THE UNITY OF THE GORGIAS

by

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This thesis aims to provide an interpretation of the *Gorgias* such that it can genuinely be grasped as a unity. That is, it will show that the formal structure of the dialogue is essentially related to the dialogue’s content, that every section of the dialogue can be seen to have a logical and necessary place within the whole, and also that every aspect of the dialogue, literary and argumentative, also has such a place. The fact that Plato has made the notion of a development or process central to every aspect of the dialogue – as, for example, we see a development from Gorgias through Polus to Callicles – must play an important role in our understanding of the work. From this perspective, many aspects of the *Gorgias* can be seen in a new light, so that this thesis presents an alternative view of the role of shame in the work; a new account of the place of Socrates within it, who does not receive an altogether flattering portrait from Plato; Callicles’ failure as a touchstone; a new account of the reason for Socrates’ failure to convince in this work; a new look at the role played by many of the arguments; and a new account of the way in which Plato speaks to the reader in this dialogue.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

It has long been understood that there is a single structure running through the whole of the *Gorgias*. The three main characters with whom Socrates speaks “do not represent three distinct forces... but three successive developments of the same force: Polus is the spiritual heir of Gorgias, Callicles is the spiritual heir of Polus. Accordingly, each takes up the discussion where his predecessor broke down, carries it to a deeper level, and shows that it involves wider issues.”¹ The most satisfactory interpretation of the dialogue would be able to show the essential relation of this structure to Plato’s overall purpose – indeed, surely an adequate account ought to attempt this – and yet previous scholarship does not appear to have pursued this line of inquiry. Certainly we often find that the underlying structure has been noticed, and is mentioned by scholars, but on the question of why Plato would go to the trouble of expressing his thought by means of such a structure there remains ample room for further insight.

This thesis will attempt to show that the purpose of the *Gorgias* is to be found in its overall structure, which includes this three-step development, in which each step arises as a natural development out of the preceding one. To put it another way, the ultimate aim is to show that the formal structure of the dialogue is essentially related to its content. Accordingly, we must begin with an overview of this formal structure. A well known metaphor, that of the doctor and the pastry-chef, provides an illuminating means of doing this.

¹ Dodds (1990: 5), originally published in 1959.
Early in the dialogue, in the course of the argument with Gorgias, the elder rhetor makes a remarkable claim: “if a rhetor and a doctor went to any city you wish, and had to compete in speech in the assembly, or in any other gathering, concerning who should be chosen as doctor, the doctor would be nowhere, but the fellow able to speak would be chosen, if he wanted.”2 (457b6-c2) Later, in the argument with Polus, Socrates describes a slightly different contest: “if a doctor and a pastry-chef had to compete among children, or among men as foolish as children, concerning which one, doctor or pastry-chef, understood good and bad foods, the doctor would die of hunger.”3 (464d5-e2) Finally, at the end of the dialogue, as Socrates defends his own life, we return to this image: “I will be judged as a doctor would be among children, with a pastry-chef for his prosecutor. For consider how such a man would defend himself if taken among such people, if someone should accuse him, saying ‘children, this man works many evils on you: he ruins the youngest of you by cutting and burning; he makes you go wanting, slimming and choking you; he gives you the most bitter drinks, and forces you to hunger and thirst – not like me: I feasted you on many and various pleasant things.’ What do you suppose the doctor could say if caught in this terrible situation? If he should speak the truth – ‘I did all these things, children, in a healthy manner’ – how great an outcry do you suppose such judges would make? Would it not be great?”4 (521e3-522a7)
In these three quotations we have more than a mere three instances of a doctor unjustly losing a rhetorical contest. Rather, over the course of the dialogue this image undergoes a structured development, both as regards its own detail and as regards its significance. The image itself is intensified so as to present us with an increasingly troubling reality. The nature of the contest changes: at first, it aims to decide who will receive the position of doctor, then to determine who best understands food, and finally it becomes a trial by jury. As we move from the first to the second instance, the penalty for losing becomes harsher, the judges less competent; from the second to the third instance, the matter is treated at greater length, making explicit the case against the doctor, and his inability to respond. Beyond the development of the image itself, its significance also becomes a more serious matter, for it begins as a purely hypothetical contest, but ends as an allusion to a real trial and death – and if we do not actually hear, in the final instance, that the doctor will be put to death, the fact that the result of the trial of Socrates hangs heavy over this part of the dialogue means that death is more emphatically present than it was in the image given against Polus.

There is no significant aspect of the dialogue that falls outside of the sort of development exhibited by this image: we begin with a hint, with something seemingly insignificant or merely implicit, and as the dialogue progresses, this hint exhibits growth, becoming more fully worked out, but usually also leading into a richer and more weighty matter. As we move through the dialogue, we shall see one example after another in which this movement “from the superficial to the fundamental”5 comes to light.

Now, if all of this is true, there is an important question that the literature seems to have passed by: why would Plato organise a dialogue in this manner? What has he gained by doing

5 Dodds (1990: 4).
so? Certainly it would have been easier to write a work without such a complicated structure; the fact that Plato took the time to do so demands explanation. By the end of this thesis, it will be possible to show how Plato’s purpose in writing the *Gorgias* is to be found in the development that characterises the dialogue’s structure. In finding the content in the formal structure of the work, we shall see that the *Gorgias* has a unity in a sense not previously appreciated by scholars.

It is worth considering, at the beginning, the question of what the dialogue is about. We are told that “in our medieval manuscripts, and in the catalogue quoted by Diogenes Laertius (3.59), the Gorgias bears the sub-title Ἥ περὶ ῥητορικῆς [or on rhetoric].”Certainly this makes sense from the perspective of the beginning of the dialogue: the discussion begins with rhetoric as its subject, and it repeatedly returns to it, even on the last page (527c). On the other hand, the discussion of rhetoric undergoes a development over the course of the dialogue, so that it becomes a discussion of how one should live (see 500c); from the point of view of the later parts of the dialogue, this might seem to be the work’s true subject. If we are to grasp the work as a whole, however, refusing to privilege one part over another, it is best to say that the *Gorgias* is about the development by which a discussion of rhetoric becomes an investigation of how one ought to live.

However, it is not only in the sense of the relationship between formal structure and content that we shall be concerned with the unity in this dialogue. Plato has not presented, in one work, a series of arguments, and in another, a series of literary devices, such as the themes of shame and friendship, or characters and their exasperation or lack of interest in the argument. Rather, he has presented all these things together, and in doing so has implicitly suggested that we are to grasp all these things together. Furthermore, we are not confronted with a series of text

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6 Dodds (1990: 1).
fragments – one, an argument with Polus about desire; another, an argument with Gorgias about rhetoric; etc. – but a single thread of argument, one whose rich interconnections should be quite clear by the end of this thesis. Again, the implicit suggestion is that we are to grasp all of this as a whole. So, for example, Callicles, as he is in fact put forward in the Gorgias, does not appear in a vacuum, but is rather the final moment in a development that begins with Gorgias. The most satisfactory account would be able to account for this context: what has been gained by presenting Callicles in this manner? What would be lost by presenting him in the abstract? The same sort of thing must be said, mutatis mutandis, for Gorgias, Polus, and the position that Socrates puts forth. There are no conclusions to be drawn at the end of the section on Gorgias himself – or at best, conclusions of very limited interest. What we have at that point is the beginnings of an argument on rhetoric (to be further developed in what follows), a characterisation of Gorgias himself (to acquire significance when the movement to Callicles has been completed), and the beginnings of a number of literary themes (to acquire significance by the end of the dialogue). An adequate interpretation of any individual passage should be able to explain (1) the detail of the text of the passage itself, but also (2) the necessary function of the passage within the larger whole. To fail to account for the literary devices would be like trying to understand an animal on the basis of a study only of the skeletal system; to abstract any passage from the whole, like trying to understand a limb without considering its place within a body: in either case, one certainly can contribute some insight, but the chance of fundamental misunderstandings is high.7

7 To look at the matter from the other side, readers who believe that some piece of the text – for example, Socrates’ talk of putting a head on the argument (505c-d), or manner in which Socrates’ account is presented against Polus, or the disappointed expectations concerning Callicles’ role as a touchstone – is not essential to Plato’s purpose are effectively asserting that he ought not to have written it, for it is a mark of a poor writer to include superfluous material. If Plato meant to speak to his readers only through his arguments, then by including all sorts of irrelevant
Accordingly, the title of this thesis – “The Unity of the Gorgias” – is meant to carry considerable weight. The aim is to demonstrate, to a greater degree than previous scholarship, the unity of all literary devices and all argumentation, the unity of every section of the dialogue within the whole, and the unity of the work’s formal structure with its content. The attempt is driven by the belief that success would provide the most substantial basis from which to claim an understanding of the dialogue: as Aristotle says, “with a true view all the data harmonise.”\(^8\) This is why the thesis has been written as it has: my goal is to explain the text, showing, as much as possible, that every detail of it is necessary to the whole. While it would be tiresome to spell out explicitly the purpose of every phrase, my hope is that by the end, readers will have been brought to the point at which they can see that this dialogue is an extraordinarily taut piece of writing, one in which Plato has brought the dialogue form to the highest level of art through a tightly interlocking series of themes, arguments and episodes, all of which come together into a seamless whole.\(^9\)

1.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE GORGIAS

The Gorgias can profitably be viewed as falling into three or four major pieces – one each for the arguments with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, with perhaps a fourth piece beginning at 499c, where Callicles becomes a less active participant and the argument begins anew – but the

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\(^9\) Of course, this is not to suggest that I am going to exhaust the philosophical material found in the dialogue, or present a definitive answer to every conceivable question concerning it. It is also quite likely that various aspects of the interpretation given here can be improved upon. What seems less likely is that it will prove possible to account for what Plato wrote from a perspective fundamentally different from the one given here.
dialogue contains a more fundamental division, into two pieces. Aristotle (*Nichomachean Ethics* i.4, 1095a32-33) tells us that Plato used to inquire whether a path led to or from the principles. This consideration points to the most basic structure of the dialogue. As we proceed from Gorgias, through Polus, to Callicles, we are on a path to the principles. From 499c we are proceeding from the principles. The “three successive developments of the same force,” mentioned above, cover only the first moment of the dialogue’s overall movement.

More specifically, as we move from Gorgias to Callicles, we involve ourselves with questions of an ever more fundamental nature. We begin with a consideration of rhetoric (from 449a), but soon turn to the question of who is happy and who is not (472c9-d1) – which Socrates declares to be ‘almost’ (σχεδόν – 472c7) the noblest that one could answer – and then to the matter of what sort of person one ought to be and what one should do (487e9-488a1), an inquiry that is “the noblest of all” (πάντων ... καλλίστη – 487e7-8). That is, we move from a relatively superficial matter to a deeply philosophical inquiry, and the final question is a development beyond the second in that we become explicitly conscious of the fact that we are talking about “how one should live” (500c3-4), as Socrates later puts it.\(^\text{10}\) Of course, it is not only the question under examination that develops as we proceed through this section of the dialogue. There is a whole suite of themes that exhibit a similar development, and we shall encounter these again and again in what follows. So, for example, we shall see that Gorgias asserts a series of ethical obligations in an unreflective fashion, as though they are simply an obvious given. As Polus intervenes, a problem with this standpoint begins to come to light: what if these ethical obligations conflict with our interests? With Callicles, we can see a standpoint from which this problem has been resolved: ‘justice’ as Callicles would understand it is indubitably in our

\(^{10}\) *Pace* Moss (2007: 229, fn. 2), who considers these “equivalent formulations.”
interest (assuming that we are the stronger). Gorgias is proud of his rhetorical skill, but the use that he suggests for this skill implies a certain kind of life. Polus simply makes explicit what this life amounts to, and the question of interests arises because he can see in the life of the tyrant something fundamentally desirable. Callicles brings out the ground of this perspective, the most fundamental reward that makes the tyrant’s life desirable: pleasure. The changes we see as we move from one position to the next are not merely placed next to one another; rather, the later ones develop out of the former. This overall process needs to be kept in mind continually in interpreting this first section of the dialogue.

There is, however, a further feature of this development, for Plato has presented it so that the end is implicitly present in the beginning. Here too we will see this repeated in various different respects, but let us take the life of the tyrant as an example. When Gorgias talks about ruling others (452d7-8) and making them one’s slaves (452e4-8), this hints at the admiration of the tyrant Archelaus that is to come with Polus (470d-471d), an idea that receives a richer development through Callicles (491e-492c) – or rather, we should understand the appearance of Archelaus with Polus to give fuller and more conscious expression to something that was already implicitly present in Gorgias. The language of potentiality and actuality is appropriate to this move. Gorgias does not intend actually to advocate the life of the tyrant, but the notion of tyrant is present in potency with Gorgias; what we see later in the dialogue is the actualisation of this aspect of Gorgias.  

All these matters are connected as part of a single movement, a single reflection in which the question ‘why?’ is brought continuously to bear, driving us to an ever-deeper consideration

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11 Dodds (1990: 15): “men like Gorgias put a deadly instrument into unscrupulous hands for the corruption of simple people. That is why the dialogue is called Gorgias, not Callicles: Gorgias’ teaching is the seed of which the Calliclean way of life is the poisonous fruit.”
of the matter at hand. Accordingly, this first part of the dialogue brings out how the seemingly mundane matters of everyday life depend on assumed answers to profoundly philosophical questions. It is because of this relationship of dependence of the earlier matters on the later ones that we may be said to be on our way to the principles in this part of the dialogue.\textsuperscript{12}

In the second section of the dialogue, from 499c, Socrates presents his own account, answering the challenge set by Callicles. Here the order of inquiry is reversed: the most fundamental matter is treated first, and subsequent questions are treated in logical order, each depending on what has preceded. More specifically, after some preliminary matters that follow from an agreement that pleasure and the good are distinct, Socrates gives his own account of the nature of the good (503d-505b). This gives him a basis from which he can give an account of the completely good person (506c-507c), which allows him to answer the question concerning the best way to live (505c-509a). When this has been accomplished, he can begin to move towards practical matters: the next question concerns a power capable of saving us either from doing or suffering injustice (509b-511b). After preparing the ground with a consideration of the value of self-preservation, the most fundamental basis of temporal power (511b-513c), Socrates can finally give his own account of politics (513d-517c), and with this comes an implicit answer concerning the nature of rhetoric; we shall see in the conclusion that this answer encompasses both the initial claims of Gorgias himself, and Socrates’ criticism of those claims. The remainder of the dialogue completes Socrates’ argument, and deals with related challenges that have come up over the course of the argument of the first main section.

\textsuperscript{12} It is in this context that we should understand this Socratic comment: “you’re happy, Callicles, because you have been initiated into the great mysteries before the small ones.” (497c3-4) The whole first part of the dialogue deals with small mysteries on the basis of assumed answers to great ones.
Again in this second section, it is the relationship of dependence that tells us we are now moving from the principles. That is, it is only when we have become clear about what is meant by ‘good’ that we can address the question concerning the good life; practical questions about how we might best attain a good life are in turn dependent on the earlier matters.

This structure is tied to a central point of this dialogue (to be treated in more detail below): the development from Gorgias to Callicles is in certain respects a good thing. Above all, it brings the focus of the discussion to the level of principles – that is, to what is by nature prior to all else – and this is a requirement for genuinely philosophical thinking.

1.2 THE ARGUMENTS

The approach taken here to the arguments used by Socrates in the Gorgias is best explained by means of earlier scholarship. Charles Kahn has convincingly argued that one should understand many of the dialogue’s arguments to be *ad hominem* – that is, directed at particular characters within the dialogue rather than directly at the reader. More specifically, Plato gives us indications that each of these three characters gives way in argument because of shame. So, for example, Polus, who admires the life of the tyrant, nevertheless recognises that much of the characteristic activity of a tyrant is morally wrong, and is ashamed to claim that it is right; because of this residual attachment to conventional justice, Socrates can force him to a contradiction.

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13 See Kahn (1983).
Now, the problem with *ad hominem* arguments is that they are in an important sense *bad* arguments. Just because a character, who is after all a creation of Plato, has incompatible beliefs is no reason for the reader to accept anything. So why would Plato deploy such arguments? Kahn has assumed without argument that it must be Plato’s purpose to move the reader to accept the position expressed by Socrates. As a consequence, he feels a need to find a missing premise in these arguments so that they may become defensible demonstrations of a Platonic doctrine. This premise he finds in shame: Plato indicates that all three characters – Gorgias, Polus, Callicles – give way to Socrates because of shame when they could have held their ground. On this view, then, shame in the *Gorgias* must point to “a Platonic conception corresponding to our own notion of an innate moral sense... an obscure intuition of the good on the part of Socrates’ interlocutors.”

This account of shame conflicts with some of Socrates’ own statements, but that point will be taken up in the section on shame below. Here we may begin to present a different account of why Plato would deploy *ad hominem* arguments to refute Gorgias, Polus and Callicles. When we turn to the structure of the *Gorgias* as laid out above, we see that its first section, in which we are moving towards the principles, actually *requires* arguments that are in some sense unsatisfactory. *Ad hominem* arguments can be said in one sense to succeed, and in another to fail. Socrates’ argument with Gorgias does decisively refute the elder rhetor, for it shows him to be attached to two mutually incompatible commitments. It is therefore necessary that he give way. However, because the argument used against him is merely *ad hominem*, Gorgias has been refuted in a manner that leaves room for further defence of his position. Polus can therefore pick up the argument where it left off, so that we really do have “the same force” running through this

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part of the dialogue. Thus, through \textit{ad hominem} arguments, each of the characters can be shown to fail to grasp the consequences of his own position, and then to recoil from those consequences as they become clear. This allows Plato to tie into the logic of key arguments a major theme of the dialogue, shame, which we shall take up below.

The assumption that Socrates must speak for Plato has been challenged, in particular by John Cooper, who emphasises the inadequacy of Socrates’ arguments, and poses what I think is a crucial question: “what is Plato’s relation to Socrates in the \textit{Gorgias}?\textsuperscript{15} This is an important move, although it does seem to me that we should try to account more fully for the literary aspects of the dialogue than Cooper does.\textsuperscript{16} Plato’s manner of expression might sometimes be still more different from that of philosophers today: the literary aspect might contain material essential to – or even more important than – the arguments.

In fact, when we turn to the literary side of the dialogue, there is ample evidence to confirm Cooper’s suggestion that Socrates does not speak in a straightforward manner for Plato. The portrayal of Socrates, and the relationship of this portrayal to the arguments, is something that will be more fully taken up in its own section below. Here, we may deal with Socrates’ ability to convince his opponents.

\textsuperscript{15} Cooper (1999: 31). I think Cooper is right to use a failure of Socrates to answer Callicles to point to a difference between Socrates and Plato, though I don’t find this failure in weakness of will. I do think that Kahn’s account of the arguments is fundamentally correct: he has been able in that respect adequately “to bring together the philosophic and literary understanding of the dialogue.” (1983: 75, fn. 1) Nevertheless, I hope to be able to achieve this more fully than Kahn has done.

\textsuperscript{16} For example, clearly Plato has made shame a significant theme of the dialogue (see Race (1979)). Why? Kahn’s interpretation suggests a way to address this. Cooper criticises Kahn’ account of the logic of the arguments, but does not provide an alternate explanation concerning Plato’s reason for emphasising shame throughout the dialogue. This is a significant omission: if it was Plato’s intention that we should not understand the relevant arguments to have been determined by shame, what is the positive function of the various suggestions that they were? (i.e., at 461b-c, 482c-e, 487b, 494d?) In shame I will find an answer to Cooper’s view that Socrates does not answer Callicles on the question of weakness of will.
If we take the Republic, from book ii onward, as a point of comparison, we note that there, the other characters are convinced by Socrates’ arguments, which are not *ad hominem*, and even Thrasyymachus remains interested in the argument (i. e., at Republic 450a-b; see also 498c-d).\(^{17}\) There is nothing easier for the writer of a dialogue than to show all of his characters being moved by his arguments to his preferred conclusion,\(^{18}\) and yet in the Gorgias this is precisely what does not happen. Instead, Callicles makes it abundantly clear by the end that he has lost interest in the argument, and is unmoved by it. In fact, Plato has made this particularly conspicuous, for he has Socrates set himself a standard: “if I do not provide you, one person, as a witness agreeing with the things I say, I do not believe anything worthy of account has been achieved by me concerning the things on which we argue.” (472b6-c2; see also 474a, 487e6-7)\(^{19}\) Socrates’ actual achievement of this aim is ambiguous, for other characters have a double relation to the argument. The final exchange with Polus can stand as a paradigm for the result of the whole dialogue in this regard (480e):

> “[The result of the argument] seems to me bizarre, Socrates” says Polus,
> although perhaps in your eyes it agrees with what went before.”
> “Well either one must resolve those [earlier] matters, or these necessarily follow,” replies Socrates.
> “Yes, that is so,” Polus admits.

\(^{17}\) I think the overall picture of Plato’s corpus given by Kahn (1996) is very much in the right direction, although I would treat some details differently. In particular, though I take a view of the purpose of the Gorgias different from Kahn, I still think my interpretation fits into his overall framework for what is traditionally regarded as the early/middle Plato. Cooper (1999: 30, fn.3) objects to Kahn’s view.

\(^{18}\) Indeed, Plato often leans so heavily in this direction that readers today complain that he has set up a Yes-man to affirm everything the principle character says. Clearly the complaint has been around since Plato’s time, as Xenophon’s recognisable parody of the Platonic dialogue shows: Socrates is shown asking a question requiring an affirmation, and everyone replies “certainly;” six more questions follow, each receiving the response “certainly.” Then he asks, “would someone who is able to make others pleasing to one person be better, or someone who can make others pleasing to many people?” At this point there is a division, with some answering, “it is clear that he is better who can make others pleasing to many,” and some saying, “certainly.” (see Xenophon’s Symposium, iii.56-59)

\(^{19}\) Klosko (1983: 587) makes a similar point.
That is, Plato presents Polus as unable to answer the argument, but ultimately unmoved by it: he does not say, “I am convinced by what you have said, and will live my life according to your principles from now on.” The same is true of Callicles, who goes further, making clear his lack of interest in the argument and trying to escape participating in it. Plato did not need to present the results of the arguments in this manner; an adequate interpretation will account for what he did in fact write.

Socrates’ failure to convince coheres with Cooper’s emphasis on the deficiency of Socrates’ arguments, and this emphasis goes naturally with Kahn’s insight that certain arguments are *ad hominem*, if we keep in mind that *ad hominem* arguments are in one respect bad arguments. Taking all of this together, we have a basis here for the view that Plato understands his character’s arguments to be inadequate to achieve their aim. We shall see below that Socrates’ inadequacy is stressed in other ways as well: Plato has distanced himself from his character. In the *Gorgias* Socrates does not speak for Plato unambiguously or in a straightforward manner.

Now, it is only in the first section of the dialogue, up to 499c, in which we are moving towards the principles, that certain key arguments are thought to be *ad hominem*. What of Socrates’ arguments after that? Although we shall see that his account contains numerous

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20 Note also that unlike Gorgias, Polus does not reappear later as an interested onlooker. As Klosko (1983: 593) says, “having explicitly made the point that his opponent must be convinced if he is to be accounted successful, Socrates is unable to convince Callicles of anything.” Similarly Rutherford (1995: 143): “an important feature of the *Gorgias* is Socrates’ ultimate failure to convince.”

21 Rutherford (1995: 141) suggests that the direct form in which the *Gorgias* is reported is to be contrasted with dialogues narrated by Socrates (specifically the *Protagoras*): “it is less natural for us to align ourselves with Socrates; he is not present as a friendly narrator inviting our sympathy.”

22 Beversluis (2000) calls into question the traditional view of Socrates as Plato’s mouthpiece over a much greater range of dialogues. Although I am often at odds with him, I have found his work very helpful, as should be clear enough from my footnotes.
important strengths, still the arguments are significantly flawed, and we shall see that Plato has pointed the reader towards these flaws in two different ways.

First of all, there are a host of literary indications – including Callicles’ retreat from the argument, his failure as a touchstone, the theme of jesting, and significant talk of gratification – all of which direct us to the conclusion that the argument has become significantly compromised. Second, there are two pillars on which Socrates’ self-defense (given at 521a-522e) must rest, and both of these are marked by comments concerning μυσε and λογος, which point to the ambiguous epistemological status of the account at these points. These pillars are (a) what I will call the ‘keystone’ of Socrates’ case (506c-507c) and (b) the myth at the end, on which the argument concerning self-preservation (511b-513c) is logically dependent, something that Socrates implicitly concedes at 522e, as we shall see. And, of course, we should not forget that the argument from 499c proceeds on the basis of an assumption – i.e., that pleasure and the good are not the same – that has been established in a merely dialectical manner, through merely ad hominem arguments.

1.3 THE CONCERNS OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND SOCRATIC IDEALITY

The preceding section presents a problem: if Socrates does not speak in a straightforward manner for Plato, how can Plato be understood to speak to the reader in this dialogue? Before giving a sketch of an answer, there is one particularly important theme that needs to be explained. By means of the conflict between Socrates and Callicles, the Gorgias raises the question of what is

23 Near the start of the Socrates section the reader will find a more detailed account of these literary indications.
really real, and the Calliclean side of the divide will often be referred to in what follows as “the concerns of everyday life.” That is, Gorgias, Polus and Callicles take for granted everyday conceptions of what is real, what is good, and thus of what is to be aimed at in action. Socrates’ position, as we shall see, is presented from the start in a manner that emphasises its difference from everyday concerns. Perhaps the best way to explain this theme, is to follow its development through the dialogue. It constitutes a fundamentally important aspect of the “single force” that runs from Gorgias to Callicles, just noticeable at first, but increasing in distinctness until, at the end, the idea has been brought sharply into focus.

At 455b-e, Socrates suggests that various experts – doctors, shipwrights, etc. – should be the ones consulted regarding their various realms of expertise. In response, Gorgias can simply point out that this is not in fact so, for instead of the relevant experts, rhetors carry the day. That is, in an ideal Socratic world, there would seem to be no place for rhetoric, because the various experts would be consulted (and would, no doubt, convince) for each particular endeavour. In the world of everyday experience that we do in fact inhabit, rhetoric wields immense power. Thus already at this point, the gulf between the everyday and the ideal is implicitly present.

In our treatment of the argument with Polus, we shall see that Plato has set up his presentation so that Socrates’ position comes to light precisely in its opposition to the concerns of everyday life: Polus is there reminding us every step of the way of certain terrible practical realities (e.g., 473c), and also of his own peculiar conception of success, the life of the tyrant. His exasperated outbursts, right from the beginning – do even you (καὶ σῦ) believe this?, he asks (461b3) – serve to emphasise Socrates’ distance from everyday experience. By having Socrates present his arguments against this backdrop, Plato implicitly brings up the question of its content.

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24 That there is no room for rhetoric in an ideal Socratic world is confirmed by the interpretation of the myth that appears below.
That is, the just life, as Socrates presents it, may be ‘noble,’ ‘good’ and ‘just,’ and result in ‘happiness’ (εὔδαιμονία – 470e10), but what does any of this mean on Socrates’ account? What Plato brings to the fore through his manner of presentation is the fact that it does not necessarily include any sensuous ‘good,’ and even Socrates would not deny that the great majority of what most people think fit (δοκεῖν) to pursue falls within this realm (475e7-476a2). The world for which Socrates is the advocate is thus being brought to light as the negation of the world most people inhabit; what its content beyond this might be is not at this point clear. Indeed, the distinction between what people want (βουλέσκει) and what seems good to them (δοκεῖν) again brings before us a distinction between ideal and practical reality, this time as applied to the will. The result of the argument is that the various appeals of Polus to concrete experience and to feeling fail to move Socrates, while Socrates’ abstract arguments are unable to move Polus. The fact that Socrates had earlier declared that the only important goal for either character was to convince the other (472b6-c2) draws particular attention to this double result. We are left, then, with an un-reconciled opposition, and the theme is more strongly present, for it impinges directly on the whole course of the argument with Polus, as it did not with Gorgias.

From the beginning of the Callicles section, this opposition is developed further and deepened. Callicles suggests that Socrates would turn the world upside down (481c), pointing to the gulf that is coming to light between Socrates’ arguments and an everyday conception of what is really real. The appearance of pleasure is important in this connection, for it is not only a foundation from which it makes sense to admire a tyrant and desire the power of rhetoric, but it

25 One should keep in mind that the Greek word used here for ‘happiness,’ εὔδαιμονία, does not simply refer to a psychological state, and would be better translated by ‘flourishing’ or ‘well-being,’ thus simply restating the idea of ‘good’ in relation to a life.

26 Note in particular that the distinction between shameful and noble rhetoric (503a-b) is a distinction between the rhetoric known in everyday experience, and something outside of experience, as 503b1-3 suggests (the point is developed at 503b4-d4 and 513d-517c).
is, in particular, a sensuous and indubitably real foundation. With pleasure the conception of reality that drives Gorgias, Polus and Callicles is brought to its most fundamental principle.

Callicles also sharpens this opposition into a two-headed practical problem, one part personal, the other political. First of all, at the end of his initial statement (i.e., at 485e3-486d1), Callicles warns that Socrates’ way of life has made him incapable of effective action just where this matters most. He would find himself defenceless in a court of law. Even if unjustly accused, he might find himself put to death – and with this remark, Plato points beyond the dialogue to the fate suffered by the historical Socrates. Socrates’ response to Callicles will culminate in a defense of his own life (521a-522e), which again contains reminders of what actually happened to Socrates in real life (521b-c, 522b-c). The political side of the problem comes at 503a-d, where it is Callicles’ insistence that there actually are (or have been) rhetors who have achieved real good rather than mere gratification that drives Socrates to set out his own account of the good and all that follows from it. Here too, through the Four Men – Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades and Pericles, four actual statesmen from Athenian history – Plato points away from a merely theoretical reflection to the question of how an ethical theory would actually accomplish good in the world of everyday experience. It is in response to this political challenge that Socrates will make the claim that he is among the few true politicians (521d6-8). What is to be emphasised in both heads of this practical problem is the focus on the actual: Plato has used real people to point to hard-headed practical realities. The question is, how does this play out in real life? It is difficult to imagine a more dramatic and vivid way of putting this demand to the reader.27

27 One can also see a practical implication in the fact that Plato in this dialogue has chosen to develop the question of how one should live out of a discussion of rhetoric – that is, out of a discussion of a practice of fundamental importance to judicial and political affairs.
The effect of all this is to develop a challenge. Plato has Socrates develop his own account specifically in relation to – or rather, in opposition to – a view that takes the here-and-now, the sensuous experience of everyday life, to be what is really real. As we move from Gorgias to Callicles, this alternative view comes ever more clearly into focus. Two related questions arise from this for the interpretation of the dialogue: first of all, does Socrates succeed in meeting this aspect of the Calliclean challenge? Secondly, what is Plato’s purpose in this manner of presentation? That is, by bringing out this particular gulf between Socrates’ position and that of Callicles, Plato might hope either to make clear to the reader what exactly it is that he wishes us turn away from, or to point to an important consideration that he believes to deserve an important place within an adequate account.

1.4 CALLICLES AS A SOURCE OF GOOD

We can now give an outline of the manner in which Plato communicates with the reader in the Gorgias. This comes to light through a consideration of the role played by Callicles, who represents the culmination of the development that begins with Gorgias. Through Plato’s use of Callicles, we can see how Socrates is presented with a problem that cannot be answered in a merely ad hominem fashion.

Readers might find themselves with an instinctive tendency to put a black hat on Callicles and a white hat on Socrates, assuming that the idea must be that one is simply wrong and the other, simply right. Recent scholarship on the Gorgias, however, has given the basis for a different view, bringing out how Callicles presents certain important considerations that need to
be included if Socrates is to make an adequate response.\textsuperscript{28} In this sense, Callicles, and the movement that culminates in him, can be said to stand for something good. By 499c, Socrates has refuted Callicles in a negative fashion, using a merely \textit{ad hominem} argument that shows that there are internal contradictions within his position. If the matter were to be left there, some might feel that Callicles' position, though incoherent, nevertheless offered certain advantages, and was therefore the best guide to a good life. A more thorough refutation would take up all the major strengths of Callicles' position and show how they could be incorporated within a coherent account.

There are five main challenges that Callicles presents for Socrates. These may be briefly summarised here, so that the reader may have an idea in advance of major themes to be developed in what follows. In the first place, when Callicles describes his law of nature (483a7-484c3) – that is, the idea that the strong should rule the weak – there is an implicit claim that he is able to base his deontic assertions on an order of nature. This should give him a real strength in argument, and is to be contrasted with his talk of “papers, trickery and incantations” (484a) to describe the beliefs of others. That is, moral claims seem often to be mere assertions, founded on nothing at all. Second, Raphael Woolf, in an excellent paper, has shown that Callicles is irrevocably committed to two ideas: integrity, that is, a demand to be true to oneself and preserve one's identity in the face of external pressure; and friendship, that is, a desire to involve oneself with others in an amicable fashion. The demand, then, is that we should give up neither of these.\textsuperscript{29} Third, Callicles presents us with the culmination of the matter of the concerns

\textsuperscript{28} I have in mind Cooper (1999) and Woolf (2000). Consider also Moss (2007: 235): “the dialogue is not concerned only to praise Socrates ... it also draws attention to his failures.”

\textsuperscript{29} See Woolf (2000); I give a brief summary of Callicles’ attempt to have both identity and friendship at the end of the section on Callicles, and a brief summary of Socrates’ solution to this problem in the section of the conclusion, \textit{How Socrates Successfully Answers Callicles (i)}. Friendship is significant in another regard: in the section Callicles
of everyday life, discussed above, and we shall see that this theme is developed in such a way as to make it a challenge of its own. That is, the concerns of everyday life exhibit a considerable pull on people: can Socrates include or respond to this consideration in his own account? In particular — and this can be considered a fourth challenge — Callicles sharpens his concern with everyday life into a practical problem with two heads, one personal, one political. On the personal level, Socrates could get dragged into court and convicted of a crime of which he is innocent (485e2-486d1); on the political level, Callicles insists that there are, or at least have been, people who have done real good in politics (503a-d). Finally, the movement to Callicles, if not only Callicles himself, brings to light a deepening of Plato's psychology. Through the notion of bravery, the possibility emerges that someone might want to do something, be able to do it, and yet fail to do so because of weakness of will. This is a possibility for which earlier, ‘Socratic’ dialogues do not seem to allow.

Accordingly, through the movement that culminates in Callicles, Plato develops a multi-faceted challenge. To rise to it, Socrates must (1) provide a basis for his own position in an order of nature; (2) preserve the demand for both integrity and friendship; (3) include, or justify the rejection of, the concerns of everyday life in such a manner that he can account for the pull it exerts on people like Gorgias, Polus and Callicles; (4) respond to the two-headed practical challenge; and (5) deal with the possibility of weakness of will. In addition to this challenge, we have already suggested how the dialogue to 499c is a movement towards the principles. That is, the development from Gorgias through Polus to Callicles is a good thing in that it drives the focus of the discussion to the level of principles, forcing Socrates to provide an account that

\[Fails as a Touchstone\], we shall see that his failure as a friend is one of the ways in which Plato indicates to us that Callicles cannot be the touchstone that Socrates seeks.

\[30\] See Cooper (1999).
reaches to the same depth. In all of these ways, then, Callicles, and the development that culminates in him, represent something good. Through these implicit challenges and the response that we find to them in Socrates’ account we may reasonably hope to get a view of Plato’s intended message for the reader.

1.5 THE SEMI-PLATONIC SOCRATES

Plato’s treatment of Socrates in the Gorgias is a complicated matter. Far from presenting a passionate defence of his teacher, he gives us instead a critical look at the older philosopher, one that goes as far as putting into question the activity that led to his death. There are two aspects of the characterisation of Socrates to be kept in mind: first, the straightforwardly critical elements, and second, the change that we can see in Socrates over the course of the dialogue. The portrayal we find here gives further support to the notion that Socrates does not speak in an unambiguous manner for Plato in this dialogue.

The first critical element of Plato’s presentation of Socrates has already been noted above: numerous arguments have been flagged as problematic, and Socrates’ failure to convince is quite conspicuous. Beyond this, we have already noted that Callicles turns the focus of the argument upon Socrates himself (at 485e3-486d1). Beginning on this basis, we shall see that a number of Socratic arguments can be applied with conspicuous ease onto Socrates himself. This is true in his consideration of rhetoric against Gorgias, and in his criticism of Polus for chasing after attributes without first considering an underlying nature (e.g., 462c10-d2, 463b7-c7, d4-5). The most important instance, however, comes at the summit of the consideration of practical matters. Already in antiquity, people noticed that Socrates’ attack on the Four Men (513d-517a)
– that is, on Cimon, Miltiades, Themistocles and Pericles – fit Socrates himself like a glove.\textsuperscript{31} Indeed, we shall see that Socrates’ argument at this point, in addition to being provocative in the extreme, is also amazingly bad as a critique of practical politics – and yet it is amazingly good if it is to be applied to Socrates. Like the Four Men, he conspicuously failed to improve the character of the Athenians, although he claims (521d) to attempt the practice of the political art.

Thus the Socrates of the \textit{Gorgias} is significantly flawed. He also undergoes noticeable changes over the course of the dialogue. That it presents us with an ordered progression as we move through Gorgias to Polus and then to Callicles should be a straightforward matter; less obvious is the fact that Socrates himself changes over the course of the dialogue from the character of the early dialogues, who confounds others while remaining convinced of his own ignorance, to someone who is trying actively to establish doctrines of his own, although with questionable success.\textsuperscript{32}

As the dialogue begins, Socrates is recognisable as the fellow from the early dialogues. He seeks to learn from Gorgias (προθέσατι παρ’ αὐτοῦ – 447c1), and proceeds only to ask questions. When Polus gets involved, there is a change: Socrates does give his own opinion, although at first (462b-465e) he does so having been asked for it, and the view he gives is to a substantial degree a logical consequence of the admission which separates Polus from Gorgias. There is then another step (466a -481b), in which he actively puts forth radical new claims of his own, which not only do not follow from what Polus has already said, but are actually characterised from this point onward by their complete opposition to what his opponents say.\textsuperscript{33}

Finally, when we get to Callicles, it is pertinent to keep in mind Socrates’ earlier admonition to

\textsuperscript{31} This is evident from Olympiadorus (1998: 261, lecture 41.3). See also Dodds (1990: 355).
\textsuperscript{32} Dodds (1990: 16-17) has drawn attention to certain Socratic changes in this dialogue.
\textsuperscript{33} Beversluis (2000: 319) points us towards the change when he reminds us in this context that Socrates is “the philosopher whose wisdom consists in the fact that he knows nothing.”
Polus: “would I not suffer something terrible, if I am not allowed to go away and not listen to you?” (461e-462a) By 497a, Callicles would very much like to go away and not listen, but Socrates and Gorgias will not let Callicles go (see also 505c-506c).\textsuperscript{34} Indeed, Socrates reaches a point (506c-509c) at which he alone is the argument, since Callicles wants nothing to do with it.\textsuperscript{35} Thus we can see an ordered progression of increasing activity within Socrates.

Plato has drawn the reader’s attention to the change in Socrates over the course of the dialogue through a well-known theme, namely that of μακρολογία (i.e., lengthy speech).\textsuperscript{36} On the dialogue’s first page, Socrates asks for a discussion rather than a display (447b-c), and from this point on there are repeated references to the length of the speeches characters make. Thus Polus is criticised for his failing at discussion (διαλέγομαι – 448d) while Gorgias, having agreed to a discussion (449b-c), is praised for the shortness of his answers (449d). The same demand to restrain long speeches is made of Polus (461e-462a). However, when Socrates first begins to give his own views, he gives a long speech, but then apologises for it, saying that he needed to do so in order to make himself understood (465e-466a). By the time we get to Callicles, not only do both characters speak at some length at the start (481c-488b),\textsuperscript{37} but by 506c, we have a dialogue no more, for Socrates takes over the argument completely on his own for several pages – and we see at this point the connection between this theme and that of

\textsuperscript{34} Similar changes are present in the first book of the Republic: Socrates at first wishes to learn (πυθάνουμαι – 328e5) from Cephalus, and asks him questions; by the end of the Polemarchus section, Socrates is beginning to argue more actively for his own views, in that the argument at 335a-e hints at a fuller doctrine, bringing in concepts like ἵρετή and ἔργον which go beyond anything Polemarchus said. Against Thrasymachus, he is more active still, first developing his own view of the arts (341c-342e), then developing his own views at some length against a Thrasymachus who would prefer to leave (from 344d), and who soon makes his lack of interest in the argument quite explicit (from 350d). I take it that the point of these changes is the same in both dialogues.

\textsuperscript{35} Klosko (1983: 580) makes a similar point. See also Dodds (1990: 16-17).

\textsuperscript{36} The word is used at 449c5.

\textsuperscript{37} Rutherford (157-158) notes that the phrase, “there’s nothing like asking him,” occurs both in the initial scene of the dialogue, where Gorgias is the one to be asked, and at the start of the Callicles section, where Socrates is the one to be asked (i.e., 447c5 ~ 481b9). I take the point of this to be a nod towards Socrates’ increasing activity.
Socrates’ increasing activity. He later excuses himself for such long speeches (519e) on the ground that Callicles refused to give answers. Thus Plato has introduced a theme right at the start, one which might seem at first to be irrelevant to the purpose of the dialogue, but its effect is to point us to the change in Socrates over the course of the dialogue.\footnote{Beversluis (2000: 364) again brings our attention to the inconsistency within Socrates by referring to him as “the man who cannot tolerate long speeches.”}

Thus Socrates has not only become so active by the end of the dialogue that he has his own doctrines, but he is propounding them at length. However, we have already noted Socrates’ failure to convince: he proves unable to move Polus and Callicles. On the basis of all this, I would suggest that the Socrates of the \textit{Gorgias} develops into a semi-Platonic Socrates, one who has doctrines, but whose arguments fail to establish all he claims for them, and whose dialectical victory is significantly qualified. It is in the second book of the \textit{Republic} that these qualifications on his philosophical activity will be removed, and we will have a fully Platonic Socrates, one who speaks for Plato in a more straightforward manner.\footnote{See Tarnopolsky (2010: 44-46) for a different account of the changes in Socrates over the course of the dialogue. She sees him changing into a fully Platonic Socrates.} The \textit{Gorgias}, then, through its portrayal of Socrates, locates itself in between the ‘early’ dialogues and the \textit{Republic}.

But why would Plato present a Socrates who actually undergoes a change within the dialogue itself? What is gained by presenting him as developing into, rather than simply being, a semi-Platonic Socrates? We can find an answer in context within which this takes place, that is, in the overall movement of the dialogue as explained above. We shall see that Socrates’ new, counterintuitive ethical claims are presented as a reaction to Polus’ appeals to the concerns of everyday life, and this, I suggest, is the idea behind the changing Socrates of the dialogue. It is the need to respond to the destructive new position we find coming into being with Polus and Callicles that provokes Socrates into increasing activity, into giving his own account. This is one
of Plato’s ways of indicating that the philosophy he will develop, of which we get an image in
this dialogue, is a response to this particular development.

1.6 SHAME: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

We have already seen how shame could be an important theme in relation to the arguments, and
it has long been understood to be a central theme of the whole Gorgias.\(^{40}\) Until very recently,
however, the account of shame given by interpreters has usually been one-sided, suggesting that
Plato might consider it a useful philosophical tool.\(^{41}\) As we noted above, one influential view
claims that “shame reflects a Platonic conception corresponding to our own notion of an innate
moral sense... Shame operates in this dialogue as an obscure intuition of the good on the part of
Socrates’ interlocutors.”\(^{42}\) Similarly, another scholar believes that in the Gorgias “pleasure pulls
us in the wrong direction, towards false value judgements, while shame pulls us in the right
direction, towards the truth.”\(^{43}\) Such statements are in need of significant qualification, because
Plato would want to be sure we are quite clear on one point: shame has no place at all as a tool in
genuinely philosophical argument. Although it might exert a useful pull on unreflective people in

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\(^{40}\) For example, Race (1979), Kahn (1983).
\(^{41}\) Tarnopolosky (2010) argues more broadly that shame can be both a positive and negative influence, but seems
largely to accept Kahn’s account of the role of shame in the dialogue.
\(^{42}\) Kahn (1996: 138). In addition to the criticism of Kahn’s account of shame that I make here, I find further reason
to disagree with him in the challenge that Callicles makes, and that Socrates takes up, on my account, concerning the
need to ground an ethical doctrine in reality. See the section of the conclusion, How Socrates Successfully Answers
Callicles (i), which includes a summary, and extension to the Republic, of this idea.
\(^{43}\) Moss (2005: 146). Moss continues (146-147), “prejudices and confusions may hide our deepest value beliefs from
our own view, but in our feelings of shame they shine through. Deep down Polus truthfully believed all along that
injustice was worse than justice.” In addition to the objections given below, recall that Plato has emphasised
Socrates’ failure to convince in this dialogue. Surely if Plato wished to direct us to the idea that shame brings out the
truth, it would make no sense that there should be any doubt at all about the conversion of Polus and Callicles to the
Socratic perspective. Finally, the idea that pleasure moves us in the wrong direction seems to conflict with pleasure
as it appears in Socrates’ account of skills at 517a-519b (at least as I understand it).
the direction of better behaviour, it is an impediment for any inquiry that seeks to know the reason for anything, and provides no logical basis for any Platonic doctrine.

There are two main considerations that point decisively to this understanding of shame: first, the manner in which shame fits into the movement from Gorgias to Callicles, and second, Socrates' comments at 487a-e. To begin with the larger picture, each character in the *Gorgias* is willing to go farther than the last; the influence of shame diminishes as the argument moves forward. Gorgias feels compelled by shame to say he would teach virtue; Polus does not feel this compulsion, but will at least grant that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it; Callicles will not even admit this. And yet as the role of shame is reduced, the discussion itself focuses on ever more philosophical issues, proceeding from relatively mundane matters – who is Gorgias, and what is the power of his art? – to the question of “who is happy and who is not” (472c9-d1), and this soon becomes a question of what sort of person one ought to be and what one should do (487e9-488a1), and how one should live (500c3-4). On each occasion that Socrates calls attention to the new subject, he also asserts its importance and/or nobility (472c6-8, 487e7-8, 500c2-3). Implicit in the development from Gorgias to Callicles, then, is the idea that a properly philosophical investigation is present to the extent that shame is absent.

Proceeding on the basis of this point alone we might conclude that Plato sees an opposition between shame and philosophy, but Plato has not been content to leave the matter implicit. Polus and Callicles both suggest that their predecessor failed to maintain himself in the argument because of shame (461b-c, 482c-e), and Socrates confirms their analysis (487b2-5, 494d2-3). It is Socrates’ remarks at 487a-e that give us an unambiguous indication of how we

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44 Cooper (1999: 49, fn. 27) disagrees, calling 494d2-3 a “ironical and tactical remark;” Socrates’ speech at 487a-488a is similarly declared “full of irony.” I see no reason to accept this reading. To object, with Cooper, that Socrates “indicates no particular statement each made out of fear of embarrassment” seems to me to push too hard in
are to understand the role of shame in the arguments. He believes that Callicles will be a touchstone (βάσανος – 486d7, 487e3), by which he may test (βασανίζειν – 487a4, e1) his own beliefs. Further, he spells out the reason for his belief. There are three qualities in question: knowledge, goodwill and frankness (ἐπιστήμη, εὐνοία, παρρησία – 487a2-3), and these indicate, respectively, cleverness (σοφός – 487a4-5, 7), friendliness (φιλός – 487b1, e5) and a lack of shame (αἰσχύνη – 487b3, e4). Now, Gorgias and Polus are not criticised in regard to the first two requirements – they are clever and friendly (487a7-b1), we are told – but “they are more deficient in frankness and are more shameful than they should be.” (487b1-2) The effect is to put particular emphasis on the matter of shame/frankness: it is specifically because Callicles is “the sort of person who speaks freely and is not ashamed” (487d5) that he will be an adequate touchstone. Accordingly, if Callicles fails to be frank, if he gives in to shame, the reader has been prepared by Plato to understand this as a failure, one that carries the consequence that Callicles can no longer be considered a touchstone.

In fact, Callicles does fail in precisely this regard. At 494c, Socrates urges him not to give in to shame (ἀπασχούμαι – 494c4-5), reminds him of the failings of Gorgias and Polus in that regard (d2-3), and appeals to Callicles’ bravery (d4) – but shortly thereafter, Callicles brings shame into the discussion (e7-8). The connection of this passage with 487a -e, where Plato set up one direction: why should we expect a more specific reference? Surely the natural way to read this is to take Socrates as indicating his agreement with what was said before about the role played by shame; the reader who wishes to be more specific can return to each passage in question. Indeed, I find no specific confirmation of Cooper’s finding of irony, which seems to be between the lines rather than on them. What would Plato’s positive purpose with this irony be, especially given that it could so easily obscure the interpretation that, on Cooper’s view, is correct? If Socrates confirms that he’s playing the crowd with his appeals to shame (494d1-2), surely that simply drives home the point that arguments that are dependent upon shame are bad arguments. The real weakness, however, of Cooper’s approach to these passages is its failure to address particular references to shame within the context of shame as a major theme of the dialogue: there is more to each of the mentions of shame (and therefore to Kahn’s reading of the arguments) than can be gleaned merely from a detailed consideration of the immediate context. I do agree with Cooper and with Irwin (1986: 71, fn. 30) that Socrates does not necessarily confirm anything Polus said at 508c1-3, but this is not an important point, for as we shall see, Socrates’ comments at this point are dependent upon 506c-507c, which is flagged by Plato as a particularly inadequate argument.
a specific expectation, is obvious, and it makes interpretation a straightforward matter: Callicles fails to provide Socrates with a touchstone. Plato’s intention is to show the reader that Socrates’ belief that an agreement with Callicles would have “the end consisting in truth” (487e7) was misplaced, and that the attainment of this end will somehow be compromised. (Plato will also emphasise, at 499c, that Callicles fails in respect to friendliness; see the section, Callicles Fails as a Touchstone.) Note that on this reading, Socrates’ comments at 487a-e cohere with our observation concerning the relationship between the absence of shame and the presence of philosophical inquiry over the movement from Gorgias to Callicles.

Now, let us return to the idea that shame in the Gorgias should be understood as a means of getting to the truth. The idea is presumably that the increasing willingness of each character to push past shame makes their eventual collective failure to maintain their stance all the more significant. That is, if Gorgias gives way in argument because of shame, and Polus, who pushes things further, does the same, then if Callicles, who goes furthest of all, can also be made to give way to shame, one might try to claim (on the basis of only three characters!) that shame is a universal reality that can be brought to bear on all people without qualification. We may leave aside the possibility that a more vigorous and consistent hedonist (note σοῦ τις νεανικότερος – 509a3) would push things farther than Callicles does, for there is a more serious difficulty: if shame is an innate moral sense, how can its absence be a requirement for a touchstone needed for an argument on moral matters, as Socrates clearly suggests at 487a-e? Finally, if Plato’s intention is that the reader should view Callicles’ succumbing to shame as a sort of success, one that brings out the truth, surely he ought to have made Socrates say, “if you too, Callicles, fail to be frank and become ashamed, as Gorgias and Polus did, then our conversation will have the end consisting in truth.”
Plato, then, has made the role of shame in the *Gorgias* quite clear: it is an *anti*-philosophical force, one that *prevents* us from getting to the reasons that things are the way they are. Further, if we look at the role it plays as the movement from Gorgias to Callicles progresses, it seems reasonable to connect shame with an adherence to conventional beliefs. That is, we shall see that Gorgias accepts a conventional notion of justice, and he is most susceptible to shame. This is less true of Polus, whereas Callicles, who is least subject to shame, is able explicitly to contrast convention and nature (*νόμος* and *φύσις*), and presents an altogether unconventional account of justice. That is, shame is an indicator, in this dialogue, of the degree to which each character is willing simply to accept conventional views as given; that a freedom from such uncritical acceptance is necessary to philosophy should be a straightforward matter. To test the soul (*βασιλεία* – 486d4), one cannot simply take for granted what most people think; rather, one must be frank, saying what one really thinks, however much it conflicts with common opinion. That is why Socrates begs (*δέομαι* – 492d3) Callicles not to slacken in any way once he is speaking frankly (492d1-5).

This view of shame as an anti-philosophical force, one connected to conventional views, finds some support in a parallel consideration concerning manners. Polus, as he enters the argument, is offended by Socrates’ very questioning, which has put Gorgias in a difficult position in front of so many people. For this, Polus accuses Socrates of crudeness, or ill-breeding (*αγορίσκη* – 461c4), and Socrates quickly admits that speaking the truth may be “rather crude”

45 In addition to the argument he specifically refers to, Polus might also have in mind 457c-458e, where Socrates uses Gorgias’ genteel nature to make him feel uncomfortable – in fact, ashamed (*σκέψις* – 458d7) – and thus pressures him to continue the argument. But as regards Gorgias’ shame at this point, does it not show the argument actually being advanced by shame, since it keeps Gorgias from leaving the argument? This seems unlikely, since it would be the only such example. I take it that the point here is to emphasise the extent to which Gorgias is subject to the influence of what others think of him. This is to be compared with Callicles, whose considerable independence from this compulsion will be an important theme later on.
(ἀγροικότερον – 462e). The point behind this is that regard for manners, or attending to the feelings of others – that is, regard for conventional behavioural guidelines – can be a hindrance to philosophical argument.46 We can see the same idea at work when Callicles, speaking frankly to Socrates about the dangers inherent in a life devoted to philosophy, admits that he is speaking “rather crudely” (ἀγροικότερον – 486c2), or when Socrates himself, when emphasising the iron-clad nature of the argument, confesses that it is “rather crude” (ἀγροικότερον – 509a1) to speak in such a manner. A truly searching philosophical investigation can be uncomfortable, in that it can require that we focus strictly on the demands of the argument; this can conflict with the polite regard for others that characterises well-mannered conversation.47

The first book of the Republic will make a similar point, for there too we find a movement through three characters, in which the subject matter deepens as it proceeds from everyday matters to the question of the best life. There too, the characters who confront Socrates are increasingly more adequate to philosophy as we progress from one to the next and leave behind an unthinking reliance on tradition. In fact, Plato has made the point there in an even more striking manner, for he has related each character to the Good through the careful use of the word ἀγαθός (=‘good’) throughout the book. Cephalus, entirely in the hold of the authority of tradition, is uninterested in the Good, responding with χρηστός when Socrates asks about

46 I am inclined to view Callicles’ use of σίγχυση at 489b8 in similar fashion. The fact that Plato uses the word here is surely significant, and I take the idea to be that Callicles is trying to pressure Socrates by bringing against him the prejudices of the audience against over-detailed inquiry. “Aren’t you ashamed to be one of these pedants and quibblers?” Aristophanes’ Clouds (144-168) gives an example of this kind of attitude. Here, Socratic inquiry is ridiculed for its attendance upon minutia – How many of its own feet could a flea jump? Do gnats buzz through their front or rear? – and for the uselessness of this sort of thing in practical affairs, particularly lawsuits (a theme of the Gorgias). The idea behind σίγχυση at 489b8 is that if Socrates were influenced by it, he would give up on the details, and thus on the argument.

47 Rutherford (1995: 150): “in Socratic discourse, the interlocutor needs to come out and show himself, to bare his soul... Socrates... is on the side of Polus and Callicles to this extent, that he wants and insists on frankness, and does not want others to cover up their real opinions with a safe, orthodox morality. He criticises his interlocutors more than once for this kind of false shame (489a2, 494cd), and he praises Callicles not least for his candour (487 passim, esp. d; cf. 492d).”
Polemarchus brings out the word ‘good’ (ἀγαθός – 332a10) of his own accord at the very moment he must think for himself rather than lean on traditional authority. Thrasymachus is largely free of convention anyway, but he uses the word ‘good’ at the very moment he expresses the view most fully liberated from convention (343b2). The point is obviously not that Plato considers Thrasymachus’ position at this point (i.e., 343b-344c) simply to be good; rather, it is good that Thrasymachus is saying what he really thinks, and is not held by the shackles of traditional authority.48

The point is the same, then, in both dialogues: conventional belief – whether it appears as shame or in some other form, such as the simple piety of Cephalus – has no place in philosophical argument. This is not to say, however, that it has no place in philosophy, for the sort of character adequate for philosophy – and therefore suitable for engaging in fully adequate philosophical argument – must have a certain sort of regard for the content of conventional belief. Turning again to the Republic, once Glaucon and Adeimantus have made their challenge to Socrates in book ii, they emphasise that they do not want to give up their belief in justice, even though they are very much aware that they are not in possession of adequate reasons for their faith (366d5-367e5). In response to this, Socrates actually suggests that they have a touch of the divine (θεῖος – 368a4, 5) in them, an extraordinary compliment. Obviously the point is not that mindless adherence to a belief is a virtue, and there is no suggestion that such belief provides a logical foundation for an account of justice; rather, it is what prevents Glaucon and Adeimantus from abandoning the inquiry into justice the moment the search runs cold, in order to pursue instead a narrow conception of their own interests. That is, this ‘divine’ characteristic is what

48 Note also that in the Gorgias Socrates wants someone to “lay hold of” him (ἄντιλαμβάνεσθαι – 506a2-3; ἐπιλαμβάνειν – 506b8) if he goes astray in the argument. This is exactly what Thrasymachus tries to do (ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι – 336b2).
keeps them from becoming Callicles (or Thrasymanus); instead, it motivates their demand for a proper account of justice. It is in this sense only that it is appropriate to call shame, or more generally faith in convention, an “intuition of the good.”

In the same way, surely shame is in one sense a positive characteristic within Gorgias himself, for while he may be inadequate for philosophical argument, at least something is keeping him back from the licentious and immoral aspects of Callicles. That is, the content of conventional belief will not be simply rejected by philosophy, and we can see some substantiation of this if we look again to the Republic: it is well known that a number of the doctrines of that work are already present in some form with Cephalus; it is the manner in which they are present for convention that is fundamentally anti-philosophical. Those with a deeply searching interest in the question of the best life will seek a reason, one not dependent simply upon the fact that a particular person feels something, for this is the most insubstantial reason of all. Shame might indeed have a place as a dialectical tool, but it would be a tool to be used only to the extent that we are confronted with unreflective, unphilosophical individuals.

In both the Republic and the second main section of the Gorgias (from 499c), we will see an account on which justice and the good have a nature, on which there is an objective basis for a good life, one with no logical dependence on any “innate moral sense.” Within the first main section of the Gorgias (to 499c), by contrast, shame is used by Plato to draw attention to the inadequacy of certain of Socrates’ arguments. At each stage of the dialogue, Socrates’ conclusions are established merely on the basis of the feelings (i.e., shame) of a particular individual, and this ultimately means that these arguments can overlook a crucial consideration (i.e., in refuting hedonism). Though Socrates initially believes that Callicles will be an adequate

49 See Nettleship (1962: 15-16).
touchstone because of his lack of shame, soon he, too (from 494e), proves susceptible to this form of emotional compulsion, and this keeps the argument of the dialogue as a whole from providing an adequate philosophical account of Socrates’ doctrines. Shame, then, is one way (there will be others) of indicating to the reader that the Gorgias falls short of being a fully adequate philosophical dialogue.

1.7 TWO OTHER THEMES

It remains to introduce two themes that are never quite given direct exposition, as is the case with shame or friendship, but that nevertheless lie just beneath the surface of the entire dialogue. These themes are (1) appearance and reality, and (2) justice and power.

The theme of appearance and reality is hinted at in various ways throughout the dialogue. Not everything actually is as it appears to be, and this creates problems – but also opportunities for certain individuals. For example, Gorgias claims to be able to outdo the experts in persuasion at their own skills (456a7-c7): clearly this will not be accomplished by actually knowing more than these experts; rather the peculiar ability of the orator will be able to make himself appear to know more. When Socrates gives his schema of skills and knacks (464b-466a), it becomes clear just how widely there are deceptive appearances that can lead us away from reality, and pleasure, we shall see, is a particularly important case, because it can often

50 Sedley (2009: 53) draws attention to five points given by Socrates at the end of the myth (527a5-c4). Four of these have clear links with earlier moments in the dialogue, but in the case of one – i.e., that “what matters most for a man to practice is not seeming to be good but actually being it” – Sedley does not see a correspondence with the way in which Socrates has put his case. I take it that this seeming/being point is a nod to the theme of appearance and reality, one that can be filled in in a variety of ways. For example, a rhetor can make himself seem good (or good-at-being-a-doctor, as at 456b-c) before a court without being so; false witnesses can accomplish the same, etc.
appear to be the good without actually being so. Furthermore, the development of the first main section of the dialogue (to 499c) is a gradual movement from appearance to reality: because of his complacency, Gorgias had not realised just where his own work would naturally lead. Unveil (ἀποκαλύπτω - 460a1) the power of rhetoric, Socrates demands, and as the dialogue progresses, the curtain is pulled back, and Gorgias is shown just what the assumptions behind his own life amount to.

The second theme is justice and power. The dialogue begins with a question concerning power (δύναμις – 447c2), but soon morphs naturally into a consideration of justice. There are two questions regarding justice and power. First, what is the nature of each? On the one hand, a conventional notion of each is in play. When Polus, for example, suggests that rhetors have great – even tyrannical – power in the city (466b-c), he appeals to a conventional notion of power; when he asserts that it is worse to suffer than to do injustice (473a), again he is thinking in a conventional sense. On the other hand, we shall see that Socrates introduces a new conception of both justice and power, ideas that depart radically from everyday usage. The second question is how justice and power relate to one another. Clearly Gorgias, Polus and Callicles see them as tending to conflict, perhaps even mutually exclusive; Socrates, of course, will describe justice such that it seems to be a power itself, and he will see a need for a power to avoid doing injustice!
2.0  GORGIAS

The argument with Gorgias taken on its own gives us very limited insight into Plato’s thought. There are, however, three main considerations that will prove important to an understanding of the dialogue as a whole, and in that context they will help us toward an understanding of Plato. Here, then, we shall try to develop a clear picture of each of the following three points out of the detail of the text. These are: first, the characterisation of Gorgias himself; second, the argument concerning rhetoric; and third, the argument that removes Gorgias as an active participant in the argument.

Let us begin by considering how the arguments in this section give us a view of Gorgias’ character. The crucial point can be summed up in one word: “complacent.”51 Throughout the discussion with Gorgias, Plato consistently brings before the reader the fact that the old man has not thought things through. Though Gorgias is a genial and respectable fellow, there are suggestions, implicit in his own words, that real evil lurks in his profession. That these suggestions are only implicit is of fundamental importance: Gorgias believes he provides a very valuable service, a genuine force for good, even as he takes pride in the power of his art. It becomes clear that there is an ethical order that exerts a very real hold upon him. His superficial thinking has prevented him from recognising the potential for evil that his art brings with it, a reality that will quickly rise to the surface when we move on to Polus.

The first section of the argument with Gorgias ends with a provisional answer concerning the nature of rhetoric: it is able (δύνασθαι – 453a4, taking up δύναμις – 447c2) to produce persuasion in the soul of the audience (453a), particularly in politics (452e). The argument to this point follows a particular pattern: Socrates asks what rhetoric is, and Gorgias fails to give an adequately specific answer. In this he fares better than Polus did, for when faced with what is basically the same question (449a3-4 vs. 448c2-3), Gorgias can at least name his craft (449a5). The question of its subject matter, however, proves more troublesome. Gorgias says it is about speech (449e1), but must soon qualify this, saying it is wholly concerned with speech (450b). This too will not suffice, and Socrates notes that one could draw absurd conclusions from what Gorgias has said (450e5-8). Finally, after all this discussion, Gorgias gives a peculiar answer to the question of rhetoric’s subject matter: he declares it to be “the greatest and best of human affairs.” (451d7-8) That is, he winds up repeating the mistake Polus made at the very beginning (448c), answering a “what is it?” question as though it were asking “what sort of thing is it?” – that is, “Gorgias, like Polus, confuses τί with ποίον.”

We shall deal with rhetoric below; here we are primarily interested in the light that this portion of the dialogue sheds on Gorgias’ character. While there is no reason to doubt that he is a superbly convincing performer, at least in front of a crowd, he has never thought in a significant manner about what he does. Behind his considerable self-confidence is no intellectual ability of any real substance. Clearly the nature of Gorgias’ activity has not required of him that he

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52 Dodds (1990: 200). Elsewhere, in relation to 448c4-9, Dodds (1990: 192) notes that “Chaerephon had grasped Socrates’ meaning from a single example [i.e., at 447d], but two have failed to enlighten Polus.” Similarly, the examples given by Socrates at 451a-c also fail to enlighten Gorgias. Friedlaender (1964: 252) also notes Polus’ inability to distinguish τί from ποίον.

53 There are many pointers to Gorgias’ self-confidence. For example, we are told that “just now he bid anyone inside to ask whatever he wished, and he said he would answer them all.” (ἐκέλευε γοῦν νυνὴν ἔρωταν ὅτι τις βουλοίτο τῶν ἐνδον ὄντων, καὶ πρὸς ἀπαντᾷ ἔφη ἀποκρινεῖσθαι – 447c6-8) Similarly, Gorgias himself declares that
conduct rigorous examinations concerning what exactly anything is. Instead, it assumes that one can gesture in the general direction of something – i.e., give a general idea of it – and everyone will know what is being talked about. Gorgias is accustomed to skim along the surface of things, focusing on attributes rather than essences, on ποίον (“what sort?”) rather than τί (“what?”). So long as nobody thinks too deeply, it will be enough to have a general idea which everyone recognises. On this basis, one can make impressive and persuasive speeches, in which one seems to know what one is talking about, without in reality being able to give an exact account – that is, it comes to a matter of appearance as opposed to reality. Socrates, by contrast, has clearly assumed that an investigation or account will be necessary before one can claim to know what something is.

We have noted that Gorgias at 451d makes a mistake very much like Polus did at 448c. Gorgias, however, does so in the context of a discussion which has already begun to bring provisional answers to light concerning rhetoric. Thus when Gorgias says that the speech of rhetoric is about “the greatest and best things of human affairs” (451d), he elicits a response from Socrates different from the one Polus got, for Socrates now begins to talk about “the greatest good.” (452a5) Gorgias has made a pregnant statement indeed, for his words assume an answer to the question of what these “greatest things” are exactly, and an answer to that question must in turn imply an answer to the question of the kind of life one should live. That, of course, will come explicitly into focus when we get to Callicles (487e).

This line of thought is strongly suggested by Socrates’ next speech (452a-c), which Plato has expressed in such a manner that it points towards a deeper issue that will be taken up later in

“nobody has asked me anything new for many years.” (οὐδεὶς μὲ πω ἡρώτηκε καὶ νῦν οὐδὲν πολλῶν ἔτων – 448a2-3) See also 449a7-8, c1-3, c7-8, d7.

54 As Beversluis (2000: 294) has noted.
the dialogue. Socrates is trying to show the inadequacy of Gorgias’ “greatest things” answer, and so he brings before us three different kinds of person: the doctor, the physical trainer and the businessman. Each of these believes his own art to focus on the greatest good, but gives no argument in support of this. Instead, each is presented as taking its nature to be obvious – note in particular that the doctor and businessman both reply πως γὰρ οὐκ (“[of course,] for how not?” – 452a8, c5) when asked if their art’s work is the greatest good. An active mind would see a problem here: three people each take it as obvious that one of three different things are the greatest good. Surely the situation must produce a contradiction: they can’t all be right – or could their statements be reconciled? What exactly is the greatest good? An answer would require some substantial thinking about the ends of life. For a reflective person, deep matters lurk in Socrates’ short speech. That Plato is himself thinking in this direction is strongly suggested by the fact that the dialogue will later turn to precisely the questions concerning the ends of life hinted at here. There is also support for this line of thought in Socrates’ way of posing the challenge: Gorgias should understand himself to be asked “by these people and by me” (452d2) – that is, the three conflicting claims concerning the greatest good are being brought to bear together.

Gorgias, it would seem, is not a reflective person. Ignoring the implicit deeper issue, he focuses only on the immediate matter at hand, the specific subject matter of rhetoric. Thus he asserts that yet another thing is the greatest good (452d5-8), and although he does at least give some account of why his art should have top spot (e1-8), he does so in a way which brushes aside the deeper issues. That is, being able to persuade people in various political assemblies is the greatest good (452e) because such persuasion puts its practitioner above all other arts: it can acquire whatever the other arts produce. He thus ignores the implicit question of ends, and
reduces this question to a *practical* matter. That is, there’s no need to inquire concerning the ends of life, for whatever these might be, rhetoric can get them for you.  

Another suggestion of Gorgias’ lack of thought is found in his statement that rhetoric “is the greatest good, at once the cause of freedom for humankind itself [τοῖς ἀνθρώποις] and, for the individual, of ruling [ἀρχεῖν] others in his own city.” (452d5-8) This statement is ambiguous, for it might point towards collective or individual freedom (or both at once). If rhetoric is simply a source of collective freedom, it will be unambiguously good, and in this case, we might understand the ‘rule’ (ἀρχεῖν) over others to be a genuine leadership in the manner of Pericles, which seeks the good of the whole community. On the other hand, perhaps the ruling over others is of the tyrannical sort, which seeks the good of the ruler at the expense of the community; in this case, it will be a source of evil (and τοῖς ἀνθρώποις might then refer only to those people who, as skilled practitioners of rhetoric, do the ruling). There is no need, however, to declare in favour of one or the other side of this statement, for its very ambiguity points towards the fact that Gorgias has not thought it through. Plato, then, intends that the statement should point simultaneously towards both collective and individual freedom: no doubt Gorgias would like to

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55 Note that Gorgias does not take the position that ends are a matter of convention as opposed to nature. That move is significantly not given explicit expression until Callicles. The point with Gorgias is that such thoughts are suggested at 452e1-8 as being *implicit*, but that he is *not* represented as having thought so far on his own.  
56 I have followed Cooper (1999: 33, fn. 5) here in translating τοῖς ἀνθρώποις as “humankind itself;” Irwin translates it as “a man himself.” Plato, of course, could easily have avoided any ambiguity if he had wanted to; that it is present is surely intended to point to a truth about Gorgias. Cooper (1999: 33, fn. 5; see also 40-41) provides a reading of Gorgias at 452d (and in general) which seeks to make explicit the nature of the unambiguous good that rhetoric aims at. In doing so, he leans too heavily on what is at best implicit in the text. I think the point is precisely that any genuine political good for rhetoric is left on the level of mere implication here, and not given the explicit development which Cooper provides; the evil, on the other hand, will be the progressively more explicit focus of the dialogue to 499c. (The good will be taken up in the Socratic account: see the section of the conclusion, *Rhetoric in the Gorgias.*) In addition, the talk of “freedom for humankind itself” does not relate to the preceding examples so unambiguously as Cooper suggests. Certainly medicine and physical training provide a good to those *on whom* the expert practices, but surely the businessman (χρηματιστής; Cooper translates with “financial expert,” which might suggest the sort of person who advises on a stock portfolio) typically provides money *for himself*, a fact which need not conflict with the description of wealth as “the greatest good for men [τοῖς ἀνθρώποις].” (452c4-5) “For men” in this case could imply that everyone wants or needs the greatest good, but its attainment might still be a sort of zero-sum game, in which some must lose if others are to win.
believe that his art is a source of collective freedom, but he shows no sign of being able to relate this idea coherently to his statement’s other implication. In fact, it is to the potential for evil that our attention is drawn, for Gorgias immediately begins to talk in terms of making people *slaves* (452e).

This talk of making people slaves gives an example of the sort of complacency characteristic of Gorgias and his activity. He speaks as follows: “through this power, you will hold the doctor as a slave, and the physical trainer as a slave ... the businessman will come to light as making money for another and not for himself, but for you who are able to speak and persuade the multitude.” (452e) Given the use of the second person singular (e5, 7), this sounds like an advertisement for Gorgias’ teaching. On the surface, this power sounds wonderful, as we think of it in *our* hands (and see also 459c3-5, which has similar force).\(^{57}\) It is only those listeners thoughtful enough to step back from the thought of *themselves* holding this power who will notice a troubling reality: the rhetor is coming to light as a sort of tyrant, one who enslaves everyone else. Gorgias’ account might seem on the surface to be morally unproblematic, but this appearance can only seem convincing to the extent that the audience is unreflective.\(^{58}\) However troubling the implications might be at this point, there is no sign that Gorgias himself has thought them through.

Although the suggestion of slavery is the first hint of the darker turn the dialogue will later take, we can see that Gorgias himself is sincerely concerned with conventional morality. This is shown above all by his behaviour in the argument that knocks him out of active

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\(^{57}\) Polus will make similar second-person rhetorical appeals, e.g., 468e6-9, 469b12. And even if the businessman’s transactions can be beneficial for all parties involved, still this does not arise necessarily out of the nature of his activity, as in the case of the skillful practice of medicine or physical training.

\(^{58}\) Perhaps there is a connection here to the *makrologia/brachulogia* theme. Rutherford (1995: 146): “in Plato and others, long rhetorical orations are suspect because they cannot be questioned and tested at every stage. The listener is carried away and forgets the details.”
participation in the dialogue, and we shall take this up below. His concern for moral matters is suggested before this, however. When Gorgias emphasises the immense power of rhetoric (456a), he gives an altogether praiseworthy first example of how this power might be used: he has persuaded those that even a doctor could not move to undergo surgery or take medicine (456b1-5). However, we soon find ourselves on more ambiguous ground: a rhetor would be more persuasive than any other artisan, and so could get himself chosen above someone who actually has the relevant skills. Although a reflective reader or listener might already note the capacity for harm implicit in this account – an ignorant quack might get himself chosen surgeon general – nevertheless, Socrates has as yet made no suggestion that Gorgias’ art stands on questionable ethical ground. It is Gorgias himself who addresses the issue, on his own initiative, and the way in which he does so is significant. On the account he gives, there are moral limits that should be recognised, for he stresses such obligation quite heavily (456c6-457c3 – the word δέι occurs here 6 times, in the sense “one ought”). The question of why one ought to act in such a manner is ignored, although one could reasonably ask at this point why someone who could benefit from doing wrong would choose not to. It is through Polus and Callicles that the dialogue will delve more deeply into the question of why one should act rightly; Gorgias, by contrast, is content simply to assert certain ethical obligations as obvious givens, and though he never abandons these, he also never confronts the difficulties inherent in his position without pressure from Socrates.

59 Dodds (1990: 212) suggests, reasonably enough, that the position Gorgias takes here (i.e., 456c-457c) “was probably the standpoint of the historical Gorgias, who did not claim to teach ἀρετή (Meno 95c1), but recognised that rhetoric could be misused.”
60 This is not to deny that Gorgias’ own self-interest is present, for he is intent on placing the blame for the misuse of rhetoric on the student, not the teacher. Murray (2001) provides a reflection on 456c-457b which correctly brings out the immoral nature of rhetoric which lies implicit in Gorgias’ own defence. This is very much in the right direction, but it is important to remember that such conclusions are only implicit at this point, a fact which becomes all the more conspicuous in relation to the rest of the dialogue to follow. Gorgias has not thought his own words out as
The characterisation of Gorgias, then, shows both a lack of thoughtfulness and a sincere concern with morality. The connection between the two is of fundamental significance for the dialogue as a whole, for when we look at the three-character progression of which he is the first moment, we find that the characters are moved by ethical considerations insofar as they are not thoughtful.\(^{61}\) This presents an implicit challenge to Socrates: will he be able to show that a fully thoughtful person ought to have a concern with such considerations?

Let us now turn to what the argument here tells us about rhetoric. It paints the discipline in a peculiar light, finding it opposed to straightforwardly rational activities such as skills. The first hint of this comes at 451a-c: even if we can get some idea of what rhetoric is if we say it is “about speech,” there would seem to be no place for it, since every sphere of activity that involves speech seems already to have its own art. Once Gorgias brings out the idea of persuasion, the same idea is repeated (453d-454b): all the other arts produce persuasion as well. Socrates pauses to make the matter more precise – the other arts produce conviction with understanding (ἐπιστήμη), whereas rhetoric produces conviction without it (454c7-455a) – and then again repeats the suggestion that all spheres of activity already have their own proper art (455b-d). Throughout all of this, Gorgias is prevented from giving a straightforward answer to the matter of rhetoric’s subject matter\(^{62}\) because he has in mind the idea that it is a sort of master art, concerned with “the greatest and best things” (451d7-8, also 452d5-7), able to hold the other craftsmen as slaves (452e). It is by means of this argument that suggests that all spheres of activity have their own proper art that Gorgias’ idea of mastery is developed into the claim that

\(^{61}\) See also the section of the introduction, *Shame: A Double-Edged Sword*.

\(^{62}\) True, he does suggest that it is particularly concerned with “just and unjust things” (454b7), but this specificity is abandoned at 455d8-456c6, where the claim is made for rhetoric’s superior persuasive power over everything.
rhetoric is more persuasive about *everything*, more so even than each art concerning its own proper subject matter (455d8-456c6).

Rhetoric, on this account, can be more persuasive than any art that possesses genuine understanding concerning its proper subject matter – at least among those who are themselves ignorant of the particular subject at hand (459b3-5). It is not hard to imagine how it might accomplish this: in some circumstances, the rhetor might appeal to the emotions, in others, he might use fallacious arguments; he might mix up well-known bits of, say, medical knowledge with pseudo-scientific quackery. That Socrates does indeed have such an uncomplimentary picture in mind is confirmed in the next section, against Polus, when we are told that rhetoric is not a skill, but a “knack and a procedure” (463b4, trans. Irwin), further, that it is not a noble thing (463a3-4), but a form of flattery (κολακεία – 463b1), and one that, “by means of what is most pleasant, chases after foolishness and deceives” (464d1-2). It is against Gorgias, by means of the argument from the analogy to skills, that Socrates lays for himself something of a foundation for such assertions.

Of course, it is easy to feel that the argument developed here passes over important possible objections. The skills analogy reduces everything to a binary opposition: one who understands a given subject has the skill; one who does not, does not. The effect is to deprive all activities that are not skills of full legitimacy. In keeping with this way of thinking, Socrates gives certain examples (449d) which suggest that rhetoric is a body of substantive knowledge. Gorgias fails to respond that rhetoric is focused on the *formal* aspect of speech, on a technique, on the organisation of one’s expression. Nevertheless, the very binary nature of the opposition is bringing to light an important reality: people can be persuaded not only by a correct chain of reasoning, but also by the manner in which a thought is expressed.
Socrates directs our attention to the negative side of this reality: someone without appropriate knowledge can convince others who are similarly ignorant – that is, it is possible to produce persuasion when one ought not to be able to do so. The laboured formulations at 459c1-2 and d6-e1 emphasise this inversion of the proper order of things: among those who do not know, one who doesn’t know will seem to know more than one who does know. We need not agree that this is all there is to the matter, and in fact the dialogue contains implicit reminders of another side, both in Gorgias’ account of how he was able to persuade patients to undergo treatment when his brother, a doctor, could not, and in the *ad hominem* arguments that we shall see Socrates use to refute Gorgias, Polus and Callicles. Gorgias’ medical example reminds us that abstract reasoning, even though it may be flawless, and proceed from true premises to true conclusions, cannot always produce conviction: if it could, a doctor would never need a rhetor as Gorgias’ brother did. The *ad hominem* arguments in the dialogue point to the fact that particular people occupy particular perspectives, from which certain considerations will seem more important than others. Thus an argument that will compel Gorgias to contradict himself will prove ineffectual against Polus. Accordingly, the fact that people are often not moved by pure reason becomes an important reality even when we are trying to move them to the truth by valid arguments: we must still express these arguments in a manner that appeals to the peculiar perspective of those whom we would persuade.

Socrates’ argument, then, brings to light an important reality concerning how people can be persuaded, but also ignores an important aspect of that reality. It encourages us to take an excessively negative view of any form of persuasion that takes anything other than the truth itself into consideration. This is an early hint of Socrates’ uncompromising nature in this dialogue, that

63 459c1-2: ὧστε φαίνεσθαι τοῖς οὐκ ἐιδόσει μᾶλλον εἰδέναι τῶν ἐιδότων. 459d6-e1: ὧστε δοκεῖν εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδός ἐν οὐκ εἰδόσει μᾶλλον τοῦ εἰδότος.
is, of his refusal to make concessions to practical realities.\textsuperscript{64} That is, we have a distinction here between, on the one hand, a valid chain of argument from true premises, and on the other, what is often actually needed in everyday life to persuade people; Socrates here gives us only an uncomplimentary portrait of the latter side of this distinction, even though in doing so, he ignores an important reality. Later on (from 503a), he will point towards what he calls ‘true’ rhetoric, which will, perhaps, contain a concession to the need to use means beyond pure reason in order to produce conviction. Gorgias, for his part, does not seem to have thought through these matters before, for he allows himself to be led through this argument without making the sort of objection we might like to see. Indeed, it is on the basis of his assent to this argument that he makes the fatal admission that he will teach virtue (460a).

But what enables rhetoric to produce persuasion without knowledge? Is there something non-rational in human nature, or is there something in the nature of the world that can make things seem to be different than they in fact are? The dialogue will pursue both of these possibilities, finding both of them important. Through rhetoric, Plato is able to open up the non-rational as a major theme of the dialogue, and we shall see in the conclusion that what seems merely to be a problem with rhetoric – that it can produce persuasion without understanding – could provide it with a peculiar means of contributing to the good life.

This section of the dialogue does set down certain basic points concerning the nature of rhetoric that are never challenged in what follows. That is, rhetoric achieves its aim through speech alone (449e-450c); it produces persuasion without knowledge (454c7-455a7); it is potentially more persuasive on any subject than any genuine knowledge (455d-456c), it is peculiarly concerned with right and wrong (454b), and it has some connection with the idea of

\textsuperscript{64} See the section, \textit{Socrates on Practical Questions}, and also, \textit{Plato and the Socratic Case}: Socrates in the \textit{Gorgias} ultimately seems to turn away from the world where Plato would try to reform it.
ruling others (452d-e). In addition, we are repeatedly reminded that rhetoric is properly practised in front of a large number of people (452e, 454b, 455a5-6, 456b7-8, c6, 457a6, 458e7, 459a3-4). That the irrationality of crowds is what is at issue is suggested at 459a4, where we are told that “in a crowd” means, “among those who do not know.” All of these points are needed to make full sense of the account of rhetoric given by Socrates toward the end of the dialogue. Accordingly, they are to be taken as given from this point on.

There is a further point we should reflect on here. If readers leave aside their own objections to the argument at this point, and confine themselves to material available in the dialogue itself, an important problem emerges: how would the activity of Socrates fit into the picture being developed here? It too concerns speech, it too proceeds without understanding and thus cannot be a skill, it too seems to occupy a superior place over many skills (here we see him besting a rhetor on the subject of rhetoric; in the Laches, he confounds generals concerning courage; in the Euthyphro, a prophet on piety) – but instead of persuasion, Socratic dialectic seems to produce the opposite state (ἀπορία) in its audience. Taken on its own, this might not seem a significant matter, but within the larger context of the dialogue, particularly the challenge made by Callicles, it will prove part of a larger pattern within which the argument is meant to be applied to Socrates.

We now come to the argument which removes Gorgias from the conversation. The turning point is suggested explicitly by Polus later on (461b4-c3), but is also suggested by the great piling-up of questions that we find coming from the mouth of Socrates. The text at this point runs as follows:

[459c8]

Σώκρατες. νῦν δὲ τόδε πρότερον σκεψόμεθα, ἀρα τυγχάνει περὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἄδικον καὶ τὸ αἰσχρόν καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἄγαθον καὶ κακὸν
ούτως ἔχειν ὁ ῥητορικός ὡς περὶ τὸ ὑγιεῖνον καὶ περὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὡς αἱ ἄλλαι τέχναι, αὐτὰ μὲν οὐκ εἰδῶς, τί ἀγαθὸν ἢ τί κακὸν ἢ τί καλὸν ἢ τί αἰσχρὸν ἢ δίκαιον ἢ ἅδικον, πειθῶ δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν μεμηχανημένος ὡστε δοκεῖν εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδῶς ἐν οὐκ εἰδόσιν μᾶλλον τοῦ εἰδότος; ἢ ἀνάγκη εἰδέναι, καὶ δεὶ προεπιστάμενον ταῦτα ἀφικέσθαι παρὰ σὲ τὸν μέλλοντα μαθήσεσθαι τὴν ῥητορικὴν; εἴ δὲ μὴ, σὺ ὁ τῆς ῥητορικῆς διδάσκαλος τούτων μὲν οὐδὲν διδάξεις τὸν ἀφικνούμενον – οὐ γὰρ σοὶ ἔργον – ποιῆσεις δ’ ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς δοκεῖν εἰδέναι αὐτὸν τὰ τοιαύτα οὐκ εἰδότα καὶ δοκεῖν ἀγαθὸν εἶναι οὐκ ὄντα; ἢ τὸ παράπαν οὐχ οἶός τε ἐσι αὐτὸν διδάξαι τὴν ῥητορικὴν, ἐὰν μὴ προειδῇ περὶ τούτων τὴν ἀλήθειαν; ἢ πῶς τὰ τοιαύτα ἔχει, ὁ Γοργία; καὶ πρὸς Διὸς, ὡσπερ ἀρτι ἐίπες, ἀποκαλύψας τῆς ῥητορικῆς εἰπὲ τίς ποθ’ ἢ δύναμις ἐστίν.

Γοργίας. Ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ μὲν οἶμαι, ὡς Σώκρατες, ἐὰν τύχῃ μὴ εἰδῶς, καὶ ταῦτα παρ’ ἐμοῦ μαθήσεται.

TRANSLATION

Socrates: Now let us consider this first, whether the rhetor is the same concerning the just and the unjust and the shameful and the noble and the good and the evil as concerning the healthy and the other things for which there are skills: does he not know these things – what is good or evil, what is noble or shameful or just or unjust – but has contrived persuasion concerning them, so as to seem to know more than one who does know when he doesn’t know among those who do not know? Or is it necessary to know these things, and must the person who intends to learn rhetoric come to you having already learned them? If not, will you, the teacher of rhetoric, teach none of these things to someone who
comes to you – for it’s not your work – but will you make him seem to know these things among many people when he does not, and seem to be good when he is not? Or will you be altogether unable to teach him rhetoric if he does not know the truth about these things beforehand? Or how do such matters stand, Gorgias? And by Zeus, as you were saying just now, unveil the power of rhetoric, and say whatever it is.

**Gorgias:** Well, I suppose, Socrates, if someone happens not to know these things, he may learn them from me as well.

Plato has given clear indications that we are to understand that Gorgias makes this crucial admission out of *shame* (461b4-c3, 482c-d, 487b-c, 494d). The earlier discussion (from 454b) did contain the implication that Gorgias, as an expert in rhetoric, must know right and wrong, but the crucial point for the argument is the context in which this statement occurs. When Socrates says, “you seem to me to say things not altogether consistent or harmonious with what you first said about rhetoric” (457e), he has in mind a conflict that has been implicitly present for some time. Earlier, Gorgias declared rhetoric to be “at once the greatest good and cause of freedom for men themselves, and at the same time rule over others in one’s city.” (452d5-7) As we noted, this statement seems ambiguous: if we focus on its second clause, together with the talk of making others slaves that follows (452e), rhetoric would seem to be good only for its possessor; alternately, it might seem simply to be a cause of good, in the manner of medicine. Now, at 457c4, Gorgias has just given a speech in which he says right out that rhetoric can be used wrongly (457b5-c1), and speaks of a definite wrong a rhetor might inflict on others (i.e., stealing reputations – 457b1-4). Accordingly, Socrates now takes aim at the morally dubious

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65 See Kahn (1983: 79-84); see also the section of the introduction, *Shame: A Double-Edged Sword.*

aspect of rhetoric which has come into focus, specifically in its relation to the original talk of “the greatest good.” Is rhetoric simply and unambiguously a cause of good, as medicine would seem to be, or is it good in only an instrumental manner, merely conferring power, as a weapon does? Does Gorgias really have some account according to which rhetoric might produce freedom for all, or is the other side of the equation the true one? Just how far is Gorgias willing to go with this talk of making others slaves? In this context, it is precisely correct to say that “the pressure on Gorgias to claim to teach justice is precisely the pressure to claim he trains only good men, who will not abuse their power.”

In fact, the argument from 458e-459e points towards very dubious moral ground indeed, suggesting how completely rhetoric could invert the proper order of things: it convinces the ignorant without itself having knowledge, and does so against those who do have knowledge. Applied in particular to the peculiar focus of rhetoric, ethical matters (454b), this will mean that Gorgias would take people who are wicked and teach them how to seem good. While skilled boxers might attack defenceless people, still they will be no more able than before to make it appear (in court, for example) that such actions were not wrong. By 460a, however, rhetoric stands on a very different footing: in principle, a scoundrel might learn from Gorgias how to commit any sort of crime with impunity. For a respectable man like Gorgias, this would be a punishing admission. He had not thought of his activity as responsible for wrongs of such magnitude – indeed, he had probably never dwelt at length upon the harm his art could do. Thus it would seem that Socrates has understood his opponent well. We have seen that there are hints

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67 Note how this interpretation coheres also with Socrates’ words at 460e5-461a2.
68 Kahn (1983: 82). Cooper (1999: 38-46) is correct to note that the controversial agreement that actually dooms Gorgias in the argument is not the claim to know just and unjust, but rather the claim that “the man who has learnt just things is just.” (460b7) Why, then, does Polus point to knowledge of just and unjust as the fatal agreement? (461b4-c1) Surely because this is the point at which he begins to take issue with the argument, and it is from here that he will begin his defence. Certainly, if this point is not granted to Socrates, the rest will not follow – although there might also be other objections (note ἵστος – 461b8).
that Gorgias is sincerely concerned with morality, and yet he was also clearly proud of rhetoric’s power. A conflict between justice and the instrumental power of rhetoric – that is, a conflict that arises because of the morally dubious aspect of rhetoric as it has come to light through Gorgias’ own words – is just the thing to move this fellow. That Gorgias is refuted by an argument which will fail to satisfy careful readers (and Polus) is essential to Plato’s purpose here, for it emphasises Gorgias’ character, while leaving a deeper analysis of the matter at hand for the rest of the dialogue.

It is important to the argument of the dialogue that we properly locate Gorgias’ shame. Certainly he does thrice mention the possibility of a teacher being hated and thrown out of the city (456e1-2, 457b6-7, c2-3), but it is unlikely that he lives in genuine fear of such a fate.69 First of all, rhetoric, we recall, has come to light as possessing an extraordinary – even godlike (δοιμονία – 456a5) – power, one particularly appropriate to courts and assemblies. As a most accomplished rhetor, Gorgias would be absolutely in his element in a court of law. However guilty he might actually be, he more than anyone could make himself seem innocent – indeed, one imagines that if not for his own sense of decency, his accusers, however innocent they might in reality be, could soon find themselves on trial for their lives.70

69 This is what Kahn (1983: 80-81) would take as Gorgias’ motivation for his fatal admissions at 460a-b.

70 So why, then, is the fate of an unfortunate teacher stressed? I would suggest that Plato’s reason for including this detail is literary, one of the many ways in which what is only hinted at with Gorgias gradually becomes more fully developed in what follows. Gorgias is quite clear that those who use rhetoric wrongly should be thrown out of the city (ἐκβάλλειν – 456e2, 457b7, c2) or even killed (ἀποκτείνωσαι – 457c3), and is concerned with who does and does not deserve this fate. Polus will use these same words, but to very different effect: rhetoric is desirable because its practitioners may kill (ἀποκτείνωσαι – 466b11) and throw out of the city (ἐκβάλλουσιν – 466c1) whomever they please. Similarly, Gorgias says a rhetor ought not to take away a doctor’s reputation or glory (τὴν δόξαν ἀφαιρέσθαι – 457b2); Polus’ rhetors are envious because they may take away the property (ἀφαιροῦσιν χρήματα – 466c1) of whomever they choose. Callicles speaks of the same penalties using different words at 486b-c: he mentions death and loss of property, although instead of speaking about being thrown out of the city, he speaks of living dishonoured within it. Of course, Callicles is now warning Socrates that he may suffer these things (and see 511a5-7, where Callicles takes up ἀποκτείνωσαι and ἀφαιρεῖσθαι in renewing his warning). Finally, the ideas receive their most pointed expression when Socrates turns them on himself (508d2-3, 521b4-c2).
Furthermore, Plato has subsequent characters talk of *shame* rather than *fear*. It would therefore make more sense to understand Gorgias genuinely to feel shame as the argument reveals the nature of his art, a reading which coheres with his character as we have understood it. When the argument points to a much deeper moral flaw in his professional activity than he had imagined, Gorgias finds himself with genuine moral misgivings. This is not to deny that Gorgias’ interests are present: he is all the more subject to shame given that the conversation is being held in front of an audience, as we are twice reminded: prospective students are present (455c5-d5), and it is the presence of the audience that shames him into continuing the argument at a moment when he would like to leave (458b5-e2). To admit that the activity he teaches has such a disreputable aspect is not only a real embarrassment for him, but could also be bad for business.

Socrates will later confirm that Gorgias (and Polus after him) was moved by shame (487b1-5, 494d2-3). By indicating that Gorgias has given way because of shame, Plato has indicated to the reader that he understands Socrates’ argument to be flawed – that is, that it will not suffice to move the reader to accept Socrates’ conclusion. Accordingly, “the outcome, for the

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71 Against Kahn on this point, see Cooper (1999: 46, fn. 23). Cooper (1999: 48) suggests that Gorgias’ response at the crucial moment (460a5-7) conflicts with the shame interpretation while that of Polus (474c8) coheres with it. More specifically, he believes that Gorgias has thought through the matter of whether “the teaching or not of what is just etc. has anything directly to do with the furtherance or not of moral values,” and that Gorgias believes that it does not. Further, Cooper tells us that this is shown “by his complaisant, unruffled response: ‘Well, Socrates, I suppose that if he really doesn’t have this knowledge, he’ll learn these things from me as well.’” This “rather self-satisfied, as well as agreeable,” manner is to be taken, on Cooper’s reading, as an indication that Gorgias is not responding out of shame, if he were, “one would expect that to be evident in his manner of responding.” Why should we accept any of this? Leaving aside that Plato’s characterisation of Gorgias emphasises that the man has not thought things through, and so is unlikely to have a position on the question of whether or not teaching what is just furthers moral values, to the rest of Cooper’s account, one can simply express disagreement: if to Cooper Gorgias’ manner of response seems to indicate that shame is not a factor at this point, to me it seems entirely compatible with shame. What should be decisive? Surely rather than trying to squeeze every last drop of possible significance out of a single phrase, we should look to the major indicators that Plato has given us: shame is a major theme of the dialogue; each character in turn is said to be refuted by shame. In that context, it would be a great failing on Plato’s part if Polus’ claim that Gorgias gave way out of shame is meant to be disregarded, for this could easily mislead readers. Further, what positive role would Polus’ false claim concerning Gorgias’ shame play? It would have to be quite important, given its potential to confuse readers.
reader, of Socrates’ discussion with Gorgias is not at all a recommendation to focus on Socrates’ arguments in order to discover their truth.”72

We may now summarise the results of the discussion so far. The final argument of this section works quite well as a means of removing the character Gorgias from active participation in the dialogue, but is not meant to convince the reader of anything that Socrates says. The argument concerning rhetoric serves two major functions within the dialogue. First, it sets down a number of basic points concerning the nature of rhetoric that will not be contested for the remainder of the dialogue. Second, it provides the means by which Plato can introduce the non-rational, which will prove to be a major theme in all that is to follow. In addition, we also noted that Socrates’ argument concerning rhetoric could easily be applied to Socrates himself.

Finally, there is the characterisation of Gorgias himself, which is of fundamental importance for an understanding of the overall structure of the dialogue. That Plato has represented the moral aspect of the dialogue as being brought forth by Gorgias himself is important, for this is one means of emphasising the sincerity of his concern with morality, a concern that sits in a significant relation to his reaction to the final argument against him (458e-459e). That is, Gorgias gives way completely the moment that Socrates shows that rhetoric could be responsible for substantial immorality. If Gorgias had thought his position through to the extent that he understood that it could lead to this, he would either avoid bringing up the moral side at all, or he would defend his position more vigorously, as Polus or Callicles do. Gorgias, then, is not conscious of the distinction between convention and nature that we will find with

72 Cooper (1999: 50). Of course, it is Kahn who has suggested that Gorgias gave way out of shame; Cooper objects to Kahn on the matter of shame. However, it does seem to me that Kahn’s reading does a better job of explaining the text, both as regards the particular passage in question and its relation to the dialogue as a whole. Cooper suggests that Plato’s purpose is “instead a recommendation to question deeply [the arguments’] presuppositions.” This thought is very much in the right direction, and should be further developed as follows: Plato’s purpose in these ad hominem arguments lies in the larger picture that is developing over the course of the entire dialogue. If we isolate particular arguments we lose sight of Plato’s purpose.
Callicles. Instead, his concern for normal ethical obligations must be sincere; he must be understood to be entirely held by the conventional order. He is most fundamentally characterised by a sort of complacency, a failure to look beneath the surface, and the moral ambiguity in his position follows from this. The moment he is confronted with such ambiguity, he backs away from it, and he remains sincerely interested in the results of the conversation that follows, as is clear from his subsequent interventions (463a5, 463d-464b, 497b, 505c-506c).73

Gorgias is thus entirely traditional in his sympathies. The conventional order of justice is his home. The problem with him is not that he has any active inclination in the direction of evil, but rather that he is not at all a thoughtful person. Accordingly, he does not realise that his own discipline, rhetoric, has a profound potential to undermine the traditional order of the just and the unjust, an order which he simply takes to be given. This complacency, however, this lack of thought, will turn out to be a serious failing indeed; the argument up to 499c is an investigation of it.

73 Such interruptions confirm that his claim to be interested in the truth (458b) is not insincere. Perhaps he is genuinely interested not only because he hadn’t thought his position would lead so naturally to Callicles, but also because he’s hopeful that Socrates can carry the day, showing that the evil that we discover is not in fact the consequence of Gorgias’ art.
3.0 POLUS

There are three aspects of the encounter with Polus that will concern us here. First, there is the characterisation of Polus himself, which will be important in relation to the overall structure of the dialogue. Second, there is the matter of Plato’s manner of presentation in this section: it is here that Socrates begins to put forth his own doctrines, but the way in which this doctrine is expressed is unique within the dialogue, and might even seem bizarre; the point will prove a significant one within the dialogue as a whole. Finally, there are the arguments themselves.

We begin, then, with characterisation. Polus is a younger man than Gorgias (e.g., 461c, 463e2), and therefore more open to new ideas which fly in the face of convention. He is unconsciously caught in a conflict between two opposed sides of his own beliefs. On the one hand he admires the life of the tyrant, unrestrained in its exercise of power; on the other, he is still held to some degree by conventional belief, since he recognises that the tyrant’s life is unjust. It is this division, and the unconsidered relation of the two opposed sides, that defines him.

This internal incoherence is essentially connected with other aspects of the characterisation that Plato has given Polus. In particular, a certain lack of intelligence is evident – indeed, one scholar has suggested that he is “perhaps the stupidest of all interlocutors with

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74 Dodds (1990: 221) has a somewhat different statement along the same lines: “Polus represents a new generation, less afraid of the consequences of its own thinking than its elders had been.”
whom Socrates converses throughout Plato’s works.” Gorgias was able, after some confusion, to focus on the nature of rhetoric rather than its attributes. Polus, by contrast, is impatient to discuss attributes only (462c7-8, 463d3), something emphasised by Socrates (463d5), and the result is that Gorgias must briefly take part in the discussion again so that the dialogue may reach a preliminary conclusion concerning the nature of rhetoric before moving on to related matters (463d-464b). In addition to other obvious mistakes (462e2, 466a4-5), Polus seems more generally incapable of leaving the realm of rhetoric for the genuine give and take of dialogue. The various forms of resistance he puts up against Socrates – vivid appeals to experience, various astonished expostulations, laughter – can certainly be effective rhetorically, but have no place in the sort of inquiry Socrates has been trying to conduct. Furthermore, the complacency we saw in Gorgias, who failed to look beneath the surface of his world, can also be found in Polus, who assumes that people know what is good, what they ought to aim at, without realising that this might itself be a genuine difficulty; the argument from 466a-468e brings out the complacency in Polus.

In particular, there is a distinction to be observed on the basis of the dialogue so far: dialogue involves both activity and passivity on the part of its participants – “refuting and being refuted,” as Socrates put it (458a5) – and this must require that participants must open themselves up to the scrutiny of the argument. The rhetor, by contrast, seeks to be purely active (note how Gorgias describes his art at 456a-c), and can thus reveal no more of himself than he wishes. Thus there is some significance in the fact that Polus at first takes for himself the active role in the discussion (462b). There is an invulnerability in this posture, for the sort of latent

75 Nicholson (1999: 39). Socrates will later make the charitable remark that Polus is ‘clever’ (σοφός – 487a7), but the purpose there is to place the emphasis on his most significant failing, his shame or lack of frankness.

76 Rutherford (1995: 155) notes that Polus, in using laughter, is following a Gorgianic precept. Rutherford connects this with the theme of frankness – laughter represents a failure to be frank.
contradiction which Socrates manages to bring out of Gorgias could never come to the surface if
Gorgias were to avoid submitting himself to the argument, and were simply to give a long
discourse of his own. This activity on the part of Polus looks ahead to the tyrant, who is
characterised by a similarly one-sided sort of activity.\footnote{It is in this context – i.e., in the context of the position being developed over the course of the movement to Callicles – that the catamite (494e) should be considered: among other things, the passivity characteristic of this figure flies in the face of the extreme of activity to which Callicles aspires.}

There is another significant aspect of Polus’ character: his lack of manners. This is
apparent right from the start: “thrusting himself forward in Gorgias’ place (448a) ... he treats
both Chaerephon and Socrates with a prickly resentfulness (e.g., 448b1, 461d8, 467b1).”\footnote{Dodds (1990: 11).} 
Similarly, his entry into his own section of the dialogue is conspicuously less well-mannered
than Callicles’ will be,\footnote{As Dodds points out (1990: 260).} for Callicles enters by first making an aside to Chaerephon; Polus
simply interrupts in a “syntactically confused outburst.”\footnote{Irwin (1979: 128).} At one point, he even suggests that a
child could refute Socrates (470c4-5).

These aspects of Polus’ character – his lack of intelligence, his attempt to be purely
active, and his poor manners – are likely connected to the significantly different tone which
Socrates now takes.\footnote{On the matter of tone, I am following Section V of McTighe (1984: 221-228; see also 217-221), who plausibly suggests that we find in the argument with Polus an example of the purgative dialectic discussed in the \textit{Sophist} (230a-231b). See also Weiss (1992: 302-303), focusing on 466e3-467a9: “Socrates’ manner of speaking is
exaggerated and extreme: he chooses ... the more shocking rather than the more sober way of refuting Polus’ views.”} Let us therefore move to the second aspect of the encounter with Polus:
Plato’s manner of presenting the argument here. With Gorgias, Socrates had repeatedly
emphasised that the argument was not a personal attack, but a sincere attempt to get at the truth
(453a8-b4, 453c1-4, 454b9-c5, 457c4-458b3), and Gorgias had signalled his approval of this
approach (454c6, 458b4-5). At the beginning of the encounter with Callicles, Socrates will

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express his belief that he has found a person whom he can use as a touch-stone to get at the truth (487a-e). Against Polus, he says nothing of the sort. On the contrary, we soon find Socrates contradicting his opponent as explicitly and fully as possible; we may speculate that the aim is to transform Polus into a state in which he might be more amenable to argument. The Polus section of the dialogue is accordingly *ad hominem* in a particularly strong sense, more so than the Gorgias or Callicles sections. Indeed, Socrates repeatedly rebukes Polus for his intellectual failings (463b7-c6, d1, e1-2, 466a7-8, 468c7-8, d6) – he might have been more generous with a younger participant.

The argument with Polus, then, is uniquely characterised by a spirit of contrariety. When Polus suggests that rhetoric is a noble thing (462c8), Socrates responds by calling it shameful (463a3-4, d4). When Polus suggests that rhetors are highly regarded in cities (466a9-10), Socrates replies, “they seem to me not to be regarded at all.” (466b3) When Polus suggests they have the greatest power in the cities (466b4-5), Socrates, rather than granting this power, as he will do at 510d1-e6 and 526b3-4, declares that rhetors have the least power of all (466b9-10), and produces an argument with this conclusion. When Polus tells Socrates, “you believe what I am saying” (471e1) and “nobody would say what you’re saying” (473e4-5; see also 471c8-d2, 468b8-9, 474b6, b9-10), Socrates then comes up with an argument that concludes with the

82 Dodds (1990: 257) notes that the conclusion of the argument with Polus (at 480a-481b) is “a comic inversion of vulgar utilitarianism” and that “Plato is interested only in giving his paradox the sharpest possible point.”

83 This leads to Callicles’ remark that Socrates would turn life upside down (481c).

84 Beversluis (2000: 321) remarks that Socrates’ claim is “demonstrably false.” There is also a difficulty concerning how we are to relate this to Socrates agreement with Gorgias (455e-456a) that rhetors do in fact carry the day rather than craftsmen.
precise opposite of this – i.e., it is Socrates’ thesis that Polus, Socrates and everyone else in fact believe (474b2-5, b8, 475e3-5).85

We thus have a picture of a Socrates focused to a remarkable degree on making statements as fully opposed as possible to Polus in this section, and we shall see further confirmation of this when we consider the logic of the arguments. An argument does not need to proceed like this – certainly the arguments with Gorgias and Callicles do not. There is, however, one significant respect in which their various disagreements align with one another, and this will prove significant within the structure of the dialogue as a whole. In the second part of the argument (again, from 466a), Polus’ claims all have their basis in the concerns of everyday life – consider, for example, his list of various torments (473c); his appeal to the fact that rhetors are highly regarded (466a-e) or to common opinion (468e, 473e); his use of the case of Archelaus as an example (470d-471d) – whereas Socrates puts forth a series of counter-intuitive theses that have no basis in the concerns of everyday life, and that are in fact increasingly opposed to it. In fact, the argument moves forward here through a continued exchange in which Polus makes an appeal to what he thinks is simply evident from everyday life, and Socrates responds to this with arguments that produce his paradoxical conclusions. Polus, of course, continually expresses his bewilderment or contempt for Socrates’ strange theses (467b1, 10, 468e6-9, 470c4-5, 473a1).

If we follow this pattern through the arguments, we see that Socrates is giving his own doctrines about justice, power and the good life as a reaction to Polus’ appeals to the concerns of

85 Socrates’ claims about what other people believe have been taken to indicate a doctrine about latent beliefs – i.e., that what people really believe, deep down, is the truth according to the Socratic argument (e.g., Kahn (1983: 110-121), Moss (2005: 140); the idea is noted by Barney (2010: 51)). By contrast, I understand Socrates’ claims concerning the beliefs of others simply to be an aspect of the spirit of contrariety that permeates this section of the dialogue. The crux of the matter will come up below, in relation to the argument at 474b-475e.
everyday life.\textsuperscript{86} Polus first suggests that rhetors are important people (466a9-10), the most powerful (466b4-5), like tyrants (b11-c2). It is in denying these claims that Socrates gives an account of his distinction between what one thinks fit (δοκεῖν) and what one actually wants (βουλέσθαι – 466c-468e). Next, Polus suggests through sarcasm that Socrates really does want the tyrannical life (468e6-9), and Socrates responds with the crucial distinction of just and unjust action (468e10), which leads to a new stage in the argument, a new counter-intuitive claim: “doing injustice is the greatest of evils” (469b8-9). From this Socrates soon makes explicit his own view that a just action is better, and an unjust one, worse (470c2-3), and that a noble and good person is happy, while a base and unjust person is wretched (470e9-11). Polus’ response effectively consists in the observation that Socrates is obviously wrong if we look to the real world (470c4-471d2). After Socrates summarises their disagreement (472d-473b), the opposition reaches its height when Polus gives a particularly vivid account of the torments to which the powerless are subject (473b12-d2), and appeals to the concerns of everyday life in the repeated assertions we have already noted, that nobody believes what Socrates is saying. From this point, the argument proceeds towards Socrates’ counter-intuitive conclusions. Socrates gave his own skills/knacks schema (464b-466a) as a result of Polus’ demand that he say what rhetoric is (462b), but Polus’ various appeals to the concerns of everyday life also seem to function as a sort of demand, one that, in its own way, drives Socrates on to produce an account of his own.

Finally, Plato has drawn attention to the fact that Socrates’ doctrine is given to us backwards. That is, Socrates repeatedly takes Polus to task for chasing after the attributes of rhetoric without first grasping its nature (462c10-d2, 463b7-c7, d4-5),\textsuperscript{87} and he has also characterised the difference between knack and skill in terms of knowing a nature (465a). Right

\textsuperscript{86} This is a point we have already seen in the introduction, in the section, \textit{The Semi-Platonic Socrates}.  
\textsuperscript{87} The question at work in these passages is τί ἐστι – “what is it?”
after this, however, he is himself guilty of the same sort of error. He denies that rhetors have the greatest power in the cities (466b). There is an obvious question in this context: what exactly is power? For Polus, ‘power’ is clearly a form of external ability, and Socrates’ argument does not show that such power cannot be good. For Socrates at this point, true ‘power’ must be related essentially to intelligence, and in this sense, few (if any) tyrants will be called powerful. Instead of addressing this difference of opinion, Socrates deals with the power of rhetoric by turning straightaway to one of its (alleged) attributes: its goodness (466b-7). In similar fashion, we shall see that the central argument (474b-475e) turns on an ambiguity in the word ‘good,’ although Socrates fails to address the question of what ‘good’ is. We shall see that the final argument against Polus (476a-479e) also suffers from this defect, assuming answers to questions concerning the nature of justice and punishment. Now, this manner of presentation does cohere with the suggestion made at the beginning, that the Gorgias up to 499c is proceeding towards the principles: rather than establishing the nature of ‘good’ or ‘power’ (etc.) and then investigating matters that follow logically from these, here there is an attempt to settle matters that are by nature posterior; the result of the disagreements reached will be a move, with Callicles, towards the principles that determine the disagreements. The backwards nature of the argument can also be justified dialectically: Socrates is paying Polus back in his own coin by pursuing attributes before essences. Nevertheless, the result is an odd presentation of Socrates’ position, in which there is no proof of anything beyond the ad hominem points scored against Polus.

These three aspects of the presentation of the argument with Polus – the spirit of contrariety; the fact that Socrates is reacting against Polus; and even the backwards nature of the

88 Beversluis (2000: 322, 333) brought my attention to this point. Friedlaender (1964: 252) notes that “Socrates criticizes a long speech by Polos as violating their agreement (471d); yet, immediately afterwards, he replies with a long speech of his own.”

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whole thing – might seem unimportant on their own, but for one fact: it is in this part of the dialogue that Socrates begins to set out his own doctrine. Why would Plato present Socrates’ account in this way? He certainly did not have to do it like this; what has he gained by doing so? A full answer must be put aside until the conclusion, but here we may observe, first, that this manner of presentation serves to distance Plato from Socrates’ doctrine: were it Plato’s intention simply to move the reader to accept the position of Socrates, it is difficult to see how most of this could serve his purpose. Furthermore, something of the character of Socrates’ position has been made quite conspicuous by Plato’s chosen approach: the Socratic view is brought to light in its opposition to the concerns of everyday life. This has the effect of emphasising all the more heavily the burden of proof that falls upon the logic of the argument, for the expostulations of Polus are present all the way through to remind us that Socrates cannot appeal to the evidence of everyday experience to support his theory, at least not taken at face value, for that evidence contradicts him at every moment. Socrates must provide a convincing proof indeed, for it must not only move people to accept something they do not already believe, but must do so while swimming directly against the mighty current of common practice and belief. And yet, having thus increased the weight which falls upon the argument, Plato has also drawn the reader’s attention to its logical inadequacy, for he has Callicles object to it (482d-483a), and we shall see just how precisely Callicles’ criticism picks Socrates’ argument apart. Were it Plato’s intention simply to move the reader to accept Socrates’ conclusion, we should expect that argument and literary device would work harmoniously towards this common end. Instead, they seem to point in diametrically opposed directions.

We turn now to the particular arguments themselves. The argument with Polus proceeds on the assumption of that which Gorgias had been ashamed to admit, namely that the rhetor does
not know “the just and the noble and the good.” (461b5-6) This has consequences as regards the nature of rhetoric, and the argument will first attend to these (462b-465e). There are also consequences concerning the attributes of rhetoric, particularly its relation to justice and power. The sort of person who, as a practitioner, would admit ignorance of the just, noble and good, must have something quite different in mind than Gorgias did. The rest of the argument (466a-481b) investigates this, becoming involved in the question of happiness, until Polus, like Gorgias before him, is caught in the contradiction of two aspects of himself.

Socrates began the dialogue asking questions, but now that Gorgias has failed to give an adequate account, and given that Polus has asked him what he says rhetoric is (462b5), Socrates produces a lengthy schema of skills and knacks (464b-466a), at the end of which (465e) the dialogue reaches a basic conclusion as regards the nature of rhetoric. This schema constitutes an important segment of Socrates’ position in this dialogue, and he will twice return to it at length (500a-501c, 517a-519b). We shall deal with it in more detail later; here it is sufficient to note three principles that govern it. First, pleasure and the good appear to occupy a mutually exclusive relationship with one another here: knacks aim at pleasure, and not at all at the good; skills at the good, and not at all at pleasure. Cosmetics, for example, has nothing to do with the good of the body; the same is true of the pastry chef (Φοσποιός), who is significantly distinguished from the baker (Σιτοποιός) later on (517e1). The work of the doctor, by contrast, aims at the good of the body, and the dialogue stresses elsewhere that it is positively unpleasant (467c, 505a). There is no suggestion here that something pleasant might also be good. Next, skills are distinguished from knacks on the basis of understanding: skills grasp the nature (Φυσις – 465a4) and cause

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89 Kahn (1983: 85) has noted that Polus’ admission leads logically to the charge that rhetoric is not an art, although there are obviously aspects of Socrates’ presentation, such as the four-fold classification of arts and knacks, which do not necessarily follow from this.

90 On the opposition between flattery and corrective practices such as medicine, see Moss (2007).
of their subjects; knacks do not. Finally, the distinction between appearance and reality (δοκούσαν / ὁσσαν – 464a3) runs through the whole. Socrates had previously been ready to grant for the sake of argument that rhetoric might be a skill, but now he asserts that it is not a skill at all but merely a knack. Certainly Gorgias took rhetoric to be a skill, and Polus does (462b6-7), but on Socrates’ account it would seem that rhetoric merely appears to be a skill, but in reality is merely a knack: knacks are apparent skills. Genuine skills aim at a real good, while flattery aims at a good that is merely apparent (464c-d). Underlying this schema, then, is the notion that pleasure is an apparent good.

It is after he has given his schema of skills that Socrates most fully embraces the spirit of contrariety against Polus, for his doctrine to 465e does at least bear a logical relation to what has preceded; from this point he will produce novel views of his own, views diametrically opposed to those who speak with him. This is also the point at which the discussion begins to move from its initial subject matter, rhetoric, towards the more fundamental question of how one should live. In the first step (466a-468e), Socrates brings out a distinction between doing what one thinks fit (δοκεῖν) and doing what one (really) wants (βουλέσθαι). These are two different perspectives from which we might conceive of desire.

The argument of this passage has often been taken as an attempt to establish something about the life of the rhetor. For example, “rhetoric, not being a τέχνη, has no scientific grasp of τὸ βέλτιστον (465a2)... Therefore the ῥήτωρ does not know what he really desires, and so cannot do it: he can only do what seems good to him.” Certainly Socrates does allude (466e13-467a6) to his earlier schema of knacks and skills, and if we were to accept this, then the rhetor,

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91 Note τὴν καλομένην ῥητορικήν (448d9); also 447c2, 449a3-4.
as such, would only be able to do what seem good to him. However, the argument here does not demand that we accept this schema – and if we were to do so here, we would simply be taking the matter on faith. Instead, the argument concludes merely with the claim that “it is possible that a person doing what seems good to him is not greatly powerful and does not do what he wants.” (468e3-5, emphasis mine)\textsuperscript{93} That is, all the argument strictly claims to have done is to bring out the distinction between δοκεῖν and βούλεσθαι. The status of the life of the tyrant or rhetor has been suggested, but no decisive claim has yet been made.\textsuperscript{94} Socrates does in fact make this claim in the \textit{Gorgias}, but only when the argument here is taken with later argumentation (i.e., 506c-517a).

To say that tyrants or rhetors think it fit (δοκεῖν) to expel certain people from a city (466b11-c2) is to focus on desire in its particularity: what is desired is that these particular people are expelled, and such things are desired because they appear to be good. Socrates also

\textsuperscript{93} Barney (2010: 49) notes that “Socrates’ conclusions at 468c-e are scrupulously conditional, viz that the unjust tyrant does not do as he wishes if those unjust actions are bad for him.”

\textsuperscript{94} Weiss (1992: 308-309), who believes that this argument is \textit{ad hominem}, makes some pertinent observations that she believes support the idea that much of what Socrates says in this argument conflicts with his statements elsewhere in the dialogue: “when Callicles at 511a5-7 uses βούλεσθαι (‘wanting’) in precisely the way forbidden to Polus in our passage... Socrates raises no objection and indeed echoes Callicles’ expression... Similarly Socrates permits himself, in conversation with Callicles, to speak in the conventional way of tyrants’ power (in the passage beginning at 509c6; see especially 510d1, 510d11-e1, 510e5-6, and 511a3), and he even remarks to Callicles at the very end of the dialogue that it is among the most powerful (i.e., kings and tyrants) that the most wicked are found (525d5-526a1) and that most of the powerful are evil (526b3-4). That Socrates speaks of tyrants as powerful and of the powerful as evil confirms that for his own part he does not deny the power of tyrants; he did so earlier only to refute Polus.” These observations do not support the notion that this argument is \textit{ad hominem}. As far as power is concerned, we will learn later (509b-511a) that there are two types of power. One is the conventional variety; in this sense, it is correct to say that tyrants have power. In the other sense, it is correct to say that rhetors have the least power in the city (466b91-0). At this point, of course, the distinction has yet to be made, but that is typical of the arguments used against Polus. The fact that Socrates will speak elsewhere of power in the conventional sense does not show anything other than that he is failing to make absolutely explicit something that is in any case obvious – i.e., that he is speaking of conventional ‘power’ rather than the other sort. On the two types of power, see the section below, \textit{Two Types of Power}, as well as the section in the conclusion, \textit{Power and Punishment}. As for the uses of βούλεσθαι at 511a6 and b4, these are both embedded in conditional clauses: if he wants (and no doubt also if it merely seems good to him), the tyrant will kill the other man. It has nowhere been said that one cannot want (βούλεσθαι) this, only that one cannot want it if it is worse (468d3-4) – but it may be better on some occasions. There is no need, then, for a correction from Socrates at 511a8, who might nevertheless have expressed this differently if he were not following Callicles’ lead.
develops another account of desire that focuses on its universal aspect: there are certain goods, such as wisdom, health and wealth (467e4-5), and it is for the sake of these that people act. These universal ends are what we want (βουλεσθαι).

On its own, all the argument from 466b11-468d7 does is establish the distinction.95 Polus begins by talking of “thinking fit” (δοκεῖν) and ‘wanting’ (βουλεσθαι) as if they are interchangeable (466b11-c2); at the end, having asserted his own understanding of these two terms, Socrates gets Polus to concede that someone who does what he thinks fit (δοκεῖν) is not doing what he wants (βουλεσθαι) if his “thinking fit” is mistaken (468d1-7). That is, there is a distinction between δοκεῖν and βουλεσθαι.96 And, of course, if power is to be understood in reference to wanting, then it is correct to conclude that one can do what one thinks fit without having power (469e3-5).97

95 Note that unlike the subsequent arguments used to refute Polus, which are (accurately) criticised by Callicles later (482c-483a), we find no indication from Plato that Socrates’ argument here (i.e., 466c-468e) is flawed.

96 Barney (2010: 48-49) suggests that there is an equivocation in the argument, which would proceed from (A) Archelaus desires (δοκεῖν) to kill his enemies if it is better for him to do so (468b7-8; the ἄρα here makes plain that these lines are a development of the preceding ones, where δοκεῖν is clearly at work); (B) Archelaus desires (βουλεσθαι) to kill his enemies if it is better for him to do so (468c3-5); (C) if Archelaus kills his enemies, and it is not better for him to do so, Archelaus does not do what he wants (βουλεσθαι). “Claim (A) presents anticipated benefit as a cause of present desire... claim (C) presents real future benefit as a criterion for ascriptions of present desire; and (B) seems to pivot between the two.” But (B) does not pivot: it is unambiguously on the side of (C), as the vocabulary makes clear. Presumably Barney takes δοκεῖν and βουλεσθαι to be interchangeable, as she does (2010: 39) with ἐπιθυμεῖν and βουλεσθαι in the Meno: the assumption is that there must be a coherent theory of desire underlying all this. The text, however, seems to me to point to the difference, not any underlying unity.

97 Irwin (1979: 144-145) and McTighe (1984: 204) note that there is a difficulty in the fact that Socrates first says (as Irwin puts it) “(1) whenever we do x for the sake of y, we don’t want x, but y” (467d6-e1, 468b8-c1), but then says “(2) if we want x and x is not identical to the good, we want x for the sake of the good, as something beneficial.” (468c4) The problem is that (1) and (2) seem inconsistent. Plato’s meaning is clear enough, and is captured by (2), not (1). The argument first sets out the priority of the end in action done for the sake of something (467c5-e1). Next (467e1-468b8), it distinguishes between the good, the bad and the intermediate. Finally (468b8-c8), it combines these two preliminary points to produce a conclusion (note the ἄρα at c2) in which the words ἄρα δόξας ὀφθήκε μας make clear that it is qua beneficial that we want actions done for the sake of something. There is also a slight difference in phrasing at action. In the case of (1) (467d6-e1, 468b8-c1), it is said that we do not want the thing (or things) that we do, but rather that for the sake of which we act; in the case of (2) (468c4), it is said that we want to do (beneficial) things. That is, in the first case, it is the things that we do not want, in the second, it is the doing that we do want. The fact that Plato phrases these two cases differently could be taken to suggest that he is alive to the potential difficulty.
We are presented, then, with two different conceptions of what it is to desire something. The fact that certain things seem good to people, and that they then think it fit (δοκεῖν) to act in certain ways, is needed to explain a great deal of what people actually do. If a tyrant “thinks it fit” to expel certain people from the city, there is certainly a sense in which he can be said to desire to do this, regardless of whether the action is actually in his interest, and it is this sense that explains the fact that he acts as he does. On the other hand, people are in another sense said to desire universal ends – wisdom, health, wealth, and, in general, their own good – other than the particular actions on which they are immediately focused. In this sense, if the tyrant expels someone from the city, mistakenly believing the action to be in his interest, he does not really do what he wants (βουλέσθαι).

Socrates privileges wanting (βουλεύεσθαι) over thinking fit (δοκεῖν): it is on the side of the former that he locates ‘power’ and ‘good.’ There is a sense in which it is correct to privilege ‘wanting’ over “thinking fit:” divorced from a grasp of what ends actually are good, the power to act as one sees fit will achieve little good, so that an understanding of ends is in that sense prior to action. However, there is another truth ignored in all of this, one that will become important as the dialogue turns to practical matters with the critique of the Four Men (513d-517a). That is, ‘power’ can quite reasonably be understood as the ability to do what one “thinks fit” – indeed, this is what is usually meant by the term. People who do not have the power to do what they “think fit” generally find themselves compelled to do what they do not ‘want.’ From a practical perspective, Socrates has things backwards: it is only once one has the power to do what one “thinks fit” that an understanding of what one ‘wants’ is likely to make much difference to one’s life.
The distinction that Socrates has brought to light divides desire into a form proper to everyday life and another appropriate to an ideal world. One sort of desire describes how people ought to act, if only they could attain a perfect understanding concerning the ends of action, while the other describes what actually motivates people to act as they do in everyday experience. Certainly the two do sometimes coincide – there are times that people actually do desire what is actually good (and even achieve it) – but the reality in everyday life is that people always act in a given way because they “think it fit” to do so; ‘wanting’ will only sometimes coincide with this. To ‘want’ in this sense is therefore ultimately an ideal beyond this world.

Soon Socrates proceeds to one of the central arguments of the dialogue, in which he will claim to prove that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (474b-475e). The text of the key section of the argument (from 474c4-475c9) runs as follows:

SW. Lege dh mi, in odh|v, wspier an ec arxh v se hrwtov:
poterou dokei soi, o Pwle, kakiou evnai, to adikein h to adikeisbai;

[474c4]

ΠΩΛ. To adikeisbai emoiye.

ΣΩ. Tí de dh; aìschion poterou to adikein h to adikeisbai;
apokrínou.

ΠΩΛ. To adikein.

ΣΩ. Oúkouñ kaì kakiou, eìper aìschion.

ΠΩΛ."Hkistá ge.

ΣΩ. Manthánw òu tautou ògì sú, òc òoi kai ògathó, kaì kaki kai aìschroú.

98 Kahn (1983: 86-87) points out that the next argument (476a-479e) is dependent on this one, putting all the more stress on it. For this reason, my own focus will fall more heavily upon it at the expense of the next argument.
ΠΩΛ. Ό,υ δῆτα.

[474d2]

ΣΩ. Τί δέ τόδε; τὰ καλὰ πάντα, οίον καὶ σώματα καὶ χρώματα καὶ σχήματα καὶ φωνᾶς καὶ ἐπιτηθεῖμα, εἰς οὐδὲν ἀποβλέπῳς καλεῖς ἐκάστοτε καλά; οίον πρῶτον τὰ σώματα τὰ καλὰ οὔχι ἤτοι κατὰ τὴν χρείαν λέγεις καλὰ εἶναι, πρὸς ὃ ἀν ἐκαστὸν χρῆσιμον ἦ, πρὸς τοῦτο, ἢ κατὰ ἱδονήν τινα ἐὰν ἐν τῷ θεωρεῖσθαι χαίρειν ποιῆ τούς θεωροῦντας; ἔχεις τι κτῆτος τοῦτων λέγειν περὶ σώματος κάλλους;

ΠΩΛ. Οὐκ ἔχω.

[474e1]

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν καὶ τὰλλα πάντα οὕτω, καὶ σχήματα καὶ χρώματα ἡ διὰ ἱδονήν τινα ἡ διὰ ὠφελίαν ἡ δι’ ἀμφότερα καλὰ προσαγορεῖεις;

ΠΩΛ. Ἐγωγε.

ΣΩ. Οὐ καὶ τὰς φωνὰς καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὴν μουσικὴν πάντα ὡσαύτως;

ΠΩΛ. Ναί.

ΣΩ. Καὶ μὴν τὰ γε κατὰ τοὺς νόμους καὶ τὰ ἐπιτηθεῖματα οὐ δῆποι ἐκτὸς τοῦτων ἑστίν, τὰ καλὰ, τοῦ ἡ ὠφέλιμα εἶναι ἡ ἠδέα ἡ ἀμφότερα.

ΠΩΛ. Οὐκ ἐμοιγε δοκεῖ.

[475a1]

ΣΩ. Οὐκοὖν καὶ τὸ τῶν μαθημάτων κάλλος ὡσαύτως;

ΠΩΛ. Πάνυ γε· καὶ καλῶς γε νῦν ὀρίζῃ, ὡς Σώκρατες, ἱδονῇ τε καὶ ἀγαθῷ ὀριζόμενος τὸ καλὸν.
ΣΩ. Οὔκοιν τὸ αἰσχρὸν τῷ ἐναὐτίῳ, λύπη τε καὶ κακῶ;  
ΠΩΛ. Ἀνάγκη.

ΣΩ. Ὡς ὁμαινόμενος δοῦν καλοῖν θάτερον κάλλιον ὑ, ἡ τῷ ἑτέρῳ τούτῳ ἁμφοτέροις ὑπερβάλλον κάλλιον ἔστιν, ἦτοι ἐδοξη ἡ ὀφελία ἡ ἁμφοτέροις.
ΠΩΛ. Πάνυ γε.

ΣΩ. Καὶ ὁμαινόμενος δοῦν αἰσχροῖν τῷ ἑτέρῳ αἰσχρὸν ὑ, ἦτοι λύπῃ ἡ κακῶ ὑπερβάλλον αἰσχρὸν ἔσται; ἡ οὐκ ἀνάγκη;  
ΠΩΛ. Ναί.

[475b2]

ΣΩ. Φέρε δῆ, πῶς ἐλέγετο νυνδῆ περὶ τοῦ ἄδικείν καὶ ἄδικείσθαι; οὐκ ἐλέγεσ τὸ μὲν ἄδικείσθαι κάκιον εἶναι, τὸ δὲ ἄδικείν αἰσχρὸν;  
ΠΩΛ. Ἐλεγον.

ΣΩ. Οὔκοιν εἶπερ αἰσχρὸν τῷ ἄδικείν τοῦ ἄδικείσθαι, ἦτοι λυπηρότερον ἔστιν καὶ λύπῃ ὑπερβάλλον αἰσχρὸν ἤν εἴη ἡ κακῶ ἡ ἁμφοτέροις; οὐ καὶ τούτο ἀνάγκη;  
ΠΩΛ. Πῶς γὰρ οὐ;  
ΣΩ. Πρῶτον μὲν δὴ σκεψόμεθα, ἀρα λύπῃ ὑπερβάλλει τῷ ἄδικείν τοῦ ἄδικείσθαι, καὶ ἀλγοῦσι μᾶλλον οἱ ἄδικοῦντες ἢ οἱ ἄδικούμενοι;  
ΠΩΛ. Οὐδαμῶς, ὁ Σωκράτης, τοῦτο γε.

ΣΩ. Οὔκ ἄρα λύπη γε ὑπερέχει.  
ΠΩΛ. Οὐ δήτα.  
ΣΩ. Οὔκοιν εἰ μὴ λύπη, ἁμφοτέροις μὲν οὐκ ἂν ἔτι ὑπερβάλλοι.  
ΠΩΛ. Οὐ φαίνεται.
Socrates: Tell me, then, so that you'll know, as though I were asking you from the beginning. Does it seem to you, Polus, that it is worse to do or to suffer wrong?

Polus: To me it seems worse to suffer wrong.

S.: What, then? Is it more shameful to do or to suffer wrong? Answer.

P.: To do wrong.

S.: So is it not worse, if it is more shameful?

P.: Hardly.

S.: I understand. You believe that noble and good is not the same thing, nor evil and shameful.

P.: I do not.

S.: What about this? All noble things, such as bodies, colours, figures, sounds and pursuits, do you not call them noble looking to something on each occasion? For example, first, do you not say that noble bodies are noble on
account of their use, for that for which each is useful, or on account of some pleasure, if it makes those who see it delight in the beholding? Do you have anything beyond these things to say about the nobility of bodies?

P.: I do not.

[Socrates: 474e1]

S.: Is it not also thus in respect of all other things, do you call figures and colours noble on account of some pleasure or benefit, or through both?

P.: I do.

S.: Do you not call sounds and all things concerning music in like fashion?

P.: Yes.

S.: And concerning laws and pursuits, the noble one, there is not anything beyond these, benefit, pleasure or both.

P.: To me it seems not.

[Socrates: 475a1]

S.: Is it not also the same with respect to the nobility of learning?

P.: Certainly. You’re now defining nobly, Socrates, when you define the noble by pleasure and the good.

S.: Is the shameful not defined by the opposite, by pain and by evil?

P.: It is necessary.

S.: Accordingly, when one of two noble things is nobler, it is nobler because it surpasses either in one of these things or both, by pleasure or benefit or both.

P.: Certainly.
S.: And when one of the two shameful things is more shameful, it will be more shameful because it surpasses in pain or evil. Or is it not necessary?

P.: Yes.

S.: Come, then, how was it said just now concerning doing and suffering wrong? Were you not saying that being wronged is worse, and doing wrong is more shameful?

P.: I was saying that.

S.: Then if doing wrong is more shameful than suffering it, it is either more painful and it would be more shameful because it surpasses in pain, or in evil or both? Is this not also necessary?

P.: Of course, for how could it not be?

S.: Let us first consider, does doing wrong surpass being wronged in pain, and do those who do wrong experience more pain than those who suffer wrong?

P.: This is in no way so, Socrates.

S.: Then it does no exceed in pain.

P.: It does not.

S.: Well the, if it does not exceed in pain, it would further not surpass in both.

P.: It seems not.

S.: Accordingly, it remains that it surpasses in the other thing.

P.: Yes.

S.: In evil.
P.: It seems so.

S.: Accordingly, doing wrong, because it surpasses in evil, would be worse than suffering wrong.

P.: It is clear that it is.

[475c9]

The claim that doing wrong is worse than suffering it, along with the subsequent claim concerning punishment, will become a repeated point of reference in the argument with Callicles (483a, 508e, 509b, 522d-e, 527b). It might appear that Socrates rests this claim only on the argument that he deploys here, and this would make this argument a keystone in the logic of Socrates’ position as he explains it over the whole dialogue. This appearance is deceptive: Socrates will give an independent – and more substantial – argument for his claims concerning justice beginning at 503d. Accordingly, it is not necessarily fatal for Socrates’ thesis on justice that scholars overwhelmingly judge the argument here (i.e., at 474b-475e) a failure. Certainly the argument is not sufficient to establish the conclusion that Socrates draws from it – and yet taken as a dialectical argument, within the wider context of the dialogue, it is an unqualified success given its intended task. The criticism of this argument that Plato himself suggests is accordingly the most illuminating as regards both the argument itself and the manner in which it is to be understood to fit into the dialogue as a whole: Socrates fails to define the word ‘good,’ although the argument turns on that word’s meaning.

99 See Kahn (1983: 87), who tells us that “in the later confrontation with Callicles, Socrates does not provide an independent argument to show that doing is worse than suffering injustice: he describes this thesis as established ‘in our previous discussion (logoi),’ where the conclusion was ‘fastened and bound by iron and adamantine arguments (logoi)’ (508e3-509a). The reference here can only be [474c-479e].” Whatever the statement at 508e-509a may point to, still the argument beginning at 503d is important if we want to grasp the reasons behind Socrates’ claims concerning justice.

100 Of course, from 503d he will present another sort of argument for this idea, beginning from an explanation of the word ‘good.’ The argument against Polus does not, therefore, contain anything crucial to Socrates case in the dialogue.
Callicles will object to the argument on the ground that Polus wrongly granted that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, and further, that he only made this concession because he was ashamed to say what he really thought (482d-e). Obviously Socrates’ argument here will collapse whatever its trickery if this premise – i.e., that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it – is removed, but Callicles does not stop at this point. He proceeds to distinguish custom and nature (νόμος and φύσις), and to accuse Socrates of craftily switching between the two so as to confound his opponent (482e-483a). Polus, he says, was speaking of the shameful according to custom, but Socrates pursued the argument according to nature (483a6-7).

All these remarks are very much to the point. To see how this is so, it is necessary to consider the ambiguity at work in the word ‘good’ over the course of the argument. The first meaning comes to light as Socrates moves towards a definition of the noble (τὸ καλὸν), which he defines by reference to pleasure and utility (χρεία – 474d); ‘benefit’ or ‘profit’ (οφελίμως – 474e) is then substituted for ‘utility.’ Some have noted that it is Polus who substitutes ‘good’ (ἀγαθός – 475a3) for ‘useful’ and ‘beneficial,’ and that the argument proceeds on the basis of this term thereafter. The substitution is reasonable enough, however, if we keep in mind that the argument at 467e-468c has already established that behind ‘beneficial’ (οφελίμως – 468c4) lies ‘good’ – that is, the beneficial is pursued for the sake of the good; the same would be true with regard to the ‘useful.’ Polus is thus simply making explicit what lies behind Socrates’ examples: things which are understood to be good in the sense of ‘beneficial,’ ‘useful’ or ‘profitable’ are pursued by people for just this reason. It is also on the basis of this sense of

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101 Archie (1984) has provided the best treatment of this argument I have read, and has already shown the pertinence of Callicles’ remarks to it.

102 e.g., Kahn (1983: 88), Archie (1984: 170, fn. 4) and Moss (2005: 140-141, fn. 10). Johnson (1989: 211) believes that the change between ‘beneficial,’ ‘useful’ and ‘good’ can cause difficulties for the argument.
‘good’ that Polus would deny that the ‘good’ and the ‘noble’ are the same (474c9-d2). This is what Callicles would call “good-by-nature.”

‘Good’ has another meaning, however, and from this second perspective – which would be “good-by-convention” for Callicles – what is normally considered ‘noble’ will also be called ‘good.’ This does not, of course, necessarily mean “good for the agent/sufferer” in the sense of achieving some material benefit, but will mean “good and admirable in the eyes of the community.”103 If we were to hold throughout to this meaning, Socrates would produce an uncontroversial and obvious conclusion, that doing injustice is more evil, or morally worse, than suffering it, for what is beneficial or useful for the community is what is conventionally considered noble (475c7-8).

This is, of course, not what Polus thinks he is agreeing to, and not what he thought he was objecting to at the start. As Callicles suggests, Polus is speaking of the shameful according to convention at the start (474c-d) – that is, the shameful would be worse-by-convention, but not worse-by-nature; the noble would be good-by-convention, not good-by-nature. The difficulty arises as Socrates leads Polus to the definition of the noble (474d3-475a4), for the examples used suggest that the meaning of ‘good’ in play is the good-by-nature; this is where Socrates “pursues the argument according to nature,” as Callicles puts it (483a6-7). But if Polus accepts this, he must contradict the position he began with. Why, then, does he not object? Because it would make perfect sense to define the noble in terms of good-by-convention, and Polus, as we shall see, has not thought through the distinction of convention and nature as Callicles has. Indeed, καλός (‘noble’ or ‘fine’) seems to have had three main senses, which would correspond to (1)

103 Dodds (1990: 249) suggests that ‘use’ or ‘benefit’ (χρέια, ὄφελιμον – 474d-e) could imply use or benefit for the community, which would mean that this second, moral meaning of ‘good’ has been ambiguously present even before Polus introduced the word ‘good’ (475a3). One need not agree with Dodds to accept what I think is the crucial point, that ‘good,’ a concept crucial to the argument, is left undefined.
pleasure, (2) Callicles’ good-by-nature and (3) his good-by-convention. To define the noble by “pleasure and the good” without specifying a particular meaning of ‘good’ is thus to invite precisely the confusion into which Polus falls. Of course, if Socrates could show that what is good-by-convention is good-by-nature, the matter would stand on a different footing.

What is particularly interesting about these two meanings for ‘good’ is that both have a sound basis in the characterisation of Polus as Plato has presented him. We can see two competing views within the younger rhetor, the first in his admiration for the power he sees in Archelaus, with the many material benefits this brings, and the second in his recognition that what the tyrant has done is unjust, i.e., morally wrong. Polus himself brings their incompatibility explicitly to the surface when he makes an example of Archelaus (471a-d). The whole force of the example is to bring out this very disjunction of justice and power: the tyrant is unjust and for precisely that reason enjoying so many material goods. Polus, however, has not properly thought through this matter.

Those who admire Archelaus will not call him ‘good’ in a moral sense – the tyrant is precisely not a paradigm of ethical behaviour – but will focus instead on the various material benefits Archelaus enjoys. It is from this perspective that Polus says that doing injustice is better than suffering it (474c), that the unjust are happy if they go unpunished (472e, 473b), and would distinguish the good from the noble and the bad from the shameful (474c9-d2). Indeed, it is correct to identify Polus’ advocacy of injustice with pleasure; ‘good’ on this view will resolve into ‘pleasure,’ in that the reason we pursue good things is ultimately they are conducive to our

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104 As Santas (1979: 236) and Kahn (1983: 94) both note,
105 Santas (1979: 239-240) and Kahn (1983: 91-92) find fault with the argument on the basis of the question, “good for whom?” They would see the good (by-nature) of the individual implicitly specified at the beginning and end of the argument, but left unspecified in the middle. This is not definitely wrong, but seems to me to miss Plato’s point. At any rate, it can be subsumed into the present account: the good of the individual Callicles would call good-by-nature, that of the community, good-by-convention. Johnson (1989) criticises the argument for the assumption that ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘noble’ and ‘shameful’ are opposites.
own pleasure. The tyrant, who can do whatever he thinks fit, is in an excellent position to minister to his appetites, and thus to enjoy the attendant pleasures; justice, by contrast, will often require that we discipline our appetites, forgoing pleasure, and even accept the pain of punishment.\(^{106}\) However, we have also seen that Polus does still have reason to be concerned with what is good-by-convention, for right before this argument begins, he shows himself to think the opinions of other people to be very important indeed (473e4-5, 474b; see also 466a9-10, 471c8-d2, 473c7-d1). In fact, his place within the world of convention can be seen even in his interruption at the start of this section of the dialogue, for he concluded this with an accusation of bad manners (461c). Thus he is characterised above all by his failure to relate these two sides, for if he were to pursue either one to its logical extreme, he would negate the other. It is precisely correct to say that there is a “latent contradiction”\(^{107}\) (emphasis mine) within him.

The purpose of Socrates’ argument is to run the two sides of Polus into each other. Once again, then, it would seem that Socrates has understood his opponent well – indeed, the argument is directed with exquisite precision, in the very nature of its error, at the confusion that defines Polus: it is confused precisely where he is, making it most likely to succeed in confounding him.

The main reason, however, that it is important to grasp how Callicles cuts right to the heart of Socrates’ argument, is that Plato is the one putting words in Callicles’ mouth. He thus shows himself both to understand precisely what is wrong with the argument put forward by

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\(^{106}\) Moss (2005: 143-144) summarises the implicit hedonistic aspect of Polus nicely. Note that if we hold strictly to this view, ‘benefit’ and ‘use’ will mean “beneficial/useful for the individual,” which will mean “leading ultimately to the individual’s pleasure.” The distinction between pleasure and the useful/beneficial/good will then become trivial, since these latter will merely be for the sake of pleasure. On the other hand, if we hold strictly to good/beneficial/useful as being so for the community, then we simply have what is conventionally good, and on this basis, doing injustice is obviously worse (i.e., more morally evil). The argument will then become trivial.

\(^{107}\) Kahn (1983: 95). Johnson (1989: 201-207) disagrees with this, presenting a view according to which Polus’ true view would be entirely on the side of the tyrant. He does this, however, by focusing only on Callicles’ talk of shame, which, while correct, is not simply correct. The whole point with Polus is that he has not thought things through as thoroughly as Johnson.
Socrates and to want the reader to understand this as well. This is a critical moment within the literary structure, and thus the argument, of the dialogue, for Callicles recognises the difficulty as Polus does not, and will attempt to resolve it with a stricter focus on what he considers good by nature. Pleasure, which lurks just beneath the surface with Polus, will become an explicit focus of the argument.

We conclude our treatment of this argument with what I think is a significant misunderstanding of part of this passage. Socrates twice claims that everyone believes what he does – i.e., that doing injustice is worse than suffering it – once right before (474b3-5), and once right after (475e4-5) this argument. This claim has been made to carry considerable weight as evidence for a theory of latent beliefs, for example, that “the conclusions established against Polus are presented as likewise binding against Callicles, and indeed against everyone else.”

The idea is to explain the argument in terms of a theory of a “deposit of truth” posited by Socrates (or Plato), according to which everyone really believes, deep down, that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. There is no need to accept this claim. In the first place, Socrates disavows his conclusion that everyone agrees with him immediately after he makes it: he grants that “everyone else agrees with you except me,” and that he “lets the others go.” (475e8-476a2; note also 474a6-7) In addition, he already said, before this argument, that “almost all Athenians and foreigners will agree with you” (472a3), as part of a longer statement to that effect (a2-b4). How are we to understand this?

To begin, recall that this argument takes place within the context of a discussion characterised by a spirit of contrariety: Socrates repeatedly asserts the very opposite of what

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Polus does. Accordingly, when Polus suggests (473e4-5) that nobody would say what Socrates is saying, and appeals to the crowd, Socrates retorts (474b3-5) that everyone, including Polus, actually agrees with Socrates. This statement is the *demonstrandum* for the intervening argument, while the statement at 475e3-5 (note the ὁρα) is the *conclusion*. Furthermore, this argument comes right after Socrates’ talk about the kind witnesses he knows how to produce: only the one person with whom he is speaking (473e6-474b2). With this in mind, what underwrites, in this argument, the idea that everyone, not just Socrates and Polus, believes that it is worse to do than to suffer injustice? The claim regarding people beyond Socrates and Polus is introduced at 475d1-3: “it is agreed by many people, and was previously agreed by you, that it is more shameful to do wrong than to be wronged.”

It is from the new premise concerning “many people” introduced in this line that Socrates draws the conclusion that “neither you nor I nor any other person would accept doing wrong before being wronged.” (475e4-5, emphasis mine) That is, the only reason this argument gives us to believe that everyone agrees with Socrates is the fact that Polus agrees to it at 475d3. This singular witness is, after all, the only kind that Socrates knows how to produce. There is no basis here for a Platonic doctrine of a “deposit of truth” in all people, and Socrates’ statements at 474b3-5 and 475e4-5 should not be ripped out of context to provide the appearance of such a basis. In context, they simply constitute one of a number of instances in which Socrates aims to contradict Polus as fully as possible and in that section of the dialogue in which he conspicuously does not emphasise that the purpose of the argument is to get to the truth.

The final argument against Polus (476a-479e) suffers from a defect mentioned above: it presupposes answers to questions concerning the nature of punishment and justice without

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110 That is, I agree with Dodds’ comment (1990: 251) that ἐν τῷ ἐμπροσθεν χρόνῳ qualifies only ὑπὸ σοῦ ὀμολογεῖτο.
having actually established anything concerning them. Near the beginning, Socrates secures Polus’ agreement that “whatever the doer does to it, that is how the thing affected is affected” (476e, trans. Irwin) – that is, if one cuts deeply, the sufferer suffers a deep cut; if one strikes hard, the sufferer suffers a hard blow, and so on. But Socrates has chosen convenient examples, and his result does not hold in every case. Rather, “this argument from correlatives... works only when the property of the action belongs to it intrinsically and non-relationally.” For example, “if I inflict pain with difficulty, it does not follow that you suffer pain with difficulty, though it follows that you suffer something done with difficulty by me.”111 The matter at hand is that of “paying justice” and punishment: the question on which the argument depends is thus whether justice and punishment are such that the relation Socrates speaks of holds. That is, what is the nature of justice? What is the nature of punishment? Socrates no doubt knows that Polus, who is inclined to chase after attributes rather than natures, is not likely to ask such questions. His argument is thus once more well-aimed at a particular opponent, while Plato’s presentation should arouse in the careful reader questions about the nature of justice and punishment, as earlier arguments aroused questions concerning ‘good’ and ‘power.’ If Socrates’ claims are to be proven, he will have to address these matters.

The place of Polus’ character within the context of the dialogue should be clear enough: he represents a midway point between Gorgias and Callicles, above all because he is less restrained by shame than his teacher, but more so than the character who will follow him. There are other points of connection as well, looking ahead and behind. We noted the complacency which came to light in Gorgias, and we find this in Polus as well, for example, in his various appeals to the concerns of everyday life, which assume that the truth is simply obvious, or again

111 Irwin (1979: 159).
in his assumption that people simply know what is good and the problem is rather its acquisition. Despite this similarity, Polus is willing to push the morally questionable side of Gorgias into definite immorality: when the older man described the power of his art, tyranny lurked implicitly in it (452e); Polus explicitly compares rhetors to tyrants (466c), and clearly admires the life of the tyrant. We can now see part of the significance of Callicles’ criticism of Socrates’ argument against Polus, “by nature all is more shameful that is also worse, such as being wronged, but by custom, doing injustice is more shameful.” (483a7-8) Callicles not only grasps the nature of the difficulty within Polus, as Polus does not, but can resolve it in favour of the life of the tyrant. What lies implicit in the life of the tyrant is the appetites, and Callicles will in his turn make explicit this next stage. The argument will accordingly focus on what motivates the life of the tyrant: pleasure.

When we look to Plato’s manner of presentation together with the logic of the arguments themselves, we find a peculiar result. First of all, Plato’s manner of presentation draws attention to the distance between Socrates’ position, and the concerns of everyday life, a factor that will carry immense weight for most people. The effect, as we suggested, was greatly to increase the demand on the argument, for it must move people to Socrates’ position against the tremendously strong pull of the considerations that Polus brings to light, considerations that simply find no place at all with Socrates. However, having done this, Plato has also drawn attention to the inadequacy of Socrates’ key arguments. This would be a poor strategy indeed if Plato’s aim were simply to move the reader to Socrates’ position. It would make more sense as a strategy if Plato wanted us to understand that Polus is in fact bringing to light important considerations. This, however, is a thought that we must leave aside until the conclusion.
The movement that has been taking shape beginning with Gorgias, and continuing with Polus, reaches its climax with Callicles. In the introduction it was suggested that one manner in which Plato communicates with the reader is through the implicit challenge that Callicles, as the culmination of this movement, presents to Socrates. One purpose of this section of the dialogue, then, is to bring Callicles’ position to light in such a manner that the various aspects of this implicit challenge come to light.\textsuperscript{112} There is, however, another side to the story, for Callicles will be seen to fail as the touchstone that Socrates at first believes him to be. He is a deeply inadequate character for philosophical argument, and we shall see that there are two conflicting sides to him, making possible an \textit{ad hominem} refutation of the same sort that Socrates used against Gorgias and Polus. The purpose of the arguments that Socrates deploys against Callicles up to 499c is to establish that he is fully committed to both of these two sides, and then to show that these two sides must contradict one another.

This part of the dialogue has three main sections. First, there is an introduction, in which Callicles makes his initial statement of his position, and Socrates sets out his hopes for the argument to follow (481b-488a). Next, Socrates tries to find the principle underlying Callicles’ initial statement, revealing, in the process, its two-sided nature (488b-494e). Finally, the tensions are shown to lead to a contradiction, refuting Callicles (495a-499b).

\textsuperscript{112} These aspects were listed in the introduction, in the section, \textit{Callicles as a Source of Good}.
4.1 OPENING REMARKS (481B6-488B1)

After an initial exchange between Socrates and Callicles (481b6-482c3), which we take up elsewhere,\textsuperscript{113} we come to what will henceforth be called Callicles’ “initial statement” (i.e., 482c4-486d1). This has four discernible sections: the first (482c4-483c7) reviews the argument so far; the second (483a7-484c3) and third (484c4-485e2) set out Callicles’ position proper; while the fourth (485e3-486d1) turns to a practical matter, the possible fate of Socrates. The argument to 499c has for its focus the question of whether a coherent position stands behind this initial statement. Certainly other matters come up along the way, but they are all subordinate, and are treated in an incomplete manner.

In the first section, Callicles reviews the argument so far, and this can profitably be taken as a hint from Plato that we should reflect on the context within which Callicles is being presented: he represents the third and final moment of a larger movement that began with Gorgias, the culmination of the “single force”\textsuperscript{114} running through the dialogue. When we look back over the earlier arguments, we can appreciate in hindsight that a particular problem has been taking shape, and furthermore, that it culminates in Callicles. Specifically, there are two problems concerning the basis of claims about justice. First, why should we act justly if it conflicts with our interests? Second, what gives any credibility at all to claims about what the just and unjust, the shameful and the noble, are?

Gorgias, we recall, was complacent, skating blithely past the deeper issue concerning the greatest good in Socrates’ words at 452a-c. When he focused on moral standards, Gorgias simply asserted them as though they were obvious givens (456c6-457c3). When the dialogue gets to

\textsuperscript{113} See in particular the section of the conclusion, \textit{How Socrates Successfully Answers Callicles (i)}.
\textsuperscript{114} Dodds (1990: 5).
Polus, it brings out the first of two problems implicit in this stance: why ought one to act in accordance with such moral standards? What if our interests conflict with these standards? More specifically, Polus focuses our attention on the concerns of everyday life, for in the power of the tyrant (471a-d) or in the torments suffered by his victim (473c), he provides a basis in definite and indubitable facts for his views concerning the importance of looking to one’s own interests. Next to this focus on the actual, Gorgias’ mere assertions of “one ought” must seem foolish indeed. A position that can make clear its basis in reality occupies a position of immense strength in comparison to a series of pious ought-to-be’s that provide no benefit at all. Whatever one might believe Socrates to have established against Polus, his arguments have certainly failed to address this consideration directly. Why would anyone choose to be logically consistent if the price of this is to be burnt in pitch (etc. – 473c)?

Understood in this context, Callicles’ criticism of Polus is that he was not sufficiently rigorous in his focus on the concerns of everyday life. Callicles can point – accurately, as we have seen – to the principles that determined the argument against Polus, νόμος (convention) and φύσις (nature – 482e-483a). Now ‘convention,’ it soon becomes clear, must refer here to the basis of a set of beliefs. That is, laws, or notions in general of how one ought to act, are, on this view, a creation of a group of individuals (483b4-7), a series of mutual agreements. From such agreements we should distinguish the objective order of the natural world, according to which lions, for example, always hunt down and eat deer while deer never hunt and eat lions. In hindsight, we see that the argument with Polus has already drawn out a practical problem with conventional beliefs: apart from the will and ability of people to enforce them, they have no power to affect the world. But as Callicles makes the difference between convention and nature explicit, another problem comes into view. If one were to ask, “do lions eat deer, or the
reverse?,” the answer would have a basis in an objective order of the world, one in no way dependent upon the wishes or decisions of people anywhere. With any question of what one ought to do, on the other hand, if one accepts a conventionalist account, one is conscious precisely of the fact that the answer is not grounded in an objective order. Instead, there are only agreed-upon opinions, which could be changed at any moment if the appropriate people so chose.\footnote{One might argue, and provide a variety of accounts, about what the basis is of conventional beliefs. Within the context of the dialogue so far, however, the answer would seem to be nothing: Gorgias was provided no reason at all for his beliefs, and Polus similarly failed to be clear about his beliefs’ basis in this sense. Socrates has provided arguments that might be taken to touch on this matter, but they have been only \textit{ad hominem}. The dialogue so far has brought out convention as what is simply given, that is, grasped in an unreflective manner.}

Thus, from the perspective of Callicles’ νόμος/φύσις distinction, we can now see that there is a second problem with Gorgias’ assumed moral standards: what makes these imperatives believable in the first place? How are they not mere “papers, trickery and spells?” (γράμματα καὶ μαγγανεύματα καὶ ἐπωδάς – 484a4–5) Even if they were shown to be not altogether at odds with our interests, what gives them any credibility at all? Surely appealing to them amounts to “enchanting and bewitching” (κατεπάδουτες τε καὶ γοητεύουτες – 483e6) one’s audience, as opposed to presenting reasoned arguments with a foundation in reality. Thus we have two problems before us that concern moral precepts: that of interest and that of credibility.

Because he is fully conscious of the distinction between νόμος and φύσις, as Polus was not, Callicles thinks he can avoid the confusion of nature and convention that confounded his predecessor, and avoid both problems in question. By founding his views only upon nature, he might hope to attain consistently – and therefore unassailably – the argumentative strength that Polus was beginning to achieve, that is, a strict basis in the concerns of everyday life. We thus have a continuation and deepening of a theme that runs through the dialogue so far.
The question is how exactly Callicles’ views will be grounded in nature. Somehow, the natural world should suffice to provide a basis from which he can derive everything he wants to say about justice and injustice, the shameful and noble, the better and the worse, and thus the question to which he turns the dialogue, what sort of life one should live. But are these matters to be resolved by appeals to an order of nature in the same straightforward manner as in the case of the question of whether lions hunt deer? As Callicles makes his initial statement, it is altogether obscure how this might be possible.

Callicles’ position is set out in the middle two sections of his initial statement, and it is to these that we must now turn. The second section (483a7-484c3) is unproblematic as regards the relation of justice and injustice to the order of the natural world. Here, he gives an account of various normative expressions in purely descriptive terms. For example, he does not say that a (real) man *ought* not to allow himself to be wronged, or that this is not fitting or proper; rather, he says that this *is* not the experience characteristic of a (real) man (483a8-b1). “The just” is not defined with the claim that the strong *ought* to rule the weak, but rather with the fact that they *do* (483d1-6). We also have the explicit claim that “nature herself shows” (φύσις αὐτῇ ἀποφαίνει – 483c9) what the just is, suggesting that facts evident in the natural world are sufficient to establish his conception of justice. Note also that the next (third) section begins with the phrase, “well that’s how things are” (Τὸ μὲν σὺν ἀληθείς οὐτως ἔχει – 484c4), as though what has preceded is a straightforward description of reality. Callicles can claim, at this point, to be appealing in a straightforward manner to an objective order; anything he might say from this standpoint about the just and the unjust, about how we ought to live, would not merely be laid down as an assertion, but would rather claim a basis in reality. His account so far would seem to be strictly on the side of nature (φύσις) as opposed to mere convention (νόμος).
argument reaches pleasure and desire (491e-492c), we find the most fundamental ground of this perspective. That is, if we inquire as to the reason one might rather be a tyrant than burnt in pitch, there is an indubitably real basis within the soul for such a wish: pleasure. This reality provides the hope for Callicles of founding all action in facts as opposed to arbitrary imaginings.

However even within Callicles’ initial statement of his own position, it is difficult to see how everything he says might be derived from the realities of nature. In the next (third) section of his speech (484c4-485e2) we suddenly find ourselves awash in words that express how things ought to be: δέω (“one ought” – 484c7), χρή (“one ought” – d1), προσήκει (“it is fitting” – 485b3), πρέπουν (“fitting” – 485b5, c4), ἄξιόω (“to be worthy” – c7). Unlike in the preceding section, here it is not clear how Callicles’ use of each of these words is to be derived from an objective order, and it is not clear that he can do this. So, for example, he says that philosophy is a delightful thing at the right time of life, but if one spends more time at it than one ought, it is a man’s destruction (484c7). Callicles does explain how philosophy can contribute to one’s destruction (484c8-e7): it can take precious time away from the pursuits Callicles thinks important (although even here, why one should value these things is not made explicit); Socrates’ own demise would no doubt provide a concrete example of the sort of harm philosophy can do in the worst case. But how is it a “lovely thing” (χαρίζει – 484c6) at an earlier time of life, how is it ‘noble’ (καλὸν – 485a5), how could it be ‘fitting’ (πρέπειν – 485c4), and why would Callicles admire it (ἀγαμάτι – c4) or think that anyone, ever, is illiberal (ἀνελευθερὸς – c6) because he does not philosophise?

When we look to the example Callicles uses in explaining the positive value of philosophy – children who do or do not mumble (485b-c) – the difficulty deepens. “The implication,” we are told, “seems to be that slave-children exhibited an enforced precocity as a
result of being set to work very young, whereas for a child to continue mumbling was [worthy of a free person], since it showed that his parents could afford not to force him.”¹¹⁶ That is, the emphasis is precisely not on the innate qualities of the child in question, but rather on his upbringing, on his conventional standing within society. Surely Archelaus the tyrant (471a-d) would be a perfect exemplar of a strong nature that tramples on all opposing charms and incantations, and thus rises to be master (see 484a). Archelaus, however, is the son of a slave (471a5-6): he would not have mumbled as Callicles would like – nor would he have practised philosophy at the appropriate time of life.¹¹⁷

There is thus reason to believe that Callicles remains very much in the grip of convention, for all his trumpeting of the virtues of nature. Accordingly, when he refers to the ideal of a gentleman of good reputation (καλός καγοθός και ευδοκιμος – 484d1-2), one with the proper experience of the laws of the city and human custom (d2-7), it is an open question whether we are to interpret this as an expression of the natural virtues Callicles endorsed at the start, or as a straightforward appeal to conventional understanding. Is he really going to be able to explain everything said in his main statement from the brute facts of nature?

Strictly speaking, we do not have an answer to this implicit problem until 494e, but Callicles’ initial statement hints at what will from now on be called his ‘realist’ and ‘aristocratic’ sides.¹¹⁸ The former contains all that can be derived from an objective order of nature, such as

¹¹⁶ Dodds (1990: 274).
¹¹⁷ Of course, this points to the fact that there are two sides of Callicles that are by their very nature opposed: Archelaus is a paradigm of the smasher of νομοι (see 484a2-6), and this smasher, qua smasher, does not care what others think of him; someone who’s going to be a gentleman of good reputation (484d1-2), or a person who aims to become very distinguished (485d6), must care what others think of him. But this has been said already in Woolf (2000); see the section Explaining the Contradiction in Callicles for a summary.
¹¹⁸ In finding two sides to Callicles, I am following Woolf (2000). He speaks of “Callicles 1” and “Callicles 2;” these are equivalent to my ‘realist’ and ‘aristocratic’ Callicles. Here and in what follows I am trying further to develop his account of Callicles. See his paper for further support for this line of thought. Note in particular his suggestion (pp. 4-5) that through Socrates’ words at 481c-482c, which discuss internal contradiction and
we find at 483a7-484c3, and is ‘realist’ by virtue of this derivation.\textsuperscript{119} The ‘aristocratic’ side would contain all that Callicles believes that cannot be derived from natural reality. Now one might try to understand the word ‘aristocratic’ in a natural sense – that is, aristocrats are those who, if the natural order of things were allowed to play out without the interference of artificial conventional agreements, would naturally rise to top place, perhaps because of their superior strength and ability. However, if there does turn out to be anything that Callicles believes that is not derived from an objective natural order, we can appeal to another sense of the word: aristocrats are, in an important sense, those most in the hold of convention, for they have the best manners, and are acutely sensitive, as the lower classes are not, to social cues that demonstrate education and upbringing – precisely the consideration which seems to govern the third section of Callicles’ speech (i.e., 484c4-485e2). From this perspective, Archelaus, for all his natural strength, could never be more than a novus homo.

This is not the place to take up the final section of Callicles’ initial statement (485e3-486d1), for the practical problem that it brings to light concerning Socrates’ life does not receive any attention until 499c, which is the beginning of the Socratic account that will culminate (at 521a-522e) in Socrates’ defense of his own life; we are at present concerned only with the argument to 499c. Similarly, Socrates’ words at 486d-488a, through which Plato makes clear to the reader Callicles’ inadequacy as a touchstone, are treated elsewhere.\textsuperscript{120}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item immediately precede Callicles opening statement, “we have been primed to go through Callicles’ speech with the likelihood of his self-contradiction at the forefront of our minds, so that if the text seems to reveal an inconsistent position on his part, we have been given a large authorial hint to accept it as such.”
\item Of course, what exactly is real is very much in question in the dialogue, for Socrates will take it to be something else entirely.
\item Specifically, see the section in the introduction, \textit{Shame: A Double-Edged Sword}, and the section below, \textit{Callicles Fails as a Touchstone}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
4.2 THE REFUTATION OF CALLICLES (I): FINDING THE PRINCIPLE (488B-494E)

As we have seen, once Callicles has made his initial statement, it is very much a question whether he has a coherent position. It is unclear what exactly moves him. His statement contained many ideas – the law of nature, the deontic vocabulary we noted above, the idea of ability, of intelligence, of bravery/manliness, pleasures and desires – but his initial expression of them does not make clear how they relate. Are some of them more important than, or reducible to, others? We saw above the significance of one question in particular: can everything he believes really be derived from the order of nature? Or alternately, perhaps it cannot, and he is instead most fundamentally interested in the seemly world of the gentleman of good repute. Perhaps Callicles is more deeply committed to one side than the other, and will abandon one if Socrates can make him see how they conflict. Before Callicles can be refuted, we must be clear on what exactly he believes. Socrates’ questioning throughout this section has the aim of discovering the principle behind Callicles’ statement. The result is that Callicles proves to be fully committed to two, contradictory ideas. Accordingly, to clarify his views is tantamount to refuting him; all that will be required in the next section will be for Socrates to make explicit the contradiction that he has learned lies implicit in Callicles’ most fundamental beliefs.

There are three steps to the argument here. Step (a), running from 488b2-489b6, pushes to its logical extreme the idea of grounding moral precepts in reality as opposed to mere agreements; this takes up the corresponding section of Callicles’ speech (i.e., 483a7-484c3). Step (b), from 489b7-491a6, pursues the subsequent section of Callicles’ speech (i.e., 484c4-485e2), which made a series of claims of what ought to be that were not obviously derivable from facts.
Step (c), at 491a7-494e8, takes up the position that comes to light as a result of the first two steps, asking whether Callicles will hold consistently to its principle, pleasure.

The question of the principle behind Callicles is what unifies this section of the text. We saw above that Callicles would represent an improvement on Gorgias and Polus above all in his more rigorous focus on the concerns of everyday life, particularly in the basis his position appeared to have in reality. Accordingly, Socrates starts in step (a) by investigating the possibility that the realist side represents what Callicles most fundamentally believes. When Callicles refuses to hold consistently to the consequences of this line of thought, Socrates naturally turns in step (b) to the other main thread in Callicles’ thought, the aristocratic side. Here, too, Callicles refuses to accept the argument as an adequate expression of his thought. The result is that he is driven to a new statement of his position (491a7-492c8), in which particular emphasis is given to its appetitive focus. Clearly this is a move back to the realist side. Socrates’ response in step (c) is to push this appetitive focus to its extreme: will Callicles really hold unwaveringly to the idea that virtue is the fulfillment of the appetites from anywhere at all? When Callicles brings shame into the argument (494e7-8), the argument has established with certainty that the realist and aristocratic sides of Callicles are indeed distinct from and incompatible with one another, and further, that Callicles is fully committed to both.

It is important to be quite clear that on the account given here, the argument of this section concerns only Callicles and his position. Doctrines such as hedonism or the law of nature enter the argument only insofar as they are relevant to this focus. There is no pretence on Plato’s part to have refuted or engaged with these doctrines except in the particular form in which they appear in Callicles – for example, we do not find here The Platonic Refutation of Hedonism.

121 Woolf (2000: 7-8) has already suggested in a more general way how it is possible to make sense of this portion of the text in light of the two sides of Callicles.
This is not to deny that this particular form is deeply relevant to views widely held in Plato’s own time, in particular by the sophistic movement. With this overview in mind, we may now proceed to the arguments themselves.

4.2.1 The Good as the Stronger (488b2-489b6)

The text of this section of the argument runs as follows:

Σώκρατες. 'Εξ ἀρχής δὲ μοι ἐπανάλαβε: πῶς φης τὸ δίκαιον ἔχειν καὶ σὺ καὶ Πίνδαρος τὸ κατὰ φύσιν; ἄγειν βία τὸν κρείττων τὰ τῶν ἡττῶν καὶ ἀρχεῖν τὸν βελτίω τῶν χειρόνων καὶ πλέον ἔχειν τὸν ἀμείνων τοῦ φαυλοτέρου; μή τι ἄλλο λέγεις τὸ δίκαιον ἐίναι, ἡ ἀρθως μέμνημαι;

Καλλικλῆς. Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα ἔλεγον καὶ τότε καὶ νῦν λέγω.

Σ. Πότερον δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν βελτίω καλεῖς σὺ καὶ κρείττω; οὔδε γὰρ τοι τότε οἶος τ’ ἡ μαθεῖν σου τί ποτε λέγεις, πότερον τοὺς ἰσχυρότερους κρείττους καλεῖς καὶ δεὶ ἀκροάσθαι τοῦ ἰσχυρότερου τοὺς ἄσθενεστέρους, οἷον μοι δοκεῖς καὶ τότε ἐνδείκνυσθαι, ὡς αἱ μεγάλαι πόλεις ἐπὶ τὰς μικρὰς κατὰ τὸ φύσει δίκαιον ἔρχονταί, ὅτι κρείττους εἶσιν καὶ ἰσχυρότεραί, ως τὸ κρείττων καὶ ἰσχυρότερον καὶ βέλτιον ταύτῶν ὁν, ἡ ἐστι βελτίω μὲν εἶναι, ἡττῶ δὲ καὶ ἀσθενεστερῶν, καὶ κρείττω ἀμιν εἶναι, μοχθηρότερον δὲ: ἦ ὁ αὐτὸς ὤρος ἐστὶν τοῦ βελτίωνος καὶ τοῦ κρείττωνος; τούτῳ μοι αὐτὸ σαφῶς διόρισον, ταύτων ἡ ἔτερον ἐστὶν τὸ κρείττων καὶ τὸ βέλτιον καὶ τὸ ἰσχυρότερον;

ΚΑΛ. Ἀλλ’ ἐγώ σοι σαφῶς λέγω, ὅτι ταύτων ἐστίν.
ΣΩ. Οὔκοιν οἱ πολλοί τοῦ ἕνος κρείττους εἰσίν κατὰ φύσιν; οἱ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νόμους τίθενται ἐπὶ τῷ ἕνι, ὦσπερ καὶ οὐ ἀρτὶ ἐλέγες.

ΚΑΛ. Πῶς γὰρ οὐ; ΣΩ. Τὰ τῶν πολλῶν ἀρα νόμιμα τὰ τῶν κρείττονων ἔστιν.

ΚΑΛ. Πάνυ γε. ΣΩ. Οὔκοιν τὰ τῶν βελτίων; οἱ γὰρ κρείττους βελτίους που κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον.

ΚΑΛ. Ναι. ΣΩ. Οὔκοιν τὰ τούτων νόμιμα κατὰ φύσιν καλά, κρείττονων γε ὄντων;

ΚΑΛ. Φημί. ΣΩ. Ἀρ’ οὖν οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν οὕτως, ὡς ἀρτὶ αὐ οὐ ἔλεγες, δίκαιοιν ἔναι τὸ ἱσον ἔχειν καὶ αἰσχισθον τὸ ἀδικεῖν τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι; ἔστιν ταῦτα ἡ οὐ; καὶ ὅπως μὴ ἀλώσῃ ἑνταύθα σὺ αὐ αἰσχυνόμενος νομίζουσιν, ἢ οὔ, οἱ πολλοὶ τὸ ἱσον ἔχειν ἀλλ’ οὐ τὸ πλέον δίκαιον ἔναι, καὶ αἰσχισθον τὸ ἀδικεῖν τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι; μὴ φθονεί μοι ἀποκρίνασθαι τοῦτο, Καλλίκλεις, ἵν’ εάν μοι ὁμολογήσης, βεβαιῶσωμαι ἦδη παρὰ σοῦ, ἀτε ἱκανοῦ ἀνδρὸς διαγνώναι ὁμολογηκότος.

ΚΑΛ. Ἀλλ’ οὐ γε πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν οὕτως.

ΣΩ. Οὐ νόμῳ ἀρα μόνον ἔστιν αἰσχισθον τὸ ἀδικεῖν τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι, οὐδὲ δίκαιον τὸ ἱσον ἔχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ φύσις ὁστε κινδυνεύεις οὐκ ἄληθῆ λέγειν ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν οὐδὲ ὀρθῶς ἐμοὶ κατηγορεῖν λέγων ὦτε ἐναντίον ἔστιν ὁ νόμος καὶ ἡ φύσις, ἃ δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ γηνούς κακουργῶ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις,
TRANSLATION

Socrates: Take it up again for me from the beginning. How do you say the just is, you and Pindar, the just according to nature? Do you say that it is just that the superior take by force the things of the inferior and that the better rule the worse and that the nobler have more than the lower? You don’t say that the just is some other thing, or do I recall correctly?

Callicles: Well I was saying these things then and I say them now.

S.: And do you call the better and the superior the same thing? For I am not able to understand from you whatever you are saying, whether you call the stronger superior, and whether it is necessary that the weaker obey the stronger. You seem to me to have shown then, that great cities attack small ones according to the just by nature, because they are superior and stronger, and the superior and stronger and better are the same. Or is it possible to be better, but inferior and weaker, or to be stronger, but more wretched? Or is the definition of the better and the superior the same? Define this very thing clearly for me: are the superior and better and stronger the same or different?

C.: But I’m telling you clearly that they are the same.

S.: And are the many not stronger by nature than the one? For they do set down the laws upon the one, as you were saying just now.

C.: Of course, for how could it not be?

S.: Accordingly, the laws of the many are the laws of the superior.

C.: Certainly.
S.: Are they not the laws of the better? For the superior are better according to your argument.

C.: Yes.

S.: Then are the laws of these people not noble according to nature, given that these people are superior?

C.: I say so.

S.: Then do the many believe in this manner, as you were saying just now, that it is just to have an equal share, and that doing wrong is more shameful than suffering it? Are these things so or not? And take care that you aren’t caught being ashamed here. Do the many believe or not that having an equal share and not more is just, and that doing wrong is more shameful than suffering it? Don’t refuse to answer this for me, Callicles, so that, if you agree with me, I will be confirmed by you, seeing that a man sufficient to determine the matter will have agreed.

C.: Well the many do believe that.

S.: Accordingly, not by convention only is it more shameful to do wrong than to be wronged, nor is it just to have an equal share, but also by nature. So that you do not seem to have spoken the truth earlier not do you seem rightly to have accused me when you said that convention and nature are opposites, and that I, recognising this, do harm in discussion, and if someone speaks according to nature, I lead them toward convention, and if someone speaks according to convention, I lead them to nature.
As suggested above, it is natural for Socrates to begin by focusing on the realist side of Callicles. The form this takes is Socrates’ questioning (488b3-d3) concerning the relation of the words κρείττων (‘superior’), βελτίων (‘better’), ἀμείνων (‘better,’ or perhaps ‘nobler’ or ‘abler’ in context) and ἴσχυρότερος (‘stronger’).

The immediate question which begins this argument turns on the relation of the words ‘better’ and ‘superior.’ First the argument investigates the possibility that ‘superior’ (by nature) is prior within the relationship – that is, people would be ‘better’ because they are ‘superior,’ where ‘superior’ means ‘stronger’ (note the order in which Socrates connects these at 488b8-c7). The idea behind this is the one set forth at 483a7-484c3, when Callicles suggested that his idea of justice by nature (τὸ δίκαιον... κατὰ φύσιν, as Socrates puts it at 488b2-3) could be substantiated in a straightforward manner by appealing to an objective order of nature. In nature one can identify the stronger because one can see them actually prevailing, and it is the pretence that he can base his position in this reality, as opposed to some mere assertion about the way things ought to be, that would put Callicles’ position a step above “papers, trickery and incantations” (484a). Accordingly, the argument now puts this notion of actually prevailing in the spotlight, applying it to people: the stronger sort of people would be those who actually prevail, and it is this that underwrites the normative claim that they are ‘better,’ and thus deserving of more (and observe how the opposite possibility – that the superior and better might be weaker and more wretched, which would require a non-factual basis for ‘better’ – is explicitly passed by at 488c7-8).

To say this is to develop the realist side of Callicles, that is, the side that would try to base ethical thought in reality, to its most extreme form, for it would eliminate any difference between what ought to happen, and what does actually happen. The fact that the many do in fact
establish the laws over the one man, then, makes them superior, and therefore better. Accordingly, their laws acquire the same justification as Callicles’ “law of nature” (483e3). That is, an appeal to reality might in some cases show us the more powerful sort of people having more than the less, but it also shows that the view “that it is just to have the same amount and it is more shameful to do wrong than to be wronged” (488e8-489a1) is a substantial reality, actually enforced in real places. Now, if Callicles were most fundamentally concerned with founding his position in the facts of nature, he could simply rest with the results of the argument at this point, and discard all that conflicts with it. That he does not do this shows that he has not thought through the basis of his position in reality so clearly as one might at first have thought.

One could argue that Callicles’ position has more to it than the argument at this point allows, because he means to appeal to an order of nature, and not the mere fact of success. That is, the stronger sort of people are those who would be on top if we would just stop obstructing the natural order with our conventions; it is in this sense that the comparison to animals (etc.) should be understood, since animals are never obstructed by convention. Certainly this idea of an order of nature is to be found in Callicles’ position, but it is remarkable that Callicles does not make an objection along these lines: he does not stop the argument (or begin it) by saying, “what proves that the stronger are by nature better is that, if conventional laws are removed, the stronger prevail.” Socrates’ argument here focuses on the notion in particular of basing a position in reality, and Callicles’ reaction to it shows just how intent he is on this basis. Recall the conspicuous absence of deontic vocabulary we noted in the appropriate part of the second section of Callicles’ initial statement (483a7-484c3): he wants to be able to claim that his position is founded in what simply is, and not in mere ought-to-be’s. The argument has shown that things
are not so simple, and that Callicles does indeed believe in a normative world, one concerned with the way things *ought* to be.

**4.2.2 The Good as the More Intelligent (489b7-491a6)**

The second step of the argument accordingly focuses on this normativity, by considering ‘better’ as prior to ‘superior.’ That is, people would be better in some way, and on that basis, could be called ‘superior;’ we could thus recognise them as people who *ought* to have top place. This develops the aristocratic side of Callicles, as he himself emphasises with a particularly heavy-handed statement of his view that some people are more worthy than others (489c4-7). As in the second part of his initial statement (484c4-485e2), the move to the aristocratic side brings a proliferation of language that emphasises that Callicles’ position must now be understood to express what *ought* to be rather than what simply *is* (δέι – 490a2, c2, d7, d11, e2, e7, προσήκει – 491d1; αξιος at 489c5 takes up αξιόω at 485c7).122

Of course, once we have determined that there is a moral imperative that demands that some people have more than others, we need to be able to provide one, or perhaps two, forms of justification of this imperative. First, to have a coherent view, there must be some criterion of differentiation. That is, what allows us to tell the ‘better’ people apart from the others? Beyond this, the argument will suggest a second form of justification, one that explains why one group of people deserve what we say they ought to get. That is, even if we can account for our division of

122 Cooper (1999: 53, fn. 33) is incorrect to assert that Callicles’ first use of the word προσήκει comes after ‘instruction’ from Socrates. In fact he used the word before, at 485b3, and Socrates, in using similar language of what ‘ought’ to happen, is showing his characteristic precision in this dialogue in directing his inquiry at exactly what the other characters have said. Cooper does point to a use of δέι by Socrates (488c2) in the preceding section of the argument (488b2-489b6), in which (on my view) the focus is the realist Callicles, but notice how Socrates qualifies this with οίνον μοι δοκεῖν... ἐνδείκνυσθαι (488c3-4) – that is, the δέι is explicitly a Socratic development of Callicles’ realist side.
people into ‘better’ and ‘worse,’ one might still maintain that all people, regardless of which group they fall into, ought to be treated in the same way. Callicles is an opponent of such equal treatment; the argument will hint at his inability to show why his two groups deserve different treatment.

The new criterion of differentiation is brought out when Callicles fails adequately to specify it – he says that the βέλτιος (‘better’) are ὀμείνοις (‘better’ – 489e5) – presumably having given limited thought in the past to what he takes to be a fairly obvious matter. Accordingly, Socrates suggests that those who are more intelligent are the better. Intelligence in this context is a virtue, intended somehow to define an ethical order, for its presence is to determine who ought, in an ideal world, to have top place.

Still, Socrates’ manner of proceeding from this point is odd: he suggests that “the person who is more intelligent with respect to a particular sort of thing should have more of that sort of thing”123 – i.e., doctors should get more food and drink, cobblers more shoes, weavers more cloaks, etc. (490b-e) Furthermore, although at first he expresses himself so that Callicles has a chance to disagree (490b1-8), soon enough, “instead of requesting that Callicles explain exactly what he does mean, as we might expect if Socrates were attempting to discover Callicles’ real view, Socrates... asks Callicles whether he is still committed to the thesis that the more intelligent man is superior, and moreover he demands that Callicles answer with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (490d)... when a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer... could be ambiguous, as it would be to Socrates’ next question, such a demand is unreasonable. After Socrates receives an affirmative answer to his first question, he asks Callicles whether he is still committed to the view that the better man should get more

At this point, Callicles is in an awkward position. This is still Callicles’ view, but a positive answer might be viewed as support for Socrates’ interpretation of it. So, rather than answering ‘yes,’ Callicles answers ‘no,’ adding the qualification, ‘not more food and drink.’

It should be obvious enough that Callicles did not have in mind that the weaver should have the biggest cloak (etc.), but Socrates keeps on with several more of his absurd examples before giving Callicles a chance to clarify what he really means. It might seem that Socrates is leaving aside for a moment any thought of discovering Callicles’ actual views for the sake of indulging in some unfair ridicule. What exactly is going on here?

It is important to be clear on the ways in which the bases of Socrates’ claims here are reasonable. In the first place, the introduction of intelligence – surely the practical, not theoretical sort – is a natural move after strength has been discarded: if simple physical superiority is not what we’re after, it makes sense to suggest something entirely different. In addition, there is a basis for this move in Callicles initial statement, not only because the word he uses (φρόνιμος – 489e8) recalls an earlier expression of Callicles (φρονείν – 486c6), but also because Callicles’ alluded to a sort of intelligence, or ‘experience’ (see ἐμπείρος – 484d1; also ἀπείρος – 484c9, d3, d6), that he thought a mark of the better sort of person. Furthermore, when Socrates begins to talk of skills, he takes up Callicles’ earlier focus on ability (e.g., μὴ ὁ ὄφεις τὴν ἐστίν – 483b3; δυνατοῦς ὄντος – c2), and connects it to intelligence (a connection certainly faithful to Callicles’ conception of intelligence). The idea behind this presumably runs along the following lines. Nobody is without qualification more intelligent and able than everyone else in every sphere of activity. Rather, those who have developed particular skills are more intelligent and able in the appropriate respect than those who have not.

This brings us to the second criterion mentioned above for a moral imperative. Callicles’ initial statement suggested that the fact that superior people succeed would somehow explain why they would deserve more. The previous argument, however, has done away with precisely this aspect of his position, so Socrates tries to produce a theory that will fulfill this requirement: his account of skills assumes that there must be something in the nature of this intellectual ability that itself justifies having more. This is what lies behind the pretence at 490d that Socrates’ absurdities – according to which the skill of the doctor leads him to gorge himself, and the cobbler’s art causes him to have the most and biggest shoes – are simply a consequence of Callicles’ position.125

Having said all this, Socrates brief indulgence in absurdity and ridicule works on at least three levels. First of all, by exasperating Callicles, it helps to provoke him into the more frank statement of his position that we get in the next section (491e-492c). Second, because the absurdities arise as a result of trying to explain why one group deserves more than another, the point is driven home that Callicles’ position cannot explain this. Finally, this passage resonates in significant ways with later parts of the dialogue, and although the connections cannot be properly appreciated at this point, it is important to note them, because they do cast some light on what might otherwise seem a strange passage.

We shall see that the talk of cobblers and weavers connects this passage with the discussion of subordinate and ruling goods at 517a7-519b2, and the connection gives us another perspective from which to view Socrates’ absurdities here: if arts that are properly subordinate, such as shoemaking or weaving, become dominant, then the sort of ridiculous situation that

125 We may assume that the doctor, *qua* doctor is meant, as is the case in the analogous argument in the *Republic* (340d-342e). This would answer objections of the sort found in Irwin (1979: 188): “Socrates... assumes that the expert can be trusted to be fair, simply because he is an expert.”
Socrates describes here, involving a mass of shoes or cloaks, is the sort of thing that results. In this connection it is also worth noting that Socrates brings up the idea of ruling (ἀρχεῖν – 490a2-3, 8, c2) here; in the preceding argument, the talk was instead of ‘law’ (νόμος). Ruling is an idea that has been at work in the dialogue since Gorgias, and runs through the entire dialogue; its significance will be taken up in the conclusion. Finally, Socrates’ use of the skills analogy here contains a hint of the core of his own view, as it will be developed from 503d. The idea of the doctor gorging himself, or the tailor clothing himself in the biggest and finest cloaks, is a rhetorically powerful piece of absurdity precisely because of its opposition to what actually happens in reality: the skill of the doctor will lead him to eat moderately, and that of the tailor is not properly acquisitive, but is focused on producing quality goods. There is a general truth behind these realities: it is the nature of intelligence, as found in particular skills, to limit and order each particular sphere (and note Socrates’ suggestion concerning the proper use of the doctor’s skill at 490c2-4). This reality will be essential to Socrates’ answer to Callicles through a new, Socratic account later in the dialogue.

4.2.3 Pleasure and the Appetites (491a7-494e8)

The preceding two steps of the argument have consisted of a preliminary investigation of first the realist, then the aristocratic, side of his position: Callicles has shied away from following either to its logical conclusion. There are signs – specifically his insistence that he has been saying all along what he means (’Αλλ’ ἔγωγε καὶ πάλαι λέγω – 491a7; ’Αλλ’ εἰρηκό γε ἔγωγε ... – 492c6) – that he is becoming frustrated, no doubt as a result of his inability to hold his ground in argument and the ridicule of the preceding section. In this third step of the argument, this frustration bears fruit: Callicles will be driven to be still more frank about what moves him; we
are twice reminded of the increased frankness at this point (note παραφθησιςζομενος – 491e7-8, 492d1-5). This will allow the argument to reach a most fundamental ground of his position, which will in turn allow a definitive conclusion about the nature and coherence of Callicles’ position.

Now, the argument of the first two steps started with activity on Socrates’ part, as he suggested one element of Callicles’ initial statement – first strength, the intelligence – which alone was taken as the principle of the whole position, from which the rest was to be derived. The third step, however, begins with some activity from Callicles: he now emphasises the need to hold together a number of these elements to produce an account adequate to his thought (491a7-b4): we’re after someone who is intelligent and brave and capable and particularly focused on the city. All of these elements were present in his initial statement.¹²⁶ This third step, then, begins with an attempt to be inclusive rather than exclusive. That is, it appears that Callicles still wants somehow to hold together elements from both the aristocratic and realist sides, even as he has just shown himself unwilling to follow either to its logical extreme. Now Socrates, still looking for some one thing that will serve as the principle of the position, does focus briefly on the newer element in all this, bravery (491c3-5), but Callicles insists on a more comprehensive statement (491c6-d3), including a hint that he would retain the normative aspect from his aristocratic side (note προοηκει – 491d1). Now, if the comprehensive picture – brave and intelligent and specifically focused on the city – is the correct one here, then the question arises, what is interesting about this particular collection of abilities? What lies behind Callicles’

¹²⁶ As regards bravery in particular, Callicles’ critique of Polus and Gorgias suggested the importance of bravery to the argument so far, for he made a significant connection, to which we shall return in the conclusion, between daring and shame, saying that a person who is ashamed does not dare (τολμαω) to say what he thinks (482e6-483a1). He also allowed (483c1) for the possibility that the strong might be scared into submitting to the weak, which implies that bravery would be a characteristic of Callicles’ ideal man.
interest in this particular grouping? This will quickly become the focus of the argument, and the answer will be pleasure. The rest of this section will then investigate the question of whether Callicles really will hold consistently to pleasure.

Before moving on to this argument, it is important to note that there is a need for Callicles to move to a more comprehensive sort of position, because the argument so far suggests how to answer the newer elements of the position – bravery and the focus on the city – if they are taken on their own. If the better sort of people were defined simply by being brave, in that they would not slacken because of softness of soul (491b3-4), we would simply be led back to Socrates’ earlier argument. That is, by Callicles’ own admission, the multitude are able to enslave the “better by nature;” this is preceded by his remark that he means the same as before (ὤπερ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἔγω ἔλεγον... 492a6), and followed by his talk of praising justice and injustice because of cowardice (a8-b1). When we look to his earlier talk of how the multitude use praise to keep the more capable down (483b4-c6), we find that he allowed that the stronger could be scared (c1). So if the multitude enslave the better in this way, it would seem that the better cannot be better because of bravery; rather they are guilty of “softness of soul.” The same is true if we appeal to Callicles’ focus on the affairs of the city (491b1): if the multitude enslave the ‘better,’ surely it is the multitude who are more capable as regards the affairs of the city. For the argument to make any real progress, then, there is a need for something new, and this the comprehensive position provides.

Callicles’ new account tries to answer Socrates’ skill-examples by focusing on one field of activity for his superior people: managing the city (491b1, c7).127 The argument of the

127 This should recall Gorgias’ own references to various particular affairs of the city (452d-e, 455d-456c); Callicles’ talk of ruling cities (491d1) recalls Gorgias’ talk of ruling others (452d7). This is yet another suggestion that what we find in Callicles is a development of what was already present in Gorgias.
Republic reaches a similar position when Thrasymachus, responding to Socrates' use of the skill-analogy, focuses on ruling as a special case (343b-c). In that case, the argument turns to consider the nature of ruling others. Here, the argument will take quite a different turn, and the reason for this can be found in the fact that ‘bravery’ comes into focus together with ‘rule.’ This is a significant moment for Platonic psychology: in speaking of the need for bravery, Callicles allows for the possibility that one might want to do something, and be capable of it, but fail to accomplish it “because of weakness of soul.” (491b4)128 This possibility poses a significant challenge to the position often found in ‘earlier’ dialogues, that virtue is knowledge. We shall deal with this challenge in the conclusion, but it provides an explanation for the difference between the turn the argument takes here, and what we find in the Republic: in this case, Socrates ignores the question of rule over others, and focuses on rule within the self.129 That is, Callicles’ talk of bravery points to the possibility for psychological weakness; Socrates responds to this by turning the argument towards the self.

Callicles’ response to the question of self-rule provides an important revelation into what is at work behind the composite picture of his ideal man: self-restraint is an utterly alien idea to him: he is simply baffled at first (491d4-10), but then rejects the idea out of hand: “how could a man be happy while a slave to anything?” (e5-6) That is, the idea at work here is of an absolute liberation, a sort of pure freedom from constraints, even from self-restraint.130 This conception will be in focus throughout the rest of the argument (to 499b), which will push a somewhat

129 On the move from rule of others to self-rule, Woolf (2000: 15) is illuminating: we have an indication here of the priority, for Socrates, “of one’s internal relations (the structure within one’s own soul) over... one’s external relations (one’s relations with other people).” For the significance of this point, see the section of the conclusion, How Socrates Successfully Answers Callicles (i).
130 White (1985: 140) is quite right to note that Callicles “rejects any and all forms of temperance.” Similarly Klosko (1984: 128).
refined version of this notion to its logical extreme in order to see just how far Callicles is willing
to take it.

When Callicles restates his position in opposition to the idea of self-rule (491e5-492c8),
his account has a new focus: the fulfillment of appetites (ἐπιθυμήσεις – 491e9, 492a2-3), with
particular mention being made of pleasure (ἡδονή - 492a8). Of these two factors, pleasure is the
more fundamental, for it is for the sake of pleasure that people want to fulfill their various
appetites. Pleasure provides a ground for Callicles’ concern with bravery and intelligence: they
provide the means by which one has the ability to minister to the appetites (492a1-2). Pleasure is
also the ultimate foundation from which Callicles’ account of justice is developed, for it is the
inability (and cowardice – 492b1) of the multitude to fulfill their appetites that leads them to
enslave those better by nature and to praise (conventional) justice and moderation (492a3-b1).
The appetites and pleasure were mentioned in Callicles’ initial statement (484d5), but their
significance has changed and grown since then: by bringing Callicles to the point where he is
provoked into speaking so frankly, the argument has brought out pleasure as a fundamental
foundation of his position, the principle from which many other elements can be derived.131 This
view represents a profound challenge to the philosophical life of Socrates; to the extent that
Callicles holds to it, the dialogue will become a rigorous and genuinely philosophical
investigation of a matter of principle.132

131 At 494a Callicles will reject Socrates’ orderly and temperate life on the ground that it does not involve pleasure;
this again makes it clear that it is one ground of his thought. Irwin (1979: 196) notes that “this view requires
pleasure to be at least the predominant component of happiness, i.e. no other combination of components must ever
outweigh the value of pleasure.”
132 Klosko (1984) points out that Callicles’ position here is more extreme than it needs to be, presenting an
‘unsophisticated’ (p. 131) hedonism. By modifying this position so as to allow for some restraint on the appetites,
Klosko produces a position that Socrates fails to answer, that would be much harder for him to refute, and would
(perhaps) also more closely represent “what others think, but refuse to say” (492d2-3) – although I am inclined to
think that the multitude, like Callicles, has not thought things through so well as Klosko. It is important to be clear
on the question of Plato’s purpose here. On my view, the point is to develop towards its logical extreme the idea of
Pleasure is significant in another regard. When Callicles describes how the inability of the multitude leads them to praise justice and moderation, and when he then asks rhetorical questions about tyrants and kings (492a3-c3), he assumes pleasure to be the universal human end. That is, he takes it as obvious to everyone that pleasure is the ultimate reason that we act. When we recall his earlier implicit attempt to derive his account from facts, as opposed to chimerical claims of what merely ought to be, the universality of pleasure takes on further significance: it is unquestionably real. Both the appetites and the pleasure that they promise are facts, indubitably present to each individual, just as much as – or even more than – the facts of history or the animal kingdom that Callicles alluded to before (at 483d-e).133

By 492d, then, Callicles’ frank speaking has brought pleasure to light as the ground of his position, and this explains the peculiar turn that the discussion now takes. From 488b to 491a Socrates used arguments, but from 492e-494e, we have a series of images, the purpose of which is to suggest with increasingly intensity the inadequacy and lack of dignity in the appetitive life. The question behind this is whether Callicles will really hold consistently to pleasure or not. If he does not, then the composite picture of his ideal person – the one who is brave, intelligent and capable in relation to the city in particular – cannot be an adequate description of his position, for pleasure is what lies behind this composite picture. More specifically, the realist side of Callicles was said above to be all that he says that can be derived from the facts of nature; pleasure would obviously fall onto this side. The aristocratic side, on the other hand, was said to consist of freedom as a liberation from restraint. The idea of the individual will opposing itself to everything external, the pursuit of utterly arbitrary individual whim, represents the full flowering of the idea of power as it lay implicit in Gorgias. The important question for the dialogue is whether or not Callicles will actually hold to this idea in its most extreme form. A thorough refutation of hedonism is beside the point here, and in the conclusion we shall get a better idea of why this is so (see the section, *Plato and the Socratic Case*).133 Moss (2005: 143) correctly points to the implicit presence of pleasure as the reason for which Polus would admire the life of the tyrant: this is another respect in which the dialogue begins with an implicit hint of what is later to be made explicit.

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everything that cannot be derived from facts of nature. If Callicles turns out to be inconsistent in his adherence to pleasure in a manner that does not appeal to other facts of nature, it will prove the fundamental incoherence of his position.

At this point we should pause to recall a claim made in the introduction, i.e., that the dialogue is able fully to investigate its subject matter only insofar as Socrates’ opponents lack shame. If Callicles is ashamed to follow through to the logical consequences of his doctrine, Socrates will be relieved of the obligation to give an entirely adequate argument for his views. Instead, an *ad hominem* argument, of the sort which silenced Gorgias and Polus, will suffice to answer Callicles, and this will not rectify the main defect of the conversation with Polus, which failed to investigate the *nature* of so many of its subjects, such as justice, power, good and punishment.

Plato has taken pains to draw our attention to shame at this point in the dialogue. Frankness, we recall, is the virtue equivalent to lack of shame (see 487a3, b1, d5). As pleasure comes to light as the ground of Callicles’ position, both Socrates and Callicles note how frank he is being (*παρρησίαζομαι* – 491e7-8, 492d2), and Socrates immediately follows this up with a reminder of how this frankness connects to the purpose of the argument (as he did at 487a-488a): because Callicles is saying what others think but won’t say, it might become clear how we should live (492d2-5). In what follows, Socrates twice encourages Callicles not to give in to shame, specifically invoking Polus and Gorgias (494c4-5, d2-4) – an indication that a crucial matter is coming to a head – and even notes that he himself must not give in to shame (c5-6). This would prevent the conversation from being an investigation of a principle (i.e., of pleasure).

The images from 492e-494e are designed to bring the apparently shameless, realist side of Callicles into contact with his aristocratic side. If Callicles really is so completely beyond
shame that he will adhere without qualification to the notion that pleasure is the good, there will be no line he won’t cross – and he will prove his realist side to be what he really believes, abandoning the aristocratic side that had seemed to be present. The first image (493a-c) focuses on the futility of the appetitive life, comparing it to having to carry water in a sieve to a leaky jar, the sieve being the soul itself. No end is ever actually attained; the means are hopelessly inadequate to their task, with the result that there can be no rest from unceasing toil. The next image, focusing on jars (493d-494a) retains this result, but now compares it to another possibility, that of the temperate life, which promises a limit to the work of filling the jars. Callicles is undaunted by the prospect of this extra work, for he locates pleasure in the flowing itself, so that the temperate man lacks it once he has filled his jars. One wants as great a flow as possible.

From this point, the images aim directly at conventional notions of a dignified life. “If much flows in,” says Socrates, “much must also flow out, and the opening for the out flow must be great.” (494b3-4) If this is so, must the appetitive life not be the same in principle as that of a χαραδριώτης? (“a bird of messy habits and uncertain identity,”134 apparently known for excreting as soon as it eats.) What about the life of someone forever scratching an itch? Scratching his head only? What about the life of a catamite?

At this point Callicles can go no further, and declares Socrates’ questioning shameful (494e7-8). This is a crucial turning point of the dialogue, and there are three main regards in which we can appreciate the significance of this moment. First of all, we must recall both from the introduction and from the argument with Gorgias and Polus the significance of shame within the dialogue: we saw that both Gorgias and Polus gave way in argument because of shame, when

they could have held their ground. The implicit question with Callicles, then, was whether he too would give way because of shame, and Plato has had Socrates make this explicit: Gorgias and Polus may both have been friendly and clever, but it is specifically Callicles’ frankness – that is, his lack of shame – that will make him a touchstone with which Socrates can find the truth (486d-487e). This explains Socrates’ repeated exhortations to Callicles not to give in to shame (489a1-2, 494c4-5, d3-4), but now Callicles has actively brought shame into the argument: Callicles has failed. To the extent that Socrates was correct to suggest that Callicles’ frankness makes him a touchstone, the dialogue can no longer provide Socrates with the basis for discovering the truth that he believed himself to have. There is a suggestion, then, that the dialogue may not attain fully adequate philosophical argument.

Second, Callicles’ introduction of shame is significant from the point of view of the argument concerning his own position. As we have seen, the first two stages of the argument with Callicles showed him to have some commitment to both the realist and the aristocratic sides of his position, but only at the start of the third stage was pleasure brought out as the principle underlying the new, composite account of Callicles’ position. This allows the argument to come to a definitive conclusion concerning the nature of this position: if pleasure is the principle of everything he believes, then the aristocratic side will be jettisoned, and he will have a coherent position. But with his expression of shame, Callicles proves that the side of him that spoke of a “gentleman of good reputation” (484d1-2) always exerts its own pull on him: it can even overrule pleasure, which, we now see, underwrites only a certain portion of what he believes. Pleasure is therefore not the principle of his position, but rather a principle of his position. Ultimately there are two sides of him, and they cannot be reconciled. Far from having resolved the tension between νόμος and φύσις, he is every bit as caught in and defined by this tension as
Polus was, even if on somewhat different terms. This ties in to the preceding point, concerning
the role of shame in the dialogue: Callicles is willing to give voice to a view which many think,
but refuse to speak, as Socrates suggested (492d2-3), and this should allow the discussion to
discover truths beyond everyday conversation – but Callicles only does this to a limited degree.

The third way in which we can see the significance of Callicles’ expression of shame
involves his own activity: from this moment, he retreats almost completely from the argument.
That is, he has to this point repeatedly introduced new concerns that change the course of the
argument. His initial statement (482c4-486d1) certainly did this, as did his objection to the idea
that a mere mob might be better than one great man (489b7-c7), and his objection to the
argument involving skills (491a7-b4), along with the new account of his position that followed
(491e5-492c8). Similarly, his expression of shame (494e7-8) prevents the current argument
concerning pleasure from continuing along its present path. From this point on, however, with
few exceptions, Socrates will be able to develop the argument as he likes, with limited or non-
existent resistance from Callicles.135 Accompanying this change, Callicles will qualify his
answers as he did not before, making his reluctance to participate particularly evident on a
number of occasions. Thus his next answer begins with the proviso, “in order that my account is
not inconsistent” (495a5); this is followed by a confirmation that he is answering contrary to his
real opinion (and believes Socrates also to do this – 495b1), and what appears to be a flippant
dismissal of the preceding argument (b7). Soon he tries to get out of answering altogether, and
Gorgias must twice intervene to keep him in the conversation (497a-c, 505c-506c). Indeed, at
one point (505c-509c) Callicles leaves Socrates to carry on the dialogue on his own for a bit. His
uninterested responses (see, for example, 510a1, 513e1, 516b4) continue right up to his final

135 We find an exception of a sort at 503a-c, where, as we shall see, it is Callicles who insists that the good is a real
presence in the world, a possibility that provides the motivation for the argument to 517a.
words (522e7-8), and at the very end, Socrates makes clear that he understands that Callicles is not convinced (527e5-7). This behaviour is easy to explain: because Callicles is firmly attached to two considerations that the argument has found incompatible, he can no longer fully participate in the discussion. Wherever the argument leads, it cannot arrive at a place he finds palatable. He has been broken by his admission of shame; even if his position has not been formally refuted yet, Callicles becomes a remarkably passive figure, particularly in comparison with his behaviour at the start of this part of the dialogue. Again we can see the coherence of this point with the role of shame in the dialogue: at the moment he fails to be frank, and thus fails to be a touchstone, Callicles also ceases actively to challenge Socrates in argument.

We can summarise the argument from 488b2-494e8 as follows. First, there is an attempt to push the idea behind Callicles’ realist side to its extreme. Callicles reacts to this by bringing up the aristocratic side (from 489c4), and so there is an attempt to develop this side. Callicles’ reaction against this leads to a turn within the soul, and pleasure is the ground within the soul that most fundamentally moves him. The matter then becomes a question whether or not Callicles will hold consistently to this as a principle, and when he brings up shame (at 494e7), it is clear that he will not. This first section of the argument with Callicles has thus clarified what moves him: both pleasure and convention. To clarify what moves Callicles is to bring him to the point where his defeat has only to be made explicit. He has not thought through his position in such a manner that he grasps the relation of its various aspects. Consequently, he is seen to shift his ground as Socrates focuses on one or another aspect of his first long speech.

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136 Scott (1999: 22) and Cooper (1999: 52, fn. 32) both note that the present tense is at work in this final passage.
4.3 THE REFUTATION OF CALLICLES (II): EXPLICIT CONTRADICTION (495A-499C)

By the end of the first phase of the argument, Callicles’ position has been clarified to the point that he is effectively defeated. The second phase of the argument simply makes this defeat explicit, by forcing him to assert the contradictory opposite of what he asserted at the start. That is, at the start of this section, he identifies the good with the pleasant (495a); at the end, he asserts that some pleasures are better than others (499b), which makes the good the standard by which pleasures are to be judged.

Taken as a refutation of Callicles, this section is a mere formality. All that the argument here does is to develop the tension between the aristocratic side of Callicles and the realist side into an explicit contradiction, although it is a contradiction on a profound matter: the nature of the good, i.e., the purpose of human life. Socrates already knows that he can produce such a conclusion from the moment that Callicles himself actively brings shame into the argument (494e), for this makes it certain that the aristocratic aspect of his initial statement, is no mere pretence, no convenient facade which allows Callicles to move more easily in the company of the powerful, but is something to which he is genuinely attached. Given this attachment, he cannot maintain consistently that pleasure is the good. What the argument here does do is get Callicles to admit that the good is prior to the pleasant, and this will be the basis from which Socrates develops his own doctrines. 137

137 In saying this, I follow Kahn (1983: 106). Cooper (1999: 69, fn. 60) believes that “the text does not support this interpretation,” and takes Callicles strong affirmation of the life of unrestricted pleasure-seeking (at 495b9) as indicative of his true view. But Woolf (2000: 8) is correct to emphasise also that Callicles says almost immediately before (at 495a5-6) that he holds to this thesis only to avoid being inconsistent: we thus have a ‘schizophrenic’ attitude, one easily and naturally explained in terms of his realist and aristocratic sides (and, I would add, by a desire
Perhaps a more difficult question is, what is the purpose of the argument from 495c3-497d7? It would seem to end in the conclusion that pleasure and the good must be different, but Socrates does not get a reaction from Callicles when he points to the conclusion. That is, Socrates ends his argument with a question that is not answered, and he proceeds straightaway from this concluding question to the final argument: “how can pleasant things be the same as goods, or painful things the same as evil? But if you wish, consider it this way too…” (497d6-8; perhaps we are to imagine a pause here in which Callicles finds himself at a loss for words). It is the next argument which produces Callicles’ move away from his claim that pleasure is the good. Furthermore, near the start of this section, Socrates produces a series of agreements concerning bravery and knowledge (495c3-d5), but these only become relevant at 497e. This makes the intervening argument (495c3-497d7) seem like a sort of interruption of the main argument.

The point of this interruption is to drive home in another way the point suggested above, at the end of the preceding section, about the end of Callicles’ activity within the dialogue. First of all, the argument of the dialogue has so far proceeded by pushing each character beyond the limit of what he felt comfortable admitting in public, and this corresponds to the limit of what he has thought about carefully. That is, the point at which feelings of shame can be brought to bear upon each character represent the point at which he simply regards something to be obvious, an unconsidered axiom of his life. Thus Gorgias took certain moral limits simply to be given and obvious, but equally did not recognise just how great a cause of evil his own teaching could be. Polus might admire tyranny, but had failed to think this through relative to his continued recognition of conventional morality. In both cases, a failure of thought means that feelings of shame become a potent weakness in argument: neither Polus nor Gorgias realised that certain of

not to lose the argument). The final argument (to 499b) does indeed bring the realist and aristocratic sides against one another, as I argue below. The text, then, does not contradict this line of interpretation.
the beliefs had consequences that they were ashamed of. The argument from 495c3-497d7 shows that Callicles has been brought to this same point, at which he both feels the urge to get away from the consequences of his own thought, but also is on ground he simply has not thought through.

More specifically, Callicles took it as obvious that pleasure is a very good thing. This coheres obviously with certain aspects of his initial statement, but he had never thought through the matter of pleasure as a basis for a life in principle, and the argument to 494e forces upon him certain uncomfortable consequences of this. Beyond this, however, he began (482c4-483c7) with a critique of an earlier argument, and his critique showed that he had grasped that argument on the level of the principles that governed it. Now, however, he makes no objection to an argument from which he might have escaped. His failure to make a substantial response is conspicuous in light of what went before. We have passed beyond the limits of what he had thought through.138

We should pause to note that the account we find of pleasure in this argument fits Callicles very well, suggesting that we are once again dealing with an ad hominem argument. It was in regard to the appetitive life that pleasure became particularly conspicuous (491e5-492c8), and he showed himself particularly concerned with the activity of ‘filling,’ as it was called (494a6-b5). If we focus on the moment of ‘flow’ as the moment of pleasure, then the experience will indeed be experienced in a sort of opposition. Of course, we need not agree that pleasure and pain are necessarily present in the same place at the same time, as Plato himself shows in the

138 Irwin (1979: 199-200) provides his own reflections on hedonism, which go beyond what Callicles says. One might declare some pleasures better than others on the grounds that they produce more gratification. Further, one might say that overall pleasure is the end aimed at, and that one might therefore choose pain on some occasions so as to attain this end. The main significance of such reflections, I think, is that they are not in the text. Callicles’ could try to resist Socrates argument in a number of ways, but he does not. Plato’s interest here is in pleasure simply in its relation to convention. I would say something similar to many of the distinctions which White (1985) introduces into his analysis of the argument: they are significant above all in not being in the text, indicating that Plato’s interest lies elsewhere. See also Cooper (1999: 55, fn. 41) in relation to this matter.
Phaedo (60b), where Socrates speaks of pleasure and pain as exclusive of, but following, one another. Callicles might try to maintain his position along these lines, but he makes no such objection. The form of resistance he does put up is telling: he makes a sustained effort to avoid answering as the conclusion looms into view (497a6-c2). No longer do we have genuinely argumentative resistance, as we did prior to 494e.

The final argument (497e-499b) provides the coup de grace, pitting two Calliclean virtues – bravery and intelligence – against his desire for pleasure. The first step is a dubious one: “don’t you call good people good by the presence of good things, just as beautiful people are those for whom beauty is present?” (497e) Once again, Socrates has not bothered to specify what exactly is meant by ‘good.’ Are “good things” virtues? To say that people are morally good by the presence of virtues seems reasonable enough. But what if we understand by “good things” riches, power or pleasures? This is perhaps what Callicles is thinking of, and he no doubt thinks people good who acquire these things. Once again, then, there are two meanings of ‘good’ potentially at play, and even if Callicles is aware of this, because he is actually committed to both meanings he cannot reasonably object to the argument

The argument shows that if we take certain virtues as the standard of what makes a person good, then one set of people – the brave and/or intelligent – will be good. If we take the presence of pleasure as the standard, we can get a different result. By the first standard, intelligent men are good, and fools bad; by the second, we might get the opposite result, so that unless we abandon one of the two standards, the same person is both good and bad. Indeed, both the brave and the cowardly experience pain as the enemy approaches, and pleasure as the enemy

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139 Dodds (1990: 309) notes that one could interpret the passage in the Phaedo so that it did not contradict the present passage in the Gorgias, but I do not agree with the interpretation: to take παραγείγνωσι at 60b as definitely meaning ‘arise’ instead of “be present in” seems to me to miss the sense of the passage in the Phaedo. On the logic of 495c-497d see also Irwin (1979: 201-202).
departs, so that at those very moments in which bravery or cowardice are relevant, brave men will be just as bad (or good) as cowards – or perhaps the cowards might sometimes be better than the brave! The conclusion is stated so as to emphasise the difficulty: “does the bad man not become bad and good in similar fashion to the good man, or even more good?” (499a7-b1)

What is most interesting here is that the contradiction arises because Callicles is ultimately caught in the same confusion over the conventional and natural use of ‘good’ that confounded Polus earlier. He began by showing an understanding of this distinction, and showed that he could explain the preceding argument in terms of it (482e-483a). It is now clear, however, that he had not applied such rigorous thinking to his own position. The aristocratic side of Callicles is still caught in the world of convention – and this is the side that admires bravery and intelligence, and would make them the standard for ‘good’ – and he has not thought this through relative to his realist side, which focuses on the natural basis for living a life, and thus identifies pleasure as the standard of ‘good.’ Because his own position is characterised by this contradiction, Socrates can defeat him using merely *ad hominem* arguments, and never needs to give his own account of the nature of ‘good’ – or anything else. A more philosophically adequate character would have forced Socrates to give an account of the nature of ‘good’ before accepting anything else.

In one sense, then, the argument has not progressed beyond the point it had arrived at with Polus: Callicles is caught in the conflict between *νόμος* and *φύσις* every bit as much as his predecessor. What the encounter with Callicles has produced, however, is a series of challenges

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140 Beversluis (2000: 356-357) notes that it takes much work for Socrates to get the admission that the coward might experience more pleasure as the enemy withdraws, or more pain as they advance, and further notes that Callicles’ agreement on these points is qualified (489b5-7). In fact the points are not necessary to the argument, though they do deepen the difficulty.
concerning how one should live and why. It remains to be seen how Socrates will respond to these.

4.4 CALLICLES FAILS AS A TOUCHSTONE

At the start of the encounter with Callicles, Socrates explains why he believes that he has found an adequate touchstone (βάσσανος – 486d7, 487e3), by which he may test (βασανίζειν – 486d4, 487a1, a4, e1) his own beliefs. The foundation of this expectation has three elements: knowledge, goodwill and frankness (ἐπιστήμη, εὐνοία, παρρησία – 487a2-3). These indicate, respectively, cleverness (σοφία – 487a4-5, 7; see also e4), friendliness (φιλία – 487b1, e5; also d4) and a lack of shame (αἰσχύνη – 487b3, d5, e4). It is because Callicles seems to have these three virtues that Socrates believes that an agreement between the two of them will have “the end consisting in truth.” (487e6-7)

The greatest stress is placed upon the need for frankness, or a lack of shame: Gorgias and Polus are friendly and clever, Socrates tells us, but are wanting in frankness, and are more shameful than they should be (487a7-b2). It is therefore Callicles’ frankness that should differentiate him from the other two, and make him the adequate touchstone. We have treated the matter of shame, and Callicles’ deficiency in this regard, in the introduction. Callicles, by making his own appeal to shame (494e) – and right after Socrates has urged him not to do this (494c-d; note also 489a1-2) – fails as regards frankness. Because of this inadequacy, the dialogue does not deal as thoroughly as it might with hedonism, and Socrates can get away with another merely ad hominem argument to refute Callicles. Shame, of course, is a major theme of the dialogue, but what is important here is that Plato has Socrates set a requirement for frankness at
487a-e, and then has Callicles fail in this regard. The implication could not be clearer: Callicles is not the touchstone for which Socrates had hoped.

Plato also points our attention towards Callicles’ failure as regards friendliness. Callicles has professed his friendly intentions towards Socrates (485e2), and Socrates accepted this claim on the basis of a conversation he had overheard between Callicles and three other associates (487c1-d4). Now, a consequence of this friendliness was said to be that Callicles would not deceive (ἀπατάω – 487e5). But by 499, Socrates finds his hopes dashed: he had not believed that Callicles would deceive him (ἐξαπατάω – 499c2, 3), since he was a friend (φίλος – c4). But in this he was wrong. Thus both at the beginning and end of this section of the dialogue, we find a connection between friendliness and sincerity, or between deception with the absence of friendliness. By tying the conclusion of the argument back to the beginning with Socrates’ expression of disappointment on this matter, Plato emphasises that friendliness is a second failing of Callicles.

Thus in the case of both frankness and friendliness, Plato sets up a standard at the start of the refutation of Callicles, and at the end of it draws our attention to Callicles’ failure to meet the standard. The case of knowledge or cleverness (ἐπιστήμη, σοφία) is less straightforward, but even here, we can find suggestions that Callicles is inadequate. Socrates connects this trait with the belief that many Athenians would say that he has been adequately educated (πεπαιδευσαί ἵκανως – 486b6), but there are numerous indications that this is not the case: Callicles’ use of literary and historical examples do not support his case nearly so much as he

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141 For his own part, Socrates claims that he does not himself willingly deceive (488a3).
142 It is a question how we are to take the claim that Gorgias and Polus are clever, as Socrates says (487a7). On the one hand, this statement could be taken to be not be very significant, for both of these characters are conspicuous within this dialogue for their intellectual deficiency: we saw that Gorgias is complacent, and that Polus comes off as definitely unintelligent. Still, the last page of the dialogue (527a-b) will contain an appeal to their intelligence of Gorgias, Polus and Callicles; I am inclined to view this statement as governed by rhetorical considerations – that is, it is an attempt on Socrates’ part to increase the plausibility of his doctrine.
seems to think, revealing his superficial knowledge of – or at least superficial reflection upon – the material.

Callicles appeals to two Persian kings as a basis for his rule of the stronger: “what sort of justice did Xerxes employ when he campaigned against Hellas, or his father against Scythia?” (483d6-7) Of course, both of these campaigns were ultimately failures: they do not support Callicles’ “law of nature” in such a straightforward manner as might at first seem to be the case.¹⁴³ Callicles’ use of Xerxes and Darius requires that we focus on them only insofar they were great, terrifying and unrestrained, not insofar as we think through to the eventual result of their characteristic activity. To someone with ἐπιστήμη concerning history, Callicles does not seem σοφός at all. When he cites Euripides’ Antiope – “you strike me now as Amphion struck Zethus in Euripides” (485e4-5, trans. Irwin) – the same sort of problem turns up again. The play has not survived in its entirety, but we know enough of it to grasp Plato’s point here. “Traditionally,” we are told, “Zethus was a herdsman, Amphion a musician; but Euripides widened the issue to a general comparison between the practical activity of the man of affairs and the ἀπραγμοσύνη (“quiet life”) of the artist and, it would seem, of the philosopher... It is the introduction of this larger issue which gives point to Callicles’ adaptation of the complaint of Zethus. Amphion’s reply is... a declaration of ἀπραγμοσύνη ... His attitude was in the end justified by Hermes, who as deus ex machina predicted that Amphion’s music should build the walls of Thebes.”¹⁴⁴ That is, the play to which Callicles appeals supports Socrates’ side in the end.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, in quoting Pindar (484b), “Callicles misuses and misinterprets the Pindaric

¹⁴³ Rutherford (1995: 163) has already drawn attention to the dubious stature of these examples. A more recent historical example would be, “did Hitler worry about conventional justice when he invaded Russia?”
¹⁴⁴ Dodds (1990: 276).
¹⁴⁵ On the references to the Antiope in the Gorgias, see Nightingale (1992).
passage, as all modern scholars agree\textsuperscript{146} – and note that he even admits that he doesn’t know the poem to which he appeals (484b10). Callicles’ literary and historical citations, then, do seem to undermine the claim that he is knowledgeable or clever. If, after all of this, Socrates suggests that he has been adequately educated and is clever, the compliment is a hopeful one.

Plato, then, has given the reader clear indications that Callicles fails to live up to the requirements of frankness or friendliness, and has left us with hints that there might also be a deficiency as regards cleverness. But if these formed the basis from which Socrates thought Callicles a touchstone, then Callicles’ conspicuous failures mean that Socrates does not have the touchstone that he feels himself to need. Furthermore, it was for this reason that Socrates felt he could declare that “an agreement between you and me will have the end consisting in truth” (487e6-7). Now we see that Plato has set up this expectation only to disappoint it: his intention must be to suggest that there is some sense in which the agreement between Socrates and Callicles falls short of its goal. It would make sense to take this in two ways. In the first place, we have already seen that Callicles is removed by way of an \textit{ad hominem} argument, which are in one sense bad arguments. Callicles’ failure as a touchstone draws our attention to this deficiency in the argument so far: it has failed fully to confront hedonism. However, Socrates’ talk of a touchstone applies to all agreement between himself and Callicles, and so must have wider significance for the dialogue. Clearly Plato’s suggestion is that all that follows must somehow be compromised, since all of it is given to us as an agreement between Socrates and Callicles – though only a qualified ‘agreement,’ for we have already noted Callicles’ lack of interest and

\textsuperscript{146} Rutherford (1995: 163; see also 166-168). For a different view, see Dodds (1990: 270-272). Callicles’ quotation is in fact not accurate – our manuscripts of the Gorgias have \texttt{βιοίων τὸ δίκαιότατον} at 484b7; Pindar seems to have written \texttt{δικαίων τὸ βιοίτατον}. As Dodds explains, many have been unwilling to allow that Plato would misquote Pindar, or allow Callicles to do this, and there is a long tradition of assuming that there is a flaw in the manuscript of the \textit{Gorgias} at this point. But on the present interpretation of Callicles, according to which he makes mistakes in \textit{all} his literary allusions, it makes perfect sense that Plato would deliberately present Callicles as getting Pindar’s words wrong.
insincerity from 495a. In fact, we shall see in the next section that the arguments that follow do contain flaws of their own; Plato is using literary means to point us toward these.

4.5 EXPLAINING THE CONTRADICTION IN CALLICLES: FRIENDSHIP AND INTEGRITY

We have seen that there are two sides to Callicles – one we called ‘realist,’ the other, ‘aristocratic’ – and that Socrates’ refutation of Callicles has consisted in playing the assumptions proper to one side against those proper to the other. Still, there remains more to say about the role that these two sides of Callicles play within the dialogue as a whole. When we see that each of these sides is based upon a conception of something required for a good life, we can see why Callicles would be pulled in two directions at once, and why an adequate answer from Socrates would have to address this.

The realist side of Callicles is characterised by an ability (and readiness) to smash and trample on the rules laid down by the weak (483e-484a). The individual admired by this side is able to maintain his own integrity rather than be determined by outside pressures, and is accordingly able to pursue pleasure unhindered by any constraint. The aristocratic side of Callicles, by contrast, is characterised by its considerable concern for what others think, as seen, for example, in the focus being a “gentleman of good reputation” (καλὸς κἀγαθὸς καὶ εὐδοκίμως ἄνηρ – 484d1-2), or on spending time in the middle of the city and in the agoras, where men become famous (485d5-6). That is, the one side aims at an independence from
external pressures – i.e., at integrity – the other at “social approval according to conventional norms.”

Now, obviously the realist side will scorn the social approval sought by the aristocratic side. Similarly, Socrates suggests that Callicles pursues this approval in a manner fatal to the demand for integrity: Callicles’ is unable to contradict his lovers, Demos and the Athenian demos, but changes this way and that to satisfy them (481d-482a). This suggestion will be confirmed at the end, when Callicles urges Socrates to serve and gratify the Athenians, and Socrates replies that this is a demand for flattery (521a2-b1). So it appears that Callicles is indeed pulled by two demands that are entirely incompatible: the realist side would achieve integrity by ignoring social approval, while the aristocratic side would attain social approval precisely by giving up integrity.

If these two demands are incompatible – at least as they appear in Callicles – still they allow us to understand why he would refuse to renounce either side of his position even if the price of this is dialectical defeat through Socrates’ arguments: each represents an important component of a good life. Clearly the integrity that Callicles aims at must be such a component of a good life if we are to get what we really want, for without it, we shall simply be determined by the wishes of others. On the other hand, the need for social approval “can be seen as a manifestation of the basic human need to be a social animal – to belong.” In fact, this need ties into a major theme of the dialogue: friendship. Certainly Socrates – and consequently the dialogue as a whole – never denies the importance of either of the basic motivations behind the two sides of Callicles.

147 Woolf (2000: 5).
Accordingly, we can see that Plato has not arbitrarily set up a contradiction within Callicles simply to give Socrates an easy win. Rather, important considerations lie behind each side of this internal contradiction, and taken together, they point to a challenge: are integrity and the desire for good relations with other people both requirements for a good life, and yet incompatible with one another? If this is so, it is easy to imagine that many people would find the fact of Callicles’ internal self-contradiction an insignificant matter. After all, they might say, this contradiction is simply in the nature of the requirements for a good life. We have, then, an implicit challenge for Socrates. Is it possible to satisfy both of these demands at once in such a manner that there is no conflict? Alternatively, it might turn out that only one of them is really important after all. We shall return to this matter in the conclusion to judge Socrates’ response.
5.0 Socrates

The argument from 488b-499c has been focused on clarifying, and thus refuting, Callicles’ position, by bringing out its internal incoherence. If the argument were to end here, Callicles would only be answered in a superficial fashion. One might still maintain that one should simply resolve his position to either its realist side, with its brutal reduction of ethical life to the facts of nature, or its aristocratic side, which would seem to require that we temper the rigour of our philosophical inquiry. One might also maintain that Callicles’ position, though incoherent, is nevertheless the best option available for living well. Accordingly, in what follows, Socrates gives his own positive doctrine, and it is as he does so that Plato’s purpose in the preceding three sections becomes most clear: we saw in the introduction (see the section, *Callicles as a Source of Good*) that the movement to Callicles produces five demands that Socrates’ position must satisfy if it is going to be a plausible and adequate alternative, and it is here that Socrates begins to respond to these demands.

The five points in question are as follows: (1) that an ethical position should have a grounding in reality; (2) that one must remain committed both to integrity and to friendship; (3) that the concerns of everyday life constitute a perspective that must somehow be included in an adequate account; (4) that the two-headed practical problem, part personal, part political, must be answered; and (5) that the challenge of the weakness of the will must be addressed.
We shall evaluate the success of Socrates’ account in the conclusion, but one demand in particular comes into focus in what follows: the practical challenge. The first aspect of this challenge is the focus on Socrates himself. The argument with Callicles has so far been directed at his initial statement, or rather at what was identified as the first three parts of it (i.e., what we find from 482c4-485e2). In the final section of that statement (485e3-486d1), however, Callicles finished with a particularly strong *ad hominem* challenge to Socrates: has his pursuit of philosophy impaired his ability to perform actions crucial to a good life? So far, this concern has been ignored, but the account that Socrates develops here will provide a basis from which he can attempt a defence of his own life (521a-522e). The second aspect of the practical challenge is political, and it only now comes properly into view (from 503a). It is above all from the perspective of this two-headed practical challenge that Callicles’ failure as regards consistency might seem an utterly insignificant matter. If his approach leads to a better life in practice than any other, why would we worry about self-contradiction?

It is important to emphasise at the start that the Socratic response is given against the background of numerous literary indications that the argument has been compromised in some way. We have already noted Callicles’ failure as a touchstone, which amounts to the intentional creation and disappointment of an expectation by Plato. More to the point, we saw a connection between Callicles’ adequacy as a touchstone and the idea that the argument might have “the end consisting in truth” (τέλος ἀληθείας – 487e7): the point must be that we are to understand what follows to be significantly deficient as regards this end. We have also seen that Callicles now retreats almost as fully as he can from participation in the argument; Socrates' requests that he should object if there seems to be a problem (504e, 506a, b-c) drive home the significance of
this. A more vigorous (note σοῦ τις νεανικώτερος – 509a3) opponent than Callicles would participate and object more than Callicles does.

Indeed, even to speak, as Socrates did, of an ‘agreement’ with Callicles (ὁμολογία – 487e7; also ὁμολογέω – 486e5, 487e1) is now in a sense inappropriate, for the themes of the sort of activity appropriate to each time of life (see 484c-485e), and of seriousness and jesting, return to suggest just how deeply the discussion has been compromised. For Callicles, we recall, philosophy is appropriate to youth; politics is appropriate for a man. Philosophers are like children who mumble and jest (παιζω – 485b2, 4, c1); older men who philosophise become unmanly (485d4; also c2). The mention of jesting in this connection links the theme of youth and maturity to that of seriousness and jesting. Now, the ad hominem refutation of Callicles comes to a conclusion when he gives up his principle that pleasure is the good by suggesting that he has been jesting (παιζω – 499b5) and that Socrates is behaving as young boys do (τὰ μειράκια – b6). That is, he is returning to his earlier suggestion that philosophy is appropriate for boys, not men. He can retreat from the argument with perfect consistency, at least in this regard. Plato, however, gives Socrates the final word here: he responds by imploring Callicles not to jest (παιζω – 500b7, c1), for anyone with any sense would be serious (σπουδάζω – c2) about the question of how to live. Callicles, we note, makes no reply to this. His position, of course, included on the implicit claim that it provided the best answer to those who think about how we ought to live. Nevertheless, if he doesn’t accept that philosophy is a serious matter, and he merely jests, then the discussion cannot even bring to light a genuine agreement between Socrates and Callicles.

150 Socrates does pick up on the matter of how one should act when younger and older (487e7-488a2).
151 Recall that Callicles intervened in the conversation by asking if Socrates was serious or jesting (σπουδάζει ... ἦ παιζει – 481b6-7, also b10-c1).
The language we find near the start of Socrates’ argument contains another suggestion of Callicles’ inadequacy to the argument at this point. Callicles indicates that he does not really agree with Socrates, but declares he will assent “so as to gratify Gorgias here.” (501c8) The word he uses for ‘gratify’ – χαριζομαι – is a significant one in the argument at this point. Knacks, concerned with pleasure (ἡδονή – 501a2-b1) and holding the good in little regard (b4-5),152 think of nothing but gratifying (χαρίζομαι – b8), and there follow nearly two pages peppered with this word (501d4, 502a1, b3, 5, c1, e5, 7) as Socrates develops his argument that the rhetoric actually used in cities aims at pleasure rather than the good. Callicles’ use of the word suggests that this same defect might apply to the argument itself (and there will be similar suggestions at 514a4, 516b4-5). That is, just as the argument assumes that pleasure and the good are different, we find a suggestion that the principle moving one participant is pleasure, rather than the good.153 Once again, the touchstone that Socrates had hoped for seems not to be available. Despite the failure of his touchstone, Socrates does not give up, but concedes that he must “make the best of what he has”154 (τὸ παρόν εὖ ποιεῖν – 499c5) and accept what he has been given (τὸῦτο δέχεσθαι τὸ δίδομενον – c5-6): clearly he recognises that these are not the ideal circumstances for philosophical inquiry.

These literary indications can be connected in two main ways with the logic of the argument, as we suggested in the introduction. First, the foundation upon which the argument will rest from here on (i.e., from 499c) is that pleasure and the good are distinct, but this point has been established in a merely ad hominem manner. That is, it is because Callicles’ position is incoherent, requiring a simultaneous adherence to his aristocratic and realist sides, that Socrates

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152 We heard earlier in the dialogue that rhetoric aims at pleasure without the good (or ‘best’ – 465a2).
153 And note also εἰ σοὶ ἡδίον ἐστιν at 504c5.
154 This is the translation suggested by Dodds (1990: 317) for the proverb.
has been able to force him to the admission that pleasure and the good are not the same. Obviously the fact that a character who is a creation of Plato has an incoherent position does not prove that they are in fact distinct. Accordingly, there is a significant sense in which this keystone of the argument from 499c has been assumed rather than demonstrated. Second, there are two pillars upon which Socrates’ case must rest, and both are flagged with remarks that seem to conflate μυθος and λόγος. These are (1) the passage at 506c-507c and (2) the myth at the end. In both cases, we shall see that the argument is deeply flawed.

Accordingly, Plato has pointed the reader toward the notion that he regards the account that follows to be in some way deficient. This does not mean, however, that Socrates’ case will not have many and considerable strengths, and we must not be blind to these. In fact, we shall see that just as the dialogue presents a deepening of one standpoint through the movement from Gorgias to Polus to Callicles, so too does it present a deepening of Socrates’ position. In this final section of the dialogue, Socrates presents a case that expands upon claims he has already made, providing, in retrospect, a more substantial basis for those claims.

The dialogue to this point has proceeded by gradually making explicit what was merely implicit with Gorgias, until we came to the heart of the matter with Callicles. In doing this, it has gone from initial appearances to the principles underlying those appearances. Socrates’ account, however, will now progress in the opposite manner: we start with the principle (a new notion of ‘good’) and then work out its consequences, descending from the principle to concerns that are determined by it. In this sense, at least, we are now beginning a more philosophical account than we had before, for we are starting with the principle, which is by nature prior, and proceeding to what follows from it.
The structure of this final section of the dialogue is as follows. First, the new assumption that governs the dialogue is clarified, and applied to the original subject matter, rhetoric (499c-502d). Next, the political aspect of the practical challenge is introduced (502d-503d), and this moves Socrates to provide his own account, which begins with a new basis for thinking about the concept ‘good’ (503d-505b). On the basis of this new way of thinking about the good, he is able to give an answer to the concerns about living the best life that arose over the course of the dialogue so far (505c-509a). From here Socrates can begin to return to rhetoric itself, focusing on the question of a power capable of saving us either from doing or suffering injustice (509b-511b). This leads naturally to a consideration of the value of the most fundamental basis of temporal power: the preservation of one’s life (511c-513c). After all this we are finally in a position adequately to consider politics, and with it, the question of whether there are rhetors, and a corresponding form of rhetoric, that aims at the good, or are they, and it, only ever pleasure-directed? (513d-517a) This then leads to a fuller consideration of the schema of skills and knacks (517a-519b), and a consideration of sophistry and true statesmanship (519b-520e) Finally, all of this provides a basis from which Socrates can give his defence of his own life (521a-522e), and the myth that concludes the dialogue.

5.1 PRELIMINARY: ASSUMPTIONS AND A RETURN TO RHETORIC

Now that Callicles has shown himself an inadequate touchstone, and Socrates is making the best of what he has, the argument enters into a new stage. There therefore follows a brief section in which the assumptions of the argument that follows are made explicit. These are (1) that pleasure and the good are different – a result of the argument with Callicles – and (2) the application of
the skill analogy to the question of living well. Gorgias and Polus both receive mentions at this point (499e6, 500a7-8), and in both cases we see that Socrates is still holding the ground to which he had earlier laid claim.\textsuperscript{155} This is a device by which Plato suggests that the case developed in what follows will be a further development of statements Socrates has made earlier in the dialogue. Furthermore, in returning to claims made in the earlier arguments, Socrates is not merely repeating himself, for in bringing forth the assumptions that will govern his argument, he is also showing how his earlier assertions can be grounded in the results of the intervening argument. His account will accordingly be a consequence of what has preceded, both in that it is an attempt to respond to the challenges that have arisen, but also in that it is logically dependent upon the refutation of the earlier positions.

The new distinction between pleasure and the good is developed through the idea of harm and benefit: one calls a pleasure ‘good’ because it is beneficial, where ‘beneficial’ is what produces good (499d). When Socrates begins to fill in his conception of harm and benefit, it resonates with the earlier argument in one particularly important way. To say that a pleasure is good because it produces health, strength or some other bodily excellence (499d6-7) is to set up some objective criterion as the measure of the good. Health and strength are not usually thought to be dependent upon the judgement of observers, as conventional values might be. Instead, health and strength are simply facts in the world: the weak, fevered, obese man will be less able to perform all the various tasks required of a body than someone in peak physical condition, and anyone who might want to disagree can be easily refuted by an appeal to the facts of life. That is,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{155} More specifically, the statement at 499e6-7 that everything should be done for the sake of the good looks back to 467e-468b, where it was suggested that everything \textit{is} done for the sake of the good (Dodds (1990: 317) and Irwin (1979: 208) both note the change in language). The change is to be understood first from the perspective of the two kinds of desire set out against Polus – what seems good (\dokia) to us and what we really want (\boulie\s{th}ai) – and second through the distinction between pleasure and the good: it is possible to act for the pleasant, but we \textit{should} act for the sake of the good. That is, this pleasure/good distinction provides the basis for a fuller exploration of the notion of \dokia, for it allows us to see how something might seem good without actually being so.
\end{quote}
we can already see a basis from which Socrates could take for himself the argumentative strength that we saw in the realist side of Callicles’ position: a basis in reality. More specifically, Callicles’ appetitive conception of the good life involved maximising the size of appetites, so as to maximise the pleasure one would enjoy from them (491e-494c). But Socrates’ appeal to health and strength points to an uncomfortable reality: one who gorges himself on beer, wine and the pastry chef’s wares will undermine his own health (and thus, probably, also his own ability to minister to his appetites in the future). Thus appetite moderation would seem to be a good idea, not simply as a matter of agreement among the weak – which might indeed amount to mere “papers, trickery and spells” (484a4-5) – but as a result of reflecting on the facts of life. As we move through the text below, we shall see that the skill analogy further develops this foundation in reality.

Feelings of pleasure and pain, then, are now to be evaluated with an objective good as the standard.156 Once the pleasure/good distinction has been assumed, Socrates’ schema of skills and knacks, originally set out against Polus (464b-465d), can be reintroduced (500a8-501b1), but it now takes on an entirely new significance. Against Polus, it had the character of a series of mere assertions. Polus had demanded Socrates’ views (462b), and Socrates ended up responding at some length, but simply asserted, rather than arguing for, his own account. Now, however, Socrates’ distinction between skills and knacks is grounded in the argument, since one of these is

156 Irwin (1979: 207) sees three types of pleasure that don’t seem to receive adequate consideration within Socrates’ argument. That is, some pleasures (such as “wanton cruelty”) would seem to be intrinsically bad quite apart from their consequences; others (“being kind or generous”) intrinsically good; while a third category of pleasures might seem to be good simply in that they are pleasant (see Republic 357b). I take it that the argument at 499c-e eliminates all three of these – note in particular 500d6-7: “something is good, something is pleasant, and the pleasant is other than the good.” That is, on Socrates’ account here, it is quite wrong to say that any pleasure is good or bad in and of itself. The possibility is left open at this point that “wanton cruelty” might be good, and “being kind or generous” evil; the question is how these are measured by an objective good.
said to aim at the good, the other at pleasure. That is, the reason why someone might adopt this schema is now coming into view. The pleasure/good distinction also provides a basis for the two lives Socrates now mentions (500c-d), as well as for the reappearance of the skill analogy: if good and evil were a matter of personal inclination or mutual agreement, anyone might distinguish one from the other, or at least take part in doing so. If, however, good and evil are objective realities, there will be something one can understand, relative to which one might make mistakes in identifying each, and those who best understand these realities will avoid mistakes, and be the craftsmen. And in fact there does seem to be a skill everywhere that we recognise an objective good, as the personal trainer and doctor know best how to care for the body, a farmer tends best to crops and animals, or a smith works best on metals, etc.

The skill analogy will determine much of the argument that follows, and it brings with it significant baggage. The moment we speak of a skill, we assume an ordering of at least a part of human activity with a good in view, a hierarchical ordering of ends relative to an overall end, which Socrates calls a τέλος at 499e8. A skill also implies that there is a definite way of achieving a given end. If the end (τέλος) of human life is to be understood through the skill analogy, it can be filled in to some degree. A craftsman making a knife (an example of something with a function at Republic 353a) will make that knife as good as possible at being-a-knife, which is to say as good as possible at cutting. This means that the knife must be strong and sharp, and the craftsman will accordingly be skilled in metallurgical and sharpening practices. Similarly, someone responsible for producing race horses will need to know the requirements of

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157 Friedlaender (1964: 267) makes a comment along the same lines.  
158 Irwin (1979: 208) suggests, correctly, that it is appropriate for Callicles to agree to the need for a craftsman because he believes (I would say his realist side believes) that “his way of life was not just his personal preference, but the just and objectively right order of nature and society.”
breeding, feeding and training them so that they will run as fast as possible. ‘Good,’ then, will point to good-at-being-human, at living so as to achieve the objective human end.

Now, the skill analogy does not provide a proof, but we shall see just how helpful it is, in that it provides the basis from which a new way of thinking can be developed, about how one should live. Indeed, we shall see that there is much that makes this way of thinking plausible. The argument that follows, then, will proceed on the basis of two assumptions, first that pleasure and the good are distinct, and second, the use of the skill analogy.

Once the assumptions have been set out, Socrates returns the discussion to its original topic, rhetoric. The argument by which he does so touches upon music, and has been called a “digression,”159 but it is nothing of the sort. The focus of this passage is not music, but rather the idea that gratification can be practised on a plurality of people – note that we begin with the observation that one can gratify not only one, but also two or more people (501d1-3). Now, in the argument against Gorgias, we saw that there were many suggestions that rhetoric was properly practised on a large number of people (e.g., 454b5-7). From 501d1-502e2, Socrates is using the idea of gratifying a plurality to move the argument back towards rhetoric, but whereas he previously simply asserted that rhetoric is a form of flattery, this time he provides an argument for his claim. We begin with examples of uncontroversially pleasure-oriented activities. Flute-playing is said “only to pursue our pleasure, and to think of nothing else” (501e2-3), while lyre-playing and dithyrambic composition are said “to have been discovered for the sake of pleasure” (502a8). Next we proceed to something that might not be so obviously pleasure-oriented: tragedy. Still, Callicles agrees readily enough that tragedy aims at pleasure and gratification (502b9-c1). Once we have stripped out from tragedy the melody, rhyme and

159 Dodds (1990: 320).
meter, it is but a short step to rhetoric: take away the tune, rhythm and metre, and you have speech (λόγοι – 502c6), directed at a large crowd (πρὸς πολὺν ὁχλον – 502c9). But this is the territory of rhetoric (e.g., περὶ λόγους – 449e1; ἐν ... ὁχλοῖς – 454b6). The musical and dramatic examples, then, provide a means by which we can see why rhetoric fits into the camp of flattery. Once again, we are returning to earlier Socratic claims, but now the reasons behind those claims are coming into view.

5.2 THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE: THE FOUR MEN (502D-503D)

The conclusion towards which the argument seems to be moving is that rhetoric is a merely flattering activity, but when Socrates turns from rhetoric in theatres to rhetoric in political assemblies, Callicles makes his last decisive resistance of the dialogue: he will not admit that all rhetors in the assembly merely aim at pleasure. “There are some,” he says, “who say what they say because of concern for the citizens.” (503a2-3) It is in response to this – that is, in response to the claim that there actually do exist rhetors who aim at the good – that Socrates suggests that there might be two kinds of rhetoric, one aimed at pleasure, the other at the good (503a5-9). Again Callicles refuses to give way, and his insistence that there do exist rhetors who aim at the good amounts to the claim that Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades and Pericles – the Four Men, as they are called – aimed at the good in their statesmanlike activity.

160 It is the aristocratic, not the realist, Callicles who is aroused here, and the explicit change of audience is clearly the determining factor. The audience in the theatre is said to be “children, women and men, slaves and free” (502d6-7), whereas rhetoric is “directed toward the Athenian people, and other free peoples in the cities” (d10-e2). That is, it is the aristocratic Callicles, who would be interested in some good not reducible to pleasure, who is happy to admit that a theatre audience is merely gratified, but in the move to the political assembly, the dignity of Athenian gentlemen, and the sort of activity that this side of Callicles prizes (484c8-e1, 485d3-6; also 500c3-7), is at stake.
We have seen that Callicles posed a practical challenge on a personal level, concerning Socrates’ life (485e3-486d1). Now, through the Four Men, we have a practical political challenge. Callicles’ contention is that there actually have existed politicians who have used their rhetorical skill for the sake of achieving good in the real world. Just as Plato expressed the personal side of the practical challenge by bringing into question the actual life of Socrates, so too has he expressed the political side of this challenge through actual historical figures. This is a particularly vivid means of driving home the point that the question is not merely a theoretical one, but rather concerns actually living well or doing good in real life.

It is through this question of actually doing good in the real world that we get our first peek at Plato’s thought on rhetoric in this dialogue, which has been developing from the beginning. On the one hand, the argument with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles developed a view of rhetoric according to which it is not a skill but a knack, although it will nevertheless confer immense temporal power upon its practitioner, an almost godlike power (δαιμονία – 456a5), making its practitioners like tyrants, killing, banishing and expropriating whomever they think fit (466b11-c2).\textsuperscript{161} The argument with Callicles showed that this conception of rhetoric implies a view of life that is ultimately grounded in pleasure. On the other hand, Socrates has given hints of a different view of rhetoric, according to which it cannot be used unjustly (460e-461a), but might be used to bring about justice (480c-d). It is this latter kind of rhetoric that would be focused on the good. In what follows, I shall refer to these two kinds as “flattering rhetoric” and “true rhetoric.” Of course, even as he allows for the possibility that there are two kinds of

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{161} Of course, Socrates has suggested (466b) – though he has not gone so far as definitely to assert – that rhetors have the least power of all. It is possible for rhetors both to have and not to have power because there are two types of power at work in this dialogue; see below, on 509b-511a, and the section of the conclusion, \textit{Power and Punishment}.}

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rhetoric, Socrates suggests that good rhetoric is unknown in the world of concrete experience: “you have never yet seen this kind of rhetoric.” (503b1)

Plato has indicated to the reader the importance of the challenge of the Four Men to the structure of the rest of the argument of the dialogue. Although Socrates dismisses them as mere appetite-fillers, that is, practitioners of flattering rhetoric, he is still prepared to investigate the question of the Four Men in more detail: “let us see in the following way,” he says, “if some one of these men really was virtuous.” (503d5-6) He then returns to the craft analogy, beginning an argument that will see him fill out his own position in considerable detail; the Four Men are not mentioned again until 515c7. The suggestion, then, is that we are to understand the whole chain of argumentation that begins at 503d5 and reaches a conclusion by 517a6 to be directed at the question concerning the Four Men. It is this practical political challenge that provides the immediate motivation for Socrates’ account – although he must also answer the cumulative challenges that have come to light over the course of the movement to Callicles. Through the Four Men the argument is also aimed at the question of true rhetoric and whether it has any practitioners in everyday life.162

If Socrates is to investigate the question of whether there have actually been rhetors who aim at the good, he must make clear what is meant by ‘good,’ and he will begin by doing just this. Again, it is important to emphasise that Plato has used the Four Men to lead us to this crucial question of what ‘good’ means from an angle that specifically maintains the focus on the concerns of everyday life that constituted one of the central – and deepening – points of interest as we moved through Gorgias, Polus and Callicles. We are being invited to ask: even if Socrates

162 Or even whether good rhetoric exists at all: Dodds (1990: 326) suggests that we translate εἰ... καὶ τὸῦτο ἐστὶ δίπλούν (503a5) as “if there are really two sides to this question.” The argument from 503d would accordingly investigate this as well.
can give a satisfactory account of ‘good,’ can he relate it to the world of everyday experience? Can he show how his notion of ‘good’ can adequately address the practical challenge that Plato emphasises here? We shall see that this will not be an easy matter.

Like so many other aspects of the dialogue, the challenge posed by the Four Men has been implicitly present from very early on: at 455b-e, where Socrates claims that appropriate experts – master-craftsmen for walls, shipwrights for ships, etc. – should be consulted for each realm of expertise, Gorgias replies that Themistocles and Pericles, not master-craftsmen or shipwrights, were the ones who actually carried the day on the matters of walls and the navy. Within the context of the argument with Gorgias himself, the mention of these two figures carries little significance. In hindsight, however, we can appreciate that there is an anticipation here of the problem of the Four Men that will drive the argument from 502d-517a.163

5.3  A NEW VIEW OF THE GOOD (503D-505B)

In considering the argument with Polus, we noted that it conspicuously failed to address the question of the nature of ‘good,’ although that concept was the key to the central argument there (i.e., 474b-475e). But now that Socrates is to give his own account, and now that the argument has explicitly acknowledged that ‘good’ is prior to pleasure, we will at last get an answer. The focus at this point is not directly on the question, “what is meant by ‘good?’” Rather, as Socrates considers “the good man, the one who speaks for the sake of the best” (503d7), he further

163 Notice also that the first hint of the everyday life/Socratic reality theme (at 455b-e) comes together with a hint of the practical thrust that this theme will eventually attain through Callicles: the mention of Themistocles and Pericles at 455e hints at the political equivalent of the personal problem to which Callicles will point at 485e-486d.
develops the skill analogy, and this implies its own concept of ‘good,’ one on which Socrates will base his arguments from this point on.

Socrates begins this argument at 503d7. It provides a different way of thinking about living well, one that provides a serious alternative to Callicles, and in a manner that rises to much of the challenge that has been set. The craftsman, we are told, aims to produce in his work some form (ἐἴδος – 503e4), setting it in some arrangement, and forcing each part to fit and be suitable with every other, so as to produce something structured and ordered (503e7-504a2). This idea is specifically contrasted with that of acting at random (ἐἴκη – 503e1, 3; see also 506d6). Skilled activity does seem to be characterised by the production of order, and this is not only true of human inventions, such as ships or houses, but also of attempts to improve the body, whether through training or medicine. A poorly-built house will leak, allow drafts or collapse; a well-made ship will better survive a storm; the trainer might aim to correct a muscle imbalance. There does seem to be a notion of ‘good’ according to which many things – perhaps all – are better off when they attain the order appropriate to their nature; skilled activity aims to produce this. Furthermore, this ‘good’ does not arise as a matter of agreement between individuals, but is simply a feature of the world.

The account that Socrates develops here thus has an important strength: it does seem to fit the facts. Reasoned disagreement would therefore require a contrary view that could account for those features of the world that Socrates’ view seems to fit so well. Perhaps one could argue persuasively, for example, that it is mere chance that houses built of sturdy materials, constructed in such a way that they fit together tightly, better withstand storms and earthquakes than other houses. Perhaps it is merely an appearance, a failure on our part to grasp the true nature of things, that visibly frail and weak people seem less able to perform the basic tasks of a body than
those whose bodies have attained a certain order and balance. Callicles, of course, does not provide a stone by which one might “test sufficiently” (βασανιέιν ἰκανῶς – 487a1) an argument: through the literary aspect of the dialogue, Plato implicitly allows for the possibility that another view might be possible. What we do have is a highly plausible account.

Even the move from order and structure as productive of health and strength in the body to the same things as productive in the soul of mental health and strength (504b-c) is a highly plausible one, and does seem to conform to many facts of life: people who act simply act at random, who are utterly unpredictable, seem mad; those who have regulated their passions, and are capable of self-control, can respond reliably to even the most stressful situations. Less easy to grasp is the application of the words ‘lawful’ and ‘law’ (νόμιμόν τε κοί νόμος – 504d2) to such a psychologically ordered state, or the use of ‘justice’ (δικαιοσύνη – 504d3) to describe the order itself. If we understand ‘justice’ or ‘law’ to have their customary meanings here, Socrates’ argument seems to make an unjustified leap here. That is, it does not seem reasonable to accept that a psychologically well-ordered person will necessarily obey the laws of the city at all times.\footnote{This is a well-known problem in relation to the Republic. I call it the “Sachs problem,” as Sachs (1963) brought it to the attention of scholars.} Surely one could be thus ordered and yet still commit, for example, an act of theft – indeed, we might expect that people with well-ordered souls, given their self-control and internal stability, would be more successful in their crimes than others. Another possibility is that the word ‘justice,’ for example, might stand for something rather different from its conventional meaning, but the argument is not concerned with such possibilities at this point. Nevertheless, it is easy, on the basis of this connection between an internal state and ‘just’ behaviour, for Socrates to reach the conclusion that “being disciplined is better for the soul than licentiousness” (505b11-12), and this contradicts Callicles’ view (492c).
Finally, we can now appreciate that Socrates has provided a retrospective basis for his earlier knack/skill schema, which was first set forth at 464b-466a. Because ‘good’ is connected to an internal order peculiar to each thing, a skill must have a grasp of the nature of its appropriate subject matter, and on this basis only will be able to work towards achieving its good. If one does not have a grasp of the nature of whatever one is working on, it will be impossible to work towards its good, so one’s work will be a mere knack. We can also now see why there cannot be a skill of producing pleasure, as opposed to a mere knack. If pleasure and the good are distinct, and the good consists in an order appropriate to each particular thing, by which that thing is the best possible, then the only pleasures produced by skills will be those that are conducive to the good – that is, to the appropriate order – of each thing, and these must be produced incidentally.

5.4 PUTTING A HEAD ON THE ARGUMENT (505C-509A)

We next have an interlude (505c1-506c4) in which Plato gives particular emphasis to Callicles’ reluctance to take part in the argument. The text of the first part of this interlude (505c1-d9) runs as follows:

Καλλικλῆς. Οὐκ οἶδ’ ἄττα λέγεις, ὥς Σωκράτες, ἀλλὰ ἄλλου τινὰ ἐρώτα.

Σωκράτες. Οὕτως ἀνὴρ οὐχ ὑπομένει ἀφελούμενος καὶ οὕτως τοῦτο πάσχον περὶ οὗ ὁ λόγος ἐστὶ, κολαζόμενος.

ΚΑΛ. Οúde γε μοι μέλει οὐδὲν ὃν σὺ λέγεις, καὶ ταῦτά σοι Γοργίου χάριν ἀπεκρινάμην.

ΣΩ. Εἶέν· τί οὖν δὴ ποιήσομεν; μεταξὺ τοῦ λόγου καταλύομεν;
ΚΑΛ. Αὐτῶς γνώσῃ.

ΣΩ. Ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τοὺς μύθους πασί μεταξὺ θέμις εἶναι καταλείπειν, ἀλλ’ ἐπιθέντας κεφάλήν, ἵνα μὴ ἄνευ κεφαλῆς περιήπ. ἀπόκριναι οὖν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ, ἵνα ἤμιν ὁ λόγος κεφαλήν λάβῃ.

ΚΑΛ. Ἡς βίαιος εἶ, ὦ Σώκρατες. ἔαν δὲ ἐμοί πεῖθη, ἐάσεις χαίρειν τοὺτον τὸν λόγον, ἢ καὶ ἄλλω τῷ διαλέξῃ.

ΣΩ. Τίς οὖν ἄλλος ἐθέλει; μὴ γὰρ τοι ἀτέλη γε τὸν λόγον καταλίπωμεν.

ΚΑΛ. Αὐτῶς δε οὐκ ἂν δύναιο διελθεῖν τὸν λόγον, ἢ λέγων κατὰ σαυτὸν ἢ ἀποκρινόμενος σαυτῷ;

TRANSLATION

Callicles: I don’t know what you’re saying, Socrates. Ask someone else.

Socrates: This man won’t submit to being helped, and to experiencing himself the very thing that the argument is about: being disciplined.

C.: I don’t care what you say. I answered you on these matters for Gorgias’ sake.

S.: Well, what are we to do, then? Are we to bring the argument to an end in the middle?

C.: You decide yourself.

S.: Well, they say that it’s not right to leave off stories in the middle, but we should put a head on it, so that it doesn’t wander about without one. And so answer the remaining questions, so that the argument may get a head.

C.: How violent you are, Socrates. If you listen to me, you will let this argument go, or cross-question someone else.

S.: What other person wishes to be questioned? For we should not leave the argument incomplete.
C.: Could you not go through the argument yourself, either speaking on your own or answering yourself?

Socrates objects that the discussion will lack a head (κεφαλή – 505d1-3): it’s not right for stories (μύθοι) to lack a head, and go about headless; so too should this argument (λόγος) have a head. Now the word used for ‘head’ here, κεφαλή, can also mean ‘completion,’ or ‘consummation’ (the related κεφαλαίος means “main point”), but however we translate it, the image emphasises that the argument will be incomplete if it is stopped here. Clearly we are about to encounter an important moment in the argument. Furthermore, though Callicles did make an earlier attempt to abandon the argument (497a6-c2), it is here that his eagerness to get out is emphasised most strongly and at the greatest length, with Socrates carrying on the argument on his own for a time after this (506c-509c). That is, at the very moment that he draws our attention to the fact that the argument is reaching a crucial point, Plato also emphasises Callicles’ lack of interest in it. The effect is to point the reader once again to Callicles’ inadequacy as a touchstone. “If I seem to some one of you to agree with myself on things that are not true,” says Socrates, “it is necessary to lay hold of me and cross-examine me.” (506a1-3; see also 504c, 506b-c) This is precisely what does not happen here. This combination of the conflation of ‘stories’ (μύθοι) and ‘argument’ (λόγος) with the most emphatic instance of Callicles' non-participation amounts to a very strong signal from Plato that we are in the presence of something problematic; the fact that all this is combined with the ‘head’ image suggests that we may be in the presence of a fundamental problem for Socrates’ account. The following portion of the argument (i.e., 506c-

165 In the myth at the end of the dialogue we will again find similar conflations of the words μύθος and λόγος (e.g., at 523a1-2). That, I shall argue, is the other fundamental problem for Socrates’ account.
509c), in which Socrates must proceed alone, without even the pretense of the touchstone that he believes himself to need, is therefore flagged as the weakest link in the Socratic case.

The argument here is expressed at a high level of abstraction, generally without the concrete examples that might make clear exactly what is being said. It begins by reviewing ground already covered, and at this point one can see a plausible account: the good and the pleasant are distinct; the pleasant is for the sake of the good; and ‘good’ is filled out in terms of that order and structure within each thing that produce its excellence (506c6-e4). This account is then applied to the soul, and the orderly soul is declared, plausibly enough, to be ‘temperate’ (σωφρον -507a), and the temperate soul, ‘good.’

At this point, however, the abstract expression of the argument allows it to gloss over a distinction of critical importance. Socrates declares that the temperate man would do fitting things in respect of both gods and men, and that this will involve him doing pious and just things (507a7-b4). Now, the concept of ‘good’ that has made the case plausible so far involves an internal order that will produce in each individual thing its peculiar excellence. One might redefine ‘piety’ and ‘justice’ so that they denote an internal order rather than an external relationship to other individuals, but this is not what seems to be happening here. Piety and justice are conventionally understood in terms of externally defined actions, and here they seem to be used in precisely these terms (i.e., “in respect of gods and men”). It is not obviously the case that a person who has attained a state of internal excellence will necessarily act justly and piously towards others as a result, especially since we know so little of the content of this

166 Similarly, to say that “it is necessary that the person doing just and pious things be just and pious” (507b3-4) requires that external action rather than internal state determines justice and piety.
excellence. Why would an internally well-ordered person not indulge in stealing, banishing and killing people whenever he feels like it? Socrates’ argument, then, through its abstract manner of expression, is able to equivocate on a crucial distinction between internal character and externally directed action.

The same problem occurs again, in the other direction. We are told that it is “very necessary” (πολλή ἀνάγκη – 507b8-c1) that the temperate man is completely good, and therefore blessed and happy, while the base fellow is wretched (507b8-c5). Included in this set of claims is the statement that it is necessary that “the good man does what he does well and nobly, and one doing well is blessed and happy.” (c3-5) It is not clear how exactly we should take this. On the one hand, we might simply see Socrates equivocating on two meanings of “do well,” that is, between “(a) ‘fare well’, i.e., be happy and flourish [and] (b) ‘act well’, i.e., do what is morally good,” effectively assuming that the two are the same. On the other hand, we might see an argument to the effect that it must follow from a completely good individual’s doing what is required for happiness that he is blessed and happy. In either case, in this passage, Socrates must be committed to the proposition that happiness is a necessary consequence of appropriate action. This would eliminate the possibility of external events playing any role in determining happiness, and therefore limit to a considerable extent the possible content of happiness. In particular, we should remember that Socrates’ argument against Polus, which concluded that doing injustice was worse than suffering it (479e), was set out after Polus had given a description of extraordinary torments (473c) as examples of suffering injustice. That is, Socrates’ argument

167 As Irwin (1979: 223) puts it, “how does temperance result in the life of a good citizen or a Socratic philosopher rather than in the life of a single-minded and well-organized miser or ambitious politician or pleasure-seeker?”
168 Once again, this is the “Sachs problem.” See also Irwin (1979: 220).
170 As Irwin (1979: 223) does.
there contained the implicit claim that doing injustice was worse than suffering such torments. Accordingly, we should bear them in mind when considering his account of happiness here: it would seem that such considerations play no role at all in the ‘happiness’ that Socrates is setting out here.

We therefore have two dubious claims here, first, that one’s internal state will reliably determine whether one acts ‘justly’ or ‘lawfully,’ as these terms are typically understood, and second, that the character of one’s actions, understood in terms of ‘justice’ or ‘lawfulness’ will produce (or indicate) a desired internal state (i.e., happiness). Perhaps Socrates’ claims here could be defended, but he would need to say a good deal more than he does in order to make them plausible, and in order to make clear that he’s not just indulging in verbal trickery the moment he can get away with it. The important point, however, is that this brief section (507a7-c7) contains the crux of Socrates’ case against Callicles, Polus and Gorgias. His whole argument in this dialogue depends on his claims here. What must above all be established by Socrates is precisely what is glossed over. The possibility of happiness even while suffering the torments pointed to by Polus should surely be the subject of detailed investigation and explanation, but instead, the whole thing rests on an equivocation. The fact that we reach the crux of Socrates’ case at this point is hinted at in the ‘head’ image, and the inadequacy of the account he gives here coheres naturally with the suggestion we get, through Callicles’ non-participation at this point, and through the \( \mu\nu\theta\omicron\zeta/\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\omicron \) equivocation noted earlier, that Socrates is relieved of the pressure to address important objections that an adequate touchstone might have provided. That is, Plato
does not consider the argument at this point to be sufficient to convince the reader of its conclusion.\textsuperscript{171}

It is important to emphasise that the argument at this point is the foundation on which Socrates will build his case over the rest of the dialogue. The best kind of life; the verdict on the Four Men and the actual practice of rhetoric; Socrates' final defence of his own life – all of this is dependent on the argument at 506c-507c. Since Plato has indicated the inadequacy of the keystone of this Socratic case, nothing that follows this can reasonably be considered a straightforwardly Platonic pronouncement.

Of course, if one accepts Socrates’ assertions here, then it is not a difficult matter to answer everything that Polus and Callicles have claimed about how one should live, and this is just what Socrates proceeds to do (507c8-508e6). We get a summary of his view of how one should live: justice, temperance and the disciplining of the appetites are the route to happiness; doing injustice is more shameful and worse than suffering it. In a final flourish that emphasises the connection of this conclusion with all that has proceeded, the catalogue of evils that first occurred in the argument with Gorgias and was repeated (with some development) in relation to Polus finds expression once more in Socrates’ mouth, but with a crucial difference. Whereas Gorgias and Polus were concerned to avoid such evils, Socrates effectively concedes he is prepared to put up with them: though someone might take away my property (\(\chiρ\chiτ\rho\mu\alpha\tau\alpha\ \dot{\alpha}\phi\alpha\iota\rho\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota\) – 508d2; see also 457b2, 466c1), he says, expel me from the city (\(\epsilon\kappa\beta\alpha\lambda\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu\ \dot{\epsilon}k\ \tau\iota\zeta\ \pi\omicron\lambda\epsilon\omega\varsigma\) – 508d2-3; see also 456e2, 457b7, c2, 466c1) or kill me (\(\alpha\pi\omicron\kappa\tau\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\iota\) – 508d3; see

\textsuperscript{171} We therefore have a sounder basis to accept the suggestion of White (1985: 158-159), that “it is hard to believe that Plato thought that this argument is adequate as it stands. For one thing, it contains no reason to think that the actions of a temperate person, even though they might be admitted to be ‘fitting’ in some sense, are so in a sense that entails that they are just. Moreover given the complete lack of any explanation of this ‘fittingness,’ it seems hardly possible that Plato should have thought that he had established this entailment... Plato has not shown that a temperate soul is ordered in any sense entailing that it acts justly (or, fittingly in a sense entailing justice).” White further claims that “the inadequacies of this argument are made good in the Republic.”
also 457c3, 466b11), still “to do injustice to me and mine is worse and more shameful for the one
doing injustice than for me who is wronged.” (508e4-6)

Socrates finishes off his account with a curiously schizophrenic statement of the strength
of his case. The matter is held down by “by steel and adamantine arguments” (509a1-2), we are
told, but this is immediately qualified by the statement “so it would at least appear on the face of
it”172 (a2), by the suggestion that someone might yet undo the argument (a2-4), and then by the
confession “that I myself do not know how these things are” (a5). That is, he seems at once to
emphasise that the matter has been definitively proven, and that it is only a potentially unstable
appearance one that he doesn’t understand anyway. This double aspect is appropriate to
Socrates’ case, from the start of the dialogue, as we have understood it: he has provided an
account with substantial strengths, in particular with a clearly discernible basis in reality, but he
has not given a straightforward proof.

Before Socrates finishes his argument, however, he makes some remarks that might be
taken to affect our reading of earlier arguments that were used to refute Gorgias and Polus (and
Callicles). In the introduction it was said that the shame felt by each of these characters played a
decisive role in certain key arguments; because these arguments depended on shame, they were
to be understood as ad hominem arguments. Socrates seemed himself to confirm this line of
interpretation (487a7-b5). Now, however, he has just distanced himself from it, for he said to
Callicles, “you supposed (ως υμισκα – 508b7) that Polus agreed because of shame;” and further, that
“Polus said that Gorgias agreed on account of shame.” (508c3; emphases mine) Are these
qualifications Plato’s way of indicating that he does not after all want the reader to follow the

172 The translation of this phrase is Dodds’ (1990:341).
earlier suggestions that shame played a role in those arguments?\textsuperscript{173} They are not, because Socrates’ statements at this point are dependent on the argument he has just given – “all those earlier things result, Callicles” (508b2-3) – and we have seen that Plato has given particularly strong indications that this argument is problematic. It is Socrates rather than Plato who stands behind these qualifications, and Socrates cannot allow that the shame of a particular individual is the only reason to accept his account. Polus and Callicles did think that those earlier arguments were governed by shame, but anyone who accepts the argument just given by Socrates will accept that argument, and not the shame of Gorgias, Polus or Callicles, as the reason behind his account. Those who find fault with Socrates’ account – and it seems Plato is among these – will maintain that the only reason for those characters to give way was shame.

In fact, Socrates’ account has changed the situation somewhat since the arguments against Gorgias and Polus, for with his current account, Socrates has now given some reason to accept the counter-intuitive claims he brought up earlier in the dialogue. While they might merely have seemed bizarre earlier, on the basis of the new concept of ‘good’ that forms the basis of the skill-analogy, we can now see how these claims are plausible. That is, if there is an internal order of the soul that is desirable in that it produces a happier life, and if ‘justice’ is essentially connected to this order, then we can see how ‘injustice,’ similarly understood, would be something we would want to avoid. Of course, to say this is not to concede that such a psychic order is so important that we should refuse to compromise it at all in order to avoid the tortures described by Polus (473c), but we can now at least see that Socrates is talking about something substantial; before 503d, his claims might merely have seemed absurd.

\textsuperscript{173} This is the view of Irwin (1985: 71, fn. 30): “Socrates... does not agree that the conclusion of his argument depended on their being ashamed.”
Finally, in this connection there are a series of rounding-off statements that also draw attention to the partial nature of Socrates’ achievement in argument. The second section of Callicles’ initial statement (483a7-484c3) was followed by the words, “well that’s how things are” (Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἀληθῶς οὖτως ἐξεί - 484c4), as though he had just given a straightforward description of the facts of the case. Socrates’ own case answers this statement twice, but with a significant difference. After he has given his account of the fully good man, he says, “I set these things down in this way, and I say that they are true” (Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα οὖτως τίθεμαι καὶ φημι ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι – 507c8-9). Next, after he has drawn out the consequences of this account of the good man, giving his answer to the question of how we ought to live, but before he proceeds to the next matter (the question of the power that will allow us to live properly), he says, “I once again lay it down that these things are so” (Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν αὐτῷ τίθημι ταῦτα οὖτως ἐχειν – 509a7-b1). Such rounding-off statements help us to appreciate the structure of each of these speeches, but Socrates’ two statements are conspicuous in that they emphasise his own activity in determining the truth.

5.5 SOCRATES ON PRACTICAL QUESTIONS (509B-517A)

Socrates has now given an outline of his own idea of the good, that is, of an order appropriate to each particular nature (503d-505b12). On the basis of this, he has presented his own account of a genuinely good man (506c5-507c7), and as a consequence, has been able to give an answer to the question of the sort of activity that constitutes the best life (507c9-509a7). The question that is driving this account, however, is a concrete, practical one (502d10-503d6): have there been rhetors who have actually accomplished good in the world? More specifically, have the Four
Men accomplished such good? Furthermore, Socrates has not yet said anything that directly responds to Callicles’ challenge in the final section of his initial statement (i.e., at 485e2-486d1): has his devotion to philosophy made him helpless in practical affairs? Now that Socrates has treated the matters that are logically prior, he can turn towards this two-pronged challenge – one part political, the other personal – concerning the ability to achieve the good.

We have three main sections in this treatment of practical matters, each depending on what has preceded it, in keeping with the character of Socrates’ whole account. First, he aims to establish what power (δύναμις) will enable us to live in the proper manner. (509b-511a) This argument will play a decisive role in the next step, which asks what the value and place of self-preservation is (511b-513c). Finally, we come to the point when Socrates has built his case enough to return to the matter of the Four Men, and answer the question of whether there have existed rhetors who actually do good (513d-517a). Because rhetoric and the practical question have been wrapped up together, this treatment of practical matters will accordingly also provide some of the dialogue’s account of rhetoric. Indeed, we should by now expect these questions to go together, since it has become evident, over the course of the argument with Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, that the practice of rhetoric is bound up with the question of how one should live.

At the beginning of this treatment of practical matters, it is important to emphasise the significance of the fact that Plato has chosen to use four actual statesmen from Athenian history whose achievements were widely celebrated as a vehicle to develop the political side of the practical problem that is put to Socrates. This will intersect in an significant way with Socrates’ account. That is, Plato has suggested an alternative to the account Socrates will give: Pericles, Themistocles, Cimon and Miltiades will be criticised for having failed to make the citizenry good, but they are not usually admired on this account. Why were the Four Men usually
admired? Surely because they helped make Athens great, but above all because they kept Athens safe. In fact, we need not give an entirely speculative answer, for Thucydides, a man of Socrates’ generation, was not only a historian who treated Pericles and Themistocles directly and admired them both, but was also an important figure in the history of political philosophy, the father of political realism. His thought provides an important foil for the political arguments of the Gorgias. The prime directive of the Thucydidean statesman is to provide safety for the city, and it is above all the achievement of this end that constitutes the good expected of political action. Safety is the concern that lies behind Thucydides’ account of how Themistocles got Athens its city walls (i.90-91); the navy, a cornerstone of the policy of both Themistocles and Pericles, is also an important source of safety. Thucydides would already have a problem with Socrates’ claims at 455b-e, for he would say that it is not master-craftsmen or shipwrights who should be consulted on the matter of walls and ships, but rather statesmen, whose decrees concerning such implements will see them as factors to be taken into consideration as part of a larger reflection on how to achieve safety. As regards Gorgias’ observation that rhetors do in fact carry the day, Thucydides would agree: rhetorical ability, in his view, is a crucial component of the statesman’s ability to achieve his aims.

The point of all this is to make clear the importance of the second step in Socrates’ treatment of practical matters, the argument on the value of self-preservation (i.e., 511b-513c), because it is here that the Socratic account connects most meaningfully with practical considerations. In the world of practical politics, the preservation of one’s city – safety, to put it

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174 To be clear: there is no pretence here that Plato necessarily read or was conscious of Thucydides. Rather, he is significant in that he provides an approximately contemporary account of the sort of thing that intelligent admirers of Themistocles or Pericles would say. In fact, the line I try to develop here is the sort that admirers of great statesmen of any era are likely to follow.

175 On the importance of rhetoric in Thucydides, see ii.60.6 together with the Sicilian debate (vi.8-26), in which the sound counsel of Nicias is trumped by foolishness wrapped in a rhetorically effective presentation by Alcibiades. See also Macleod (1975).
another way – is normally considered a cardinal virtue. Socrates will deny this, denigrate the value of self-preservation, and conclude that we should not love living, but as for preserving life, we should “leave it to the god.” (512e2) The moment that we have a conception of political life that denies the value of this, the world, as Callicles suggested (481c), must be turned upside down, and there will be little hope of defending what actual statesmen typically do. That this argument applies to the personal as much as the political realm is suggested by the connection of Socrates’ fatalistic remarks at 512e2-4 with his words as he nears the end of his own self-defence: “perhaps I will suffer whatever happens.” (522c2-3) A great deal rides on that argument, then.

5.5.1 Two Types of Power (509b-511a)

We begin, however, with the question of the power needed to defend us against the greatest evil (509b-511a).176 That a power is necessary to avoid suffering injustice is plain enough, but Socrates also asserts, recalling his earlier agreement with Polus, that a power – “and art” (509e1), he now adds – is necessary to avoid doing injustice. This may seem a strange claim – note that Callicles’ agreement at this point is less than enthusiastic (510a1-2) – but there is more than mere assertion behind Socrates’ view. Two other passages help to bring this out.

First, the agreement with Polus that is mentioned refers to the argument at 466a-468e; the specific agreement in question is that nobody does what he (really) wants, when these things are

176 This question of power is connected to the skills analogy that has run throughout the dialogue, since each art can be understood in terms of the peculiar power it grants its practitioner. The dialogue’s argument began with a question concerning the power (δυναμις) of Gorgias’ art (447c1-2).
in fact bad (468d5-7). The reference to this earlier passage brings to mind the distinction between doing what seems best (δοκεῖν) and what one (really) wants (βούλεσθαι), and thus to the fact that people can err concerning their interests. The other passage in question is 525d-526b, part of the myth at the end, where Socrates explains that there is a correlation between having great temporal power and doing wrong: those who have much of this power, such as tyrants, tend to do wrong (although there are rare exceptions); those without this power, tend to do less wrong precisely because they lack this power. These two passages are important to the current argument because taken together with it, they point for a need for a power to avoid doing injustice. Socrates’ account by 509b has declared that doing injustice is the greatest of evils; avoiding injustice must accordingly be in our interest. If this is so, then we can see the need for a power to avoid doing injustice, first because we can wrongly identify our interests (see 466a-468e), and second because in practice it seems that people do in fact tend to do injustice to the extent that they are able (see 525d-526b).

These two powers – to avoid suffering and to avoid doing injustice – can be filled in by bringing the two passages just mentioned together with the present argument. Now, it is suggested that tyrants, and their friends, have the power to avoid suffering injustice (510a-e); against Polus it was implied (466a-468e) that tyrants merely do what seems best; while in the myth it is said that tyrants do tend to do injustice. The three passages line up nicely with one another. One kind of ‘power’ is what is conventionally understood by the word – “temporal power,” we might say, the power exemplified by tyrants – and this allows people to do what typically seems best to them, i.e., to keep from suffering injustice. The second kind of power –

177 Irwin (1979: 229) points out that Polus did not agree to what Socrates is now claiming, that nobody wants to do injustice. It is only when we add Socrates’ current argument, which would show that doing injustice is always bad, that Polus’ admission could be said to amount to Socrates’ current claim.
“Socratic power” – keeps us from doing injustice, and this allows us to do what we really want (βούλεσθαι), assuming we accept the claim of Socrates’ account so far that doing injustice is the greatest of evils. It is this second form of power that makes sense of Socrates’ earlier suggestion (466b9-10) that rhetors have the least power of (all) those in the city.\textsuperscript{178}

The argument here (509b-511a), however, is concerned with a further point. It soon becomes clear that these two powers are mutually exclusive: the power to avoid suffering injustice requires a sort of sycophancy, an imitating of the ruler(s), according to which one must give up some degree of one’s own integrity in order to conform to external necessities (510a-e). But this lack of internal integrity is the very worst kind of evil according to the new Socratic account, for ‘good’ on this account points precisely to one’s own internal order. This is an important result, and we shall see that it plays a decisive role in the next step of the argument.\textsuperscript{179}

Socrates’ argument seems to suggest that we should entirely ignore the matter of suffering injustice, and focus only on not doing injustice. Doing injustice is, after all, the greatest of evils, on his account, and the two powers have just been shown to be mutually exclusive. At this point, however, Callicles returns the focus of the argument on the practical reality: “do you not know,” he asks, “that this fellow who does the imitation will kill that one who does not, if he wishes, and will take away his goods?” (511a5-7) This leads into the next section, which discusses the merits of self-preservation (511b-513c).

\textsuperscript{178} That there are two types of power resolves what might seem to be a difficulty when Irwin (1979: 230), speaking of a line at 510c (“The man will have great power”), remarks, “Socrates speaks of power as Polus and Callicles speak, though strictly he denies that this is real power; cf. 486d.”

\textsuperscript{179} The argument here is also important in relation to the themes of friendship and integrity, which we noted at the end of the treatment of Callicles. The sort of ‘friendship’ that Callicles pursues – note his enthusiasm at 510a11-b1 – involves trying to make oneself as like as possible to the ruler(s) of the city, but this is precisely the opposite of internal integrity. The keystone of the Socratic account is an internal order, with the result that Calliclean friendship is unacceptable.
The form of power to which Callicles' question points represents a most fundamental reality. A person whose goods are stolen may yet recover them; a banished citizen might still find a way to come home one day. One might even recover to some degree from the various tortures to which Polus alluded (473c). A dead person, however, would seem to have no hope of recovering his situation. The power to preserve one's life, then, is prior to the ability to avoid suffering various other forms of injustice. Without this most basic power, the ability to protect oneself against, say, stealing or banishment, is of decidedly limited use. If one fails at self-preservation, one can enjoy no pleasures. Accordingly, if Socrates can successfully argue against this most basic form of Calliclean power, he will also deal with all lesser forms of this power.

5.5.2 The Value of Self-Preservation (511b-513c)

The first thing that we should note about Socrates’ argument about self-preservation is that he seems to think it superfluous: the man who imitates the tyrant may kill the one who does not, but Socrates replies that “it will be a base man killing a fine and good man” (511b); he will repeat and expand on this remark at 521b5-c2, suggesting that he does think it an adequate answer. For anyone who has agreed with every word of Socrates’ account up to 509a, these words will carry the consequence that the friend of the tyrant is miserable, even as he kills the other man, who will be happy. After all, on Socrates’ account, external events count for nothing as regards happiness; all that matters is one’s internal order. Accordingly, the idea will be that, yes, one man will kill the other – but who cares about that? Surely happiness is all that really matters in the end. If this is so, there is no need for Socrates to argue the matter further, and in fact, the argument that we now get concerning self-preservation will add nothing of substance to the account, providing instead another ad hominem argument.
Socrates begins by asking if we should aim to live as long as possible, and in particular if we should practise those skills that preserve us from danger, mentioning rhetoric in particular (511b6-c2). There then follows a lengthy passage which considers certain skills that aim at self-preservation: swimming, the helmsman’s art, the skill of the mechanic (511c4-512d). The idea here is straightforward enough. Insofar as rhetoric is to be valued merely as a source of self-preservation, it has no claim to superior dignity over the most run-of-the-mill arts, such as the helmsman’s art, or that of the mechanic. This is an effective ad hominem argument. That is, it is an effective move for Socrates to make against Callicles in particular – or rather against the aristocratic Callicles, who is concerned with a conventional understanding (note νόμος – 512b3), where notions such as dignity have their place. We get a particularly class-oriented reminder of this as Socrates points to the possibility of marriage between Callicles’ family and that of a mechanic (512c-d). It is presumably this aspect of the argument that explains the fact that Callicles is somewhat moved at the end of all this (513c), but he also declares himself not quite convinced, and it is not hard to see why. Let us now turn toward the less satisfactory aspects of this argument.

We saw above that the matter of self-preservation carries considerable weight in regard to the two-pronged practical problem posed by Callicles, and yet we have just seen that a large part of what Socrates has to say focuses on the matter of the dignity, or conventional standing, of arts concerned with self-preservation. When dealing with matters of life and death in political and personal matters, dignity is surely a consideration of decidedly secondary importance, a consideration that will be ignored entirely on many occasions. The aristocratic Callicles may be concerned with it, but many others will not be, and will reasonably demand an argument whose force is not merely ad hominem. So what else does Socrates’ argument here have to say to us?
The answer would seem to be, “not much.” He is concerned with the extreme position that virtue (ἀρετή – 512d3) is to be understood as the preservation of oneself and one’s own. Now, to follow examples used in the course of the argument, if the helmsman's skill, or perhaps that of the mechanic, is the master skill, the one that aims at the highest human good, to which all other skills are subordinate (an idea that first arose in Gorgias' mouth at 456a7-8), then we might have a position that takes virtue to be self-preservation. But can we not argue that self-preservation is a subordinate, but nevertheless necessary or important good? The gymnast's skill, for example, aims at maintaining an ideal order in the body, but surely one aspect of this work will involve preserving the body from destruction.

When we look to Socrates' concluding remarks (513a4-c3), however, we can see more clearly what is moving his argument here. First we have the image of the Thessalian women who pull down the moon, and then a repetition of an idea from the preceding section, that being powerful in the city requires imitating its political system. The reference to the Thessalian women ends with the remark that “our choice of this power in the city will come at the cost of what we hold most dear.” (513a6-7) We are told that “pulling down the moon, i.e., causing an eclipse,” was “the typical feat ascribed to Thessalian witches,” and further that there was a “widespread belief that a witch must pay for her powers either by a mutilation (often blindness) or by the sacrifice of a member of her family.” This image, then, emphasises that we are dealing with a power that comes at a cost. When we look to Socrates' next remarks, which look back to the preceding section with the reminder that we cannot expect to be powerful in a city while being dissimilar to it (513a7-c3), we can be more specific: the image of the Thessalian women points to the fact that the argument concerning self-preservation is grounded on the

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180 Dodds (1990: 350-351). Dodds also tells us that “Thessaly was traditionally regarded as the home of witches, perhaps because it was a leading center of the Hecate cult.”
earlier argument that the two types of power, by which we could avoid either suffering or doing injustice, are mutually exclusive. The power to avoid suffering injustice, and thus to survive, requires that we mutilate our own internal order, imitating whoever happens to be ruler, thus making ourselves wretched.181

But to say this is to say that this argument on self-preservation amounts to a repetition of the preceding argument on the two kinds of power (i.e., 509b-511a), at least to the extent that it does not rely on conventional considerations that are of merely ad hominem significance. Callicles broke in with a consideration of profound practical significance – that friend of the tyrant will kill the other man (511a5-7) – and Socrates replies with nothing new of substance. For the two-pronged practical problem that this argument must address, the question was how Socrates’ account might interact with and address practical realities. The answer must be that it will not concede any ground at all to such considerations.

However, we must consider the significance of the fact that arts focused on self-preservation do come up over the course of this argument. The helmsman or mechanic, it is suggested, do not have the right to put on great airs, but there is no suggestion that their skills are to be done away with entirely. Presumably the idea is that where justice and injustice are concerned, we should have no thought for self-preservation if it will require us to abandon justice, and thus to do harm to our souls. In many domains, such as swimming or directing a boat, the skill that preserves life does not often have anything to do with justice or injustice. If we want to be able to preserve ourselves within the city, however, we shall have to ingratiate ourselves with the ruling power, and that is a different matter.

181 Note Socrates’ earlier suggestion that the person with the power to avoid suffering injustice is “mutilated on account of his imitation of the tyrant” (λειωθησθαι διὰ τὴν μίμησιν τοῦ δεσπότου – 511a2-3): perhaps we are meant to connect this talk of mutilation with the fate of the Thessalian witches.
Socrates’ focus on self-preservation as virtue itself turns this argument into an all-or-nothing question concerning what should be the guiding principle of our life. There are possibilities, however, that are not taken up in this argument, but that do come readily to mind, given the practical problem at hand. We might agree with Socrates that there are indeed (rare) situations in which it is better to die than to live, for example when people are incurably ill, and thus wretched (perhaps in terrible pain) so long as they live. This is sufficient to show that virtue is not self-preservation, but it does not seem to justify Socrates’ conclusion, that we should leave self-preservation to the god, and focus strictly on living well for however much time we get (512e-513a). On the contrary, surely in most situations we should do everything in our power to continue living, even if wretched, in the hope that we may later make ourselves happy, just as, when sick, we do everything to live, so that we may later become healthy. From this standpoint, one might prefer a certain level of ‘mutilation,’ and its attendant misery, to death. A little bit of injustice, a little flattery, just enough to keep ourselves alive – surely we could heal ourselves later with some just activity, when circumstances permit. Socrates account, of course, is an absolutely uncompromising one, conceding nothing to circumstances, and he never addresses this possibility.

There is one respect, however, in which Socrates does later show himself to be conscious that he has not completely settled the matter here: what about being dead? Could this be a more wretched state than anything possible while alive? Is the just person more blessed when dead than the unjust person is when alive? At the end of Socrates’ self-defence, just before the myth

182 This remark is effectively repeated in Socrates’ self-defence right before the myth: ὧν πέσει ἔνοχος, ὅτι ὅν τύχω, τούτο πείσομαι (522c2-3).
183 The dialogue never spells out what exactly makes an injustice ‘incurable.’ Socrates brings the idea up on a number of occasions (480b2, 512a3, 7, 525c4, e4, 526b8), sometimes invoking the medical metaphor. All we are told is that the most extreme injustices make their practitioners incurable (525c1-2). Certainly Socrates and Callicles are agreed that there are times when it is better not to live (483ab, 505a, 511e-512b).
(522d-e), there is an implicit concession that this matter has not been treated. We shall see that most of this self-defence consists in a straightforward application of Socrates’ account to his own particular situation, but this is uniquely untrue of the matter of choosing between injustice and death. Instead of a simple appeal to the argument he has already given, he begins a new treatment of the matter through the myth, one that would fill in the lacuna concerning the matter of death. The myth, then, will be necessary to Socrates’ account, because that account makes assumptions about death, and these assumptions are only treated in the myth. Now, if we accept as true the content of the myth, then we shall have an answer to our difficulties with Socrates' position on self-preservation. However, a myth is not an argument, and we shall see that the myth itself contains reminders to this effect. Accordingly, we have found another important point – important partly because the next section, in which Socrates applies his account to politics, is dependent on this one – at which the dialogue points to the inadequacy of the Socratic argument.

5.5.3 Politics and the Four Men (513d-517a)

By now Socrates has built himself a foundation from which he can deal with the questions raised through the Four Men at 503a-d. It should be clear that a great deal is riding on Socrates’ verdict concerning the Four Men. Not only the question of whether or not there have ever existed rhetors who aim at the good rather than pleasure, but also the question of how good is to be achieved at all in politics, is at stake here.

The argument here has two parts. First, Socrates aims to establish a truth about skills in general: before undertaking any art on a civic scale, we must be sure that we have adequately acquired it, which will require being able to point to a teacher, as well as successful smaller-scale works in the past (514a5-e10). Second (from 515a1), this principle is turned towards politics in
particular. On the basis of Socrates’ account so far, the question of whether or not there are actually any good rhetors must amount to, who has actually made citizens better? ‘Better,’ of course, in the context of the argument from 503d, must refer to the internal psychic order of the citizens. So did the Four Men – Pericles, Cimon, Militiades, Themistocles – make people better in this sense?

Socrates thinks not (515a-517c). If the citizens underwent some change over the course of Pericles’ statesmanlike activity, then it should be possible to observe some difference between the beginning and the end of that activity. But the difference Socrates sees is that Pericles began with a good reputation, and ended with charges being brought against him, including the possibility of a death sentence (515e10-516a3). The people, then, appear to have become more savage towards Pericles over the course of their encounter with him. Now if the just are tame (516c3), and Pericles made the people more savage, then he made them more unjust and worse (516c11-12). One can therefore conclude that Pericles was not good at politics (516d2-3). A similar conclusion can be drawn for Cimon, Militiades and Themistocles (516d-e).

Within the context of Socrates’ overall case – that is, if we take as premises all that Socrates claims to have established from 503d – this argument is not nearly so bad as it seems. Of course, as we suggested above, those who study practical affairs will want to bring in the objection that the city’s survival and safety should be the standard by which the Four Men should be judged, but Socrates has dealt with that in the preceding section; here, he simply assumes the result of that section, which rejected self-preservation as incompatible with achieving the good.

184 Irwin (1979: 235) objects to this portion of the argument, but surely if we have accepted the argument at 506c-507c, we can justify this portion of the argument with reference to the internal order of the just person. That is, someone with a properly ordered soul does tame things and is therefore tame, just as an internally well-ordered person would do just things, and one who does just things is just (from 506e1-507b4). ‘Just’ and ‘tame’ would point to the same well-ordered psychic state, so if Pericles made people more savage, he worsened their psychic order, and therefore made them more unjust.
So, for example, one might object that “Plato says nothing about the strategy of evacuation which both Themistocles and Pericles imposed on their fellow citizens ἐπὶ τὸ βῆλτιστὸν [for the sake of the best] at the risk of immediate unpopularity.” But the ‘good’ in question is the city’s self-preservation. Similarly, Callicles cannot object to the idea that a good statesman should be concerned with improving the citizens, because this is a consequence of the peculiar notion of ‘good’ and ‘skill’ that has been at work from 503d. Furthermore, an appeal to various contingent factors that make effective control or improvement of the citizens impossible does not help, because the claim that the Four Men were good at rhetoric must be based on their actual practice of it. If we can point to no success achieved by them, how could we claim that they were good at politics? Still, this is a pertinent line of thought, because it suggests that Socrates’ demand for what the political skill must achieve is unrealistic. Nowhere does he point to anyone who he believes to have succeeded at politics; of himself he says only that he tries (ἐπιχειρεῖν – 521d7).

This argument allows Socrates to answer the question that has motivated his whole account from 503d: is it possible to find examples of rhetors who have aimed at the good, rather than pleasure? On the basis of the account that has been given, the answer must be ‘no,’ but Socrates puts this in a significant way: these men did not practice “true rhetoric” (517a5), which would obviously be the kind that aims at the good. Earlier (503a5-9), he had only allowed for the

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185 Dodds (1990: 356). Irwin (1979: 237) makes a similar objection: “Socrates omits to mention that Themistocles’ naval proposal had to compete against a proposal to distribute the necessary money among the people (Thuc. i.90.3, Hdt. vii.144.1-2).” This is true, but Socrates would no doubt reply that Themistocles’ proposal amounted to the replacement of a short-term appetitive project with a longer-term one.

186 See Dodds (1990: 355).

187 Irwin (1979: 233-234) finds an unjustified move from “good citizens” (which he incorrectly asserts to have been the term at 503c) to “good statesmen,” people good at “political affairs” here. Whatever move is made is justified by the argument. The question at 503c was whether or not the Four Men were good men, and this was in the context of the matter of whether or not there are practitioners of rhetoric who aim at the good rather than pleasure, aiming to make the citizens as good as possible (502d-503a). But, on the basis of the account of skills that has since come to light, this must be the political craft.
possibility that there might be two kinds of rhetoric; now he effectively asserts that there are
indeed two kinds. He can do this now because he has by this point set out his own idea of the
good at 503d-505b: it is in reference to this that one can speak of ‘true’ rhetoric. Accordingly, a
peculiar account of rhetoric is coming into view: the base, flattering, pleasure-oriented kind
seems to be what is actually practised in the world; it now seems to be acknowledged that there
is a good rhetoric – but it is not practised anywhere!

Now, this argument concerning the Four Men cannot simply be Plato’s thought, for it is
dependent on the dubious argumentation at 506c-507c, which was flagged as problematic, and
on the preceding section on self-preservation, which was similarly flagged. What, then, is the
argument intended to achieve?

Socrates’ dismissal of the greatest figures of Athenian history was extremely provocative
in its time: to claim that Pericles or Militiades – Militiades of Marathon, we are reminded
(516d9) – was no good at political matters was to assail the reputation of the greatest statesmen
of Athenian history; it can be compared to saying the same thing of Washington or Churchill
today. It was to be expected that this argument would generate a hostile reaction: many readers
would look for every possible avenue of attack to avoid its conclusion. If Plato’s purpose was to
move the reader to Socrates’ position, he could not have found a less effective means of doing
so. What the argument is remarkably well-suited to, however, is the life of Socrates himself.
Indeed, if we are meant to apply it to Socrates himself, then Plato did in fact achieve his aim with
readers in antiquity: “people asked whether Socrates had made Alcibiades and Critias better
men... and whether the Athenians’ treatment of Socrates did not disprove his claim to be a
statesman.”188

188 See Dodds (1990: 355) and Olympiadorus (1998: 261, lecture 41.3).
In fact, the text has numerous hints that we are supposed to think along these lines. We have already noted that Callicles, in the fourth part of his initial statement (485e3-486d1), made Socrates’ life a particular focus of the argument. On that basis, the question of how any of this applies to Socrates can reasonably be thought to be internal to the text, and we should keep in mind that we are building here towards Socrates’ defense of himself (521a-522e). Focusing on this passage in particular, Socrates has just applied the argument to himself when considering a hypothetical doctor (514d6-8), and shortly thereafter, when he turns to politics, he says “should we not observe one another?” (515a3-4). From this we would expect that both Callicles and Socrates should be in the spotlight in what follows, and yet attention is from this point focused only on Callicles and the Four Men. This alone should be sufficient to get the reader to turn this argument on Socrates – to do so is, after all, simply to follow his own suggestion about “observing one another” – but in addition, we will later see him claim to be one of the few practitioners of the political art (521d6-8). Surely this requires that we think through his argument on political matters in relation to himself.189

We must ask, then, if Socrates has made the citizens better or worse.190 Just like Pericles, it was after having encountered Socrates’ attempts to make them better that the Athenians turned upon him, except in Socrates’ case they did not “almost” (ὅλγογος – 516a2) condemn him to

189 Note also ὁ ὅτας μοι ἦκει λόγος ὑπὲρ πρὸς Πιὼλος έλεγον (“the same account that I was saying to Polus applies to me” – 521ε2-3), said of the doctor-pastry chef analogy: within a few lines of claiming the political skill as his own, Socrates applies an earlier idea to himself. The application of considerations from one realm to another runs through the dialogue in another way, in that Socrates’ schema of practices, such as cosmetics, cookery, gymnastics and medicine, is explicitly worked out in terms of the body; we must apply it to the soul for it to have its desired impact on the argument. Accordingly, to apply the argument against the Four Men to Socrates is entirely consistent with a mode of thinking central to the dialogue.

190 Regarding the earlier portion of the argument, which demanded that we must be sure that we have acquired a skill, including being able to point to a teacher, and smaller-scale successes in the past (514a5-e10), it is not clear exactly how to relate this to Socrates. Though he may have had no teacher, his defenders might claim that he had made certain individuals good in the past. However, within the context of this dialogue, the emphasis seems to fall on Socrates’ failure as an improver of individuals: neither Gorgias nor Polus nor Callicles can be cited as converts to the Socratic viewpoint.
death – they actually did so! The end of Socrates' life fits so easily into the argument here – better, we note, than the near-deaths of certain of the Four Men (i.e., Pericles – 516a, and Themistocles – 516d-e) – that it seems reasonable to claim that one major purpose of this argument is precisely that it is to be applied to Socrates himself. In fact, the death of Socrates at the hands of a jury is not merely a piece of external knowledge that a reader brings to the dialogue, but is suggested within the dialogue itself: Callicles alludes to it (521b2-3, c3-6; note also 486a6-b4), and Socrates explicitly mentions it as a possibility (521b4-6, 522b3-c3). Accordingly, it is even more appropriate to compare Socrates than Pericles to a keeper of animals who took them over not kicking or butting or biting him, and then made them do all these things (see 516a6-8). Furthermore, if the just are tame, and Socrates made the people more savage, then he made them more unjust and worse (516c11-12). Accordingly, Socrates was not good at politics – at least, “from this argument” (ἐκ τοῦτου τοῦ λόγου – 516d2-3).

In defense of Socrates, one might point out that he only claims to try (ἐπιχειρεῖν – 521d7) to practise the political skill. And yet surely if this defense is to be allowed to him, it must also be allowed to the Four Men. In fact, as we approached the Four Men, the question was at first whether there were good rhetors, who aimed at (στοιχάζομαι – 502e4) making the citizens as good as possible, or only those who tried (πειράζομαι – 502e8) to gratify people. Shortly thereafter, the question becomes whether or not anyone has actually made the Athenians better (503b6-9). That is, we seem to move without comment from a question of intention to a question of results, and it is the latter demand that underlies the claim that the Four Men had no genuine political skill – reasonably enough, as we saw above, for the presence of a skill must be attested by results (and note Socrates’ focus on the matter of results at 514a-515a). Accordingly,  

191 Thus Dodds (1990: 355): "if Plato makes [Socrates] claim to be a true πολιτικός (521d), it is only in the sense of claiming to know the general principle on which a statesman should act."
regardless of whether the Four Men could claim that they are good men (ἀνὴρ ἄγαθος – 503c1) on the basis of their intentions, this is not enough for them to claim to have political skill – and the same is true of Socrates, though he too may at least be good (ἄγαθος – 521b6) because of what he tries (unsuccessfully) to do.

Finally, it may help to confirm the line taken here if we can find Plato saying something complementary in the Republic, and in fact we can. Those who want to object to Socrates that statesmen should be concerned with preserving the city, and that the Four Men therefore deserve our praise, at least in that respect, have Plato on their side: the city of the Republic will require an army so that it can defend itself (374a-d). In fact, the activity of this army is described as the “greatest work” (μέγιστον ... ἔργον –374d8). The preservation of the city is accordingly of very great importance, and statesmen who do what is necessary to achieve this aim cannot be so simply condemned as they are through the argument Socrates uses in the Gorgias. This is not to deny that the rulers of the Republic will ignore the need to make the citizens as good as possible – they certainly will be concerned with that – but it does seem that Plato would consider the Socratic account of statesmanship in the Gorgias to be too simple.

5.6 servile and master arts (517a7-519b2)

From 503d to 517a, Socrates has provided a philosophically structured case, proceeding from the principle through a series of subordinate considerations, each dependent upon what has preceded, until he has answered the question that his account set out to answer. Now, the argument takes what might seem a strange turn: in response to Callicles’ appeal to the works accomplished by the Four Men (517a7-b1), Socrates gives a speech in which he produces a fundamentally new
account of the way in which skills relate to other practices, one that casts all that he has so far said in a different light.

This development is to be explained as follows. Within the context of the dialogue as a whole, it is pertinent to recall here that “the movement of the dialogue is not rectilinear like that of most plays (and most philosophical treatises) but spiral: cf. 517c6 οὐδὲν παυόμεθα ἐκ τὸ αὐτὸ ὁμίλον in περιφερόμενοι”192 (“we do not stop continually coming round to the same thing”). That is, with the conclusion of the recognisable chunk that runs from 503a-517a, the dialogue is ready to look yet again at one of its central themes, deepening our view of it once more, and, in this case, complicating it. Callicles does not try to overturn the verdict on the political skill of the Four Men, but by focusing on their works he continues the movement that has been at work from 503d. That is, he forces Socrates to try to work out more specifically the principle that has been driving the argument from 503d. This demand causes Socrates to refine further, and in an unexpected way, his schema of skills.193

The key section of text (517c7-518a5) here reads as follows:

Σώκρατες. ... ἐγὼ γοῦν σε πολλάκις οἴμαι ὁμολογηκέναι καὶ ἐγνωκέναι ως ἀρα διττή τις αὐτή ἡ πραγματεία ἐστίν καὶ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ περὶ τὴν ψυχήν, καὶ ἡ μὲν ἐτέρα διακονική ἐστιν, ἥ δυνατὸν εἶναι ἑκπορίζειν, ἐὰν μὲν πεινῇ τὰ σώματα ἡμῶν, σιτία, ἐὰν δὲ διψή, ποτά, ἐὰν δὲ ρίγω, ἴματια, στρώματα, ὑποδήματα, ἀλλ᾽ ἐὰν ἑρχεται σώματα εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ ἐξεπίτηδες σοι διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν εἰκόνων λέγω, ἵνα ρᾶσον καταμάθης. τούτων γὰρ ποριστικῶν εἶναι ἡ κάπηλον ὑπερτο ἣ

192 Dodds (1990: 5).
193 My interpretation of this passage is highly dependent on drawing out the consequences of an analogy. Socrates’ whole argument in his schema of skills is an analogy. Everything depends on the reader working out the consequences of the images. The point of the talk of the doctor and the body is not to give insight into these things, but rather for the reader to work out the analogous case of the soul. To find the meaning of this passage in what is merely implicit in the text is therefore entirely within the spirit of the dialogue at this point.
εμπορον ἢ δημιουργόν του αὐτῶν τούτων, σιτοποιόν ἢ ὄψοποιόν ἢ ύφαντην ἢ
σκυτοτόμον ἢ σκυτοδεψόν, οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν ἔστιν ὅταν τοιούτον δόξαι καὶ αὐτῶ
καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις θεραπευτὴν εἶναι σώματος, παντὶ τῷ μὴ εἰδότι ὅτι ἔστιν τις παρὰ
ταύτας ἀπάσας τέχνη γυμναστικῆς τε καὶ ἱατρικῆς, ἡ δὲ τῷ ὄντι ἔστιν σώματος
θεραπεία, ἀναπαρασφαλοῦς παρασκευὴν τῶν τεχνῶν καὶ χρησαθὶ τοῖς
toútvn ἔργοις διὰ τὸ εἰδέναι ὅτι τὸ χρηστὸν καὶ πονηρὸν τῶν σιτίων ἢ ποτῶν
ἔστιν εἰς ἀρετὴν σώματος, τὰς δὲ ἄλλας πάσας ταύτας ἁγνοεῖν διὸ δὴ καὶ
taútaς μὲν δουλοπρέπειας τε καὶ διακονικὰς καὶ ἁνελευθέρους εἶναι, τὰς ἄλλας
tέχνας, τὴν δὲ γυμναστικὴν καὶ ἱατρικὴν κατὰ τὸ δίκαιον δεσπόινας εἶναι τούτων.

TRANSLATION

Socrates: I believe that you have often agreed and understood that the practice
concerning the body and the soul is double, and one practice serves, and by it it is possible
to provide food, if our bodies are hungry, drinks if they thirst, cloaks if they are cold,
bedding, shoes, and other things for which bodies have an appetite. And I’m speaking to
you through the same images on purpose, so that you may understand more easily. If
someone who is a retail-dealer, or trader or producer of these things – a baker or cook or
weaver or leather-cutter or leather-dresser – is able to provide these things, it is no wonder,
given that he is able to do this, that he seems, both to himself and to others, to be one who
cares for the body. He seems to all who do not know that there is, besides all these, a
certain gymnastic skill and medical skill, which are in truth the care for the body, and
which fittingly rule all these skills and uses their works on account of knowing what is
useful and bad among foods and drinks for the virtue of the body, and all these other
practices do not. On this account these serving practices are worthy of a slave and not fit
for a free man, while the other skills, the gymnastic and medical skills, are mistresses over
these according to justice.

Previously, Socrates spoke of ‘flattery’ (κολακεία – e.g., 465b1, 501c3), and there
seemed to be a clear demarcating line between pursuits such as cosmetics and cookery (465b),
which aimed at pleasure as opposed to the good (464d1-2, 501b5-c1), and genuine skills such as
gymnastics and medicine, which aimed at the good rather than pleasure. There was never any
suggestion that gymnastics, for example, might make use of cosmetics: the former aims at the
actual, the latter merely at the apparent, good. We thus seemed to have two fundamentally
different types of activity that excluded one another.¹⁹⁴ Now these waters are muddied
considerably. Socrates now speaks of serving (διακονίκη) rather than flattery, and the two do not
seem simply to be equivalent to one another. The Four Men, who did not really practice
flattering rhetoric (517a5-6),¹⁹⁵ were servants (διακονικοί – b2-3) of the desires of city, better in
this regard than people today. The notion of ‘serving’ seems to be filled out by providing
(ἐκπορίζειν – b4) what is desired (see also c4, d2).¹⁹⁶

That this change of vocabulary points to something genuinely new is confirmed by the
examples used to explain Socrates’ schema at this point. When he claims, “I am deliberately
speaking to you through the same images” (517d4-5), he is technically correct: the general

¹⁹⁴ Moss (2007: 244): “the Gorgias draws a polar opposition between flattery, which is both persuasive and pleasant,
and correction – including dialectic – which is both unpersuasive and unpleasant.” She is correct to speak of flattery
and correction as opposed, and not pleasure and the good. Her paper is helpful in working out the opposition she
identifies: it is so strongly present that we can see how easy it would be to attribute to Socrates a polemical aversion
to pleasure in general.
¹⁹⁵ The idea is presumably that they could not have been set upon by the citizens if they had.
¹⁹⁶ Irwin (1979: 238) points out that “the term ‘serving’ [διακονίκη] is ambiguous between (1) ‘serving the whims
of the audience,’ and so an irrational knack; (2) ‘serving the aims of the superordinate science.’” This ambiguity
serves Socrates’ pretence, which I take up below, that he is simply extending the same case he has been developing
all along. In fact, on my account, it is meaning (2) that determines his account at this point.
analogy to bodily needs has appeared before, and it included the specific examples of food, drink, cloaks and shoes (490b-e); walls, harbours and dockyards were also mentioned earlier in the dialogue (455b-e). Nevertheless, these examples had not been used in the context of Socrates’ schema of true skills and mere flattery, and their new use in this schema, in the place of the examples that had previously been used to explain it (cookery, medicine, cosmetics, gymnastic, etc.), suggests that ‘serving’ must cut across the line between flattery and true skills. These new examples do not unambiguously point to mere pleasures that are independent of or even opposed to a good, as tasty treats or cosmetic adornment might be. Rather, we now have necessities vital for survival. That is, a body without food or clothing will starve or freeze to death. If food, drink, cloaks and so on are objects of bodily appetite (d4-5), then a new view of appetite has emerged, one that allows that appetites can be in accord with the good, not independent from or opposed to it. The implication of Socrates’ talk of “the same images” is misleading: it masks the fact that these images actually point to something new.

In what follows, Socrates seems to acknowledge that the appetites can accord with the good, for true crafts – gymnastics and medicine are the chosen examples – are now said properly to rule over the other crafts, and to use their work (517e6-7). The idea, then, would be that the baker, weaver and shoemaker provide things that are necessary for a healthy body, but if one of these arts were the one ultimately in charge of the activity of the body, the result would be an overindulgence in bread, or an excessive acquisition of cloaks and shoes (recall 490d-e, where the weaver is to have the biggest cloak and the cobbler the largest and most numerous shoes). In this sense, these arts only seem to care for the body (517e2-3); in reality (τῶ δύτὶ e5), there are other, genuine skills – medicine and gymnastics – that can properly be said to care for the body. These understand the nature of the body and, according to what is just (κατὰ τὸ δίκαιον –
518a4), should direct the servile (διακονικής – 518a2) arts so as to achieve bodily health. That is, a doctor or gymnast will use the work of the baking art to give the proper quantity of bread to a body, and will similarly use the weaving and shoemaking arts to make sure that the body is properly clothed. There is, then, a hierarchy of practices, each aiming at some partial good, but it is crucial that the genuine skill be in charge of all the others.197

This new paradigm is determined by the idea of rule, giving a new perspective on a theme that runs throughout the dialogue. The idea first appeared when Gorgias claimed that rhetoric would provide rule over others (452d), and was developed by Polus (470d-471d) into the notion of tyranny, a conception of rule also admired by Callicles (491e-492c).198 Now, however, we have a Socratic development of the idea of rule, and it is this that distinguishes this new schema of skills from the previous one. Earlier, the distinction between knacks and genuine skills was underwritten by the distinction between pleasure and the good (464b-466a, 500a-501c). Here, however, the crucial question is what practice is to rule. Baking or shoemaking satisfy appetites (and so will presumably produce pleasure), but can achieve good if they maintain their appropriate place subordinate to and directed by the appropriate master art (e.g., medicine). If, however, an art that should properly occupy a subordinate place comes to occupy the top spot, in the place of the art that ought to rule, all sorts of evil results.

Socrates' earlier remarks on the work of doctors can be connected with this new view. Doctors, he said, typically allow healthy patients to eat and drink as much as they like, according to hunger and thirst, but almost never allow this to sick patients (505a). We also hear later of a

197 Insofar as flattery (κολαζέω) and serving (διακονική) are not to be reconciled, there is, I think, an anticipation here of the necessary/unnecessary appetites of the Republic (558d-559c). The former practice would point to an unnecessary, the latter a necessary appetite.

198 The two sets of examples from earlier passages mentioned above also have connections to the idea of rule. The first mention of walls, harbours and dockyards (455b-e) includes the first mention of Themistocles and Pericles. In the passage that contained the food, drink, cloaks and shoes examples, Socrates explicitly brought up the notion of rule (ἀρχέω – 490a2-3, 8, c2).
doctor who compels patients to go hungry and thirsty (522a). The idea behind this (as Socrates at 505b suggests) is that a healthy body is properly ordered, so that its appetites align with its needs (and therefore with its good), whereas a disordered, sick body will have inappropriate appetites, which tend towards its own destruction: all will depend upon the type of order present within the body. The most important thing, then, is to have properly ordered appetites. Once this has been achieved, one can make use of various serving arts to see to the individual’s needs. Here too we find that appetites are not to be avoided as such; here too we find that it is the order of the soul that determines whether appetites lead us toward good or evil.199

It is possible to reconcile the new schema with the old one. The arts that properly rule, because they know what is useful and base for the excellence (διὰ τὸ εἰδέναι ... χρηστὸν καὶ χρησθαῖ ... εἰς ὀρετήν – 517e7-8) of their subject, will always, and of their nature, aim at the good. The serving arts, because they satisfy appetites, will always and of their nature aim at pleasure, and will achieve good only when directed and limited by a proper master art. The distinction that governed the earlier schema (464b-466a, 500a-501c), pleasure and the good, is still present as a governing principle in the new one, but in a different manner than we would have expected. Previously it might have seemed that pleasure was simply evil, a perilously seductive force that could lure us away from the good. Now, however, it appears that pleasure need not be avoided, and can lead us toward the good as much as away from it – indeed, surely the reason that we have appetites is that we have needs for food, drink, and so on.

199 Accordingly, there is a reason to disagree with Moss (2005: 146) when she says that “pleasure pulls us in the wrong direction, towards false value judgements.” An appetite properly subordinated to its master art will pull us in the right direction, for example, towards eating an appropriate quantity of food, or towards wearing something warm in the winter. Accordingly, the pleasure that comes from the satisfaction of appetites in such cases will pull us in the right direction, towards correct value judgements.
Having thus interpreted Socrates’ new schema of arts, we should return to the question that provoked it. Callicles spoke of the ‘works’ (ἐργα – 517a8) of the Four Men; the word is echoed when Socrates says that the ruling art will make use of the ‘works’ (ἐργα – 517e7) of the others. Now the specific works of the Four Men are said to be ships, walls and dockyards (517c2). This would carry the implication that these are not simply bad things. As a body needs clothes and shoes, so does a city need ships, walls and dockyards to survive; as a body has an appetite for its needs, so too does a city. A city that ignores such necessities can expect to be conquered by its neighbours. From this perspective, the problem with the Four Men would seem not to be that they provided ships, walls and dockyards, nor that the city’s appetite for such things was simply evil as such (517b4-5). Rather, the problem was that they focused on these things “without justice and temperance” (519a1-2), perhaps focusing on them to an excessive degree, like one who, recognising food and drink as goods, gorges himself until sick. A true statesman, then, would also have provided ships, walls and dockyards, but would have been sure to subordinate these things to the overall order and health of the city.

With all this in mind, we can resolve an apparent problem when Socrates contrasts the provision of such naval apparatus with “changing the course of the appetites and not yielding to them, persuading and forcing them toward what will make the citizens better” (517b5-7), and says that the latter activities constitute the “only work” (μόνον ἐργον – c1) of a good citizen. That is, the work of a good citizen might seem not to involve ruling over various subordinate skills and using their works; rather, it is only a matter of directing the appetites of the citizens. However, the talk of the “only work” of a good citizen is to be interpreted in the light of Socrates words at 517d6-e6: many arts might seem to be the care of the body, but in reality (τῶ ὀντὶ – e5) medicine and gymnastic are the arts that care for the body. This is not to say that the baker or
the shoemaker fail to care for the body in any sense – their works will, after all, be used by the ruling arts – but rather that they fail to do so in the strictest sense. The force of the words “only work,” like the words “in reality” (τῶν ὑπ' αὐτῶν – 517e5) is not to point to an actual form of activity that aims at the good as opposed to a practice that ignores the good entirely, but rather to a fully adequate form of activity as opposed to a merely partial (and thus potentially destructive) form.

If we keep this idea in mind, we can see that when Socrates calls harbours, dockyards and walls ‘nonsense’ (ϕιλοσαφίκα – 519a3), he does not suggest that these things are inherently harmful to a city's health any more than food, drink or shoes might be to a body. This is confirmed by a verbal echo. We have already noted the significance of Socrates’ claim that he is using the same images as before (517d4-5), and these images point to an earlier passage in which Callicles called food and drink ‘nonsense’ (ϕιλοσαφίκα – 490c8-d1). In the same passage, when Socrates spoke of a person intent on wearing the biggest and the most shoes, Callicles replied, “you're talking nonsense.” (ϕιλοσαφίκα – 490e4) Obviously Callicles did not mean to imply that food, drink and shoes are simply undesirable. Rather, such things are nonsense in comparison to what is really important. Socrates’ talk of ‘nonsense’ can therefore be taken to have a similar sense: an excessive focus on dockyards, food or even shoes will undermine the health of the entity in question.

There remains a problem with this interpretation of this passage: Socrates’ manner of expression. He seemed harshly critical of the Four Men in the preceding section, and he expresses himself here in a manner that appears to maintain this stance. When he begins by describing them as servants of the city, and better at providing it with what it had an appetite for (517b2-5), he echoes his earlier suggestion that the Four Men were good at filling up the appetites (503c5). In both cases, it sounds as though they will fit into the category of flatterers,
serving pleasure and not the good. It is only when we work through the implications of Socrates’
new account of the arts (517c7-518a5) that we realise that it provides a basis for a sort of
affirmation of the work of the Four Men: the problem with it is not that it is simply and
essentially perverse, but that it has usurped its proper place in the order of things. Restored to its
proper place, the provision of dockyards, ships and walls would be a profound good, and it
would be quite right to say that Pericles, Themistocles, Cimon and Miltiades were good men, at
least, in the appropriate respect. Socrates, however, directs our attention to the negative aspect of
their work, emphasising how the actual activity of these men has made the city sick (518a7-
519a4). A more conciliatory manner of expression, one that focused explicitly on the fact that the
Four Men were aiming at something good, but were doing so in a misguided way, would be
more likely to move Callicles (and the reader). Indeed, Socrates could have emphasised that
pleasure is not all bad, that we don’t need to eliminate it entirely from our lives if we wish to be
good. What purpose is served by the actual way in which Socrates expresses himself, which
leaves the good of serving arts at the level of implication, and giving emphasis to the difference
between Socrates and the admirers of the Four Men? The answer began all the way back in the
Polus section: Plato has presented Socrates’ doctrine in a manner that maximises its differences
with the other three characters, and here he continues this presentation. Through this manner of
presentation, two views of the world are coming to light in their opposition from one another.

There remains one problem whose solution is not so easy. The keystone of Socrates’
case, we have seen, came at 506c-507c, where it was effectively asserted that an internal order
would alone be sufficient for happiness; this point was needed again and again in the argument
that followed. This seemed to fit with the earlier account of skills, which suggested that base
flattering practices that aim merely at pleasure were to be avoided in favour of genuine skills that
aim at the good. The doctor was concerned with restoring the internal order of the body, not with the external delights of the pastry-chef. Now, however, we have examples that remind us that the internal order of the body, though it may be sufficient for health, is itself dependent upon its external circumstances: a body needs clothes, shoes and food. The skill of providing these will be used by the master-skill of caring for the body. If the analogy holds, then an adequate psychic order will be sufficient for happiness, but that order will itself stand in need of adequate external circumstances, and subordinate skills will be needed to attend to these external circumstances. Perhaps we are simply to understand that the analogy breaks down at this point, and that the soul should be understood to be capable of an independence that is not available to the body (certainly this is the direction that is taken in the *Phaedo*).²⁰⁰

### 5.7 SOPHISTRY AND TRUE STATESMANSHIP (519B-520E)

We now have one final jab at both sophists and politicians: they claim to have made people just, and yet to have been wronged by their students. Socrates is entitled to the argument here on the basis of the claims at 506c-507c: if a person has been made just, he will act in a just manner. It is important to attend to the language used: neither politicians nor sophists are said to have pointed out to people what justice is. Rather, they have taken away injustice from their students or

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²⁰⁰ The matter still does not end there, for the reader will recall from the end of the Callicles section that we find a demand for both integrity and friendship; we shall see in the conclusion that Socrates accepts this double demand. To the extent that friendship is necessary for a good life, the soul is not independent, for it requires adequate external circumstances in which friendship is possible. Here the answer must be that friendship is needed for the best life, but not for a happy one – and we shall see in the conclusion that Socrates considers integrity prior to friendship, i.e., not to be sacrificed in order to attain friendship.
citizens (519d3, 520d4), and these have become good and just (519d2-3). A true leader of a city, one who skillfully aims at what is best for his city, will make the city good, and therefore cannot be a recipient of its base action.

Once again, this argument could be turned upon Socrates: if, as he will shortly claim, he is a true practitioner of the political skill, then he cannot complain of unjust treatment at the hands of the city, nor can his future trial be compared to a doctor prosecuted by a cook in front of a group of children (520e) – surely both the jury and the prosecutor must have profited by Socrates political activity?

5.8 SOCRATES’ SELF-DEFENSE (521A-522E)

In the final section of Callicles’ main statement (485e3-486d1), the focus of the discussion was turned upon Socrates’ life. In this final portion of the argument, we can appreciate that virtually everything Socrates has said since 503d has been directed towards answering this challenge: on the basis of the account Socrates has given, he can now defend his own life. There is little new here as regards the content of this defense – for the most part, he needs only to apply the conclusions of his earlier arguments to his own situation – but there is one telling move on the matter of self-preservation.

Socrates’ defense rests on what has been the keystone of his account so far, the notion that an adequate internal order will alone be sufficient for happiness; nothing else counts at all.

201 Thus, though the sophists are said to be teachers of virtue (519c5), the key phrase would be that their students have fared well (ἐνοὺς σωφρόντες – 519d1) by them – that is, the students have actually benefitted, which is to say that the internal order of their soul has been improved. There is no need to follow Irwin (1979: 239) in introducing the Socratic virtue=knowledge here.
He can therefore brush aside Callicles’ suggestion that he should practice flattery with the words, “don’t you say what you have so often said, that one who wishes will kill me, so I do not also say again that a base man will kill one who is good.” (521b4-6) That is, the matter of who is base and who good is taken to be sufficient on its own to answer Callicles’ concern about Socrates’ fate; it is a repetition of something Socrates has said before (at 511b3-5). In similar fashion, on the matter of self-defense, he can repeat (at 522c8-d3) the result of the argument from 509b1-513c3, which produced a Socratic doctrine on the most important kind of self-defense and the power necessary to achieve it.

In one case, however, that of whether injustice is worse than death, Socrates does not simply apply an earlier argument to his own particular situation, and this must be because he recognises that something was left out of his argument on self-preservation. Now, the basis so far for Socrates’ claim that we should fear injustice more than death (522e1-3) lies in the idea that the power of self-preservation, by which we avoid death, is in a mutually exclusive relation with the power of leading a good life, by which we avoid injustice. But is injustice actually worse than death? To answer this, we must be able to say something about what happens after death, and the myth will address this. Socrates’ language points to the fact that the myth will give the reasons for his claims at this point: if he were to die because he had no flattering rhetoric, he would bear death easily (522d7-e1). The reason for this (γὰρ – e1) is that one should not fear death, but rather doing injustice (e1-3). The reason for that (γὰρ – e3) is that such injustices will carry the worst consequences after death – and this takes us into the myth. Accordingly, the content of the myth is necessary to Socrates’ argument.

Other aspects of this passage are taken up elsewhere, but one point is particularly important to bear in mind for the conclusion; Socrates defends himself in a way that simply
denies the demands of everyday life. His ‘defense’ would, from Callicles' point of view, amount to a *confession*, for Socrates makes no attempt to deny what seemed so troubling to Callicles (486a-c): he would be helpless in a court of law.

5.9 THE MYTH (523A-527E)

In order to bring out the full significance of the myth, it is necessary to bring in two points from the conclusion. First, Plato wants the reader to understand that the two-headed practical challenge, part personal, part political (discussed in the introduction) is not adequately answered by Socrates. Instead, Socrates is shown merely to turn away from the world. Second, we shall see in the conclusion that true rhetoric provides a practical means of dealing with the difficulties that the non-rational creates in real life. The content of the myth, I shall argue, confirms the place of Socrates in this dialogue: he turns away from the world rather than fully wrestling with its problems.

Previous scholarship has produced two interpretive lines of interest through which we might view the myth. First, it might be “giving us a consequentialist reason to be just”\(^\text{202}\) – that is, one reason to be just is for the sake of the rewards and punishments in the afterlife as the myth describes it. This will be referred to as the ‘consequentialist’ reading in what follows. Second, the myth might be understood in the manner of the Divine Comedy, so that “afterlife punishment, of curable and incurables alike, is at bottom much the same kind of mental torture as

vice already causes in this life.” 203 It would thus give us an “allegory of moral malaise and reform in our present life,” 204 in which the reign of Cronus stands for the Athenian courts, and the reign of Zeus for Socratic dialectic; this will be the ‘allegorical’ reading. Given the literary nature of the myth, we might reasonably accept both of these lines of interpretation. 205

It should be clear from the preceding section, however, that the consequentialist reading lies closer to the surface of the text: immediately before he gives the myth, Socrates connects it to his defense of his own life, in which questions concerning death become important. Furthermore, the conclusion of the myth (527a5-c4) is coupled with a summary of major themes of the dialogue - that one should avoid doing injustice more than suffering it; one should seek punishment if one becomes bad in some respect; one should avoid flattery; etc. – and this coupling should suggest to us that the myth is itself tied in to the reasons for us to accept these various claims. Accordingly, we must take the myth to be a consequentialist argument, and its literal meaning, as an account of the afterlife, is an important part of its function within Socrates’ account.

The allegorical reading does not fit so easily with these suggestions that the myth plays such a direct and literal role in Socrates' argument, and for this reason it must be considered a secondary resonance. 206 Nevertheless, we can appreciate its strength through certain intratextual

203 Sedley (2009: 68). Radcliffe (2012) presents reading fundamentally the same as Sedley’s, but is nevertheless well worth reading for additional insights. Annas (1982: 124) acknowledges this as a possible reading: “we can read the myth literally or demythologize it, taking it as claiming that the unjust person is being punished now in having a scarred soul.”

204 Sedley (2009: 68).

205 Another possible reading, alluded to by Sedley (2009: 66, fn. 25), would take the myth to be itself an example of true rhetoric. Callicles, of course, would dismiss it as “spells, papers and incantations.” Perhaps we should take it as a sort of exhortation to the reader of the sort of thing we ought to believe to motivate a good life, for we find similar myths elsewhere in Plato’s corpus. Here I do not pursue this view of the myth.

206 Sedley (2009: 67) makes clear that he does not take the allegorical interpretation necessarily to “exhaust the meaning of the myth;” Radcliffe (2012: 166, 182), by contrast, accepts the allegorical interpretation and not the consequentialist one.
ties to earlier parts of the dialogue. In the argument with Callicles at 492a-493d, “where the appetites were compared to the myth of the leaky jars in Hades, Socrates ... explicitly advertised the idea that myths of afterlife punishment serve as allegories for moral truths about this life. If he is inviting us to do the same with the closing myth, therefore, that should come as no surprise.” More specifically, there is a basis for comparing Athenian law courts to the situation under the rule of Cronus. In the argument against Polus, Socrates referred dismissively to the misuse of witnesses in law courts (471e2-472c4), who are believed on the basis of their reputation. “But this manner of refutation,” he tells us, “is worthless as regards the truth.” (471e7-472a1) The same sort of difficulty arises in the account of the false witnesses used in the age of Cronus, and the improvements to these made by Zeus (523b-e). Now, if the age of Cronus is an analogy for the law courts, then the situation under Zeus can be naturally compared to Socratic dialectic, which effectively puts on trial the value systems of those it encounters, administering effective punishment through refutation, or, if dealing with an incurable person, it “at least exposes the nature of their psychic disorder and self-inflicted torture, providing a frightful deterrent for others.” Callicles might be one such incurable; Archelaus certainly is: “even in this life, according to Socrates, Archelaus is a paradigm of the mental torment to which the morally bad condemn themselves. Socratic dialectic can make Archelaus a negative moral paradigm here and now just as effectively as the penal code of Tartarus will do later.” What the myth does accomplish for the dialogue, on this view, is that it allows us to appreciate why Socrates would consider himself to be a true politician: his dialectic is a genuine means of getting to the truth.

\[\text{207 Sedley (2009: 53).}\]
\[\text{208 Sedley (2009: 67).}\]
\[\text{209 Sedley (2009: 66).}\]
However we pronounce on the consequentialist and allegorical readings, there remains the fact that the myth points to a difficulty with Socrates. The *Gorgias* began with a question concerning rhetoric, and a rich and multifaceted problem has been developed out of this question. Now rhetoric, we recall, was characterised as a practice that persuades people who do not have knowledge without itself having knowledge (see 459a-c). The very possibility of rhetoric presupposes a non-rational aspect of the world: somehow, persuasion is possible without understanding. This can result in a gulf between the way things are and the way they ought to be: often, when one ought to consult an expert, rhetors carry the day (455b-456a); if a doctor and a rhetor were to compete for a doctor's position in front of the assembly, the rhetor would win (456b-c). Central to this non-rational persuasion is an epistemological reality: somehow the way things appear can be very different from the way that they actually are. Socrates’ schema of skills, first given at 464b-466a, had the effect of emphasising just how widespread the problem of non-rational persuasion is: there exists a plurality of counterfeit practices that imitate genuine skills - indeed, the suggestion is that there is one such practice for every genuine skill. Furthermore, he pointed to a principle underlying all these imitative practices: pleasure. In case there was any doubt about just how compelling pleasure can be, we soon saw that Callicles would base his whole life around it. The *Gorgias* is not content, however, simply to point to the fact and scope of the non-rational, for it also demands a certain kind of solution. Socrates, in his criticism of the Four Men, made the demand that they *actually make* the citizens better, and it was their failure in this regard that justified the conclusion (at 517a) that they were not practitioners of true rhetoric. That is, the demand is not simply that we recognise the non-rational as a fact of the world, but also that we deal with it head-on: how can the recognition that people can be non-rationally persuaded be used to turn them towards the good? Given the compelling
nature of pleasure, how could a genuine statesman keep his people away from the lure of mere gratification? We shall see in the conclusion that true rhetoric would do this – i.e., use non-rational persuasive means to turn the mass of people towards the good.

With all of this in mind, it is pertinent to ask: what place do we find given to rhetoric in the myth? Clearly, it could only exist within the reign of Cronus. It is correct to note that “the reign of Zeus is superior to that of Cronus... we have before us a parable of political progress.” The myth effectively poses a problem - the situation under Cronus - and then dwells at some length on the solution provided by Zeus. However, the whole point of that solution is that rhetoric is effectively obliterated: the various forms of non-rational confusion have been eliminated, and direct access to the truth becomes possible through the contact of soul on soul.

However we interpret it, this is not a satisfactory solution to the practical problem of the Gorgias, or to rhetoric as it has been developed over the course of the dialogue. To deal with the non-rational simply by eliminating the non-rational must fail as regards the political demand that came to light through the Four Men. On the allegorical interpretation, if the reign of Cronus stands for normal Athenian law courts, and the reign of Zeus for Socratic dialectic, then the myth effectively asserts that it is possible, through Socratic dialectic, to achieve a genuine connection to reality, and to avoid falling victim to the seductions of the non-rational. This is, no doubt, an encouraging sentiment, and is no doubt a necessary step towards a proper solution, but it falls far short of the demand set earlier. On the consequentialist view, we are encouraged by the thought that problems presented by non-rational persuasion will be resolved after death - but the challenge is to find a way to grapple with these problems now, in this life.

210 Sedley (2009: 56).
Thus we can grant that the myth is both an allegory for this life and a serious account of the afterlife. What is most important for its interpretation in relation to the whole dialogue is what we come to on either interpretation: the myth fails to address the problem of rhetoric as it has been developed since we first encountered it with Gorgias.\textsuperscript{211} Instead of giving a picture of the non-rational as a reality with which we might successfully struggle, it presents a world in which this problem has been absolutely eliminated by divine decree.

There are, of course, numerous other links between the myth and earlier themes of the dialogue. Let us now look at a few of these. Whatever pleasures the Calliclean individual might enjoy, if the myth is true, Socrates’ central disagreement with Polus (474b-475e) will ultimately be vindicated, and will overcome the difficulty between custom and nature that Callicles complained of: we all die, and given what we learn here of the afterlife, doing wrong will ultimately be worse than suffering it. Secondly, those who commit the greatest crimes and escape punishment because of their temporal power, such as kings and tyrants, are declared to be incurable, and to undergo the greatest penalties for eternity (525c-e). Thus whatever might happen in this world, in the end, as we pass into the next, we will be confronted with the truth of another point that Socrates presses upon Polus, that committing injustice and avoiding punishment for it is the greatest and first of evils (476a-479e).

The rule of Zeus is distinguished from that of Cronus, and the purpose of this is to bring the distinction between appearance and reality most clearly to the fore. In the past, those about to die were judged before death, while clothed, with full foreknowledge of their impending death,

\textsuperscript{211} Annas (1982: 138) compares the myth of the \textit{Gorgias} with similar afterlife-myths in the \textit{Phaedo} and \textit{Republic}, and finds it optimistic by comparison. That is, there is no explicit mention of a cyclical journey of souls, giving this myth a comparative emphasis on finality, and this finality is combined with a relative optimism: everything will be put right in the end. This comparison coheres with the current analysis: the optimism is of a naive variety that arises from not having worked through the difficulties of the matter.
were dressed up in fine bodies, family connections and wealth, and could even call witnesses to testify that they had lived justly. The judges, too, were alive and clothed, with their eyes, ears and whole bodies obstructing their souls (523b-d). All these are respects in which appearances can get in the way of reality. People who know they are about to go on trial right before death can use their temporal means to dress themselves up and bring in false witnesses, and can further bring attention to their fine ancestry. None of this should be relevant to the question of whether or not they have actually lived justly, but Pluto complains that it has affected the verdicts (523b7-c1). Clearly the judges, embodied, alive and clothed as they are, have been susceptible to sensual distractions.

Under the rule of Zeus, appearances will not be allowed to distort reality. Judges and judged alike will be dead and stripped of all sensuous externality so that soul may be beheld directly by soul (523e), reality brought into direct contact with reality. Zeus’ own sons will be the judges, with the first two sending difficult cases to the third for maximum certainty. The underlying aim at every point is to get at the reality, “so that the judgement concerning the journey of men is as just as possible.” (524a6-7)

There follows a more specific account of how judgement in the afterlife is carried out (524b-526c). The soul, just like the body, is said to carry marks of the major wounds it bore, and other signs of its earlier care. It is by these alone that the sons of Zeus make their judgements. The fate of tyrants receives particular mention, and it is worth pausing to reflect on the logic at work here, because this is the only place in the dialogue in which incurables are considered. The most extreme form of Callicles’ position as the argument approached 494e took the individual will to be absolutely opposed to any constraint. Socrates has tried to advance the idea of an objective moral order, one according to which everything achieves its own best state through its
own proper order. If this is right, then those who have attained a position in which temporal limits are effectively absent can assert their own arbitrary will as absolute against any actual order of things, including their own proper order, through which they would attain their own best state. The ‘power’ of tyrants is the ability to negate this objective order without qualification, as most people cannot. In doing so, they actively put themselves completely beyond it, and apparently beyond any possible cure.

Finally, there are three pointers to the myth’s ambiguous epistemological status: Socrates begins by saying “you may consider [it] a story [μῦθος]... but I consider it a [true] account [λόγος]. For the things that I am going to say to you I will say as though they’re true.” (523a1-3) At the midpoint of the myth, Socrates tells us that “these are the things which I have heard, Callicles, and I believe them to be true. And from these accounts [λόγοι] ...”²¹² (524a8-b1) He finishes it with the suggestion that one might consider it a mere story [μῦθος], something characteristic of an old woman and worthy of contempt (527a5-6). The effect of these remarks is to draw attention to the questionable epistemological status of the myth even as Socrates insists on its truth.²¹³ The attention given to the distinction between μῦθος and λόγος points to the fact that the ‘reason’ to be just given by the myth is of a decidedly less certain nature than much of

²¹² Sedley (2009: 52) takes the myth to fall into two sections, (1) 523a3–524a7, in which the reign of Cronus is contrasted with that of Zeus, and (2) 524a8–527a4, in which the state of affairs under Zeus is described in greater detail. This is correct, and this second epistemological comment of Socrates, in which he reminds us that these are (merely) things that he has heard, and yet asserts their truth, falls right at the division.
²¹³ Annas (1982: 121) provides a list of passages from the Platonic corpus in which mere stories are abused or despised as trivial, “suitable only for children or lightweight entertainment.” However, she reminds us that “Plato nowhere says or implies that there is a single all-purpose distinction between storytelling and reasoning such that all stories are necessarily stupid or immoral. He in fact clearly believes that some mythoi, stories, do have rational depth.
what has gone before. Indeed, perhaps this is to be expected in a consideration of the afterlife, which is surely harder to know than anything else treated by the dialogue.

214 Recall from the introduction that the μοθος/λογος distinction was also the focus of attention right before the ‘keystone’ at 505c; in that earlier case, the distinction is de-emphasised, suggesting that the account (λογος) we find there is still mired, in some sense, in the realm of mere stories, or is perhaps a story trying to pass itself off as an argument. The ‘keystone’ and the myth are the two uncertain pillars on which Socrates’ case must rest.

215 I do not accept the suggestion of Sedley (2009: 51) that if the myth gives us a reason to be just, it undermines the rest of the dialogue. In the first place, nothing prevents the Gorgias, like the Republic, from trying to show that justice is desirable both in itself and for its consequences. Beyond this, if the view taken above on the μοθος/λογος matter is in the right direction, then the ‘reason’ to be just supplied by the myth, given its particularly questionable epistemological status, is unlikely to supplant the argument of the rest of the dialogue anyway.
6.0 CONCLUSION

We began with a concern about the unity of the Gorgias, in three respects: the unity of the literary and argumentative aspects of the dialogue; the unity of the parts within the whole; and above all, the unity of the overall formal structure of the dialogue with its content. We may now attempt to summarise our results and produce definite conclusions, taking each of these types of unity independently.

The first kind of unity, that involving literary and argumentative aspects, is the most difficult to test. One can only look at any given detail of the text – e.g., the youth of Polus (461c et al.), Callicles’ talk of boys who lisp (485c), the logic of the first argument Socrates uses against Callicles (488b-489b) – and ask whether it finds a place in a given interpretation. To the extent that an interpretation can show how all the detail contributes in some manner to the dialogue’s content, it may claim to have understood the author’s thought. Now obviously, one cannot summarise all the detail of the dialogue in the conclusion (although we shall treat the first two pages of the dialogue below, in the section, The First Two Pages); rather one must call attention to this aim here, and ask the reader to decide for himself whether one might achieve this aim to a greater extent through a different interpretation.

The second sort of unity, that of parts within the whole, is a more straightforward matter. Can each part be shown to occupy a logical position in relation to other parts and also to a whole? This is accomplished through the structure of the dialogue, as set out in the introduction.
So, for example, the Gorgias section of the dialogue achieves its full significance in relation to the whole that follows: it provides, in embryonic fashion, the various themes that will flower into the content of the rest of the work. The case that Socrates makes after 499c is to be understood as a reaction to the development that has preceded it, and it attains its full significance when seen in this light. One might consider arguments, such as Socrates’ own account of the good (503d-504c), in abstraction from this structure, and find something interesting and instructive therein, but on each occasion one would also lose something important to Plato’s purpose (in the case of Socrates’ account of the good, one could easily miss the importance to Plato of founding an ethical theory in reality – on this, see the section How Socrates Responds to Callicles (i), below).

The unity of the work’s formal structure and content will be taken up in the final section, below. There is, however, another question that one should ask in relation to any of the three types of unity mentioned above: what is the result of producing an account unified along these lines? Does it raise more questions than it answers, or can it produce a coherent account of how the whole dialogue speaks? In what follows, we shall be focused on this question of how the dialogue speaks, because on this question a great deal of the interpretation given so far depends. So, for example, in the introduction a new account was given of the way in which the logic of certain *ad hominem* arguments works within the dialogue, and a corresponding new account of shame. But this account involved setting aside an earlier conception of how Plato speaks to the reader in the *Gorgias*. If we cannot show that this new account can provide its own view of how Plato speaks in this dialogue, it will not seem like much of an alternative to the account it is meant to replace. Once this matter has been treated, it will possible to take a final look at the question of what Plato is trying to communicate to the reader, and, finally, to return to the question of the relation of the overall formal structure and content.
The first step towards seeing Plato at work in the *Gorgias* comes through the suggestion, made in the introduction, that Callicles represents something good within the dialogue insofar as he provides a series of challenges for Socrates. Socrates’ achievement in responding to these challenges is successful only in certain respects. In one respect he fails completely, and it is this that explains why Callicles is not ultimately convinced. Beyond the question of how well Socrates answers Callicles, there are other themes to bring together here, above all what the dialogue has to say about rhetoric, and how a later Platonic doctrine is taking shape here. Once all of this has been explained, it will be possible to grasp the unity of the *Gorgias*.

6.1 HOW SOCRATES SUCCESSFULLY ANSWERS CALLICLES (I): REALITY, FRIENDSHIP AND INTEGRITY

By the end of the dialogue, Socrates can claim an unambiguous victory over Callicles in at least two regards. In the first place, we have seen that one seductive strength of Callicles’ position was the suggestion that it could ground itself in the order of nature. The Socratic account of ‘good’ provided a serious alternative to the Calliclean view. That is, Socrates suggested that there is an order peculiar to each thing that can be considered the good of that thing, and this does seem to be confirmed by an order of the world. Certainly the dominion of the strong over the weak is something that can be found throughout the natural world, and pleasure, which provides the ultimate foundation of this aspect of Callicles’ view, is an indubitably real phenomenon, but the good of which Socrates speaks can also be found throughout the natural world, and is itself indubitably real. Indeed, the Socratic notion of ‘good’ obtains just as much in the case of animals as it does in the case of the human creations to which Socrates so often appeals. Furthermore,
while the refutation of Callicles showed that his position’s implied claim to be able to derive all of its deontic claims from facts of nature was quite empty, Socrates’ position can genuinely claim to be able to find his notion of ‘good’ in objective realities. As far as basing one’s views on reality is concerned, then, Socrates has provided a substantive response to Callicles.

If this interpretation could be shown to point to a Platonic reflection beyond just one dialogue, it might be thought to stand on a firmer footing. Let us therefore turn briefly to the Republic. Just as the Gorgias, from 499c, begins to provide a response to the problem that has been developed, so too does the Republic from 468c (in book ii) begin its own answer. This answer takes up the idea of a foundation in reality. The city comes to exist, we are told, not by some contractual arrangement as Glaucos suggested (358e-359b) – that is, its order is not a matter of convention (νόμος), as Callicles would put it – but rather, it comes to be out of human nature. The argument proper of the Republic begins when Socrates says that the city comes to be because each of us is not self-sufficient, but in need of many things (369b). His account does not begin on an intuitive, arbitrary or contractual basis, but rather on the basis of a natural reality – indeed, he later refers back to this as the “city founded according to nature.” (κατὰ φύσιν οἰκεῖσθαι πόλις – 428e9) Accordingly, just as Socrates’ account in the Gorgias took up a challenge from Callicles by means of a foundation in reality, so too does the account in the Republic begin on this basis. The reappearance of this idea in the Republic suggests that the idea of founding an ethical theory in reality, as opposed to on some arbitrary assumption or merely subjective intuition, is an abiding interest of Plato. His view, then, would be that if the Republic
consists in nothing more than a series of pious ought-to-be’s, if it’s just one man’s vision, it is a worthless document.\(^{216}\) In the *Gorgias* we can see this thought taking shape already.

Socrates also provides a response to Callicles concerning the twin demands of integrity and friendship; here too the Socratic position represents a clear improvement.\(^{217}\) We recall from our treatment of Callicles (see the section, *Explaining the Contradiction in Callicles*) that he was pulled simultaneously in two directions by the ideals that motivated his realist and aristocratic sides. That is, he sought on the one hand integrity, which for him involved a smashing of conventional norms and a complete disregard for the views of others, and on the other hand, friendship, which he pursued through an obsequious, flattering attention to the views of others and an adherence to conventional norms. Socrates, though he does attack the Calliclean account by running the two sides against one another, “never challenges the basic assumption that seeking one’s inner fulfillment (in some way or other) is an important human aspiration,”\(^{218}\) nor does he deny that friendly relations with others are of value.

Integrity certainly is a Socratic aspiration: “he would rather most people disagree with him than that he should be at odds with himself (482b7-c3)... Socrates will portray the life in pursuit of conventional honours as a life of servility, in which one sacrifices one’s own integrity for the sake of conforming with other people (512e-513c), a life of flattery and ingratiating (e.g.,

\(^{216}\) It also provides further reason to reject Kahn’s account of shame, according to which it “reflects a Platonic conception corresponding to our own notion of an innate moral sense.” (Kahn (1996: 138)) Certainly Kahn, in speaking of an innate moral sense, is not altogether at odds with Plato’s thought taken generally – one thinks of the theory of recollection – but in this particular situation, Plato is interested in finding an adequate logical foundation for ethical thought. In this context, trying to rest things only on an “innate moral sense” could easily amount to the very sort of “papers, trickery and spells” (484a4-5) that Plato has made Callicles deride.

\(^{217}\) In this and the next two paragraphs, I am attempting to summarise, and in certain limited regards to embellish, material from Woolf (2000).

\(^{218}\) Woolf (2000: 6).
He also confesses his incompetence in regard to contemporary political and judicial institutions (473e6-474a1, 521e2-522c3), another suggestion of his lack of regard for conventional norms. However, friendship also seems to be a crucial component of a good life for Socrates: when he declares that the life of intemperately fulfilling the appetites is an “endless evil” (507e3), he goes on to explain that the reason for this (γραφέ – e3) is that such a person is incapable of community and friendship (e3-6). Our first glimpse that friendly relations with others constitutes an important Socratic goal, however, is first suggested when “we find out at 481d that Socrates, like Callicles, is in love.” Unlike Callicles’ love, which causes him repeatedly to change this way and that (481d5-e6), Socrates’ love is for philosophy, which always says the same things (481a7-b1). This “always the same” motif is one to which Socrates will return in what follows (490e9-11, 491b5-c2, 509a4-5; see also 527b3-4), but it is introduced to us in connection with love. Socrates’ love, then, is an important source – perhaps the source – of his consistency (to the extent that he is in fact consistent) from 481a. Here, then, is a suggestion that integrity and the desire for good relations with others do not have to conflict. In fact, it appears that Socratic friendship includes and requires the demand for integrity, for “it seems to me that one person is most of all friend to another ... when the one is similar to the other” (510b2-4); similarly, he advises Callicles that genuine friendship requires

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219 Woolf (2000: 7), who also draws attention to the phrase χαίρειν οὖν ἐξοσας τὰς τιμὰς τῶν πολλῶν ὀνθρώπων (“I renounce the honours of many men”) at 526d5-6. Note also that even Callicles’ presentation of the philosopher suggests that he scorns convention in his own way, for he avoids the city centers, where men become famous (485d5-6); he passes his life whispering in a corner with a few boys (486d7-e1); he lives dishonoured (ἀτιμῶν – 486c2), and his activity fails to acquire for him the appearance of intelligence (c5-6).
221 Note that we do not hear that Socrates’ love for Alcibiades causes him to change this way and that. What we do hear about is the character of philosophy, singled out as his ‘darling’ (τὰ ἐμὰ παιδικά - 482a4).
222 The importance of friendship to Socrates is also suggested, as Woolf (2000: 11) tells us, when “Socrates concedes the importance in principle of helping one’s friends and family (508c, 509b), picking up Callicles’ similar point of 483b and 486b. He also twice addresses Callicles ‘in the name of Friendship’ (πρὸς Φιλίου: 500b, 519e).”
not imitation, but being similar to another in one’s very nature (513b3-6). Of course, Callicles, as we saw, proves to be a poor friend to Socrates;\(^{223}\) perhaps the reason is their dissimilarity.

Now, Callicles’ conception of the good sets people against one another, for unrestrained appetite fulfillment requires tyrannical power over others who also seek to fulfill their appetites without restraint. The Socratic conception of the good, however, because it focuses on an internal order, does not of its nature produce conflict within individuals. Instead, because true friendship requires that individuals are like one another in their own natures, well-ordered souls will be capable of true friendship with one another. Now Socrates shows himself interested in making other people good: this is the reason that he claims to be the only politician in Athens (521d-e), and he ends the dialogue with the suggestion that he and Callicles practise goodness together (527d), and that they call others to it as well (527e5-6). The importance of friendship to a good life explains why Socrates would be interested in the good of others (or in politics at all): by making others good – i.e., with well-ordered souls – he produces potential genuine friends for himself. The difference between Socrates and Callicles here is not on the value of friendship or integrity, but rather on the way in which these goals are present. The major improvement that the Socratic position offers is coherence: Socratic integrity is the basis from which Socratic friendship is possible. Accordingly, here too he can claim to have provided a substantial response to Callicles in terms of goals that are of fundamental importance to Callicles.

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\(^{223}\) See the section, *Callicles Fails as a Touchstone*. The argument from 510a-511a is particularly of interest to the themes of friendship and integrity.
6.2 HOW SOCRATES SUCCESSFULLY ANSWERS CALLICES (II): SHAME AND WEAKNESS OF WILL

Over the course of the *Gorgias*, a problem gradually comes into focus that is new within the context of what are usually called ‘Socratic’ or ‘early’ dialogues. This is the problem of weakness of will – that is, the possibility that someone might be able to do something, judge that he ought to do it and still fail to do it. This possibility must conflict with “the unity of virtue defended by Socrates in [the *Protagoras*], according to which (true) moral and political knowledge and (true) bravery are to be identified somehow with an underlying general knowledge of what is good and what is bad for human beings.”\(^\text{224}\) Certainly, Callicles, in making an ideal out of bravery, and in conceiving of bravery as separate from intelligence, includes in his position the possibility of weakness of will, and thus poses an implicit challenge for Socrates: how can he deal with this phenomenon?\(^\text{225}\)

The problem of weakness of will, however, is not confined to Callicles, for this theme, like so many others, develops gradually over the course of the dialogue from a mere hint at the start. This hint comes when Gorgias tells us that he has often been able to convince patients to undergo unpleasant treatments when doctors could not (456b).\(^\text{226}\) It is, of course, possible that he has merely changed the patients' beliefs, but two considerations suggest that this is not so. First, the rhetor succeeds where the doctor has failed: a patient who has agreed to see a doctor is

\(^{224}\) Cooper (1999: 54).

\(^{225}\) See Cooper (1999), who believes that Socrates fails to rise to the challenge.

\(^{226}\) Carone (2004) provides an interesting discussion of weakness of the will, and points to a number of relevant passages, not all of which appear in my account of the development of this theme. The passages I do not reference in my account of the development of the theme here are in some way relevant to weakness of will, but do not focus directly on it.
usually prepared from the start to accept the doctor’s view as true. Second, we are dealing here with unpleasant or very painful medical treatments rather than a question of policy, such as whether to build shipyards. These two factors make it more plausible to understand that the problem that the Gorgias was able to overcome where the doctor had failed was weakness of will; rhetoric was able decisively to move the will in this case, and not just to change a patient’s beliefs. (Of course, in keeping with the rest of the dialogue, we should expect the matter only to be implicit at this point, and not to find it worked out yet in a clear and explicit fashion.)

In the Polus section of the dialogue, we begin to hear of bravery directly. At the end of the argument with Polus, Socrates suggests that one should not be a coward (μη ἀποδειλιᾶν – 480c5), but should present oneself well and bravely (ἀνδρείως – c6), eyes closed, as to a doctor for cutting and burning (and note that the simile returns to the same situation as Gorgias’ words at 456b). The notion of weakness of will is hinted at here: the talk of cowardice and bravery looks ahead to bravery as it will appear in Callicles’ position, which is definitely separated from intelligence, and accordingly involves the possibility of weakness of will.

Of course, it is with Callicles that this theme really comes into its own, when he is provoked into the more frank account of his position (491e-492c). Here two stages in the pursuit of the best life can be discerned: “first, one must ‘unleash’ the appetites in the sense that one does not train or discipline oneself not to hanker after some bodily experiences, not to dwell on food or sex or drink or power over others... second... one must be brave and manly and intelligent or resourceful, so that one never lacks for a means of fulfilling any appetite when it arises and never shrinks through fear or low spirits or shame from taking it.”227 Socrates, for his

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227 Cooper (1999: 56). Here I give a bare bones treatment of the theme of weakness of will in Callicles; for a more thorough development of the matter, readers should see Cooper.
part, takes care to make clear that, for Callicles, intelligence and bravery are distinct (495c-d): virtue cannot, on this account, simply be knowledge.

By the end of the dialogue, Socrates does provide an answer to Callicles on this matter. It is not the case that he recognises, but then ignores, Callicles’ view that weakness of the will is a problem that must be confronted. 228 There are two sides to Socrates’ response. In the first place, his account does ultimately allow a positive role for the appetites in the motivation of a well-ordered soul. In addition, through shame, and a suite of related themes, we can see that Socrates’ account has built up resources that will serve to impede any tendency to indulge the appetites to an excessive degree.

We saw that Socrates’ first exposition of his schema of skills and knacks (464b-466a), seemed to suggest that pleasure and the good are mutually exclusive: cosmetics and cookery aim at pleasure, and in doing so, fail to attain the good at all, because pleasure is only an apparent, not an actual good. We also saw, however, that when Socrates returned to his final account of skills and knacks (517b-519a), there were practices that served (διακονική) bodily appetites, such as hunger, thirst, etc. If these bodily appetites were simply ignored, the body would die. This suggests that there are appetites, on Socrates’ view, that are directed towards a genuine (if only partial) good; his earlier comments on doctors point in the same direction: “don’t they allow one who is healthy to fill up the appetites, such as to eat as much as one wants when hungry, or to drink when thirsty?” (505a6-8) That is, a well-ordered body will have appetites, and the art of medicine (which grasps the good of the body) will allow the satisfaction of these appetites. We must assume, then, that a well-ordered soul will be moved by certain of its appetites, although its

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228 Cooper (1999: 57) suggests that Socrates’ position will be that “it is not even possible to experience a desire for something, e.g., an appetite, when at that moment you ... judge it inappropriate to do what such a desire would direct you to do.”
order will keep even these healthy appetites in their proper place, and prevent them from growing excessive. Nevertheless, if there should arise situations in which even a well-ordered soul finds itself tempted to overindulge certain appetites, then shame, and related forces, can play a role in pushing a soul in the right direction.

We have treated the theme of shame in the introduction, finding it to be an anti-philosophical force, one that is useless for discovering the reasons behind things. Still, Socrates repeatedly shows himself to be interested in it as he gives his own account. The immediate significance of this is obvious enough, and comes into view in the nature of the conclusion for which Socrates aims at the end of his very first argument against Callicles: “accordingly, not only by convention is it more shameful to do wrong than to be wronged... but also by nature.” (489a8-b1) In order to answer Callicles’ criticism of earlier arguments (482c-484a), Socrates must respond to the distinction Callicles made between what is by nature and by convention shameful. If he can show that in this case the two coincide – i.e., that it is more shameful both by nature and convention to do wrong than to suffer it – it will have the effect of resuscitating, in hindsight, his earlier arguments against Polus and Gorgias.

Accordingly, once Socrates has given his own account of the good, and of his ideal sort of person, he takes care to attend to shame. Now, shame is based on a certain conception of the good: people are ashamed to do what they feel is not in some sense good. It was suggested in the introduction that shame is connected to conventional values – that is, that it serves within the dialogue as a sort of barometer of a character’s attachment to conventional values. Indeed, that conventional values and shame are connected should be a straightforward enough point. For example, a few hundred years ago, people might have felt ashamed to miss a day of church, or to be a homosexual. Today, because conventions have changed, people are much less likely to feel
shame on these grounds – and their behaviour is likely to differ accordingly. The content of conventional values can have an influence on behaviour in that people will tend to feel ashamed of what is not conventionally acceptable, and this shame can help restrain them from conventionally inappropriate action. This line of thought, I shall argue, helps to make sense of many of Socrates’ remarks as he responds to Callicles.

Now, Callicles’ conception of what is by nature shameful was based on his concern with practical matters in everyday life: he suggested that it would be shameful to go further and further into philosophy, because in doing so one deprives oneself of the means of self-defence (486a-c). Once Socrates has his own conception of the good, he has a basis from which he can claim that it is both more shameful and worse to do wrong than to suffer it (508d3-e6). It is significant that he takes the time to spell out that the greatest evil is the most shameful thing, the second greatest evil, the second most shameful thing, and so on (509b1-c3), so that each thing will be shameful to the extent that it is evil: he is intent on establishing the place of shame within his view. On this basis, he will ultimately respond to Callicles that he would be ashamed to be unable to defend himself against doing injustice (522d3-6).

However, the need to answer Callicles’ criticism of earlier arguments cannot be the only significance of Socrates’ attention to shame, for Plato has given the theme another aspect. Socrates, exhorting Callicles to continue to be frank and say what he really thinks, says, “you won’t be shocked or ashamed, for [γάρ] you’re brave.” (494d3-4) That is, it is because Callicles is brave that Socrates expects that he won’t give in to shame. Callicles himself made a similar connection when he spoke of how Socrates produces a contradiction “if someone is ashamed and
does not dare [τολμέω] to say what he thinks.” (482e6-483a1) 229 Plato has set up a connection, then, between shame and the will, for one needs bravery or daring to overcome shame in certain situations. Clearly shame is a force that can impede other impulses toward action.

If this is correct, then the weakness of the will is a theme that Plato has built into the structure of the whole first major part of the dialogue (i.e., to 499c), because each of the three main characters confronted by Socrates – Gorgias, Polus and Callicles – gives way in argument because of shame. Socrates connects shame with a failure to speak frankly (486e6-487b5; d5); when he commends Callicles for his frankness, he says, “you now say what others believe, but refuse to say.” (492d2-3) The failures of these characters, on each occasion on which shame holds them back from saying what they really believe, are instances of the ability of shame to impede other impulses towards action, in this case the desire to maintain a stance previously taken. For example, Gorgias, in a crucial turn of the argument, says at 460a that he would teach right and wrong to students who come to him without knowing these things, and it is on the basis of this admission that Socrates can refute him. Now, obviously Gorgias was able to say that he would not do this, and in some sense he must judge that this is what he ought to say, for that was the substance of his earlier position on rhetoric – i.e., that it produces persuasion without knowledge rather than persuasion with knowledge, and it does this in particular concerning the just and the unjust (454e5-455a2). Why does Gorgias speak as he does? Because he was ashamed to speak otherwise, as Polus (461b), Callicles (482c-d) and Socrates (494d) tell us.

Accordingly, when Socrates’ attention turns to shame throughout his own account, he is not merely answering Callicles’ criticism of earlier arguments, but is also building a bulwark

229 Socrates is already starting to turn towards his own view of what we should be ashamed of when he suggests that Gorgias and Polus “have come to such a degree of shame that each one dares [τολμέω], on account of shame, to contradict himself in front of many people, and this concerning the greatest matters.” (487b2-5) That is, what seems particularly awful to Socrates is that one might be seen to be inconsistent with oneself.
against impulses toward improper or harmful action. If we accept and internalise the Socratic account of what is shameful and what is not, then on those occasions on which we may feel tempted to do some injustice (perhaps in order to fulfill an excessive appetite), shame will come into play and will exert influence to help restrain us from actually doing injustice. It is not only shame that is important here, but convention taken more generally, for it is the conventions to which we subscribe that determine what causes shame in us. There is a suite of themes – the ideal of the gentleman; manliness; the question of what makes a person ridiculous – through which Plato has shown that Socrates is not only trying to present an answer to Callicles on the specific matter of what is shameful, but is also trying to adjust the entire conventional order so as to give an adequate foundation to his bulwark against possible weakness of will.

Before dealing directly with these themes, let us consider two other regards in which Socrates tries to re-found the conventional order. In the course of his argument concerning self-preservation, he considers the skill of the helmsman (511d-512b). Now, it is not difficult to imagine why, from Callicles’ perspective, the helmsman – like the mechanic, who is mentioned next – is not considered very important: his work is of a menial sort, does not attain the control of others that the rhetor/tyrant will achieve, and does not make very much money. Socrates, however, gives his own account of why “it is not the convention [νόμος] that the helmsman does not affect an exalted air.” (512b3) On this view, the helmsman is conscious that self-preservation is not necessarily a good thing, so he does not consider himself to have performed some great service. It is unlikely that any helmsman ever had such a thought; what is interesting is that Socrates is trying to rearrange a conventional understanding of things (i.e., that being a helmsman is not an upper-class sort of occupation) so as to give his own view a basis in convention. As was discussed above, the tying of an account into convention carries the
advantage that people will tend to feel ashamed for that which runs contrary to convention, and this feeling of shame can influence action.

Something similar is at work as Socrates completes his final critique of sophists and rhetors. He takes a view that clearly was widely accepted – i.e., that it is shameful to take money for giving advice on how to be as good as possible, or how to govern one’s house or city – but claims that the reason for this can be found in his own account: if one actually does give such advice, the recipient will want to give some benefit in return (520e), whereas in the case of other forms of instruction, such as how to build, it is appropriate to expect some payment (520d), because the work will not necessarily make the recipient want to give back. Obviously, the reasons Socrates is giving to explain a conventional view were not generally held; rather, he is building his own account into views that were more generally held.

In addition to such general conventional considerations, there are a number of themes that fit in here. Callicles alluded, in his initial statement, to the ideal of the gentleman – literally a “fine and good” man (καλός καγαθός ... ἄνηρ – 484d1-2; the fact that ‘man’ is explicitly stated here is likely significant: see below on manliness). In what follows, Socrates will make reference to this phrase, although with very different force.230 He is, of course, entitled to do so once he has set down the basic principles of his account: if he is correct that doing wrong is more shameful than being wronged just so much as it is worse (508b8-c1), then it is the ideal Socratic individual who can claim the title of both καλός and ἀγαθός, not the Calliclean man. What is remarkable is that Socrates repeatedly returns to this phrase in what follows. When Callicles points out that a friend of the tyrant will kill the man concerned with avoiding wrongdoing,

230 There is even a teasing reference in that stage of his argument specifically focused on the aristocratic side of Callicles, when Socrates speaks of the farmer, who is “fine and good concerning land.” (περὶ γῆν ... καλὸς καὶ καγαθός – 490e6).
Socrates responds that it will be a base man killing a gentleman (καλός καγαθός - 511b4). The thought of the citizens must be “fine and good” (καλή καγαθή - 514a1; see also 515a6, e13); those whom Callicles considers “fine and good” prove not to be so (518b1, c4). In the myth, Socrates notes the extreme rarity of genuinely “fine and good” people (526a7). Finally, at the end of the dialogue, he declares that if one should be “fine and good” (527d2), one will suffer nothing terrible. What is the purpose of these verbal echoes of a phrase first used by Callicles? The ideal of the gentleman was part of what motivated the aristocratic Callicles: the recognition that a gentleman receives is one way in which Callicles would enjoy friendly relations with other people (as opposed to the philosopher, who whispers with a few boys in a corner – 485d6-e1). If Socrates can lay claim to the phrase καλός καγαθός, and all that it entails, he will bring to his side a non-rational force that can move people to act in a desired manner: people who do not act appropriately will lose the acclaim due to a gentleman.

The same idea is at work in the theme of manliness. Callicles introduces this theme when he declares that being wronged is not a characteristic experience of a man (ἀνήρ), but of some slave (ἀνδροπός – literally, “man-feet”), who would be better off dead (483a8-b2; note also ἀνήρ at 484a3). Now, obviously, the ideal of the man (ἀνήρ) is connected to that of bravery (ἀνδρεία), but Socrates throws all of this back at Callicles when he deals with self-preservation: a real man (ἄνερ ἀληθῶς ἄνηρ – 512e1), he says, doesn’t fear for his life; only those who are altogether irrational and unmanly (ἀνάνδρος - 522e2) fear death. This pits a most fundamental benefit of rhetoric against something that clearly plays a significant role in motivating Callicles: the ideal of the real man.

232 Socrates will later suggest that it is Callicles’ view that speaking among the people, practising rhetoric and conducting politics as he does is characteristic of a man (ἀνήρ – 500c4-7), a hint that this theme will be taken beyond the limits of Callicles’ own peculiar manner of self-expression.
The question of who is ridiculous plays a part in Socrates’ turning-around of convention. According to Callicles, a man who pursues philosophy late in life becomes ridiculous (καταγέλαστος – 485a7, c1-2). This is surely because of his inability to tend to his practical interests (484d2-e1) – here we see Callicles’ conception of the good at work – which also makes him ridiculous (καταγέλαστος - 484e1-3). Socrates takes up this charge, saying – on the basis of his own conception of the good – that those who try to argue a position other than his own end up ridiculous (καταγέλαστος – 509a7), and that those who lack the power to avoid the greatest harm, doing injustice, become ridiculous (καταγέλαστος – 509b4). In similar fashion, Callicles had characterised a boy’s lack of a lisp as befitting a slave (δουλοπρεπής – 485b7), and a boy who fails to philosophise unfree (ἀνέλευθερος – 485c6); we may assume he meant to imply the same thing of the mature philosopher. When describing those practices that provide for the appetites, but only serve higher, and more genuine, skills, Socrates throws both these words back at Callicles (δουλοπρεπής, ἀνέλευθερος - 518a2), adding, for good measure, that it is fitting that the higher skills rule – another Calliclean idea – and use the work of the lower. That is, Socrates is careful to denigrate the idea of ministering to the appetites here.

The point of all these themes is not simply to drive home the fact that there is a wide gulf between Socrates and Callicles – although they do certainly accomplish this. Beyond this, by shifting conventional concerns so that they become a part of his own account of how one ought to live, Socrates provides a basis for right action that does not simply consist of knowledge. Though it may be true that it is better to suffer wrong than to do it, still people who accept this may find themselves in a situation where they are in danger of acting inappropriately, because of the temptations of pleasure or related drives, such as the desire for power or good looks. In such circumstances, people may yet be kept on the right path if they find themselves ashamed of
acting wrongly – or if they recall that such behaviour does not befit a fine and good person, or is ridiculous, or that ministering to the appetites is fit for a slave, or unfree, or that fear of death is unmanly. Any such thoughts could provide additional, and much-needed strength to a debilitated soul. Accordingly, to Callicles’ implicit challenge concerning weakness of will, we find in Socrates’ account an implicit answer.

6.3 WHY SOCRATES FAILS TO CONVINCE CALLICLES

If Socrates had responded to Callicles with a position that was simply superior in respect of every aspiration dear to Callicles, he could reasonably hope to move Callicles to the Socratic standpoint. Why, then, does Plato make Socrates’ failure to convince so conspicuous?233 There is one important regard in which Socrates completely fails to meet Callicles on his own terms, and this provides the best available explanation of Callicles’ reluctance to become a protégé of Socrates.

This failure turns on the concerns of everyday life. It is in the argument with Polus that Socrates began to set out his own doctrine, and we saw that Plato’s manner of presentation did much to emphasise the gulf between them. Now, it is reasonable to expect that if we want to move someone, we will need directly to address matters of fundamental importance to that person – indeed, the ad hominem arguments at work in much of the dialogue provide an implicit reminder of the fact that different considerations move different people. Polus is concerned to

233 That Socrates conspicuously fails in the Gorgias to convince is a familiar point (e.g., Cooper (1999: 52)), although some have sought to explain this failure in terms of some non-rational aspect of Callicles that cannot be reached by argument. For example, Klosko (1983: 594): “reason is unable to overcome those who refuse to listen to reason.” Similarly, Moss (2007: 247): “the dialogue emphasises appetites for pleasure as the chief obstacle to Socratic persuasion.”
avoid such things as being burned in pitch (see 473c), and even though his own statements compel him to agree with the conclusion of Socrates’ argument that it is ‘better’ to suffer injustice than to do it, still he is unlikely to be moved to act according to what is ‘better’ in this way if the matter of being burnt in pitch has not been addressed (and no doubt many readers feel the same way). We saw that Plato drew attention to Socrates’ failure, by the end of the Polus section, to give any content to crucial terms such as ‘good,’ or ‘justice,’ and although Socrates will, much later, address this (i.e., from 503d), what we have seen within the argument against Polus suggests that his conception of these terms is entirely indifferent to Polus’ concern with being burnt in pitch, and with everyday life more generally. 234 No wonder, then, that the encounter does not end with Polus declaring himself ready to live according to Socrates’ precepts.

The confrontation between Socrates and Callicles is more complicated. It should be clear enough from what has been said above that Callicles and Socrates are not simply opposed to one another: they are agreed on the need for both integrity and friendship in a good life, and they also seem to hold in common the view that a foundation in reality is an important advantage for moral imperatives.235 Nevertheless, the text does emphasise an opposition between the two men in another regard. 236 Right from the start, Callicles is clear that he thinks that experience in the laws

234 This is not, of course, to say that Polus recognises that Socrates has failed to define ‘good,’ etc. The final arguments used against him can only work because he does not recognise this. To Polus it will seem that Socrates has twisted words around, making the weaker argument the stronger – which is not entirely false. If Socrates could explain the content of his ‘good,’ and show how this can be used to address directly the matter of being burnt in pitch, he might produce the sort of account that might hope to move Polus.

235 See also Woolf (2000: 16, fn. 21) on the need to avoid an overly simple characterisation of the opposition between Callicles and Socrates.

236 The tone of the argument with Callicles reflects this more complicated reality. On the one hand, unlike in the Polus encounter, there are mutual expressions of regard: Callicles makes clear his friendly intentions towards Socrates (485e2-486d1), while Socrates, who addresses Callicles as ‘friend’ (φίλος – 482a5), explains his delight at the chance to argue with Callicles (486d-487e), and, as we saw above, finishes the dialogue by inviting Callicles to practice philosophy with him (527d). On the other hand, the encounter does become uncomfortable: Callicles “accuses Socrates of pouncing on a small verbal slip (489b7-c1), of being ironic (489c1), of deliberately
of the city, in speeches to be used in assemblies, and human pleasures and desires (484d2-7) is of fundamental importance. Clearly, we have here a continuation of Polus’ concern with everyday life, and as his position is clarified, pleasure comes into view as a fundamental ground of this point of view. Callicles, of course, sharpens this theme into a practical reality of direct concern to Socrates: thanks to his devotion to philosophy, if someone were to drag him into court, saying that he’d done wrong when he hadn’t, he would be utterly unable to defend himself (486a6-b4). Thus by the end of Callicles’ initial statement, we have a challenge: can Socrates respond to this concern with everyday life, and in particular, can he respond to the practical point that provides the culminating moment of Callicles’ initial statement?

The answer is clear: Socrates cannot. On the contrary, he frankly grants the truth of Callicles’ charge. Already in the argument with Polus, Socrates had declared his incompetence in regard to contemporary political institutions (473e6-474a1), and he makes a similar statement in regard to the court at the end of the dialogue (522b3-522c3).237 His answer to Callicles is not that he, as a philosopher, can do what Callicles believes he cannot. Rather, Socrates thinks we shouldn’t be concerned with that. Now, readers might argue about the merits of Socrates’ case, but on one point there can be no argument: for Callicles, this is no answer at all. It denies what is most important to him – and note that right to the end, Callicles remains insistent on the importance of being able to defend oneself in court (521b2-3, c3-6). Clearly, Socrates and Callicles have some common ground – and perhaps this is to be connected with Socrates’ expression of delight at having the chance to argue with Callicles (486d-487e) – but it is their

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237 Dodds (1990: 31): “We are repeatedly reminded that Socrates has wagered his life on his decision (486ab, 511ab, 521c); and he foresees that he will lose his wager, as the world understanding losing (521e ff.).”
difference that explains Socrates failure to convince Callicles in the end. If Socrates’ position is simply otherworldly, if it amounts to an uncompromising rejection of the claims of the concerns of everyday life, Callicles will remain unmoved.

The fact that Plato has opposed to Socrates someone who is so convinced of the importance of the concerns of everyday life that he is unmoved by the argument will prove an important point for locating Plato within the dialogue. It was suggested in the introduction that Socrates does not simply speak for Plato in the Gorgias, but the moment that we make such a division, questions concerning the manner of Plato’s presentation – of Socrates, and of everything else – become quite important in locating Plato himself. That an inclusion of the challenge of the concerns of everyday life is important to Plato will come up in the resolution of the “Janus-faced” view that the Gorgias might seem to present (see below, in Plato and the Socratic Case).

6.4 RHETORIC IN THE GORGIAS

The argument of the Gorgias begins with rhetoric as its subject, and though the focus moves on to related matters, this original matter never disappears from view, still receiving a mention on the dialogue's last page (527c). What, then, does the Gorgias have to say about rhetoric?

238 The reason that Plato has chosen rhetoric as a jumping-off point for a discussion of how one should live has been treated elsewhere (e.g., Dodds (1990: 4), Doyle (2006: 93)): rhetoric in Plato’s time provided a means of swaying political and judicial decisions, and was thus a source of immense power. In our own time, money would be the closest equivalent to rhetoric as Plato conceives it: one could hope to steer the political process by buying newspapers, websites, and cable news channels, and by pouring money into advertising; in court, one could afford the best lawyers, among other things. To suggest that rhetoric could confer a tyrannical – even godlike – power on
We saw that the argument with Gorgias himself laid down a picture of the basic nature of rhetoric, a picture that went unchallenged in all that followed. That is, Socrates and Gorgias agree that rhetoric works through speech alone (449e-450c); that the form of persuasion that it produces does not involve knowledge (454c7-455a7); that it can be more persuasive on any subject than actual knowledge concerning that subject (455d-456c); that it accomplishes this among large numbers of people (454b5-7, 501d-503a inter alia); that it has a particular concern with right and wrong (454b); and that it has some connection with the idea of ruling others (452d-e). Finally, we saw that there are suggestions that rhetoric could persuade people not only in the sense of causing people to change their beliefs, but also in the sense of moving their will against contrary impulses: Gorgias, using rhetoric, has been able to persuade people to undergo unpleasant medical treatments when a doctor could not (456b), while Socrates suggests that rhetoric could be useful in getting ourselves or others to submit bravely to the pain of justice (480c). As the dialogue progresses, it never brings these matters into dispute, but seems instead to assume them as it moves on to controversies concerning the status of rhetoric as an art or form of flattery, and as a good or bad thing.

Against Polus, Socrates gives an altogether uncomplimentary picture of rhetoric, declaring in particular that it is not really an art, but a knack (462b-c). Now, the knack/art distinction is underwritten first by the distinction between pleasure and the good (464c5-d3, 464e2-465a2), and second by the notion that arts know the nature and cause of their proper subject matter (465a2-5). Socrates’ schema of arts and knacks accordingly stands on somewhat stronger ground after 499c, since from that point, it is agreed that pleasure and the good are not the same.

its bearer is quite accurate. See, for example, Thucydides’ portrayal of the Sicilian debate, in which the sound advice of Nicias proves futile in the face of the rhetorical ability of Alcibiades (see Macleod (1975)).
In spite of this improved foundation for his schema, it is right after this that we see Socrates shift his ground. First, rhetoric seems to become divided along a line beyond that of pleasure and the good: we are told that the poets practice rhetoric in theaters (502d2-3), and this is followed by a definitely political form of rhetoric, one addressed to the free men of Athens or a similar city (503d10-e2). We may assume that this political rhetoric that will be his concern from this point in all that he says concerning rhetoric, but we must pause to note the implications of this passage: political rhetoric is not the only kind of rhetoric. At the very least, there is another sort of rhetoric aimed at theater crowds, and it would make sense if there were numerous other realms in which one could practice rhetoric, given that the claim that rhetoric can be more persuasive on any subject than actual knowledge concerning that subject (455d-456c) has never been rejected by the argument. Furthermore, has not been made clear whether rhetoric can only be practised in front of a crowd. From 501d, as the argument returns to rhetoric, we are dealing only with an audience of numerous individuals, and yet it is never actually said that rhetoric only deals with crowds. Accordingly, though Socrates will be concerned only with political rhetoric, addressed to crowds, in what follows, the possibility is left open that there may be many other fields in which one can practice rhetoric, and even the activity of Gorgias, when he persuades his brother’s (individual) patients (456b), might still be thought to be a kind of rhetoric.

Nevertheless, when Socrates suggests that rhetoric may be double, with one kind aiming at pleasure, and the other at the good (503a5-b1), the focus is on political rhetoric, addressed to crowds of free men in cities. It may well be that all other sorts of rhetoric – the kind in theaters, the kind aimed at medical patients who don’t want to undergo painful procedures, etc. – can also be divided in terms of pleasure and the good, but the rest of the dialogue will not be concerned
with that. Instead, there will be a focus on the good kind of political rhetoric, which aims to make citizens as good as possible, with no regard for what they find pleasant (502e2-5, 503a7-9).

Now, the reason that Socrates suggests that rhetoric could be double, with one sort aiming at pleasure, the other at the good, is Callicles’ insistence that there do exist people who aim at the good with their rhetoric, an insistence that soon becomes focused on the question of the Four Men: were they exemplars of rhetors who aimed at the good? The argument from 503a-517a arises as a response to this question, but ends in a peculiar fashion: in concluding that the Four Men practised neither ‘true’ nor ‘flattering’ rhetoric (517a5-6), Socrates speaks as if both of these are now established realities – and this despite having rejected the reason for adapting this talk of two kinds of rhetoric in the first place (i.e., that there actually are or were good rhetors).

The distinction does seem to be maintained in what follows: later, he will speak of “flattering rhetoric” (522d7), as though he needs to be clear that he is not speaking of the other kind. The way Plato shows the argument coming to this point is worth emphasising, however: the original reason for considering the possibility of two kinds of rhetoric was the claim that one could point to actual people who have practised the ‘true’ kind; after this claim has been rejected, Socrates nevertheless adopts the double view of rhetoric as a reality. The effect is to emphasise the abstract nature of ‘true’ rhetoric: it is an idea rather than an observable fact in everyday life. As Socrates says, “you have not ever seen this rhetoric” (503b1); when he speaks of being the only one who ‘truly’ practises the political craft (521d7) – and we may assume that this will involve ‘true’ rhetoric (see below) – he qualifies this with ἑπιχείρειν (“to try”), again emphasising that the real thing is not a reality of everyday life (the application to Socrates of the criticism of the Four Men at 513d-517a suggests the same thing).
True (political) rhetoric, though it has clearly become part of Socrates’ account of things, is never given its own full and explicit treatment. Nevertheless, on the basis of what the dialogue does say, we can produce a sketch of it. Obviously true rhetoric will differ from flattering rhetoric in that it aims at the good, rather than the pleasant. On the basis of Socrates’ account of the nature of the good (503d-505b), this means that true rhetoric must know the nature of whatever it is focused on, because the good for each thing is essentially connected to its nature. Furthermore, Socrates arrived at a number of conclusions concerning rhetoric in his argument with Gorgias. Some of these will conflict with the requirements of true rhetoric, but those that do not must be applied to it. Accordingly, as a kind of rhetoric, true rhetoric will work through speech alone (449e-450c). In the Gorgias section of the dialogue, there were many suggestions the rhetoric was typically practised among a large mass of people (452e, 454b, et al.); clearly that must be the case with the true rhetoric that Socrates is intent on, given the way that it is introduced (501d-502e). Finally, against Gorgias there was a suggestion that rhetoric might be particularly concerned with justice and injustice in particular (454b); the true rhetoric that will be Socrates’ interest for the rest of the dialogue will have justice and injustice as its central – and perhaps only – subject matter, since it will be concerned with making the citizens as good as possible. The statesman practicing true rhetoric, then, will be concerned with persuading and moving his people to act and become just, and this will be the means by which he makes them as good as possible. It should be clear that this account harmonises with another aspect of the earlier account of rhetoric, i.e., that it involves a sort of rule over others (452d-e), although it should be clear that what was a double-sided statement in Gorgias’ mouth there – “at once the cause of freedom for humankind itself and, for the individual, of ruling others in his own city” – will here be an unambiguous description of the wholly beneficent activity of the statesman.
From this perspective, we can look back to the earlier arguments of the dialogue and appreciate that true rhetoric was hinted at already during the refutation of Gorgias. There, Socrates suggested that rhetoric would never be an unjust thing (460e5-8); this will be the case with true rhetoric. At the end of the argument with Polus, Socrates suggested that rhetoric could be useful in producing appropriate punishments for oneself and one’s friends and relatives – or to keep one’s enemies from such punishment! (480b-481b; see also 508b) Such claims need to be untangled from their immediate context (see below, on punishment), but the basic idea at work continues the idea from 460e, that rhetoric will aim only at the good. In his own account, Socrates asserts that we should use rhetoric to denounce our own injustice, and use it always for justice (508b, 527c); this would be true rhetoric at work. And obviously, the rhetoric of Gorgias, which Polus defends, the rhetoric used in the assembly, and that keeps us safe in law courts (500c, 511c, 521a-c) – this is flattering rhetoric.239

It is worth noting that the dialogue is not at all clear on what might seem an obvious characteristic of rhetoric. Some have seen a straightforward correspondence between lengthy speeches and rhetoric, on the one hand, and philosophy and brief speech, on the other.240 Rhetoric is twice distinguished from διαλέγεσθαι (448d, 471d) – that is, from dialogue, or conversation – but in each case, the distinction seems to turn more on the content of what is said than on its length (448e2-449a2, 471d3-472c6). When Socrates does explain what (flattering) rhetoric is, he does not describe it in terms of speech length, but, as we saw above, in terms of its aiming at pleasure and its ignorance of causes and natures (464c-465a). Along the same lines, Socrates excuses his own use of lengthy speech on the ground that it was necessary for him to

239 Note the irony at work 466e13-467a1: “won’t you refute me and prove that rhetors have sense and that rhetoric is a skill, not flattery?” Of course, Polus won’t do this, but Socrates in a sense will, by bringing to light true rhetoric.
speak at length in order to make himself understood (465e1-6): that is, the purpose of long speech in this case is instruction, not persuasion without knowledge, and it was the latter that was supposed to characterise rhetoric (454c7-455a7). Surely this confirms that long speeches need not be rhetoric. We can get a complimentary result from the opposite angle: Gorgias declares that he is able to express himself more briefly than anyone (449c1-3). That is, the skill of the master rhetor with words encompasses short answers, something emphasised when Socrates says that Gorgias is to give a display (ἐπιδείξει, 449c4) of short speech: he was giving a display (note ἐπιδείκνυμι, 447a6, b2, b8; ἐπιδείξει, 447c3, c6) before the dialogue began. Accordingly, short speech would appear to be rhetoric every bit as much as long speeches. Accordingly, when Socrates gives his own long speeches later in the dialogue, he is not necessarily leaving philosophy for rhetoric.

Now, it is true that at 461d, we are told that Polus was beginning a lengthy speech (μακρολογία) back at 448cd, and in that place, what Polus was doing was described as rhetoric, but this need not require that the two are simply the same thing. Socrates does express a preference for a short question-and-answer dialogue over extended speeches (e.g., 449b4-8, 461d1-462a5), but we are never told that the former manner of proceeding is an essential characteristic of philosophy or that the latter is an essential characteristic of rhetoric. The theme of long or short speech, then, is distinct from the theme of rhetoric.

6.5 PLATO AND THE SOCRATIC CASE

Even if Plato does not speak to the reader directly through Socrates, it is still possible to show what Plato means to communicate to the reader in the Gorgias. Let us begin with the difficulty of
the *ad hominem* arguments that are used to refute Gorgias, Polus and Callicles. In one sense, it is clear that Plato, by pointing us to the weakness in these arguments, means us to understand that there is a problem here. Ultimately, this problem is that Socrates’ refutation of Callicles does not confront hedonism as thoroughly as it might. Socrates is able to play Callicles’ use of pleasure as the good against his continued attachment to conventional values. Certainly he does refute Callicles in that he shows him to hold two incompatible commitments, but this proves nothing to the reader concerning hedonism. Why would Plato allow the argument to pass by such an important point? What has he gained by writing the dialogue as he has?

We can find an answer through the theme of friendship, which one scholar has suggested “can be seen as a manifestation of the basic human need to be a social animal.” If there is such a basic human need, it would provide a response, of a sort, to Callicles’ dismissive talk of laws and conventional values in general as “papers, trickery and spells.” (484a4-5) Now, conventions and laws are the means by which the need of people for one another is expressed and regulated. In this sense, such agreements could claim a basis in reality: they represent a necessary component of human life. It is only through conventions that Callicles can receive the recognition he desires as a gentleman of good reputation (καλός κἀγαθός καὶ εὐθείμος – 484d1-2), as a free man (ἐλευθερος – 485c5), as fine or noble (καλός, γενναῖος – 485c7) or as a real man. Only through conventions can one be “very distinguished.” (ἀριστεύεις – 485d6)

The idea, then, would be that a complete indifference to the views of other people, and thus to convention, is not a problem that we should normally expect to encounter. The pure independence represented by Callicles’ smasher of laws is an illusion. Indeed, the smasher is the character central to the realist side of Callicles’ position, but insofar as he disregards a need

fundamental to human nature, he fails fully to face reality. Accordingly, although a philosopher will want a more substantial answer to hedonism than Socrates gives to Callicles, still it should always be possible to produce an ad hominem refutation of the sort that Socrates uses, because all people seek recognition from others, a need that can always be played off against a focus on pleasure.  

Now, so far this may seem a highly speculative account: does the fact that Plato represents Callicles as desiring friendship really give us license to declare that Plato believes the desire to associate with other people to be a universal human need? On its own it does not, but the theme of friendship does not occur in a vacuum. The Gorgias, as we have seen, presents Socrates with not just a personal, but also a political challenge. Clearly Plato is not aiming for a solution to the question of how one should live that consists of a philosopher-hermit turning away from the world and living alone with the alone. That is, the notion that the good life involves amicable relations with other people is not just built into the theme of friendship as we see it in Callicles and Socrates, but into the dialogue itself, in the form of the political challenge. Friendship “helps to explain why Socrates is concerned with social and political activity in the Gorgias at all” – indeed, the need for other people, which lies behind the theme of friendship, is sufficient to explain this. We can see, then, why in the Gorgias in particular Plato would think it fit to pass by the question of hedonism with a merely ad hominem argument: in the very nature of this argument is a consideration appropriate to a central consideration of this dialogue, politics.

242 We can find some confirmation of this idea in the first book of the Republic, where Thrasymachus, who is more fully liberated from convention than Callicles, nevertheless desires recognition from others, and is thus subject to the argument.

The *ad hominem* arguments were not the only pointer to a flaw in Socrates’ case, however. We saw that there were two occasions in which Socrates seemed to blur the distinction between the words *μῦθος* and *λόγος* (‘story’ and ‘account’/’argument’). At 505c10-d3, he suggests that one should not break off *stories* in the middle; Callicles should answer so that the *argument* might receive its head. That is, he passes without comment from *μῦθος* to *λόγος*, as though they were the same thing. Right after this we find a highly dubious piece of argumentation, in which Socrates effectively asserts that an orderly internal state will necessarily produce actions that are ‘just’ according to conventional standards. The *μῦθος*-*λόγος* slide is Plato’s way, I suggested, of indicating to the reader that he is aware that there is a problem here: Socrates’ ‘argument’ at this point might as well be called a ‘story.’

We find similar hints before, during and after the myth: Socrates begins by admitting that what he considers a *λόγος*, Callicles may think this a mere *μῦθος* (523a1-3). Midway through (524a8-b1), Socrates makes clear that the basis of his *λόγος* is simply that “these are things that I have heard;” he finishes with an admission of the merely mythical status of what he has said (527a5-6). Now, to say that Plato is aware that a myth is not an argument may not seem like much, but we saw that the self-preservation argument ultimately rested on this: if we are to accept Socrates’ claim that death is better than an unjust life, then we must know something about what happens after death, and it is in the myth that this is addressed. There is an argumentative requirement of the myth, and the *λόγος*-*μῦθος* talk constitutes a pointed reminder from Plato that Socrates’ claims on this matter do not rest on ground justified by fully adequate argumentation.

244 The “Sachs problem:” see Sachs (1963).
On this reading, then, Plato is pointing us to two crucial difficulties within Socrates’ case, one at the beginning, one at the end, so to speak: the first problem is the keystone on which the rest of Socrates’ case must depend; the second concerns where it will lead. Either one of these problems must be fatal for Socrates’ account, and the self-defence in which it culminates (at 521a-522e). Socrates’ case, then, is not Plato’s, at least not without qualification.

This divide between Plato and the Socrates of the Gorgias provides the basis to resolve a difficulty in finding Plato’s message in the Gorgias. One scholar has made the perceptive remark that the Gorgias seems “Janus-faced. It remains ambiguous whether we are to think of its treatment of rhetoric, trial and punishment as Socrates’ reform of political norms and practices, or his rejection of them.”245 Now, on the one hand, we have seen that Plato has constructed the Gorgias so as to run the most hard-headed practical concerns against the uncompromising stance of Socrates. On the other hand, we saw above that Socrates provides no answer at all on Callicles’ terms, and we have also seen that Socrates’ criticism of the political careers of the Four Men fits like a glove onto Socrates’ own life. The situation can only be ambiguous if we assume that Plato is speaking directly to the reader through Socrates. If we can distinguish between Plato and the Socrates of this dialogue, then the ambiguity disappears: Plato is interested in reforming the world, but he has represented Socrates here as inadequate in that he merely turns away from the world.

Still, Plato, though critical of Socrates in the Gorgias, is not simply hostile to him. Socrates is, after all, shown to hold his own against three increasingly formidable opponents, and providing an account of his own with substantial merits. The problem with Socrates here is ultimately a matter of his relation to practical, everyday life – and here we return to his

conspicuous failure to convince Callicles. An adequate program of political reform would be able to hold on to the principle that is beginning to come to light in the Socratic account, but show how it could be made actual in practical, political life. The Gorgias has brought out the problem; Plato will make a more substantial attempt at a solution in the Republic.

6.6 THE FIRST TWO PAGES

The opening scenes of Plato’s dialogues are quite often ignored, but readers who do this pass up valuable hints on how the dialogue should be interpreted. Proclus, a philosopher of the fifth century AD, knew of an approach to these scenes that we shall follow here, one that “requires... that the prologue be brought into relation to the substantive philosophical content of the work. When the philosophical content is properly understood, it will be seen to be imaged or reflected... in the details of the opening scene.”\textsuperscript{246} Accordingly, while the opening scene may mean little at first, it can be used as a check on, or confirmation of, an interpretation of the dialogue.

The first two pages of the Gorgias accomplish at least three things. First, “this prelude introduces the reader to all the personages of the coming dialogue.”\textsuperscript{247} Second, a number of subsequent themes are suggested here. Finally, the opening discussion with Polus leads into the subject of the discussion in a manner that creates a sense of the difficulties to come before the word ‘rhetoric’ is even uttered.

\textsuperscript{246} Burnyeat (1997: 3).
\textsuperscript{247} Dodds (1990: 188).
The first words of the dialogue tell us something about both Callicles and Socrates. “There was,” we are told, “evidently a saying about the wisdom of being, in the English phrase, ‘first at a feast, last at a fray.’” Callicles looks on the possibility of an encounter between Socrates and Gorgias as a conflict – and of course this coheres with his position as we later see it, and, indeed, with the tone of much of the argument that is to come – while Socrates looks on it as a feast, consonant with what we shall later see of his attitude towards a debate, pleased if he should be refuted, but also delighted at the chance to test his beliefs (458a-b), but also delighted at the chance to test his beliefs (486d-487e). Gorgias is confident in his abilities – “no one has asked me anything new for many years” (448a) – while Polus (448a-c) shows himself as ill-mannered, impetuous and incompetent as he will be later.

There are hints here of major themes that are to follow, and Chaerephon is the vehicle by which these hints can be made. When Chaerephon says he will ‘cure’ (ἰόσομαι – 447b1) the situation he has created by keeping Socrates in the agora, we have our first hint of medical activity, one that will reappear in both the competitions suggested concerning doctors and rhetors or pastry-chefs, and Socrates’ analogy of medicine to the care of the soul. The question concerning the power of Gorgias’ skill (τέχνη – 447c1-2) will lead to the question of whether rhetoric is a skill at all, and the mention of τέχνη points to the question of what constitutes a skill, and thus to Socrates’ schema of skills and knacks, which we encounter repeatedly

248 Dodds (1990: 189).
249 See Burnyeat (1997: 12). For further suggestions concerning the first eight lines, see Doyle (2006), who suggests, in particular, that by having the dialogue start after a rhetorical display, Plato communicates his low opinion of rhetoric.
250 Haden (1992) takes the fighting and the feasting suggested in the opening lines to point to two types of power, the former good, that latter bad. However, the feast/fighting imagery should probably not be taken too far, because neither activity is unambiguous in the Gorgias. Eating, particularly feasting, points to the pastry-chef, but a well-ordered soul, as Socrates’ no doubt is, can fulfill these appetites as much as he wants (see 504a-b). The conflict suggested by Callicles’ first words is certainly bad if it is an internal conflict (482b4-c3), but can be good: Socrates will fight (διαμαχόσθαι – 521a3) with the Athenians so that they will be as good as possible.
throughout the dialogue (464b-466a, 500b-501c, 513d-e, 517b-519a). When Socrates asks Chaerephon who Gorgias is (447d1), it is important that “the form of the question embraces both Gorgias’ moral character and his profession,” because this is the beginning not only of an inquiry into the nature of rhetoric, but also into a moral question, one that touches on Gorgias’ character insofar as we will see ever more clearly what lies implicit in his work. The fact that the very first word of the whole dialogue is ‘war’ is significant in a historical connection; this we will come to at the very end of the conclusion.

The initial argument involving Polus (448a-e), a sort of opening act before the main show, has the effect that before the word ‘rhetoric’ is even uttered it is already coming to light as a problematic activity. Medicine is a straightforward matter; Polus can classify Aristophon as a painter – but when it comes to rhetoric, we get a speech about experience instead. Rhetoric is hard to classify, and this no doubt is a hint of its inclusiveness, its implicit claim to be a sort of master art: “having seized all the powers, so to speak, it holds them under its influence.” (456a7-8) Perhaps there is also a hint here, in this initial difficulty in getting a hold of rhetoric, of its non-rational nature: rhetoric occupies a place that is difficult to see, just like the non-rational persuasion it can produce. In all these ways, then, the first two pages provide an image of the dialogue to come.

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POWER AND PUNISHMENT

We saw in the treatment of Socrates’ account (specifically in relation to 511b-513c) that there are two kinds of power. One, characteristic of tyrants, is the power to avoid being wronged. Above all, this will confer the ability to preserve one’s life within the city, but it must also bring lesser benefits, such as the ability to keep one’s property or avoid being exiled. Those for whom the concerns of everyday life are the most fundamental consideration around which life is to be lived will, of course, want this power. Consequently, it is the power that allows people to do what seems best (διόκειται) to them, even though this might not always be what really is good for them. The second sort of power is that to avoid doing wrong, and this, on Socrates’ account, is what we really want (βουλέσθαι).

Punishment has been treated elsewhere, and here I will add only that there seem to be two types of punishment. On the one hand, there are repeated references to punishments of the sort actually handed down in contemporary Athens: the loss of property, banishment, or death (see 457b-c, 466b-c, 486b-c, 511a, 521b-d). On the other hand, there are suggestions of another kind of ‘punishment,’ one that makes the soul better by restraining its appetites or correcting its false views. The word often used for ‘punish’ – κολαζω – might also be taken as ‘check’ or ‘temper,’ thus allowing a useful ambiguity (the word for intemperance, ἀκολασία, is important in this context). At 505c, as Callicles tries to get out of the argument, Socrates declares, “this man won’t abide being helped, and is himself undergoing what the argument is about, being punished [κολαζόμενος].” (505c3-4) This statement coheres meaningfully with his earlier words explaining why he would be pleased to be refuted, for to be rid of a false belief concerning the

254 Moss (2007: 231-232, fn. 7) explains her preference for the translating κολαζω with ‘discipline.’
current subject matter is to be rid of the “greatest evil.” (458a2-b1) In the argument with Polus, we hear more about the “greatest evil,” which is described as injustice (479c8-d1, 480d5-6) or baseness (478d5). To punish rightly is to practise some kind of justice (478a6-7) and to pay justice (δίκην διδόναι) is to be rid of the greatest evil (479d1-2); we are also told that justice frees us from intemperance (ἀκολασία) and injustice (478a8-b1). In the context of the argument with Polus, this may seem bizarre, but with the benefit of the account that Socrates later gives, we can make sense of it: the greatest evil is a disorder of soul, which will involve intemperance (ἀκολασία); the temperate and orderly soul, by contrast, is good (506e5-507a2). This novel form of ‘punishment,’ or ‘discipline,’ will aim at improving the internal ordering of a soul, either by removing false beliefs or by leading it towards temperance.

Recall that the final argument of Polus (476a-479e) served to raise questions about the nature of punishment and justice. Socrates’ claims seem absurd if they are applied to conventional punishments – ἄτοπα, cries Polus at the end (480e1) – but if we think of them in terms of the new conception of ‘good’ that he introduced beginning at 503d, his claims start to make more sense. That is, if a person’s ‘good’ is to be found in the order of his soul, and this involves temperance, then the worst evil will be a disorder of the soul, which intemperance will bring about. To ‘punish’ (κολάζω) someone would be to check the intemperate course of his appetites, to improve the order of his soul, and thus to do him the greatest good possible. Of course, how exactly one would go about doing this is never said. It is suggested that this will be a painful path, but whether the pain is simply that of refusing to attend to intemperate appetites, of being dialectically refuted, or something more grim, is never explained. Still, thus understood, it
is correct to say that “Socratic interrogation... is a technique which succeeds in doing what the Athenian judicial system fails to do, namely to identify bad souls and to set about their cure.”

Now, at the end of the argument with Polus (480a-481a), Socrates makes a series of statements in which he might appear to suggest that such punishments as beating, imprisonment, fining, exile or death are to be understood as ways of introducing temperance into the soul. Furthermore, later on, he declares that, on the basis of his account, “all those earlier things follow” (508b3-4), referring in particular to his comments at the end of the argument with Polus – i.e., that one should use rhetoric to accuse oneself, one’s son and one’s friend, if wrong has been done. That is, it might seem that Socrates consistently insists that conventional Athenian judicial punishments are of a piece with his own, unconventional, understanding of punishment. But we must attend to the continually conditional nature of his statements at the end of the Polus section: if he has done wrong worthy of a beating, he should present himself to be beaten; if worthy of prison, he should present himself for prison; if worthy of a fine, for paying a fine; if worthy of death, for death (480c8-d3). That is, Socrates does not commit himself to the idea that beating, prison, fines or death are proper means of punishing – i.e., of tempering and improving the soul – but only that if they are, we should actively give ourselves over to them. If Socrates were in charge of the judicial system, punishments might not play out precisely as they do, since the aim would be the improvement of the criminal. Accordingly, it does seem that there are

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256 Sedley (2009: 62-63) attempts to understand these punishments in this way. But Moss (2007: 232) rightly objects: “the idea that the genuine craft of justice is practiced in law courts clashes with the characterization of the courts elsewhere in the dialogue: in the courts an innocent man may be unjustly accused and unable to defend himself, while a person who knows how to speak well will escape punishment for his crime (472a-12, 486a7-b4), 521b1-522e2). The courts are the domain not of genuine justice, but of the worthless knack that imitates it, rhetoric.”
257 It does seem, however, that he would require those who steal to pay the money back (481a2-5); one expects that an Athenian court would be rather more severe. The summing-up of the Polus section, at 480a-481a, is deliberately paradoxical – indeed, Dodds (1990: 257) comments that “Plato is interested only in giving his paradox the sharpest possible point.” This is an appropriate conclusion to an argument that achieves its aim, as we saw, by means of a
two kinds of punishment in the *Gorgias*, one the conventional sort actually handed down by Athenian courts of the day, the other a Socratic innovation, which aims at the improvement and benefit of the criminal.

6.8 THE UNITY OF THE *GORGIAS*

In the introduction, we noted that many ideas that are only implicitly present in the early pages of the *Gorgias* later receive explicit treatment. Similarly, ideas that might seem basically irrelevant early in the dialogue return later with far greater significance. So, for example, we saw in the introduction that Gorgias talks about ruling others (452d7-8); this is our first hint that the idea of ruling will be an important theme of the dialogue. Gorgias, of course, talks about making other people slaves (452e4-8), and we saw that this conception of rule leads to the tyrant Archelaus with Polus (470d-471d), and the tyrannical conception of rule that we find in Callicles (491e-492c). Socrates, of course, does not take up the idea of tyranny as his own, but the more general notion of ruling is taken farther, to the extent that the dialogue turns to politics and becomes a consideration of statesmanship, with Socrates describing himself as a sort of statesman at the end (521d), but also in the way in which the idea of ruling becomes the governing idea in Socrates’ final treatment of his schema of skills (517a7-519b2). Indeed, as regards this political theme, we saw that Themistocles and Pericles are mentioned early on (455e), and at first glance this might seem a casual and irrelevant aside. It is only in hindsight (i.e., from 503c, 515d-517a) that we can manipulation of the gulf between convention and nature. This deliberate paradox explains why Socrates allows the implication that his own kind of ‘punishment’ might be just the same as the conventional Athenian judicial kind.
appreciate that these two figures point to a major theme of the dialogue, through which Plato develops the practical political demand of the *Gorgias*.

The theme of weakness of will; the list of conventional punishments; the theme of the opposition between everyday life and Socrates’ position – there is no need to provide a comprehensive list of all the different respects in which Plato has developed an initial hint into something far more significant over the course of the dialogue. The important point is clear enough: Plato has taken considerable care to make the notion of a development, or process, central to the structure of the *Gorgias*. He might have presented the doctrine of Socrates directly, in a much shorter and simpler work – certainly this would have been easier to write. Why, then, has he presented the major ideas of this dialogue as coming gradually to light from indefinite beginnings? No adequate interpretation of the *Gorgias* can fail to account for the purpose of this most basic structure, which runs through the entire work.

The first step toward an answer lies in the fact that Socrates becomes increasingly active over the course of the dialogue and also in Plato’s manner of presenting the Socratic doctrine against Polus. Both of these pointed to the idea that Socrates was producing his own doctrine as a reaction to the challenge presented by the development from Gorgias to Callicles. Now, one aspect of this development was an increasing demand that one think out for oneself the basis of concepts such as ‘good’ or ‘justice.’ Gorgias simply accepted as given a series of things that one ‘ought’ (δεῖ) to do or not to do (456d-457c); by the time we get to Callicles, however, we find an attempt to work out a basis in nature of an ethical system. It is only after Callicles has set out his own view that we get anything like a full and systematic account of the Socratic doctrine. There is a reason for this: the complacency acceptance of traditional mores that we find in Gorgias does not of itself require a philosophical response. Not everyone can be a philosopher, and unless we
are going to take this position – as Plato, in the Republic, will not – that non-philosophers as such lead wicked lives, we must accept that an uncritical acceptance of conventional ethical views can provide a basis for an adequate practical life for many people (it is in this context that shame is a good thing: it is shame that prevents Gorgias from adopting the licentious and violent aspects of a Callicles). The movement to Callicles, however, does require philosophy, for Callicles (and even Polus) poses a profound problem for all reflective people about how one ought to live, and convention cannot provide a response to this problem for reflective people. There is, therefore, a critical need for philosophy that develops over the course of this movement, and Socrates’ doctrine is represented as arising in response to this need.

To say this, however, is not sufficient to account for all the data that must be explained. The reason for a development has not really been accounted for: why not simply show Socrates reacting to Callicles? In addition, both in the number of characters that Socrates confronts and in most of the themes that develop over the course of the dialogue, we find three stages: why not rather two or five, or some other number? Three stages are sufficient, as two would not be, to make clear the idea of a process: in Gorgias we have a recognisable starting point; in Callicles, an extreme endpoint; Polus presents a midpoint between the two, defined by its inability entirely to free itself from the earlier standpoint or to go so far as the final standpoint. Polus can thus stand, in principle, for any middle position between the two extremes.258 Certainly one could include more than three stages, but no more are necessary.

But this is not just a process, it is a history. Gorgias, we recall, is an old man, while emphasis is placed on the fact of Polus’ youth: in moving from one character to another, we are moving from one generation to the next. That is, as an old man, Gorgias is naturally at home in

258 In the first book of the Republic, Polemarchus fulfills a similar function, but he is closer to Cephalus than Thrasyymachus; Polus, by contrast, is closer to Callicles than Gorgias.
traditional conceptions of the good and the just, conceptions that have, we may assume, long
guided his life. Polus, by contrast, “represents a new generation, less afraid of the consequences
of its own thinking than its elders had been.” As a consequence of his youth, Polus is more
alive to new possibilities that disregard traditional modes of thought. Accordingly, he takes what
is merely implicit in Gorgias, and begins to develop it into something substantial. Once a
standpoint such as that of Polus has been reached, in which traditional values are in fact being
questioned and rejected, a particularly thoughtful and uninhibited character is all that is needed
to bring the new thinking to its logical extreme, and such a person we find in Callicles.

The Gorgias thus gives us a picture of the historical development of an idea, a sceptical
revolution against a standpoint that would accept, in an unreflective fashion, a conventional
account of how one should live. The reason that Plato paints this picture can be found in the
indications we saw that Socrates is producing his position as a reaction against the Gorgias-
Polus-Callicles movement: this new position, this new perspective on the world, which contains
so much that will reappear in Plato’s Republic, is a response to this historical situation. At a time
when it is no longer possible for reflective people to accept uncritically a conventional account
of the just and the good, there is a critical and pressing need for a philosophy that can directly
take on the challenges inherent in the new and more sceptical thinking. Platonism – or at least
what we find of it in the Republic – is an attempt to meet this need. We can connect this thought
with a remark of Aristotle: “in Socrates’ time interest in this [i.e. in essences] grew, but research
into the natural world ceased, and philosophers turned instead to practical virtue and politics.”

259 Dodds (1990: 221). Similarly Friedlaender (1964: 251): Gorgias’ “inconsistency was due to an adherence to
traditional commitments, which interfered with a pure statement of the view both in life and in thought. Polos, who
is a younger man and does not feel bound by the traditional ties of the older generation (461c7), now proposes a
more radical formulation.”
260 The same young/old split is used in the first book of the Republic to point to a generational move, but more
strongly present, since there we are dealing with the move from a father to a son as we pass from Cephalus to
Polemarchus.
(Parts of Animals i.1 (642a28-31), trans. Lennox.) Plato obviously dramatises the Socratic origins of his own thought; on the account given here he is situating his own thought precisely within a question concerning “practical virtue and politics.”

On the basis of all this, we may attempt to characterise the sort of communication that Plato is making in the Gorgias.261 There are numerous indications that the dialogue is not meant to present a fully philosophical account. Rather, it is an introduction, a prolegomena, to such an account. This is brought out by the pointers to the fact that numerous arguments fall short in some way of full adequacy – which is not to say that they do not provide considerable positive insight – and by the various aspects of the portrayal of Socrates that are critical. It is also suggested by the inadequacy of the other characters for philosophy, above all by Callicles’ failure as a touchstone and his virtual non-participation in the argument from 499c. Plato has not presented us directly with his own arguments for his own doctrines. What we find instead is that Plato has brought out a specific problem, that of a situation in which a conventional understanding of ethics has broken down and the only genuinely thoughtful position that has come to light involves an inherent violence inimical to the bonds of community that all people seek. Even Callicles has the need for a stable political framework for a good life, but his smasher of laws would destroy that framework. In such a situation there is a critical need for something fundamentally new, and Plato has given us a sketch – in the account of Socrates – of the sort of answer he will give in the Republic.

The problem brought to light in the course of the Gorgias is essentially mixed up with a deepening sense of the non-rational. This is true first in that we are reminded that things can

261 Note the difference between this and many other approaches. Many assume at the beginning that the dialogue must speak in a certain manner (e.g., Socrates=Plato, or dialogues=drama), and proceed on the basis of this assumption to interpret the text. Here, by contrast, it is only on the basis of having accounted for the entire text that we can claim an adequate basis from which to say how it speaks.
seem very different than they are, and this corruption of perception can corrupt action. We get a sense of the breadth of this problem through the schema of knacks and skills, where it seems to affect the whole range of skilled activity. The non-rational has a second aspect in the problem of weakness of will; through the ability of pleasure and pain to motivate action we see most clearly the power of non-rational forces to lead us astray even when we can see things clearly. Both sides of this problem are present in Callicles. His position may be the result of profound thinking in certain respects, but it is the appetites that are in the driver’s seat. Further, he does find himself caught up in mere appearances, for example in his ultimately empty pretence that his position has a foundation in reality, or in his failure to recognise that his realist and aristocratic sides conflict.

It is above all in light of this double problem that Socrates’ account seems most attractive, for he proves able to get behind appearances. The meeting of soul on soul that we hear about in the myth (see 523e3-4) is present in the devastatingly accurate *ad hominem* arguments, each one perfectly suited to its target, that Socrates brings against his three opponents. Socrates is also able to bring out the reality implicit in Gorgias’ practice of rhetoric, to unveil the unpleasant reality behind the old man’s respectable appearance. Socrates also provides a response to the problem of weakness of will. When we see how rich and difficult is the problem of the non-rational, we can appreciate the motivation behind the oppressive or totalitarian aspects of *Republic* ii-iv, where the need to restrain the irrational is a constant concern.

The *Gorgias*, then, aims not only to situate Plato’s own thought relative to the problem of a historical situation, but also to bring out the necessity of finding an answer to that problem, and further, the necessity of the sort of answer that he is trying to give. By then end of the dialogue, we are well on our way to the needed philosophical account, but we’re not there yet.
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