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SOCRATES VS. CALLICLES: EXAMINATION & RIDICULE IN PLATO'S *GORGIAS*

David Levy

ABSTRACT

The Callicles colloquy of Plato's *Gorgias* features both examination and ridicule. Insofar as Socrates' examination of Callicles proceeds via the elenchus, the presence of ridicule requires explanation. This essay seeks to provide that explanation by placing the effort to ridicule within the effort to examine; that is, the judgment/pronouncement that something/someone is worthy of ridicule is a proper part of the elenctic examination. Standard accounts of the Socratic elenchus do not include this component. Hence, the argument of this essay suggests a need to revise the standard account of the elenchus, at least as it relates to the use of that method within the *Gorgias*. Insofar as a revised account of the elenchus has implications for our understanding of Socratic moral psychology, the argument of this essay also suggests a need to reconsider the moral psychological framework within which Socrates operates in the *Gorgias*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Plato's *Gorgias* has been the focus of many studies that seek to highlight some feature or other of Socrates' approach to philosophy. In particular, commentators have used the text to ground their discussions of Socratic method (i.e., elenchus),¹ of Socrates' use of shame,² and of Socratic moral psychology.³

What is missing from these otherwise excellent discussions is a phenomenon within the dialogue that cannot be overlooked: Socrates ridicules his two younger interlocutors (Polus and Callicles), and ridicule is, in some ways, an organizing theme of the entire Callicles colloquy. I should like to argue that understanding Socrates' use of ridicule allows us to understand how Socratic method, use of shame, and moral psychology cohere. The aims of this essay, however, are rather less ambitious: to illustrate how, within the Callicles colloquy, Socrates' ridicule of his interlocutor is connected to his elenctic examination of him, and is the mechanism by which Socrates seeks to shame him into moral improvement.⁴

Before I begin my detailed discussion of ridicule within the Callicles colloquy, I wish to clarify that the focus of this study is on the dialogue's explicit characterization of individuals/acts as ridiculous. That is, I will examine the dialogue's uses of *katagelastos*, rather than other ways in which an individual might invite ridicule of another, such as when one laughs derisively at another (as occurs within the Polus colloquy, at 473e; see Callicles' characterization of this moment in the dialogue at 482d). A more comprehensive account of ridicule within the dialogue would take into consideration these other

mechanisms, but it nonetheless is plausible to lay the groundwork for such an account by examining those moments when Plato is explicit.

II. CALLICLES' USES OF *KATAGELASTOS* IN RELATION TO HIS AXIOLOGY

All told, there are eight uses of *katagelastos* within Plato's *Gorgias*.⁵ Each occurs within the Callicles colloquy. Callicles is responsible for the first four occurrences. These all occur during his initial great speech, during which he assesses the value of pursuing the practice of philosophy into one's adult years. More specifically, they appear in one 23-line section of this speech (484e1-485c1). Immediately prior to these lines, Callicles asserts that, although philosophy is a 'delightful' (*charien*) thing, devoting too much time to it would bring about the 'ruin' (*diaphthora*) of humanity (484c5-8). In this way, the continued practice of philosophy is utterly incompatible with the satisfaction of any condition necessary for consideration as a *kalon k'agathon*. Instead, the philosopher appears ridiculous in that he ends up wholly ignorant concerning both private and public matters of interest to human beings. In fact, Callicles identifies such individuals as so vicious that they deserve to be beaten, for in their continuing concern for philosophy they resemble other ridiculous men whose speech and mannerisms are appropriate for children.

The import of these occurrences of *katagelastos* is that those who devote too much of their lives to philosophy suffer from some moral failing. According to Callicles' axiology, mastering those skills necessary for success in politics is the *sine qua non* of leading

the excellent life. Thus when Callicles claims that continued devotion to the philosophical way of life leads to humanity's 'ruin,' he does not simply mean that from a practical point of view things would start to go poorly. His worry is not, for example, that shoes would not be repaired or that food would no longer be produced, even if he is disposed to agree that these consequences would follow. Instead, Plato is exploiting an ambiguity in *diaphthora*. This term can mean simply ruin or destruction, but it also invites images of decay or corruption, including morally. So Callicles' position here seems to be that the philosophers' 'ridiculous' appearance is symptomatic of a more general moral failure, one that also leads them to refrain from participation in politics and instead relegates them to shadowy corners, where they do nothing but whisper in the ears of impressionable youths (485d3-e2).

III. SOCRATES' USES OF *KATAGELASTOS*

Socrates utters the final four occurrences of *katagelastos* in *Gorgias*. My position is that the first three occurrences (509a, 509b, 512d) gradually draw out the connection between appearing ridiculous as a symptom of moral failure and the goals of Socratic philosophy. The final occurrence (514e) then announces a complete reversal of Callicles' position on the relative value of philosophy and politics: it is not Socrates (*qua* philosopher) who is ridiculous and thus who suffers from some moral failure; rather, it is Callicles (*qua* would-be politician) who is and thus who does. Moreover, this announcement seems designed especially to induce a feeling of shame in Callicles. Putting these together, Socrates' position seems to be that Callicles is ridiculous, and thus should

feel shame, precisely because he fails to pass the elenchic test.

III.1 BEING RIDICULOUS, MORAL FAILURE, AND FAILING THE ELENCHIC TEST

Socrates first invokes the notion of being ridiculous as he reviews the positions for which he argued against Polus and asserts that those arguments are held fast by bonds of iron and adamant. Here is his full statement:

But as for me, the *logos* I give is always this: that I do not know how these things are in this way, but no one I've ever come across (as is the case now) can argue anything else without being ridiculous (*katagelastos einai*). (509a4-7)⁶

Socrates here does not assert explicitly that those who maintain positions that differ from his believe falsely. We might expect him to do this, given that the language that precedes this statement virtually commits Socrates to the position that the arguments he has offered in support of his theses are conclusive. Instead, he turns our attention to a characteristic of those interlocutors who have attempted to maintain different positions: they are ridiculous. Note that in doing so he does not characterize how such interlocutors *appear* to be; he claims that this is how they *are*.

Moreover, the surrounding context for this statement decisively connects it to the function of elenchic examination. This statement initiates a series of remarks that succeed in drawing Callicles back into the discussion. Callicles first signals his desire to leave the discussion at 505c.⁷ The process of drawing him back begins

with a review of the earlier discussions (506c5), but is immediately preceded by an invitation to *refute* (506c1: ἐξελέγχεις) Socrates if Callicles does not think he is speaking well (ἐὰν τί σοι δοκῶ μὴ καλῶς λέγειν). After reviewing and expanding the positions that were secured during the earlier stages of the discussion, Socrates effects a transition to the specification of the consequences of accepting his views (i.e., the views that he takes as established during the earlier parts of the discussion). That transition is achieved by presenting a choice: either the argument must be refuted (508a8: ἐξελεγκτέος), or they must consider what the consequences of accepting it are. Socrates' statement at 509a4-7 characterizes those who have sought to refute this argument (i.e., those who have tried to maintain a different position in order to avoid accepting the consequences Socrates identifies as required by accepting his position): they are shown to be ridiculous precisely insofar as expressing their position involves a failure to speak well (509a4: καλῶς λέγειν).

Socrates follows up his first use of *katagelastos* by turning his attention to the moral implications of taking seriously his position. In doing so he draws a very strong connection between acceptance of his theses and the ability to care properly for one's soul. So, he wonders, if his positions really are correct—that is, if it really is the case that injustice is the greatest evil for the one who commits it, and if it really is the case that it is worse to be an unpunished perpetrator of an injustice than it is to be punished for an injustice—then what aid must one provide for oneself to avoid truly being ridiculous (509b1-5)?⁸

Although Socrates will not characterize anything as 'ridiculous' for another three and a half Stephanus pages, using instead

this dialogue's more familiar pair of apparent contraries—admirable (*kalon*) and shameful (*aischron*)—at the start of the response to his wonder, he will cap off this portion of the discussion by once again leveling this charge. This time that charge is more explicitly directed at Callicles than it was in either of the first two occurrences. Of additional note is that this third use comes at the end of what appears to be a rather straightforward elenctic argument.

This argument begins—at least from Callicles' perspective—on a rather promising note. Socrates announces that the *technê* one must acquire if one is to avoid suffering injustice is to become a ruler; short of that, the surest protection against suffering injustice is to become like the ruling party (510a). This means that one must train his desires from youth on to be identical to the ruler's; in this way, one maximizes his chances of becoming a friend of the ruler (510d, with 510b). Such friendship serves as a deterrent against the commission of injustice in that the one considering performing the injustice has some reason to fear the retribution of the ruler. Moreover, these conditions give one license to commit unjust acts (510e). In this way, one gains protection against suffering unjust acts in the same way one acquires the ability to commit unjust acts.

This, however, means that in gaining protection against suffering unjust acts, one brings to bear upon oneself the greatest evil for oneself: a depraved (*mochthêria*) and mutilated (*lelôbêmenê*) soul (511a). Callicles balks at this implication, noting that the one who has gained protection against suffering injustice through his imitation of the ruler has the power to put to death the one who refuses to imitate. Socrates concedes this point, but he refuses to see this as a point in favor of Callicles' position. After

all, in order to see this as reason to engage in the sort of imitation championed by Callicles, one would have to believe that the good for a human being is to make sure his life is as long as possible.

It is Callicles' commitment to this principle—that the good for a human being consists in living a long life—that Socrates proceeds to subject to elenctic testing. Callicles refuses to grant that a scientific knowledge of swimming is a grand (*semnê*) thing, yet such expertise does allow people to prolong their lives (511c). Perhaps recalling Callicles' earlier aversion to mundane, trivial concerns (see 490c–491b), Socrates shifts to an examination of an apparently more important expertise: that of the helmsman. The helmsman's knowledge of how to conduct passengers and their goods to safe harbor does not lead him to become boastful; rather, he remains unassuming (*prosestalmenos*) and orderly (*kosmios*). This is because, so Socrates supposes, he realizes that the life he has prolonged by steering safely through the storm might not be a life that is worth living—it might suffer from either an incurable disease of the body or, worse, an incurable disease of the soul (512a).⁹

Of course, Socrates knows that Callicles won't find anything truly admirable in what the helmsman does; even this practice is too mean for Callicles' tastes. However, Socrates works hard in this passage to get Callicles to see that what the helmsman does is in important ways analogous to what the orator does. Each has the power to prolong life; each is indifferent to questions concerning whether the life it is in a position to prolong is worth prolonging. That is, neither the helmsman nor the orator—to count as an expert in his field—has any need to consider whether he is applying his skills to a worthy cause. Put somewhat differently,

neither need consider if he has identified an appropriate aim; the methods are, in this way, applied aim-independently.

Still, Callicles has already shown his affinity for those who have the skill to avoid suffering the consequences of committing an injustice. This is one of oratory's great powers.¹⁰ But if this is reason to value the skills of the orator, then Callicles ought to concede that what the helmsman or the engineer does is admirable after all. So Socrates concludes:

And yet, given your grounds for applauding your own activities, what just reason do you have for despising the engineer and the others whom I was mentioning just now? I know that you'd say that you're a better man, one from better stock. But if "better" does not mean what I take it to mean, and if instead to preserve yourself and what belongs to you, no matter what sort of person you happen to be, is what excellence is, then your reproach against engineer, doctor, and all the other crafts which have been devised to preserve us will prove to be ridiculous. (512c-d, trans. Zeyl)¹¹

This passage is important for our understanding of how Socrates conceives of his own activity. Note that Socrates does not issue as his concluding judgment that what Callicles believes is false; nor does he conclude that Callicles is not in agreement with himself, language we might take to mean merely that Callicles holds inconsistent beliefs.

Moreover, it is not his position that the thesis maintained by Callicles is itself ridiculous. Rather, Socrates' judgment is that it would be ridiculous for Callicles to continue

to issue apparently inconsistent judgments of the value of practices that, although different, are relevantly similar in their objectives. Importantly, these judgments seem to arise on the one hand from a general principle of the nature of value and on the other hand an assessment of the value of various practices vis-à-vis that general principle. In this way, the argument that follows Socrates' first two uses of 'ridiculous' and that contains his third use of it really does seem to connect the *moral* objective of elenchus with something like an *epistemic* test: if maintaining a (moral) position would involve one in appearing/being ridiculous, then there is some good (epistemic) reason for doubting that position. The revelation of the ridiculous status of the interlocutor who maintains inconsistent beliefs, and so who acts and speaks in inconsistent ways, is thus itself part of the elenctic examination.

For all this, however, we might still be tempted to understand the elenchus more or less as Vlastos does.¹² After all, in the context of this argument Socrates' use of *katagelastos* seems to indicate nothing other than an inconsistency in Callicles' beliefs. That is, the concluding diagnosis of Callicles—that were he to maintain his apparently inconsistent beliefs he would be ridiculous—seems to add nothing to the apparently more factual claim that he holds apparently inconsistent beliefs. Most directly, one might understand this elenchic argument without mentioning the role played by the use of *katagelastos* and not miss anything important in the argument. Insofar as Callicles holds inconsistent beliefs, he ought to experience *aporia*, but nothing any more psychologically disturbing than that.

Still, it should be noted again that it is not the inconsistency in belief itself that is

characterized as ridiculous. What is ridiculous is the activity of reproaching various individuals for engaging in pursuits that Callicles finds to be inferior. That is, actions Callicles would continue to perform, now that the elenchus has identified an inconsistency in his beliefs, are found to be ridiculous.

Moreover, the dialogue includes one further use of *katagelastos*, and an analysis of the term's function within the dialogue ought to cover all the instances. I turn now to the final instance.

III.2 CALLICLES AS RIDICULOUS

After Socrates announces at 512d that it would be ridiculous for Callicles to continue to issue judgments that appear to be inconsistent with his beliefs, he exhorts Callicles to reconsider one of these beliefs: that the good for a human being just is preservation. In particular, he exhorts Callicles to reconsider his attachment to preserving himself and his property by seeking power in the city's political affairs, especially if the way he intends to pursue this is by merely conforming himself to what the people expect (513a-b). After all, the people will not be satisfied with a mere imitator, but will seek out one who is genuinely like them; this is the surest way of providing themselves with the pleasure that comes from hearing speeches that flatter.

Of course, underlying Socrates' exhortation of Callicles is his understanding of Callicles' great disdain for the masses. Socrates knows well that Callicles will not respond favorably to the (ironic) suggestion that he win the friendship of the Athenian people by 'naturally' (*autophuôs*) being like them (513b3-6).¹³ But the point of this exhortation is not to get Callicles to be more like

the Athenian people in his pursuit of political power in Athens. Rather, it is to get him to give up that pursuit because it is founded upon a mistaken conception of what makes a man's life valuable.

Callicles' response to Socrates' exhortation is particularly interesting. He says, "I don't know how it seems to me that you speak well, but what happens to many has happened to me: I'm not entirely persuaded by you."¹⁴ That is, Callicles appreciates the logical force of Socrates' comments, and perhaps even recognizes that the premises Socrates employs are true (or reasonable to believe), but logic alone is not sufficient to effect a change in his attitude. As Dodds puts it in his commentary on the *Gorgias*, "We may take this remark... as expressing Plato's recognition that basic moral attitudes are commonly determined by psychological, not logical reasons."¹⁵

Though Dodds's way of putting the point is not entirely perspicuous, the next phase of Socrates' discussion with Callicles features yet another elenchic argument that is designed to do more than diagnose inconsistency in Callicles' beliefs (or beliefs and subsequent actions): it is designed to shame him. Toward this end, Socrates utters the final use of *katagelastos* in *Gorgias*.

Socrates begins this instance of elenchus by reminding Callicles of the earlier distinction between pleasure and what is best, concerning both body and soul, and between practices that pursue one or another of these. He further elicits Callicles' (reluctant) agreement that the proper political aim is to make the citizens as good as possible (514a). He then reasons that before one endeavors to conduct business in important civic affairs, the proper thing to do is to 'look carefully' (*skepsasthai*) at and

‘examine closely’ (*exetasai*) oneself in order to see if one has learned the appropriate *technê*. If the result of this self-examination is that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that one has learned the appropriate *technê*, then it would be ‘utterly foolish’ (*anoêton*) to continue the pursuit of the public business (514c-d). Again, Callicles agrees to all of this.

Socrates next considers the specific hypothetical case in which he and Callicles would consider pursuing appointment to the position of public physician. The appropriate source of evidence of their qualifications in this case would be testimony concerning whether they have ever improved the health of anyone by applying their putative medical expertise. If no such evidence were to be found, then, Socrates concludes, it would be ‘ridiculous’ (*katagelaston*) and ‘utterly foolish’ (*anoêton*) for them to continue their pursuit. After all, these affairs are too important to the well-being of others to consider them merely an opportunity for developing one’s skills (514d-e).

After getting Callicles to agree to his characterization of such pursuits in the absence of evidence that one is skilled enough to warrant the people’s trust as ridiculous and foolish, Socrates notes that Callicles himself is at the start of his own pursuit of influence over affairs of great importance to the city and its citizens. Thus, the appropriate question to ask Callicles is whether he has ever improved any of the citizens. More specifically, since the proper political aim is the moral improvement of the citizens—i.e., the ordering and controlling of the citizens’ desires—we must ask Callicles to provide testimony that he has contributed to the production of any one ‘admirable and good’ (*kalos...k’agathos*) citizen (515a).

Although Socrates does not state it directly, the implication of this argument is clear.

Once again, it has been revealed that Callicles issues (or is disposed to issue) inconsistent judgments and to act on them. On the one hand, he would judge that it is ridiculous and foolish for someone to pursue important business in the city without being positioned to provide evidence that one is qualified to do so. On the other hand, his own pursuit of important business in the city would seem to indicate that he judges himself positioned to provide this kind of evidence. However, when Socrates provides him with the opportunity to do just this, he falls silent.¹⁶ Ultimately, he is left to offer a rather hollow attack on Socrates’ intentions: “You love to win, Socrates.”¹⁷

The overwhelming sense one gets from this argument is that Socrates is trying to effect some change in Callicles not merely by getting him to see that he holds yet another inconsistent set of beliefs, but by doing so in a way designed to shame him.¹⁸ This is a feature of Socrates’ method for which Vlastos and his ilk could not account: it is not at all clear that the proper response to learning that one’s beliefs are logically inconsistent with each other is to experience shame. Yet having Callicles experience shame seems to be precisely what Socrates is after. Were Socrates interested only in demonstrating the presence of a logical inconsistency, he could have refrained from using such derisive language; were he not interested in bringing to bear on his interlocutor public pressure to effect some change, he could have pulled him aside and “whispered” in his ear that he finds some of his beliefs implausible. Given, then, that he opts for a different approach, it seems reasonable to ascribe to him intentions that go well beyond what Vlastos’s analysis of his method would lead us to expect.¹⁹ Socrates is no mere diagnostician of logical inconsistency. In his pursuit of the

production of moral excellence, he recognizes that shame can be a powerful tool.²⁰

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCRATIC MORAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE *GORGIAS*

But this has implications for how we understand the moral psychological framework within which the examination of Callicles is conducted. It is difficult to see how a purely intellectualist moral psychology—such as the one ascribed to Socrates by Terry Penner, for example—could make sense of Socrates' combining of examination and ridicule. Were Socrates the sort of intellectualist described by Penner, he would be content to seek to change Callicles' attitudes and actions by changing his beliefs. Calling attention to the inconsistencies in Callicles' beliefs would thus be the strategy he would adopt. As I have argued, however, Socrates does something different from calling attention to the inconsistencies in Callicles' beliefs: he uses his diagnosis of inconsistency to force Callicles to see himself as ridiculous and utterly foolish.

Brickhouse and Smith have called attention to some sort of connection between Socrates' use of the elenchus and his efforts to shame (some of) his interlocutors. In that context, they have also noted the difficulties involved in reconciling Socrates' efforts to shame with some forms of intellectualism. They write, "Socrates makes no secret of the fact that he often seeks to create [an unpleasant emotional experience] in others, and to use shame in such a way as to lead them to change their ways. But the process...seems to work in the opposite direction from the one required by the standard interpretation [offered by Penner, for example]: instead of shame

adjusting to reason, one's reasoning seems to be influenced by shame."²¹

The analysis of Socrates' examination and ridicule of Callicles presented in this paper, I believe, is consonant with Brickhouse and Smith's rejection of Penner's reading of Socratic moral psychology. At least with Callicles, Socrates tries to initiate a process of moral improvement by leading Callicles to recognize that he is ridiculous, and to feel the shame of being such. It remains to be seen if Socrates' efforts to effect moral improvement in his interlocutors (at least in Callicles) are successful. If they are not, it further remains to be seen if this is because of some failing in Socrates' method, or if it is due to some additional problem in his interlocutors (or at least in Callicles). I suspect that the matter is actually rather more complicated than either of these options, but my arguments on that point are best saved for another occasion.²²

END NOTES

1 The work of Gregory Vlastos remains the benchmark against which all subsequent accounts of Socratic elenchus are measured. See in particular "The Socratic Elenchus" with "Afterthoughts on the Socratic Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983): 27-58, 71-74. Vlastos himself recognizes that his account of the Socratic elenchus represents especially the way in which it is employed in the *Gorgias*. So in "Afterthoughts" he writes, "I now see that a more appropriate title for section III of 'The Socratic Elenchus' would have been 'The Socratic Elenchus in the *Gorgias*.'" (page 74, n. 8; emphasis in the original). Others who provide accounts of the Socratic elenchus while remaining essentially within Vlastos's framework include Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Hugh H. Benson, "The Dissolution of the Problem of the Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1995): 45-112.

2 The importance of shame within the *Gorgias* has been recognized by at least the following: W. H. Race, "Shame in

Plato's *Gorgias*," *The Classical Journal* 74 (1979), 197-202; Charles H. Kahn, "Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), 75-121 and *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Richard McKim, "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*," in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold (New York: Routledge, 1988), 34-48; Daniel Sanderman, "Why Socrates Mocks His Interlocutors," *Skepsis* 15 (2004), 431-41; and D. B. Futter, "Shame as a Tool of Persuasion in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47 (2009), 451-61.

3 Here, of course, the work of Terry Penner and of Brickhouse and Smith has come to frame the discussion of Socratic moral psychology. See Penner, "Socrates," in *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. C. J. Rowe and M. Schofield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 164-189 and now especially Brickhouse and Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Others have offered more nuanced readings of moral psychological issues as they play out specifically in the *Gorgias*. These include Jessica Moss, "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef: Pleasure and Persuasion in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2007), 229-49 and Raphael Woolf, "Callicles and Socrates: Psychic (Dis)Harmony in the *Gorgias*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 18 (2000), 1-40.

4 Sanderman ("Why Socrates Mocks His Interlocutors") discusses Socrates' "mocking" of his interlocutors, but assimilates it to some form of Socratic irony. As my discussion will make manifest, there is nothing ironic about the manner in which Socrates ridicules Callicles.

5 This is the greatest number of occurrences within any of Plato's dialogues (and Plato's writings collectively include more instances of the term than in any other author's writings). *Republic* includes seven instances, and is a much longer text than *Gorgias*. Although there are some dialogues in which this term appears with greater frequency than it does in *Gorgias* (i.e., although it occurs fewer times, the text is shorter—for example, six occurrences in *Lysis*, which is only 20 Stephanus pages long), the eight occurrences within *Gorgias* are contained within two well-defined portions of text (four within 484e1-485c1, and four within 509a7-514e3). This "density" of occurrence warrants our attention. Further justification for a focused study of these occurrences is provided by the fact that these two portions of text seem rather deliberately set in opposition to each other.

6 Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. I discuss this passage in "Techné & The Problem of Socratic Philosophy in the *Gorgias*," *Apeiron* 38 (2005): 185-227; see esp. 209-214.

7 Is this desire to break off the discussion itself symptomatic of Callicles' being ridiculous? An anonymous reviewer for this journal has suggested that it is important to consider what precisely distinguishes interlocutors who are ridiculous from those who merely maintain ridiculous positions (i.e., theses). I agree that drawing this distinction is important, but I'd like to consider that there is at least a third category: those who

regard their position within the discussion with Socrates (i.e., as interlocutor) as ridiculous. At 505c and following, I think we see that Callicles has come to consider that his position within the discussion is problematic in some way, and I find it plausible that he would regard it as ridiculous. The same reviewer addresses Thrasyarchus as a candidate ridiculous interlocutor, observing that he "evidently change[s] [his] position without letting others know ostensibly for the sake of winning the fight." Callicles admits to something similar at 505c5-6: he gave the answers he did only for the sake of respecting *Gorgias*. Perhaps there is something ridiculous about not having fixed positions. If that is the case, then participation in an elenctic examination by someone of that sort would involve finding oneself in a ridiculous position, insofar as one's beliefs lack the logical structure presupposed by the elenchus. Raphael Woolf's discussion of the examination of Callicles ("Callicles and Socrates: Psychic (Dis)Harmony in the *Gorgias*") discusses related issues.

8 Note what is *not* said at this point: his question is not about finding resources that will enable one to avoid acting in inconsistent ways, or avoid asserting inconsistent positions.

9 The presence of "incurables" within the *Gorgias* is a challenge, especially for those who wish to defend an intellectualist reading of Socratic moral psychology. Briefly, if one ascribes to Socrates a form of intellectualism with respect to motivation, then for a soul to be incurable would be for it to be incapable of holding true beliefs about what is (really) desirable. Brickhouse & Smith (*Socratic Moral Psychology*, Chapter 4) offer an account of the ways in which unrestrained appetites can compromise the functioning of an agent's cognitive capacities. There is not room in this essay to explore the notion of incurability within the *Gorgias*. However, an anonymous reviewer for this journal has suggested that ridicule of an incurable individual could function—not to improve the condition of that individual—to instruct others who witness the ridiculing. As I will observe later, Socrates' effort to induce feelings of shame within Callicles includes the fact that this discussion is taking place before an audience. Perhaps, then, we should understand the ridiculing of Callicles primarily in terms of the intended effects this will have on members of the audience (including, of course, the readers of the text). I think that considerations of the effects on the audience are indeed relevant, but I resist allowing that relevance to be identified to the exclusion of the intended effects on Callicles himself. The only case in which the effects on Callicles would properly be reduced to zero is the case in which Callicles is thought (by Socrates) to be incurable. I am not persuaded that Callicles is incurable, nor am I persuaded that anyone else within the dialogue believes that he is. Briefly, I am moved by the ways in which both Socrates and *Gorgias* work to keep Callicles participating in the discussion to accept that they at least believe that he can benefit from the discussion. Moreover, I contrast this concern shown for Callicles with the disregard

shown for Polus; see esp. 463a-e. In this way, I find it more plausible to consider that Polus is the incurable one, if anyone is. Finally, I'll note that although Polus might be shown to be ridiculous, Socrates never characterizes him in this way (including by never using the term *katagelastos* to refer to him). Perhaps, then, the reason Socrates allows for and encourages the characterization of Callicles as ridiculous is precisely that he is not incurable. I investigate the challenges presented by the notion of incurability in "On (In)Curability in Plato's *Gorgias*", presented at the U.S. Regional Meeting of the International Plato Society, Ann Arbor, MI, October 6, 2012.

10 Recall that Callicles becomes Socrates' interlocutor only after Socrates has concluded against Polus that the only proper use of oratory is to convict oneself when one acts unjustly or to make sure that one's unjust enemies never suffer retribution for their unjust actions. See 480a-481b.

11 καίτοι ἐξ ὧν τὰ σαυτοῦ ἐπαινέεις, τίτι δικάω λόγῳ τοῦ μηχανοποιῦ καταφρονεῖς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὧν νυνδὴ ἔλεγες; οἶδ' ὅτι φαίης ἂν βελτίων εἶναι καὶ ἐκ βελτιόνων. τὸ δὲ βέλτιον εἰ μὴ ἔστιν ὃ ἐγὼ λέγω, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἀρετὴ, τὸ σφάζειν αὐτόν καὶ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ ὄντα ὁποῖός τις ἔτθχεν, καταγέλαστός σοι ὁ ψόγος γίγνεται καὶ μηχανοποιῦ καὶ ἱατροῦ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τεχνῶν ὅσαι τοῦ σφάζειν ἔνεκα πεποιήνται.

12 Vlastos's account of the elenchus continues to provide the framework within which most subsequent accounts are developed. See, again, the sources listed in n. 1.

I know of no account of the elenchus that explicitly connects Socrates' use of it with his efforts to induce feelings of shame in his interlocutors. Brickhouse and Smith (*Socratic Moral Psychology*) recognize some connection—even calling a section of Chapter 5 of that text "Elenchos as shaming" (136)—but their discussion of the connection they find stops short of a recognition of the fact that, at least sometimes (as with Callicles), Socrates' examination of his interlocutor *is* a shaming experience.

13 I have said nothing to this point about Socrates' use of irony, whether restricted to the *Gorgias* or in general. I'm not sure that I have anything compelling to offer, but an anonymous reviewer for this journal has called attention to the need to distinguish ridicule more clearly from other notions, including irony. At least in relation to the ironic suggestion Socrates makes at 513b, irony would seem to function to remind Callicles to consider carefully what his priorities (or axiological commitments) really are. That is, Socrates' use of irony at this point is designed to get Callicles to say what he really believes. This is quite different from what I am suggesting about the role of ridicule as expressing the concluding judgment of an elenctic examination.

14 Οὐκ οἶδ' ὄντινά μοι τρόπον δοκεῖς εὖ λέγειν, ὦ Σώκράτες, πέπονθα δὲ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν πάθος οὐ πάνυ σοι πείθομαι.

15 E. R. Dodds, trans. *Plato Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), note on 513c5, page 352.

16 See the implied pauses between Socrates' questions at 515a7-b4.

17 Φιλόνικος εἶ, ὦ Σώκράτες (515b5).

18 Both Charles Kahn and Richard McKim also locate a role for shame in Socrates' efforts to effect moral change in his interlocutors, at least within the *Gorgias*. Kahn does so in his chapter on the *Gorgias* in *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 125-47; see esp. 133-42. McKim does so in "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*." I cannot here distinguish fully my position on the role of shame from their positions. I will merely observe that the emphasis in my interpretation is on the way in which Socrates seeks to shame his interlocutor (an interpersonal function), whereas the emphasis in their interpretations seems to be on Socrates' efforts to characterize positions (theses) as shameful (an impersonal—perhaps purely logical—point).

19 Of course, we might well conclude that Callicles himself "asked for" this kind of treatment. After all, his opening maneuver seems designed to shame Socrates in front of a crowd, all but encouraging them to slap Socrates across the face. Moreover, he is the one who impugns Socrates' character by invoking the image of whispering in dark corners. While I am moved by these considerations, I hesitate to conclude that this is all Plato is after.

20 But then why isn't there a ninth instance of *katagelastos* in the dialogue? Why doesn't Socrates end this stage of the discussion by simply asserting that Callicles has been shown to be ridiculous? Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that Callicles also does not explicitly characterize Socrates as ridiculous, even though what he does say encourages that characterization. It strikes me that this, too, connects with the issues surrounding the status of interlocutors as curable or otherwise (see n. 9 above), as well as the ways in which my reading of ridicule as shame-inducing differs from the roles assigned to shame by Kahn and McKim (see n. 18 above). Additional work in this area could fruitfully be done to understand these issues in relation to the ways in which Socrates and Callicles might prove to be friends (see, for example, 487a-e, with 499c). Some discussion of related issues can be found in Rachana Kamtekar, "The Profession of Friendship," *Ancient Philosophy* 25 (2005), 319-339, and in Roslyn Weiss, "Oh, Brother! The Fraternity of Rhetoric and Philosophy in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Interpretation* 30 (2003), 195-206.

21 Brickhouse & Smith, *Socratic Moral Psychology*, 59.

22 For an intriguing discussion of why Plato shows Socrates failing to improve the character of his interlocutors, see Julie Piering, "Irony and Shame in Socratic Ethics," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (2010), 473-488.