

## PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC IN THE *MENEXENUS*

PLATO'S *Menexenus* opens with a scene of typical Socratic interest in the young, as Socrates questions Menexenus about his activities and intentions. This scene, however, I would suggest, is not simply an illustration of Socrates' characteristic behaviour, forming a suitable introduction to this or any other dialogue. Its relation to the work as a whole is closer than this: it raises a question with which the *Menexenus* may best be understood as being essentially concerned.

Menexenus, Socrates supposes (234a-b), considers himself ready to abandon παιδείσις and φιλοσοφία for higher things (Menexenus himself declares a different intention at 234b3-4: he will submit to Socrates' authority. This does not necessarily alter the effect of Socrates' words—the opinion ascribed to Menexenus introduces the idea of the relationship between philosophy and statecraft regardless of whether he in fact holds it—but it does suggest that we should ask how seriously Menexenus' protest should be regarded. His admiration for 'Aspasia' and her speech, as well as for Socrates—249d-e—suggests that there is at least some uncertainty and inconsistency in his position; this would be in keeping with the understanding of the dialogue which I shall propose.) The irony is immediately obvious as Socrates expresses a Calliclean view of the place of philosophy (with τὰ μείζω at 234a6, compare *Gorgias* 484c4-5; 484c-486c expands, without altering, the view ascribed to Menexenus); it is underlined by the wording at a7-b1, ἀρχεῖν ἡμῶν . . . τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τηλικούτος ὢν, with the pointed address ὦ θαυμάσιε.<sup>1</sup> Through this ironic formulation of the view, Socrates is already suggesting his own opposed belief that philosophy is the highest pursuit, constantly necessary to the statesman.

At 234b1-2, Socrates more subtly continues to raise this question of the relationship between philosophy and statesmanship, and to suggest his own position. He does so by exploiting a τόπος of encomium—one which will be seen taken to extremes in the speech of Aspasia—the praise of the subject's ancestry, with its implication that this is evidence for the subject's own merit.<sup>2</sup> Menexenus' reason for entering politics is said to be his family's tradition of providing statesmen. This word which Socrates uses, however, ἐπιμελητήν, in its relation to ἀρχεῖν at a7, suggests the question of the true nature and rôle of a ruler. If ἐπιμέλεια is required of a ruler, the implication may be that inheritance alone is not a sufficient qualification; a true ruler is such only in virtue of his own character and his own effort—including essentially, the context suggests, his philosophical effort. Without this, he will be unable to understand or fulfil what is required of an ἐπιμελητής.<sup>3</sup> (Compare the effect of Menexenus' reply, where ἀρχεῖν is again seen in significant relation to other words, this time ἐὰν σύ γε . . . ἔξῃ καὶ συμβουλεύης. A ruler,

<sup>1</sup> Socrates recurs to the question of the activities proper to different ages at 236c8-9, where he professes to fear Menexenus' ridicule ἂν σοι δόξω πρεσβύτης ὢν ἔτι παίζειν (in delivering Aspasia's speech). This remark bears a complex relation to Socrates' words at 234a-b. Menexenus, Socrates implies there, is too young to exercise authority over his elders; but this is not due to an as yet imperfect mastery of rhetoric, a pursuit which, as is suggested at 236c, is appropriate, if to any age, to Menexenus' rather than Socrates'. Rather, Menexenus is not yet fit to command because this would call for abilities other than a young man's skill in rhetoric.

<sup>2</sup> See Arist. *Rhet.* 1418a34-37 (=Diels-Kranz 82.B17) on Gorgias' practice: εἰ γὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς λέγει Πηλέα ἐπαινεῖ, εἴτα Αἰακόν, εἴτα τὸν θεόν. See also *Rhet. ad Al.* 35, especially the remarks on inferring the merit of one generation from that of another: ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἄδηλον εἶναι πᾶσι, ὅτι τοὺς ἐξ ἀγαθῶν γενομένους εἰκὸς ἔστι τοῖς προγόνοις ὁμοιοῦσθαι (1440b37-39); καὶ δῆλον, ὡς οἱ γε τούτων πρόγονοι σπουδαῖοι τινεῖς

ἦσαν. οὐ γὰρ εἰκὸς φανῆναι τοὺς τοιοῦτους καλοὺς ἢ ἀγαθοὺς εἶναι ἐκ μοχθηρῶν προγεγονότας (1441a3-5); Arist. *Rhet.* 1367b30-32: τὰ δὲ κύκλω εἰς πίστιν, οἶον εὐγένεια καὶ παιδεία. εἰκὸς γὰρ ἐξ ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθοὺς καὶ τὸν οὕτω τραφέντα τοιοῦτον εἶναι. (Though see *Rhet. ad Al.* 1441a8-10 for a possible reversal of the τόπος.)

<sup>3</sup> L. Méridier, in the Budé edition of the *Menexenus* (Paris 1949), translates ἐπιμελητήν as 'un gardien', and notes that Plato is apparently ignoring the technical distinction between ἐπιμελητής and ἀρχων (83-4, n. 7). I would suggest that this is a deliberate adaptation on Plato's part of a technical term, the better to suggest his own views on the nature of political authority and the qualifications necessary for it. 'Επιμεληταῖς is used of the Guardians at *Republic* 424b4; and its uses in Plato tend generally to suggest expert care. See, e.g., *Laws* 706a5-b1 on the qualifications necessary for an ἐπιμελητής concerned with παιδῶν τροφή; and note *Politicus* 276, where ruling is agreed to be an instance of ἐπιμέλεια rather than τροφή.

it is suggested, must be subject to discipline; and since it is *Socrates'* authority to which Menexenus is submitting, the necessity of philosophy is again conveyed.) Socrates is exploiting the rhetorical τόπος to make it point to its own inadequacy and contribute to the raising of questions in this passage concerning the relationship between philosophy and politics.<sup>4</sup>

The question raised in these opening lines, and the suggested answer that philosophy is essential to the statesman, are, I believe, central to the *Menexenus*; and if the dialogue is seen in this way, questions concerning its purpose and seriousness, and the relation of the content of the funeral speech to Platonic ideas, may be more easily resolved. The *Menexenus* may be seen as illustrating the necessity of philosophy in politics and the consequences of ignoring it. In the funeral speech, we see the history of a state whose policy is not guided by philosophy, presented by the rhetoric which accompanies and serves such policy, encouraging its unreflective character. (Contrast Socrates' use of a rhetorical τόπος to undercut itself and serve his philosophy.) Spoken by Socrates, and contained within a Socratic conversation, the speech is a sufficient condemnation of the unphilosophical politics and rhetoric which it represents.<sup>5</sup> The effect is heightened by passages which recall Platonic ideas; for these serve, on examination, to underline the contrast with the ideas which they recall, and so to suggest more strongly the need for true philosophy. At the same time, these passages have an effect similar to that of Socratic elenchus, where Socrates leads his interlocutors to acknowledge the unrealised implications of their beliefs and to recognise that they are committed to the views which they try to reject. From elements in an unphilosophical policy, and from tendencies in the rhetoric associated with it, could be drawn Platonic conclusions; and the speech suggests the inconsistency which must prevail unless the necessity of philosophy is recognised and these conclusions drawn. (Compare, most obviously, *Gorgias* 482 b–c; but also the confusion of, for example, Polus or Meno, and the unphilosophical virtue of Cephalus.)

In the *Menexenus*, then, Plato is concerned to expose the deficiencies of contemporary rhetoric and politics, which he sees as intimately related. This may be one reason for his choice of the form of the funeral oration, as one in which these two concerns most plainly converge. The funeral oration embodies clearly the characteristics of rhetoric in general.<sup>6</sup> In addition, however,

<sup>4</sup> Compare the use of the τόπος in the *Charmides*, *Lysis* and *Meno*. At *Charmides* 157d–8b, Socrates' exploitation of it is complex. He begins, at 157d9–e4, by using the idea of inherited excellence to deflate Critias' exaggerated praise of Charmides—it is only natural that the boy should excel. The idea is given a new direction at 158a–b, however, in the contrast between the physical characteristics which Charmides can be seen to have inherited and the more important question of σωφροσύνη, which he cannot be seen to have inherited and which, it is suggested, is a matter not of inheritance but of personal responsibility. (Note the contrasting forms of address ὦ φίλε παῖ Γλαυκῶνος and ὦ φίλε Χαρμίδη, contributing to this distinction between inherited characteristics and personal character.) In addition, the eulogy of Charmides' family is clearly ironic, and would be recognisable as such even were we not told that the family surpassed in τῇ λεγομένη εὐδαιμονίᾳ. Compare *Meno* 90a–b, where Anytus' personal inadequacy is underlined by Socrates' recommendation of him on the basis of his father's qualities (especially pointed in the context of Socrates' doubts as to the ability of fathers to transmit their excellence to their sons). Anthemion's qualities are themselves largely a matter of reputation (δοκῶν, 90a6); while the fact that the first characteristic mentioned is his wealth (90a2) hardly suggests serious praise. Socrates is thus able to exploit the τόπος not only to underline the importance of personal qualities and responsibility, but to comment

on the values of those whom he affects to extol. Contrast Hippothales' uncritical use of praise of Lysis' ancestors at *Lysis* 205b–d, with Socrates' comments at 205d–6b. Ctesippus makes a criticism complementary to Socrates': not only does Hippothales concentrate upon Lysis' ancestors rather than the boy himself, but he has nothing to say which is unique to himself, the encomiast, either (205b7–c2).

In the *Menexenus*, Socrates' use of the τόπος to call its implications into question is complemented, within Aspasia's speech itself, by the exhortation to rely on one's own ἀρετή rather than one's ancestors' reputation (247a–c), following the extreme praise of the ancestors in the preceding section.

<sup>5</sup> N. Loraux, 'Socrate contrepoison de l'oraison funèbre', *L'Antiquité Classique* xliii (1974) 172–211, notes that although only Socrates speaks, the funeral oration, and the rhetorical tradition which it represents, are in the position of an interlocutor (172); representation is equivalent to refutation. Compare the *Euthydemus*, where the representation of the two sophists is sufficient condemnation, with no need for elenctic refutation.

<sup>6</sup> R. Clavaud, *Le Ménexène de Platon et la rhétorique de son temps* (Paris 1980), argues that the characteristics and deficiencies illustrated in the *Menexenus* should be understood as those of rhetoric in general, not just of ἐπιτάφιοι.

ἐπιτάφιοι as a genre had an essentially political character. Not only in the apparently mandatory discussions of the πολιτεία, but implicitly throughout, funeral orations embodied an Athenian image of the city's constitution and policies.<sup>7</sup> Plato's awareness of this leads him to exploit the form in conveying his view of Athenian policy and its need for different guiding principles.

It is in this light that the question of the relation between the *Menexenus* and the funeral oration of Pericles should be regarded. Plato draws attention, at 235e–6b, to the connection between the speech of 'Aspasia' and a speech of Pericles; parallels between the speech in the *Menexenus* and that in Thucydides indicate that the latter is the oration of Pericles with which Plato is concerned.<sup>8</sup> Amid Socrates' remarks on the nature and effects of ἐπιτάφιοι in general, the attention drawn to this unusual example of the genre suggests that the relation to it will be important in elucidating Plato's intentions; and this is understandable if Plato is interested in the ἐπιτάφιοι as an embodiment of Athenian constitution and policy. This concern makes it natural that Plato should be interested in, and direct his readers' attention to, the funeral oration which devotes itself most explicitly to the Athenian constitution and character. Allusion to this speech in particular would help to make his intentions clear.

However, Plato is interested in the Thucydidean speech not as the only ἐπιτάφιος with political import, but as the one in which this import is made most plain. The character of Pericles' oration is such that by alluding to it, Plato can convey his recognition that the more conventional speeches, which his ἐπιτάφιος on the whole resembles more closely than it does that of Pericles, also offer a representation of Athens in which the issues of statesmanship which concern him can be perceived. The precise relation which he establishes between the speeches is significant. In representing his ἐπιτάφιος as containing περιλείμματα from the speech of Pericles (236b6), Plato suggests that it uses material which, while not included by Pericles, is not out of keeping with the concerns of the oration for which it was originally designed. In associating the orations in this way, Plato indicates his intention of continuing Pericles' analysis of Athens by other means.

The figure of Aspasia has an important part to play in establishing the relation between the speech in the *Menexenus*, the oration of Pericles, and ἐπιτάφιοι in general. Plato's introduction of Aspasia as the author of the speech delivered by Socrates fulfils various functions. As will be seen later, it was necessary that Socrates should be able to distance himself from the speech by referring it to another source. The choice and treatment of Aspasia, however, is also such as to relate the speech ascribed to her both to Pericles' oration and to other ἐπιτάφιοι. In attributing both the speech of Pericles and that delivered by Socrates to Aspasia, Plato is able to relate them and so to use the former in elucidating his concerns. Aspasia, however, has taught not only Pericles, but many other fine orators (235e5–6); and the techniques ascribed to her correspond to those of rhetoricians in general. Plato can thus associate the two ἐπιτάφιοι attributed to her with the other examples of the genre. Aspasia becomes a link figure, the famous speech ascribed to her indicating what most interested Plato about the genre whose techniques as a whole she represents.

<sup>7</sup> See the extended discussion of this characteristic of the funeral oration in N. Loraux, *L'Invention d'Athènes: histoire de l'oraison funèbre dans la 'cité classique'* (Paris 1981), hereafter *Invention*. Loraux discusses the funeral oration as a product of democracy, part of a ceremony designed to embody democratic principles, with a eulogy of democracy as the heart around which it is organised (64). She recognises the importance of this for the *Menexenus*: 's'il a choisi pour cible l'oraison funèbre, c'est que dans les *épitaphioi* la cité se reconnaît telle qu'elle veut être [317] . . . c'est d'abord de politique qu'il est ici question [319]'.

Note how, in Thucydides, the choice of the orator to deliver the ἐπιτάφιος is made to mirror the working of democracy as described by Pericles: the choice falls on a

speaker ὃς ἂν γνώμη τε δοκῆι μὴ ἀξύνετος εἶναι καὶ ἀξιόσπει προήκη (ii 34.6); cf. 37.1, especially κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀξίωσιν . . . εὐδοκιμεῖ.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., C. H. Kahn, 'Plato's funeral oration: the motive of the *Menexenus*' *C. Phil.* lviii (1963) 220–34; T. Berndt, *De ironia Menexeni Platonici* (Münster 1881) 3–4, for collections of parallels. In addition to parallels within the speech, note Socrates' identification, at 234c4, of one of the faults of ἐπιτάφιοι—praise is given to a man otherwise φαῦλος, on the grounds of his death in battle. Of the extant funeral speeches, only that in Thucydides shares this admission with Plato (ii 42.3); contrast, e.g., the denial at Demosthenes lx 3 that the dead men's ἀνδρεία was their only virtue; also Gorgias' ἐπιτάφιος (Diels-Kranz 82.B6).

In Plato's concern with the funeral oration as a πολιτικός λόγος lies one possible explanation of the notorious anachronism of the *Menexenus*, whereby Socrates is presented as alive some thirteen years after the actual date of his death. Heightening as it does that awareness in the reader of Socrates' death which forms an important background to the dialogues in general, this anachronism, like the introduction of Aspasia, has various functions, more of which will emerge later. In relation to Plato's interest in using the ἐπιτάφιος to explore the failings of Athenian policy, it can be seen as making possible a clearer illustration of these faults. It will be seen later that the extension of the historical survey in the ἐπιτάφιος to include the Peace of Antalcidas allows the inconsistencies in Athenian policy, especially with regard to the relations between Greeks and barbarians, to emerge particularly clearly.<sup>9</sup> The anachronism which this necessitates is turned to advantage, in that it suggests a link between the deficiencies thus illustrated and the methods and principles of rhetoric. In making Socrates refer to events of which neither he nor Aspasia could have known, Plato presents the ἐπιτάφιος as a supreme example of the rhetoricians' habit of preparing speeches long before they are due to be delivered (234c5–6, 235d1–2), substituting a predictable employment of stock elements for inquiry into the truth of particular circumstances (see below). This rhetorical indifference to the truth, in contrast to the concerns of philosophy, lies, in Plato's view, at the root of failings such as he is enabled through the anachronism to expose more plainly. In the dramatic date, as in the choice of the ἐπιτάφιος as form, Plato's concern with rhetoric and with politics can be seen to converge.

The funeral speech in the *Menexenus* is, then, I suggest, a parody in the sense that it exemplifies in an extreme form the tendencies of such speeches as Plato saw them. Its exaggerated rhetorical technique combines with other details of composition to give the reader an impression of irony. The mastery of ironical writing displayed elsewhere by Plato encourages the reading of the *Menexenus* as an extended exercise in this style. Responsiveness to irony in this and other dialogues allows the recognition of a constant fundamental ethos which does not exclude extreme fluidity of expression and is thus more important than exact agreement between particular passages. However, reading the speech as ironic need not reduce it to mere caricature indulged in for its own sake; the *Menexenus* is a richer work than this would suggest, offering in the funeral speech not simply parody but an analysis of the faults of the rhetoric and politics which it represents. Inasmuch as this analysis grounds the faults in neglect of philosophy, it points to the figure of the philosopher as the true statesman.<sup>10</sup>

How consistent is it with this interpretation that Socrates should himself deliver a speech exemplifying the faults which he identifies in his mocking attack at 235a–c? The fact of Socrates' delivering such a speech might be thought an obstacle to the theory of a contrast between the speaker and what his speech represents, so that if Socrates is being portrayed as the true statesman, his speech cannot be regarded as a parody.

A first possible reply is founded on the idea of Socrates' superior understanding. Socrates is clearly aware, it may be said, both of the effects of rhetoric and of the means by which these effects are produced; his philosophy gives him a greater insight into rhetorical techniques than is possessed by those who study only those techniques. Socrates' superior understanding is thus demonstrated by his delivering the speech, as his mastery of rhetoric is seen to surpass that of the supposed experts.<sup>11</sup> Such superior skill on Socrates' part is a recurrent theme of the dialogues (Socrates can match Protagoras in μακρολογία and in the interpretation of poetry, for example);

<sup>9</sup> This view differs in emphasis from that of Kahn (n. 8), in taking the Peace of Antalcidas less as a major stimulus to the composition of the dialogue than as an example chosen to illustrate a more general concern.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kahn (n. 8) 226: 'the irony is designed to nudge the Athenian reader out of his complacent self-admiration, to put him in a more critical state of mind,

by offering him a glimpse of Socratic ἀρετή; in other words, by asking him (indirectly) to consider for a moment what the true excellence is which really fits men to rule'.

<sup>11</sup> Compare the exhaustive knowledge of rhetorical terms shown by Socrates rather than Phaedrus at *Phaedrus* 266d–7e, 269a.

but it is more usually a matter of superiority combined with a change in the level on which the skill is exercised—it is exercised not in its own right, but in the service of philosophy, just as Socrates is able to engage in conversations on a wide variety of topics because he relates them all to questions of central concern. As a justification of Socrates' speech in the *Menexenus*, therefore, the idea that he is displaying his superior ability should be combined with that of his using this ability to advance his philosophical concerns—in particular, to render more obvious the defects of the rhetoric which his speech exemplifies.

This is not all that can be said in defence of Socrates' delivering the speech, however. There are points at which an intended contrast may be not obscured, but emphasised, by Socrates' being the speaker.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly true of passages whose content resembles Platonic ideas, and, as I shall suggest below, of the echoes of the *Apology* from 246a onwards. When Socrates is represented as saying such things, the reader may be intended to recall occasions when he says something similar, and in so doing, to become more aware of the important differences.

Finally, of course, Socrates could reply that this is in any case not his speech at all, but that of Aspasia. The introduction of Aspasia distances Socrates from the speech: he can emphatically deny responsibility for it at 236a8, αὐτὸς μὲν παρ' ἑμαυτοῦ ἴσως οὐδέν.<sup>13</sup> Socrates similarly insists on the external origin of the speech with the third person ἔλεγε at 236d2, and at 249d1–2.<sup>14</sup> The impression of dissociation is enhanced by Socrates' reluctance to repeat Aspasia's speech, comparable to his attempts to avoid delivering his first speech in the *Phaedrus* (236–7), and in contrast with his unalloyed eagerness to recount a philosophical discussion at *Protagoras* 310a. Menexenus, however, is sceptical about the attribution to Aspasia (236c6–7, 249d–e). Socrates' distancing from the speech is therefore not complete. The effect of superior understanding can thus still be felt: only Socrates, perhaps, could compose a speech exposing so clearly the character of the rhetoric and politics with which he is concerned, and their relation to his own beliefs. At the same time, it is this exemplification of rhetorical faults in the speech which makes it necessary for Socrates to distance himself from it by referring it to an external source.

This interpretation supposes that the funeral speech may be taken as being what Socrates, at 235e–6b, implies that it is—that is, an example not differing in kind from other funeral speeches, although, he claims, it is of high quality, or at least was composed by no mean rhetorician (οὐ πάνυ φαύλη περὶ ῥητορικῆς, 235e4–5). It may be challenged on the grounds that it is unwise to take Socrates at his word in such matters: Socrates, after all, introduces the eloquence of his speech in the *Symposium* with the warning that it will be given ὀνόμασι δὲ καὶ θέσει ῥημάτων τοιαύτη ὅποια ἂν τις τύχη ἐπελθοῦσα (199b4–5). Socrates does, however, say that that speech will be different in kind from those which precede (199a–b); and a difference in quality seems a more likely subject for εἰρωνεία than a difference in kind, which would be in question the *Menexenus*. Furthermore, the particular way in which Socrates introduces the funeral speech suggests that his representation of its nature should be taken seriously. Here again, the introduction of Aspasia is important.

As Socrates' instructress, Aspasia obviously invites comparison with Diotima. Such comparison, however, reveals notable differences between the two. Aspasia is a well known figure, whose name Menexenus can supply after hearing Socrates' description (δῆλον ὅτι

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Clavaud (n. 6) 110: 'Mis dans la bouche d'un autre personnage, ses propos se remarqueraient moins. Dans la sienne—et précisément parce que nous le connaissons bien par ailleurs—ils étonnent par le contraste que nous établissons entre son caractère et ses paroles.'

<sup>13</sup> This denial of responsibility, contrasting as it does with Socrates' usual demand that his interlocutors should state their own opinions, is among the reasons for doubting interpretations which represent the speech as a serious Platonic idealisation of Athens. See Loraux

(n. 5) 200 on its implications.

The contrast with Socrates' usual procedure is again brought to our attention at 236d1–2, in his consenting to repeat the speech to Menexenus ἐπειδὴ γε μόνω ἔσμεν, which recalls the usual Socratic insistence on individual argument but is here applied to the delivery of a supposedly public speech.

<sup>14</sup> Clavaud (n. 6) 109 notes that the effect of distancing is heightened by Socrates' change of tone on resuming the conversation at the end of the speech.

Ἄσπασίαν λέγεις, 235e8), whereas Socrates has to introduce Diotima (*Symposium* 201d—a contrast which is especially striking given the important service to Athens which is attributed to Diotima [*Symposium* 201d3–5]). As hetaera and priestess, the two are again in obvious contrast.<sup>15</sup> A further, and significant, difference appears in Socrates' fear of Aspasia's anger should she learn that he has repeated her speech (235c3–4, 249e3–4). He seems to have no such fear with regard to Diotima; the impression is that he feels bound to convince others of the truths of which she has convinced him (*Symposium* 212b1–4)—he might perhaps feel more reason to fear her anger were he not to do so. The possibility of Aspasia's anger, surprising given that she has taught Socrates the speech, may be explained in terms of the speech's purpose. The context of its introduction is a discussion of the way in which an orator can win the admiration of his audience (see εὐδοκιμεῖν, 236a6); Aspasia's aim may be no different. Her anger might then result from the fear that the impact of her speech might be diminished if it had already been privately heard. Socrates' fear may thus point to the character of the speech as a rhetorical show-piece, aiming to impress, and to do so more by its form than by its content. (Compare, within the speech itself, 239b–c. The form of expression, especially at c1–2, conveys a competitive spirit and a concern above all with form, as choice of material is governed by considerations of what can or cannot be said more elaborately than it has been already.)<sup>16</sup>

Aspasia has already been angry with Socrates, at his difficulty in memorising the speech—236b8–c1. (Diotima, in contrast, grew impatient at Socrates' difficulty in *understanding*—*Symposium* 204b1, 207c2–4.) This draws further attention to the way in which he teaches him, or what it is that she teaches. At 235d2, Socrates suggested the possibility of improvisation as well as the reading of prepared speeches, and it might be expected that this would be the skill which he claimed to have learned from Aspasia. In fact, however, she has not taught him even this (itself no great mastery—235d2–3), but has given him a speech to memorise. Her teaching thus exemplifies that attributed to Gorgias by Aristotle (*Soph. El.* 183b36–184a8). It typifies the uncritical character of rhetoric as Plato sees it, not encouraging personal thought even to the extent of applying its rules for oneself.<sup>17</sup> This is an appropriate introduction for a speech in which this uncritical character of rhetoric, and the consequences for a state when such a way of thinking prevails in place of philosophy, are illustrated.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps significantly, Connus, the teacher with whom Aspasia is associated at 235e9, is also said to have grown angry with Socrates, ὅταν αὐτῷ μὴ ὑπέικω (*Euthydemus* 295d3–5). Socrates' teachers in general, perhaps, expect from him an uncritical submission which he is not prepared to show. With Socrates' difficulty in memorising Aspasia's speech may also be compared his claim to a poor memory for speeches at *Protagoras* 334c–d, a claim exploited in favour of a more critical form of argument, and *Meno* 71c8–d1, where a claim to forgetfulness is used to induce Meno to state his own opinion rather than referring to Gorgias. These comparisons make still clearer the criticisms implied in Socrates' description of Aspasia's method of teaching.

<sup>15</sup> H. S. Stern, 'Plato's funeral oration', *The New Scholasticism* xlviii (1974) 503–8, notes the appropriateness of Aspasia as the author of a speech illustrating Plato's view of rhetoric as an instrument of seduction and κολακεία (506); cf. Berndt (n. 8) 20.

Given the concern with the requirements for a state's well-being which I am claiming is central to the *Menexenus*, it is significant that of the two, it is Diotima who is said to have secured at least a postponement of disaster for Athens.

<sup>16</sup> Loraux *Invention* ch. 5 discusses the agonistic character of ἐπιτάφιοι for which see especially Lysias ii 2.

<sup>17</sup> The passivity of the pupils in Gorgianic teaching is suggested by the formulation of *Gorgias* 449e4–5, λέγειν γε ποιεῖ δυνατούς. The scholiast, glossing this as ἀντι τοῦ διδάσκειν δύναται, offers a version from which, in contrast, the suggestion of passivity is absent.

<sup>18</sup> G. Kennedy, *The art of persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963) 161, compares the speech to 'the common type of the sophistic specimen speech'. This comparison, however, with its implications as to the manner of teaching and thought involved, would seem to cast doubt on his theory that the speech is presented as an ideal model. (Kennedy supposes that Plato need not object to the unscientific teaching of rhetoric given that he 'regards oratory as a knack rather than an art'; but this character of rhetoric is used as a reproach against it in the *Gorgias*, and the methods of teaching which it implies are thereby discredited.)

On the implications of Socrates' memorising Aspasia's speech, compare Loraux (n. 5) 200, Clavaud (n. 6) ch. 4; and compare the play on Phaedrus' attempts to memorise Lysias' speech (*Phaedrus* 228).

In its details, the ascription of the speech to Aspasia thus confirms Socrates' presentation of it as a representative example of the rhetoric whose effects he has described. There are suggestions that what is to follow is an ἐπίδειξις, whose author is concerned above all with form, and whose content reveals the same uncritical thought as does the way in which it is itself transmitted. Such are the characteristics dwelt upon at 235a–c. The manner in which the speech is introduced suggests that the reader is justified in using Socrates' attack in the earlier passage as a basis for understanding it.<sup>19</sup>

An ornamental style is a preoccupation of the orators as Socrates portrays them (κάλλιστά πως τοῖς ὀνόμασι ποικίλλοντες, 235a1–2; attention to style is also implied by the time spent in preparing speeches—see especially 234c5–6). Aspasia's speech, introduced in such a way as to suggest that this preoccupation will be among its features, presents in an extreme form stylistic tendencies characteristic of the rhetoric with which Socrates is concerned. In the self-conscious initial discussion of the appropriate form for the speech (236e–7b), and the subsequent regular marking of transitions, Plato draws attention, as in Agathon's speech in the *Symposium*, to a feature particularly characteristic of Gorgias' style. The speech in fact reveals its Gorgianic character from its opening, in the complex antithetical structure of the first sentence (a double antithesis, with the contrast κοινῆ / ἰδίᾳ included within ἔργω / λόγῳ).<sup>20</sup>

Excessive attention to style is in Plato's eyes a symptom of indifference to content, and so of disregard for the truth of what is said—a judgement witheringly expressed at 234c6–235a1, καὶ τὰ προσόντα καὶ τὰ μὴ περὶ ἑκάστου λέγοντες.<sup>21</sup> Unhampered by a concern for truth, orators can produce speeches which will please their audiences both by their style and by the unalloyed praise which they contain. (See 235d; and Socrates' account of the complacency produced in him by such speeches, 235b–c.)

Associated with this criticism is a further feature illustrated by Aspasia's speech, the use of stock themes and commonplaces. At 239b–c, the suggestion, discussed above, of the priority of stylistic considerations is combined with the idea of stock topics. Where the same subjects are the material for all speakers, form rather than content must be the object of chief concern. The use of commonplaces and the preoccupation with style are thus interdependent, and both spring from indifference to truth. This lies at the root of Plato's attitude both to the use of commonplaces and to the preparation of speeches in advance. Both are means of ascribing καὶ τὰ προσόντα καὶ τὰ μὴ; for if the same themes can be used on any occasion, or a speech can be written long before it is delivered, this can only be because the truth concerning the particular subject is not considered, so that even if some truth is told, this is accidental.<sup>22</sup>

The speech in the *Menexenus* illustrates the use of commonplaces—and, as with stylistic features, takes it to extremes, in the number which are included.<sup>23</sup> In ascribing the speech to

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Clavaud (n. 6); Berndt (n. 8).

<sup>20</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his criticism of the opening sentence (*Demosthenes* 24), ignores this effect of double antithesis. His comment that the second section of the sentence is unnecessary, however (1029.15), if directed against Aspasia rather than Plato, would capture the point that what is illustrated is a concern for form not guided by the necessities of content. (This charge is made against Plato himself at 1032.8–9.) Compare Dionysius' analysis of the antitheses at 236e1–3, 3–5 (*Demosthenes* 26); these are, significantly, given as examples of Plato's use of τὰ θεατρικὰ τὰ Γοργία (1033.6–8). Dionysius' criticisms, in other words, identify the faults which Plato illustrates, although supposing that they should be attributed in a straightforward way to Plato rather than seeing them as committed deliberately and for the purpose of illustration.

On the form and style of speech, compare Méridier (n.3) 66–71; Clavaud (n. 6) ch. 7; Berndt (n. 8).

<sup>21</sup> Compare *Symposium* 198–9, especially 198d8–e2, an equivalent juxtaposition of καλῶς ἔπαινεῖν with an allegation of indifference to truth. (In the context of the *Symposium* the ascription of beauty is of course especially ironic.) See also *Rhet. ad. Al.* 1425b37, the definition of encomium as προαιρέσεων καὶ πράξεων καὶ λόγων ἐνδόξων αὔξησις καὶ μὴ προσηκόντων συνοικείωσις.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Loraux (n. 5) 174–5, 195–202.

<sup>23</sup> For detailed discussion of correspondences between the speech and the funeral speeches of Thucydides, Lysias, Demosthenes and Hyperides, and of the relation of these to the use of commonplaces in funeral orations, see M. M. Henderson, 'Plato's *Menexenus* and the distortion of history', *Acta Classica* xviii (1975) 25–46; Méridier (n. 3) 57–9; Clavaud (n. 6) 168–75. J. E. Ziolkowski, *Thucydides and the tradition of funeral speeches at Athens* (Salem, Arno Press 1981), identifies thirty-nine commonplaces of ἔπαινος, and compares the frequency of their occurrence in the different speeches

Aspasia, Socrates calls attention to this, and to his opinion of the tendency. Aspasia wrote the speech, he tells Menexenus, by fitting together the leftovers from Pericles' funeral oration (236b4–6); the description fits the use of preexisting material, and the pejorative tone is unmistakable.<sup>24</sup> The reference to Pericles' funeral speech suggests still more plainly the disregard for the truth about the particular subject, since fragments of the same composition can be used on occasions so far apart in date. True to this suggestion, Aspasia's speech, on reaching the more recent history relevant to the dead whom it is supposedly honouring, asks μηκύνειν μὲν τί δεῖ; (244d2). A detailed account of the immediate circumstances is irrelevant to the orator's purpose.<sup>25</sup>

The use of commonplaces thus plays an important part in the orator's pursuit of his aim of winning favour by praising the Athenians among the Athenians (235d). It is an instrument of indiscriminate praise (or apparent praise, to use the distinction drawn at *Symposium* 198e3–4); and, by failing to concentrate on the particular occasion, it extends the praise from the dead men to the city as a whole—hence the self-satisfaction which Socrates claims that it produces in him.<sup>26</sup>

The orators are no more concerned with truth in the praise of the city than they are anxious truly to praise the dead. Plato illustrates this view through Aspasia's treatment of Athenian history. Here, two main methods are employed in achieving praise at the expense of truth. These methods, which, in addition to their indifference to truth, do not seem wholly consistent with each other, are the treatment of motives, and claims to success.<sup>27</sup> Noble motives are declared, at the beginning of the historical survey' (239b1–3), to be the distinguishing feature of Athenian policy; and they are repeatedly, and improbably, ascribed. (See, for example, 242a–b, 243a, 244e; also Athenian nobility—242c–d—and innocence—242a, c.)<sup>28</sup> At the same time, military success is either falsely claimed or exaggerated, as at 241e1–2, 242b1 (contrast Thucydides i 109–10, 108.1).<sup>29</sup> This tendency reaches its height at 243d, where the judgements of Thucydides (ii 65.12) and Lysias (ii 65) that the defeat of 404 can be traced to internal dissension are transformed into the claim that in this case, Athens was not after all defeated.<sup>30</sup>

(see the tables on pp. 95, 134–6). See also Arist. *Rhet.* 1396a12–14, Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Demosthenes* 28 (1039.20–1040.3), on stock themes in encomia of Athens, all of which occur in Aspasia's speech.

<sup>24</sup> Loraux *Invention* 469 n. 282 notes the significance for this pejorative tone of συγκολλᾶν (see συγκολλῶσα, 236b6) as a term used in comedy. F. Muecke, 'A portrait of the artist as a young woman', *CQ* n.s. xxxii (1982) 41–55, argues that comic use of craft metaphors applied to composition drew on the language of literary criticism (44–6); Plato's use of such language would in this case be the more pointed. With συγκολλῶσα here may perhaps be compared Demosthenes lx 12, συνάψαι τὸν λόγον.

<sup>25</sup> Contrast Thucydides ii 36.4, where reluctance μακρηγορεῖν ἐν εἰδόσιν is a reason to avoid expansive treatment of earlier history. Loraux (n. 5) 179 compares with the *Menexenus* the proportion of Lysias' *Epitaphios* assigned to earlier and more recent history, explaining this in terms of the 'déplacement' by which what is ostensibly praise of the dead men becomes praise of the city. See also the more extensive treatment of this idea in *Invention*, attributing the indifference of ἐπιτάφιοι to particular circumstances to their character as πολιτικοὶ λόγοι.

The exordium of Lysias' *Epitaphios* (ii 2) tends towards the impression that it is the same group of men whose exploits will furnish the material for the successive speeches to which he refers. Demosthenes (lx

12) finds it necessary to explain that his praise of earlier generations does not spring from ἀπορία over what to say about the present war dead.

<sup>26</sup> Note the impression of generalised praise given by the repeated καί at 235a2–5.

<sup>27</sup> See Henderson (n. 23), Kahn (n. 8), Méridier (n. 3) 59–64, Clavaud (n. 6) ch. 5, for detailed analysis of the treatment and distortion of history.

<sup>28</sup> In support of the view that Plato is here again taking to extremes a feature of funeral speeches in general, compare Lysias ii 48 with *Menexenus* 242a; see also the generalising eulogistic passage replacing a more detailed narrative of the Peloponnesian War at 54–7. Compare also, perhaps, the emphasis on defence rather than aggression at Thucydides ii 36.4, in contrast with the starkness of ii 63.

<sup>29</sup> With the inclusion of the Egyptian campaign in the list of successes, contrast Thucydides ii 41.5, μνημεῖα κακῶν τε κάγαθῶν. Pericles claims that Athenian failures as well as successes may be worthy of renown; Aspasia converts them into triumphs.

<sup>30</sup> This bears an ironic relation to the praise of self-sufficiency, advocated for individuals at 247a–c, 247e–8a. The self-sufficiency attributed to Athens and Athenians by Pericles (Thucydides ii 36.3, 41.4–2) is extended to the provision of their own defeat. Compare and contrast also Lysias' treatment of the theme of choosing death for oneself rather than waiting for its inevitable approach (e.g. ii 24, 79).



From this example, it emerges most clearly that Plato would not necessarily regard claims of this type as reflecting understanding of what constitutes success or is a matter for praise: the author of the *Republic* would hardly see disaster resulting from internal division as preferable to defeat by external enemies.<sup>31</sup> He seems, moreover, to suggest that credit is being claimed for Athens not only where it is not due, but on grounds which are at least very different, if not inconsistent. The praise of Athens reflects admiration both for virtues such as justice and generosity, and for power. Furthermore, the very obviousness of the distortions reminds the reader of the motives of self-interest underlying those which are ascribed in the speech. Aspasia's praise of Athens, therefore, both illustrates rhetorical unscrupulousness and conveys the confusion in values and interests of the city which she describes.<sup>32</sup> The insufficiency of rhetoric is thus suggested not only through its falsehood, but through its inability to resolve such confusions.

This is to assume that the encomium is a parody of idealising tendencies in funeral speeches, and not a serious presentation by Plato of an ideal Athens.<sup>33</sup> The first interpretation accords better with those passages where Aspasia is made to undercut her own idealising remarks. Thus, for example, at 242b, some doubt is cast upon the Athenian motive of championing the liberty of the Boeotians at the battle of Tanagra by the use of the same words, οἷς ἐβοήθουν, to refer to the allies of both Athens and Sparta (242b3, c1). Athenian and Spartan actions, it is suggested, were of much the same nature; both could with equal truth or falsity be ascribed to altruistic motives or explained in terms of self-interest.

The account of the Persian Wars may prepare the reader to be suspicious of the motives ascribed to Athens. Certain descriptions of Persia could apply equally well to the Athenian empire, and suggest that a parallel is being intentionally drawn—see especially 239e4–240a2, 241b2–3.<sup>34</sup> This would undercut the effect of Aspasia's careful avoidance of mention of the empire at 242 ff.; equally, it should alert the reader to the use of pretexts by the Athenians as by the Persians to whom they are implicitly compared. For 239d7–e1 ἐλευθερώσας . . . ἔδουλώσατο emphasises the fact that freedom for some may mean slavery for others (and Athens has already, at 239b1–3, been proclaimed the champion of liberty).<sup>35</sup> Again, the words αἰτιασάμενος, προφασισζόμενος, applied to Darius at 240a4, 6, could equally be intended to refer forward to Athens. (At Lysias ii 48, it seems to be Athens' opponents who are in need of

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Loraux *Invention* 140–1.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. C. H. Kahn, 'Drama and dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* i (1983) 95–5, on the inconsistent elements in popular morality exploited in the refutation of Polus.

<sup>33</sup> Contrast, e.g., Kahn (n. 8), Kennedy (n. 18), I. von Loewenclau, *Der Platonische Menexenos* (Stuttgart 1961), N. Scholl, *Der Platonische Menexenos* (Rome 1959), and, in a modified form, R. Thurow, *Der Platonische Epitaphios* (diss. Tübingen 1968).

I doubt whether the distortion of history in the *Menexenos* can be seen as being of the same character as, e.g., the myth of the metals in the *Republic*, as such interpretations would require it to be. Socrates' remark at 235c4 seems an adequate reply to such 'utopian' interpretations: funeral speeches, he claims, give the impression that one is living in the Isles of the Blessed—until one remembers the truth. (Contrast *Republic* 519c1–6.)

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Henderson (n. 23) 34–5. See also M. Cogan, 'Mytilene, Plataea and Corcyra: ideology and policy in Thucydides book three', *Phoenix* xxxv (1981) 15–17, on the equation of ἀττικισμός with μηδισμός at Thucydides iii 64.5–65.1 and the development of this compari-

son—making it seem more likely that Plato could have expected his readers to recognise the parallel.

See also the treatment of Spartan hegemony at 244c–d, similarly suggesting a comparison discreditable to Athens. (Cf. Kahn [n. 8] 228, Henderson [n. 23] 44.)

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Henderson (n. 23) 34. For arguments to the effect that the Greeks regarded the ideas of freedom for oneself and domination of others as complementary rather than inconsistent, see J. A. O. Larsen, 'Freedom and its obstacles in ancient Greece', *C. Phil.* lvii (1962) 230–4; F. W. Walbank, *A historical commentary on Polybius* i (Oxford 1957) 630–1, on v 106.5; J. de Romilly, *Thucydide et l'impérialisme athénien* (Paris 1947) 73. (Compare, e.g., *Gorgias* 452d6–7, αἴτιον ἅμα μὲν ἐλευθερίας αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἅμα δὲ τοῦ ἄλλων ἀρχεῖν.) H. C. Avery, 'Herodotus' picture of Cyrus', *A.J.P.* xciii (1972) 529–46, argues that while Herodotus presents Persian freedom in this light, he portrays the Greeks as fighting for a freedom which does not imply rule over others; this might suggest some unease at the connection. Emphasis on the domination of others would in any case be more embarrassing for Athens in that Aspasia's speech presents her as guarding not only her own freedom but that of other Greeks (239b).

pretexts.)<sup>36</sup> Even the reference to Athenian aid to the families of the Seven against Thebes and the Heracleidae (239b5–6) may now become suspect. In its brevity, it is made to appear as much like an account of inconsistent and indiscriminate aggression (ἤμυναν Ἀργείοις πρὸς Καδμείους καὶ Ἡρακλείδαις πρὸς Ἀργείους) as like an illustration of Athenian altruism and justice.<sup>37</sup> If these episodes, which could be used to portray Athens as φιλοικτίμων and τοῦ ἥττονος θεραπίς, are discredited, the same may be true of the events with which this description of Athens is in fact associated at 244e; fine words and noble motives again cover a reality of inconsistency prompted by self-interest.

One factor contributing to the effect of undercutting is Plato's choice of the sections of the historical survey which he expands or compresses, in which he can be contrasted particularly with Lysias and Demosthenes. Attention was drawn above to the way in which the suggestion, at 244d2, that more recent events call for less detailed narrative reflects on rhetorical use of stock themes and commonplaces in preference to the pursuit of truth. A similar effect is produced by the extreme brevity of Plato's allusion to Athens' mythical exploits (239b3–6), more compressed than the treatment by Lysias (ii 4–16) or even Demosthenes (lx 8–9). In addition to the suspicion cast on Athenian motives by the compressed formulation, the themes' stock character is conveyed—they are so familiar that a brief allusion to them is sufficient.

Where the structure of the speech is most unusual is in the space devoted to the Peloponnesian War, a period more commonly passed over extremely swiftly. Plato's narrative becomes more detailed at the point where Lysias conveniently remembers that it is impossible for one man to recount all events and substitutes a general eulogy (ii 54–7); Demosthenes is still more concise (lx 11). Detailed narrative at this point allows greater scope for the undercutting of Athenian pretensions.<sup>38</sup> Plato also in fact offers more detail concerning the Corinthian War than the introductory μῆκύνει μὲν τί δεῖ; might lead us to expect; here too, the narrative allows for the undermining of idealisations.

It seems unlikely that, if Plato had intended to portray an ideal Athens, he would have undercut his idealisation in this way. Rather, such passages reflect a recognition of the falsehood of the idealised pictures which are made the objects of parody in Aspasia's speech. They render more apparent the failings of the rhetoric of which these pictures are a characteristic. In this way, they contribute to the double condemnation conveyed by the speech—condemnation of the policy which it describes, and of the rhetoric which serves such policy, glorifying it and discouraging reflection on its defects. Both are condemned from the standpoint of the philosopher, as springing from unreflective pursuit of self-interest rather than philosophical insight into the good.

If this is so, what should be made of the alleged Platonic elements in the speech? Do not passages such as the portrayal of the Athenian constitution at 238c–9a, or the position taken on the relationship between Greeks and barbarians (see especially 242d), reflect seriously held Platonic ideas, and so identify the speech as a genuine Platonic idealisation?

The introductory conversation, however, has already offered a reminder that similarities of this kind may be deceptive. In Socrates' description of funeral speeches and their effects at 235a–c, the complaints of his interlocutors on undergoing his elenctic examination are echoed. Meno accuses Socrates of γοητεία just as Socrates imputes it to the orators (*Meno* 80a–b); Alcibiades, at *Symposium* 215b–6c, describes possession by Socrates' words as complete as Socrates' possession by the power of rhetoric. Underlying these similarities, however, is an essential difference. The

<sup>36</sup> A further consequence of the parallel between Athens and Persia would be increased irony at 241b5–6—Athens is self-defeating in putting an end to fear of superior naval power. (The idea of Athens as school of Greece is adapted here—see 240d5 διδάσκαλοι, ε5 μασθηταί, 241c1 παιδευσθηναί; and cf. Kahn [n. 8] 233 n. 12, Scholl [N. 33] 45–6.)

<sup>37</sup> Lysias (ii. 8–9) mitigates the inconsistency by

insisting that the earlier campaign was undertaken out of piety, not out of favour towards the Argives. See also his insistence (8, 14) that Athens had no previous quarrel either with Thebes or with Argos under Eurystheus, and could hope for no material gain from conflict with the latter.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. E. F. Bloedow, 'Aspasia and the "mystery" of the *Menexenus*', *Wien. Stud.* ix (1975) 43.

activities whose results are so similar in detail are directed to fundamentally different ends; their spirits are utterly opposed. Socrates' account of the speeches is coloured by his opening comment on their disregard for truth (234c6–235a1). The sorcery of rhetoric is exercised in producing an unjustified pride in its audience (σεμνότερος, 235b4, σεμνότης, 235b8); only when its influence has weakened is a listener restored to self-awareness (ἀναμνησκόμαι ἑμαυτοῦ, 235c3). Concerned with appearance rather than truth, rhetoric has an effect which is correspondingly superficial and immediate (note the repeated ἐν τῷ παραχρῆμα, 235b1, 4). Socrates' sorcery, in contrast, as the passages in the *Meno* and *Symposium* attest, is felt in his reduction of his interlocutors to awareness of their ignorance and wretchedness, as he exercises it in his pursuit of the truth.<sup>39</sup>

The idea that Socrates' practice is very similar in detail to that of his adversaries, so that the essential contrast can be discerned only through a view of the wholes which these details comprise, with their opposed spirits and purposes, is recurrent in the dialogues. It is perhaps most clearly apparent in the *Euthydemus*, where the two sophists practise a technique of question and answer deceptively close to that of Socrates, and similar language is used of both (compare, for example, 285a3 with 283b9), yet the course of the dialogue reveals their opposition in spirit.<sup>40</sup> Apparent resemblances in practice and ideas need therefore to be examined carefully; they may prove to be superficial similarities which serve only to underline a basic opposition. This is true of the passages in Aspasia's speech which most clearly recall ideas expressed in other dialogues. Not only should it be remembered that they are interspersed with passages which contradict other dialogues (contrast, for instance, 237c–d with *Critias* 109b–c, *Republic* 378), but the precise context and application of the ideas must be examined. Verbal correspondences are not in themselves sufficient to prove agreement in content. The passages in which Aspasia appears to express Platonic ideas may reflect rhetorical devices superficially similar but opposed in purpose.

At 238c–239a, Aspasia describes the Athenian constitution, calling it an ἀριστοκρατία. The suggestion that Plato is here portraying his own ideal constitution is prompted both by the view that he would approve of distribution of office according to merit such as is claimed here for Athens and by doubts as to whether the orators whom he is supposedly satirising could have used the word ἀριστοκρατία in praising their city. So Pericles, at Thucydides ii 37, prefaces his similar assertion of the preeminence accorded to merit with the identification of the constitution as a δημοκρατία. It may still be true, however, that Plato is exploiting a feature of rhetorical practice, drawing attention to it by presenting it in an extreme form, and so revealing the implications which call its validity into question. In making Aspasia describe as ἀριστοκρατία the constitution which she praises for the equality of opportunity which it offers, Plato gives a particularly striking illustration of a tendency to praise the existing constitution on all possible grounds, however uneasily these may sit together. The description makes explicit the aristocratic tendencies of the constitution as presented by Pericles.<sup>41</sup> The use of a term not normally employed in praise of the constitution does not exclude an intention to parody such eulogies. Rather, the fact that ἀριστοκρατία is avoided by orators in such contexts underlines the tension with which Plato is concerned, between the ideas of democracy which prompt this exclusion

<sup>39</sup> Loraux (n. 5) 283–9 explores the relation between rhetoric and elenchus. The underlying opposition is neatly summarised in her account of Socrates' and Alcibiades' awakenings from the different spells cast upon them: 'Les deux expériences s'achèvent l'une et l'autre par un difficile réveil. Mais ici la ressemblance s'inverse en opposition: Socrate se retrouve, Alcibiade se perd' (186).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1355b17–18, ἡ γὰρ σοφιστικὴ οὐκ ἐν τῇ δυνάμει ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει; also *Metaph.* 1004b17–26.

<sup>41</sup> See G. Vlastos, 'ἸΣΟΝΟΜΙΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ', *Platonic Studies* (Princeton 1973) 196–201, for an analysis of these tendencies in the Periclean portrait of democracy and a comparison with the *Menexenus*. As Vlastos says (199), '[Plato] flaunts the word Pericles had held back, he says outright that the constitution . . . is an aristocracy.' Loraux, *Invention* ch. 4, both analyses Pericles' treatment of the constitution and argues that praise of democracy in terms of aristocratic ideals was a feature of ἐπιτόφιοι as a genre.

and the more aristocratic sentiments which emerge from the terms in which the constitution is praised.<sup>42</sup>

The use of the word ἀριστοκρατία may not, therefore, exclude the possibility that Plato is exploiting a feature of contemporary oratory here; nor is it in itself sufficient to indicate his approval of the constitution to which it is applied. Ἀριστοκρατία is used of the ideal constitution at *Republic* 445d6, 544e7, 545c9, 547c6; but at *Politicus* 291e8, 301a7, c7, 302d3, it is distinguished, as second best, from the rule of the ideal statesman, and the contrast between ἀριστοκρατία and ὀλιγαρχία is treated as less important than that between both and the ideal.<sup>43</sup> Only the way in which the idea is developed can reveal Plato's attitude towards the ἀριστοκρατία in question—whether it represents his own ideal or a rhetorical idealisation deceptively similar to it.

The tone of the passage is set by the opening assertion of the constitution's stability—ἡ γὰρ αὐτὴ πολιτεία καὶ τότε ἤ καὶ νῦν, 238c5–6. Stability is not only a τόπος of praise, but a concern of Plato's, as the *Republic* attests. The stability which he requires, however, is stability achieved in fact, not claimed through specious argument and word-play. (Note the evasive qualification ὡς τὰ πολλά at 238c7, as well as the treatment of the idea of βασιλῆς at 238d2–3.) Here at least, then, Aspasia's rhetoric creates a shadow of a Platonic ideal.

Similarly, Aspasia proceeds at 238d–9a to assert that a citizen's position in Athens is determined by merit, and that the criterion for the bestowing of honour has a unitary character which should win Plato's approval (εἰς ὅρος, 238d8). The root δοκ-, however, appears with ominous frequency—εὐδοξίας, 238d2; τοῖς ἀεὶ δόξασιν ἀριστοῖς εἶναι, d5; ὁ δόξας σοφὸς ἢ ἀγαθὸς εἶναι, d8; ἀρετῆς δόξη καὶ φρονήσεως, 239a4. (Compare Thucydides ii 37.1, ὡς ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ εὐδοκιμεῖ, and contrast *Politicus* 293c7, the demand for rulers who are ἀληθῶς ἐπιστήμονας καὶ οὐ δοκοῦντας μόνον.) Honour is given, then, not to merit, but to the appearance of merit; and we have been told at 235d, 236a, on what the Athenians base their opinion—they will think well of anyone who praises them. (Notice εὐδοκιμήσοντος, εὐδοκιμεῖν, 235d5, 236a6; δοκεῖν εὖ λέγειν, 235d6.)<sup>44</sup> In this city, autochthony, used at *Republic* 414d–415d to account for the *unequal* abilities of the citizens, is described as ἡ ἐξ ἴσου γένησις (238e1); the citizens thus equal in origin are left free to be distinguished on the basis of δόξα. The irony in Plato's treatment of praise of the constitution gains a further layer. Not only is the democracy revealed, on the basis of the terms in which it is praised, as being an aristocracy; it is not even a true aristocracy, but one based on appearance. The ἀριστοκρατία of the Athenian constitution, like its stability, thus proves illusory. Aspasia's praise of the πολιτεία, far from representing it as a Platonic ideal, is so phrased as to reveal how far below that ideal it falls.

The treatment of relations between Greeks and barbarians, another allegedly Platonic element in the speech, similarly reveals shortcomings; and these may be seen to derive from the failure of Athenian ἀριστοκρατία, the fact that the state is not in fact governed by those best qualified, most able to discern the right policy.<sup>45</sup> The opinion ascribed to the Athenians at

<sup>42</sup> Plato may also be exploiting a rhetorical tendency to redescribe a constitution according to the orator's immediate purpose. See Henderson (n. 23) 38 n. 55; and to his examples add, perhaps, κατ' ὀλιγαρχίαν ἰσόνομον at Thucydides iii 62.3. J. de Romilly, 'Le classement des constitutions d'Hérodote jusqu'à Aristote', *R.E.G.* lxxii (1959) 81–99, discusses the increasing difficulty of identifying a particular constitution as classifications become more complex (95–9); this would result in correspondingly greater scope for persuasive redescription.

<sup>43</sup> At *Laws* 701a2, ἀριστοκρατία is compared favourably with θεατροκρατία in the context of judging music; the uses at 681d3, 721c3, d7, are neutral—ἀριστοκρατία is used descriptively, or as the name of a currently recognised constitution. The uses of the word in this work thus confirm the importance of context in

determining whether it conveys a favourable or unfavourable judgement.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Vlastos (n. 41) 200 n. 133: 'The irony in this passage has been misunderstood. The joke is on the Athenians—not because the δόξα of an electorate could never result in ἀριστοκρατία (else the joke would be also on the city of the *Laws* . . .), but because the δόξα of the Athenian ὄχλος could not.' The remarks at *Menexenus* 235d and 236a are important in conveying this opinion of the Athenian ὄχλος within the dialogue itself.

<sup>45</sup> Here at least it cannot be objected, as with the use of the word ἀριστοκρατία, that Plato cannot be exploiting rhetorical practice, and a feature of funeral speeches in particular. See, e.g., Diels-Kranz 82.A1.4–5, B5b, on the use of the theme in Gorgias' *Epitaphios* and *Olympicus*.

242d1–4, that barbarian enemies, as opposed to fellow Greeks, should be destroyed, does indeed correspond to that developed at *Republic* 469b–471c.<sup>46</sup> However, the speech shows that it was not consistently adhered to. Thus at 244b, the difference between Athens' relations with the barbarians and those with other Greeks is made a reason for feeling less resentment towards the former; the specious character of this argument is underlined by the fact that in the sentence preceding Aspasia's account of Athens' forgiving attitude towards the barbarians (συγγιγνώσκουσα, 244b5), she remarks on the mutual forgiveness between the survivors of the civil war (συγγνώμην, b2), ascribing this to their kinship (a1–3).

Inconsistency in Athenian relations with barbarians may be hinted at from the very opening of the historical survey. At 239b, Aspasia refers to the Athenian resolution to contend with barbarians on behalf of all Greeks (b2–3); but they will also fight "Ἕλλησιν ὑπὲρ Ἑλλήνων—and, significantly, this is placed first (b2). The distinction between Greeks and barbarians may not, it is suggested, be the constant guiding principle that it is made out to be at 242d; other motives must be invoked to explain inconsistency in the choice of allies and enemies. A constant defence of ἐλευθερία is presented as Athens' motive at 239b; but as the narrative proceeds, it will be suggested that this too masks an inconsistency governed by more self-interested impulses.<sup>47</sup>

The contradictions in Athenian relations with the barbarians reach their height in the events of the Corinthian War, which are so treated as to emphasize the reversal of the circumstances of the Persian Wars. In his narrative of the latter, Plato does call attention to the tendency to exploit them so as to confer exaggerated glory upon Athens (see, for example, 240b–c, where the Persian conquest of Eretria is so treated as to magnify Athens' achievement; also the failure to mention Thermopylae, in contrast with *Lysias* ii 30–32); but the general impression given is not that they were in fact inglorious, but that they set an example which was not consistently followed.<sup>48</sup> Verbal echoes underline the reversals of policy. Thus to 241e3–4, βασιλέα ἐποίησαν δείσαντα τῆ ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίᾳ τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν, corresponds 244d6–8 (σωτηρίαν, d8); to 241d6–7, ἐξελάσαντες πᾶν τὸ βάρβαρον ἐκ τῆς θαλάττης, corresponds 246a2, ἐκβαλόντες ἐκ τῆς θαλάττης Λακεδαιμονίους. The unusual representation here of Sparta as a naval power emphasises the paradoxical reversal of alliances.<sup>49</sup> Athens presents herself as true to her policy of defending freedom, in particular freedom from menace by sea; her policy in general is represented at 244e as a manifestation of her traditional generosity.<sup>50</sup> The state with which this brings her into conflict, however, is so presented as to underline the unexpected nature of the opposition; while the earlier silence about Athens' negotiations with Persia during the Peloponnesian War (in contrast with the treatment of her enemies' conduct—243b) would be sufficient to suggest that later relations with Persia were regarded with disfavour, even without the explicit comment on Athenian αἰσχυνή at the memory of Marathon, Salamis and Plataea (245a4–6). Like the stability of the constitution, Athenian consistency with regard to the relations between Greeks and barbarians is merely verbal.<sup>51</sup> It manifests in fact the inconsistency characteristic of a policy governed not by insight into the good (as would be the case in a true ἀριστοκρατία), but by the pursuit of self-interest (itself, of course, in Plato's eyes, destined to fail

<sup>46</sup> But contrast *Politicus* 262–3, calling the absolute distinction between Greek and barbarian into question.

<sup>47</sup> See above on the elements of undercutting in the narrative. As a further example, note the adaptation at 242e3–4 of the traditional κοινῆ / ἰδίᾳ contrast. Athenian behaviour is apparently constant, characterised by the opposition which is regularly applied to it; but here, in place of the usual contrast between the common safety of Greece and the individual Athenian efforts which secured it (see, e.g., *Lysias* ii 44), we see the shared victory over Persia contrasted with Athenian conquest of other Greeks.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kahn (n. 8) 227–8.

<sup>49</sup> This need not exclude the criticism of Spartan readiness to adopt a policy which resulted in her finding herself in a position corresponding to the earlier fate of

Persia, any more than the ironic presentation, at 245b–e, of Athens' role in negotiations with Persia should conceal Plato's disapproval of the conduct of the other states. Plato concentrates on the failings of Athens; but this does not prevent him from conveying at the same time awareness and condemnation of other states' deficiencies.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Lysias* ii 67–8, where the apparent inconsistency in the formation of alliances becomes an instance of Athenian magnanimity.

<sup>51</sup> *Plut. Ages.* 15 is explicit in commenting on and condemning the reversal; see also 16.4. *Xen. H.G.* iv ii.8 notes that on his return to Greece, Agesilaus took τὴν αὐτὴν ὁδὸν ἥνπερ βασιλεὺς ὅτε ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐστράτευεν.

if divorced from knowledge of the good). Aspasia ascribes an apparently Platonic opinion to the Athenians; but their inconsistency proves it to be only a pretext, not genuinely held and guiding their policy.

Where Aspasia's speech seems to recall Platonic ideas, the effect is thus, by inviting comparison, to make apparent the gulf between the Athens portrayed here and Plato's ideal state. In itself, the comparison points to the necessity of philosophy for statesmanship. This necessity is further suggested by the effect of inconsistency created by the Platonic echoes. The treatment of Greeks and barbarians reveals the inconsistencies resulting from the pursuit of self-interest without insight into the good; but, as argued with regard to the ascription of noble motives to the Athenians, the echoes of Platonic ideas suggest also an inconsistency between self-interest and other values. There is an element in the Athenians, and in the orators who please them, which can perceive the value of ἀριστοκρατία, as of justice and altruism—or why should these be used to praise the city? The abuse of such praise is due to a conflict of values, which in turn results from the Athenian's failure to perceive where their true interest lies. Only the philosopher has this perception; and so only in a state ruled by philosophy can such inconsistencies be avoided.

This idea, of the confusions and inconsistencies which necessarily arise in a state not ruled by philosophy, is given a bitter turn in the second major section of the speech, the consolation and exhortation at 246a–249c. In this section, with its increased solemnity of tone and its exhortation to ἀρετή, has been seen Plato's direct address to Athens.<sup>52</sup> Its message seems, however, less straightforward.

The section opens with a very clear reminiscence of the *Apology*: 246b–c echoes Socrates' description, at *Apology* 29d–30b, of his constant exhortation of the Athenians. (Compare also 246b4, ὡσπερ ἐν πολέμῳ, μὴ λείπειν τὴν τάξιν, with *Apology* 28e.) The effect of this echo could be to present what follows as genuine Socratic and Platonic protreptic; but equally, as Socrates pronounces the words of Aspasia's speech, the reader may be intended to reflect upon a contrast with the similar words which he spoke in his own person. Socrates died rather than renounce the practice which he described, whereas the speaker here evidently expects the audience to accept his exhortation as admirable. This contrast may suggest that the exhortation will differ from the philosophy to which Socrates was devoted. The speaker, after all, urges the audience to emulate the ἀρετή of the dead men; but Socrates called this ἀρετή into question at 234c. His own message, then, is indeed likely to be different. This is further suggested by the details which Socrates gives in the *Apology* concerning his *method* of exhortation. His protreptic, which is addressed to both young and old (30a2–3), not just to children as in the *Menexenus*, is identical with his philosophical inquiry. Rather than offering his interlocutors precepts to follow, he will exhort them through elenctic examination (ἐρήσομαι αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξετάσω καὶ ἐλέγξω, 29e4–5). Socratic exhortation as described in the *Apology* is more painful and more intellectually demanding than that in the *Menexenus*.

It is, then, perhaps not surprising if the content of the παρακάλυσις seems to differ from Socratic philosophy—and to differ precisely in its intellectual level.<sup>53</sup> Its sentiments may be largely unexceptionable; but they give the impression of a rather bland conventional moralising.<sup>54</sup> How many Athenians, we may ask, would not say ἕάν τι καὶ ἄλλο ἀσκήτε, ἀσκεῖν μετ' ἀρετῆς (246d8–e1)? The preceding echoes of the *Apology* are a reminder of what Socrates saw to lie behind sentiments such as this—the ceaseless inquiry, the choice of death rather than

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Scholl (n. 33) 59 ff.; Stern (n. 15); Kahn (n. 8) 229. Thurow (n. 33) 54, 144 ff., sees the whole speech as dependent upon this section.

<sup>53</sup> Clavaud (n. 6) 209 remarks, 'On peut même parler . . . d'une "transposition" inversée qui dégrade le platonisme en lui ôtant la rigueur de son raisonnement et son ascétisme moral . . .'

<sup>54</sup> The instructions given at Menander *περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν* ii 9 (*περὶ παραμυθίας*) 414.2 ff. suggest the

conventional character of some such reflections at least in later rhetorical tradition; it may be significant that they are introduced with the comment that some philosophising in such circumstances is οὐκ ἀπειρόκαλον.

Ziolkowski (n. 23) 138–63 discusses the commonplaces of παραμυθία, giving evidence for the conventional character of the sentiments. See also Méridier (n. 3) 71–3; Clavaud (n. 6) ch. 6.

the unexamined life. This does not appear in the present exhortation; but without it, in Plato's eyes, the moral sentiments expressed must be superficial and insecure. (Compare also the introductory εἶναι ὡς ἀρίστους, 246c1–2, with the more specific τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς ἀρίστη ἔσται at *Apology* 30b2, especially as the latter is given content by the preceding account of Socratic examination; at 29e1–2, τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς βελτίστη ἔσται is linked with φρονήσεως καὶ ἀληθείας.) The one noticeable divergence from Platonic thought or expression is significant. At 246e7–247a2, the speaker dwells on the worthlessness of ἐπιστήμη apart from δικαιοσύνη and all other ἀρετή. Now Plato is well aware of the possibility and danger of δεινότης divorced from moral qualities (see, for example, *Republic* 519a–b). The expression ἐπιστήμη χωριζομένη δικαιοσύνης, however, with its suggestion that δικαιοσύνη and ἀρετή in general could exist apart from ἐπιστήμη, is in conflict with the views expressed elsewhere by Socrates. (For similar wording reversing the thought of 246e7–247a2, see *Meno* 88b6–8; and compare *Euthydemus* 278e–81c.)<sup>55</sup> This divergence, brief as it is, from Socratic views reflects the character of the sentiments in this part of the speech. They are uttered without understanding, or awareness of the need for it—without realisation, then, of what is required to achieve ἀρετή, and of how difficult it is. (Notice the excessive confidence at 246d1–2.)

There is, however, a good reason why this section of the speech, while not a direct expression of Platonic views, should be more serious in tone than what precedes. This seriousness enhances the bitter irony as moral sentiments are applied to what Plato's treatment has revealed as a sordid reality.<sup>56</sup> The lack of a basis in understanding from which these sentiments suffer renders them liable to such abuse; for they are not informed by that insight which would discern the true character of the policies which they are used to justify. In the relation between the two parts of the speech, with their contrasting tone, thus lies the starkest and most bitter representation of the inconsistencies which must beset a state where philosophy is not supreme.

The *Menexenus* thus returns to the question of the true statesman, and to the necessity of philosophy; the character of the speech points to the philosopher who delivers it as the true πολιτικός. Socrates, however, is dead; and he died because the Athenians failed to recognise their need for his philosophy. At 235d3–5, there may be a play on the paradoxical encomia of the sophists (see *Symposium* 177b–c). When written solely for entertainment, such speeches were popular. A paradoxical speech more seriously uttered, however, one which could affect the well-being of its audience, would arouse hostility—and so Socrates died for refusing to praise the Athenians among the Athenians. Speeches such as Aspasia's, however, are assured of popularity; and they are in plentiful supply.<sup>57</sup> Athens prepares to continue in her non-philosophical tradition; the dead men's sons are urged to imitate their fathers, and the state will equip them to do so (248e–249c; see especially ἀναμιμνήσκουσα τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐπιτηδεύματα, ὄργανα τῆς πατρώας ἀρετῆς διδοῦσα, 249a7–b1.)<sup>58</sup> The *Menexenus*, then, conveys the necessity of philosophy to a state's well-being; its bitterness lies in its recognition that its message will not be heeded.<sup>59</sup>

LUCINDA COVENTRY

Somerville College  
Oxford

<sup>55</sup> Scholl (n. 33) 63 compares this passage with *Apology* 29–30; but ἀρετή is not there *opposed* to ἐπιστήμη, as he suggests, but rather associated with it.

<sup>56</sup> Compare the effect, in Eur. *I.A.*, of the contrast between Iphigeneia's arguments at 1347 ff. and the representation of the situation at 334 ff., 511 ff.

<sup>57</sup> This turns to some extent on the interpretation of the words λόγους . . . πολιτικούς at 249e4. P. Friedländer, *Plato* ii (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1965) 218–20, suggests that a contrast is intended with the speech which Socrates has just delivered. Contrast, however, the presentation in Loraux *Invention* of ἐπιτάφιοι as the λόγοι πολιτικοί *par excellence*; see also

Loraux (n. 5) 172–3; Thurow (n. 33) 7. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Demosthenes* 1027.6–7) calls the *Menexenus* κράτιστος πάντων τῶν πολιτικῶν λόγων.

Socrates' promise to deliver further speeches composed by Aspasia gains an extra irony through its relation to his own habit of concluding a conversation with the comment that further enquiry is called for—see especially the end of the *Laches*.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Eur. *Suppl.* 1143 ff. Contrast the care for his sons which Socrates requests at *Apology* 41e.

<sup>59</sup> I have profited constantly from comments on this paper by Dr C. B. R. Pelling and Dr R. B. Rutherford, for which I am deeply grateful.