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PLATO ON RHETORIC AND RHETORICIANS

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THE honor of writing the greatest work in the field of Rhetoric has long been attributed to Aristotle. Welldon refers to the Rhetoric as "being perhaps a solitary instance of a book which not only begins a science, but completes it."¹ The importance of this work to all subsequent study of Rhetoric adds interest to its origin. It was not the first attempt to treat rhetoric systematically. Aristotle himself made a collection (now lost) of all the numerous treatises on Rhetoric which preceded his own.² In the first book of the *Topica* he says, while claiming originality for himself in the matter of the syllogism and other logical methods, that in rhetoric he had the help of many earlier writers.³ But it was not in imitation of the other rhetoricians he wrote. It was in protest against their incompleteness and their unscientific methods.⁴ The source of his ideas upon the subject, then, is not to be looked for among the current rhetorical treatises of the day. The references of his master Plato to rhetoric and rhetoricians are, for the most part, so contemptuous that it would not seem to have been a Platonic stimulus which produced the Rhetoric. But in the *Phaedrus*, while he keeps his earlier attitude toward the existing rhetoric, he does admit that there might be a genuine and useful rhetorical art, and he goes so far as to throw out suggestions which reappear as fully developed ideas in Aristotle's Rhetoric. Plato, then, assumes a position of importance in the history of rhetorical theory. It is the purpose of this study to present and evaluate Plato's theory of rhetoric and his attitude toward contemporary rhetoricians.

The *Phaedrus* contains within itself three speeches, and it is in a comparison of these speeches that Plato's ideas about

¹ Welldon. Trans. of Aristotle's Rhetoric. London 1886. Preface, p. vi. For other tributes to the Rhetoric see Jebb trans. Cambridge 1909, quotation from Copleston's Reply. p. facing Intro. Also Cope, An Introduction to Aristotle's Rhetoric. London 1867, Preface p. xi.

² Cope op. cit. p. i.

³ Grote. Aristotle. London 1872, vol. i, p. 378 ff.

⁴ Cope op. cit. Intro. p. x.

rhetoric are expressed. The three speeches are upon the general subject of Eros, Love. The speeches themselves form so large a portion of the dialogue, they present so many ideas of philosophic significance, that there has been great dispute as to what is the real subject of the dialogue. Some have asserted that love and immortality form the theme and that the discussion of rhetoric is only an afterthought. Others insist that the speeches are inserted merely to exemplify the principles of rhetoric; while still others say the emphasis is equally divided between the two.⁵ Whatever the truth of the matter, it will certainly be justifiable for the present purpose to treat the dialogue from the viewpoint of the student of rhetoric.

Thompson says the *Phaedrus* may fairly be described as "a dramatized treatise on rhetoric."⁶ The scene is under a plane tree, by the banks of the Illissus. The persons of the dialogue are Socrates and *Phaedrus*. *Phaedrus* has been spending the day with *Lysias*, a noted rhetor of the day, and has heard from him a pleasing speech in praise of surrender to the desires of a suitor who neither loves nor is loved.

The speech is typical of many written by rhetors and sophists of the day for the purpose of giving plausibility to a paradoxical thesis by the use of clever wit. Many contemporary parallels might be mentioned—the speech of *Polycrates In Praise of Mice*, his defence of the cruel tyrant *Busiris*, and the encomia on *Helen* written by *Gorgias* and by *Isocrates*.⁷ It is such a speech as would delight the heart of *Bernard Shaw*. It is described by *Jowett* as a speech consisting in "a foolish paradox, which is to the effect that the non-lover ought to be accepted rather than the lover—because he is more rational, more agreeable, more enduring, less suspicious, less hurtful, less engrossing, and because there are more of them from which to choose." In other words, by dwelling upon the well-known irrationality and selfish capriciousness of lovers the suit of a temperate friend is made to seem

⁵ On the subject-matter of the *Phaedrus* cf. W. H. Thompson's edition of the *Phaedrus*. London 1868. Intro. p. xiii and xv. *Lutoslawski*, *Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic*, London 1897 p. 326. *Jowett*, Intro. to his translation of the *Phaedrus*. Grote, *Plato*, London 1888, vol. 3, p. 1.

⁶ There has been much scholarly dispute as to the authenticity of this speech of *Lysias*. For arguments *pro* cf. *Lutoslawski*, *Op. Cit.* p. 327 n. Also *Gomperz*, *Greek Thinkers*, N. Y. 1905, vol. 3, p. 16. For arguments *con* see *Jowett's* introduction to the dialogue.

⁷ *Jebb*, *Attic Orators*. London 1893, Vol 2, p. 91f.

more desirable. This speech is read by Phaedrus, who is captivated by its beauty, to Socrates. He asks Socrates if any Hellene could have said more or spoken better on the same subject. Socrates is not so pleased with the speech. Admitting that Lysias has not altogether missed the mark, he says "the worst of authors will say something that is to the point."⁸ Socrates offers immediately to compose another and better speech upon the same subject. Veiling his face as a sign of inward dissent he speaks. He denounces surrender to a lover and describes eloquently the evils of passion. But as he comes to the point where Phaedrus expects him to praise surrender to the non-lover he breaks off abruptly. He is about to depart when he pauses and says, "the usual sign was given to me; that is the sign which never bids but always forbids me to do what I am going to do; and I thought I heard a voice saying in my ear that I had been guilty of an impiety and that I must not go until I had made an atonement."⁹ Socrates therefore makes another speech, this time in praise of love. In this speech, which becomes mystical in its exaltation, Plato reaches the heights of his eloquence. No dialogue surpasses it for poetic imagery. Its philosophical significance is here passed over. At its close Phaedrus expresses his admiring approval; he fears that Lysias could not produce anything so good, and that if he were to attempt it he would give up writing altogether, for he has already been reproached for his speech writing. Socrates says it is not writing speeches, but writing them badly that is disgraceful. This opens the way for a discussion of the entire practice of speaking and writing.

The first rule of good speaking, Socrates asserts, is that "the mind of the speaker should know the truth of what he is going to say. . . . There never is nor ever will be a real art of speaking which is unconnected with the truth."¹⁰ This rule of Socrates is contrasted with the prevalent conception of rhetoric. Rhetoric is usually considered to be "an art of enchanting the mind by arguments"; it has no concern with the nature of truth or justice, but only with opinions about them. Rhetoric draws

⁸ Phaedrus 235. The references to dialogues are to Jowett's trans. and (Stephen's edition).

⁹ Phaedrus 242.

¹⁰ Phaedrus 259.

its persuasive power, not from truth, but from harmony with public opinion, "he who is practised in this art will make the same thing appear to the same persons to be at one time just and at another time unjust, if he has a mind."¹¹ This conception of rhetoric, however, Plato thinks is inadequate. The objection is not, as has been sometimes stated, from high moral motives. In the *Gorgias* and elsewhere it is stated that the genuine rhetorician must be a true and just man. And from many sources we know how Plato abhorred the "lie in the soul." But here the ground is simple expediency. The art of persuasion is the art of winning the mind by resemblances. The speaker goes by degrees from that which is accepted to that which he wishes accepted, proceeding from one resemblance to another. If the difference between the two resemblances is small there is a large opportunity for making the audience believe that one is the other. "He then who would deceive others, and not be deceived, must exactly know the real likenesses and differences of things. . . . He who being ignorant of the truth catches at appearances will only attain an art of rhetoric which is ridiculous and is not an art at all. . . . He who would be a master of the art must know the real nature of everything; or he will never know either how to contrive or how to escape the gradual departure from truth into the opposite of truth which is effected by the help of resemblances."¹²

To this rule that the "mind of the speaker should know the truth of what he is going to say," and not "catch at appearances," the modern student of rhetoric will be inclined to give immediate assent as to a commonplace. But it has a larger and deeper meaning for Plato. It is Truth spelled with a capital T. It is not mere accuracy in the use of statistics, care in quoting history, fairness in the selection of examples. These things may be done by tradesmen. A knowledge of Truth is reserved for philosophers. All others dwell, to refer to his famous figure, in a darkened cave.¹³ The moving figures they behold are not realities; they are shadows, phantoms. Only the philosopher has ascended into the clear light of day. Only he has beheld the Ideas in their Absolute form. Only he it is who is able to "see

¹¹ *Phaedrus* 261.

¹² *Phaedrus* 262.

¹³ *Republic* Book, vii p. 515.

unity and plurality in nature." Only he knows Truth. Hence the exclamation of Socrates, "Come out, children of my soul, and convince Phaedrus, who is the father of similar beauties, that he will never be able to speak about anything unless he be trained in philosophy."¹⁴

These Platonic ideas are not new to Phaedrus, and no time is wasted in explaining them. Having secured acceptance of this first rule of good speaking, Socrates proceeds to lay down two corollaries. First, in concrete, physical realities such as iron and silver, misunderstandings about meanings seldom arise. But in discussions of justice and goodness there is every sort of disagreement. Rhetoric has greater power in dealing with discussions where men disagree and are most likely to be deceived. The rhetorician ought therefore to make a regular division and acquire a distinct notion of both classes. Secondly, he must develop a keen eye for observation of particulars in speaking, and not make a mistake about the class to which his subjects are referred. In other words, whatever belongs to the debatable class must be carefully defined.

A lack of any definition of the subject of love is the first criticism of the speech of Lysias. This is particularly reprehensible as love is used in two different senses. Socrates however, was careful in both speeches to start from a definition of the love he was treating. Again, there is no principle of order in the speech of Lysias. He is accused of beginning at the end, and his topics follow one another in a random fashion. "I cannot help fancying that he wrote off freely just what came into his head." . . . Every discourse ought to be a living creature, having its own body and head and feet: there ought to be a middle, beginning, and end, which are in a manner agreeable to one another and to the whole."¹⁵

From this study of the speeches two fundamental principles of composition emerge. "First, the comprehension of scattered particulars in one idea; the speaker defines his several notions in order that he may make his meaning clear. . . . Secondly, there is the faculty of division according to the natural ideas or members, not breaking any part as a bad carver might."¹⁶

¹⁴ Phaedrus 261.

¹⁵ Phaedrus 264.

¹⁶ Phaedrus 265.

But these processes of generalization and division, which the speech of the famous rhetorician failed to employ, are principles that Socrates has hitherto held to belong to dialectic, and not to rhetoric. "I am a great lover of these processes of division and generalization; they help me to speak and think. And if I find any man who is able to see unity and plurality in nature, him I follow, and walk in his steps as if he were a god. And those who have this are, I have hitherto been in the habit of calling dialecticians."¹⁷

Phaedrus acknowledges that these principles rightly belong to the dialecticians, but persists in inquiring about the principles of rhetoric and mentions a number of prominent rhetoricians together with the characteristic elements of their systems. Socrates admits that in addition to these really fundamental principles of composition to be found in dialectic there may be found in rhetoric some "niceties of the art." These theories and practices of the rhetoricians, however, are not really principles of the art of rhetoric. They are mere preliminaries, as the tuning of strings is preliminary to playing upon an instrument. But no one would call the tuning of strings the art of music. The contemporary rhetoricians have no more real claim to be practitioners of the art than a man who knows a few drugs but does not know how or when to use them, could claim to be a physician. Since all these teachings of the rhetoricians are not true principles of the art and are altogether useless except when used in conjunction with the principles of dialectic, Socrates proceeds to give what might be called an outline sketch of a true art of rhetoric.

"Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul, and therefore he who would be an orator has to learn the differences of human souls—they are of so many and of such a nature, and from them come the differences between man and man. He will then proceed to divide speeches into their different classes. Such and such persons, he will say, are affected by this or that kind of speech in this or that way, and he will tell you why; he must have a theoretical notion of them first, and then he must see them in action, and be able to follow them with all his senses about him, or he will never get beyond the precepts of his masters.

¹⁷ Phaedrus 266.

But when he is able to say what persons are persuaded by what arguments and recognize the individual about whom he used to theorize as actually present to himself, This is he and this is the sort of man who ought to have that argument applied to him in order to convince him of this; when he has attained the knowledge of all this, and knows also when he should speak and when he should abstain from speaking, when he should make use of pithy sayings, pathetic appeals, aggravated effects, and all the other figures of speech, when, I say, he knows the times and seasons of all these things, then, and not until then is he perfect and a consummate master of his art."¹⁸

The three books of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* are virtually an expanded *Phaedrus*. He accepts the view that the speaker must first acquaint himself with human nature and he agrees with Plato in condemning as unscientific the Arts of Rhetoric which were so numerous at this time. His first book contains a classification of the different modes of producing persuasion. The second book contains (1) an analysis of the affections of which the human nature is susceptible, and of the causes by which such affections are called forth: (2) a descriptive catalogue of the modifications of human character, and the sort of arguments adapted to each.¹⁹

There are, however, two important differences between the theories of Plato and Aristotle that should not be overlooked. In the first place, Plato's metaphysical demand that the speaker should know Truth would only be recognized by a believer in his doctrine of Ideas, or some similar philosophic creed. Aristotle, who in so great a measure followed the program of his master, was little troubled by this requirement. He frankly limited

¹⁸ *Phaedrus* 271.

¹⁹ Lutoslawski, op. cit. p. 344, confirms this view of the correspondence between the *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. He says: "This clear program of a future rhetoric has been so exactly followed up by Aristotle in his work on the same subject that probably Plato's special teaching on the matter is preserved in his pupil's exposition. Plato himself left no written system of rhetoric, because he did not write for the purpose of teaching, but for artistic reminiscence, or in order to refute the enemies of philosophy. Systematic teaching was probably given by Plato to his pupils, and transmitted to them to following generations in the Academy. But he appears not to have thought it a convenient subject for written exposition. . . . Aristotle wrote four or five times more copiously than Plato, and this implies a great difference of views about the use of writing. It is clear that many things written out by Aristotle were not held by Plato as fit for literary representation."

rhetoric to the realm of opinion, and admits that most of its premises are not more than probabilities. Even dialectic, so sacred to Plato for the contemplation of Ideas is considered a counterpart of rhetoric and given a place with it in the realm of opinion, founding its propositions largely on probabilities. Truth with a capital T is absorbed by Aristotle into a new division of thought, the realm of science. In place of Plato's contrast between dialectic, knowledge and Truth on the one hand, and rhetoric, opinion and error on the other, we have science based upon unquestioned first principles and employing a rigidly logical method invented by Aristotle opposed to rhetoric and dialectic, which reason as accurately as possible upon all matters where specialized scientific knowledge is not available. In Aristotle, then, neither the dialectician nor the rhetorician are primarily concerned with the discovery of anything approaching absolute Truth. Truth, says Aristotle, is stronger and will naturally prevail, and one of the purposes of rhetoric is to strengthen her. But he freely admits that the dialectician and rhetorician deal largely with probabilities, and that they may be indifferent to truth.

A second difference between Plato and Aristotle is in regard to the art of writing. While Aristotle admits Plato's views of the subordinate relation of rhetoric to dialectic and of the necessity of a thorough dialectical training to the future orator, he nevertheless adds to his two books covering the ground outlined by Plato, a third book on style of writing. He thus emphasizes its importance: "It is not enough to know what to say but it is also necessary to know how to say it, and the art of saying things is largely influential in imparting a certain color to the speech."²⁰

In the *Phaedrus*, however, after the essentially dialectical part of rhetorical theory is stated, the rest is dismissed. Socrates, after stating that enough has been said of the true and false art of speaking, admits that there is something yet to be said of propriety and impropriety of writing. But he speaks of writing only to condemn the practice.²¹

²⁰ Welldon's trans. of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Book 3, chap. 1.

²¹ Scholars have commented variously and at length on this attitude of Plato toward the art of writing. Schleirmacher (quoted by Lutoslawski, p. 340) argues from this attitude that the *Phaedrus* was written in Plato's early

Concerning the invention of letters he cites a myth in which the prophecy is made that "this invention of yours will create forgetfulness in the learner's souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. You have found a specific, not for memory, but for reminiscence, and you will give your disciples only the pretense of wisdom; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will be tiresome, having the reputation of knowledge without the reality."²² Another objection to writing is, "writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence."²³ And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know any-

youth. Such contempt for writing, he thinks, is unthinkable in a man who has already written very much. Lutoslawski, however, insists that Plato does not despise writing in general, but only bad writing, and the cult of mere literary erudition which substitutes opinion for knowledge, and leads men to spend all their attention on the form, making it impossible for such mechanical writers to have a clear view of general ideas. He has an ingenious explanation of the passages which at the close of so wonderful a bit of writing seem to condemn writing. In Plato's time, and in his own opinion, oral teaching stood much higher than written handbooks. Plato was very proud of his own eloquence. The purpose of these passages, therefore, is to raise the reader's expectation to the highest pitch by announcing that this beautiful sample of written eloquence is nothing compared with his oral teaching.

A different view is taken by S. H. Butcher in an essay upon "The Written and Spoken Word" found in his volume "Some Aspects of the Greek Genius," London 1893. He quotes from the *Phaedrus* in proving that the Greek dislike for writing was general. In further proof of this thesis he offers arguments which may be summarized as follows: (1) The Greeks, the most keen witted and original people of antiquity, gave a very cold reception to the discovery of letters. For centuries they employed it, not as a vehicle of thought, but almost wholly for memorial purposes, such as registering treaties and commercial contracts, preserving the names of Olympic victors, and fixing boundaries. Even after writing had come into general use, the Greeks still thought of it as imported from abroad and spoke of the alphabet as "Phoenician symbols," (2) They shrank from formulæ, unvarying rules petrified action. To reduce laws to writing was to kill the spirit and exalt the letter. (3) Writing was inartistic, as the letters conveyed no images. (4) The Greeks had a high conception of the dignity of knowledge. True knowledge is not among the marketable wares, that can be carried about in a portable shape in books, and emptied from them into the mind of the learner. True knowledge is a hard-won possession, personal and inalienable. It is not mere acquisition, but mental enlargement, inward illumination. "Much learning does not teach wisdom" was a saying of Heraclitus, and even Aristotle declared that "much learning produces much confusion."

For a further account of Plato's aversion to writing, cf. Grote, *Plato*, vol. 1, p. 358.

²² *Phaedrus* 275.

²³ Typical of Plato's attitude toward art.

thing and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down they are tossed about anywhere among those who do not understand them. And they have no reticences or proprieties towards different classes of persons; and, if they are unjustly abused, their parent is needed to protect his offspring, for they cannot protect or defend themselves."²⁴

The philosopher then, "will not seriously incline to write his thoughts in water with pen and ink, or in dumb characters which have not a word to say for themselves and cannot adequately express the truth. . . . In the garden of letters he will plant them only as an amusement, or he will write them down as memorials against the forgetfulness of old age, to be treasured by him and his equals when they, like him, have one foot in the grave."²⁵

Contrasted with this futility of writing is "an intelligent writing which is graven in the soul of him who has learned, and can defend itself, and knows when to speak and when to be silent." This expression of opinion about writing concludes Plato's theory of rhetoric as found in the *Phaedrus*.

From this exposition of the *Phaedrus* and from a comparison of it with Aristotle, then, we may summarize Plato's theory of rhetoric as follows:

1. The mind of the speaker should know the truth of what he is going to say.
2. The rhetorician must classify his subjects with reference to their definitions and as to the possibility of debate upon them.
3. He must introduce a principle of order in presenting his topics.
4. He must see unity and plurality in nature so that he can classify particulars under a general head or break up universals into particulars. He must therefore be a philosopher.
5. He must show the nature of the soul.
6. He must speak of the instruments by which the soul is affected in any way.
7. After having classified souls and speeches, he must point out the connection between them, showing why one is persuaded by one kind of argument and another not.

²⁴ *Phaedrus* 275.

²⁵ *Phaedrus* 276.

8. He will think little of the art of writing.

We turn now from the theory of rhetoric held by Plato to a further development of his already expressed attitude toward contemporary rhetoricians and their theories. In the conclusion of the *Phaedrus* there is a reference to a rhetorician of his day which has more significance than at first appears. Having ended their discussion upon Rhetoric, Socrates and *Phaedrus* agree to impart their conclusions to *Lysias* and *Isocrates*. Of the latter Socrates says, "*Isocrates* is still young, *Phaedrus*; but I am willing to risk a prophecy concerning him. . . . I think that he has a genius which soars above the orations of *Lysias*, and he has a character of a finer mould. My impression of him is that he will marvelously improve as he grows older, and that all former rhetoricians will be as children in comparison of him. And I believe that he will not be satisfied with this, but that some divine impulse will lead him to things higher still. For there is an element of philosophy in his nature."

²⁶

Isocrates was the most prominent rhetorician of his day. In his youth he followed the common practice of writing forensic speeches for clients, but he outgrew this, and later repeatedly expressed his contempt for all such activity.²⁷ For his teaching he claimed the title of "philosophy." He has been much criticised for this, but it did not represent so much arrogance as has been attributed to him, for the term was then used very loosely.²⁸ This philosophy was the art of speaking and writing on large political subjects considered as a preparation for advising or acting in political affairs.²⁹ He wrote against the "vulgar sophists," attacking them for their fallacious disputations and their concern with petty affairs. He also attacked—under the name of sophists—*Plato* and *Aristotle*, as vain speculators about useless matters.³⁰ In the "*Helenae Encomium*" he says, "It is much better to form probable opinions about useful things than to have an expert knowledge of useless things." In the speech "*On the Antidosis*," "Since it is impossible for human nature to acquire any science by which we should know what to do or say,

²⁶ *Phaedrus* 279.

²⁷ *Jebb. Attic Orators*. London 1893, vol. 2, p. 7.

²⁸ *Jebb. op. cit.*, p. 35.

²⁹ *Jebb. op. cit.*, p. 38.

³⁰ *Jebb. op. cit.*, p. 39.

in the next resort I deem those wise who, as a rule, can hit what is best by their opinions; and I call those men philosophers who give themselves to studies by which they will soonest acquire practical wisdom."³¹ This contrast between scientific knowledge and opinion is just the issue between Plato and Isocrates. Plato in numerous places also contrasts knowledge and opinion. For him public opinion is entirely worthless.³² Even opinion which is true falls short of knowledge, for knowledge and opinion are entirely different faculties with different subject-matter.³³ The difference is so wrapped up in Plato's doctrine of Ideas that it is a point upon which he would insist with greatest vehemence.³⁴ It is not strange, therefore, that the relations between Plato and Isocrates were not altogether friendly. The supposed allusions of Plato to Isocrates prove his regret—sometimes expressed with sarcasm—that so much ability and industry should have been lost to the search for knowledge. The references of Isocrates to Plato show vanity and petulance. While they do not justify the hypothesis of a serious feud they show that an inner harmony or friendship was impossible between the two men.³⁵

The tone of the reference to Isocrates at the close of the *Phaedrus* has been explained in various ways. The most generally accepted chronology of the *Phaedrus* indicates that it was written long after the death of Socrates and when both Plato and Isocrates were mature men.³⁶ Isocrates was seven years older than Plato, and had been intimate with Socrates in his youth.³⁷ Plato's repetition of this prophecy of Socrates so many years after, when it was evident that it would not be fulfilled, has been interpreted by Lutoslawski to be an ironic invitation to Isocrates to learn true philosophy,³⁸ as Lysias is told to do.³⁹ Grote explains it by saying that the publication of the *Phaedrus*

³¹ Citations from Isocrates, quoted by Jebb. *op. cit.* p. 49.

³² *Crito* 42, 48. *Republic* 493.

³³ *Republic*, 478.

³⁴ For the spheres of knowledge and opinion in relation to the doctrine of ideas, cf. *Republic*, 510-11.

³⁵ Jebb. *op. cit.* p. 50.

³⁶ Lutoslawski *op. cit.*, 352; Thompson *op. cit.* Intro. xxiii. Grote, *Plato*, vol. 3, p. 38.

³⁷ Jebb. *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁸ Lutoslawski, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

³⁹ *Phaedrus*, p. 257.

was likely to bring upon Plato a good deal of enmity since it attacked, by name, both Lysias, a resident at Athens of great influence and ability, and several other contemporary rhetors more or less celebrated. Plato was therefore disposed to lighten this amount of enmity by a compliment paid to Isocrates.⁴⁰ He was the more disposed to do this since Isocrates occupied a sort of middle ground between the rhetoric of Lysias and the dialectic of Plato. Plato's opinion of Isocrates was shared by Aristotle. Aristotle was so irritated by the number, quality and success of the pupils of Isocrates that he changed his whole system of teaching. "He said that it was disgraceful for him to be silent while he allowed Isocrates to speak. He therefore adorned and illustrated all his philosophical learning, and associated the knowledge of things with practice in speaking."⁴¹

If Plato and Aristotle, considering themselves philosophers, and largely agreed in their views of rhetoric, despised Isocrates, whose teaching was distinguished from the other rhetoricians by largeness of view, elevation of moral tone, thoroughness of method, and desire for permanent results,⁴² it is not difficult to anticipate what Plato's relations with the other rhetoricians would prove to be, particularly when we remember that Plato was much more of a haughty and uncompromising idealist than Aristotle.

In many of the dialogues Plato's contempt for the rhetoricians is much more marked than in the *Phaedrus*. The *Euthydemus*, a dialogue which in dramatic vivacity and comic force approaches the *Clouds* of Aristophanes ridicules the sophists and rhetoricians as effectively as Aristophanes ridiculed Socrates. Its purpose seems to be to make clear to the popular mind, incensed by Aristophanes and the comedians against all speculative thought or disputation, the difference between the discussions of the philosophers and those of the rhetoricians. The *Gorgias* gives a much more complete account of Plato's view of contemporary rhetoric than the *Phaedrus*. But here there is no contrast between a true and a false rhetoric. Rhetoric is condemned utterly, and with the public strife of the rhetoricians there is eloquently contrasted the life of the philosopher who desires

⁴⁰ Grote. op. cit., vol. 3, p. 35.

⁴¹ Cicero-De Oratore. Translated by J. S. Watson. London 1909. Bk. 3, Chap. 35.

⁴² Jebb. op. cit., p. 40 ff.

only to know the truth, to live as well as he can, and when the time comes, to die.⁴³

Indeed, what seems a condemnation in the *Phaedrus* is so much milder than Plato's earlier remarks that scholars have been at pains to explain it. Gomperz says, "In the *Phaedrus* we have a reconsideration of the same question which, in the *Gorgias* was disposed of by a passionately hostile verdict. This time, the wholesale condemnation of rhetoric is not repeated. What the judicious critic of the earlier dialogue says to himself today, Plato said to himself in the interval between the composition of the two works."⁴⁴ Lutoslawski offers what seems to be a rational explanation of the change in attitude. "In the preceding dialogues we have seen Plato rising to the highest principles of knowledge without any attempt to reason about the best way of imparting them, except the few precepts given in the *Republic*. He tacitly assumed that any one possessing knowledge can impart it to others, if they are able to receive it. We may suppose that Plato attracted chiefly very gifted pupils, and to begin with he had such a great power of teaching that he felt no need of rhetorical artifice. His eloquence, which we admire even in such early dialogues as the *Apology*, was the natural outburst of his genius progressing spontaneously from the *Apology* to the *Gorgias*, from *Gorgias* to *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and the dialectical books of the *Republic*, apparently without effort or study. This explains why he so contemptuously defined rhetoric in the *Gorgias* as a kind of flattery, and why he condemned tragic poetry in the *Republic* as an imitation. His first opportunity for noticing the usefulness of some rhetorical artifice must have arisen at a time when his pupils began to teach, and he first observed that some of them, with all the knowledge inherited from the Master, were less capable of imparting it than others. Their deficiencies may have led Plato to some reflections on Rhetoric, which he embodies in the *Phaedrus*."⁴⁵

An examination of Plato's utterances on rhetoric and rhetoricians, then, proves that throughout his whole life he regarded with contempt and disdain all contemporary rhetoricians and theories of rhetoric. Only in later years did he come to admit

⁴³ *Gorgias*, 526. For a similar contrast of *Theaetetus*, 173.

⁴⁴ Gomperz, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Lutoslawski, *op. cit.* p. 326.

that there might be a genuine art of rhetoric. Even then he insists that it must be very different from anything hitherto known.

When we attempt to account for this attitude of Plato's, the first consideration is, of course, the difference between his theory and that of his contemporaries. Certainly the sketch in the *Phaedrus* is a noble ideal and not to be compared with the rule of thumb methods then in vogue. Its conception of the office of the rhetor is lofty. And a more general acceptance of some similar theory would have done much to elevate the political life of Athens. And yet as a standard of judgment, such an ideal would in any age lead to disappointment not less bitter than Plato's.

His demand for a complete knowledge of truth, even when divested of all metaphysics, and considered in the aspect it wears to practical men, seems a large requirement. Certainly it is not Socratic. Socrates, who went about convicting of ignorance men who spoke so confidently never laid claim to a higher state of knowledge than a consciousness of his own ignorance. A large part of the Platonic dialogues reach no conclusion upon the subjects of their search. If Socrates and Plato knew so little truth it is a discouraging requirement to demand that the speaker shall know the truth of all matters upon which he speaks. A speaker who realizes that he is in the realm of opinion and therefore liable to error may in the end attain more truth than one who solves everything by immediate reference to eternal, immutable and infallible principles.

The psychological demands of the theory are little short of appalling. Even in Aristotle's day, with the limited psychological data of the time, it was an almost impossible aspiration. Those whose hopes of progress in Public speaking are based upon psychology will enjoy Plato's approval of their efforts. But even they, however much they may specialize, will hardly claim to have attained unto the Platonic ideal.

To judge by such an ideal standard the rhetoricians, practical men, who lived in a world where political assemblies must determine policies, where decisions must be made, wars waged, taxes raised, laws passed, states governed, would be to invite pessimism and condemnation. Whatever may have been the

facts in the case concerning the rhetors or sophists,⁴⁶ a knowledge of Plato's viewpoint should put us on our guard against placing too much confidence in his pronouncements. But in addition to the standards which Plato laid down for the judgment of rhetoric, there are other factors which further tend to invalidate Plato's criticisms.

Plato was the most unGreek of the Greeks.⁴⁷ His own experiences both in Syracuse and Athens had given him a profound distrust of Democracy. For Athenian politics he had only contempt. A passage from the *Theaetetus* illustrates this. After an account of the life of the lawyer and the practical man he says he will describe the real leaders, for there is no use in talking about the interior sort. "In the first place, the lords of philosophy have never, from their youth upwards, known their way to the Agora, or the dicastery, or the council, or any other political assembly; they neither see nor hear the laws of the state written or spoken; the eagerness of political societies in the attainment of offices, clubs, and banquets and singing maidens, do not enter even into their dreams. Whether any event has turned out well or ill in the city, what disgrace may have descended to any one from his ancestors, male or female, are matters which the philosopher no more knews than he can tell, as they say, how many pints are contained in the ocean. Neither is he conscious of his ignorance. For he does not hold aloof in order that he may gain a reputation; but the truth is, that the outer form of him only is in the city; his mind, disdaining the littleness and nothingnesses of human things is 'flying all abroad,' as Pindar says, measuring with line and rule the things which are under and on the earth and above the heaven, interrogating the whole

⁴⁶ The term Sophist was applied by Plato to both dialecticians and rhetoricians. The dialecticians devoted themselves largely to speculative matters, either ethical or metaphysical. They spoke before small groups and employed the question and answer of the dialogue rather than the continuous speech. The rhetoricians employed the same methods of reasoning, but took public affairs and civil and criminal trials as their subject-matter. They used long speeches rather than question and answer. Since each at times performed the functions of the other, and since most of the sophists mentioned in Plato's dialogues were rhetoricians, the terms sophist and rhetorician are used interchangeably in this paper.

⁴⁷ Livingstone. *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to Us*. Oxford, 1912. Chap. 7.

nature of each and all, but not condescending to anything which is within reach."⁴⁸

In the *Gorgias* Plato asserts that "no one has ever shown himself a good statesman in this state."⁴⁹ He condemns in sweeping fashion all the practical pursuits of the city.⁵⁰ But it is not only in the condemnations of Athens that we see the bias of his mind. In the *Republic* and the *Laws* are descriptions of states after his own heart. Here he reveals to an even greater extent how unGreek he was. Liberty had always been an ideal of the Greeks. But Plato's ideal throughout these works is the wise but "despotic lawgiver and man trainer, wielding the compulsory force of the secular arm for what he believes to be spiritual improvement."⁵¹ In the *Republic* poets are to be banished and existing literature expurgated that no harmful doctrines may be taught.⁵² In the laws ethical and theological dogmas are to be enforced upon the people with rigorous penalties.⁵³ Foreign travel is forbidden to any one less than forty years of age.⁵⁴

The Greeks were the great humanists. They centered their attention upon the joys of this world.

Your gay religions knew no sadness:
They banished each austere emotion;
What bosom could but throb with gladness,
When gladness was the best devotion?
Whate'er was sacred then was fair;
No pleasure feared the eye of God
Where roamed the blushing Muses, where
The Graces still abode.⁵⁵

But for Plato, experience was illusion. All his values were in the other world. Love was praised because it was a reminder of the Absolute Beauty and was a stimulus to the contemplation of all the Ideas.⁵⁶ This is far from Sappho and Sophocles. The body, a source of delight to the Greeks, was for Plato the prison

⁴⁸ *Theaetetus*, 173.

⁴⁹ *Gorgias*, 517.

⁵⁰ *Gorgias*, 518 ff.

⁵¹ Grote. *Plato*. vol. 2, p. 363.

⁵² *Republic*, Bk. v.

⁵³ *Laws*. 662 ff., 885.

⁵⁴ *Laws*, 950.

⁵⁵ John Brown Patterson's translation of Schiller's *Gods of Greece*.

⁵⁶ *Phaedrus*, 255 ff., *Symposium*, 210 ff.

house of the soul. The soul, indeed, is hard to recognize; it is marred by communion with the body and other miseries, disfigured by ten thousand ills.⁶⁷ It is not strange that Neo-Platonism should become the philosophy of the early Christians, and that it should be one of the sources of a movement which almost banished art from the world for a thousand years.

Such was the viewpoint of the man who sat in judgment upon the rhetoricians. Such was the philosophy that colored the accounts which have been so influential in fixing our opinions of the sophists. For it is upon Plato that the responsibility largely rests for the meaning of the term sophist. It had no such meaning in his own day. "A sophist, in the genuine sense of the word, was a wise man—a clever man—one who stood prominently before the public as distinguished for intellect or talent of some, kind. Thus Solon and Pythagoran are both called Sophists: Thamyras the skilful bard is called a sophist: Socrates is so denominated, not merely by Aristophanes, but by Aeschines: Timon, who bitterly satirized all the philosophers, designated them all, including Plato and Aristotle, by the general name of sophists. In this large and comprehensive sense the word was originally used, and always continued to be so understood among the general public. But along with this idea, the title sophist also carried with it or connoted a certain invidious feeling. The natural temper of a people generally ignorant toward superior intellect—the same temper which led to those charges of magic so frequent in the middle ages—appears to be a union of admiration with something of an unfavorable sentiment—dislike or apprehension, as the case may be, unless the latter element has become neutralized by habitual respect for an established profession or station. . . . The one characteristic peculiar to themselves whereby they drew upon themselves a double measure of that invidious sentiment which lay wrapped up in the name, was that they taught for pay. Of course the eminent taught only the rich, and earned large sums, a fact naturally provocative of envy. . . . Socrates and Plato, though superior to any such envy, cherished a genuine and vehement repugnance against receiving pay for teaching. . . . Plato therefore considered the name sophist, denoting intellectual celebrity combined with an odious association, as preëminently suitable to the leading

⁶⁷ Republic, 611.

teachers for pay. The splendid genius, the lasting influence, and the reiterated polemics of Plato have stamped it upon the men against whom we wrote as if it were their recognized, legitimate and peculiar designation. . . . Moreover, Plato not only stole the name out of general circulation in order to fasten it especially upon his opponents the paid teachers, but also connected with it express discreditable attributes, which formed no part of its primitive and recognized meaning."⁵⁸

Plato, then, used the term sophist to apply to men with whose disputes he had no sympathy. Yet his dialogue, *The Sophist*, written to caricature the sophists and their methods, is a faithful portrayal of the logical methods of Socrates.⁵⁹ The difference is, he approved of the purpose and subject-matter of Socrates. Therefore he approved of his logical method. But when other men, whose subject-matter and purposes did not meet with his approval, used the same method—or one very similar—he seeks to condemn the method along with the men.

By one of the curious ironies of history, in the instances where the sophists did enter into metaphysical discussions, discussions Plato would have understood and appreciated, they have been so misinterpreted that their philosophy has only served to make them ridiculous to the rest of the world. Gorgias, the sophist and rhetorician, is quoted in an introductory note to one of his speeches⁶⁰ as teaching "that there is nothing that has any real existence; even if anything did really exist, it could not be known; and supposing real existence to be knowable, this knowledge could not be communicated." This statement is often quoted to show how ridiculous the sophists were. But when one understands that Gorgias by "real existence" was referring to the metaphysical One or Ens or Absolute of Parmenides, a doctrine similar to Plato's Ideas, the denial is not so ridiculous⁶¹. The paradoxes of Zeno are often quoted to show how willing the sophists were to contradict facts very evident to the senses of all men in order to display a little clever reasoning. These paradoxes were not contradictions of the senses, they were para-

⁵⁸ Grote. History of Greece, vol. 8, p. 479 ff.

⁵⁹ Grote. Plato., vol. 3, p. 216.

⁶⁰ Library of Oratory. Depew. New York, 1902., vol. 1, p. 12.

⁶¹ Grote. Plato, vol. 1, p. 103.

doxes to show the logical difficulties consequent upon accepting the philosophy of Heraclitus.⁶²

The sophists are not the only ones who have been ridiculed because their arguments have not been understood. Any argument the outcome of which does not interest us is very likely to be an "idle disputation"—to us. Because the attention of the world has been drawn away from the metaphysical problems that occupied the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries we hold up to ridicule their arguments over the power of God to make two hills without an intervening valley, and over the number of angels that could stand upon the point of a needle. These questions are but concrete statements of profound problems that concern the relation of the finite to the infinite. But having lost interest in the problems to which they brought such keen minds, we discredit all their logic, and attach the same contempt to the term scholastic dialectician that has come to accompany the terms sophist and rhetorician.

It is evident, then, that the commonly accepted historical interpretation of the activities of the sophists is in need of revision, and that we cannot place too much confidence in the pictures of the wonderful Platonic dialogues, in which Socrates as a philosopher and holy man is contrasted with the ignorant imposters, corrupters and self-seekers whom Plato calls sophists and rhetoricians.

The thesis that Plato's account of the rhetoricians is not altogether trustworthy has not yet in this study been supported by an actual historical study of the lives and teachings of the rhetoricians themselves. While that is necessary to complete the proof the limitations of this article make it necessary to state briefly the conclusions of Grote in his classic chapter. The rhetoricians were practical men, educating young men for practical life as it was then lived in Athens. They had as great a contempt⁶³ for speculative thought as Plato had for practical activity. They accepted for the most part without question the current moral and ethical standards of the day, and by them

⁶² Grote. *Plato*, vol. 1, p. 98 ff.

⁶³ Callicles in the *Gorgias* says "Philosophy, if pursued in moderation and at the proper age, is an elegant accomplishment, but too much philosophy is the ruin of human life. . . . Philosophers, when they betake themselves to politics or business are as ridiculous as the politicians when they make their appearance in the arena of philosophy." *Gorgias*, 484.

sought to guide their students in practical life. Had they done otherwise they could never have become so popular or have had so many wealthy pupils. The teachings of the particular men who roused Plato's wrath have no marked or generic difference from the educational practices of their predecessors. They put, perhaps, more emphasis upon public speaking; but this was natural, as Athenian history had served to emphasize its rewards. They may have placed undue emphasis upon success in public life, and may have justified Plato in feeling toward them much as many modern Professors of Philosophy feel toward Aldermen or Congressmen. In that their teaching was essentially practical and applied, there was perhaps as much reason for treating them with contempt as a teacher of pure science has for feeling superior to a professor of engineering. The same antithesis, if not antagonism, has always existed between theory and practice.

To summarize the results of this study of Plato on Rhetoric and Rhetoricians: Plato in his earlier years despised both rhetoric and rhetoricians. His own abundant genius made rhetorical artifice entirely unnecessary. Later he came to see some possibility in rhetoric, and he outlined a theory of it in the *Phaedrus*. This sketch is only an outline, but there is some reason for thinking that he may have given a more systematic and detailed instruction. The outline was followed by Aristotle when he came to write his rhetoric. The theory as set forth in the *Phaedrus* may be accepted as a noble ideal, but no one up to that time had appeared who could approach its requirements. With the advancement of learning the theory recedes even farther into the realm of ideals. As a standard for judging his contemporaries it is so high that its use results in a very unfair account. It is as much too broad a view of rhetoric as theirs was too narrow. His account of the rhetoricians is prejudiced by several other factors. Plato was not a typical Greek in politics or religion. He had little sympathy with the Athenian state and judged nothing in it by its own standards. The unfavorable connotation of the terms *sophist* and *rhetorician* as applied to his contemporaries is largely due to the literary power with which he expressed his prejudices. For a complete understanding of the Greek study of and love for rhetoric, we must seek other sources.