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Introduction

Dialogue has suffered a long eclipse in the history of rhetoric and in the history of philosophy. Socrates, its most important early practitioner, left no writings of his own, and his voice has become inextricably merged with the writings of Plato. As a consequence, Socratic dialogue has become little more than a precursor to the dialectic and rhetoric of Plato and Aristotle, and Socratic questioning has come to be seen as a search for answers—a quest for universal definitions that set philosophy and science on a fruitless search for truth.¹ In traditional readings of the early history of rhetoric, the Socrates of early Platonic dialogues such as the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* is a practitioner of a dialectical/dialogical method that becomes transformed into the dialectical rhetoric of the *Phaedrus* and the philosophical rhetoric of Aristotle.² In traditional readings of the early history of philosophy, he is also a practitioner of a rudimentary form of inductive method in search of universal definitions that becomes refined as a method of argument and persuasion in Aristotle's dialectic and his rhetoric.³ Thus dialogue has merged almost imperceptibly into dialectic and has become the cornerstone of a dialectical or philosophical rhetoric. Dialogue has reemerged, however, in the twentieth century, in the work of theorists from a range of disciplinary orientations—Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Martin Buber, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Carl R. Rogers, for example—some of whom have taken an interest in the early Platonic dialogues and their relationship to the rhetorical tradition.⁴ Recent scholarship on the early dialogues, moreover, has envisioned a Socrates distinct from the Socrates of the later dialogues, a Socrates more concerned with how we live than with what or how we know, a Socrates who practices dialogue as the only true art of politics and who rejects rhetoric as the dangerous tool of an imperialistic empire.⁵ This renewed interest in dialogue offers an opportunity to rethink the

role of dialogue within the rhetorical tradition and to reconstruct a dialogical (not a dialectical) rhetoric as a rhetoric that is responsive, and accountable, to other people. This renewed interest offers an opportunity, moreover, to rethink the very meaning and purpose of public discourse not as persuasion but as an ongoing exchange in which we test and contest and create ideas in cooperation and when necessary in conflict with others.

Among twentieth-century theorists of dialogue, Bakhtin takes a special interest in the early Platonic dialogues and in their relationship to the rhetorical tradition. Gadamer writes extensively about the Platonic dialogues, but he is less interested in the early than the later dialogues.⁶ Nonetheless, Gadamer's reading of the dialogues provides a useful reminder of the importance of questioning as the starting point of dialogue and a reminder also of Plato's ever-present hand in the shaping of the dialogues, including the early dialogues.⁷ Buber reads Socrates as prototypical of the person who lives the life of dialogue, between I and Thou, but Buber's commentators maintain that Socrates was a "monological thinker," too much given to "dialectical thought," to provide a model for Buber's life of dialogue.⁸ These reservations notwithstanding, Buber provides an important point of departure for contemporary thinking about the possibility of a dialogical rhetoric—a dialogical rhetoric quite different, however, from Bakhtin's.⁹ Unlike other twentieth-century theorists of dialogue, Bakhtin distinguishes the earlier from the later Platonic dialogues, Socratic dialogue from rhetorical dialogue and Platonic monologue.¹⁰ In the earlier dialogues, he finds a Socrates who offers alternatives to the traditional view of rhetoric as persuasion. But he also envisions the possibility of a rhetoric transformed by dialogue, a rhetoric that acknowledges prior speakers and future answerers—a *dialogized* or dialogical rhetoric.¹¹

At first notice, Socrates and Bakhtin might appear to be unlikely sources for a revisioning of the rhetorical tradition as dialogue, for both are at times quite openly hostile to rhetoric. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates rejects the rhetorics of Gorgias and Pericles as equally unjust—Gorgias' carelessly and confusedly, Pericles' thoughtfully and deliberately.¹² In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin describes rhetoric as a formal and superficial method of analysis that hears a mere diversity of voices and misses the "double-voicedness" of rhetorical discourse, its orientation toward both the listeners who answer and react to it and the prior speakers whose words it transmits and re-accentuates.¹³ In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, however, Bakhtin describes the kind of double-voicedness that he finds in the earlier Platonic dialogues: the testing and contesting and creating of ideas that occurs not as a result of a single speaker speaking but only as a result of a change, and an exchange, of speaking subjects—the drawing forth and juxtaposing of voices and the collision of voices by which old ideas are challenged and new ideas are born.¹⁴ Bakhtin probably overstates his distinction between the earlier and the later dialogues, as R. Allen Harris and Paul Kameen suggest in their Bakhtinian readings of

the later *Phaedrus*.¹⁵ Bakhtin's reading of the earlier dialogues thus might be extended to some of the later dialogues as well. It might also be enriched by concepts that appear elsewhere in his work. Bakhtin's concepts of novelistic discourse—polyphony, hybridization, parody, and carnival—can help to explain *how* Plato's ever-present and artful hand works to re-create the Socrates who appears in the earlier (and some of the later) dialogues.¹⁶ His contextual and extratextual approach to textual analysis—his insistence upon reading texts in relationship to other texts and to their historical and cultural context—can help to explain *why* Socrates engages in testing and contesting and creating ideas.¹⁷ Socrates is not seeking but rather questioning universal definitions because he believes that others uphold definitions that they do not understand, definitions that are grounded in cultural values that they do not question, definitions that are, moreover, in conflict with each other.

The most important of the early dialogues for the study of rhetoric and other forms of public discourse are, of course, the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*, and these are also the dialogues that offer the clearest articulations of Socrates' thoughts about the art of dialogue. The texts of these dialogues take on different meanings in different contexts, of course, as they are read in relation to other early dialogues and to their historical and cultural context or in relation to later dialogues such as the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* and to the dialectic and the rhetoric of the later Aristotle.¹⁸ Read in relation to other early dialogues, the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* reveal the persistence of the problem of the relationship of the virtues, and read in relation to the *Laches*, in particular, they reveal the immediate and pressing problem of courage in its relationship to the other virtues or to virtue itself. Read, too, in their historical and cultural context, as Bakhtin insists we read them, these early dialogues show that the problem of the relationship of the virtues is not as much a philosophical problem as it is a cultural problem, not a problem of knowing but a problem of living. It is specifically a problem of cultural conflict between courage and the other virtues, between the traditional Homeric virtue of *aretē* and the newer civic virtues, between the virtue that supports and sustains an unjust empire and the virtues that oppose it.¹⁹ The problem is both historical and contemporary, for the cultural values embedded in the Greek oral tradition persist in the literate tradition of printed texts, and the emergence of Socratic dialogue as a response to the oral tradition finds its parallel in the reemergence of dialogue as a response to the cultural values embedded within printed texts, beginning as early as Bakhtin and extending to recent discussion of the new digital media.²⁰

RETHINKING THE SOCRATIC DIALOGUE

Bakhtin's invitation to rethink the Socratic dialogue and its place in the rhetorical tradition is supported by scholarship on the origins and early history of

rhetoric and by scholarship that seeks to recapture the Socrates of the early dialogues as the best evidence that we have of Socrates' life and work. Studies of the early history of rhetoric demonstrate that this history is more rich and varied than traditional accounts would have us believe,²¹ and studies of the early dialogues identify unique features that distinguish the earlier from the middle and later dialogues.²² These studies recognize the Socratic art of dialogue as a significant contribution to the development of the arts of public discourse in the Athens of the fifth century BCE.

Studies of the early history of rhetoric demonstrate that both the term *rhetoric* and the disciplinary concepts associated with it were relatively late developments, belonging to the fourth rather than to the fifth century BCE. According to Edward Schiappa, Plato likely coined terms such as *rhetoric* (*rhētorikē*) and *dialectic* (*dialektikē*) in the fourth century and thus made possible the coalescence of disciplinary meanings that we have come to associate with these terms.²³ The naming of rhetoric was thus significant because it allowed the discipline of rhetoric to develop, to become the locus for organizing thought and effort around a set of problems concerned with the persuasive *rhētōr*.²⁴ In the fifth century, in contrast, sophists such as Protagoras and Gorgias regularly used the term *logos* in a broad "predisciplinary" sense to designate speakers and arguers, various forms of argument, different and competing ends or purposes for argument, and different contexts for argument, both political and nonpolitical.²⁵ Schiappa notes that the few extended fifth-century texts that address issues in persuasive discourse suffice to challenge the now standard accounts of early Greek rhetorical theory.²⁶ Michael Gagarin believes that these texts challenge even the traditional view that sophistic discourse always aimed only to persuade.²⁷ According to Gagarin, these texts express disapproval of persuasion as either ineffective or harmful and explore *logos* as a tool for thinking rather than persuasive speaking.²⁸ G. B. Kerferd maintains, moreover, that Socrates belongs to this same period, that he was considered a sophist by his contemporaries, that he was interested in the same kinds of problems, and that he was in this respect more like the sophists than the later Plato.²⁹ Thus we might add to the few surviving texts from the fifth century the portrait of Socrates in the early Platonic dialogues, which offers the best evidence that we have of Socrates' life and work, whether or not it happens to present an accurate portrayal of the historical Socrates himself.

Much has been written about the so-called Socratic problem, that is, the problem of weighing and evaluating the sources—Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle—and re-creating on the basis of these sources the life and character of the historical Socrates and assessing the significance of his work.³⁰ The Socrates of the early Platonic dialogues is especially prominent among these sources, not because this Socrates necessarily represents the historical Socrates but because this Socrates is the best evidence that we

have of Socrates' intellectual work.³¹ This Socrates is traditionally read from the perspective of Plato and Aristotle, just as the early Platonic dialogues are often read from the perspective of the later dialogues, the *Gorgias*, for example, from the perspective of the *Phaedrus*. Thus W. K. C. Guthrie, for example, assesses Socrates' contribution to philosophy from the perspective of those presumed to be most capable of understanding him, that is, Plato and Aristotle:

For the personal appearance, character and habits of Socrates we may go with confidence to both Plato and Xenophon, and we find indeed a general agreement in their accounts of these matters. But for our chief concern, the contribution of Socrates to philosophical, and in particular ethical, inquiry, I believe it is best to rely primarily on those who were themselves philosophers and so best capable of understanding him. That means in the first place Plato, but also Aristotle in so far as he was a student and associate of Plato and had learned from him the relation of his own thought to the unwritten teaching of his master.³²

Similarly, the *Gorgias* is traditionally read as an early expression of ideas about rhetoric that reach fulfillment in the later *Phaedrus* and in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Thomas M. Conley finds a scathing attack on rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and finds its positive counterpart in the legitimate rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*.³³ George A. Kennedy, conversely, finds suggestions about the positive role of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and finds their fulfillment and fruition in the later rhetorics of Plato and Aristotle: in the *Phaedrus*, he argues, "Plato goes significantly beyond the suggestions of *Gorgias* about the positive role of rhetoric; he lays the foundation for basic features of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and he integrates rhetoric into his other philosophical ideas in a way not attempted elsewhere."³⁴

Jacques Derrida, however, envisions an alternative Socrates, a Socrates with a life of his own. In a striking portrait of Socrates and Plato in *The Post Card*, Derrida describes the teleology according to which Socrates always says only what Plato wants him to say and envisions the possibility of reversing the teleology and catching a glimpse of a Socrates who writes what he himself, not Plato, wants him to say.³⁵ In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin offers a brief sketch of a Socrates of the kind that Derrida envisions—the Socrates of the early Platonic dialogues. Bakhtin, of course, reads the early dialogues from the perspective of his own teleology, his attempt to trace the lineage of the dialogue form, a form that he characterizes as "serio-comical" and "carnivalistic" and situates in a line of novelistic development that leads to Fyodor Dostoevsky.³⁶ Bakhtin finds in the Socratic dialogue the same emphasis upon the dialogic nature of truth—the juxtaposing and testing, the

colliding and contesting, the collectively seeking and *birthing* of ideas—that he finds in the Dostoevsky novels.³⁷

Studies of the early dialogues support this vision of an alternative Socrates. Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, Terry Penner, and Gregory Vlastos note the differences between the early and the middle and later Platonic dialogues.³⁸ All agree that the early dialogues are more ethical than philosophical, more concerned with living than with knowing, and less concerned with the exposition of positive doctrine than the middle and later dialogues. Brickhouse and Smith explain that the Socrates of the early dialogues examines not propositions but lives, not what people say or even what they believe but how they live.³⁹ Others explore the ethical problem in the early dialogues. Arthur W. H. Adkins and Charles H. Kahn, for example, observe the cultural conflict between courage and the other virtues apparent in the early dialogues, especially the *Gorgias*, and Harvey Yunis explains the cultural conflict in the *Gorgias* as a conflict between the Athenian quest for empire and the Periclean rhetoric that sustains it, on the one hand, and Socrates' pursuit of justice and the art of dialogue that nurtures and preserves it, on the other.⁴⁰ Still others explore the contribution of the Socratic dialogue to the arts of public discussion. Andrea Wilson Nightingale and Robert Wardy observe Socrates' insistence that his art of dialogue is the only "true political art" since his art alone is capable of improving people's lives.⁴¹ Brickhouse and Smith and Penner explain the Socratic art of dialogue as a kind of exhortation or teaching, distinct from the Platonic view of rhetoric as persuasion.⁴² As Penner observes, while the later Platonic dialogues identify persuasion with appeals to emotion, the earlier Socratic dialogues maintain that persuasion can only be teaching, that is, bringing people to understand, for themselves, though with the aid of Socratic questioning, what is or is not the case.⁴³

BAKHTIN, DIALOGUE, AND THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

The distinction between rhetoric as persuasion and dialogue as teaching one to think for oneself is not, of course, quite as simple as Penner suggests, and assessments of Bakhtin's contribution to rhetoric have struggled, often uneasily, with the relationship between dialogical and rhetorical activity and with the meaning and purpose of a dialogized or dialogical rhetoric.⁴⁴ The issues are whether or not dialogue has a place in the rhetorical tradition, whether it can find such a place without simply collapsing into another version of persuasion, and—if it can find a place in the tradition—what that place, that is, what a dialogical rhetoric, might be. In this context, dialogue sometimes seems to be distinct from rhetoric or even subordinate to rhetoric, as a particular kind of rhetoric or a setting for rhetorical activity, an opportunity or occasion for persuasion.⁴⁵ Increasingly, however, Bakhtin's concept of

dialogue seems to present a fundamental challenge to traditional rhetoric, his view of the utterance as an exchange between speaking subjects upsetting the traditional relationship between speaker and listener and speech, writer and reader and text, thus inviting a thorough rethinking of the ends or purposes traditionally associated with rhetoric.⁴⁶ But the implications of this challenge remain unclear. Thus Kay Halasek pointedly asks: “Bakhtin . . . implicitly calls into question the purpose of discourse. Are its goals those delineated by Cicero—to prove, charm, or sway? Or are they those of Augustine—to teach, delight, or move—or others not yet systematized or theoretically articulated?”⁴⁷ Others, turning their attention to Bakhtin’s early work, pose new and troublesome questions for rhetoric, communication, and composition studies: How can we bridge the experiential abyss between ourselves and others?⁴⁸ Or should we not try? How can we bridge the abyss between ourselves and the cultural values that so often seem to be imposed upon us by disciplinary and other kinds of authoritative texts?⁴⁹ How can we surround ourselves with difference without succumbing to power and prejudice, injustice and intolerance?⁵⁰ Bakhtin’s reading of the Socratic dialogue provides partial answers to some of these questions.

Dialogue and Dialogical Rhetoric

Dialogue seems at times to be distinct from rhetoric, at times subordinate to rhetoric—a particular kind or subset of rhetoric. Don H. Bialostosky looks to Bakhtin for “an art of dialogics” distinct from rhetoric, modeled after Plato’s *Symposium* and directed toward the remaking of literary criticism as dialogue.⁵¹ Bialostosky reads Bakhtinian dialogics as distinct from dialectic and rhetoric on the basis of the centuries-old tradition that associates rhetoric exclusively with persuasion: “As dialectic strives for conviction on a question and rhetoric for persuasion of an audience, dialogics strives for comprehensive responsiveness and responsibility to the consequential person-ideas of a time, culture, community, or discipline—that is, for the fullest articulation of someone’s ideas with the actual and possible ideas of others.”⁵² Others similarly turn to Buber for a “dialogical rhetoric” distinct from traditional rhetoric and characterized as existential-ontological rather than pragmatic, attentive and responsive to others rather than persuasive and manipulative of others, and personal and communal rather than social psychological and logical.⁵³ They perceive this rhetoric to be grounded in living mutual relationships between oneself and others and thus to be momentary, ephemeral, and fleeting and, as a consequence, very difficult to research, except through studies of one’s own and others’ lives.⁵⁴

Simon Dentith seems to subordinate dialogue to rhetoric as a particular kind or subset of rhetoric when he claims that a broad concept of rhetorical

criticism can accommodate Bakhtin's dialogics.⁵⁵ Like Bialostosky, Dentith associates rhetoric with persuasion, but he is prepared to accommodate a wide range of discourse practices under the rubric of rhetoric on grounds that every utterance is "suasive" and "*interested*."⁵⁶ Thus, while he acknowledges Bakhtin's preference for "the plural and the dialogic over the singular or monologic" he nonetheless envisions a rhetorical criticism that grasps "the situatedness" of every utterance and is thus capable of both accommodating novelistic prose as Bakhtin conceives it and accurately describing it.⁵⁷ Others see a possibility of expanding, perhaps even altering, our notion of what counts as rhetorical discourse by accommodating Bakhtinian dialogics. Halasek, for example, distinguishes "polemic" rhetorical forms such as epic, encomium, apologia, and epideictic from "parodic" rhetorical forms such as symposia, diatribes, and soliloquies and associates the former with official culture and monologic rhetoric, the latter with unofficial culture and Bakhtinian dialogic rhetoric.⁵⁸ According to Halasek, parodic rhetorics broaden and enrich the tradition by introducing multiple and sometimes conflicting intentions and purposes into rhetorical texts.⁵⁹ Similarly, James Jasinski distinguishes rhetorical advocacy as personal polemic isolated from social practice from rhetorical performance as a practical discursive event situated in its social and historical context and associates the former with Bakhtinian rhetoric, the latter with Bakhtinian dialogue.⁶⁰ Jasinski thus finds Bakhtinian dialogue not in rhetorical forms but in public discursive practices—political, legal, and epideictic.⁶¹

Dialogue as the Occasion for Persuasion

Dialogue seems to be subordinate to rhetoric in another sense as well, when it is conceived as a setting for rhetorical activity, an opportunity or occasion for persuasion. In this sense, Bakhtinian dialogue is antithetical or even peripheral to rhetoric because it does not share rhetoric's instrumental (and persuasive) purpose. John M. Murphy sees dialogue and rhetoric as antithetical and claims that even advocates of a dialogic rhetoric such as Halasek and Jasinski actually dissociate rhetoric from dialogue, Halasek by dissociating official from unofficial culture, Jasinski by dissociating decontextualized rhetorical advocacy, which seeks only victory, from contextualized rhetorical performance, which "manages tensions, orchestrates voices, and reveals anxiety."⁶² Murphy seeks to restore the instrumental purpose that seems so antithetical to Bakhtin's view of dialogue but that nonetheless lies at the very heart of the rhetorical tradition.⁶³ Thomas B. Farrell similarly emphasizes the instrumental purpose of rhetorical activity but sees Bakhtinian dialogue not as antithetical but rather as peripheral to rhetoric, as an opportunity or occasion for persuasion.⁶⁴ Farrell situates Bakhtinian dialogue in a long line of historical

development that apparently begins with Homer and Aristotle. In Homer, conversational dialogue originated as a break in the extended poetic monologue, a break initiated by an interruptive question, a request that the poet repeat a statement that seems to be unsatisfactory or unclear.⁶⁵ It is a reminder of “*contextuality*,” a reminder, that is, that the poetic monologue is not monologue but dialogue.⁶⁶ In Aristotle, rhetoric and other modes of inquiry retain this conversational quality since each is a response to different kinds of questions.⁶⁷ Analytic responds to questions about the causes of the essential nature of things based upon unproblematic principles and materials.⁶⁸ Dialectic not only responds to questions but in turn invites another’s response. Dialectic responds to questions in problematic contexts based upon generally accepted premises and framed to invite participatory answers of affirmation or denial.⁶⁹ Rhetoric responds to questions about appearances by identifying signs, probabilities, and examples on either side of an issue, thereby representing appearances with sufficient clarity to guide us toward prudent decisions and conduct.⁷⁰ Because it deals with appearances, rhetoric contests the very notion of the problematic, “even as it aims to facilitate judgment based on persuasion.”⁷¹

In Farrell’s reading, Bakhtinian dialogue is ordinary conversation, which—like Homeric conversation and Aristotelian dialectic—provokes or invites a response. Rhetoric is a persuasive response to questions or issues that arise in ordinary conversation. Rhetoric is “monologic, partisan, and directed outward to the attention of others, who then judge its quality”; conversation is “dialogic, bipartisan, and directed only to those in the immediate encounter, who may appreciate, but never fully grasp, the holistic form itself.”⁷² According to Farrell, rhetoric enters into conversation at occasions or “*junctures*” of tension, intervening with “intentional consciousness—the practical intent to shape discourse toward extrinsic goals.”⁷³ These occasions or *junctures* of tension are moments of premeditation, where the content and/or direction of a conversation has been prepared in advance by at least one of the participants; disturbance, where the definition or status of a developing conversation is contested; and disputation, where the participants openly disagree about some issue outside the parameters of the conversation.⁷⁴ Rhetoric responds to these moments with positions of partisanship and advocacy directed toward practical and purposeful conduct, which may nonetheless require the cooperation of the other participant(s) in the conversation.⁷⁵ At these moments, conversation becomes rhetorical and persuasive.

Dialogue as an Exchange of Speaking Subjects

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue, however, also seems to challenge traditional rhetoric by redirecting rhetorical activity away from persuasion toward a wider range of ends or purposes. In particular, Bakhtin’s notion of the utterance as an

exchange between speaking subjects redirects rhetorical activity by radically altering the relationship between speaker and listener and speech, writer and reader and text—a relationship that becomes even more complicated in the light of recent attention to Bakhtin's early work.⁷⁶ Bakhtin's concept of dialogue seems similarly to challenge traditional dialectic. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson argue that Bakhtinian dialogue resembles neither Buber's I-Thou relationship nor the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, which Bakhtin characterizes as "deeply monologic."⁷⁷ Jean-François Côté maintains, however, that Bakhtin's notion of the utterance as a unit of speech marked by a change of speaking subjects recalls Hegel's dialogue with other philosophies and reveals a fundamental affinity between Bakhtinian dialogism and Hegelian dialectic, between "our possible *perception* of an event called 'dialogue'" and our understanding of "the *essential structure of experience*" as a movement from dialogue to its abstraction in dialectic to further dialogue.⁷⁸ Michael Gardiner perceives a resemblance between Bakhtin's dialogism and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's dialectics but notes that both attempt to rethink traditional dialectic by returning to the conversational model inspired by Socrates, thus resituating dialectic in the utterances, activities, and aspirations of people who live in a world that is inconclusive and open and free.⁷⁹

The Bakhtinian challenge to traditional rhetoric seems at times to be a simple rejection of rhetoric. Thus Morson and Emerson, for example, recall Bakhtin's claim that the reestablishment of rhetoric helps to strengthen the position of contemporary formalist critics by giving them a tool for analyzing, rather than simply rejecting, novelistic language.⁸⁰ Bialostosky explains that Bakhtin challenges the formalists' rhetoric because it seeks to silence opponents and advance its own monologic pronouncements, because it overlooks the multi-voicedness inherent in all discourse, including rhetorical discourse.⁸¹ But Morson and Emerson also point out that Bakhtin seeks not simply to reject or even to supplement rhetoric, pragmatics, and other contextual approaches to language but to fundamentally reconceive them.⁸² Their exposition on Bakhtin's concept of dialogue suggests how such a reconceptualization is possible. According to Morson and Emerson, Bakhtin's concept of dialogue is grounded in his view of the utterance as unit of speech communication situated in relation to other utterances.⁸³ Unlike the sentence (as it is conceived in traditional linguistics), an utterance exists only in context: it is spoken by someone, in response to something, in anticipation of a response from someone else.⁸⁴ It thus exists not in isolation but only in relation to other utterances—in an exchange of utterances.⁸⁵ The utterance therefore requires the active understanding of the listener, who must grasp the utterance and prepare to respond to it, who thus participates in shaping the utterance *as* it is being made (not *after* it is made).⁸⁶ From the point of view of linguistics, two utterances spoken in succession—"Life is good." "Life is good."—are simply repetitious.⁸⁷ From the point of view of logic, they are identical.⁸⁸ From a dialogic perspective, they constitute an exchange of utterances, an

expression of *agreement* between the first speaker and the second.⁸⁹ Bakhtin's view of the utterance as part of an ongoing exchange of utterances helps to explain related concepts such as *heteroglossia* and *dialogized heteroglossia*.⁹⁰ Heteroglossia is the mix and diversity of languages that represent various professions, generations, classes, geographic areas, ethnic groups, and so on.⁹¹ As Morson and Emerson point out, however, these languages, like individual utterances, exist not in isolation but always in relationship to each other. Dialogized heteroglossia is the interanimation of languages that occurs as each language is viewed from the perspective of the other.⁹² Bakhtin's view of the utterance thus informs his thinking about dialogue and about language practices generally. As Emerson and Michael Holquist point out, Bakhtin uses the Russian word *slovo* in a broad sense (not *word*, but *discourse*)—much as the Greeks used the word *logos*—as a “diffuse way of insisting on the primacy of speech, utterance, all *in praesentia* [in presence] aspects of language.”⁹³

These concepts challenge traditional rhetoric because they place greater emphasis upon the listener or reader as an active participant in the making of meaningful communication.⁹⁴ Indeed in the context of an exchange of utterances the very concept of listener/reader becomes suspect since the listener/reader is not simply a *listener* or *reader* but the next person in a sequence of speakers/listeners or writers/readers who participate in the exchange. Assessments of Bakhtin's contribution to rhetoric and composition studies have noted this shift in emphasis and have begun to explore its implications for rhetorical theory. In an early study of Bakhtin's “rhetoric,” Charles I. Schuster observes that Bakhtin upsets the Aristotelian paradigm that has dominated rhetorical theory throughout its long history: the “rhetorical triangle” of “speaker-listener-subject.”⁹⁵ Bakhtin shifts the traditional emphasis away from the speaker by replacing “subject” with “hero” and by recognizing both the hero and the listener as equal participants (with the speaker) in a complex dialogic interaction.⁹⁶ Halasek similarly observes that the traditional rhetorical triangle of “speaker, audience, and subject” fails to recognize the importance of the utterance “as part of an ongoing, complex, interactive web of discourse set within a social context,” and she begins to explore the multiple roles of the listener/reader/audience within this complex web of discourse.⁹⁷ The implications of this shift for rhetorical theory are not simply a broadening of what counts as rhetorical discourse but more fundamentally and more importantly a resituating of rhetorical forms and a redirecting of rhetorical purposes within the context of ongoing dialogic interactions. John Bender and David E. Wellbery are explicit: “For Bakhtin every utterance is many utterances; every speaker is many speakers; and every seemingly rhetorical context encodes many other occasions.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Frank Farmer observes: “Bakhtin understands that all our efforts to persuade, convince, move, inform, affect, contend, agree . . . are dialogically situated.”⁹⁹ All of these efforts need the voices that they address and answer; they need their

“other words.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, as Halasek points out, not only agonistic but also epideictic or ceremonial forms of rhetorical discourse are dialogically situated, with the consequence that traditional rhetorical ends or purposes change fundamentally: the ends of persuading, instructing, or proving become secondary to the ends of establishing and maintaining communities and affirming political, social, and cultural beliefs.¹⁰¹

Recent attention to Bakhtin’s early work further complicates the traditional paradigm. Whereas Halasek emphasizes the ends of community building and cultural affirmation, readers of the early work observe the abyss between ourselves and others, between ourselves and our cultural beliefs and values. Emerson observes in “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” Bakhtin’s absolute affirmation of the radical difference, the unbridgeable gap, between self and other and the consequent need that each of us has for the other—for each of us can see the clear blue sky that provides the background to the other’s suffering.¹⁰² Each of us, that is, needs the other because that other can see what we cannot see for ourselves. Emerson believes that Bakhtin would advise us, therefore, to associate with people who are different from ourselves: “Saturate a self in otherness and surround it with difference: That is how it will find its own freely constituted way.”¹⁰³ She nonetheless acknowledges the difficulty of Bakhtin’s position: how can we surround ourselves with difference without risk of surrounding ourselves with people who are powerful or prejudiced, unjust or insensitive or hurtful toward others?¹⁰⁴ Bialostosky observes in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* a similar gap between ourselves and our cultural beliefs and values: nothing less than “a contemporary cultural crisis in which the weight of what is already known and established threatens to preempt individual authorship altogether.”¹⁰⁵ According to Bialostosky, the early Bakhtin believes that the world of culture seeks to impose upon living consciousnesses what he would later call “authoritative discourse”: published knowledge, moral laws, aesthetic judgments, and the like.¹⁰⁶ Bakhtin himself seeks not an imposition of cultural values but an integration of culture and life in which uniquely situated individuals evaluate the cultural values offered to them in acts that constitute what Bakhtin would later call—in contrast to authoritative discourse—“internally persuasive discourse.”¹⁰⁷ Contemporary writers, Bialostosky maintains, continue to “write against the backdrop of disciplines whose accumulated knowledge demands their acquiescence and threatens to silence or preempt them.”¹⁰⁸

DIALOGICAL RHETORIC AS TESTING, CONTESTING, AND CREATING IDEAS

Bakhtin’s reading of the Socratic dialogue suggests how he might respond to some of these challenges. Like the early Bakhtin, the Socrates of the early dia-

logues felt the burden of cultural values that were not his own. Like others of his time, he was heir to the Homeric oral tradition, with its cultural ideal of excellence (*aretē*)—noble birth and high social standing joined, in the warrior, to courage (sometimes *manly courage*) and skill in battle.¹⁰⁹ Like others, too, he was heir to the newer cultural ideal of virtue (*aretē*)—courage joined to justice and temperance (often *self-restraint*)—an ideal that nourished and sustained the Athenian democracy and that applied, in principle at least, to both men and women.¹¹⁰ Unlike others, however, he believed that courage and skill in battle, exercised in an unjust cause, was no virtue at all. He opposed the Athenian pursuit of empire, which Pericles himself admitted was expedient but unjust. He questioned those who held beliefs that they apparently did not understand: Athenian generals such as Laches and Nicias, who professed courage but could not explain it; sophists such as Protagoras and Gorgias, who claimed to teach virtue and the arts of discourse but were unable to explain or defend either; Callicles, the contemporary embodiment of Periclean injustice and Periclean rhetoric; and, finally, even Pericles himself.

The Socrates that Bakhtin finds in these early dialogues is a Socrates who tests and contests and creates ideas in dialogue or discussion (*dialegesthai*)—not dialectic (*dialektikē*)—with others.¹¹¹ This Socrates is not the speaker/writer/rhetor who seeks to persuade others to accept his own account of the virtuous life—his own *logos*—but the listener/reader/respondent who renders and receives accounts with others, thus contributing to the multiplicity of meanings associated with the term and the concept of *logos* in the ferment of the fifth century BCE.¹¹² He is the questioner who draws forth and juxtaposes the inconsistent and conflicting beliefs of others, thus testing not only their ideas but also their persons (for the idea and the person were not yet separate), not only what they think but who they are and how they live. He is the *midwife* who brings together diverse ideas, thereby creating new ideas, new cultural hybrids. He is the participant in carnival-like debate, contesting others' ideas and decrowning their persons with the base and lowly language of the streets. He is not, as Michel Meyer points out, a person of authority but an ordinary citizen who questions persons of authority and position, the leading citizens of his time, who do not understand and cannot explain their own beliefs.¹¹³

Bakhtin's Socrates thus provides one kind of response to the challenge of individual differences, the seemingly unbridgeable gap between self and other. Situated contextually and extratextually, this Socrates also provides a response to the problem and the challenge of cultural differences. Socrates tests and contests not only individuals, their ideas and their persons, but also their most deeply held cultural convictions, in particular their unreflective commitments to the traditional virtue of courage, exercised in pursuit of an unjust empire, on the one hand, and the newer virtues of justice and temperance, proclaimed as the basis of civil society, on the other. Thus he brings these cultural conflicts into the light of day, asks persons of authority to reflect

upon them, to accept responsibility, and to acknowledge their accountability for what they think and say and do. As re-created in the early dialogues under Plato's guiding hand, Bakhtin's Socrates is the artful practitioner of anacrisis and syncrisis and novelistic polyphony, hybridization, parody, and carnival. In the *Laches*, he tests Laches' and Nicias' ideas of courage, drawing forth (anacrisis) and juxtaposing (syncrisis) the conflicts in their ideas and in their lives, leading them to acknowledge that they do not understand their own most deeply held convictions. In the *Protagoras*, he ridicules Protagoras' speech of display and parodies his method of interpreting poetry, but he accepts Protagoras' proud commitment to the civic virtues of justice and temperance. He nonetheless believes that Protagoras' view of civic virtue is incomplete if it does not encompass the traditional virtue of courage, so with Protagoras and the other sophists he works to create the new idea of the unity of virtue—a cultural hybrid that joins courage to the other virtues. He refuses, however—or Plato refuses—to acknowledge Protagoras' contribution and forces him to acquiesce to the new ideal. In the *Gorgias*, he contests Gorgias' and Polus' and Callicles' ideas about rhetoric and justice, decrowning each of them with carnivalesque images, forcing them to acknowledge that a rhetoric without justice is no true rhetoric. Finally, he contests Pericles' unjust pursuit of empire and the rhetoric that sustains it and asserts his own belief in courage joined to civic virtue and his commitment to dialogue as the only true art of politics—the summation of his life and work as he stands at the threshold of death.

Bakhtin's Socrates thus illustrates the possibility of a dialogized or dialogical rhetoric—the possibility of restoring to the rhetorical tradition the multiplicity of voices that Bakhtin believes are always there, whether we listen to them or not. Socrates' own conclusion about dialogue, presented at the end of what may be the latest of the early dialogues—the *Gorgias*—is that rhetoric and dialogue are distinct and opposed endeavors—rhetoric a vehicle of persuasion in pursuit of an unjust empire, dialogue the only true art of politics in pursuit of justice and the other virtues. Bakhtin, however, perceives in Socrates' artfully re-created practice of dialogue the possibility of reconnecting dialogue to the rhetorical tradition, not by rhetoricizing dialogue and thus reducing it monologue but by dialogizing rhetoric: by introducing the voices of others into rhetorical discourse, by showing how these voices test and contest and create or re-create ideas tacitly and unreflectively held to be true, by asking those of us who speak and write to render ourselves accountable to others in an ongoing exchange of voices.

Bakhtin's Socrates upsets the traditional polarity between speaker and listener, writer and reader, inviting us, each in turn, to examine the ideas and the persons of others and to submit our own ideas and our persons—our *selves* and our lives—for examination by others. This process of examining by testing and contesting and creating ideas is not restricted to oral discourse. Bakhtin's concept of dialogue and his vision of a dialogized or dialogical

rhetoric extends to all forms of human discourse, both oral and written.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the Socratic dialogue itself is a hybrid form, oral discourse transcribed and transformed in writing. As Bakhtin's own concept of polyphony reminds us, and as Gadamer also reminds us, Plato's authorial hand—his "surplus" of knowledge and active understanding—is ever present, and sometimes intrusive, even in the early dialogues.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the oral/written hybrids characteristic of this early period of manuscript literacy reappear in contemporary electronic media, in the give-and-take exchanges in electronic mail, electronic bulletin boards, and chat spaces and in the hypertextual linking of the World Wide Web. Thus Jay David Bolter observes a parallel between the Socratic dialogue and "network" structures such as the nonlinear "antibook" and the "hypertextual essay," for example, and Kathleen E. Welch observes a similar parallel between Isocratean written speeches and contemporary forms of "electric rhetoric."¹¹⁶ Socrates, the speaker who did not write, and Isocrates, the writer who did not speak, thus reappear in contemporary hybrid forms of electronic discourse, which are at once oral and written and graphic and which seem to provide new opportunities for interactivity, intersubjectivity, collaboration, and dialogue.¹¹⁷ However, as I argue in my epilogue, dialogue as a Bakhtinian/Socratic testing, contesting, and creating of ideas is neither impossible nor inevitable but is merely possible and only possible in any medium if we are willing to hear and to engage in the ongoing exchange of voices in each of them.

2

The Traditional Socrates

Dialogue, Rhetoric, and Dialectic

Socrates is frequently criticized as a rationalist who nonetheless practices a fallacious logic and a devious rhetoric by which he leads others to accept conclusions that he has previously determined to be true.¹ From the perspective of the more mature dialectic and rhetoric of Plato or Aristotle, Socrates may seem to be, at best, a canny rationalist and, at worst, a devious manipulator. But the Socrates who emerges in studies of the early dialogues (including Mikhail M. Bakhtin's) was less concerned with establishing positive knowledge and persuading others to accept that knowledge, by whatever means, than he was concerned with improving his own and other people's lives by examining, together, their most fundamental beliefs.² These studies situate Socrates within the context of fundamental but inconsistent and conflicted values deeply rooted in Greek culture and history.³ In this context, the Socratic art of dialogue was neither a *dialectic* nor a *rhetoric* in the traditional sense of these terms but a means of testing Socrates' own and other people's beliefs, revealing their inconsistencies, contesting false beliefs when necessary, and creating new beliefs, with others, when possible. This art of dialogue disappears as it is transformed into Plato's dialectical rhetoric and Aristotle's dialectic and rhetoric but reappears in the nineteenth century in opposition to the unified truths of philosophy and science and the persuasive purposes of traditional rhetoric.

In the rhetorical/philosophical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, Socrates is the practitioner of a dialectical/dialogical method that appears intermixed with the dialectic and rhetoric of the *Gorgias*, becomes transformed into the dialectical rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*, and disappears entirely from the ideal

state of the *Republic*.⁴ In this tradition, Socrates is also the originator of a rudimentary form of inductive method in search of universal definitions that becomes refined as a method of argument and persuasion in Aristotle's dialectic and his rhetoric.⁵ In nineteenth-century British empirical thought, Socrates is the practitioner of a negative dialectic that helps to build the unified truths of philosophy and science and at the same time permits and requires each of us to contest those truths.⁶ In more recent studies of the early dialogues, in contrast, Socrates is the practitioner of an art of dialogue that seeks not positive knowledge but a solution to the pressing ethical problem of how we should live our lives.⁷ The problem arises from a fundamental conflict in cultural values—a conflict between self-regarding and other-regarding virtue, between the traditional Homeric ideal of courage and skill in battle and the newer civic ideal of justice and temperance, between the ideal of justice in Athens and the reality of injustice in the regular and systematic expansion of its empire.⁸ In his creative reading of the Socratic dialogue, Bakhtin interprets dialogue not as an emerging dialectic or rhetoric but as a means of testing one's own and others' ideas, at times contesting others' ideas, at times joining with others to create new ideas.⁹ From this perspective, Socrates' response to the problem of how we should live is his practice of the art of dialogue—the true political art—by which he tests his own and others' ideas, always seeking to confirm his own most fundamental belief that one cannot practice the self-regarding without the other-regarding virtues, that one cannot be courageous but unjust.

SOCRATES' LIFE AND WORK

Socrates' life and work is obscure, his life retold in fragments in quite disparate sources, his work recorded and probably transformed in the early dialogues of Plato.¹⁰ As retold in ancient and contemporary sources, Socrates' life is set against the active political and intellectual life of his time, a period spanning roughly the last seventy years of the fifth century, following the Greeks' successful defense against Xerxes and his Persian invaders, concurrent with the development of the Periclean democracy and the growth of the Athenian empire, and ending shortly after the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War, with Athens' capitulation to Sparta and the dissolution of its democracy and its empire.¹¹ Both Athens and Sparta had earned lasting fame in the early stages of the defense against the Persian invasion. Athenian hoplites successfully routed the Persians at the battle at Marathon (490 BCE), with little assistance from other Greek states, including Sparta, and its heavier ships and crews outmaneuvered the Persian vessels at the naval battle at Salamis (480 BCE)—the battle in which the Persian Artemisia was said to have distinguished herself by fighting better than the men.¹² Earlier in the

same year, Sparta, with a force of three-hundred hoplites, plus its allies, had withstood the entire Persian army at the pass at Thermopylae before falling to vastly superior numbers, their courage memorialized in Simonides' poem of praise, "The Greek Dead at Thermopylae."¹³ Athens' success against the Persians profoundly affected its subsequent history, its successes at Marathon and at Salamis justifying the claims of its hoplites and even its poorer oarsmen (and the women who served with them) to broader participation in the Athenian democracy, its position of dominance among the Greek states justifying—to Athens at least—the creation and systematic expansion of its empire.¹⁴ Athens' very success, however, seems to have been one of the causes of its undoing, its arrogant self-interest in the pursuit of empire leading to war in the Peloponnese and the disastrous campaign at Syracuse, which left Athens weakened before a rebuilt Spartan naval force and led ultimately to the dissolution of its democracy and its empire and the brief but violent rule of the so-called Thirty Tyrants.¹⁵

Socrates lived his life, conducted his discussions, and met his death against the background of these events.¹⁶ Physically, Socrates was unattractive and even comical, "snub-nosed, with wide nostrils, protruding eyes, thick lips, . . . and a paunch."¹⁷ He served as a hoplite in the Peloponnesian War, earning a reputation for his courage in battle and for his endurance in harsh winter conditions and becoming legendary for his courage during the retreat from the battle at Delium (424 BCE).¹⁸ Socrates enjoyed extraordinary freedom of speech throughout the latter years of the fifth century and especially under Pericles, who was well known for his personal support and patronage of visiting sophists such as Protagoras.¹⁹ In his exercise of this freedom, he was known as a relentless questioner, who challenged other people's pretensions and revealed inconsistencies in their beliefs and who was in this respect indistinguishable from the sophists, at least in the popular imagination.²⁰ He was also in Plato's later description (*Theaetetus* 148e–51d) a "midwife," who helped to give birth to the ideas of others.²¹ In his infrequent forays into public life, Socrates acted strictly in accord with Athenian law or refused to act.²² Nonetheless, he had associates among both proponents of the democracy and the Thirty Tyrants and was reputed to have influenced Alcibiades, Charmides, and Critias, who became notorious for their opposition to the democracy and to Athens itself.²³ Alcibiades, for example, was vilified in Athens for persuading the Athenian assembly to launch the disastrous expedition against Syracuse, then defecting to Sparta, leaving the expedition under the command of the popular but indecisive Nicias, whose delays at critical moments led to the destruction of the Athenian army and navy and to Nicias' own death.²⁴ Socrates was tried on vague charges of failing to recognize the gods and corrupting the youth of the city but according to ancient tradition may in fact have been condemned for his association with figures such as Alcibiades.²⁵ He was sentenced to death and executed in the year 399 BCE.²⁶

Socrates' work is represented by his oral discussions, which he did not commit to writing. As recorded in Plato's early dialogues, Socrates' discussions were evidently transformed, by Plato's philosophy, perhaps, and certainly by his artistry.²⁷ Studies of the early dialogues have nonetheless sought to distinguish the earlier Socratic from the later Platonic dialogues and to identify their characteristic features, without resolving the issue of whether the early dialogues represent the views of the historical Socrates or the early Plato.²⁸ Studies of the chronology of the dialogues posit four main groups and characterize the first two groups as Socratic, the second two groups as transitional or Platonic—with some disagreement, however, about the position of the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* relative to each other and to the other early dialogues.²⁹ Terence Irwin presents roughly the current consensus, as follows: Group 1 (Early): *Apology*, *Crito*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, and *Protagoras*; Group 2 (Early): *Lysis*, *Cratylus*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Menexenus*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Symposium*; Group 3 (Middle): *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and *Phaedrus*; and Group 4 (Late): *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, and *Laws*.³⁰ Irwin takes the two early groups to be Socratic and supposes that the *Protagoras* belongs late in the first group, the *Gorgias* relatively early in the second group.³¹ Others generally concur with these groupings but disagree, especially, about the place of the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias* in relation to the other early dialogues.³² Charles H. Kahn offers the most radical revision when he proposes to place the *Gorgias* before and the *Protagoras* with or perhaps after *Laches*, *Charmides*, and *Euthyphro*, on grounds that the *Gorgias* does not share but the *Protagoras* does share close thematic connections with these three dialogues and also with the *Meno*.³³ For example, though the *Gorgias* implicitly endorses the concept of the unity of the virtues, it does not include any unmistakable reference to the thesis that virtue is knowledge.³⁴ The *Protagoras*, in contrast, affirms the unity of virtue on grounds that virtue is knowledge and explores the teachability, the nature, and the parts of virtue, issues that link the *Protagoras* directly with *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, and *Meno*.³⁵ Whatever the order of these early dialogues, the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* are almost certainly later.

These efforts to distinguish the earlier from the later dialogues are complicated, however, by evidence of Plato's ever-present and artful hand, which permits both Plato and his readers to enter into and participate in the dialogues. Charles L. Griswold Jr. and Drew A. Hyland explain Plato's use of the dialogue form as an attempt to show, through dramatic art, how philosophy emerges from nonpropositional concrete experience and popular opinion.³⁶ Kahn rejects the notion of a sharp break between the earlier and the later dialogues and argues that the earlier dialogues are Plato's attempt to bridge the psychological distance between his "otherworldly vision" and that of his audience through his consummate literary artistry.³⁷ Hans-Georg

Gadamer observes that the effect of Plato's dramatic art is to transcend the point of view of the individual participants.³⁸ The Socratic dialogue, the art of using words as a midwife of ideas, is directed toward the participants in the dialogue but generates a truth that is larger than both: "What emerges in its truth is the *logos*, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know."³⁹ This *logos* is partly the participants' creation, but it is partly Plato's and partly the readers' creation as well, hence the importance of hermeneutics as an interpretive practice.⁴⁰ Similarly, Paul Kameen notes that the Plato's dramatic art permits readers to enter into and disrupt the apparent meanings of the texts.⁴¹ In the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedrus* in particular, Kameen observes, "Plato provides systematically an array of gaps and fissures through which a reader can enter highly ambiguous spaces in relation to the declared significance of the texts."⁴² Given these difficulties, studies of the earlier dialogues have not resolved, and likely will never resolve, the issue of whether these dialogues represent the views of the historic Socrates or the early Plato, but they nonetheless hold that the earlier dialogues are—in some sense—more *Socratic*, the later dialogues more *Platonic*.⁴³ Thus we may speak of *Plato's Socrates*, *the Socrates of the early dialogues*, or (as Bakhtin does) *the Socratic dialogue*, but not simply *Socrates*.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL/RHETORICAL TRADITION: FROM DIALOGUE TO DIALECTIC AND RHETORIC

Within the philosophical/rhetorical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, Socrates was the practitioner of both the dialectical/dialogical method that Plato transforms into the dialectical rhetoric of the *Phaedrus* and the inductive method in search of universal definitions that Aristotle refines as a method of argument and persuasion in his dialectic and his rhetoric.⁴⁴ Socrates has consequently become the object of criticism in contemporary literary theory, rhetoric, and composition studies, first, for launching the quest for a rationally ordered, unitary truth that now seems fruitless and misguided and, second, for practicing a devious logic that seems more like *mere rhetoric* than either philosophy or science.⁴⁵ In contemporary interpretations of Plato's dialectic and rhetoric, Socrates is usually represented by his appearance in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, the two dialogues most concerned with rhetoric and its relationship to dialectic.⁴⁶ In these interpretations, Socrates is the practitioner of a dialectical/dialogical method and proponent of a rhetoric directed toward a just and temperate civic life that together become the dialectic/rhetoric or dialectical rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*. He is also a resilient and Janus-like figure whose art of dialogue (*dialogesthai*) survives alongside and as part of the dialectic (*dialektikē*) and rhetoric (*rhētorikē*) of the later

Phaedrus and disappears only in the ideal state of the *Republic*, in the unity and stability of Plato's conservative view of justice.

The *Gorgias* shows Socrates practicing a dialogical/dialectical method to demonstrate the limitations of Gorgias' rhetoric and to advocate an alternative philosophical rhetoric directed toward a just and temperate civic life.⁴⁷ In George A. Kennedy's close reading of the dialogue, Socrates' dialogical/dialectical method is a mixture of dialogue and dialectic, combining elements of question-and-answer, definition and division, and testing of hypotheses and leading the respondent to greater understanding, without Socrates' knowing with certainty what the outcome will be but nonetheless with a certain feeling of inevitability.⁴⁸ Kennedy characterizes this dialogical/dialectical method as itself a kind of "rhetoric," a mix of logical argument, irony, and ethical and emotional appeals that is "not always fair."⁴⁹ Thomas M. Conley similarly characterizes the method as frequently fallacious but nonetheless compelling.⁵⁰ Richard Leo Enos, however, finds that the very act of writing the *Gorgias* transforms the dialogical/dialectical method into a rhetorical composition, "one detailed argument of proposition under the guise of a dialogue."⁵¹ All agree that, to one degree or another, the *Gorgias* contains elements of dialectic and rhetoric that anticipate the later *Phaedrus*.

The dialogue itself is a sequence of three discussions: one with Gorgias about the nature of rhetoric (449c–61b); one with Polus about whether it is better to do wrong or to suffer wrong (461b–81b); and one with Callicles about how one should live and specifically about the role of justice in civic life (481b–505d).⁵² The first two discussions illustrate the dialectic of definition and division; the third describes the true philosophical rhetoric as the art of engendering justice in the soul. In the first discussion, Socrates questions Gorgias, asking him (in search of a definition) what rhetoric is and leading him (by the method of division) to respond that rhetoric is persuasion that produces belief, rather than knowledge, about right and wrong, the just and the unjust (*dikaion, adikon*) (449c–55a).⁵³ Conley explains the method of division in a simple formula: "It [the topic under investigation] must be A or B or C; it is not A, nor B; so it must be C."⁵⁴ Socrates uses this method to divide A (persuasion that produces belief) from B (persuasion that produces knowledge):

SOC. Then would you have us assume two forms of persuasion—one providing belief without knowledge, and the other sure knowledge?

GORG. Certainly.

SOC. Now which kind of persuasion is it that rhetoric creates in law courts or any public meeting on matters of right and wrong? The kind from which we get belief without knowledge, or that from which we get knowledge?

GORG. Obviously, I presume, Socrates, that from which we get belief.

SOC. Thus rhetoric, it seems, is a producer of persuasion for belief, not for instruction in the matter of right and wrong.

GORG. Yes. (454e–55a)

Socrates thus elicits Gorgias' admission that persuasion produces belief rather than knowledge. He is then able to lead him into self-contradiction, pressing him to acknowledge that the rhetorician must know what is just and unjust and, knowing the difference, cannot act unjustly, contrary to his belief that rhetoric is about justice and injustice indiscriminately (460a–61b).

In the second discussion, Polus questions Socrates, provoking him to respond with a comparison of rhetoric to cookery, one of a series of comparisons in an elaborate division and subdivision the true arts of the soul and body and their corresponding *arts* or knacks of flattery.⁵⁵ The true arts include legislation and justice, as arts of the soul; and gymnastics and medicine, as arts of the body. The *arts* of flattery include sophistic and rhetoric, as arts of the soul; and cosmetics and cookery, as arts of the body. These arts constitute a series of comparisons: as sophistic is a sham of legislation, so rhetoric is a sham of justice; as cosmetics is a sham of gymnastics, so cookery is a sham of medicine. Rhetoric, like cookery, is a sham, imitating justice in the way that cookery imitates medicine. R. E. Allen characterizes this series of comparisons as an early application of the method of division, "used to show identity of relation between diverse terms, as geometric proportion shows identity of ratio in diverse multitudes or magnitudes."⁵⁶

Finally, in the third discussion, Socrates questions Callicles, the most recalcitrant of the three, and presents his own view of rhetoric as an art of justice, which Kennedy claims is the essence of the philosophical rhetoric of the *Gorgias*.⁵⁷ Callicles holds that self-interest, though unjust by convention, is just by nature and that by nature the strong should always rule over the weak (482e–84c). Socrates responds with his own view of rhetoric as the art of engendering justice. He claims that rhetoric must always be concerned with how the orator may improve the souls of other citizens: "it is this that our orator, the man of art and virtue, will have in view, . . . 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" (504d–e).

If a justice-engendering rhetoric is the true philosophical rhetoric of the *Gorgias*, then its method of definition and division, transformed into a dialectic/rhetoric or dialectical rhetoric, is the essence of the philosophical rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*.⁵⁸ As Kennedy indicates, however, the Socratic dialectic as a method of question and answer survives, paradoxically, in the myth about the invention of writing at the end of the dialogue.⁵⁹ The *Phaedrus* has two main

parts, the first a series of three speeches on love (227a–57b), the second an exposition on dialectic, rhetoric, and writing, including the myth (257b–79c).⁶⁰ The first speech, composed by Lysias and read by Phaedrus, presents love as evil and is repetitive and unfocused (230e–34c, 243a). The second speech, attributed first to a clever boy and then to Phaedrus and spoken by Socrates, similarly presents love as evil but is carefully structured, beginning with a definition of love and proceeding by division of the effects of love as advantage or harm to the beloved and a division of the latter as harm to the beloved’s soul, body, and estate and to the beloved’s feelings, both during and after love (237b–41d). The third speech, attributed to Stresichorus and spoken by Socrates, presents love as good and is again carefully structured, proceeding by a division of divine madness as inspiration of the prophets, madness expressed through purifications and rites, inspiration of the poets, and the madness of the lover (hence a definition of love as a kind of divine madness) and presented in a striking metaphor of the soul as a charioteer who guides a team of winged horses toward a vision of absolute and eternal justice, temperance, and knowledge (243e–57b).

The exposition on dialectic, rhetoric, and writing presents dialectic and rhetoric as closely related and even equivalent procedures—a dialectic/rhetoric or dialectical rhetoric. Dialectic is the double method illustrated in its true form in Socrates’ second speech; it is both a definition, a bringing together of scattered particulars into a single idea; and a division, a separating of single ideas or things into classes of particulars or parts (264e–66b). Rhetoric is synonymous with persuasion and hence requires a knowledge of the various kinds of souls and the various kinds of speeches, so that the rhetorician will know which sort of person is persuaded by which sort of speech (269c–72b). Dialectic and rhetoric are equivalent since the same person must know both procedures and so may be called either a *dialectician* or a *rhetorician* (266b–c, 277b–c). This dialectic/rhetoric or dialectical rhetoric is a lengthy and difficult but necessary procedure since it enables the orator in the public assembly or in the law courts to distinguish the truth about what is just and good from a probability, which is a mere likeness of truth (261a–64e, 272b–74b).⁶¹

The myth about the invention of writing at the end of the dialogue preserves as a part of this dialectical rhetoric the Socratic art of dialogue as a dialectic of question and answer. The myth is the story of the Egyptian king Thamus and Theuth, the inventor of writing (274b–78b). Socrates speaks for Theuth, who claims to have discovered writing and who offers them to Thamus as “an elixir” (*pharmakon*) that will make Egyptians wiser and improve their memories (274e). Socrates then speaks for Thamus, who objects to writing because it will discourage the practice of memory and thereby produce forgetfulness. Socrates concurs and defends his own dialectic of question and answer: “serious discourse . . . is far nobler, when one employs the dialectical method and plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent

words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, which are not fruitless, but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process for ever, and which make their possessor happy, to the farthest possible limit of human happiness" (276e–77a). This defense of dialectic as a method of question and answer is paradoxical, Kennedy notes, since Plato has written the dialogue in which the defense appears and since he presents dialectic not as a method of teaching of what one already knows but as a planting in the minds of others ideas that will forever have a life of their own.⁶²

Such a dialectic of question and answer has no place in the ideal state of the *Republic*, however, for in this ideal state the philosopher-king who has perfected the art of dialectic orders the virtues within the state in harmony with the virtues within the parts of the individual soul: for the rulers, wisdom; for the soldiers, courage; for everyone, temperance and justice—temperance, to ensure concord between rulers and ruled, and justice, to ensure the order that results from “doing one’s own business” (427d–34c).⁶³ Such an ideal state, Julia Annas observes, is by its very definition a unity in which all citizens are “at one in finding harmony between the interests of the city as a whole and their own interests as members of their own group.”⁶⁴ Its sense of justice, Eric A. Havelock maintains, is a “symbol of unchanging stability” that can only be explained by Plato’s conservative social background.⁶⁵ Such a state does not admit nor does it require either a dialectic of question and answer or a rhetoric of persuasion. Harvey Yunis explains: “Political discourse in the ideal *polis* appears to be a straightforward matter: the ruling expert issues authoritative advice, all other members of the *polis* obey.”⁶⁶ Thus Socratic discussion, the two-way discussion to which both parties contribute, gives way to “a discourse of command.”⁶⁷

In contemporary interpretations of Aristotle, Socrates is best known as the originator of the use of inductive method in search of universal definitions that Aristotle refines as a method of argument and persuasion in his dialectic and in his rhetoric.⁶⁸ Contemporary interpreters take as their point of departure Aristotle’s assertion in the *Metaphysics* that Socrates may fairly be credited with two innovations, “inductive reasoning and general definition,” both of which “are associated with the starting-point of scientific knowledge” (1078b).⁶⁹ They also note Aristotle’s observation that Socrates concerned himself with the moral virtues only but that he did not, like the later idealists, posit a separate existence for either universals or definitions. They conclude, therefore, that Socratic reasoning was dialectical and rhetorical, not scientific, and observe its limitations as either philosophy or science. J. D. G. Evans claims that Socratic reasoning was dialectical, in Aristotle’s assessment, because it was concerned with both definition, the cornerstone of syllogistic reasoning, and induction and thus introduced the two basic forms of dialectical argument, syllogism and induction.⁷⁰ However, even as

dialectic, Socratic reasoning was inadequate because it supposed that dialectical reasoning was *necessarily* concerned with definitions, a supposition that led Plato to posit definitions of universals as separately existing Forms.⁷¹ W. K. C. Guthrie notes that Socratic reasoning was also rhetorical since, according to Aristotle, the use of illustrative examples resembles induction.⁷² Following Evans's argument, Socratic reasoning might also be considered rhetorical since it provides the cornerstone of syllogistic reasoning and since the rhetorical enthymeme resembles the syllogism.⁷³

Aristotle includes Socratic reasoning in both his dialectic and his rhetoric. He explains the deficiency of the Socratic search for definitions in the *Topics*.⁷⁴ But he includes Socratic induction as a method of argument and persuasion in both the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric*.⁷⁵ The Socratic search for definitions is usually explained as a search for an answer to the question, "What is X?"—that is, a search for the real definition of a moral term.⁷⁶ Richard Robinson explains that the Socrates of the early dialogues apparently assumes that we can know nothing whatever about X until we know what X is and that we must answer this question before we attempt to answer any other questions about X.⁷⁷ Socrates' repeated failure to answer this question led the Plato of the later dialogues to posit an answer to the question in the form of Ideas or essences in general.⁷⁸ Aristotle objects to this answer, of course, but he also objects to the question itself. In the *Topics*, he claims that Socrates led Plato to get the wrong answer because he asked the wrong question. Instead of asking a "What is X?" question, such as, "What is man?" he should have asked, "Is 'the good' used in this or in that sense?"—a question that admits of affirmation or denial (158a). Aristotle does not object, however, to the dialectic of question and answer itself, and he includes a long section on questions and answers at the end of the *Topics* (155b–164b).

Socratic induction is sometimes explained as a form of reasoning from particulars to universals.⁷⁹ Robinson, however, explains it more broadly as a form of inference from one proposition or set of coordinate propositions to another proposition that is either superordinate (more universal) or coordinate to the first proposition or set of propositions.⁸⁰ In the *Topics*, Aristotle explains induction as "the progress from particulars to universals" and provides a characteristically Socratic example: "If the skilled pilot is the best pilot and the skilled charioteer the best charioteer, then, in general, the skilled man [i.e., person] is the best man in any particular sphere" (105a). Aristotle uses the example to illustrate the progress from particulars to a universal, but it can also be explained as an inference from a set of coordinate propositions (the skilled pilot is the best pilot; the skilled charioteer is the best charioteer) to a superordinate proposition (the skilled person is the best person). In a similar example from the *Protagoras*, Socrates cites particular instances that show that people who have knowledge, such as divers, horsemen, and bucklers, are more bold than those who do not, and he concludes that those who are wisest

are most bold and being most bold are most courageous (349e–50c).⁸¹ C. C. W. Taylor maintains that the shift in this argument from knowledge (*epistēmē*) to wisdom (*sophia*) is only apparently equivocal since both terms clearly refer to knowledge as technical expertise.⁸² Norman Gulley, however, observes that Socrates uses these same examples in both the *Laches* and the *Protagoras* to raise the question of what kind of knowledge counts as courage and concludes in both instances that the kind of knowledge that counts is not knowledge as professional skill or technical expertise but the knowledge of good and evil.⁸³ Conley points out that these shifts in meaning are common in the early dialogues and, while frequently fallacious, are nonetheless compelling.⁸⁴ In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains induction as an illustrative example, citing an instance of example by comparison drawn directly from Socrates: “if someone were to say that officials should not be chosen by lot (for that would be as if someone chose athletes randomly—not those able to contest, but those on whom the lot fell); or [as if] choosing by lot any one of the sailors to act as pilot rather than the one who knew how” (1393b). The example—which Robinson would explain as an inference from a set of coordinate propositions (about the athlete and the sailor) to another coordinate proposition (about the magistrate)—has no scientific validity, of course, but it may nonetheless have persuasive force.

These developments in Aristotle’s dialectic and rhetoric notwithstanding, Socratic reasoning may nonetheless appear to provide the foundation for scientific inquiry since it is “associated with the starting-point of scientific knowledge” (*Metaphysics* 1078b). As Aristotle indicates in the *Topics*, dialectic is able to raise difficulties on either side of an issue and thus to determine the truth or falsity of particular points of interest to each particular science (101a). Evans argues that dialectic is external though not irrelevant to the sciences since its scope is not restricted to any particular area of study and since it, not the particular sciences, is concerned with induction.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the link between Socratic reasoning and Aristotle’s dialectic and rhetoric and between Aristotle’s dialectic and the particular sciences is sufficiently clear in Aristotle’s assessment. Contemporary critics have therefore not surprisingly found Socratic reasoning wanting, on the one hand, because it apparently leads to the quest for a rationally ordered, unitary truth that now seems fruitless and misguided and, on the other hand, because it succeeds in its quest only by practicing a devious logic that seems more like *mere rhetoric* than either philosophy or science. J. Hillis Miller, for example, writes of “Socratic, theoretical, or canny critics,” who are likely to speak of themselves as scientists and who are “lulled by the promise of a rational ordering of literary study on the basis of solid advances in scientific knowledge about language.”⁸⁶ Victor J. Vitanza writes of a Socrates who seeks unity and sameness and who only “counted to *one*.”⁸⁷ Livio Rossetti cites Socratic strategies of concealment, insinuation, persuasive definitions, examples, and analogies and compares the

Socratic “rhetorical machinery” to “successful advertising, propaganda, and other even more fearful manipulations of opinion.”⁸⁸ James J. Sosnoski explains Socratic dialectic as a means of drawing students out and leading them to accept the same hegemonic cultural values that many teachers deplore, adding simply “Socrates Begone!” from the rhetoric and composition classroom.⁸⁹ Such comments can best be explained, and perhaps only explained, by the historical development of Socratic thought from the dialectical/dialogical method of the early dialogues to the dialectical rhetoric of the later Plato and to the dialectic and rhetoric of Aristotle.

THE BRITISH EMPIRICAL TRADITION: LOGIC AND SOCRATIC NEGATIVE DIALECTIC

Within the tradition of nineteenth-century British empirical thought, Socrates is both heir to the philosophical tradition that he is said to have originated and practitioner of a negative dialectic that is said to be uniquely his own. Socrates, like the sophists and in some of the same writings, was subject to widespread revival and reinterpretation in the nineteenth century, the reinterpretations usually reflecting the views of the interpreter.⁹⁰ For G. W. F. Hegel, Socrates represented the morality of the critically reflective individual in a clash with the collective moral sense of the whole people, a tragic but necessary stage in a dialectical process that leads to a higher unity in which individuality is constituted by its role in the collective.⁹¹ For Søren Kierkegaard, Socrates represented the morality of a subjective inward truth and a subjective faith in God, expressed as irony, “the very incitement of subjectivity.”⁹² For Friedrich Nietzsche, Socrates was the subject of ambivalence, most memorably, however, the representative of scientific rationalism, a profound delusion destructive of art and culture (and the inspiration for Miller’s remark cited in this chapter).⁹³ For George Grote and John Stuart Mill, Socrates was the originator of the Platonic/Aristotelian logic of induction that produces unanimity of truth and opinion and practitioner of a negative dialectic that enables each of us to contest that truth.⁹⁴

In his *History of Greece*, Grote credits Socrates as the originator of the logic of Plato, Aristotle, and Mill and as the practitioner of a negative dialectic that was inseparable from his logic of definition and induction.⁹⁵ According to Grote, the logic initiated by Socrates was improved by Plato, developed as a comprehensive system of logic by Aristotle, and enlarged and revised by Mill “commensurate with the vast increase of knowledge and extension of positive method belonging to the present day” (234). This logic bound together “the dialectic method and the logical distribution of particulars into species and genera” (236). The dialectic initiated a discussion in search of a definition of a generic term and tested the definition by bringing it into colli-

sion with various particulars, usually revealing the generic term to be merely nominal and fallacious. This same dialectic was also an “indirect and negative proceeding” by which Socrates challenged other people’s most confidently held convictions, leading them into self-contradiction and inconsistency while disclaiming any positive knowledge of his own (248). Even as a negative dialectic, however, it served the positive purpose of clearing the mind of “its mist of fancied knowledge” and “laying bare the real ignorance,” thus introducing the possibility of the birth of positive knowledge (252).

Mill admired Grote’s portrait of Socrates and probably drew upon it for the development of his own view of the relationship between logic and Socratic negative dialectic.⁹⁶ In his *Logic* and “On Liberty,” he shows how the logic of induction builds positive knowledge on the foundation of our collective human experience and how the Socratic negative dialectic serves as a check on human experience and as an assurance of our right to contest that experience.⁹⁷ In the *Logic*, he explains deduction as a process of reasoning from a generalization to particulars, for example, from “All men are mortal” to “Socrates is a man,” to “Socrates is mortal” (7:184).⁹⁸ He claims that such reasoning proves nothing since we cannot know the general principle, “All men are mortal,” unless we already know the conclusion, “Socrates is mortal,” and he concludes that “no reasoning from generals to particulars can, as such, prove anything: since from a general principle we cannot infer any particulars, but those which the principle itself assumes as known” (7:184). Mill explains induction as a process of reasoning from particulars to a generalization, that is, “the process by which we conclude that what is true of certain individuals of a class is true of the whole class” (7:288).⁹⁹ He claims that this process is valid: “Whenever the evidence which we derive from observation of known cases justifies us in drawing an inference respecting even one unknown case, we should on the same evidence be justified in drawing a similar inference with respect to a whole class of cases” (7:284).

Though Mill believes that this process is valid, he also recognizes that it presents a fundamental problem (often called *Hume’s problem*, after the philosopher David Hume).¹⁰⁰ If it is true, he observes, that we can reason from a set of particulars (white swans) to a generalization (all swans are white), it is also true that we cannot do so with any certainty in the validity of the generalization since we cannot be certain that the next particular that we encounter (it might be a black swan) will resemble, in relevant respects, the set of particulars upon which we have based the generalization. Granted that we can reason from a set of particulars to a generalization on the assumption of uniformity in the course of nature, we nonetheless encounter difficulty with respect to the generalization: “The universe, so far as known to us, is so constituted, that whatever is true in any one case, is true in all cases of a certain description; the only difficulty is, to find what description” (7:306). Moreover, we encounter a similar difficulty with respect to the

assumption of uniformity in the course of nature since “this large generalization” is “itself an instance of induction” and “far from being the first induction we make . . . is one of the last” and is therefore subject to the same difficulty as all the others (7:307).

Given this problem in inductive reasoning, Mill sets in place of the generalization our own experience. He explains that the assumption of uniformity in the course of nature does not hold in every instance, that nature varies, so that while “we have always a propensity to generalize from unvarying experience,” we have to be sure that if there are instances contrary to our experience, we can know them, and “this assurance, in the great majority of cases, we cannot have, or can have only in a very moderate degree” (7:312). Nevertheless, he believes that our experience is genuine, even when it is insufficient to establish a generalization: “That all swans are white, cannot have been a good induction, since the conclusion has turned out erroneous. The experience, however, on which the conclusion rested, was genuine” (7:313). Mill concludes that since we can reason from particulars (e.g., white swans) to our experience (Swans are usually white or insofar as we have experience are white) with only a moderate degree of assurance, we cannot reason from our experience to other particulars (other white swans) with absolute certainty. He nonetheless believes that we can increase our assurance that our reasoning is valid by trusting our collective human experience and by practicing the Socratic negative dialectic as a test of that experience.

In the *Logic*, he explains that we can increase our assurance if we trust our collective human experience. He observes that our process of reasoning from particulars to our experience depends not only upon our immediate and limited experience (e.g., with white swans) but also upon our broader experience (e.g., with the colors of animals). Why, he asks, do we not reject the assertion that there are black swans though we would surely reject the assertion that there are men who wear their heads beneath their shoulders? He answers that we accept the former but reject the latter because our experience of uniformity in the course of nature varies, because that experience tells us that “there is less constancy in the colours of animals, than in the general structure of their anatomy” (7:319).¹⁰¹ And what assurance can we have that our reasoning, based upon this broader experience, is valid? Mill explains that experience is its own test, “that we need experience to inform us, in what degree, and in what cases, or sorts of cases, experience is to be relied on” (7:319). He therefore claims that our own limited experience must be based upon our collective human experience, upon “a general knowledge of the prevalent character of the uniformities existing throughout nature,” so that the necessary and indispensable foundation of “a scientific formula of induction” must be “a survey of the inductions . . . conducted in unscientific practice” (7:319–20). On the basis of this collective experience, we can apparently reason with greater assurance about the vari-

ety of colors in animals or the structure of their anatomy, for example, than we can about the white swans.

In his essay “On Liberty,” Mill explains that we can further increase our assurance that our reasoning is valid if we practice the Socratic negative dialectic as a test of our collective experience. Whereas in the *Logic* he had allowed that experience is its own test, he now maintains that experience alone is incorrigible but that it can be corrected through public discussion. People are capable of correcting their mistakes, he claims, by discussion and experience: “Not by experience alone. There must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted. Wrong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument: but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it” (231). He still maintains the validity of our collective human experience and claims that our well-being “may almost be measured by the number and gravity of the truths which have reached the point of being uncontested” (250). However, he also maintains that this collective experience must be tested and corrected continuously and that it can be tested and corrected only if we possess some method of ensuring its “intelligent and living apprehension” (251). He claims that the Socratic negative dialectic is just such a method:

The Socratic dialectics, so magnificently exemplified in the dialogues of Plato, were a contrivance of this description. They were essentially a negative discussion of the great questions of philosophy and life, directed with consummate skill to the purpose of convincing any one who had merely adopted the commonplaces of received opinion, that he did not understand the subject—that he as yet attached no definite meaning to the doctrines he professed; in order that, becoming aware of his ignorance, he might be put in the way to attain a stable belief, resting on a clear apprehension both of the meaning of doctrines and of their evidence. (251)

This method of public discussion is so important that where it cannot be found to exist it must be imagined: “if opponents of all important truths do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them, and supply them with the strongest arguments which the most skilful devil’s advocate can conjure up” (245).

Mill’s attempt to explain induction by joining our collective human experience to the Socratic negative dialectic revives the dialectical/dialogical method of the early Socratic dialogues. Nonetheless, his linking of the inductive and dialectical/dialogical methods creates a tension between the progress toward a rational and unified truth, on the one hand, and the openness of dialectic or dialogue, on the other. Post-colonial critic Homi K. Bhabha explores this tension as it is expressed in Mill’s concept of public discussion.¹⁰² Bhabha finds in this concept both a practice of public rhetoric

as dialogue and a limitation of this practice by the rationality of the collective mind and by Britain's unified colonial vision. According to Bhabha, Mill creates "a form of *public rhetoric* able to represent different and opposing political 'contents' not as a priori preconstituted principles but as a dialogical discursive exchange."¹⁰³ This public rhetoric presumes that knowledge can only become political through such an exchange: "dissensus, alterity and otherness are the discursive conditions for the circulation and recognition of a politicized subject and a public 'truth.'"¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, Mill's concept of a public rhetoric is limited in practice because it depends upon the rationality of "the 'whole truth'" and "the unreal neutral space of the Third Person . . . who witnesses the debate from an 'epistemological distance' and draws a reasonable conclusion," even as it suggests something "much more dialogical: the realization of the political idea at the ambivalent point of textual address, its emergence through a form of political projection."¹⁰⁵ Mill's public rhetoric is also limited in practice by Britain's unified colonial vision, a vision that Mill seems to have shared. In his work as an examiner of correspondence for the East India Company, Mill envisioned "a perfect system of recordation," a complete written record of all executive orders and acts performed in India, designed as "a strategy for policing the culturally and racially differentiated colonial space," as "a strategy of colonialist regulation," and as "a colonial substitute for democratic 'public discussion.'"¹⁰⁶

THE DIALOGICAL TRADITION: TESTING, CONTESTING, AND CREATING IDEAS

In his striking portrait in *The Post Card*, Jacques Derrida envisions a Socrates who writes and who therefore disrupts the "historical teleology" by which a letter (or a postcard) always arrives at its destination and the "common sense of the chronology" according to which Socrates always says only what Plato wants him to say.¹⁰⁷ Derrida describes a postcard that depicts Socrates seated and writing as Plato stands behind him apparently dictating what Socrates writes.¹⁰⁸ Derrida calls this Plato "authoritarian, masterly, imperious," perhaps even "wicked," because he seeks "to kill," "to eliminate," and "to neutralize" Socrates by putting his own words into Socrates' mouth and, as the postcard suggests, into his pen as well.¹⁰⁹ Derrida's portrait of Socrates writing suggests the possibility of revisioning the Socrates of the early dialogues as a Socrates who says (or writes) what he, not Plato, wants to say. Studies of the early dialogues have sought to recapture this Socrates as the practitioner of an art of dialogue that was not yet inextricably intertwined with the rhetorical and philosophical traditions that extend from Plato and Aristotle through George Grote and John Stuart Mill even to the present time. These studies distinguish the earlier from the middle and later dialogues and situate them in relationship

to their cultural and historical setting.¹¹⁰ Bakhtin's reading of the Socratic dialogue suggests how these dialogues might be rehistoricized, how Socrates might be reconfigured as a Socrates who examines and tests ideas and people but does not seek to persuade: testing his own and others' ideas in early dialogues such as the *Laches*, collectively creating ideas with others in the *Protagoras*, and testing and also contesting the ideas of others in the *Gorgias*.

In contrast to the middle and later dialogues, the early dialogues seem to be exclusively ethical, aporetic or inconclusive, and exhortative rather than persuasive. Gregory Vlastos finds ten points of difference between the early and the middle dialogues.¹¹¹ Most importantly, the Socrates of the early dialogues is concerned with ethical or moral issues and, "seeking knowledge elenctically, keeps avowing that he has none"; the Socrates of the middle dialogues is concerned with a whole range of philosophical issues, has "a grandiose metaphysical theory of 'separately existing' Forms" and "a complex, tripartite model of the soul," and "seeks demonstrative knowledge and is confident that he finds it."¹¹² Terry Penner similarly characterizes the early dialogues as "aporetic and without positive results," "amusing, bantering, extroverted, optimistic, and mischievous in tone," "almost exclusively ethical in content," and lacking any interest in the question of the immortality of the soul, which is so passionately embraced in later dialogues.¹¹³ Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicolas D. Smith explain Socrates' ethical concern, quite simply, as a concern with living rather than knowing: "Socrates does not say that untested propositions are not worth believing or that unexamined beliefs are not worth holding; he says that the unexamined *life* is not worth living."¹¹⁴

Situated in its cultural and historical setting, the ethical problem of the early dialogues seems to emerge from the conflict between competing ideals of virtuous living, more specifically, the conflict between self-regarding and other-regarding virtue, between the courage and skill required in a warrior culture and the justice and temperance required in a civil society.¹¹⁵ This problem is frequently approached as a question about the relationship of the virtues: whether the individual virtues are related as part to whole, as part to part, or as one with the whole, as an identity or unity.¹¹⁶ But the question, and the underlying ethical problem, remains open and unanswered, at least in the early dialogues. Irwin characterizes the problem broadly as a conflict between self-regarding and other-regarding virtue.¹¹⁷ Arthur W. H. Adkins describes it as a conflict between the bravery, skill, and success of the warrior and the "quiet virtues" of justice and temperance.¹¹⁸ He explains that the conduct of both the assembly and the law courts within Athens and the empire beyond its walls required good counsel or sound judgment (*euboulia*), directed toward success in politics in the same way that courage and skill were directed toward success in battle.¹¹⁹ Such a concept of virtue (*aretē*), he argues, "requires courage, initiative, and the willingness to take risks to achieve a desired end . . . and hence is unlikely to be conducive to peace and justice between

states or within the state.”¹²⁰ The concept justified Athens’ rule over its empire but also led to the dissolution of its democracy and its empire and the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, for which “the Athenian democracy paid in blood.”¹²¹

This ethical problem surfaces in the ordinary uses of language, for example, in the use of the same term to refer to either professional skill or knowledge (*epistēmē*) and wisdom (*sophia*).¹²² Derrida illustrates the problem in his explication of the *Phaedrus* as “a chain of significations.”¹²³ According to Derrida, Plato’s reference to writing as *pharmakon* conveys the double meaning of both *remedy* and *poison* and suggests other meanings as well through its etymological link to Socrates, “he who does not write,” he who is both *pharmakeus* (a magician or sorcerer) and *pharmakos* (magician or poisoner and also scapegoat).¹²⁴ Unlike Plato, however, who sought to fix meanings in writing (paradoxically protesting as he did so), the Socrates of the early dialogues plays upon these multiple meanings to effect a cultural transformation, leading others to understand true courage as courage in a just cause, true knowledge as the knowledge of good and evil.

Socrates, however, approaches the problem by way of exhortation rather than persuasion. That is, he seeks rather to lead others to their own solution to the problem, and simultaneously to confirm his own tentative solution to the problem, than to persuade others to accept a conclusion that he has previously determined to be true. Socrates’ exhortative approach is usually referred to as the *elenchos* (refutation or cross-examination), though Socrates does not claim to have a method as such.¹²⁵ Irwin explains the *elenchos* as the process by which Socrates leads others into self-contradiction.¹²⁶ Socrates typically asks a question about the virtues, either a “What is X?” question about a particular virtue or some other question. The other person in the discussion responds with a proposition, Socrates asks further questions, and the other responds with additional propositions. Socrates then shows the other person that these additional propositions lead to a proposition that directly contradicts the original proposition, leaving the other in a state of *aporia*, uncertain which proposition to accept or reject. Irwin claims that the *elenchos* is exhortative *and* persuasive.¹²⁷ Penner maintains, however, that Socrates construes “rhetoric” as teaching rather than persuasion and explains teaching as bringing people to understand, for themselves, but with the help of Socratic questioning, what is and is not the case.¹²⁸ Brickhouse and Smith claim that Socrates exhorts people “to *do the right thing*,” that he persuades them, perhaps, but only in the sense that he exhorts them to act as they, not as he, believes they should act.¹²⁹

Bakhtin’s reading of the Socratic dialogue suggests how the Socrates of the early dialogues might be recaptured as a Socrates who exhorts but does not seek to persuade.¹³⁰ Bakhtin claims that the Socratic dialogue is a testing not only of ideas but also of the people who represent them. Brickhouse and Smith explain that Socrates is often said to practice the “method of *elenchos*”

but that he himself claims only that he “examines,” “inquires,” “investigates,” “searches,” and “questions.”¹³¹ Moreover, he examines not ideas but people: “Socrates does not say that he examines what people say or even what they believe; he says he examines *people*, . . . and as we have said, by this he means examining the ways in which they live.”¹³² He therefore insists that others say what they really mean, for only in this way can he be certain “that he is really testing an aspect of how they think they should live.”¹³³ This testing of ideas and especially of people is evident in the *Laches*, in Socrates’ testing of Laches and Nicias and in Plato the author’s allusions to the historical persons, which remind us that people’s ideas can and do shape their lives.

Bakhtin also describes the Socratic dialogue as a creating of ideas between people with the help of the Socratic midwife. Myles F. Burnyeat claims that the concept of Socrates as the midwife of ideas should be attributed to the later Plato and not to the historic Socrates.¹³⁴ He suggests that the Socrates of the early dialogues tests but does not create ideas and that the later Plato creates ideas not in interaction with others but in isolation, in a creative interaction between (his own) reason and inspiration.¹³⁵ Bakhtin, however, finds the Socratic midwife in the early dialogues in the dialogic interaction between people by which truth is born. This creating of ideas between people is evident in the *Protagoras*, which is usually read from the perspective of either Protagoras or Socrates, not both, but which seems more than any of the other early dialogues to illustrate Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue as a creative interaction between people, for both Protagoras and Socrates contribute substantively to the new ideas in the dialogue, in particular the new idea that courage is inseparable from the other virtues, that the virtues are therefore one—a unity.

Finally, Bakhtin describes the Socratic dialogue as a carnivalesque debate between opposing points of view, with a ritualistic crownings and decrownings of opponents. I call this Socratic form of debate a *contesting* of ideas to capture the double meaning of the Socratic debate as both a mutual testing of oneself and others and a contesting or challenging of others’ ideas and their lives. Brickhouse and Smith explain that Socrates’ testing of ideas and people is a mutual testing not only of others but also of himself: Socrates claims that he has been commanded by the god to examine himself as well as others; he claims that the unexamined life is not worth living; and, since he rarely submits to questioning himself, “it must be that in the process of examining others Socrates regards himself as examining his own life, too.”¹³⁶ Such a mutual testing of ideas provides the only claim to knowledge that Socrates can have: since neither he nor anyone else knows the real definitions of things, he cannot claim to have any knowledge of his own; since, however, he subjects his beliefs to repeated testing, he can claim to have that limited human knowledge supported by the “inductive evidence” of “previous elenctic examinations.”¹³⁷ This mutual testing of ideas and people is evident in the *Laches* and also

appears in the *Gorgias* in Socrates' testing of his own belief that courage is inseparable from the other virtues and in his willingness to submit his belief and indeed his life to the ultimate test of divine judgment, in what Bakhtin calls a *dialogue on the threshold*. The contesting or challenging of others' ideas and their lives and their ritualistic crowning/decrowning is evident in the *Gorgias*, in Socrates' successive refutations and humiliations of Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles.