does act unjustly, then, would err, transgressing rhetoric's proper aims, and the rhetor's own inmost desire (ἐθέλω). In this account, I part ways with James Stuart Murray, who argues that Gorgias's notion of rhetoric requires that it tyrannize over other arts by bending them to rhetoric's own aims (2001, 355–363). That may be true of Callicles' later position, but insofar as Gorgias proposes that rhetoric ought to be used justly, rhetoric's ability to be wielded unjustly is not inherent to

the practice, as Murray wants to say it is. In fact, Gorgias may recognize implicitly that the rhetor ought not wish to wield rhetoric unjustly. In that case, knowledge of justice empowers the rhetor to avoid erring and going against her true wishes.

The distinction just indicated between ἐθέλω and βούλομαι may also provide a further insight regarding Socrates' stated preference for being refuted over refuting others, and the attending priority of self-persuasion in his own philosophical activity. First, the inmost desire (ἐθέλω) to do justice hinges on knowledge of what justice is. One's turn towards a fundamental desire for justice, then, results from being persuaded (either by the self, or through didactic persuasion at another's hand) about the nature of justice. Once this persuasion is accomplished, desire aligns with knowledge and would seem, therefore, to be guided by reason. But even this might not amount to a simple correspondence between one's desire and one's action, since Socrates leaves open the possibility that our wishes (βούλομαι) may run contrary to our inmost desire (ἐθέλω), whereby self-persuasion would be required to subordinate the wish to do injustice to the inmost desire to do justice. In this case, we have a conflict between two impulses, one which is aligned with knowledge and reason and one which pulls contrary to knowledge and reason. The tacit distinction between ἐθέλω and βούλομαι points to a need for self-persuasion to complete the individual's alignment towards justice. But, with this appeal to self-persuasion only implied, Socrates and Gorgias leave unexplored how such persuasion should be achieved. Moreover, this claim will provide Gorgias an opportunity to unify his advertisement and defense, by calling the rhetor to recognize this distinction and subordinate her wish to do injustice to her desire to do justice, such that she

no longer unjustly wishes to appear wiser than the knowers. Therefore, her persuasion over others will be predicated on this first moment of self-persuasion.

Socrates refutes only the claim that rhetoric can be wielded unjustly, not Gorgias's claim to its δύναμις over all technical domains. In other words, returning to the account Gorgias provides when first asked about rhetoric's object, Socrates permits Gorgias's original answer to stand. Rhetoric will be "about speeches (λόγοι)" and performed in λόγοι (449e). Thus, with the advent of confining rhetoric to aim only at what one *truly* wishes (ἐθέλω), the parallel between rhetoric and philosophy becomes perfectly clear, both are about and take place in λόγοι. The rhetor may still persuade others to submit in all areas, but she will no longer do so unjustly. Further, while Socrates formulates his refutation here negatively, claiming that the rhetor will be *unable* (ἀδύνατον) to do injustice, he builds to it through a positive account of rhetoric's knowledge of justice. From within Gorgias's account and given the negative formulation, this looks like a limitation to rhetoric's δύναμις, but in fact, it provides Gorgias a way of holding together his claim that rhetoric is essentially a divine δύναμις, as opposed to a limited τέχνη, and that it ought to be practiced justly.

There are many ways to interpret Gorgias's assent to Socrates' arguments here and his attending sacrifice of rhetoric's δύναμις. Marina McCoy, for instance, points out that there is no real contradiction in Gorgias's initial account of rhetoric's δύναμις, since Gorgias simply separates rhetoric's practice from the rhetor's knowledge of justice (2008, 89). Gorgias's assent, McCoy proposes can be read as his attempting to avoid appearing to the public to contradict himself and to be

unable to teach justice (2008, 90).¹⁵ Indeed, Socrates himself suggests that Gorgias may be concerned with such appearances when he urges Gorgias to uncover whether he makes the rhetor good or simply makes her seem better than she is (459e). McCoy then makes the compelling argument that Socrates employs rhetoric to persuade Gorgias to shift his initial position, at least in order to save face, rather than didactically teaching him a truth to replace his false opinion (2008, 91). In her account, McCoy sheds light on the similarity between philosophical and rhetorical practice. I emphasize here how Socrates' arguments will affirm δύναμις as the greatest good, thus bringing together philosophy, rhetoric, and politics as directed towards this common judgment. I thereby part ways with Rachel Barney, who reads the incoherence of Gorgias's advertisement and defense, along with Socrates' ensuing elenchus as indicating that rhetoric is, for Plato "an incoherent, deceptive, and thus essentially vicious practice—not merely that it can be unjustly abused" (Barney, 2010, 107).¹⁶ Thus, while Barney notes in passing that Socrates himself indicates a true rhetoric that would be utterly divorced from its spurious, wicked counterpart, I have proposed that Socrates' elenchus revives Gorgias's own account (2010, 107n22).

III. SOCRATES' PHILOSOPHICAL POWER

Here, we see the first indication of Socrates' sense of δύναμις, which comes to be more fully developed in his later challenges to Polus and Callicles. For Socrates, to be truly powerful suggests mastery over one's practice that keeps it within its proper boundaries. If the rhetorician ought only to act justly, as Gorgias's defense su-

ggests, then rhetoric's δύναμις will include the δύναμις to do so, which knowledge of justice affords. Socrates' own understanding of power does not simply oppose Gorgias's, as scholars often propose, but rather Socrates makes possible and coherent all that Gorgias claims about rhetoric's δύναμις. This, in turn, presents an opportunity to join philosophical inquiry into the truth (about justice) with rhetoric's political ambition to persuade. However, this union requires the rhetor first to persuade herself to forsake her wish (βούλομαι) to act unjustly by recognizing her deeper desire (ἐθέλω) for justice. Rhetoric's inability (ἀδύνατον) to act unjustly constitutes its true δύναμις for Socrates, following Gorgias's own sentiments. And, in precisely this sense, Socrates implicitly allows δύναμις remain the greatest good.

Moreover, the union of philosophy and rhetoric illuminates Socrates' earlier drive to confine rhetoric to a τέχνη, but not in the sense that Duke had suggested, wherein rhetoric must have a specific sphere of objects that limits its activity. Rather, Gorgias and Socrates come closest to identifying a sphere of knowledge that would enable rhetoric to be considered something like a τέχνη when they determine that it governs matters of justice and injustice. While this is not as determinate a sphere of knowledge as medicine or another such art, and thereby pushes the boundaries of Roochnik's formulation of a conventional τέχνη, this practical knowledge of virtue approximates technical knowledge. And yet, rhetoric can still retain its unrestricted δύναμις to persuade about all matters, retaining its claim to divinity. This indicates the second way in which Socrates develops his own notion of δύναμις in parallel to Gorgias's own. Rhetorical δύναμις must involve the knowledge of justice and injustice that will enable one to act only in accordance with justice.

For Socrates, then, δύναμις involves a self-reflexive turn. While Gorgias claims that rhetoric ought to be able to rule over everyone else and renders the practitioner free, Socrates, by claiming that one who knows justice is unable to act unjustly, suggests that the truly powerful person first governs her own actions and wishes, rather than being condemned to act contrary to how she ought, and ultimately would wish, out of ignorance.¹⁷ Socrates provides a way to resolve the tension in Gorgias's account between rhetoric as all-powerful and the imperative that the rhetor ought only to act justly. To this extent, Socrates' notion of δύναμις parallels Gorgias's.

IV. CONCLUSION

Because Socrates' notion of δύναμις parallels Gorgias's rhetorical δύναμις of political persuasion, we can see already in the dialogue's first exchange a hint towards elucidating Socrates' claim that he alone tries his hand at the political τέχνη (521d). Politics and philosophy are not simply opposed. Both involve freedom and rule, and both regard δύναμις as that which enables those ambitions. But δύναμις, properly understood, must submit to a kind of philosophical tempering. Philosophical δύναμις is distinguished from conventional, rhetorical δύναμις in its self-reflexive turn. Gorgias focuses on rhetoric's δύναμις to enslave and rule over others, which leads to Polus's and Callicles' tyrannizing ambitions, while Socrates introduces self-rule by claiming that knowing justice means confining oneself to act justly. While Gorgias claims that the rhetor could persuade anyone she wishes over any matter she wishes (βούλομαι), Socrates takes up Gorgias's second claim, that the rhetor act justly, to reinterpret the first. If

the rhetor knows what justice is, she will not desire (ἐθέλω) to act unjustly and thus her true δύναμις entails avoiding injustice. Philosophical δύναμις consists in the self-persuasion to forsake one's base wishes (βούλομαι) for one's inmost desires (ἐθέλω), which are ordered by the knowledge of justice. Only then, might the philosophical ruler seek to persuade others, or, perhaps, to inspire others to undergo their own self-persuasion about the nature of justice. This indicates both the shared origins of and difference between philosophy and tyranny. Both include a universalizing claim to δύναμις over all domains. But the philosopher, according to Socrates, knows what she wishes and prioritizes self-rule before (and if ever) attempting to rule others.

A further question, then, arises here: to what extent can philosophical δύναμις bring about change in the other's desire, should the other refuse to recognize philosophy's claim to δύναμις? Does this self-reflexive turn render philosophy ineffectual in political life? While Socrates himself unites the political and the philosophical in idea, are readers meant to understand his inability to persuade Callicles and perhaps even Polus to indicate a problem in reconciling the two in practice? Does this failure reveal something about the fragility of λόγος and philosophical δύναμις or simply indicate Socrates' particular failure? Perhaps the Platonic dialogue itself affords a vehicle by which to inspire self-persuasion in others without the dangers attending a direct attempt to persuade others. While these questions are never addressed in the dialogue, and thus can only be indicated and not answered here, I hope to have paved the way to address these questions more directly by revealing how philosophy, rhetoric, and politics share the same object and how they differ.¹⁸

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Notes

- 1 I translate δύναμις here and throughout as “power,” rather than “potential” or “capacity,” to better preserve the word's original ambiguity. Δύναμις concerns both the potential or capacity that rhetoric affords and the power it actively wields.
- 2 The first two criteria of philosophical δύναμις are hinted in Socrates' initial exchange with Gorgias, but the third, that power must be directed towards living the best life and not simply prolonging life, is developed in his final exchange with Callicles.
- 3 The noun δύναμις and its relatives occur 16 times throughout the dialogue, while the verb δύναμαι and its relatives occur 33 times, for a combined total of 49 mentions. The dialogues stated object, ῥητορικὴ and its relatives occur 91 times. While rhetoric remains the dialogue's main concern, power plays a crucial part in the discussion.
- 4 Translations of the *Gorgias* are taken from James H. Nichols, Jr. with minor modifications indicated, unless otherwise noted.
- 5 My translation.
- 6 Nichols's translation with minor modification.
- 7 Nichols's translation with minor modification.
- 8 My translation.
- 9 Nichols's translation with modification.
- 10 In the *Phaedo*, Socrates identifies two other interconnected greatest evils for human beings. First, there is the evil that befalls one who is experiencing violent pleasure or pain and believes that whatever causes her suffering is most manifest and true (*Phaed.* 83c). Second, there is the evil befalling the misologist who, having been deceived by a number λόγοι distrusts all λόγοι (*Phaed.* 89d). The pain misologist suffers through her deceit leads to her conclusion that all λόγοι are untrustworthy. It seems the danger Socrates identifies here may connect to these dangers as well; if trust in the λόγος gives one

- intense pleasure, as it seems Gorgias's opinion about rhetoric's divine δὴναμῖς gives him, he may begin to take that opinion as indubitable and thus suffer the danger of one who takes the source of her pleasure as most true. Perhaps Socrates, too, even finds such an opinion pleasant and must remind himself here to ward it off.
- 11 The simultaneously parallel and contrasting claim that Socrates will make in his later discussions with Polus and Callicles that it is better to suffer than to do injustice hardly answers the question regarding selfishness since it is largely the harm attending one's soul that follows doing injustice or the relative happiness of the just person, rather than the action's effect that leads Socrates to prefer suffering injustice to doing it. Socrates repeatedly emphasizes care for one's own soul with the attending effect that another's soul is attended. One possible explanation for this preference may be that caring for one's own soul is a prerequisite for adequate care of another. As Socrates will soon point out, the rhetor who unreflectingly wishes to act unjustly transgresses her deeper, unrecognized desire to do justice. Socrates may hold that similarly one who seeks to care directly for another's soul without first attending to their own runs the risk of unknowingly harming the other in their pursuit.
- 12 "From this investigation, Athenian men, much hatred has come, the most grievous and serious kind, so that many slanders have arisen from them, and I received this appellation of being 'wise,' for those present at each occasion think that I am wise in those things about which I refute others, whereas it is likely, men, that the god is wise and the oracle meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing" (*Apol.* 23a–b). Translations from the *Apology* are from the Kremer edition, with modifications noted.
- 13 Nichols's translation, with modification.
- 14 For a more thorough discussion on the relationship between βούλομαι and ἐθέλω, see John Madden's "Boulomai" and "Thelo": The Vocabulary of Purpose from Homer to Aristotle, Yale University, 1975.
- 15 McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, 90.
- 16 A full account of the way Socrates' critique of rhetoric pertains to the way it was practiced in Athens specifically is beyond the scope of this paper. For a fuller discussion of how Plato might be seen to implicate Athenian practice in his account see Michael Svoboda, "Athens, the Unjust Student of Rhetoric: A Dramatic Historical Interpretation of Plato's *Gorgias*" *Rhetorical Society Quarterly* 37, 3 (2007) and Josiah Ober, "Justice, Knowledge, Power: Plato *Apology*, *Crito*, *Gorgias*, *Republic*" in *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, (Princeton University Press, 1988).
- 17 For a helpful discussion of the ways in which Gorgias's rhetorical persuasion and Socrates' philosophical persuasion may be more compatible than it first appears in how they engage with others, see James H. Nichols *Gorgias and Phaedrus: Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Politics*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998): 134–149.
- 18 Many of the ideas in this paper developed out of a series of conversations with Marina McCoy, who also provided careful and invaluable feedback to an earlier draft of this paper. I am also grateful to the audience of the 2019 Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Meeting, who heard and provided feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. Finally, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose extremely helpful comments on the submission likewise helped to improve this paper.

