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Classical Rhetoric Debates

A Quantification of Writing Center  
Session Reports: Is Rhetorical Grammar  
Rhetorical?

Sophist (Gorgias) Versus Philosopher  
(Socrates)

# A Quantification of Writing Center Session Reports: Is Rhetorical Grammar Rhetorical?

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In 2002, when weblogs first captured the attention of the public and academia, our writing center began using a blog to send faculty interactive session descriptions and to store them as a research project. The result (August 2002 – May 2011) is a text archive of about 3000 session reports (750,500 words). We contend that a quantification of these session reports reveals the tutors' pedagogical priorities.<sup>1</sup> Our archival analysis suggests that first-year tutors foreground grammatical instruction, doing so in a manner that emphasizes sentence-level error, even though the tutors were introduced to Kolln's theory of rhetorical grammar. In contrast, the experienced tutors (more than one year tutoring) deemphasized grammar and correctness, and their lessons primarily focused on global, not local level writing issues.<sup>2</sup>

## Background

Since the publication of *Research in Written Composition* (Braddock et al., 1963), which argues that emphasizing grammar in a writing class has a "harmful effect" on students, instruction in the subject has been contentious. Hartwell expands this criticism in "Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar" (1985), maintaining that formal instruction in

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<sup>1</sup> During this web-based study, 2652 students (2565 undergraduates, 87 graduate students), 49 tutors (40 undergraduate, 9 graduate), and 98 faculty participated.

<sup>2</sup> Basically, global revision involves the big picture of your essay; it relates to ideas, purpose, audience, evidence, analysis, and organization.

Local revision focuses more on sentence-level revision: changing words so that a sentence is clearer, correcting grammatical or spelling errors (*Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing Concise Edition*)

grammar does little to improve student writing. Kolln and Micciche, proponents of grammar instruction, have worked to reform the subject as rhetorical or transformational grammar to stem what Kolln refers to as grammar's "freefall." One long-term study counters Kolln's rhetorical reframing of the subject (Elley Study, New Zealand 1976) and argues that even instruction in transformational grammar has a negligible effect on writing proficiency; Kolln debunked this research as limited and called for more discussion and exploration (1991).

### **Research Method**

Our project's research philosophy and related methods are informed by guerilla methodology (e.g. low/zero cost research with available/free technology)<sup>3</sup>. As a method of text archive analysis we applied word frequency count and cluster analysis software to our compiled session reports, each ranging from 25 to 750 words. Using word frequency counts to decipher the tutors' pedagogical priorities is a basic method of text analysis; yet, Glesne argues that the widespread "mathphobia" of many researchers underscores the appropriateness of "simple frequency counts" to identify patterns and to "assist in shaping a more specific hypothesis" (140). Cluster analysis, a far more complex mathematical method to discern text data patterns, arranged the tutors' most prominent and consistent word choices according to terminological associations developed over a ten-year period. As a means to contrast the tutors' pedagogical priorities, as expressed in word counts, we quantified historical and contemporary sources that reflect composition and rhetoric's current and historical priorities. The first source Garland Greveer's *Century Handbook* is informed by a current-traditional approach to teaching writing (1927), and the second Dartmouth Writing Program is representative of current writing pedagogy ("Materials for Students" [web resources for students], 2004). According to these word counts,

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.uxbooth.com/articles/guerrilla-research-tactics-tools/>

even though there are significant differences both the new and experienced tutors weave together pedagogical emphases that display current priorities—an emphasis on process, working through a *paper* by *discussing* the *ideas* and *topics* that inform a *thesis/argument*, the highlighting of a supportive and circumspect pedagogy, one where assertions are qualified (*seemed*) and positives are affirmed (*good*). However, noteworthy dissimilarities in the word counts center on priorities that gravitate toward either local or global writing issues. The chart below lists the 25 most frequently used terms for each source.

<b>Garland Greever Century Handbook Total Words: 35,711 1927</b>		<b>Dartmouth Writing Program Materials for Students Total words: 91,161 2006</b>		<b>Session Reports First-year Tutors Total Words: 244,481 2002-2011</b>		<b>Session Reports Experienced Tutors Total Words: 273,541 2002-2011</b>	
<b>WORD</b>	<b>FREQ</b>	<b>WORD</b>	<b>FREQ</b>	<b>WORD</b>	<b>FREQ</b>	<b>WORD</b>	<b>FREQ</b>
Right	383	Writing	1103	Paper	2943	Paper	1684
Will	201	Paper	649	Thesis	1565	Writing	1125
Used	185	Students	359	Writing	1127	Asked	992
Words	176	Thesis	343	Ideas	1036	Students	735
Sentence	138	Might	342	Sentences	930	Thesis	668
Good	133	Argument	333	Structure	896	Good	628
Wrong	133	Can	318	Argument	848	Seemed	623
Exercise	123	Topic	295	Worked	734	Draft	540
Man	110	Sentence	250	Grammar	732	Assignment	466
Time	107	Write	235	Center	671	Suggested	464
Past	101	Reader	225	Sentence	650	Read	452
Word	101	Academic	201	Discussed	588	Class	450
Verb	99	College	197	Work	586	Questions	430
Thought	97	Work	195	Needed	568	Research	415
Noun	95	Example	169	Talked	563	Argument	382
Me	94	Paragraph	165	Me	547	Discussed	369
Clause	91	Consider	160	Seemed	522	Discussion	364
Sentences	88	Advice	156	Topic	509	Needed	297
Shall	88	Research	148	Analysis	491	Might	280
Project	87	Good	143	Good	450	Topics	260
Means	85	Think	133	Errors	433	Better	248
Faulty	84	Ideas	131	Suggested	429	Felt	248
Go	80	Read	130	Issues	408	Information	247
Work	80	Writer	129	Paragraphs	397	Sentences	233
Better	79	Process	129	Told	384	Able	225

**Figure 1. Contrastive Word Count (eText, Web Resources, Tutorial Session Descriptions)**

A reading of the contrastive word counts (see Fig. 1) suggests that Greever's *Century Handbook* and the first-year tutor word counts are associated with error/correctness on the sentence-level: Greever (*right, words, sentence, wrong, exercise, word, verb, noun, clause, sentences, faulty*), first-year tutors (*sentences, structure, grammar, sentence, needed, errors, issues, told*). Dartmouth and the experienced tutors, in contrast, are more globally oriented and less focused on correctness: Dartmouth (*might, argument, can, reader, academic, college, example, consider, advice, writer, process*), experienced tutors (*asked, students, seemed, draft, talked, assignment, suggested, class, questions, research, argument, discussed*).

	Local	Global
Greever	7	3
Dartmouth	1	18
1st year tutors	5	8
Experienced tutors	1	13

Greever: 3 global, 7 local; Dartmouth: 18 global, 1 local; first-year tutors: 8 global, 5 local; experienced tutors: 13 global, 1 local. Based upon this terminological contrast, the first-year tutor priorities are aligned with Greever's *The Century Handbook of Writing* (1927), while the experienced tutors foreground more global issues, priorities that are apparent in Dartmouth's term list. Even though the new tutor list prioritizes global concerns in writing instruction, with words such as *thesis, ideas, and argument*, and less prominent global concerns like *analysis* and *topic*, sentence-specific concerns, such as *sentence, sentences, grammar, and errors* suggest that new initiates to the writing center tend to spend a great deal of time on local writing issues. The new tutors' categorization of sessions as *work* can likely be attributed to the labor of crafting writing on the sentence level. In fact, they use the words *work* and *worked* a total of 1,320 times. Combined, these words are one of the primary terms that the newly employed use to describe their experiences with student writers. Further, *grammar* and *error* are of central priority only

among the new tutors. Among the experienced tutors, *grammar* is ranked 54<sup>th</sup> and *error* 60<sup>th</sup>, a significant decline after one year in the writing center.

In the cluster analysis of the new tutors session descriptors (appendix A), we can see more clearly how the terms are associated. One cluster almost reads as a sentence: *grammar, errors, worked, needed, work, sentence, structure*. Without the cluster analysis as a complement to the word counts, one might interpret *grammar* as global, and therefore as potentially rhetorical. Likewise, *structure* might signify paragraph or essay organization. However, the clustering of *grammar* with *error* and *structure* with *sentence* means that both priorities are local, thereby underscoring the association between the new tutor pedagogy and local writing concerns and defining their use of grammar as focused on correctness and therefore as non-rhetorical.

In the experienced tutors' cluster analysis (appendix A) grammar and error have dropped from the list and we see short phrases that suggest their priorities: *might research, felt better, asked paper seemed good, thesis writing, students questions discussion discussed, class read, needed draft, suggested assignment topics*. After the first year, the tutors shifted away from an emphasis on sentence-level correctness, with grammar as the central topic, and toward more global writing concerns. The primary influence on this pedagogical shift is likely found in the textbooks that introduced the tutors to composition pedagogy.

## **Literature Review**

Tutor training was informed by three well-known composition and rhetoric textbooks: *Rhetorical Grammar* (Kolln), taught in an Advanced Grammar course; *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (Corbett), in History and Theory of Rhetoric; and *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* (Villanueva), in Introduction to Composition Studies. Of the 45 tutors who participated in the

study, 27 took Grammar, 27 took Rhetoric, and 19 Composition Studies.<sup>4</sup> The tutors were not told which teaching strategies or informing theories to emphasize in their writing center tutorials. Only general pedagogical axioms were policy; for example, “keep the sessions active, not passive.”

Kolln’s *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects* argues for the reframing of grammar as rhetorical and against an emphasis on correctness in its preface:

You’ll discover that the lessons in this book are not the definitions and categories and rules of traditional grammar that students encountered back in junior high. Rather, rhetorical Grammar brings together the insights of composition researchers and linguists; it makes the connection between writing and grammar that has been missing from our classrooms. It also avoids those prescriptive rules of handbooks, offering instead explanations of the rhetorical choices that are available. And, perhaps most important, it gives the students confidence in their own language ability.

(vi)

Kolln notes that the research critical of grammar instruction in writing classes is directed at “formal grammar” or what she defines as “teaching grammar in isolation” (vi). She argues that grammar has been misunderstood as a “band-aid” for remedial writers, rather than as rhetorical: “This book, then, substitutes for that negative association of grammar a positive and functional point of view—a rhetorical view” (vi). To highlight her emphasis on rhetorical grammar, each chapter concludes with a “Rhetorical Reminder.” In the chapter on “Understanding Pronouns” Kolln asks students questions that are geared toward audience or stylistic concerns:

Have I avoided sexism in my choice of pronouns?

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<sup>4</sup> Due to overlap, the cumulative figure is 60 (greater than the 45 total number): 5 tutors took all three courses, 6 took Grammar/Composition, 6 Rhetoric/Grammar, 3 Rhetoric and Composition, and 2 took none.

Have I avoided the awkward *he/she* and *his/her*?

Have I avoided ambiguous antecedents? Does my reader understand the referent of every *he, his, him, she, they*, and so on?

Have I avoided the fuzzy use of the broad-reference *this* and *that*?

Kolln does, however, introduce students to errors associated with personal pronouns:

Among the most common pronoun errors that writers make are the errors of **case**.

As you'll recall, case refers to the changes that pronouns undergo on the basis of their function in the sentence. . . . The subject slot of the sentence, of course, takes the **subjective case**. The subjective case is also traditionally used in the subjective complement slot following *be* as the main verb. For example, when a phone caller says,

**'May I speak with Ann?'**

Ann will reply,

**'This is she,'**

unless she wants to be informal, in which case she might reply,

**'Speaking.'**

At any rate, she would not sound grammatical if she said,

**'This is her.'** (68)

In *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices/Rhetorical Effects*, Kolln works to expand the range of grammar's relevance by associating grammar with traditionally global writing issues like audience effect and style, or how writing "sounds." Though subordinated in her textbook, grammatical rules and error still receive attention.

Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* does not mention "error" or "correctness" at all and devotes only two pages to the relationship between grammar and rhetoric, yet the author prescribes the domains of grammar and rhetoric clearly:

GRAMMAR: phoneme—syllable—word—phrase—clause



RHETORIC: word—phrase—clause—paragraph—division—whole composition

It is clear from this schema that grammar and rhetoric overlap in the areas of the word, the phrase, and the clause. But although grammar and rhetoric deal with these common elements, their concern with these elements is not, strictly speaking, the same. Commonly we think of grammar as being concerned with ‘correctness’ and of rhetoric as being concerned with ‘effectiveness.’

(383)

As supporting evidence of his definition, Corbett argues that Bartolomeo Vanzetti’s statement pending execution (Sacco-Vanzetti case), if translated into grammatical English would have lost a “great deal of its rhetorical effectiveness”:

If it had not been for these thing, I might have live out my life, talking at street corners to scorning men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man’s understanding of man, as now we do by an accident.<sup>5</sup> (383)

For Corbett, much of the debate concerning grammar and rhetoric stems from confusion surrounding grammar, usage, rhetorical effectiveness, and correctness. His answer is to limit the domain of grammar to correctness on the sentence level. Rhetoric, for Corbett, is concerned more with effectiveness and global writing issues.

Villanueva’s *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader* presents students with thirty-one references to “Grammar”; however, all but two of these are from Hartwell’s denunciation of the subject. Kolln’s and Micciche’s theory of “Transformational Grammar” is mentioned twice in Villanueva’s reader, but only within the context of Hartwell’s “Grammar.” Kolln is cited as often as Hartwell; however, neither Kolln nor Micchicci have an article included, so there is no direct

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/06/22/last-speech-bartolomeo-vanzetti>

counter voice. In “Grammar Defined” Hartwell states, “The New Zealand study concluded that the ‘formal study of grammar, whether transformational or traditional, improved neither writing quality nor control over sentence correctness” (206). Further, other sources reinforce Hartwell’s critical perspective on grammar and rule-based writing instruction. Breuch, in “Post-Process Pedagogy,” argues “while grammar and rules can be easily codified and transmitted to students, these systems should not be confused with the Writing Act—and act that is uncertain and indeterminable” (100). The first section of *Cross-Talk* is titled, “The Givens in Our Conversations: The Writing Process” (v). The first article, Murray’s “Teaching Writing is as a Process Not Product,” lays the groundwork for many of the subsequent articles in Villanueva’s reader. Murray’s “Implications” number six and ten argue for an emphasis on global writing issues and away from concentrating on correctness and rules:

Implication No. 6. Mechanics come last. It is important to the writer, once he has discovered what he has to say, that nothing get between him and his reader. He must break only those traditions of written communication which would obscure meaning

Implication No. 10. There are no rules, no absolutes, just alternatives. What works one time may not another. All writing is experimental. (6)

The subject of “Error” also receives significant treatment in *Cross-talk*; 24 pages reference either error or correctness. In “Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone,” Min-Zhan Lu states, “I want to articulate one ‘import’ of multiculturalism here by exploring the question of how to conceive and practice teaching methods which invite a multicultural approach to style, particularly those styles of writing which appear to be ridden with error” (487). Mike Rose, in “Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University,” asserts that many misguided assumptions about writing center on error:

Writing ability is judged in terms of the presence of error and can thus be quantified. Writing is a skill or tool rather than a discipline. A number of our students lack this skill and must be remediated. In fact, some percentage of our students are, for all intents and purposes, illiterate. (547)

For the tutors to conclude that teaching grammar is problematic and that an emphasis on error/correctness is equally troubling seems unavoidable. Given these informing sources (Kolln, Corbett, Villanueva), it is understandable that the tutors would shift away from focusing on grammar and error and adopt a traditional definition of grammar, one in line with Corbett. Grammar's consistent affiliation with error facilitates this decline in pedagogical emphasis.

## **Conclusion**

Although mathematically based, our research is influenced by perception. The new tutors' session description clusters, for example, offer many interesting terminological associations that might be pursued productively, i.e., why is *told* so closely associated with *topic*? For John C. Brereton and Cinthia Gannett, the merit of interpretative archival research is that: "every encounter—creating, classifying, organizing, re-searching—of the archive can be a remaking of the interpretive relationships between artifacts, and constitutes a reformulation or re-construction.

Clusters don't simply exist in the text, but are an interaction between the observer and the text. What clusters emerge and are important depends both on how closely concepts are located to each other and on the interests of the observer. A janitor, student and professor walk into the same classroom, but focus on different things, because the clusters depend on the way the room is and the interests of the observer....the relationships between terms are mathematical and unchangeable; however, analyzing a

cluster is still an interpretive act. (Woelfel)

These dynamic versions of archival work are part of the knowledge production of the field and a legitimate, even necessary object of study” (677). Our interpretive focus is on what we take to be the most conspicuous and sustained terminological alignments.

### **Data Interpretations:**

Although this archive analysis cannot offer conclusions regarding whether teaching grammar (traditional or rhetorical) improves student writing, the following data interpretations are reasonable:

Even though the tutors were introduced to rhetorical grammar, both the new and experienced tutors taught grammar in reference to error; as such, they applied a traditional grammar, as defined by Corbett: a subject focused on sentence-level correctness.

The arguments against foregrounding correctness/error found in Villanueva’s *Cross-talk* and the exclusion of counterarguments against Hartwell might have led the tutors to deemphasize grammar after their first year teaching.

The tutors de-emphasis of grammar after the first year (and its related term error), facilitated a shift away from local to more global writing concerns. The textbooks might have influenced this shift with their prioritizing of “effective” communication over “correct” communication.

Finally, the shift in pedagogical emphasis (new to experienced tutors) suggests an emphasis on grammatical correctness is more likely when new tutors are developing a teacherly authority.

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<sup>6</sup> Data collected with shareware HTML text extractor.







## *Sophist (Gorgias) Versus Philosopher (Socrates)*

The first assignment in ENGL 220 (Introduction to Composition and Rhetoric) is to take a stand on the debate between the sophists and Socrates in Plato's *Gorgias*. Socrates views rhetoric is nothing more than a knack that is unethical and cannot be taught. In contrast, the sophists view it as the highest social art. The students often side with Socrates' viewpoint, even though the informing context of the course foregrounds rhetoric. The following is a sample of their arguments for and against rhetoric.

### *Gorgias and the Essentiality of Rhetoric*

Ciara Kelley

The study of rhetoric in past and present times has earned itself several dissenting opinions, however its reputation still prevails to be overwhelmingly negative much of the time. Plato's *Gorgias* dialogue incorporates both affirmative and negative arguments for rhetoric, summarizing each side through the style of an intellectual conversation. Socrates and the sophists raise several questions within their discussion, predominantly themes that surround rhetoric's status as an art form and overall ethical nature, incorporating different hypotheticals to demonstrate their stances. However, the simpler aspect of the discourse begins to take shape once Socrates identifies that the true argument lies in the subject of belief versus knowledge, or truth. Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles alike dissent with the opinion that truth is the most desirable virtue, arguing on behalf of rhetoric and the strategies it can afford men, concluding that always prioritizing an absolute truth is not always the most effective. Although the conversation is recorded from the bias of

Plato, the sophist argument that affirms the usage of rhetoric is more agreeable, because it reveals Socrates' stance to be inflexible. Overall, the *Gorgias* dialogue demonstrates how essential the teaching of rhetoric is because of the numerous methods, strategies, and advantages it lends rhetoricians in the field of discourse.

Socrates, throughout the discussion, preaches philosophy to be the just, noble art and the only way to attain the knowledge to bring oneself closer to absolute truth. He criticizes the rhetorician in saying "as he [the audience] changes you change," claiming instead that "philosophy is always true." However, he neglects to acknowledge how being perceptive to one's audience is the most effective way to "win the point" (14) and being so resolute in one's personal ideals causes a speaker to "creep into a corner" (58) as Callicles puts it. Take the hypothetical physician dilemma for example: the doctor able to get the patient to better themselves is the better physician, regardless of how extensive their knowledge is. A doctor that may *know* more than the rhetorician is no better if they cannot achieve the ultimate goal of helping their patient. So, in a broader sense, those that prioritize knowledge over belief isolate themselves from their fellow men, becoming utterly unequipped to understand how to manipulate the information they *do* know to best reach their intended audience.

Additionally, Socrates asserts that rhetoric is an experience more so than an art, claiming it is no more than flattery. He notes how arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and many of the liberal arts depend on words rather than action, yet rhetoric falls within these parameters because it effectively derives its "efficacy and power" (8) from the medium of discourse, only. Therefore, Socrates is again scrutinizing rhetoric by the quality or knowledge that is being communicated, which is unique to each individual rhetorician

and should not be applied to judge the entirety of the teaching. Socrates attempts to further devalue rhetoric through his leaky jar analogy as well, claiming that rhetoric can never ‘fill the jar’ in the same way philosophy can. But ultimately equating rhetoric to that of cookery and cosmetics removes it from the sphere of what he considers to be a noble art, such as medicine, in which he claims a physician can attend to the “nature and constitution of the patient” yet goes on to explain how rhetoric does not possess the ability to appeal to such things. Although, Socrates does conclude that rhetoric is within the realm of pleasure, but neglects to acknowledge that pleasure is within the ‘nature and constitution’ of a person. He views everything from the perspective of how it affects the body and soul, which is why he does not see rhetoric as fulfilling. Nonetheless, adapting to any pleasure is more than an innate gift and still applies to body and soul, because it is flexible enough to adapt to human character. Understanding the “pleasures and desires of mankind” (57) requires practice and is much more complex than Socrates makes it out to be. Learning rhetoric is learning to understand other people and is just as essential as any other art that aids the body and soul.

Another point of contention, however, presents itself in the aforementioned ‘manipulation’ of information. Socrates spends the better half of his argument debating whether or not using rhetoric is just or unjust, his prevailing stance relying on the idea that rhetoric is innately deceptive. He finds issues with the ability for rhetoric to allow weaker, unbased arguments to appear strong. Rhetoric, from Socrates’ perspective, is not based in truth, instead on “discover[ing] some way of persuading the ignorant” (20). This view of rhetoric does appear inherently conniving, but it is more than just ‘persuading the ignorant’ and does not directly relate to an absence of justice. Using the boxer versus

student image, it is clear that rhetoric itself is not the issue, rather those who choose to abuse it are the ones that are unjust. The teacher who instructs the boxer is not responsible for what his student ends up doing with said information. Platonists choose to link the teacher and student indefinitely, even though the student possesses autonomy to make choices that the boxer never explicitly stated or instructed. As the sophists describe it, rhetoric can be used to gain advantage in assemblies and courts to sway decision making towards what is just and beneficial to all. Those that decide to use their rhetorical strategies in a way that is immoral are the ones who are manipulative, therefore the art and teacher should remain blameless. Gorgias explains that those who have “perverted their instructions” (15) are the ones that should be deemed unjust. However, rhetoric in its most basic form is meant to aid those who wish to appeal to the multitudes and learn how to effectively persuade. Not to mention, many other art forms, even ones that Socrates’ appreciates, can be used in an unjust manner. The power to abuse is within the capacity of any individual that has knowledge of a competitive art and should not reflect the overall nature of the teachings themselves.

Those against rhetoric also use Socrates’ ‘Isle of the Blessed’ to further explain how the theoretical final “judgement will be just” (107). Yet again, it is important to understand that rhetoric itself is not what is immoral, rather the abusers of it, but if the concern is dealing with the inequality that rhetoric brings about, it is important to note how inherently unequal society already is. Using rhetoric to gain advantage can easily be skewed as something morally unjust, but leaving those without the tools of rhetoric leaves people a great disadvantage to continue suffering under those that use their power to remain at the top of society. The society that Socrates and the sophists lived in was one

where few men were seen as superior over others and to become educated was to deliver oneself from inferiority. Rhetoric, as Socrates puts it, allows for the weak to establish themselves in the political and social sphere with less knowledge than other men, something he views as a manipulative, immoral privilege. Although, Callicles goes on to explain how “nature herself” establishes the weak and powerful whilst the notion of equality that Socrates speaks of is merely “artificial law.” Conventions and the entire premise of what is good and evil is enforced by the few that write societal laws. Socrates may believe that a just equality is what everyone is striving towards, but truthfully that is a *belief* personal to him and another instance of him neglecting to understand that not all men desire an absolute truth, rather things like power or pleasure. There are men who are born with privilege and the ability to educate themselves, whereas others are inherently weaker due to lack of resources. Commonly, this is where rhetoric can lend those that are ‘inferior’ an advantage to better themselves and appeal to their fellow men without extensive lifelong education. It is not unjust or manipulative to better oneself through learning and using rhetoric efficiently, especially if in the absence of it the man would have been worse off, forced to remain powerless and unaware of how to communicate with his peers.

Overall, rhetoric is beneficial to learn. It allows for effective communication and an understanding of the audience. Learning to understand belief rather than always striving to know an absolute truth is crucial because opinions and beliefs are so fluid, as is the truth. Perception of what is just or unjust, true or false, differs from person to person, therefore prioritizing understanding the conventions what other people believe will ultimately be more effective than remaining resolute in one fact. Learning rhetoric

helps people to be in tune with the ever-shifting belief systems of others and to better persuade based upon understanding them.

## The Overwhelming Nature of Socratic Logic

Xavier Mulligan

In *Gorgias*, Plato write Socrates as the protagonist of the text who challenges the sophist rhetorical teachings through a one-sided and merely anecdotal dissection. The author's bias towards Socrates, which has limited the conversation to favor the philosopher, leaves the sophist Gorgias to continually converse defensively. Therefore, the reader must inherently favor towards Socrates, as most of the text is comprised with the logic of a negative and ultimately condescending attitude towards rhetoricians.

Gorgias' limitation of speech in his debate, which hinders the strength of his argumentative capabilities, allows Socrates to fully develop his critique of the sophist. The debate then favors the philosopher, who can then break down Gorgias without resistance. Socrates goes on to compare the skill of sophistry with cosmetics, a superficial experience that further obscures those who seek a further reality. The superficial experience of sophistry further carries Socrates argument, stating that the "power of persuasion" (Plato) allows the ignorant to gain more knowledge than those who devote their life to a study. To Socrates, this "power" further strays from the truth of reality, which is the antithesis of a philosopher's teaching. Socrates having stated early on that Gorgias' profession is a superficial experience, that allows for the power of persuasion to the ignorant, creates an immediate delegitimizing of sophists as a whole.

Socrates benefits off of the brevity of Gorgias' answers, which allows him to take advantage of the inconsistencies in sophist's responses. However, the first time Gorgias allows himself to speak, he presents a logical assessment of sophistry in his own defense, seemingly teemed with frustration. Gorgias states the power of rhetoric is not to give the ignorant a persuasive advantage over others, but rather a rhetoric gives only those who are truly skilled at the craft the power to persuade. However, Gorgias' limited time to articulate his point is futile, since Socrates promptly continues to dilute the sophist teachings. Gorgias makes a point of stating that they are "detaining some part of the company" as they may be "wanting to do something else" (Plato), illustrating Socrates disposition to overwhelm his opponents. Gorgias' interruption into Socrates dissection details his frustration into the one-sided debating that has taken place between two great minds. This also represents how the reader does not have sufficient evidence to side with the sophist's argument, as the philosopher has taken total control over the argument.

Therefore, I side with Socrates, as he is able to bring together a concise and logical assessment of his opponent's profession. Gorgias is allotted a very limited timeframe into speaking, his greatest strength, of which Socrates took full advantage. The superficiality of rhetoric, as claimed by Socrates, removes the credibility of a sophist and belittles those with a knack for rhetoric, claiming it is for those who can merely persuade the ignorant. Conversely, Socratic philosophy stands for a pillar of truth in an unaware world, allowing the student to see past the power of persuasion and inherently understand and seek for a world of justice.

## Response to Gorgias

Michael Meillarec

*Gorgias*, like many of Plato's dialogues, was not meant to be an accurate historical account of an event. Rather, he wanted to provide an anecdote to demonstrate effective rhetoric. It can be compared to pretend sword fighting. One's fictional opponent is always highly skilled, yet easily defeated. The same can be said for Gorgias and Callicles, who are considered great rhetoricians yet easily bested by Socrates. However, Socrates' methods are questionable. He skillfully manipulated the opinions of his peers, yet fails to do so without contradicting himself.

The first argument Socrates made was that rhetoric is not an art form. By Socrates' definition, art is something meant to help the common good. For example, skill in medicine is an art because it truly helps people, whereas serving alcohol is not an art because it creates the illusion of helping people. Then he claims that an art is teachable and that rhetoric can never truly be taught. Therefore it is a knack, which means that it cannot be taught and is inherent.

However, Socrates' entire argument falls apart if one questions other art forms. Not every art form promotes the common good. Sculpting, for example, is a relatively useless skill. A skilled sculptor can earn a living with that skill, but what makes his craft good? Maybe this sculptor is carving statues of great tyrants, which would be viewed as evil to Athenian society. Graffiti can incite rebellion, a photo can be manipulated to implicate someone in a crime, a book can teach people how to make bombs. If art can only be used for good, then it is not likely there is *any* art.



More important than the moral question, however, is the question of whether or not an art form can be taught. If what Socrates says is true, then rhetoric (a knack) cannot be taught. Luckily, Gorgias does not care what Socrates thinks is true and teaches rhetoric anyway. Gorgias teaches rhetoric so much that he is famous across Greece for it. In addition, this account was written by Plato, who was taught the art of rhetoric by Socrates. Socrates' argument is invalidated by the fact that he himself is a teacher and that he is arguing with Callicles, a student of Gorgias'. Ironically, Plato himself was a teacher of rhetoric, though not until after he wrote *Gorgias*.

The next major subject of contention is the role of rhetoric in relation to power. According to Polus, a young student of Gorgias, rhetoric is the ability for one to get what they want. He then includes that what one wants is power and pleasure. Therefore rhetoric should be used to acquire unlimited power and pleasure, and that all people want this on some level. Polus claims that those who are skilled in rhetoric have the power to do what they see fit. Socrates compares them to the tyrant Achelous, saying that even though he had ultimate power he still had responsibilities to his subjects. Then Achelous escaped his punishment, which means that rhetoric is only useful to manipulate others. This returns to Socrates' previous statement that art can only be used for good.

Polus believed that power is good for its possessor, and therefore rhetoric is good for a rhetorician. Socrates points out that it is not the action itself that is good, but its purpose. Socrates compared it to taking medicine. One does not take medicine just for the sake of it, but so they feel better. One does not acquire power for its own sake, but for some purpose.

It is obvious in this argument that Plato is trying to show his students something about rhetoric and philosophy. He fit a moral lesson into a practical lesson, in effect, because he did not want his students to wind up like Achelous. This decision of Plato's reflects the tone of the entire piece. He is not trying to tell an accurate story, he is trying to teach his students. He does this by demonstrating both the skills and morality that Aristotle, whom they admire, demonstrated in life.

Following the debate of power comes a discussion about evil. Interestingly, all of the rhetoricians seemed to be in general agreement that evil was rooted in wrongful deeds. The disagreement comes with Polus and Calicles claim that suffering from wrongdoing is worse than committing it. The concept is fairly basic, the person who got robbed is suffering more than the thief. Socrates disagrees, stating that it is painful and shameful to commit and wrongdoing. He then explains that it is even worse when they do not seek to repent for their crimes.

While that may certainly be true, it does not mean the wrongdoer suffers more than the victim. Many would argue that a knife hurts more than guilt.

It is also important to note that if the wrongdoer suffers more than his victim, then any judicial system is redundant. Socrates' argument ties back to his comments about Achelous, whom he believes suffers internally.

This commentary about evil also seems to be a clever manipulation by Plato. Plato seems to be trying to convince his students that if they use rhetoric for malicious purposes, they will suffer even more. Then he implies that if they do so they should turn themselves

in. This further drives the idea that Plato is simply using this anecdote as an educational tool.

This discussion may also be relevant to Socrates' execution, which occurred shortly before this was written. Plato may have been inferring that the government responsible for killing his teacher was actually suffering more than he was. This may have been his way of justifying their miscarriage of justice.

These three qualities (good, power, and justice) are all things that correlate directly to rhetoric. Plato had just recently served in the military after writing this, and had lost his teacher and friend. This dialogue may have been a way for him to personally memorialize Socrates, just as much as it may have been an attempt to consolidate multiple separate beliefs he held.

By the end of the dialogue, the three qualities primarily discussed fused into one. Plato called it virtue, and it would dominate the study of philosophy even into the Renaissance. Rather than define virtue outright, he used the qualities of good, power, and justice, in relation to rhetoric, to show the traits of a virtuous man.

Plato's goal appears to have been to paint Socrates as a virtuous man by having him argue in favor of virtuous traits. His fatal flaw, however, is portraying the world as black and white. In modern times, many would disregard these teachings because they are absolute in regards to good and evil. Today we prefer to see everything as shades of grey. While Plato's instructions on virtuous living may provide society with a few paragons of virtue, its absolutism alienates people who might benefit from reading it. If this were

rewritten in modern times, it might replace the ideas of good and evil with selflessness and greed.

## Gorgias and the Art of Rhetoric

Ashton Siwek

Rhetoric is a concept that is difficult to conceptualize, as it can take many forms, change, and be used differently depending upon the circumstances, individual, and topic. *I Have a Dream* by Martin Luther King, *Woman's Rights to Suffrage* by Susan B. Anthony, even *Reichstag* by Adolf Hitler are some examples of well-renowned speeches all using rhetoric. Often the term rhetoric is looked at negatively, but from the speeches above it is not so black and white. To move on, one must look at the use of rhetoric as a tool, "speech or writing intended to be effective and influence people" ("Rhetoric" 2021). Rhetoric is a tool to put together words and express thoughts more powerfully and effectively. Socrates is well known for not writing anything down, but through the writings of Plato, we have a pretty good sense of his ideas on this subject. Plato's *Gorgias* is a great introduction to the complex discussion of rhetoric. Through the dialogues in the text, it will be shown that rhetoric is a perfectly ethical and often necessary tool.

Historians have always been thankful for Plato's because of Socrates perceived superiority over writing. It seems we can get a pretty good idea of his teacher, Socrates, through the writings of his most important student. Plato writes the idea of rhetoric, from Socrates's view, to be none other than a form of flattery, which is similar to making unhealthy foods taste extremely good or using cosmetics to cover one's flaws. On the

other side of the coin, Plato uses Callicles to depict rhetoric, describing it to be a teachable skill of self-interest to benefit the user. Due to this, several debates occur throughout the Socratic dialogue within *Gorgias* consisting of several major and minor arguments. The disagreements stem from whether rhetoric is even an art, rather a simple knack. Continuing along these lines, should a guilty person seek justice even if it is against themselves, and should they have the right to defend themselves with rhetoric to reduce or get out of punishment. Lastly, the largest debate of the entire argument, who is right, Socrates and his student's viewpoint or Gorgias and his student, Callicles.

As mentioned, *Gorgias* is a Socratic dialogue written with the intent to test the reader's virtues of power, justice, and good versus evil. The overall combining factor of the text was rhetoric, in which four characters played a part. Chaerephon was the first of the characters who played little part besides introducing and beginning the dialogue. This allowed Socrates to take over. Plato's teacher, Socrates, is naturally the protagonist of the dialogue expressing his views as the "good" side, being morally correct, and portraying a disgust of rhetoric. Socrates, during this time, is a high-ranking philosopher and believes he sides with the truth. For example, within the dialogue, Socrates argues that if a boxer punches a civilian, badly injuring them, the blame would then fall on the instructor rather than the student. Even though most would believe the student would be at fault rather than the instructor. Being the author of this story and Socrates' student, Plato naturally tends to position the fabricated story siding with his teacher's beliefs. The next character Gorgias is similarly another high-status sophist and a professional orator. He sides with the belief that even a skilled orator can persuade even better than an expert, and doing so, is an important skill when it comes to justice. A great example of this is the concept

found in the *Gorgias* which asks the reader who makes a better doctor, a highly skilled doctor lacking the ability to persuade their patients to follow his/her advice, or the rhetorician who can sell his medical advice to anyone. The last two characters and antagonists, Callicles and Polus, are disciples of Gorgias and portrayed as naïve, arrogant, and express importance in power.

These five characters are the center of the dialogue. Logically, it is important to know the characters that play a part in the dialogue and whom their beliefs side with to further the argument that rhetoric is not necessarily evil.

Now that a foundation of the characters has been set the real question becomes how does one obtain the ability of rhetoric: is it an art or simply a knack? Throughout the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates speaks of rhetoric in a manner that is nothing more than being able to flatter those around. Socrates states, “which rhetoric is a part not an art at all, but the habit of a bold and ready wit... this habit I sum up under the word 'flattery'; and it appears to me to have many other parts, one of which is cookery, which may seem to be an art” (Plato). Socrates's ideology of cooking not being art is highly flawed. Art is a subjective creation, an application of skill that humans do, and is highly individualistic and unique. Hence why it is art. For Socrates to state that cooking is not an art but rather an “experience or routine” (Plato) would send the students of Culinary Arts on heated Socratic debates until they are blue in the face. Where Socrates has based his argument from the beginning is flawed. Putting it simply, to make a comparison that rhetoric is not an art and then juxtapose it next to art is simply nonsense, and completely invalidates Socrates's argument. Due to this, it is easy to side with Gorgias and Polus who argue that

rhetoric, like cooking, is an art. Instead of focusing on something so trivial, it is best to look at something that looks deeper.

An individual's moral code is about the deepest a person could dive into that individual. Throughout the dialogue, Plato has Socrates lead the conversation between the two opposing sides. For example, when the idea of justice is presented, the question is: who lives a happier life those who do injustice, or those who receive injustice. Polus begins with a new king explaining how his side of the argument is valid,

“POLUS: You see, I presume, that Archelaus the son of Perdiccas is now the ruler of Macedonia?

SOCRATES: At any rate, I hear that he is.

POLUS: And do you think that he is happy or miserable?

SOCRATES: I cannot say, Polus, for I have never had any acquaintance with him.”

Yet, due to Socrates' inability to control the situation and know if this new king is happy, he changes the argument in his favor. Instead of trying to debunk the example Polus put forth, explaining that those who do unjust acts are happier. Socrates simply avoids the example and uses one that aids his argument. Leading the conversation, he is then able to twist Polus, a new sophist, and young rhetorician's thoughts, tricking him in the process. Confusing him and causing him to feel guilty of his prior beliefs. When, depending upon the example, both could be seen as more or less just. This is seen time and time again throughout the entire dialogue, Socrates always using subject matters of his own. This could be comparable to a scientist attempting to disprove another's theory but the only

data they were allowed to collect was from a small, perhaps biased sample. It would be impossible to disprove anything, the same situation occurs in the *Gorgias*.

Callicles is undoubtedly the most prominent figure when it comes to the dialogue and his views that oppose Socrates. Portrayed as the main antagonist, it is easy, at first glance to dismiss his intentions. Yet, when looking deeper into the text it becomes clear as to what is happening. Callicles is a new sophist and rhetorician. Being new, many of his ideas and mannerisms come off stubborn and despotic. In a sense, from the way the text is portrayed from Plato's writing, they are. Yet for an antagonistic character it is strange that Socrates himself states they both share traits of, "knowledge, good-will, and frankness". Callicles argues that rhetoric develops power which can aid in the justice system, overall prosperity, and, on an individual level, constantly filling one's leaky jar. In sum, creating an admirably social and individual lifestyle. Socrates, on the other side of the fence, very ignorantly believes that humans are perfect creatures and government can't be flawed. He believes one does not need rhetoric to have justice, that if people accept justice (even against themselves), be content with what they have, and constantly have a full jar they will have an even better lifestyle. In simple terms, perhaps this argument in the text deals with a realist Callicles and an optimist Socrates.

The wiser and more mature philosopher, one would have thought Socrates would have been able to comprehend differences in opinions and individualistic ideals. This simply is not the case. Socrates views life as good and evil, without any grey. His stubborn ideologies were his limiting factor in seeing the truth: both ideologies are ways to live, that neither is necessarily right or wrong but, like many ordeals, determined situationally. For instance, Socrates believes if you commit a crime such as speeding, you



should turn yourself in, while Callicles argues that you should not have to. If you do though, Callicles believes you should have the right to defend yourself and use rhetoric to reduce the punishment. A question someone could ask is if it is fair to receive the same punishment for speeding to get to a hospital in an emergency versus speeding to a McDonalds to get food? In the end Socrates believed in a higher power, the Isle of Blessed, where not turning oneself in for any situation would be judged, determining if you are going to heaven or forever be damned.

Upon reading the dialogue between Socrates, his followers, and lesser-known sophists who believe in rhetoric, it is easy to side with history's golden boy. Yet, when the stigma of rhetoric is removed, and the audience views this dialogue written by Plato as skewed in favor of Socrates, one begins to reconsider. For being a well-renowned philosopher, one would imagine Socrates would recognize rhetoric as an art yet fails to do so and compares it to cooking, a point that should leave a distaste in the reader. When Socrates begins losing control of the conversation, he changes it to something in his favor like when speaking to Callicles about justice. For someone who is supposed to be capable of viewing the world from all angles, in the end, Socrates was still too stubborn to see that both Callicles and himself were both right. Due to all these errors in Socrates's ideologies, it is easy to see why a sophist would defend rhetoric, and claim a type of expression to be an extremely important art.

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## Reader Response to *Gorgias*

Shayna Griffitts-Lindsay

Plato’s dialogue of two lifestyles, the Orator and the Philosopher, and their implications on human life and society winds its way slowly and over many foothills before it reaches its final destination. Bluntly, Socrates, the philosopher, is long-winded, which is hypocritical since he had asked the supreme orator, Gorgias, to refrain from making speeches, and to answer Socrates’ questions shortly. The comedy between these two throw a shadow over their subject matter, but the point of their discussion becomes less muddled as others, such as Polus, chime in with their own two cents.

However, some readers may ask what is the point in Socrates’ examination of Gorgias and the other Sophists, or orators. Socrates is trying to point out the error in the Sophists’ ways. As Socrates uncovers the truth of what rhetoric does and the kind of power it holds over others, he asks about Gorgias’ morality and whether he can teach that to his students. Or more pointedly, Socrates asks if Gorgias would feel the need to teach his students morality in order to use rhetoric, to which Gorgias affirms he would. From there, Socrates argues that rhetoric without philosophy only serves self-interest, and therefore is considered bad or immoral. Philosophy, a study of values, knowledge, and reason, must be instilled for a rhetorician to be righteous and interested in nothing but truth.

Plato's dialogue is perilous for contemporary readers. Socrates uses rhetoric that some would liken to a lawyer today, such as tossing out jargon and euphemisms heedlessly. However, this was not always the case for readers, and with some background knowledge of the Greek society back then, readers today could make sense of Socrates and Gorgias' arguments and see how these arguments are still applicable.

### Callicles vs. Socrates: The Contradiction of Philosophies

Felicia Becker

Two of the most historically diverse icons in philosophy are Callicles and Socrates. Although both of their roles in shaping the foundation of philosophy are of great importance, they are incredibly different. Callicles believed that the primary purpose of the citizen was to improve the state. He depicts the satisfaction of human fulfillment as a "leaky jar." People are constantly in a state in which they need to replace the emptiness in their jar because they view life as nothing more than a series of gains and losses. Calicles sees this as enjoyable. It brings pleasure to individuals to realize that they have the ability to take control on the substance levels in their lives.

Furthermore, Calicles believed that the art of rhetoric was a highly renowned art that was a marvelous skill to possess. He believed that through being a sophist, and sharing his knowledge of rhetoric, that he was enhancing the value of the youth in his current day. One of the more common and literal examples he gives of the value of rhetoric is that it is not simply the knowledge of a subject that is important, but more it is the ability for one to be able to articulate and persuade their knowledge upon others. He

illustrates this through his understanding of practicing to become a doctor. Although the more knowledgeable doctor would be able to determine a way to handle an ailment, it is really the doctor that is able to persuade the patient to take the medicine that is more successful at the end of his career.

However, this is a direct contradiction to that of Socrates. He believes in both universal and ultimate justice and philosophical fulfillment. Justice is viewed as an absolute measure of what is “right.” It is not seen that justice is circumstantial to individuals and situation. In the same breath is the topic of fulfillment. Socrates believes that when one reaches the ultimate level of enlightenment that effortless fulfillment can be achieved. There is nothing that we as humans can do to ensure our own fulfillment and that we must seek a higher level of being, knowledge, or god to reach fulfillment. He disagrees with the perspective of Callicles’s “leaky jar” analogy. Callicles refers to the experience in pursuit of fulfillment as inflicting “hunger and thirst”. Socrates would disagree that hunger and thirst can be associated with something pleasant and enjoyable. Therefore, the endless pursuit for fulfillment is impossibly enjoyable.

Socrates also rebuts and disagrees with the perspective of Callicles on rhetoric being seen as an “art”. Socrates sees the concept of rhetoric as a nothing more than a “knack”. It is a skill set that is only acquired out of natural selection. He believes that some people are just born with the innate ability to persuade and convince others into doing things for their own personal gain. He views sophists that go around convincing others that rhetoric is a teachable art as deceitful and manipulative. He does not believe they are teaching a learnable art, and that like those naturally born with the ability to bolster and persuade, they are only interested in gaining students for their own personal financial

gain. Overall, Socrates' main argument is that the most noble and rewarding skill to obtain is the ability to see that the wisest of men are those that accept what they don't know and are willing to pursue a life of pure knowledge and enlightenment.

I would have to concur that Calicles is predominantly correct in his philosophical theories on justice and fulfillment. Both of these aspired life goals, although ideally desired, lack on major factor, universalism. What may constitute fulfillment and justice, regardless of the means in which it is strived for, is so situational to the individual, time, and space that it is implausible for it to be captivated and explained through the mind of one man. Although a world with a universal perspective is far more ideal, I envision a more realist world supported by the philosophies of Calicles.