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Socrates and the weakness of the strong man: The rhetoric of the true politician

kterou prosloví

Prof. Michael Erler

Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg

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Abstrakt:

The *Gorgias* is one of the most extensive and richest of Plato's dialogues but also one of the most relevant to our contemporary situation. Two concepts of life are up for discussion – that of the traditional politician and orator, who is focussing on increasing his or her own power and influence, and the life of the philosopher or – to put it in modern terms – the intellectual, which is regarded as alien, apolitical and too weak for self-help, and therefore becomes the subject of the mockery of comedy. Plato's *Gorgias* reacts to such attacks by showing that traditional politicians or even the tyrants are weak, because they do not have the knowledge which is necessary to distinguish between good and bad. They therefore fail to achieve what really is good for them. Plato's Socrates offers a new understanding of what he calls true politics and true rhetoric, which is bound by norms and focuses on people, the addresses or audiences, rather than on one's own benefits. This new focus requires a fundamental reorientation and transformation of traditional political and rhetorical concepts and instruments, but also helps to understand Socrates' claim that those true politicians or rhetoricians, i.e. philosophers or intellectuals, are not weak but do have power. Plato thus reacts to developments in his own time like the growing theatricality of politics as described by Thucydides which might look familiar to us in times when populism and anti-intellectualism seem to gain importance.

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