

## What Quintilian Wants Plato to Want: A Reading of the *Gorgias* in *Institutio Oratoria* 2.15

As Quintilian sifts through definitions of rhetoric in Book 2, he confronts the challenge posed by Plato's *Gorgias*. Criticizing other authors for quoting Plato out of context and thus for mistakenly concluding that Plato had a negative view of rhetoric (2.15.24-28), Quintilian claims Plato as his ally in propounding a positive vision of rhetoric that incorporates justice. However, Quintilian's own quotation of Plato is liable to the same criticisms he leveled against other readers. In 2.15.27, he claims that Socrates' argument with Gorgias concludes with the words "therefore it is necessary for the rhetorical man to be just, and for the just man to want to do just things" (οὐκοῦν ἀνάγκη τὸν ῥητορικὸν δίκαιον εἶναι, τὸν δὲ δίκαιον βούλεσθαι δίκαια πράττειν, from *Gorgias* 464b) and that at this point Gorgias falls silent. Quintilian's framing makes it appear as if the argument ends with a triumphant proclamation of the justice and goodwill of the rhetorical man (Reinhardt and Winterbottom 2006). But in the context of the dialogue itself, this statement serves as one of the nails in Gorgias' coffin of self-contradiction, not as an affirmation of a just rhetoric.

One could argue that Quintilian's dislocation of this quote shows him to be a careless or hypocritical reader of Plato. But I prefer to suggest, on the contrary, that Quintilian's choice actually highlights a key concern of both the *Gorgias* and the *Institutio* and demonstrates Quintilian's deep engagement with Plato's text in an attempt to solve the problem of rhetoric being misused for evil purposes. The shared concern and possible solution focus around the idea of *wanting* (*volo* and cognates in Latin, βούλομαι and ἐθέλω in Greek). Wanting is an important theme of the *Gorgias* (e.g., Wolfsdorf 2008), particularly in Socrates' and Polus' discussion about whether or not rhetors and tyrants actually do what they *want* when they kill or banish

other people (466c-468d). It also determines whether the discussion itself can proceed when Callicles' marked unwillingness to participate is overcome by Gorgias' wish to continue listening (βούλομαι, 506b). In *Institutio* 2.15 as well, the notion of wanting frames the discussion by accentuating Quintilian's deliberate choice. Quintilian aligns himself with those thinkers who *want* the title of "orator" and the art of oratory to be used only in the case of good men (*nomen hoc artemque de qua loquimur bonis demum tribui volunt*, 2.15.1-2), and he insists (contra Cornelius Celsus) that he *wants* his orator-in-training to be a good man (*quem in primis esse virum bonum volumus*, 2.15.33). By taking pains to show that Plato's true intention is in accord with his own (2.15.5), Quintilian refashions a potential opponent of his idea of moral rhetoric as an ally. In addition to shaping the process of inquiry, wanting itself is under discussion in 2.15. Crucially, wanting must have goodness as its object. When wanting is untethered from justice and possessed of persuasive power, it is dangerous and morally detrimental. This is why Quintilian rejects the definition of rhetoric as "leading people by means of speech to that which the speaker wants" (2.15.10) since this definition could apply just as well to prostitutes and flatterers as to a moral orator. Quintilian's choice of quotation from the *Gorgias* about the rhetorical man having to *want* to do just things takes on new significance in this regard. If the person invested with the powers of speaking wants to do just and upright things, then the threat rhetoric poses to the community is nullified and its teachers, himself included, cannot be charged with harming humanity (2.15.32, cf. *Gorgias* 457a-c, 460d).

How can the teacher of rhetoric make sure that the student, informed by the knowledge of justice, actually does want the good? The final words of Quintilian's masterwork guarantee the transmission of *bona voluntas* to the student (12.11.31). A complete answer to how this transmission takes place is beyond the scope of this paper, but the teacher's ability to inspire and

sustain willingness in the student is key (e.g., 2.9.2-3). Quintilian's express desire that oratory be understood as compatible with and dependent on justice, bolstered by his deliberately selective reading of Plato, proposes a positive reading of the *Gorgias* that encourages the free cooperation of the morally upright student in the project of forming the truly just rhetorical man (τὸν ῥητορικὸν δίκαιον, 464b) but does not unequivocally affirm.

#### Bibliography

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