

PLATO ON THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY

Plato was the first philosopher in the Western tradition to reflect systematically on rhetoric. In this book, Tushar Irani presents a comprehensive and innovative reading of the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, the only two Platonic dialogues to focus on what an art of argument should look like, treating each of the texts individually, yet ultimately demonstrating how each can best be understood in light of the other. For Plato, the way in which we approach argument typically reveals something about our deeper desires and motivations, particularly with respect to other people, and so the key to understanding his views on the proper practice of argument lies in his understanding of human psychology. According to this reading, rhetoric done well is simply the practice of philosophy, the pursuit of which has far-reaching implications for how we should relate to others and how we ought to live.

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The Art of Argument in the Gorgias and Phaedrus

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-18198-4 — Plato on the Value of Philosophy
 Tushar Irani
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
 It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
 education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107181984
 DOI: 10.1017/9781316855621

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First published 2017

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Irani, Tushar, 1980– author.

Title: Plato on the value of philosophy : the art of argument in the Gorgias and Phaedrus / Tushar
 Irani, Wesleyan University, Connecticut.

Description: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical
 references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016048275 | ISBN 9781107181984 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Plato. | Philosophy, Ancient. | Reasoning. | Rhetoric, Ancient. | Plato. Gorgias. |
 Plato. Phaedrus.

Classification: LCC B395 .I73 2017 | DDC 184 – dc23
 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016048275>

ISBN 978-1-107-18198-4 Hardback

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For my mother, and in memory of my father,
Daryush Aderbad Irani (1943–2012)

φιλονικεῖτω δὲ ἡμῖν πᾶς πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἀφθόνως.
ὁ μὲν γὰρ τοιοῦτος τὰς πόλεις αὔξει, ἀμιλλώμενος μὲν αὐτός,
τοὺς ἄλλους δὲ οὐ κολούων διαβολαῖς . . .
Plato, *Laws* 731a2–5

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Preface

This book is about Plato's views on the art of argument. More precisely, it is about what Plato believes a proper engagement in argument requires with respect to our engagement with others. Since this is a topic that occupies us as much as it did him, I hope the discussion that follows is of more than mere scholarly interest. That said, this book is primarily a work of interpretation. Plato's most concentrated thoughts on the practice of argument appear in two dialogues – the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* – and in this study I suggest that reading these works alongside each other gives us a new understanding of his views on what an art of argument requires.

Almost all scholars of Plato recognise that the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* are connected. The two dialogues share a common focus on the nature and limitations of rhetoric, and there are numerous internal references in each work that make this connection explicit. I hope the present study provides some new insights into these two dialogues, while also attending to the richness and philosophical complexity of each work on its own terms. The last sixty-five years of interpreting Plato's dialogues have produced a wealth of individual studies on the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* – in article, chapter, commentary, and monograph form – to which I am indebted. So while there has not, in my opinion, been an adequate treatment of the connection between these texts in existing scholarship in ancient philosophy, I have learned a good deal from work in the field, as well as from work on the history and practice of Greek rhetoric. I have tried to make this clear in my engagement with the secondary literature on these dialogues. Even in cases where my reading of some passage or another in Plato departs from others, I have benefited greatly from explaining how and why it does so.

Doing philosophy is hard; appreciating the hardness is harder still. Completing this book has led me to reflect on those who motivated me in my earliest intellectual pursuits, and I am happy to acknowledge the influence they had on me here. I will always be grateful to Bob Granner and Kamakshi Balasubramanian, two of the first teachers to take an interest in

my thoughts and writing, and to give me a sense of the worth of a life of learning.

I was fortunate as an undergraduate to have four inspiring professors of philosophy introduce me to the subject at Colgate University: Anne Ashbaugh, Maude Clark, Robert M. Wallace, and Jim Wetzel. I owe all of them thanks for training me in their different ways to become a better reader and philosopher, and for encouraging me to pursue a career in academia.

During my first semester as a graduate student at Northwestern University, I had the opportunity to take a seminar on Literature and Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome at the University of Chicago with Martha Nussbaum. My thoughts on the *Phaedrus* have undergone a long period of development and some of the ideas I advance in Chapter 7 of this book were put forward in rudimentary form in a paper I wrote for that seminar. Martha was one of the first scholars of ancient philosophy to give me the confidence to believe I had something original and important to contribute to the study of the subject, and though I depart in places from her reading of Plato, she has engaged generously with and supported my work since then. Thank you, Martha.

Throughout my years at Northwestern, I benefited from the community of students with whom I shared my work and engaged in philosophy. I am grateful to them all, especially Brad Cokelet, Eli Diamond, Ryan Doran, Katie Padgett-Walsh, Laura Papish, B. Scot Rousse, Steve Skultety, and the late Jonathan Trejo-Mathys. About midway during my graduate studies, Tad Brennan joined the faculty and soon enlivened department life with his characteristic blend of intelligence and good humour. In conversation and through his service on my dissertation committee, he has been a valuable interlocutor in helping me refine my views on Plato. Thank you, Tad. Members of the Chicago Area Consortium in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy also heard me present some of the ideas that made it into this book at workshops organised at the University of Chicago, and I'm grateful to the participants at those events for their comments, particularly Jonathan Beere and Gabriel Richardson Lear.

My greatest intellectual debt by far is to Richard Kraut. He was a model mentor to me in graduate school in numerous respects, but first and foremost in giving me the freedom to explore my scholarly interests. Never did I feel under pressure to toe any interpretive line in reading Plato. On the contrary, Richard always encouraged me to follow the texts where I believed they might productively lead, and to make the best case I could for what I took them to say. Where I had an unorthodox reading, he applied

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the requisite critical pressure that enabled me to clarify and sometimes modify my views, and while this book is quite removed from the work of my dissertation, it is due to his trust in the quality of my ideas for that project that I have felt motivated to develop some of the more original views I present here. Thank you, Richard.

I began this book four years ago, and I doubt I'd have been able to write it were it not for the institutional and collegial support I have received at Wesleyan University. I am grateful for its humane parental leave policy, which allowed me to pause my tenure clock twice for the birth of my children. Teaching the *Gorgias* during my first year as a professor gave me the earliest inkling of the relationship I draw in this study between that dialogue and the *Phaedrus*. A faculty fellowship later in the spring of 2011 at Wesleyan's Center for the Humanities gave me the opportunity to think again about Plato's views on reason and its role in the good life, and his conception of philosophy as a form of 'ensouled' speech. By the end of that fellowship I was reading Alcidas and formulating the ideas that are key to the final chapter of this book. I also completed a paper that was subsequently published as 'Reason and Value in Plato' in *Philosophy and Literature* 36 (2013). A revised version of that paper appears in Chapter 6 and I thank Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to use the material here.

I have benefited from having two sets of excellent colleagues at Wesleyan in the Department of Philosophy and the College of Letters. The friendship and wisdom I have found in both departments made the process of writing this book a happy experience, even when it involved considerable labour. For their mentorship, I give special thanks to Steve Angle, Lori Gruen, Steve Horst, Ethan Kleinberg, Typhaine Leservot, Laurie Nussdorfer, and Kach Tölölyan. Various other friends and colleagues, some retired, have enhanced my thinking on themes in this book: Javi Castro, Eric Goldman, Berel Lang, Howard Needler, Joe Rouse, Elise Springer, and Eirene Visvardi. I am also grateful for the privilege of teaching and trying out some of my ideas in the company of such inquiring students at Wesleyan. My thanks to all of these students for continuing to remind me about the value of philosophy.

Many people have assisted me by providing detailed comments on portions of this project. The first half of the book began life as an enormous paper that I submitted unsuccessfully for publication to *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*. Brad Inwood, editor of the journal at the time, nonetheless took an interest in the material and sent me generous feedback, and I'm grateful for his advice in urging me to expand the piece into

a longer project. Verity Harte and Nick Smith read the *Gorgias* material at a particularly crucial period in the development of the book, and supplied comments that enabled me to connect those chapters with my interpretation of the *Phaedrus*. Jimmy Doyle later sent me constructive criticisms on a version of Chapter 3 that helped improve my reading of the *Gorgias* significantly. My thanks also to Susan Hahn for her comments on this chapter. Ethan Kleinberg and Andy Szegedy-Maszak offered sound advice on the introduction to the book. Noah Chafets sent me some excellent remarks in response to my views on the *Phaedrus*. I would like to acknowledge especially Richard Kraut and Bob Wallace for providing comments on the entire manuscript, and Steve Horst, who gave me feedback on two occasions – at the halfway stage of the project and on the final draft – and whose comments and counsel have been of vital assistance in helping me write this book. Thank you, Steve.

I have presented some of the material in this book at a number of scholarly venues over the last few years: at a meeting of the Ancient Philosophy Society in Utah in 2011; at a meeting of the International Plato Society at the University of Michigan in 2012; and at Central and Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2016. I am grateful to Rachel Barney, Eric Brown, Noah Chafets, David Ebrey, Jill Gordon, Dhananjay Jagannathan, and Rachana Kamtekar for their questions and comments at these events, and am particularly indebted to my commentators for their criticisms and helpful feedback: Jim Butler, Sean Kelsey, Gerald Press, Mark Senteny, Nick Smith, Franco Trivigno, and Charles Young. Replying to and incorporating the points they raised have made this study a better piece of work.

At Cambridge University Press, I thank the two anonymous referees who were commissioned for their comments on my manuscript, Iveta Adams for her outstanding work as my copy-editor, and Cassi Roberts for seeing the book through to publication. Most of all, I owe a debt of gratitude to Hilary Gaskin for taking an interest in this project, and for the professionalism and judiciousness she showed in ensuring a fair and timely review process for my manuscript. Thank you, Hilary. I am also grateful for the superb research assistance of Isabel Fattal, a student of mine at Wesleyan, who compiled the index locorum for the book and saved me from making several typographical errors in proofreading the text.

Finally, I thank my family, those near and far, whose love, support, and guidance have kept me on the straight and narrow. My sister, Shireen, was a ready source of cheer and companionship while growing up, and enriched my young life considerably. To my wife Roxanne I owe my world

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and express my deepest love, for sharing in my life and aspirations, and allowing me to share in hers. Our two children, Anya and Jahan, have shown me a new kind of beauty and given me a new kind of joy.

A major theme of the present study is the relation between *philologia* and *philosophia*, and I dedicate this book to my parents for nurturing my own love of *logoi*. My mother indulged my perfectionism from an early age, sitting with me through countless projects and helping me put words to page when I insisted she wake me before dawn to finish a piece to my satisfaction. My father, a *philologos* in all the manifold senses of that term, passed away the year I began work on this book. I wish he were alive to read the finished product, and to take pride in knowing that the faith he put in me and my abilities has borne fruit. If this book can be a fitting tribute to his memory, I'll have done my work.

Note on Editions and Translations Used

The Greek text of Plato's dialogues in this book refers to *Platonis Opera*, edited by John Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900–7). All English translations are drawn from *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997): quotations from the *Gorgias* refer to Donald Zeyl's translation; quotations from the *Phaedrus* refer to Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff's translation. I have sometimes made minor modifications to these translations. Significant modifications are explained in my notes. In making these decisions, I have benefited from consulting commentaries on the *Gorgias* by E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) and T. H. Irwin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), and commentaries on the *Phaedrus* by R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), C. J. Rowe (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986) and Harvey Yunis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Editions and translations used for other ancient works are listed in my notes.