

DAVID LÉVYSTONE

Socrates' Versatile Rhetoric and the Soul of the Crowd*

Abstract: In Plato's early dialogues, the impossibility of talking to the crowd appears as a constitutive element of the opposition between rhetoric and dialectic and raises the understudied question of the role of the audience in Socratic thought. However, Xenophon's Socrates constantly identifies public and private speech. But this likening is also found in the *Alcibiades Major*, which gives a key to understand the true meaning of this assimilation: one can convince an audience, by talking to *each individual* in the crowd. The need to address each one implies an adaptation of language that can be found in the texts of different disciples of Socrates. The rhetorical aspects of the *Phaedrus' psychagogia* should then be understood, not as a new Platonic concept which allows the good orator to address the many, but rather as a new formulation of a well-known and shared Socratic ideal.

Keywords: Socrates, rhetoric, psychagogy, crowd, polytropy, Phaedrus

Why is it that Socrates, who knew how to conciliate two individuals, was unable to bring into harmony a man with a crowd? How comes it that neither Antisthenes, Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, nor any other <philosopher>, could manage such success?

Philodemus, *Rhet.* p. 223, 12 Sudhaus¹

*My warmest thanks to Michael Chase for his most useful corrections on the last version of this paper.

¹S. Sudhaus, *Philodemi Volumina Rhetorica* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1892–6). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

Socratic dialectic is generally considered to be an art of argumentation that has no use in the public sphere, where orators and rhetoric reign.² The ambitious young man who wished to reach a position of power in Athens would consort with orators and Sophists in order to learn from them the means to convince a crowd: rhetoric. On the contrary, he who engages in a philosophical conversion by dialoguing with Socrates will have to put aside his ambitions, at least until he is properly armed to speak at the assembly. In Plato's dialogues, where the sphere of influence of each art seems to be strictly delimited, rhetoric appears first as a *public logos*, a long speech in front of a crowd, dialectic as a *private logos*, proceeding through questions and short speech, a dialogue of one soul with another, and finally of the soul with itself.

However, Diogenes Laërtius³ reports that Socrates was "formidable in public speaking" (ἐν τοῖς ῥητορικοῖς δεινός) and that he was the first to "teach rhetoric" (ῥητορεύειν ἐδίδασκε). This testimony, no matter how excessive or implausible (Tisias or Corax taught rhetoric long before Socrates), shows that the opposition between the method of Socrates and the speeches of the orators or Sophists was not as clear as we sometimes believe. At any rate, Socrates' rhetorical abilities were already renowned in his lifetime: if we are to believe Xenophon, it was *only in order to* acquire the art of words necessary to fulfil their political ambitions that Alcibiades and Critias became companions of the philosopher.⁴ In the *Memorabilia*, Socrates himself constantly refuses any distinction between public and private speeches. For him, the art of words is similar to the art of ruling: there are no more differences between the administration of a private domain and that of the city, than between the capacity for private conversation and the aptitude for public deliberation.⁵

²In the *Apology*, Socrates himself claims that he is foreign to the Sophistic artifices that could have been useful for his defence (Pl. *Ap.* 17b–c).

³D.L. 2.19–20. Diogenes quotes two sources in order to support that claim: Idomeneus and Favorinus, and mentions, in the same paragraph concerning Socrates' rhetorical abilities, the testimonies of Aristophanes and Xenophon.

⁴Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.15; 1.2.39; 1.2.47. On the status of rhetoric in Xenophon's Socratic writings, see I. Deraj, "Xenophon's Representation of Socratic *dialegesthai*," *Electryone* 1 (2013): 28–38 and L.-A. Dorion, "Le statut et la fonction de la rhétorique dans les écrits socratiques de Xénophon," in P. Pontier, ed., *Xénophon et la rhétorique* (Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014), 17–40.

⁵Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.6; 3.4.6; 3.4.11–2; 3.6.14; 4.2.11; *Oec.* 21.2. The parallel between capacity to rule and the art of discussion in their relation to the many is quite clear in Xen. *Mem.* 3.6.14. The thesis according to which there is no difference between ruling

Despite appearances, this thesis is not exclusive to Xenophon. It appears in a few dialogues of Plato, or attributed to Plato, for example in *Alcibiades Major* (114a–d) where Socrates proceeds to the same identification between public and private speech. This important passage, if proven compatible with other texts and despite the dispute over its authenticity,⁶ gives us a key to understanding the true position of Socrates in the texts of his different disciples: talking to the many would be indeed possible. . . *if one addresses "each individual in the crowd"* (*Alc.* 114b). This paradoxical statement and the difficulties that appear in Xenophon's texts do not indicate a contradiction in Socrates' 'teaching' or an opposition between his different disciples. They rather demonstrate that the problem of the audience in the Socratics' treatment of rhetoric deserves special attention.

In order to show that this question was a key issue for the disciples of Socrates, I will first set forth the role of the audience in their criticism

one's own affairs/house and ruling the city is a common Socratic thesis, which can also be found in Plato, and which Aristotle criticises at the beginning of his *Politics*.

⁶Admitted in the ancient world, the authenticity of the first *Alcibiades* has been discussed since the 19th century. Among the important studies, in favour: M. Croiset, *Platon: Hippias Mineur, Alcibiade, Apologie de Socrate, Euthyphron et Criton* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1920); P. Friedländer, *Plato*, tr. H. Meyerhoff (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964), II, 231–32; V. Goldschmidt, *Les dialogues de Platon* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1947); R. Weil, "La place du Premier Alcibiade dans l'œuvre de Platon," *L'information littéraire* 16 (1964): 75–84; S. Ford, "On the Alcibiades I," in T. L. Pangle, ed., *The Roots of Political Philosophy. Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues* (Ithaca & London, 1987), 222–239; against: Schleiermacher in W. Dobson, *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 329; E. de Strycker, "Platonica I. L'authenticité du Premier Alcibiade," *Les Etudes Classiques* 11 (1942): 135–51; G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973). See the almost exhaustive list in the edition of C. Marboeuf and J.-F. Pradeau, *Alcibiade* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 219–20 and 24–29, the introduction of N. Denyer, *Alcibiades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and the annex in M. Dixsaut, *Naturel Philosopher. Essai sur les dialogues de Platon* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), 219–20. Though I believe the arguments in favour of the authenticity to be more convincing, the question can't be answered in this article. In any case, as the dialogue would belong to the early works produced by the Academy, it does not change the points put forth in this paper, which tries to highlight a general Socratic intuition, through its different manifestations in Xenophon, Antisthenes, Plato or the Pseudo-Plato of the *First Alcibiades*. For a justification of the use of the general notion of "Socratic rhetoric," see the numerous works of L. Rossetti: "Rhétorique des Sophistes - Rhétorique de Socrate," in C. Boudouris, ed., *H APXAIÁ ΣΟΦΙΣΤΙΚΗ / The Sophistic Movement* (Athens, 1984), 137–145; "Sulla dimensione retorica del dialogare socratico," *Méthexis* 3 (1990): 15–32; "Retractando atque expoliendo. Sulle tracce della letteratura socratica antica," *Giornale italiano di Filosofia* 14/2 (1993): 263–274; "'Rhétorique et anti-rhétorique' et 'Effet de surprise' : à l'origine de l'image négative des sophistes," *Noesis* 2 (1998): 105–119; "La rhétorique de Socrate," in G. Romeyer Dherbey & J. B. Gourinat, eds., *Socrate et les socratiques* (Paris, 2001), 161–185.

of rhetoric. While traditional scholarship⁷ tries to explain Plato's views of rhetoric, whether in the *Gorgias* or in the *Phaedrus*, by studying the nature of the speech delivered and the knowledge or ignorance of the person who pronounces it, I believe that a better understanding of the position of Plato and other disciples of Socrates regarding rhetoric could be reached by also taking into account the relation between the speech and the audience who receives it. I will defend the idea that it is precisely the audience – the crowd, the many – which is, for Socrates-Plato, at the origin of most of the defects of rhetorical speech.

I will then discuss the surprising thesis presented in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and in the first *Alcibiades*, where Socrates identifies public and private speech. A careful reading of those texts shows, however, that, despite appearances, Socrates still upholds the same thesis, although he does so, at times, in a very paradoxical way.

By exploring the apparent differences between the treatment of the question of the audience in those various texts, we can uncover the necessity, mostly implicit in Plato's early writings but present in the texts of other Socratics, especially of Antisthenes, to adapt one's speech to the personality or belief-set of one's interlocutor. This comparative reading of texts of the Socratics will finally lead us to revise the traditional opposition established between the early Socratic method of dialogical discussion and the philosophical rhetorical discourse of the *Phaedrus* by finding, in all those texts, an attempt to define a middle-term between the crowd and individual: groups of similar men or 'souls'. There will be then no contradiction or even a strong evolution between the early dialogues and the later works of Plato, on the question of rhetoric. If so, the *psychagogia* and the whole discussion on "true oratory" in the *Phaedrus* wouldn't be as much a novelty as it is commonly claimed to be,⁸ but rather a new formulation of Socrates' teaching which may be found in Plato, Xenophon or Antisthenes.

⁷See the references in the course of the article, when specific interpretations are discussed.

⁸Many scholars acknowledge that the *Phaedrus* gives a positive view of rhetoric or presents the possibility of a good and true public speech. This view is commonly shared, both by commentators of Plato: E. Black, "Plato's View of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 44 (1958): 361–74 (p. 365–6) refuses to see, even in the *Gorgias*, a general condemnation of rhetoric; B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato, vol. III Cratylus. Phaedrus. Theaetetus. Sophist. Statesman. Philebus. Timaeus. Critias* (Clarendon Press, 1953 (4th ed.)), 107 considered that the *Phaedrus* "must have been written at a time when Plato contemplated the introduction of rhetorical training into the academy and had to defend his aims..."; T. C. Brickhouse and N. D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 140 clearly oppose Socratic and late dialogues on this issue; and by historians of rhetoric: P. Bizzell and B. Herzberg, eds., *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000), 56;

In doing so, I will set aside, or rather consider as 'solved', the opposition between the respective ends of Socratic and Sophistic speeches, and simply admit the common and general idea that the former aims at the discovery of a stable, eternal truth, while the latter confesses to offering only a mere illusion. This basic opposition, which is generally accepted, would bring nothing new to the specific purpose of this paper. The question I intend to address is first that of the *means* used to convey a message to one or multiple interlocutors – that is, precisely, 'rhetoric' in a general, neutral sense – and not of the *ends* – the content of the message itself. Certainly, the two questions cannot be radically separated, especially in Socratic thought. But it is precisely by initially carrying out such an abstract distinction and by focusing on the second problem that one can fully perceive the importance of those questions in the texts of the various disciples of Socrates.

CROWD AND TRUTH

I know how to produce only one witness in support of what I say, the man with whom I find myself discussing; the many I ignore; there is also one whose vote I know how to muster, whilst to the many I have nothing to say.

Plato, *Gorgias* 474a

Attacks against rhetoric are a commonplace in Plato's works. They appear most clearly in the *Gorgias*, which aims precisely to discover "what is the power of this art" (447c: τίς ἡ δύναμις τῆς τέχνης). Rhetoric is first defined as an "art about speeches" (450c, *περὶ λόγους*) dealing with "the most important things" (451d). Questioned by Socrates, Gorgias admits that it is an art "of speaking and persuading the multitude" (452d–e: λέγειν καὶ πείθειν τὰ πλῆθη), that it has for its main object the just and the unjust (454b) and produces beliefs and

K. Welch, *The Contemporary Reception of Classical Rhetoric: Appropriations of Ancient Discourse* (NJ: Erlbaum, 1990), 94 describes the "rhetoric's positive force" in the *Phaedrus*, cf. p. 100; C. J. Swearingen, "Plato," in T. Enos, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age* (NY: Garland, 1996), 523–8 (p. 526): Plato "argues for a philosophical and ethical rhetoric." Those who deny this possibility and claim that Plato's views didn't change (W. C. K. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy IV: Plato: the man and his dialogues, earlier period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [¹1975]), 413: Plato is just "pretending to take it (rhetoric) seriously"; B. McAdon, "Plato's Denunciation of Rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*," *Rhetoric Review* 23/1 (2004): 21–39 (p. 22): "philosophical or dialectical rhetoric [...] is an oxymoron as far as Plato is concerned") do not mention the problematic of the audience.

not knowledge (454b, 455a). Socrates adds that rhetoric does not need to know the “reality of things” (459b: αὐτὰ μὲν τὰ πράγματα οὐδὲν δεῖ αὐτὴν εἰδέναι ὅπως ἔχει).

Gorgias, of course, tries to defend and praise his own art: it is “a thing, Socrates, which, in truth, is the greatest good, and is source of freedom for the one who has it and also of dominion over the others in his city” (452d). Rhetoric appears to him as the true political art, at least in a democratic city: the walls and harbours of Athens were built, not by engineers or architects, but thanks to the orators who convinced the city to erect them (455d–456e). Gorgias admits that rhetoric should be just, but he does not define justice, nor does he claim to teach virtue, and, finally, concedes that his “art” could be used for good or evil and is similar to a martial art (456c): rhetoric is both morally neutral and aggressive.⁹ For Plato’s Socrates, such neutrality seems impossible: the wise and moderate Gorgias may make use of his art properly, but certainly not his young amoral and ambitious followers, Polus and Callicles. For them, rhetoric is first and foremost a source of power – no matter how it is used – and power is its only goal.¹⁰

The criticism of the ignorance and lust for power or wealth of the orators obviously plays a central role in Socrates’ attacks. In the *Gorgias*, the orator is first described as an ignorant addressing ignorants: he cannot but fail to reach the truth; he won’t even look for it as he uses his ability only to fulfil his personal ambition. But the weakness and corruption of rhetoric does not exclusively originate in the character and (lack of) skills of the person speaking; it seems also to have its origin in the simple fact that it addresses the many – as Gorgias himself admitted (452d–e). Rhetoric is defined as a way to address the *crowd in order to please it*; dialectic, or the *dialegesthai* of the first dialogues, is the art of addressing *one interlocutor, in order to engage a common search for truth*. Socrates constantly opposes *rhetorikê* to the art of discussion (διαλέγεσθαι) in which the young disciples of Gorgias had obviously no practice,¹¹ but such an opposition is not

⁹See F. Renaud, “La rhétorique socratique-platonicienne dans le *Gorgias* (447a–461b),” *Philosophie Antique* 1 (2001): 65–86. J. S. Murray, “Plato on Power, Moral Responsibility and the Alleged Neutrality of Gorgias’ Art of Rhetoric (Gorgias 456c–457b),” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34/4 (2001): 355–363, claims – without judging Gorgias’ position – that Plato’s goal in comparing the art of the Sophists to that of wrestlers is precisely to prove that rhetoric is necessarily immoral, for such an analogy is false.

¹⁰Teaching “political art” or “the most important things for men” is a common Sophistic claim: Pl. *Prt.* 318d–319a, *Meno* 91a–b, *Grg.* 451d, *Resp.* 600c–d.

¹¹Pl. *Grg.* 448d; cf. 474a and 471d: his attempt at refutations are of no value for the philosopher, for they are made “in a rhetorical fashion, as they understand

based on the one between the ignorance of the orator and the knowledge of the one who engages in a philosophical conversation. If the orator is unable to bring forth any truth because he is ignorant – and worse, ignorant of his own ignorance – the one who engages in a dialogue may hope to do so, *despite* his ignorance. For the Socratic dialogue itself does not require knowledge of both interlocutors, nor even of one of them only if we are to believe Socrates who constantly claims he does not know, only their good will and honesty.

Persuasion in public, on the contrary, can only be carried out through flattery or seduction (465c: κολακευτική). That's precisely why, for Socrates, the power promised by rhetoric is an illusory one. Far from being all-powerful, "like a tyrant," as Gorgias and Polus present him, the orator has for Socrates "the smallest power of all who are in the city" (466–b). Not only is he ignorant of the object of his speech (justice), but he is also forced to yield to the passions of the audience he has to seduce (465e–468e).¹² Contrary to what Gorgias believes, the orator is never the true master of the "illusion" he claims to bring forth; the crowd, which he has to please, is; the public speaker is, ultimately, its slave. Never could this kind of oratory achieve the ideal of *psychagogia*, defined in Plato's later text: far from 'leading' the souls, or even the crowd, it will always follow blindly the changing whims of the one(s) he addresses. Rhetoric may thus be defined literally as a *flattery*,¹³ and the one who addresses a crowd will necessarily be, to borrow Montesquieu's definition of the flatterer, "a slave who is of no good for any master" (Montesquieu, *Pensées* II, 1322).

The reason for the submissive and slavish character of rhetoric is to be found in Plato's perception of the multitude. When Plato considers the crowd as such, as an entity by itself, he describes it as a "big animal," a "huge and motley beast" in the *Republic* or, at best, as an "assembly of children" in the *Gorgias*.¹⁴ The two analogies are clear: when the crowd is described as such, the philosopher or the orator

refuting in the law courts. For there, one party is supposed to refute the other when they bring forward a number of reputable witnesses to any statements they may make, whilst their opponent produces only one, or none. But this sort of refutation is quite worthless for getting at the truth."

¹²On the relation seduction/love/truth, see W. J. Kelley, "Rhetoric as Seduction," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6/2 (1973): 69–80.

¹³Rhetoric is not an art (463a–b) but a "*habitude*," a habit born from experience (462c: ἐμπειρίαν ἕγωγά τινα). The knowledge of the causal relations necessary to a true art of rhetoric is only alluded to in the *Gorgias*, and fully described in the *Phaedrus*: below p. 151–3.

¹⁴This passage of the *Alcibiades* does not present the usual, pejorative, vocabulary that Plato normally uses to designate the crowd (*ochlos, polloi*). Socrates rather uses here συμπόλλους. For the beast: Pl. *Resp.* 493a–c: θρέμματος μεγάλου καὶ ἰσχυροῦ;

does not address men anymore – that is, beings capable of reason – but irrational beings: animals or children. Of course, the one who dares face such a beast has no choice but to flatter it, to rub it the right way, so that it does not bite him. Facing an assembly of children, one would also rather be the cook who gorges them “with abundance of nice things of every sort,” than the doctor with his bitter cures. These images definitely disqualify Gorgias’ foolish hope that rhetoric may remain morally neutral: by the nature of its audience, it will be corrupted; the orator will change his language to please the beast. Even pronounced by an orator of good will, a public speech would depend on the taste and passions of the audience he is addressing and is thus doomed to be *philodoxic*, to follow the passions of the many.

Certainly, as Socrates did during the trial of the Arginusae generals,¹⁵ the philosopher will discard the expectations of the crowd, in the interest of truth, and he will not be a slave to the passions of the many, but ultimately he will be equally incapable of bringing forth any truth in front of the many: had Socrates undertaken to speak to the assembly, he would simply “have been put to death long ago” (Plato, *Ap.* 31d), as “a doctor tried by a bench of children on a charge brought by a cook” (*Grg.* 521e). To that fierce animal, the philosopher “has nothing to say” (*Grg.* 474a).

Thus, the problem of rhetoric does not lie only in the ignorance of the one speaking, and it is not enough to claim that “Platon refuse de séparer l’art de la parole de l’art de la pensée, la forme du contenu,”¹⁶ even if in order to be a true art, oratory must rely on “thought” or knowledge.¹⁷ It does not even originate first in its formal aspect – the long speech opposed to the method of questions and answers favoured by Socrates¹⁸ – which is only a consequence derived from the main difficulty of the public speech: its audience.

Facing Callicles, Socrates gives hope for conciliation between truth and rhetoric when he mentions “the orator according to the art and the good” who could “give birth to justice in the soul of his fellow-citizens, and free them from injustice” (504d–e).¹⁹ In the *Phaedrus*, he will define a “true” art of oratory. But it is generally admitted, as T. C. Brickhouse

590a: τὸ μέγα ἐκείνο καὶ πολυειδὲς θρέμμα; 590b: τῷ ὀχλώδει θηρίῳ; cf. 496c–d, 588b–591a, *Grg.* 516a–b; for the children: *Pl. Grg.* 464d, cf. 502e, 512e.

¹⁵*Pl. Ap.* 32b–c; *Xen. Hell.* 1.7.15; *Mem.* 1.1.18; 4.4.2.

¹⁶Renaud, p. 78, cited in n. 9 above; although it is true that, contrary to the *Phaedrus* “La question centrale de l’entretien entre Socrate et Gorgias ne concernera donc pas la méthode ou le comment de la rhétorique, mais son objet et sa fin” (*idem*, p. 71), such a claim leads one to disregard the question of the audience.

¹⁷In the *Republic* (392c *sqq.*), Plato will distinguish clearly between *lexis* and *logos*.

¹⁸*Pl. Prt.* 329b, 334c–d, *Grg.* 448d, 449.

¹⁹Cf. *Pl. Grg.* 526d on Aristides, and 527d.

and N. D. Smith (p. 140, cited in n. 8 above) have stated, that "Nowhere in the early dialogues is another form of discourse identified by which a speaker can accomplish both of the goals of the other two forms of discourse: persuading 'the many' and 'stating the truth'." Such views seem to be confirmed by Socrates' claim at the beginning of the *Apology* (17b, cf. 18a): "I am not a talented orator, unless they mean by that one who says what is true."

DECOMPOSING THE CROWD: CROWD AND INDIVIDUALS

... it is worth noticing that "one man persuaded" must be found in the multiplicity of men persuaded at the same time.
Proclus, *In Alc.* 309, 7–15.

Xenophon's testimony seems at odds with what we know from Plato. A very similar development is also found in the *First Alcibiades*. In the *Memorabilia* (3.7.8), Charmides objects to Socrates who encourages him to speak at the assembly: "Don't you know that the crowd often laughs at sound speech?" Socrates answers that this also happens in private conversations, and that Charmides feels perfectly comfortable in such situations. And when the young man retorts that a private discussion is very different from a public debate,²⁰ Socrates replies simply that a harp player excels no less in public than alone, or that the demonstration of a person who knows mathematics will be as perfect whether in presence of a multitude or in private. Although one could discuss the validity of such an argument, Charmides admits the analogy and is thus led to accept that the art of persuasion is always the same, in both situations. In the same fashion, Socrates tells Glaucon – who wishes to embrace a political career – that he cannot seriously claim to convince the Assembly, even though he is not even capable of persuading his uncle in a private conversation (3.6.15–16).

In these texts, Socrates appears quite naïve: he makes no distinction between individuals and a crowd, between a dialectical conversation and a rhetorical speech.²¹ But we cannot, as scholars have often done

²⁰Xen. *Mem.* 3.7.4: οὐ ταῦτόν ἐστιν, ἔφη, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἰδίᾳ τε διαλέγεσθαι καὶ ἐν τῷ πλῆθει ἀγωνίζεσθαι.

²¹It is true that Xenophon does not pay much attention to this distinction, but it is implicit in many passages of the *Memorabilia*, and we cannot entirely agree with the radical conclusion of Dorion, p. 21–22, cited in n. 4 above: Xenophon "ne reconnaît pas la pertinence de cette distinction." His Socrates does attack the speeches of the orators and their influence on the crowd when, for example, he compares them to the charms

when Xenophon's testimony seems to contradict our usual – Platonic – view on Socrates, blame it on the “simple mind” of the historian: this thesis appears almost exactly in the same form in the *First Alcibiades* when Socrates invites Alcibiades to present his conception of the relation between the just and the advantageous. From that point, the discussion is quite similar to the one with Charmides in the *Memorabilia*, but while the latter finds it easy to speak with Socrates and is afraid of the crowd, Alcibiades becomes unsure of himself when confronted by the philosopher:

Alcibiades But I am not sure I should be able, Socrates, to set it forth to you. **Socrates** Well, my good sir, imagine I am the people in Assembly; even there, you know, you will have to persuade each man singly (καὶ ἐκεῖ τοῖ σε δεήσει ἕνα ἕκαστον πείθειν), will you not? **Alcibiades** Yes. **Socrates** And the same man may well persuade one person singly, and many together, about things that he knows (οὐχοῦν τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνα τε οἷόν τε εἶναι κατὰ μόνους πείθειν καὶ συμπόλλους περὶ ὧν ἂν εἰδῆ), just as the schoolmaster, I suppose, persuades either one or many about letters? **Alcibiades** Yes. **Socrates** And again, will not the same man persuade either one or many about number? (ὁ αὐτὸς ἕνα τε καὶ πολλοὺς πείσει;) **Alcibiades** Yes. **Socrates** And this will be the man who knows—the arithmetician? **Alcibiades** Quite so. **Socrates** And you too can persuade a single man about things of which you can persuade many? **Alcibiades** Presumably. **Socrates** And these are clearly things that you know. **Alcibiades** Yes. **Socrates** And the only difference between the orator speaking before the people and one who speaks in a conversation like ours is that the former persuades men in a number together of the same things, and the latter persuades them one at a time? (ἄλλο τι οὖν τοσοῦτον μόνον διαφέρει τοῦ ἐν τῷ δήμῳ ῥήτορος ὁ ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ συνουσίᾳ, ὅτι ὁ μὲν ἀθρόους πείθει τὰ αὐτά, ὁ δὲ καθ' ἕνα;) **Alcibiades** It looks like it. **Socrates** Come now, since we see that the same man may persuade either many or one (πολλοὺς τε καὶ ἕνα πείθειν), try your unpracticed hand on me, and endeavor to show that the just is sometimes not expedient. (Pl. *Alc.* 114b–c)²²

Socrates distinguishes here a private speech, which persuades (πέθειν) καθ' ἕνα, from a public one, delivered to “those gathered in great number” (ἀθρόους). However, he makes no use of this distinction, or

of the sirens (2.6.11), to spells or magical amulets (*Mem.* 2.6.13). For a comparison between Plato's *Gorgias* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia* see F. Renaud, “Le *Gorgias* de Platon et les *Mémorables*: étude comparative,” in M. Narcy and A. Tordesillas, eds., *Xenophon et Socrate* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), 161–180.

²²Translation W. R. M. Lamb, *Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, vol. 8 (Alcibiades)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955).

more precisely he seems to state it only to conclude that it is irrelevant! The art of persuasion would always be the same.²³

Two elements could explain the present claim of Socrates.

The first one is obvious and quite common in Socratic texts: the model of science.²⁴ The examples offered as arguments, similar to those put forth in Xenophon, are enlightening: in grammar, in mathematics, one can convince an individual as well as a multitude (Xen. *Mem.* 3.6.17–18; Pl. *Alc.* 114c). Socrates adds, as usual, that only the one who has knowledge of the object of his speech can persuade according to the art.²⁵

The second point is more surprising, and explains by itself the unique appearance of this thesis in Plato's early dialogues. Socrates says: "At the assembly, you will have to convince *each one*" (114b: ἕνα ἕκαστον πείθειν). He does not distinguish between the individuals and the social group: to convince the crowd is not to convince a whole, a mass, but a collection of individuals. This implies dividing the mass into the units that compose it,²⁶ and, to that end, Socrates seems to set aside the basic sociological phenomenon of the crowd, which he knows and describes in other dialogues (above p. 141–2).

To "decompose" the crowd into the individuals that compose it has two immediate advantages. First, the orator will face *de novo* rational beings, and not a wild beast. Secondly, and contrary to

²³On the contrary, in the usual Platonic dialogue: "The value of rhetoric – 'the greatest good' – is precisely related to the context in which it operates" (H. Yunis, *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 120), *i.e.* the assembly of the people (cf. *Grg.* 455b–456a).

²⁴Proclus, *In Alc.*, §307, 16: "The present argument, which shows that it belongs to one unique science to convince one and many, constitutes both a hymn to the power of science and a praise of it." Cf. §308, 21–3.

²⁵The idea that only the one who knows can truly convince is quite common in Plato's dialogues, whether in the *Gorgias* or in the *Phaedrus*. It is also found in Xenophon: *Mem.* 3.6.17–8; Xen. *Mem.* 4.6.1: Σωκράτης γὰρ τοὺς μὲν εἰδότας τί ἕκαστον εἶη τῶν ὄντων ἐνόμιζε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἂν ἐξηγγεῖσθαι δύνασθαι and 3.3.11: οἱ τὰ σπουδαιότατα μάλιστα ἐπιστάμενοι κάλλιστα διαλέγονται.

²⁶See Proclus, *In Alc.*, §309, 7–15: "Secondly, it is worth noticing that 'one man persuaded' must be found in a multiplicity of men persuaded at the same time. This is why, indeed, Socrates says that the same orator persuades those gathered in a crowd, and each one individually in the crowd; it is in that sense that he says at the beginning of the argument: 'For at the assembly you will have to convince each of the individuals which compose the many'." Cf. the analysis of B. Lévy, *Le meurtre du pasteur, critique de la vision politique du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 2002), 23–26. To my knowledge, Plato simply states, but does not explain, the contrast between a collection of individuals and a mob: he does not answer the question why, as a member of a mob, one may be tempted to do things he never would have done as an individual (see n. 28 for an example involving Socrates himself).

appearances, he will speak to an interlocutor who is truly one. The unity of the many, of the crowd, is only appearance, barely a linguistic convenience that hides a real multiplicity. That's the meaning of the adjectives "multiple" or "motley" (*Resp.* 590a: πολυειδής) which Plato sometimes uses to characterise it. The division of the "many" into the individuals that compose it does not bring about a multiplicity from a unity: it aims rather to find what is truly one (the soul, the man) behind the apparent unity of the group.

Being multiple or motley, the crowd does not agree with itself – how could it? – and one can hardly reach agreement with it and thus give birth to any real conviction. The Socratic dialogue, on the contrary, allows such an agreement, for it is at the same time a dialogue of the soul with itself and a search for agreement of oneself with oneself. The discussions of Socrates with Charmides in the *Memorabilia* and with Alcibiades in Plato follow the same course: from speech to the crowd to dialogue, from dialogue to the necessity of knowing oneself. For, as Plato's Socrates says: the one who does not know what belongs to himself, does not know what belongs to others either, and thus what belongs to the State (*Pl. Alc. I* 133e–134a). Xenophon is doing in a few paragraphs – as if he was summarising the *Alcibiades* or another Socratic dialogue – what the author of the *Alcibiades* does at length, but the progression is globally the same, and, in both texts, the identification of private and public speech has no other role than to lead an interlocutor, who was at first reluctant, to the practice of dialogue and philosophy. To convince each one in the crowd is obviously an ideal impossible to reach, and Socrates simply hopes to lead Alcibiades towards what he considers as the true political activity – philosophy.²⁷ In order to do so, he sets forth a *false identification* of

²⁷The distinction between "public" and "political" is crucial to understanding Socrates' thought in the early dialogues. The fact that Socrates is not a public man (*Ap.* 32a: δημοσιεύειν) does not prevent him from being "the only true statesman" of his time (*Grg.* 521d); on the contrary, it appears as a condition *sine qua non* (*Ap.* 32a): "A man who really fights for justice, if he hopes to live for even a little while, must be a private citizen, not a public man." For Socrates, the true statesman is *only* the one who acts in order to make "his fellow-citizen as good as possible" (*Grg.* 502e), and not the one who gorges his city with "ships, walls and arsenals" (*Alc.* 134b). Only with philosophy can such a goal be achieved, not through the shadow of politics that is rhetoric (*Grg.* 463d), despite the claim of many Sophists to teach "political art" (*Pl. Prt.* 318d–319a, *Meno* 91a–b, *Grg.* 451d, *Resp.* 600c–d). Incidentally, it is clear that the different disciples of Socrates saw a possible political tool in the dialogical method of their master: the *Hiero* of Xenophon, or the letters attributed to Plato (*Pl. Epist.* 7.328b–c, cf. 5.322a–b) relating his experiences with Dionysius, suffice to show the existence of such a hope. For Damascius, the *Alcibiades* precisely teaches "knowledge of oneself as fit for citizens" (τὸ πολιτικῶς γινῶναι ἑαυτὸν); see also the

public and private speech, but shows, at the same time, the impossibility of discussing with a crowd as such.²⁸

MULTIPLICITY AND UNITY OF LANGUAGE

One is what is proper to each. It is why the adaption to each individual gathers the diversity of speeches into one thing; what is suitable to each one.

Antisthenes, SSR VA 187=51 DC²⁹

One cannot converse with a multiplicity, but must first divide it into the units constituted by (individual) human souls, for a speech, in order to produce a proper persuasion, should be made according to the specific characteristics of those who listen to it. And if Socratic language consists, first of all, in a brief³⁰ and dialogical speech, as opposed to the endless discourses of the Sophists, this is not an abstract and impersonal method without any "rhetorical" dimension. Xenophon states explicitly that Socrates, in using such or such an argument, was only trying to lead his interlocutor to a specific end,³¹

introduction of A.-P. Segonds to Proclus' text (*Proclus, Sur le Premier Alcibiade de Platon* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986), vol. I, p. X-CXXV, esp. LVI). For different presentations of the "private politics" of Socrates: see P. Coby, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment: a commentary on Plato's Protagoras* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987), 181-7; T. C. Brickhouse and N. D. Smith, p. 139 and 141, cited in n. 8 above; W. C. K. Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 = *A History of Greek Philosophy III(2)* [1969]), 96-97; Yunis, p. 154 and 121, cited in n. 23 above; J. Colaiaco, *Socrates against Athens, philosophy on trial* (New York & London: Routledge, 2001), 165.

²⁸Similar developments may be found in other texts, though the *Alcibiades* is, to my knowledge, more explicit. In the *Symposium* (194b sqq.), Socrates (ironically?) praises Agathon's performance in front of the crowd and is surprised of his shyness in front "of a few fellows like us." Agathon answers that he does not "forget that an intelligent speaker is more alarmed at few wise men than a crowd of fools." Socrates retorts: "I am quite sure that if you find yourself with a few persons whom you considered wise, you would make more account of them than of the multitude. Yet we, perhaps, are not of those; for we also were there, and we were part of the crowd." Phaedrus interrupts the conversation but, once again, we have a similar discussion and Socrates proceeds to the same identification of public and private speech.

²⁹SSR = G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquae* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1990) and DC = F. Deleva Caizzi, *Antisthenis Fragmenta* (Milano: Instituto editoriale cisalpino, 1966).

³⁰Pl. *Grg.* 449c, βραχυλόγος; on the theme of brachology, see E. Dupréel, *La légende socratique et les sources de Platon* (Bruxelles: R. Sand, 1922), ch.2: *kata brachu logos*.

³¹Xen. *Mem.* 4.1.2-3: "His method of approach varied. To those who..."; cf. 1.3.8; 1.4.2; 2.1.1; 2.2.1; 2.3.1; 2.7.1; 3.1.1; 3.2.1; 3.7.1; 3.12.1.

Plato seems more reluctant to openly admit such “craftiness,”³² but arguments especially adapted to the beliefs of those Socrates wishes to refute are common in the early dialogues. We see, for example, Socrates praising the wisdom of the Athenians and the virtue of Pericles³³ to show Protagoras his own contradictions (*Prt.* 319b–320a)! The knowledge of the subject of the speech is not sufficient: the “good orator” should also have knowledge of his audience.

It is the object of Plato’s late *psychagogia* to adapt the speeches to the different types of souls. But this requirement is expressed in different Socratic texts, before the developments of the *Phaedrus*. It could be found in a common defence of Odysseus’ oratory and *polytropia* in Antisthenes, in Xenophon (*Mem.* 4.6.15) and perhaps in Plato.³⁴ A long fragment from Porphyry shows Antisthenes (or Antisthenes’ Socrates) in discussion with an unknown orator on the Homeric heroes (Antisthenes *SSR* VA 187 = 51 DC = Porph., *ad. Od.* 1.1). The debate is so close to that of the *Hippias Minor* that Plato’s dialogue has sometimes been read as a polemic against Antisthenes, or as the residue of a common early Socratic teaching.³⁵ Antisthenes explicitly defends Odysseus and expresses the necessity of a philosophical rhetoric:

If the wise are skilful in discussion, they know how to express the same thought in many ways; but as they know how to say things in many ways, they will be *polytropos*. And the wise are also good. This is why Homer says that Odysseus, who was wise, was *polytropos*: he knew how to discuss with men using many ways (of speech).

Antisthenes *SSR* VA 187= 51 DC

³²Plato explicitly admits it only in later dialogues. In the *Meno*, for example, Socrates uses Gorgias and Empedocles’ theories, with which he disagrees, but which *Meno* himself knows and seems to admit. Socrates then explains (*Meno* 75d) that discussing on the ground of “what the questioned individual concedes he knows” (δι’ ἐκείνων ὧν ἐν προσομολογῇ εἰδέναι ὁ ἐρωτώμενος) is “more dialectical” (διαλεκτικώτερον).

³³Which he usually criticises, see for example *Grg.* 515c–e.

³⁴Through a specific reading of the *Hippias Minor*, see D. LévyStone, “La figure d’Ulysse chez les Socratiques: Socrate *polytropos*,” *Phronesis* 50(3) (2005): 181–214 (p. 199–206).

³⁵For A. Brancacci, *Oikeios Logos: La filosofia del linguaggio in Antistene* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1990), 51, the *Hippias Minor* is Plato’s answer to Antisthenes. On the contrary, for Deleva Caizzi, p. 105, cited in n. 29 above, Plato’s text is prior to Antisthenes’ interpretation. Finally, Giannantoni, vol. IV, p. 315–316, cited in n. 29 above insists instead on the proximity of the two texts; see also LévyStone, cited in n. 34 above. On Antisthenes’ theory of language: Romeyer Dherbey, G. “La théorie du langage chez Antisthène,” in Id. *La parole archaïque* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 81–102. The text is from Caizzi’s edition.

This diversity of Odysseus, which Hippias, in Plato, mistakenly associates with lies, concerns only the form of the speech. The aim of his polytrophy is to "express always the same thought," as Socrates himself claims in Xenophon (*Mem.* 4.4.6) or in the *Gorgias* (490e–491a; cf. Pl. *Symp.* 221e). These requirements are not contradictory, and polytrophy even appears to be the necessary condition of an (efficient) expression of truth. At the end of the same fragment, Antisthenes legitimates the *polytropia* of Odysseus in a more technical way:

The polytrophy of speech and the varied use of speech become, when they address varied ears, monotropy. One is what is proper to each. It is why the adaptation to each individual gathers the diversity of speeches into one thing, what is suitable to each one. Conversely, the unity of aspect of speech, because it is not adapted to the diversity of the listeners, produces the effect of a diversity of ways in a language which should be rejected by many, for it seems to them despicable.
Antisthenes SSR VA 187= 51 DC

Polytrophy is thus defined as the good orator's ability to adapt,³⁶ which allows him to harmonise his speeches with the audience: the diversity of the hearers unifies the apparent multiplicity of the speeches. As each (formally different) speech is received differently by each individual, polytrophy makes it possible to maintain a unity of content, and becomes ultimately a positive "monotropy."

Regarding the adaptation of language, Antisthenes' polytrophy has much in common with Plato's psychagogy, and we may be tempted to see in the latter the new expression or theorisation of a common and well-known Socratic idea, rather than a proper and radically new Platonic concept. Besides, on many points, the *Phaedrus* does nothing but express more clearly and accurately what was only sketched in the *Gorgias* and in other texts – as the positive counterpart of the criticism of rhetoric. Certainly, the vocabulary is different, and the idea of knowledge developed in the *Phaedrus* is more complex – as it involves the doctrine of the Ideas, of which there is no trace in the *Gorgias*. Plato's view on knowledge and dialectic in the *Phaedrus* appears as mid-way between the *Gorgias*³⁷ and the *Philebus* (16c ff.): a method of division and collection (*Phaedr.* 266a).

But on the specific question of oratory, it is generally admitted that the *Phaedrus* presents a radical change on at least one point: in that text,

³⁶See also SSR VA 30 = 153 DC.

³⁷Same analogy with medicine, the mysterious *denundering - diarithmeisthai* in *Grg.* 501a, which seems out of place and can only be understood with the help of later texts... etc. On dialectic and Plato's idea of knowledge in the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias*, see the analysis of P. Kucharski, "La rhétorique dans le *Gorgias* et dans le *Phèdre*," *REG* 74 (1961): 371–406.

Socrates would assume fully, *for the first time*, the existence of a “good” rhetoric, of a kind of speech which allows the simultaneous achievement of two goals that had previously been considered contradictory: stating the truth and talking to the many. Socrates, however, mentions this possibility only once in the whole dialogue, at the beginning of the actual discussion of the art of rhetoric, when he uses for the first time the term *psychagogia*:

Is not rhetoric (ῥητορικὴ) in its entire nature an art of leading the soul by means of words (τέχνη ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων), not only in law courts and other public assemblies (ἄλλοι δημόσιοι σύλλογοι), but in private discussion (ἐν ἰδίῳ) as well? And is it not the same when dealing with small things as with great, the right being no more honourable in serious than in trifling matters? Isn't this what you have heard?

Pl. *Phaedr.* 261a–b

It is this passage that leads many scholars to perceive in the *Phaedrus* a fundamental evolution of Plato's views on rhetoric. But, as in the previous texts, everything that Plato adds after this first identification really makes little sense if applied to the crowd, and the later developments on the true art of rhetoric seem to contradict this first affirmation. According to this reading, the *Phaedrus* instead repeats the same movement of thought, with more details and a new vocabulary, as that of the *Alcibiades*, or Xenophon's short dialogues.

Plato gives his readers two clues to unveil Socrates' stratagem. First, the philosopher does not explicitly endorse this thesis, but rather assigns it to the common opinion when he adds: “Isn't this what you have heard?” (261b). Secondly, Plato makes it clear in Socrates' previous statement that the aim of this development is to “persuade Phaedrus that unless he perfectly studies philosophy, he will never be able to speak properly about anything” (261a). How to persuade him? By identifying at first, once again, public and private speech, rhetoric and dialectic, that is by applying, at the very moment he's defining it, *psychagogia* to the young lover of speech that Phaedrus is.³⁸ Clearly, Plato is not as explicit as in the *Alcibiades*: he does not ask Phaedrus to speak to “each one.” But he develops the same idea in exposing the notion of *psychagogia*, an adaptation of language to the audience – the positive corollary of the impossibility of speaking to the many.

The features of *psychagogia* are well known to Plato's readers, but can they possibly be applied to a crowd? The good orator has

³⁸Or, as J. V. Curran, “The Rhetorical Technique of Plato's *Phaedrus*,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 19/1 (1986): 66–72 (p. 69, cf. p. 71), wrote more generally about the *Phaedrus*: “Socrates has not only analysed the soul theoretically, he also adapts his style of speech in order to appeal to what he knows of Phaedrus' soul.”

to know the *human* soul (270e) with its different parts (271a), because different souls will be affected in different ways by different speeches (271b); when meeting *one individual*, the wise will be immediately able to discover his nature (272a), and thus find the kind of speech adapted to his specific soul (277c). The criticism of writing inserted between these developments makes use of similar arguments: if writing cannot compare to a dialectical discussion, it is, among other reasons, because it “speaks” in the same way to all – it does not even “know to whom to talk or not to talk” (275e). It is only thanks to dialectic, “the living and breathing word of him who knows” (276a), that the orator could “plant a seed” of value in the soul of his listener (276b–d). None of those elements may be properly applied to a crowd, to a multiplicity, and there is no textual evidence, nor any reason to believe that Socrates imagines here a “soul” of the crowd,³⁹ that is, seeing a proper unity, a unity of form, in what is, by nature, multiplicity.

The comparison with medicine (*Phaedr.* 270b–271a), which appears also in Antisthenes' fragment (SSR VA 197), sheds light on Plato's developments. In the *Phaedrus* (270b: ὁ αὐτός που τρόπος τέχνης ἰατρικῆς ὅσπερ καὶ ῥητορικῆς), as in the *Gorgias* (500e–501a), rhetoric could hope to become a true art by taking medicine for a model: the exact analogy between Hippocrates' art and good oratory is the same in both texts. The art of medicine involves first a general knowledge of the body, of its parts, and of the harmony between them (health). It requires also a knowledge of the drugs and of their actions, a knowledge, which is more than the one that derives from mere experience, of the necessary causal relations (*Phaedr.* 271b). Finally, it necessitates, in its practice, an understanding of the specifics of the patient one has to cure: a drug should be used in different particular proportions on different diseased individuals.

The same elements are put forward, regarding the nature of the art of words, when Plato describes the three aspects of *psychagogia* (270e sqq):

1. The good orator should know the nature of the soul, whether it is something simple and homogeneous or multiform like the body (271a).
2. He should know of the soul what “its action is and towards what it is directed, or how it is acted upon and by what” (and likewise of its parts, if any).

³⁹There is no textual reason (other than the passage, previously quoted, identifying public with private speech) to believe that there is a “soul” of the assembly, to believe that it constitutes a unique soul, contrary, for example, to what Yunis, p. 202, cited in n. 23 above, wrote: “The attempt to develop a systematic psychology tied to mass discourse constitutes a fundamental change in Plato's thinking about politics.”

3. Finally (271b), having classified (διαταξάμενος) the species-kinds (γένη) of speeches and of souls, and their respective power (270d: δύναμιν), he must search for the causal relation between them, in order to know what kind of speech is adapted to what kind of soul. The adapted speech, acting as a cause, produces in its corresponding soul the necessary effect of a persuasion (δὲ ἦν αἰτίαν ἐξ ἀνάγκης), while it is powerless on another one.

The knowledge involved in the first point does not give an account of the specificity of the audience, i.e., of the patient. It is rather linked to the knowledge of “health” in general, of the good of the soul and of the harmony of its parts – that is, justice (cf. *Grg.* 459c–460a). Plato does not mean, of course, that one must adapt his speech to each part of the soul,⁴⁰ but, as he already states in the *Gorgias*, that good oratory, like all *technai*, “arranges everything according to a certain order, and forces one part to suit and fit with another, until he has combined the whole into a regular and well-ordered production” (503e). As the doctor brings “order and harmony into the body” (504a: κοσμοῦσί που τὸ σῶμα καὶ συντάττουσιν):

It is this that our orator, the man of art and virtue, will have in view, when he applies to our souls the words that he speaks, [...] with this thought always before his mind—how justice may be engendered in the souls of his fellow-citizens, and how injustice may be removed; how temperance may be bred in them and licentiousness cut off; and how virtue as a whole may be produced and vice expelled.

Pl. *Grg.* 504d–e⁴¹

It is only in the third point that we find the problematic of the necessary adaptation of souls and speeches, and the introduction of another knowledge, the knowledge of the species of soul (*Phaedr.* 271d: ὅσα εἰδη ἔχει). A similar view is already expressed, though

⁴⁰One could imagine that we must, for each man, convince each part of the soul differently. There would be, in order to convince properly, a need for three speeches: one for the *logistikon*, one for the *thumoeides*, one for the *epithumetikon*, which multiplies indefinitely the kinds of speech and, above all, which is not the way that Plato expresses himself in the *Phaedrus* (the orator must know and talk specifically to each *kind* of soul, but not to each *part* of the soul). But it is worth noticing here that this possibility actually appears in the *Phaedo*. Cebes and Simias are said to be convinced by the rational argument of Socrates – that there is nothing to fear in death. But they are not *persuaded* completely and are still afraid (78a): they pray Socrates to speak to “the child within (them), who is afraid of such things,” to reassure him “not to fear death as if it were the bogeyman.” There would be a need to persuade differently the different elements of the soul in such cases. But Socrates’ answer is clear: it is not up to him, but up to each man to sing a lullaby, to “charm” the child in him (78a–b). And the philosopher does not address the irrational, the child within us.

⁴¹Trans. Lamb, cited in n. 22 above.

implicitly, in the *Gorgias*, through the medical analogy: the practice of medicine requires the knowledge of health, of the drug and of the specific patient. Cookery cannot explain the nature of things it cooks, nor the nature of the one to whom it gives them (*Grg.* 465a: ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει λόγον οὐδένα ᾧ προσφέρει <ῆ>⁴² ἃ προσφέρει ὅποι' ἅττα τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν). Medicine, on the contrary, "has investigated the nature of the patient whom she treats and the cause of her proceedings, and has some account to give of each of these things" (501a: τούτου οὗ θεραπεύει καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἐσκεπται καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν ὧν πράττει, καὶ λόγον ἔχει τούτων ἐκάστου δοῦναι). Similarly, in the *Phaedrus*, the doctor knows not only the effect of each kind of treatment (on the human body in general) but also to whom and when it should be applied (*Phaedr.* 268a–b).

One can no more cure various patients (with varying disorders of the body) with the same cure, than address various souls in a unique speech: "unless a man reckons up one by one the nature of his hearers [...] he will never possess truly the art of speech, as far as it is humanly possible" (*Phaedr.* 273d–e). In the *Phaedrus*, as in *Gorgias*, talking to an audience that is anarchic and motley, composed of different natures, is not appropriate to true oratory or *psychagogia*⁴³ but only to this "kind of rhetoric addressed to such a crowd, mingled of children and women and men alike, and slaves as well as free" (*Grg.* 502d). Neoplatonists made no mistake in their analysis of the *Phaedrus*: Olympiodorus and Hermias both saw in the true art of oratory, not a new way to speak to the crowd, but a dialogue between two individuals.⁴⁴

PSYCHAGOGIA, ORATORY AND DIALECTIC

The idea that there is a fundamental change in Plato's views on rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* thus deserves to be questioned. The same identification of public and private speech appears in other texts than in the *Phaedrus*, in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, but also in the *Alcibiades* or in the *Symposium*.⁴⁵ However, in all those texts, the conversation follows the same course: Socrates' interlocutor praises a Sophistic or

⁴²I'm using here Dodds' text, *Plato Gorgias. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002 [1959]), p. 94–5, cf. 229.

⁴³Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy IV: Plato...*, p. 416, cited in n. 8 above: "It could not possibly be practised by an orator addressing the Assembly or an Athenian court: in an audience of hundreds or thousands every psychological type will be represented."

⁴⁴Hermias even explicitly identifies true rhetoric and philosophy (*In Phdr.* 1.5–6): ἐπανάγει ἐπὶ τὴν ἀληθῆ ῥητορικὴν, τουτέστι φιλοσοφίαν; cf. 7.4–13.

⁴⁵Above n. 28.

a public political speech; Socrates introduces the idea that *if* there is an *art* of words, it should be the same in all areas. The other character admits it; Socrates then defines this art in a way that makes it impossible to apply it to the multiplicity that the crowd is. The identification of public and private speech is (implicitly) refuted in the following argument: if rhetoric is indeed an art, it can only be practiced in private and the true orator, philosopher, should talk to *each one*, or to *each type of soul*, not to this motley thing, the crowd, which has only the name of a formal unity. Antisthenes illustrated in simple words the basic and obvious meaning of such a conception. One should, as Pythagoras did, give “to children discourses arranged for children, to women discourses fitted for women, to rulers discourses for rulers, and to young men discourses for young men” (SSR VA 187 = DC 51).

The real evolution of the *Phaedrus* should rather be sought in the meaning of *dialectic* itself. The true art of oratory in the *Phaedrus* is not to be identified with dialectic as it is defined in the same dialogue, i.e. as a process of division and collection (266a). *This* dialectic is only a part – though an essential one – of the true art of oratory: it is the method for achieving knowledge, a knowledge necessary to make a proper speech. But it is not, by itself, the way to address one’s interlocutor. And as Plato’s theory of knowledge changed, so did his method to reach it. However, *psychagogia*, as the way to *communicate* knowledge, or rather to lead one’s interlocutor to knowledge, is still the dialogical method of Socrates – what we designate, perhaps abusively, as Socratic “dialectic”⁴⁶ as opposed to the late Platonic one – the one used and discussed in the early texts of Plato and in those of his other disciples: ‘private’ dialogue rather than public speech.

An ambiguity, to which there is no explicit answer, arises both in Antisthenes and in Plato’s *Phaedrus*: should the philosopher limit himself to the practice of individual discussion or may he hope to convince simultaneously a group of “similar” souls? The problem could be solved theoretically. Ideally, the philosopher-dialogician (who speaks to one individual) questions the person he addresses in order to build an argument from the answers, from the very words, of his interlocutor.⁴⁷ The philosopher-orator addresses an

⁴⁶The notion appears only twice, and even then as a verb (with no technical meaning, ‘to engage a dialogue’), in the *Memorabilia*, while Xenophon’s work illustrates Socrates’ method of discussion quite clearly. On the *dialegesthai* of Xenophon’s Socrates, see Deraj, p. 31, cited in n. 4 above: “Despite the fact that in Plato’s early aporetic dialogues, Socrates uses *διαλέγεσθαι* to investigate an interlocutor’s character in the same way as Xenophon’s Socrates, Plato begins to transform it step by step into a dialectical art (*ἡ διαλεκτικὴ τέχνη*).”

⁴⁷Cf. S. Rendall, “Dialogue, Philosophy, and Rhetoric: The Example of Plato’s Gorgias,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 10/3 (1977): 165–179 (p. 166): “the interlocutor’s

audience composed of the same kind of souls with a speech that this specific type of soul can easily understand and agree with. He will be able to formulate in his speech the point of view of his hearers, *without* questioning them. This philosophical rhetoric can certainly appear to be of a more epideictic character than the dialogical, elenctic, maieutic method of Socrates. It will, however, pursue a similar end and will rely on the same basic assumptions, by being adapted to a specific, though collective, 'soul.' This method may well apply to a group of men of the same kind of soul, who would share the same basic beliefs, but would never function with a motley crowd. Such may be the Platonic solution to the *aporia* of rhetoric: the material impossibility of talking to each individual in the city; the theoretical impossibility of talking to the many as such. Between the too numerous individuals who have to be persuaded and the abstract and false unity of the crowd to which he cannot even talk, the philosopher will find the mediation, the middle step, of groups of similar men.⁴⁸ He will be able to do so by studying first, as in the *Phaedrus*, the nature of the human soul. Applied to a limited number of 'types' of soul, the philosopher-orator's task would then become manageable.⁴⁹

active participation and assent to each step of the argument – which make it his own argument as well – are essential to realizing the main goal of the dialogue, which is to *change* the participant."

⁴⁸Finding the mediation is precisely the first concern of the dialectician: *Phil.* 17a, *Symp.* 211c, *Resp.* 511b.

⁴⁹In a political context (*Republic*, *Statesman*, *Laws*), it seems that the philosopher-ruler will indeed need to address at least groups of people in the state. The theory of the three classes of the *Republic* would seem to make the task of the philosopher-king-rhetorician easier than it would be under the conception of rhetoric as addressing each individual in the crowd. No longer would it be necessary to address each individual, with differing individual psychologies: the philosopher-king could simply address the classes, knowing that he would be addressing the motivational structure of the various members of the state (for the workers in terms of their economic interests; for the soldiers, appealing to their sense of honour and shame; and in the case of his fellow rulers, to their reason). This could be the germ of the idea of the good kind of rhetoric developed in the *Phaedrus*. The three classes however, even in the *Republic*, do not define 'kinds of soul,' or of men; the nine kinds of embodiment of the soul given in the *Phaedrus* (248d–e) may provide a better starting point. Finally, for a brief presentation of the problem of rhetoric in the *Statesman*, see J. Poulakos, "Rhetoric and Political Leadership in Plato's *Statesman*," in K. J. Boudouris, ed., *Platonic Political Philosophy and Contemporary Democratic Theory* (Athens: International Center for Philosophy and Culture, 1997), vol. I, 154–161.