

## The Rhetoric of Manhood in Plato's *Gorgias*

As a work that deploys as well as attacks rhetoric, Plato's *Gorgias* has drawn some attention (Scholtz *Concordia Discors* 127–135; Gentzler *Ancient Philosophy* 15 [1995] 17–43) but not enough. Seeking to deepen appreciation of the dialogue's rhetorical dimension, I shall argue that attitudes to gender and identity inform its verbal sparring, whose impact derives from a pair of social-psychological phenomena little studied in rhetorical contexts: “essentialism” and “inductive potential.” Debating not just the relative merits of rhetoric and philosophy but, in a sense, what it means to be a man, speakers in Plato's *Gorgias* show how the rhetoric of manhood, while it objectively relied on no well-defined or self-consistent set of definitions (Roisman *Rhetoric of Manhood*), nevertheless strove to present itself as if it did.

I shall start with the underlying problem: that of gaining a purchase on manhood's rhetorical valence in sources conflating manhood with Athenian civic identity. Yet that conflation deserves closer study in its own right. For it exemplifies “inductive potential,” the capacity for the human mind to conceptualize identity as qualities bonded together into a single, psychologically potent package (Hamilton *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37.6 [2007] 1077–1101). How, then to isolate manhood from the manhood-citizenship dyad? Enter Plato's *Gorgias*, a dialogue pitting Calicles' self-seeking political climber against Socrates' crowd-alienating philosopher. Neither is defined in precisely civic terms. Each is, in his own way, an individualist, each a “real man.” Which is to say, each constructs manhood as a rhetorically compelling essence implying a range of qualities symptomatic of a given social identity (Hamilton). Yet each is different. Socratic self-control and Caliclean hedonism thus illustrate how a truism like “A man is a man,” while it can be made to mean many things, must always *seem* to mean only one.