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# **FREE SPEECH IN PLATO'S GORGIAS**

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## **FREE SPEECH IN PLATO'S GORGIAS<sup>2</sup>**

As this new reading of Plato's Gorgias shows, four distinct positions with regard to freedom of speech are introduced in this classical text on the relations between philosophy and rhetoric: two realistic and two logical. The realism of rhetoric poses the key political problem of incommensurability between freedom and justice. The realism of philosophy is able to solve this problem, but only through a mediatory differentiation of two purely logical stands, which might have found direct counterparts in the two dominant forms of political philosophy in the 20th century. One of them is political liberalism, which corresponds to the 'geometric' way of argumentation in 'Gorgias' and inevitably passes into a theory of normative justice. Another is the mainstream 'continental' philosophy, which corresponds to the 'erotic' way of argumentation in Gorgias and explores the possibilities of the positive freedom.

Keywords: Free speech, freedom, justice, liberalism, rhetoric, philosophy, politics, logic, myth, analytic-continental divide

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## Introduction

At least since the later work of Michel Foucault, who explored the subject of free speech (*παρρησία*) in Plato's *Gorgias* in his penultimate lecture course in *Collège de France*,<sup>3</sup> one does not need to find a pretext to dwell on this topic. However, I do not want to make an impression that my argument follows Foucault's path. I will speak of certain 'scenes', which a reader can associate with each core participant of the dialogue. The term might seem artificial and deserves an explanation. Yet again, I don't want to lean here on Straussian concept of 'setting', which has a different meaning in his interpretations of Plato's dialogues<sup>4</sup>. This calls for an approach from a different angle, which has less to do with the history of Platonic scholarship, than with the actual political theory.

Plato was hardly, if ever, appreciated as a philosopher of freedom. However, such fathers of modern liberalism as John Stuart Mill and Isaiah Berlin cared enough to introduce a counterpart to what we can learn from Plato's text, when they advocated the concept of liberal freedom. Mill taught about the 'sphere of individual freedom', and Berlin mentioned 'limits of liberty'<sup>5</sup>. Since both Mill's and Berlin's arguments belong to the classical heritage of Western philosophy, one may confidently state that there is nothing unusual in connecting the notion of freedom with a spatial representation.

Instead of a neutral term, such as 'sphere', I prefer to employ the term 'scene', and that has an obvious explanation. While Mill and Berlin speak of abstract individuals, Plato portrays familiar or even famous people with vivid and memorable characters. They do not merely occupy allotted places, but dramatically perform both in real life and in his dialogue. The rhetorical quality of the liberal argumentation notwithstanding, for Mill and Berlin the freedom of speech is one among several other fundamental rights of every human being. It is an inalienable possession of an individual, which a society should learn to keep its distance from. Switching back to the spatial metaphor, the liberal freedom of speech is a formally and even legally defined area within a clearly outlined space, the same for everybody. There is no performative perspective in this strictly geometrical vision. As we will see, this perspective is not alien to Plato's text, but it is not a predominant one within the dialogue. Likewise, we may first see a theatrical scene as a well-defined geometrical structure, but that all changes once actors appear on it. From that point on their acting defines the limits of this place. Unlike a theatrical performance a written dialogue is disposed of no actions, but only of words. This is why I will also speak of 'logical scenes'. If

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<sup>3</sup> (Foucault 2011).

<sup>4</sup> (Strauss 1978).

<sup>5</sup> (Mill, Bromwich, and Kateb 2003). (Berlin and Harris 2002).

the original logical scene in Plato's text starts changing, this effect can be produced solely through the transformative and liberating powers of speech itself.

The play that Plato shows us is a consecutive piece in four acts. One after another each of the main speakers comes forward and has his own moment to prove that his speech is absolutely free. Each speaker's abilities are tested against the structure of the original logical scene, where he first enters the conversation. Some speakers are willing to change the original scene, others are not. Some speakers see the connection between the power of the speech and one's ability to change the logical 'scene', others do not. But even among those who do (I will call them 'the realists'), not everybody is able to implement the transformation promised or desired. There are two realists in the dialogue and two unlikely 'logicians' (later I will justify the appropriateness of this term). Because the realists know the difference between the logical scenes, they understand as well that the freedom of speech is subject to change. Naturally they want to increase their abilities and to enjoy the freedom of speech to the fullest. They initiate the corresponding transitions between the scenes. In the end one of them fails, whereas another one succeeds. On the contrary, the two logicians do not want to change their original scenes; however, they provide two different reasons. One of them is confident that his speech is already free. There is no sense to move elsewhere. Another one does not believe that such a change is attainable for him given the unfavourable circumstances. Rather he hopes for a miracle.

Thus, Plato's four-part play exemplifies four clearly distinct positions in regards to freedom of speech. It is neither a mere gathering of famous rhetoricians, nor a simple game of survival where a random newcomer substitutes a failed predecessor as a conversational partner. The order of the appearance has a deep meaning: a realist, two logicians, and then another realist. So the first part poses a real-life political problem of free speech, which can be realistically solved in the final part only through a differentiation between two types of logical argumentation, introduced in the middle part of the dialogue. Already this composition demonstrates that the difference between rhetoric and philosophy has little to do with either the alleged 'mundaneness' of the former or the 'abstractness' of the latter. Being no less realistic and politically informed than rhetoric, philosophy is able to separate and use in turn two particular logics of argumentation, thus succeeding where rhetoric fails. Albeit I am speaking about logics, it does not imply that all philosophy can offer is an abstract solution to the political problem, posed by rhetoric. These two logics are political, not 'formal'. The arguments built upon them are incommensurable, but while they remain incomprehensible to each other, they are both familiar to everybody who has an experience of political life in a community. The two logics relate to two different political problems. The problem of freedom, that spurs the progress of the conversation, meets with the problem of justice that finds a more ostensible articulation in the

dialogue. Philosophy holds a priority over rhetoric, only because philosophy is able to solve those two fundamental problems at once and on the spot.

All of this may sound rather dry, but in fact Plato's approach in *Gorgias* is unheard of in contemporary political theory. Suffice to say, that the liberal argument of Mill and Berlin makes only one section of the four-part drama, presented in *Gorgias*. But the same applies to their competition coming from what may be roughly described as 'continental' political philosophy.

Now I will turn from the general framework of my interpretation to the dialogue itself. The main conversation takes place in a private house in the city of Athens shortly after the famous Gorgias has made a presentation of his rhetorical abilities before a group of his admirers. Socrates arrives too late to witness the success of the great rhetorician. An explanation he gives introduces one of the many shifts of *scenes* in the dialogue. Earlier Socrates was busy at *agora*, the public place, with his companion, Chaerephon. Now they are about to enter a private house. The audience here (οἱ παρόντες, 458b) is limited and selected, and that is an essential feature of the subsequent conversation.

One after another Socrates speaks with the three main interlocutors: Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. It is not unusual for a Platonic dialogue to be split into several parts according to the number of conversational partners. However, this time the last interlocutor, Callicles, actually joins the common conversation with Socrates already in the middle of the text. Callicles is by far the most exciting speaker among those three, but he does not receive any advantages over Gorgias and Polus. Callicles gets his fair share of attention, but it is not Callicles, with whom Socrates converses in the fourth and the final part of the dialogue. Socrates literally speaks with himself.

In his opening line Callicles jokingly welcomes Socrates, implying that such an unfortunate timing would rather suit a participation in a war battle. 'War' (πόλεμος) is the first word of the entire dialogue. In some sense the whole conversation turns out to be a battle of words until the last man stands. The winner takes it all; his trophy is the unlimited freedom of speech.

Solely, the initial scene is somewhat clearly presented by the author. Though the question has been disputed by scholars, I believe Eric Robertson Dodds was wrong in questioning the old tradition, according to which the main conversation took place in Callicles's house<sup>6</sup>. Anyway,

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<sup>6</sup> Dodds's view on the place of the dialogue is predominant in contemporary publications on Plato's *Gorgias*. His argument for the rejection of the old hypothesis, according to which the main conversation was set in Callicles's house, runs as follows: 'For Callicles does not invite them [Socrates and Chaerephon] to 'come straight in', as on this hypothesis he naturally would, but to 'come and visit him at his house, whenever they please, because Gorgias is staying there' (Dodds 1959, 188). However, Dodds misinterprets the reason for the postponement of the visit. The dialogue starts with Callicles' remark on Socrates' being late to Gorgias' lecture. Developing this initial remark, Callicles suggests that Socrates should choose another occasion to come to listen to a presentation of the great rhetorician. However, Socrates does not need a presentation, therefore he asks whether Gorgias is available for a regular chat. After Callicles confirms, Socrates stays, and the main conversation can begin (447bc). So the point of Callicles's suggestion is not the place, but the timing. Hence there is no reason to question the old tradition at least on this ground.

one may safely assume that, firstly, it was not an open political space like *agora*, but a private space (a private house, rather than a gymnasium or some other public building as Dodds suggested without any justification). And, secondly, it is in this scene where Gorgias triumphs.

From general grounds it is obvious that a private space tolerates more outspokenness. However, the conversation takes place in the city of Athens, where there's greater freedom of speech than anywhere else in Greece (461e). The political constitution of Athens promotes the freedom of speech. No wonder that each interlocutor basically claims the same thing -- that his speech is absolutely free. But what might be the point in such a claim, provided that freedom of speech has nothing more to gain in Athens?

It was Socrates who reminds his audience of the cherished fame of the city's ability to host the unreserved liberty of expression. Obviously, he mentions it ironically only to deny it. His method of denial is to put his interlocutors' claims to the test. In the end all of them fail to withstand his dialectical pressure. Yet, it was not Socrates who silenced them. They refused to fight themselves for their free speech and preferred to remain silent. Eventually each of them found proper limits for his freedom of speech, his genuine 'scene'. They did not want to leave it anymore even though Socrates forced them to do so.

Now I will briefly touch upon the four positions presented in the dialogue, focusing on the above mentioned features like 'scenes', political implications, and the logic behind the arguments.

## **1. The conversation between Socrates and Gorgias**

The main interlocutor in the first part of the dialogue is Gorgias, the prominent rhetorician. He coined a phrase that serves as a slogan for the whole sophistic enterprise: 'Speech (*λόγος*) is a great potentate' (*Encomium of Helen*, 8). For him freedom of speech is bound to the power of speech. However, in the dialogue he presents himself as a rhetorician, not a sophist. Socrates explains that sophistry relates to law-making, so as the oratory relates to legal proceedings. Law-making presupposes the full sovereign power, whereas in the courts two equal parties contend. The standpoint of sophistry is the absolute domination, not struggle. But the historical sophists were usually some foreigners who frequented the great imperial city of Athens. They did not have the slightest political ground to behave here like lawmakers, all the evil suspicious of the Athenian demos notwithstanding. Demos hated sophists, but the art of rhetoric was a different case, because it was incorporated in the social routine like court hearings and political debates where the oratory was turned against itself, which made it less dangerous and extremely useful for the democracy. The conditions of oratory are a contest; therefore, it is subversive. The condition of sophistry is full power; therefore, it is sovereign. The free speech of Gorgias oscillates between those two possibilities. At the beginning of the dialogue he calls his

professional abilities with a modest name, the oratory, but at the same time he gives a dare to his audience, which reveals his true aspiration for the absolute logical domination; sophistry. It is Gorgias, who simultaneously bears and hides this contradiction within himself. The sole impact of Socrates is to make it visible.

Gorgias claims to be able to answer any question on anything anyone in the house cared to ask him (447c). Moreover, he hurries to seal his future triumph with a reminder that for many years he has never been faced with a question he hadn't met before (448a). On the one hand, Gorgias' pretension seems unlimited in regards both to his audience ('anything anyone') and to the timeframe. Therefore, his claim means that he enjoys the absolute freedom of speech. On the other hand, this unlimited pretension is qualified because the audience has been preselected ('anyone in the house'). Already the initial formulation of his claim contains a hidden contradiction. It is about the ultimate logical power that acts on a limited space. Gorgias' claim is supported though his professional expertise in rhetoric. 'For it is experience that enables our span of life to proceed according to art, whereas lack of experience leaves us at the mercy of chance' (448c)<sup>7</sup>. The expert is master of his fate. Gorgias challenges the fate represented by random questions of random people gathered in Callicles' house. With his speech Gorgias is able to overcome any of them, which is not only mathematically improbable, it is simply unjust. But justice is not what Gorgias promised to his audience; on the contrary, he is here to prove his excellence which is a rather undemocratic quality. Therefore, if justice ever enters his sovereign presentation, it happens only under compulsion as evidence that the initial plan failed.

Gorgias wants, but does not dare, to expand the sphere of influence for his rhetorical power. After Socrates forced him to define it, he finally admits that rhetoric is the ability 'to persuade the jurors in the courts, the members of the Council, the citizens attending the Assembly, in short to win over any and every form of public meeting of the citizen body' (452e), in other words, to enslave everybody in Athens with speech. However, the undemocratic character of Gorgias' excellence becomes dangerous for him. In this 'scene' Gorgias does not run the risk to speak recklessly. Socrates is satisfied in discovering this hidden scene behind the ostentatious presentation. Now it is time for a real test of Gorgias' claim as the conversation touches the question of justice. Gorgias is compelled to admit that the province of rhetoric is right and wrong (454b). However, as mentioned above, he does not dare to go openly from his stand as reactive rhetorician to the position of absolute power, proper for both the sophist and the lawmaker. Hence he does not dare to claim that he is able to educate the people about right and wrong, his only concern is to persuade them. But even in this cautious form his statement is venturesome. If an alien orator obtains the power to instil into the Athenian *demos* his ideas about right and

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<sup>7</sup> Cited from (Plato 1960), the other English citations of *Gorgias* are from (Plato 1994).

wrong, the *demos* is deprived of the sovereign notion of justice. It is nothing short of a *coup d'état*.

Socrates substitutes the original scene, where Gorgias is triumphant with the preselected audience in a private house, with the decisive scene, the sovereign *demos* in the political assembly, and lets Gorgias speak. Socrates stops interrupting him with questions and asks Gorgias -- once again, but this time with a different scene -- about the divine powers of rhetoric (456a). What follows is the climax of Part I of the conversation -- a lengthy and completely free speech of Gorgias. Spared of any extraneous interference, Gorgias collapses in the middle of it. As if suddenly realizing something, he abruptly moves in speech from a measureless glorification of rhetoric to a backup apology for it (456b-457c).

His clever manoeuvre proves his talents, as well as his realism. He is clearly able to make a distinction between the two different scenes, the original, artificial one and the decisive, natural one, and -- being a realist -- he knows for sure that in the end what he needs is a smart defence. The harsh reality will destroy his success. Being a realist, Gorgias knows to appreciate a momentary distance from reality. Therefore, he refuses to go to where Socrates invites him, and abandons the conversation.

## **2. The conversation between Socrates and Polus**

Polus, the next interlocutor of Socrates, does not understand what is happening. This means that he is no realist. For him there is no distinction between private and public spaces. Without reservation he resumes the conversation where it stopped, and in his turn raises claim that his speech is absolutely free and tries to prove it by inviting everybody to ask him any questions they want (462a). Socrates has a prompt explanation for why Polus is so confident. Free speech is tolerated and promoted under democracy; it is a law in the city (*isēgoria*). What Polus really says, is that everybody in Athens may answer any questions; he just happens to be more skilful than others. Hence Polus' claim is very different from Gorgias' one. The tactics Socrates successfully employed against Gorgias are of no use in the case of Polus. However, that does not mean that there is not some other scene to which Polus naturally belongs even if he does not realize it. The difficulty is only with its presentation, because it is not a real, but a logical one. However, Socrates makes it almost visible by showing the hidden limits to which Polus' speech is confined. Of huge help here is not the city topography, but a different branch of knowledge. Polus and Socrates converse as geometers (465b). Not everybody is able to use this language: e.g., Callicles is not. Yet, it is the language of the majority, the 'normal people', the 'regular guys'. Polus may safely rely on the fact that almost everyone in the world would agree with him (475e).

Polus sticks to the systematic coherence of an argument. That explains why he never understood the reasons which forced Gorgias to back off. Indeed, he mistook the political grounds of Gorgias' defeat for some logical misunderstanding. I call Polus a logician, not because he studied logic as a science the way Aristotle did, but because some logic is his trusted guide through life. Of course, for the pre-Aristotelian era we must be cautious with the term 'logic'. Polus cares for the consistency of what is said. It is little in comparison to Aristotle's' comprehensive approach. At the same time, it is more fundamental, since it persists even if one moves beyond Aristotle's account of logic to that of Gottlob Frege. Consistency is systematic, it ignores exceptions. It is like a highway with no exits, it facilitates and restricts. One can show its pure geometry in symbolic form. Socrates gives a geometrical proof of Polus' normality.

One cannot be less impressed with eccentric views, than when dealing with a great and complex personality such as that of Gorgias. Remarkably, Socrates introduces his paradoxical doctrine of justice only when he speaks with the consistency-oriented Polus. Against such a backdrop every unusual thesis gains in prominence. But this is true for both sides. The 'sheer eccentricity' of Socrates sets off the mediocrity of Polus (473e). Socrates subverts the system with singularity, ironically justifying the tactics with his inability to follow commonly established procedures (474a). We start perceiving the boundaries that Polus would never dare to transgress. Those boundaries have no gaps, and their continuance delineates the logical scene where Polus feels safely at home. Moreover, Polus does not recognize the necessity to leave it. One can explain this optical aberration. Polus believes that the logical scene he feels comfortable with covers all of reality with the exception of negligible nuances. The system of polis (the common opinion) coincides with the system of argumentation. The logical scene and the real one are the same. The only way to test his confidence is to put him in a position where the simplified logic of consistency runs so blatantly against reality, that even Polus would have noticed it.

Some readers blame Plato for making Socrates supply superficial logical conclusions in this part of the dialogue. I think this is a misunderstanding. A certain degree of superficiality is inevitable, because the whole point is to demonstrate that Polus blindly follows the form at the expense of the content.

As an example I will cite only the final argument, which leaves Polus speechless (476a-481b). Socrates begins with a very formal consideration, that 'in all cases the affected object is affected in a way which reflects the way in which the agent acts' (476c). Polus sees no immediate objection. However, by giving his consent he promptly loses the entire game, the progress of which is from now on secured by Socrates, who makes the best of it at his discretion. There is a quite obvious political implication of the initial consideration, which Polus perceives too late. In politics the agent is sovereign; the people that enact the laws. Through laws and courts, the

political agent administers justice and affects the object, i.e. the individual. The logic of consistency forces one to conclude, that any action considered good by the agent may only be beneficial to the object. What is good for polis is good for its citizens, who after having committed a crime should willingly and eloquently beg the state for a salutary punishment. This 'extraordinary' conclusion stuns Polus, who cannot believe his ears, but has no objection to the argument, since the logic remains consistent (480e). He must accept this view as the formal consequence of the earlier conclusions. Remarkably, his last words are not denial, but consent. Polus goes down by saying 'yes'.

Polus is the most underestimated character in the dialogue. Yet, in some respects he is the most important one. Gorgias is a celebrity, Callicles is an enigmatic rebel, but Polus is hardly known for more than a handbook of rhetoric which unfortunately was not spared by time. However, his elusiveness is not a mere lack of qualities, but a quality on its own. He is a regular person, but there is no more exotic tribe in Platonic dialogues, than 'normal people'. Being a regular person, Polus is not able to say anything incomprehensible or shocking to other regulars. What he means, is that speech of any regular person in a community which promotes free speech, is free by definition. This thesis may seem feeble, until we realize that it is exactly the point made by contemporary liberal theory. It is the negative definition of freedom, which is seamlessly tied with the possibility to outline a formal sphere of freedoms, the geometrically defined logical scene, within the political reality. Therefore, the negative concept of freedom is easily compatible with the task of establishing normative justice within community. One may point out that the first and the most valuable principle in John Rawls's theory of justice<sup>8</sup> presupposes the freedom of speech on the same terms, which are quite sufficient for Polus. The rationality of political agents in Rawls' theory means that they would be able to converse with Polus and Socrates as geometers. Polus may admire dictators, but this flaw is correctible through regular and well defined procedures, because it is the characteristic of the community as whole and not of his particular mindset. Thus, despite being blind to the problem of positive freedom, Polus is a rewarding recipient of the normative justice. Also he is the touchstone for political liberalism. Where Polus stops, this theory stops as well. It is silenced by the consideration that all normality is a derivative of system. The individual is betrayed by the same logic, which is employed to protect them. This is the starting point of Callicles's counter-attack.

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<sup>8</sup> (Rawls 1971).

### 3. The conversation between Socrates and Callicles

There are five speakers in the dialogue (including Chaerephon, a companion of Socrates). Naturally, Socrates is shown in conversation with everybody else. The same is true for Gorgias and even for Chaerephon, who hardly gets to put a word in. Interestingly, there is only one pair of participants who do not talk to each other, Polus and Callicles and it is as if they always needed a mediator. The mediatory part could be reserved for Chaerephon (see 447-448, 481b), but for my interpretation, it is essential that Polus and Callicles do not talk. It is not a coincidence, but a logical necessity -- they do not talk, because they cannot. Despite that they are both Greek, they actually speak two different languages, which are based on two incommensurable logics, and therefore have nothing in common.

Callicles is the embodiment of transgression. He rushes to overcome all boundaries, norms and limits. The geometrical character of conversation between Polus and Socrates is unbearable for him. Yet, Callicles and Socrates have also something special in common. They share an experience of being in an extraordinary and almost redundant love for two objects at the same time (ἐρῶντε, “both being in love”, 481d). They both know the erotic language of exception, which is the opposite to the geometric language of norms. However, Callicles does not appreciate that Socrates is versatile in different ways of argumentation. For him it is not an advantage, but hypocrisy, because to him there is only one true language of free speech, which is his own, the shameless language of natural desires. The conventional norms are the fetters, which are used to enslave the most freedom-loving spirits in the political community (481b-486d). Individual freedom and democratic justice are in an inevitable conflict. It follows that the only way for a strong man to be free is to overthrow democracy and to become a tyrant, i.e. to do wrong.

Callicles easily escapes from the logical labyrinth which trapped Polus, because he feels no embarrassment in expressing unconventional views and never puts consistency over the truth. Socrates hopes to finally meet a person who openly speaks his mind, who is παρρησιαστής, an ‘outspoken person’ (487d). It implies that there may be no logical scene to impose limits on Callicles’ free speech. Obviously, the scenes discovered while examining Gorgias’ and Polus’ claims do not count. Callicles is an Athenian citizen; moreover, he is a demagogue, a speaker who knows to lead the audience in the political assembly. Neither the public, nor a private space discomforts him. Keeping in mind his inclination for exceptions, it is appropriate to conclude that he is able to escape any such scene.

Nevertheless, Socrates succeeds in showing that Callicles fails. How is that even possible? Callicles’ language is not a geometrical, i.e. it may not be ‘depicted’, even logically, in the way Socrates did with Polus. What is not depicted cannot be demonstrated. This line of thought might

seem like a metaphor, yet it is a strict logic, only not of the kind we learn at school. Albeit we do not know whether Callicles was a real person, his approach was highly appreciated by such prominent figure in 'continental' philosophy as Gilles Deleuze, who practically identified Callicles and Nietzsche.<sup>9</sup> Deleuze blames Plato for using Socrates as a dialectical tool to silence Callicles and those like him. The French philosopher sees no point in a deeper examination of Socrates' position, for he is confident that Callicles' logic is impeccable. A logical truth of this kind needs no further examination.

The problem with Callicles' position is that his aspiration for individuality is undermined by his preference for the most common pleasures (492a-c). He presents himself as possessing an extraordinary nature and, yet, he wants to satisfy any desire indiscriminately. Where does he obtain the 'list' of pleasures to enjoy? His source is the same as that of Polus, -- the common opinion. The vulgar basis of his desires contradicts to his non-egalitarian elitism. Callicles is not initiated in the mysteries of the true artistic freedom, which is utterly discriminative (493a). Still, a formal contradiction is not an objection, per se, against the logic of exceptionality, which Callicles employs. Remarkably, it is not a contradiction, but a hidden consistency behind the pretended independency of free speech that ultimately leads to Callicles' withdrawal from the conversation. Callicles boasts that he is faithful only to himself, but he is not able to present anything of his own. Too easily he compensates the void with a mere negation of conventions. However, that may only mean that Callicles' pretended individuality depends on them absolutely. It is no wonder that he eventually admits that he has no other choice than to please the same *demos* which he secretly hates.

Indeed, the two seemingly opposite characters, Callicles and Polus, have much in common. They share the key scene, the same logical labyrinth. The only difference is that Polus is trapped inside, while Callicles is trapped outside. But Callicles can get away from this position no more than Polus can. They are both 'logicians', since they both rely on a specific logic of argumentation, rather than take into account the real-life political incompatibility between freedom and justice. While Polus is blind towards the problem of freedom, Callicles ignores the problem of justice. By way of inversion, it may mean that the geometrical logic of norms, shared by Polus and Socrates, is the foundation of every account of justice possible, while the erotic logic of exception, shared by Callicles and Socrates, is the ultimate source of any positive account of free speech. But this general question of political philosophy reaches beyond the scope of my presentation.

I cannot help but conclude my interpretation of Callicles' position by going back to the question of whether the place of main conversation is in his private house. The negative answer

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<sup>9</sup> (Deleuze 1962). Interestingly Deleuze links Callicles to Nietzsche almost simultaneously with Dodds.

(championed by Dodds) does not harm the core of my interpretation but his argument does not convince me at all. Moreover, I believe that it makes every sense that the answer is positive. For that, one can give not only text-related considerations, but also a more substantial reason, which highlights the importance of this particular fact for understanding the dialogue. Callicles, in short, says that one should do wrong and commit injustice, unless one is a slave by nature. The pure logical character of his view is best shown by the reality-related fact under consideration. Callicles is and will be the master of his household, even if he does not do wrong. Callicles completely ignores the real scene, where he stands, in favour of the logical scene, where his argument works most persuasively. Instead of becoming a tyrant in the real life he proves to be a slave to logic.

#### **4. The conversation of Socrates with himself**

With all of his opponents having failed, the rest of the dialogue belongs to Socrates. His sovereign speech is characterized through two crucial features: it is free and, being free, it is just. Socrates wins, but he deserves his success only because he is able to show that there is no real incompatibility between freedom and justice. Being a realist, like Gorgias, Socrates clearly sees a variety of scenes through which people move in their lives. Some of them test one's freedom, others test one's justice. Dealing with it, a rhetorician can employ two types of discourses. First he may boast of his rhetorical power over ordinary folks, then he can persuasively justify himself by pointing out the inevitable limits of his impact. He fails only when it comes to a decisive scene, where it is indispensable to be both at once. By having exposed that scene, Socrates shows Gorgias' weakness. In turn, another rhetorician, Callicles, warns Socrates that his philosophical attitude would be fatal in court (521c). Yet, neither a political assembly, nor a court hearing counts as a particularly decisive scene for Socrates. Formally, his fate was indeed determined under such circumstances, and every reader of Plato is supposed to know that. However, as both *Gorgias* and *Apology of Socrates* make us believe, it was Socrates himself rather than the Athenian *demos*, who sealed his fate. For him, 'excellence and goodness do not consist merely in the preservation of life' (512d). Socrates drops the explicitly political scenes out of consideration, but far from becoming another 'logician', he claims to be 'the only genuine practitioner of politics in Athens' (521d). When he advances his paradoxical thesis on justice, that doing wrong is worse than suffering wrong, it is not simply a moral radicalism, wishful thinking, or fanaticism, detached from this world (521c). Socrates' life is a constant source of moral inspiration, but besides the model life path to follow, the Platonic Socrates actually presents in *Gorgias* a highly important philosophical argument, which often goes unnoticed.

It is particularly difficult to appreciate the real merit of this line of thought for our generation of scholars, who live in the aftermath of the global philosophical schism of 20<sup>th</sup> century that made it practically impossible to pair some names and their respective reasoning within a valid philosophical investigation. E.g., these days one does not get much reading where the works of Isaiah Berlin and Gilles Deleuze (to name a few) receive equal treatment. Yet, I have tried to stress, that a pure logical position of either kind is not the reason for Socrates to win the war of words depicted in *Gorgias*.

At the same time a preliminary differentiation of the two above mentioned logics is an essential step in moving from a rhetorical to a philosophical perspective. For a rhetorician the positive freedom, i.e. the freedom as power, always confronts justice. Therefore, the only safe tactic is to choose a separate scene for discourse of each type, as Gorgias tried to do. For a philosopher, the geometrical and the erotic ways of argumentation do not exclude each other. They are so different, that eventually they pass by each other without collision, so as Polus and Callicles never get a chance to talk in the dialogue, albeit they are both present in the same scene. The very arbitrariness of the scene of the main conversation is not without purpose (whether it is Callicles' house or not, does not matter for that). Only Socrates declares this particular scene to be decisive for him to withstand, as well as many other scenes which his interlocutors do not condescend to recognize. Their tendency towards conventional places like courts and assemblies exposes their dependency on the established political framework of Athenian democracy. Socrates proves his autonomy from the city by choosing the decisive scenes by him. Every scene, every conversation, is a dialectical test for him. A totality of those scenes arranges into his unique course of life.

His unrivalled freedom of speech is matched only by the justice of his words and deeds. This final part of the dialogue is something outstanding if placed into the context of contemporary political theory. Obviously, it does not have much in common with the liberal concept of freedom of speech, which is negative rather than positive. The negative freedom serves for the legal protection of one's inalienable human rights. However, at this stage of the dialogue Socrates has already defended his right to speak freely. Now he proceeds to show some positive examples of freedom of speech: two myths are told. These examples are so incomprehensible, that such a prominent thinker as Hannah Arendt (who herself belongs to the 'continental' tradition, despite her émigré life in the USA) accused Plato of cheap moralism and intimidation of his readership<sup>10</sup>. I will skip the long final myth about afterlife judgement and discuss only the much shorter cosmological story (508a).

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<sup>10</sup> (Arendt 1990).

Socrates reproached Callicles for neglecting geometry. Clearly he meant that the geometrical language of justice is unknown to his interlocutor. As an example of the unusual geometrical equality, Socrates describes the cooperative structure of the cosmos where ‘love, order, discipline, and justice bind heaven and earth, gods and men’. This ultimate scene, the entire cosmos, is the place of justice and freedom for every kind of inhabitant because the two logics, love and justice, inequality and equality, are made compatible in it. The scene has a clear parallel in Martin Heidegger’s notion of ‘the fourfold’ (‘das Geviert’) from his lecture *The Thing*. This short and enigmatic piece pretends to be as apolitical as possible. It radiates confidence and calmness, especially in its final section, where the author does not need to criticize the concept of objectivity of things adopted in the contemporary science anymore. Yet, after establishing the absolute sovereignty of his speech, Heidegger uses it exactly as Plato’s Socrates in *Gorgias*. Heidegger describes the world as the unity of the fourfold: ‘earth and sky, divinities and mortals’. In that, the utterly complex relations within the fourfold unity preserve the unmistakable traces of its genealogical relation to the issues of freedom and justice<sup>11</sup>.

In *Gorgias*, Socrates presents the principle scheme for the solution of the main political problem which philosophy can offer. The solution itself is reserved for another of Plato’s masterpiece, the *Republic*. Whereas *Gorgias* is an examination into the conditions of free speech, the *Republic* (II-X) is the sovereign speech itself, which, as *Gorgias* teaches us, can be nothing other than a discourse on justice.

## Conclusion

In the final remarks I will put the key elements of my interpretation into the meta-philosophical perspective, which is becoming more and more accessible on the brink of the new millennium. I used the term ‘scene’ as an obvious metaphor, which was useful in keeping my interpretation open to a reader with limited expertise in contemporary philosophy. Yet, at some point the metaphorical usage must make way for an uncompromising philosophical approach. There are several reasons for it, and not the least among them is that we cannot ignore the implications of philosophically looking for metaphors, which has established itself as a profession on its own since Friedrich Nietzsche. But the more exciting opportunity is the chance to gain a vision for the sense of philosophy from Plato’s text, which seems to have been lost towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century amidst the chronic institutional opposition between the analytical and the continental traditions.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. : ‘The mirroring that binds into freedom is the play that betroths each of the four to each through the enfolding clasp of their mutual appropriation’ (Heidegger 1971, 177).

Even such philosophers as Richard Rorty, who managed to stay loyal to both parties, obviously did not see much value in philosophy, giving democracy a priority over it.<sup>12</sup> Surprisingly, his verdict of philosophy is similar to that of Callicles. Therefore, it is significant to underline that according to Plato's *Gorgias* the solution to the real problem, exemplified by political experience, is attainable only through philosophy, which is presented as highly critical and provocative thinking and not as a respectable, but rigid moralization. The philosophical underrating of Plato's *Gorgias*, as well as others dialogues including the *Republic*, remained hidden throughout the majority of the last century. The reason for that is remarkable.

The structural peculiarities of this dialogue and of contemporary philosophy mirror each other, helping to unravel and explain their nuances. The logical turn in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with the parting of the ways of the analytical and the continental philosophy, is quasi foretold in the middle part of *Gorgias*, where realism gives place to some kind of logicism. The 'geometrical' manner of conversation between Polus and Socrates corresponds to the logic of representation, which is a distinct feature of the mainstream analytical philosophy, whereas the 'erotic' discourse of Callicles and Socrates corresponds to the logic of difference, which became almost a brand name for the various continental initiatives. Since any description of 'scenes' is founded in the possibility of spatial representation, my reading strategy of Plato's *Gorgias* may be explained as the matching of the four different types of argumentation, introduced in the dialogue, against the logic of representation.

Such a matching is successful only in the case of Polus. Callicles is an obvious antagonist to this type of argumentation. The intense grade of his animosity to what Socrates calls 'geometry', may be compared only to the heated antagonism between orthodox adherents of the analytical and the continental philosophies. In this perspective the philosophical solution, impersonated by Socrates and founded by his reasoning, goes beyond the contemporary analytical-continental divide. Socrates feels himself comfortable in every place, but does not feel bound by any of them, because he is 'the mostly out of place' person (cf. ἀτοπώτατος in *Phaedrus* 230c). Philosophically it means that Socrates is able to use both the logics, but unlike a rhetorician like Gorgias, who is careful enough in choosing only one type of argumentation on each occasion, the philosopher is able to use them both everywhere and anytime. In our circumstances this would mean a person, who is an expert in both the contemporary philosophical traditions. However, that is not all, because as the history of philosophy teaches us, this is rather impossible. The last century was the period of logical antagonism. So one has to choose a school of thought to belong to, otherwise one is doomed to be confronted with internal and external conflicts.

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<sup>12</sup> (Rorty 1991).

Such an experience instils disappointment in the value and abilities of philosophy, but also it dooms every hope of a political reality which is free and just at the same time. Plato's response was a purely philosophical one, and we are able appreciate it only in the aftermath of what happened in philosophy in the last century. Exactly as Polus and Callicles, the analytical and the continental modes of philosophy, may be present at the same place and not clash. They are too incommensurable to even have a chance to touch upon each other. The same incompatibility, which makes it doomed for a rhetorician, proves the philosophical solution. This leap in the argumentation may seem to be a theoretical trick, but it is not, because the theory is insufficient. A philosophical proof of this kind requires one to be both free and just in real life.

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