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CHAPTER NINE

WHIP SCARS ON THE NAKED SOUL: MYTH AND *ELENCHOS* IN PLATO'S *GORGIAS*

Radcliffe G. Edmonds III

Stripped of his regal robes and all the trappings of his worldly power, the soul of the Great King cowers naked before Rhadamanthys, who looks down upon the crippled wretch before him, disfigured like the basest slave by the marks of the whip and covered with festering sores. Many scholars have interpreted this horrific image of the judgement of the soul from Plato's *Gorgias* as a threat of hell-fire designed to convince the skeptical Callicles that justice pays 'in the end'. The myth at the end of the *Gorgias* has thus been seen as a failure of Plato's philosophy, one of those places which, in Zeller's condescending words, 'indicate the point at which it becomes evident that as yet [Plato] cannot be wholly a philosopher, because he is too much a poet'.¹ Scholars have been critical of what they see as an attempt by Plato to beg the premises of his argument for the philosophic life by appealing to the idea that justice always pays off 'in the end' because of some system of compensation in the hereafter. Even Annas, whose treatment of Plato's myths of judgement is among the most sensitive, sees the myth in the *Gorgias* as asserting a necessary premise without proof: 'The *Gorgias* myth is both the most religiously coloured and the starkest in the claim it makes that justice pays *in the end* In the *Gorgias*, Plato insists flatly that justice will bring rewards in the end, though without giving us any good reason to believe this'.² Without the moral optimism that

¹ Zeller (1888), 163. This idea that the myths betray the limits of Plato's philosophic ability goes back to Hegel.

² Annas (1982), 125, 138, here 125: 'The myth, then, is giving a consequentialist reason to be just. Whether we take it as really threatening future punishment for wrongdoing, or demythologize its message as the claim that being wicked brings the punishment of a scarred and deformed soul now, its message is still that justice pays 'in the end,' on a deeper level than we can now see'. I would point out, however, the crucial difference between 'in the end' and 'on a deeper level' of reality.

justice will prevail in the end, she asks, how could one not be as unconvinced as Callicles by these old wives' tales?³

I argue, to the contrary, that the details of the myth help clarify the ways in which Plato tries to prove that Socrates' way of life really is better than Callicles', not just 'in the end,' after the afterlife judgement, but right now, at any given moment. Specifically, I suggest that a proper understanding of the myth helps resolve another of the recurring problems in Platonic scholarship, the nature of the Socratic *elenchos*. Plato carefully manipulates the traditional mythic details in his tale of an afterlife judgement to provide an illustration, in vivid and graphic terms, of the workings of the Socratic *elenchos*. Not only does myth of the reform of the afterlife judgement illustrate through narrative the contrasts between Socrates' *elenchos* and the rhetorical arguments of his interlocutors, but the description of the judgement and punishment as the examination and healing of a soul scarred with wounds and disease illuminates the effects of the *elenchos* on the interlocutors. The image of the Great King's scarred and misshapen soul, stripped of all its coverings and supports and examined by the expert in justice, illustrates the way Socrates puts his interlocutors to the test, while the afterlife punishments prescribed for the wrong-doers depict the suffering that the shame of the *elenchos* inflicts. Moreover, Plato manipulates the traditional mythic punishment of the water carriers to depict the life of those who fail to be cured by the therapeutic punishment of the *elenchos*. The myth does not supplement a deficient argument for the philosophic life; rather, Plato makes use of the narrative and the traditional aspects of the myth to depict the examination of the unexamined life in the here and now.

1. THE *ELENCHOS*

The 'Socratic *elenchos*' is a term used in the scholarship for the method of argumentation that Socrates employs in all of the so-called 'early' dialogues, a process of question and answer by which Socrates shows his interlocutor that his statements involve an inconsistency.⁴ While in other

³ Cf. Saunders (1991), 205, 'Socrates' interlocutors, who are commonly sceptical of the need to cultivate the soul and to adhere to just conduct at any price, are confronted with edifying and powerful stories designed to appeal to their feelings and imagination, even if argument has failed to convince their intellect'.

⁴ Vlastos (1983), 39, translates the procedure into the propositional logic of modern philosophers, although Brickhouse and Smith (1991), 135 ff., have emphasized that Socrates

dialogues Socrates employs his *elenchos* without much comment on its form or method, in the *Gorgias* the *elenchos* is not only employed, but discussed by the interlocutors.⁵ The verb Socrates uses to describe this process of refutation or cross-examination is *elenchein*, which derives from the Homeric *to elenchos*, meaning shame or disgrace.⁶ The implicit competition in this form of argument has been stressed in recent scholarship; the *elenchos* is a contest of speech between two parties—to win is to put your opponent to shame (*elenchein*), to lose is to be humiliated (*elenchesthai*).⁷ Like any of the contests which were central to the Greek way of life, however, the *elenchos* must be played by the rules, and, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates carefully specifies the rules for his kind of *elenchos*, rules that differ in significant ways from the refutations practiced in the law courts and the assemblies. The basic process of refutation, pointing out a contradiction between accepted premises and consequences that follow from them, is not much

is testing not so much propositions as ways of life, cf. *La.* 187e6–188a2; *Ap.* 39c7. See also the critique of Vlastos' *elenchos* in Talisse (2002). Whether the so-called 'early' dialogues (Vlastos' list is *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major* and *Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus*, *Protagoras*, and the first book of the *Republic*) were in fact written earlier than Plato's other dialogues is irrelevant for my purposes. They may be conveniently grouped together because they exhibit a number of common characteristics, one of which is the prominent use of the *elenchos*.

⁵ Brickhouse and Smith (1991), in their examination of Socrates' use of the *elenchos*, draw together from other dialogues many of Socrates' comments on the way the *elenchos* should be conducted, but the *Gorgias* is the only dialogue in which Socrates explicitly compares types of refutations.

⁶ The Attic ὁ ἐλεγχος is generally used in the specific sense of a legal or rhetorical refutation, in contrast to the broader epic sense of shame, but the sense of failing a test or contest always underlies this refutation. To lose a contest or to fail a test, particularly in a public arena such as a lawcourt or even a street corner in front of a crowd, inevitably produces shame for the loser. While in other dialogues, the *elenchos* can become a friendly game played between friends, where the element of shame is minimized, in the *Gorgias*, the game is less friendly and the shame element is more prominent.

⁷ See especially Leshner (2002), who traces the use of the word from its Homeric uses to its philosophic uses in *Parmenides* and up to Plato, Ausland (2002), who emphasizes the forensic context for the *elenchos*, and Dorion (1990), who emphasizes the agonistic nature of the *elenchos* and shows the ways in which Plato builds upon contemporary forensic procedure to create his own type of philosophic *elenchos*. Cf. Tarrant (2002), 68: 'The Greek verb was still correctly understood as involving the *exposure* of an opponent. In forensic speeches, where it was extremely common, it might involve the exposure of the *faults* (and hence the guilt) of the defendant, or the accuracy (and hence the reliability) of a witness. It was never a friendly process'. See *ibid.*, n. 3: 'I count 181 uses of *elenchos* terminology in the speeches attributed to Antiphon, Andocides, Lysias, Isaeus, and Isocrates'. Adkins (1960), 30–60 rightly points to the connections between shame and failure to succeed at heroic action.

different when employed by Socrates from the process employed by eristic opponents like Dionysiodorus or indeed by opponents in the law courts.⁸ Plato nevertheless has Socrates insist on differences in his mode of *elenchos*, and he further amplifies and illustrates those differences with the myth at the end of the dialogue.

2. JUDICIAL REFORM

In the *Gorgias*, Plato plays off his contemporaries' understanding of the way a normal Athenian legal contest worked to level a critique at the judicial system that condemned his teacher to death, contrasting the contest of litigation with his ideal of philosophic examination. Success in the Athenian lawcourts, it must be remembered, did not depend on fingerprints, bloodstains, and DNA evidence. Rather, the trial was a contest between two opponents, both of whom were subject to the scrutiny and judgement of the huge panel of *dikasts*. In the absence of high standards for material evidence, the *dikasts*' decision had to be made largely on the grounds of the character of the accuser and accused. A fragment of Euripides' *Phoenix* expresses the idea nicely: 'I've already been chosen to judge many disputes and have heard witnesses competing against each other with opposing accounts of the same event. And like any wise man I work out the truth by looking at a man's nature and the life he leads'.⁹ Accordingly, both sides tried to present themselves in the most positive light, appealing to the standards and prejudices of the *dikasts*. Much of the preparation for an effective law court speech consisted in the creation of a portrait of the speaker that would appeal to the *dikasts*. In the courts, the witnesses served to establish the litigant's status in Athenian society and to affirm his good reputation within the networks

⁸ As Tulin (2005), 304 comments, 'admittedly, Plato never tired of distinguishing *his* dialectic from the petty, logic-chopping sophistic which he terms eristic, antilogic, and the like: he seeks truth, theirs seeks only victory, *doxa*, and appearance. But, this said, the fact remains that there is no *formal* difference between the two, and that Plato retains (from first to last) a lively interest in the gymnastic, or purely logical aspect of the *elenchus*—developing by example many of the finer points of logic which Aristotle would later formalize as precept'. Cf. Ausland (2002), who compares the usage of the *elenchos* in forensic contexts and Platonic dialogues. Dorion (1990) argues that Plato draws on the *ἐρώτησις* procedure of the law courts in manipulating the *elenchos*.

⁹ ἤδη δὲ πολλῶν λόγων κριτῆς καὶ πόλλ' ἀμιλληθέντα μαρτύρων ὑπο τάναντι' ἔγνω συμφορᾶς μίας πέρι. κἀγὼ μὲν οὔτω χῶστις ἔστ' ἀνήρ σοφὸς λογίζομαι τἀληθές, εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν σκοπῶν διαίταν θ' ἦντιν' ἡμερευται (fr. 812 Nauck—from Aeschines, *C. Timarch.* 152). See Humphreys (1985), 313–369, esp. 322 ff.

of family and local units of which he was a part, thus supplementing the positive self-presentation in his speeches.¹⁰

In the myth, this normal Athenian system of justice is in place before the reign of Zeus over the cosmos: the one about to die appears before a large mass of *dikasts* to defend the conduct of his life, and he sways his judges with his displays of character and status, bolstered not only by his trappings of wealth and power but by the witness of his friends.

For now the cases are judged badly. For those being judged (he said) are judged with clothes on; for they are judged while they're still alive. And so many (he said) with base souls are covered in fine bodies and noble birth and riches; and when their judgement comes, many witnesses come to support them and to testify that they have lived justly. And so the judges are impressed by all this; and at the same time they judge with clothes on, obstructed by eyes and ears and their whole body in front of their soul. All these things, then, are in their way, both their own coverings and the defendants.¹¹

(*Gorg.* 523c2–d5)

To remedy the injustices this system produced, however, Zeus reforms the whole system of judgement. Not only will mortals be judged after death by other dead people, but they will be stripped of the foreknowledge of death, leaving them no time to prepare an elaborate defence. Moreover, they will be stripped at death not only of their bodies, but also of all their marks of status in life, all of the clothes and riches and supporting witnesses. The naked soul alone will face judgement, and not by a mass of ignorant citizens, but by a single expert judge: one of the sons of Zeus famed for his wisdom—Rhadamanthys, Aiakos, or Minos (*Gorg.* 523a1–524b1).¹²

¹⁰ As scholars such as Todd and Humphreys stress, the primary function of a witness in the Athenian court was not, as in the modern courtroom, to present impartial factual evidence, but rather to support the status of the speaker. Witnesses represented, in Humphreys' terms, 'the social networks in which litigants were personally known. The support and good opinion of such social networks was very important for the litigant' (Humphreys [1985], 350). See Todd (1990), 23: 'Traditional interpretation of the Athenian law of evidence rests on the unstated assumption that Athenian witness had the same primary function as a modern witness: to tell the truth. But it is clear even on a cursory examination that Athenians did not use witnesses in the way that we do'.

¹¹ νῦν μὲν γὰρ κακῶς αἱ δίκαι δικάζονται. ἀμπεχόμενοι γάρ, ἔφη, οἱ κρινόμενοι κρίνονται· ζῶντες γὰρ κρίνονται. πολλοὶ οὖν, ἢ δ' ὅς, ψυχὰς πονηρὰς ἔχοντες ἠμφισπόμενοι εἰσι σώματά τε καλὰ καὶ γένη καὶ πλούτους, καὶ, ἐπειδὴν ἡ κρίσις ἦ, ἔρχονται αὐτοῖς πολλοὶ μάρτυρες, μαρτυρήσοντας ὡς δικαίως βεβιώκασιν· οἱ οὖν δικασταὶ ὑπὸ τε τούτων ἐκπλήττονται, καὶ ἅμα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀμπεχόμενοι δικάζουσι, πρὸ τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς αὐτῶν ὀφθαλμοῦς καὶ ὠτα καὶ ὄλον τὸ σῶμα προκεκαλυμμένοι. ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῖς πάντα ἐπίπροσθεν γίγνεται, καὶ τὰ αὐτῶν ἀμφιέσματα καὶ τὰ τῶν κρινομένων.

¹² Citations from the *Gorgias* are from the text of Dodds (1959); I take all the translations of the *Gorgias* from Irwin (1979).

The reforms of the judicial process that Zeus imposes in the myth correspond to the differences that Socrates points out between his *elenchos* and the lawcourt rhetoric of his interlocutors, particularly that of the impetuous Polus. Just as souls under the new regime cannot prepare an elaborate defence speech, so Socrates repeatedly prohibits his interlocutors from making the long, oratorical speeches that would be appropriate in a lawcourt, requiring them to submit to the examination of the *elenchos* (*Gorg.* 449b48).¹³

Calling witnesses as if in an Athenian court is another mark of the rhetorical style of Polus' refutation which Socrates rejects. When Socrates refuses to agree with him, Polus appeals to the crowd to support him. 'Don't you think you are thoroughly refuted, Socrates, when you say things like this, that not a single man would say? For look, ask one of these people here' (*Gorg.* 473e4–5).¹⁴ Socrates accuses Polus: 'You're trying to refute me rhetorically, like those who think they're refuting people in the jury-courts' (471e2–3).¹⁵

Socrates, by contrast, claims that his *elenchos* produces the one crucial witness worth more than any number of other witnesses, the interlocutor himself. 'For I know how to produce just one witness to whatever I say—the man I am having a discussion with whoever he may be—but I forget about the many. I know how to put the question to a vote to one man,

¹³ Ἄρ' οὖν ἐθελήσῃς ἄν, ὦ Γοργία, ὥσπερ νῦν διαλεγόμεθα, διατελέσαι τὸ μὲν ἐρωτῶν, τὸ δ' ἀποκρινόμενος, τὸ δὲ μήκος τῶν λόγων τοῦτο, οἷον καὶ Πῶλος ἤρξατο, εἰς αὐθις ἀποθέσθαι; ἀλλ' ὅπερ ὑπισχνῆ, μὴ ψεύσῃ, ἀλλὰ ἐθέλησον κατὰ βραχὺ τὸ ἐρωτώμενον ἀποκρίνεσθαι. 'Then would you be willing, Gorgias, to continue this present way of discussion, by alternate question and answer, and defer to some other time that lengthy style of speech in which Polus made a beginning? Come, be true to your promise, and consent to answer each question briefly'. See also 462a1–4: ἀλλ' εἴ τι κήδη τοῦ λόγου τοῦ εἰρημένου καὶ ἐπανορθώσασθαι αὐτὸν βούλει, ὥσπερ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, ἀνθέμενος ὅτι σοι δοκεῖ, ἐν τῷ μέρει ἐρωτῶν τε καὶ ἐρωτώμενος, ὥσπερ ἐγὼ τε καὶ Γοργίας, ἔλεγχέ τε καὶ ἐλέγχου. 'No, if you have any concern for the argument that we have carried on, and care to set it on its feet again, revoke whatever you please, as I suggested just now; take your turn in questioning and being questioned, like me and Gorgias; and thus either refute or be refuted'.

¹⁴ Οὐκ οἶε ἐξεληγέχθαι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅταν τοιαῦτα λέγῃς ἃ οὐδεὶς ἂν φήσειεν ἀνθρώπων; ἐπεὶ ἐροῦ τινα τουτωνί. Socrates characterizes this law court refutation as 'worth nothing towards the truth. For sometimes someone may actually be beaten by many false witnesses thought to amount to something'. 471e7–472a2: οὗτος δὲ ὁ ἔλεγχος οὐθενὸς ἀξιὸς ἐστὶν πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν· ἐνίοτε γὰρ ἂν καὶ καταψευδομαρτυρηθεῖ τις ὑπὸ πολλῶν καὶ δοκούντων εἶναι τι (Plato, unlike the Lord Chancellor in *Iolanthe*, tends to 'assume that the witnesses summoned in force,| in Exchequer, Queen's Bench, Common Pleas, and Divorce,| have perjured themselves as a matter of course ...').

¹⁵ ῥητορικῶς γὰρ με ἐπιχειρεῖς ἐλέγχειν, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν τοῖς δικαστηρίοις ἡγούμενοι ἐλέγχειν. See Dorion (1990), 323–327, on the use of witnesses in the courts and Plato's critique.

but don't even have a dialogue with the many' (474a5–b1).¹⁶ Socrates rejects the 'wisdom of the masses,' preferring to settle the question with a dialogic interchange between two individuals.¹⁷

Plato crafts his description of the reformed afterlife judgement to resemble the Socratic *elenchos*, tailoring the traditional mythic motifs to fit with the process. Like the Socratic *elenchos*, the afterlife judgement in Zeus' regime takes place between two individuals, an examiner and an examined. In both, the examined is the only admissible witness, and that one witness is sufficient for a judgement, even superior to a crowd of false witnesses—the body, the clothes, the friends and relatives of the deceased—who could obstruct the examiner in his inquiry.¹⁸ The striking image of the naked soul, unprepared and trembling before the expert judge, depicts the interlocutor whose beliefs are being examined in the *elenchos*, bereft of appeals to popular opinion or the authority of his social status, and the chronological structure of the narrative in the myth highlights the logical contrast between types of refutations.

3. MEDICAL METAPHORS

Rather than the afterlife judge acting as a surrogate punisher for the wrongs committed against others, as the limited evidence for earlier myths of the afterlife suggests, in the *Gorgias* myth, the judge uses his expertise to

¹⁶ ἐγὼ γὰρ ὧν ἂν λέγω ἓνα μὲν παρασχέσθαι μάρτυρα ἐπίσταμαι, αὐτὸν πρὸς ὃν ἂν μοι ὁ λόγος ᾗ, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς ἐὼ χαίρειν, καὶ ἓνα ἐπιψηφίζειν ἐπίσταμαι, τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς οὐδὲ διαλέγομαι. After Socrates has made Polus concede that neither he nor anyone else could prefer to do injustice rather than suffer it, he once again draws the contrast between their two styles of *elenchos*. 'You see, then, Polus, that when this refutation is compared with that one it is not at all like it. You have everyone else agreeing with you except me, but I am quite satisfied with you just by yourself, agreeing and being my witness. I put the question for a vote to you alone, and let all the others go'. 475e7–476a2: Ὁρᾷς οὖν, ὦ Πῶλε, ὁ ἔλεγχος παρὰ τὸν ἔλεγχον παραβαλλόμενος ὅτι οὐδὲν ἔοικεν, ἀλλὰ σοὶ μὲν οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες ὁμολογοῦσιν πλὴν ἐμοῦ, ἐμοὶ δὲ σὺ ἐξαρκεῖς εἰς ὧν μόνος καὶ ὁμολογῶν καὶ μαρτυρῶν, καὶ ἐγὼ σέ μόνον ἐπιψηφίζων τοὺς ἄλλους ἐὼ χαίρειν.

¹⁷ Cf. Socrates' rejections of the common opinion in *Laches*, 184e and *Crito*, 46d–47d (a contrast to Xenophon's depiction of Socratic argument starting from common opinion in *Memorabilia*, 4.6.15). Moreover, if indeed Socrates' mention of his service on the Council is meant to recall the illegal trial of the Generals after Arginusae, Plato is attacking not just the idea of having a mass of *dikasts*, but also the idea of trying a group of defendants en masse. Another layer of imagery that may be in play is the idea of the private arbitration that could often substitute for the public trial, in which a single arbitrator (chosen by both parties out of respect for his fairness and insight) would render a judgement instead of the mass of *dikasts*.

¹⁸ The examiner too relies not on the bodily senses that perceive these superficial attributes, but on the faculties of his soul.

evaluate the soul by the wrongs it has done to itself, the harm caused to the soul by its way of life, and then, like a doctor, to prescribe the appropriate corrective treatment.

3.1. *Diagnosis*

In the myth, the deceased mortal, stripped of body and marks of mortal status, faces the judge with a naked soul. Just as presenting a good appearance through one's rhetoric and witnesses is the key to winning in an Athenian court, so too in the afterlife the primary criterion on which Aiakos or Rhadamanthys evaluates the deceased is the appearance of his soul.

But what, for Plato, is a good-looking soul? Plato employs very physical terms to describe the soul in this dialogue, and a good-looking soul is described in terms appropriate to a good-looking body. A soul must present an appearance worthy of a free citizen, well developed from exercise in the gymnasium and without the whip scars that mark the disobedient slave or the festering sores that indicate poor health.¹⁹ The soul coming to judgement bears only the marks of the conditioning of its soul, which are exposed to the expert knowledge of the judge who can diagnose the disease or deformity of the soul from its appearance and prescribe the fitting correction.²⁰ The expert examination of the judge in the myth thus serves

¹⁹ As so often, especially in an aristocratic context, the aesthetic appearance carries a moral connotation—καλός is both beautiful and good, while αἰσχρός is ugly, base, and shameful. Only an appearance that is fine enough qualifies for honoured treatment. However, the afterlife judgement of naked souls may well also recall the examination of the athletes before a competition such as the Olympic games, in which the competitors had to strip down and be examined by judges who, on the basis of the athletes' physical development, would classify them as *paides* or ephebes, cf. Pausanias V, 24.10 (I owe this idea to Betsy Gebhard). Unfortunately no evidence remains that gives any detailed description of such a process of judgement before the competition. It may well be that the *Gorgias* contains more imagery resonant of this process, but the allusions are lost to the modern reader.

²⁰ Cf. 524c5–d7, where the marks on the soul are compared to marks on the body. The souls of the dead were frequently imagined as *eidola* of the deceased—insubstantial, but essentially like the deceased as he was remembered from life. The deceased was frequently represented as being like to the living person, but with the wounds that caused his death. Such an image appears not only in Homer (*Odyssey*, 9, 40–41), where Odysseus sees 'many fighting men killed in battle, stabbed with brazen spears, still carrying their bloody armour on them,' but on numerous vases, where the depiction of dead men with bandaged wounds was a recognized topos. Dodds *ad loc* (p. 379) points out the tradition of scarred souls following Plato: Lucian, *Cataplus*, 24ff.; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* i. 103; Plutarch, *Ser. num. vind.* 22, 564d; Epictetus 2.18.11; Tacitus, *Annals* 6.6.; Themistius, *Orat.* 20, 234a. The wounds that the body sustained were, moreover, thought to leave their mark on the soul after death, to the extent that those who feared the retribution of the angry dead might deliberately mutilate the

the same function as the examination in the *elenchos*, to determine the errors in the patient's way of life. By using Socrates' myth, Plato presents in graphic form the contradictions exposed by the Socratic *elenchos* as the scars and wounds that mar the soul which is laid bare to Aiakos or Rhadamanthys.²¹

3.2. *Prescriptions for Corrective Treatment*

While Plato uses the tale of Zeus' reform and the image of the naked soul to illustrate the contrasts between the rhetoric of the Athenian lawcourts and the Socratic *elenchos*, other aspects of the myth depict the effects of the *elenchos* itself. The metaphor of the diagnosis and healing of the soul underlies both the discussions of the *elenchos* in the dialogue and the myth at the end, providing a link between the two. The effect of the *elenchos* is described in medical terms throughout the dialogue, and the myth separates the diagnostic and curative functions of the process in its images of judgement and punishment.

Scholars of ancient philosophy have debated what the Socratic *elenchos* is supposed to achieve in the philosophic arguments of the Platonic dialogues.²² Many suppose that the *elenchos* is purely negative, disproving the false ideas of Socrates' interlocutors, whereas Vlastos and others have argued that Plato intended the *elenchos* to do more, to prove the truth of the

corpse to prevent it from being able to wreak its revenge. The ritual of *machalimos*, which Clytemnestra is said by both Aeschylus and Sophocles to have performed on Agamemnon, involves chopping off the hands of the dead man and stringing them under his armpits, effectively disarming any attempt he might make at revenge from beyond the grave, cf. Aeschylus, *Choephoroi*, 439, Sophocles, *Electra*, 445. According to the scholiast on Sophocles' *Electra*, this gruesome operation was performed to deprive the deceased of the power of avenging the murder: ἵνα, φασι, ἀσθενῆς γένοιτο πρὸς ἀντιτίσθαι τὸν φονέα.

²¹ Nothing in the soul was healthy, but it was thoroughly whip-marked and full of scars from false oaths and injustice—all that each of his actions stained into the soul—and everything was crooked from lying and insolence, and nothing straight, from being brought up without truth; and he saw that from liberty and luxury and excess and incontinence in actions the soul was full of disproportion and shamefulness. 524e4–525a6: οὐδὲν ὑγιές ὄν τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλὰ διαμεμαστιγωμένην καὶ οὐλῶν μεστήν ὑπὸ ἐπιορκιῶν καὶ ἀδικίας, ἃ ἐκάστη ἢ πράξεις αὐτοῦ ἐξωμόρξατο εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ πάντα σκολιὰ ὑπὸ ψεύδους καὶ ἀλαζονείας καὶ οὐδὲν εὐθύ διὰ τὸ ἄνευ ἀληθείας τεθράφθαι· καὶ ὑπὸ ἐξουσίας καὶ τρυφῆς καὶ ὕβρεως καὶ ἀκρατίας τῶν πράξεων ἀσυμμετρίας τε καὶ αἰσχροτήτος γέμουσαν τὴν ψυχὴν εἶδεν.

²² For further views on the *elenchos*, see Vlastos (1983); Kraut (1983); Irwin (1979); Brickhouse and Smith (1984, 1991, and 1997); Kahn (1984 and 1996); May (1997), and Talisse (2002). Scott (2002) contains a number of essays that treat the *elenchos* from a variety of perspectives, mostly using Vlastos (1983) as a starting point.

opposing positions and thus to teach the interlocutors something.²³ I would argue that the medical metaphor is crucial to understanding the effect of the *elenchos* in the Platonic dialogues. Is the *elenchos* merely diagnostic, pointing out the interlocutors' errors or does it also serve a curative function, correcting the errors that it has diagnosed? Plato supplements his discussion of the workings of the *elenchos* in the dialogue with the description of the afterlife judgement in the myth, and this description of the process of judgement and punishment of the soul in the afterlife provides a clearer picture of the effects and limits of the Socratic *elenchos*.

In developing the medical metaphor of the health of the soul, Plato again makes use of a contrast between the Socratic *elenchos* and forensic rhetoric. The philosophic *elenchos*, in contrast to the oratory of the rhetoricians like Polus and Gorgias, is described throughout the dialogue as a kind of purgative medicine designed to aid the soul in achieving a good condition. Rhetoric is compared to an elaborate banquet, designed to give pleasure to the audience.²⁴ Both rhetoric and cookery are part of that practice of pandering to the pleasures of the audience without regard to its welfare that Socrates terms 'flattery', *kolakeia*. The *elenchos*, by contrast, is not merely a diet, a regimen, but actually bitter medicine, painful and unpleasant to swallow, unlike the pleasing periods of oratory. Although pain is not the essential feature of medical treatment, it is an unavoidable result of the change in state that the treatment effects—a correction or restraint of the disordered elements, *kolasis*. If, according to contemporary Greek theories of medicine, health is a proper balance of elements, and disease is an improper balance, then any medical treatment must alter the balance of elements in the body, a process which Plato sees as involving a certain amount of pain merely through the change.²⁵ Nevertheless, those who do

²³ While some scholars, e.g., Vlastos (1983) and Irwin (1979), argue that *elenchos* is intended to produce a positive result by proving the truth of some proposition, others, e.g. Benson (1987), claim that the *elenchos* is intended only to disprove propositions by showing inconsistency in the interlocutor's beliefs. Brickhouse and Smith (1991), 135 ff., point out that the target of the *elenchos* is more the way of life that follows on the proposition in question, cf. *La.* 187e6–188a2; *Ap.* 39c7. Talisse (2002) argues as well against the idea that the proposition is the target of the *elenchos*, although he sees the interlocutor's knowledge, rather than way of life, as the target of the attack.

²⁴ Socrates and Chaerophon, arriving too late for Gorgias' oration, are told that they have missed a feast (447a). In the *elenchos*, one must proceed in a moderate fashion, not snatching and grabbing at clever phrases or unfortunate definitions as though trying to stuff oneself with the dainties prepared by the chefs (454c).

²⁵ Of course, in Plato's time almost any medical procedure would have been painful and unpleasant, more in the manner of dentistry today, which remains uncomfortable despite

not understand the benefits try to avoid the painful corrections (*kolaseis*) of the doctor's medicine, preferring the pleasant confections (*kolakeia*) of the cook.²⁶

3.3. *Avoiding Treatment*

Plato also applies this medical metaphor in Socrates' debate with Polus whether it is better to be punished for injustice or to escape punishment. Like the child who would avoid the doctor for fear of the painful treatment, the foolish prefer to escape punishment for injustice. As Socrates remarks: 'For these people have managed to do about the same thing, my friend, as if someone suffering from the most serious illnesses, managed not to pay justice for the faults in his body to the doctors and not to be treated—afraid like a child of the burning and cutting because it is painful' (479a5–b1).²⁷ Polus' hero, the tyrant who can avoid paying for any of his crimes, is reduced to the little child whimpering with fear at the prospect of a visit to the doctor that would cure his sickness.

In just this way, Socrates' interlocutors try to avoid the bitter medicine of the *elenchos*. Socrates rebukes both Polus and Calicles for trying to wriggle out of answering the questions that have trapped them into contradicting themselves, urging them to take their medicine: 'Don't shrink from answering, Polus—you won't be harmed at all; but present yourself nobly to the argument as to a doctor; answer (475d5–7)'.²⁸ Answering in the *elenchos* is

all the advances in anesthetics and modern technology. In the *Laws*, Plato explicitly talks about the pain involved in any kind of shift of mode of life or regimen. 'Take as an example the way the body gets used to all sorts of food and drink and exercise. At first they upset it, but then in the course of time it is this very regimen that is responsible for putting on flesh But imagine someone forced to change again, to one of the other recommended systems: initially, he's troubled by illnesses, and only slowly, by getting used to his new way of life, does he get back to normal' (*La.* 797d ff., Saunderson's translation). Saunderson (1991), 172 ff., sees this idea that pain is a necessary component of any change as a new element in the penal theory of the *Laws*, stemming from the physiology of the *Timaeus*, rather than an idea implicit in contemporary medical ideas that Plato applies to the reform of the soul from injustice as early as the *Gorgias*.

²⁶ Cf. again the image of the doctor prosecuted by a cook in front of a jury of children (521e, 464de).

²⁷ Σχεδὸν γὰρ που οὔτοι, ὦ ἄριστε, τὸ αὐτὸ διαπεπραγμένοι εἰσιν ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις τοῖς μεγίστοις νοσήμασιν συνισχόμενος διαπράξαιτο μὴ διδόναι δίκην τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα ἁμαρτημάτων τοῖς ἰατροῖς μηδὲ ἰατρεύεσθαι, φοβούμενος ὥσπερ παις τὸ κάεσθαι καὶ τὸ τέμνεσθαι, ὅτι ἀλγεινόν.

²⁸ μὴ ἴκνει ἀποκρίνασθαι, ὦ Πῶλε· οὐδὲν γὰρ βλαβήσῃ· ἀλλὰ γενναίως τῷ λόγῳ ὥσπερ ἰατρῷ παρέχων ἀποκρίνου.

also likened to facing the doctor's treatment in the argument with Callicles. The effect of the *elenchos* is to restrain or temper the one who undergoes it, to correct the imbalance in his soul and restore it to proper balance and harmony. Callicles, when he sees that he is about to be put to the shame of having to deny his thesis, tries to avoid completing the *elenchos*.

Socrates rebukes him: 'This man won't abide being helped and corrected (*kolazomenos*), and himself undergoing the very thing our discussion is about—being corrected' (505c3–4).²⁹ The treatment of the *elenchos* cannot be effective if the patient is able to avoid taking his medicine. Callicles indeed grumbles that he has only gone along with this argument so far at the request of Gorgias, who intervened earlier to make Callicles continue the discussion (497b5). Gorgias' role in making the patient take his philosophic medicine recalls his boast at the beginning of the dialogue that he often was able to persuade patients to take the medicines his brother the doctor was not able to get them to take (456b). As Socrates warns Callicles, if Callicles cannot refute the idea that it is better to suffer than to do injustice but continues to live by that idea, then: 'Callicles himself will not agree with you, Callicles, but he will be discordant with you in the whole of your life' (482b5–6).³⁰ The *elenchos*, then, is depicted throughout the dialogue as a kind of purgative medicine that produces a painful effect of *kolasis* upon the patient, providing a shock to his system that checks the elements of his soul that are out of balance, restores the harmony, and makes health possible.³¹

²⁹ Οὗτος ἀνὴρ οὐχ ὑπομένει ὠφελούμενος καὶ αὐτὸς τοῦτο πάσχων περὶ οὗ ὁ λόγος ἐστί, κολαζόμενος.

³⁰ οὗ σοι ὁμολογήσει Καλλικλήης, ὦ Καλλικλείς, ἀλλὰ διαφωνήσει ἐν ἅπαντι τῷ βίῳ. Callicles is trapped between his idea that it is better not to suffer anything, even helpful restraint, and his desire to achieve the best. At the heart of Socrates' debate with Callicles is the question of whether it is better to rule or be ruled, to do or to suffer. Callicles' advocacy of extreme hedonism in the debate, as well as his political ambitions, stem from the assumption that, in every case, it is better to do actively than to suffer passively. Socrates' example of the *kinaidos* (494e), is fatal to Callicles' position, not because it is so disgusting that it makes even Callicles ashamed, but rather because the *kinaidos* presents the paradoxical case of one who actively desires to be passive. Callicles cannot handle such a contradiction of his ideal and tries to avoid the issue by claiming that such an example is too shameful for mention. On the *kinaidos*, see Winkler (1990).

³¹ Cf. the description in *Sophist*, 230cd. For just as physicians who care for the body believe that the body cannot get benefit from any food offered to it until all obstructions are removed, so, my boy, those who purge the soul believe that the soul can receive no benefit from any teachings offered to it until someone by cross-questioning reduces him who is cross-questioned to an attitude of modesty, by removing the opinions that obstruct the teachings, and thus purges him and makes him think that he knows only what he knows, and no more: νομίζοντες γάρ, ὦ παῖ φίλε, οἱ καθαίροντες αὐτούς, ὥσπερ οἱ περὶ τὰ σώματα

The myth separates, in the chronological order of the narrative, the diagnostic and punitive effects of the *elenchos*. While the exposure of contradictions corresponds to the examination by the judge in the hereafter, the pain and shame (*to elenchos*) the interlocutor feels as he loses the argument and his way of life is turned on its head correspond to the punishments (*kola-seis*) the judged soul undergoes.³² In the *Gorgias*, Plato does not go into a detailed description of the process of punishment in the underworld for the one whom the judge condemns (as he does, for example, in the *Phaedo*); he merely describes it as undergoing 'what it is fitting for it to undergo' (525a7). This punishment, however, this suffering, produces benefit for the punished soul, since it is corrected and made better by the treatment prescribed by the judge. 'Those who are benefited and pay justice at the hands of gods and men are those who are at fault with curable faults; but still their benefit comes to them through pain and sufferings both here and in Hades—for there is no other way to get rid of injustice' (525b6–c1).³³ Plato makes the punishment of the wrongdoer in the afterlife judgement correspond to the shaming effect of the *elenchos* in this life on someone who is defeated in an argument.³⁴ Like taking the doctor's medicine, these processes consist of suffering something unpleasant but beneficial. However, their helpful function does have its limits; only those who submit to treatment can be cured, and those who, like Callicles, avoid the treatment cannot get the benefits. Such

ιατροί νενομίκασι μὴ πρότερον ἂν τῆς προσφερομένης τροφῆς ἀπολαύειν δύνασθαι σώμα, πρὶν ἂν τὰ ἐμποδίζοντα ἐντός τις ἐκβάλῃ, ταῦτόν καὶ περὶ ψυχῆς διενεόθησαν ἐκεῖνοι, μὴ πρότερον αὐτὴν ἔξειν τῶν προσφερομένων μαθημάτων [230δ] ὄνησιν, πρὶν ἂν ἐλέγχων τις τὸν ἐλεγχόμενον εἰς αἰσχύνῃ καταστήσας, τὰς τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἐμποδίσους δόξας ἐξελῶν, καθαρὸν ἀποφῆνῃ καὶ ταῦτα ἡγούμενον ἅπερ οἶδεν εἶδέναι μόνον, πλείω δὲ μή. As Renaud (2002), 194–195, comments: 'according to this description of the *elenchus*, then, the soul cannot receive any benefit from knowledge if it is not first refuted and humbled, indeed brought to shame. ... If philosophy begins in wonder, the *elenchus* provides the wonder through the *aporia*, the sufficient proof of one's ignorance and of the necessity of learning'.

³² As Callicles protests: 'If you *are* in earnest and these things you're saying are really true, won't this human life of ours be turned upside down, and won't everything we do evidently be the opposite of what we should do?' (481c). For discussions of the role of shame in the dialogue, contrast the arguments of Kahn (1984) with those of McKim (1988), but it is important to remember that, whatever else Socrates' interlocutors may or may not feel shame about, they all feel shame at losing a contest—in contrast to Socrates, who proclaims that he would rather lose and be corrected than win and be wrong.

³³ ὅμως δὲ δι' ἀλγηδόνων καὶ ὀδυνῶν γίγνεται αὐτοῖς ἡ ὠφελία καὶ ἐνθάδε καὶ ἐν "Αἰδοῦ οὐ γὰρ οἶόν τε ἄλλως ἀδικίας ἀπαλλάττεσθαι.

³⁴ Allen (2000), 60–61, points out the equivalence, between loss in a contest and punishment, 'punishment, like reward, was the outcome of a contest for honour, but a punishment was equivalent to a loss in a contest and a loss of honour'. This equivalence would be particularly felt by an aristocrat such as Callicles, whose life is focused on winning honour.

unpleasant but beneficial medicine, whether it be the *elenchos* administered by Socrates in the streets of Athens or a judgement rendered by Aiakos in the underworld, is the only way to cure the erring soul. Those who refuse the treatment must live out their existence forever unhealed, for there is no other remedy.

4. THE INCURABLES

The *Gorgias*, however, is notable as a dialogue in which Socrates utterly fails to convince his interlocutors, to the extent that he must even finish his *elenchos* of Callicles by speaking both parts, since Callicles refuses to continue the contest. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates and Callicles both regard each other as pathological cases, in need of radical treatment to correct the unhealthy way in which they spend their lives. While Callicles warns Socrates to give up his practice of skulking in the corners, playing at philosophy with a few young boys, and to take up the place of a man, using rhetoric to win contests in the assembly and the lawcourts, Socrates earnestly tries to convince Callicles to submit his life to philosophic scrutiny and to give up the life of the mob orator. Callicles' refusal to take his medicine, however, marks him as one of the incurables Socrates describes in the myth, who cannot benefit from the treatment they get in the afterlife judgement, but can only serve as an example to others. The *elenchos* cannot cure those who refuse to accept the treatment and to adapt their lives to the conclusions of the argument, but the spectacle of their suffering may nevertheless induce others reform themselves.

The role of the incurable offenders in the *Gorgias* has been much debated, for the very idea of punishing an incurable seems to fly in the face of the rehabilitative idea of punishment that appears in the Platonic dialogues from the *Gorgias* to the *Laws*.³⁵ While there can be no doubt that Plato takes the idea of the eternal punishment of certain exceptional figures like

³⁵ Mackenzie and Saunders see the punishment of the incurables as a survival into Plato's penal theory of the retributive element of Greek penology, the idea that the divine surrogates inflict retribution on those who did not pay the penalty in life (Mackenzie [1981], 225–239 and Saunders [1991], 198, 206, particularly his discussion of the idea of the surrogate, 52–61). While Mackenzie sees the retributive element as a flaw throughout Plato's penology, Saunders argues that Plato eliminates this aspect from his later works. Contrast now, however, Brickhouse and Smith (1997 and 2002), who argue that the passages that appear to advocate retributive punishments in fact make sense in terms of Socratic intellectualist theories of punishment helping the wrongdoer become virtuous.

Tantalus from a mythic tradition in which they have been used to represent retribution, Plato himself has a use for them that does not include the retributive element. The fate of the incurables in the afterlife illustrates, in this life, the life of the unphilosophic who are powerful enough to evade any kind of outside restraint (*kolasis*).³⁶ Their inconsistent and irrational lifestyle actually inflicts continuous suffering upon them, and their souls are so deformed from the way they have lived that they can only continue, in the afterlife, the kind of life they lived when alive. Although it does not cure them, this punishment has a deterrent effect, serving as a warning to those who are considering choosing the life of Calicles instead of the life of Socrates.³⁷ Even if Calicles refuses to change his life in consequence of his public humiliation in the refutation, the silent audience of the dialogue, the aspiring students of rhetoric who had come to hear Gorgias (and, of course, the readers of Plato's dialogue), may profit from the spectacle of his suffering.³⁸

³⁶ Cf. *Tht.* 177a: οὐ δὴ τίνουσι δίκαν ζῶντες τὸν εἰκότα βίον ᾧ ὁμοιοῦνται. 'The penalty they pay is the life they lead, answering to the pattern they resemble'.

³⁷ Their deterrent value is not, as some have supposed, only for souls who are about to be reborn into another mortal life, for the *Gorgias* makes no mention of the metempsychosis that plays such an important role in Plato's other eschatological myths. The incurables serve as a deterrent to anyone who pays heed to the myth that Socrates tells, for like all *nekyias*, it reveals the conditions of the underworld for ordinary mortals who have not, like Odysseus, Heracles, or Theseus, ventured into the unseen realm. See Guthrie (1975), IV, 306, who points out that revelations of the afterlife need not imply metempsychosis, as Friedländer (1969 [1954]), i. 185 had argued. Friedländer was supported by Dodds, who commented, 'The passage only makes sense on the assumption that the dead will one day return to earth: it presupposes the doctrine of rebirth, which Plato evidently already held when he wrote the *Gorgias* but did not choose to expound in this context' (Dodds [1959], 381). Such an assumption comes from the misguided attempt to find consistency between the myths of Plato, as though they all expressed Plato's own beliefs about the afterlife rather than being used by him to express particular ideas in the different dialogues. As Long, in the best treatment of metempsychosis in the Greek tradition, remarks, 'there is no trace of metempsychosis in the *Gorgias* any more than in the *Apology*' (Long [1948], 65). Annas argues that metempsychosis need not be implied for the punishment of the incurables to make sense: 'it is inappropriately literal-minded to press any further the question, what happens to these curables who are cured. There is no answer within the myth in the form and to the extent that Plato has developed it' (Annas [1982], 124).

³⁸ At the end of the dialogue, of course, Calicles shows every sign of disregarding the admissions he has made in *elenchos*, of remaining uncured and incurable because he refuses to take his medicine. Socrates, on the contrary, says that if he is defeated in the *elenchos* and agrees with Calicles, but is found living contrary to his admissions, then he should be considered a complete fool and worthy of nothing: καὶ ἐάν με λάβῃς νῦν μὲν σοὶ ὁμολογήσαντα, ἐν δὲ τῷ ὑστέρῳ χρόνῳ μὴ ταυτὰ πράττοντα ἄπερ ὠμολόγησα, πάνυ με ἡγού βλάκα εἶναι καὶ μηκέτι ποτέ με νοουθήσης ὕστερον, ὡς μηδενὸς ἄξιον ὄντα (488a6–b1).

Plato uses the myth of the water-carriers, earlier in the dialogue, to illustrate the sort of perpetual suffering that Callicles inflicts upon himself by refusing to change his way of life, to show how Callicles' choice of life, far from being a life of action without restraint, is actually a life of suffering, both on a personal and political level. Socrates signals the application of the myth of afterlife to life in this world by his quotation of the famous Euripides' tag: 'Who knows if being alive is really being dead, and being dead being alive?' (492e10–11)³⁹ While, on the literal level, the story conveys the familiar traditional idea that those who are not initiated 'carry water to this leaky jar with another leaky thing, a sieve,' Socrates builds an interpretation into the tale (493b5–7).⁴⁰ According to the clever man from whom he heard the tale, the uninitiate (*amuetoi*) are the unintelligent (*anoetoi*), and the jar (*pithos*) is the persuadable (*pithanon*) and impressionable (*peistikon*) soul, which is leaky like the sieve.⁴¹ 'In the foolish men that of the soul with appetites, the foolish, intemperate, and insatiable in it, was a leaking jar, because it couldn't be filled' (493a6–b3).⁴² Socrates goes on to develop this idea of the soul as a jar which the intemperate man spends his whole life trying to fill in vain, deriving pleasure from the process of filling but pain from the endless emptying. On this level, the image obviously applies to Callicles' ideal of suffering no restraints on one's appetite, but Plato also

³⁹ τίς δ' οἶδεν, εἰ τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἔστι κατθανεῖν, τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν, cf. Euripides' *Phrixus*, fr. 833. The tag is attributed either to the *Phrixus* or the *Polyidos*. Sextus Empiricus attributes the same idea to Heraclitus (*Pyrrh. Hyp.* 3.230, see Heraclitus, fr. 62, 88). Cf. Dodds' treatment of the passage in the *Gorgias*, *ad loc.* Aristophanes repeatedly uses the line to great effect in the *Frogs* (1082, 1477), finally turning it against Euripides when Dionysos abandons him in the underworld and brings up Aeschylus instead.

⁴⁰ φοροῖεν εἰς τὸν τετρημένον πίθον ὕδωρ ἑτέρῳ τοιούτῳ τετρημένῳ κοσκίνῳ.

⁴¹ Irwin translates *πιθανόν* as 'persuadable' and *πειστικόν* as 'impressionable,' but, as Dodds points out, both adjectives should have an active sense. If both are derived from *πειθω*, the meaning would be some sense of 'persuasive'. A similar phrase occurs just above, attributed to some 'wise man,' τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθυμῖαι εἰσι τυγχάνει δν οἶον ἀναπειθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω κάτω. 'That of our soul with appetites is liable to be persuaded and to sway up and down'. 'Ἀναπειθεσθαι, however, is unequivocally passive in sense. Blank (1991), 26–27 points out that the confusion between the active and passive senses, persuadable and persuasive, reflects the confusion of Callicles about the role of the orator, whether he is the persuader of the masses or is constantly persuaded by the masses to different things. One might speculate whether the words in question also carried the sense of *πείσεσθαι* derived from *πάσχω*, to suffer, playing on the pun between *πίθος*, *πείθω*, and *πάθος*. If the words carried the resonance of suffering, as well as persuadable and persuasive, the connection between Callicles' confusion and the fate he will suffer, both in life and in the myth, would be neatly drawn. But perhaps this word play would be too much, even for a *καμψὸς ἀνὴρ*.

⁴² παράγων τῷ ὀνόματι διὰ τὸ πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικόν ὠνόμασε πίθον, τοὺς δὲ ἀνοήτους ἀμύητους, τῶν δ' ἀνοήτων τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὐ αἱ ἐπιθυμῖαι εἰσὶ, τὸ ἀκόλαστον αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐ στεγανόν, ὡς τετρημένος εἶη πίθος, διὰ τὴν ἀπληστίαν ἀπεικάσας.

uses the image to describe the life of the orator trying to gratify the ever-changing and unsatisfiable appetites of the persuadable masses, a task as vain and tormenting as the labors of the water-carriers.⁴³

The power to persuade the masses, Gorgias has claimed, 'is responsible for freedom for a man himself, and at the same time for rule over others in his own city' (452d6–8).⁴⁴ Callicles urges Socrates to a life of public speaking because learning how to please the crowd will enable him to save his life, but Socrates objects that to be able to have power in a city requires one to accommodate oneself to the rulers.⁴⁵ For Plato, who could not accept the idea of the 'wisdom of the masses,' the policy of an orator trying to express the will of the people is nothing more than pandering, *kolakeia*. Like the cook who strives to delight the palates of his diners regardless of the effect on their health, the orator who stays popular by telling the people what they want to hear is merely gratifying irrational appetites, a task that is ultimately as fruitless as trying to fill a leaky *pithos*, for the masses will

⁴³ Socrates opens his attack on both the personal and political position of Callicles with his observation that Callicles is in love with two beloveds, Demos, son of Pyrilampes and the Athenian *demos* (481c ff.). The choice of the homoerotic metaphor allows Socrates to point out the confusion of the active and passive, ruler and ruled in Callicles' ideal. Although the adult male *erastes* like Callicles is the active pursuer, and the younger *eromenos* or *paidika* like Demos is the more passive, pursued person in the ideology of this kind of Athenian aristocratic homoerotic relationship, the beloved was also able to exercise a fair amount of control over the lover, who would go to great lengths to win his beloved's favour. Socrates notes that however absurd the things their beloveds say may be, both he and Callicles are helpless to contradict them (481d–482b). Although they are, in theory, the active partners in the relationships, guiding the youths into manhood, they are both, in fact, helplessly subject to their beloveds, the ruled instead of the rulers. The familiar paradox of the homoerotic romance allows Plato to bring out the ambiguity of Callicles' relation to the masses he desires to dominate.

⁴⁴ αἴτιον ἅμα μὲν ἐλευθερίας αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἅμα δὲ τοῦ ἄλλων ἄρχειν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ πόλει ἐκάστω.

⁴⁵ 486b–c, 521a–d, 510a–e. Callicles here expresses the ideology found in Demosthenes and other orators, that the orator reflects the ideas of the masses whom he is leading. Ober (1989), 167 summarizes this ideology: 'the worthy orator prefers the same things as the many, and therefore, when speaking in public, he simply vocalizes the desires of the majority of his listeners. Because the wisdom of the group is superior to that of the individual, the desires of the majority are right desires, and the orator who voices these desires is therefore advocating the right decision ... The presumption that to agree with the masses was to be in the right easily led to the implication that one's opponent must be regarded as a traitor. The savage tenor of Athenian political invective must be seen in the light of this progression'. Demosthenes 18.20 is the most concise expression of this idea in the extant speeches: 'but it is not the speech of a rhetor, Aeschines, or the power of his voice which are his worth, but it lies rather in his preference for the same things as the many and in his hating and loving the same things as his homeland. Having such a disposition, everything a man says will be patriotic'.

never be satisfied.⁴⁶ What Callicles thinks is ruling, both gratifying one's own appetites and gratifying the masses as an orator, is in fact being ruled, being enslaved to the never-ceasing, ever-changing demands of an irrational, contradictory mass. Callicles' chosen mode of life, which he refuses to reject even after his encounter with Socrates, this life amounts, in short, to nothing more than the fate of the uninitiate in the underworld, the eternal vain carrying of water in a sieve in the attempt to fill a leaky jar.

5. THE ADVANTAGES OF MYTH

The myth of the water-carriers, like the myth of judgement at the end, serves to amplify and clarify the arguments in the dialogue, not to present ideas ungraspable by reason or to supplement a deficient argument with threats of hell-fire hereafter. In the *Gorgias*, as in other of his dialogues, Plato takes advantage of the nature of myth as a traditional tale by utilizing both the traditional and narrative aspects. His myth plays with a variety of ideas and motifs familiar from the mythic tradition, elements that would evoke for his audience many other tales. The resonance of these traditional elements permits Plato to convey complex ideas in compact form, without a large amount of tedious explanation, since he need merely mention the name, for example, of Aiakos to conjure up the associations of just behaviour, judging disputes between the gods, and a special function in the realm of the dead.⁴⁷ Not only does the general familiarity of these elements lend credibility to Plato's often radical ideas, but Plato sometimes invokes a specific myth from the tradition that carries special authoritative force. He situates his narrative of a shift from the judicial system of Kronos to that of Zeus with

⁴⁶ When ill health results from the diet of flattering oratory, the city will blame the orators who are currently dishing it up, not those who accustomed them to Sicilian banquets instead of healthy regimens. Cf. Socrates' warning to Callicles and prophecy (*post eventum* for Plato) about the catastrophe of Alcibiades (519ab). The connection between Sicilian banquets and the Sicilian disaster of 415 should not be overlooked.

⁴⁷ Aiakos, as Pindar (*Isthmian*, 8.21) tells us, settled disputes among the gods, καὶ δαίμονεςσι δίκας ἐπέειπεν. No tale of such judging survives, but Aiakos plays a privileged part in interactions between the gods and men in a number of other stories, and later tradition gives him the role of the doorkeeper of Hades. In many manuscripts of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the doorkeeper is labelled Aiakos, but there is no evidence that Aristophanes' audience would have thought of him as such. Lucian (*DMor.* 6) and Apollodorus (3.12.6) make him the holder of the keys to Hades. Isokrates relates that he was made a special servant of Hades and Persephone as a reward for his virtue, just as Rhadamanthys becomes the servant of Kronos on the Isles of the Blest in Pindar. (Isokrates 9.14; Pindar, *Olympian* II, 83 and *Pythian* II, 73, Cratinus, *Cheirones*, 231 [i: 83 K], Plato, *L.* 948b, Plut. *Theseus*, 16b.)

a reference to Homer's tale of the division of the cosmos when Zeus took power from Kronos (523a3–5). He also calls upon Homer to confirm his assertion that only the most powerful will be punished eternally in the afterlife (525d6–e2). Even his assignment of the expert in justice, Minos, as judge in the afterlife, is backed up by a direct quotation from Homer (526c7–d2). The support of the most authoritative voice in the tradition, whose tellings are familiar to nearly all of Plato's intended audience, shows that Plato's ideas fit within the framework of Greek culture, making them more acceptable and persuasive to his audience even as he engages in shifting their values and ideals.⁴⁸

Plato also makes use of the features of myth as narrative to augment the force of his ideas in the dialogue by employing the temporal sequence of the narrative to bring out the relations between ideas. As scholars of myth as far back as Plotinus have noted, one advantage of a mythic narrative is that it can illustrate through chronological sequence the logical relations of ideas.⁴⁹ Plato depicts the relation between the Athenian lawcourt system and the philosophical judgement of Socrates in terms of the shift from the system of judgement in Kronos' time to the system in Zeus's time. By separating them in time and portraying the system he prefers as the reform of the other system, Plato builds his evaluation of the two systems into his presentation of them and shows how the advantages of the later system specifically compensate for the problems of the former system. The contrast between the systems can be represented more clearly in narrative than in a discussion because of the temporal sequencing of the narrative.

Plato also uses this feature of narrative to illustrate more clearly several different aspects of the Socratic *elenchos*. In the myth, the stripping of the soul so that it appears before the judge without any witnesses occurs before the judge examines the soul of the deceased and before the deceased suf-

⁴⁸ Allen (2000), 267 suggests that Plato's reshaping of the traditional story serves as a philosophic medicine for the audience (within and outside the dialogue). 'Both the stories about punishment and the decisions about punishment "cure" injustice in the soul by making a statement about the proper way to think about desert and by teaching the wrongdoer the "right" system of value. The storyteller who effects a resignification of a symbol that encapsulates principles of authority and desert has the power to effect a cultural paradigm shift and to change "the present order of things". This is Hippocrates' definition of what a *pharmakon* does (*Top. And.* 45), and stories are medicine in this way'.

⁴⁹ Δεῖ δὲ τοὺς μύθους, εἴπερ τοῦτο ἔσσονται, καὶ μερίζειν χρόνοις ἅ λέγουσι, καὶ διαιρεῖν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων πολλὰ τῶν ὄντων ὁμοῦ μὲν ὄντα, τάξει δὲ ἢ δυνάμεσι διεστῶτα (*Ennead* III, 5.24–27). 'Myths, if they are really going to be myths, must divide out in time the things they relate and separate from one another many realities which are together, but which stand apart in rank or powers' (text and translation from the Loeb edition).

fers the corrective punishments. Each of these incidents, however, reflects an aspect of the *elenchos*. The lack of witnesses corresponds to the elenctic examination of a single person's ideas, without the recourse to the opinions of others or to long oratorical speeches. The examination of the naked soul by the judge corresponds to the analysis of the person's ideas and the pointing out of the inconsistencies. The suffering in the afterlife corresponds to the shame of the *elenchos*, the effect of the defeat in this philosophic contest which provokes the one who has undergone the *elenchos* to change his life. Although Plato illustrates the process of *elenchos* in many of his dialogues by depicting the interlocutors engaged in *elenchos*, the myth in the *Gorgias* separates out these different aspects of the *elenchos* from one another, giving the reader a better understanding of the different effects of the Socratic *elenchos*.

6. PLATO'S *ELENCHOS*

The *elenchos*, then, does not merely point out the inconsistency in an interlocutor's argument, diagnosing his problem. Rather, as the parallels with the judgement and punishment in the myth suggest, the shameful defeat in the *elenchos* also serves as a bitter purgative medicine that can transform the life of the interlocutor, checking the inharmonious elements and correcting the deformities of his soul. The Socratic *elenchos* humiliates its victim by showing him to be a fool who does not know what he is talking about or how he should live, but the pain of this experience can serve a positive function if he abandons his former ideas and way of living. The *elenchos* has its limits, however. Just as correction of injustice in this life can only be effective if the guilty one is not able to escape punishment, the curative treatment of the *elenchos* can only work if the victim takes his medicine and engages in dialogue. If like Callicles he sulks and refuses to admit that he has been defeated in the *elenchos*, then he will continue to inflict the sufferings of the unphilosophic life upon himself. The spectacle of his humiliation and sufferings, nevertheless, can serve to educate those who see it, just as the punishment of the incurables in the afterlife acts as a deterrent to others. Plato makes use of the narrative logic of the myth to clarify the presentation of the philosophic mode of self-examination, supplementing the discussion of the *elenchos* with the illustration in the myth.

The vivid images of the myth are perhaps the most memorable parts of the whole dialogue. The picture of the naked soul of the Great King,

covered with the festering sores of his unchecked injustices, who is facing the stern judgement of Rhadamanthys, encapsulates a number of ideas in a compact and memorable form. In this one image are crystallized the ideas of the self made witness against itself, the damage that injustice does to the wrongdoer, and the need for an expert in justice to replace the reliance on the 'wisdom of the masses'. In the *Gorgias*, Plato makes use of the mythic tradition to condense his philosophic ideas into evocative images—whip scars on the naked soul.