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Origen and Augustine: Rooted in the Socratic tradition of philosophical rhetoric

ABSTRACT

The article surveys a number of common elements between Augustine and Origen that shed light on the existence of a Christian form of philosophical rhetoric with roots in Plato. The article briefly presents Socrates' approach to this form of rhetoric in the Phaedrus dialogue, a rhetoric that aims at teaching truth, unlike the other forms of rhetoric, and focuses on the true nature of the soul, its present condition, and the journey towards true happiness. Socrates calls it a form of ψυχαγωγία, guidance for the soul. A brief survey of Philo's use of ψυχαγωγία/ψυχαγωγέω in his comments on Moses illustrates how the Socratic form of rhetoric has been appropriated in some currents of Hellenistic Judaism, which could have been one of the sources for the development of the Christian form of philosophical rhetoric in Origen and Augustine.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

For many years, it has been common among historians of rhetoric to skip the Early Christian period in their historical surveys of rhetoric, as if Christian faith and rhetoric were viewed as “two seemingly irreconcilable ideologies”



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- 1 With this article, I wish to honour Professor Francois Tolmie, who has published extensively on the topic of rhetoric and on the rhetorical character of the Letter to the Galatians. I highly esteem him as scholar and I have for many years enjoyed the various opportunities of meeting him and of collaborating with him.

(Duncan 2015:88).² Historians often resume their history of rhetoric with Augustine (and Chrysostom), as if Augustine was the first to negotiate a union between these two. The aim of Duncan was to show that, 200 years earlier, Origen was in many ways already a predecessor of Augustine. The article surveys a number of common elements between Augustine and Origen that are crucial for their Christian form of rhetoric. Furthermore, the article shows how Origen's approach to rhetoric is rooted in the Platonic tradition, in which sound philosophical rhetoric is focused on teaching the truth, on the true nature of the soul, and on guiding the soul on its journey towards its true destiny (*ψυχαγωγία*).³ A brief survey of Philo's use of *ψυχαγωγία/ψυχαγωγία* in his comments on Moses shows what is, for him, the difference between vain and genuine rhetoric.

2. ORIGEN AND AUGUSTINE IN A COMMON TRADITION: THE PRIORITY OF TEACHING

Indeed, it is clear that Augustine's approach to rhetoric is not a radically new beginning in Early Christianity, but it is rooted in a long tradition. Augustine himself was well aware of this. For instance, in *De Doctrina christiana* 4, one of his most important works in this regard, he considers not only Cicero as his model of preaching, but also biblical figures such as Paul and Amos as well as Early Christian ones such as Cyprian and Ambrose.

Another clear indication of the tradition in which he stands is his repeated reminder that rhetoric is first about teaching what is true and then about teaching in a delightful and inspiring way, "*docere, delectare, flectere*" (*Doctr. chr.* 4:34, 74).⁴ The emphasis on genuine rhetoric as teaching what is true goes back to Socrates who was opposed to the empty

2 The simplification of the "two seemingly irreconcilable ideologies" has largely disappeared. Philosophy and rhetoric were put to use in the preaching of the Gospel from the beginning, in whatever way appeared to be beneficial. With regard to philosophy, recent detailed studies have shown how Paul was familiar with the popular philosophy of his time and that he was able to use elements of rhetoric wherever he thought it was useful (see Malherbe 1989). With regard to rhetoric, for some time now, many studies have appeared that have drawn attention to the rhetorical dimension of the New Testament writings, among those of Professor Tolmie.

3 Origen was well versed in the philosophical texts of his time. In his school, in Caesarea Maritima, he read these texts with his students in a critical way, but he encouraged them not to become a follower of simply one school (see Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Thanksgiving* 13-14).

4 "For what shall we do in the end thereof? And assuredly it is preferable, even though what is said should be less intelligible, less pleasing, and less persuasive, that truth be spoken, and that what is just, not what is iniquitous, be listened to with pleasure. But this, of course, cannot be, unless what is true and just be expressed with elegance (*Doctr. chr.* 4:14. 30; all translations of this work from Hill [1996]).

frivolity of rhetors or their manipulation of the truth, and of the hearers in the courts or in the political arena. As for Socrates, rhetoric is genuine, if it is used at the service of philosophy, the search for wisdom,⁵ and not a mere display of one's literary skills. The functions of *delectare* and *flectere* serve the psychagogical⁶ process of enlightening and moving the listeners or readers towards the true goal of the soul. In the Christian tradition, in which both Origen and Augustine stand, the rhetorical techniques need to be tailored to fit this practical goal of progress in Christian living. For Augustine, the *delectatio* itself should progress from being moved merely by the external style of the communication (to keep at least people's attention) to a *delectatio* in the subject matter, in the tasting of the truth, the cross.⁷

Christian discourse easily found a home for itself in this Socratic tradition because, in the Christian tradition, teaching was the primary concern, that is, the proclamation of the Gospel and the call for conversion. The Socratic teaching was taken as a valuable but deficient philosophy and, therefore, replaced by the Gospel, the true philosophy. The understanding of the gospel message in terms of philosophy attracted the attention of the wider Roman society and became very fruitful for dialogue and argument with the gentile world. This move had its predecessors, for instance in Philo and 4 Maccabees, for whom the Law of Moses was given that supreme philosophical status. Prior to Origen and Augustine, Justin Martyr already walked in the streets of Rome in the dress of a philosopher and taught the Gospel, in which he believed he had ultimately found the true philosophy.

3. PHILOSOPHY, RHETORIC, AND TEXTUAL AUTHORITY⁸

Duncan (2013:89) characterises Origen's rhetoric as "a distinct Christian rhetoric based on textual authority and an ethos of inspiration". This connection of rhetoric and textual authority may be surprising at first sight.

5 About this, see Primmer (1995).

6 The noun and verb are used in the Platonic tradition in the sense of guiding and inspiring the soul towards its true goal (*Phaedrus* 261a, 271c-d).

7 Cavadini (1995:172) concludes: "What finally renders any cultural artefact 'useful' is the sign of the cross, the 'foolishness of God ... the foolishness of preaching' which disassembles the sweetnesses formed by perverse sign systems, and which turns everything else into a sign, in effect a sacrament – of God's Wisdom."

8 By Origen's time, the boundaries of Christian Holy Scriptures had been sufficiently delineated, even if there were still some particular differences depending on the regions. The main issue was the understanding of the Scriptures; see Sheridan (2004).

But one should recall that, in Origen's time, the core of the philosophical programmes consisted in commentary on the classical authoritative texts.⁹ Of course, this meant for Origen that the Scriptures were understood as being at the level of the Platonic and other famous philosophical texts, in fact, even higher, as divinely inspired texts and more than that.¹⁰ For Origen, the Scriptures are the permanent incarnation of the Logos and as such the supreme norm of truth among all other philosophical texts. In the Christian Scriptures, people can meet Jesus, the Logos incarnate, who appeared in a humble state and is now accessible in a humble text. Origen views the words of the Scriptures as

earthen treasures of paltry language, whose written character is read by all who happen upon it, and whose sound is heard by all who present their physical ears (*Comm. Jo.*1.24).¹¹

The literality of the Logos embodied in the Scriptures, like the materiality of the incarnate Logos, requires careful respect and attention; to do justice to these words, they must be regarded as "sacraments" of the Logos.¹² Encountering the divine beauty in these "inadequate" words, as in creation,¹³ requires divine teaching, human communal support, and a process of personal conversion. Origen exclaims: "How great must be our understanding that we may be able to understand [this] in a worthy manner" (*Comm. Jo.* 1.24).

9 See Löhr (2010:174). One can already note this approach to philosophy in Philo. He writes about the Therapeutae: ἐντυγχάνοντες γὰρ τοῖς ἱεροῖς γράμμασι φιλοσοφοῦσι τὴν πάτριον φιλοσοφίαν ἀλληγοροῦντες ἐπειδὴ σύμβολα τὰ τῆς ῥητῆς ἐρμηνείας νομίζουσιν ἀποκεκρυμμένης φύσεως ἐν ὑπονοίαις δηλουμένης. (*Cont.* 1:28).

10 According to Simonetti (1994:41), Origen "does not limit himself to thinking of Scripture as a book inspired by the Holy Spirit, but as the divine word he effectively identified with Christ (=Logos), the Word of God: The letter of the sacred text functions, like the human body assumed by Christ, as the envelope which encloses the divine Logos (*C. Celsum* VI 77; *Comm. Ser.* in Mt. 27): Sacred Scripture is the permanent incarnation of the Logos."

11 Philo (*Migr.* 12) also refers to the inadequacy of language. In his journey of spiritual progress, Abraham also had to move beyond human language, which is only a mere shadow of the reality to which the words refer. Augustine expresses similar views: In "On Catechizing the Simple", we read that language does not measure up to the heart (2.3). At the philosophical level Augustine is probably adopting the Platonic idea that words (or propositions) can only inadequately represent their subject-matter, and that propositional knowledge about the Good only gives us a poor image of the Good itself (Rist 1994:38).

12 See Shin (1999).

13 The material world is the first level of God's creation, "an unfinished reality" (*Princ.* 4.4.8). It is holy when directed by the soul towards God; it is carnal when undirected by the soul to its proper goal. See Thomas (2004:54).

It is obvious that the rhetoric of both Origen and Augustine is based on the reading of the Scriptures as God's Word. A respectful approach to the literality of the Logos in the Scriptures requires the use of the *artes*. Origen exhorts Gregory Thaumaturgus to make use of all the *artes*, together with philosophy, as useful tools for the interpretation of Holy Scripture and Christianity (*Ep. Greg.* 1-3). The continuation of the Letter recalls the traditional *topos* of the theft of the treasures of Egypt at the time of the Exodus to justify the appropriation of these "foreign skills", but Origen also warns against their seduction.¹⁴ The theme of the usefulness of the *artes* and their seductive power can already be found in Philo.¹⁵ Augustine continues the tradition and considers the *artes* to be gifts from God.¹⁶ He also recalls the *topos* of the theft of the treasures of Egypt.¹⁷ However, Augustine also warned his readers to ensure that they keep the *artes* subordinate to the message of the cross.¹⁸

There is cause for concern with one of the branches of the *artes*, rhetoric. Right from the beginning of Book 4 of *De Doctrina christiana*, Augustine urges his readers to use rhetoric for the promotion of the truth against the abusive usage thereof in his society:

Rhetoric, after all, being the art of persuading people to accept something, whether it is true or false, would anyone dare to maintain that truth should stand there without any weapons in the hands of its defenders against falsehood ... That those, to move and force the minds of their hearers into error, should be able by their style to terrify them, move them to tears, make them laugh, give them rousing encouragement, while these on behalf of truth stumble along slow, cold and half asleep? (*Doctr. chr.* 4:2.3).

Both Origen and Augustine were very committed to reach out to as many people as possible. Both were attentive to the usefulness of rhetoric for this purpose and to the issue of style, but each one in his own way. Augustine is particularly interested in using the rhetorical means, in order to protect people from those who abuse these, as noted in the above quote. Further down in the Book (*Doctr. chr.* 4:10.25), he points out that the eloquence he has in mind is about clear teaching:

14 See Crouzel (1989:56-57, 61-62).

15 See Philo's view on the seductive power of the *artes* (*Congr.* 1.77-78).

16 "Nay, but let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master" (*Doctr. chr.* 2:18.28).

17 *Doctr. chr.* 2:9.14-41.62.

18 Cavadini (1995:170) comments on Augustine's caution about the riches taken from Egypt: "We may take the gold of the Egyptians, but only through the Pasch which is the blood of Christ." See *Doctr. chr.* 2:41.62.

When this is attained, the thought should not be labored any further as though it had to go on and on being taught; perhaps though they need to be urged to take it to heart and remember it.

To keep the attention of, and teach the masses, much care must be taken to present the teaching in stimulating ways. Augustine recognises that the few eager and capable listeners will profit from a teaching, even if it is “dismally and crudely expressed”:

It is indeed the characteristic trait of good minds and dispositions to love in words what is true, not the words themselves (*Doctr. chr.* 4:11.26).

Like many before him (for instance, 1 Cor. 3:2), Augustine perceives a similarity between feeding and learning and he remarks about food:

many people are fussy and fastidious, even those foodstuffs without which life cannot be supported need their pickles and spices (*Doctr. chr.* 4:11.26).

For the vast majority of people, the truth needs to be spiced, in order to become attractive and get the necessary attention. Augustine even thinks that it can be helpful if the teacher, on occasion, briefly gives a display of his/her rhetorical abilities, but for the rest displays his/her restraint by opting for “a graver and more moderate eloquence” (*Doctr. chr.* 4:14.31). The way in which the speakers come across, their ethos, their character, and skills can contribute to their persuasive power.

Origen also displays his concern to reach as many people as possible when he compares the humble style of the Scriptures with the brilliant language of Plato. As a teacher, he is more concerned about the divine power of the message than about the power of human eloquence. A remark in Thaumaturgus' *Thanksgiving* 4-5, about “the wonderful men who have embraced the good philosophy”, probably refers primarily to Origen:

Not, I think that they are unwilling – they are eager – to fashion fair and precise thoughts in a fair and graceful language. But perhaps they cannot easily combine in one and the same soul, so puny and human, the sacred and godlike power of thought with eloquence in the spoken word, accomplishments for two men, each a specialist, since they are contrary to each other. For silence is the friend and partner of thinking and discovery, but someone who seeks to speak well and confidently will not find that skill except in words and in their constant employ.¹⁹

19 Thaumaturgus, *Thanksgiving* 1 (4-6). Later in the text (7 (107)), Thaumaturgus asserts that Origen did not fuss like famous rhetors over the purity of language, whether an expression is “Greek or barbaric in its expression, that is an insignificant and unnecessary thing to learn”.

In his sermons to the crowds, Origen may not have equalled the rhetorical skills of Augustine. He regrets the lack of attention during his preaching (*Hom. Gen.* 10:1; 11:3; *Hom. Ex.* 13:3) or even that some people leave before the sermon (*Hom. Ex.* 12:2). Origen may not have been the most impressive public speaker in front of mixed groups (*Hom. Ex.* 9:2),²⁰ and in smaller circles. However, his knowledge, his methods of teaching, his commitment, his holy life, and his charm impressed and attracted many people. He was able to stir his listeners profoundly. Thaumaturgus experienced the moving and inspiring power of Origen's words when he was convincing him to remain in Caesarea and follow Origen's formation programme:

As he made these last points, which really shook us, with full force and very artfully [μάλα τεχνικῶς], he added, 'while they pay no attention to our most important feature: reason'. ... We were pierced as by a dart by his discourse even from the first, for he combined a kind of winsome grace with persuasiveness and compelling force. But we still vacillated and pondered: on the one hand we resisted taking up the life of philosophy, still not entirely convinced, and on the other hand for some unknown reason we were unable to depart, but were constantly drawn towards him by his words as if under some greater constraints. ... As he poured out more arguments like these one after another, and by his arts [ταῖς αὐτοῦ τέχναις ... ἀτεχνῶς] brought us in the end to a complete standstill like men under a spell, he was supported in his words, I know not how, by some divine power (*Thanksgiving* 6 (77-80)).²¹

The manner of life of the speaker and his sincere commitment to the truth are crucial for effectiveness. Augustine dedicates a few paragraphs on this in his instructions to his priests and deacons:

But for us to be listened to with obedient compliance, whatever the grandeur of the speaker's utterances, his manner of life carries more weight (*Doctr. chr.* 4:27.59).

20 As noted earlier, this does not mean that Origen would not have had any appreciation for rhetoric; for instance, we read in *Hom. Lev.* 6:4: "For it is not sufficient for the high priest to have wisdom and to know the reason for all things unless he can communicate what he knows to the people." There is also a helpful remark by Rufinus, where he explains in his Peroration appended to his translation of Origen's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*: "This I have done in the case of the homilies and the short lectures on Genesis and Exodus, and especially on those in the book of Leviticus, where he spoke in a hortatory manner, whereas my translation takes the form of an exposition. This duty of supplying what was wanted I took up because I thought that the practice of agitating questions and then leaving them unsolved, which he frequently adopts in his homiletic mode of speaking, might prove distasteful to the Latin reader."

21 Translations for this work are taken from Slusser (1998).

With regard to Origen, there are very enlightening insights in Thaumaturgus' *Thanksgiving*. After five years of study and close personal guidance under Origen's care, he pronounces a thanksgiving discourse and, while this genre tends to exaggerate the image of the person who is being thanked, Thaumaturgus' discourse nevertheless gives a useful picture of how he experienced the person of Origen and his methods of teaching.²² In the eyes of Thaumaturgus, the *ethos* of Origen is extraordinary. Early on in his discourse, he states:

I have the intention of speaking about a man, or about someone who seems and appears to be a man, but to those capable of seeing the extent of his condition, he has already finished with the human condition in order to arrive at a better situation in his migration to divinity.²³

They were struck by the fact that, as a genuine teacher, he practised what he taught (*Thanksgiving* 133:9-16).

Origen's preferred method for teaching, as for Socrates, was the dialogue and the search for truth by raising questions; the *Thanksgiving of Thaumaturgus* witnesses to this.²⁴ One also finds this approach in Philo before Origen and in Augustine; one only has to look at the titles given to some of their works.

Finally, both Augustine and Origen agree on the importance of prayer and the divine power in communicating the message of the Scriptures and rendering it effective in the lives of the hearers. Origen regularly refers to prayer or invites to prayer in his homilies and commentaries.²⁵ According to Augustine:

And so our Christian orator, while he says what is just, and holy, and good (and he ought never to say anything else), does all he can to be heard with *intelligence, with pleasure, and with obedience* [italics mine]; and he need not doubt that if he succeeds in this objective, and so far as he succeeds, he will succeed more by piety in prayer than by gifts of oratory; and so he ought to pray for himself, and for those he is about to address, before he attempts to speak. ... For,

22 Trigg (2001:29-33) discusses various views that question whether the discourse represents the view of Origen in a reliable way; ultimately, Trigg holds to his view that "the Address reveals a serious appropriation of Origen's actual thought ..." (2001:31).

23 *Thanksgiving* 10(17-20).

24 Trigg (2001:42-52) explores this in some detail.

25 Konstantinovskiy (2004:175-176) gives a brief overview of Origen's approaches to prayer. See, for instance, *Comm. Cant. Prologue 2*; Lawson 1957:24); the reference in the Letter to his pupil, Gregory the Wonderworker, is particularly relevant: "Do not be content simply with knowing and seeking; for most essential is prayer for the understanding of divine things" (*Ep. Greg.* 4 (3)).

as in regard to every matter of faith and love there are many things that may be said, and many ways of saying them, who knows what it is expedient at a given moment for us to say, or to be heard saying, except God who knows the hearts of all? (*Doctr. chr.* 4:32).

While prayer and divine inspiration are decisive for the understanding and impact of the reading of the Scriptures, both Augustine and Origen open up a space for human agency in this process, for the teacher and preacher. In the Preface to his *De Doctrina christiana*, Augustine argues in various ways against those who think that there is no need for his booklet or for any human instruction on how they approach the Scriptures. They claim that divine inspiration suffices, as if they are expecting to be taken up into the third heaven “and there to see the Lord Jesus Christ and listen to the Gospel directly from his mouth rather than from other people” (*Doctr. chr.* Prologue 5).²⁶ Therefore, there is a need to attend community gatherings and to receive human instruction.²⁷

4. SOCRATES’ UNDERSTANDING OF RHETORIC AND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION²⁸

Early Christian rhetoric relates to the Socratic understanding of genuine rhetoric.²⁹ In the *Phaedrus*, for instance, Socrates regards genuine rhetoric as committed to teaching moral values within a teacher-pupil relationship, as opposed to the rhetoric in the courts and the political arena. In *Phaedrus* (261a, 271c-d), Socrates views this philosophical rhetoric as a kind of ψυχαγωγία.³⁰ He takes the word in its etymological sense as soul guidance

26 According to Augustine, “[t]hen again charity itself, which binds people together by the knot of unity, would have no scope for pouring minds and hearts in together, as it were, and blending with one another, if human beings were never to learn anything from one another” (*Doctr. chr.* Prologue 6). Augustine adds an *argumentum ad hominem*: “But they themselves read the Bible, and understand it without any other human being explaining it to them, why are they so eager to explain it to others, instead of referring them to God, so that they too may come to understand it through his teaching them inwardly, and not through the teaching of other men?” (*Doctr. chr.* Prologue 8).

27 See *Barn.* 4:11-12.

28 Reading philosophical texts was the common practice in his school in Caesarea Maritima, according to the witness of Gregory Thaumaturgus, who was Origen’s student for 5 years. Furthermore, Origen was very interested in Philo and he brought a collection of Philo’s writings to his library in Caesarea, from where later on almost all existing manuscripts have their source.

29 “Although he [Origen] does not teach it in his school, he welcomes a rhetoric which is philosophical. Such a rhetoric, adumbrated by Plato and developed by Aristotle, was available to all later scholars” (O’Cleirigh 1995:280).

30 See Decock (2022). This section of the article is based on my research of the translation of ψυχαγωγία in 2 Macc 2:25.

(Yunis 2005:183). In Greek usage of the time, the noun and the verb can refer to a variety of ways of moving persons, from seducing, beguiling, bewitching to inspiring and motivating. The sense in which Socrates uses it is that of moral education, soul care, and *paideia*. For Socrates, a genuine rhetorician is one “who has knowledge of what is just, honourable and good” [and] because he knows the soul he is addressing, he acts “like a sound farmer who knows in what soil he should sow and during which season” (Plato, *Phaedrus* 276b-c).³¹ This psychagogy is not teaching in the sense of merely giving information but of touching and awakening the memory of the soul and arousing from within the divine gift of *eros* for beauty, goodness, and justice (see *Theaetetus* 15b-d).

Socrates’ concern about genuine rhetoric does not focus on the type of rhetoric for the courts or in the political arena, but on the philosophical rhetoric that educates the soul. In this type of rhetoric, what matters first is solid teaching, in this case, about what the human soul is. Socrates admits that what the soul really is requires a long discourse, divinely inspired, because it is beyond human grasp. Therefore, he presents a more modest, human exposition in the form of a myth.³² The truth of this myth enables persons to understand themselves and appreciate the *eros* operative in their souls.³³ This *eros*, the attraction towards earthly beauty, in this dialogue, a beautiful youth, is a gift from the gods, a form of divine and beneficial “madness”, “*mania*”, whereby the soul transcends itself and is drawn to its true goal, the absolute beauty. Philosophical rhetoric thus requires a firm basis in a vision of the truth about the soul, which makes it very different from the rhetoric for the court or the political arena. Furthermore, because genuine rhetoricians are leading souls towards their “salvation”, they need to know how to select the rhetorical skills that are appropriate to each soul at its present stage in its return journey towards the intellectual world. Genuine rhetoric is committed to this vision and at the service of this spiritual journey. The energy of persuasion is not merely a force from outside the soul like charming language, but more a stirring from within the soul, enlightened by the truth, a stirring of the *eros* to take the journey of true education. In the imagery of the myth, the soul grows in its capability to fly upward (the nourishment of the feathers) to the extent

31 See the Stellenbosch dissertation by Jung Hoon Park under the direction of Johan Thom: 2023:2-6, 20-41.

32 This truth, “what it is”, is difficult to articulate; therefore, Socrates will use a story (246a).

33 The disputed question in this dialogue is whether a cool and calculating relationship between a teacher and his pupil is to be preferred above a relationship where the teacher is “madly” in love with the pupil, the result of his *eros*. Socrates wants to show that there is a kind of divine *eros* that should not be despised. It is a divine gift; see 244a-245c, where it is compared to the other divine gifts, of prophecy, healing, and poetry. See Pieper (1964); Asmis (1986); the articles in Brown & Brown (2021); Jasso (2014).

that it is nourished in the pastures of the truth, that is, of the intelligible world with the virtues (Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c-d, 248b-c). It is a challenging journey, because the chariot used for the journey is drawn by two horses, representing two versions of desire, a disciplined one and one still to be disciplined (Plato, *Phaedrus* 253c-254e). The image of the charioteer with the two horses points to the challenge of developing a life of virtue for the chariot to move ahead on the journey, ending up in respect and awe in front of the loved one (Plato, *Phaedrus* 254e).

Socrates' reflections on the limitations of the written text compared to a live dialogue (Plato, *Phaedrus* 275d-276d) left their traces in the question-and-answer approach in Early Christianity. Origen liked open-ended questions in his sermons. Rufinus thought that they did not fit well in the written sermons, at least not for Latin readers.

One can conclude by pointing out some characteristics of Socrates' view of rhetoric which are fundamental for the Early Christian tradition of rhetoric: the function of teaching truth, particularly the virtuous life, is fundamental; rhetoric needs to guide the soul from beauty accessible to the physical senses to the transcendent beauty; such discourse relies not only on the external power of persuasive words but also on the internal divinely given energy of *eros*.

5. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

Philo stands in the tradition of Plato in the way in which he defends the respectability of Moses' writings. This article examines a selection of passages from Philo where he uses the verb *ψυχαγωγέω*.

In *De vita Mosis* 2.48, Philo argues that the Books of Moses offer solid philosophy and that the content is itself most pleasing and moving for those who are mature and able to appreciate it. In his Books, one will not find the kind of rhetoric that is useless psychagogy [τοῦ ψυχαγωγῆσαι χάριν ἀνωφελῶς]. Moses was, in fact, concerned to offer *epideixis* and *protrepsis* on creation and on the laws of God (*De vita Mosis* 2.51). Such solid teaching does not need the tricks of rhetoric, because the truth expresses itself in a language that is in harmony [συνφδός] with their wonderful content.

Another text, *Det.* 125, articulates more clearly what is meant by helpful *ψυχαγωγία* and by the useless type:

And in the account of the creative power of God you will find no cunningly devised fable, but only unalloyed laws of truth firmly established. Moreover, you will find no vocal measures or rhythm, no melodies alluring the hearing with musical art [διὰ μουσικῆς ψυχαγωγούντα]; but only most perfect works of virtue, which have all

of them a peculiar harmony and fitness. And as the mind rejoices which is eager to hear of the works of God, so also does language, which is in harmony with the conceptions of the mind, and which in a manner is compelled to attend to them, feel exultation.³⁴

In *Congr.* 1.77-78, one finds another use for *ψυχαγωγία*, where Philo warns against a kind of *ψυχαγωγία*, which is not a discourse but a kind of attraction and seduction by the lower subject matter such as poetry or painting in the education programme. Students can be captured and led astray [*ψυχαγωγούμενοι*] by their fascination and fail to focus on what is of ultimate concern, that is, the covenants they have made with philosophy, wisdom, and truth.

However, besides the seductive or useless forms of *ψυχαγωγία*, there is also one which is the fruit of an encounter with wisdom and which fascinates and captivates the soul in the right way. This is what genuine rhetoric, concerned with personal growth, is all about. Philo understands this personal growth as the journey from the sensible to the intelligible level,

the contemplation of which attracts the soul [*ἡ θεὰ ψυχαγωγούσα*] and will not suffer it any longer to turn aside to the objects which belong to the outward senses (*Sobr.* 3).

It is an experience of divine “*mania*”, “sober drunkenness”, or “intoxicated sobriety”.³⁵

As for Socrates, the psychagogical process is not a merely rational or calculating process, but akin to the various forms of divine “*mania*” Socrates spoke about; some kind of divine inspiration. Philo describes such an experience in *Mos.* 2:188:

On other occasions, I have approached my work empty and suddenly become full, the ideas falling in a shower from above and being sown invisibly, so that under the influence of the divine possession I have been filled with corybantic frenzy and been unconscious of anything, place, persons present, myself, words spoken, lines written. For I obtained language, ideas, an enjoyment of light, keenest vision, pellucid distinctness of objects, such as might be received through the eyes as the result of clearest shewing.

34 Augustine’s view is in harmony with this statement. See *Doctr. chr.* 4:10: “And in those passages where the learned note its presence, the matters spoken of are such that the words in which they are put seem not so much to be sought out by the speaker as spontaneously to suggest themselves; as if wisdom were walking out of its house – that is, the breast of the wise man, and eloquence, like an inseparable attendant, followed it without being called for.”

35 On the “drunkenness” of Hannah, see Mackie (2014:158-160).

6. CONCLUSION

This article explored a tradition of philosophical rhetoric that focuses on teaching the truth about the human person and the way to a just, good, and beautiful life. Socrates called it a kind of soul-guiding, soul care, and *ψυχαγωγία*. The force of persuasion to grow needed in this guidance does not come only or mainly from the beautiful words and the elegant ways of presenting the teaching but from the internal energy generated inside the person by the truth, not merely by the “beautiful words” but by the “beautiful content” of the teaching. For Socrates, the source of energy evoked is the divine gift of *eros*. Philo, Origen, and Augustine spoke in their own ways of such a divine gift and energy within the person, of which the teachers of the Scriptures with their literary skills are the servants.

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