

CHAEREPHON, TELEPHUS, AND DIAGNOSIS IN THE *GORGIAS*

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INTRODUCTION

The *Gorgias* starts with Socrates and Chaerephon chastised for showing up late to Gorgias's performance. Socrates explains (447a7–b2):

S.: Chaerephon here is to blame, Callicles: he made us use up our time in the agora.

CH.: No matter, Socrates; I'll also cure it (ἐγὼ γὰρ καὶ ἰάσομαι). Gorgias is a friend of mine, so he'll perform for us if you wish, now, should you want, or later.

Olympiodorus claims that in saying "I'll also cure it," Chaerephon alludes to the story of Achilles' wounding of Telephus. In that story, an oracle says that only that which caused Telephus's wound will cure it (ὁ τρώσας καὶ ἰάσεται, 1.7; Jackson et al. 1998). Many modern commentators ignore Olympiodorus's claim. Some, however, accept it.¹ None of those who have accepted it, though, have made explicit their reasons for doing so or what the consequences of accepting it would be. This paper investigates to what extent we can establish the existence of this allusion and what we would gain if we could. I consider several kinds of evidence.

¹ E.g., Dodds 1959.189 and Lodge 1891. Thompson 1871 quotes without comment the Scholiast's remark that there is an allusion. Robin and Moreau 1950 infer a background proverb in the third person: "Celui qui a fait la blessure devra aussi la guérir," and Dalfen 2004 also accepts a background proverb and assumes it came from Euripides' *Telephus*; neither commentary cites Olympiodorus.

First, I cover some miscellaneous facts that make Olympiodorus's claim *prima facie* plausible. Then I draw out the systematic parallels between the Telephus story and some aspects of the *Gorgias*'s plot and Socrates' life; these parallels emphasize some of the *Gorgias*'s key observations, in particular the importance of seeking out discussions about how to live well. In the last part of my argument, relying on the fact that an allusion draws attention to its phrasing and vice versa, I show that attention to the theme of "curing" helps solve one of the dialogue's enduring puzzles: how to differentiate true and false doctors, true and false statesmen, and true and false philosophers.

PRIMA FACIE EVIDENCE

1. In the opening two lines of the dialogue, Callicles and Socrates debate which proverb (τὸ λεγόμενον, 447a3)—being late for a fight or for a feast—best describes Socrates' tardy arrival. This exchange presages both the dialogue's ensuing contentiousness and Socrates' remarks about cooking as a shadow of medicine (analogous to the way rhetoric is a shadow of justice).² Chaerephon would have, for reasons of urbanity, concerns about keeping up with this exchange of metaphorical or (from the reader's perspective) foreshadowing sayings.³ The slight oddness of using a medical term in a non-medical context, even if fifth-century authors already used *ἰάομαι* metaphorically,⁴ gives Chaerephon's remark the sheen of a pre-existing phrase dropped with a minimum of strain into a novel context.

2. Chaerephon's words match the oracle's metrically. Olympiodorus explains that Chaerephon could not quote the oracle word-for-word because it mentions wounding, and to mention wounds would upset Callicles (1.7). Even without accepting or trying to understand Olympiodorus's tendentious reasoning, one can imagine the ease with which proverbs could be transformed from a third-person to a first-person formulation.

3. Telephus seems to have been on Plato's mind while writing the *Gorgias*, despite the fact that he does not mention Telephus by name

2 Doyle 2006, Sansone 2009. See Burnyeat 1997 on the allusiveness of many dialogues' opening lines, and Moss 2007 on the importance of the *Gorgias*'s pastry-cooking story.

3 Cf. Dodds 1959.190: "In Plato's world, as in the eighteenth century, neatness in handling such literary allusions was no small part of the art of conversation." Euripides wrote his *Telephus* in 438 and it became very famous, making Chaerephon's quotation of it, or of stories related to it, possible. On its cultural popularity, see Miller 1948.174 n 3, 182 n 45; Platter 2007; and Aristotle *Poetics* 1453a20 and 1460a33.

4 As in, for example, Euripides (*HF* 1107, *Or.* 650).

here.⁵ According to Olympiodorus again (45.4), Callicles quotes directly from Euripides' *Telephus* (εἴ σοι Μυσίον γε ἥδιον καλεῖν, "if it's nicer for you to call a Mysian [a Mysian]," 521b2) near the dialogue's end. We have some reason to believe that Olympiodorus had access to good information about Euripides: elsewhere in his commentary on *Gorgias*, he gives accurate citations of *Medea* 410 and *Orestes* 256–58. But even if Olympiodorus is wrong about the play to which the line alludes, the modern consensus is that Callicles does allude to the story of Telephus.⁶

4. Given one possible quotation from the Euripidean *Telephus*, the quotation at 447b could also be from the Euripidean *Telephus* rather than simply a reference to the background myth. Plato cites Euripides at least twice elsewhere: Callicles and Socrates refer at length to the *Antiope* (see, most recently, Trivigno 2009), and more briefly to either the *Polyidus* or the *Phrixus* (492e10–11).

5. Chaerephon's words imply that Chaerephon is taking himself to be Achilles. Plato elsewhere has his characters relate themselves to Homeric heroes, i.e., Socrates to Achilles in the *Apology* (28cd) and the *Crito* (44b1) or to Odysseus.⁷ Chaerephon's self-valorization would have a nicely comic touch.

6. Several centuries before Olympiodorus, Plutarch connected the story of Telephus with a seemingly Socratic mode of philosophy: "For not only is the wound of Telephus, as Euripides says, 'soothed by fine-rasped filings from the spear,' but the smart from philosophy, sinking deep in men of noble nature, is healed by the very words which inflict the hurt" (*Recta Rat. Aud.* 46f–47a, trans. R. B. Rutherford). The briskness of Plutarch's parallel suggests that this was a familiar allusion.

This evidence for an allusion to the Telephus story shows that Olympiodorus's claim is plausible. Further evidence comes from the

5 Socrates speaks of Aeschylus's Telephus at *Phdo.* 107e6. That Plato doesn't mention Telephus by name in the dialogue should not be taken as strong counterevidence, since the *Thesmophoriazousae*, which is deeply parodic of Euripides' *Telephus*, don't mention the name either; see Revermann 2006.116 on explanations for the silence.

6 Dodds 1959 ad loc. says that Olympiodorus "may be right" in his identification but "fails to prove it" (presumably the proverb, even if referring originally to Telephus, could have shown up in many other plays). Collard, Cropp, and Lee 1995 (1.52) accept the Euripidean provenance, but cannot determine the play. Pearson 1917.59: Plato's words "are actually taken from Euripides . . . and refer to the ἀναγνώριστις [recognition] of Telephus, which revealed that he was no Mysian, but a Greek of the homeland."

7 On Socrates as Achilles in the *Crito*, see Payne 1983. In the *Hippias Minor*, one might think Socrates is associating himself with either Odysseus or Achilles; for the view that it is the first, see Lévystone 2005.

existence of systematic parallels between the *Gorgias* and the Telephus story and from the fact that these parallels draw attention to some of the most important themes of the dialogue.

PARALLELS BETWEEN *GORGIAS* AND THE TELEPHUS STORY

Telephus was a king of Mysia in Asia when the Achaeans first set out to rescue Helen. Instead of landing in Troy, however, they landed on Telephus's Teuthranian shores. They fight. Telephus repels the Greeks. Just before they return home, however, Telephus trips over a vine and Achilles' spear catches him in the thigh. The wound suppurates and after nine years it has not healed. The oracle is therefore consulted. Telephus learns that the cause of the wound will cure it. He decides to dress as a beggar and go to the Greeks to ask for Achilles' help. Another oracle has told the Greeks that they must assist Telephus if they want to get to Troy. But Achilles, judging himself ignorant of medicine, refuses to treat Telephus. Odysseus, cognizant of Telephus's crucial role in the Trojan campaign, reinterprets the oracle to refer not to Achilles but to Achilles' ashen spear, the one he was uniquely able to wield.⁸ Achilles scrapes some material from the spear's tip and applies it to Telephus's wound; it proves to be the right balm (Apollod. *Epit.* 3.20). Healed, Telephus helps the Achaeans to Troy.⁹

This summary allows us to see the systematic parallels between Achilles and Chaerephon and between Telephus and Socrates.

1. Both Achilles and Chaerephon have harmed a countryman, and only they can repair the harm they have caused (cf. Benardete 1991.9). Achilles gave a fellow Greek a wound that, according to the oracle, would fester until Achilles attended to it himself.¹⁰ Chaerephon caused his fellow Athenian Socrates to miss Gorgias's speech, a loss reparable, at least from his perspective, only by leveraging his friendship with Gorgias

8 Hygin. *Fab.* 101. Achilles' spear once belonged to Chiron, a centaur wise in medicine, and was like Odysseus's and Philoctetes' respective weapons in being useable only by its owner (*Iliad* 16.143, etc.).

9 For further details, see Collard, Cropp, and Lee 1995.17–52 and *Dict. of Greek and Roman Myth.*, s.v. "Telephus."

10 Achilles' healing powers are referenced at *Iliad* 4.217–19 and 11.828–32; on his indirect tutelage by Asclepius, see Mackie 1997.1–2.

(φίλος γάρ μοι Γοργίας) and asking him to repeat his performance.¹¹ (The nature of Chaerephon's offer to help means that Chaerephon takes Socrates' ignorance of Gorgias's speech—rather than the social slight to Gorgias's hosts—to be the wound he caused and must cure. Calicles and Gorgias would have been harmed only if they had expected Socrates, but neither did: 447b4.)

2. In the most interesting interpretation of both stories, the wounding-and-curing instrument has a characteristic relation to its owner. Achilles' spear was his legendary and particular weapon. Chaerephon's wounding instrument would be his eager pursuit of Socratic-style conversation, for which he was notorious in literary Athens.¹²

Blaming the wound (Socrates' ignorance of Gorgias's speech) on the friends' lateness, on their presence in the agora, or on "missing Gorgias's performance" rather than on Chaerephon's eagerness for Socratic conversation would ignore whatever characterological material Plato could be exploiting by including Chaerephon in this dialogue. Chaerephon is not just Socrates' admirer but also a fellow participant in the philosophical life. It is hard to see why Chaerephon is included in the dialogue (as he is in the *Charmides*) and made to ask Gorgias the opening sequence of questions (447d6–48c3) unless it is to present him as the personality for which he had come to stand.¹³

Treating the wounding instrument as Chaerephon's eager pursuit of conversation makes the best sense of Chaerephon's presence in the dialogue; it also helps establish a parallel with the Telephus story:

11 Chaerephon may really have to identify his position to ask a favor, given that it would otherwise be "very peculiar that [Gorgias] would instantly offer himself to a testing by this minor Socratic," as Thesleff 2003.255 notes.

12 He announces his commitment to Socratic conversation later in the dialogue: "I hope never to be so busy that I'd leave such arguments, so conducted, because it had become more important to do something else" (*Grg.* 458c5–7, trans. Allen). Cf. *Clouds* passim, *Chrm.* 153d, *Apol.* 21a; see, generally, Nails 2002.86–87, Dalfen 2004.138–39, and de Stryker and Slings 1994.74–76. *Clouds* 502 treats Chaerephon as a student of Socrates, not just a partner; Chaerephon doesn't teach Stespiades or Pheidippides. Many comic writers took him to be "under the spell of his beloved master," according to Borthwick 2001.299. Xenophon implies that because he was an associate of Socrates, Chaerephon did no evil (*Mem.* 1.2.48), and that Socrates thought him to be flexible and eager to do well should he know what to do (2.3.17).

13 Davies 2000.8 observes that the first Achaean expedition and the ensuing battle "anticipates, serves as a *doublet* of, the Trojan War itself" (emphasis in original); so might Chaerephon and Socrates' time spent in the agora.

Chaerephon *repeats* something he's used or done before.¹⁴ To heal Telephus, Achilles put the point of his spear to his leg again. Chaerephon does not offer to repeat their lateness, repeat their presence in the agora, or repeat their missing of Gorgias's performance. What he does seek to cause again is the watching of some speech-performance (ἐπιδείξεται, 447b2) and the chance to ask questions (447c5–8). The reason we can consider this a repetition—a reapplication of the wounding instrument—is that Socrates and Chaerephon had probably just spent their time in the agora listening to speeches and afterward talking with the speakers, the bystanders, and each other.

We have good reason to think Socrates and Chaerephon had been engaged in Socratic-style listening and talking even though *Gorgias* does not state this explicitly.¹⁵ In the speech of the *Apology*, foreshadowed in the conversation of the *Gorgias* (486a6–b4, 522b3–c3; cf. Allen 1984.189–90), Socrates says that he has always frequented the agora, that he listens for and to whomever is considered wise, and that he asks them questions (17c8–18a4). That he engages in such discussions with Chaerephon himself is clear from the fact that Chaerephon comes to think Socrates is the wisest of the Greeks (21a8). Socrates' remark early in the *Gorgias* that they “spend time” (διατρῖψαι) talking echoes other conversations Socrates has about how to spend one's time listening and talking and other places where his wonted conversations are depicted or referenced (e.g., *Euthyphr.* 2a2, *Phdr.* 227b, *Clit.* 406a3). It is common in the Platonic dialogues to see Socrates listening to speeches and discussing them afterward (*Hip. Mi.* 363a2, *La.* 181d1–10, *Rep.* 2, *Prot.* 320b4–c5). Later in the *Gorgias*, Callicles charges Socrates with practicing philosophy ignobly: wasting time conversing endlessly with young men and refuting people rather than seeking honor in politically productive ways (484c10–86d1). Socrates' acceptance of the outline of Callicles' complaint means that we should see Socrates as spending much of his public life in listening and responding to what he hears. Callicles' impatience with Socrates' way of life could have been incited by Socrates acting in this unmanly way that morning. And Socrates continues

14 The καὶ of 447b1 makes it clear that he who caused the lateness will also fix the problem, and thus that even without character sigla, it would be clear that it was Chaerephon speaking, contrary to the contention by Thesleff 2003.254.

15 Stauffer's speculation is similar (2006.17–18): “Socrates' ‘lingering in the agora’ may refer to the time he was ‘forced’ to spend investigating the claims to knowledge raised by his fellow citizens.”

with such behavior at this very point in the dialogue: listening to a speech and then saying they need to analyze it (486d4–88b8).

Asking Gorgias to give some version of his presentation again and to stay for questions, apparently a typical conclusion of Gorgias's practice (447c6–8), would allow Chaerephon to repeat and thereby repair what caused Socrates and him to be ignorant of Gorgias's performance in the first place.¹⁶

An apparent problem with this parallel is that in our records of the Telephus story, Achilles is not to reapply the whole spear but only its shavings. Accordingly, it might be wrong to look for an exact repetition. It is true that much of the narrative interest in the Telephus story comes from Odysseus's clever reinterpretation of the first oracle. Achilles' initial interpretation—that *he* (not his spear) has to perform the healing—causes him only annoyance. Telephus continues to suffer until Odysseus revisits that oracle. Attentive to the grammatical ambiguity between agents and instruments, Odysseus realizes that healing need not come from the person himself but the thing that caused the wound, namely the spear. He goes on to specify that they can just use the spear's leading edge, presumably by mixing into the wound whatever "rust" or "shavings" can be scraped off the weapon's tip. But this addendum may not be thematically important. The oracle doesn't itself indicate the part of the instrument needed. The use of scrapings is likely a merely practical consideration; scrapings may be rubbed into a wound more easily than a long spear.¹⁷ (Still we might wonder whether, from Socrates' perspective, just as the rust is a superficial version of the spear, Gorgias's speech is a superficial version of the kind of talking Socrates engaged in when in the agora.)

3. Both Telephus and Socrates famously wore rustic clothing (465b4; cf. 451e).

4. Both Telephus and Socrates were the subjects of similar oracles. The (archaic) Greeks received an oracle stating that their campaign required Telephus. Socrates interpreted the oracle he received as stating that the (classical-era) Athenians needed him (*Apol.* 23a5–8). And in both cases, the

16 Irwin 1979.111–12, contrary to my view, claims that this part of Gorgias's performance would involve "a *single* question put to the orator from the audience, which he can then answer at length [, not] . . . the *repeated* cross-questioning of the Socratic method" (emphasis in original). But Irwin's references to *Hip. Mi.* 363d and to *Pr.* 315c support the practice of continued questions (if not specifically "cross-questions"), and aren't even about Gorgias. His reference to *Men.* 70c is neutral as to our views.

17 See Collard, Cropp, and Lee 1995.71 (ad frag. 724) on rust vs. shavings and also about the medical and magical uses of either.

aid they would provide was, unlike the aid Philoctetes, for example, could provide, non-martial. Telephus just had to be made better. Socrates had to go around seeking the nature of justice and, like a brotherly advisor, or a gadfly, or an examiner, help others do the same (*Apol.* 30e6; cf. *Grg.* 493c5–d3).

5. At least in Euripides' telling, Telephus's self-defense before the Greeks presages Plato's retelling of Socrates' own self-defense. Telephus "refuses to refrain from talking, even at the risk of personal danger, since the arguments he has to present are just (δίκαια)."¹⁸ This mirrors Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that he will never stop philosophizing, whatever the threats: he must always examine virtue in the interest of living the most just life possible (*Apol.* 29c7–d3).

6. Both wounds are significant. Telephus's suppurates for nine years, and he is presumably incapacitated during this time. Socrates believes that ignorance about the best sort of life to be the worst harm (cf. 487e9), and Gorgias, who claims to teach about the "greatest of human affairs, and the best" (451d7–8) and "the cause of freedom for men" (452d6), topics Socrates presumably takes himself to be ignorant about, can be expected to be absent from Athens for years at a time.

Chaerephon's friendship with Gorgias, and Gorgias's general repute, would explain Chaerephon's belief that Socrates would value studying with Gorgias. This could be so even if Chaerephon thinks by now (427 B.C.) that nobody is wiser than Socrates. Socrates is surely always demonstrating his enthusiasm for seeking wisdom wherever people think it might be found and his faith in the idea that *someone else* could have some skill useful for living well. Chaerephon would probably also know that Socrates had read Polus's work (462c1) and that Polus studied with Gorgias (448a5).

It might seem strange that Chaerephon, who so esteemed Gorgias, allowed Socrates and himself to miss the talk (were Socrates not really the one deserving the blame). But knowing that he could get Gorgias to repeat his performance, he might have thought that they should keep listening to or working out whatever had been occupying them in the agora (cf. 458c5–7).

Socrates' wound is ignorance of Gorgias's teaching. According to Gorgias, this would be ignorance of how to live well or, more precisely, of the route to living well. Socrates may not believe that one could ever vanquish this ignorance completely; the human condition won't allow it. But just as Telephus goes to Achilles not to be made immortal but to alleviate

18 Miller 1948.179, 181; frag. 706 Nauck.

his suffering and immobility, Socrates could go to Gorgias to gain (a temporary) reprieve from error and incompetence.

7. Both Telephus and Socrates fail at significant points to be recognized by their fellows. The Greeks attack Telephus because they mistake him for an Asian (to which event the “call a Mysian a Mysian” line alludes) rather than as a countryman of great import to their campaign, and Telephus can enter the Greek camp nine years later because they don’t recognize him under his deceptive rags. The Athenians fail to recognize Socrates as a true politician, as he says in the *Gorgias* (521d7–e2), and thus take him as their worst enemy (486a6–c3) rather than as their most important citizen (521d6–8).¹⁹ Callicles fails to see through Socrates’ apparent naïveté to his political savvy and significance.

These parallels strongly suggest that Chaerephon is indeed alluding to the story of Telephus. The narrative or thematic structural similarities are striking. What is more important, however, is how the similarities draw attention to key Socratic themes. Telephus’s nine-year wound emphasizes how drastic a problem Socrates considers lacking wisdom about how to live well to be. The Achaeans’ unexpected reliance on Telephus emphasizes the Athenians’ need for Socrates. The misrecognition of Telephus concretizes the failure of many to understand Socrates’ allegiances. And as Telephus is harmed, then helped, by the same thing, philosophical conversation has its costs in time and pain,²⁰ but is also the redemption of those costs.

CURING AND DIAGNOSIS

Chaerephon’s claim that he will “cure” the problem he caused uses medical terminology. Since the dialogue does not begin in a medical context, the term’s metaphoricity may have helped Olympiodorus see the Telephus allusion. The existence of an allusion, in turn, draws attention back to that medical word itself. As an intertextual pivot, the term is significant, and when taken literally, it can serve as well as an intratextual pivot.

Socrates’ reaction to Chaerephon’s offer to cure what harm he caused draws attention to that very offer. He neither directly accepts it nor refuses it. He modifies it, saying he wants to ask Gorgias some questions

19 That Socrates’ immediate interlocutors know that he is Socrates (447a1, 447b2, b7, 461b3) is not relevant.

20 Michelini 1998.54 thinks that Socrates accepts a “philosophical justification” for his “harsh behavior”: “‘caring for’ someone may involve hurting rather than pleasing.”

about himself (447b9–c4). In foregoing Chaerephon’s offer to get an encore and in his request that Chaerephon ask Gorgias questions instead (447c9), Socrates points out to Chaerephon that something is wrong with the way Chaerephon wants to approach remedying the situation. Socrates soon takes over, and the conversation quickly turns to medical practice. This talk reveals the error in treating any skill as concerned principally with cure, reconstruction, or improvement. All skills demand, first, some kind of *diagnosis*. Diagnosis is finding out what exactly the problem is. It must precede any effective cure. Gorgias’s failure as teacher of the best human things and Socrates’ success as a true statesman are the results of Gorgias’s concern only to cure and Socrates’ primary concern with diagnosis.

Midway through his discussion with Socrates, Gorgias argues that doctors will not get their patients to follow their prescriptions unless they get help from someone with rhetorical expertise. He cites the case of his brother Herodicus, whose patients do not take their bitter decoctions or undergo surgery unless Gorgias contributes persuasive arguments (456b5). He then says that a rhetorician could persuade a city to appoint him city doctor more readily than a trained doctor could (456b6–10). These two claims seem to show that rhetoric is better than medicine and, by extension, than all skills that depend on persuading other people to use them.

The weakness with Gorgias’s argument is that it fails to acknowledge that medicine already includes rhetorical training, although he had already explicitly admitted as much (450a3–4). Further, according to his arguments, it is only by having rhetorical skill that any real doctors would ever have succeeded at having their prescriptions followed or being appointed city doctor, and he does not deny that real doctors have succeeded in these ways.

When Gorgias acknowledges the weakness of his argument, he goes on to limit its scope, saying that his superiority over real doctors exists only when addressing the “many” (ὄχλῳ, 459a3). The “many” he defines as those who are “ignorant” (μὴ εἰδότες, 459a4–5). The rhetorician, according to him, is superior to the real doctor with respect to persuasion, and thus curing, only among those who know less.

Despite agreeing that the rhetorician is better at persuading some audiences than the doctor is, neither states why this is so.²¹ The way to a

21 I don’t think this issue reduces to whether rhetoric is actually a skill, as (true) medicine was often considered to be. Whether apparent skills are actually only matters of habit and a mode of flattery seems a matter of their being unable to *give an account* of how

solution seems to come from identifying what the real doctor can do better than the rhetorician. Medicine is not just the application of balms and purgatives, it is also the determination of a particular illness (cf. 464a). The doctor has the ability to decide on the basis of signs, symptoms, and conditions the nature of the malady. This part of medical skill is called diagnosis.²²

How could the real doctor's ability to diagnose make him more successful at persuading knowledgeable patients than someone who couldn't diagnose correctly? Knowledgeable people would presumably accept the first premises of medicine, for example, the nature of bodily equilibria. A diagnosis would explain certain discomforts by an appeal to certain plausible failures of equilibrium. A patient who knows that her body could reach such disequilibria and that such disequilibria would plausibly have somatic consequences, and who sees that such disequilibria could be righted, might readily understand the value in her doctor's prescriptions. She would be persuaded to take whatever course of treatment the doctor recommends. An ignorant patient, on the other hand, would find technical diagnoses meaningless and thus unable to provide reasons for action. That patient would see only the unpleasantness of undergoing the course of treatment. It *would* take an expert rhetorician to appeal to that patient's merely vague sense that some good ends take hard means.

Jessica Moss explains (2007) Gorgias's ability to persuade only the ignorant without an appeal to the idea of diagnosis. She argues that the ignorant confuse the pleasurable with the useful, and the painful with the harmful, and thus reject as bad doctors' requests to apply painful treatments. Her argument implies that knowledgeable patients realize that painful treatment may nevertheless be useful. But there are two problems with using this observation of people's illusions about pleasure and goodness to explain the difference between the true doctor and the sham doctor. First, taking "knowledgeable" as simply "understanding that pleasure and goodness sometimes diverge" is too broad when Socrates

they could produce good, as Woolf 2004.127 argues in the context of *Gorgias*. Our issue is more concerned with what is investigated first, not what can be explained (though the ability to explain does surely matter to the effectiveness of the doctor, both in persuading the patient and in thinking through possible treatments).

22 On disputes between doctors on what a doctor needs to know, see Cooper 2004 and Schief-sky 2005. Lidz 1995.534, 536 mentions diagnosis twice, once in the context of differential competence in treatment and once in the context of the inexactness and necessarily personal attention of medicine, and treats it in a way sympathetic with the present work but does not focus on the conclusions I draw.

and Gorgias have confined themselves explicitly to the medical context and what a doctor knows—and thus what the orator fails to know (459a1–b6). Second, if the orator is able to persuade the pleasure-focused ignorant to undergo a painful treatment, it must be by showing how that treatment is less painful than the discomfort he is currently feeling or anticipates feeling. Even this persuasive maneuver will require some sort of (unsubstantiated) diagnosis. Good treatment requires correct diagnosis, and knowledgeable patients—just as knowledgeable people in other contexts are persuaded more effectively by knowledgeable speakers (cf. 459b6–7)—will accept the explanations and prescriptions only of those doctors they know to be skilled.

That Plato has in mind a strict distinction between cure and diagnosis is clear from the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue even more concerned with medicine and rhetoric.²³ In it, Socrates says to Phaedrus: “Suppose someone said, ‘I know a treatment to raise or lower the temperature of people’s bodies; if I decide to, I can make them vomit or make their bowels move, and all sorts of things. On the basis of this knowledge, I claim to be a physician’” (268b–e). Phaedrus and Socrates agree that this person’s knowledge doesn’t suffice for medicine. It leaves out the knowledge about to whom and when to apply these treatments. Doctors are not simply to *change* a person’s internal state, but to *correct* it. Unlike thirst, which is a kind of emptiness that any kind of drink can slake, illness is a particular sort of disorder, and only by knowing which disorder it is can the problem receive the correct treatment. One had better know whether the illness is a result of too much heat or too much cold before choosing whether to apply cooling or warming treatments.

The contrast between the free doctor and the slave doctor in *Laws* 4 further supports the claim that Plato is concerned about diagnoses. Though the Athenian’s point does not concern the true rather than the sham doctor but the more, rather than the less, effective healer, his comparison shows that Plato’s understanding of medical practice comprehends accurate and vocalized diagnosis. The slave doctor “never gives any account of the particular illness . . . [and] simply prescribes what he thinks best in the light of experience.” This contrasts with the free doctor,

23 Consider 227a5, 227d4, 268a, 270, and Phaedrus’s remark to Eryximachus at *Symp.* 176d: “I always follow your advice, especially when you speak as a doctor. In this case, if the others know what’s good for them, they too will do just as you say” (trans. Woodruff and Nehamas).

whose “method is to construct an empirical case history by consulting the invalid and his friends; in this way, he himself learns something from the sick and, at the same time, he gives the individual patient all the instruction he can. He gives no prescription until he has somehow gained the invalid’s consent; then, coaxing him into continued cooperation, he tries to complete his restoration to health” (720c3–e1, trans. Saunders). “Giving the account,” a diagnosis, is important to the process of healing, and we can assume that the Athenian assumes free patients have more knowledge than slave patients.

It was already obvious in the *Gorgias* that the rhetorician, unable to provide a diagnosis, cannot on his own heal the infirm. Gorgias never says he replaces his brother; he must rely on what Herodicus has already decided about which cure to persuade the patient to take. The ascension of a rhetorician to the post of city doctor speaks only to the gullibility of the voters, not to any medical success that the rhetorician will go on to have.

The real doctor knows how to diagnose, and this knowledge distinguishes him from the sham doctor, who is, in Gorgias’s case, the rhetorician. Might it also be said that the doctor needs to know *health*, or *medicine*, or *the good*? Perhaps so. But such objects of theoretical knowledge are insufficient for the practice of medicine. Diagnostic ability is in large part a practical ability. It is the ability to examine people. It depends on background knowledge about the nature of bodies. But knowing the nature of bodies does not itself make clear a patient’s problems to the doctor. The doctor must know how to look, ask, listen, infer, consider the patient’s history, and assess the local environment. These research abilities are about particulars and so cannot be known ahead of time as some corpus of “medical knowledge”; nor are they instantly evident to any bystander.

What holds for the doctor holds for the statesman to the extent that the statesman must improve his citizenry. What holds for the statesman holds for the philosopher: his first step is diagnosis—questioning, examination, and testing (cf. *Apol.* 29e8)—not cure.²⁴ The philosopher discovers his interlocutor’s commitments and confusions: his problems. A philosopher can always exhort his interlocutor to care for himself and for virtue,

24 Cf. Peterson 2011 on the importance of Socratic questioning and examining—diagnosis—at every point in the Platonic dialogues, and Moss 2007 on the connection between statesmanship and Socratic practice in the *Gorgias*. See also McPherran 2004, Anton 1980, Gill 2003, and Moes 2000.51–52 (with evidence in chap. 2) and 2007.

and here the philosopher's skill may be matched by the rhetorician's.²⁵ But exhortation will have little value unless the listener first believes that he has a problem, one that he himself has to take care of. The ultimate goal of philosophy is to help a person's soul: to cure it of that confusion that leads a person into injustice and ignorance of the good (514d1; Woolf 2000). The rhetorician can, at best, add to a person's beliefs or list of desired actions. Addition does not always cause improvement.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that there are significant reasons to take Chaerephon to be paraphrasing the Telephus oracle and no good reasons to think that he is not. Recognizing the allusion concentrates the reader's attention on, first, important parallels between the story of Telephus and the story of Socrates and, second, the literal meaning of "cure."

Socratic philosophizing, as Callicles argues, does indeed take lots of time and can get in the way of listening to important people or participating in public activity. Missing either can contribute to the harm caused by ignorance. But Socratic conversation—listening and talking—may also provide the only cure to precisely those wounds of ignorance.

By saying that he will cure Socrates without also showing that he knows exactly how his proposed cure would help Socrates, Chaerephon introduces the problem of diagnosis. Both doctors and sham doctors look able to cure, just as statesmen and sham statesmen, or philosophers and sham philosophers, look able to rule and persuade. What differentiates each of the three true versions from their sham versions is the true version's ability to diagnose the exact problem from which a person suffers.²⁶

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25 Weiss 2003 claims that because eight pairs of brothers are mentioned in *Gorgias*, we should think of rhetoric and philosophy as needing each other in the way the brothers do. The philosopher must "acknowledge the worth of the orator's persuasive expertise, an expertise that he himself lacks and needs" (206). But Weiss's discussion fails to mention what skills exactly (*viz.*, more specifically than "rhetorical ones") the philosopher needs or to show that Socrates does not really have them already. I take Socrates' point to be that the cost of persuading people "non-diagnostically," that is, by making "rhetorical" and false assertions, is too great to tolerate.

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