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## Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, the greatest evil, and the true art of politics

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PLATO'S *GORGIAS*: RHETORIC, THE GREATEST EVIL,  
AND THE TRUE ART OF POLITICS

By

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the

**Master of Arts in Political Science**  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Plato's *Gorgias*: Rhetoric, the Greatest Evil, and the True Art of Politics**

by

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The interweaving of rhetoric, the greatest evil, and the true art of politics create the unity of the dialogue. Whereas Gorgianic rhetoric is pleasure seeking flattery which inspires belief without knowledge, noble rhetoric is refutative, inspiring the acknowledgment of falsity or ignorance. Moreover, it is self-refutation, meaning that the person being persuaded arrives at the conclusion of his ignorance by his own realization; the noble rhetor does not connect all the dots for them. The greatest evil is to have a false opinion about justice. A just penalty for suffering from the greatest evil is to face self-refutation in hopes that this will inspire a desire to seek true knowledge through philosophical inquiry. The true art of politics is a personal, individual art, coordinating justice and legislation. Justice teaches what the best care for the soul is and legislation regulates behavior to conform action with the demands of justice, being guided by self-discipline and moderation. Each participant in the dialogue suffers to a degree from the greatest evil, which Socrates addresses by conversing rhetorically with them to arouse an understanding of what rhetoric is, what their false opinions are, and how that relates to living the best life.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Plato's *Gorgias* has a strange magic to it. The dialogue is named after the famed rhetorician from Sicily, Gorgias of Leontini, who claimed to possess a kind of "verbal magic": the art of rhetoric. This he described as "the incantatory power which by its witchery enchants, persuades, and changes the souls of men" (Dodds 1959, 8). That the *Gorgias* is concerned with this "magical" art is clear when early on Socrates states his intention to meet the rhetor in order to "learn from him what the power of his art is, and what it is that he professes and teaches" (447c). The discussion that follows, however, deals with more than just rhetoric. It probes into a plenitude of subjects including justice, punishment, pleasure, politics, and philosophy, often causing this original topic to be overshadowed. The dialogue delves into the depths of the souls of the discussants, challenging them on their beliefs, desires, and ways of life.

But the direction of the dialogue does not produce a parallel change in all the souls of the participants, nor in those of its readers. Where the dialogue proves persuasive for some, it is problematic for others. While some of the commentators point to the power of Plato to "attract and enchant" those looking for "a richer and truer account of human life," others see mostly "dark and gloom that awaits" (Stauffer 2006, 1; Arieti 1991, 79). What is to account for the discrepancy between these descriptions?

Answers to this question are varied and widespread, but are centered on the unique characteristics of the dialogue, such as its tone. In comparison to the rest of Plato's works the *Gorgias* arouses a unique bitterness, both from the philosopher and his

participants. This bitterness is often seen as an indictment of rhetoric and democracy. Kennedy, ascribing the bitterness in the work to the death of Socrates, claims that Plato “is so prejudiced that he weights the scales against rhetoric” (1964, 15). Hunt, blaming Plato’s dislike of Athenian politics, describes the apparent harsh treatment of rhetoric as a “broadly satirical caricature...(of) false pretense to knowledge, overweening conceit, fallacious argument...and, in general, a ready substitution of appearance for reality” (1925, 20).

This view of Plato, however, is shortsighted. The existence of things like logical flaws, historical liberties, and excessive bitterness might show something akin to motive to lambast rhetoric or democracy, but the evidence for intent is lacking. Rather, the author’s intent can be found by turning to the most overlooked aspect of the dialogue: the drama.

The dialogue format is not a treatise. It is not meant to be a systematic, scientific analysis attempting to uncover and exhaust all aspects of a topic. It is a conversation between individuals meant more to bring out what those individuals think, feel, and understand. As a conversation, a dialogue involves action, or in other words, it involves drama. The emphasis, the tone, the body language, and everything else that fills out a thought and completes what is being said are crucial parts of the work but have to be understood without explicit direction, as there is none given by the author. Those in Plato’s day might have relied on their own knowledge of the historical characters to fill in these dramatic blanks, but we can still be assured today that someone who “curried and combed the locks of his dialogues to the end of his days” has left enough indirect cueing to bring us to his desired understanding of the work (Black 1958, 361). A careful reading



will show there exists a depth, eloquence, and respect given by Plato to the characters that breathes truth. It is thus becoming of the reader to give scrutinization to the work on par with the care put into it, which includes acknowledging that apparent fallacies were also apparent to the author and perhaps purposely so.

Ultimately, the intent of all of Plato's dialogues is to show us the life of Socrates and bring us to a life of philosophy. Often the most important part of such a philosophic education is to understand the obstacles in that path. As Bruell notes, "the most important obstacles, which stem from the intrinsic difficulty of the problems treated by Plato, would have been encountered by readers of any period, including Plato's own; and we can assume that he has supplied in the dialogues themselves the most suitable assistance for overcoming them" (1995, 96). The problems of the dialogue thus prove to demonstrate the internal inconsistencies of the dialogue's participants, perhaps the same ones that are in us as well. In turn, the dialogues are not meant to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the tenets it supports, but to show how characters themselves stand in relation to that tenet. The argumentation is meant to draw them to reflect inwardly about their own opinions. Attention to the drama of the dialogue brings out this understanding.

Often Plato will use another character to point out the inconsistencies or faulty logic used elsewhere as another sign of the time and care put into the dialogues, showing the ultimate end of the work is a philosophical inquiry. Moreover, it is a careful reader that will notice the inconsistencies that go unmentioned by others in the dialogue and to question those. It is in this way that the inner reflection the dialogue prompts in the participants serves as a signal to the reader to ponder the same points. This is the magic of the *Gorgias*; this is how the dialogue works its witchery.

The question to ask is what problems, points, or obstacles to philosophy does the *Gorgias* wish its readers to ponder? The subject of rhetoric has to be at least one of them. The dialogue begins as an inquiry into rhetoric with the father of the art. In the subsequent jumble of interruptions that follows, the topic of rhetoric seems to be swallowed up by a number of different subjects. But toward the end of the dialogue the topic again takes the forefront, though with new treatment. Whereas in the beginning it merited a harsh critique as a base thing that promotes pleasure, in the end it reveals noble potential (503a).

The notion of a noble rhetoric, in fact, has seeds planted throughout the dialogue, even before the art receives its acrid assailment, and what these seeds point toward is possibly an alliance between rhetoric and dialectic. Dialectic is a type of conversation, but is more of an inquiry, within a small group. Views are presented, refutations then offered, and a common ground is arrived at, upon which the process begins again. The process is able to proceed because the goal is truth, not victory over the other participant. But as Vlastos points out, Socrates typically has two ends for his dialectical debates: “how every human ought to live and to test the single human being that is doing the answering” (1983, 115). It is this latter aspect that often ignites anger from the participants. Additionally, the argument rarely ends with the discovery of truth, but instead produces *aporia*. Rather than being brought to know something, the participants are more often left to realize that they do not know. This awakening of ignorance also results in anger.

How might rhetoric be used to supplement dialectic? For dialectic to work, two characteristics, derived from the description above, are needed: a desire to search for the

truth and openness to recognize ignorance. Rhetoric may be able to fill in these gaps. Rhetoric may be the supplement needed to persuade those otherwise closed off to philosophy to partake. Rhetoric is like medication, indeed, a bitter pill, to cure the sickness of confusion, apathy, dislike, or hatred toward philosophy.

Although Gorgias plays only a small part as the direct speaker in the dialogue, the whole work is really a conversation with the rhetor. Gorgias does not remain silent after his beginning section ends, but he intercedes at crucial parts of the dialogue to keep it from breaking up. Moreover, his interjections show that he is sincere and interested in what Socrates has to say, as if he is beginning to understand what an alliance between the two could mean. Perhaps Socrates has some hope of a Gorgianic style of rhetoric that could reach the masses and the closed off in ways he couldn't to turn them toward philosophy.

While this fits the character, content, and drama of the dialogue, I feel there is still a greater lesson to learn. The dialogue is not only a conversation between the characters, but also literature, and thus a conversation between the author and the reader. Plato's intent would then not be to make sure the reader has a proper understanding of the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic simply, but to bring him to philosophy. In that sense, the dialogue acts as a piece of rhetoric itself, perhaps turning into propaganda for the Academy (Nichols 1995). Also, the question of what obstacles kept the others in the dialogue from becoming philosophical has not been answered. The greater lesson from the dialogue is a deeper understanding of the specific obstacles faced by the participants.

In some way or other, Socrates accuses each of the discussants of not being in agreement with themselves. Upon the notice of the first such inconsistency in the

dialogue, Socrates takes his time to explain that his purpose is not to refute in order to achieve verbal victory but to find the truth (457d-458b). He then emphasizes this by stating that he believes “that nothing is so great an evil for a human being as a false opinion about the things that our argument now happens to be about”. The subject matter then before them happens to be the power of rhetoric, or more particularly, the just use of that power. Socrates’s reference to the greatest evil for a human being is more than simply a false opinion about the just use of rhetoric, but a false opinion about the nature of justice.

The tyrannical talk of the rest of the dialogue overshadows discussion of the greatest evil as having a false opinion. Later on Socrates will repeat the label of the greatest evil but ascribe it to unjust acts instead of false opinions about justice (469d, 479d). To differentiate between having wrong beliefs about justice and committing unjust acts may seem an unnecessary differentiation, but the drama of the dialogue reveals that, at least for the three participants, having the false opinion is the greater harm. Hobbes seemed to recognize this distinction and word it accurately when he wrote, "The actions of men proceed from their opinions; and in the well-governing of opinions, consisteth the well-governing of men's actions, in order to their peace and concord" (Hobbes 1996, 118). While the participants, as well as many today, would insert the word "interests," or perhaps "passions," where "opinions" appears, Hobbes's position is clear: opinions are the primary factor behind action, and the root of the greatest evil (Grant 2002).

To be under the persuasion of false opinions, particularly false opinions about justice, is the obstacle to a philosophic life that Plato presents in the *Gorgias*. Each

speaker presents the obstacle in a unique way, to which Socrates responds accordingly. The adherence that they give to their false opinions, the extent to which they hold to these tenets, keeps them from arguing dialectically. This causes Socrates to speak rhetorically throughout the dialogue, which accounts for faulty arguments and bitter tone. Were they able to participate in a dialectical conversation then this dialogue would look more like the *Republic* and delve into the nature of justice. In fact, just as the *Gorgias* begins to touch upon the nature of justice the direction of the discussion swings away in order to face these dialectical obstacles first. What the dialogue reveals as these obstacles are uncovered is not only an understanding of how to begin to pursue a philosophic life, but also important implications for leadership, education, and politics as a whole.

The next three chapters that follow will be devoted to each of the participants from the dialogue. The arguments will be analyzed, with special attention paid to the drama, to understand the obstacle before the participant, his false opinion of justice, and what Plato is trying to suggest about it. Concluding the paper will be a summary of the arguments and a possible suggestion for their application today. The primary edition of the *Gorgias* used for this work is Nichols's translation (1998). All quotations to the text, unless otherwise noted, are his translation.

## CHAPTER 2

### GORGIAS

Gorgias was from the Greek colony of Leontini, of the island of Sicily. He lived roughly from 485- 380 BCE. Most of what remains of his past is largely that of rumor and anecdote with few firm facts to rely upon. The surviving, reliable sources attest to the effectiveness and persuasiveness of Gorgias's rhetoric, showing "that he was widely admired, that his popularity never waned during his life, and that he was wealthy and famous beyond all the other sophists" (Connors 1986, 46). The rhetor spent his days travelling through Greece, unwed and childless, teaching his craft. He is said to have taught Isocrates and Pericles and to have had an influence upon Thucydides; additionally, his ideas were predecessors for such modern-day thinkers as Heidegger, Derrida, and Rorty (Consigny 2001, 2).

What was it about this speaker, whose use of rhetoric "set the tone for the last thirty years of the fifth century," that made him so attractive (Jaeger 1943, 127)? His novelty in style set him apart, which included both a new sense of structure and ornamentation. His work was innovatively poetic, using such literary devices as antithesis, anadiplosis (repetition of words), homoeoteleuton (similarity in ending syllables) and parisosis (arrangement of words in nearly equal periods) (Consigny 1992, 43). For Gorgias, *logos* with meter is poetry and *logos* without meter is rhetoric (a comment that does not go unnoticed by Plato in his dialogue) (McComisky 2002, 30). While his stylistic beauty won him praise, it also spurred heavy criticism. The most forceful criticism comes from Aristotle, who calls his work "derivative," "frigid," and "overly theatrical," which held as the prevailing attitude toward the rhetor until recent

times when both Hegel and Grote began their attempt to “rehabilitate” the sophists (Consigny 2001, 69).

Their “rehabilitation” brought about an emphasis on the substance of his work, which is the other attractive aspect that brought Gorgias recognition in his day. His novelty in content set him apart, particularly his use of *paradoxologia*, earning him the title of the father of the sophists. While critics find his examples of paradox artistic but empty, others see in them a “practical validity” that points toward a certain epistemology, guided by a principle of *kairos* (McComisky 2002, 18). This principle of an “opportune moment” creates a relativistic conception of truth, requiring a “continuous adjustment to and creation of the present occasion,” of which *logos* interprets (White 1987, 15). This is seen in his work *Encomium of Helen* where the rhetor states:

If all people on all subjects had memory of things past and comprehension of things present and prescience of things to come, then language [*logos*] would not function as it does [that is, as an imprecise medium]’ however, the way things are, it is difficult to remember the past and perceive the present and foretell the future, so that most people regarding most subjects accept opinion as advisor to their soul. (Van Hook, 1993, 123)

Still, a reliance on the principle of *kairos* may be too little to rest a full philosophy upon. With an insufficient amount of the rhetor’s work extant, Consigny decided to compare what remains with other works within their relative genre rather than compare Gorgias’s works side by side. What emerged, rather than a “theoretical consistency, “is a chameleon like Gorgias, able to shift, change, and adapt to relative audiences” (Consigny 1992, 46). While this imitative aspect may reinforce the idea of a relativistic

epistemology, there are several other aspects of his writings that cast a shadow on Gorgias having a firm philosophical stance. The concluding line of the *Helen* reads, “I wished to write a speech which would be a praise of Helen and a *diversion to myself*” (Van Hook 1993, 123, emphasis added)

There are many unanswered questions about Gorgias, prominent among them is whether he is serious or joking. His most paradoxical work, *On What Is Not*, is considered by many to be a parody of Parmenides’s work *On What Is*. Others believe that the other remaining works are models for instructing pupils (Poulakos 1983, 3). The last line of the *Helen* certainly raises questions about his true intent. While these unanswered points are important to ponder, another more pertinent question about the rhetor remains: why was Plato interested in him?

The thesis of this paper is that the greatest evil to afflict a human being is to have a false opinion about justice. The conversation with Gorgias, which forms only a short part of the whole dialogue, is quickly steered toward the topic of justice. Some argue that the historical Gorgias would never have conceded to the premises of rhetoric and justice in the dialogue thereby making the arguments invalid (McComisky 2002, 31). But whether Plato was completely true to the historical character or not is largely beside the point. What proponents of the historical Gorgias cannot dismiss is the rhetor’s claim to not teach virtue, an aspect of his character that set him apart from the rest of the sophists, and the aspect that in all likelihood is the impetus for Plato’s interest (Harrison 1964, 188).

So how does his denial of teaching virtue relate to a false opinion about justice? To understand this there must first be mention of how the term was used in fifth-century



Greece. Irwin, in his commentary on the dialogue, gives a good understanding of the term:

*Arētē*, normally translated by virtue or excellence, refers quite generally to whatever properties make a thing good, *agathon*, at something or for some purpose...Gorgias denies that he teaches virtue because, unlike Protagoras, he does not claim to teach the recognized virtues which will make someone an all-round good citizen. But he can claim to teach *a* virtue, since he claims that the power gained by being a rhetor is a good for the rhetor himself. (1979, 122)

Harrison agrees with Irwin's conclusion and is quick to dismiss Gorgias's denial of teaching virtue as "lacking any real substance" (1964, 189). In his opening lines in the dialogue, Gorgias not only declares that he is a rhetor, but "a good one, if you wish to call me what I boast I am" (449a). This is followed by his assertion that he is able to make other men rhetors as well. Surely these claims together are not a promise to make his pupils bad at rhetoric; his promise is to make them able men of the art, to give them "freedom for human beings themselves and at the same time rule over others in each man's city" (452d). Clearly he teaches virtue as ability.

But Irwin defined Gorgias's denial to teach virtue as a denial to make his pupils good citizens. This sets Gorgias apart from the other sophists found throughout the Platonic corpus. In fact, Plato is consistent in giving Gorgias preferential treatment in the dialogues over other sophists. The conversation between Socrates and Gorgias is not a sarcastic, humoristic one like in the *Hippias Major*, nor is it a quasi-competition as in the *Protagoras*, but it is a cautious discussion that does more to pique the rhetor's intrigue rather than anger or humiliate him. His role as a money-maker for selling his craft earns

him a spot with others sophists elsewhere in the dialogues (*Apology* 19d, *Hippias Major* 282B). But more remarkable is his absence from the gathering of sophists in the *Protagoras* and his own self labeling as “rhetor” rather than sophist in this dialogue (*Pro.* 314e-316b, *Gor.* 449a). There is an important difference between Gorgias and the rest that Plato wants discerned.

What the sophists meant by teaching virtue, as seen in the *Protagoras*, is a very similar to the education just outlined by Gorgias: a promise of “success in political debate and action” (319a). Socrates sums up this education as “art of citizenry” (319a). Gorgias, on the other hand, seeks only to define his art in terms of persuasion (453a, 454b, 455a). This persuasion focuses on political aspects (being in a law court, gaining rule over others, etc.) but Gorgias never calls it an art of politics or citizenry. First and foremost it is an art of persuasion.

What does this show about Gorgias’s opinion about the art? Perhaps it shows a deeper care, or a greater passion, than what the other sophists have. While both his initial claim to be a good rhetor and his finale in the *Helen* might be seen as arrogance they can also be a demonstration of his care for the craft. He takes it seriously, while enjoying it immensely. Neither is he when he states that his art is the best and greatest, nor is he simply pandering to potential pupils; he truly believes there is a greatness in the art that surpasses all others. He does what he does because he cannot help himself, which relegates money-making to a secondary concern. It is hard to say where money-making ranks for the sophists in the other dialogues. A greater care for the art (perhaps a greater *eros*) and less care for money-making account for Plato’s preferential treatment of Gorgias.

How does this relate to Gorgias's denial to teach virtue? It is because his main goal is not educating but practicing his art, perhaps something not too uncommon with some professors in academia today who are more interested in research than in shaping young minds. So the important thing to understand about his denial of teaching virtue is realizing he has little care for it. The relativistic nature of *logos* makes an idea of virtue, or good citizenry, superfluous or irrelevant. He can be considered agnostic on the question of virtue, which allows him to define his art as amoral.

Plato, on the other hand, understands virtue in the morally laden sense that is more typical of its use today. This is crucial to understanding the thesis of the dialogue. Plato believes that despite Greek culture's understanding of virtue as good by effective use, there is an inner understanding in all of us that concurs with understanding virtue as good for the soul. McKim calls this the "Socratic Axiom," which states: "for Socrates, virtue is always supremely beneficial *to the moral agent himself* as well as to those toward whom he acts virtuously, whereas vice, in addition to the material harm it inflicts on others, is always supremely harmful to the agent, being bad for the health of his soul" (1988, 35). Part of Socrates's intent in questioning Gorgias is to bring him to realize that he too believes this axiom, and that his ambivalence toward virtue is itself unjust.

Following the drama of the dialogue closely will show the rhetor's stance toward virtue, which will be revealed by uncovering Gorgias's false opinions about justice. To do this Socrates will have to question the rhetor in his usual way, which requires putting aside Gorgias's show rhetoric and following a course of conversation instead (447c). Gorgias, having just made an offer to answer any question posed to him, gladly agrees to answer Socrates, expecting it to be a demonstration of his skill (449c).

The first question posed asks for a definition of rhetoric which does not come easily. In compliance with Socrates's request to give brief answers, Gorgias first concludes that rhetoric is about speeches (449e). But this is too vague; medicine, arithmetic, and even gymnastic all require speech. What are rhetorical speeches about that makes them different? Still not getting to the point, Gorgias tries to differentiate between arts that use manual skill and those that do not. Rhetoric produces its "whole action and decisive effect" without manual input (450c). After a third request for clarification, the rhetor draws the conclusion that rhetoric is speeches about "the greatest of human affairs, and the best" (451d). But does not the doctor claim health is the best thing for humans, and the trainer claims beauty is, and the moneymaker wealth?

With a little more prodding Gorgias arrives at almost a clear answer: rhetoric, with its decisive effect through speech, causes "freedom for human beings...and rule over others in each man's own city" which includes persuading judges, assemblymen, councilors, and any type of man in every "political gathering" (452d-453a). Socrates sums this up succinctly: rhetoric is the craftsman of persuasion. Gorgias is happy with this answer; what makes this answer pleasing to him is that persuasion is the "chief point" (453a). Through speech, Gorgias has been able to persuade the politically powerful, which he did in 427 BCE as an ambassador sent to Athens to ask for assistance against Syracuse. He has also been able to persuade many into becoming his pupils by having them believe he has value to impart to them. But perhaps most important, he has been able to persuade himself that his art is good and valuable.

Socrates takes an approach that addresses these three areas: persuading the politically powerful, the potential pupil, and one's self. Working in reverse order, the

philosopher gives an example of how he persuades himself. Self-persuasion, as the dialogue will show, is ultimately what rhetoric, or better stated noble rhetoric, is about. This first inkling toward a noble purpose or use for rhetoric will grow from this quiet interjection to a harsh refutation by the end of the dialogue, culminating in a new outlook for politics and philosophy.

Socrates's own use of self-persuasion is to ascertain the bottom-line truth of any argument (453b). This shows Socrates's openness to discussion and his desire to know, placing knowledge higher than verbal victory on a hierarchy of importance. What matters is the truth that comes from the argument. This is in contrast to Gorgias's use of self-persuasion, which had been to instill a deep care for rhetoric above anything else, including justice. What matters to him is the ability to craft the argument in any way desired through *logos*.

This mention of self-persuasion is preparation for a refutation of Gorgias's false opinion on justice. While dialectic was Plato's general scientific method, rhetoric is a special psychological application of it (Black 1958, 369). Noble rhetoric's purpose is refutation, primarily to refute or persuade ourselves against our own false opinions. Socrates takes extra care at this point to show his sincerity toward the argument, not toward verbal victory. This is the first of many coddlings that Socrates will offer the rhetor to ensure Gorgias does not become personally offended and therefore sticks with the argument. As will be seen, these coddlings will work, for, unlike the other participants in the dialogue, Gorgias will remain an active, though mostly silent, participant.

Next Socrates has Gorgias focus on his ability to persuade potential pupils by asking whether any other art persuades. Socrates gives teaching as an example and

Gorgias replies in the affirmative, acknowledging that instructive arts also persuade (453d). Just as other arts also use speeches, clarification is sought here by asking about what is rhetoric persuasive? The answer reveals an unforeseen, or better yet, neglected aspect of Gorgias's role as a teacher. The rhetor replies that it is persuasion in the law courts, "about the just and the unjust" (454b).

This is an important turn in the drama. Just raised is an issue that connects virtue and rhetoric, so how can Gorgias claim not to teach virtue when his whole art revolves around a part of virtue, being the just and the unjust? This admission that rhetoric is about the just and unjust may not be a completely sincere answer. Levett believes this simply refers "to a common-sense, general knowledge of laws, customs, values and even the procedures that pertain in such circumstances" (2005, 212). This is an emphasis on place rather than value. Nichols notes that it is more an advertisement to the potential students listening by forcing Gorgias to leave behind a universal art of persuasiveness and instead focus on the rhetorical area most in demand, "politics in general and judicial proceedings in particular" (1998, 132-133). Alternatively, Kahn offers that in, order to protect himself from expulsion from the city, Gorgias, a foreigner to Athens, has to keep hidden both his ambivalence toward virtue and the unjust nature of rhetoric to avoid "suspicion and hostility" from the families of the youth that surround him (1983, 80-81).

Socrates, however, is concerned with having Gorgias come face to face with his false opinion about justice. This point, though, is not yet apparent to Gorgias. It not likely that Gorgias is thinking of virtue in the same manner as Socrates, nor is it likely that Gorgias is connecting virtue to justice at this point. To ensure that Gorgias does not begin to think Socrates is trying to corner him into harm or embarrassment, Socrates

offers another coddling, again confirming the conclusion of the argument as the most important thing (454b-c).

The focus is now on the third example of rhetorical persuasion, the politically powerful. Socrates eases into addressing the political aspect by first focusing on persuasion. Two types exist, that which teaches and that which inspires belief. When asked which type of persuasion rhetoric engenders Gorgias answers, “it’s clear, I suppose Socrates, that it’s the one from which believing comes” (454e). If the answer is clear, why does Gorgias add “I suppose,” thereby adding a touch of hesitation to his response? It is because he can see where this admission can lead and he is beginning to wonder whether Socrates is true to his consoling sidebars to put the argument over verbal victory. From this concession Socrates clarifies a new definition of rhetoric, stating it as “a craftsman of belief-inspiring but not didactic persuasion about the just and the unjust” (455a).

Now comes the focus on the persuasion of the political. Rhetoric is not didactic in the law courts due to two difficulties: a lack of time and the size of the audience. Both Nichols and Irwin see this as a sizeable attack on rhetoric, suggesting that the non-didactic nature shows a lack of concern with or a lack of knowledge about justice (1998, 37; 1979, 119). On the other hand, Stauffer sees no attack on rhetoric here, but counts this remark simply as an admission of the reality of political discourse and the necessity to speak both to the many and with little time, meaning that “the most effective political speech must include appeals to mere opinions and beliefs, having the necessary strength of instilling those very opinions or beliefs” (2006, 28). Whether this is an attack or a

support, the next statement will be a golden invitation for Gorgias to extol the good of rhetoric.

Suppose there is a situation where the city is in need of counsel, such as a pressing need to construct a dockyard. Socrates suggests that the city will seek counsel from “the most artful,” which in the case of the dockyard construction would be the architect, not a rhetor (455b). Prompting the opinion of Gorgias, the question is posed in chorus with the voices the potential students in attendance, “What will be ours Gorgias, if we associate with you? About what things will we be able to give counsel to the city?” (455d).

Gorgias is a clever man. He recognizes that Socrates has shied away from turning negative toward rhetoric, stating that the philosopher has “paved the way beautifully” (455e). He has been given an opportunity to present his art in the best light possible. Perhaps this makes the rhetor believe that Socrates is really concerned with the argument itself. It is not the craftsman who guides the city, but the rhetors, such as Pericles and Themistocles. This is the power of the rhetor, to victoriously give counsel and have their resolutions win over the craftsmen (456a).

Even as Socrates posed the question he already knew the answer. Themistocles’s accomplishments of constructing the Athenian navy were well known and Socrates personally heard Pericles counsel for the construction of the middle wall. Neither of the two was a craftsman for that which he counseled (455e). This was a essentially a free throw for Gorgias. This was a concession of the debate principle of charity: allowing the opponent the best position to defend their side. This charity will be built upon and provide another free throw for Gorgias. Socrates wonders at the power of rhetoric,



calling it “demonic in greatness,” which prompts Gorgias to deliver his longest speech in the dialogue as a praise of rhetoric.

The power of rhetoric is to gather under itself all things, making it more persuasive than any craftsman (456c). Gorgias then relays an anecdote of an experience with his brother, Herodicus the physician. The craftsman of health was unable to persuade a patient to submit to a treatment, but Gorgias, using only the power of rhetoric, was able to do so. The power of rhetoric is power: the ability through persuasion to make others do, think, and believe anything. Gorgias has finally answered the first part of Socrates’s initial inquiry.

But then Gorgias takes a confusing turn; he begins a defense of rhetoric. Why offer a defense? Was an accusation given? Gorgias claims that, like any other competitive art, the trainer should not be blamed for the misuse of the art; just as a boxing trainer should not be blamed for a student who beats his parents, the rhetor should not be blamed for the unjust use of rhetoric. Dodds suggests that this may have been an illustration from the historical Gorgias himself (1959, 212). Rhetoric’s tendency toward injustice has been the anticipated point in the dialogue ever since Gorgias defined rhetoric as being about the just and unjust; however, it was anticipated that Socrates make this point instead of the rhetor.

But still, why offer a defense? Why not continue to praise the power of rhetoric and give more examples of how it is good? Would not this do more to both please the crowd and answer Socrates’s inquiry? There are two possible answers. First, it is possible that Gorgias realizes that the good examples of rhetoric do not show the preeminence of the art but demonstrate its subservience to another art, such as how

rhetoric served medicine. Rhetoric did not diagnose the medical problem, and persuading the patient to submit to the treatment does nothing to elevate rhetoric over medicine. If the patient is cured it is the doctor, not the rhetor, who will be praised. Additionally, it is more probable that Gorgias assisted at his brother's request; there is no glory in rhetoric exerting itself over medicine. In a similar manner, the examples of Themistocles and Pericles previously given also show how rhetoric was subservient to the greater interests of the common good of the state.

Second, it is possible that he can think of no good example of the exercise of this power unless it reveals his ambivalence toward justice or an unjust exercise of the power. The best he can do is exculpate himself by claiming (insincerely) that rhetoric is taught justly, thereby placing the blame of unjust use on wayward students. Gorgias has no guilt blaming students in this way because through his practice of rhetoric he never committed an overt act of injustice. This raises an important point when talking about the unjust side of rhetoric: power. Ranasinghe describes Gorgias's desire for power well, "The sophists see human beings as so many frogs living around a Mediterranean Sea of words, but [Gorgias] does not seek to be the Frog-King's speechwriter or a predatory Water Moccasin" (2009, 32). Unlike the other participants in the dialogue, Gorgias has little or no desire for power, which is why he can remain amoral toward justice and virtue. The greater desire for power by the other participants will force them to adopt an immoral stance.

Realizing that Gorgias anticipates an embarrassing attack upon rhetoric or himself, Socrates slows down to coddle the rhetor again. Dodds notes that "Plato was always careful to distinguish Socratic dialectic, which aims only at the attainment of

truth, from its vulgar counterfeit, the ‘eristic’ or ‘antilogic,’ which aims at personal victory” (1959, 213). The coddling here, however, is more to prepare the rhetor for the next potential knock to rhetoric rather than reassure him of the argument’s importance over verbal victory. Socrates is about to reveal the greatest evil.

The coddling at this part emphasizes that Socrates is happier to be refuted than to refute because it is “the greater good to be released oneself from the greatest evil...For I think that nothing is so great an evil for a human being as false opinion about the things that our argument now happens to be about” (458a-b). The argument currently is about the just use of rhetoric. A false opinion about the just use of rhetoric is a false opinion about justice itself, which is the greatest evil.

Several reasons show why this has been an overlooked aspect in the *Gorgias*. One is that the definition of the greatest evil gets confused during the dialogue. Two other places where Socrates speaks of the greatest evil show it as doing injustice, and doing injustice without suffering the just penalty (469b, 479d). While these bear similarities to one another, the difference between them boils down to thought versus action. Which is worse, thinking or committing an unjust act? Even though committing an unjust act in ignorance might make thought the more heinous part, most seem to side with the commission. But referring again to the point made by Hobbes, actions proceed from opinion, or thought. Additionally, the drama of the dialogue will show that false opinion is the greater concern for the participants as no one truly has the stomach to actually commit such unjust deeds as they extol.

A second reason why false opinion is the greatest evil is overlooked is simply that, it gets overlooked. The topics of discussion in the dialogue bounce around with

great variety. The question about rhetoric turns into a discussion on flattery, then tyranny, followed by punishment, shame, justice, philosophy, politics, pleasure, good, happiness, injury, courage, and death. With so many topics receiving attention, this sentence gets only passing mention by commentators, like Olympiodorus, who simply emphasizes that a false opinion about a great matter leads to great harm (1998, 107). Dodds also gives it passing mention, recognizing that “something more fundamental (is at stake), a whole *weltanschauung*,” relating it to two other references about man’s happiness at 472c and 500c (1959, 215), but fails to make a larger connection to anything else in the dialogue. Closer attention to these passages about happiness make clear the importance of having a correct opinion about justice in order to obtain happiness.

A third and final reason why the greatest evil being a false opinion of justice is overlooked is that Socrates appears to not be able to persuade anyone in the dialogue. Toward the end of each section, there are no firm statements of agreement with Socrates from the discussants, but ambivalent declarations that Socrates is able to make everything harmonize (460e, 480e, 513c). This causes a focus more on Socrates’s technique rather than substance, which is revealed to be rhetorical, making rhetoric the sole central theme of the dialogue rather than a triumvirate of rhetoric, the greatest evil, and politics. But overlooked link between these themes is that the self-persuasion of noble rhetoric is self-refutation, to confront and deny our own beliefs in order to correct and adhere to a true understanding of justice.

A sign of having a false opinion is internal dissonance. The Socratic axiom states that everyone has the correct, moral understanding of virtue, but for some reason or other a false opinion takes supremacy. In the lengthy coddling that revealed the greatest evil,

Socrates notes such a dissonance in Gorgias, claiming that he is “saying things not quite consequent or consistent with what you were saying at first about rhetoric” (457e). This is a polite way of bringing up his dissonance, consistent with the rest of the coddling paragraph.

Socrates spells out this dissonance a little later, swearing “by the dog” that understanding this is no small matter (461b). The use of the oath “by the dog” turns into a dramatic element that signals when Socrates is addressing the participants’ internal lack of harmony. Later on, Socrates will expand this oath to “by the dog, god of the Egyptians!” (482b). The significance of this is described by Blackwood, Crossett, and Long. The dog-like god of the Egyptians was Anubis, who, at the doors to the underworld, would weigh the heart of the recently deceased in order to measure truth and deception. The weighing of the heart would consist in a “negative confession,” wherein the dead would make such statements as “I have not done iniquity” and “I have not uttered falsehood” (Blackwood et al 1962, 318). Only the truthful were allowed to pass. Socrates, in a similar manner, thus weighs the hearts of his participants against the Socratic standard of virtue and swears the oath when a falsehood is spoken or otherwise uncovered.

Rather than pursue his lack of harmony, Gorgias tries to excuse himself from the argument by stating that the crowd must be tired from listening to him for so long. The crowd, however, gives an uproar of approval to hear the conversation to its end. Ashamed to not live up to his offer to answer any question put to him, he reluctantly continues. His reluctance to further pursue his inconsistency openly is centered upon his devotion to his art. He is convinced that rhetoric is a good thing despite the bad face it is

putting on. He probably believes this because he is so good at it. Being good at it makes him feel good and therefore it must be good. But at the same time he cannot name why it is good. He has demonstrated that it is power, but can offer no just example of the art without diminishing its power with the taint of injustice. Socrates will attempt to show Gorgias that his ambivalence to virtue is what is keeping him from naming what is good about rhetoric. In order to do that, Gorgias will have to give real consideration to justice, a necessary step to overcome his false opinion.

The argument then shows that the rhetor is more persuasive only to the ignorant. A group of experts would not be persuaded by his seeming knowledge. The whole system of rhetoric is simply to “discover a certain device of persuasion” to appear to know (459a-c). This is perhaps a worse blow to rhetoric than demonstrating its tendency toward injustice. But allowing Gorgias to bring up the question of justice softens the reception of the this critique. Gorgias can see the implication of this and again he tries to save it, not by offering what is good to counter what makes it look bad, but again trying to appeal to its power. Just by learning this one art, still the rhetor “in no way gets the worse of it from the craftsman” (459c). This seems to be a call for a judgment on the quality of rhetoric, but Socrates will withhold from stating whether it is good or not until another time, which will come in the discussion with Polus when the art itself is actually defined by the philosopher.

Socrates wants Gorgias to stay focused on the issue of justice, so he asks the obvious question: if rhetoric is about the just and unjust, has the rhetor simply discovered a device to appear to know justice, or does he really know it? Had he stopped here this would have been quite a damaging question for Gorgias to answer, but Socrates does

something interesting. He changes the focus of the question and asks whether the student of rhetoric needs to know these things before coming to the teacher of rhetoric or can they be taught later. Gorgias concedes that he would teach his students if they did not know. Notice that this answer responds only to the second question about the students and does not directly answer the question about the teacher. Implicit in the concession to the student question is an acknowledgement for the teacher to truly know justice, but this goes by with little attention called to it. It is here, in this affirmative response by Gorgias, that Socrates has made his point: you cannot claim to be ambivalent about justice and virtue when your art is centered upon them, and your deep care for the art is really a deep care for justice.

Nichols notes that Gorgias must be feeling two things at this point: intrigue and a puzzled gratitude (1998, 136). The gratitude stems from being let off easy by not having to respond directly that the rhetor must be a knower of justice; the intrigue stems from the next set of questions. Socrates presents a paradox: if someone who learns carpentry is called a carpenter, is the man who learns justice called a just man? Moreover, as a carpenter performs carpentry, does the knower of just necessarily do just things (460b)? Paradox may have been a playful thing for Gorgias, but he sees no levity in what is presently before him

The logical problems of the argument are obvious. The substitution of a value for a profession in the analogy given is a not comparing apples to apples. Additionally, there is no guarantee that the knower of justice will do only justice, never committing injustice. But this matter of justice is not the main point Socrates is trying to make. His point has already been made to Gorgias: he cannot take justice and virtue so ambivalently. The

conclusion of the argument turns the attention of the crowd away from Gorgias the man to rhetoric the art. Gorgias wants to know why Socrates has not pressed the point against himself, and that is why he will remain as a small, but crucial, participant in the dialogue.

Gorgias, the father of rhetoric and sophistic, was a novel writer to be sure. But it was not his novelty in writing that attracted Socrates, but his sincerity for his art and his ambivalence to virtue. His sincerity for his art will make him open to a discussion that will lead to a deeper discussion about justice and virtue. If the dialogue were a polemic against rhetoric then Socrates passed up some very opportune moments to attack. The purpose of the dialogue, however, is to combat the greatest evil, having a false opinion about justice. Socrates is successful in getting Gorgias to open himself up to what he really thinks about justice and what the consequences of his beliefs mean for his art and his life. He recognizes that Socrates is not out to harm him, both by the many cautious statements denying the desire for mere verbal victory and by actually passing up the many opportunities to humiliate the rhetor in front of a large crowd. But to really push Gorgias over the edge to make him confront the consequences of his ambivalence toward justice, Socrates will have Gorgias see the fruit of his labor. Perhaps because he was in so much demand Gorgias never stayed in any place long enough to see how his pupils would use the art he had taught them. But now, one of his students will take over the discussion, forcing Gorgias to come to grips with what a promise of power without the restraints of virtue looks like.



## CHAPTER 3

### POLUS

Polus of Acgras, like his teacher Gorgias, is also from Sicily. His name in Greek means “colt,” which suits his nature as he is young and brash, often careless as well. He is an advanced student in rhetoric, having written a treatise on the subject that Socrates mentions at 462b, apparently familiar enough with it to quote it. This makes Polus something like a published graduate student. He is mentioned by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* and Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* also makes a short note about him. Otherwise, little else is known about the historical person.

What purpose does Polus have in the dialogue? He is treated harshly in the literature, many noting how dim-witted he is and how badly he argues. Most treat him as a simple stepping stone to get to the real meat of the dialogue: the Callicles section. These statements are true but miss the larger point. Each successive participant opens the existing discussion a little further, brings out a little more of the bitterness in the work, and also goes in new directions. The previous chapter ended with the thought that Gorgias needed to view what his art produced in order to turn away from his false opinions of justice and virtue. But Polus himself will also present his own unique false opinions.

So what false opinions does Polus have? The drama of the dialogue reveals it. Polus first appears in the very beginning, before Gorgias utters a word. Socrates asks his companion Chaerephon to ask the rhetor “who he is,” but it is Polus who impetuously jumps in to answer. His justification for answering in place of his teacher is that he can answer as well as his teacher (448b). His answers, however, prove no better than

Gorgias's first responses. Instead of offering a direct answer he delves into a detailed praise of the art, apparently quoting himself from his own work. Because no praise or defense was called for, Socrates accuses Polus of practicing rhetoric, which is the first mention of the term in the dialogue (448d).

Polus's response to the accusation of not answering but practicing rhetoric is "did not I answer that it was the finest?" (448e). This response is very telling. This mistake of stating worth in lieu of a definition is a mistake all the participants will make, but perhaps Polus takes this correction a little personally. Like his master, Polus has a deep care for rhetoric, but unlike his master, it is not a care for the art itself. It is a care for what the art can get him: power and reputation. Everything he does in the dialogue is to set himself up as a good rhetor, which takes the form of praising and protecting the art itself. This will lead him to claim that the rhetor is like a tyrant, powerful enough to do anything he desires, such as beat, steal, and kill at will (466b). This praise of injustice, however, is all show, for Polus has courage enough only to commit the injustice of being ungrateful toward his teacher by trying to establish himself as greater. Socrates will thus go about combating this false opinion by eroding what Polus thinks is good about rhetoric and reputation.

As noted, his initial interruption was to prove his rhetoric is as sufficient as that of his teacher. His subsequent interruption that begins his long section in the dialogue is upon slightly different grounds, that he knows what Gorgias knows (462a). These two things, being equal in style and knowledge, put him on par with his teacher, but what sets him above is that, unlike his teacher, he will not fall prey to shame. It was shame that caused Gorgias to admit that he would teach the knowledge of the just to his students if

they did not know them (461b). It was fear of the crowd, losing students, being deported, but mostly fear of defacing rhetoric that caused Gorgias to go along with Socrates.

Unlike his master, Polus is courageous (or shameless) enough to fully speak his mind.

Polus is correct that it was shame that caused Gorgias to admit that rhetoric is about the just and unjust, but it was not shame that caused him to fall silent toward the end. Gorgias's silence came from a sudden self-realization brought about by Plato's paradox: can an art about the just and unjust not truly know or care about justice?

Gorgias is beginning to think this is not possible. The young colt jumps into the conversation so fast it is difficult to discern whether Gorgias would have continued the conversation. His subsequent contributions to the dialogue suggest that he would have.

The apparent shamelessness of Polus to speak his true mind on these things points toward his own false opinions about justice. Much like his teacher, he has a sense of ambivalence toward the question of justice. This stems mostly from a lack of intent to actually commit injustice, or at least overt acts of injustice. The student, however, is more self-centered than the teacher, and desires from rhetoric not an art, but reputation. He truly is an example of the unjust student Gorgias outlined, which will make this part of the dialogue a pertinent example of what his craft, a practice that teaches the power of power without the restraints of morality, looks like. In this way, the Polus section is a continued conversation with Gorgias as well as an attempt to address the false opinions of Polus.

Polus's lack of sincerity toward rhetoric will cause Socrates to refrain from the coddling he showed Gorgias. His large ego will call for a harsher refutation than Gorgias needed. As a result Socrates will begin to display the bitterness the dialogue is known

for. But why is bitterness necessary? Fussi describes it well when she writes, “we can understand why the *Gorgias* sounds so bitter to its readers. It is as bitter as the bitter drugs Socrates claims to be administering to his interlocutors. It is the work of a doctor, not that of a cook. It uses rhetorical devices, not to please us, but so that we may be willing to discard them” (2000, 54). Gorgias’s anecdote of the doctor and the rhetorician becomes more pertinent now. The cure for a false opinion about justice is in the understanding of the nature of justice, which is the work of the philosopher. Socrates can offer them a cure, but it will be a doctor offering it to a stubborn patient who refuses to submit to treatment. So rather than elaborate on the nature of justice, Socrates will play the role of the rhetor and use rhetoric to persuade them to refute their own false opinions. Since rhetoric is not a didactic art, Socrates will not be teaching about justice, but using a persuasive device to convince the participants that their own opinions are false. As such, the arguments presented in the Polus section will contain several logic flaws; they are not perfect proofs about the tenets they uphold. Rather than reveal absolute truth, they will reveal how Polus feels about justice, which is the first step toward self-refutation.

The first difference in treatment tailored for Polus is that he is allowed to ask the questions. This is unusual for a Platonic dialogue; Socrates typically serves as the questioner and rarely gives as frank an answer as he does here. This, however, is mere placebo for Polus. Though he thinks he is in control of the discussion, Socrates will blatantly direct Polus on which questions to ask and how to ask them, eventually assuming the reigns of questioning completely. Right from the first question, which asks for a definition of rhetoric, Socrates redirects how the questioning proceeds. Before asking what rhetoric is, Socrates states that what is needed first is to know whether it is

an art (462b). It is no art, but rather an experience “in the production of a certain grace and pleasure” (462c).

Not even attempting to understand what this means Polus asks if this definition does not mean that rhetoric is a fine thing. Throughout, Polus will seek the commendation of rhetoric, which really serves his own aggrandizement. Socrates, however, is afraid to give a fuller meaning of rhetoric in fear of offending Gorgias, who might think that Socrates is trying to attack him personally. This further coddling of Gorgias, even when he is not the main participant in the dialogue, is the first proof that Socrates is not done conversing with the rhetor (Friedländer 1969, 253). But Gorgias gives his assurance and encourages the philosopher to “speak without feeling ashamed before me” (463a). What might be added to the end of that is “unlike how I was ashamed to speak before you,” a sign that the rhetor has begun to take the pill of self-refutation.

Socrates’s initial inquiry of Gorgias was to discover the power of the art and to ascertain what the rhetor professes and teaches. The former was discussed, the latter only slightly and indirectly. But all along Socrates has had a “suspicion” of what Gorgias teaches. Although Socrates offers his last coddling of Gorgias by suggesting that he is unsure that what he is about to say is “the same rhetoric that Gorgias pursues,” what is described seems to be exactly what the rhetor pursues and teaches (462e; Stauffer 2006, 44).

Rhetoric is a part of flattery. It is not an art, but simply an experience, learned by someone good at guessing with sufficient cleverness and courage. It belongs with the other experiences that shadow true arts: cookery, cosmetic, and sophistry. Flattery thus consists of these four parts, and rhetoric is the part of flattery that is the phantom of

politics (463b-d). Polus, however, is still not listening, for he immediately asks whether rhetoric is a fine thing or not. Socrates responds no, it is not fine, but shameful. At this point someone who is listening, Gorgias, interrupts and admits he does not comprehend, to which Socrates concurs that he has not said anything clear yet. The conversation now takes an important dramatic turn and puts Gorgias back in the participant's seat. With an active, open participant, Socrates is able to pursue a more dialectical course and begins a didactic exposition of the nature of flattery, which will hint toward the nature of justice. This leads to the discussion of what Plochman and Robinson call "the Divided Oblong" (1988, 63-70). There are other, more simple, diagrams that outline what Socrates explains here, but Plochman and Robinson correctly see that the structure created here creates "a context that will retain for the rest of the dialogue" (1988, 57).

The name is derived from its similarity to the divided line in Book 6 of the *Republic* (509d-513e). The subject matter of the divided line of the *Republic* is one-dimensional, dealing with the nature of existence, the subject matter in the *Gorgias* is two-dimensional, extending the line into a rectangle, or oblong. The oblong outlines the best care of both body and soul. The example runs from 464b-466a, and goes as follows: there exist both body and soul and each has a particular business, or art, which governs it, looking toward what is best. The business of the soul is politics; the business of the body Socrates is unable to name. While the business of both body and soul is singular, each art branches into two parts, gymnastic and medicine for the body and the legislative art and justice for the soul. Then came flattery, which by luck and experience discovered how to mimic these true arts, replacing the care of the best with folly and whatever is pleasant. In a geometrical fashion, the correlating flatteries align with the true arts as follows: "as

cosmetic is to gymnastic, so is sophistry to the legislative art; as cookery is to medicine, so is rhetoric to justice” (465c).

There is a significant amount of work going on in this framework. There is a juxtaposition of internal versus external. It is easy to recognize the external nature of the body compared to the internal soul, as well as the external beauty gymnastic creates and the internal health made by medicine. But if this dichotomy is to be used throughout the framework, it becomes a little more difficult to understand legislation as external and justice as internal. To complicate this, while the idea of a soul is intuitively internal, an understanding of politics is not. More on this internal/external aspect will be discussed shortly.

Also involved is a suggested, though not explicitly stated, hierarchy of the arts. While the divisions within body and soul share similarities they also maintain distinct differences, though what these differences are goes unmentioned (464c). Stauffer believes that the lack of differentiation suggests “the difference is between seeking the correction of an ill condition (medicine/justice) and the pursuit of further development beyond a basic state of health (gymnastic/legislation)” (2006, 46). In other words, he puts the external factors as deserving a higher place than the internal ones. Plochman and Robinson agree, and conclude that legislation and sophistic are the true arts of body and soul that Socrates is trying to emphasize (1988, 68).

What leads Stauffer to make this assumption is an unspoken implication that this framework makes about justice: “namely, that justice serves merely to remedy a flawed situation” (2006, 46). I disagree. As Stauffer would outline it, the art of politics is the art of legislation, meaning that perfect laws will achieve a perfection to politics; justice is

merely a corrective principle to help achieve this perfection. This suggests that flawed legislation simply lacks justice, but what I believe is being presented is that flawed legislation is a reflection of flawed justice. The art of politics is not to create perfect laws, but to create perfect justice. From perfect justice will flow perfect laws, and both working together will create perfection to the art of politics.

The suggested hierarchy should thus put the internal over the external. Medicine ranks over gymnastic because even the most beautiful body can fall victim to horrible disease, rendering the body terribly unhealthy. Though lacking nothing in the appearance of perfection, an internal disease can render the body useless. Similarly, laws may have the appearance of justice, possibly even providing great benefits such as wealth and power to the community, but appearances can be deceiving. The only way to ensure that justice pervades the laws is to be a knower of justice. It requires a complete understanding of the nature of justice. This is why the greatest evil is to have a false opinion about justice: justice ranks the highest on importance in what is best for human beings.

The question still remains as to why the business/art of the soul is politics. If a complete understanding of justice is what is required to perfect the most important aspect of human excellence, then shouldn't Socrates claim the business of the soul is philosophy? Additionally, politics seems to be an external thing; would not it be a more appropriate name for the business/art of the body? One possibility is that naming the art of the soul as politics may be a rhetorical function. Shortly after finishing this illustration Socrates notes how he has just "done something strange": that he just finished a long, extended speech when he had forbidden Polus from doing the same thing (465e).



Additionally, the Divided Oblong may not be a complete account of the hierarchy of the best condition of both body and soul and their corresponding arts, but simply a device to persuade. There are several questions that suggest this framework is incomplete: do the businesses of both body and soul really only boil down to their two respective branches? Why does flattery desire to mimic the true arts? Does it simply seek folly and pleasure on whim, or is there something more to it? Where do the examples Gorgias gave of Pericles and Themistocles fit into politics as the art of the soul? Surely their work to establish Athens as an imperial power is tied to legislation but seems more directed at the body?

Though lacking in a fullness of content, and laced with rhetoric, this framework still represents Socrates's thoughts and opinions. What it takes to wrap this all together is further clarification on the art of politics, which will come in the Calicles section. To address the false opinions of Gorgias and Polus, completing this illustration is not necessary, which is why after establishing this framework, Socrates changes direction. He has just made an important connection between rhetoric and justice and could continue on that point to further educate Gorgias, but instead he turns the argument back over to Polus, leaving justice behind and returning to flattery. The reason flattery, and thus rhetoric, is no art is because it provides no reasoned account, no *logos*, "as to what sort of things they are in their nature" (465a).

Polus, however, pays no attention to the greater lesson of the Divided Oblong, focusing only on rhetoric as part of flattery. Concerned with praising rhetoric (and himself) Polus asks if rhetoric is simply flattery, which is more of a statement that he does not agree that it is as base as Socrates has made it seem. His follow-up question

asks whether rhetors are esteemed as lowly flatters, which is again more of a statement than a question. With Gorgias present, and the large crowd that has come to hear him, Polus's understanding that the rhetor is indeed esteemed highly is obvious, and so is his desire to be esteemed like Gorgias.

Socrates, recognizing that Polus is not making any progress, starts a new strategy. Moving away from answering whether rhetoric is noble or base he instead asserts that rhetors are neither esteemed nor powerful. This takes the wind out of Polus's sails, for these are the two things he desires from rhetoric. But this tactic is successful in directing Polus toward the topic of justice.

Polus's reply is largely misunderstood. His reply is that rhetors are powerful like tyrants, who kill, steal, and expel whom and what they wish (466c). This has led to commentators referring to the "tyrant Polus," or other such remarks that define his true desire as reigning like a tyrant (Ranasinghe 2009, 55). This is almost the complete opposite of the case. Polus has no desire to be a tyrant; he has no stomach for tyrannical acts, as will be shown in the course of the dialogue. The introduction of the tyrant serves as a reference to esteem the power of the rhetor. Of all the commentators on this dialogue Stauffer seems to understand it best as he refers to this argument as "rhetorician-tyrant" example, emphasis on the rhetor (2006, 51).

All the praise and admiration of the tyrant ultimately points back to the power of the rhetor. Understanding this reveals the false opinion that Polus carries about justice. As a sign that Socrates is preparing to confront Polus's false opinion, he again swears "by the dog" and asserts that even Polus does not believe the things Polus is saying (466ce). This dissonance derives from internal conflict with the Socratic Axiom, the

understanding that everyone holds to virtue as good for the soul, regardless of what we claim to believe.

The medicine needed to cure Polus's false opinion has to be a strong one to match his ego, so Socrates lays it on heavy here. He overbearingly asserts himself against the young rhetor, demanding a refutation from him. Perplexed, all Polus can do is insult Socrates, to which Socrates charges that if Polus cannot ask then he should answer. Perhaps a little relieved at the offer Polus gives up the reigns of questioner (467c). Back in the driver's seat, Socrates will continue to administer to Polus the bitter pill that will bring him to a realization of his internal conflict over justice.

He begins with explaining why tyrants do not do what they wish. The basic premise is that we all wish for what is best, and all things that we do are for the sake of that good (468c). The importance here is that we do not take certain actions just to perform those actions, but all actions point toward some end. Therefore, the power of the tyrant to kill, steal, and expel at will is irrational, for he does not do these things simply on whim, but for something beneficial. And when the tyrant is mistaken about what is beneficial, his power to kill is no power at all.

While it may be true that our actions point toward some ultimate good, the logic of the argument does not establish that following after a mistaken good leads to a lack of power. This point has not gone unnoticed, but those who focus on the logical flaws miss the greater point that Irwin states well:

So Socrates's conclusion that someone who fails to do what is good for him thereby shows that he has no power is unjustified; Polus is still free to maintain that the rhetor or tyrant is powerful. But Socrates has shown that if I do not have

correct beliefs about what is good for me, I lack the power to achieve my own good, which I want above all, and so I lack the power which is an unqualified good promoting my over-all welfare. (1979, 146)

Polus realizes this to a degree, but he still is confused about his ultimate good. This reveals a desire for and concordance with justice, but there is one major problem still confronting him: being just often means being unjustly acted upon. Is not it then better to do such things, even kill unjustly, if it means a certain protection from suffering injustice?

Socrates firmly responds in the negative, confirming that “doing injustice happens to be the greatest evil” (469b). Understanding Polus’s thought here shows how the greatest evil presented as committing injustice really points back to his false opinion. So Polus challenges Socrates on that point the only way he can think of, claiming that even the philosopher would prefer to do injustice than suffer it. But Socrates holds his ground. Polus is not yet convinced, and he falls back to one of his original tenets- having power is doing what one wants according to his opinion. Polus is trying to throw out that we need to question our opinions, for it seems obvious that everyone wants to seek their desires, have the power to do so, and not suffer is the course of the exercising that power (469c). The witness of the many here overpowers most of the progress that Polus has made in questioning his own opinions. Surely so many people cannot be wrong.

As his response, Socrates offers the allegory of the dagger. The allegory supposes that Socrates came into possession of a dagger and, showing it to Polus, claimed that he has assumed a great, tyrannical power that will allow him to kill, beat, and otherwise exercise great power. The reason that this is no great power is because a punishment is

sure to follow. But the real reason Socrates offers this allegory is to get Polus to think about punishment and offers a way to be able to do these tyrannical things without punishment. Polus, however, is disappointed when the philosopher reveals that these acts go unpunished when they are done justly (470c). Polus was expecting the Archelaus answer, which is what he offers as his rebuttal.

Archelaus of Macedon rose to power by committing a slew of murders of his family members. Polus details many of his gruesome acts on the premise that these things had made him happy (471a-d). Socrates will have none of it, for a man's happiness is measured by his education and justice. But rather than focus on happiness, on elaborating on why education and justice are appropriate measurements, Socrates instead outlines how the Archelaus answer is merely a rhetorical attack. This is the more appropriate course to attack Polus's false opinions about justice.

There are three rhetorical techniques that Polus employs. First, his rhetorical attack resorts to the witness of the many. There are two problems with this, one being that even the witness of many can still be false, and the other being that the sheer number of the witnesses often is sufficient to persuade without hearing the other side. Socrates notes this latter aspect when he states that Polus is "attempting to expel (him) from (his) substance and truth" (472b).

Rather than many witnesses Socrates will provide just one, Polus himself, to prove his point. This becomes Socrates's main point to demonstrate, to set the two refutations side by side, that of the many against that of the one, to show which is better when searching for truth. Proving the latter over the former will help Polus come to

understand his own stance on justice, for Socrates uses this method to answer the chief point between them, “how to either know or ignore who is happy and who is not” (472d).

Second, Polus’s rhetorical attack relies on “frightening with bogeymen” (473d). Polus tries to back up his points by outlining the horrible consequences of being unjustly acted upon, including being tortured, castrated, and killed. The truth of the matter is that when justice is concerned there can be no fear of these things, even if it means death (480d, 522e). Socrates can state this because his few acts in politics threatened him with these things, including his refusal to call to vote the condemnation of the generals at the battle of Arginusae, as well as his refusal to recall Leon the Salaminian (474a, *Apology* 32c).

Third, Polus’s rhetorical attack relies on *ad hominem*. Polus laughs at Socrates (473e). Not only does this suggest that what Socrates says is comical, but it suggests that Polus knows why it is comical and what should be properly said in its place. A laugh like this is just another way of pandering to the crowd and persuading them that you know something.

All of this has a point, it is priming Polus to reveal his false opinion of justice. Polus states that doing injustice is *aischron* (shameful), but suffering injustice is *kakon* (worse). His admission that injustice is *aischron* suggests that justice is the opposite of *aischron*, being *kalos* (noble or fine), confirming his concordance with the Socratic Axiom. Polus can state this because he and every other human being considers it to be so (474b). This is his only justification, he gives no other grounds how doing injustice can be both good and shameful other than it appears that way to the many. Dodds clarifies this as he notes, “Polus said that doing wrong was less admirable, he clearly meant that it

was *ophelimos* (profitable) *for the community*, and from this it does not follow that it is less *ophelimos for the agent*" (1959, 249). The young colt believes that justice is good, but stricken by the many examples he has witnessed of the just man suffering, he claims it is unprofitable, and thus shameful, twisting his whole sense of justice.

The refutation is short and simple (474d-475d). Something is fine on account of its beauty or benefit. Conversely, something is shameful if it is the opposite of these, being pain and badness. So for one thing to be more shameful than another it must exceed in either pain or evil. Polus has called doing injustice more shameful than suffering injustice, so it must exceed in either pain or evil. It is not more painful, so doing injustice is worse on account of its evilness/badness. So more shameful also means worse.

To all of this Polus finally concedes, though he does not know why. His answers reveal his confusion: "It looks that way," "It seems so, at least according to the argument," "So it appears" (475de). None is a clear exclamation of his acceptance or approval; all show some ambivalence. It is clear from how the argument unfolds that Polus becomes less clear about his own definition, unsure of how to define his key terms. Archie calls this "dialectic chicanery" that undid Polus (1984, 167). Vlastos, claiming Polus just needed to keep his wits about him, also accuses Socrates of a logical fallacy, stating the question should be *to whom* is injustice more painful, the agent or the observer (1967, 458).

All of these are correct on their points of logic, but the logic is not the point: To proceed, as so many have done, to analyze Socrates's argument as if it purported to be a logical proof of the preferability of suffering injustice, rather

than as a demonstration that Polus and everybody else already believes it to be preferable, is to exhibit a rather impenetrable insensitivity to Plato's dramatic signals...thus his argument is designed to encourage Polus to choose justice.

(McKim 1988, 37)

Polus seems dimwitted because he does not truly believe the tenet he proposes and cannot argue accordingly. The worse and the shameful are equivalent to him. He proposes a differentiation to win the argument and gain his reputation. Socrates is not so much attempting to convince him of the absolute truth that suffering injustice is not worse than doing injustice, as he is forcing Polus to confront his false opinion that injustice can be both good and bad. The drama directly after this refutation reflects this point just made.

Socrates has to first drag the refutation out of Polus, admonishing him to "not shrink from answering, you will suffer no harm. Submit yourself in a nobly born manner to the argument as to a doctor" (475d). Evoking the image of the doctor should bring to mind the purpose of rhetoric, recognizing that this proof is more of a non-didactic persuasive device to inspire belief. This is not to say that Socrates himself does not hold to the argument. He truly believes that injustice is the greatest evil. But instead of reinforcing this idea after the refutation, Socrates puts the focus on the manner of refutation: "so you see then, Polus, that when one refutation is put beside the other, they don't look like each other at all" (475e). Polus's faith in the refutation by the witness of the many is shaken. If his desire for a good professional reputation relies on the witness of the many, what does this refutation signify about what Polus considers as his ultimate good? With his ultimate good in question, Polus is open to refutation on his false opinion toward justice.



The rest of the Polus section is devoid of bitterness. Polus has been refuted and perhaps has no more fight in him, but Socrates also becomes more generous in his treatment of the young man. The concluding argument will prove the second point of what Polus unknowingly asked, whether it is better to suffer the just penalty. Socrates asks to whom the unjust man goes in order to be cured from his illness. The sick man goes to the doctor, where does the unjust man go? Polus suggests it is to the judges (478a). Socrates will work with this, but it is the wrong answer. What Polus has failed to realize is that he has just suffered the just penalty. Referring again to the Divided Oblong, medicine is to the body as justice is to the soul. But is it the same saying that the doctor is to the body as the judge is to the soul?

If, as Plochman and Robinson believe, the external factors of the Divided Oblong deserved the top hierarchical spot then Polus would be correct in stating that the judges cure injustice. Justice, in this sense, simply requires interpretation and correct application of the law, which will correct unjust acts. But justice as the internal factor with the prime point of importance on the Divided Oblong is understood in a different way. Though justice does not receive an explicit definition in the dialogue, the fact that Socrates strives to have his participants face their false opinions that govern their souls suggests that justice merits a similar definition here as it does in the *Republic*. Justice is an understanding of the correct way to act through a structuring an organization of the soul, through the placing of prudence over passion, virtue over vice, knowledge over opinion, etc. It is thus to the philosopher, who can reveal this nature of justice, that someone with false opinions about the virtue needs to turn in order to suffer the just penalty, which is exactly what Polus has just experienced.

This raises a pertinent question: does knowing what the nature of justice is ensure being just? Socrates had begun this question in the Gorgias section, and now the Divided Oblong shows that this is not the case. The two parts of the soul art of politics are justice and the legislative art. Justice has been discussed, but what is the legislative art? Like justice, the legislative art does not receive a detailed explanation in the dialogue, but perhaps Socrates means something like this: it is the enforcement of the justice. Understanding justice creates a hierarchy of principles within the soul. The legislative art is the actual decision making process of how to live according to that hierarchy. It is the structuring and regulation of behavior in accordance with justice, guided by self-discipline and moderation. The knowledge of how to act and the regulation to act accordingly combined is the true art of politics.

Socrates, rather than opening up this deeper line of thought (which will be saved for the Callicles section) instead tries to reinforce the idea of suffering the just punishment by stating that this can be the only good use of rhetoric: to accuse parents, comrades, and children of the injustice they have done to the end that they submit to the just penalty (480bc). If a correct understanding of justice is already had, then there is no need for a self-refutation to seek justice's true understanding through philosophical inquiry. Polus admits that there is a certain logic to this statement, but it still seems strange to him (480d). In other words, he is not fully convinced. Had he realized that this dialectical exchange really did bring him no harm, as he feared might happen to his reputation, he might have realized that Socrates has something to offer. Had he realized that Socrates had been playing the role of the rhetor in order to turn Polus toward self-refutation of his false opinions he might have had an enlightening experience as to his

own profession. But he realizes none of this. Soon Callicles will jump in and attack where he feels Socrates played unfairly. With Callicles on his side, Polus will feel courageous enough to fall back on his false opinion (511b). This shows how susceptible he is to the opinion of the many. . This is why Polus is no real tyrant. He lacks the strength to stand alone. He has no stomach for being so courageous.

To summarize, Polus is a young and semi-accomplished student of Gorgias. All his interactions leading up to his main role in the dialogue are to establish himself as equal to or greater than his teacher. Above all, he desires to be more famous than Gorgias. He is an example of what an amoralistic teaching of rhetoric offered by Gorgias produces, and this is perhaps the first time that Gorgias can see the effects of his ambivalence toward justice. For half of the discussion Polus is simply focused on praising rhetoric, establishing it as a fine and good thing. This focus puts blinders on him to the greater meaning of the argument, which is to open Polus to his false opinions about justice.

Polus learned from his teacher a certain ambivalence toward justice, but the suffering of the just at the hands of the unjust leads him later to hold that justice is good, but doing injustice is merely shameful. It is his desire for power (manifested as reputation) that causes him to leave his ambivalence for this immorality. It may be safe to have an ambivalence toward justice if there are no unjust deeds that follow, but Polus is willing to act unjustly, to a point at least. He may lack courage to do the things that would make him a powerful tyrant, but he is willing to publically discredit his teacher in order to make himself appear greater.

It is not only a lack of grit that keeps him from extreme unjust deeds, but deep down Polus also holds to the Socratic Axiom. He is perhaps disappointed that justice does not seem powerful enough to protect the just from suffering injustice, and has instead found his answer in the power of rhetoric. This leads him to become dissonant with himself, still wanting justice but looking to other things to fill in where he feels it lacks. Socrates is successful in at least momentarily showing to Polus that rhetoric is not as powerful as he hopes it to be either. The way Socrates was able to do this is similar to the anecdote of the rhetor and the doctor that Gorgias relayed earlier in the dialogue. The true cure for Polus is for him to come to an understanding of justice and to align himself with its demands rather than demand from justice things on his own terms. A philosophic education is necessary to come to such a reasoned account of justice and virtue. But as a philosopher, Socrates is unable to persuade the sick Polus to submit to the treatment; instead, Socrates as rhetorician is able to at least persuade Polus to be open to the possibility. But as noted, Callicles steps in and attacks Socrates anew. For the last half of the discussion Polus had been alone. He had lost the witness of the many that once supported him as he became Socrates's witness. But now someone is on his side again, or rather, there is someone he can side with, and he falls back to all his former opinions, losing any progress on his false opinions toward justice that had been made.

## CHAPTER 4

### CALLICLES

Few facts are known of Gorgias, fewer of Polus, and nothing of Callicles. There is a question as to whether he was an actual, historical person or simply a fictional character. Dodds seems persuaded that Callicles, if not a real Athenian himself, is at least based on a real person who more than likely was killed during the purges of the Thirty Tyrants (1959, 13). Callicles is a tough opponent of philosophy, perhaps the toughest in the Platonic corpus. He is tough enough to be praised by the likes of Nietzsche. But though Plato put this toughness into this character, he also seems to have taken great time and care into him to reflect more than that. A first reading of Callicles will show a confident, patriotic man attacking philosophy in the name of business and politics, the truly manly arts, but who then becomes so frustrated by Socrates that he shuts down completely. He appears unreachable by philosophy. A close reading, with attention to the drama, will reveal why he shuts down, showing that Socrates words do affect him in a deep manner, creating a glimmer of hope for Callicles and philosophy.

Jaeger is one of a few in the literature to note how deep the care that Plato puts into Callicles is. His first reason to assume so is to look to Plato's biography. Plato was exposed to the political life in Athens from a very early age by his noble birth and aristocratic education. His family members who were politically active included Charicles and Critias, who both took roles in the reign of the Thirty Tyrants. It is from these sources that

Plato may have drawn upon for Callicles. Jaeger continues:

He must have immersed himself deeply in their thought, to express it with such convincing vividness, such overwhelming force as he does through Callicles...

Perhaps we have not given thought to the possibility that in his own character Plato had so much of the unruly will to power as to die, and fight, *part of himself in Callicles*. (1943, 137-138, emphasis added)

Skemp concurs, writing, “may not this cultivated and ambitious young man who has lately entered public life represent Plato himself- what Plato might have been but chose not to be?” (1987, 29). Perhaps these feelings are not to mirror those of family members, but come from Plato himself, making Callicles a semi-autobiographical character. This I find very convincing. Callicles represents the “other” side so well that it suggests such a deep familiarity that internal conflict about these topics could give birth to.

Another clue that perhaps point toward an autobiographical Callicles includes Plato’s carefulness in putting himself in his dialogues. He is never a speaker in the dialogues and is only mentioned in a few. This makes it difficult to figure out what his thoughts are exactly because as all characters are part of his literary creation he is putting the words in everyone’s mouth. With that said, claiming that Callicles is Plato does not suggest that Callicles is a complete autobiographical sketch. Neither does it suggest that only Callicles out of the whole Platonic corpus represents the author’s thoughts, nor does it mean that any other character with a questionable historical background is meant to portray a personal side of the author. But the reading of Callicles, with attention to the drama given him in the *Gorgias*, shows a careful understanding of his position, which is not as shallow as it appears to be.

Another clue is the dramatic date of the dialogue. There are several historical references in the work that are conflicting, making it impossible to fix a specific date as to when the conversation took place, if it was an actual occurrence. Gorgias was known to have visited Athens a few times, but the earliest was when he was sent as an ambassador from his home colony to plead for the aid of the Athenians against Syracuse in 427 BCE. This date coincides with the mention of Pericles having just died, which occurred in 429 BCE (503c). But then the ambiguities begin. The climax of the Polus section, the history of the tyrant Archelaus, is said to be happenings of “just yesterday” (470d). Archelaus rose to power in 414 BCE. Socrates, in detailing his response to Polus as to not being one of his “political men” relates his experience as president of the Council in the trial of the generals of Arginusae, which battle took place in 405 BCE and the trial shortly thereafter (473e).

So what is the point of this ambiguity of the date? Benardete states it well when he states the dialogue “is of a time but not in time” (1991, 7). Of what time is Plato trying to draw our attention to? The first word of the dialogue is “war,” and indeed, the suggested dates span the length of the Peloponnesian war (Ranasinghe 2009, 16). Perhaps more importantly, the suggested dates also span Plato’s youth. He is thought to be born between 429-424 BCE, making the earliest reference of Pericles’ death also a possible coincidence of his birth (Nails 2002, 243). Some of the later dates end during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants. It has already been noted that Plato had a strong connection to politics from early on, including several family members as leaders of the thirty. Could the ambiguity of time be a metaphor for the development of Plato’s political becoming?

What does this mean for the dialogue if in fact Callicles is, at least in part is, Plato himself? Callicles is called a hedonist, a nihilist, and other branding terms, and he speaks with exceptional force against philosophy that has a timeless character that rings true for some today; for such a character to eventually overcome these things and turn himself over to philosophy is a bright hope to combat the natural tendency of many to emphasize the problems of justice.

The discussion with the young Athenian begins with his interjection to ascertain whether Socrates is serious or not. This sarcastic and confrontational remark is met by a lengthy reply, noting that it is through a community of feelings shared among human beings that allows us to converse about things (481c). By this Socrates is pointing back to the Socratic Axiom, and elaborates indirectly by showing how both he and Callicles are lovers. Callicles is a lover of the Athenian people, the *demos*, and the son of Ppyrilampes named Demos; he is unable to contradict either one and thus turns every which way to please them (481e). Socrates, whose lovers are Alcibiades and philosophy, only says what philosophy says and stays ever constant.

It becomes clear right at the beginning of their discussion that of the three participants Socrates knows Callicles. This is either because he is an Athenian, or because Plato is writing about his own struggles with the Socratic Axiom. Either way, it is right off the bat that Socrates uses the oath, “by the dog, god of the Egyptians!- Callicles will not agree with you Callicles, but you will be dissonant your whole life” (482b). The emphatic statement of his dissonance is a prelude to the intense bitterness that will follow.



Callicles then lays out his famous charge (482c-486d). It opens as a critique of Socrates's methods. The philosopher is fond of word catching and substituting convention for nature and vice versa. Polus was ashamed to hold to injustice being good but shameful because convention makes it shameful. Nature has it a different way. By nature the strong rule and have a right to a larger share. The whole history of human beings and the animal kingdom attest to this. But it is a rabble of slaves and other weaklings who join together and through convention make it shameful to practice natural justice. Convention thus takes the roar out of the lions while they are young. A sufficiently strong man can break these chains and spells to become the master natural justice demands. Socrates would see this but he is tainted by philosophy.

Philosophy, rather than creating a good, noble, and reputed man, instead only engenders inexperience. While appropriate for a youth in order to learn articulation, philosophy in a grown man creates inexperience. The philosopher loses care for the laws of the city, lacks the ability to associate and speak adequately both publically and privately, and becomes alienated to human pleasures and desires. All in all, he falls out of touch with human customs and characters. This makes philosophy ridiculous, unmanly, and deserving of a beating, causing the philosopher to flee the agora, where a man becomes distinguished, and sully himself by "whispering with three or four lads in a corner" (485d).

Callicles speaks all this out of a certain charity towards Socrates. He recognizes that the philosopher has a noble soul but that he does not do noble things. He should be speaking in councils about justice. He should be advising new proposals to the *polis*. Instead, following his current course will lead him to the law court where he will be

sentenced to death and powerless to do anything about it. The charge ends with an admonition to obtain a “livelihood, reputation, and many other good things” (486c).

Socrates sees the difference between Callicles and his previous participants. Both previous participants only required a narrow approach to address their specific concerns about justice. Callicles’s concern is more encompassing, driving at a broader question: “what sort of man one ought to be and what one ought to pursue and how far” (487e). This is the very question that Guthrie suggests Plato faced in his life and wrote about in the *Gorgias*: whether to hold to the tenets of justice that all seem to believe, or to pay them no heed and seek power and reputation as earned through a political life (Guthrie 1975, 296)

The Polus section was a continuous conversation, albeit indirect, with Gorgias as an example of what kind of student he produces. The Callicles section will act in a similar function, to show Gorgias what kind of a politician he makes through his teaching; Dodds seems to concur with this, noting that “Gorgias’s teaching is the seed of which the Calliclean way of life is the poisonous fruit” (1959, 15). But Callicles is unique from the previous two on his stance of justice. Whereas the two foreigners were mostly ambivalent to justice, different from each only in their desire for power, Callicles transforms justice and gives it a new definition. Additionally, his desire for power is more sincere than Polus’s. Polus wants from power only a reputation; he wants the appearance of power. Callicles seems likely to act on his power, but what he would do with it is difficult to understand at this point in the dialogue.

The discussion begins anew having Callicles be more specific about what he means by the stronger, since it is upon this that his view of justice rests. Callicles agrees

that the stronger is the same as the superior and the mightier (488c-d). But this simple definition soon shows that the many are much stronger than the one, making the oppression of the singular strong man just by nature as well. Callicles responds angrily, as he will at most times, and accuses Socrates of more of the same, word-catching, and being ironical (489d). Socrates meets his anger with a demanding reply: tell me what you mean by the superior! Like his predecessors praising rhetoric before him, he can offer only a praise of the superior, calling the better men superior (489e). The philosopher helps him along and asks whether by the better he means the intelligent, to which the young politician emphatically gives his support. It is this man who is deserving of rule and having more.

Then comes an important dramatic directional by Socrates: “Stop right there” (490b). He knows that Callicles is getting closer to facing his false opinion and wants to make sure he stays on track. He then goes about giving many examples of how having more looks ridiculous, such as a shoe maker wearing exceptionally large shoes, or a tailor with a huge coat (490b-491a). He is trying to get Callicles to understand what Callicles means by having more, and what promise justice gives, if any, as to why the superior deserve more. Socrates will not relent. He has to have Callicles voice his ideas himself if self-refutation is to take place.

Out of frustration Callicles responds, but only gives a half answer. He reemphasizes that the intelligent in regard to the affairs of the city should rule, and they should be courageous as well (491a-b). Socrates chides him for his inconsistency. Angered by the argument Callicles reasserts his definition strongly, concluding that these superior, intelligent, courageous do indeed deserve more. Since Callicles answers neither

why nor of what the superior deserve, Socrates opts for a change in tactic and asks if these rulers deserve more “in relation to themselves” (491d). In other words, do they rule themselves? Are they moderate? His response is that no man “should impose a master on themselves” and launches into the hedonist argument by praising “luxury, intemperance, and freedom- this is virtue and happiness” (492b-c).

There is an error in assuming from this argument that Callicles’s defining characteristic is pleasure-seeking. This is far from the truth. He takes up the hedonist argument thinking it will support what he really believes; it is not completely sincere and it is not the point he is trying to make. From what we’ve seen of Callicles so far, he has an attachment to strength, intelligence, courage, and freedom. This is the essential package of Greek manliness in fifth century Greece, and perhaps along the lines of Machiavelli’s *virtu* (Klosko 1984, 127). These standards are why he does not slip into a nihilist argument, which is impenetrable to attack, “and in the existence of these standards, on which they and the ordinary man are agreed, lies the hope of a solution” (Adkins 1960, 240).

Callicles wants to prove to himself that he is a man; the hedonist argument is simply a position he is forced into supporting because moderation does not fit his image of manliness. As his reasoning goes, when the weak turned justice into a conventional virtue, in order to tie down the strong, so too did they conventionalize moderation, making it shameful for the superior, though naturally deserving, to take more than any other.

His stance on moderation may stem from a disappointment in Socratic virtue. Per the axiom, all human beings have a notion of and believe in the moral goodness of virtue

in the soul. But like Polus, Callicles could not but see the tendency of the just man to suffer injustice. How does this suffering align with the other virtues he holds dear? Rather than pursuing the necessary philosophic inquiry to reconcile this disparity Callicles simply forfeits justice, twisting it into his perverted sense of natural justice. This is the easy way out, the cowardly and unmanly way out, “for to admit that one is concerned with virtue, and that one has a deep desire to see virtue triumph, is to open oneself to sorrow and anger when virtue fails or is defeated by vice” (Stauffer 2006, 117).

Socrates is content with Callicles’s response, seeing in it an opportunity to address the main concern. He states that Callicles is finally stating what many think but are unwilling to say (492d). He encourages Callicles not to slacken. Socrates then proceeds with a couple of fables. Subtly, Socrates is trying to persuade Callicles to change his position, but he will really offer nothing through the fables to replace his false opinions. Socrates’s point will be to make Callicles’s stance on hedonism look ridiculous; he will be speaking rhetorically in hopes of inspiring Callicles to refute his own ideas.

Relying upon a myth that uses a clever pun in original Greek, Socrates relates how the persuadable part of the soul is like a jar, and the unintelligent man’s jar is perforated (493b). Also, in order to fill their jars, the unintelligent are forced to use a sieve. Again, this myth offers nothing constructive for Callicles. It is a mental image to get him to think about an order in his soul, about a hierarchy to the parts of his soul and which ones are persuadable. A second myth reinforces this- the moderate man is like someone with several jars who had great difficulty filling them, but finally rests after doing so, whereas the immoderate man has leaky jars and is constantly filling them. So

which life is happier? For Callicles, happiness is in the flowing. It is having all the desires and “in keeping as much as possible flowing in” (494b).

What Callicles really wants to show by this is the power and courage that are needed to produce such an inflow. His focus is not on being pleased and satisfied. The emphasis on the inflow is a stress on activity. Callicles holds that a political life is more active than a philosophic life, which is why he and his friends decided to leave it behind (487c-d). He takes up the hedonist argument because he thinks he is stressing these factors.

Again Socrates congratulates him on this fine definition, because it is leading along to the point he desires to make. Callicles needs to fully understand what his false opinion is if he is ever to overcome it. If filling desires is happiness then a man who gets pleasure from itching will be happy if he could itch for the rest of his life. While the man with a simple itch on his head is conceded to by Callicles in order to keep the argument consistent, he cannot concede to the shame in admitting that the culmination of this example, the catamite, is a happy existence (494c-e).

Perhaps a little agitated about the catamite jab, Callicles puts a more intense scrutiny to his words. Taking advantage of this Socrates begins a new line of questioning and draws careful consideration to his next tenet. He warns Callicles to answer carefully after consideration: can the good and the bad exist at the same time? Callicles gives his emphatic approval that they cannot. When this proves that the good and the pleasant are not the same, Callicles erupts and accuses Socrates of sophism (497a). Perhaps the argument would have ended here with Callicles quitting from the conversation, but Gorgias intercedes, making known his desire to bring the discussion to an end.

Why does Gorgias intercede? Does he see what Socrates is getting at and does he understand what Socrates is trying to define as rhetoric? When Callicles asks why he should continue the rhetor responds that it is not Callicles's honor at stake (497b). What does he mean by this? Is it, rather, Gorgias's honor at stake? Does a refutation of Callicles, as well as Polus (both being products of the man), really amount to a defeat of Gorgias? To a degree yes, but what is interesting is that Gorgias is then encouraging his own defeat by desiring the conversation to continue. Alternatively, it could be that the many codlings by Socrates convinced the rhetor that what is at stake is the truth of the argument, not verbal victory. Either way, Socrates has intrigued Gorgias, and perhaps now, through the examples of Polus and Callicles, the rhetor is beginning to see the need for an alliance of rhetoric and dialectic. Additionally, Gorgias admonishes Callicles to submit to Socrates's refutations, urging the young Athenian to submit to the just punishment (497b).

The real point that Socrates was trying to make now comes through: the good is not the same as the pleasant, but more importantly, this also means that neither is the bad the same as the painful (497d). This is a key point in refuting Callicles's false opinion because if some painful things can be good then a just man suffering from an unjust act can be good. This opens Callicles to an understanding of what good means and he is finally forced to admit that some pleasures are bad, though he does so under the guise of joking and attributing the saying to others. Socrates catches him on this, chides him for his rhetoric, and forces him to take up the opinion as his own (499b-c). Without fully owning up to these confessions Callicles will never be able to suffer the just penalty of self-refutation.

The fact that the good is the end goal, and not the path pursued, is reinforced. This had been Callicles's belief all along. The good is action and strength to procure that action, particularly political action, and hedonism simply was a way of expressing that. But it takes an artful man to know the good that is being sought. This brings Socrates to hit on a key note that really opens up what the philosopher is driving at. The question Callicles is really driving at is, as has been noted, is what way of life is best, politics or philosophy. But Socrates notes that in order to answer this he needs to go back and distinguish between "acting in politics in this way in which you now act in politics; or this life in philosophy; and in what respect it can be that this life differs from that one" (500c).

While it is clear that the way that Callicles currently acts in politics is differs dramatically from the philosophic life, a more important question to ask is if and how much a life practicing the true art of politics differs from a philosophic life. Kastley suggests, "The confusion in which Socrates and Callicles place themselves begins by their false assumption that the political and philosophical lives can be isolated from each other. The choice that the dialogue must explore is whether one should lead a philosophically criticized political existence" (1991, 105). It will be Socrates who, just a little later on in the dialogue, will assert that he alone practices the "true political art" (521d). The true political art is not practicing politics as Callicles understands it. A truly political life has more in common with a philosophic life than has been previously considered. As their discussion continues, and this confluence between the two lives becomes clearer, Callicles will become more active in the dialogue, but will fall short of being courageous enough to make a change that the argument upholds.



Callicles notes that he does not understand what Socrates is getting at. Socrates promises to speak more clearly, but will need to reiterate much of the argument, establishing anew that a true art gives a reasoned account of the nature of the thing, and that by lacking this flattery is merely a knack (501a-c). Callicles accedes to this only to move the conversation along; he does not give it as his opinion. Socrates then lists several practices that fit the definition of flattery: flute playing, choruses, tragedy, and poetry (501d-502c). This last practice of poetry Socrates adds in particular for Gorgias as a warning to the rhetor not to glory so much in his renowned style and to focus on the content and how it is taught, a lesson perhaps taken to heart by his witnessing the actions and words of Polus and Callicles.

But now the conversation turns back to Callicles. These were the simple questions, and now Socrates will try to make clear the distinction, if any, between the political and philosophic life. While the above-mentioned practices of rhetoric were directed to a very general audience, “both slave and free,” he now begins to ask about the rhetoric directed only at the free Athenian people. Is the rhetoric addressed to them aimed at making citizens better or at gratifying them as children (502e-503a)? This is difficult to answer, to which Callicles responds that some speak toward the best and some speak to gratify. “That is enough” responds Socrates, showing that Callicles is proceeding in Socrates’s desired direction (503a). It shows that perhaps Callicles wants to look toward more than just pandering to the *demos* in his political career, but has at heart the best interests of the *polis*.

What Socrates says next is crucial: “for if this thing too is double, one part of it anyway would be flattery and shameful popular speaking, and the other would be noble:

making preparations for the citizens' souls to be as good as possible and fighting to say the best things, whether they will be more pleasant or more unpleasant to the hearers" (503a).

What does he mean by "this thing" and how is it "double"? It obviously points toward rhetoric, and this is the first mention of the practice having a noble aspect.

While the argument demonstrates a dual nature to rhetoric, Socrates can think of no statesman that has used this form of rhetoric. Callicles suggests several examples from the past: Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles (503c). But with virtue defined as making men better, Socrates cannot admit to these men accomplishing that. He begins an examination of this "in a calm manner" (503e). He desires the conversation to be calm because he knows where the conversation is headed, which will inspire the most bitter part of the dialogue, for it will challenge Callicles at his core.

The philosopher does not come right out and state why these men were not good politicians. He first builds a foundation for all craftsmen, which includes those of the political art, stating that their work is not random, but in order, "working to have a certain form" (503e). An understanding of the form of an art requires a certain arrangement, a harmony with the whole. Callicles's answers show that he is only giving acknowledgment to continue the argument, making it difficult to discern how much he actually agrees to. The proper order and harmony of the body is called health, and that of the soul is called "the lawful" and "law," which are "justice" and "moderation" (504d). These things are the focus of the noble rhetor, "always directing his mind toward how he may get justice to come into being in the citizens' souls and injustice to be removed, moderation to arise within and intemperance to be removed, the rest of virtue to arise

within and badness to depart” (504d-e). Just as a doctor does not allow a sick patient to indulge in pleasant but harmful food and drink, so too must the artful and good rhetor keep the base soul from indulging in harmful desires (505b).

The conclusion is painful for Callicles, for it follows that punishment is thus better than intemperance. It becomes clear that Socrates is trying to administer the just punishment to Callicles, as he had to Polus, when he states, somewhat sarcastically, “this man here does not abide being benefited and suffering for himself this thing that the arrangement is about, being punished” (505c). Callicles has suffered enough, quits the argument, and suggests that Socrates complete it himself. Socrates is not reluctant to do so. He again reiterates what was stated in the beginning, that the worst evil is to have “falsehoods as regards the things we are talking about” (505e). But unlike this admonition that was given to Gorgias in the beginning, Socrates here adds a correlation to being a lover of victory over these falsehoods, “for it is a *common good* for all that it becomes manifest” (506a, emphasis added). Though not completely revealed yet, here is a major unveiling of the true art of politics.

Politics as used by Socrates until this point in the dialogue had always been used as a personal, individual thing. Politics is the business of the soul, the individual soul; all references to the many involved rhetoric, the phantom justice. How then does politics apply to the “common good,” to the many? It must be remembered that the references to the many were that rhetoric could only inspire belief in, not teach, the many at one time. That politics is an individual thing, and that Socrates works on a one-on-one basis, does not negate that what he teaches is only *for* the few. Rather, as noted in the *Apology*, he spent his days speaking with all manners of peoples, urging them to care more for their

soul than for their bodies, urging them to truly care for politics. That he refrained from entering the public arena, but held these conversations privately, seems to make him apolitical, but as more is unveiled and the true art of politics becomes clear; it will be clear how political he actually was.

The conversation may have ended before any of this was revealed though. Callicles's quitting the conversation prompts an offer from Socrates to offer to drop the whole thing and bid it farewell. But Gorgias offers his last comment, expressing his desire to hear the remaining things, even if that means that Socrates carry on the conversation with himself. Callicles, perhaps out of shame, concedes and asks that Socrates finish the conversation (506b-c).

To put the head on the argument first requires a recitation of all the points settled upon. The three Stephanus pages from 506c-509c provide a succinct and direct reiteration of the important points established in dialogue: the pleasant and the good are not the same; the pleasant is done for the sake of the good; all good things are good by the presence of virtue; virtue is a certain art and orderliness; thus each thing's order makes it good, the soul has an order which includes moderation; the moderate man does fitting things both toward gods and men; the fitting things toward the god is piety and towards man is justice; he who does just things is just; being just requires courage; acting well and nobly while being just, courageous, and pious will be a blessed and happy life.

This leads Socrates to answer Callicles's indirect question that the best life to live is "straining to direct all one's and the city's things toward this, that justice and moderation will be present for him who is to be blessed" (507d-e). When Socrates first mentioned the greatest evil it was prefaced by stating the greatest good is to be "released

from the greatest evil” (458a). How great is the good to release one’s self from the greatest evil, but how much better is it to increase that number and release others as well! Socrates continues, “thus must one act, not allowing desires to be intemperate and striving to satiate them...For such a one would be dear friend neither to another human being nor to god; *for he would be unable to share in common, and he in whom there is no community would have no friendship*” (507e, emphasis added).

This emphasis on friendship at the end is an important aspect to refuting Callicles. Leading up to this statement Socrates changed his mode of recognizing dissonance from swearing “by the dog” to using the oath “by the god of friendship” (500b-c). Callicles wants a political life, but he also wants something out of the political life for himself personally: a reputation of manliness. To Callicles, serving the *polis* is perfectly confluent with his desire; they are one and the same. But as Socrates is unveiling what the true art of politics is, he is trying to get Callicles to consider if he is not mistaken about the point of politics.

The whole *kosmos*-gods, heaven, earth, and human beings-is held together by “community, friendship, orderliness, moderation, and justice” (508a). These things follow a sort of “geometrical equality” resting upon the premise that the happy are happy by virtue. Additionally, “he who is to be correctly rhetorical must therefore be just and a knower of just things” (508c). If there was any ambivalence about this point in the Gorgias section, that the man who has learned justice is in fact just, Socrates clears it up here: a man must be a knower of just things and exercise his just knowledge appropriately. This has been an underlying theme about rhetoric: that it is used inappropriately. It is a key factor that Gorgias himself struggled with. Socrates was not

ignorant about this aspect applying to Gorgias. It was not a necessary point to drive home to Gorgias because of his lack of desire for power. But for the aspiring politician, it is a strong point that needs to be driven home. Rhetoric is to refute the false opinions of our friends and family to the end that they become just. Moreover, rhetoric is most useful when the one that we attempt to persuade is ourselves.

Now Socrates will begin the strong arguments in attempting to persuade Callicles to choose the just life over what his false opinions are pulling him toward. Callicles's so-called "greatest dangers" (such as being beaten, robbed and killed) are petty concerns. Whereas it might take courage and manliness to stand up to those who would commit such injustices, it is real courage to stand up to the injustice we personally are tempted to commit. The arguments Socrates has laid down are bound with iron and adamant. Anything less is ridiculous and no fine thing (509a).

This statement has caused some to pause. Stauffer notes that nowhere does Socrates state that these arguments are true, simply that anyone who argues against them becomes ridiculous (2006, 137). There have been several logical flaws noted already. Does Socrates not believe in his own stance and position? The fact that Socrates does not state that they are the absolute truth has two purposes. First, it follows along with his professed, albeit probably ironic, ignorance (509e). Second, it is an invitation to discuss these things more. Socrates knows that he has been speaking rhetorically and that he has not given a fully reasoned account of what he argues. That is one of his main purposes. But although he cannot call it knowledge because he does not possess a full accounting, it does not necessarily follow that he does not believe it (Cornford 1927, 310). A dialectical conversation might be what is needed to uncover the absolute truth of these

things, but as the dialogue has shown this is an impossibility with the present company in their present condition, false opinions and everything. Perhaps at some later point Callicles might reflect upon these things, discover that they are not tied down with iron and adamant, and seek out Socrates to do so.

But more convincing than these two suggestions is to understand what Socrates means by “ridiculous” here. The same word is used again in the following sentence, claiming that the human being who commits injustice and escapes the just punishment is a human being “ridiculous in truth” (509b). What makes the person ridiculous is not so much the inconsistency of the logic in their argument as much as the inconsistency in their soul. Unfortunately, this latter aspect is impossible to see physically and difficult to discern otherwise. Again, this is the greatest evil, to have these false opinions and to suffer such an inconsistency of soul. On the flip side, if this is the greatest evil, the greatest benefit is to be able to relieve this inconsistency. The power to do this is the will to power that Callicles falsely aligns with his twisted understanding of justice, and it again points toward Socrates’s desire to help the community.

Now Socrates opens up more, and the dialogue takes a dialectical turn. He asks if there is a way to avoid suffering injustice (509d). Is it sufficient simply to not want to suffer it, or is there a need to prepare some kind of power? Callicles can agree with this easily enough: a prepared power is necessary. This might even have intrigued Callicles a bit to bring him a little more into the conversation, but it will not last long. Socrates then follows up this question by asking whether a certain power or art is necessary to protect us from committing injustice. Callicles is slow to answer, and when finally forced, he explodes and answers only to please Socrates so that he can continue. This is not his

concern. Socrates may have touched him enough to stroke his care for justice, but his main concern is that it still seems powerless. There is no guarantee from injustice by acting justly.

So Socrates returns to the subject that interests the young politician. What is the power to avoid suffering injustice? Is it anything less than actually ruling in the city or being a comrade to the regime in power (510a)? Callicles is more than ready to praise this; it is the exact opinion that his own thoughts had concluded upon and led him to a political life. But in order to do this an assimilation needs to take place. The strength of a friendship is correlated with the degree of likeness between the friends. So the direct answer to this inquiry is that, from youth, the man who wants great power in the city in order to avoid suffering injustice must “accustom himself to rejoice and to be distressed at the same things as the master, and to make preparations so as to be as much as possible like that man” (510d). In other words, he must learn to flatter. He must disrupt any harmony in his soul to make it a rag-tag collection of thoughts, beliefs, and desires in order to appear alike to anyone in power.

The consequence of this is easy to see. Protection from suffering injustice may be achieved, but protection from committing injustice will be diminished if not destroyed (510e). Worse yet, not only will this man commit injustice, but he will also escape the just penalty. Getting away with injustice only works to cement the false opinion that injustice is good, causing this man to fall victim to the worst degree of the greatest evil. Callicles, however, makes a pertinent point: this man commands great power. Similar to the argument in the Polus section, the tyrant in the city does indeed have power.



Socrates then offers the answer that Callicles was too cowardly to pursue previously, that led him to his twisted sense of justice. If this tyrant should kill, it would be a base man killing a noble and good one. The outburst that follows reveals how Callicles truly feels about justice and these matters; “is not this exactly the infuriating thing?” (511b). Callicles is not in the pursuit of power simply; he has no desire to kill at whim. Why else would he be infuriated at the suffering of the just man? Hasn’t his argument promoted it, even aligned it with natural justice? His words have, yes, but his words did not relay his true intent. As has been noted, Callicles uses the examples of the hedonist, and now the tyrant, in order to exemplify certain characteristics: manliness, courage, intelligence, or in a word, the good. Callicles believes, even desires, that the moral plane Socrates puts justice and these things upon is correct, but there is a big problem in the way that keeps him from accepting it: the just man often suffers. There is no guarantee from injustice by acting justly. It infuriates him enough that he no longer has the patience to think about the matter any more, and he simply throws up his hands and submits to a more cynical paradigm: natural justice is the rule of the stronger, and it is manly, courageous, and intelligent to pursue this.

Socrates sets about correcting him on his false opinions on all these virtues. The unjust treatment of the just is not among the greatest dangers to the intelligent man (511b). Intelligence was the first characteristic that Callicles firmly laid down as his definition for the superior, it is fitting that Socrates follow the path that has already established. The intelligent man realizes that the purpose is not to live as long as possible, but to live well (513a). Examples holding to long life are easily seen as ridiculous. Swimming is an art that can be life saving, as navigation and engineering can be. Yet

these professions are not held in so high esteem as a life of politics. What makes the practice of being able to speak in a law court, to the saving one's life from execution, any different from practicing one of these arts? There is a difference between these arts that makes politics nobler than the rest, but it is not in the ability to save lives.

The second aspect of the superior that Callicles praised was courage. Perhaps Callicles holds to this virtue most strongly as he sees it as the gateway to all others. It is courage that presents a strong sense of manliness; it is the quintessential element of a man of all ages. Courage will give him the strength to take the first step to break the chains of convention and rise to the top of the political spectrum. But perhaps he holds to it so tightly because it is what he lacks most. Socrates confronts it face on to see if it will really yield what Callicles expects it to. The philosopher begins with a warning, claiming that Callicles may achieve great power in the city but at the cost of what he holds most dear (513b). Callicles may still have a hope that if he can just pretend to be like the existing regime that once he has power he can return to his desire for true justice and do good. Socrates says don't kid yourself. The cost of obtaining such power will not be in merely pretending to be like the regime, but in actually becoming like them. It will cost Callicles his attachment to justice and to the good.

Is this a condemnation of politics as a whole? Is it really impossible to obtain power in a city without sacrificing justice, moderation, and the rest of virtue? This is not what Socrates is suggesting; this is what Callicles thinks, this is the path that he is on. His considerations on how to obtain power and to hold to virtue left him abandoning justice and the lot. Socrates is about to offer a way to obtain political power, though it will be a new concept of politics Callicles has not considered before.

Callicles recognizes the truth in this statement, but he cannot bring himself fully to commit to what Socrates is suggesting: “In some way, I don’t know what, what you say seems good to me, Socrates; but I suffer the experience of the many- I am not altogether persuaded by you” (513c). Socrates knows the cause of this; he has experienced it before in others he has talked with. It is the love of the people, and it opposes Socrates. The word love here is *eros*, whereas the word elsewhere used in the dialogue was derived from *philia*. The difference between the two is important in understanding Plato. It is an essential attachment in order to obtain any goodness.

But what exactly is the attachment that Callicles has with the *demos*? He speaks poorly of them at the onset of his discussion with Socrates, but he also praises previous politicians who were good servants of them? Ultimately it seems he cares little for them, as one of his last statements will reveal. “But what do you say about human beings who are worth nothing?” asks Callicles (520a). Or is Callicles in love with them because they promise him the political power he craves? They are the means to his end.

But perhaps Callicles hasn’t thought it through completely. He feels a desire, he sees a personal benefit, but just like the question about whether a prepared power is necessary to avoid suffering injustice, is a simple desire to have political power enough to seek it, or is a prepared power necessary? This is what Socrates suggests: there is a need for preparation, and a power that will come from that preparation. Just as the first mention of politics revealed a double nature, something that looks toward pleasure and something that looks toward the best, so, too, is it now. Actions for political affairs need to look toward what is best by nature.

Now supposing some political action at hand was the need to build something, what would be the necessary steps to have this done? The decision to make the building would include finding someone who had the necessary knowledge and knowing their background as shown by their education and experience. It would be thoughtless to give someone such a task with no proof (or condemning proof) of their stated ability (or inability) (514a).

Similarly, the same must be asked of Callicles before he enters public life, “is there someone who was base before-unjust, intemperate, and foolish-and has become noble and good because of Callicles” (515a). This is a fair question to ask anyone who desires to enter politics. He asks only to truly understand “what in the world is the way you think you ought to act in politics?” (515b). To this Callicles replies, “you are a lover of victory” (515b). This answer is telling, and it can mean a few things. I do not believe that it is simply Callicles shutting down more. The last time the phrase “lover of victory” was mentioned was in relation to being a lover of victory in revealing the falsehood of the virtues being discussed. Is this an admission that Socrates has revealed the false opinion at the core of Callicles?

This should be looked at more closely. Firstly, is it unfair to judge someone who wants to enter politics, but has no previous political experience, on the merits of whom they have made better citizens? Presumably, this is something that can be done only in office, and the lack of not being in office shouldn't count against the aspiring politician. But Socrates is changing the way we look at politics. After all, it is foremost an individual art. Callicles should at least have the claim that he has made himself better, and this is the face he puts on in trying to be courageous and manly. But this

conversation with Socrates has revealed how cowardly and womanly he is, causing him to vocalize this admission of victory to Socrates.

At the same time, this is not a willful admission, and it is not a happy admission. Callicles is wounded by having to say it, and his tone is angry and bitter. Socrates matches the anger and gives his harsh critique of the Athenian leaders Callicles had praised (515d-517a). As the dialogue reaches an apex of bitterness here, it should be noted that the intense bitterness is not a sign of anger, but a genuine concern for the well being of Callicles (Michelini 1988, 57). This attack does two things: it shows Callicles that even a life in politics, as much assimilated to the regime as possible, or even ruling the regime, does not turn out to be a guarantee against suffering injustice. The proof previously given of the prepared power to avoid suffering injustice has famous historical contradictions, being the same leaders that Callicles looks up to.

Socrates is unfair in his critique of the Athenian leaders. Or rather, he is using the rhetorical technique of the bogey man, much as Polus had tried to do with Socrates, by showing Callicles the lack of guarantee against injustice while serving politically. Socrates cites Pericles for making the Athenians lazy, but calls him wise and the most perfect rhetor in the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedrus*, respectively (Nichols, 1998, 117). He mentions Cimon's ostracism, but fails to mention his recall.

It all becomes clear after Callicles interjects that none of the politicians today have accomplished what they did. Here it comes to light that Socrates does not blame them, but actually considers them skilled in their service (517b). They were good at providing for the desires of the Athenians, but they were not good at leading those desires, ergo they were bad leaders. It becomes clear to Socrates why Callicles argues as

he does; there is a miscommunication between them. Callicles does not understand the Divided Oblong. As Socrates notes, “you have many times agreed and understood that this occupation concerned both with the body and with the soul is indeed a certain double one” (517e). Previously when Socrates referred to something being double it was that it had an aspect that looked toward the best and an aspect that looked toward pleasure. That is not the case here. The use of double refers on one side to the body and on the other to the soul. This is how the Divided Oblong was introduced. But Socrates here is referring to a single occupation as being double, whereas at the introduction of the Divided Oblong there were two distinct businesses, the unnamed business of the body and politics for the soul. Could it be that the unnamed business of the body is also politics, making it a double art of the singular occupation being referred to here, of both body and soul?

If this is true, how does this affect the argument? It sets the background for the true art of politics and it will make Callicles confront what he really wants to accomplish and what he wants personally out of a political life. By purposely omitting the name of the body of business as politics at the beginning Socrates was able to keep Polus focused on how rhetoric relates to justice. It was noted in the Polus chapter how at several junctions the discussion could have led to a further inquiry of justice, and hence the true art of politics, but Socrates held back because it was not important for Polus. Had he given the double nature of politics at the beginning it would have diminished the effect that flattery plays as the doubling role the true arts. Now Socrates reveals that he has been concealing some things, “on purpose...so that you may thoroughly understand more easily” (517d).

Referring to the two-fold division of gymnastic and medicine in the business of the body, it comes to light that other arts, such as “retailer or importer or craftsman...baker, cook, weaver, cobbler, and leather dresser,” that are in the service of the body, and often confused as the “caretakers of the body” (517e). Why these practices get confused for true arts refers back to the Polus section, which proved that all our actions are for some good. These practices supply the body with things necessary to make it good, but the tendency is that the good becomes defined by the practice of supplying these things rather than their effect on the body. Their activity becomes political in that they rank their arts of supplying to one another not in relation to the value supplied, but by the supplying itself. This is not an intentional corruption of the true art of politics; rather, these caretakers of the body engage in political activity in good faith, but through ignorance misplace the focus (Kastely 1991, 103-104).

The art of the body is political because, just like the soul, it requires understanding what is best and then regulating behavior to stay in accordance with that. But when politicians become more concerned with the supplying of the needs of the body than with the good that come from those supplies, the regulatory aspect also shifts from making the body better to perfecting the process of supplying. Thus things like the regulation of commerce become the focus of politics.

Even though during the argument Callicles agrees to the definition of politics as looking toward the best, he constantly falls back to this procedural politics. When presented with the choice of either practicing true politics or this procedural one Callicles recommends the latter, urging Socrates to choose the same (521b). The only way Callicles can make sense of what Socrates is saying is if the philosopher does not really

understand what politics is really about. He retreats to his argument that anyone doing anything other than a focus on this procedural politics will suffer the worst dangers, and accuses Socrates of not seeing this because he “dwells out of the way” (521c).

This accusation deserves reflection. Is Socrates really just out of touch, unable to realize the impracticality or impossibility of his idealistic view of politics? Even Socrates admits that there has never been a practitioner of true rhetoric, nor does he think much of the *demos* as to hope they would all be able to look toward the best instead of seek after pleasure and folly. But if Socrates “dwells out of the way,” it is because he has left the cave and ascended the heights of philosophy (*Republic VII*).

The Calliclean charge accused philosophers of being out of touch with the city. They know neither the laws nor the customs, and are unable to associate with others. While it might be easy to conjure up an image of a philosopher that meets this description, it portrays nothing of Socrates. He perhaps knows the law of Athens better than Callicles; he participated in festivals and parties, and was constantly in the agora speaking with many diverse people. Additionally, Socrates also portrays the manly characteristics that Callicles desires of courage, strength, and intelligence as attested to by Alcibiades’s speech in the *Symposium* (219-222).

Socrates is fully aware of the way things “are” and the way they “really are,” which includes being aware of the consequences, and dangers, his lifestyle is threatened with. Thus he boldly proclaims, “I put my hand to the true political art and I alone of men today practice politics” (521d). What makes it the true political art is not that he actually improves souls of others, but by “testing them, testing their beliefs, he improves their souls by removing the chief source of their souls’ ugliness —their belief that they



are already beautiful, i.e., already know what values they should pursue” (Labarge 2005, 32). He fully expects to be brought to court and tried as a doctor before a jury of children, being prosecuted by a pastry chef. His only defense will be, “I did all these things, boys, in the interest of health” (522a). This is a simple metaphor, but not an inaccurate one, of his actual defense in the *Apology*.

This is courage. Socrates represents everything Callicles wants: belief in virtue and justice, courage to stand up for it, and a reputation of manliness and intelligence. True courage is not flinching from the appropriate way to act, whether it be to charge into battle or to flee injustice. Still unconvinced, the last option is for Socrates to use another rhetorical technique, referring again to the use of bogey men, and tell a myth (though he considers it a reasoned account) of the afterlife and the punishment/rewards of injustice and justice. A close look at the myth, however, scares away the bogey man and turns it into a myth of optimism in that “being good will benefit you...and justice really is the best” (Annas 1982, 125).

In conclusion, Callicles cannot reconcile his wish to be just with how the just often suffer at the hands of the unjust. He therefore abandons Socratic virtue to assume the belief of his twisted natural justice, which he believes will allow him to earn the reputation of manliness. Socrates attempts to refute both Callicles’s false opinion about justice as well as his expectations from politics. To gain the reputation that he desires will cost him what is most dear to him: his buried belief in virtue. The true art of politics is to always look toward the best, encourage others to do so, and not flinch from acting accordingly.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The interweaving of rhetoric, the greatest evil, and the true art of politics creates the unity of the dialogue. The relationship between these three topics is revealed through a reading with careful attention paid to the drama of the dialogue. Drama is character driven. It is understanding a character: what he believes, what he desires, and why he acts as he does. The most common aspects that reveal character are dramatic blanks in the dialogue, meaning Plato has not explicitly given direction about tone, motion, emphasis, or other actions that are revealing. But there are enough clues throughout to provide a good idea of how the participants in the dialogue should respond.

Rhetoric is the phantom part of politics, corresponding to justice, because it creates a false opinion about what is best. It gives no reasoned account as to why anything is best, but mostly relies on persuasive power of pleasure and folly to mask having a care for this knowledge. This is the nature of rhetoric when it is taught as a means to obtain power. Undoubtedly rhetoric has an amazing power to move, motivate, and persuade any number of people to do or believe a number of things. But to mistake this power as the good in and of itself is when error begins.

Noble rhetoric is subservient to a true art. The example of the rhetor and the doctor shows its value and utility to medicine, but perhaps its best use is in the political art, particularly to persuade about the true nature of justice. It does not flatter, saying only the pleasing things to the audience, but “fights to say the best things, whether they will be more pleasant or unpleasant to the hearers” (503b). Often this means noble rhetoric is refutative, aiming to persuade those with a false opinion of justice to refute

their own opinions by coming to a realization of their own falsity or ignorance. This self-refutation inspires Socratic ignorance, the knowledge of not having knowledge, which hopefully leads toward philosophy, which is the true cure for a false opinion.

Having a false opinion, particularly of justice, is the greatest evil for a human being to suffer. This is not to diminish the great evil in actually committing injustice, but it is from thoughts that actions flow. A just punishment of a fine or a prison sentence may correct the damage of an injustice committed, but is no guarantee of correcting the damage to the soul, which is a better guarantee against future injustices. A false opinion, rather than an unjust act, is the true disease and it requires the just punishment of self-refutation.

Toward the end of the dialogue, Socrates asks Callicles if there is some kind of prepared power to avoid both doing injustice and suffering injustice (509d-e). The power to avoid suffering is in becoming a friend of the state, assimilating as much as possible to the character and nature of the regime. This is what most people consider to be politics. But this power does nothing to diminish, but rather enhances, the likelihood of committing injustice. What the dialogue points toward as the power to avoid committing injustice is the true art of politics.

The true art of politics is two-fold: it is recognizing the nature of what is best, for both body and soul, and regulating behavior to abide by the precepts of the best. Justice is the principle that guides what is best for the soul and medicine for the body. Through the legislative art for the soul and gymnastic for the body the proper rules, regulations, and laws are made to align with what justice and medicine dictate, being enforced by self-discipline and moderation.

The true art of politics is an individual matter. But this does not negate the importance of politics on a larger scale, for the community. While politics, like rhetoric, has an offer of power to its pursuers, those desiring this power need first to come to terms with what they really want from the practice of politics. What holds human beings together is “community, friendship, orderliness, and justness” (508a). This seems to be the same principle that justice follows to create a structure of good within the soul, outlining what is best. Politics on a larger scale should thus only be entered upon when the things that hold human beings together are correctly ordered within the self. The politician needs to offer himself as an example of someone he has made better through practicing the true art of politics, qualifying him to deem what is best and what laws will uphold that on a larger scale.

Each of the characters in the dialogue has his own unique false opinion of justice. Gorgias is largely ambivalent to justice, recognizing the power of *logos* to create a relativistic, situational nature of things. His ambivalence toward justice, however, is an endorsement of injustice by default, for when pressed to describe the good of rhetoric he is too ashamed to show that most uses are examples of injustice and resorts rather to a praise of the art for simply being powerful. This makes Gorgias question his own indifference toward justice and appear to be convinced that a teacher of rhetoric must in truth be a knower of the just and unjust, as well as a doer of justice.

Socrates’s initial desire to speak with Gorgias was two-fold. He recognized something different about the man from the rest of the similar profession of sophistry, which was his denial to teach virtue. As the self-refutation from the dialogue with Socrates takes hold, Gorgias begins to realize the error in this stance. As Socrates sees

the greatest good as being released from false opinions by “straining to direct all one’s own and the city’s things toward this, that justice and moderation will be present,” he would welcome the help of Gorgias in his ability to speak to the many (507d-e). Rhetoric would create a fraternity to the true art of dialectic in an effort to educate the citizens about the best things (Weiss 2003, 195).

Polus interrupts to save the reputation of rhetoric. As a student and aspiring professional, Polus’s reputation is tied to that of rhetoric, a reputation he will fight to uphold at the expense of discrediting his teacher of the value of his education and worth of his knowledge. Like his teacher he has a certain ambivalence toward justice, but his greater desire for power and reputation amplifies his default endorsement of injustice. Perhaps recognizing this to a degree he tries to cover this by admitting that justice may be good, but injustice is merely shameful, not bad. His own lack in believing this, and in part due to a lack of intelligence, causes him to be refuted, but the self-refutation is not fully persuasive.

Socrates tries to show Polus that he is mistaken in the value he puts in rhetoric. The philosopher bests the young rhetor’s rhetorical techniques by turning Polus into his own witness. This refutation was meant to show Polus that rhetoric’s power is not as great as he makes it out to be, and that the humiliation for a lack of reputation is not a harmful thing. The refutation was a just penalty to persuade Polus to question his own views and investigate these things further. The colt proves quite cowardly and instead of proceeding forward falls back into the protection and comfort of his false opinions as soon as Callicles jumps on the scene.

Callicles, perhaps once a student of philosophy but now an aspiring politician, opens with a condemning charge against Socrates. In it, he upholds his natural view of justice and the classical Greek sense of manliness over philosophy. He holds tightly to the traits of manliness (intelligence, courage, strength) as they seem to him the only way to effect any good in the *polis*. Virtue otherwise is powerless to stop injustice and thus seems slavish. But he wants to do good, whether he truly loves the *demos* or not. His attachment to manliness obligates him to take up the hedonist argument simply as a demonstration of these characteristics rather than from a desire to please his appetites.

Where Socrates really refutes the young politician is in his assumptions about politics. Callicles is forced to confront whether his political heroes were actually good or not. In service to the city they excelled in cleverness and accomplished more than any other statesman, but in actually leading and making the citizens better, they apparently failed. Callicles should decide what is really more important: administrative service or actual leadership. Additionally, he should provide proof of his ability to lead, meaning he should master himself before he tries to master others.

Upon concluding the ending myth, Socrates reiterates that his participants should be persuaded by the arguments of the dialogue, for they alone remain standing while all else has been made to look ridiculous. They are currently all in a shameful position, acting like youth in claiming that the greatest things, justice and the rest of virtue, all change and never seem the same, to which he exclaims. “to such a degree of lack of education have we come!” (527d-e). So many of the problems of the *Gorgias* seem to point to just this, education. The greatest evil is cured by a type of education: a realization of ignorance and an understanding of nature derived through philosophic

inquiry. The true political art requires an education in justice. Perhaps the only true prepared power to protect against injustice is just this: a proper education for oneself as well as the community.

Leo Strauss noted that “the classical teaching cannot be immediately applicable to modern society, but has to be made applicable to it, that is, must be modernized or distorted” (1946, 333). How is the *Gorgias* to be viewed through a modern lens to be made applicable today? How useful can Socrates’s rhetoric be today? Firstly, I don’t agree that the dialogue is meant to be a condemnation of the Socratic method. Klosko calls the failure of Socrates to truly persuade any of the discussants, to force them to listen to a complete reasoned account of their false opinions, “the tragedy of philosophy” (1983, 593). The importance of philosophy is not diminished by this fact, but the point remains that philosophy is not for everyone. A Gorgianic/Socratic alliance is perhaps needed now more than ever.

But rhetoric itself has also changed. Hamilton in the introduction to his translation of the dialogue notes, “To us the ability to speak acceptably and convincingly in public is a relatively trivial factor in the ordinary citizen's equipment for a successful life; to the ambitious Athenian of the fifth and fourth centuries b.c. it was essential” (1960, 7). Rhetoric today is more the stuff of reelection speeches and the bashing of ideologues on blog posts, Twitter feeds, and cable news networks. The essential nature of rhetorical speech has lost its value for common citizens.

Rhetoric in use today, similar to Gorgianic rhetoric, is not in line with noble rhetoric. But the answer is not to simply add more rhetoric to the mix; it would be more likely to be drowned out in what already pervades multi-media. The answer lies in the

ending of the dialogue: education. For noble rhetoric to be self-refutative it needs to be presented in a manner where the subject will be forced to make the correct conclusion of his falsity. What better way to address these issues than to partake in some of the original dialogues that addressed this issue. An emphasis on classical education is the best chance to instill the critical thought necessary to truly answer the questions about what is best and grant us the path to correct our false opinions along the way.

But if classical thought admits to only one good, one way that is best, does not that do more to damage public discourse by creating intolerance? Socrates may be adamant in his stance on the good, but he is closed off neither to differing ideas nor people. His openness was a way to ensure that none of the good escaped him. Dialectic is not a tactic to debase the other side and glorify one's own position as best, but rather it is "an idealized analogue of democratic debate" (Euben 1994, 222). There is a greater sincerity in coming face to face with a conflicting view that may diminish and destroy beliefs and opinions that are held dearly and deeply than in pandering to their untested value in the name of toleration. There is nothing to fear in pursuing a philosophic education and much to gain. If indeed the dialogue is a piece of propaganda for the Academy then its persuasive point toward education has been acknowledged even today.



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VITA

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