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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.