DEZ 2013
ISSN 2079-7567
eISSN 2183-4105

Established 1989
http://platosociety.org/

Papers
William H.F. Altman
“The Missing Speech of the Absent Fourth: Reader Response and Plato’s Timaeus-Critias”

David Levy,
“Socrates vs. Callicles: Examination and Ridicule in Plato’s Gorgias.”

Nathalie Nercam,
“En tout et pour tout (Théétète 204a-210b)”

Matthew Robinson,
“Competition, Imagery, and Pleasure in Plato’s Republic, 1–9”

Scott J. Senn,
“Ignorance or Irony in Plato’s Socrates?: A Look Beyond Avelals and Disavowals of Knowledge”

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I. INTRODUCTION

Plato’s Gorgias has been the focus of many studies that seek to highlight some feature or other of Socrates’ approach to philosophy. In particular, commentators have used the text to ground their discussions of Socratic method (i.e., elenchus),¹ of Socrates’ use of shame,² and of Socratic moral psychology.³

What is missing from these otherwise excellent discussions is a phenomenon within the dialogue that cannot be overlooked: Socrates ridicules his two younger interlocutors (Polus and Callicles), and ridicule is, in some ways, an organizing theme of the entire Callicles colloquy. I should like to argue that understanding Socrates’ use of ridicule allows us to understand how Socratic method, use of shame, and moral psychology cohere. The aims of this essay, however, are rather less ambitious: to illustrate how, within the Callicles colloquy, Socrates’ ridicule of his interlocutor is connected to his elenchic examination of him, and is the mechanism by which Socrates seeks to shame him into moral improvement.⁴

Before I begin my detailed discussion of ridicule within the Callicles colloquy, I wish to clarify that the focus of this study is on the dialogue’s explicit characterization of individuals/acts as ridiculous. That is, I will examine the dialogue’s uses of katagelastos, rather than other ways in which an individual might invite ridicule of another, such as when one laughs derisively at another (as occurs within the Polus colloquy, at 473e; see Callicles’ characterization of this moment in the dialogue at 482d). A more comprehensive account of ridicule within the dialogue would take into consideration these other

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