

## Leo Strauss

Plato's *Gorgias* (1957)

A course offered in the winter quarter, 1957

Department of Political Science, The University of Chicago

Edited and with an introduction by Devin Stauffer

With the assistance of Anastasia Berg, Ariel Helfer, Mark Verbitsky, and Peter Walford

Devin Stauffer is Associate Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *Plato's Introduction to the Question of Justice* (State University of New York Press, 2001), *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias: Rhetoric, Justice, and the Philosophic Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), and *Leo Strauss's Defense of the Philosophic Life: Reading "What is Political Philosophy?"* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

## Table of Contents

Editor's Introduction	i–iv
Note on the Leo Strauss Transcript Project	v–vii
Editorial Headnote	vii
Session 1: Introduction	1–18
Session 2: Gorgias section (447a–452d)	19–34
Session 3: Gorgias section (452d–458e)	35–52
Session 4: Polus section (458e–468e)	53–72
Session 5: Polus section (468e–480d)	73–97
Session 6: Polus, Callicles section (480d–486d)	98–111
Session 7: Callicles section (486d–488a)	112–126
Session 8: Callicles section (488a–493d)	127–145
Session 9: Callicles section (494a–d)	146–158
Session 10: Callicles section (494e–499b)	159–181
Session 11: Callicles section (499b–505e)	182–197
Session 12: Callicles section (505b–513d)	198–209
Session 13: Callicles section (508c–516c)	210–228
Session 14: Callicles section (516d–520e)	229–244
Session 15: The <i>Gorgias</i> myth (521–end)	245–261

## Preface to Plato's *Gorgias*

Devin Stauffer

Leo Strauss taught two seminars at the University of Chicago on Plato's *Gorgias*, the first in the winter quarter of 1957 and the other six years later, in the fall quarter of 1963. He was also teaching a seminar on Plato's *Gorgias* at St. John's College in Annapolis in the fall of 1973 when he died. Only the transcript of the 1957 course remains, whereas there are audio tapes of the 1963 course and of a single session (what appears to be the second meeting) of the 1973 seminar at St. John's. When he died rather suddenly in 1973, Strauss was not only in the midst of teaching the seminar on the *Gorgias* but had also begun work on an essay on the *Gorgias* which he intended to include in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Since we have a tape of only one session of the 1973 seminar, and since both that seminar and his work on an essay on the *Gorgias* were cut short by his death, students and scholars of Strauss must rely for access to his interpretation of the dialogue primarily on the two earlier courses. Both have now been edited.

When Strauss gave his first seminar on the *Gorgias* in 1957, he was finishing one of his greatest works, certainly his deepest and most detailed statement on a modern author: *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, published in 1958. Strauss dated the Preface, which appears to have been written after the completion of the rest of the work, as December of 1957. We can assume then that in the fall of 1957 Strauss was in the final stage of his work on *Thoughts on Machiavelli*<sup>i</sup>, and thus that Machiavelli was still very much on his mind as he was teaching the *Gorgias*. A note late in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* can perhaps provide a clue to a connection between Strauss's work on Machiavelli and his interest in the *Gorgias*: Note 219 to chapter 4 comes in an important section near the very end of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* where Strauss compares Machiavelli's thought, especially regarding the status or meaning of philosophy, with the thought of "the classics." This is the section of the work in which Strauss is most explicitly critical of Machiavelli. He argues that the consequence of Machiavelli's analysis of the political "as if it were not ordered toward the supra-political or as if the supra-political did not exist" is "an enormous simplification and, above all, the appearance of the discovery of a hitherto wholly unsuspected whole continent" (295). "A stupendous contraction of the horizon appears to Machiavelli and his successors as a wondrous enlargement of the horizon" (295; see also 173, 296–98). "The classics," by contrast, who "understood the moral-political phenomena in the light of man's highest perfection," insisted on judging the city by "its openness, or deference, to philosophy." Yet, since they also understood why the city is necessarily closed to philosophy, the classical philosophers regarded themselves as separated from the city, that is, from the *demos* in the sense of "the totality of citizens who are incapable or unwilling to defer to philosophy," by "a gulf" (295–96). Strauss then writes: "The gulf can be bridged only by a noble rhetoric which we may call for the time being accusatory or punitive rhetoric. Philosophy is incapable of supplying this kind

---

<sup>i</sup> Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

of rhetoric. It cannot do more than sketch its outlines. The execution must be left to orators or poets.” It is at the end of this last statement that Strauss places note 219, which reads: “The quest for this kind of noble rhetoric, as distinguished from the other kind discussed in the *Phaedrus*, is characteristic of the *Gorgias*.” (Strauss also asks his readers to consider Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1074b1–4, where Aristotle refers to an ancient tradition of myths that describe the heavenly bodies as gods and the whole of nature as pervaded by the divine, and he points back to pages 125–26 of his own text, where he discusses a subdued criticism that Machiavelli makes of Livy for allowing his judgments to be shaped by moral considerations, a criticism which prepares Machiavelli’s “criticism of authority as such.”)

If this note to *Thoughts on Machiavelli* provides us with a lead in trying to grasp the connection between his first course on the *Gorgias* and his main work at the time, the connection between the second course and his writing at the time is more straightforward and direct. In the fall of 1963, Strauss was finishing *The City and Man*, published in 1964, and he had already begun work on *Socrates and Aristophanes*. Although he did not publish *Socrates and Aristophanes* until 1966, he wrote in 1962 in a letter to Alexander Kojève: “I am preparing for publication three lectures on the city and man, dealing with the *Politics*, the *Republic* and Thucydides. Only after these things have been finished will I be able to begin with my real work, an interpretation of Aristophanes” (see *On Tyranny: Revised and Expanded Edition, Including the Strauss–Kojève Correspondence*, 309). Since one of the three main parts of *The City and Man* deals with the *Republic*, a dialogue that Strauss regarded as closely connected to the *Gorgias*—most immediately because the question of justice is central to both dialogues, but also because both treat the relationship between philosophy and politics—the relevance of the *Gorgias* to *The City and Man* is obvious. But the *Gorgias* may also have been of interest to Strauss in connection with his “real work,” his interpretation of Aristophanes, since the theme or question of rhetoric plays an important role in that work. In many passages of *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Strauss examines Aristophanes’ critique of Socrates for his imprudence and his failure adequately to appreciate the need for a rhetoric that would protect both philosophy and the city from the dangers each poses to the other. In fact, a part—not the whole, but an important part—of Aristophanes’ case for the superiority of poetry to philosophy rests on his conviction that poetry supplies the poet, especially the comic poet, with rhetorical resources and defenses that the philosopher, especially the Socratic philosopher, lacks (see, e.g., *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 24–25, 44–49, 63–65, 192–93, 233–35, 311–12). It is possible then to read the *Gorgias* as a kind of Platonic response to Aristophanes’ critique, albeit one that quietly concedes that there was more than a little truth in charge of the “adversary.” A reading of sessions 12 and 13 of the 1963 course confirms that Strauss regarded the *Gorgias* as a reply to Aristophanes. And as far as one can discern from the barely legible notes in which Strauss sketched the beginnings of an outline for his planned essay on the *Gorgias*, the *Clouds* was to play a key role in the introductory section of that essay.

A detailed comparison of the 1957 course and the 1963 course is not possible here. Nevertheless, let me raise a few points that readers may consider further as they turn to the transcripts. The most striking difference is in Strauss’s mode of proceeding: In the

1963 course, Strauss has virtually every passage of the dialogue read aloud (by his reader, Donald Reinken), whereas in the 1957 course he often paraphrases portions of the text himself before commenting on them. One result of this difference is that Strauss does not make it to the end of the dialogue in the 1963 course and does not discuss, beyond a few general remarks, the myth at the end of the *Gorgias*. Still, the 1963 course sticks somewhat more closely to the text, and as the second of the two courses it should be regarded as the more authoritative source for Strauss's considered view of the dialogue. In this connection it will also be relevant to students and scholars that the tapes of that course survive (and are available on the Leo Strauss Center website) and that Strauss's seminar on Plato's *Protagoras* in the spring of 1965 devoted the first three meetings to a summary of his interpretation of the *Gorgias* from the course given in 1963.

As for differences between the content of the two courses, I will mention only two. First, whereas the 1963 course opens with an extensive discussion of the twin challenges to the possibility of political philosophy posed by positivism and historicism, the 1957 course begins with a broader consideration of Plato's understanding of the meaning of philosophy as such, a consideration that includes a striking comparison between Plato on the one hand, and Descartes and his heirs on the other, over the question of dogmatism and skepticism. If the 1963 course is perhaps superior as a reading of the *Gorgias*, the opening lecture of the 1957 course is of broader interest than its 1963 counterpart since the earlier lecture takes up more fundamental questions. (A reading of the opening lecture of the 1957 course should be supplemented by a consideration of Strauss's discussion of Plato's doctrine of the ideas in session 12 of the 1957 course.) Second, when it comes to interpreting the dialogue itself, perhaps the most important difference between the two courses concerns Strauss's analysis of the character of Callicles. In both courses, Strauss repeatedly emphasizes that Callicles cannot be persuaded by Socrates; unlike Polus, with whom Socrates has at least some success, Callicles cannot be moved by Socrates' arguments or by his rhetoric. He is the representative in the dialogue of the man whom the philosopher cannot really budge. But why is he immovable? In the 1957 course Strauss initially stresses as the root of Callicles' obstinacy his softness and his desire for self-indulgence. Only subsequently and to a limited extent does he discuss two other features of his character or concerns that are more heavily stressed in the 1963 course: Callicles' enslavement to convention, which manifests itself especially in his attachment to a certain vision of manliness according to which a true man never leaves his post or abandons his position in argument, and his indignation at the suffering of the just and the prosperity of the wicked. These aspects of Callicles' complex make-up are more fully fleshed out in the 1963 course, especially Callicles' indignation, the discussion of which leads to a fascinating account of what Strauss calls "the dialectics of self-defense," whereby a legitimate concern for protection against injustice can lead one ultimately in the direction of tyrannical aggression.

Despite these differences, the two courses interpret the dialogue in fundamentally the same way. Strauss did not drastically change his view of the dialogue between the two courses or in the process of teaching the second of them. I can hardly do justice here to the richness and complexity of Strauss's interpretation of the *Gorgias* as a whole, but I will indicate a few of its leading features. Unlike most scholars who have written on the

dialogue, Strauss does not read the dialogue as an unmitigated condemnation of rhetoric. Crucial to his interpretation is the thought that rhetoric remains the central theme of the dialogue throughout its three main parts: the Gorgias section, the Polus section, and the Callicles section. According to Strauss, the harsh criticism of rhetoric in the first and especially the second section eventually gives way in the third to a more complicated verdict that, in important ways, restores the standing of rhetoric. The examination of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* proves to be in part an examination of its necessity, even or especially for the philosopher. And while Socrates may be genuinely critical of the sophistic rhetoric practiced and taught by Gorgias, he also points towards a new form of rhetoric that could bridge the gulf between philosophy and the city. Strauss's analysis of this new, noble rhetoric has many aspects, but let me highlight three points on which he places particular emphasis. First, the rhetoric that Socrates sketches in the *Gorgias* defends philosophy in an indirect way, by accusing the city or by "calling the *polis* before the bar of philosophy." Second, to be effective, such rhetoric must abstract from or remain silent about the peak of philosophy, as is indicated by the absence of the doctrine of the ideas from the dialogue. "The peak is missing," Strauss says repeatedly in the 1963 course. Third, since the silence about the peak of philosophy is also a silence about its pleasures, the new rhetoric asserts a radical divide between the pleasant and the good. Of course, these are only three points in Strauss's rich account of the kind of rhetoric to which the *Gorgias* points, a rhetoric which, as he also repeatedly stresses, is quite different in its aims and character from the erotic rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*. In stating these three points in list form, I have surely oversimplified Strauss's interpretation, and to correct that oversimplification one would need to elaborate each point, think about the connections between them, and bring in other many considerations that have not even been mentioned. No preface can adequately capture the intricacy of Strauss's reading of the *Gorgias*. Fortunately, readers can now see with their own eyes what Strauss actually said.

I would like to thank Mark Verbitsky and Ariel Helfer for their help in editing the 1957 and the 1963 courses.

Devin Stauffer  
The University of Texas at Austin

## The Leo Strauss Transcript Project

Leo Strauss is well known as a thinker and writer, but he also had tremendous impact as a teacher. In the transcripts of his courses one can see Strauss commenting on texts, including many he wrote little or nothing about, and responding generously to student questions and objections. The transcripts, amounting to more than twice the volume of Strauss's published work, will add immensely to the material available to scholars and students of Strauss's work.

In the early 1950s mimeographed typescripts of student notes of Strauss's courses were distributed among his students. In winter 1954, the first recording, of his course on Natural Right, was transcribed and distributed to students. Professor Herbert J. Storing obtained a grant from the Relm Foundation to support the taping and transcription, which resumed on a regular basis in the winter of 1956 with Strauss's course "Historicism and Modern Relativism." Of the 39 courses Strauss taught at the University of Chicago from 1958 until his departure in 1968, 34 were recorded and transcribed. After Strauss retired from the University, recording of his courses continued at Claremont Men's College in the spring of 1968 and the fall and spring of 1969 (although the tapes for his last two courses there have not been located), and at St. John's College for the four years until his death in October 1973.

The surviving original audio recordings vary widely in quality and completeness. When Strauss moved away from the microphone the volume of his voice may diminish to the point of inaudibility; the microphone sometimes failed to pick up the voices of students asking questions and often captured doors and windows opening and closing, papers shuffling, and traffic in the street. When the tape was changed, recording stopped, leaving gaps. When Strauss's remarks went, as they often did, beyond the two hours, the tape ran out. After they had been transcribed, the audiotapes were sometimes reused, leaving the audio record very incomplete. And over time the audiotape deteriorated. Beginning in the late 1990s, Stephen Gregory, then the administrator of the University's John M. Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy funded by the John M. Olin Foundation, initiated the digital remastering of the surviving tapes by Craig Harding of September Media to ensure their preservation, improve their audibility, and make possible their eventual publication. This remastering received financial support from the Olin Center and was undertaken under the supervision of Joseph Cropsey, then Strauss's literary executor. Gregory continued this project as administrator of the University's Center for the Study of the Principles of the American Founding, funded by the Jack Miller Center, and brought it to completion in 2011 as the administrator of the University's Leo Strauss Center with the aid of a grant from the Division of Preservation and Access of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The audiofiles are available at the Strauss Center website: <https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/courses>.

Strauss permitted the taping and transcribing to go forward, but he did not check the transcripts or otherwise participate in the project. Accordingly, Strauss's close associate and colleague Joseph Cropsey originally put the copyright in his own name, though he

assigned copyright to the Estate of Leo Strauss in 2008. Beginning in 1958 a headnote was placed at the beginning of each transcript, which read: “This transcription is a written record of essentially oral material, much of which developed spontaneously in the classroom and none of which was prepared with publication in mind. The transcription is made available to a limited number of interested persons, with the understanding that no use will be made of it that is inconsistent with the private and partly informal origin of the material. Recipients are emphatically requested not to seek to increase the circulation of the transcription. This transcription has not been checked, seen, or passed on by the lecturer.” In 2008, Strauss’s heir, his daughter Jenny Strauss, asked Nathan Tarcov, who had been the director of the University’s Olin Center and later its Center for the Study of the Principles of the American Founding, to succeed Joseph Cropsey, who had faithfully served as Strauss’s literary executor for the 35 years since his death. They agreed that because of the widespread circulation of the old, often inaccurate and incomplete transcripts and the continuing interest in Strauss’s thought and teaching, it would be a service to interested scholars and students to proceed with publication. They were encouraged by the fact that Strauss himself signed a contract with Bantam Books to publish four of the transcripts although in the end none were published.

The University’s Leo Strauss Center, established in 2008, launched a project, presided over by its director Nathan Tarcov and managed by Stephen Gregory, to correct the old transcripts on the basis of the remastered audiofiles as they became available, transcribe those audiofiles not previously transcribed, and annotate and edit for readability all the transcripts including those for which no audiofiles survived. This project was supported by grants from the Winiarski Family Foundation, Mr. Richard S. Shiffrin and Mrs. Barbara Z. Schiffrin, Earhart Foundation, and the Hertog Foundation, and contributions from numerous other donors. The Strauss Center was ably assisted in its fundraising efforts by Nina Botting–Herbst and Patrick McCusker, staff in the Office of the Dean of the Division of the Social Sciences at the University. The transcripts based upon the remastered tapes are considerably more accurate and complete than the original transcripts; the new Hobbes transcript, for example, is twice as long as the old one. Senior scholars familiar with both Strauss’s work and the texts he taught were commissioned as editors, with preliminary work done in most cases by student editorial assistants.

The goal in editing the transcripts has been to preserve Strauss’s original words as much as possible while making the transcripts easier to read. Strauss’s impact (and indeed his charm) as a teacher is revealed in the sometimes informal character of his remarks. Sentence fragments that might not be appropriate in academic prose have been kept; some long and rambling sentences have been divided; some repeated clauses or words have been deleted. A clause that breaks the syntax or train of thought may have been moved elsewhere in the sentence or paragraph. In rare cases sentences within a paragraph may have been reordered. Where no audiofiles survived, attempts have been made to correct likely mistranscriptions. Changes of all these kinds have been indicated. (Changes to the old transcripts based on the remastered audiofiles, however, are not indicated.) Changes and deletions (other than spelling, italicization, punctuation, capitalization, and paraphrasing) are recorded in endnotes attached to the word or punctuation prior to the



change or deletion. Brackets within the text record insertions. Ellipses in transcripts without audiofiles have been preserved. Whether they indicate deletion of something Strauss said or the trailing off of his voice or serve as a dash cannot be determined. Ellipses that have been added to transcripts with audiofiles indicate that the words are inaudible. Administrative details regarding paper or seminar topics or meeting rooms or times have been deleted without being noted, but reading assignments have been retained. Citations are provided to all passages so readers can read the transcripts with the texts in hand, and footnotes have been provided to identify persons, texts, and events to which Strauss refers.

Readers should make allowance for the oral character of the transcripts. There are careless phrases, slips of the tongue, repetitions, and possible mistranscriptions. However enlightening the transcripts are, they cannot be regarded as the equivalent of works that Strauss himself wrote for publication.

Nathan Tarcov  
Editor-in-Chief

Gayle McKeen  
Managing Editor

August 2014

### **Editorial Headnote**

There are no surviving audiotapes of the sessions of this course. This transcript is based upon the original transcript, made by persons unknown to us.

The course was taught in a lecture format, with occasional student questions and comments.

The text assigned for the course is *Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, no. 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).

The transcript was edited by Devin Stauffer, with assistance from Mark Verbitsky, Ariel Helfer, Anastasia Berg, and Peter Walford.

For general information about the history of the transcription project and the editing guidelines, see the general headnote to the transcripts above.

## Plato's Gorgias

### Session 1: January 3, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** The course will take on the form of an analysis of the Platonic dialogue called *Gorgias*. It would be advisable if we were all to use the translation in the Loeb Classics Library because it can be presumed to be superior to the common translation by Jowett. In addition, there are some explanatory notes in it.

The subject matter of the dialogue *Gorgias* is the art of rhetoric, the art of getting, and especially the art of getting acquitted by fair means or foul. As such, the art of rhetoric is a part of the art of getting what one wants by fair means or foul. It is, in other words, a morally indifferent art, [an art] that<sup>1</sup> presupposes that justice is not the unquestionable standard. Therefore, the subject of the dialogue becomes the problem of justice, and in this respect there is a kinship between the *Gorgias* and Plato's *Republic*. But there is this difference: the *Republic* is devoted to the problem of justice by itself, whereas the subject of [the] *Gorgias* is devoted to the problem of justice within the context of the problem of rhetoric. Or to say it very simply; the theme of the *Gorgias* is not justice as such, but just speeches. There is another Platonic dialogue devoted to speeches, to rhetoric, and that is the *Phaedrus*. But the *Phaedrus* is devoted not to just speeches, but to love speeches. Still, however this may be, the *Republic* and *Phaedrus* are the dialogues closest to the *Gorgias* as far as subject matter is concerned.

Now why does this concern us? Why are we interested in a dialogue dealing with just speeches? The dialogue deals with just or unjust speeches in a context of the broader question of the art of getting what one wants by fair means or foul. I have heard of a book which was written in our generation in which politics is defined as "the knowledge of who gets what, when."<sup>1</sup> There is a certain kinship obviously—a value-free political science, which is not even concerned with the art of getting the most, but rather the purely factual study of who gets what, when. The question is whether such a value-free political science is possible, And this is the most gripping question today in social science. This very topical question is dealt with by implication in the *Gorgias*. But the theme of that work is not present-day social<sup>2</sup> science. The theme is much broader than that. We must enlarge our horizon and the horizon supplied by our most urgent problems if we want to understand the *Gorgias*. We must not merely seek an answer to our initial and untutored question as to whether a value-free social science is possible.

[This is] the only lecture course given by me in whose title a proper name occurs<sup>3</sup>. By this, I indicate that Plato is of special importance, of unique importance, for political philosophy. Why do I believe this? Political philosophy is a branch of philosophy. What, then, is the peculiarity of Plato's philosophy? I have to develop that, otherwise it might seem to be wholly unwarranted to devote such a tremendously long period of a whole quarter to a single Platonic dialogue.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harold Laswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: P. Smith, 1936).

Philosophy meant originally, as the Greek word indicates, quest for wisdom, love for wisdom. And wisdom means here, primarily, adequate or sufficient knowledge of the whole, of [the] first causes or grounds of the whole, of the imperishable in the whole. Adequate knowledge meant final knowledge. This was a claim of philosophy. Yet look at the fulfillment: There is an infinite variety of philosophical opinions, sometimes called systems, And this contrasts with the steady progress of science, science which does not even claim that it can ever reach final knowledge, which lives within the horizon of infinite progress of an unfinishable process of surprises, of scientific revolutions in the future. Philosophy is distrusted today because of the contrast between the exorbitant claim of philosophy and the poor fulfillment, on the one hand, and this steady, solid progress of science. What is prevalent today is a distrust of all claims to finality,<sup>4</sup> a distrust of all dogmatism, as people say. And Plato appears to be *the* dogmatic philosopher *par excellence*.

Now there always existed an alternative to dogmatism, and that was called skepticism, which means simply the denial of the possibility of any knowledge. What is characteristic of our age is not the distrust of all dogmatism but the absence of the alternative to dogmatism, namely, skepticism. The scientist, the chief “knower” as we know him today, is neither a dogmatist nor a skeptic. He does not deny the possibility of knowledge, but of final knowledge. He does not say that the truth is inaccessible, as the skeptic says, but that the truth is elusive. If we want to understand this peculiar phenomenon of a pursuit which is neither dogmatic nor skeptic, we have to turn to the beginnings of modern times which are identical with the beginnings of modern philosophy. There we find a man whom you all know: Descartes. Descartes’ doctrine may be described sufficiently for our purposes as follows. Descartes starts from the most extreme skepticism. It is precisely this extreme skepticism which will lead to the most indubitable knowledge, and therewith to a genuine dogmatism. In brief, we can say that what Descartes tried to do was to establish dogmatism based on skepticism. All pre-scientific knowledge succumbs to skepticism. What is required is a break with all pre-scientific knowledge or a jump from pre-scientific knowledge to an entirely different dimension, the dimension of scientific knowledge. To use an expression familiar in present day social science, pre-scientific knowledge is folklore and not knowledge. There’s still Descartes in that. Dogmatism based on skepticism is something very different from either dogmatism or skepticism. In Descartes’s version, the radical skepticist discovers something which is absolutely indubitable: the ego, the I, with its objects or contents. Or, to use a more familiar term, the consciousness and its contents. Out of Descartes grew the following notion of philosophy: the whole is not knowable, but everything that can be known must comply with the conditions of human knowledge, or human consciousness and its condition. From this emerged a new type of philosophy which was neither dogmatic nor skeptic, but, as it called itself at its peak, critical philosophy.

This analysis of the human mind, of the consciousness, or theory of knowledge, as it is called—or epistemology, or methodology—supplies the overall orientation without which progressive and unfinishable science remains blind about its own meaning and character. Even the most extreme adherent of the position that science is the highest form

of human knowledge would still admit the need of a methodology which clarifies the character and meaning of science. This has *ultimately* the character of final knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

[Now], this critical philosophy—the name stems from Kant, but the phenomenon itself is older, at least as old as Locke—is emphatically *human* wisdom, not wisdom simply. It is wisdom insofar as it is final and demonstrative knowledge. It is human wisdom because it consists of the proof of the impossibility of wisdom proper. For example: from the point of view of critical philosophy, the issue between atheism and theism, the issue regarding the immortality of the soul, cannot be settled, whereas from the point of view of the dogmatic philosophy of the past, it can be settled, either positively or negatively.

Now, thought, consciousness—what I call the sieve through which everything we have knowledge of has to go—depends on other things. Could the consciousness be changed as these other things? The impossibility of wisdom in the old and original sense of the term cannot then be proven by the analysis of the consciousness, because the consciousness itself depends on other things which modify and alter the consciousness. Proof of the impossibility of wisdom would require knowledge of the whole of which the sieve (the consciousness) is only a part. Consciousness, knowledge, science depend on conditions outside of them. Let us say they depend on society and its changes, a thought familiar to you through a branch of learning called sociology of knowledge. The conclusion is, then, that all knowledge is culture-bound or time-bound, that it belongs to its time and its culture, or that it is historically relative. Every thought is a child of its time.

There is only one way out of the difficulties created by this alleged or real insight into the historical character of all thought, and that is to say that there is an absolute time, an absolute moment, a fullness of time, a moment when the historical movement and change have been completed, or, in other words, when all theoretical and practical problems have been solve[d] in principle. This was Hegel's solution to the problem of history. This, of course, implies that after this absolute moment, there cannot be any more meaningful future or meaningful history. As Marx put it, there has been history up to now; there will be no history in the future—from Hegel's point of view, that is. If Hegel is right, there can be only "epigonism," a dreary repetition of what has been<sup>7</sup> for all [time] afterward. Therefore very few people have remained Hegelians. The view which has prevailed, on the whole, in the Western world is this: there is no possibility of a final solution of all theoretical and practical problems in principle. Truth is eternally elusive, and therefore history is eternally unfinishable. But this insight itself necessarily presents itself as final, which means that the most comprehensive and the most important knowledge about the character of human knowledge and its limitations is available, and is available as final. There can no longer be any fundamental surprises. There may be entirely different cultures of civilization springing up in the future, but we know in advance their fundamental character. This position, which is called in Europe—and I think it is as good a term as any other—"historicism," is a modified form of critical philosophy. Now, the<sup>8</sup> the final character of the most fundamental knowledge which this kind of philosophy implies, is incompatible with<sup>9</sup> [the] divination inherent in modern science, that

knowledge is an essentially unfinishable quest. How, then, can philosophy be understood as an unfinished quest?

Now I am slowly approaching what Plato meant. We do not possess wisdom. I believe it is easy for most of us to admit that. No one of whom we know possesses wisdom. The claim of any man to possess it is implausible. The brute fact that wisdom is not available creates a suspicion that there are essential, if hidden, reasons why wisdom is not available and that it will never be available. A suspicion is something very different from certainty or evident certainty. Evident certainty about the impossibility of wisdom—this is what critical philosophy meant—would imply the availability of human wisdom in the sense of critical philosophy, and therefore it would imply the closing of the horizon of inquiry. There are these grave questions that men cannot help raising, but we know that every attempt at solving these questions is condemned to failure, and that makes us unwilling to go on. But the merely factual character of the observation that wisdom is not available and never was available does not entail such a consequence: It allows the possibility of future progress, of deeper penetration in the future, of future revolutions of thought.

Yet how can there be any direction, any sense of direction, under this condition? The assertion that wisdom is not in fact available means that the problems have not been solved. It presupposes, then, knowledge of the problems, and therewith of the order or hierarchy of the fundamental problems, of the problem of the whole. Knowledge of the problem of the whole must be admitted by everyone, for one cannot deny the possibility of the solution of that problem without having identified the problem of the whole. Knowledge of the fundamental problem as such is what has been called knowledge of ignorance. Knowledge of ignorance *is* knowledge. Knowledge of ignorance presupposes that the problems are more evident to us than any solution of which we know. Knowledge of ignorance is neither dogmatic nor skeptical and, still less, dogmatism based on empiricism or critical philosophy. There is something by Pascal which is very helpful here. Pascal said, “We know too little to be dogmatists, and we know too much to be skeptics.”<sup>ii</sup> Pascal drew from this the conclusion that philosophy is therefore impossible. This follows from the premise that philosophy is either dogmatism or skepticism. But Plato said, as it were, that the fact stated by Pascal that we know too much to be skeptics, too little to be dogmatists, is the reason why philosophy is necessary and possible. Philosophy is essentially inquisitive. Kant has said, “One cannot teach philosophy, one can teach only philosophizing.”<sup>iii</sup> In other words, philosophy cannot be a doctrine. This, if true, leads to a conclusion which Kant did not draw: that philosophy cannot be communicated in the way in which other doctrines, say, mathematics, can be communicated. And an indirect pupil of Kant’s, very well known today at least by name, Kierkegaard, coined a name for this kind of communication: he called it “indirect communication.”<sup>iv</sup> In the sciences, we have necessarily direct communication—<sup>10</sup> [for

---

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Pascal, *Pensées* Lafuma 131, 406 (= Brunschvicg 434, 395).

<sup>iii</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 838/B 866.

<sup>iv</sup> See, e.g., *Concluding Scientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* 2.2.2, especially VII 203ff, 233ff, and *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, XIII 495ff, 540–543. Page references are to *Søren Kierkegaards samlede Værker* (Kjøbenhavn: F. Hegel & søn, 1901–06).

example], proof and so on. But in philosophy, or in pursuits of a similar character, only indirect communication is possible.

That Plato was neither a dogmatist nor a skeptic can be seen from the history of the school which he founded. For some time, that school was dogmatic; for some time, it was skeptic. The skeptic stage was best known from Cicero, who was a skeptical Platonist. Plato's thought gave rise to both opposite ways of considering philosophy, the dogmatic and the skeptic way, which means that Plato's philosophy itself is beyond that opposition. One could also refer to the fact that the predominant image of Plato as a dogmatist, as the chief dogmatist, must be contrasted with the predominant image of Socrates as the master of the knowledge of ignorance, for Socrates is a Platonic character. What we know of Socrates which we have not taken from Plato's dialogues would go on the back of <sup>1</sup> [a] stamp. In the eighteenth century, Plato was in the dog house; they had no use for Plato, but it was the high time of the popularity of Socrates, which means again of Plato in disguise. Yet, to come back, what I am driving at is this: that Plato's way of philosophizing agrees in a strange way with what the best scientists of our age understand by human knowledge, that it is neither skeptic nor dogmatic. But there are great differences between Plato and the scientists, as we shall see later. But their agreement must not be minimized. Let me pursue first the general presentation.

How can the problem of the whole be known if the whole is not known? We must have knowledge of the whole somehow. We must be aware of something which necessarily pretends to be the whole, something which we can realize is not truly whole or complete. And the consequence of this realization is that we must seek the true whole because we know only a pseudo-whole. Now we all know that pseudo-whole, in the words of the Bible: heaven and earth and what is between them. The visible whole gives rise to the fundamental question: What keeps this whole together? What establishes it as a whole? What is its origin? What are the characteristics of heaven, on the one hand, and the earth, on the other? What are the characteristics of the heavenly bodies and of the earthly bodies, and of the different earthly bodies, such as plants, brutes, and man? And last but not least, what is good and bad? How is the question of good and bad related to the fact that the ways of man differ from tribe to tribe and from epoch to epoch? How does it come [about] that whenever we find men they possess arts and customs and accounts of the early times or the beginnings? As long as man is, that is to say, as long as man is man, he lives within that whole. He is on the earth and he is below heaven. He is open to that whole, and therefore gripped by the questions imposed upon him by that whole. To be within that whole, to be open to it, and to be gripped by the questions imposed by it—this constitutes the situation of man, the permanent and universal situation of man as man. Whatever other beings within that whole might think of man—if there are other beings in that whole which can think, and therefore think particularly of man—for man, man is certainly the most important being within the whole.

Now Plato has expressed this story of the whole, of this first whole, a pseudo-whole. He called it a cave in the Seventh Book of the *Republic*. The cave is a whole kept together and kept from everything else by a comprehensive covering: the walls of the cave. Yet it has an opening leading out of it: the opening consists of the questions to which the given

whole gives rise. An awareness of our living in the cave, the cave as a visible universe, is a necessary and sufficient condition of philosophy. That awareness gives direction and unity to all the particular questions which we may raise. This awareness would not be affected even if full wisdom were available to man, because the starting point for everyone would always be what we see around us. At any rate, awareness of our being in the cave is a most comprehensive knowledge and therefore the only knowledge which can give us [the] direction which non-wise men can have.

All philosophizing begins with the awareness of the cave. That awareness is the only non-arbitrary beginning of philosophy. Descartes's beginning with the universal doubt is derivative from that true and absolute beginning. Descartes has to prove that our knowledge of heaven and earth is not reliable. But if you are to prove, you presuppose something else. Presupposed is alleged knowledge of heaven and earth and what is between them. Thus, beginning with the cave is the only beginning which is evident for us, for every human being at all times. Heaven and earth and what is between them is permanently and universally given. It is evident for us, which means it is not truly evident. We do not know why it is so, why the human situation is as it is. The beginning which for us is inevitable and the only non-arbitrary beginning, and in this sense the absolute beginning, does not imply absolute knowledge or knowledge of the absolute. It is merely inescapable. Now Plato again coined a word for that. Plato called our awareness of the cave, which means heaven and earth and what is between them, *pistis* in Greek, which means trust: blind, inevitable trust. We live in the derivative, in the conditioned, in what is not in itself intelligible. We know with the greatest certainty that this is a tree; but why it is, and what does it mean—here the difficulty begins. We live in that which makes intelligible what is finally given, [what] is less known to us than the given. We live, as it were, upside-down. Every explanation of our situation, or every interpretation of our situation, lacks that compulsory power which our awareness of that situation by itself possesses.

But the human situation is not sufficiently indicated by the fact that we live in the cave. Realization of the fact that we live in the cave is the condition of philosophy. But this condition is not always fulfilled. The realization of the fact that we live in a cave requires an effort. Primarily, we live in the belief in the truth of questionable opinions about the whole. We live in the belief in the truth of opinions which claim to solve the riddle of the whole. These beliefs do not have the character of trust, of blind, inevitable trust. We are not compelled to accept them: they lack the compulsory power peculiar to that initial trust. These opinions are questionable. In other words, we live primarily—again, using the Platonic terms—primarily in a mixture of trust and imagery. You remember the divided line and its four kinds of knowledge.<sup>v</sup> I speak now only of the lower ones, and the lower is called trust, and the other is called imagery. The imagery does not have compulsory power as trust has. If people, for example, say “white sacred cow,” whether the cow is sacred is questionable. That the cow is white, that is not questionable, except in schoolrooms. That is what Plato means by the distinction. The beginning of philosophy is the awareness of the fundamental difference between this initial trust and imagery; it is

---

<sup>v</sup> *Republic* 509d–511e.

the resolve to take the difference seriously—as a matter of fact, so seriously that we are prepared to apply that distinction to all matters.

But how, then, is it possible to live on this basis, on the basis of the plausible assumption that the problems are always more evident than the solutions? Isn't the problem of the good man also always more evident than the solution of this problem? One may answer as follows to this question: perhaps knowledge of ignorance, as Socrates and Plato meant it, implies the answer—nay, it constitutes the answer—to the question of the good life. Given the human situation, given the fact that we are derivative and live in the derivative, we have no choice except to seek for the non-derivative, or to philosophize. If we fail to do this, we inevitably become boasters, people who claim to know what they do not know, or else drifting fellows, unserious people who do not take seriously the serious things. But if this is so, if philosophy is evidently required by the human situation, grave consequences necessarily follow for our everyday conduct as well as for society. That, we can say tentatively, is indeed the chief function of Plato's *Republic*: to show what consequences flow for human life both individually and collectively from the necessity of philosophy. In other words, it is possible that political philosophy, which includes moral philosophy, leads to answers which in principle are final, even though cosmology or the questions regarding the whole may not allow a final answer. This, at any rate, seems to be Plato's contention. We can state this as follows: the philosophic questions are imposed upon us by our situation as human beings. But no philosophic question is as deeply rooted in our needs as human beings as the question of the good life, of how to live. This question is always answered before it is raised by the society to which we belong. We all are brought up as children and told do this or do that, and so on. These social answers are in fact never clear and satisfactory. Think today of the meaning of democracy. To the extent to which we try to be decent, to keep our self-respect, we comply with social standards of society in deed. Yet, at the same time, we realize the problematic character of these standards as commonly understood, and therefore we are compelled to transcend them<sup>12</sup> [in] the direction of greater decency, not of lesser. Yet the contention that the good life consists in philosophizing, or that virtue is knowledge, is very far from being self-evident. Hence we are compelled to raise the question: Why philosophy? This question calls philosophy itself before a tribunal other than philosophy. That tribunal is primarily society insofar as it raises a claim on our allegiance or our loyalty, and the society which raises that claim is a political society. Political society, too, belongs to what is primarily, permanently, and universally given. Whenever and wherever there are human beings, they are subjects, not necessarily of kings, but of society. And one can easily see that this is not due to childish taboo: we need society. Therefore, we must be concerned with our society, which means we must be concerned with our society being good.

We must raise the question of what is the good society, for there is no necessity that the socially given answer is the true answer. Our concern with society, then, leads us immediately to political philosophy, and one may very well say that political philosophy is not merely a branch of philosophy, but also the natural beginning of philosophy. That seems again to be a suggestion of Plato and Socrates. Philosophy is a quest for knowledge of the whole, but to know the whole means to know its parts. Philosophy



becomes, therefore, the study of the parts of the whole. But the parts cannot be truly known except as part[s] of the whole. The parts cannot be truly known except in the light of the whole. This is a fundamental difficulty of philosophy, as Plato sees it. There is, however, a part of the whole which is of itself a whole, a privileged whole, the most accessible whole, the whole which is limited by the ends which man is born to pursue. This whole dealt with by political or moral philosophy is to some extent intelligible by itself, at least sufficiently so for practical purposes. Philosophy, as Plato understood it, is essentially inquiring, inquisitive. The beginning of philosophy is awareness that we live in the cave, that we are fettered by socially-imposed respectable opinions. If this awareness that we live in the cave is not given immediately, it must be aroused. Primarily, we live in the accepted opinion as if it were the truth. To begin with, we do not believe that we live in a cave. Someone must show us that we live in the cave. Someone must unfetter us. This is one reason why Plato wrote his dialogues. He thus shows us someone, a man called Socrates, who tries to unfetter other men by convincing them of the fact that they live in a cave and not in the free air, and by pointing out to them the way out of the cave. The dialogue is, then, not an arbitrary form of presenting a philosophic doctrine, but the necessary consequence of the way Plato understands philosophy. Plato teaches not a philosophic doctrine, but how to philosophize.

Let us be somewhat more precise about the starting point of philosophy. We live in the cave without knowing it. We believe that all fundamental problems have been solved by someone else for us. But everyone does this in his own way. Everyone, let us say, lives in his own cave. Hence the starting point differs in principle from individual to individual. Philosophy can begin at every point,<sup>13</sup> in every individual in his individual situation, and it *must* in each case begin in accordance with the individual situation, with the individual needs of the individual concerned. There is no great wisdom about that; every teacher knows that or should know it. There is an infinite variety of ways of unfettering men. Therefore, Plato is incapable of presenting the unfettering fully in his dialogues because the infinite cannot be comprehended. Yet the infinite variety of human beings, human situations, can, fortunately, be reduced to a number of types. So the unfettering of human beings can be presented in a fairly small number of dialogues. In every dialogue, there are individual human beings, which means beings with proper names and peculiarities—they can be bald, they can be fat, and have all the other qualities. In other words, not a fellow called A or B, as Hobbes called them when he wrote a dialogue.<sup>vi</sup> They address each other as “Dear A” and “Dear B.” That is not Plato’s way—they are real human beings. So in every dialogue, individual human beings with proper names, living then and there, occur. Yet those human beings are selected to view their typical character.

Now let us conclude this introductory remark, which may be too obvious for some of you and too difficult for others. I admit that I have said a number of things which are not visible at the beginning of one’s reading Plato. And yet we must, by all means, begin at the beginning, with the surface of things. Let us then return and now really begin with the surface. We start with the certainty that we are bewildered (if there is anyone of you who wants to be excluded, he has the privilege), that we are bewildered and in need of

---

<sup>vi</sup> LS is referring to Hobbes’s *Behemoth*.

guidance. And we start, furthermore, from the prejudice or the plausible assumption that we may receive some guidance from Plato. Plato has composed many writings, and he has not told us with which of these writings we should begin. Any beginning, beginning with any Platonic dialogue, is therefore perfectly legitimate. The proper beginning is to begin anywhere but truly to begin reading Plato, which means not literature on Plato.<sup>14</sup> [Nor] should we take for granted any hypothesis about Plato, but rather [we should] accept only Plato's text, the text which has been transmitted to us. Perhaps the errors of scribes shouldn't be surprising to us. There are 2,300 years between Plato and us. But without a cautious trust in traditional texts, we can have no access whatever to Plato. We do not care for one moment what clever men tell us about [the] time and circumstances in which the dialogues, say, the *Gorgias*, are composed. We consider only the time and other circumstances which Plato himself mentions in the dialogue. To begin with, we do not even know, of course, why Plato even wrote the dialogues. The dialogues are, to begin with, if [we] are reasonable, just strange creatures of Plato. Strange and, we may add, beautiful. We do not of course [know], to begin with,<sup>15</sup> even if the dialogues are philosophic books; that is only a grave premise.

What do we do in such a case? Let me state the problem as simply as I can. To understand Plato—and that, with minor variations, applies to any author of this kind or rank—means to understand what Plato says. There's a book by Paul Shorey which some of you will know: *What Plato*<sup>16</sup> [Said]<sup>vii</sup>. It is useful for many purposes. But what is fundamentally wrong with this book? Plato hasn't said anything. When you quote anything, as I did, it's not Plato. Maybe Socrates, maybe someone else—but Plato hasn't said anything. I disregard those thirteen letters which Plato is said to have written and which have come down to us, and I limit myself to the dialogues. In the dialogues, Plato never speaks, but only his characters. Even if there is a kind of prologue to the dialogue, a Platonic *character* speaks, never Plato. People will say that's childish because there is always a mouthpiece of Plato—a mouthpiece, and that is a man who is Plato. But the trouble is there is more than one mouthpiece. There is Socrates, but there are some other people. In<sup>17</sup> [five] great dialogues, it is not Socrates but some other men who are the mouthpieces. But why did Plato make different mouthpieces? You must know that if you want to know what Socrates stands for. But let us grant that and say that Socrates is *the* mouthpiece and not the Athenian stranger nor the stranger from Elea and other people. But Socrates is well known for one quality which is very important as far as speeches are concerned. That quality was irony. Plato never says anything, and his mouthpiece Socrates is the ironist. The Platonic dialogue, we may safely conclude, is a riddle.

Before one can consider Plato's teachings, [then,] one must then consider the dialogue, which means the form in which Plato presented what he had to say. This is a literary problem to begin with, and we run into a strange situation wholly unworthy of a social scientist: that we must postpone a most serious problem—how to live—in order to solve first the literary problem. Or is there a connection between the literary problem and the philosophic problem or scientific problem? Tentatively we can say the problem of presenting a teaching is a problem of human communication, and communication, as we

---

<sup>vii</sup> Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1933).

all know, is a means of living together. But that is not sufficient. Communication really is living together. (And I don't think now of TV and radio.) What does it mean, to "live together"? If I understand it correctly it means, to use a fashionable expression, to share experiences. To live together means to share experiences. So the problem of "presentation" rightly understood is really identical with the problem of society. Communication in general, that means sharing experiences, because you must admit that the communication that you get from an advertisement for a new kind of soap, although it is today called with emphasis "communication,"<sup>18</sup> is of course the poorest kind of communication; it's no kind of communication. He tells you. You are not communicating with him. So the real communication is really a two-way street, I take it, and [it is], therefore, society. Communicating generally means sharing experiences. There is one kind of communication which is called quest for truth, or philosophy, or science. So the full phenomenon of communication (where it is really communication and not only so-called communication) is identical with society and philosophy. By devoting some attention to Plato's mode of presentation, we do not leave for a moment the substantive problem of philosophy or political philosophy.

After this "apology," I turn now to the question. The Platonic dialogue is a riddle. Can it be solved? Do we have any access to it? And what is the real riddle? I give you a very common example. Let us say that the only thing on this blackboard is this "?"—a big question mark. Well? Question: What can we make with that? Is it a big [question mark]? Now let us make another. It helps, doesn't it? Some relation is possible. A question mark could stand for forty-five, or ninety-seven, or fourteen questions. But two question marks must stand for only two. So in other words, if we have more than one riddle, the riddle is not quite as bad as if we had only a single one. Lack of articulation and lack of multiplicity is the worse thing. Fortunately there are many Platonic dialogues. If we trust the tradition, there are thirty-five of them. But more than that, there are many *kinds* of Platonic dialogues. I give now a survey of the kind[s] of dialogues. I try to do what a biologist would do if he were confronted with a previously unknown fauna of a small island, so to speak. In some points, I believe, it will appear to you to be of some help.

In the first place, the Platonic dialogues can be divided into two classes: performed or narrated. Narrated means that someone in the beginning says, "I heard Socrates and some other fellows having a conversation, and so and so." Now, this looks like a drama, you know—A, B, no introduction. The majority are performed, that is, twenty-four. Nine are narrated; six of these nine are narrated by Socrates. In two cases, one can say it is uncertain whether they are performed or narrated. The second division is a simple one, into Socratic or non-Socratic, meaning whether Socrates is the chief speaker or not. In the large majority (twenty-eight cases), Socrates is the chief speaker. So we can tentatively say the normal Platonic dialogue is a performed dialogue in which Socrates is the chief speaker. This must be understood with a grain of salt. There are, I think, eighteen dialogues of this kind, out of thirty-five. There's just one more than half. In this connection, we may note one thing. Socrates appears [in] Plato in a double role: as character and actor, and as a narrator. So we have the double access to Socrates. We see him not only on the stage; we see him also in our company, as it were, telling us of something which he has heard.

The third consideration—I have no particular order in my enumeration—is of the title of the dialogues. In most cases, in twenty–seven of those thirty–five, the titles have proper names, and in seven cases, not proper names. In one case, I would say it is uncertain: the *Apology of Socrates*. I don’t know whether I shall say it has a proper name or it’s not a proper name. Now what does this mean: proper names or not proper names? The majority of Platonic dialogues have proper names, just like the *Gorgias*. In what kind of literature do we find proper names in ancient times? Tragedies, yes. *Antigone* and *Agamemnon* and so on. But there is this difference: in tragedies, the proper names are proper names of heroes, at least normally, but in Plato, the proper names occurring in titles are almost always proper names of contemporaries. That seems to reveal a real difference between Plato’s dialogues and tragedies. Where do we find contemporaries, if not in titles at least predominantly? Comedy. So it would seem that the Platonic book titles, the typical book title of proper names, indicates something in between tragedy and comedy. If you would look up the end of Plato’s *Banquet*, you would find a remark about the inseparability of tragedy and comedy in some way.<sup>viii</sup> There are only four dialogues of Plato in which the subject matter is indicated in the title, and they are: the *Republic*, the *Laws*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*. You see, if you have a proper name in a title, you know absolutely nothing of what is inside the book. For instance, you will find *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, you haven’t the slightest idea; it could be a story of a girl from Hollywood, Anna Karenina, for all we know after having read the title. Proper names are actually unrevealing [as] to the content of the book. But *Republic*, or *Laws*, it’s not unrevealing. If Plato has given only four revealing book titles, and these book titles are, to repeat, *Republic*, *Laws*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, what indication does he give of his works? Because all others are wholly unrevealing. *Banquet* is wholly unrevealing. But, I would say, he seems to have particular interest in political matters, because *Republic* (or *Politeia*), *Laws*, and *Statesman* are obviously political phenomena, and the *Sophist* [is] in this neighborhood, at least, [as it] is also [a] political<sup>19</sup> [phenomenon]. *Sophist* is the Greek equivalent to what is now called [an] intellectual. It is obviously a social or political category and has not to do with other things itself. Plato suggests in his book titles that his themes are primarily political.

I turn now to a fourth criterion of distinction, and that is the characters—but the characters in a narrower sense, namely, those who participate in the conversation, as distinguished from the chief participant. Those who are “together with,” [as] they would be called in Greek. For example, in this dialogue, the *Gorgias*, Gorgias and the others are characters, but not Socrates strictly speaking. Now all dialogues are located in Athens except two: [the] *Laws* and the sequel to the *Laws* called *Epinomis*. But there are two dialogues which are a bit outside: the *Phaedrus* is definitely outside, and the *Republic* is in the harbor outside Athens, Piraeus, which is outside Athens proper. And there are some other slight irregularities, but those which are clearly far away from Athens without any question are the *Laws* and the sequel to the *Laws*. In most dialogues, there are Athenians present apart from Socrates himself. There are two exceptions, the *Larger Hippias* and the *Ion*. In twenty–one dialogues, the chief interlocutors are Athenians—an enormous percentage, more than fifty percent. But let us look at this more closely. There

---

<sup>viii</sup> *Symposium* 223d2–6.

is not a single Platonic dialogue where Socrates talks to an artisan, craftsman, or a laborer—not a single one. That is important to notice because Plato’s contemporary, Xenophon, made it clear that Socrates talked a lot with such simple, humble people and gave some examples of it.<sup>ix</sup> You know perhaps from Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* that Socrates was presented there as spending all his time in the market place talking to all kinds of people. And it may have been true. But Plato didn’t give any evidence of it except in the statement of Socrates in the *Apology of Socrates*.<sup>x</sup>

Now another thing. There is no Platonic dialogue in which the interlocutor is a woman. There is a minor qualification, and the ladies will take it in their stride—you know what kind of prejudices man had in former times. There appear two women, of course, who were very famous: Diotima in the *Banquet* and Aspasia in the *Menexenus*, but they don’t appear. Socrates tells what these ladies told him. There is only one woman [who] really appears for a second: Socrates’ wife.<sup>xi</sup> [Inaudible words] but they are socially respected or socially famous people. But they are strangers. So while the taboo against the lower class people and women is preserved, the taboo against strangers is not preserved. But the most curious thing is the following one. There are only three dialogues in which the chief interlocutors are men actually in politics at the time—for young people who later on became famous politicians, like Charmides, Critias, and Alcibiades, are of course not yet actual politicians. Alcibiades in the *Banquet* is of course not the chief interlocutor, nor is Anytus in the *Meno*. The dialogues in which actual Athenian politicians are the chief interlocutors are the *Apology of Socrates*, where he talks to the *polis* of Athens as a whole, and *Laches*. In other words, while Plato indicates by the externals—and I’m now thinking only of the externals—that politics is his major theme, the atmosphere is not political, for politicians don’t play any role to speak of in the dialogues. I think it makes sense, doesn’t it, that someone would regard the question of the right order of society as the most urgent, and in a way the most important question? And yet these are things too serious to be left to the politicians and to be even discussed with politicians. And there are some remarks approaching this in the Platonic dialogues.<sup>20</sup> And here, I can leave it at the following remark: there is one dialogue in which a very young Socrates appears, *Parmenides*, and seven in which the very old Socrates appears, and all of the dialogues are, of course, within these limits.

The sixth point I would make is concerned with distinctions between dialogues which lead up to a teaching and dialogues leading up to a question. For instance, the *Republic* leads up to a teaching, the *Gorgias* leads up to a teaching, but the *Theaetetus*, for example, leads up to a question. Now these remarks, are they helpful to solve the riddle? I think they also increase the riddle.

Now let us make a fresh start at this point. What does “dialogue” mean? Dialogue is derived from a Greek verb which means to converse with each other—meet one<sup>21</sup> [with] another. Now what does it mean? I would like to quote you a passage which is not

---

<sup>ix</sup> Cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.10.

<sup>x</sup> *Apology of Socrates* 17c7–d1.

<sup>xi</sup> *Phaedo* 59e8–60b1.

sufficiently considered, I believe, in a work by Plato's contemporary Xenophon, which is called *Memorabilia* or *Recollections*, Book IV, chapter 6, in which we read:

When anyone contradicted Socrates on any point without being able to make himself clear, asserting, but not proving, that so and so was wiser, or an abler statesman, or braver, or was not, Socrates would lead the whole discussion back to the definition required [just] about<sup>22</sup> in this way: 'Do you say that your man is a better citizen than mine?' 'I do indeed.' 'Then why do we not first consider what is the function of a good citizen?' 'Let us do so.' 'A financial administrator, isn't he a man who makes the city wealthier?' 'Certainly.' 'And in war, he who makes us stronger than our rivals?' 'Of course.' 'And in embassy, he who turns our enemies into friends?' 'Presumably.' 'And in debate, he who puts down strife and produces harmony?' 'I think so.' By this process of leading back the argument, even his adversary came to see the truth clearly. Whenever Socrates himself argued out a question, he advanced by steps. He moved through that which was in the highest degree generally accepted, holding this to be the only safe form of speech. Accordingly, whenever he argued, he gained a greater measure of assent from his hearers than any man I know. He said that Homer gave Odysseus the credit of being a safe speaker, because Odysseus was capable<sup>23</sup> [of leading] the discussion through these things which are generally admitted by man.

Now you see here Xenophon makes the distinction between two kinds of dialogue. In one case, the one mentioned by Xenophon first, Socrates talks to a contradictor. And then Socrates says, "All right, let's go back to principles. Let us go back to the beginning and see what the fundamental issue involved is. What is it that makes a good citizen a good citizen?" But there are also other cases [in] which not the contradictor but Socrates has the initiative. In this case, Socrates did not go back to principle, but led the discussion through things that were generally accepted. And in this way, Socrates produced agreement, consent, harmony. What does this mean? The second form of dialectics is not meant to lead to truth but to mere agreement in the generally accepted. The first one is meant to lead to truth, and this first one, which is so much more important ultimately, Socrates used only when talking to contradictors. Now, why are contradictors given a preferential treatment by Socrates? Did he like smart alecks, or what? No. The reason can be said very crudely, that (very generally speaking and making allowances for an infinite number of considerations) a person who is<sup>24</sup> [able] to contradict and not simply to take things and accept them in a passive way is more<sup>25</sup> [able] to understand. All understanding, whether it is an expression of a form of contradiction, an external contradiction, has this character—"What does he mean by that?" "Is this true?"—which is, of course, contradicting. And to that extent, all true learning consists of contradiction.

Now Xenophon pursues this point throughout his work. To mention only one or two more examples, he indicates that Socrates made a distinction between various human types. One he called good-natured, by which he did not mean good-natured people, but meant what we would call gifted people. And the other were various kinds of non-gifted people.<sup>xii</sup> Xenophon does not present Socrates' conversations with gifted people—generally speaking, only with the non-gifted people. I give you first certain facts; later on I will interpret them. The greatest examples of that [are] in the Third Book of his

---

<sup>xii</sup> *Memorabilia* 4.1.

*Recollections*. He begins with utterly uninteresting anonymous people—no names are mentioned—and then he comes up in chapter 6 to a fellow called Glaucon, who may be known to some of you from Plato's *Republic*. This Glaucon was a young fellow of twenty–some–odd years, silly but very nice. So<sup>26</sup> Xenophon had to add that Socrates conversed with him for the sake of Charmides, the son of Glaucon, and for the sake of Plato. This is the only occasion that Xenophon mentions Plato. So Charmides was much closer to Socrates than this young fellow Glaucon. And Xenophon goes on in the next chapter, chapter 7, where he gives the conversation between Socrates and Charmides. Now we must get the taste for a real conversation, the conversation between Socrates and Plato. Instead, we get the conversation between Socrates and Aristippus. Aristippus was a philosopher of a kind, but certainly not Plato. So what Xenophon is doing is this: he points to a peak, and that peak is not given. We must imagine, guess, what would have happened there. We don't know.

Now what does this mean regarding Plato? Has this any meaning regarding Plato? One general consideration regarding all Platonic dialogues: there is never a conversation between equals. Now, you can perhaps say there was no equal to Socrates. That is not quite true. There was a man<sup>27</sup> [who appears] in some dialogues called the Stranger from Elea. If he was not exactly the equal of Socrates, he came closer to being an equal of Socrates than any one else. Or for that matter, Timaeus in the dialogue called *Timaeus*. But in these cases, only amenities are exchanged between Socrates and these other men. No theory is worked out. Plato never gives us a conversation between equals, the only exception<sup>28</sup> being *Parmenides*, where Socrates talks to such giants as Parmenides and Zeno. But in this case, unfortunately, Socrates is not equal to Parmenides and Zeno, because he's very young. So that is one major principle of the Platonic dialogues: never to present a dialogue with an equal. The chief speakers are always talking to people lower than they, intellectually. Now there are some indications of that in a cruder but by no means negligible way. For example, when Plato wants Socrates to discuss courage, he has him discuss courage, of course, with great experts of courage, and they are, naturally, generals. At least they are presumed to be the greatest experts. So he had the dialogue on courage with two generals, Laches and Nicias. But, alas, they are both seen as defeated generals. And later they have a discussion on moderation—on modesty, we can say. He naturally chose a youth who was outstanding because of his modest, charming, retiring ways, called Charmides. But again, alas, this Charmides later on became a master in immodesty, namely, a tyrant. And similar things happen in other matters, even the *Republic*. I don't have to dwell on that now. So, what does all this mean?

One conclusion is obvious. The element of irony that goes through all the Platonic dialogues can never be disregarded—or the element of comedy, if you wish. I would like to state a conclusion: in all Platonic dialogues, the chief interlocutor—in most cases, Socrates—talks to [an]other man or [other] men who are lower on various stages. Some are very low intellectually, very simple and unsophisticated;<sup>29</sup> [others are] very sophisticated. The conversation is always “up to down.” The true understanding of the Platonic dialogue and what Socrates *means* and what he is *doing* requires the translation of what is said in this level, low, into this, high; what is said on a lower level must be translated back to a high level. In other words, if in reading the *Republic* you understand

of Socrates' conversation with Polemarchus or Thrasymachus, let us say, only what Polemarchus and Thrasymachus understood, you do not understand it sufficiently, because then you are still Polemarchus or Thrasymachus, or Laches, or whoever it may be. The task—whether it can be fulfilled by people like ourselves is another matter—but the ideal task is to raise from here, low, to here, high—to understand what Socrates means, as distinguished from [what he could convey to this particular individual at his stage of development].<sup>30</sup> That is a general rule which is of practically no use because how do you apply this?

This question, however, how this rule can become operational, can be answered. There is a Platonic dialogue called *Phaedrus* which is devoted to love speeches—speeches dictated by love and ultimately by love for the truth, and therefore to such things as Platonic dialogues. And Plato gives this notion: all writings are necessarily defective<sup>31</sup> because they say the same thing equally to all men. They are rigid; they cannot adapt themselves.<sup>xiii</sup> And everyone who teaches knows that to make people understand means to adapt oneself to the different kinds of capacities, interests, of the student. Plato wrote his dialogues with the intention of producing such writings as are free from the defects of writing. So a Platonic dialogue is *meant* to say different things to different people. So the ambiguity of the dialogue is not due to that which every artist today would say: a painting by Rembrandt says infinitely different things to infinitely different people. He does not mean by that that Rembrandt *intended* that painting to have an infinite variety of meanings. As far as Plato is concerned, I would not say he has [an] infinite variety of meanings, but a large variety of meanings intended by Plato himself. But there is, of course, one highest meaning: that meaning which would exhibit to us Plato's thoughts on the subject matter—say, rhetoric, justice, or whatever it may be. How can we reach them? The general answer again is given in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*. Plato compared there a perfect writing to an animal.<sup>xiv</sup> In an animal, every part of the body—that is what Plato assumes—has a function. And without that part, however small, the animal could not be; that is to say, it could not function well. Plato applies this to perfect speeches and says there is a kind of necessity which determines the writing of speeches and therefore the understanding of speeches. Every part of this speech is necessary. There are no impressions permitted on the part of the reader. There is no slipshod work permitted on the part of the author. Everything is meaningful. For instance, when you take a dialogue like the *Republic*, which most of you have seen, I guess, you have a prelude in which a certain scene is described. Certain people go down to the Piraeus to look at a procession, and they are kept there by some people, and there they stay until deep into the night, maybe the whole night, and have a conversation. And they meet a fellow of this character and a fellow of that character, and even their names are given, and sometimes the father's name too and so on. [What has this to do with the serious problem of justice?]<sup>32</sup> You can say at the beginning, it has nothing whatever. But Plato means something by this. You do not understand the *Republic* if you do not understand the time at which the conversation took place, the location at which it took place, the personnel, if I may say so,<sup>33</sup> [who] participated in that conversation, and what is the order in which they enter and so forth. All these things have to be considered. For example,<sup>34</sup> at the beginning of the *Republic*, a

---

<sup>xiii</sup> *Phaedrus* 275d–e.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Phaedrus* 264c.



boy, a slave of Polemarchus, is catching Socrates from the back of the coat, keeping him back, and at the beginning of the Fifth Book, someone makes a similar gesture, dragging Socrates. The question becomes necessary: Why? Why does Plato do this? Merely in order to make this more enjoyable? This is an idiotic answer because no serious book becomes enjoyable by the addition of<sup>35</sup> [complete] irrelevance. So what, then, is the meaning of this? What does this scene in the beginning of Book 5 have in common with the beginning of the work, so that such an external thing like the touching of a fellow's coat can be used as an indication, as it were. An infinite number of questions. When we study the *Gorgias*, we will have to mention at least some of them.

Now I think I'll leave it at that for the time being, because the development of all these things requires the detailed study of a Platonic work, whichever it may be. And for some reasons I chose the *Gorgias*. I would like to summarize what I have tried to say today. I want[ed] to explain in a general way, why Plato can be, might be, should be, of particular interest to us as contemporaries of the time in which philosophy has fallen into complete discredit and science claims to reign supreme. And then I tried to indicate the peculiar difficulties with which we are confronted when trying to read Plato—difficulties which do not appear when we would read, for example, Aristotle, and still less of course when we try to read Hume or Kant or Hegel. But I have tried to indicate that this apparently unnecessary or superfluous complication, which arises from the fact that Plato wrote dialogues, is not external to the subject matter, because the understanding of Plato's technique—the understanding of Plato's way of communicating—is a part of his teaching regarding communication, [and] that means regarding society. And therefore even though we have not the slightest interest in literary matters, we have to do something which might look to be guided by interest in literary matters. And I hope you'll keep these in mind.

**Student:** I have one question. You spoke about the primarily, necessarily, and universally given absolute beginning for philosophy. And then you also spoke about each "given" being different relative to each individual. It's a little hard to see how you get to the primary, necessary, and universally—

**LS:** But look. It is wise to assume that every human being differs qualitatively from every other human being. I mean, up to now, I have always found it true. Take two men. Where are they? They meet somewhere in the Midway,<sup>xv</sup> but certainly on earth, and the heaven is above. And there is always something like other human beings and brutes and plants. And there are always in them, in some way, notions of good and bad, what are now called "values." We cannot imagine a human being which is not somehow haunted by "values." These things are perfectly compatible. But the point is this: To reach this point of agreement regarding the questionable character of our overall opinions—there is real unity *there*. Strictly speaking, men can become united only in thinking. Physical union is not, obviously, a complete union. But if you study [a] mathematical proposition, a demonstration, and you understand it, you and your neighbor think exactly the same thing. You are indistinguishable there, in what you think. So let us apply this to the fundamental question in the Platonic problem, the realization that we live in a cave—that

---

<sup>xv</sup> The Midway is a park that runs through the University of Chicago campus.

can be identical in principle in all human beings. The point from which they start to that realization differs from individual to individual. That, I think, is really a constant experience in the classroom. I remember that I made certain points for years and years, and sometimes I made a dent; but where I made a dent, that differs from individual to individual, absolutely. That is the infinite variety of individuals, individual needs, individual opinions, and individual predilections. It's perfectly compatible with some, not only similarity, but true identity of thoughts. But what I was trying to say is this: That the primary identity, if I may use it, concerns really heaven and earth and what is between them in<sup>36</sup> [the] very crude sense in which I tried to state it. No discussion, even if the fellow is an extreme skeptic—in between, for example, he says, “You don't grant that?”<sup>xvi</sup> Mind you, what does he admit? That he *knows* that you are. Then he goes to the library and gets other books. He has to read an argument. Heaven and earth and what is between them are all implied in this simple thing. So even the denial of the fact that things are, even if it were true, would be derivative from the admission that things are, because it must be proven on the basis of our ordinary understanding. And that finds, of course,<sup>37</sup> [a] parallel within the more technical parts of social science—as most of you will know, because, while there is no social scientist who doubts the existence of heaven and earth and what is between them,<sup>38</sup> they doubt some equivalents of that. For example, that [a] common good may exist is part of the story. And the denial of [a] common good is the intra-social science equivalent to the denial<sup>39</sup> [of] the existence of heaven and earth in a certain kind of philosophy. Because once you say “society,” you admit there's [a] common good. Otherwise, it's not a society, it would be just many herds living by accident in the same place—which, I believe, no one understands. Well, then, let us begin next time by studying *Gorgias*.

[end of session]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “art.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “sciences.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “is this one.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “in.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “How.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “This critical philosophy.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “finalities.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “its.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “e.g.” and replaced it with “for example.” This change was introduced throughout and will henceforth go unnoted.

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “into.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “Prior.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “not.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “Says.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “give.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “it.”

---

<sup>xvi</sup> The original wording of this perplexing sentence has been retained. [Ed.]

- 
- <sup>19</sup> Deleted “phenomena.”
- <sup>20</sup> Deleted “Under this consideration, I mentioned that time.”
- <sup>21</sup> Deleted “to.”
- <sup>22</sup> Deleted “much.”
- <sup>23</sup> Deleted “to lead.”
- <sup>24</sup> Deleted “capable.”
- <sup>25</sup> Deleted “capable.”
- <sup>26</sup> Deleted “that.”
- <sup>27</sup> Deleted “coming in.”
- <sup>28</sup> Deleted “...the exception.”
- <sup>29</sup> Deleted “or the.”
- <sup>30</sup> Changed from “what he could convey at his stage of the development to this particular individual.”
- <sup>31</sup> “But” deleted after “defective.”
- <sup>32</sup> Changed from “This is what has to do with the serious problem of justice.”
- <sup>33</sup> Deleted “which.”
- <sup>34</sup> Deleted “Thrasymachus.”
- <sup>35</sup> Deleted “completely.”
- <sup>36</sup> Deleted “a.”
- <sup>37</sup> Deleted “to.”
- <sup>38</sup> Deleted “but.”
- <sup>39</sup> Deleted “to.”

## Session 2: January 8, 1957

[In progress] **Leo Strauss:** —and of the primacy within that philosophy of political philosophy, and of the connection between Platonic philosophy and the dialogic form in which it is presented. The problem of this form, the dialogue, which to begin with seems to be a merely literary problem, proves to be identical with the substantive problem of the greatest importance—if we assume that society means essentially communication, and that the quest for truth is, to say the least, inseparable from communication. I indicated the difficulty caused by the fact that we cannot possibly say what Plato said, for Plato never says anything in any dialogue. And the only way to establish what Plato meant is to read his dialogues as dialogues in which he does not participate. I don't have the time to repeat the details, but the most relevant ones will come up quite naturally in the course of our discussion. I would like to add only one point. The principle of the Platonic dialogues is this: the dialogues are writings which are free from [the] deficiencies<sup>1</sup> [of] writing in general. They achieve this by being controlled by what Plato called the necessity governing the writing of speeches: *logographic* necessity. Everything is necessary, nothing is accidental. But did I not say that Plato does not present in his dialogues individuals as such, but only as representatives of types? And are not the purely individual features necessarily incidental? By purely individual features, I mean a man—his proper name is this and this, [the] proper name of his father is this and this, the city of his origin is this and this. Or, to take the simple example, let us assume that Socrates [re]presented<sup>2</sup> [the] type of the philosopher. Why does Plato or Xenophon stress so much the fact that Socrates had a snub nose, protruding eyes, a most difficult wife, was the son of a midwife, and other purely accidental things? Because Plato cannot possibly mean that a philosopher must have a snubbed nose and protruding eyes, and a difficult wife, and be the son of the midwife. These things are matters of chance, not of necessity. But this is exactly the point. The Platonic dialogue is based on a fundamental untruth, which in Greek is the same as a lie, a noble untruth, [a] noble lie—and that is that there is no chance. [In] Plato's dialogues, that somebody like Socrates has protruding eyes, with other qualities, must be understood to refer to something essential. To what, we don't know. But the simplest explanation, of course, is to take all these features together and say Socrates was a very ugly man. And whether a philosopher has to be an ugly man, in a literal sense, is a dubious question. Plato was very handsome, and John Locke was, I think, very handsome. But we must understand that on the proper occasion. But this principle, [this] deliberate untruth—that there is no chance—is the principle of the Platonic dialogues. Now we turn, then, to the *Gorgias*.

Now a few words about the *Gorgias* in general, the first impression which everyone gets in reading it. The *Gorgias* contains an examination of the art of rhetoric, which means here more specifically, the art of getting acquitted before a law court by fair means or foul. But it really leads to a broader issue of the art of getting what one wants, before law courts or anywhere else,<sup>3</sup> by speeches or any other means, by fair means or foul. This art of getting what one wants by fair means or foul is a morally neutral art, obviously. It presupposes in its very conception that justice can legitimately be questioned; in other

words, the consideration of justice is not so evidently necessary that you cannot abstract from it; in other words, that justice is a problem. We are familiar with this notion from present-day political science because we know that some political scientists conceive of political science as an art of getting what one wants and how. Therefore, there's a certain proximity, a kinship, between our most pressing problems today in political science, if not in politics, and the problem of the *Gorgias*. But, as I said last time, it may be that there is much more in the *Gorgias* than a criticism of Lasswell. And therefore, I've only mentioned this to show that even if you regard the issue raised by Lasswell as terribly important, that alone would be a reason to study the *Gorgias*.

Now another very general word about the dialogue. It consists of three major parts. After a brief introduction, Socrates engages in a conversation with Gorgias, thereafter with Polus, and thereafter with Callicles. And the size always increases. The largest part, [with] Callicles<sup>4</sup>, is considerably longer than with Gorgias. And this is paralleled by the structure of the *Republic*, and that is not altogether unimportant, because the *Republic*, too, consists of three such parts. After a brief introduction, there is a conversation between Socrates and Cephalus and Polemarchus. They belong together because Polemarchus is simply the heir, the son and heir, of Cephalus, and the heir not only of Cephalus' considerable fortune but also of his thesis. Then we have the second part: Thrasymachus. And Thrasymachus reminds in many ways of Polus. Both were teachers of rhetoric and both seemed to be violent people, as anyone of you who have read it will know. And the Callicles part is parallel to the<sup>5</sup> [third] part of the *Republic*, Books 2 to 10, the conversation<sup>6</sup> [with] two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus. Needless to say, Glaucon and Adeimantus are very different from Callicles. [Yet] the difference here is not too great. And Cephalus and Gorgias have something in common: both are old men. But the one is an old merchant, and this one is also in a way an old money-maker—Gorgias.

Now, let us now go into the midst of things. We take first the beginning, 447a<sup>1</sup>–c, roughly, a prelude to the conversation, a conversation between Socrates, Chaerephon, and Callicles. Callicles is later on the big hero. But Chaerephon shows up only at the beginning and very occasionally in the dialogue. And the first word of Callicles is to this effect: Callicles wishes to say, “Of war and battle, one should partake as you, Socrates, partake of the exhibition as displayed by Gorgias.” Meaning: “You are a fool to come too late to the display of Gorgias. If it had been war and battle, you would have been wise to come after the battle.” But he does not say this. Socrates, Chaerephon, and Callicles meet somewhere and certainly not in the house of Callicles. But not very far from where Gorgias is at present. Gorgias was a very famous teacher of rhetoric, and also, in a way, a philosopher. But that's the only thing you have to know. And he comes from Sicily. Gorgias had displayed his art of speaking and Callicles enjoyed it. But, for one reason or another, Callicles left Gorgias' company. Perhaps he had another date for the time being. Callicles begins the conversation. He begins with the words “war and battle.” War is a frightening condition, and battle is a frightening action. Unwittingly, Callicles describes

---

<sup>1</sup> LS uses “to” for indicating a span of Stephanus pages, as here “447a to c.” The “to” is replaced throughout with an –en dash.

Gorgias' display, show-off, exhibition, as something terrifying. Let us venture a guess which is absolutely outlandish to begin with, but it is not unimportant to say so. Maybe Callicles left Gorgias' company because of the terrifying character of what had happened. Socrates tacitly corrects Callicles: "We<sup>7</sup> [haven't arrived] after war and battle, my dear Callicles. You want to say 'you arrive after the feast.' We missed something good." Callicles chose the wrong proverb. He made a poor choice. He lacks prudence. Callicles believes in opinion. That's the reason why he chose the proverb. But the proverb is against him. And that is perhaps the riddle of Callicles in a nutshell, which we may see later. Socrates replaces the improper proverb by a fitting one—not war and battle, but after a feast.<sup>8</sup> He also follows opinion in choosing a proverb, but he questions somehow its wisdom. He adds a remark which is deleted in the usual edition but it should be in: "and we are late." Period. Meaning, that is no proverb: "we are late." Whether it's something good or bad is another matter. Callicles says, "You come after a very nice feast." "Nice"<sup>ii</sup>—he doesn't say beautiful or grand. To extend the meaning of what I say by "nice," Aristotle says short people can never be beautiful, but can be nice.<sup>iii</sup> Nice is something less than beautiful.

Socrates excuses his being late. He would have come in time, but Chaerephon compelled him to stay in the marketplace. Socrates does not stay voluntarily in the marketplace. But Chaerephon does, to say the least: Chaerephon compels himself to stay in the marketplace, whereas Socrates was compelled by another man to stay in the marketplace. Socrates would prefer to listen to Gorgias' display rather than to stay in the marketplace. Staying in the marketplace is a poor substitute for listening to Gorgias' display. Or the other way around, Gorgias' displays are a superior substitute for the marketplace. Chaerephon apologizes to Socrates. He has inflicted on Socrates a loss, a wound. But he will heal it, for he, Chaerephon, is a friend of Gorgias. And Gorgias will do him a favor, displaying his art again for the benefit of Socrates. Chaerephon is considerate for his friend, Gorgias: perhaps Gorgias needs some rest. Whether Gorgias will make another display now depends not only on Socrates, but on Gorgias' health, whereas it depends only on Socrates whether Gorgias will display for Socrates on another day. Chaerephon is the link between Socrates and Gorgias, just as he is the link between Socrates and the marketplace. This is emphasized by the fact that Socrates and Gorgias know each other prior to the conversation. The question is: Why, then, is the link needed between Socrates and Gorgias? And why is Chaerephon that link? Chaerephon does not know why Socrates wants to see Gorgias. He believes that Socrates desires to listen to a display of Gorgias. Even Callicles has difficulty in believing this. In a way, Callicles knows Socrates better than Chaerephon does. Callicles says that whenever Socrates wants to listen to Gorgias' display, he should come to Callicles' house where Gorgias is staying during his sojourn in Athens. Callicles implies that this could not well be done now. It seems the display had taken place within. We do not know within what. But I don't believe it was in Callicles' house. Perhaps, as someone has suggested, in a gymnasium,

---

<sup>ii</sup> *asteias*.

<sup>iii</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1123b7–8.

which means, rather, outside of Athens. The locality of this dialogue is ambiguous. But this only in passing.

Socrates does not desire to listen to Gorgias' display; he wills to have a *conversation* with Gorgias. In the one word, it is "desiring," and the other is "willing." It's not unimportant. Desire means a kind of a sensual pleasure, and willing has something to do with the rational. So Socrates *wills* a conversation with Gorgias about "[the] power of the art of that *man*," Gorgias. Gorgias is emphatically a "man." One word about this. There are two things that come out in the translation: one Greek word which I translate as "he-man," *anēr*, and then there is the word *anthropos*, from which "anthropology" is derived, which means "human being," *anthropos*. But a male—I think also in the Spanish, *hombre*, there's a similar meaning, you know, "real guy." And Gorgias is such a "real guy," and we will see this is of some importance.<sup>9</sup> You will see [this] later, because [it]<sup>10</sup> has something to do with the art of rhetoric.<sup>11</sup> [While] Socrates would prefer to listen to Gorgias' display rather than to stay on the marketplace, he prefers still more to have a conversation with Gorgias about his art, rather than to listen to Gorgias' display. There is a certain urgency about this conversation: "Let us have it now." Why? We do not know. At any rate, there is no difficulty, Calicles suggests, about their having the conversation now—the conversation, as distinguished from the display. Do you have any difficulties in understanding the word "display"? I do not want to be more technical than absolutely necessary. Can you imagine that there are people who make speeches which do not have any practical function, but only to display the art of the man? That's a display, for the time being at least. But this conversation between Socrates and Gorgias is from Gorgias' point of view, again, a display. That's different. But still, Socrates is not interested in the display but only the conversation.

Now we come to 447c–d, the conversation between Socrates and Chaerephon. Somehow they've entered now the place within which Gorgias and his friends are. Socrates asks Chaerephon to ask Gorgias a question. Why? Because Chaerephon is Gorgias' friend. He's the link between the two men. But there is perhaps a bit more to this than that. I read to you a passage from Plato's *Apology of Socrates*: "Chaerephon was my comrade," which does not mean, needless to say, a member of the Communist party, but it had something, however, in common with that usage, because that term has a political connotation. The political group, they are chiefly of an oligarchic character, they are called "comradeship," and so on. And so we chose this translation wisely. "Chaerephon was my comrade from childhood on, and, at the same time, a comrade to the multitude of you. And he was exiled together with others, in that famous exiling and he came back together with you"—which means that Chaerephon was a comrade of the *demos*, of the common people, and he was exiled after an oligarchic revolution and came back after the oligarchic revolution together with the other democratic leaders, after all were free—"You know what kind of man Chaerephon was, how impetuous towards everything he moved forward to. Hence, having once gone to Delphi, the seat of the oracle, he dared to ask the oracle whether there was anyone wiser than I, Socrates."<sup>iv</sup> Chaerephon had gone

---

<sup>iv</sup> *Apology of Socrates* 20e8–21a6.

to ask the oracle. Here Socrates requests him to ask another oracle, Gorgias—for Gorgias is obviously an oracle: he said he can answer any question.<sup>12</sup> [Did] Socrates also have [Chaerephon] put the question regarding Socrates' wisdom to the oracle of Delphi? We don't know. Gorgias, at any rate, is an oracle. He claims to answer every question, but also, as stated later in 456, the art of rhetoric has something demonic. This, in Greek, does not mean something evil, but something uncanny, let me say. Socrates formulates a question for Chaerephon, just as he formulated the question for Xenophon, when Xenophon wanted to go to Delphi to ask the gods there for an answer.<sup>v</sup> Chaerephon does not understand the question, because Socrates says "ask him what he is." "What do you mean?" Chaerephon does not understand the question although Socrates had spelled it out before. Socrates explains to Chaerephon by giving him an example. If Gorgias were a maker of footwear, then he would answer, "he is a shoemaker." And now what then is he, since he obviously is not a maker of footwear? The art of making footwear is the art of making something protecting the body. Rhetoric, too, will prove to be an art of protecting the body, by which I mean to say [that] the examples chosen are not simply haphazard. We note in conclusion of this remark, Chaerephon is a link between Socrates and the marketplace—and the marketplace is a place of the *demos*—and between Socrates and the oracle in Delphi, and between Socrates and Gorgias.

Now we turn to the next point: 447d–448a, the abortive conversation between Chaerephon and Gorgias. Gorgias knows all the answers, and, as he now adds, he knows all the questions, which is of course a necessary consequence from the former. But there is a difficulty here because the oracle knows all the answers but not all the questions. Gorgias might be able to answer all questions but not willing to do so. Hence Chaerephon raises the question "you will easily answer." Gorgias gives an evasive answer. He divines a difficulty. He's really a demonic man. The difficulty will prove to be caused by his companion Polus, who simply takes over with a view to Gorgias' alleged tiredness. Whereas Socrates' companion, Chaerephon, does Socrates' bidding, Gorgias' companion achieves, apparently, a mastery over Gorgias. Socrates is a successful ruler, whereas Gorgias is not. Those who are interested read the account given by Xenophon in the *Expedition of Cyrus*, Book 2, of Proxenus, a pupil of Gorgias who is tacitly contrasted to Xenophon, the pupil of Socrates.<sup>vi</sup> Gorgias was really not a teacher of good rulers; Socrates was. Proof? Xenophon's *Anabasis*, if you have ever read that. Impetuous, swearing, Polus pushes Gorgias aside.

Now the next step: 448a–d, the abortive conversation between Chaerephon and Polus. Chaerephon is no match for Polus. Should Socrates be [considered] so successful in ruling Chaerephon? Because Chaerephon is a walkover. Is Socrates really such a successful ruler? At any rate, the superiority of Gorgias is tacitly admitted by Polus. He doesn't say that he is as good as Gorgias, but he says he's good enough for Chaerephon. Chaerephon steps back and hesitates. Now he shows a certain independence: in reformulating Socrates' question, he shunts Socrates' homey example, the shoemaker. In

---

<sup>v</sup> *Anabasis* 3.1.5–7.

<sup>vi</sup> *Anabasis* 2.6.16–20.



another respect, his examples are more homey than Socrates'. Gorgias reminds Chaerephon of Gorgias' brother: these two brothers, brother artisans—all are famous men. The unnamed brother of Aristophon is the painter Polygnotus.<sup>vii</sup> Chaerephon replaces the art of shoemaking by the art of medicine, which is also an art of protecting the body by curing it, and of painting, which is an imitative art. Should rhetoric perhaps cure the body—or cure generally speaking by imitating, by the use of simile, for example? But why this reference to brothers? You see, does Chaerephon have<sup>13</sup> [a] kind of associative mind? Gorgias reminds him of<sup>14</sup> [Gorgias'] brother, and they remind him of two other brothers. We read in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Book 2, chapter 3, Chaerephon had quarreled with his younger brother. His younger brother says of him to Socrates that Chaerephon's brother could more easily be persuaded to restore amity between the two brothers than the difficult Chaerephon himself. It seems that the efforts of the younger brother to restore friendly relations were of no avail. So, in other words, "brother" reminds him of his personal problems: his brother. And that throws some light on Chaerephon, as we shall see later. Polus says, of course, that the art of Gorgias is the finest and best of all arts. The answer implies there is no essential difference between experience and art, and there is no difference between the best and the finest, or noblest, or most beautiful. We shall see later, when Polus' own entry will take place, that Polus will say there that there is a lot of a difference between the good and the fine and noble. That, however, for later.

Now, if we summarize<sup>15</sup>—well, one thing I should mention right away. I often translate the Greek word *technē* as "art," but you must understand that has a very broad meaning in Greek. It embraces the art of the shoemaker as well as the art of Homer. It may even embrace, and indeed it does embrace in Plato, all science. Let us say tentatively an art is a pursuit which can be transmitted from teacher to pupil because it consists of rules. That is a good beginning. So, in other words, whether it is a shoemaker—you have to think of shoemaker and Homer at the same time if the word art occurs without any addition. Now, if I summarize what happened up to this point, up to 448c, we find four brief dialogues which are followed by three long dialogues. Altogether seven dialogues. And the brief dialogue between Chaerephon and Polus is in the center. Chaerephon is defeated by Polus. Chaerephon can't say a word against him. The power of Gorgias is in a way revealed in this short dialogue—the power of the art of that man, Gorgias, which reveals its power over the democratic, impetuous, unfraternal Chaerephon. Also, Gorgias has Polus, who takes up the fight for him after he has become tired and old. Socrates has no such Polus. Does he need one? Does his<sup>16</sup> [cause] need one? Is Socrates anxious to investigate Gorgias' art because he needs an equivalent of it? We don't know. I mention here only two facts. In the first presentation of Socrates which has come down to us, in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Socrates is presented as possessing two arts. The one is "physiology" in the Greek sense, which meant at that time the same as philosophy, and the other art is rhetoric.<sup>viii</sup> And the symbol "clouds" is taken because it indicates both the clouds [as] the sky and [the] clouds<sup>17</sup> [as] imitating bears and lambs and human beings

---

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. *Ion* 532e.

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. *Clouds* 94–99.

and on and on. That is the meaning of the title. But that was a young Socrates, and, of course, Socrates changes his ways in many ways. But you must also not forget that a very great orator came out of Socrates' school: Isocrates. See the end of the dialogue *Phaedrus*.<sup>ix</sup> And, above all, Xenophon, whose writings have come down to us, and [who] is called in the manuscripts "the orator, Xenophon." So what I suggest in the beginning is only this simple thing: there is a Socratic rhetoric, and this Socratic rhetoric is an indispensable part of Socrates. And we must see what light falls on the Socratic rhetoric, which is, of course, fundamentally distinguished from Gorgias' rhetoric. That's exactly the subject of the dialogue.

So from this point on, 448d–461b, in which<sup>18</sup> Socrates' conversation with Gorgias [takes place]. The first step, 448d–449a: Socrates brings about the conversation with Gorgias by pushing Polus aside. Socrates has to overcome a certain resistance not only on the part of Polus but on the part of Gorgias as well. Gorgias is not eager to converse. Suddenly, Socrates proves to be stronger than Polus. He rebukes him very sharply, and Polus has to take it. Polus has tried to answer the question of how noble or good the art of Gorgias is without having previously answered the question of what that art is. That calls for a brief comment: the distinction between what the art is and of how good a quality it is. It might at times remind some of you of the distinction between facts and values, but that is not quite the case, I believe. What does Polus say? What should he have said? Rhetoric is the noblest or best art because it fulfills this and this function. The question is, of course, what function does it fulfill? And he didn't say a word about that. Only after we know which function is fulfilled by rhetoric can we properly decide the question whether rhetoric is the noblest or not the noblest art. Socrates does not say, nor imply, that the question as to which art fulfills the noblest function cannot be answered rationally. We must know first what function is fulfilled by the art of rhetoric. And once we know that, we have, of course, to make up our mind how important, or good, or valuable that function is.

Then the second step: 449a–c, the beginning of the conversation with Gorgias, which consists of two parts. First, we must know the *name* of that art, because in the dialogue we have not yet heard the name, and, second the *manner* in which the subject is to be discussed. We learn now that Gorgias' art is rhetoric, and Gorgias himself is an orator. He calls himself a good orator and asks Socrates to call him also a good orator. But Socrates refuses to do so. Socrates uses here a plural, as you might see. He makes common<sup>19</sup> [cause] with Chaerephon. He and Chaerephon want to find out. His conversation with Gorgias takes place somehow on behalf of Chaerephon. But you must always remember when we speak of Chaerephon what we have found out about Chaerephon's character.<sup>20</sup> [He is] a man of great affection for Socrates but distinguished from Socrates by quite a few qualities, one of them being that he was much more dedicated to democracy than Socrates was, to put it mildly, and, on the other hand,<sup>21</sup> he was somewhat unfraternal. Now Gorgias claims he's an orator; second, a good orator; third, he can make others orators; fourth, he can do this not only in Athens but also elsewhere; and [yet] fifth,<sup>22</sup> we could say, he is a master of brevity at the same time.

---

<sup>ix</sup> *Phaedrus* 278e–279b.

Because rhetoric is the art of speaking, you see—speaking, speaking, and speaking—and so the art of brevity is a kind of opposite of rhetoric. What is implied is this: if Gorgias possesses an art and not merely a natural gift, he can teach that art to others, but he cannot teach it to all others. Some gifts are presupposed. Furthermore, he can teach his art not only in Athens but elsewhere too—but not everywhere. He can teach it only in Greece. At the end of his remarks, Socrates transforms his request for brevity into a *duty* of Gorgias to be brief, because Gorgias had allegedly promised to be brief.<sup>23</sup> He had not, in fact,<sup>24</sup> explicitly promised it, but only by implication, namely, because he had said that he's a good orator, and therefore also a master of rhetoric.

We come now to the third step: 449c–453a, where Socrates leads Gorgias on toward a definition of this art, for up to now, mind you, we know only the name of the art. And I subdivide this into various parts. 449c–d: Socrates formulates the question. What is the subject matter of rhetoric? About which of the things that are, is rhetoric? He illustrates the question and the expected answer by giving examples of two arts: the art of weaving and the art of making tunes. Both are speechless arts, as everyone of you [who] has<sup>25</sup> [ever] seen weaving or making tunes will know, and therefore they are the opposite pole of the art of rhetoric. Furthermore, the art<sup>26</sup> [of] weaving is practiced, or was practiced, chiefly by women. And music is derived from the Muses, and the Muses were goddesses. Here Socrates swears for the first time, by a goddess, Hera, Juno—and this was generally a woman's oath. Now, what does this little joke mean? Socrates is, in a way, not a man, not a male, a “he–man.” He is not good at protecting himself. It is no accident that at the beginning he replaced “war and battle,” Callicles' word[s], by “feast,” a peaceful activity. Gorgias' rhetoric will prove to be emphatically a he–man's affair—[the affair of] a man who can take care of his rights. The deeper question which arises here again: Does not Socrates, too, or Socrates' cause, too, need an art which protects that cause? That might be the function of rhetoric, or one important function of rhetoric, from the Socratic point of view. In this context, Socrates expresses admiration for Gorgias' brief answers. And that, of course, is nasty of Socrates, because he thus induces Gorgias to give the briefest answer possible to the question of what rhetoric is. And he thus brings about the fact that Gorgias' answer is found to be very unsatisfactory.<sup>27</sup> [As a] consequence, Gorgias is compelled later on to give a long speech in 450b–c, in order to remedy this impossibly short answer. You see, he regards it as a kind of conflict. And then when Socrates asks, “About what is rhetoric?” he says, “about speeches.” It was the briefest possible answer. It does not mean that Gorgias was unable to do better, but [it is] folly, consisting in the fact that he accepts the principle of “brachylogy”—*brachēs* means “short,” and *logos* means “speech.” In other words, he had gotten in a kind of a game. Why Gorgias does this kind of thing is a question. I would like to say to begin with: one of the greatest difficulties of this dialogue is that we are inclined to underestimate Gorgias' cleverness. We have to take this up on a later occasion. But here you see, it is not just stupidity—not simple stupidity, but a kind of contest.

449d–451d, where Gorgias gives the first answer. The answer is “the things that are, which, as a subject of rhetoric, are speeches.” Socrates' criticism, generally, is this: this is much too general an answer, much too brief an answer. Speeches are the subject matter of other arts and sciences as well. Now, what about the Socratic argument? Because, if

we want to understand a Platonic dialogue, [we] must become participants<sup>28</sup> [in] the dialogue and not simply say that “Socrates says this is so—oh yes, Socrates will always give a good answer.” That is not the idea. Now, what about this argument then? An example that is used is medicine. But the subject matter of medicine is, of course, diseases. Medicine *uses* speech, but it is not *about* speeches. Gorgias could have said all human thought requires speeches as its medium—at least as a medium of communication. Why should not this medium of all human thought be capable of being made the subject matter of a special art or science? Can one not teach and learn elocution and [the] writing of essays regardless of subject matter? I believe, at least, that in former times that was done in school, that students learned to write essays regardless of subject matter. There is a certain *technē*, a certain art of making written or other speeches which can be transmitted. In other words, what Gorgias could have said is that rhetoric is a formal science, akin to logic. Since it does not have a proper subject matter, a specific subject matter, rhetoric may be the universal, all-comprehensive art or science, comparable to logic. Which means, however, that rhetoric may challenge philosophy, which claims to be that universal science or art. The question is, then: Why cannot rhetoric take the place of philosophy? The answer given later in the dialogue is this: rhetoric can admittedly be misused. We are therefore in need of an art or science which *regulates* the use of rhetoric, but this regulating or ruling science is of necessity higher than rhetoric. And this higher art must be *incapable* of being misused. Otherwise, an infinite, vicious regress is inevitable. This conclusion could be avoided only if rhetoric could not possibly be misused. But such a rhetoric which cannot possibly be misused is exactly Socrates’ rhetoric and certainly not Gorgias’ rhetoric. But this only in anticipation.

Now, let us go to the details: 449b–450b. A formal art of speaking, Socrates says, is impossible. For it is impossible to speak about a subject if one does not have adequate knowledge of that subject. And a subject is always a specific subject: diseases, numbers, stars, and so on. For example, only a physician can speak well about diseases and their cures. But here again a question arises: Is every competent physician able to speak well about diseases and their cure? And Gorgias will give us later an example: that he, being a complete layman in medicine, could speak much more effectively about diseases and their cures than his brother, a leading medical authority<sup>29</sup>. Again, here’s the question of Socrates’ emphasis on brief answers, [which] pushes Gorgias always into inadequate answers and finally brings about his downfall.

450b–c. If speeches are the subject matter of many sciences, Gorgias should have said rhetoric is the only art which deals with speeches<sup>30</sup> [as] speech.<sup>31</sup> [He] should have denied that medicine is about speeches, or [that] arithmetic is about speeches. But on the basis of this problematic admission, we reach the following argument: speeches are the subject matter of many sciences other than rhetoric; therefore, speeches cannot be the subject matter peculiar to rhetoric. Therefore, Gorgias changes his thesis in a long speech. You see, long speeches are really inevitable. And the competitiveness of Gorgias admittedly induces him to take this too literally. Rhetoric is not so much *about* speeches; it’s *through* speeches. It is the only art which proceeds only through speeches, as distinguished from manual work. This is not a very intelligent move, for many arts

proceed exclusively *through* speeches, whereas there is only one art which is *about* speeches. Why does Gorgias do this? Gorgias' answer is sufficient for distinguishing rhetoric from medicine and gymnastics, the arts immediately adduced by Socrates. Because it is obvious a physician and a gymnastic teacher cannot only speak; they have to do all kinds [of] bodily motion to fulfill their functions. In other words, Gorgias merely reacts to Socrates' move in each case. He does not look ahead. In other words, his long speech was not long enough. He is still under the spell of his claim to be a master of short speeches. And we will gradually see what is that long speech which is required at this time to answer the question properly.

450c–e. Here Socrates makes the indispensable long speech. And he begins at the beginning. “We,” which means “we human beings,” “possess art, do we not?” The fact that we possess art is undeniable. It is more evident than the reasons of that fact. Without that evidence that we possess art—[that] it is common to all man—no further steps would be possible. This is a simple explanation of what I called in the Platonic language “trust,” “faith,” as the beginning of all knowledge. He doesn't say here “I *believe* that there are,” nor does Gorgias in his answer say “I *believe*.” That is certain, that we possess art. Who can deny it? Granted. And if you deny it on the basis of some outlandish, skeptical consideration, then you have to deny ultimately your own skepticism. You can't go back behind that as a fact; you have to start from it. Starting from the fact that we possess art, Socrates goes on to divide the arts in order to arrive at a definition of rhetoric. “Brachylogy,” speaking short, briefly, alone will not do. One has to proceed in an orderly fashion. One has to begin at the beginning. Otherwise, the short speeches are of no help, and that may require long speeches. Socrates divides all [arts] up into two classes: arts in which work, that is to say, silent work, predominates, and arts in which speech predominates. The true beginning, according to<sup>32</sup> [Plato's Socrates], is from an overall view, and making the proper division, and then coming down more precisely to what one is examining. That is developed more at length in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, but it's present also in the *Gorgias*. Socrates suggests, furthermore, a subdivision, a subdivision of the class of arts in which speech predominates. There are arts in which fifty percent is speech, and arts in which more than fifty percent is speech. Rhetoric, as Gorgias understands it, belongs to the class in which the majority of activities consists of speeches. The two examples of silent art which Socrates uses are imitative arts: painting and sculpture. The four examples of speaking arts are the mathematical arts: arithmetic, logistic, geometry, and the game of drafts—backgammon, I think they sometimes say. Anyway, this is one in which the manual activity is less [than], or at most equal to, what we speak. The closer we come to rhetoric, the arts regarding the body, medicine and gymnastics, are dropped in this section. Rhetoric seems somehow to combine the imitative arts, painting and sculpture, and the true sciences, the mathematical sciences. Rhetoric seems [somehow] to combine, in other words,<sup>33</sup> silent and demonstrative speech. Should the true sciences be in need of being protected by the imitative arts?

Let's go on: 450e–451a. If rhetoric were sufficiently defined as the art which proceeds chiefly through speeches, arithmetic and geometry, too, would be rhetoric, because [they] chiefly proceed through speeches. Not exclusively, because we all know we<sup>34</sup> [make] gestures, but chiefly. And Gorgias cannot [be] supposed to have meant that arithmetic

and geometry are rhetoric. But Socrates may say more. He may say rhetoric does not belong to either of the two classes<sup>35</sup> [of] art[s] mentioned, [namely],<sup>36</sup> the predominantly speaking and the predominantly silent arts. How could this be? Gorgias has divided the arts clumsily into arts which are manual and arts which are perfectly non-manual. How does this division fit rhetoric? If we assume the division of arts into the manual arts and the non-manual arts, where does rhetoric come in? What does an orator do, apart from merely speaking? Part of it is gestures—the manual work. Of course, you would say<sup>37</sup> [oration] is not manual—which I would admit—but the action of the orator. Now, Socrates made a much better division. He divided all arts into (a) silent and (b) speaking. Where does rhetoric come in? I mean, not as the subject matter, but it's own activity. Does the orator do nothing but speak? He certainly is not completely silent. That is obvious. But<sup>38</sup> is he completely speaking? Certainly not. A very poor orator would say everything which is relevant, for he may do harm to his cause. So in those divisions, silence is a part of the art of rhetoric, naturally. Think of a trial lawyer. He has to keep silent about a number of very relevant facts if he wants to win an acquittal for his client, obviously. So both divisions don't fit rhetoric, and we have to start from a much better overall division than either of the two to define rhetoric; one would have to start from an entirely different overall division. For example, one could start from the overall division of all arts into arts concerned with human beings directly and arts concerned with things other than men (numbers, horses, the soil), and then we could make the subdivisions of all arts dealing with men (say, body and soul). [LS writes on the blackboard.] And so medicine here, [and] rhetoric, yes. Or we could do what Plato himself suggests at the beginning of the dialogue the *Statesman*, a fundamental distinction of all arts: purely theoretical and practical.<sup>x</sup> A true division can only be in terms of the subject matter of rhetoric. Here he suggests definitions of arithmetic, *logistic*, and astronomy. As for the meaning of *logistic*, I can say this: what we today call arithmetic is almost the same as what the Greeks called *logistic*. By arithmetic, they meant only the art of numbering, of knowing the numbers, and knowing the kinds of numbers, odd and even, and the various combinations of them. To know your way among numbers as numbers is arithmetic, but operations with numbers is *logistic*.

Now, you will see in the former enumeration, he had mentioned arithmetic, *logistic*, geometry, and draughts. And here he mentions arithmetic, *logistic*, and astronomy. He replaces, as it were, geometry plus draughts by astronomy. Does this ring any bell in any one of you? We have a list of sciences in Plato's *Republic*, Book 7. Do you remember what it is? Numbers (arithmetic), geometry (*logistic*), astronomy, and then dialectic.<sup>xi</sup> Well, it is a bare possibility that draughts might be a kind of ironical substitute subject for what Plato called dialectic. Would this make sense? What do you do in discussion, and what do you do in draughts? But what you do is this: apparently in some of the games the Greeks played, when you made a move, and once you made the move, that was settled, and dire consequences would follow if the move was wrong. But there was the possibility under certain conditions that you could change your mind after you made your move. That happens between Socrates and the interlocutors all the time. They made a move, an

---

<sup>x</sup> *Statesman* 258b ff.

<sup>xi</sup> 526b–535a.

expression, and then they see that they do it again. How would you say it in English? Take it back and make another move. So this is only in passing, and it is more important for us in the present to know the following things. Regarding this, I would say only this: astronomy is between geometry and dialectic.

But in 451a–c we find the first example in this dialogue of a dialogue within the dialogue. Now, what does this mean, if we can understand it precisely? The premise is, of course, that the dialogue between Socrates and Gorgias is a *true* dialogue, [a] real, actual dialogue. And then the dialogue within the dialogue is, from this point of view, a fictitious dialogue. “If I were asked by someone else, I would answer in this way”—fictitious dialogue within a dialogue. Now, the function of that, the most simple function of that, is, of course, to give the other fellow a lesson. And that is what happens. What Socrates does here is this: he pretends that he made the same mistake as Gorgias made, and [he says] what would happen to him<sup>39</sup> [at the hands of] another interlocutor in that case, which is a very nice way of teaching a man how to change his first move. Another thing is that the fictitious dialogue begins and ends with “O’ Socrates.” So it is very clear [that] Socrates presents himself as being in the unpleasant position in which Gorgias is in fact. Socrates, as it were, says, “it is really very simple to answer such questions; you see this from my example.” The fictitious enlargement of the audience is an act of urbanity.

451d: Gorgias gives an answer. Rhetoric is not only an art proceeding chiefly through speeches, but it is an art chiefly proceeding through speeches the subject matter of which is the biggest and best of human affairs. Numbers are, I believe, generally admitted not to be the biggest and best of human affairs. Gorgias’ answer is superior to Polus’ answer because Polus had merely said that this is the finest art. This is much more general than what we know now. But, on the other hand, we must say that Gorgias has had the benefit of guidance by Socrates. Guided by Socrates, Gorgias had first said [that] the subject matter of rhetoric is speeches, then that rhetoric is *through* speeches, which is an entirely different proposition: not the subject matter, but its medium. And then the specific difference is the subject matter, that is, the biggest and best of human affairs. This is another great difference between Polus’ definition and Gorgias’ definition apart from those things which I mentioned. Gorgias’ definition implies: rhetoric may *not* be the finest and best art as Polus had said, for perhaps the human things are not the highest things—a severe limitation. From this point on, say, roughly 451d–453, Gorgias gives a more precise answer to the question of what rhetoric is by stating what he regards as the biggest and best of human affairs. If<sup>40</sup> [we] know that rhetoric is an art preceding predominantly through speeches and dealing with the best and biggest human affairs, we know still very little because we do not know what the biggest and best of human affairs are. That will be cleared up in the next section.

Now first, in 451d–e, what are the biggest and best human affairs? Socrates says that it’s controversial. Today, that does not need any proof, because that’s been learned in the elementary introduction in social science, that values are controversial. And in addition, Gorgias’ answer is not clear because he did not specify what he understands by the biggest and best human things. Socrates quotes here some verses. These verses do not show that it was controversial, for the verses establish a clear hierarchy. The best thing is

health, then beauty, and the third, honest wealth. Well, there's nothing controversial about that, as far as these verses go. Therefore, Gorgias' question in this context seems to be perfectly legitimate: "Okay, I grant that; I grant this popular view that health is the highest, then beauty, then wealth—<sup>41</sup> how does this contradict my assertion?" Still, if the thesis of the verses is correct, rhetoric would be, at best, the fourth finest art. Because the art of health-getting is not rhetoric, the art of beauty-getting is not rhetoric, and the art of wealth-getting is not rhetoric, at least it seems. Incidentally, Socrates omits the sequel of his verses which is, I quote, "the fourth best thing is to be in the prime of youth together with friends." For obviously Gorgias is old, and whereas he's apparently healthy, good looking, and wealthy, why should you mention an embarrassing thing? These good things generally sought by men—health, beauty, and wealth—necessarily compete, it would seem, with *any* good thing which Gorgias may claim to produce. Gorgias says, by implication, "I am productive of the best human things, that is, of the greatest human goods." But these other arts—say, medicine, gymnastics, money-making—also claim to produce the best; certainly health and medicine. How, then, does it come [about] that Gorgias does not see any difficulty? Does he not consider for one moment that the good things praised in the poem could possibly compete with that good thing which his art procures? Or does his art not produce, and not *claim* to produce, any other good things than health, beauty, and wealth? Then there would be no difference. How could rhetoric be productive of health, beauty, and wealth? There he would, of course, say that [he] means to usurp the function of the physician, the gymnastic trainer, and the money-maker. How could the rhetorician say "I produce them much better than these three fellows"? How could he? Let us take a simple example—health, admittedly the highest good according to this argument. How can the rhetorician produce health to a higher degree than a physician? Well, the physician, for all his art, may be completely unable to produce health if the patient won't listen to him. Gorgias, being a perfect rhetorician, has a perfect bedside manner. So therefore it could be. So, you see, one must watch these things. Gorgias' seeming lack of understanding, where we understood immediately, must be considered. Perhaps we do not see the problem from the right perspective. Therefore, the apparent dumbness of Gorgias isn't really a dumbness at all.

Now in the sequel, 452a–d, we find another fictitious dialogue within the actual dialogue. Socrates again enlarges the audience. Socrates indicates he is a fictitious character explicitly at the beginning<sup>42</sup> [by] the term "perhaps." "Perhaps someone would say," which means it's not an actual dialogue. In the sequel, in c–d, he presents a unitary front together with Gorgias and makes the fictitious interlocutor demand an answer from Gorgias. In other words, he says this: "They ask us. What would we say?" It, of course, makes it easier for Gorgias, because Socrates is in the same spot as Gorgias is, which, of course, is ironic because Socrates had not made these claims on behalf of rhetoric. But you see what is illustrated is this: that one important element of Socratic rhetoric, or Socratic irony, is the same as what we call urbanity. To be urbane means to do such things. But Socrates does more: he points out to Gorgias Gorgias' competitors. These people all stand in the marketplace, praising their merchandise, and say "*we* have the right stuff," and Gorgias must meet them in the marketplace. He tries to arouse Gorgias' competitiveness, while he makes it clear that *he*, Socrates, is not a competitor, but an ally of Gorgias. He enlarges the audience, to repeat, so as to bring in Gorgias' competitors.



Perhaps Gorgias had gotten a little bit sleepy; he had talked so very much. And one way of arousing him would be to remind him of his competitors.

Now<sup>43</sup> in this passage, 452d, we get the definition of what Gorgias understands as the biggest human thing, and there is his answer to the question of what rhetoric is. Gorgias says of his rhetoric this: “Rhetoric is productive of freedom for the very human beings whose good things are in question. And it is productive of rule over others, for each in his city.” What does this mean? First, it means freedom is possible only under government—rhetoric is productive of free government. But it could also mean this: rhetoric is productive of freedom for human beings, for anybody, and of rule for [a] single real<sup>44</sup> [man] in his city. Rhetoric does not enable a man to become a ruler in a foreign city. That Gorgias does not say. Ruling is not transferable. So, if you can be a good president of the United States, that doesn’t give you a ghost of a chance of becoming a good president of the French Republic. While ruling, however good, is *not* transferable, the art productive of ruling is transferable. Gorgias, coming from Sicily, can teach people how to rule well anywhere. That’s an important point. Rhetoric can satisfy both those enamored of freedom and those enamored of rule—even of monarchic or tyrannical rule, which, of course, Gorgias in his prudence does not say, but which Polus will bring up later. In other words, rhetoric has the breadth which is familiar to us from present day social science. The irony is this: Gorgias says to Socrates by implication, “you see, I, Gorgias, cannot be a competitor of you, Socrates, if you desire to become a ruler of Athens, because I could never become a ruler of Athens, being a foreigner. Just as you were my ally shortly before when we were confronted by this other man who had merchandise, the physician, gymnastic trainer, and so on, just in this way, you were my ally shortly before<sup>45</sup>—in fact,<sup>46</sup> my teacher—now I, Gorgias, can become your ally by becoming *your* teacher. But I can never become a competitor because I am a foreigner in Athens.”

But however this may be, Gorgias does *not* say—and that is decisive—that freedom and dominion are the greatest good. That is absolutely crucial for understanding the whole dialogue. The greatest good is *not* freedom and dominion, including tyrannical rule, but the greatest good is *productive* of freedom and dominion. It makes an enormous difference. Not freedom and dominion is the greatest good, but *rhetoric*. This is the reason why Gorgias is apparently so dumb in 451e. Of medicine, no one ever said it is the greatest good, while many people frequently say that health is the greatest good. But in the case of rhetoric, we are confronted with the paradoxical situation that the *cause* of freedom and dominion is maybe of] a higher rank than the effect. Of rhetoric, one can say, as shown by the fact that Gorgias does say, that [it] is<sup>47</sup> [a] greater good than the good things which it produces. Strictly speaking, Gorgias does not even say that rhetoric is the greatest good. His statement does not necessarily mean more than that rhetoric is a very great good. Freedom and dominion may be the best of the *human* affairs—of human—all-too-human things. They are, for this reason, not the greatest things simply, and not even<sup>48</sup> very great good[s]. What that means, we do not know. But we have to accept the fact.

And I would like to make this anticipatory remark that will become more important as we come to the core of things: these fellows, these teachers of rhetoric, however dubious

their principles in other ways were, they were not crooks. What distinguishes them from crooks is this. Not that they were not bent on money-making—they were—but one little thing: they had a genuine respect for their art. And that leads to their downfall. That leads to their downfall both in the First Book of [the] *Republic* and in the *Gorgias*. Callicles regards the art as merely a means. But they see that this art has a quality of its own which surpasses in dignity its product. By the way, you have a parallel to that in present day political science. Political scientists believe, in their heart of hearts, that a true scientific study of politics, an exact scientific study, is ultimately much more valuable than political life itself. But that, of course, leads in their case, too, to great difficulties.

Socrates, in 452d, does not understand Gorgias' answer—quite naturally. For Gorgias has not said what that very great good is which he possesses and which he can procure for others. Yet Gorgias had mentioned certain good things which his very great good can procure and on which men are very keen,<sup>49</sup> [namely], freedom and dominion. How are those good things mentioned that are produced by Gorgias, namely, freedom and dominion—how are they related to health, beauty, and wealth? With what right can Gorgias claim that freedom and dominion are the biggest and best *human* affairs? How can you refute the claim of the physician, and the gymnastic teacher, and money-maker? We leave it at this point today and go on next time.

[end of session]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “in.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “a.” “represented the” replacing “presented aA.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “or.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “to Polus.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “second.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “between.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “don't arrive.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “But.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “And.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “Why.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “should.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “his.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted ellipsis.

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “course.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “also.”

<sup>18</sup> Moved “takes place.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “course.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “As.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “and yet.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “every.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “is.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “In.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “was.”

- 
- 30 Deleted "of a."
  - 31 Deleted "Who."
  - 32 Deleted "Socrates' Plato (sic)."
  - 33 Moved "somehow."
  - 34 Deleted "do this:".
  - 35 Deleted "or."
  - 36 Deleted "In other words."
  - 37 Deleted "oral."
  - 38 Deleted "what about..."
  - 39 Deleted "by."
  - 40 Deleted "you."
  - 41 Deleted "then."
  - 42 Deleted "but."
  - 43 Deleted "then he."
  - 44 Deleted "men."
  - 45 Deleted "but."
  - 46 Deleted "being."
  - 47 Deleted "the."
  - 48 Deleted "as."
  - 49 Deleted "mainly."

### Session 3: January 10, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** Socrates appears in the company of Chaerephon.<sup>1</sup> Chaerephon is the link between Socrates and the market place, the oracle at Delphi, and that newfangled orator, Gorgias. Chaerephon is devoted to Socrates, but he does not understand him too well. And this defect may be connected with certain defects of Chaerephon's character: his impetuosity and his lack of fraternity. Someone asked a question shortly before class: With what right can one use evidence supplied by Xenophon for interpreting a Platonic passage? That's a very long question, and I cannot answer it right now. I would like to say only this: according to present usage, there is no problem in it. Present usage is not the highest tribunal, and therefore a long argument would be needed. Socrates comes to have [a] conversation with Gorgias in order to find out about the power of Gorgias' art, the art of rhetoric. Why he wants to find out about that is not obvious. An ancient commentator says that Socrates wants to save Gorgias' soul. This is not wrong, but insufficient. For to save a man's soul, in a sense in which Socrates could have attempted it, would mean to turn Gorgias away from a bad use of his faculties to a good use of them. The question is: What, then, did Socrates regard as the good use of Gorgias' powers? Can rhetoric be good, and what would be the function of a good rhetoric?

This question is explicitly discussed in the *Phaedrus*—in a way, a companion to the dialogue *Gorgias*. But the rhetoric discussed in the *Phaedrus* cannot possibly be understood as a good use of Gorgias' faculty. There must be a good rhetoric different from the good rhetoric sketched in the *Phaedrus*. This good rhetoric, if it is discussed at all, will be discussed in the *Gorgias*. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates comes to sight as a man who is not a rhetorician but a dialectician, a man possessing the skill of conversation. The most superficial difference between rhetoric and dialectics is this: the product of rhetoric is an uninterrupted long speech followed by applause. The product of dialectics is a frequently interrupted speech, a long chain of short speeches, relatively speaking, followed not by applause, but rather by silence. In this superficial but by no means arbitrary perspective, dialectics itself may appear as a part of rhetoric—the part specializing in giving short answers to questions. The art of giving answers to questions, and, in particular, short answers, is a part of Gorgias' art of display speeches, which means fireworks for fireworks' sake. In this way, the antithesis of dialectics and rhetoric is changed into a subordination of dialectic to rhetoric. Socrates himself, therefore, would be a rhetorician. The conclusion is sound, although the premises are somewhat questionable. There is a difference of kind between Gorgias' rhetoric and Socrates' rhetoric, that is to say, between Gorgias' rhetoric and Socrates' dialectics.

Now let us try to<sup>1</sup> [watch] this fundamental difference as it reveals itself on the surface of the surface. Gorgias' art is not unrelated to the desire for money and fame. He believes that he can earn both, but especially fame, to the highest degree by making long speeches, of no immediate usefulness, on grand themes—say, on the beauty of Helen. He may thus be able to show his power, but he cannot possibly thus show his supremacy. He may

---

<sup>1</sup> LS begins the session with a summary of the dialogue thus far.

impress his audience profoundly, and that shows power. But so did Euripides, Aristophanes, Gary Cooper, and so on and so on. Is Gorgias *superior* to Euripides, Aristophanes, and so on? The audiences cannot possibly answer this question, if for no other reason, at least for this: that the audience gets tired, that the first brilliant fellow has advantages that the second one lacks and which the second one can overcome only by a still greater speech. Now, how will you measure here the power, given this complicated state of affairs? Socrates' art, on the other hand, is excellent, not only for showing power, but for showing supremacy. Like a wrestling match: everyone can see who is or who is not knocked out. If you see people dialoguing, you can see who wins, assuming there is any superiority there. But if he understands Socrates' art as it appears first, as the art of giving brief answers, Socrates cannot possibly win. For he does not practice the art of giving short answers. Only the interlocutor can win. There is the simple example: oral examinations. The only person who can win or lose is the candidate, not the professor. Socrates can win only against men who claim to be able to answer all questions, which, of course, a candidate is supposed to claim in his chosen field. But, in this field, Socrates can win. He can win only against fraud—by which I do not mean to cast any reflection on any candidate at any time. And therefore Socrates' art is a just art. Now, from what has been said, it follows that Gorgias' art, the art of making long speeches is simply an art of speaking, and therefore Gorgias was very well advised when he said rhetoric is about or with speeches. Socrates' art is an art which is, roughly speaking, fifty-percent speaking and fifty-percent silent. He questions, the other fellow answers. A rough division: fifty-fifty. By addressing questions to a man, you speak and you do not speak. For to raise a question does not mean to assert something. Socrates' art acquires, therefore, a higher degree of discretion or prudence in the old sense of the word: not only what and how to say, but also whether to speak at all. The art of raising good questions is less visible than the art of making brilliant speeches and giving brief answers. We can also say, in Gorgian rhetoric, the individual has no influence on what the speaker says. In Socratic rhetoric, the individual has decisive influence on what the speaker says, because Socrates considers the individual in his individuality.

Now, why is it necessary to make these admittedly superficial remarks? Because if we want to understand the Platonic dialogue in general, and this [one] in particular, we have to see the situation not only from Socrates' angle, but also from the point of view of Gorgias. Gorgias doesn't know what Socratic dialectic means. We can know it or believe to know it from textbooks, or articles, or maybe from other Platonic dialogues. But Gorgias hadn't been presented them, and we have to see how this thing appears from Gorgias' point of view: a kind of display, but of [an] entirely different kind than Gorgias has ever seen before. This much about the seemingly merely literary things.

Now, as for the substance, I will only say this much now. Gorgias, guided by Socrates, gives this answer to the question of what rhetoric is: rhetoric is the art proceeding chiefly through speeches which deal with the biggest and best human things. These biggest and best human things prove to be freedom and dominion. But Gorgias says more. He says rhetoric is the greatest good or at least a very great good, and not merely a very great human good. Socrates justly asks for clarification. And that is the point at which we begin

in 452d on page 279.<sup>ii</sup> Socrates does not understand Gorgias' answer. And everything depends on that answer because that is *the* Gorgian definition of rhetoric. For Gorgias has not said what that very great good is which he possesses, and which he can procure to others. Yet he had mentioned certain good things which *his* very great good can procure and for which men are very keen: freedom and rule. How are those good things, freedom and dominion, related to health, beauty, and wealth? That's the inevitable question, as you know, because these are the human goods which Socrates presented as competitive with anything which Gorgias might produce. With what right can Gorgias claim that freedom and dominion are the biggest and best human goods? How can he refute the claim of the physician that health is the greatest human good, or the gymnastic trainer, or the claims of the money-maker?

Gorgias answers in 452e. He does not even try to prove that freedom is a greater good than health, beauty, and wealth. And he's very practical in that. Take a man who is a freeman, not a slave, who is very sick, very poor, and very ugly. Why should this be a greater good than to be a slave but very healthy, very handsome, and perhaps indirectly possessing some money, because he may be the bailiff of his master or something of this kind? And Gorgias doesn't even try to prove that freedom is a greater good than health, beauty, and wealth. But he does prove that dominion, or rule, is a greater good than health, beauty, and wealth. For the ruler uses the physician, gymnastic trainer, and the money-maker as his slaves. Dominion is the faculty which controls medicine and the other arts, and hence indirectly produces the product of medicine and the other arts. You control the physician, and therefore you control the product of medicine, which is health. But how is ruling related to rhetoric? Ruling would seem to be, on the basis of vulgar premises, really the greatest good, because he who can confiscate money is wealthier, potentially, than the owner of the money. But how is dominion related to rhetoric? Ruling is possible only through rhetoric. The ruler is a rhetorician or a pupil of a rhetorician, which of course is a tall order, but not taller than what some social scientists say today, that without social science you cannot have good government. A ruler is a rhetorician or a pupil of a rhetorician. Socrates might become a ruler by becoming a pupil of Gorgias. Thinking of his competitors, Gorgias speaks only of forensic and deliberative rhetoric. He drops his display rhetoric, the core of his doings. Political rhetoric proper, is, of course, not the highest good for Gorgias; display rhetoric is at least as high. To the extent to which this definition of rhetoric as political rhetoric, deliberative plus forensic, delimits the further discussion, Gorgias' *true* art, the display rhetoric, will not be discussed at all in this dialogue, and we must keep it in mind. By political rhetoric, I mean here deliberative rhetoric—that is to say, the kind of rhetoric which we today would call only political rhetoric—plus forensic rhetoric. Because if you speak before a jury, that's essentially a political assembly, an assembly established by public authority, and therefore it can justly be called political. At this point, we have reached the end of the definition of rhetoric given by Gorgias. Gorgias has said rhetoric is the art of persuading, the art of persuading people which brings about the greatest human good—it's productive of greatest human good.

---

<sup>ii</sup> LS is referring to *Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library Edition, no. 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925). This is the edition used throughout the course.

But here the fourth step is taken, and that is 452e–457c. The amazing power of rhetoric for good or for evil is revealed. Why is the definition as given insufficient? That appears in 452e–453a. Gorgias finds that rhetoric is sufficiently defined as the art of persuasion. Here we should note that the Greek middle and passive form of the verb indicating persuasion means “to obey.”<sup>iii</sup> To be persuaded, in other words, is the same as to obey. In other words, to persuade means in the Greek to induce one to obey, to submit to authority, as distinguished from to follow the *logos*, to follow reason. Gorgias’ view is defensible: that the art of rhetoric, of creating persuasion, is an art of its own,<sup>2</sup> fundamentally distinguished from all other arts, because persuasion is something different from proof. We would of course have to say, persuasion *by speech*, because in Greek, you can say to persuade a man by money, which means to bribe him, and that, of course, is not rhetoric—that’s persuasion by money. But Socrates chooses to understand persuasion in a broader sense where it includes not only persuasion but also convincing or demonstrating. Therefore, he says that Gorgias’ last definition, which is 452e, comes<sup>3</sup> close[st] to what rhetoric is; it does not come close enough; that the definition [that] stated the genus to which rhetoric belongs (that is, non–manual and non–silent) was a wrong statement of the genus. I refer to what we discussed last time. But does Socrates’ suggestion not presuppose a distinction of all arts into persuading and non–persuading arts? That is hard to maintain. For example, painting may be a persuading art, whereas weaving and medicine are apparently not. And this does not strike one as a good overall division of all arts: persuading and non–persuading arts. Why, then, does he not simply leave it at Gorgias’ definition, which is, roughly, rhetoric is the art of persuading people by speeches in prose? That should be sufficiently clear. Because the character of persuasion cannot be brought out unless in contradistinction to demonstrating or convincing. Socrates must seek for a general [division], and [he is] tracing both persuasion and truth. This, however, means that the present division is not a division of all arts, unless all arts other than rhetoric are demonstrative. In this section, Socrates says, rhetoric produces persuasion—except in the soul, not the finger or the hair. In a passage of the *Phaedrus*, 271[a], rhetoric is called an art, some kind of art which leads the soul through speeches, because there are other arts which lead the soul, for example, through tunes, or maybe through gestures, maybe even through money. We will see later on what this means. At any rate, Socrates wants to have a fuller clarification of what rhetoric is.

And here, 453a–c, there is a kind of intermezzo: Socrates speaks on how to conduct a conversation. This corresponds to the earlier statement on brief speeches. It begins, “Hear, then, O’ Gorgias.” Gorgias is a hearer of Socrates. Socrates tries to produce persuasion in the soul of Gorgias. Socrates too is an orator. Socrates has persuaded himself that he is a man of a certain kind. You see, he applies the expression “persuasion” to himself. Does he *know* that he is a man of that kind, or does he merely *believe* it? I think he *believes* it, and he desires to persuade Gorgias that he, Socrates, is a man of a certain kind. How does he persuade Gorgias that he is a man of a certain kind—say, a man concerned with the truth, let us say? The means of persuasion is an address: “know well.” Of course, no good knowledge can be transmitted by the appeal “know well” or such a declaration. What,

---

<sup>iii</sup> LS is referring to the verb *peithō*.

then, does such a declaration [as] Socrates makes about himself achieve? He can never prove that he is the man who speaks the truth by saying, “I have persuaded myself that I speak only the truth.” But, nevertheless, it is not irrelevant. The hearer may try to live up to the image of the speaker without being certain that the speaker himself lives up to it. That can be achieved by such a speech. Again, we see Socrates is really a rhetorician. Socrates has persuaded himself that he is a man conversing with another man. [He] wishes to *know* the very thing with which that conversation is concerned, and he esteems<sup>4</sup> [Gorgias as] a man of the same kind. Gorgias quite rightly does not know what Socrates is driving at by this remark. In his reply, Socrates emphasizes the word “I,” *egō*, and therewith the difference between himself and Gorgias. He, Socrates, does not know clearly what the persuasion stemming from rhetoric is, and with what matters rhetoric deals. But he has a suspicion of what Gorgias has in mind. Gorgias, on the other hand, will know clearly what Gorgias means by rhetoric and the subject matter of rhetoric. That’s the situation.

Although Socrates has a suspicion of what Gorgias has in mind, Socrates will *ask* Gorgias and not say what he, Socrates, suspects. Why? Socrates says “not for your sake, but for the sake of the speech, so that the speech will go ahead in such a way that the speech will make clear to us as much as is possible that with which the speech is concerned.” I translate literally without regard for elegance. But could this not be achieved if Socrates would tell Gorgias what he suspects Gorgias to think, and Gorgias will correct him if Socrates misunderstands him? Is this not what we do so frequently, and isn’t it very natural: “I guess you mean this, am I right?” Is this not a natural procedure? Yet, in this case, Gorgias might become deceived about what he, Gorgias, thinks. That’s the real danger in this. You know, there is a kind of suggestiveness in guessing what the other fellow thinks. He, Gorgias, might become influenced by Socrates, and we, including us readers, will never know what Gorgias, untutored by Socrates, thought. But what does he mean by the expression “for your sake, Gorgias”? Why should a man refrain from stating what he suspects the other fellow to mean, and ask the other fellow for the sake of the other fellow? Because he might think that the other fellow cannot state what he means. That’s to state that he’s not an orator. That happens very frequently, where an oldish person is talking to a very young student, and frequently I try to spell out what he means<sup>5</sup> because the indication is that he could not express it—in other words, that he is a bad speaker, [a] bad orator. That is, of course, not possibly true in the relation of Socrates and Gorgias. And Socrates cannot think this or say this of Gorgias, of course. Socrates abstains from stating his suspicion about Gorgias, not because he thinks that Gorgias is unable to express his opinion unless he is tutored by Socrates, but because otherwise there might not be a true meeting of their minds in common clarity about rhetoric. And that is good education, good rhetoric. Now, you will see that this is important for what happens later.

In this sequel, 453[c]–454b, Socrates proves the insufficiency of the given definition of rhetoric. Socrates is compelled to address an additional question to Gorgias because Gorgias’ answer, “rhetoric is the art of persuasion,” is too general. Socrates illustrates this question by a question, not regarding the art of painting, but<sup>6</sup> regarding an individual painter, Zeuxis. Should the meaning of rhetoric be so unclear, or so ambiguous, because of the variety of rhetoricians, a variety perhaps connected with local or regional differences?



In c8, you'll find the word "there" in Greek. Socrates stresses here the fairness and the justice of his question three, four times. We shall see later. Socrates says, briefly [that] rhetoric is not the only art of persuasion; whoever teaches something by this very fact persuades. What then is the distinction between rhetoric and the other arts of persuasion? The Greek word for persuasion can be used in this broader sense. As Socrates uses it, it can also be used in the narrower sense; in this, it would be opposed to demonstration. And it is used in both senses in the *Gorgias* here. That ambiguity is deliberate.

Now we come to the more [inaudible] definition of rhetoric in 454b: rhetoric is persuasion in law courts and in other crowds, regarding things just and unjust. But this definition is much too narrow. After Gorgias had dropped his display speeches, he now drops political oratory proper, deliberative oratory, too. Why did he do that? You see, previously he spoke of all kinds, and needless to say, just as today, a great deliberative speaker has, of course, a much higher position than a great forensic speaker. Think of Winston Churchill. We have a great contemporary example: Churchill is a deliberative speaker, not forensic. And that is because he deals with grander thing[s]: the survival<sup>7</sup> [or] glory of the *polis*. Why did Gorgias drop the deliberative rhetoric and limit himself to forensic? Now I have indicated the answer, or part of it. Socrates, when raising his question in the preceding passage, 453c–454b, emphasized fairness, justice. Socrates suggests to Gorgias to put the emphasis on that part of oratory which has most obviously to do with the just and unjust. Socrates somehow induces Gorgias to do that. Why does he do that? That is only a part of a larger process. Originally, Gorgias had this broad conception as shown by his deeds: rhetoric is display rhetoric, deliberative rhetoric, and forensic rhetoric. And then Socrates, first by his fictitious dialogue introducing Gorgias' vulgar competitors, makes Gorgias push into the background<sup>8</sup> [the] wholly useless part of his rhetoric, display rhetoric. Because<sup>9</sup> [in] the marketplace, he can only compete with a view to political and deliberative and forensic rhetoric. You see, Socrates really controls him completely. And then Socrates takes a further step and narrows him down to forensic rhetoric. Why does Socrates do it? The simplest answer, which is very good as far as it goes, is: we do not know. There may have been a willingness on the part of Gorgias to accept this narrowing down. Socrates does not seem to have clarified about rhetoric what its power is and what its usefulness is, and Gorgias may wish to remind Socrates of that part of rhetoric which is manifestly useful, precisely against unjust enemies. Men like Socrates and Gorgias, Gorgias may have thought, need deliberative rhetoric much less; even if their cities were destroyed, they could go elsewhere and they would always find a following. Gorgias does this all the time. Rhetoric reveals its useful character most clearly by its protective character, as forensic rhetoric.

454b–c: a restatement on how to conduct a conversation. You see that<sup>10</sup> [the] substantive and methodological discussion[s] alternate. Socrates does not say here, as he said in the first statement, that he does not know clearly what Gorgias understands by rhetoric, for he knows it clearly enough. He says again that he suspects what Gorgias thinks about rhetoric, and that, nevertheless, he will ask Gorgias for his opinion—and that he does not do this for the sake of Gorgias but so that the speech will be completed. There is never in Plato a simple restatement or repetition. There is always a little bit of change, either addition or subtraction. Here Socrates adds: "so that Gorgias can complete *his* speech in

accordance with the premise, the hypothesis, in whatever way he, Gorgias, will.” He does not say here anything about a *common* understanding, common to Socrates and Gorgias, of what rhetoric is. In other words, if Socrates would interfere by saying you can fundamentally<sup>11</sup> [inaudible] then he interferes with Gorgias’ freedom. Gorgias should feel completely free to hang himself or to save himself, whatever the case may be. But he refers here to a hypothesis, an assumption on which the whole argument is based. I would say the assumption is to omit the display oratory altogether. Gorgias<sup>12</sup> [will] preserve the freedom to say, to declare his opinion to be whatever he wishes. That is to say, in a sense Socrates asks Gorgias for the sake of Gorgias, namely, of Gorgias’ freedom, to say and not to say what he wishes. Socrates asks Gorgias for the sake of Socrates also. Socrates is anxious to see Gorgias’ rhetoric *in deed* as Gorgias applies it in answering the question. Now we understand a bit better what it means when Socrates said shortly before, in 453a, “rhetoric produces persuasion in the *soul*.” The effect of rhetoric does not have to become visible in the *speech* of the addressee. Socrates’ effect on Gorgias does not simply become visible in Gorgias’ speech. We have to do a lot of thinking in order to find that out.

And now, in 454c–455a, we get the conclusion of the definition of rhetoric. To define rhetoric properly, we must start from a fundamental distinction of persuasion into two classes. The word “classes” is the same here as a word which is usually translated in somewhat different context[s] by “ideas.” The Platonic word for ideas in Greek—at least one of these words—is *eidos*, which means<sup>13</sup> [two] things primarily before it means ideas in the Platonic sense: the shape of things and the class of things. Etymologically prior is “shape.” It comes from a Greek word for seeing. But, for reasons which we do not yet know, shape and class belong together. “How does he look like?” we say. “Look like”—to which class does he belong by his looks? That, I mention only in passing, and I translate the word here by “classes.” We must start from the fundamental distinction of persuasion into two classes: persuasion which supplies belief and persuasion which supplies knowledge. Rhetoric merely supplies belief, not knowledge, about just and unjust things. And this is crucial. That is accepted by Gorgias.

In 454d, we find another fictitious dialogue within the actual dialogue. This fictitious dialogue enables Socrates to dictate to Gorgias the answer which Gorgias should give. That is contrary to his preceding statement that he will leave to Gorgias perfect freedom in his answer. Why does he so flagrantly interfere with Gorgias’ freedom here? Socrates does not wish to leave it at a mere belief that belief and knowledge are essentially different. That is too important [for us to] be<sup>14</sup> kind and considerate for Gorgias or what not. The essential difference between belief and knowledge can be *known* and *must be known* if the essence of rhetoric is to be understood. And it is important and possible to *state* this point—not only to see it and realize it, but also to state it explicitly. Why is this so important? Ultimately, also, not only because Gorgias’ rhetoric is admittedly, at least as it seems, merely belief-producing, but<sup>15</sup> rhetoric is, in a higher sense, a combination of heterogeneous elements, of imitative arts and the demonstrative arts. And this heterogeneity, between imitative arts, such as poetry, and demonstration, must be *known* as such, if we are to understand rhetoric in the highest sense.

In 454e–455a, the subject matter of rhetoric is stated three times with a slight variation. In the first and third case, the subject is said to be the just and unjust things in the plural. In the central statement, the subject is [said] to be the just and unjust in the singular. Rhetoric creates mere belief, not only<sup>16</sup> [regarding] this or that just thing, but regarding the essence of justice itself. But what is a just thing? For example, lying is unjust, stealing is unjust. That is one thing. But that is not the essence of justice. What is it by virtue of which lying is thought to be unjust, stealing is thought to be unjust, and so on? So, in other words, the rhetorician creates beliefs, not only regarding the unjustness of stealing, treason, or what not; he creates a belief also regarding the essence of justice.

Now we come to the concluding part of the section, 455a–457c. The theme is the mysterious character of rhetoric, its “demonic”<sup>iv</sup> power. And it is liable to be misused. Regarding “demonic,” you must disregard the Biblical connotation of that word, “demonic.” The translator says “supernatural.” This is a very bad translation because, as Aristotle says somewhere, nature is “demonic,” so therefore “demonic” cannot be supernatural. We shall see later how to translate that. I’ll simply say “demonic” and ask you to put it in quotation marks until we are into it. Now, how does the argument here begin? At first glance, rhetoric seems to be useless. That’s up to 455d. We have arrived at a definition of rhetoric. But the definition does not give us clarity about rhetoric. For, if rhetoric produces only belief, what is the use of such a thing? The definition is insufficient because it does not state the purpose of rhetoric, the *telos* of rhetoric—and that, indeed, has not been given. Rhetoric seems to be of no use, because in all important matters we turn to *knowledge*–producing men, and not to belief–producing men—for example,<sup>17</sup> [to] physician[s] and not to quacks. But this is not quite what Socrates says. He says that in all important matters we turn to men who possess knowledge—for example, the physicians. But physicians, addressing a popular assembly, saying that a hospital [should] be erected, produce not knowledge, but belief. Because the men addressed are not physicians. There is a twofold difficulty. The first is this: Is not every man who possesses knowledge also a man who produces knowledge? If a man possesses an art, can he not also teach that art? And if he cannot teach it, is it not a sign of the inadequacy of the knowledge which he possesses? But the situation is certainly different in the case of rhetoric. A man may be an orator without being a rhetorician. This distinction is crucial for this dialogue. For example, Gorgias may make a man a good speaker without clarifying to him the reasons why this and that technique is productive of good speech. He may tell his pupil, “Do this and this, and you’ll see that it will be a hit.” The student does it and it proves to be a hit, and that’s all that is interesting to that practical fellow. In other words, that is the difference between experience and art or science in the classic sense of the term. Gorgias may not tell his students why this is necessarily a hit. His pupil will then acquire experience in contradistinction to the art. But will Gorgias *himself* know the reason? That is the great question. Does he possess an art? Then he possesses *knowledge* regarding the production of belief; he possesses knowledge or science; he possesses science regarding the production of belief, whereas he does not possess science regarding the just and unjust things. This thought should not be too difficult to understand today. There could be a supreme technician, [a] scientific technician who would teach people how to influence various kinds of people and give them all the reasoning behind these precepts. That would

---

<sup>iv</sup> See *daimonia* at 456a5.

be such a thing. In other words, if Gorgias knows the reasons for his rhetoric, his rhetoric will be a genuine art. The examples given here in 455b deal<sup>18</sup> always [with] deliberative rhetoric, as you may see. Socrates enlarges now the narrow definition which identifies rhetoric with forensic rhetoric only, and which narrowness was suggested by Socrates, too. He enlarges rhetoric while indicating the fundamental narrowness of everything said here about rhetoric,<sup>19</sup> [namely] the disregard of the fact that the rhetorician is a man of *knowledge*. Do you see? In the whole argument, the emphasis is put on the fact that the rhetorician is a belief-producing fellow. But that he produces belief on the basis of knowledge or science regarding persuasion is not mentioned. That we must keep in mind. In all matters where there is knowledge, we have recourse to men of knowledge and not to orators. For example, whether a war should be waged or not, or whether a city wall should be built or not.

455b–c. Now this is a manifestly untrue statement, as we shall see on the next page, because we listen to all kinds of speakers who are not experts. And the statement<sup>20</sup> [has] the purpose of inciting Gorgias to state, if not the *usefulness*, at least the *power* of rhetoric. Socrates appeals explicitly to Gorgias' self-interest.

455c–d: It will pay for Gorgias to state the power of rhetoric, its *full* power and not merely the power of a relatively low part such as forensic rhetoric. This implies, of course, that display oratory does not pay. Socrates is at least partly responsible for Gorgias' silence about<sup>21</sup> display oratory. I'm sorry if I have to hammer that in, but that is crucial. 455b: in every election, one must elect the best expert. Hence the rhetorician cannot give advice. Why not? Who does the electing in Athens? The popular assembly. And are they experts or non-experts? Non-experts. Hence, why should the orator, the expert in talking to a non-expert, not speak as well? Every carpenter, farmer, business man can talk in the assembly. Why should not the orator talk? And if he is better in talking, why not? Now, that has a very great implication. Once you admit the rule of non-experts, the political rule of non-experts, or more specifically, democracy, you have already admitted the need for deliberative rhetoric. There's no way out of it. And this is of course not emphasized here, but we must keep it in mind.

**Student:** But should not the people be brought to the point where they are experts?

**LS:** But how can they be made experts in medicine?

**Student:** If that is the aim of political organizations, which it is not—

**LS:** Let us take it on the most commonsensical basis. If you have a popular assembly deciding on political issues, and even if there are representatives of them, is it not so, that people who are not scientists talk to other non-scientists about matters of which they have no scientific knowledge? Is this not a fair description of what is happening in every political assembly, and necessarily in every popular assembly?

**Student:** But here is a peculiarity about Plato's conception of democracy: he seems to think that you can locate authority within the people, and, by doing so, if you do locate

authority, you have to give them the proper information, or at least the proper expert opinion.

**LS:** Okay. Let's assume that this is a correct statement of Plato's view of democracy, which I doubt—but let us grant that. And then we have this. We bring in an expert in, say, the matter of the war.<sup>22</sup> We bring in the military expert. Now, how do people know that he is really a competent man? They know it only by sight. He has one big war, perhaps two big wars. And then the presumption is he is an expert. The *assumption*—they don't know. And then this man, how can he tell them? Disregarding completely the security considerations, if strategy is a science, understanding of the science requires science on the part of the hearer. In other words, they would have to take a three-month course in strategy if they want to follow him. That is impossible. So he must be a public speaker. He must have the capacity of impressing the public by his character, and he must appeal to things which they cannot understand without being experts. But this is rhetoric—so that Gorgias' definition of rhetoric<sup>23</sup> [as] the art which produces belief as distinguished from knowledge among *non-knowing men* is indispensable. And even if you say the problem only arises for Plato, you will be mistaken. I can show that.

Let us take the extreme statement, and that occurs of course in the *Republic*. And there you have a city that is really not a democracy, but the rule of the super-experts, if there is such a word. You will admit that. Now, these men rule the city. There are three or four men who are philosophers, others are non-philosophers, but in order to get cooperation, obedience, and what not, they have to talk to these people from time to time. That means in this case *knowing men* will talk to *non-knowing men* according to the principles accepted by non-knowing men—the noble lie in the *Republic*. And when you read that passage, you will see that this is of course a speech, a product of rhetoric. This is addressed by knowing men to non-knowing men. And therefore, if we do not see that that is an act of necessity for rhetoric, we can never understand the dialogue.

We have two Platonic dialogues on rhetoric. One is the *Phaedrus* and the other is [the] *Gorgias*. The *Phaedrus* presents, we can say, Socratic rhetoric explicitly. But this Socratic rhetoric as presented in the<sup>24</sup> [*Phaedrus*] is a rhetoric which deals with individuals: how to guide this man and that man. The Gorgian rhetoric is not individual rhetoric. The Gorgian rhetoric, as described here, is speaking to crowds. But the rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias is bad. That will come out: it's impossible. But does this mean that the fundamental idea of a crowd rhetoric, of popular rhetoric, assembly rhetoric, is wrong?<sup>25</sup> I would say no, because that rhetoric is necessary. And what Socrates will bring out is the most important thing<sup>26</sup> [about] popular rhetoric, which means a speech addressed by knowing men to non-knowing<sup>27</sup>. In addition, the other point which he wants to make is this: that the good kind of popular rhetoric will not be only rhetoric produced by knowing men, but, by this very fact, be incapable of being misused. Gorgian rhetoric, as we shall see, is admittedly liable to misuse.

So let me just repeat this point. Once you admit the rule of non-experts—and every government of the world hitherto, and I'll imagine for all the future, will be a rule of non-experts (because these experts who would rule as technocrats would be worse than the

non-expert, Plato doesn't think of these guys)—once you admit the rule of non-knowing men, you have already admitted the need for deliberative rhetoric. For the same reason for which Chaerephon is the link between Socrates and the *demos*, he is the link between Socrates and Gorgias. We understand that now. Gorgias stands for the possibility, not fulfilled by him, of the good popular rhetoric. The sentence which is translated “in every election one must elect the best expert” is ambiguous. It can also be translated as follows: “in every election the best expert must *do* the electing.”<sup>v</sup> In this case, the case of aristocracy<sup>28</sup> [radically] understood, *Platonically* understood, rhetoric at first hand,<sup>vi</sup> would not be necessary, because only experts talk among each other. But that only reinforces the problem.

We turn now to the section on the tremendous power of rhetoric: 455d–456c. Gorgias now reveals the whole power of rhetoric. He states explicitly that Socrates has finally prepared that revelation, which means in plain English that Socrates has *guided* him. Again, we note, display rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias does not belong to the power of rhetoric. Therefore, it doesn't have to be mentioned. Display rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias is mere enjoyment—merely “nice,” as Calicles said right at the beginning. And that is another problem: Could it not be something more than nice? [Inaudible words] . . . means control of all faculties and powers with a view to the effect on laymen, not simply. Gorgias does not say, but implies, that an orator could get himself elected as general in a city, if he wanted. He can get anything he wants. But note: *elected*. [The orator whom he trains], he implied, [could not] become a tyrant.<sup>29</sup> It would be a very bad thing. Furthermore, Gorgias proves the power of rhetoric only in the case of private rhetoric. And he is speaking in a sick room with his brother, and the brother says he must undergo an operation, and the patient says no, then Gorgias, with his bedside manner at its best, comes in and proves that the patient must have an operation. Regarding public oratory, or election to public office rather, he merely asserts that this power is so great. Very emphatic in the Greek. Rhetoric has an amazing power. But this is also its drawbacks. The rhetorician may be admired, but for the very same reason he will be envied and feared. And therefore a *warning* is in order. The rhetorician must not be held responsible, Gorgias says, for the misuse of his art by his pupils. In other words, his pupils could misuse it. They might use the art of rhetoric for becoming, not only elected generals, but tyrants. If it can be misused, why can it not be misused for the greatest of all crimes? One uses rhetoric well if one uses it for helping friends and hurting enemies—the old formula in the *Republic*.<sup>vii</sup> A nice man will help his friends and hurt his enemies. That is the good use. Then Gorgias suddenly swears by Zeus, and thereafter he replaces the word for enemies, which means also private enemies, by a word which means *only* public enemies, foes of the country and the evil-doers.<sup>viii</sup> He said the just use of rhetoric is use not for helping your private friends and hurting your private enemies, but use for the common good. The oath comes in beautifully because Zeus is the guardian of justice.

---

<sup>v</sup> LS is referring to the sentence at 455b4–5.

<sup>vi</sup> This expression, “first hand,” has been retained from the original transcript.

<sup>vii</sup> *Republic* 332d.

<sup>viii</sup> The words for enemy are *echthros* and *polemios*.

Now then, in 457a, he says the teachers of rhetoric are not wicked if the pupils use wickedly what they have learned. And he says furthermore, the art of rhetoric is not responsible and wicked if the pupils use wickedly what they have learned. He makes here a distinction between the teachers and the art. Both the teachers and the art are not wicked, but the art, in addition, is not responsible, whereas the teachers may be responsible without being wicked. I think the answer is simple: that teachers may have selected pupils improperly, the art could not be responsible for that. In other words, the teacher of rhetoric may show bad judgment, by picking the wrong pupil, but the art cannot show wrong judgment. And therefore the teachers are not wicked, whereas the art is also not wicked but also not even responsible.

Now we have reached the point where we have reached the greatest clarity which we will ever reach regarding Gorgias' opinion of rhetoric. From this point on, the fifth and last step of the conversation begins, the refutation of Gorgias: 457c–461b. This refutation is prepared in 457–458e. First, Socrates makes a move (457c–458b). Socrates is now ready for refuting Gorgias because he has heard everything he could have. But that doesn't mean that he is ready for refuting Gorgias: he must make Gorgias ready for refuting, which is a different proposition. He gives Gorgias advance notice that he's trying to refute him. Why does he do this? He doesn't always do this. For example, Thrasymachus is not given advance notice that he will be refuted. Why does Socrates make Gorgias *nervous* by giving advance notice? Does he want to show to Gorgias his, Socrates', power? Looking more closely at the advance notice, we see that Socrates touches Gorgias, that he binds him hand and foot so that he cannot run away—and that is the master of rhetoric! And Gorgias had just spoken of his power, the power of rhetoric. Socrates now reveals to Gorgias Gorgias' impotence; he has to hear what is said and cannot do anything about it. In what does the power of rhetoric consist? In making men win victory. Socrates shows now that the desire to win victory, which was admitted by Gorgias, is the greatest, at least in certain cases. Rhetoric is self-defeating; rhetoric as the art of winning arguments is self-defeating. At least the end or purpose of rhetoric cannot be admitted, and that is a very bad thing. Socrates says that conversations are frequently broken up because the interlocutor wishes to "humiliate him"—a phrase not used here, but we can use it—and thus degrade the conversing man in the eyes of the bystanders. Because, you see, they just want to show off; they are not concerned with the subject. In other words, Socrates warns Gorgias that Gorgias has no choice except to accept his refutation<sup>30</sup> [at] the hands of Socrates with his good grace. In this connection, he makes two points which call for special attention. First, in 457e, Socrates is afraid that Gorgias might think that Socrates was talking against Gorgias with a view to Gorgias, whereas he was talking with a view to the subject matter, for the sake of its coming to light. There is no longer any question about Gorgias being *free* to conclude his thesis as he sees fit. He is now bound by what he has said, hand and foot. Secondly, 458a, Socrates says, "I would not mind being refuted. On the contrary, I would prefer being refuted rather than to refute another man. For if one is refuted, one's self is liberated from the greatest evil—ignorance in important matters—whereas if one refutes another man, one merely liberates another man from the greatest evil." He implies, of course, the greatest good is knowledge, but he implies also charity begins at home, or, to overstate it, a great selfishness: "I prefer to be refuted because I am

more concerned with me than the other person.” And now Gorgias makes his countermove, which does not lack cleverness, though it is not up to Socratic standards.

458b–c: Socrates has left Gorgias with the<sup>31</sup> [choice] between undergoing his refutation or admitting that he does not care a bit for truth. This is a bad choice, we must admit. And Socrates has left Gorgias with the choice between admitting defeat prior to the battle or certain defeat in battle, which is also a very bad choice, and which proves the imprudence of Gorgias, the lack of *phronēsis*, of prudence, to our eyes. Gorgias tries to get out of this by a move<sup>32</sup> [which looks] like an act of justice, and that is absolutely charming: “You, Socrates, ought not be so selfish as to think only of your being improved by being refuted by me. You should also consider the others. Maybe they are tired or have other business.” In other words, Gorgias hopes that the others will help him—and perhaps Polus, who had succeeded in helping him before at the beginning. Socrates says, “you are licked, and you must take it.” And Gorgias says, “no, no.” And now the deadlock. How do you solve such a deadlock under these conditions? And this is the solution, the last step in 458c–d.

The very thing—popular vote! Chaerephon, Socrates’ friend and Gorgias’ friend, prevents a break up of the discussion by appealing to the voice of the people—[a] limited group of people, ten, twenty men, maybe. And Callicles, who is also Gorgias’ and Socrates’ friend, does the same. And that is very amusing, because now Socrates has won a victory. Before a popular assembly, he is shown to be a better popular speaker than Gorgias. In Callicles’ case, I’m afraid we may suspect that he wants to see and enjoy the kill. But why does Polus not jump in? After all, [he is] a friend of Gorgias and not a friend of Socrates. Perhaps he realizes that Socrates has reduced Gorgias to a condition where no choice is left to Gorgias except to go down. From now on, the discussion is no longer a matter only of Socrates’ or Gorgias’ selfish concern with their improvement, but a matter of justice, a duty to the others, of general interest, public interest as seen by public vote. And it is noteworthy that Callicles here makes a very emphatic and very comprehensive oath: he calls on *all* the gods—so practically important, so political is the situation. Socrates, however, says in 458d that the popular vote does not bind Gorgias. Gorgias is a superior man, but, of course, that is only a kind of reservation, not uninteresting, but of no practical use here, because Gorgias himself admits that, while he is not bound by popular vote, he is bound by his own claim. He is caught in a trap of his own making, by his claim that he will answer every question.

It would be very tempting to compare this beautiful play on justice with that in the *Protagoras*. I can give you the reference: 334c–338e. There the question is this: Protagoras, too, claims to be as good at making long speeches as at making brief speeches, as Gorgias does. But he refuses to comply with Socrates’ request to make only brief speeches. In other words, this answer is cleverer than Gorgias’. He refuses, and the reason which he gives is very charming. He says, “it would be foolish if I would accept the conditions laid down by my antagonist; I could never have won as many victories if I had accepted the conditions laid down by my antagonists.” And there is a very beautiful scene where Socrates compares the situation between two men, one of<sup>33</sup> [whom] is a very fast runner, very good at running fast, and the other man can only run at a medium speed. But he said this is not a contest: “I will ask you only to run as fast as I can.” The point is this:



in the *Protagoras* there is a very real dissension between Protagoras and Socrates. After all, here it remains very subdued. Gorgias says, “Yes, I’m willing, but we have to also ask the others.” In the *Protagoras* this comes [in]to the open and Callias, the host, the wealthy stuffed shirt,<sup>34</sup> intervenes on Protagoras’ side, and Alcibiades on Socrates’ side. Critias, later the tyrant, wants to be an impartial arbitrator, and the three other sophists present there also want to act as impartial arbitrators. There is a popular vote, again, in favor of continuation of the debate. You deprive yourself of a great joy if you do not read this. The decisive difference, I believe, is this: There is no competition between Socrates and Gorgias; there is a competition between Socrates and Protagoras, at least in the mind of Protagoras. The situation here is strangely much more amiable. The situation is different, and the dialogue *Protagoras* is made because Socrates wants to debunk Protagoras in the eyes of the younger Athenians. He doesn’t want to find out about Protagoras. This dialogue has really served the purpose of finding out more about Gorgias’ art and of making an implicit suggestion to Gorgias—how he could put his faculties to a good use, after he has put them up to now, if not to a bad, at least to a trifling use.

Now at this point, 458e, the refutation begins, which I must say is not really a refutation at all. It is only a silencing of Gorgias, and we have to ask the question why Socrates or Plato wastes our time speaking of the semblance of refutation instead of really having a refutation. This, for next time. Now in passing, the meaning of the term “rhetorician” is a man who possesses the art and can transmit it. Whether such an art exists is, of course, questionable, and up to now, that is in no way proven; and Socrates even sets forth<sup>35</sup> [a] strong argument, in<sup>36</sup> [the] section against Polus, that it cannot be an art. But this does not exhaust the problem. This is an argument which is decisive against Gorgias, as he understands it. But we have already some inkling of the difficulty, and that is that there is no intrinsic impossibility of having art or science or knowledge regarding [the] production of persuasion. It’s not intrinsically impossible, and it was proved afterwards by Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. But that is a difficulty, and this difficulty is not discussed, but only alluded to. In other words, the argument is to that extent sophistic: that [the distinction is not sufficiently made] between the orator and the rhetorician<sup>37</sup>. What Socrates says, in effect, is that the art of rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias, while claiming to be an art, and while it has certain characteristics of art, is *not* an art. Plato’s question would also be directed, up to this point, against Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in anticipation. But still, we know that this is a respectable consideration which we must keep in mind against what Socrates seems to say: that there is no contradiction in having a knowledge or science of producing belief or persuasion. There is also even an evident necessity for such an art, if we consider the character of popular assemblies—even, for that matter, forensic oratory. As Aristotle puts it at the beginning of the *Rhetoric*, why should only injustice be art? Why should only the lawyers representing crooks be good speakers? Still, if it is true [that] the shyster and the decent lawyer both can possess the art of rhetoric equally,<sup>38</sup> [then], since the one is bad and the other is good, we need a higher knowledge which allows us to regulate the use of that faculty. And what is that? Now the traditional answer for that is of course ethics, or<sup>39</sup> moral principle as far as a habit is concerned. But that is not the answer given by Socrates, because Socrates thinks, as everyone knows, that morality is the same as knowledge. Virtue is knowledge, and to the extent that this is true, we cannot refer to moral principle

as such, conscience, nor can [we]<sup>40</sup> [refer] to ethics in the Aristotelian sense, because that is a problem from Plato's point of view.

Since I'm really a political scientist, as I hope you know, I always wish you to think of the topical relevance of the conversation which is said to have taken place 2,300 years and more ago in Athens. From time to time, we will come quite naturally to modern equivalents of Gorgias. I can give you one general word that may be of some help. The problem posed by Gorgias in Plato's time is fundamentally that which holds today and which is now called "the intellectual." Gorgias certainly was an intellectual. An intellectual is a man who spends most of his life reading and writing and derives his livelihood from that. That is what I think intellectual probably means. I don't know what the authorities say about it. But there is a problem in that kind of occupation.

Now for Plato, the problem was simple—why he turned his mind to rhetoric. Plato was concerned with philosophy,<sup>41</sup> and philosophy must be distinguished from pursuits that can easily be mistaken for philosophy. And rhetoric, as popularly understood, was such a phenomenon. Rhetoric was a competitor of philosophy for the simple reason that both the philosopher and the rhetorician raise a universal claim. The philosopher deals with all things and the rhetorician deals with speeches about all things—which creates a certain difficulty. But, as for us, we are perhaps not concerned with philosophy, but rather with social science and the understanding of our society. Now in our society, the public speaker does not play the role which he played in Athens. What is the present day equivalent in our society to the public speaker? Well, one could perhaps say journalists and other writers, or those people who try to influence multitudes in non-specialized matters and who do not claim that their writings are scientific—people who try to put their stamp on the public mind, who aspire to become opinion leaders. Now, in this sense, rhetoric exists of course in our society as well as it existed in Plato's time. But Gorgias, of course, claims to be much more than an opinion leader. He claims to be a teacher of opinion leaders, a teacher of men like Kirk<sup>ix</sup> and others. This has perhaps<sup>42</sup> no immediate equivalent in our society, but perhaps because no one has yet thought of this possibility. And in addition one could also say that the absence of it throws as much light on our society as the presence of it in ancient Greece throws on Greek society.

**Student:** Would there be any difference between the demagogue and the rhetorician in this sense?

**LS:** But would the chief activity of the demagogue not still be oral somehow? Because we live in an entirely different, much larger society where the spoken word does not have the effect, in spite of radio and TV, and people still depend very much on reading. And therefore I think the equivalent of the speaker is today the writer, rather than the speaker. Of course, these differences are very external differences. I mean, it doesn't go to the root of the matter.

**Student:** I wonder if advertising does not perform this function today?

---

<sup>ix</sup> Russell Kirk (1918–1994) was an American political theorist and historian.

LS: Ya, I don't know very much about that, but I think the advertiser usually limits himself to the fellow you see on the city streets. He recommends soap, dog food. I see, but you say that he recommends everything—to that extent, I see. In other words, the teacher of advertisers would—but even the teacher of advertisers, would he—do you think he would also teach politicians and political writers? But would not Kirk and others refuse to accept these fellows as their teachers? So in other words, if you would take a supreme teacher of advertising, much beyond anything that has ever appeared up to now, then you would get something like an equivalent of Gorgias. Very good.<sup>43</sup> But, if there could be a teacher of opinion leaders, in the sense in which Gorgias was one, he would be a kind of unofficial legislator for society as a whole. And an unofficial legislator may be more powerful than the official legislator for all we know. He would necessarily *appear* to be a philosopher, because the function is somehow the same. Such a man would not be a scientist in our present-day sense of the term, for science is morally neutral, or value-free. Such a man would precisely aspire to teach the opinion leaders of how to sway the multitude regarding values. Since he would have to teach both Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Russell Kirk, he would not be committed to either liberalism or conservatism.<sup>x</sup> Naturally—otherwise, he couldn't teach both equally. Would he, then, not be forced to be value-free? Would he not be forced to be beyond all values, so that he can teach anyone to teach his particular value? No. He certainly would have to ascribe value, and a very high value, to his own pursuit. And in this respect he would be a bit clearer than some present-day equivalent of his type. The question then arises: What is the value of that teacher of opinion leaders, Gorgias, to the subordinate values, [the] values preached up by Schlesinger and Kirk respectively? The subordinate values are different notions of what constitutes justice, the liberal and the conservative notion[s]. So a teacher would be beyond justice in either the liberal or conservative sense; otherwise, he could not teach both equally. Is this possible? Does his credit not depend on the belief in his integrity, that is to say, in [his] justice? For example, if Schlesinger believed that the teacher of opinion leaders is secretly allied with Kirk, he would distrust him and wouldn't want to be his pupil. So he must, then, have a justice of his own. He must take a higher justice, higher than either [the] liberal or conservative interpretation of justice. The very notion of [a] teacher of opinion leaders forces us, then, to raise the question of the relation of his teaching to justice, just as Plato was compelled to raise the question of the separation of rhetoric and justice. So in other words, if we think a little bit of what is going on and what is today concealed by the term “intellectual,” we arrive at the same phenomenon which Plato analyzed under the heading “rhetoric.” And so it is not an old and buried story, but a very timely and topical issue<sup>44</sup> [with] which we are concerned.

Now, after having reminded you again that we are not interested in ancient history, we turn again to the *Gorgias*. We have finished the discussion between Socrates and Gorgias, which led to the result that rhetoric is necessarily just. But the trouble is that this was not really proven. What was proven was that Gorgias contradicted himself regarding this very point. He had said, on the one hand, that rhetoric can be misused, which means it<sup>45</sup> [can] be unjust, and, on the other hand, he had said it cannot be misused, which means it cannot be unjust. At this point, Polus takes over. And the first step, which we

---

<sup>x</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (1917–2007) was an American historian and prominent Democrat.

discussed last time, is this: Polus is dissatisfied with the results. “What is the use of a rhetoric which cannot be unjust?” It might be good public relations, but [it] would not be very practical for teaching the kind of fellows he wants to teach. And Polus tries to beat Socrates at his own game, the game of questioning. But he fails. He’s a poor questioner. At this point, Gorgias comes in again, and in the second step of the argument, which is 463a–466a,<sup>46</sup> Socrates develops his notion of rhetoric in a conversation with both Gorgias and Polus, but with the understanding that this thesis will be discussed with Polus. Gorgias will be only a listener to the conversation between Socrates and Polus on rhetoric. What that means will become clear in the sequel.

[end of session]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “patch.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “is.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “most.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “that Gorgias is to be.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “a question.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “his.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “on.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “this.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “shall.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “both.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “that we can be.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “regards.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “in.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “mainly.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “And.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “that means.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “*Gorgias*.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “is radical.”

<sup>29</sup> This sentence has been changed from “He could not, he implied, that the orator whom he trains, could not become a tyrant.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “in by.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “advice.”

<sup>32</sup> Deleted “looking.”

<sup>33</sup> Deleted “which.”

<sup>34</sup> Deleted “Callias.”

<sup>35</sup> Deleted “this.”

<sup>36</sup> Deleted “this.”

<sup>37</sup> Moved “the distinction is not sufficiently made.”

<sup>38</sup> Deleted “and therefore.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleted “of.”

---

<sup>40</sup> Deleted “it be referred.”

<sup>41</sup> Deleted ellipsis.

<sup>42</sup> Deleted “has.”

<sup>43</sup> Deleted “Now.”

<sup>44</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>45</sup> Deleted “cannot.”

<sup>46</sup> Deleted “where.”

#### Session 4: January 17, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** Now we begin. We have to consider this scheme. But before I do that, I draw your attention to the remark at<sup>1</sup> 464a.<sup>2</sup> There is a conversation here between Socrates and Gorgias. Socrates questions Gorgias' answers—the normal situation in Platonic dialogues. You see here that Gorgias certainly admits that there is a well-being of some things. For example, he will be brought by Socrates to admit that there is a well-being also of the body and of the soul. Socrates presumes that Gorgias will admit the well-being of some things because he's a rhetorician. As a rhetorician, he will admit, of course, there is a well-being of diction, for example—a good condition of speech and a bad condition of speech. And so Socrates appeals to that and says, "Do you not also admit a well-being of the body, the well-being of the soul?" Gorgias has no difficulty. And then Socrates develops this in a very long speech, this view of rhetoric, making a distinction between art and flattery, and dividing both with a view to the fact that they can deal with the body or the soul. The arts dealing with the body are gymnastics and medicine, and [the] arts dealing with the soul are the legislative<sup>3</sup> [art] and justice. And the flatteries which<sup>4</sup> [mimic] the arts are: cosmetic<sup>5</sup> [mimics] gymnastics (I think there is no difficulty in understanding that, that gymnastics builds up real beauty and cosmetics builds up sham beauty); medicine restores the body to its good condition, cookery mimics<sup>6</sup> all that—it gives you not what you really need in order to become again healthy, but what pleases your tongue. Similarly, there is an art, building up the<sup>7</sup> [soul] to a good condition like gymnastics builds up the body, that he calls the legislative art. Then there is the art which restores the good condition of the soul after it has been impaired, and that is justice. You can, of course, say "criminal justice," but we have to take seriously the fact that Plato calls it here simply "justice." And there is a mimicry of the legislative art, which is called sophistry, and a mimicry of justice, which is called rhetoric. All these things are base and not arts, and all these things are good and noble and art[s].<sup>1</sup> Now, we must consider a little bit. The characteristic of flattery is twofold. It is (a) base, because it tends towards the pleasant, as distinguished from the good, and (b) it is not an art but a mere routine, because in some cases probably there are intermediate stages. But still, to the extent to which he is a physician, a professor of the art, he knows.

In 465b, page 319, Plato gives a mathematical presentation of these things, and he indicates the fact that this mathematical presentation, in the form of a proportion, is a kind of *brachylogy* or short speech. You know that if you have a simple mathematical formula, you can't express it more shortly, more briefly, than that. But it has also another meaning. This mathematical expression is laconic. You have to do some other mathematical operation to get out the full meaning. Now in 465c, where the proportion is given, all the editors, as far as I know, suppress a variant which I think is very good and can be understood. I give you first what I think Plato really said, what is in the manuscript. He said, first, "cosmetics to gymnastics equal to cooking to medicine." That appears from this statement. But he, Socrates, adds, "But *better*—the proportion is *better* stated in the following way," and that is in your text, "cosmetics to gymnastics is equal to

---

<sup>1</sup> LS may be referring here to two lists written on the blackboard.

sophistry to the legislative art, and cooking to medicine equal to rhetoric to justice.” Now, what is the difference of this proportion, which as projected is not good enough, and the other one? What is characteristic of this proportion, “cosmetics to gymnastics equal to cooking to medicine”?

**Student:** Both refer to the body.

**LS:** Only to the body. And “cosmetics to gymnastics equal to sophistry to [the] legislative<sup>8</sup> [art]”?

**Student:** Body and soul together.

**LS:** Body and soul together. Why is that better than the one which keeps only in the realm of the body? Does it make sense? On the one condition: perhaps the relation between body and soul has the form of a proportion—that could have been in Plato’s mind—so that a proportion which embraces body and soul is superior to one which deals only with bodily phenomena. So, since this is a perfectly reasonable thought, I don’t see why one should destroy this passage. The better proportion combines body and soul, and is not limited to the body.

Now, if we turn to the whole proportion, Socrates speaks explicitly of the intra–body proportion and of those body–soul proportions which include both arts and flattery. He does not speak of the intra–soul proportions. That is not separated out; that, we have to figure out for ourselves. That means mathematical *brachylogy*: we have to figure it out for ourselves. Nor does he speak of that body–soul proportion which includes only the art, which is, of course, also a proportion. But—and this is the beauty of mathematics—the omitted proportion[s] can be figured out because they are implied in the proportions given. It’s a simple illustration of the usefulness of mathematics, which Plato regards as important enough to insert here. He does not say, in particular, that justice is related to the legislative art as medicine is to gymnastics. That has a great implication. Question: Do all men need gymnastics? I mean, from Plato’s point of view, or from a Greek point of view. How can you have a healthy body if you don’t have training? Do all men need medicine? No. If they keep the body healthy, they don’t need it. All men need the legislative arts; I mean, they must be brought up. But not all men need what we call justice. Whether the use of that word, “justice,” is of some meaning, of some deeper meaning, we will see. The healthy soul would not need justice in the sense in which the term is used here.

Now in the sequel, 465c, he says if there were no mind above the soul, sophistry and rhetoric could not be distinguished. They are very closely akin to each other, and they are not distinguishable empirically. But if there were no pure mind above the soul, then they could not be distinguished, for the simple reason that the legislative art which legislates deals with the universal. Justice deals with a particular individual—[it] says that *this* fellow should be punished or not—whereas the legislative art is universal, the law concerning all cases. The universal and particular could not be distinguished if there were no mind, as distinguished from the soul in the general way, just as Polus cannot

distinguish between experience and art, as we have seen. In this sequel, in the flatteries, the body is in control. In the art, the soul is in control. But how can the body be in control in rhetoric and sophistry? They may be terrible things, but how can they be controlled by the body? How would you explain that?

**Student:** Pleasure is controlled primarily by body?

**LS:** Ya, pleasure is primarily bodily pleasure—that is here the indication. But more simply and empirically as follows. Take the simplest case of the orator. What does he want to bring about? An acquittal of the accused, regardless of whether he is guilty or not. That means life, mere preservation of the body, is the goal of rhetoric. So the body is really in control. The body is concerned with the self-assertion of the *animal*,<sup>9</sup> [whose desire] to live controls it, and uses<sup>10</sup> reasoning for this purpose. But perhaps there is also a deeper reasoning. Perhaps what is underlying rhetoric and sophistry, as here understood, is a materialistic philosophy. Then also, in a way, the body would be in control.

In this section, 465c–d, there is one explicit reference to Polus, when Socrates speaks of a certain philosopher called Anaxagoras—the first philosopher, according to Aristotle, who began to talk sense, who appeared like a sober man<sup>11</sup> [among] so many drunken ones, because he asserted the primacy of the mind.<sup>ii</sup> But unfortunately, according to Socrates as well as to Plato, he did not really understand what he meant.<sup>iii</sup> Now this Anaxagoras is familiar to Polus; that is clear. But in a previous reference to mathematics, an addressee is said to be familiar with mathematics, and we do not know if this is Gorgias or<sup>12</sup> Polus. I believe it is Gorgias. So there is a real difference. Gorgias has a deeper grounding; he knows, has some understanding, of mathematics, whereas Polus is a kind of clever reader of the most exciting literature of the time.

In 465e–466a, Socrates here completely abandons the spurious distinction between making long speeches and making short speeches. Why has this spurious distinction been used? Well, we can give a number of reasons. In the first place, it was used to ridicule Gorgias and in order to bring about Gorgias' downfall. Because Gorgias fell for that and wanted to give very brief answers, and then he of course was licked. This is now completed. Gorgias' art proves to be no art at all, but a despicable flattery, at least by implication. The distinction between short and long speeches also serves to indicate, ironically, the superiority of dialectics, which consists of short speeches, and of little speeches, making little distinctions. Contrasted with the long speeches of rhetoric and the broad sweep of the orator, the dialectician must appear as a petty person, because he makes minute distinctions, whereas the orator appears as a general person (he doesn't carefully pick out these distinctions). And above all, Socrates has now shown himself to be a superior rhetorician, even a superior popular speaker. You remember the scene where he won the multitude for his proposal over against the rhetorician, Gorgias. You remember this scene? It is very important. The question which is much more important, of course, is the following one.

---

<sup>ii</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 984b15–20.

<sup>iii</sup> See *Phaedo* 98b7–99d2.



Here we have a statement about the arts in general, and about rhetoric in particular. Rhetoric, of course, is the most important one. How far is this an adequate statement of the arts concerned, and especially of rhetoric? That it fulfills a function in this dialogue, we can take that for granted. But does it express directly Socrates' or Plato's opinion of rhetoric as well as the other arts mentioned here? Well, I give you some piece of evidence. In the *Phaedrus*, the other dialogue on rhetoric, 270b, the rhetorical *art*, not flattery, [is] said to deal with the soul, just as the medical *art* deals with the body. So, in other words, that is not the last word of Socrates, or Plato, on rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> [From] a certain perspective, rhetoric can be presented as that—I mean, if you take a very vulgar view of rhetoric, which seems to be taught by Gorgias, then it makes sense. But it is not true of rhetoric simply. And an equally interesting passage occurs in the dialogue called *Sophist*, 222c–223a. There we find the following divisions, which are more funny at first glance than this one, but ultimately both are funny.<sup>14</sup> [There] rhetoric or the other things are introduced as parts of the art of hunting. The art of hunting is subdivided until we come to a class which is called “hunting of tame animals,” tame animals being men. Hunting of tame animals is subdivided into hunting them by force or by persuasion. Hunting by force is, of course, slave–trade and war. Now<sup>15</sup> persuasion is subdivided into persuading individuals and persuading communities. The art of hunting tame animals by persuading communities is rhetoric.

Now let us go on. The art of persuading tame animals as individuals can be practiced either by bringing gifts (this is the amatory art) or by receiving pay (which is exactly the opposite). And this hunting tame animals individually by receiving pay, that can be done either through gratification and pleasure (. . . words used here)<sup>iv</sup> and demanding as pay only maintenance—that is flattery. In other words, if you hunt a human being through gratifying his pleasure and so on, and demand as the remuneration only maintenance—to use the house and the other things—that is flattery. But if you hunt an individual by receiving pay while claiming to work for the sake of virtue and demanding *monetary* payment—that is sophistry. You see, in other words, what I'm driving at is this. You must not take this very humorous—obviously very humorous—distinction<sup>16</sup> [either more or] less seriously than that. Both are incomplete. And whether their incompleteness hits you in the face, as it does in the *Sophist*, or does not hit you in the face ultimately makes no difference. You have to figure it out for yourself, and what you would have to do, I suppose, is to introduce at least a distinction between true rhetoric and sham rhetoric. And of sham rhetoric, you could say that.

But even that would be a question. Someone brought this up, whether it is not misleading to call even sham rhetoric “flattery.” It does not extend the meaning of flattery much beyond the ordinary usage, though that could be defended. We note this only as an indication of the limited character of this distinction. For the primary purpose, what is very clear is this: Socrates wants to compel Polus to stand up in defense of rhetoric so that the fundamental issue can come out. And as long as Polus could be left in the belief

---

<sup>iv</sup> It is possible that the transcriber meant to indicate that LS's words were inaudible at this point. However, since an intelligible meaning can be given to the words as they appear in the transcript, these words have been retained.

that rhetoric may not be quite clear as to its purpose but is something very noble, Polus would not need any inducement. But once he is told it is as despicable as cosmetics and cookery, then he must do something. Today, we would not regard cosmetics as something base. But I remember, if you compare certain parts of Europe which I know a bit, with opinions in this country, you would still not find a difference. For example, in my childhood, lipstick didn't exist, at least in the region in which I lived. And today it is a matter of course. So that also is of some importance. How fast, in one generation, certain things generally admitted up to this time have fallen into obsolescence. I mean, it's not a thing of centuries—a very short time. So in 465a, Socrates says explicitly with a view to Polus [that] whatever tends towards the pleasant without regard to the best is base and cannot be an art. What does that mean? Why is the aiming at the production of the pleasant incompatible with art? Or is this perhaps an overstatement of Socrates here? What is it in the pleasant and painful which is incompatible with art? I mean, let us really use our heads and not believe Socrates upon his word. Could there not be an art of producing, say, the greatest titillation of the tongue? Culinary art. Why can't this<sup>17</sup> be an art? Can we not know something about the tongue, and what is pleasant to the tongue, and, by ever deeper investigation, make the culinary art as much an art as, say, shoemaking? Where does the difficulty lie?

**Student:** Well, I think there's a very basic difficulty in that reason in no sense enters into the precise reason for the pleasure. The reason has nothing to do with it—that the tongue, that is something completely divorced from reason.

**LS:** Ya, but where is the precise point? I mean, let us take this very clever cook. Would he not be able to give you a precise account? He would say we start from the distinction between sweet and bitter, I suppose, and similar distinctions, and say these and these mixtures produce a perfect satisfaction of the tongue, and he can really prove that. If you would say that, in some cases, people do not find this good food, one could perhaps say in other arts, too, people are deficient. For example, color-blind people do not check on any art which has to do with color.

**Student:** Well, when it's based on a<sup>18</sup> [pleasure], it's based on individual things. And it's hard to get into a standard, or a general, or a universal. Whereas in art, you have to—

**LS:** In other words, what is pleasant and painful is known only by sense perception, not by any other perception, and therefore we are up against something fundamentally sub-rational and non-rational. But take a simple example. Let us assume a person likes garlic. You can, of course, never prove to such a person that garlic does not taste good. The only way to argue against that person would be to say, "But you create an impossible situation for everyone else in the room." That is reasoning, you see. And this reasoning can prevail on the person. But this, of course, would never convince him that garlic doesn't taste good. He only balances the pleasure of the tongue against the discomfort to others. That's the point, see? The tongue cannot be persuaded, yes? That is it which is at the bottom of this difficulty. Still, one could however argue as follows against that and show that [it] is not that simple: Is it not possible to speak of, to make an objective distinction between, the right kind of pleasant things and the right kind of painful things by coordinating the

right kind with the healthy constitution and the wrong kind with an unhealthy constitution? You know, there are certain people who like to eat certain things which no one else likes. They are extreme cases; there are no examples which occur to me at the moment. Wheat germ? But then, of course, it is clear. In order to know that, you would have to introduce something entirely different from mere sense perception, namely, the healthy constitution. You have to go beyond the merely sensual perception in order to establish an art. That is, I believe, the point which is necessary to admit.

But let us come now to the more interesting case: rhetoric. Rhetoric, which is frequently indistinguishable from sophistry,<sup>19</sup> [mimics] the legislative art. But what would be the common notion which we all have inherited about the art which is<sup>20</sup> [mimicked] and counterfeited by sophistry? I believe no one would, if we<sup>21</sup> [were] asked what is that true art, [inaudible] philosophy. So how can we account for that? I think only in one way. That here Socrates replaces, for the purposes of this argument, philosophy by the legislative art. And that finds its parallel in what happened to Gorgias. The purely theoretical element of philosophy is disregarded by Socrates, just as Gorgias' display oratory is disregarded. Now, if we disregard philosophy on the highest level, theoretical philosophy, the legislative art is certainly superior to the deliberative and forensic rhetoric. I mean, is it not evident that the legislative art is higher than deliberative and forensic rhetoric? Why?

**Student:** Because in the real art of legislature you know the causes of all kinds of good and evil.

**LS:** Yes, you can say that. But even on a more superficial level, does not all deliberation and deliberative and forensic rhetoric presuppose a body of law<sup>22</sup> to which the forensic rhetorician must defer?<sup>23</sup> In the case of the deliberative orator,<sup>24</sup> it is somewhat different, but even there what is always presupposed [is] what is now called the constitution. There is always some order presupposed, within which deliberative and forensic rhetoric exists, and therefore the art which establishes that order, and which we call the legislative art, is higher. So,<sup>25</sup> in other words, in the purely political perspective, the highest which we can possibly become aware of is the legislative art, the architectonic art. But Gorgias and Polus presume that the distinction between right and wrong and all just things are merely conventional. But precisely if this is the case, the man who establishes the convention, the legislator, must be higher than the orator, who merely uses things established by the legislator. But of course this leads immediately to another question, and we don't know how Gorgias would answer that: Granted that all right and wrong is conventional and goes back to the act of legislators, are we not compelled to distinguish somehow between good and bad legislation? Must, therefore, not the legislative arts be based on some *natural* principles which perhaps are not, by themselves, principles of justice? So,<sup>26</sup> we can leave it in this discussion at the legislative art as the highest art—for the time being. Later on, this will prove to be insufficient. Now this much about this distinction here.

Now let us turn to the sequel, 466a–467, the third step after Socrates has developed his opinion about rhetoric. Polus tries again to question Socrates. This is a rather difficult section, [a] particularly difficult section, I believe. To understand it, we must remind

ourselves again of the overall situation created by the end of the conversation with Gorgias. That conversation led to the conclusion that rhetoric is necessarily just. But is this *really* so? Is this even Socrates' view? Polus does not like the result of the conversation with Gorgias. He is sure that Socrates has done something improper in order to bring about that result. He believes that rhetoric is not necessarily just, that it can be misused, but that it is nevertheless certainly something noble. Before the conversation between Socrates and Polus on the substantive issue begins, even before Polus can develop his thesis, there takes place the first discussion about the manner in which the substantive discussion should be conducted: long speeches or short speeches? You see, there were some remarks about it, but there was not yet a discussion about it. A compromise is reached: short speeches, but Polus shall be the questioner. Polus proves to be as poor at questioning as he had proved to be at answering. As a consequence, Gorgias reenters and Socrates expounds to Gorgias the thesis that rhetoric, counterfeiting justice, is something base. Yet this thesis is to be discussed not with Gorgias but with Polus, and with Polus as questioner. That is the situation.

Now in 465e–466a, which means on pages 321—that is a complicated passage. Socrates excuses here his long answer in the following way: Polus had not understood Socrates' brief answer that rhetoric is flattery, and Polus was unable to use that brief answer. Therefore, Socrates was compelled to give a long answer. Now Polus may become the answerer, contrary to the previous suggestion that he should become the questioner. Why? This question is only indirectly answered in the following manner: if Socrates will be unable to use Polus' brief answers, Polus, too, will be free to give a long answer. You see,<sup>27</sup> [it] is implied; there is no question that Socrates would be unable to understand Polus' answer—he may be only unable to use it. And Socrates suggests to Polus that if Polus is willing to become again the answerer, he has the chance of giving long answers. You know, the former compromise was “always short speeches, but you may make the short questions.” Now the compromise is “if you will be satisfied with the position of answerer, you may, under certain conditions, give long answers.” Do you see? We do not know what that means yet. But if Socrates will be able to use Polus' brief answers, Polus should let Socrates use those brief answers and not make long speeches. Socrates will decide as to whether Polus shall or shall not make long speeches. That is very well. But Polus is confronted with an *answer* given by Socrates. And how can you answer an answer? Polus is advised to use that answer given by Socrates, that long speech, *if he can*.

Now, here we must think a bit for ourselves. What does using an answer mean? Accepting it or rejecting it. Yet Polus cannot accept it or reject it if he has not understood it. And if he has not understood it, he must become a questioner. In other words, [he must ask], “How did you mean it?” By becoming questioner, Polus would show his lack of understanding. If he has understood Socrates' answer and has rejected it—for example, by saying, “Your answer, Socrates, is nonsensical”—Socrates will become the questioner, and Polus will be compelled to become the answerer. If Polus has understood Socrates' answer and *accepts* it, he can simply answer, “You are right Socrates, that's good,”<sup>28</sup> [and] thus stop Socrates from any further doing. If he has understood Socrates' answer and tries to refute it, he can make a long speech in defense of rhetoric. But in that case, he must have a very good memory in order to meet Socrates' point. But he does not

have a good memory, as Socrates points out in the sequel. Therefore, he cannot refute Socrates except by making sure of every essential point, by becoming a questioner. He is, then, confronted by this unpleasant choice: either to say “yes” to Socrates’ long speech (and that would be fatal to him as a rhetorician) or else to admit his defects by becoming again a questioner. Socrates, who knows from experience that Polus is a poor questioner, advises him to become an answerer. But to be an answerer means now—no longer to be an orator, as at the beginning—but, as Polus knows all too well, to be absolutely at the mercy of Socrates, or even to grant in advance that Socrates’ opinion about rhetoric is true. Polus is reduced to a condition where he has no choice except to grant to Socrates that Socrates’ view of rhetoric is true or else to grant that he, Polus, has the defect of either lack of understanding or else of a poor memory. This is the final ruin of the claim that a man, of this kind especially, can say, “I answer all questions.” To be an answerer now means something very humble.

466a: Polus, somewhat chastened, prefers the latter alternative, meaning to grant that he has not understood and therefore to become a questioner. But he may do this also for another, more respectable reason. He may be genuinely curious because he has never heard that before: “What does that mean?” Socrates, as you see, is a bit nasty here. For the question which Polus raised is not so absurd as it seems to be. For Socrates had of course said that rhetoric is flattery, as distinguished from art. Polus’ answer<sup>29</sup> takes the form of a question, of a polite question: “At any rate, Socrates, you did say, didn’t you, that the orators, even the good orators, practice flattery?” And therefore why can’t one say that rhetoric is a [form of] flattery? “But flatterers are despised, and yet, don’t we see everywhere that the good orators are honored?” So, is that not a strong point? Empirical evidence!

466b–c. Socrates makes sure that this remark of Polus is a question and not an assertion, and then answers this in the negative. He denies that the orators, good or no good, have any power in the city. We recall here that Gorgias had admitted that the orators, or at any rate the rhetoricians, are powerless, that they are expelled from the cities and all this kind of thing. Polus, perhaps somewhat exasperated, says, “If you deny any power to orators, then you will also deny any power to tyrants.” “Do you deny that tyrants can kill, exile, and impoverish everyone as they please, and that they possess, undoubtedly, power?” Polus compares here the orators to tyrants, which implies<sup>30</sup> a suspicion that rhetoric is akin to tyranny, or that rhetoric is essentially unjust. Socrates warns him: “This is not your opinion Polus—you merely ask questions.” Polus grants it. Thereupon, Socrates calls him a friend. Socrates makes it clear, you see:<sup>31</sup> [Polus] gets, as it were, his reward for having given a good answer. Socrates [here] makes<sup>32</sup> clear—and that is something which goes much beyond this particular passage—<sup>33</sup>the fundamental difference between asking questions and making manifest one’s thought.

466c–467c. Socrates says, “Polus, you have tacitly identified doing what one *wills* with doing what one *pleases*. And you have asserted that<sup>34</sup> [to] have power means to do what one wills. This power both orators and tyrants *lack*, for only a sensible being can be powerful, and therefore only the orator who would possess an art could be powerful.” But this precisely is the question: *Is rhetoric an art?* Does it make sense—that will be taken

up at much greater length later—that a senseless being cannot have power? Take the simple case of a fellow who runs berserk. He has, obviously, the power to kill any number of people until he is caught. But would we call him a powerful man? No. So, if you think that through, only an intelligent or sensible being can have power. And, if [the] sensibility of a pursuit depends on that pursuit being an art, only if rhetoric is an art can the orator have power. And the parallel case, regarding the tyrant, we will take up later.

“You, Polus, have to refute me in order to establish what you regard as an evident fact, namely, that tyrants and orators have power.” The fate of the so-called fact depends entirely on Polus’ refuting Socrates, and that is a very bold statement because it means, in effect, that Socrates’ mere assertion—which he has not proven—that orators and tyrants are powerless *makes* the orators and tyrants powerless. Until Polus has proven that tyrants possess power, tyrants won’t have power. You see, the strangeness consists in the fact that Socrates has not proven it, he has merely asserted it. Polus is completely perplexed. He “accuses” Socrates (the word is in the text<sup>v</sup>) of saying “shocking and monstrous things.” He is now willing to become an answerer. Polus is indignant. That, Socrates has done. What is the meaning of all this? On one occasion, Socrates indicates that he is imitating Polus in a relatively minor matter, in a stylistic matter. The question: Is this whole section not an imitation by Socrates of Polus, of Polus’ *impudence*? Because, after all, there is some impudence<sup>35</sup> [in saying] whether tyrants have<sup>36</sup> power [or not] depends on your refuting me. Without having proven it, the mere assertion would not affect the state of affairs. There occurred two Socratic oaths in this section and no oath by the interlocutor, which is a very very rare thing. In one case, Socrates says “by the dog,” 466d, and, in one case, he says “by the—”; the name is omitted in 466e. Now the first oath, “by the dog,”<sup>37</sup> was a favorite oath of Socrates. Gorgias had said on a similar occasion, in the last preceding oath, “by Zeus.” So Socrates’ “by the dog,” as it were, corresponds to Gorgias’ “by Zeus.” In the second oath, Socrates leaves it open whether he swears “by the dog” or “by Zeus,” because it could be “dog,” could be “Zeus”—it’s left open. This happened in a context where Socrates appears to be wholly mysterious in the eyes of Polus. Socrates is wholly unintelligible to Polus. That, he achieves. Socrates perplexes Polus completely. He is very rude to Polus. He appears to be an intolerable extremist who denies obvious facts, so<sup>38</sup> Polus appears, for a moment, as a defender of common sense against Socrates’ “shocking and monstrous” assertions. [Just] because we may be [as] opposed to tyranny as we want—it doesn’t make sense to say the tyrant has no power, at least not without a very, very long speech. Socrates beats Polus at his game, whereas Polus proved to completely unable to beat Socrates at Socrates’ game. So there is really a contest of two rhetoricians *in deed*, in their practice, quite apart from the discussion, the speech, about the right meaning of rhetoric. We can also say that Polus’ name means, literally translated, “colt,” young horse. Fitting. What happens here is the taming of the colt, the breaking in of the colt. That is absolutely necessary. Polus will never again use such strong language against Socrates as he used here when he accused Socrates of saying “monstrous and shocking” things. That, Socrates brought about, which is not a minor achievement.

---

<sup>v</sup> See *katēgorei* at 467b11.

Polus doesn't know where Socrates stands in any sense of the word. Socrates proves to be superior, the superior orator, even from Polus' point of view. For if to be noble means to be regarded as powerful, Socrates' rhetoric is more noble than Polus'. He wins. In this action, which precedes the discussion, Polus throws all caution to the wind and compares rhetoric to tyranny. He thus suggests<sup>39</sup> not only [that] can rhetoric be used for unjust purposes, but that rhetoric is essentially unjust, something like tyranny. And this leads to the consequence that the true character of popular rhetoric does not come to sight, except indirectly, in the following way. Because that's much too extreme a statement. And how can you say,<sup>40</sup> thinking of Demosthenes or Cicero, that popular rhetoric has this character? And Plato knew that. But Polus, this young, impetuous fool, practically identifies or compares rhetoric with tyranny and says therewith that rhetoric is essentially unjust. Then he is compelled to defend injustice, if he wants to defend rhetoric. And Socrates is compelled to defend justice, which he does in the sequel. And then the limits of Socrates' defense become clear, especially in the section with Callicles. Callicles is not convinced by Socrates. It becomes therefore clear what the function of true popular rhetoric—not this sham—would be: to supply the defects of the strict argument in favor of justice. The strict arguments are not<sup>41</sup> sufficient in all cases. Proof: Callicles. And therefore we need a supplement to that. That can only be . . . rhetoric. [Break in the tape at this point. The conversation is carried on at the behest of Gorgias, where Gorgias tells Socrates to continue. Gorgias, but not Socrates, has authority over Callicles. Gorgias wants to see Socrates "at work." The dialogue is carried on for the sake of Gorgias; it is therefore rightly called *Gorgias*.]<sup>vi</sup>—that would be the true popular rhetoric, as distinguished from that true rhetoric which is private rhetoric and which is sketched in the *Phaedrus*.

Now we come then to the fourth step, 467c–474b: Socrates and Polus develop their<sup>42</sup> [theses] regarding happiness. And the last part of the Polus conversation, after 474b, will then be the refutation of Polus' thesis regarding happiness by Socrates. But first, I must develop this thesis. Whether rhetoric is a flattery or not, and whether rhetoric is base or noble, depends ultimately on what is the highest good or on what constitutes happiness. Socrates and Polus now develop their opposed views regarding happiness. First, 467c–468e. The understanding of happiness starts from the distinction between desiring to do what one *wills* and desiring to do what one *pleases*, or what *seems* to be best to one. I deliberately translate it by "will," although that is somewhat questionable as a translation; the Greek word *boulomai* has really a broad meaning, including "wishing," which you can see when you look up Aristotle's analysis of that in the second book of the *Ethics*.<sup>vii</sup> But still, it also means something which we mean by will, in contradistinction to desire. Polus does not make the distinction between desiring to do what one *wills* and desiring to do what one *pleases*. Socrates does make that distinction. What is the connection between

---

<sup>vi</sup> The brackets here are in the original transcript and not an editorial insertion. The transcriber may have meant to indicate that there was a break in the tape after the bracketed statement; another possibility is that the bracketed statement is the transcriber's own attempt to summarize some garbled material.

<sup>vii</sup> LS is probably referring to the second chapter of Book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See 1111b22–30.

this distinction and the question of happiness? From Polus' point of view, happiness, we may say, is satisfaction of desires—a view always popular in all ages. [From] Socrates' point of view, happiness, we may say, is satisfaction of *rational* desires. Polus defines happiness on the basis of opinion; Socrates defines it on the basis of knowledge. An idiot has opinions and desires as well as the most thoughtful of man. On Polus' premises, an idiot should be [as] capable of happiness as a thoughtful man. Sometimes we see such moronic people, who are perfectly happy and smile all the day, and we say they are happy. The Greeks would not have called him happy, because the word has a more precise meaning. Polus denies that the idiot can be happy, because he knows that happiness is not merely satisfaction of desires but, at the same time, an enviable state, and no man, except in a condition of extreme distress, would envy an idiot. I mean, in a state of extreme distress, anyone might say, "I wish I had no understanding." But normally you would never say that—nor does Polus. So, then, Polus must make a distinction between sound and unsound opinions, or between normal and abnormal desires which are [not] to be satisfied. Does Polus have a valid principle for making this distinction? This delimitation of sound desires, which should be satisfied, and unsound desires, which should not be satisfied, this is the theme of the sequel.

467c–d: The beginning of this argument; Socrates says here this: the will is directed primarily toward the end for the sake of which the action is done, and not to the action itself. This must be, at the beginning, clear to everyone. We intend primarily the end for which we commit an action, and not the action. The action is not the end. Then what is the difference between art and flattery? Of course, the difference between reason and non–reason. And here the difference between willing and mere pleasing is again the difference between reason and non–reason. That's a common thing, and to that extent there is indeed a necessary connection. Socrates says, to repeat, the will is directed primarily to the end for the sake of which the action is done, and not the action itself. And he illustrates this by the example of *painful* actions, which no one in his senses would regard as done for their own sake—for example, taking bitter medicine. Taking bitter medicine is an action done for the end: health. Socrates gives another example, which is not so obvious perhaps today: sailing—sailing or other forms of money–making, as he says, which no one in his senses would commit<sup>43</sup> except for the sake of something else (in this case, wealth). [This] Socratic assertion goes rather far. Are there no actions which we do for their own sake, which are in themselves an end? To take very homely examples: seeing sights, or even sailing, for some people, is [a] pleasure. So there is a question here, as though Socrates were pointing to something. Let us see the sequel, 467d–e. Socrates admits this, by the conditional clause he uses here: *if* [men] do something for the sake of something else, then of course they do the action only for the sake of that for which they do that. So there are actions which are done for their own sakes. In e, that for the sake of which men do what they do is something good; [actions] are not chosen for their own sakes. All things are either good or bad or neither. He gives then the following examples of good things for the sake of which we do what we do: wisdom as well as health and wealth—meaning the well–being of the soul, the well–being of the body, and the "external equipment," to use an Aristotelian expression.<sup>viii</sup> Shall we say, then, that Socrates means that rational desire is desire directed to<sup>44</sup> those

<sup>viii</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098b12–15.



good things—wisdom, health, wealth—in proper proportion? Of course, we have no evidence here. We have to raise the question: Are wisdom, health, and wealth of higher rank than the other good things? You remember, perhaps, this quotation from a poem in<sup>45</sup> [451e], where some good things were mentioned. Do you remember them? Health, wealth, and beauty. You see the difference here: beauty has been replaced by wisdom. Now, this poem expressed the crude popular notion: health, wealth, and beauty. This is not Polus' notion. Polus admits he is not dissatisfied that beauty is not mentioned, and he is satisfied that wisdom is mentioned. Polus regards wisdom as good.

**Student:** Wisdom, health, and wealth in proportion. Did you mean [in] proportion to each other?

**LS:** No, what I mean is this. Let us assume that wisdom is the highest, and health is the second highest, and wealth, the least, the lowest. Then it would mean that a sensible man would devote most of his energy in order to acquire wisdom, some of his energy to acquire health, and as little as possible to acquire wealth. So, in other words, the activities must be divided in proportion to the value of the ends. Because if someone would devote all his energy for wealth, then he would be a fool; he would subvert the real order of these good things. For a moment I would like to mention only this point. Let us assume for argument's sake that "wisdom, health, and wealth" describes the objects of rational desire, crudely. They alone would be in themselves good. Everything else would be good conditionally, for the sake of these things. Needless to say,<sup>46</sup> from this point of view, medicine and gymnastics are not simply good, but only *good for* . . . . For they exist *for the sake* of the well-being of the body. And they can be misused. And the same would also apply to the legislative art and justice, because they are also for the sake of the well-being of the soul. The question is whether these, too, could be misused just as the others can be misused. Another point: if we assume for the moment that wealth is a good—and I think within reason that makes sense—could there not be an art productive of that goodness called wealth?<sup>47</sup> [What] would it be called? The Greeks called it *chrēmatics*, but it's more or less the same as what we understand today by moneymaking. But if *chrēmatics*, money-making, can be an art, could rhetoric not be an art too, if rhetoric is [the] best branch of the art of money-making? That has not yet been decided. So the<sup>48</sup> question of wealth altogether is involved here. Now let us see, first, the sequel.

467e–468a: here Socrates gives some examples of things which are neutral, neither good nor bad. He gives such simple examples as wood, sitting or standing, running, and so on. They can be good or they can be bad. In themselves, they are neutral.

**Student:** Socrates must be referring to the forms, the ultimate forms of good and bad.

**LS:** Where is that?

**Student:** 468a: "By things neither good nor bad, do you mean such things as<sup>49</sup> sometimes *partake* of the good and sometimes of the bad, and sometimes of neither."<sup>ix</sup>

---

<sup>ix</sup> The statement quoted by the student runs from 467e6–468a1.

**LS:** Why?

**Same student:** I have a feeling that he is referring to an *actual* good thing or a bad thing partaking of it—*form*—by the means of the word “partake.” I believe that Taylor brings up this difficulty. He says that when<sup>50</sup> [Socrates] says there’s a neutral being, neither good nor bad, there’s a difficulty here because there must be a form of “neutral,” a neutral part referring to something which has no form. I mean, if something partakes of neither good nor bad, it is formless. So he says there’s a problem<sup>51</sup> involved [here].

**LS:** Yes, I can believe there may be a problem. But let us not be prematurely sophisticated. Does it not make sense, apart from all Platonic doctrine of ideas, to say something “partakes” of something else? Plato didn’t coin the word “partaking”—I mean, the Greek word for “partaking.” Does it not make absolute sense to say standing may be wholly indifferent? It may also partake of good. For example, a soldier is standing in front of his officer as he’s supposed to stand, not sit—that’s good. But some standing, under other circumstances, could be bad, improper. Does it not make sense? You see, the mistake of all these remarks is this: they go into the deepest questions of Plato without considering what *Polus* would make of that statement. You see, they always think that Plato addresses professors of philosophy or future professors of philosophy, which may be true in a certain sense to be defined, but it obviously says that Socrates here addresses *Polus*. *Polus* has not the slightest notion of the doctrine of ideas—not the slightest notion.

**Student:** We hope not.

**LS:** I mean, there is not the slightest evidence for assuming that he has. You see, Socrates, after all, appears to begin with as a strange Athenian, very clever and very strange, who never wrote a book. He<sup>52</sup> always [had] conversations, and, in some conversations, he brings up the forms or ideas, in others, he doesn’t. Now, here there is no reference. When he said once, “there are two *forms* or *classes*—one is persuasion, one is teaching,” that, of course, meant for *Polus* not more than that there are two kinds, which it would have meant for everyone else—kinds of speaking: one is persuasive, one is teaching. Let me see if I can define a very simple example to show that. Let us take a somewhat clearer example: killing. Because *Polus* is very much concerned with killing. Is killing in itself bad or good? Well, one could maintain that, in itself, one can’t say. It depends on the circumstances. It can partake of the good, if it is *just* killing; it can partake of the bad, if it is *unjust* killing. There could perhaps be no case in which killing is just neutral, as standing and sitting may be neutral. I mean, there is a real danger in missing something. Even the doctrine of ideas itself is not such a clear and given datum that you can say, “Here, I have the doctrine of ideas, taken from the First Book of [the] *Metaphysics*, and then I watch.”<sup>x</sup> Because you have first to establish that Aristotle stated the doctrine of ideas in the First Book correctly, which is a very controversial matter. People have written books of 600 pages on this subject. So it is safer to stick to the text. Plato will bring in the ideas in this dialogue, but after due preparation. Don’t

---

<sup>x</sup> The phrase “and then I watch” is in the original transcript.

underestimate<sup>53</sup> common sense here. Common sense means, of course, in the philosopher, the knowledge that common sense is never enough, but also<sup>54</sup> the insight that without beginning from common sense, commonsensical distinctions, you can never understand that which transcends it. In other words, there is a kind of academic system in the interpretation of Plato, which is very dangerous for the understanding of Plato, because then you interpret this long and complicated discussion in terms of an abbreviation, a kind of a summary which differs from scholar to scholar—because what A. E. Taylor thinks about ideas is not what other people think about ideas. And so you introduce, not clarity, but new confusion. So it is wiser, since it is difficult enough, to stick to that. And so you can<sup>xi</sup> be sure that when Plato uses the word “partaking,” this is surely always in Plato’s mind—I mean, the doctrine of ideas. So it is in Socrates’ [mind], but not in Polus’. And you deprive yourself of the great benefit of ascending slowly, step by step, from a Polus understanding to a better understanding, if you do not stick first to the Polus understanding. You know what I mean by “Polus understanding”? The way in which Polus,<sup>55</sup> who was absolutely unaware of the doctrine of ideas, [must have understood it].

Now let us see, in this section we just discussed, where Socrates gives examples of things which are in themselves neutral, neither good nor bad, he does not mention killing. And I emphasize this point because killing is, of course, the supreme sign of power, according to Polus. Polus seems to forget it. He regards this enumeration as substantially<sup>56</sup> complete, as appears from the Greek. Or should he regard killing as intrinsically good? We must wait.

468a–b, the neutral things are done for the sake of the good things and not the other way around. I mention here, very briefly, a subtlety:<sup>57</sup> [Socrates] no longer speaks of sitting, running, and sailing, but of walking and standing. By this procedure, sailing comes into the center of the seven enumerated neutral things. Sailing is here mentioned among the *neutral* things, contrary to what was suggested in the first remark<sup>58</sup>. Which means—why was sailing bad? From the point of view that the unpleasant is bad, and sailing was assumed to be unpleasant. You must not think of the Queen Mary and such things when we speak of sailing here. Sailing was assumed to be unpleasant. The hedonistic criterion has been tacitly replaced by a non-hedonistic criterion, from which even bitter medicine is not, [from] the highest point of view,<sup>59</sup> in itself bad. Now in the sequel, 468b, we see killing is specifically said to belong to the neutral, which makes sense. We all admit that—that the killing of an enemy by a soldier and the killing of an old woman by Raskolnikov are very different cases. But that is not so simple. Because what we know up to now is that wealth is a good thing. What about the case of killing for the sake of wealth? That’s Raskolnikov’s case. That is not excluded by anything up to now. Socrates makes an enormous concession here to Polus. However, you may note the conditional clause here when he mentions killing. That is only a reminder. But let us argue it out, as it were, on this basis: wisdom, health, wealth—and then we do all kinds of things with a view to these things. If these actions, done for the sake of wisdom, health, or wealth, are

---

<sup>xi</sup> Strauss might have said or meant “can’t”; consider his remark about Socrates in the next sentence.

conducive to bring[ing] them about, are they good? Is that [a] sufficient criterion of the goodness or not? A kind of utilitarianism? We will see.

468b–c: Polus accepts the whole thesis. Sometimes we choose wrong, but the<sup>60</sup> [error] concerns the means, not the end. For example, we may in a given case butcher a man—“butcher” is a word suggested by Socrates here. For example, we may butcher a man for the sake of wealth. And we could have gotten the wealth without committing the murder, because the man might have given us the money for the asking. And then it would be foolish to butcher. But in other cases, where we might not have gotten it, the choice of murder might not be wrong. In the sequel, in spite of this enormous concession made by Socrates, Polus hesitates to agree. What could he want more than that? I mean, his tyrant could be justified on this ground. Apparently he wants to have the right to butcher people without *any* strings attached to it.

In d–e, which I summarize as follows: only an intelligent murderer can be said to do what he wills. Only an intelligent murderer can be said to have power, for only the intelligent murderer gets something good—for example, wealth—without having to undergo capital punishment. In this connection, in the beginning of e,<sup>61</sup> [Socrates] uses the expression “in *this* city.” That contrasts with a remark made by Gorgias in 457d: “in his city.” Now, what does it mean? Gorgias had brought in a severe limitation on the potential tyrant: he can become an actual tyrant only in his city. This limitation is now taken away: “in *this* city,” meaning in any city where he is a tyrant. Socrates thus strengthens the case for rhetoric. You can become a tyrant not only in your city, but, if you are clever enough, in any city. By the way, Hitler is not a bad example, because he was not strictly speaking a German but an Austrian, and [he] became a tyrant of Germany, which shows the power of rhetoric. Consider also the remark I made before about the possibility that rhetoric might be the highest branch of the art of money-making. Now what is the meaning of all of this? Socrates analyzes action here in strictly non-moral terms. Both the ends and the means are not simply moral, which doesn’t mean that they are immoral. Yet Polus is dissatisfied, as appears from the sequel. Why? Does he reject rationality in every form, even in Max Weber’s form? Because what Socrates is discussing here is rationality in the Weberian form—you know, whether the means are conducive or not conducive to the end. Still, the ends which Socrates assumes are not so arbitrary as Weber’s, because [it is universally admitted, outside of classrooms,] that wisdom, health, and wealth are good things<sup>62</sup>. Polus is really a colt. He wants, it seems, perfect liberty to trample people to death just for the fun of it.

You note that in this section, there is no reference whatsoever to the just or to the noble. “Just” and “noble” are the Greek equivalent to what we call “moral”—both words together. Reference is made only to the good. The good does not have this strictly moral meaning. Now this is a very long question. I refer you to the following evidence. In the teaching [of] Plato’s *Republic*, the highest thing is the idea of the good. Of the idea of the good, it is explicitly said it is beyond the just and the noble. And even the common term in the Western tradition, the highest good, *summum bonum* (*megiston agathon* in Greek), the word “good” is used, not the words “noble” and “just.” The problem is also indicated at the end of Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics*, where he makes a distinction between the

gentleman who is concerned with noble actions—gentleman means “noble *and* good”—and the merely good man who is only concerned with getting the things which are by nature good, and finding the right means for them, and not concerned with the noble as noble.<sup>xii</sup> There is another indication of this difficulty.

At any rate, the primary consideration, the fundamental consideration, concerns the good and the bad. The question therefore arises: Where do the just and noble things come in? They are secondary. In the sequel, it will appear that Polus’ dissatisfaction with rationality as such—Socrates shows that prior to investigation, he could get everything he wanted for his tyrant on the basis of such a scheme, if he proved, for example, that in order to get his wealth and to get his wealth safely, the actions of the tyrant are most conducive, taking everything into consideration; Socrates is willing to argue it out on the grounds of expediency alone—Polus’ dissatisfaction with rationality in any form enables Socrates and compels him to bring in justice as the qualification of mere bestiality, of complete unreason. Socrates has tried to show him, to suggest, “But, my dear, as a human being, you must qualify bestiality by rationality, precisely if you want to get all these things you want to get.” He doesn’t like that. Socrates brings in the qualification in the form, not of rationality, but of justice. That happens in the sequel. The one thing is very striking. Polus could have answered<sup>63</sup> Socrates as follows: “Your enumeration of these three goods is shockingly incomplete. What about honor, prestige, deference, glory?” Strange that Polus does not say so—it throws some light on him. But assuming he had said it, how would the argument have run then? Can we imagine that? Let’s assume Polus would have said, “What you say is very fine, but you omit the highest good, honor. And that is the only thing which really counts, and honor you can have in the fullest and biggest form only by becoming a tyrant.” This could also have been discussed. Then, of course, this question of the status of honor would have become the<sup>64</sup> [theme]. That does not take place here. In fact, I repeat, it is important that Polus does not bring up this point at all—<sup>65</sup>[that] would have been very natural for someone so much in favor of tyranny—not so much the wealth, but [the] “position,” as we say, the “honor,” as the Greeks say. I will leave it at this point. To repeat: we have first the discussion in which the problem of justice does not come up at all, and [in] which Socrates makes an extreme concession to Polus in order to bring Polus to the admission of the principle of rationality. Polus does not like that. He returns to the initial thesis and says, “To do what one likes, that’s the real thing.” And then, in this context, justice is mentioned for the first time.

**Student:** I have two questions. With regard to this diagram on the board. Were they not [saying] a little earlier in the discussion that the morally neutral nature of rhetoric, that [is],<sup>66</sup> its misusability—was that not one of the grounds for Socrates characterizing it as flattery rather than a true art, because it could be misused?

**LS:** That was not the explicit grounds. The argument was as follows. Gorgias, in agreement with common sense, said that rhetoric can be misused, as boxing can be misused. And from this it follows that rhetoric as well as boxing are in themselves morally indifferent. But this, of course, has one great implication: if rhetoric can be misused, it must be regulated by something higher than rhetoric, by a higher art, and then

---

<sup>xii</sup> See *Eudemian Ethics* 1248b26–1249a17.

rhetoric cannot be the highest art. You see? Therefore, we can say Gorgias ultimately said rhetoric cannot be misused, because that is the only way to safeguard the supremacy of rhetoric. That was in the first part. But this argument was wholly inconclusive, as we will see. Now in the discussion with Polus, Socrates makes a mere assertion that rhetoric is not an art, but that it is something base. Now the question arises, then: How does Socrates establish it? Because he has not established it. Or for that matter, how will Polus refute it? Polus begins to refute it as follows:<sup>67</sup> [he] says, “What you say is against common sense, because flatterers, flatterers of all sorts, are despised, but orators are honored as a matter of fact—hence it can’t be true.” But that is mixed up with another question: whether rhetoricians, or orators, have power. Because what Polus means is that they are honored because of their power.<sup>68</sup> To which, Socrates says they have no power what[so]ever. and, if this would not satisfy<sup>69</sup> [Polus], he says even tyrants don’t have any power because they are irrational—and the orators are all irrational, which also goes very far, you see. He wants to get Polus to listen first and then argue it out.

Where do we stand now? In a way, Socrates of course has proved his point by the behavior and conduct of Polus. Polus is irrational, and therefore his art, his so-called art, can’t be an art. To that extent, it is proven, but that, of course, is very little, because it merely shows that such fellows like Polus, and maybe Gorgias, are no good. But it does not answer the question whether there cannot be a *respectable* rhetoric—even if that rhetoric *could* be misused, because the example of boxing is not too bad. Why should not even decent men improve their power of influencing multitudes so that this power is not left entirely to the bad kind of people?

**Student:** When Socrates says that the tyrant has no power because he is not rational, does he mean to state this extreme position only to gain the attention of Polus, or does he mean to indicate something more, that if he were really rational, he would not be a *tyrant* then?

**LS:** Yes, ultimately this. The “shocking and monstrous” statements of Socrates, as Polus calls them,<sup>70</sup> really run counter to common sense. If you take this narrowly and literally, they are really untenable. But if you understand what Socrates has in mind—which will come out later on, especially in the Callicles section, but already in the Polus section—[it] is this: that the good life requires, as Socrates says elsewhere, a complete conversion of the soul. So<sup>71</sup> from this point of view, the ordinary way in which we live is really absurd. And from the point of view of the ordinary way of life, the good way of life will appear as crazy. That is what you are driving at, that he has [that] in mind? That appears from the dialogue very clearly. When he says later on to Polus, “You have to go to all the finest families in Athens—they would all side with you against Socrates”—

**Student:** But he doesn’t seem to give Polus a chance to take<sup>72</sup> his notion of rationality, combine it with the tyrant, and give him the chance to defend—

**LS:** He really went very far. Let us argue this out. I don’t care if [there are] any petty . . . prejudices against murder. Why not wealth? Murder? Very fine. But you must admit that murder must fulfill its functions. Not just running around . . . it must be really useful. And then he would have gone on with this business. Even that was not acceptable

to Polus. He is really a colt, which does not mean that he does not have certain nice sides, as will become clearer later on, but there is something bestial in him.

**Student:** But because Polus is this way, the argument is not given its due.

**LS:** Ya, if you put it this way, then it is true, not only of the *Gorgias* but of every Platonic dialogue, that there is always a limitation of [the] value of the argument, which is due to the character of the interlocutor. That I tried to say at the beginning, that there is never a dialogue between two equals. Never. And therefore every Platonic argument is, in principle, rhetorical. By rhetorical, I mean with a view to the capacity and so on of the interlocutor. The real argument regarding rhetoric we must disentangle by considering the characters. You know, we will see later on [that] Polus will be licked, as Gorgias was licked, because he made an admission: the admission that to commit murder is expedient but base. And then Socrates ruined him by that. Later on, Callicles comes and says, “No, no admission of this kind—forget completely about nobility and<sup>73</sup> speak only of the expedient, which is rooted in the pleasant, and let us argue it on this basis.” There the argument becomes more radical. But even Callicles gets into difficulties because he has no criterion for distinguishing between the wrong and the right kind of pleasures, so that he is reduced to a condition, [when Socrates asks] . . . “How about a fellow who is suffering from”—how do you call it? an itch?—“and now he is<sup>74</sup> [scratching] all the time, he lives in constant pleasure, therefore, do you mean that?” Callicles is indignant about this supposition, but he doesn’t deny it. So the point which comes out altogether in the dialogue is this: the only alternative to what Socrates suggests is hedonism—I mean, that the good is identical with the pleasant. And that is impossible, because the pleasant as pleasant does not allow you to distinguish between the preferable pleasant and<sup>75</sup> [the] non-preferable pleasant, because even if you<sup>76</sup> [add] such conditions as the more lasting pleasures and the pleasure not followed by pain, that won’t help very much, because the other things come in in a more subtle way. You can have a rational orientation regarding actions only if you assume that there is such a thing as a nature of man with its inner order, by virtue of which one thing is higher than another. There is a certain proportion, and these good things must be pursued in proportion.

But the argument by which Socrates established this in the case of Gorgias and Polus is altogether inadequate, because it is only based on the contradictions which they commit. Only in the case of Callicles does the fundamental issue appear relatively clearly. That does not mean that the argument<sup>77</sup> [with] Callicles is entirely “scientific” or “philosophical,” because, you see, Callicles is also handcuffed by something, because he has a certain notion of human excellence which he doesn’t want to give up. So in other words, Socrates does not meet anyone who will take the view that the way of life of a complete bum, if that’s the proper word, is perfectly human, or [that] a life of complete aimlessness is as good as the rational life. Such people never occur. They all have some notion of a noble life. Polus, too, has it—[the] life of the orator, or of the rhetorician. The question is: Is this an essential limitation of Socrates’ argument which could be remedied? Can you *convince* a devoted or dedicated bum of the wrongness of his life? Or must you not be able to appeal to some sense of self-respect in that other person? Socrates’ arguments, we can say, are all addressed to people who have some sense of

self-respect, even if they are his mortal enemies like Anytus. He has something which gives him self-respect, that he is a defender of the democracy of Athens or something. Plato must have thought about that, that there is a level of human life which cannot be touched by argument, except accidentally. But some people would regard this as proof of the irrationality of ethics. It could also be a proof of [the] irrationality of the people concerned, that they are not amenable to argument. That is a real problem. But, generally speaking, one must always keep this in mind: If you do not understand the character, and not only the character in general, but the character *now*—for example, Polus defeated and chastened is not quite the same as Polus at the beginning—if you do not consider that, you cannot understand the speech on these pages (you know, the whole, what Socrates says and what the other fellow says) and therefore you cannot understand what Plato meant to convey. The purpose of this dialogue is *not* to clarify justice—that is done in the *Republic*—that is here only incidental to the discussion. Justice is only incidental to the discussion of rhetoric, of popular rhetoric. Popular rhetoric is the theme of this dialogue. But this cannot be done completely without articulating to some extent the problem of justice.

[end of session]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “no.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “page 315 on bottom, 317 top.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “arts.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “mimicry.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “mimicries.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “mimicries.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “body.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “body.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “which desires.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “in.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “it is.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “in.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “here.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “by.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “not more nor.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “not.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “pleasant.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “mimicries.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “mimicried.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “have been.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “Presupposed by it.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “where.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “there.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “then.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “which.”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>31</sup> Deleted “he.”

<sup>32</sup> Moved “here.”



- 
- 33 Deleted “makes it clear.”  
34 Deleted “you.”  
35 Deleted “to say.”  
36 Moved “or not.”  
37 Deleted “which.”  
38 Deleted “that.”  
39 Moved “that.”  
40 Deleted “that.”  
41 Deleted “honor.”  
42 Deleted “thesis.”  
43 Deleted “them.”  
44 Deleted “what.”  
45 Deleted “415e.”  
46 Deleted “that.”  
47 Deleted “Hhow.”  
48 Deleted “a.”  
49 Deleted “we.”  
50 Deleted “he.”  
51 Moved “here.”  
52 Moved “had.”  
53 Deleted “the.”  
54 Deleted “that from.”  
55 Moved “must have understood it.”  
56 Deleted “as.”  
57 Deleted “that he.”  
58 Deleted “as was assumed in the first statement, but neutral.”  
59 Deleted “not.”  
60 Deleted “other.”  
61 Deleted “he.”  
62 Moved “is universally admitted outside of classrooms.”  
63 Deleted “to.”  
64 Deleted “scene.”  
65 Deleted “which.”  
66 Deleted “to.”  
67 Deleted “it.”  
68 Deleted “and.”  
69 Deleted “him.”  
70 Deleted “and which.”  
71 Deleted “that.”  
72 Deleted “warning.”  
73 Deleted “we.”  
74 Deleted “itching.”  
75 Deleted “at which is.”  
76 Deleted “ask.”  
77 Deleted “of.”

## Session 5: no date

**Leo Strauss:** We are discussing the question whether justice is good or bad. Now, what did we learn from Socrates about how to handle such questions<sup>1</sup>? What was the first criticism that Socrates made of Polus? No one of us had thought of the difficulty that we are engaged in a beautiful discussion of whether justice is good or bad without having raised the previous question as to what justice is. This is one of the striking examples of the mistakes we all make. And here we have in the same dialogue<sup>2</sup> advance warning, so<sup>3</sup> no one can say Plato came to think of it only in a book which he wrote twenty years later. It is the same book—no teleological<sup>1</sup> difficulties arise. I thought I should communicate to you this experience.

Before we go on, on page 333, I would like to summarize some of the previous things. The claim of rhetoric is based on the underlying fact that men of first-rate competence in any field are not necessarily effective public speakers and that in any society which is not ruled by experts—that is to say, any society that ever was—all experts have to plead their cause sooner or later before the tribunal of laymen. The art of public speaking or writing is therefore independent of any subject matter. Every expert in whatever field has to learn somehow to speak effectively to laymen. The art of public speaking is a formal art. No word would have to be said against rhetoric if it presented itself as a subordinate art. But it claims to be the highest art, the best and most noble art. This claim doesn't arise accidentally, because of the public relations concern of Gorgias or Polus. This claim has an essential reason: rhetoric alone provides the link between all men of knowledge and the *polis*, the city, or, more generally stated, rhetoric alone provides the link between philosophy and the city.

Two conclusions could be drawn from this: either only the philosopher can be a rhetorician or even an orator (and some men did draw this conclusion—the Stoics, who followed Plato in his more paradoxical statements and said [that] only a philosopher can be a king, which is obvious, but also that only the philosopher can be an orator, which is less obvious), [or] one could also say, since rhetoric provides a link between philosophy and the *polis*, rhetoric, in a way, controls philosophy, it brings about that union. Now this is, of course, not what Gorgias says. This would be a kind of Platonic argument, but Gorgias raises his claim on behalf of a rhetoric whose relation to philosophy is, to say the least, obscure. Hence, he asserts that rhetoric can be misused and therewith grants implicitly that rhetoric must be regulated by a higher art, ultimately by philosophy, contrary to his claim that rhetoric is the highest and noblest art. On the level of the explicit discussion, Gorgias contradicts himself: rhetoric can be misused—it is not necessarily just; rhetoric cannot be misused—therefore it is necessarily just. The apparent result of the conversation with Gorgias is that rhetoric is necessarily just. This result is based on the premise that justice, or virtue in general, is knowledge. It is based on the Socratic premise. Socratic rhetoric would be necessarily just. This implies, of course, that

---

<sup>1</sup> This may not be the word that Strauss used, but it has been retained in the absence of a clear alternative.

ordinary rhetoric, the rhetoric of Gorgias, is a very subordinate art in the best case. The superiority of the Socratic rhetoric to ordinary rhetoric, even in the highest form of that ordinary rhetoric, Gorgias' rhetoric, is demonstrated by deeds—by the defeat of Gorgias by Socrates.

Polus, Gorgias' pupil, is annoyed by the defeat of his master, which Socrates has brought about, as Polus thinks, by the use of improper means. Polus wants to save ordinary rhetoric. Therefore Socrates does not return in his conversation with Polus to the alleged result of his conversation with Gorgias, namely, to the result that rhetoric is necessarily just; that is simply dropped. Socrates asserts that rhetoric is a part of flattery, something despicable, whereas Polus asserts that rhetoric is noble. Polus tries to prove that rhetoric is *not* flattery by referring to the fact that orators are honored, whereas flatterers are despised. All orators are honored because they have power. Socrates denies that orators have power, for power cannot coexist in the same human being with senselessness or irrationality, and rhetoric is not rational; [it is] not an art but mere routine, and, in addition, flattery. He implies [that] every flattery is routine, but not every routine is flattery. Routine may be also an incipient art or ministerial, like in the case of a nurse, or else it may be flattery. If it is incipient art or ministerial to art, routine has the character of the art like the art itself. But if the routine is flattery, it is emancipated from the good and directed only toward the pleasant. Rhetoric, being flattery, belongs to the lowest kinds of routine. Rhetoric as routine, if it were ministerial to the good, would already constitute a great improvement over ordinary rhetoric, because it would be directed toward the good, whereas the other rhetoric is not even directed toward the good. I mention these forms because we must really find out, if we can, the full Platonic teaching regarding rhetoric, which is not identical with what Socrates says in this long speech about rhetoric as flattery<sup>4</sup>. At any rate, rhetoric [not] being art, the orators cannot give an account of what they are doing. Their pursuit is irrational, and hence they have no power. Polus thinks that Socrates says monstrous things, things which fly in the face of obvious facts. For who does not know that orators have power? And Socrates goes even so far as to deny that tyrants,<sup>5</sup> who obviously have power, [have power]. The cause of the orator thus becomes identical with that of the tyrant, and this implies that rhetoric is necessarily unjust. One can, perhaps, prove this as follows: if rhetoric is not necessarily just, as Polus assumes and as common sense assumes, and it necessarily deals with just and unjust things, it is necessarily capable<sup>6</sup> [of using] the knowledge of just and unjust things for unjust purposes. But a pursuit which is necessarily capable<sup>7</sup> [of using] the knowledge of just things for unjust ends is necessarily unjust, as you see<sup>8</sup> [in] an individual human being who is,<sup>9</sup> [if] necessarily capable of<sup>10</sup> [injustice], necessarily unjust. The potentiality must come to an actuality sooner or later.

After having suggested that rhetoric is necessarily unjust, Polus is compelled to defend injustice in order to defend rhetoric. Socrates, on the other hand, must defend justice in order to defend his indictment of rhetoric. The question suggested is whether justice is good or bad: Is it required for the highest good, happiness, or not? At the beginning of the whole dialogue, Socrates had established the principle that one cannot say of a thing that it is good or bad, noble or base, if one does not know first *what* the thing is. Therefore, one cannot answer the question of whether justice is good or bad if one does not know

first what justice is. This question is not even raised in the *Gorgias*. This is the most important difference between the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, because in the *Republic* the question of what justice is is the theme. But<sup>11</sup> there is a parallel within the *Republic*. In the First Book, Socrates proves against Thrasymachus that justice is good and makes clear, at the end of the refutation, that the refutation is of no value because they don't know what justice is, and they had proved that justice is good—this is a sophistical proof.<sup>ii</sup> The difficulty is indicated by the following fact: Socrates declares his willingness to discuss happiness without referring to justice, on grounds of expediency alone. The theme “justice” is brought up, to begin with, only in the sections in which Socrates is the answerer, not in the sections in which he is the questioner. But even a discussion of happiness on grounds of expediency alone demands recognition of the principle of rationality: only such actions are good as are conducive to happiness, even if happiness is identified with wealth or honor.

But Polus very strangely rebels, not only against justice but even against the principle of rationality as such. He is, as his name indicates, a colt. In this context, Polus and Socrates develop their opposed theses regarding happiness (<sup>12468c</sup>). By questioning Polus, Socrates had tried to establish what I call the principle of rationality, while making the greatest concessions to Polus' savage taste: all our actions which we commit every day, like killing and exiling, ought to make sense. There is nothing wrong with killing, but it must make sense.<sup>13</sup> [These actions] should be conducive to our well-being—the well-being of our soul (wisdom), of our body (health), or to our external well-being (wealth). “So, do not worry, Polus,” Socrates suggests, “you will get plenty of killing on that basis.” But Polus is dissatisfied with even this limitation. He returns to his initial assertion: that to do what one pleases, and especially to do to others the greatest harm one pleases, is most enviable and constitutes happiness. He reveals himself as a savage—more precisely, as a man controlled by anger or ire, because a man controlled only by stupidity would not necessarily imply such an interest in harming others. In other words, he represents what Plato calls spiritedness, [which] can also be called [the] irascible. Plato makes the distinction in the *Republic* and elsewhere between three parts of the soul: the rational and the irrational, the irrational part<sup>14</sup> [being] subdivided into spiritedness and the desiring.<sup>iii</sup> The desire is desire for food and drink, a creeping and low thing, but spiritedness is of a higher character, because there cannot be anger without an implicit notion of injustice, and that is represented by Polus. He is willing to hurt in turn; he is vindictive;<sup>15</sup> therefore he is a potential instrument of vindictive justice. This we must keep in mind for the great question of what Plato's notion of rhetoric is.

After having been the answerer in the preceding question, Polus now becomes the questioner and, very strangely, he becomes a good questioner. He has undergone some education; he proved to be educable to some extent. He compelled Socrates to say that suffering injustice is preferable to doing injustice, that is to say, he compelled Socrates to say something which is manifestly paradoxical, or to say something which in Polus' eyes is absurd. He refutes Socrates. We note here again that the theme “justice” is brought up here by Socrates, not spontaneously, but when he is first questioned by Polus. The

---

<sup>ii</sup> *Republic* 354a–c.

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. *Republic* 435b ff., *Timaeus* 69c–70d.

conversational superiority of Polus in this section is due to the fact that he has common opinion on his side—because that is common opinion, as we shall see later. Polus has no doubt that Socrates, as well as everybody else, would wish to be a tyrant and to do the things which tyrants alone can do properly in the largest case. Polus is sure of that. Socrates asks Polus whether he thinks of just killing or of unjust killing, which Polus says does not make any difference. Socrates says, “Now you, Polus, say monstrous and wicked things, something almost blasphemous.” He warns Polus that now Polus, too, becomes paradoxical by saying that it does not make any difference whether you kill justly or unjustly, just as Socrates had said, paradoxically, that tyrants have no power. Socrates said something paradoxically by denying that tyrants have power; Polus said something paradoxically by saying that it does not make any difference whether you kill justly or unjustly. And so it appears that Socrates, too, has common opinion on his side when he said that just and unjust killing make all the difference, whereas Polus had common opinion on his side when he said tyrants have power. Socrates and Polus stand at opposite poles. But by this very fact they have something very important in common. The extremes touched each other—those who hold paradoxical opinions. The non-paradoxical, the common opinion, is a compromise, an unclear mixture of justice and injustice. Socrates and Polus are friends—Socrates says so repeatedly—to the extent that they are both dissatisfied with this thoughtless mixture as a thoughtless mixture. Perhaps the gentleman today, who defends the intellectuals, means just this. But that would be very hard to prove.

Socrates, to go on, says even justly killing is not enviable, as Polus contends that it is. Even justly killing. Why? One could say as follows. Killing, mentioned together with sitting, standing, and running, is something neutral. Killing is neutral, and therefore it is as little enviable as sitting or standing or walking. But is this a good example? Is killing, to take the lowest view, not much rarer than sitting or standing? Who of us has ever killed a man, at least in peacetime? While all of us have been sitting or standing very frequently. Killing requires a degree of power, maybe moral power, that is not required for sitting or standing. Hence it is enviable—that is what Polus implies. But does not Socrates, too, imply that killing is not as neutral as sitting and standing? Sitting is neutral: it may not make any moral difference whether we sit or stand. Killing is never morally neutral. You may sit for fun. We do not kill for fun. Killing always requires, not so much power, as a powerful justification, and that means killing is bad in itself, although it may be justified by a good reason. There are then actions which are bad in themselves. At the beginning of the discussion with Polus, something of this kind was admitted by Socrates. Painful actions are bad in themselves—taking bitter medicine, you may remember. Does Socrates suggest now that actions harming other human beings are bad in themselves and therefore require a powerful justification? In other words, does he replace the principle of selfish pleasure by that of human kindness? Perhaps. Note that in this context Socrates refers to pity. The wicked are not to be hated; they are to be pitied. Socrates certainly is gentle. But human kindness<sup>16</sup>—[this] we must make clear—does not exclude the possibility that human beings may be harmed justly. Kindness, in other words, must be regulated by a higher principle. As Leibniz, a modern philosopher, put it: “justice is kindness, tempered by wisdom.” Must kindness not be grounded on that higher principle, or does kindness have a ground of its own? We do not receive an answer here, but we

cannot help [but] raise the question. Socrates goes on to say that committing unjust actions is the greatest evil. What does that mean? The question what unjust actions are is never raised. Is committing just actions the greatest good? Socrates merely says that committing unjust actions is a greater evil than suffering injustice. Socrates, we note, asserts this only. We may guess the reason for this assertion. Why should doing injustice be worse than suffering injustice? He does not give any reason here. What would occur to you as a reasonable explanation? Suffering injustice does not necessarily damage one's soul—let's be quite cautious—[but] doing injustice necessarily does. The interesting point is, as we shall see later, that in the explicit argument this will play hardly any role. In 469b, being killed unjustly is less wretched than killing unjustly and being killed justly. What about killing justly? Is killing justly better or worse than the three things mentioned? I wonder: Is killing justly not less wretched than being killed unjustly? Think of self-defense. In self-defense we may kill another man justly, and to come out of it safely is preferable<sup>17</sup> [to] being killed in the encounter. The full hierarchy would then be this: killing justly is highest, then being killed unjustly, then being killed justly, and finally killing unjustly.

469c–470b: Socrates becomes again the questioner, and again no reference to justice. In 469c, Polus repeats his statement about tyranny. These are the most annoying things in the Platonic dialogues, the seemingly unnecessary and senseless repetitions. This and the previous statement are exactly the same; there is only one little change: the tense has been changed from the past to the present. In the previous statement, Polus said he who *has* killed is better off than he who is killed; now he says he who kills is better off, and that, of course, is very bad from his point of view. He disregards here what comes after the killing. What is the benefit of killing a man when you are killed immediately afterwards? There must, then, have been some time span between the killing and your judgment that this fellow is happy. Polus then is really a bad orator: he doesn't use the proper tenses. Now the argument here is this: killing is a sign of power only if it is not followed by punishment. A man doing what he likes is doing himself good only if such doing is attended by consequences which are to his interest. That is the least we can demand. Hence, killing is not always good because sometimes people, by killing, get hurt in turn. Socrates asks Polus to draw the line between that killing which is good and that killing which is not good. You see here, in 469e, how Socrates characterizes Polus' flightiness by imputing to him a statement which Polus did not make but which, on the other hand, he does not contest—that with a dagger he could also burn down houses.

470b–471d: Polus does not want to draw the line between good killing and bad killing. He asks Socrates again to answer the question. Polus resumes, again, the role of the questioner, the refuter, which means he resumes again the role of Socrates.

470c: Socrates draws the line. Just killing is the right kind, unjust killing, the wrong kind. Just killing is better, unjust killing is worse. In the sequel, Polus [says], “Even a child can refute you. Fresh examples”—*esempli freschi*, as Machiavelli would say—<sup>18</sup> “[recent] facts, which have a much greater power to convince than ancient histories, go to show that many arch-criminals are happy, which means that unjust killing pays, or is good.” Here in 470e, Socrates swears for the first time by Zeus. The context is the story of a man

who came to power by dispossessing his rightful ruler. Look, Archelaus did not go so far as to dispossess his own father as Zeus.

470e: Socrates makes<sup>19</sup> the following statement: education plus justice is happiness; happiness does not require either health or wealth. By this statement, Socrates implicitly takes back all the enormous concessions he has made to Polus in order to convince him of the soundness of rationality. We note also that he adds very emphatically “and woman.” In Polus’ understanding, a woman could not really be happy because she is not as good at killing, etc., as a man could be. This is very important and occurs also in the *Republic* in Plato’s famous statement about the equality of the sexes—part of this statement is that the true perfection of man is independent of the sex he has.<sup>iv</sup>

471a: Socrates calls<sup>20</sup> [Polus] his friend again. Why? Because Polus tries to refute him and hence to improve him, and only friends can do that.<sup>21</sup>

471a–471d: Polus refutes Socrates by the example of Archelaus, and I hope you notice that beautiful specimen of rhetoric again. It is very well done. The proof is of no value because Socrates had already denied the premise of the refutation. I draw your attention to a few minor things in this story of Archelaus. In this story, it is not said that Archelaus was the son of Perdiccas. It is only said that he was the son of a slave woman and, therefore, he was simply the subject of that uncle. The fact that he was of royal stock is completely suppressed in order to aggravate Archelaus’ crime, and aggravating crime is, of course, a part of rhetoric, as in the case of a public prosecutor. This is the savagery of Polus. His vindictiveness, together with his<sup>22</sup> [rhetorical abilities], make him apt to be a servant of justice, if he is controlled by Socrates. There is an allusion to the fact that Archelaus was appointed by his father Perdiccas to rule Macedonia. There is another interesting point. When he killed his seven-year old half-brother<sup>23</sup> [and then said] he had fallen into a well chasing a goose, Archelaus did not dare to say that he had killed the boy. So justice must have some part; otherwise, why would he have said, “I didn’t do it”? Polus imputes to Socrates the view that a just slave is happy. By saying that happiness is education plus justice—and education is not to be normally obtained by slaves—Socrates could never have said that a slave could be as happy as a prince. It is important that Polus overstates Socrates’ assertion. Polus makes Socrates more stoical than Socrates is.

471d–474e: Now Polus<sup>24</sup> no longer question[s]. Socrates tells him that Polus has not yet learned to refute; he has just learned to question. And in this context Socrates gives the most important information about rhetoric which we have received hitherto. At the beginning in 471d, Socrates says, “You are a good rhetorician, Polus, but you do not know how to converse—that is, to argue, to refute—you have not refuted me at all with this story about Archelaus.” Rhetoric, as such, cannot bring about refutation. The doer of unjust things, Socrates asserts again, is not happy. We know that Socrates does not say here that the doer of unjust things is wretched, but even a man who kills justly is not happy as such.

---

<sup>iv</sup> See *Republic* 451c–457b.

471e: Polus is certain that Socrates does not believe what he says. Polus is certain that Socrates does not regard justice [as] essential to happiness. Socrates' cleverness makes Polus sure of this—clever people don't believe in justice. Does this mean that Polus is a crook? No, because a crook would not have wanted to prove that everyone ought to be a crook. Crooks live on the existence of non-crooks. Therefore, there is a strange [dis]proportion between Polus' unjust speech and his action. His action is that of every decent man, who, if he thinks he knows the truth, will try to convince other people of it. It is needless to say that this mixture does not exist only in Polus or only in Greece, but it exists at all times. Even today we can find people who are no crooks but who defend the principles of crookdom. In 471e: "I do not believe that you believe what you say," Polus says. He knows that this is also a kind of rhetorical refutation, something like an assertion. The right thing to do is to refute it or confirm it, but we know from an infinite number of examples that some people don't refute; they simply say, "I don't believe that you believe what you say," which, of course, is no refutation, but which is a very powerful rhetorical device. We know that some people admit that they have lied when they are told that they have lied. In criminal investigations, this is common practice, but it happens even in discussions and is another example of rhetoric.

471e–472d: Socrates to Polus: "Your attempted refutation by that arch-criminal Archelaus was rhetorical because you refer to many and well thought of witnesses, whereas I have only one witness, myself, and therefore, I have, of course, no witness." Polus' proof is of no value if the veracity and competence of the witness is not established first. The fact that they are many and well thought of does not establish their veracity and competence. Now, who is this witness? In the best case, it could only be Archelaus, that arch-criminal, himself. But did Archelaus tell him, "I am very happy although I committed these crimes"? Even if he said so, we don't have to believe him. How can Polus know that Archelaus is not very unhappy, even if he says that he is very happy? This argument is very beautifully developed in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Book 4], chapter 2, that is, how little you can judge people's happiness by appearance and what others say about their condition. But Socrates says Polus has had many famous witnesses. Who are they, the many famous witnesses<sup>25</sup> [who] prove that Archelaus was happy? This statement here about Archelaus is unique. There is a very flattering statement about him in Thucydides,<sup>v</sup> that he was a very distinguished ruler, and there is also the fact that some famous Athenians like Euripides lived at the court of Archelaus. Perhaps famous witnesses are such men<sup>26</sup> [as] Euripides and other Athenians living there who liked it very much. But this is not the main point. Socrates says, "You, Polus, will find many witnesses, not for the happiness of Archelaus, which is not a very important question, but for the truth of your general thesis that criminality is compatible with happiness and perhaps the condition for happiness, and you will find these witnesses for your atrocious assetion, not in circles of tyrants or the underworld, but in the best circles of Athens." "All the distinguished families agree with you, Polus," says Socrates. "One witness—Socrates alone—holds out against all of you." You can use force in company with these distinguished people against Socrates easily, but, needless to say, force wouldn't prove a thing. Socrates, on the other hand, is willing to make his case entirely on whether he can bring the single Polus to agree with him.

---

<sup>v</sup> Thucydides 2.100.



472a–472e:<sup>27</sup> [Socrates] gives three examples. These are of some importance for the establishment of the inner date of the dialogue. Pericles is presumed to be dead, as appears from another passage. He doesn't speak of Pericles but of "the house of Pericles." The other two persons are still alive, Nicias and Aristocrates. Nicias died about 413. The dialogue could have taken place anywhere between 428 and 405<sup>vi</sup>. Aristocrates was the principal man in the oligarchy of the Four Hundred,<sup>vii</sup> and of the same party as these were the really nice, moderate people who, therefore, were called bad names . . . [Aristocrates], who was connected with Socrates, was called something like "trimmer." He was for the ruling party, but always for the moderate wing. He perished with five other generals as a result of the trial which followed the battle of the Arginusae, which means 406. In other words, Aristocrates, this man so favorable to Polus, was killed unjustly. The story of the trial is this. There was a naval battle in Asia Minor which the Athenians won.<sup>viii</sup> There was a storm after the victory and the generals could not take up the corpses, which was a religious crime. There was a trial and they were condemned to death. The procedure in the trial was altogether illegal: there had to be a special vote on every defendant. An article of commons in Athens demanded that only one vote be taken. The only man who protested the procedure was Socrates; he refers to that later.<sup>ix</sup> Aristocrates was unjustly killed and is an example for people who hold Polus' views. The place of this dialogue is obscure. It seems to be Callicles' house, but it isn't. And why should not the time, too, be obscure? Imagine someone saying all the gentlemen of Athens, to say nothing of the rabble, side with you. Is that not the most atrocious statement a man can make in order to undermine his own moral position? If it becomes clear by such allusions that Aristocrates, for example, was unjustly killed, that strengthens the paradox. If you had taken a man who killed unjustly all the time, that would be easy.

472b: "You try to expel me," says Socrates—a tyrannical act. But from what does Polus try to expel Socrates? Not from Athens, not from "my substance" (my fortune), but from "the substance and the truth." In other words: "Polus, you are not an empirical tyrant, such that you want to take away my money and my country; the true polis, the true fatherland, is the truth." This is, of course, of decisive importance for the understanding of justice, [because]<sup>28</sup> for the respectable Athenians, the fatherland is the highest consideration. They define justice in terms of the fatherland, and hence, whether they are aware of it or not, the fatherland itself is not subject to justice.

472d: Socrates reformulates the question. Previously, in 471d, he had said the man who commits an unjust act is not happy. He had said it in the form of a question. Now he says, "Can a man who commits unjust acts and is unjust be happy?" Socrates makes here a distinction between committing unjust acts and being unjust. Compare *Ethics*, Book 5: a

<sup>vi</sup> This date would seem to be misleading in light of the preceding sentence.

<sup>vii</sup> This refers to the oligarchic coup in Athens during the late stage of the Peloponnesian War (411 BC). See Thucydides 8.63–97, and Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 29–34.

<sup>viii</sup> For the details of the Battle of Arginusae and Socrates' involvement in the trial, see *Apology of Socrates* 32a–c; Xenophon *Hellenica* I.6–7, *Memorabilia* I.1.18, IV.4.2.

<sup>ix</sup> *Gorgias* 473e6–474a1.

man may have the habit of justice, [he may] be a just man, even if he were to commit an unjust act occasionally.<sup>x</sup> On the other hand, [a] man who would refrain from committing unjust acts for fear of the police would still be fundamentally an unjust man. Socrates takes the [two] conditions<sup>29</sup> together. The man who commits unjust acts and is unjust—can he be happy? He draws our attention to a problem: Is happiness impaired by a single unjust act, or is happiness impaired by an unjust disposition? Socrates is now the questioner. Previously he did not bring up justice when he was the questioner. Now, while he is the questioner, he brings up the *problem* of justice. Note also that Socrates does not pass judgment on Archelaus. He merely listens. He does not know whether it is true and regards it as possible that it is not true.

472d–472e: Socrates and Polus disagree as to whether an unjust man, a man of unjust disposition, as distinguished from the occasional evildoer, can be happy. Socrates, then, brings up the further question of whether the doer of an occasional unjust act will be happy if he is punished. Polus says emphatically, “No, think of Archelaus—he is very happy, and if he were to be punished as he deserves”—and he gives a very telling description of criminal punishment—“he would not be happy.” Polus says the doer of unjust acts is happy if he is not punished. In 472e, Socrates says the unjust man who commits unjust acts is miserable—this is a twofold assertion—and more miserable if he is not punished for his acts of injustice, and<sup>30</sup> less miserable if he is punished by gods and men. Here again, a difficulty: Is he less miserable if he is punished only by gods<sup>31</sup> [or] only by men? Is the unjust man who does not commit an unjust act miserable? We can reconstruct the argument as follows. Committing unjust acts is admittedly bad if followed by punishment. But all unjust acts are followed by punishment, if not by men, certainly by the gods. Hence all unjust acts are bad. The allusion to the gods is crucial. In the argument with Polus, Socrates does not make any use of divine punishment. This comes in the Callicles section and is very important there.

473a: Polus rejects here Socrates’ contention as an attempt to say absurd things. He does not say that Socrates says absurd things, but that he makes an attempt, which is much milder. In the sequel, Socrates calls Polus both “comrade” and “friend.” “Comrade” has a more social and political meaning; “friend” is a more serious word. Polus has tried to improve Socrates; therefore Socrates regards him as a friend. Socrates wants to reciprocate, but he does not say what he said when talking to Gorgias—that he wants to refute Polus. This friendship between Socrates and Polus is compatible with disagreement regarding the most important thing. One cannot think of a greater disagreement than that between Socrates and Polus, and yet they are friends. That is probably what liberalism originally meant.

In 473a–473b, Socrates incorporates his statements that to act unjustly is worse than to suffer injustice and that the evildoers are miserable. In this context occurs an oath by Polus—the only oath of Polus. This is interesting since it occurs after the only reference to divine punishment. But here, as you can see, are indicated the limitations of rhetoric; later we will see some more obvious examples. We have seen that such statements as “you don’t believe what you are saying” are rhetorical, but oaths, too, are a rhetorical

---

<sup>x</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1134a17–23..

device. What an oath proves is made here very clear: oaths prove, [at] the most, that the man who swears believes something to be true;<sup>32</sup> [they do] not prove the truth of his assertions. An interesting example is that there is not a single oath in Euclid. In a distinctly demonstrative argument, they have no place. Polus claims to have refuted Socrates' contention that the evildoers are miserable and he used for this purpose the story of Archelaus. He says he can refute even more easily the contention that the evildoers who are punished are less miserable than the evildoers who are not punished. What does Polus mean with this assertion, "every child would see that"? Polus' argument could be stated as follows. The evildoers who are at present happy may become unhappy in the future, but the evildoers who are at present drawn and quartered are at present unhappy. Therefore, it would be easier to prove that than that they would be in general happy or unhappy. That makes sense.

473b–473d: Polus refutes here Socrates' thesis that the<sup>33</sup> [punished] arch–criminal is<sup>34</sup> [better] off than the arch–criminal who has become a tyrant and lives happily ever after. This, again, is a beautiful piece of rhetoric, where he describes very powerfully all the nice things of capital punishment, all inflicted on the same human being at the same time, to heighten the effect—"and you call that man happy? That's absurd." In d–e, Socrates says, "This is no refutation at all; you merely use another form of rhetorical device, the device being frightening; previously, you had used the device of calling on witnesses." In the sequel he will give another rhetorical device, that is, ridiculing. Ridiculing also does not prove a thing. The central device mentioned is frightening. This we must keep in mind. It plays a crucial role in the rhetoric which Plato will develop. We can say frightening is a chief device of rhetoric, popular rhetoric, as it is or as it should be. Of course, we do not know what Gorgias thought of that, but we do know from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that ridiculing was recommended by Gorgias as a rhetorical device.<sup>xi</sup> Gorgias gave the advice to destroy the seriousness of the opponents by laughing at them, and to destroy their laughter by being serious. I don't know whether the other devices occurred also in Gorgias' teaching. The question which is more important is this: Did Socrates really prove that the example of Polus about the arch–criminal slowly tortured to death is irrelevant? In other words, is the tyrant improved if he and his family are tortured to death? Nothing short of that will prove Socrates' extreme thesis. In other words, the question of punishment and the details of punishment are by no means irrelevant; the form of punishment is a morally very relevant question. In this context, Socrates calls Polus [*gennaios*],<sup>xii</sup> which would<sup>35</sup> [be] something like "nice," "noble." The meaning of this word is explained by Xenophon as follows: we call animals [*gennaios*] if they are beautiful, big, and useful, and at the same time tame and gentle to human beings.<sup>xiii</sup> Polus is beautiful as a rhetorician, but he is also tame, since he tries to protect Socrates from a great error.

In 473e, Polus makes another remark about rhetoric: if a man is reduced to saying what no one else says, he is refuted. To which Socrates answers as follows: to have an opinion

<sup>xi</sup> *Rhetoric* 1408b19–20; cf. 1406b15–19..

<sup>xii</sup> *gennaios* inserted on the basis of 473d3.

<sup>xiii</sup> See *Oeconomicus* 15.4.

decided by majority vote is political reason but not true reason. Of course, this is not what Polus had said; Polus had<sup>36</sup> [spoken of] a decision by unanimity of the whole human race. What does Socrates mean, then? There are many opinions on which there is practical unanimity—which means all men except one or two agree—which are nevertheless false. The examples from astronomy abound. Plato was familiar with these examples. Everyone knew in Plato’s time that the popular notion of the size of the sun was wrong. All men, except one astronomer, said that the sun has the size of . . . well. What, then, does Socrates mean? The falseness of these practically [universally] held false opinions can be shown by the fact that they contradict other opinions truly universally held.

In 473e–474a, Socrates grants that someone may justly try to become a tyrant. Does this make sense? First of all, the Platonic evidence that this is possible is considerable. In the *Phaedrus*,<sup>37</sup> [Socrates] makes a long list of human pursuits, and in all cases there is a good and a bad case.<sup>xiv</sup> In the *Laws*, there is a statement that in order to have the best society you must have a young tyrant.<sup>xv</sup> The word in itself does not say that tyranny is altogether unjust for Plato, though the general usage is that tyranny is bad. Why, then, does Socrates not wish to be a tyrant, if one can justly be a tyrant? He said it here: he is not a political man. And that will become the big theme in his discussion with Callicles. In this connection, 474a–b, he says, “With the many, I do not even converse.” He talks only to single people, not with the many as many. Is this true? What follows from that, since Socrates did make a public speech in spite of his indictment of public speaking here? If Socrates did make a public speech, he could not hold the opinion that a public speaker is unqualifiedly a flatterer, otherwise he would grossly contradict himself. The story of the trial which he here mentions, where he was unable to count the votes, refers to the reason for Socrates’ unpopularity and to the cause of his trial. He says here that he did not know how to take the vote. This can be understood, as it is understood by Thompson, as an ironical statement: the vote was illegal: Socrates did not know how to act illegally, how to act unjustly. Socrates’ behavior during the trial is *the* public proof of Socrates’ justice, the only public proof available. It is interesting that in the *Apology* he uses his behavior at the trial of the generals as proof of his justice; here he uses it as proof of his ignorance of political things. Whether Socrates’ justice and his ignorance of political things are ultimately the same is a question to which we will come later.

In 474b, Polus says in effect, “Your not believing in justice, Socrates, is not due to your cleverness but to the fact that you are a human being; no human being believes in justice.” When Polus said “you don’t believe what you are saying,” the most simple explanation would be “you are much too clever.” Now he says no human being believes in justice. This is prepared by the fact that Socrates had granted that the most respectable Athenians agree with Polus’ view about justice. At the end of b, there seems to be merely a repetition of what was said in the first part of b. Socrates: “I believe that you and I and the rest of the world believe that doing wrong is worse than suffering it, and escaping punishment worse than incurring it.” Polus: “And I believe that neither I nor anyone else in the world believes it. You, it seems, would choose to suffer wrong rather than to do it.”

---

<sup>xiv</sup> *Phaedrus* 248c2–e5.

<sup>xv</sup> *Laws* 709e6–710a2.

And then it is repeated again. These repetitions, which by themselves don't teach us anything, always require some reflection. What's the difference? The difference indicated is this: Socrates uses the word "believing," which has no emphatic meaning like the Biblical "believing." Polus replaces that by "accepting," "choosing," "preferring." What does that mean? Polus suggests that to believe that doing wrong is worse than suffering wrong means to prefer suffering wrong to doing wrong. What does this substitution of preferring<sup>38</sup> [for] believing mean? To believe something, to have a certain opinion, necessarily issues [in] choosing, preferring, willing. To think well means to choose well, to think ill, means to choose ill—virtue is knowledge. This [is an] important point, which we have to consider when we speak of the Polus section as a whole, namely, that Gorgias and Polus approach Socrates. The simplest example is in the Gorgias section. Gorgias collapsed and was defeated by Socrates because he made this admission: to have learned the musical things means to be a musical man, hence to have learned just things means to be a just man. This, from the point of view of common sense, is an absolutely impossible admission. How was this admission possible on the part of Gorgias, because a man of ordinary intelligence would have questioned the transition? Because Gorgias has such a high opinion of thinking. Once you think well, you will act well. The fact that he hasn't thought it through the way Socrates has is another matter. But in our vulgar language, one could say that Gorgias and Polus are intellectuals. Socrates is not an intellectual, but a philosopher. Intellectuals have something in common with the philosopher, a certain respect for the mind, intellect, or what have you. This is not unimportant, though to overlook the difference is fatal. Socrates, Polus, and Gorgias have one thing in common: they like to talk and to listen. From this point of view, they belong together. If you contrast them with someone like Anytus or an excellent Marine instructor, you would see the difference immediately. This difference, while superficial, is not altogether irrelevant. The danger arises only when we take this superficial agreement to be [decisive].<sup>39</sup> The difference between Socrates, on the one hand, and Gorgias and Polus, on the other, is crucial. This will come out<sup>40</sup> [more clearly] when we come to the Callicles section. There we have someone who rejects this completely. Callicles says, "When boys go to school, then they should make speeches and listen to speeches. Once they are out of college, they should go into business or politics—some real man's stuff." This sociological difference is nevertheless of great importance. Socrates always calls Polus "friend," and an agreement, however specious, is reached between them, whereas the fact that no agreement is reached between Socrates and Callicles is very revealing of the overall situation. To repeat: this little substitution of choosing or preferring for opining or believing reveals a regard for thinking, which is interesting. At this point, the preparation stops and Socrates refutes Polus in the rest of the Polus section.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** Men desire to be happy, that is fundamental. Plato has a word for that, a general word, and that is *eros*, which means primarily nothing but desire, desire for the good and for the complete good. That characterizes man. You want to know how this desire for the good is affected by the identification of virtue and knowledge. Mathematical knowledge has essentially nothing to do with what Plato would call moral character. A man can be an excellent mathematician and an absolutely impossible human being. From Socrates'

point of view, that is impossible for the philosopher. Even in vulgar language, when one says a man behaves philosophically, it means that thinking about these matters necessarily affects the whole man. The *Republic* presupposes a complete conversion of the soul. The problem raised is this: What is the relation of this conversion to pure acts of understanding? The two are inseparable, but they are not identical. These crucial insights can be developed, but the argument must fall on a prepared soul, prepared by nature or previous experience. That is where the moral element comes in. But there is nothing emotional about this. So-called emotion can be truly understood only as a consequence accompanying, necessarily, certain insights. You cannot see the beautiful without being affected by beauty, but your being affected is no proof, because many people are affected by the ugly and think it is beautiful. Therefore, it is necessary to establish by speaking, by arguing, that that which affects you deserves to be known. The intellect remains in control in Socratic teaching. If the highest good is knowledge, then the highest desire would be desire for knowledge. Can man satisfy this desire without also satisfying other desires? Obviously not. He must eat, sleep. He has social relations. And so the question of the full goodness of man, which Plato sometimes calls justice, is not limited to that knowledge. The simplest interpretation of Socrates' statement, I believe, would be this: the highest virtue is knowledge, but the whole of virtue cannot be knowledge. Habituation and other things enter. In the highest case, virtue is knowledge,<sup>41</sup> [but] the application of [this to] what we ordinarily understand by a virtuous man—that this should be knowledge—is of course absurd. In the *Laws*, we see that Plato knew the importance of habituation, child education; but there is no knowledge involved, and Plato knew that, without that, it is almost impossible to become a truly good man. Therefore, virtue cannot be simply be identified with knowledge. But if “virtue is knowledge” is a statement with a view to the highest, there is then of course perfect agreement between Plato and Aristotle: the highest virtue is contemplative, and habituation in the moral sense is of course indispensable; but the moral virtues don't have the same dignity. What is called by Aristotle the moral virtues is called by Plato the popular or vulgar virtues, by which he means they do not require the full life of the mind; they can be acquired by habituation. He speaks of this on many occasions, but the most impressive passage is, perhaps, at the end of the *Republic*, when he speaks of the myth and this fellow who was a very nice man but then, at the choice of the next life, he chooses the life of a tyrant—not because he was an arch-criminal, but because he had only moral virtue, virtue acquired by habituation.<sup>xvi</sup> Only virtue that is founded on insight can be stable, because it knows fully why virtue is good. Whether even that can be fully known is another matter.

In this dialogue, the question<sup>42</sup> “What is justice? or “What is virtue?” is not raised. There is a companion dialogue which is more immediate than any other, the *Meno*, in which the question “What is virtue?” is raised, but not explicitly answered. This makes it all the clearer that this question is not raised here. Here we have a more limited, less interesting question. We must never forget that this dialogue is not on justice, but on rhetoric. It proves, however, impossible to speak about rhetoric without at least considering the question of justice. In other words, while the question<sup>43</sup> “What is justice?” is not explicitly raised and answered, it is in fact answered. That comes out in the conversation

---

<sup>xvi</sup> LS is referring to the Myth of Er at 614b ff. The particular episode he describes is at 619b2–e5.

with Callicles, because only Callicles questions radically. Polus and Gorgias, strange as it may seem, grant too much to Socrates; they grant too much to the mind in a confused and distorted way, being rhetoricians. Only Callicles questions Socrates' whole way—the talking as distinguished from the acting. That was the common distinction, which is commonly presented as “real men” and “men as women,” men who talk. Women spin and talk, and men go out for more manly objects such as war, hunting, etc.

The people in this dialogue are not immediately concerned with the question<sup>44</sup> “How shall I live?” Polus and Gorgias know how they shall live—as rhetoricians, of course, since this is the noblest and best art. Callicles also knows how he shall live. But here the opposition between his way of life and Socrates' way of life is so brutally met that the question of how should a man live can become distinct. Gorgias and Polus are so easily defeated because, in an unenlightened way, they are much too close to Socrates. If they knew what they meant in their respect for speeches, it would be different. But they don't understand themselves. Therefore, they are ultimately fools. But they are not fools, especially Gorgias. The first thing we have to take up next time is the refutation of Polus by Socrates. Up to now we have not had any refutation—only an attempted refutation on the part of Polus, by the example of Archelaus' criminality and respective capital punishment. And Socrates says, with some justice, that they [haven't]<sup>45</sup> settle[d] the issue, and Socrates must now refute Polus. Only if we have understood this refutation can we really understand the whole setting and atmosphere. One thing I must stress here again<sup>46</sup> is the information we get about rhetorical proof as opposed to true proof: witnesses, frightening, ridiculing, to say nothing of swearing. This is of some importance because it will play a role in Plato's presentation of the true [popular] rhetoric<sup>47</sup> which is ultimately the theme of this dialogue: to give us an idea of what is the true function of popular rhetoric. The true rhetoric Socrates uses all the time, but this is, of course, not popular rhetoric, since it is only directed to one man. Rhetoric fulfills a function, but not properly. What would it look like if properly fulfilled? That is the question.

Page 353, 474c–479e, is the fifth step: Socrates refutes Polus, Polus being the answerer, which is the normal situation. Socrates is the questioner, the other fellow the answerer, and the other fellow is refuted. In the first step, Socrates proves that suffering wrong is better than doing wrong: 474c–476a.

474c–474d: Polus says to do wrong is better than to suffer wrong, but to do wrong is baser than to suffer wrong. Polus makes a distinction between the good and the noble. The base is, of course, the opposite of the noble. Yet there is a difficulty: Polus had said in the beginning that rhetoric is the best and noblest art. Perhaps he means, although he makes that distinction, that on the highest level the good and the noble coincide (the best is identical with the noblest), but on a lower level they may very well be distinguished—which is a defensible position. Yet in the conversation with Socrates in 462c–d, Polus puts the emphasis on rhetoric being noble, not on [it being] good. Why? Rhetoric is unjust or at least indifferent to justice. What does he mean by that nobility of rhetoric which has nothing to do with its justice? Rhetoric seems to have a splendor beyond right and wrong. I think when we hear a public speaker, we understand that splendor; there is a peculiar charm about it. Persuasion is a power admirable for its own sake, independent of

the services it renders in regard to freedom and domination. This is what Gorgias himself had said in 452e: the greatest good is the power of persuasion, not the services which it renders. Polus ascribes here a dignity to public speaking which only philosophy has in fact. This means, from Socrates' point of view, that Polus does not understand himself in ascribing this significance and splendor to rhetoric. Hence the thesis that doing wrong is better than suffering wrong, but doing wrong is baser than suffering wrong, expresses [not] a<sup>48</sup> thought-out position but the accepted or popular view—meaning that, if we do not think, [we] mean that. No one wants to suffer wrong, but, on the other hand, it is nobler than to do wrong; we also know that. In this contradiction, we move prior to reflection.

In the sequel, in 474d, Socrates, since everything turns around the distinction between the noble and the good, takes up the question: "What is the noble?" He says there: "we must look away." "All the fair, noble things, is it according to no standard that we call them fair or noble in each case?" More literally translated: "Do you call these things noble or fair, looking away from all other things to one—from all noble things to the one noble?" What he means is very simple, although the expression is not familiar to us. All understanding implies a looking away from the many to the one. We say commonly "we must abstract from the non-essential." To "abstract" means to "look away." This is what Plato sometimes calls the idea, but he does not speak of that here. Something is noble or fine either with a view to usefulness or with a view to [being] pleasing to sight or to both. Polus is satisfied with that. Sometimes we call a kitchen utensil fine, thinking of its usefulness, and sometimes we call a horse fine, thinking of his looks rather than his usefulness, and sometimes we may mean both. Socrates first enumerates various things which are fine or beautiful, and then he discusses them. In the discussion of these fine things, he makes some changes. He had spoken of fine pursuits. He broadens that now and speaks of laws and pursuits. Furthermore, in the discussion, he adds teaching or fields of learning; there are fine and noble fields of learning. The consequence of this is that, in the discussion section, the sounds come into the center. I raise here this provisional question: Are sounds ever called fine or beautiful with a view to their usefulness? I doubt it. In other words, there is a problem here whether this analysis of the fine or noble is adequate.

To get some criteria for its inadequacy, let us look at Aristotle's analysis in Book 1, chapter 9 of the *Rhetoric*.<sup>xvii</sup> There Aristotle has an analysis which reminds of this passage. By noble or fine, we understand in the first place [that] something, while being choiceworthy for its own sake, is praiseworthy. Seeing sights is choiceworthy for its own sake—we like that—but it is not praiseworthy. We don't say, "Look, this is an admirable man, he has seen the sights in Chicago, or even in France for that matter." The second meaning of noble or fine for Aristotle is [that], while being good, it is pleasant because it is good. For example, to undergo an operation is good but not pleasant; no one will say it is fine to undergo an operation. If you call an operation fine, you refer to the surgeon, not the patient. A well-tasting medicine is both pleasant and good, but its being pleasant is not derivative from its being good; it is merely accidental. Therefore, we do not say it is a noble or fine medicine, whereas the pleasure deriving from health is derivative from the

---

<sup>xvii</sup> See *Rhetoric* 1366a33–36.



goodness of health, and therefore we can very well say health is something noble or fine. If we compare Socrates and Aristotle's analyses, we see that Socrates<sup>49</sup> [omits] the element of the praiseworthy. How do we become aware of praise? We hear. Now you see why the sounds are so important. But that will come up later. A particularly beautiful statement about the fine and noble you find in Plato's *Laws*,<sup>xviii</sup> where he says the noble or fine or beautiful is the lovable which calls all to itself. There is a pun in that because "calling" in Greek<sup>50</sup> [is] *kalein* and *kalos* is beautiful. Socrates here says nothing about the loveliness—he is very pedestrian—only the expedient, useful, and pleasant to sight. We now have a list of the fine and noble things, and we have been given a definition which Polus enjoys: the noble is useful or pleasant, and the third consideration is useful plus<sup>51</sup> [pleasant]. This is crucial for the argument.

In 475b–475c: If doing wrong is baser than suffering wrong, doing wrong is either more painful than suffering wrong or less useful—worse—than suffering wrong. But doing wrong is not more painful than suffering wrong. Ergo, doing wrong is worse than suffering wrong. That's the argument. Thus we have proven that suffering wrong is nobler than doing wrong.

In 475d–475e, Socrates requests Polus to say that he would prefer suffering wrong to doing wrong. In other words, after having proved it in general, he asks that individual, Polus, to appropriate it to himself: "From now on, you will prefer suffering wrong to doing wrong." That's very serious. In other words, Polus is requested to regard the argument, the *logos*, as a physician. This means that rhetoric is a medicine, and hence it is not a part of flattery, because it has the same effect on the soul as medicine on the body—a statement which we know from the *Phaedrus*.<sup>xix</sup> Polus is requested not to consider the pain of refutation, but the usefulness of improvement. Polus hesitates a bit, especially when he is asked by Socrates whether all human beings would prefer suffering wrong to doing wrong. It is one thing to say [that] suffering is preferable to doing wrong, and [another that] all human beings would prefer suffering wrong to doing wrong. Polus says, "According to this argument, all human beings would prefer suffering wrong to doing wrong." This is quite strange, and Polus is quite justified in being hesitant,<sup>52</sup> [as] Socrates indicates later on in 475e–476a and, above all, as is shown later on in the Callicles<sup>53</sup> [section]. Even if it were demonstrated that suffering wrong is preferable to doing wrong, it would not mean that all human beings would prefer it. This argument, then, does not at all prove the assertion, unless we assume that all men necessarily agree to a sound argument—and in a way Polus has been trying to do that. This is due to his peculiar intellectualism. At any rate, he is much less realistic than Socrates.

In Xenophon's analysis, Xenophon presents a pupil of Gorgias, Proxenus, and Xenophon is of course a pupil of Socrates.<sup>xx</sup> What is the difference between these two men? This is

---

<sup>xviii</sup> The phrase in brackets is in parentheses in the transcript. The transcriber probably could not hear the precise wording of the question but only enough to discern its gist. In the transcript, the word "student" is not given, but the phrase "In answer to."

<sup>xix</sup> *Phaedrus* 270b.

<sup>xx</sup> See session 2, n. vi above.

very striking for those of you who know only a caricature of the sophists. This Proxenos was very good in handling gentlemen, but when he had to handle tough soldiers, he couldn't do it—whereas Xenophon, who had that realistic, tough trait, like Socrates, could handle rough men and gentlemen. There are two impressions of the sophists and orators: that they are a kind of crooks, and the other that they are too idealistic. They are both, and you have parallels to that in modern times. Certain political thinkers and dreamers—names would be only offensive without hurting—are absolutely terrible, and what they do is fatal to all human decency; on the other hand, they are particularly gentle and nice. That goes together and is perhaps inseparable, in the language in which it is meant here. At any rate, Socrates says somewhat triumphantly: “I was right, I told you so.” Polus<sup>54</sup> no longer [has] any reservation, and he has no resentment against the conclusion that suffering wrong is simply better than doing wrong. In e, toward the end, you will see that the purpose of the discussion was to show the superiority of Socrates' art of refutation to the rhetorical art of refutation; it was not so much to prove the superiority of suffering injustice to doing injustice.

Now let us analyze that argument a bit. What has been proven? What has been asserted? The assertion was very ambiguous. I will give you four different statements [from] 471d [to] 473a: The man who commits an unjust act is not happy; the man who commits an unjust act and is an unjust man is not happy; the man who commits an unjust act and is an unjust man is altogether wretched; and lastly, the man who commits an unjust act is wretched. What, then, did<sup>55</sup> [Socrates] want to prove with these four different assertions? It has been allegedly proven that doing injustice is worse than suffering injustice. But suffering injustice is also bad, [as] Socrates makes clear. It has therefore not been proven that the man who commits an unjust act is wretched, the opposite of happy. This could be only if justice were identical with happiness; then, of course, the man who would commit an unjust act would, by this very act, forfeit happiness. But happiness is justice plus  $x$ . Socrates understands by  $x$ , education. But the ordinary fellow, and perhaps Polus, understands by that  $x$ , wealth and power. At any rate, that some addition is needed is granted by both. If the man who commits an unjust act possesses  $x$ , while lacking  $y$ , he is not absolutely unhappy, because he has one element of happiness. How important that element is would, of course, have to be settled first before this argument could be of any value.

I don't even go into the difference now between the man who commits an isolated unjust act and the man who is habitually and thoroughly unjust. It is more important now to raise the following question: Has it been proven that suffering injustice is worse than doing injustice? This has been proven on the basis of Polus' concession that doing injustice is baser than suffering injustice. The base is the opposite of the noble or fine, and the fine is either useful or pleasant to sight or to hearing, What is meant by that? Polus' thesis can be interpreted as follows: doing injustice is baser than suffering injustice because doing injustice is of worse repute. That is what an ordinary person would mean by Polus' statement. Thus, Polus indicated that doing injustice is more advantageous but of worse repute than suffering injustice. To refute Polus, one would have to show that ill repute is disadvantageous or, rather, that all acts of injustice lead to ill repute, which of course is not true, since not all acts of injustice become known to

other men, and the fact that all acts of injustice should become known to other men cannot be proven. One could at most say they might become known. But then the argument of the clever criminal is, “I’m more clever.” All one would have to presuppose is that all unjust acts are perceived by an omniscient, divine judge. But in the refutation of Polus, no reference is made to a divine judge. Polus becomes convinced of the badness of injustice without reference to a divine judge. He becomes convinced on insufficient grounds. He has not been refuted. On the other hand, he did not defend his thesis well. He could have said that committing unjust acts is painful because it is destructive of the pleasure of good reputation, and not, as he had said, that doing injustice is not painful—in other words, doing injustice is baser because it leads to pain, and not<sup>56</sup> [because] it leads to disadvantage. Socrates, then, has<sup>57</sup> proven, [not] that suffering injustice is better than doing injustice, but that he is a better refuter, a better orator, rhetorician, than Polus.

What light does that victory of Socrates throw on rhetoric? For most practical purposes, it is sufficient that men prefer suffering injustice to doing injustice, regardless of the grounds. Even if they do it on the right grounds, without knowing them to be the right grounds, but only opining or believing them to be right grounds, they do it on wrong grounds. Because to accept a true view on wrong grounds is to accept a wrong view potentially. Since most men accept the preferability of justice on insufficient or wrong grounds, and cannot help doing so, there is a need for what Plato calls “the noble deception” in the *Republic*—that is, rhetoric. Socrates’ rhetoric, as distinguished from Gorgias’ rhetoric, is productive only of noble things. This much about the first part of the argument. I am not concerned here with whether or not Socrates’ *believes* that suffering injustice is better than doing injustice. I am concerned here with the argument, which is an entirely different story. To say here that Socrates’ heart was in the right place, but to be indifferent to the poverty of his *argument*, is humanly and politically sound, but academically impossible. Therefore, I must bring out this point.

**Student:** [Question about doing the right thing for the wrong reason.]<sup>xxi</sup>

**LS:** What else can we do? Is anything else possible? What does the noble lie in the *Republic* mean? It means that all societies rest ultimately on certain convictions which cannot be evident truth for all members of society. This is a simple premise which Plato states very forcefully and provocatively. How can these convictions be planted in men? By speech, and that means rhetoric, an undemonstrative speech. The question of the goodness of justice is here discussed without previous clarification of what justice is. This is not a criticism from the point of view of some modern man; it is a criticism with which this dialogue begins. There is no doubt that the problem of rhetoric is inseparable from the problem of justice and vice versa, but the relation is not<sup>58</sup> [so] simple that Socratic rhetoric means to give strict proof of the goodness of justice, which proof would be effective in the case of every human being. Therefore, the argument used for many men must be rhetorical. The queer thing is that this is given, not in the form of an admonition, a long speech, but in the form of what seems to be a strict argument. In the

---

<sup>xxi</sup> The phrase in brackets is in parentheses in the transcript. It is likely that the transcriber could not hear the precise wording of the question but only enough to discern its gist. In the transcript, the word “student” is not given, but the phrase “In answer to.”

second part of the proof, Socrates proves that not to be punished for acts of injustice is a greater evil than being punished for them, and following from this, that the man who commits an unjust act is absolutely wretched.

476a–477a: The punished wrongdoer is benefited by punishment. “Of whatever quality the action of an agent is, [of] the same quality will be the affection of the thing which is acted upon by the agent.” For example, if someone beats another man, and he beats him hard, the other fellow will have been beaten hard. To be punished is to be acted upon by the punisher. Hence, if the action of the punisher is just, the affection of the punished man is just. But whatever is just is noble. Hence, both to punish justly and to undergo just punishment is noble. But whatever is noble is either pleasant or useful. But to be punished is not pleasant. Hence, it is useful and, further, it is useful to the punished man. The punished man derives an advantage from the punishment. Let us examine this argument. Not only to undergo punishment is noble, but to punish as well is noble. To punish justly is, then, either pleasant or useful. Useful means useful to the punisher: his soul will be improved. But then he cannot be quite just, and he is not likely to punish justly. Hence, to punish justly is pleasant. That is the crucial point in this argument. Socrates<sup>59</sup> [raises] here a very grave problem in punishment and its kinship to vindictiveness. That is something wholly alien to Socrates. Socrates does not mind the punishment. The question does not arise on the immediate practical level—because there [it] is a matter of convenience, one can say—but the question is the curative function of punishment on the highest level.

Let us then reexamine the premise: all just things are noble. This assumption is crucial, as Socrates emphasizes in 476b. But this assumption is false. Neither to punish justly nor to undergo just punishment is noble. In 469a and 472e, Socrates says the man who kills justly is not enviable. It has to be done, but it is not noble. And Aristotle makes that clear in the *Rhetoric* and elsewhere that just and noble things are akin but not identical, especially in the case<sup>60</sup> [of] undergo[ing] punishment: [it] is just, but it is not noble.<sup>xxii</sup> If not all [just] things are noble, it does not follow that to undergo punishment is useful for the punished, especially in the case where a man undergoes punishment involuntarily. The evildoer who is punished is helped, for the punished evildoer receives something just, hence something noble, hence something good, without that mixture of the pleasant. But what about the evildoer who is not punished? He keeps the good things and, in addition, he has the pleasant things. Therefore, to prove Socrates’ thesis, one would have to show first that the good things which the punished criminal receives outweigh by far the good things which the punished criminal loses. In other words, without first establishing the hierarchy of the good and bad things, the whole argument is meaningless. Furthermore, the argument presupposes that there are no incurable criminals—a presupposition explicitly denied later on very emphatically in the Callicles section. The incurable criminal cannot be benefited by the punishment; only the observer, but not he. If we look at the examples in 476b–476e,<sup>61</sup> [Socrates] takes three examples of actions which have something to do with punishment: beating, burning, and cutting. Beating can be severe or quick; burning can be severe or painful; cutting can be deep or painful. There [are] seven cases altogether. The center one is slowly burning a man to death. The

---

<sup>xxii</sup> LS may have in mind *Rhetoric* 1366b32–33.

question we must raise is: How does this contribute to the improvement of the criminal? It may be conducive to the improvement of the spectators, but the question concerns here exclusively the improvement of the sufferer. Also, the strict parallel made between the action of the agent and the one acted upon—<sup>xxiii</sup>

477a–477e: The justly punished man is being benefited by being freed from the worst defects. In other words, what should have come first—the establishment of the hierarchy of the good things—comes last, which is an indirect proof that the preceding argument, as it stands, is of no value. The justly punished man is benefited in regard to the soul.<sup>62</sup> [Socrates] implies that he is obviously not benefited in regard to the body and wealth—most punishments affect adversely either the body or the purse. He is freed from badness of the soul. Polus has no difficulty whatsoever in admitting this. He agrees immediately. He believes in the virtue of punishment. That the punished man is freed from badness of the soul is not proven, because Polus agrees to it immediately. What Socrates tries to prove, somehow, is that badness of the soul is the greatest evil. There is badness in regard to money, poverty, [and] badness in regard to the body: weakness, sickness or disease, and ugliness. In regard to the soul, there are three things: injustice, ignorance, and cowardliness. Sickness and ignorance are the center examples. This we must keep in mind. In the repetition later on, he mentions only poverty, sickness, and injustice. Let us see whether we can understand this. In the repetition, injustice alone remains, whereas here the emphasis is on ignorance. Let us reflect on ignorance as a defect of the soul. Is ignorance taken away by punishment? Hardly, especially if the punishment is very tough. But let us assume that injustice is a form of ignorance, as Socrates would say somehow,, because virtue is knowledge. Then injustice would not be taken away by punishment. The fundamental defect of the soul, namely ignorance, is not touched by punishment. We note also that the central defect of the body is ugliness. Is ugliness removed by medicine? In other words, there are some incurable defects. Is ugliness of the soul removed by punishment?

In 477c, Polus admits that injustice is the basest of all defects. But he does not say that it is the worst defect. In other words, he has not been fully convinced by this beautiful argument. He still makes the distinction between the noble and the good, or between the bad and the base. Socrates argues as follows. What is base is base because it is either most painful or most damaging or both. To be unjust is not more painful than to be just. Hence, to be unjust is the basest defect means to be unjust is the worst defect; injustice owes its baseness entirely to its badness. Therefore, injustice is the greatest evil merely by being damaging, without being in any way painful.<sup>63</sup> [This] proves that it owes its badness entirely to its damaging character and is the greatest evil. Socrates treats here the case of injustice as exactly parallel to that of the other three cardinal virtues: intemperance, cowardliness, ignorance. Is intemperance less painful than temperance? Is cowardliness less painful than courage? One could make a strong case for the negative because the intemperate man will suffer pain. The cowardliness in a man will cause him to be more frightened than the courageous man. In addition, then, intemperance and cowardliness are harmful plus damaging plus painful. Why, then, should intemperance

---

<sup>xxiii</sup> LS seems to have cut himself off in the middle of a sentence here. It is also possible that the tape cut off at this point.

and cowardliness not be a greater evil than injustice? Furthermore, Polus says that injustice is the basest defect, but he is not sure whether it is the worst defect. What could he mean by that? Perhaps poverty and disease combined is a worse defect. But what is bad is also base. Hence, poverty plus disease is base. They are also painful, fulfilling two specifications of baseness. Hence, poverty and disease combined are the worst defects. That is as good an argument as is presented here. In b, Socrates speaks of badness or defect only in the case of money, not in terms of the body or soul. Then he uses the word “frame” or “fabric” only in the case of money and the body, not in case of the soul, whereas in the *Republic* the expression “frame” or “fabric” is applied to soul as well.<sup>xxiv</sup> Socrates disregards in this argument here entirely the fabric of the soul, the order of the soul. Therefore, no true understanding of the virtues can be expected. The argument is entirely illogical, as Aristotle would say. Certain assertions of Polus are taken and they are confronted with other assertions of Polus, and all kinds of conclusions are drawn which can never be true arguments.

477e–479e: Punishment is medicine of the soul. The health of the soul is superior to the medicine of the soul, to punishment. But punishment is superior to unattended sickness of the soul. We have allegedly learned that doing injustice is simply worse than suffering injustice and ultimately because injustice is the greatest of all defects.

477e–478b: Socrates asks which are the arts that free us from evil regarding wealth, body, and soul. In the case of the body, he asks: Where and to what men do we bring the sick in body? He does not ask the corresponding question regarding the poor: Where and to what men do we bring the sick in purse? There may be an art of money-making as a<sup>64</sup> [chrēmastic] art. A sick man may have money to pay his physician, but a poor man, by definition, has no money to pay anyone, not even the man who professes to teach him the art of getting rich. May not, strangely enough, the sickness of the soul have something in common with the sickness of the purse, whereas the sickness of the body is an entirely different case? There are physicians of the body; there are no physicians of poverty, nor are there physicians of the soul who can take on the responsibility for the sickness of our souls, as we can easily trust the responsibility for our defective body to a physician. In 478a, Socrates does not answer Polus’ question as to whether he regards the law courts as the equivalent to the physician. He makes use of that identification later on, but it is really a question whether the law courts, however well constructed, are physicians of the soul. Men who punish justly use some sort of justice, which means the law courts do not use justice simply.

478b–478e: So far we have seen only that there are three defects. But there are three arts: moneymaking, medicine, and justice. Justice here is penal justice, corresponding to medicine in the body. According to Polus, penal justice is the most noble of these three arts; after all, penal justice was said to be the equivalent of rhetoric in Socrates’ long statement. Since penal justice is the equivalent to rhetoric, Polus is naturally attracted by penal justice or the art of<sup>65</sup> [health-making]. Penal justice is not the noblest because it is productive of pleasure; hence, penal justice can only be the noblest art because it supplies

---

<sup>xxiv</sup> See *Republic* 449a1–5. The Greek word is *kataskeuē*.

the greatest usefulness, second only to the health of the soul. Health of the soul, not needing these physicians of the law court, would of course be higher. This implies that the legislative art of which Socrates has spoken, and which is the equivalent of sophistry, would of course be higher. The punisher deals with the sick souls and heals them by admonishing, rebuking, and punishing. We see how close[ly] penal justice and rhetoric are akin. Is not admonishing and rebuking speaking? If it is speaking, can this speaking not be skillful or inept? The art productive of punishment looks very much akin to rhetoric. The man who undergoes healing of the soul, who is punished, is better off than he who does not undergo treatment, namely, [he] who is not punished. Polus does not understand the Socratic question, for Socrates might mean by this question: Which one of the three ends is the noblest? After Socrates has suggested that undergoing punishment is noble, nothing would surprise Polus.

In 478b–478c,<sup>66</sup> [Socrates] speaks exclusively of medicine and penal justice. He has dropped the art of money-making altogether. Let us, however, think of it again. The [liberation] from sickness was discussed explicitly. What about the liberation from<sup>67</sup> poverty? Is the liberation from poverty painful? Do the indigents when they get money suffer pain? Could the case of injustice not be similar, just as penal justice resembles the art of money-making in regard to the absence of experts in the way in which we have medical experts?

In 478d–478e, the punished evildoer is called happy, which means he is distinguished from the most happy who does not need punishment at all. In the sequel, in 478e, Socrates limits himself to the man who does the greatest wrong and makes use of the greatest injustice, a man like Archelaus: he would be wretched simply. But the question is: Are all evildoers evil like Archelaus? In other words, the question arises about the degree of evildoing. Are all things equal? There is a classical school, stemming from Socrates, which says that, [namely], the Stoics: every sin of omission is equal. This is not Socrates' point of view. But the interesting part is that in this part of the *Gorgias* he frequently uses expressions of a Stoic quality. He seems to suggest that the evildoer simply is wretched, which means that it does not make any difference what degree or kind of evildoing is committed. In other words, he suggests the extreme Stoic doctrine. Only when one reads carefully does one see that this is not what he means.

In 479b–<sup>68</sup>[479e], the ordinary use of rhetoric is comparable, not to that rhetoric which Gorgias practiced when he persuaded his brother's patients to swallow bitter pills, but to that rhetoric which discourages people from swallowing bitter pills. This is not said here, but if you think of the example, you must draw this conclusion. In other words, Gorgias ought to be doing for the sick in soul what he has been doing for the sick in body, [persuading them] to undergo treatment, [to] undergo punishment. In d–e, Socrates<sup>69</sup> [blurs] completely the difference between the arch-criminal and the evildoer simply, namely, the man who has committed a minor crime once in his life: even the man who has once committed a minor crime is wretched. He qualifies this somewhat: [all] evildoers, from Archelaus [on down], *ought* to be wretched differently than other human beings. This is a very vague statement. Doesn't the mass of human beings commit any wrongs? Are all human beings just or unjust?

480a–481b: It has been proven, allegedly, that injustice is the greatest evil. What follows from that in regard to rhetoric? The premise of vulgar rhetoric is that not being punished for injustice is preferable to being punished for it. The same is true today, when someone hires a clever lawyer to get an acquittal. If injustice is the greatest evil, one must crave punishment and not acquittal. Hence, apologies—mean[ing] forensic rhetoric in the most common sense that a man pleads not guilty when he is guilty—are altogether bad. Instead, one should use rhetoric rather for self–accusation and the accusation of one’s nearest and dearest. If it is proper to hurt anyone, one should use rhetoric for getting one’s enemies acquitted, and, if one could bring about that one’s enemies would live forever, that would be the real punishment for them.

In 480b, Socrates notes that there are incurable diseases of the soul, and here I repeat my question from before: How can the people suffering from incurable diseases of the soul be benefited by punishment? Furthermore, these people are not pleased by punishment either. In the case of these men, punishment cannot be<sup>70</sup> [noble] as far as they are concerned. It might be<sup>71</sup> [noble] as far as their punishers [are] concerned. Either it improves the punishers—and then the punishers would not be strictly just, in which case they cannot be expected to punish justly. Therefore, justly punishing in the case of the incurable criminals is noble because it is pleasing for the punisher. Socrates knows this. He is gentle. But that does not mean that he was an anarchist. But he leaves this necessary work of punishment to others, just as most of us do not apply for the job of a hangman. In this connection, in b, he makes this remark: “one ought to accuse oneself and one’s nearest and dearest,” and he mentions among his “nearest and dearest” one’s parents. One of the parents is invariably the father. In the *Euthyphro*, we find a man who accuses his own father and is credited for it by Socrates.

In 480c–480d, Socrates mentions five kinds of punishment; the center one is payment of money, the kind of punishment which Socrates was willing to propose in his own case in the *Apology of Socrates*.<sup>xxv</sup> In e: as for one’s enemies, one must indeed prevent that one suffers wrong from them, for suffering evil is a wrong; but if<sup>72</sup> [an enemy] does wrong to others, one must take care that he is not punished, so that he will become worse and worse. To get one’s enemies acquitted is one of the good uses of rhetoric. If someone takes your money, he injures you; but he injures only your purse, not your soul. He improves his purse and injures his soul. If you hate him, you should leave him the money. The just man sacrifices his self–interest, in the vulgar sense, to the improvement of his soul. The unjust man sacrifices his self–interest to his hatred. The fundamental point: to derive pleasure from punishment is the crucial theme. If suffering wrong is evil, as is clearly stated, and we may recover what was stolen, for example, how do we recover [it]? By legal action. That means in principle through the use of rhetoric. If a case can be made for self–preservation, then the same can be done for rhetoric. Is it not necessarily legitimate that one should use rhetoric for avoiding suffering wrong—if suffering wrong is bad—and use rhetoric not merely for self–accusation? If it is perfectly just in [the] case of injury to take legal action and therefore use rhetoric, can it be worse to use rhetoric for helping others? That is the irony. Socrates grants, as it were, the right to use rhetoric in

---

<sup>xxv</sup> *Apology of Socrates* 38b.



the least respectable case, namely, for oneself. But what about the more respectable case when some other person is injured? He has clearly suffered an injustice and you are trying to help him. And, as a matter of fact, you cannot help him without making a case—that is, a speech before a jury. Is this unjust? This, it seems to me, would be the ultimate justification of rhetoric, though not of that rhetoric in which Socrates is particularly interested, but of the ordinary rhetoric which, at this point is the thing. Let me state it as follows. Rhetoric must not be used against just condemnation toward oneself or others, but it may be used for just condemnation toward oneself or others. Why should the benefit of rhetoric be restricted to one's nearest and dearest, and not also to other members of the community? At the end, if you read it carefully and consider it carefully, this<sup>73</sup> [minor] admission—you may use rhetoric for false<sup>xxvi</sup> accusation if you commit a crime—if you think it through, you are led to the conclusion that rhetoric can very well be used for accusation of everyone who committed injustice, and that implies for the defense of the innocent, naturally. This little thing is all that Aristotle or Gorgias needed in order to teach rhetoric, in a humble sense. It is not philosophy, but it can be a respectable and useful art.

[end of tape]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “in this order.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “the.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “etc.”

<sup>5</sup> Moved “have power.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “to use.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “to use.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “while.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “it.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “rather.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “p. 273.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “They.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “is.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “vindicative.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “than.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “reasoned.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “here.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “forth.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “In.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “vindictiveness.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “by saying.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “does.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “which.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “like.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “he.”

<sup>28</sup> Deleted “for.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “(two).”

<sup>30</sup> Deleted “he is.”

---

<sup>xxvi</sup> “false” is in the transcript, but it may be an error.

- 
- 31 Deleted “and.”  
32 Deleted “it does.”  
33 Deleted “unpunished.”  
34 Deleted “worse off.”  
35 Deleted “by.”  
36 Deleted “said.”  
37 Deleted “he.”  
38 Deleted “to.”  
39 Deleted “decursive.”  
40 Deleted “clearer.”  
41 Deleted “and.”  
42 Deleted “of.”  
43 Deleted “of.”  
44 Deleted “of.”  
45 Deleted “don’t.”  
46 Deleted “and that.”  
47 Moved “popular.”  
48 Moved “not.”  
49 Deleted “emits.”  
50 Deleted “mean.”  
51 Deleted “noble.”  
52 Deleted “and.”  
53 Deleted “situation.”  
54 Moved “has.”  
55 Deleted “he.”  
56 Deleted “that.”  
57 Moved “not.”  
58 Deleted “that.”  
59 Deleted “bases.”  
60 Deleted “to.”  
61 Deleted “he.”  
62 Deleted “he.”  
63 Deleted “it.”  
64 Deleted “schematistic.”  
65 Deleted “wealthmaking.”  
66 Deleted “he.”  
67 Deleted “deliveryation.”  
68 Deleted “479c.”  
69 Deleted “blows.”  
70 Deleted “noted.”  
71 Deleted “noted.”  
72 Deleted “he.”  
73 Deleted “pioneer.”

## Session 6: February 5, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** Plato charms his readers, but every charm endangers seriousness, serious thinking about man's great objectives. No one knew this better than Plato himself. He would not have employed his charm had he not thought it necessary in order to counteract the charm produced by present power, present success, but also by present danger. Both present success and present danger produce delusions of their own. To see the present success and present danger without delusion, it is necessary to go away from the present, to withdraw to a mountain or to a cave in order to concentrate. But this does not necessarily mean that we must withdraw to the study of a Platonic dialogue in general and to the *Gorgias* in particular—so many questions remain. I repeat: This is a course on political philosophy, but political philosophy has not yet appeared in the book which we are discussing, except in one place, where Socrates speaks of the legislative art with the obvious indication that it is the highest of the arts mentioned there. He gave the proportion: gymnastic is to medicine as the legislative art is to justice. The legislative art is the art producing health of the soul or virtue and is meant to be an art; it is teachable, to be taught primarily to legislators. This is primarily what we mean by political philosophy. Political philosophy understood in this way is distinguished, of course, from the study of who makes the laws in a given time and place with a view to what, without raising the question of who *ought* to make the laws with a view to what. This latter study, now called empirical political science, has a hole somewhere, where the other questions come in. For example, must we not distinguish between good and bad laws? Or is everything claiming to be a law truly a law? These questions necessarily lead up to the older notion of political philosophy as the legislative art<sup>1</sup>.

You have then plenty of opportunity to raise the question, “Why do we read the dialogue?” For even this remark about the legislative art is made only in order to bring to light the character of rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of getting acquitted<sup>2</sup> [when] one is guilty—a perversion of justice, justice being the art of restoring the health of the soul by proper punishment. Yet rhetoric, as Socrates says, insensibly shifts into sophistry, sophistry being the perversion of the legislative art. Sophistry, as the perversion of the legislative art, is the perversion of law as law, and rhetoric, as the art of evading punishment, insensibly shifts into the art of subverting law as law. Therefore, rhetoric and sophistry cannot be well distinguished in all stages. Rhetoric, then, is not only a perversion of justice but of the legislative art itself, and we cannot understand rhetoric without learning something about the legislative art as such. In other words, while the theme is rhetoric,<sup>3</sup> [since] rhetoric<sup>4</sup> [is] a perversion of the legislative art, we cannot help learning something about the legislative art by learning something about rhetoric. But this is by no means a sufficient statement of the difficulty. For is this description of rhetoric—getting acquitted in law courts by fair means or foul—a sufficient<sup>5</sup> [characterization] of rhetoric? The description of rhetoric as an unqualified perversion amounts to this: rhetoric is base and unjust. But in the conversation with Gorgias, it was suggested that rhetoric is essentially just. In the conversation with Polus, who had suggested that rhetoric is not just but noble, Socrates first asserts that rhetoric is both unjust and base.

Yet it appears later on that rhetoric, while being base, may be just. That occurred at the very end of the conversation with Polus. The end of the conversation with Polus shows that rhetoric can be just under two conditions: it can be used decently, [first], for accusing oneself and one's nearest and dearest if they commit unjust acts, and, second, for getting acquitted one's enemy who has wronged others, so that one can vent one's hatred. This is, of course, not a very satisfactory explanation, but here we are. We have seen that in this context, at the end of the conversation with Polus, Socrates notes, in the center of that statement, that one may prevent that oneself be hurt: to defend oneself against injury is legitimate. If this is permitted, then rhetoric too is permitted. If one analyzes the section completely, one sees that one can use rhetoric legitimately for the purpose of self-defense. If this is admitted, then you may with equal and greater right use rhetoric for accusing those who have hurt others, perhaps others who are not able to take care of themselves, [and] also for getting those who have not hurt anyone acquitted, the innocent. This is not explicitly stated. The most natural and soundest use of rhetoric is not explicitly stated. Only the two extreme cases are stated: accusing oneself and one's father and mother, and getting one's enemies acquitted merely because it serves them right. Socrates is silent about the *just* use of rhetoric by truly just men, and Polus does not notice this great concession of Socrates.

Why is this legitimation of rhetoric only alluded to? Rhetoric is discussed in the *Gorgias* rhetorically, that is to say, for a practical, specific purpose here and now. Socrates tries to persuade two individuals, Gorgias and Polus, who are teachers of rhetoric, to turn away from the low, if legitimate, rhetoric which they practice, to a higher rhetoric which is needed and which Socrates cannot practice. The rhetoric practiced by Gorgias and Polus is public rhetoric, whereas the rhetoric practiced by Socrates is private rhetoric. But we must make some distinctions. Public rhetoric is either directed toward some action here and now—that would be subdivided into forensic and deliberative rhetoric. Both the forensic and the political orator are concerned with action here and now. But public rhetoric may also be directed toward a whole way of life of men—then it is display rhetoric, the praise of virtue. The public rhetoric with which Socrates is primarily concerned is a substitute for, an improvement of, that display rhetoric. Gorgias' display rhetoric is to be replaced by a public rhetoric which is less concerned with praising virtue than with punishing vice. The ineffectiveness of Gorgias is largely due to the fact that he limits himself to praising virtue. Private rhetoric is practiced not only by Socrates but also by Gorgias. Gorgias himself gave the example of what he did when he accompanied his brother to the sick people, which is obviously not public, but private rhetoric. The private rhetoric practiced by Gorgias concerns the well-being of the body; the private rhetoric practiced by Socrates is concerned with the well-being of the soul. Socrates practices his private rhetoric before our eyes in the *Gorgias*. At the same time, however, he does not only practice his rhetoric in the *Gorgias*; he also, as we shall see more and more, *exhibits* it in the *Gorgias*. Generally speaking, Socrates practices his rhetoric in every dialogue. But in the *Gorgias*, more than anywhere else, he exhibits his rhetoric. He wants to show Gorgias and Polus what his rhetoric is. Therefore, one can say with some justice that the *Gorgias* is *the* Platonic dialogue which presents Socrates' *display* of his art. In the beginning, there was a reference to a display speech made by Gorgias. That speech we have never heard. Instead, we are treated to a display speech by Socrates which consists

to a considerable extent of short speeches, more sophisticated and subtle than a Gorgian speech. The only objection one could make to this is that there is a Platonic dialogue in which we also find a Socratic display speech: the *Menexenus*. The difference is that the *Menexenus* is a satire on ordinary display speeches.

Some more specific remarks regarding the Polus section. In this section, Socrates develops his doctrine of rhetoric as a branch of flattery. Why can't we take this statement as a direct expression of Socrates' view? For the same reason that we cannot leave it at Socrates' indictment of long speeches as such. Socrates does make long speeches, so that if there is any proof needed that Socrates is ironical it is given by this fact: the indictment of long speeches followed by the practice of long speeches. Or the alleged necessity to have a conversation with Polus in order to clarify the meaning of rhetoric. Socrates had made up his mind about rhetoric being flattery long before the conversation; he did not learn anything and could not learn anything from Polus. Furthermore, we have also seen that, in the Polus section, Socrates discusses the question of whether justice is good without having raised the previous question of what justice is, contrary to the principle laid down at the beginning of the argument. All these considerations must be remembered so that one can see that when Socrates makes a statement, such as [that] rhetoric<sup>6</sup> [is] flattery, it does not yet prove that this is Socrates' last word on the subject. Whether it is the art of persuasion, and primarily the art of persuasion of crowds and multitudes, and primarily the art of persuasion of crowds by means of long speeches,<sup>7</sup> [rhetoric] derives its legitimation first from its purpose, and secondly from its character. From its purpose: on the lowest level, the right of self-defense, and then the duty of helping one's fellows. Secondly, from its character: rhetoric has to do with law and facts, meaning with things which can sufficiently be known by all men. That is to say, rhetoric is not simply talk by ignoramuses to ignoramuses, as it is presented. It can very well be a talk by a man who knows everything relevant to people who *can* know everything relevant. Rhetoric itself is, therefore, legitimate or just and in the service of the good. But it is liable to be misused; therefore it must be regulated by a higher art, by philosophy.

Another consideration in regard to rhetoric is that philosophy itself is in need of rhetoric. The non-philosophers do not understand the full meaning of philosophy. They may suspect philosophy, for instance, by mistaking the philosopher for a sophist—that happened to Socrates. It is, therefore, necessary to explain to non-philosophers the meaning of philosophy in a way the non-philosophers can understand—that is to say, in a way which is not altogether adequate to what philosophy is, for one cannot understand philosophy except by philosophizing. That rhetoric is legitimate is shown in the *Gorgias* not by argument but by deed, by the fact that Socrates practices rhetoric. He does not demonstrate. He persuades Polus by arguing from Polus' premises which Polus himself does not clearly understand (for example, by suggesting to Polus a certain interpretation of these premises and then subtly guiding Polus), and by appealing to the passions of Polus (for example, by rebuking him, perplexing him, provoking him). All this is rhetoric and not demonstration. But the rhetoric which Socrates practices is not the art of persuading multitudes. Socrates converses only with a single man, if in the presence of quite a few. The rhetoric practiced by Socrates is, then, distinguished from the legitimate public rhetoric. What is the relation between these two kinds of legitimate rhetoric?

Gorgias and Polus prove to be utterly unable to practice Socratic rhetoric, meaning persuading individuals by short speeches. We only know from Gorgias' report that he succeeded in the sickroom, but we don't see it. Yet Gorgias and Polus are rhetoricians. The second kind of legitimate rhetoric, public rhetoric, the rhetoric not practiced by Socrates, may in the highest case be an improved version of Gorgian rhetoric, a Gorgian rhetoric brought to its senses. Why, then, an improved version of Gorgian rhetoric? Certainly Socrates does not practice it, although it is legitimate and necessary.<sup>8</sup> [Could] Socrates be unable to practice it?<sup>9</sup> [Could] he have a defect which he cannot remedy? Socrates admits that he suffers from a defect. In 473 and following, he says that he is not a political man; he is a philosopher. Philosophy may be higher in rank than politics, but politics and government are necessary. Perhaps it is not possible for the same man to be both a philosopher and a statesman—for, as stated in Plato's *Republic*, one man, one job.<sup>i</sup> At least it may not be possible to be a philosopher and a statesman for all practical purposes. In that case, Socrates would need a helper, an auxiliary, to use the term used in the *Republic*, where the philosophers, too, need auxiliaries whom they cannot convince by demonstration.

If the philosopher needs the art of persuading multitudes, and if this art is an improved version of the pursuit to which Gorgias and Polus have dedicated themselves, we must be able to discern in Gorgias and Polus the rudiments of this art and therewith also the specific reason why Socrates does not practice it. We may learn something about this by studying Polus' character. Which are the qualities of Polus which are relevant for this purpose, so that an improved, educated, whipped Polus can become a helper of Socrates? What one might say is that this kind of rhetoric is also represented in Gorgias. Why, then, do I suggest that we should concentrate on Polus? In the first place, in the Gorgias section, the character of rhetoric has not become clear—at least to us, although Socrates understood it well enough. In the second place, while Polus is inferior to Gorgias, he belongs to Gorgias. We have to learn from Polus, since we know too little about Gorgias. What kind of man is Polus? A strange mixture of bestiality and humanity. He rebels against rationality in every form; he behaves like a young horse which enjoys trampling people to death. He reminds us of the horses in the *Phaedrus*, the other dialogue on rhetoric.<sup>ii</sup> In the *Phaedrus*, the human soul is compared to a chariot. Reason is the charioteer; the chariot is drawn by two horses, a noble one and a base one. The noble horse listens to reason, the base one does not and must be whipped into submission. The noble horse is called spiritedness, anger, irascible; the base horse is called desire. Anger, as bad as it may be, necessarily contains a divination of justice. When we get angry, we imply that this should not have been done. In desire, no notion of justice is implied. Polus reminds us of a horse, but of a noble horse; he can be brought to listen to reason, as we have seen. With the help of Socrates, he is educable. The rational part prevails: he learns to question and even to answer, although he did not learn to refute or argue in a strict way. This partial success of Socrates in the case of Polus shows us the power of Socrates' rhetoric; he can really tame Polus. Polus' desire to question Socrates enables Plato to distinguish between what Socrates says spontaneously and what he says under torture, when he is cross-examined by Polus.

---

<sup>i</sup> *Republic* 369c–370e.

<sup>ii</sup> See *Phaedrus* 253c ff.

This gives us an important clue to the distinction between voluntary and compulsory conversation, which applies to all Platonic dialogues. Any Platonic dialogue is either voluntary (Socrates desires to have the conversation) or [compulsory] (he is compelled to have the conversation). In every case, it is necessary to find out what kind of dialogue it is. The clearest case of a compulsory dialogue is, of course, the *Apology of Socrates*. Socrates was compelled by the law of Athens to have this conversation with the people of Athens. One of the clearest cases of a voluntary dialogue is the *Charmides*. Socrates comes back from war—it was rather tough—and he is happy to meet again such people as<sup>10</sup> [Charmides]. The *Euthyphro*, on the other hand, is a dialogue forced on Socrates. The *Gorgias* is a voluntary dialogue, as we see from the beginning.

This important distinction is indicated in the *Gorgias* more clearly than anywhere else by the fact that we notice a difference between how Socrates argues when he argues spontaneously and how he argues when he is questioned. Plato indicates the character of rhetorical argument by Polus' desire to refute Socrates. Rhetorical arguments use witnesses, oaths, etc., as we have mentioned. Furthermore, Polus admits tacitly the principle that virtue is knowledge, as we have indicated. He believes that all men necessarily agree to a sound argument. His very bestiality is connected with his faith in *logos*, in argument, in reason, in speech, in universal agreement as the criterion of truth. And this is the contradiction within Polus. Since Polus rebels against the principle of rationality as such, Socrates is enabled to introduce justice, as distinguished from wisdom, as the limitation of bestiality. All this is in agreement with Polus' character. This character expresses itself in his thesis: while suffering wrong is worse than doing wrong, it is nobler—the noble has an independent status and cannot be reduced to the expedient or good. Polus expresses here the popular, accepted view. In other words, prior to reflection, we all think as Polus asserts. This popular view moves between two extremes. The one accepted view, expressed by Socrates, is free from self-contradiction. The other extreme is expressed by Calicles. Socrates says suffering wrong is simply preferable to doing wrong. Calicles says doing wrong is simply preferable to suffering wrong. Polus says in one respect it is preferable, in another it is not. This being in the middle means, in Plato, always being a link or a bond between. *Gorgias* and Polus are a bond between Socrates and Calicles, between the highest and the lowest. This being in-between is the character of all popular opinions about right and wrong, about the human things, the noble and just, as ordinarily understood. Socrates' refutation of Polus is itself rhetorical. Polus does not discern the weakness of that refutation. One must distinguish between Socrates' thesis and his argument in support of his thesis. Polus does not discern the weakness of the argument, but he does not rebel against the thesis. This we know from experience. Someone may present an argument with which we disagree for a variety of reasons, but we may like the result of the argument. If we don't like it, we may look for a weakness in the argument. Here we have the interesting case where Polus does not rebel against the result, which means that he must have a certain sympathy with the result. He becomes reconciled with it, showing that he has a potential kinship with justice. This kinship is actualized by Socrates' argument. This has something to do with that middle position between rationality and bestiality, and [it] is connected with the problem

inherent in penal justice. Penal justice<sup>11</sup> is necessary but also creates a problem: those who like to punish. Punishment must be inflicted, but to like to punish is not so good.

Socrates' refutation of Polus is rhetorical. The true argument regarding justice and rhetoric is not given, for the true argument is not generally persuasive. The true argument must be supplemented by rhetorical argument. This rhetorical argument is given in the Polus section, at least sufficiently for noble horses such as Polus. Let us assume that the true argument regarding justice is not sufficient for persuading base horses. Then Polus' rhetoric, properly directed, might exactly be the instrument for persuading base horses. They might be persuaded by Polus precisely because there is an admixture of irrationality in the make-up of Polus. Polus is spirited, violent, angry, willing to hurt in turn,<sup>12</sup> vindictive, whereas Socrates is gentle. But the argument in favor of justice which is to impress base horses must be frightening and punitive. It is an art which is both just and base. The art of executing, though necessary, is a base art, and the same might be true of Polus' rhetoric, in the best form. This branch of rhetoric, punitive speeches of a general kind, must take the place of Gorgias' display speeches, which are pleasing to the ear but entirely unserious and useless, what Callicles called in the beginning "nice"—they are only nice. The Polus section is in the center of the dialogue, and the center is always most important in Plato. The Polus section exhibits to us the power of Socrates' rhetoric. In the beginning, Polus was disgusted with Socrates' strange arguments. He was sure what had happened to Gorgias could never happen to him. He challenged Socrates, rose to considerable heights, and became the questioner. And yet Socrates could deal with him perfectly. Socrates' rhetorical power is clearly established. At the same time, the nature of the desired public rhetoric which is not in existence is disclosed.

**Student:** [Question on forensic rhetoric.]<sup>iii</sup>

**LS:** So what we understand by "just defense" is justly inflicting evil for the sake of the greater good<sup>13</sup> [of] a human being. It would still be an evil. This in itself can create a problem for sufficiently sensitive people. We could imagine that someone shoots down another fellow with perfect justice, and he needs some weeks to become reconciled to it. Some people can do it easily and others, although they are perfectly justified, suffer from it. Why do they suffer? Because there was some evil in it, although it was just. This is a problem for Socrates. For this reason, self-preservation altogether becomes a problem for Socrates, as we shall see later on in the Callicles section. The principle of self-preservation justifies killing in self-defense without any difficulty. Why does a fellow who kills in self-defense have pangs afterwards? Because he is aware that self-preservation is not the highest consideration. What Hobbes would have done when his self-preservation was at stake, nobody knows, but he speaks about killing in self-defense as if it were the most natural thing, as common as it is on the TV screen. Socrates is not a lawyer. He is concerned with the right way of life altogether, and there the subtleties which are of no concern to law as law must be considered. The world would be wonderful if men would kill only in self-defense, but whether that would be sufficient to make men as good as they can be is another question. The main point with which

---

<sup>iii</sup> The phrase in brackets is in the transcript. Apparently the transcriber was able to discern only the gist of the question.



Socrates is concerned<sup>14</sup> in the Polus section is to indicate the problem of punishment altogether, not because he has intentions of an anarchistic kind—this is wholly alien to him—but because there is a problem there. In Aristotle, all virtues except justice have two opposites; justice has only one. In the case of courage, you have cowardliness and foolhardiness. In the case of justice, there is only injustice.<sup>iv</sup> How come? Because in the case of justice, the unjust man wants more than he deserves; the just man, what he deserves and not more. But if you want less than you deserve, you are not vicious. In a way, this is higher than justice. Insisting on one's rights is perfectly alright, and civil society could not exist without it, and yet there is something harsh, tyrannical about it. This shows itself, perhaps most massively, in punishment. Legal and political considerations in this respect are simply not enough; there are things in man which go beyond that.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** There is another, lower art of persuasion, a lower and cruder kind, which is legitimate only in the service of Socrates—as it were, Socrates via Gorgias and Polus controlling Callicles. This is a possibility. Why did Callicles go to Gorgias? He was attracted by him. There was some possibility of influence which Socrates cannot have. Pericles, who according to very high standards is a statesman, would not be a statesman according to Plato's or Socrates' standards. Pericles has something in common with Callicles from Plato's point of view. If Pericles could be influenced by some Gorgias, that would be the best one could expect. But the trouble is that what Pericles learned from Gorgias is the use of some wonderful devices for ordinary political deliberative rhetoric. Socrates thinks these things through and arrives therefore at very shocking conclusions. In the Callicles section, the seeming extremism of Socrates becomes clearer than is here the case.

The Callicles section: 481b to the end of the dialogue. The first section is 481b–482c. Enter Callicles, and he is welcomed by Socrates.

481b: Callicles addresses Chaerephon, not Socrates. Callicles has more access to Chaerephon than he has to Socrates. Both are lovers of the common people, and, furthermore, the question is whether Socrates is joking. If Socrates should joke, his reply to Callicles might again be a joke, whereas Chaerephon is presumed not to joke. So it is perfectly legitimate. Chaerephon says here to Callicles exactly what Callicles had said to Socrates at the very beginning, in 477c. Chaerephon says to Callicles regarding Socrates exactly what Callicles had said to Socrates regarding Gorgias. In the first place, Socrates has taken the place of Gorgias as regards the object of curiosity. Secondly, Callicles has taken the place of Socrates as regards the passion of curiosity. In the beginning Socrates was curious; now Callicles is curious. Finally, Chaerephon has taken the place of Callicles as regards being the link between the curious man and the object of his curiosity. Callicles swears again by the gods. He is the only character in the *Gorgias* who uses this comprehensive and sweeping form of an oath. Callicles regards it as possible that Socrates believes what he says, whereas Polus did not regard it as possible that

---

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a33–b4, 1129a3–11.

Socrates believes what he says. Callicles is more open-minded than Polus. For the same reason, Callicles regards it as possible that the way of life which he and everyone else leads may be fundamentally wrong. He is open to this possibility, at least in speech. The question here concerns no longer rhetoric, but how man should live. Callicles is more serious than Polus and Gorgias. He raises the question,<sup>15</sup> “What does it mean for my whole life?”—not, “What does it mean for one special branch of knowledge called rhetoric?” This link-up of the limited question of rhetoric with the overall question of how one should live is characteristic of Plato’s treatment of all questions. Every question is linked to the question of how one should live, directly or indirectly. No part can be understood except in the light of the whole. The whole which is primarily accessible to us is the whole of human life—the ends by virtue of which our lives can be complete.

481c–482c: Socrates says to Callicles, “You and I have the same *pathos*,” which means passion in the literal sense, “to be acted upon”: “You and I are acted upon in the same way.” What is that passion? They are both lovers and, in addition, each one is a lover of two. Hence, Socrates says, “We depend in what we say on what our beloved said.” There is a total dependency on the beloved so that one cannot possibly contradict the beloved. Yet, says Socrates, there is this difference: “Your beloved ones, Callicles, are fickle, while one of my beloved ones always says the same things.” Socrates begins, then, by stating that the opposition between him and Callicles is based on something which they have in common: they are both lovers, men of passion in the modern sense. This implies that Gorgias and Polus are not lovers. They are elegant triflers; they are not serious. For love is serious—love, the spirit of life, akin to spring, “as strong as death,” as is said in the Song of Songs.<sup>v</sup> The work on love, according to generally held opinion, is *Romeo and Juliet*, which is not exactly gay. Gorgias and Polus are animated by the desire for wealth, prestige, and placid pleasure. Callicles, like Socrates, is an erotic man, a loving man. “Erotic” must here be understood in the Platonic sense, not in the sense of so-called psychology. We must see whether Callicles’ *eros* is erotic enough. We must see whether he does not see *eros* too much in the sense of self-preservation, and thus ruin *eros* as *eros*. We also see from here that Socrates’ rhetoric is erotic rhetoric. Proof: the *Phaedrus*. Socrates indicates that there are other passions which he may have in common with men other than Callicles. There may be passions which he has in common with Polus and Gorgias—for example, a certain thrill effected by competence or cleverness. It is easy for men to reveal their passions because there are always others who have the same passion. In other words, if each one had a passion peculiar to him, we couldn’t talk about it; there would be no means of communication. But there are no such passions which are absolutely peculiar to any individual. Each passion is known from experience also to others, though not necessarily to all others. This fact is a basis for human communication.

In d, [Socrates says], “We both love two things.” Socrates loves philosophy and Alcibiades; Callicles loves the Athenian *demos* and a young man called Demos, the son of Pylilampes. It appears from this remark that Socrates does not love the Athenian *demos*. The implication is that one cannot love both philosophy and the *demos*: either, or. In fact, this is *the* either, or, as we shall see. Why is that so? The *Gorgias* contains the severest indictment of the *demos*, the *polis*, that Plato ever wrote. This indictment is

---

<sup>v</sup> See Song of Solomon 8:6.

overstated in this dialogue, just as the indictment of poetry is overstated in the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, it seems that Plato simply rejects poetry. The real question is not whether poetry is bad; the question concerns what deserves the first place, philosophy or poetry. Since philosophy deserves the first place, it means that poetry not ruled by philosophy is bad; poetry ruled by philosophy is good. The *polis* cannot be the whole, the true community, the true common, but it claims to be that. It must be reduced to its proper proportion; otherwise, it is bad. Reduced to its proper proportion, it is good, and then it will be subservient to philosophy. The *polis* and the *demos* cannot occupy the highest place, and they are ultimately the same. In the beginning of the Third Book of the *Politics*, Aristotle tries to define what the citizen is. The first definition is the democratic citizen, which he then corrects.<sup>vi</sup> Why does the democratic definition suggest itself first? Ultimately because the *polis*, as *polis*, has a democratic bias,<sup>16</sup> [even if] it might be empirically anti-democratic. The thought that the *polis* must be subordinated to something higher is a thought that is very familiar to us, but in a different way. We know that the secular life of man is inferior to his religious life. In modern terms, we feel that culture is higher than the political life. Culture, of course, can be elegant dabbling; Gorgias and Polus are very cultured men.

The theme of the *Gorgias*, we remind ourselves again, is rhetoric—more precisely, public rhetoric. To understand rhetoric means to understand it in its relation to philosophy. By viewing rhetoric in the light of philosophy, Socrates intimates the limitations of philosophy itself. Philosophy cannot fulfill the necessary function which rhetoric can fulfill, namely, persuading the *demos*. The *demos* means not just the poor, but the non-philosophers. There is a gulf between Socrates and the *demos*. The accidental links, like Chaerephon, do not suffice. Socrates was unable to stem the *demos* in the trial of the generals.<sup>vii</sup> His failure then portended his failure in 399, when he was on trial. Socrates' art needs a supplement. A supplement can only be an improved and properly directed Gorgian rhetoric. In d, Socrates emphasizes that Callicles has two beloved ones. What does that mean? Socrates, too, has two beloved ones, Alcibiades and<sup>17</sup> [philosophy]. But not quite. Socrates, in loving Alcibiades, loves philosophy. Callicles' beloved one has only the name in common with the other—both are called “*demos*”—whereas Socrates' love of Alcibiades is in reality love of philosophy. Callicles' beloved one is explicitly said to be beautiful; the *demos* is not beautiful. Therefore, the defect of the one beloved makes it necessary for Callicles to love someone else, who is capable of being beautiful.

In [481]d–482a, Callicles repeats all the self-contradictions of his beloved ones. And if he happens to speak first, he retracts immediately if his beloved ones contradict him, and thus he contradicts himself. Socrates repeats the speeches of his beloved, that is to say, of philosophy, which always speaks of the same things, or the same things. Philosophy is less fickle than humans, which means there is also a certain fickleness in philosophy, due to the fact that philosophy is not wisdom, but only quest for wisdom. In this context here, the conversation with Polus is described as a philosophic discussion, which, as we know, cannot be literally true.

---

<sup>vi</sup> See *Politics* 1275b5–7.

<sup>vii</sup> See session 5, n. vii above.

In b–c: Since the thesis proven against Polus is a philosophic thesis, one cannot deny the thesis without contradicting oneself. What does that mean? One necessarily admits so much of the truth that<sup>18</sup> [one] cannot deny *the* truth without contradicting<sup>19</sup> [oneself]. To have a non–philosophic view is not possible without self–contradiction. Philosophy essentially produces agreement with oneself, not necessarily agreement with others. Rhetoric produces agreement with others, either one or many. Here in b, we find the famous Socratic oath “by the dog” in its most explicit form: “By the dog, god of the Egyptians.” The Egyptians were, according to Herodotus, excessively pious. They worshipped everything, and therefore dogs in particular. Let us assume that Socrates is excessively pious and therefore worships everything. Why does he swear “by the dog”? He does not swear “by the cat,” for example. In the *Republic*, the dog is faithful and protective.<sup>viii</sup> At this point, Callicles’ long speech begins at—<sup>ix</sup>

482c–486d: Socrates had restated his thesis here, that committing unjust acts without undergoing punishment is the greatest evil. He had linked up this assertion for the first time with philosophy. I believe this is the first time that the word “philosophy” occurs in the whole dialogue. This is very strange. In the *Gorgias* and *Polus* sections, the very word philosophy does not occur, and here it comes in. What does it mean? It is an ambiguous statement. It can mean that the thesis that suffering injustice is better than doing injustice is established by philosophy; it can also mean that the thesis is connected with philosophy as a choice of a way of life. Philosophy might lead to the conclusion that service to the common people is the best. Therefore, philosophy would only be a means to show us the best, but would not be the end; whereas Socrates asserts that it is both: it is the way to uncover the end and it is the end itself. Callicles seems to say that philosophy is required in order to establish the right way of life, but the right way of life does not consist in philosophizing: it must turn away from philosophizing to a higher pursuit. From here, we understand the general plan of what follows and the plan of Callicles’ long speech which we have here. First, Callicles must show that suffering injustice is the greatest evil, or doing injustice is very good. He shows this philosophically, by appealing from law or convention to nature. The ordinary views about the badness of doing injustice, he says, are based on convention and not nature. What he has to do first, then, is to blame law as law. Secondly, he will blame philosophy. After having used philosophy for blaming and subverting law as law, he rejects philosophy. The task of Socrates will therefore also be twofold. First, he has to praise the law, and, secondly, he has to praise philosophy. This will be the theme of the rest: the harmony between philosophy and the law. Since law is that by virtue of which<sup>20</sup> [justice] is, or is effective, it will, at the same time, be a proof of the harmony between philosophy and justice.

Callicles’ speech consists of three parts. In the first part, 482c–484c, Callicles tries to show the fundamental error committed by Polus and declares the truth about justice and injustice. In the second part, 484c–485e, he blames philosophy. In the last part, 485e–486[d], he applies the result to Socrates. After having shown that suffering injustice is worse than doing injustice, and that philosophy must not be chosen as a way of life, he

---

<sup>viii</sup> *Republic* 375e–376b.

<sup>ix</sup> There may have been a break in the tape here.

admonishes Socrates to choose the right way of life as Callicles has found it, the life of politics.

It is difficult to say who is superior or inferior, Callicles on the one hand or Gorgias and Polus on the other. Let us therefore concentrate on the character of Callicles and abstain, for the time being, from a full comparison. Callicles is an erotic man; Polus and Gorgias are not erotic men. Since to be erotic means here to be noble, to what extent does Callicles partake of that very kind of nobility of which he partakes in some degree? To understand this, you must take this crucial point into consideration: love means here to be able to forget oneself in the sight and the desire of the beautiful. Thus, it is directly opposed to self-preservation and that which is built on self-preservation, like money-making. We must also keep in mind that Callicles is serious; he has the seriousness of love. In the vulgar language of today, what comes to our mind is the serious business man—there is no nonsense here. But from the point of view suggested here, love is in itself more serious precisely because of this kinship between love and<sup>21</sup> [death], which is not so visible in the case of self-preservation—needless to say,<sup>22</sup> self-preservation is also connected with death (Hobbes calls the desire for self-preservation “fear of death”). The problem of Callicles will be whether he can really understand himself as an erotic man while taking this view of justice and injustice, or while taking<sup>23</sup> [the] view of philosophy which he does take. We must also keep in mind that, in this last part of the dialogue, the question of law or justice is inseparable from the question of philosophy. What can be the connection between the proposition “law is not merely an invention by low people” and the case of philosophy? What is the connection between justice and philosophy? Again we turn to the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, the just man, to the extent<sup>24</sup> [to] which a man can be just, is the philosopher, because to be just means to do one’s job well. The function of man is to understand, to think. Therefore, the man who thinks as well as possible, who thinks best, is just. According to the *Republic*, then, justice and philosophy are the same. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the *Gorgias* the defense of law and philosophy [are] identical. Needless to say,<sup>25</sup> there is another problem: justice is not exactly the same as law—we can distinguish between just and unjust laws. The first thing we must understand is Callicles’ long speech by which he lays down the law.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** If we understand by *demos* the non-philosophers and the people who are, as such, not even open to philosophy, then it applies to the *polis* as such. Only certain individuals in the *polis* would be open. *Demos* means the poor, but the greatest poverty is the poverty of complete ignorance; complete ignorance is the unawareness of one’s ignorance.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]<sup>x</sup>

**LS:** Friendship is a relationship which, in some cases, transcends justice. It doesn’t matter who gets the piece of pie. The harshness of justice disappears in such cases. One could also say that in one respect the *polis* is higher than friendship. The *polis* could not

---

<sup>x</sup> The transcript does not indicate a question at this point, but the shift in LS’s remarks suggests that he is addressing a new question.

exist if any communities were regarded as higher. Friendship as such presupposes the *polis*. The quality of men depends on the quality of the society to which they belong, at least to a considerable extent. Even the family remains defective if it is not part of the political society. The highest form of friendship is that which consists in common quest for truth, and this is superior to justice.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** There is again a reversal of roles here. There was a reversal between Socrates and Polus. The reversal here is indicated by the fact that Callicles attacked Socrates as a public speaker. Callicles is a philosopher. Later on, we see that the identification of the good and the pleasant is a position which is untenable. The general impression that the Callicles section is the most important part of the dialogue is well founded. This must, however, be qualified, because in the most important respects the Polus section is the most important. This is the section which shows the rhetoric of Socrates and its power, whereas in the case of Callicles, although Socrates uses<sup>26</sup> partly demonstrative arguments, Socrates fails. Socrates can silence Callicles relatively easily; he cannot convince him or persuade him. He could persuade Polus by a very poor argument, as we have seen. He cannot persuade Callicles, although he uses a much stronger argument. Callicles has a nobility as a human being which strikes one by the very way in which he speaks. Yet he is much less accessible to Socrates. What Plato means to show in this last part of the dialogue [are] the limits of Socrates' power of persuasion. To make it stick, he did not take a nasty boy like Anytus, the accuser of Socrates, but he took a man who liked Socrates and who, of all non-philosophers, presented the highest type. Callicles, one could say, is the best unphilosophic man presented in Plato. Anytus is simply an enemy of Socrates and a narrow man; Hippocrates, in the beginning of the *Protagoras*, is also a non-philosophic man, but he is very young. Callicles is a mature man, and here we see this possibility in its full development. It would have been easy to show the limitations of Socrates' rhetoric in a dialogue with Xanthippe, which was done in comedies, over, for example, buying a new hat. Socrates could give many rational arguments, and Xanthippe, at the conclusion of the argument, would repeat her first position. She would simply refuse to listen. One could see a similar case with Anytus in the *Meno*. Anytus refused to listen. But here we have a man who is friendly to Socrates and who is even willing to grant that philosophy is something very nice, who even uses philosophy for basing his<sup>27</sup> [opposition] to Socrates on what he believes to be philosophy—for example, the appeal to nature—and yet he is untouchable by Socrates.

The Callicles section begins literally in the same way in which the whole dialogue begins: “Nothing like asking him.” But there is one difference: In the beginning, the question is, “What is the power of Gorgias' art?” Callicles does not raise this question. Callicles does not ask this question of Socrates. Either he has not become aware of it or else he is not interested in it. He is interested in the more comprehensive question of how men should live. He does not have the technical interest of Gorgias and Polus. Callicles is completely dedicated—this is implied in his being a lover. He is completely dedicated to the opposite of philosophy, so much so that he cannot be persuaded. That opposite is what Socrates calls the *polis*.<sup>28</sup> [Callicles] is incapable of going beyond it. He has chosen

the way of life opposite to that of philosophy. He is so much advanced in it that he cannot be helped. The ultimate question would be: Why is there such an incompatibility between the philosophic and the political way of life? One cannot serve two masters, and to think the truth about the whole is incompatible, within the same individual, with taking completely serious everything in the political society. There are two wholes: the whole of society and the whole simply. The political man is the man who absolutizes the political whole, society. The philosopher absolutizes the true whole. And there is no immediate link between the two. This is only one, the most extreme, formulation, because Plato can also say that statesmanship in the highest sense is part of philosophy, and the most important part. One cannot see the relationship between philosophy and politics in the highest sense if one does not also see the tension between them; there is no simple harmony between the two. For example, when you talk about fundamental issues of politics,<sup>29</sup> there are many people who are perfectly satisfied by the fact that a certain value system is accepted by their society, or they are perfectly satisfied with the usefulness of certain opinions, so satisfied that, if the usefulness of those opinions is true, the question of the truth of those opinions does not enter into it—this is political, but it is not sufficient. Some people can leave it at that, and they can say that this is the wonderful ideology that will do the trick. But this is insufficient. For some, this is unbearable, and so it is bound to lead to friction, because [those] who raise the anterior question are annoying to the others.

The question is this: Can these things with which philosophers concern themselves—can this be of immediate effect on political society? Must this not be somehow diluted or transformed or watered down to become socially effective? The problem is blurred today by the belief in the popularization of science. One can state the problem as follows. There was a notion in the world, which is still going on, which implies that the truth has been discovered or is in an ever-progressing process of being discovered, and this discovery can be translated to those who do not participate in the process of discovery itself. This transmission of results is sufficient for solving their special problems. Plato thinks just the opposite. By presenting the view which is diametrically opposed to the modern view,<sup>30</sup> [he] gives us the opportunity to think more sharply and decisively about this difficulty, the difficulty inherent in modern science.

[end of tape]

---

<sup>1</sup> The unintelligible phrase “in the sense to time” has been deleted at the end of this sentence.

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “while.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “being.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “characteristic.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “being.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “and it.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “should.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “should.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “\_\_\_\_\_.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “which.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “vindicative.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “or.”

- 
- 14 Deleted “with.”  
15 Deleted “of.”  
16 Deleted “however.”  
17 Deleted “the *demos*.”  
18 Deleted “they.”  
19 Deleted “themselves.”  
20 Deleted “law.”  
21 Deleted “best.” It is possible that LS said “beauty” not “death.”  
22 Deleted “that.”  
23 Deleted “this.”  
24 Deleted “in.”  
25 Deleted “that.”  
26 Deleted “a.”  
27 Deleted “apposition.”  
28 Deleted “He.”  
29 Deleted “and then.”  
30 Deleted “it.”



## Session 7: February 8, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** We [began] last time to discuss the conversation between Socrates and Callicles, and we have been given some light as to the character of the whole conversation by the remark of Socrates that he and Callicles are lovers, which implies that Gorgias and Polus are not lovers. In connection with this, the question concerns now no longer rhetoric but the whole way of life: how men should live. I tried to explain the connection between these two things by saying that love has a seriousness of its own, which, for example, self-preservation would not have. We must keep this in mind. However, as important as that which Socrates and Callicles have in common might be, the difference is no less important. Socrates and Callicles love different things and different beings. Socrates loves Alcibiades and philosophy; Callicles, the Athenian *demos* and Demos, the son of Pyrilampes. Socrates loves Alcibiades for the sake of philosophy, for the sake of Alcibiades' promise. Callicles loves Demos, the son of Pyrilampes, because of a defect in the *demos*, the common people. The common people as a whole are not beautiful, whereas Demos, the son of Pyrilampes, is. The main point is this: the loves of Socrates and Callicles are mutually exclusive. No love is lost between Socrates and the *demos*—as is shown by the end of Socrates—and vice versa. The problem posed by this fact, by the disproportion between Socrates and the *demos*, can *only be solved by rhetoric*, by a kind of rhetoric which transcends Socrates' power and which does not yet exist, that is, the improved Gorgian rhetoric, a rhetoric<sup>1</sup> [which] is no longer deliberative and forensic—*that* exists, and this kind of rhetoric is uninteresting from the highest point of view. But we need a higher rhetoric.

The Polus section had shown that Socrates is a rhetorician. Socrates had succeeded in persuading Polus. For he succeeded not only in *refuting* Polus—you may refute a man and he may obstinately shake his head. But Polus has not only been refuted; he has been tamed at the same time. The result of his conversation with Socrates, and the way in which that result was reached, satisfied Polus. Therefore, we do not see yet why Socrates' rhetoric needs a supplement at all, [one] which Socrates himself cannot supply. The necessity for such a supplement which Socrates himself cannot supply will come out in the Callicles section. Socrates draws our attention to the issue right at the beginning: love of the *demos* or love of philosophy. There is no common ground between him and Callicles, except the fact that they have the same passion. But the objects of their passion are incompatible. This incompatibility between philosophy and the *demos* calls for a bridge between philosophy and the *demos* which Socrates cannot supply and which Gorgias or a pupil of Gorgias can supply, provided he accepts the direction which Socrates can give him.

We turn now to Callicles' long speech in 482c–486d. I remind you of the general problem. Socrates had restated his thesis that committing unjust acts without undergoing punishment is the greatest evil. He had linked up his thesis, for the first time, in his welcome to Callicles, with philosophy. This link-up is ambiguous. It means that the thesis that doing injustice without undergoing punishment is the greatest evil has been

established by philosophy and, secondly, [that] the thesis regarding the status of injustice is connected with the choice of philosophy as a way of life. There is a difference between these two points: a thesis established by philosophy and a thesis linked up with philosophy as a way of life. For philosophy might lead to the conclusion, for example, that service to the *demos* is the best. In this case, philosophy would only be the mean[s], not the end. It would only be the way toward the end, not the end itself, whereas Socrates asserts that it is both. Philosophy establishes that philosophy is *the* right way of life. It is important to make this distinction in order to understand Callicles. For Callicles will say the right way of life has to be established by philosophy, but philosophy establishes that not philosophy but the *political* way of life is the right way of life—that [is], philosophy might lead to the good life, but the good life is not philosophizing. The other possibility is that the good life itself is philosophizing. From this follows the general character of Callicles' long speech. He asserts first that suffering injustice is the greatest evil and doing injustice is very good. But this is contrary to all ordinary notions, contrary to all conventions, contrary to the law. It is according to *nature* that suffering injustice is the greatest evil. Nature is here understood in opposition to law and convention; Callicles must therefore criticize law and convention as such. That's the first point he has to make. In the second point, he has to show that philosophy is not the right way of life; he has to blame philosophy. His speech consists, therefore, of two parts: blame of law, blame of philosophy. Conversely, Socrates [first] will have<sup>2</sup> to praise the law, and secondly he will have to<sup>3</sup> [praise] philosophy.

Now we turn to the long speech itself. The first part is 482c–484c, in which Callicles says Polus has committed a fundamental error, and then he goes on to declare the truth, the truth being the blame of law. First, the fundamental error of Polus: 482c–483[a]. Just as Socrates had begun his welcome speech by referring to the passion which he and Callicles have in common, Callicles begins his speech by referring to the passion which Gorgias and Polus have in common. The latter passion, however, is not love, but fear, or a sense of shame. They were afraid simply to reject the popular notions. They were, of course, ashamed or afraid to do<sup>4</sup> [so], because they<sup>5</sup> [are] rhetoricians, and rhetoric lives in the element of popular notions, whereas, according to Callicles, Socrates is truly a public speaker, a public orator. Socrates simply accepts the common or popular notion; Gorgias and Polus only refuse to reject them. Socrates accepts them without qualification, and this is shocking because Socrates, according to Callicles, pretends to seek the truth, and that means he pretends to seek nature,<sup>6</sup> [but] the popular common notions are not natural, but conventional. *Nomos*, law or convention, is fundamentally distinguished from nature.<sup>1</sup> The crucial thesis of certain Greek thinkers is that all moral distinctions are merely convention. We must see, of course, how far Callicles goes. He says that Socrates accepts these common notions about right and wrong which are merely convention, although he pretends to seek the truth. Socrates is dishonest, Callicles says. For, as he puts it,<sup>7</sup> [Socrates] does evil in his speeches, in popular parlance, he swindles. But he swindles only in speeches. What Callicles says is that Socrates is not a philosopher but a slave of these popular notions, a slave of the *demos*—a public speaker who desires to win

---

<sup>1</sup> This sentence may be only the gist of what LS said. In the transcript, the transcriber indicates that he or she is paraphrasing by putting in parentheses: “(LS explains that *nomos*, law or convention, is fundamentally distinguished from nature.)”

public applause and thus to win—whereas Callicles is a philosopher and not a slave of the *demoi*. In other words, Callicles gives exactly the opposite diagnosis of his relation to Socrates as Socrates himself had done.

What was the error that Polus had committed? Polus, according to Callicles, had meant [that] to do injustice is base according to convention but<sup>8</sup> [not] according to nature. According to nature, to suffer injustice is base, because what is by nature noble is by nature good, what is by nature base is by nature bad. To do injustice is by nature good, to suffer injustice is by nature bad. Polus had said doing injustice is base. Callicles says that Socrates has taken advantage of a certain imprecision of Polus. What Polus had meant was that doing injustice is bad according to *convention* and not base simply, and what is base by convention is not at all base by nature. Therefore, what Polus had meant was that doing injustice is noble by nature, and what is noble by nature is good. Polus had not contradicted himself at all, according to Callicles' analysis. Whether he is right in that is a very long question. It is not clear whether Polus had recognized something which is by *nature* noble or by nature base at all, to say nothing of other difficulties. Polus, at any rate, had failed to make a clear distinction between what is noble by nature and what is noble by convention, and that was the reason for his downfall. Socrates took unfair advantage of this lack of clarity of Polus; he attacked Polus by starting, not from the conventional angle, but from the angle of nature. This point of Callicles is correct—namely, Socrates tried to define happiness without speaking of justice. Happiness is a natural good; whether justice is natural or not was controversial. To that extent, Callicles gives the correct diagnosis.

In 482e–483, you note that Callicles traces the self-contradiction of Gorgias and Polus to a lack of daring. They were afraid to set forth the thesis that the<sup>9</sup> [moral] distinctions are simply conventional. Socrates had traced the self-contradictions to lack of philosophy. That we must keep in mind, whether [or not] Callicles' view that the self-contradictions of Gorgias and Polus arose from lack of daring is correct. Polus, then, had made a fundamental blunder by not making a clear distinction between nature and convention. This is what Callicles is now going to do in 483a–484c.

The first point, 483a–483b: Callicles proves that suffering injustice is both bad and base. Polus' thesis was that suffering injustice is bad, but it is not base. Callicles says what is by nature bad is by nature base, just as what is by nature good is by nature noble. What is by convention noble is<sup>10</sup> [the] opposite of what is by nature noble. Suffering injustice is by nature bad; hence, it is by nature base. How do we know these premises, [that] (1) what is by nature good is by nature noble, [and] (2) it is by nature good not to suffer wrong? Callicles does not establish these premises. Does he have a justification for this failure? In these points he agrees with Socrates. What, then, is controversial between Callicles and Socrates? Callicles says that, to say the least, to suffer injustice is by nature a greater evil than doing injustice. That he has to establish, because this is questioned by Socrates. His argument can be stated as follows. What is by nature noble can be seen most clearly if we look at a real man as distinguished from a slave, but the real man is characterized by the fact that he is<sup>11</sup> [able] to take care of himself, to help himself, to repel assailants. Therefore, the general notion of what constitutes the real man is a sufficient argument for Callicles to assert that to suffer injustice is a greater evil than

doing injustice. He presupposes in this the following equation: what is by nature noble is complete or healthy in body or soul—a being which can stand on its own feet, as it were. This is normal, this is healthy, this is complete. The human being who can stand on his feet to the highest degree is the real man, and the real man is the man who does not stand for nonsense, but hits back; he hits back better than he was hit. The question, then, is exclusively this: whether Callicles sees the complete human—completion, health, perfection. Taken in itself and disregarding other considerations, Callicles is right within these limits. This section, 483a–b is the only proof which Callicles gives, if this is a proof. The other argument has no longer this proof character.

In 483b–c, Callicles has to explain the vulgar error that suffering injustice is preferable to doing injustice. From here on Callicles uses the word “I believe,” “I think,” “I fancy,” seven times. He had not done this before. This is his way of indicating that this is no longer proven. The only unqualified assertion of Callicles is the preceding appeal to the notion of the real man, as distinguished from his opposite, the slave. Here, in explaining the vulgar error, Callicles says that [that] doing injustice, or rather trying to get more than others, is unjust, as some say, is an artifice of the<sup>12</sup> [weak] or the many, who are the makers of law and who seek to depreciate having more than others because they seek their own utility. By nature all men seek to have more, to overreach others. This attempt, however, is condemned to failure by most men, because they are not able<sup>13</sup> or clever enough to get more. These many or weak are in danger of getting less all the time. Therefore, they assemble and make it a law that no one must try to get more; they gain by that. In a state of nature, they would gain less. But those who suffer are the clever and strong ones who would get more if those foolish laws were not established. In other words, the ordinary notion of justice is merely conventional. This convention has its root in the self-interest of the many weak. In this is already implied a certain notion of what is truly right and wrong. Callicles is going to make this explicit in the sequel.

483c–484c: It is by nature just that the superior have more than the inferior, says Callicles. How does he know that? He says it shows itself in all living beings. What does he mean by that? Big fishes eat little fishes, lions eat lambs, lambs don’t eat lions, etc. So nature shows it in all living beings, and in humans as well. But here he makes the qualification: he says in human *societies*, by which he implies that this superiority of the stronger over the weaker is obscured in the case of human individuals, because there convention is so powerful that we don’t see it. But if we look at societies, we see it. There we see that the strong states give the law to the weak states, etc. He gives some examples, human examples. As a matter of fact, only two examples in d. These examples are Persian kings. But the examples are inept. There is, first, Xerxes. What happened to Xerxes? Did he impose his law on Athens and Sparta? No, he was defeated. Then he refers to Xerxes’ father, and I believe that this is a mistake of his, because I think he means Cyrus, the great-grandfather of Xerxes, who fell in a war against the Scythians, which again does not seem to prove a clear case of the stronger imposing his will on the weaker. Callicles hesitates to use Athenian examples. Because Athens would be a beautiful example—how she imposed her will on the weaker Greek cities. Can you imagine why he would have hesitated to use Athenian examples? If the dialogue was in 405, this was about when Athens was about to be stripped of her empire. In addition,

Gorgias is present, a man coming from<sup>14</sup> [Sicily], a big reminder of Athenian desire to have more, which led to folly. We see from these little things that Callicles is not a good speaker or orator. A good orator must find apt examples.

In 483e, Callicles opposes to the ordinary notions of justice, not the expedient or the pleasant, but what is by nature just—the natural right. The *right*, not the expedient. He uses also another term: he says “the nature *of* the just”, “the nature *of* the right,” or even—and this is an extreme paradox—“the *law* of nature.” If law and nature are opposites, then a law of nature is a contradiction in terms. This is, as far as I know, the earliest occurrence of the term “law of nature,” if we agree, as is today generally assumed, that the *Gorgias* was written earlier than the *Timaeus*.<sup>ii</sup> Here, in this context, he swears by Zeus. There is some notion in his mind that this law of nature is a law of Zeus. Zeus’ law was, of course, not so absolutely just, since he dethroned his own father—which shows that there is a problem. This law of nature, or the natural right, is distinguished for Callicles from the law which we make, we humans. Callicles does not claim to be one of those super “he-men” who can rebel against the human law.

A word about these terms, “what is by nature right” and “the nature *of* right.” What is by nature right is in itself different from what is right by convention; that it certainly implies. But it may also imply that it is opposed to what is right by convention. But when<sup>15</sup> [Callicles] speaks of the nature of right, he means that which is natural *in* right, what is natural *in* law as generally admitted. Therefore, the term “the nature *of* right” occurs, for example, in Epicurus, who denied natural right proper. He had to raise the question “What is justice?”—though nothing is by nature just or unjust. Justice, then, is a kind of convention—convention concluded with the intention to avoid harm and being harmed. But this convention is the *nature of justice*. So you see, a man can speak of the nature of justice without admitting natural right. Present day legal positivists will deny natural right in any manner or form, but they must speak of the nature of right, of the nature of law. This is the difference between these two terms. Callicles admits—and this is crucial—that there is something by nature right and by nature noble.

When trying to understand Callicles’ doctrine, one cannot help comparing it with the seemingly identical doctrine presented by Plato elsewhere. Does Callicles teach the same thing as Glaucon and Thrasymachus? The doctrine of Callicles reminds one primarily of the doctrine of Glaucon. Glaucon, however, does not admit a natural right. Glaucon tries to explain how the notion of right, as a purely conventional notion, arises. “To wish to have more, that is by nature good,” say Callicles and Glaucon. But it does make a difference if you say what is by nature good is also just by nature, as Callicles says, or<sup>16</sup> [you] say that the notion of justice and injustice does not enter at all when we speak of what is natural. Thrasymachus’ thesis is entirely different from that of Callicles with which it is usually connected. Thrasymachus does not speak of what is by nature just at all. He simply says that there is nothing by nature just. Everything which is just is so by virtue of positive law—what is now called legal positivism. Thrasymachus goes one step further and says, “What does this mean?” If the positive law is the origin of right and wrong, then the lawmaker is the originator of right and wrong. But who is the lawmaker?

---

<sup>ii</sup> See *Timaeus* 83e.

That differs from society to society. In a democracy, it is the common people; in an oligarchy, the few; in a monarchy, it is the monarch, etc. But what do they all have in common, the *demos* as lawmaker, the few as lawmakers, the king as lawmaker? They are the powerful in every society. Therefore, going one step further, he says what is right is the determination by the strong. That this is just is not<sup>17</sup> [said]—one could say that this is implied, but it would be only an implication, and that makes all the difference. Callicles, then, certainly speaks of a natural right, of something which is by nature right and by nature noble.

In 484c, the conventional right, which does not allow the strong to have more, is unjust. The conventional right degrades the best. Callicles' statements are all moral statements, not statements of a physicist. Callicles goes on. He accuses us, including himself—the many. He accuses us as unjust, and that is quite amazing. By accusing himself of injustice, he is just in the highest Socratic sense. Callicles does not think of his own benefit. He belongs to the many; he is well served by equal laws. But he thinks that men better than he are harmed by<sup>18</sup> [them]. He does not think of his own benefit and forgets himself in the sight of the higher. He is a noble man, an erotic man, a man who can forget himself in favor of that which he loves. In this passage, he speaks of the natural right as “shining forth.” There is a splendor of natural right, a nobility. To set the crown on his praise of the beauty of natural right, he quotes from the poet Pindar. This passage is also quoted by Plato in the *Laws*.<sup>iii</sup> The reading by the best manuscripts has been corrected in all editions with a view to the way in which the verse is quoted elsewhere. This is, of course, impossible. Why could not Callicles have misquoted it, especially since he says “I don't remember the poem very well?” It is possible that what Callicles said, as opposed from what Pindar had written, is that the law does violence to what is justice, what is most just. For example, it is most just that one should not take away other people's oxen. But the law, praised by Pindar, had this character, that it does violence to such prohibitions as theft, robbery, murder, etc. Callicles makes Pindar praise law to the extent to which this law is most unjust.

Let us observe a progress in his speech. First, there is an appeal from law to what is by nature right, by nature just; then, the law of nature; then finally, with the words of Pindar, the law which is the king of all<sup>19</sup> [mortals], which does violence to what is most just. Is Callicles opposed to the law or not? He says he is opposed, but introduces the law very emphatically twice: first, when he speaks of the law of nature, and then when he quotes Pindar. What does this reveal? Let us assume that that which the philosophers seek—and this is, I think, presupposed by Callicles—is nature, as distinguished from law or convention. Callicles appeals from law or convention to nature, but this nature appears immediately in the form of law. What does that mean? If law—and nature is the theme of philosophy—if law is the element of political action, then by making a strange combination of the two things, he reveals the fact that he is part philosopher and part politician. The term “law of nature,” as used by Callicles, corresponds to his soul, which is half-philosophic and half-political. This will come out in the next passage, where he speaks of the role philosophy should play in a well-ordered life.

---

<sup>iii</sup> *Laws* 690b.

484c–485e: Callicles had appealed from law to nature, not being a public speaker as Socrates is. He seems to have argued philosophically, disregarding completely popular notions. At the end, he had appealed to the law, Pindar’s law, and in the long speech he had said seven times, “I believe,” which means not proven. He is aware, somehow, that his argument was not philosophic. In 484c, he says one has to transcend philosophy in order to see the truth—the truth about the beauty of having more cannot be established by philosophy, although philosophy shows that big fishes swallow small ones, etc. But the question is: In the direction of what? Later on, in 497c, Socrates will say that Callicles has been initiated into the lesser mysteries and not into the higher ones. There is a kind of mystery above philosophy to which Callicles tacitly appeals. What Callicles says here in his speech about philosophy is well known from another famous Greek document, namely, Pericles’ funeral speech. Pericles says, “we love philosophy with thrift,”<sup>iv</sup> which could mean “we love philosophy and do not get soft habits from soft pursuits like sitting around and discussing.” It can also mean “we love philosophy with moderation.” This is what Callicles means: [the] lifelong pursuit of philosophy is incompatible with gentlemanship. A gentleman can have a nice education at Oxford, Cambridge, or similar places, but afterwards serious business begins.

484d: To devote oneself entirely to philosophy means to be ignorant of the laws. A man who depreciates law in the way in which he did should not complain that there are people who are ignorant of the law. To devote oneself entirely to philosophy means that one is ignorant of the law, [of] political things, and especially of the characters of men. A man who devotes himself to philosophy will not find his way among human beings. This is stated in a different way, though not fundamentally different, in a famous dialogue of Plato’s, the *Theaetetus*. There is a passage in which Socrates describes to an old mathematician, Theodorus, to the great enjoyment of that mathematician, that a truly theoretical man would not even know whether his neighbor is a human being or a cat, because he doesn’t care for such things.<sup>v</sup> The mathematician, though, is pleased by this prospect of not having to worry about such uninteresting things, but for Callicles this is the severest objection. What Callicles means is that if you want to succeed in getting more, you must know the laws which you try to evade. Callicles, in other words, is concerned not with nature, but exclusively with human things and with success in human things. There are some little points which one must mention because they give the flavor to his blame of philosophy. In 484e, he contrasts the situation of a philosopher coming into the political arena and becoming ridiculous and then a great Athenian statesman, say, Pericles himself, coming to a group of philosophizing people and then Pericles becomes ridiculous. When he talks of the politicians coming to the philosophers, he says only “the speeches,” whereas in the previous remark, where he speaks of the philosopher coming into the arena, in d, he speaks of speeches qualified.<sup>vi</sup> The idea is clear: speeches simply are philosophic speeches; the other ones need a qualification.

---

<sup>iv</sup> See Thucydides 2.40.1. LS’s quotation is imprecise here. The line in Thucydides reads: *philokaloumen te gar met’ euteleias kai philosophoumen aneu malakias* (“For we love beauty with economy, and we philosophize without softness”).

<sup>v</sup> *Theaetetus* 174a–b.

<sup>vi</sup> For the meaning of “qualified,” see 484d3–5.

In 485a, he speaks of the noble. It is noble to partake properly of both philosophy and politics: of philosophy, when you are in college; politics, later on. In 485b, he compares philosophy in mature men to the lisping of baby talk. Baby talk is sweet in a baby, but in an older person it is simply absurd and deserves whipping. The same goes for philosophy. If a boy of twenty takes philosophy seriously, that's fine, as fine as baby talk of a two-year old. But if he is thirty, whipping is the only thing to be done. What does this mean? Callicles reveals his soul here. Not only that he dislikes philosophy, but he alludes to something which is by nature proper. To study philosophy after a certain age is by nature indecent—not according to some foolish prejudice by the Athenians, but by nature it is improper, ignoble. Having Socrates in front of him, he almost says, “You deserve to be whipped.” This implicit reference to what is by nature indecent and improper is of<sup>20</sup> [the same] character as the appeal to what is by nature right, by nature noble, the law of nature, the law of Zeus, which is higher than any human laws. Callicles represents the anti-philosophical man. These so-called sophists, who simply oppose nature and convention and who say that all moral distinctions are merely convention, are in a way anti-philosophic, but they are not representative of the anti-philosophic man proper. They partook, though in a questionable way, of philosophy. Callicles, I would suggest, represents the anti-philosophic man at his best, whereas people like Anytus would not. In the sequel, we shall see that even in the best case the anti-philosophic man is immune to Socrates' rhetoric.

The last part of Callicles' long speech, 485e–486d: Callicles now applies this lesson about the proper treatment of philosophy, the proper role of philosophy in life, to the culprit, to Socrates. In e: Callicles feels toward Socrates like a friend, like a brother, but like a brother with whom he profoundly disagrees. In the beginning of the dialogue, we noted that Chaerephon was a man who is particularly preoccupied with his brother, and Socrates had tried to settle the problem between him and his brother, as Xenophon tells us.<sup>vii</sup> Here the same scene reappears again. This has broad implications—one of them being that Callicles has no *eros* for Socrates, because *eros* between brothers is improper, nor, for that matter, Socrates for Callicles. I have to refer from time to time<sup>21</sup> [to] certain Greek prejudices about the relations, erotic relations, between men, to which Plato, of course, constantly refers. Between brothers such relations would be as improper as relations between brothers and sisters in our opinion. Both Callicles and Socrates are erotic, but there is no erotic relationship between Callicles and Socrates. Feeling toward Socrates like a brother, Callicles gives him the best advice he can give him, namely, to turn away from philosophy. In this connection he makes the remark, “such a noble nature of the soul as you, Socrates, have.” That's very tactful. There is no noble nature to Socrates' body, according to common views, because Socrates was notoriously ugly. Then he quotes again a few verses from Euripides. There are some minor changes which Callicles makes in the Euripidean text, which should be mentioned. Euripides had spoken of a female or womanly appearance; Callicles replaces this by a boyish, boy-like appearance. Euripides speaks of a spear; Callicles replaces this by trial. Euripides spoke of wars; Callicles replaces that by affairs. To summarize: Callicles makes such changes in the Euripidean poem as befit a civilian: his weapons are supplied by rhetoric; he is not a

---

<sup>vii</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.2.



warrior. If he were a warrior, the whole dialogue couldn't arise, because then he would appear perhaps in the entourage of Laches and Nicias and not in the entourage of Gorgias.<sup>viii</sup>

In [486]a–d: Why is this such good advice that Socrates should turn away from philosophy? Socrates, says Callicles, would be the victim of any accuser, however low. He couldn't help himself. His accuser could bring about Socrates' capital punishment, if he wished, and Socrates could not prevent it. This sounds like a prophesy, but Callicles did not seriously believe that Socrates would ever undergo capital punishment. He seems rather to believe that Socrates might be deprived of his whole fortune, that he might have to live like an outcast, or that he would be boxed on the ear. Callicles who despises rhetoric, public speaking, is of course in need of public speaking.

The next unit is from 486d–488b, where Socrates describes the situation as it exists in the conversation with Callicles.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** Due to the particular composition of Callicles' soul, he cannot help giving things a political interpretation. Therefore, the philosophic distinction takes on a political meaning; therefore, what is primarily nature, as opposed to convention, becomes, without his being aware of it, the law or convention of nature. This, in the particular context, is a contradiction reflecting the contradiction within him, a man who philosophizes up to a point and then forgets it, just as he forgets his baby-talk. The consequence is a kind of educated, cultured man, but not a philosophic man, because philosophy is merely a means for raising his expressions. Though his speech is highly rhetorical, it is not meant as a rhetorical exhibition. He possesses certain rhetorical powers, but he does not want to exhibit his power. What Plato does in every dialogue, though it is not always equally visible, is a mirror of all of us. If we could stand at a distance and really look into a mirror, we would see that we are involved in certain contradictions, though not necessarily<sup>22</sup> [Calliclean] contradictions. Some terrible blemish of our soul would be revealed, and then we would have to begin to do something about it. Even Socrates might have some, although it would be more remote in this case.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]<sup>ix</sup>

**LS:** If law is a fundamental fraud, you disregard it completely. But to disregard it means to go back to a state of complete savagery in which not even the strongest can have more, because there is nothing to get more of. The right thing, then, is to have the *polis*, to have the laws, and then to exploit the stupidity of the fools. The real life of nature, if thought through, is the life of the tyrant. But the tyrant necessarily presupposes a *polis*. It presupposes, therefore, the basic fraud, believed in by all except him. Therefore, it is indeed a<sup>23</sup> [synthesis]—nature and convention—but you must spell out the terms.

---

<sup>viii</sup> Laches and Nicias, Athenian generals, are the primary interlocutors in Plato's *Laches*.

<sup>ix</sup> Given the reply LS gives to this question, one can guess that it was the question concerning anthropology that LS loosely restates at the start of the next class session (session 8).

Otherwise, it sounds as innocent as many present day social scientists' assertions. [That] Callicles<sup>24</sup> [is] an unphilosophic man shows itself in the fact that he knows only such substances which people can take away from him. We must not do Callicles the injustice of making a modern relativist out of him. What he has in mind is not this or that peculiar convention, or this or that society, but *the* fundamental convention on which *every* society rests. What he says is that every society rests on the same fundamental convention, namely, that all should be equally subject to the law, whatever the law may be, and that is what he attacks.

Could not a desire for acquisition be natural to man? Which does not mean that it is good. It could arise without convention telling him "be acquisitive." Just as love and hate, admiration, ambition, etc., arise in man by nature, the desire for wealth could be natural too. There are, for instance, societies in which jealousy is taboo. This means that when a foreign guest comes, he must be given the wife of the host. This does not prove that there are no feelings of jealousy in this man, just as it does not mean that if it is strictly forbidden to get drunk, people don't have the desire to drink and to get drunk.<sup>25</sup> [What chance] do these anthropologists have to look into these people so they can see their passions? If they were free from these passions, I would say that they are amazingly good men, and I would wonder what conditions made them so good—and maybe we ought to have the same conditions here. Both Callicles and Socrates are satisfied to say that the desire to have more has its roots in the nature of man, and if it does not develop it is due to the extreme poverty of the society. The power of habit, especially when based on religion, can be very strong. But [so strong] that it should eradicate completely these desires which you cannot<sup>26</sup> escape unless you are a very<sup>27</sup> [reflective] and thoughtful person? To see a beautiful thing and to desire it is, without reflection or interjection of something on a higher level, inevitable. This may be an old habit, but the old habit alone can only be understood on the assumption that the habit is needed in order to prevent the full development of these desires.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** Callicles takes the example of the lion, not a group of lions. Rebellion does not presuppose that his fellow lions join in the rebellion. I think this is just a modernistic, socialistic prejudice. Why could not individuals rebel? They could not make a social rebellion, that is probably true. But why could not the rebellion of an individual lead eventually to a social rebellion after a certain number of individuals had been infected by that individual? . . . Bohemians are not rebels. Leaving aside the question of whether to be a rebel is good, we smile about these people. They don't know what they are doing. They are nice people, and you shouldn't take them so seriously. Let us leave it at that. From Plato's point of view, there is no question that man has in himself a desire to have more of the pleasant things, though this, too, is a question of degree—some people are simply good natured. The only true remedy against it is understanding. This understanding must be acquired by actualizing the potential understanding.

The next section, 486b–488b: Here Socrates describes the situation as it exists in the conversation with Callicles. We know that both Callicles and Socrates are lovers.

Socrates loves philosophy, Callicles does not. This might disqualify Callicles. Therefore, Socrates establishes now the fact that Callicles is perfectly qualified for such a conversation. In 486b, Socrates says, “If I had a golden soul, you, Callicles, would fulfill for me the function of a certain kind of stone; you could test me, whether my soul is of pure gold or not.” One must think this simile through. Socrates says to Callicles, “You would be much less valuable than I”—a stone being less valuable than gold—“but you would be very valuable to me for bringing out my excellence, my superiority.” Whether Socrates’ soul is golden or not can be questioned, but it seems certain that Callicles is a stone of the kind indicated—the<sup>28</sup> [touchstone]. The stone would be used not only for testing Socrates’ nature, but also the cultivation which he had given to his soul. No cultivation of the stone is presupposed or alluded to. In e, you see a slow transition to the explanation of this simile. Socrates says, “If you, Callicles, were to agree with what my soul opines, then that which my soul opines is true.” Socrates has certain opinions—for example, that suffering injustice is a lesser evil than doing injustice. Whether this is true, we don’t know; it has not yet been proven. But if Callicles will agree with it, it has been proven. Callicles will be *the* testing stone.

In [486]e–[488]a, Socrates gives some reasons. Callicles possesses all the qualities which someone testing souls must possess. Testing souls means testing the truth of opinions held by souls. These qualities are: knowledge or science, good will, and frankness. In the Greek manuscript, “good will” is really “good repute.”<sup>x</sup> Because *doxa* means good repute, it can be replaced by good will. A tester of the soul must have knowledge, science, of what is good or perfect or true. He also must have opinion, which is another meaning of that word *doxa*. He must have true opinion about this man here. According to Socrates or Plato, you cannot have knowledge or science about any individual, only opinion. Secondly, he must have willingness to tell that man what he has seen when looking at him in the light of the truth. Good will is in this analysis not needed in addition to knowledge, opinion, and frankness, for, according to Socrates, knowledge guarantees good will. On the other hand, knowledge does not guarantee frankness. Think of the physician who has perfect knowledge of the disease and does not tell the patient because the patient’s knowledge of the disease might prevent proper treatment. But if we turn now to the later formulation, knowledge, good will, and frankness are the condition for testing opinions. Callicles possesses these qualities. Men like Callicles are extremely rare. In a–b: many men are not wise; only few are wise, but not all of them would care for Socrates, for example. Among the few who are wise and who care for one, not everyone is frank. To find the three qualities is a kind of miracle. Quite a few questions arise at this point. Socrates says that Gorgias and Polus were wise and men of good will, but lacking frankness. Now we have a paragon who is wise and has good will and is frank. Therefore, what will come out in this section will be the absolute truth—“the perfection of truth,” as it is called a little bit later.

---

<sup>x</sup> LS is referring to 487a3: *doxan* from the manuscripts is replaced by most editors with *eunoian*, the original source of which is Olympiodorus’ paraphrase. At 487b7, the manuscripts have *eunous*.

Socrates says by implication: up to the Callicles conversation, we haven't found out anything. Everything will depend on this second part of the work. This condition is now specified. The first-rate quality of the second part of the *Gorgias* depends on the qualities of Callicles—on Callicles being wise, a man of good will, and frank. If any of these qualifications is spurious, what follows then? We have to reconsider the whole thing. Question: Is Callicles wise, a man of good will, and frank? In reading Plato, you cannot do what you do when reading anthropological literature. You have to check and test the prejudices and competence of it; you cannot simply quote it as absolute truth. We must form a judgment about Callicles' qualities here defined, and, on that judgment, our judgment of the whole dialogue depends. Is<sup>29</sup> [Callicles] a wise man? How is it proved that he is a wise man here? In 487b: "Many Athenians would grant it." Is this the proof that Callicles is wise? At least it's questionable. I think we can form a bit of our own judgment by seeing how he behaves in the dialogue, and I would suggest tentatively that he is not wise.

How about his other quality, the quality of good will? How is it proven that he has good will toward Socrates? The proof is this: Callicles gives to Socrates the same advice that he had given to his most intimate friends. Hence, he must have good will toward Socrates. Is this a conclusive argument? Let us assume Callicles has a partisan attitude against philosophy—deeply convinced, but partisan. That would, of course, show by his friends. It would show itself also toward Socrates or anyone else. In other words, the motivation could be in all cases malevolence against philosophy, and this would show itself on all levels. If someone has a prejudice of a racial kind, he will express it<sup>30</sup> [in] all conditions. Therefore, his openness toward Socrates in this respect is not necessarily a sign of friendship, but a situation parallel to the man with racial prejudice who would speak of it openly before anyone. The question raised is this: What is the primary motivation of Callicles? If it is a disgust<sup>31</sup> [at] philosophy—and that seems to be the case—that would explain why he would express it to anyone, regardless of whether he had good will toward that person or not. What Socrates says is that "Callicles has benevolence toward me, so he would not withhold the truth from me in order to harm me." As I see it, Callicles' dislike of philosophy would necessarily include malevolence to Socrates if Socrates does not listen to him. For example, Socrates' benevolence toward his children is not affected by his concern with philosophy. His interest toward his children might be affected, but not his benevolence. Question: Would Socrates himself have had good will or benevolence? Benevolence means a simple good-naturedness, which does not go very far indeed and is not the same as love.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]<sup>xi</sup>

**LS:** If you take knowledge in the deep sense in which he means it, then benevolence or good will is a matter of course. So we must have understood this in a more colloquial sense. In the summary, it is said explicitly that both Gorgias and Polus are wise and friends. They only lack the third qualification, frankness, whereas Callicles has both. If

---

<sup>xi</sup> Given the reply LS gives to this question, one can guess that it was the question concerning the requirements of philosophic discussion to which LS refers in the next class session.

someone has very strong convictions for or against something, he is likely to preach that to everyone. This does not prove benevolence to that particular person. This much is clear. The meaning of the whole dialogue depends on the judgment as to whether Callicles is wise, of good will toward Socrates, and frank. If he does not meet one of these three qualifications, the dialogue cannot possibly lead to *the* truth, according to the explicit statement of Socrates. Needless to say, we have not yet raised the question<sup>32</sup> [from] the other angle: Must only Callicles have these qualities? What about Socrates? Is it sufficient for Callicles to have these three qualities and Socrates is unwise, lacking in benevolence, and lacking in frankness? I believe the answer is given by the simple proof of Callicles' wisdom: "You are wise—at least many Athenians would say so." That's no proof. It is even a prejudice against Callicles' being wise. Therefore, we have to read the refutation of Callicles with special care. We still have to devote much attention to these three qualifications. Socrates makes here a statement which applies to *all* discussions. Compare the *Republic* 450<sup>33</sup>[d–e]. There Socrates says that one can say the truth among sensible people. That's very important. Two conditions are mentioned there: reasonableness or sensibility and friendship.

**Student:** Are we to assume that Socrates was sincere?

**LS:** "Sincere" is a strong word. There are habits pertaining to conversations which we praise, though they are not identical with what we call now "sincerity." One is called "politeness." When Socrates says, "if I had a golden soul," if Callicles would understand this, it would be very hard for Callicles, gold being much more valuable than any stone. He doesn't speak here of any jewels; he speaks of a stone. Secondly, there is another fact to which Callicles later on refers, where he says, "Socrates, you are ironical." Socrates was famous for his irony. Irony, according to Aristotle, is a virtue of intercourse. What does irony mean? Literally, it means dissimulation. Here it is understood as a noble kind of dissimulation. Aristotle refers to it in the *Ethics* when he says that it is brutish to reveal one's superiority to others.<sup>xii</sup> To the extent to which Socrates shows himself less wise than<sup>34</sup> he is, that's irony. If sincerity means that one says what one<sup>35</sup> [thinks] to everyone, regardless of the circumstances, Socrates is not sincere, but no reasonable man would be sincere. Sincerity is reasonable only when the well-being of the person to whom you are talking depends on your being sincere. For example, if you<sup>36</sup> [sell] him something and you are not sincere about the quality of the merchandise, or if someone wants to know about the progress of his studies. But in some cases it can be harmful to be sincere. If a student were to ask me a question and I could not answer it without at the same time telling him what I thought about a fellow student, then it might be improper for me to answer that question. It might do harm to that other person.

So sincerity must be defined; there are limits to it from any point of view. Here, in Socrates, if you take it in a simple way the moral question does not appear so clearly, although it is there. Socrates jokes very frequently. A joke means to say something in front of people, and not in all cases do the other people know what it means. For example, Socrates says, "I love Alcibiades." That is taken by everyone in the way it was understood by the average Athenian, namely, when an older person is in love with a

---

<sup>xii</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1127b22–26.

beautiful young man. It is sure that's not what it meant, but it was understood that way, and he did not find it necessary to counteract that misinterpretation—that's irony. In addition, in every teaching in a classroom, as every teacher knows, outside of some special sciences, it is necessary to make sweeping statements to suggest the problem. The qualification or the footnote can be appreciated only in the more advanced stage. Strictly speaking, such a statement without qualification is not true, but is absolutely necessary for starting the discussion. In such a conversation, a Socratic conversation, it is infinitely truer than it is of formal teaching.<sup>37</sup> We have so many examples. [For instance], the fact that Socrates says long speeches are bad—only short speeches. [That] is not true. We found that out. Similarly, when Socrates says these are the three qualities, we can be sure that this is not simple nonsense, but that it should be a final statement about<sup>38</sup> [the] qualities required for philosophic discussion, that is absolutely uncertain and, I would say, unlikely. It is a statement which is sufficiently clear and useful in this particular context. When you read the *Gorgias* as a whole, there is no doubt that Socrates did not regard Callicles either as wise or of good will toward him, or frank. The latter he may have admitted, but that which is admitted to Callicles is not a virtue. That can be due to a lack of self control, that is, Callicles' frankness. Frankness in this context here means frankness in front of many. Why frankness in front of many should contribute to the level of philosophic discussion is not so obvious. (In this respect the statement in the *Republic* is more obvious.) But if the other person is intelligent and if he has a trust in the person with whom he talks—these are the necessary conditions. How you would speak of these or other subjects in front of many is irrelevant. Going one step further, one could say this: from Plato's point of view, the distinction between reasonableness and friendship can only be provisional. People dedicated to the quest for truth—that is what he means by reasonable—are of necessity friendly. Only a defect in that dedication may make necessary, as a supplement, friendship. Socrates talks on many levels. Therefore, what one has to do in trying to understand a dialogue is to determine the level on which a given statement is made—how provisional and how final is it.

[end of tape]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted "whiff h."

<sup>2</sup> Moved "first."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "blame."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "say."

<sup>5</sup> Delete "were."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "and."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "he."

<sup>8</sup> Deleted "hot."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "wall." It is conceivable, although very unlikely, that LS did say "wall" here, meaning by "wall distinctions" the distinctions on the wall of the cave.

<sup>10</sup> Deleted "in."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "capable."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "week."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "to."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "Thessaly."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "he."

<sup>16</sup> Deleted "to."

- 
- <sup>17</sup> Deleted “that way.” It is hard to determine with any certainty what LS said here.
- <sup>18</sup> Deleted “it.”
- <sup>19</sup> Deleted “models.” See *Gorgias* 484b5.
- <sup>20</sup> Deleted “one.”
- <sup>21</sup> Deleted “about.”
- <sup>22</sup> Deleted “Call clean.”
- <sup>23</sup> Deleted “syndicate.”
- <sup>24</sup> Deleted “being.”
- <sup>25</sup> Deleted “Which instances.”
- <sup>26</sup> Deleted “esteem.”
- <sup>27</sup> Deleted “reflected.”
- <sup>28</sup> Deleted “best stone.” LS may have said “test stone.”
- <sup>29</sup> Deleted “Gorgias.”
- <sup>30</sup> Deleted “on.”
- <sup>31</sup> Deleted “of.”
- <sup>32</sup> Deleted “of.”
- <sup>33</sup> Deleted “b–c.”
- <sup>34</sup> Deleted “what.”
- <sup>35</sup> Deleted “says.”
- <sup>36</sup> Deleted “serve.”
- <sup>37</sup> Deleted “The fact that.”
- <sup>38</sup> Deleted “these.”

## Session 8: February 12, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** Let me remind you again of Callicles' general thesis: to live means to try for having more. Which is ambiguous: either to have more than one has already or more than the others have. This trying to have more is the nature of all living beings, in particular of man. Last time, the objection was made that anthropological evidence does not support Callicles' assertion. There are societies in which that striving does not exist. Let us reflect for one moment on this problem. What is the value of that evidence? If Plato was unaware of this possibility, the basis of his reflection would certainly have been too narrow. The question is: Was Plato unaware of it? The answer is an emphatic no. Proof: the Second Book of the *Republic*, where he describes the first city, which is exactly a non-competitive society: nice people, no envy, no jealousy, and everyone stays within very narrow limits. But as not indeed Socrates, but Glaucon says, this is a city of pigs.<sup>1</sup> What Socrates seriously means is that these people live in a state of dormancy—they are satisfied with ancestral custom, both theoretical and practical. No cultivation of the mind, no quest for truth, is found among them. This simple, and in its way charming, society is indeed destroyed by the desire to have more, by desire which was, perhaps, elicited by opportunity to have more. And out of that vicious desire, which destroys this nice society, there emerges the need for correction of that desire to have more and its effects. This corrective is virtue proper and philosophy. The complete absence from a society of the desire to have more is possible, as Plato knew. But it is a defect. It must be<sup>1</sup> [there] and corrected, because without the opportunity of deviation, the true peak of humanity cannot be reached. One could also say these people are not really free. They may be politically free, but they are not truly free, because they do not know the possibility of deviation.

The anthropologist is a man who believes in the value [of] the quest for truth; otherwise, he could not be a social scientist. But he shows that to live without that quest is as good as to live with that quest; otherwise, he would not write his lyrical raptures about these people. In other words, the anthropologist does in his humble way what Pascal did in a grander style. Anthropologists, too, believe that the highest achievement of reason may be the disavowal of reason. The anthropologist is aware of a problem, a problem of which the primitives are not aware. The anthropologist has a broader horizon, being less provincial than his friends or victims, the primitives or pre-literates. Therefore, the anthropologist confronts us with the following question: How is such awareness as he possesses related to humanity, that is to say, to being a human being? This question, without which his studies remain provisional and ultimately blind, cannot be answered by anthropology, but only by philosophy. The anthropological evidence as such is irrelevant, and, in addition, it is not even new evidence, as is shown by the Second Book of the *Republic*. Because if we know seventy-five cases of the same thing<sup>2</sup> [or] only one, that<sup>3</sup> [makes], for a serious person, no difference. Because the crucial thing you would see even in the one case. There is no dialogue between Socrates and a primitive or a pre-literate. That is indeed remarkable. Yet let us put this problem on a broader basis. The

---

<sup>1</sup> *Republic* 372d.



primitive silently rejects philosophy. He silently rejects what he does not know at all, whereas Socrates explicitly rejects primitivism. Socrates has given thought to what the primitive has never considered, and the opposite is not true. The primitive, in rejecting philosophy, does silently what Callicles does explicitly. The discussion of Socrates and Callicles, the non-philosopher, will deal by implication with the primitive as well. And one could say, although we cannot do it now, that a full understanding of that conversation would also be an understanding of a non-written dialogue between Socrates and a primitive. Another aspect is the veneration for old, ancestral orders, which is characteristic of so-called primitive society, which is something that Callicles, of course, lacks. Therefore, Socrates' conversation with an old Spartan and an old Cretan in the *Laws*, also brings in some aspects of the problem of the primitive which you would not find in the *Gorgias*. This only in answer to that very interesting question which was brought up last time.

Plato was confronted by the fundamentally same variety of ways of life as we are. Thinking about their respective merits, he reached the conclusion that the right way of life is the philosophic way of life, the life dedicated to the quest for *the* truth. Quest for the truth means transcending the opinion about the truth, however hallowed by tradition, and transcending pursuits which imply that the quest for truth is not the one thing needful. This primary notion of philosophy implies a distinction between nature and convention or law. Convention or law is primarily that which is to be transcended by thought in order to reach the substantial truth: nature. Or as Plato also puts it, leaving the cave. To go from here [to] there, or to learn to die, are all different formulations of the same thing: complete withdrawal from the ordinary pursuits of man. This thought is most clearly developed in the *Phaedo*, in the conversation which Socrates had on his last day, on the one hand, and in the so-called excursus in the dialogue *Theaetetus*, on the other. In the *Theaetetus*, the philosopher is represented as a man who does not know the marketplace—you will recall the allusion to this in the beginning of the *Gorgias*—he doesn't know the laws, he doesn't even know whether his neighbor is a man or a cat.<sup>ii</sup> This is the same thing to which Aristotle refers in his *Ethics* when he says we must make a distinction between the wise and the sensible man. The sensible man is in the highest degree the statesman, say, Pericles, but the wise man is a man like Thales, who fell into a pit because he looked at the stars, so he was extremely impractical. This is, so to<sup>4</sup> [speak], the first appearance of the problem of philosophy.

But there is a problem: there are the needs of the body, of which even the philosopher must take care. The answer is clear: to take care of these needs as indifferently as possible. But that is not the real problem. The real problem is the other human beings. Knowing that the quest for the truth is man's perfection, the philosopher cannot be indifferent to the fate of his fellows. He will derive enjoyment from the *community* of the pursuit; he will even derive *benefit* in his pursuit from the community, the communication with others. At this point, the question arises whether this helping others toward the pursuit of the truth is extraneous to philosophy or an essential part of it. Will the philosopher not learn something about the truth by helping other men, by guiding other men? Will he not learn something through this guidance about the human

---

<sup>ii</sup> *Theaetetus* 174a–b.

soul? Is there any other way<sup>5</sup> [of] learning about the human soul except by living with men, by communicating with men? But the human soul is not the sole theme of philosophy. Philosophy would then appear to consist of two parts: one which is purely theoretical, comparable in its theoretical character to mathematics, and the other [which] is political, moral. This is the view suggested by Plato in the two united and kindred dialogues the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Here we can understand the difference between Plato and Aristotle which was brought up on an earlier occasion. For Plato, political philosophy, which of course includes moral philosophy, is at least as important for the understanding of the whole as theoretical philosophy. The most important clue to the whole is the<sup>6</sup> [light provided] by the understanding of man and human pursuits. This is not so in Aristotle. There it is somehow concealed by other considerations. In Plato, it is manifestly so.

Philosophy is the right way of life and helping others to lead the right way of life: both belong together. But the right way of life consists in making speeches about the right way of life. That's the paradox. As Socrates puts it, "spending one's life in making speeches about virtue, that is virtue." There is a variety of levels of such speeches. I have now prepared the real problem under discussion here. Yet not all men can become philosophers, and this has two reasons. First, there is a difference of gifts. Certain natural gifts are required,<sup>7</sup> [such as] memory. If one has a memory like a sieve, one cannot think; one forgets. The second, equally important, reason is leisure. The majority of men have to work so hard at non-philosophic pursuits that they simply are not free for philosophic pursuit. Hard labor takes away from the freedom of the mind. This fact, that not all men can become philosophers, which is due to the nature of things, leads to the fact that the relation of philosophers to non-philosophers is a problem—or, to use the harsh expression which Socrates uses in the *Gorgias*, the relation of philosophy and the *demos*, the common people. While *demos* means primarily a political phenomenon, the poor people who have to earn a living, it is refined and means ultimately the non-philosophers altogether. Whether they be kings or tyrants or knights, they would still be part of the *demos* in that sense.

The question is this: Is philosophy as such able to establish mutually satisfactory relations between the philosophers and the *demos*? If not, philosophy needs a supplement. This supplement will be rhetoric, public rhetoric of a certain kind. We are not very familiar with this way of looking at the relation of philosophy and the non-philosophers. Why? Because we are thoughtless? Sure, we are thoughtless, but that is not the only reason.<sup>8</sup> Modern philosophy has discovered an alternative to the public rhetoric in question. That alternative is enlightenment: the results of philosophy or science can be communicated to all; philosophers and non-philosophers can be united by recognition of the same philosophic truth. This solution is exposed to certain difficulties because it<sup>9</sup> [blurs] the difference between genuine knowledge and superficial information. Above all, enlightenment is insufficiently defined as public communication of philosophic or scientific discoveries. I would like to explain this and then you will see that this is really our problem in discussing and reading the *Gorgias*.

Socrates says, and will say in the section we are discussing today, the only way of extirpating the desire to have more is philosophy. As far as the non-philosophers are concerned, the only thing possible is the *limitation* of the desire to have more by more or less external means, such as compulsion and habituation. Philosophy is then understood as morally more exacting than both common morality and the law. This is still remembered when people say someone leads “a philosophic life.” This indicates the aspect that his morality is more demanding. This, however, means that philosophy is for this reason unpopular. But let us assume for one moment that philosophy would cease to be morally exacting. This would indeed require a radical change in the meaning of philosophy. If the end of philosophy will be not simply to know the truth, but by knowing the truth to contribute to the relief of man’s estate, as Bacon said, [to contribute] to the increase of man’s power over non-human things, as Hobbes thought, or to contribute to comfortable self-preservation, as Locke meant it—in other words, if the end of philosophy will be<sup>10</sup> in *agreement* with the desire to have more, philosophy will become immensely popular. The *demos* will not merely be the recipient of scientific information, more or less superficial or unsubstantial: the *demos* will be, as it were, the customers of the merchandise supplied by philosophy or science, from which merchandise they would derive substantial enjoyment.

In a word: the modern substitute for that public rhetoric which Plato seeks is technology based on science. That bridges the gulf between philosophy and the non-philosophers, a kind of speechless conviction of all people that philosophy or science is<sup>11</sup> [salutary]. We can say that technology is [the] public rhetoric of modern times. Even without advertising, although I believe that it is not an accident that technology still needs advertising, which is obviously public rhetoric, as I don’t have to prove. To take a crude example, when a certain medical invention is preferable to another and that is shown to you by a presentation of a handkerchief in one case and the handkerchief in another case or whatever they do, that is of course public rhetoric. So<sup>12</sup> even the technological reconciliation of philosophy and the *demos* needs still a kind of rhetoric. The problem which we have here to consider is not merely the A-bomb or the population bomb, as the enormous increase in the birthrate was called, but this new kind of philosophy or science, which was made for the relief of man’s estate, leads to a new kind of political philosophy or social science in which relativism, as it is called, reigns supreme. The highest authority becomes science in this modern world, and science empowers every choice of ends by its inability to pronounce any ends. This means that science does not supply the social bonds. For comfortable self-preservation or enlightened self-interest is not sufficient. No social scientist, I believe, would rely today on comfortable self-preservation or enlightened self-interest as a social bond. People talk all the time of the need for ideology. Ideology and myth are recognized necessities in this social science. This is, again, an admission of the need for public rhetoric. For how can ideology and myth be transmitted in the long run without it? Again, we are back at Plato, even if we accept the modern premises. After this reminder of the fact that we are not here antiquarians, let us turn to the *Gorgias*.

The Callicles section begins with a statement by Socrates of the antithesis of philosophy and the *demos*. Why did this antithesis not become explicit in the earlier sections, the

Gorgias and Polus sections? Socrates says, by implication, Gorgias and Polus lack *eros*, lack love, and therewith seriousness. Callicles says Gorgias and Polus lack frankness, which is in a way admitted by Socrates. They were ashamed. Now, there is a connection between these two things, because *eros* overcomes sense of shame. Since Gorgias and Polus are rhetoricians, this must be connected with the character of rhetoric, of Gorgian rhetoric. Gorgias and Polus, we may say, absolutize rhetoric and they do this because they believe that rhetoric has solved the problem created by the antithesis between philosophy and the people. Thus, Gorgian rhetoric is comparable to modern technology: both bridge the gulf between the philosophers and the non-philosophers by satisfying the desires of the non-philosophers, only with different means. The ancient means were insubstantial; they were only words. Today, there are tangible gifts, but words are not so unimportant, as modern science has found out. The rhetorician tries to satisfy the common desires for life, liberty, wealth, and reputation, and [he] enables a man to defend himself before law courts when these goods are threatened. The rhetorician does not question these desires. They are given—just as they are given to the modern economist, for example. He treats these desires as if they were the only natural desires. The rhetorician acts on the assumption that the desire to have more is *the* natural desire. But in order to satisfy these desires for more within a social context in which laws of one kind or another have to be complied with if one is to get the prizes,<sup>13</sup> the rhetorician must accept, without believing in them, the common opinions about just[ice] and right and wrong, common opinions which he regards as merely conventional, as rules of the game, valid here and now. Yet, in so doing, in making this concession, the rhetorician is not guided by the quest for truth, by the philosophy which in one way or another enables him to be a rhetorician. The rhetorician himself is swayed by the desire to have more, the desire to have more than he would need if he were truly a philosopher. He betrays philosophy, although he is somehow trained by philosophy, and this betrayal is underlying his belief that rhetoric, being the synthesis of philosophy<sup>14</sup> [and] the multitude, is the noblest art. Especially important is his concern with prestige, for the concern with prestige means inevitably concern with living up to conventional standards. This man who preaches the despicable character of the convention is concerned with prestige. This is at least Plato's analysis of this man, and [it] applies, of course, to men like Gorgias and Polus also. It applies, in a different way, to Callicles.

Callicles too is a mixture of nature and convention. But Callicles is much less aware of his dependence on philosophy, and he is much more involved in the *polis*. Therefore, he coins this paradoxical expression, especially from his point of view, "the law of nature," which means, in his mouth, "the convention of nature." On the other hand, his concern with gentlemanly dignity and gentlemanly propriety makes him divine that which is by nature noble or by nature becoming. After all, Callicles does not earn money as Gorgias and Polus do from rhetoric or teaching rhetoric. I don't say anything against earning money—I myself am compelled to earn money—but the most superficial sign in Athenian society of<sup>15</sup> not [being] a gentleman was to earn money, especially by teaching. That means to regard the highest things as obtainable by cash. We do not understand this immediately, and Plato and Socrates, I am sure, did not take this too literally, because there is a book on Socrates' economic basis, which is very charming, where it is made clear that Socrates, too, needed some pipeline to replenish his simple needs. He had

friends who took care of him. But he says these friends are, for him, money.<sup>iii</sup> Socrates, then, saw this bit of hypocrisy underlying his elegant notion of a gentleman but, still, it was not altogether irrelevant because there is something to this point of which one might be aware.

We have also noted regarding Callicles his unselfish dedication to what we would call an ideal—an ideal to which he knows he cannot live up. Callicles is a lover of the *demos*, yet he praises the outstanding individual, knowing that he is not such an outstanding individual, knowing that he belongs to the *demos*. Belonging to the *demos*, he aspires beyond the *demos*. He loves the beautiful Pylilampes in addition to loving the non-beautiful *demos*. He divines that there is something higher than the *demos* and himself. But he interprets that higher thing within the horizon of the *demos* or politics, just as he interprets nature as a convention of nature or Zeus, which means that he interprets nature as based on arbitrary will. Gorgian rhetoric has not solved the problem constituted by the antagonism of philosophy and the multitude. The proof: Callicles, the friend and admirer of Gorgias, condemns the philosophic way of life. He condemns Socrates,<sup>16</sup> in a very significant passage, [to be whipped]. It is a mere accident, his relative benevolence to Socrates, that he does not condemn Socrates to death. This accidental benevolence distinguishes him from the other enemies of philosophy who did condemn Socrates to death, the most famous of them being Anytus, who is in a way the hero of the companion dialogue to the *Gorgias*, the *Meno*. Callicles and Socrates agree as to the antagonism between philosophy and [the] *demos*. Callicles says the philosophers become ridiculous in the political arena, and the politicians become ridiculous in philosophic discussion. This means the problem of the limitation of philosophy, that it cannot gain entrance beyond a certain point, is real, as both Socrates and Callicles see. Only they draw different conclusions. You may also have seen, in 485d, when Callicles describes the philosopher's life, he says three or four people are sitting in a corner—not<sup>17</sup> speaking [loudly] in the marketplace, addressing the multitude, but whispering in a corner. When Socrates speaks of Callicles' deliberation with his friends [over] which life they should choose, there were also four people, also whispering in a corner rather than speaking in the marketplace. Even Callicles had to withdraw when he chose his way of life. Even Callicles had to withdraw at least once.

This is followed by the passage we began to discuss last time: the qualifications required for finally establishing the truth. After Callicles has completed his long speech, Socrates prepares the discussion with Callicles by a general remark regarding the conditions to be fulfilled by a perfect and final discussion, that is to say, by a discussion leading up to the complete solution of a problem. These conditions, Socrates says, are fulfilled in his conversation with Callicles. They were not fulfilled in his conversations with Gorgias and Polus. Not much reflection is needed in order to see that these conditions are not fulfilled in the conversation with Callicles either. The conditions for philosophic discussion, then, are never fulfilled in the dialogue. What is the purpose of this statement of Socrates about the conditions of a philosophic discussion? Why does Socrates, as it were, proclaim the defect of the whole discussion? The theme is rhetoric, that is to say,

---

<sup>iii</sup> LS is referring to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. See, in particular, 1.14 and 2.8.

the supplement to philosophy, or the defect of philosophy. Socrates says the discussion up until now was defective. It did not fulfill the requirements of philosophic discussion. For there are three such requirements, [only] two of which<sup>18</sup> were fulfilled—the two being wisdom and benevolence or friendship, the third being frankness. Polus and Gorgias had not been frank; therefore, the discussion was not adequate. Callicles will have the three qualities.

The question which we have to raise, and which was, as a matter of fact, raised by one of you last time: Are these three—wisdom, benevolence or friendship, frankness—the requirements of philosophic discussion? What would we say if someone were to ask us what are the conditions of a philosophic discussion? Intelligence and honesty—intelligence including, of course, in certain fields, the necessary information. What does honesty here mean? The fact that a fellow forges checks is not relevant to his honesty in discussion. There is a specific honesty meant. The dishonesty consists in the will to win, or the will to avoid the shame of refutation. If this is absent and competence is present, then the conditions are met. Plato speaks of this problem in the *Republic*, 450b–c, where he says one can say the truth among reasonable friends. Plato implies [that] these two conditions guarantee honesty. If the men are intelligent and true friends, there is no further question of honesty. But he also implies that in the absence of this, honesty, in the sense of perfect frankness, is not possible. Therefore, a philosophic discussion is not possible. There is, then, according to the statement in the *Republic*, no need for mentioning frankness as an independent third condition. More than that, in this passage in the *Gorgias*, frankness means frankness in front of many<sup>19</sup> strangers. Regarding this frankness, the passage in the *Republic* says by implication [that] such frankness is impossible. Philosophic discussion then is not possible under the conditions fulfilled in the *Gorgias*, because of the presence of many strangers. Socrates creates the impression that the only thing hitherto lacking, but now available, is frankness, and that the presence of this additional element will guarantee a perfect philosophic discussion. But this additional element is incompatible with philosophic discussion. The defect, then, of philosophic discussion is that it cannot be frank in the presence of many strangers. Or if we may use the simile of love, love overcomes sense of shame, but not in public. Discussion in front of many is necessarily rhetorical. The lack of frankness is a virtue in a rhetorical discussion. Allegedly, the conversations with Gorgias and Polus were defective, and the conversation with Callicles promises to be perfect. But, in fact, all three are defective as philosophic discussions, and the conversation with Polus was precisely the perfect rhetorical discussion, while the discussion with Callicles will prove to be imperfect not only as [a] philosophic discussion, but even as a rhetorical one. For what is the proof of the imperfection of a rhetorical discussion? Lack of success. Socrates' statement, according to which we can now expect a perfect philosophic discussion, is doubly ironical. The discussion with Callicles will be imperfect, not only philosophically, but also rhetorically. This much as a reminder of the general situation, and let us now turn to 487d.

Since Socrates has shown Callicles to be the perfect tester for Socrates, the stone by which he can test whether Socrates' soul is of gold, silver, bronze, or iron—since Callicles is the perfect tester, the result of this conversation will be the absolute truth. It

will be *the* truth about the most important subject, namely, what is the right way of life. But Callicles is not wise. The only proof Socrates offers of Callicles' wisdom is that many Athenians would say that he is wise, which is not a proof of wisdom. You can, perhaps,<sup>20</sup> [notice] the increase in the claim[s] for [the] discussion from<sup>21</sup> [487e–488a]. First, he says the proof will be that “Callicles will agree with me,” then “our agreement will be equal,” [then] Socrates will agree with Callicles<sup>22</sup>, which means that Socrates will be the tester and Callicles the tested. Socrates agreeing with Callicles would mean the culmination of the discussion, and that, indeed, is wholly impossible, as we can guess from the data at our disposal. Let us reconsider the main point: if Callicles is wise, a friend, and frank, the result will be the truth. But what if the interlocutor of Callicles lacks these three qualities? Then the two interlocutors must be frank, wise, and friends. Therefore suffice it to say that Socrates would refuse to call himself wise. We have here his own denial of the quality.<sup>23</sup> [So he must think] that a perfectly held discussion, in the sense of the final establishment of the truth, is not here possible.

488a–b: Callicles, being the perfect tester will be the perfect refuter, therefore the best rebuker and, that is to say, the best judge. Socrates requests here [that] Callicles<sup>24</sup> punish him for Socrates' misconduct. He says that his misconduct is not voluntary and, therefore, deserves indulgence. But still, it is misconduct and deserves punishment. In what does the punishment consist? In being taught the truth. This kind of punishment obviously improves the soul, as distinguished from whipping and decapitating, of which it is not so certain. If Socrates should relapse, he says, which means misbehave knowingly, Callicles shall punish him with silent contempt. We get here an indication of Socrates' notion of vindictive justice: it is perfectly free from vindictiveness. That the *polis* cannot leave it at punishing with teaching or with silent contempt is undoubtedly true. But this also indicates a severe limitation of the *polis* as such, and therefore that philosophy and the *polis* need each other. But the difference between them is also in certain respects a gulf between them.

At this point, 488b–491b, a new section begins. Socrates criticizes here Callicles' proposition that the stronger ought to have more. In 488b, there are three formulations given by Socrates of Callicles' thesis. The center formulation is this: the better should rule the worse. This is, of course, Socrates' own view too. Callicles agrees somehow with Socrates, but he doesn't understand him. The agreement is expressed in this formula: “What do you mean, is it the same or different from stronger?” Callicles says, “better means stronger.” Then Socrates argues as follows in 488b–489b. The many are stronger than the one, hence the laws laid down by the many are the laws of the stronger. But the stronger are the better, hence the laws laid down by the many are laid down by the better. These laws express, therefore, that which is noble or just by nature. But these laws laid down by the many say that to do injustice is baser than to suffer injustice, hence doing injustice is by nature baser than suffering injustice. In brief, what Socrates is trying to prove is that if the right of the stronger is valid, the right of the *demos* follows.

Let us look at this more closely. By nature, the stronger has a right to rule the weaker, to give laws to the weaker, and such laws will be just. But does this guarantee that those laws will be good? Could the stronger not wish to deceive the weaker, just as Callicles

has said that the weak deceive the strong by their laws? Yet it might be argued that the stronger have no reason to deceive. Why should the five thousand deceive the ten? But do not the strong have grounds to deceive, in spite of their strength? For, while the many may be stronger than the few in some respects, they may be weaker in others. In other words, only if the stronger are the better can the enactments of the stronger be said to be by nature just. Callicles grants this, but, on his basis, this would lead him to be compelled to accept the view about injustice which he rejects. What Socrates tries to show is this: if you speak only of physical strength, without any qualification, then you make the strongest case for the rule of the many and therewith also for the laws or prejudices of the many, which are hallowed by them. Then you arrive at the conclusion that to do injustice is baser than to suffer injustice.

Callicles is of course dissatisfied, and therefore<sup>25</sup> in<sup>26</sup> [489b–d] he grants that he has expressed himself badly. He did not mean bodily superiority. Even democracy cannot be based on the bodily superiority of the many, on the simple substitution of ballots for bullets—that does not work out. The superiority of the *demos* is based on the fact that it consists of free men as distinguished from slaves, and of men who are not of every kind but homogeneous—that is to say, of common descent. The *demos* says that free men of common descent are by nature the legislators. This is, of course, not the same thing as to say “the right of the stronger,” because it is a qualified, qualitative statement. But are free women of common descent equal with the best legislators? This remains a question. The wisdom of Callicles, to which Socrates refers in c, consists in the fact that he realizes the irrelevance of mere majority. In the same context, Socrates calls Callicles *daimonios* (strange). It means he is a divining person; he divines that those who are better by nature should rule the worse. He merely divines it; he does not understand it. Another epithet [is] applied to Callicles in 489<sup>27</sup>[d]: “You strange fellow, you claim to be willing to help me, but in fact you merely incite me.” In this context occurs the first reference in the *Gorgias* to Socrates’ irony: “You merely pretend, Socrates, that you want to learn from me.” Socrates says that Callicles, too, dissembles, for he uses Zethus in the Euripidean play as a mask in his conversation with Socrates. Callicles dissembles because he pretends to be Socrates’ brother (compare 485e).

Callicles gives now a better definition of what the better are in 489e–490a—the better are the wiser—and he does this at the suggestion of Socrates. By nature, the wiser ought to rule and to have more. While Socrates would grant the first, he questions the second. Socrates says that the physician must rule the non-physicians regarding food and drink, but it would be absurd to say that he should have more food and drink than the non-physician. He who is wiser [than others] in certain things<sup>28</sup> should rule the others regarding these things, but of course there is no reason why he should have more than they. If you look more closely at what is said in 490b, Socrates describes this equation: the physician and the non-physician as an example of the wise and the unwise. Many human beings of different qualities are together. They are assembled, and they have in common much food and drink—a sketch of a communist society having plenty and ruled by the wise. There is no question here of mine and thine—property—and therewith of justice in the most common sense of the word justice. Justice, in the most common sense, implies respect for property, regardless of whether the property is good for the owner or



not. There is a certain problem in that. To disregard property right[s] in the interest of the property owner is injustice. But, if this is injustice, is injustice such an abysmal evil as it appeared before? Is injustice not from one point of view, understood wisely and properly, good? In other words, Callicles got a point which Plato developed at length in the *Republic*, where he introduces communism in order to show the problem of justice: that justice means really to sanction necessarily many follies, many abuses. We cannot have it differently. Again, Callicles has a point, but he doesn't understand it. There is a problem of the law, the positive law: distribution of property, which is sanctioned by the law, may be unjust in itself.

In c: The physician will be punished if he takes more than is good for him. By whom? There are two answers, equally good: by the philosopher-king, who rules over the whole, or by nature—<sup>29</sup> [the physician] will get stomach troubles. This throws light on what the philosopher-king means. The philosopher-kings are supposed to do what nature, in a way, does. In d-e,<sup>30</sup> [Socrates] gives a number of examples, which are fundamentally the same: physician (food and drink), shoemaker (shoes), weaver (garments). The central example: the largest number of the most beautiful garments. Should they not be given to the weaver? This example makes it clear that the wisest should not only be rulers, but also the richest in the community. This is<sup>31</sup> [the] serious meaning: the wisest should have the maximum amount of private property. In e: “Why do you keep<sup>32</sup> [driveling]?” This term<sup>33</sup> is very frequent in Aristophanes.<sup>iv</sup> There is a certain comical aspect obvious in this discussion.

In e, Socrates turns now from consumption to production. Should the wisest producer have the most and use the most? If the farmer does not have much land, then getting much seed would be bad for production. The conclusion would be, then, that property should be assigned according to the competence to<sup>34</sup> [use] it. The common notion of property disregards the manner in which the owner puts his property to use. As the Roman law says, property right means the right to use and misuse. There is something irrational in this notion of property. Indicated here is a criticism of the ordinary notion of property which is developed much more fully in the *Republic*, and this criticism implies a criticism of justice, since the virtue that is primarily connected with private property is justice. Therefore, Socrates will go over shortly to another virtue which is not open to these difficulties, and that is moderation or temperance. Xenophon's economic treatise also begins with an indication of the problem of private property. There the question arises: Property is something good, but can property be misused? Or if used by incompetent people, can it still be good?<sup>v</sup> If this is thought through, it leads to the conclusion that the rule of the wise man would assign to everyone what is good for him. The difficulty which this proposition has then leads to an acceptance of private property [as] the best you can have, but fundamentally problematic. The problem remains: that human justice is not unqualified justice. But one must see that. Otherwise, the expectations from law and from any particular arrangement become visionary.

---

<sup>iv</sup> The word at 490e4 is *phluareis*. For a few instances in Aristophanes, see *The Knights* 545, *Thesmophoriazusae* 559, *The Wasps* 85, and *The Plutos* 575.

<sup>v</sup> See chapter 1 of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*.

In a, Socrates says all this is saying [the same] things about the same beings; Callicles always says different things about the same beings. In other words, Callicles always says something new, whereas Socrates says always the same old stuff. There is a connection between this and the problem of justice. Justice means primarily the old, established, ancestral—the prescriptive division of property. But the question that is inevitable is whether the established is good.

491a: Granted that the wiser should rule, this does not mean that he should have more. Or, of what could they reasonably have more? The gods have the wide heaven. What should the wise human ruler have? Wide halls? Callicles says then, in a–b, “The<sup>35</sup> [politically wise] should have more, provided they are at the same time more manly.” In other words, he doesn’t like that constant harping on wisdom or sensibility; he wants to get something tougher. In the sequel, Callicles accuses Socrates and blames him. Socrates accuses Callicles, but does not blame him. That means the emphasis is on Socrates as accuser. That means, in this context, that Callicles is no longer the judge, as he originally appeared to be. Socrates accuses his would-be judge, the lover of the *demos*, and therewith his later actual judge, the *demos* itself.

In c–d: Those who are both politically wise and manly should rule and have more. Now, this may have a very good political sense. As a condition of their successful ruling, [they] should have large properties, to live as what Burke called a natural aristocracy. What Callicles suggests can be understood as an abortive political suggestion which he does not understand. So,<sup>36</sup> we find in him, this lover of the *demos*, not only a tyrannic suggestion, but also an oligarchic suggestion.

In 491d–494b: Why should the politically wise and manly have more? Callicles could have given a political answer along the lines of Burke, an answer which goes back to Aristotle’s *Politics* and which is implied in Plato’s *Laws*. But Socrates prevents the discussion from becoming politically problematic. Political discussion would not necessarily go to the root. For the question would arise: How should these rulers use their large estates, for self-indulgence or for noble purposes? Callicles had added manliness to wisdom. That was his reservation, as it were. Socrates proposes to add moderation to wisdom. This raises the question: “What is justice—justice, as distinguished from wisdom and moderation combined?” Is justice needed in addition to wisdom and moderation combined? Is not to be satisfied with one’s own, and not<sup>37</sup> [to covet] what belongs to others, a by-product of moderation, so that, from one point of view, justice as more than that is not even needed? Let us see how the argument proceeds.

491d: Must those rulers, Socrates says, not rule themselves? Or are they not in one respect rulers and in another respect ruled? Callicles does not understand, because he has not read what Socrates says later. That is a folly which these texts commit. They don’t seem to know that Callicles didn’t have the *Gorgias* in front of him. He was sitting there, and the conversation develops. Socrates’ statement is perfectly ambiguous. He could mean this: since Callicles had not said that there should be one ruler only in each city, the more than one rulers are necessarily also ruled in one way or another—either by ruling

and being ruled in turn, or by ruling in one sphere and being ruled in another sphere. Callicles has no notion that Socrates is driving at self-rule: self-government in the sense of self-control. That is what the term “moderation” means here primarily. One could raise the question of whether we always think of self-control when we speak of self-rule. When Callicles becomes aware of what Socrates has in mind, he rejects it with contempt. This self-control means sobriety—to be sensible, to be shrewd. Callicles says, “If you understand by this fine word self-control, then the simpletons would meet the condition because they have self-control.” They don’t have large desires, and then they would be the sober, wise men.

In 491e–492c: Every servitude or subjection is incompatible with happiness. Every servitude is violent and therefore not natural. What is right and noble according to nature consists in fully satisfying the greatest desire, meaning: first allow your desires to become as great as possible, and then you are strong and clever enough to satisfy them. That is happiness or virtue. But the many are not capable of this; therefore, there emerged the conventional virtues of self-control and justice. They have to be distinguished from the natural virtues: cleverness, wisdom, and manliness—cleverness for finding out what is conducive to satisfying the desires, and manliness or energy for really getting it. You see a progress in this remark of Callicles, beyond what he had said in his long speech, 482–486. Now Callicles reveals the end for which doing injustice or having more than others is useful. He goes now closer to the root. Callicles does not count himself [any longer] among the many<sup>38</sup> who put the yoke upon the few. This thought is here absent. The politically wise and manly ought to have more. That is to say, those that are by nature superior are those who can satisfy the maximal desires. But this requires political power, grasped or maintained by means of cleverness, manliness, energy, and practical wisdom combined.

In d–e, Socrates says Callicles’ view is the view of the others, by which he means [that], contrary to Callicles’ contention that this is the view of an elite, Callicles’ view is, in fact, the vulgar view—only Callicles has the courage to express that view. But are there not many people who reject Callicles’ view, honestly and sincerely? How can Socrates say “the others”? That is a problem which recurs time and time again. The majority of people who reject that view of Callicles do it out of ancestral piety. The question arises, therefore, whether they do not understand by gods precisely such beings as Callicles understands by the outstanding individuals—in other words, [beings who indulge] the maximal desires which they condemn in human beings. They admit, as a matter of course, the results, so the desires are in them. Those people believe that men should do what the gods say men should do, but they will always be exposed to attack by those who say that men should imitate the gods, which is to say, [they] should do what the gods do, and Zeus is not a model of self-control.

Here in this context, Socrates uses his classic phrase, “how one should live.” Socrates tries now to persuade Callicles that his view is wrong, the view that intemperance is better than self-control. He opposes to this view three sayings [in] 492e–494b. The first is this: “Those who want nothing are happy.” Callicles answers: “In that case, corpses would be the only happy beings.” He either forgets the gods, who also were thought to be

free beyond wants, or else assumes that the gods, too, have wants. Certainly man is a being which has wants. If the saying quoted by Socrates that those who want nothing are happy were true, all men<sup>39</sup> [would] necessarily always [be] miserable, because to be a man means to be a being which has wants. To this, Socrates answers in 492e as follows: “But if one accepts your premise, Callicles, life would necessarily be miserable too.” He therewith grants that life would be miserable on the basis of the saying quoted by him, literally understood. Why would life be miserable on the basis of Callicles’ premise that the greatest wants, the maximal wants, maximally satisfy? For life would be like filling the jar of the Danaids.<sup>vi</sup> But that is not what Socrates says here. What he says is this (because Callicles had said he preached the happiness of corpses): “Are we sure that we are not corpses? That life is not death, and death life?” Here, Socrates quotes Euripides, the poet quoted before by Callicles. What does this mean? To have great wants means to have the source of one’s happiness entirely outside of oneself, that is to say, not to live *through* oneself, not to have life *in* oneself, and therewith to be dead.

Then, in 493a–494a, the third speech comes in. This third saying consists of two parts or, as we may say with equal right, of two versions. This third saying is explicitly used in an attempt to persuade Callicles. That attempt explicitly fails. Socrates says, “Do I persuade you?” And Callicles says, “You do not persuade.” To persuade, of course, is the problem of rhetoric, and it comes here to the fore again. Socrates tries to persuade Callicles to a life of self–control by presenting life as death, that is to say, by presenting the desires of the living as signs of the living being dead, or as signs of [the] extinct or reduced vitality of the living. This can perhaps be best understood by thinking of the Aristotelian statement that being in its activity of the mind, that is life.<sup>vii</sup> Socrates gives two similes which stem from the same gymnasium, as he says. A gymnasium is a place where you strip, but in Europe they call the high schools also “gymnasia.” There the soul is stripped. The clearest demonstration is, of course, an examination where everyone has to lay bare the ignorance in his soul. This stripping of the soul will come up later in the myth at the end.

In 493a–d, the first simile is one which Socrates had *heard* from a sage. It is also called a myth and even an absurdity. This is generally regarded as a story of Pythagorean origin. You remember the Pythagorean theorem, and you know that Pythagoras had something to do with mathematics, but this was much more than mathematics—it was a way of life. One point is immediately relevant here. The Pythagorean school made a distinction between two kinds of students, the “mathematicians” and the “acousmaticians”:<sup>viii</sup> the “mathematicians,” not in the narrow sense, [were] those who learned, who understood; the “acousmaticians,” those who only listened. Now Socrates tells here a story which he had heard from such a sage. Before I turn to the simile, let us see how it continues the

---

<sup>vi</sup> In Greek mythology, the Danaids are the forty–nine daughters of Danaus who married and murdered the sons of Aegyptus. They were punished in Hades by being forced to carry water to fill a leaking jar.

<sup>vii</sup> *Metaphysics* 1072b26–27.

<sup>viii</sup> LS is here anglicizing the Greek term *akousmatikoi*, as “mathematicians” is an anglicization of *mathematikoi*.

preceding two sayings: to be happy means to need nothing, and that is to be dead, “dead” being now truly alive, to be free from the body. The soul freed from the body is self-sufficient and therefore happy. Life begins after death. After death, the intemperate will be extremely rich, because their soul retains, as it were, the body. They have been nailed by their bodily desires to their bodies. The crucial passage is in 493a, where the famous saying occurs: *sōma*, *sēma*. *Sōma* is “body,” and *sēma* is “tomb.” The body is a tomb, a tomb in which the soul is buried; the soul becomes alive only by separating from the body. But this word *sēma* means literally “sign,” “mark,” “token”—the token by which any man’s identity can be certified, and also such things as a device on a shield by which a warrior is known. If this literal meaning of *sēma* is taken, the passage would mean that<sup>40</sup> individuality is due to the body. The self-sufficient soul would, then, not be the individual soul. If there is to be happiness of the individual, it would have to be happiness in this life, just as Socrates at the end of the *Phaedo*, with a view to his life and to his dying, was called happy.<sup>ix</sup> If that is so, happiness cannot be identical with having no wants whatsoever. Self-control, then, can only mean being satisfied with little, or with having small wants. It cannot be identical with happiness, but it can only be the indispensable condition of happiness. Those who have larger and always new wants are necessarily always miserable, whereas the first condition of happiness consists in having small wants.

One point has to be considered in particular: What Socrates suggests here is an ascetic notion of the good life, a notion friendly to death, as it were, a notion diametrically opposed to<sup>41</sup> [the] vital he-man’s notion which Callicles embraces. Socrates speaks here of the power by which the soul desires. He calls it the power of desire because it is easy to persuade. The faculty of desire in the soul of the uninitiated or thoughtless is a leaking jar. The thoughtless are most wretched in Hades, but Hades means in the invisible, as far as the understanding of the ideas is concerned. These thoughtless, uninitiated people carry water in a leaking sieve into their leaking jar. The leaking sieve is the soul of the thoughtless, and the leaking jar is the faculty of desire in the soul of the thoughtless. The soul of the thoughtless, the leaking sieve, is characterized by the incapacity to believe or to trust and therefore to be persuaded, and [by] forgetfulness.

There are two striking absurdities. First, the soul of the thoughtless is compared to a leaking sieve, and the faculty of desire in the thoughtless, which is easily persuadable, is called a leaking jar. In other words, is not the faculty of desire a part of the soul? Must not, therefore, the jar be a part of the sieve? The only way out is this: the leaking sieve is the [ir]rational and irascible part of the soul of the thoughtless, which in their case is not persuadable—indicating that Socrates cannot persuade Callicles because Socrates cannot persuade the desiring part of the soul. Socrates can only persuade reason and spiritedness—spiritedness, the noble horse, as it is called in the *Phaedrus*. Therefore, he cannot persuade, not only Callicles, but bums and drifters too. There is no common ground. A man who completely lacks any sense of honor cannot be appealed to. But the term which Socrates applies to the faculty of desire means primarily not “persuadable” but “persuasive”—good at persuading. Callicles is good at persuading the *demos*.

---

<sup>ix</sup> This is inaccurate. Socrates is called “best, wisest, and most just” at the end of the *Phaedo*. *Phaedo* calls him happy near the beginning of the dialogue, at 58a.

Callicles is good at persuading the *demos* and at being persuaded by the *demos*. Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles are good at persuading the *demos*, but whereas in the case of Gorgias and Polus reason and spiritedness are persuadable, this is not the case as regards Callicles. Polus–Gorgias can be the link between Socrates and the *demos*, between Socrates and Callicles. The second absurdity is this: the soul is compared to a sieve—the soul selects, distinguishes, discerns—but here we have a sieve used for transporting water, and no sieve will hold water. This means that the specific character of the soul of the thoughtful, which does retain and discern, is not brought out at all. Only the unreasonable is the theme here. Moderation or self–control is the theme, and self–control has to do with the unreasonable part of man. This implies that moderation cannot be the highest virtue. This much about the first simile.

Now a word about the second simile: 493d–494a. The relation of the two similes, I think, is much easier to understand than some details of the first.<sup>42</sup> [Socrates] no longer speaks of water, but of wine, honey, and milk. In addition, there are two *hombres*, two real men—obviously two rich men—who have many jars full of wine, honey, and milk. But one of them has sound jars, whereas the other has leaking vessels. The word for vessels is also the word for holding money in a treasury, an indication of the fact that the fellow who will be intemperate, the rich fellow, soon will become poor. The one fellow with sound jars will not have to worry about the jars, only about their content. The other one will have to worry about the jars in addition. That means the man with the sound jars will have more rest, a more pleasant life, than the fellow with the leaking jars. However, both have troubles, for both need replenishment for their jar, for their stomach. This simile, in contrast with the first, is entirely<sup>43</sup> [worldly]. There is nothing here of Hades and death. There are men, male men. After death, there would be no difference between men and women, at least from Plato’s point of view. The superiority of moderation or temperance to intemperance can be established according to the second simile without regard to the other life, simply by understanding the character of the needs of the body within the economy of human life in this life. One only has to understand the disproportion between the troubles the procurement of this replenishment produces and the contribution which these activities make to the truly human life. In other words, Socrates thinks sensibly about our care for food, drink, clothing, or whatever it may be. These are necessary things, though they cannot be called the content of a life which deserves to be called human. It is so troublesome to acquire food, drink, and other things of the same caliber. There is, therefore, a certain justice in giving greater right to certain souls who take the greatest trouble most successfully in procuring these things, indirectly at least, for the community. Such a view is somehow present in Plato’s mind. A case can be made for the view that the politically wise should have more, or as Socrates<sup>44</sup> [puts it] in his formulation, that the political man and the economic man are fundamentally the same. That could be defended within certain limits. However this may be, no case can be made for the view that the rulers should lead a life of self–indulgence, as Callicles suggests.

In summary: Callicles is the perfect type of those whom Socrates cannot persuade. This becomes explicit here by the very question, “Do I persuade you, Callicles?” And Callicles says, “You do not persuade me.” Callicles is the prototype of those whom Socrates cannot persuade, and he is presented as the incarnation of desire. This raises a

very great difficulty: Are the true enemies of philosophy the friends of self-indulgence? This does not make sense. Are not the true enemies of philosophy rather the fanatics—men like Anytus? Yes. But with men like Anytus, Socrates could not even talk. We must, then, repeat the question: With what right are the unpersuadable equated with the self-indulgent? Not the self-indulgent directly, but their gods reveal the desires of the self-indulgent. Crudely expressed: the demands for sacrifices, that is, food and drink. Furthermore, the gods of these people fight among themselves. Why do they fight? Because they desire to have more.

In terms of Platonic dialogues, one could say [that] the link between Callicles, who is benevolent to Socrates, and Anytus, who is an enemy of Socrates, is Euthyphro. Euthyphro is an expert in piety, and he shows his superiority by the fact that he accuses his own father; contrary to custom, the son accuses the father. That shows his special claim to<sup>45</sup> [expertise]. Euthyphro, who accused his own father, would be incapable of accusing himself. Accusing his own father is the peak of his habit of accusing others. He also develops a certain theology whose thesis can be reduced to one simple proposition: will is above reason. But that means, since will is above reason, prior to when reason had its say, it cannot be will, rational desire—it can only be desire. It is essential to this view that these gods—however modest<sup>46</sup> [Euthyphro] may be—these gods are desire incarnate. The problem to which I can only allude here is this: that this Euthyphro, this strange figure, lacks success. He is an outsider, a lone wolf, just like Socrates, and, in this case, the reason is the same: Euthyphro, too, lacks rhetoric. He says that when he talks in the assembly, everyone laughs at him. But the main point seems to be this: without taking into consideration the gods by whom Callicles swears more emphatically than anyone else—only he swears by *the* gods—one cannot solve the difficulty. The life of desire can very well be controlled by the individual who is properly brought up, but if the gods are desire incarnate, then the superiority of desire is still recognized, no matter what may go on in the mind of the individual. Without taking this problem of the gods into consideration, one cannot solve the problem of the *Gorgias*.

**Student:** [Inaudible comment]

**LS:** Certain things that Callicles says remind of Nietzsche, who articulated this very clearly. You must not forget that Callicles admits without any reservation that the good is the pleasant. The first thing which distinguishes Nietzsche from Callicles is that he agrees absolutely with Socrates that the good is not the pleasant. Then this soaring thing comes in only by virtue of the distinction between the good and the pleasant. Callicles is in a certain way impressive. There is a certain splendor within him. He reminds people of Alcibiades. This is perfectly intelligible and quite true. One must not be taken in, however, by this splendor, because it is really a sham. It is very nice to have all these qualities which Callicles has, or claims to have, but this, in itself, is not a necessary condition of a human life, and one must not be blinded by it. This does not mean that Socrates' arguments are always conclusive; they are largely rhetorical. One could say, generally speaking, what are serious are<sup>47</sup> Socrates' assertions [rather] than his demonstrations. Callicles is characterized by desire as distinguished from spiritedness, [as] appears clearly the more he reveals himself. In the beginning, he is<sup>48</sup> [presented] as

the representative of an “ideal,” in modern language. But this ideal proves to be extremely poor and low. It is splendid because of its challenging character, something merely external and specious. At closer inspection, it proves to be merely the life of enjoyment on a large scale. And the only thing you could say is this: the more important discussion would be that between Socrates and the lover of political power, or the lover of honor, as the Greeks said—the man who is willing to forego all these pleasures. I believe the answer is this: this phenomenon of honor in this sense is so radically ambiguous—in between these bodily desires and the truly human—that clarity is achieved better if you take the simple opposite, mere desire. The gymnasium, this stripping, is what is taking place in the dialogue. Callicles is stripped of the beautiful garment in which he appears. Then he sees something which is not beautiful at all. Polus, a man at first much less attractive than Callicles, proves to be persuadable; Callicles proves to be unpersuadable.

Then we have the right to question: Why is Polus persuadable and Callicles not? This is the question which I tried to elucidate as much as I could, and I think it has something to do with the fact that in Polus there is a certain element of bitterness. That, strangely enough, in connection with the fact that he is truly dedicated to a relatively low, but still intellectual pursuit, namely, rhetoric, creates a bridge between him and Socrates, whereas Callicles, whether by nature or through his former life, is completely impermeable, not only to Socrates’ reasoning, but also to his attention. Polus is defeated; that is, he is refuted. This shows a lack of acumen, that he did not see the defect of Socrates’ reason. This shows all the more that the result of that argument is to be expected. Another man of no more nor less intelligence than Polus, who had been confronted with that, would at least have been articulate enough to say, “That’s nonsense, you must have fooled me. State again the center argument, etc.” If people accept the result of the reasoning, that is due in many cases to the fact that this result is acceptable to them. In most cases, people accept an argument unless the result is repulsive to them. Socrates’ argument is by no means good, but Polus has something within himself, contrary to first appearance, which is near to Socrates. Callicles, who seems to be a so much nobler person, does not have it. Therefore, the only way in which Callicles could be reached is through a mediator, one who has elements which [Polus] share[s] with Socrates, but also others which connect him with Callicles. In this way, an improved Polus might reach Callicles. That might perhaps mean that he would have to argue on the basis of the common notion of the gods, for example—not eradicating what Socrates did, but modifying it to the extent that Callicles can accept it.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]<sup>x</sup>

**LS:** There is no problem of communication between Socrates and Callicles. When Callicles speaks of a life of self-indulgence, Socrates knows exactly what he means. The only question is: Does human happiness consist in dedication to self-indulgence or not? Both know the question, but both know that they disagree as to the answer. You speak of language, and what is language. Where you find difference of language, Plato finds

---

<sup>x</sup> The transcript does not indicate a question here, but the shift in LS’s remarks suggests that he may have been responding to a further question or comment.



difference of souls. When you speak of difference of language, you seem to suggest a superficial difference; Plato finds the difference in the depth of man. This is one reason why Callicles is groping for the words. To articulate his views would require a kind of theoretical sophistication, perhaps also theoretical perversion, which Callicles lacks. The violence done to language is done only by Socrates, in those incredible puns to which I referred. Callicles cannot find the words available in the language because he has not made the necessary distinction between things such as strength, wisdom, manliness, etc. Everyone has dreams. For instance, the secretary sitting at her machine dreams of marrying the boss. But even that has its depth. Because these silly dreams of that silly girl are based on some longings whose real purpose she does not know at all. The question is to find clarity in oneself. This silly notion that some people have (not some professors, only some students) that there are, let us say, ten values, [that] they are isolated things, having no background whatever, as empty and barren as such a symbol—is this not infinitely more involved? And does it not come out much more clearly if one thinks about them than if one goes around with questionnaires, where you get superficial reactions of superficial people? That Callicles cannot be reduced to the formula of the most superficial man who dreams of a Cadillac is clear. The point is that if he did not have this beautiful garment, this idea, then . . .

[end of tape]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “fair.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “and are.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “is.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “say.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “for.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “plight.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “i.e.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “namely.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “blows.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “to be.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “solitary.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “therefore.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “arid.”

<sup>15</sup> Moved “being.”

<sup>16</sup> Moved “to be whipped.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “loud.”

<sup>18</sup> Moved “only.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “note in.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “488e.”

<sup>22</sup> Moved “then.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “to make him feel.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “to.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “he says.”

<sup>26</sup> Deleted “499b–d.”

<sup>27</sup> Deleted “a.” LS seems to be referring to Socrates’ statement at 489d7–8.

<sup>28</sup> Moved “than others.”

<sup>29</sup> Deleted “he.”

- 
- 30 Deleted "he."
  - 31 Deleted "a."
  - 32 Deleted "dribbling."
  - 33 Deleted "keep."
  - 34 Deleted "using."
  - 35 Deleted "political rights."
  - 36 Deleted "that."
  - 37 Deleted "coveting."
  - 38 Moved "any longer."
  - 39 Deleted "being."
  - 40 Deleted "the."
  - 41 Deleted "this."
  - 42 Deleted "He."
  - 43 Deleted "worthy."
  - 44 Deleted "uses."
  - 45 Deleted "expertness."
  - 46 Deleted "he."
  - 47 Moved "rather."
  - 48 Deleted "represented."

## Session 9: February 14, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** I believe that we all know that it is necessary to read Plato with care: this means with the greatest attention to details. But by doing so, we must never forget the whole. This is always a difficulty in such readings. This shows that reading, [being only one form of thinking], has the same character as all thinking<sup>1</sup>. All thinking has to do with whole[s] and parts—or, to speak of the intellectual qualities which correspond to that, breadth and precision are equally necessary. Only breadth can guarantee that precision will not be wasted on things which are not worthy of such consideration. I say this not without an ulterior motive. There is a certain school in social science which is very much concerned with precision and not at all with the other pole which is equally necessary. From that might arise much complicated idiocy, to use the term coined by Churchill.<sup>1</sup> What breadth means has been stated implicitly by Socrates. The broadest question which it is evidently necessary to raise, because it is evidently our concern, is the question of how one should live—not necessarily here and now, but what is the highest end for man as man? Because the particular question cannot be properly decided without reference to the end.

Now this question may not be the most comprehensive question, but all other questions derive their relevance, their being of concern to us, from the question of how we should live. Every question implies that, prior to its perfect solution,<sup>2</sup> we are confronted with at least two alternative answers, perhaps with an infinite variety of answers, and perhaps the question cannot be answered. What would this mean in the case of the question of the best life? That the choice of the way of life is not rational. This is the view present-day relativist social scientists teach by saying anything can be a value. This means, of course, that the choice is no genuine choice. To state it as in the *Gorgias*, everyone can do as he pleases or, differently stated, the wise and kind man is not intrinsically superior to the insane killer. You all know that the social science relativists do not go as far as that. They are prevented from drawing this conclusion by surreptitiously admitting some rational principle—that is, that man is a social being. Therefore, the throat-cutter has something wrong with him, he is maladjusted. Thus, we come to some criteria for good and bad—adjusted versus maladjusted. What does this imply? Merely a transcending of this very superficial notion that somewhere there are values. There is, then, some recourse to the nature of man as a social being. His actions are measured against that. But the question is whether the nature of man is broadly enough conceived. To be adjusted may mean to be a self-satisfied, successful, philistine. A slick operator is excellently adjusted, I would say. Hamlet, in his monologue, is definitely maladjusted, but I think everyone in his senses who is not completely crude and stupid, would say that Hamlet is a more noble and preferable man than a slick operator. In other words, one has to transcend this whole dimension in which adjustment and maladjustment are the highest point of view. Again we are reminded of the *Gorgias*. Something of this kind is implied in Callicles' appeal from the convention to nature, because adjustment means simply to accept the values of

---

<sup>1</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. 1: The Gathering Storm* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948), 9.

one's society and to live up to them. But one can rightly raise the question: What about the value of these values? That means to appeal from them to something higher. This can be expressed by the formulation "from convention to nature."

Let me state the difficulties somewhat differently. All values are equal—that is a necessary consequence of the view that anything can be a value. Some people deny the necessity of the consequence, but they never give any reason. From this follows that no one has the right to impose his values on others or to interfere with anyone's pursuit of happiness, [which] means simply to follow one's value, regardless of what that value may be. Egalitarian society can be most simply and crudely supported in this way. The appeal which social science has in many circles is, of course, due to the fact that people believe once you deny that, you deny equality. This implies that equal maximum freedom for each is the overriding concern, the concern common to all members of society, the concern which makes possible the freedom for each to pursue his own value. Egalitarian justice, then, necessarily becomes the highest value. To that extent, this is a much more thought-out position than that which identifies the good with the just. But certain difficulties arise even on this level. Obviously, there is need for law. There are people who do interfere with the pursuit of happiness of others, and they must be prevented from doing that. These laws, furthermore, must be just laws if they are to be really respected. But who is going to make the laws? The answer normally given is "all equally." But there cannot be, and will not be, unanimity. This means, in practice, the majority makes the laws—a society in which the will of the majority is identical with the law, and in which the standard of the law is equal opportunity for all to pursue their values as they understand them.

Obviously, there is a conflict between the will of the majority and justice, however understood. How can this conflict be solved? Answer: need<sup>3</sup> [to enlighten] the majority, so that their will will eventually agree with the requirements of justice. The enlighteners are obviously different people than the people to be enlightened. Some recognition of the difference between wise and unwise is here implied. One cannot understand the difference between the wise and the unwise without thinking about the relationship between the wise and the less wise, or, to introduce the formula suggested by the *Gorgias*, the relationship between philosophy and the common people. We see here that the problems discussed in the *Gorgias* are identical with our own—not only that they have a vague kinship, but [that] they are literally identical, as we can see the moment we begin to think.

<sup>ii</sup>In *The Lonely Crowd*,<sup>iii</sup> Mr. Riesman does not speak of adjusted and maladjusted, he uses another distinction: inner-directed and other-directed. There is one other type: the autonomous man. This man transcends the slick operator. But autonomy means giving oneself a law, and not just receiving it from society. But what is the content of that law?

---

<sup>ii</sup> At the beginning of the next paragraph, the transcript includes the words "After comment" in parentheses. It is possible that this paragraph was spoken by a student, or by Strauss.

<sup>iii</sup> David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

Is there any description of the character of that law? Would Callicles be an autonomous man? He rejects the convention; he refuses to be guided by the values of society; he has his own understanding of what is right or noble.

**LS:** Socrates is the autonomous man, but not Callicles. Because autonomy requires not only that you reject the centers of society, but full clarity<sup>4</sup> [about] that in the name of which you challenge society. But what about the intermediate cases, those who grope for something beyond society, who do not see it clearly, but who certainly cannot be compared to the maladjusted, to the people who are not even capable<sup>5</sup> [of living] up to society? If the possibility to transcend society is in itself not neurotic, then I do not see why the imperfect attempt to transcend the society's demands should prove neurotic. Think of people who think that segregation is immoral. Living in a segregated society, it would be unfair to call them maladjusted. So they transcend the society's demands. How is this connected with autonomy? What subject matter do they think about to give autonomy content? With what right can the individual oppose society? He must have some virtues which society does not have. There have been revolutions from which a new way of life has emerged and primarily only in a single individual. Think of the genesis of Christianity. There was no Christian way of life prior to Jesus. Originally, the Christian idea was in the mind of only one man. Prior to the existence of a social movement, it is not only possible but necessary that this idea should exist in an individual, and maybe even in seven different individuals in seven different places. It would still be individuals who then meet on that basis. What I do not understand is what autonomy means here.

**Mr. Jaffa:** May I suggest what might be the foundation of this value which transcends? You have some notion in mind of how some unusual ideas come about. What is in them that makes it possible, or what is it that makes it possible?

**LS:** That is a very long question, but the point is only [that] if you speak of autonomy, the term should have a definite meaning. And if autonomy is itself defined in terms of the social values already in existence, then I see no essential difference between the adjusted, or, for that matter, the maladjusted, and the autonomous.<sup>iv</sup>

What I wanted to say in this introduction is only this: Whenever we begin to think, we are immediately confronted with the problems discussed in the *Gorgias* and, to repeat, with identically the same problems. The linguistic difficulties are trivial. In the *Gorgias*, these problems are discussed not by starting with present-day relativism—that I grant. Why? Is it not legitimate to demand of Plato as a thinking man that he consider all possibilities of starting points, however erroneous and narrow? The reason, I think, is simple. The basis of this social science relativism is not at all a reflection on human things, but a consequence of what is called scientific method. This problem, sufficiently generalized, is discussed by Plato, not in the *Gorgias*, but in the *Statesman* [and] in the *Philebus*.<sup>v</sup> There Plato makes the distinction between two kinds of the art of measuring. One kind asks, "How much?" Counting, lettering, and weighing, these are the forms in which we establish quantities. What is wholly absent from this kind of measuring is the

---

<sup>iv</sup> Session 8 may end here; it is not clear in the original transcript.

<sup>v</sup> See *Statesman* 283c ff., *Philebus* 23c ff.

consideration of too much or too little. Therefore, the results of this kind of measuring regarding human matters are necessarily meaningless. For example, saying how many people live in a country is meaningless unless you say whether the country is overpopulated or underpopulated, to say nothing of more refined questions. What is absent there is the consideration of the good or the proper, the measure in the strict sense of the term. If these things are not referred to [the] right measure, they are meaningless.

In the *Gorgias*, the problems (which are our problems) are discussed by starting from rhetoric. I tried last time to show at some length why this problem of rhetoric is an immediately intelligible problem. We tried to think about the premises underlying our society. As I stated it, technology is the modern equivalent to what Plato understands by the desired public rhetoric [which addresses] the gulf between philosophy or science [and the multitude] and the problem constituted by the antagonism of philosophy and the multitude. The proof: Callicles, the friend and admirer of Gorgias, condemns the philosophic way of life. [In a very significant passage], he condemns Socrates to be whipped<sup>6</sup>. It is a mere accident—his relative benevolence to Socrates—that he does not condemn Socrates to death. This accidental benevolence distinguishes him from the other enemies of philosophy who did condemn Socrates to death, the most famous of them being Anytus, who is in a way the hero of the companion dialogue to the *Gorgias*, the *Meno*. Callicles and Socrates agree as to the antagonism of philosophy and [the] *demos*. Callicles says [that] the philosophers become ridiculous in the political arena, and that the politicians become ridiculous in philosophic discussion. This means that the problem of the limitation of philosophy, that it cannot get entrance beyond a certain point, is real, as both Callicles and Socrates see—only they draw very different conclusions. You may also have seen in 485d, when Callicles describes the philosopher's life, he says three or four people are sitting in a corner, they are not loud-speaking in the market place, addressing the multitude; they whisper in a corner. When Socrates speaks of Callicles' deliberation with his friends [over] which life they should choose, there were also four people, also whispering in a corner rather than speaking in the marketplace. Even Callicles had to withdraw when he chose his way of life. Even Callicles had to withdraw at least once.

This then is followed by the passage which we began to discuss last time: the qualifications required for establishing finally the truth. After Callicles has completed his long speech, Socrates prepares the discussion with Callicles by a general remark regarding the conditions to be fulfilled by a perfect and final discussion, that is to say, by a discussion leading up to the complete solution of the problem. These conditions, Socrates says, are fulfilled in his conversation with Callicles; they were not fulfilled in his conversations with Gorgias and Polus. Not much reflection is needed in order to see that these conditions are not fulfilled in the conversation with Callicles either, so that the conditions for philosophic discussions are never fulfilled in the dialogue. What is the purpose of this statement of Socrates about the conditions of a philosophic discussion? Why does Socrates, as it were, proclaim the defect of the whole discussion? The theme is rhetoric, that is to say, the supplement to philosophy, or the defect of philosophy. Socrates says the discussion up to now was defective; it did not fulfill the requirements of philosophic discussion. For there are three such requirements, [only] two of which<sup>7</sup> were

fulfilled: wisdom and benevolence or friendship. The third being frankness; Polus and Gorgias had not been frank. Therefore, the discussion was not adequate. Calicles will have the three qualities, as Socrates ironically says. The question which we have to raise, and which as a matter of fact was raised by one of you last time: Are these three—wisdom, benevolence<sup>8</sup> [or] friendship, frankness—the requirements for philosophic discussion? What would we say if someone would ask us what are the conditions of a philosophic discussion? I think we all would say intelligence and honesty. What does honesty here mean? Dishonesty is excluded—the dishonesty consisting in the will to win, or the will to avoid the shame of refutation. If this is absent and competence is present, then the conditions are met. Plato speaks of this problem in the *Republic* in 450b<sup>9</sup>[-e]. [Inaudible words] [The gulf between philosophy or science and the] many, the *demos*, is bridged either by a<sup>10</sup> [salutary] science or else by speech. It is bridged either by the production of allegedly or [truly] salutary things, like medicines, etc., or else by speech. The question we are concerned with is whether the modern level of bridging the gulf by deeds is an unqualified success or not. To the extent to which we realize that, we become more interested in Plato's discussion.

Turning again to the *Gorgias*, and taking a somewhat broader view, I would like to remind you of the previous discussion. In the first place, the section between Socrates and Gorgias, in which Socrates starts from the premise, admitted by Gorgias, that rhetoric can be misused, and the tacit conclusion from that is that rhetoric cannot be the highest art, but must be controlled by a higher art, and ultimately by the highest art, which Socrates assumes to be philosophy. In this part of the dialogue, however, he calls this the legislative art, a kind of first appearance of philosophy. Such control of rhetoric by the highest art would guarantee the justice of rhetoric. The explicit discussion turns around the following question: Must the rhetorician not know just or unjust things? Gorgias can't help admitting it, and then Socrates draws the seemingly and literally atrocious conclusion: he who knows the just things necessarily does the just things, hence the orator is necessarily just. This becomes legitimate provided one understands the relation of virtue and knowledge. As stated, and as intelligible to Gorgias, it is an atrocious feat of rhetorical knockout.

The Polus section is much more detailed and revealing. There, Socrates develops his notion of rhetoric as a part of flattery, which means rhetoric is neither an art ([it is] merely [a] routine) nor noble. It is directed toward gratification and not toward the good, toward health. It is ultimately based on the false premise that to do what one pleases is happiness. This is today's relativism. It amounts<sup>11</sup>, as Polus becomes aware, to the denial of the principle of rationality.<sup>12</sup> [Polus'] second statement is far more rational: to do injustice is better than to suffer injustice. By this very fact, he recognizes a standard. Better with a view to what? Answer: to happiness. At the same time, Polus asserts that to do injustice is baser than suffering injustice. Then he is led by the complicated relationship of these two assertions to admit in the end that to do injustice is worse than to suffer injustice. A closer examination of this argument shows that the real theme here is the problem of punishment. The problem of punishment comes up here in the following context. To do injustice is worse than to suffer injustice. To do injustice without undergoing punishment is worse than to do injustice and<sup>13</sup> [to be] punished for it.

The problem of punishment is this: Does punishment make a man better? Can anything make a man better except insight and friendly, fraternal correction? Is the motivation for punishment, namely, to inflict pain, not rather the desire to hurt again, or the desire to take revenge? This argument goes through the whole dialogue and affects the argument in various ways, as we will see.

The conclusion of the Polus section was: rhetoric is useless for the just man; it is useful only for bringing about the punishment of the unjust. Yet, as we have seen by simply thinking about that, rhetoric is also useful for the acquittal of the just man who is<sup>14</sup> [wrongly] accused, and therefore the end of the Polus section amounts to a vindication of forensic rhetoric, provided it is justly used. But forensic rhetoric is only a part of rhetoric. There is also political rhetoric, or, as the Greeks called it, deliberative rhetoric, about which there is complete silence, as we have seen. And, above all, there is this highest form of rhetoric in the Gorgian sense: display rhetoric, *epideictic* rhetoric. What about this highest form of rhetoric? Is this simply nonsense, simply gratification of the senses of the ear, or can it receive good meaning, provided it is better understood? The answer to this question becomes clearer—although it is already sufficiently clear if one reads carefully—in the Callicles section. The need for a rhetoric higher than forensic rhetoric arises from the fundamental issue, the relation between philosophy and the common people. How can this gulf be bridged for the benefit of both, and therewith for the benefit of civil society? Gorgian rhetoric, at the highest level, does not solve the problem. But Socrates points out to him and to us this problem, if we follow carefully what he says. In this part, we are confronted with the great difficulty which we have by no means solved: What is the meaning of the Callicles section? What is the meaning of Callicles? What the meaning of Polus is, I think, we have understood: Polus is an unphilosophic man, somehow trained by philosophy, but he is persuadable by Socrates. Callicles is in the same boat as Polus as far as his training is concerned (except that he is not so technically trained in rhetoric), but Callicles is unpersuadable. What do we learn<sup>15</sup> [for] the fundamental issue by the fact that Callicles, this insignificant individual, is the representative, the prototype, of the man who cannot be persuaded? I suggest that we read on so that we have most of the material together to form a judgment about Callicles' character and<sup>16</sup> [thereby] make the discussion a bit more precise.

Socrates has tried to persuade Callicles by means of a myth—by three sayings—and Socrates has failed there. In the next section, which begins in 494a–499b, Socrates does not speak mythically, but uses an argument. The distinction, which is very common, is that between *mythos* and *logos*. Originally the two terms meant the same, but since about the fifth or sixth century a distinction was made between *mythos*, as an untrue speech, and *logos*, as a true speech. We can also say a *mythos* is a speech using imagery, and a *logos* is an argument not using imagery. *Logos* approaches the meaning of demonstrative speech.

In 494a–b, Socrates gives a *logos* which is meant to show that the good is fundamentally different from the pleasant. I remind you again of the Callicles thesis: by natural right those who are wiser and more manly both rule and have more than the others. Socrates raises the question: Must they not first rule themselves, which means exercise self–



control, or temperance, or moderation? Callicles: “Not at all, they must satisfy maximally their desires.” Socrates tries to persuade Callicles of the superiority of temperance or moderation to intemperance by three sayings, the last of which consists of four similes. In the second simile, the temperate man and his opposite are compared to two men, one having sound jars and the other leaking jars. Both have to replenish their jars. He suggests that these jars are the[ir] bodies, and therewith that the desires which are now under consideration are based on the needs of the body. Callicles is not persuaded. He says [that] he who has filled his jars has no longer the pleasure which goes with replenishing—eating and drinking—but lives like a stone. The pleasant life is the maximum inflow. In other words, if you have the leaky jar, you have a chance of always having pleasure, and this is the desirable life.

In 494b, Socrates replies as follows: “All right, you have the maximal inflow, but you have also the maximal outflow—therefore, the enormous trouble in getting these things into you. In addition, you need big holes so that you can get big piles into you.” He uses the example of a bird there, a pelican,<sup>vi</sup> a very ravenous and stinking beast. Aristotle notes about this bird that it is bad both in regard to color and sound, to say nothing of the smell.<sup>vii</sup> Socrates’ reply is, of course, purely rhetorical: “You say stone. The question is: Is a stone not nicer than an ugly and smelling bird?”

In the sequel, Socrates begins an argument without similes. He tries to analyze the relation between desires and pleasures, suggesting the example of food and drink, the most common form of desires and their satisfaction. Callicles draws his attention to the fact that there are many other kinds of desires. Socrates replies that neither Callicles nor he must be bashful, which is an obvious reference to sexual desires, not honor, which would be the highest object of desire. Socrates is responsible here—and this is important—for the narrowing of the discussion to the bodily desires. Socrates narrows the discussion from desires in general to the desire for bodily pleasures in particular. He mentions first the pleasure derived from scratching. This is, of course, a substitute—and we do not need any Freud for that—for sexual desires. There is a fragment of Democritus, who compared scratching and sexual enjoyment.<sup>viii</sup> Callicles is disgusted. “You are simply an orator,” he says to Socrates, meaning you are a poor orator. Callicles naturally has in mind pleasures of an entirely different kind—the grand life.

In d, Socrates: “Because I am simply and artlessly an orator, I succeeded in making Polus and Gorgias perplexed and ashamed”—that is to say, unwilling to say what they think—“but of course I cannot upset you and make you ashamed, for you are manly, and you are not ashamed, you will not blush.” In order to avoid the fate of Polus and Gorgias, Callicles admits that even those who scratch when they have the itch are happy. This

---

<sup>vi</sup>Dodds notes that the *charadriou* (the Greek name of the bird referred to in the text) is “a bird of messy habits and uncertain identity. Ol[ympi]odorus and the scholiast inform us that *hama tōi esthlein ekkrinei* [it excretes at the same time as it eats] . . . it is tentatively identified by D’Arcy Thompson, *Glossary of Greek Birds*, 311, following Gesner and Linnaeus, with the stone-curlew” (306).

<sup>vii</sup> See Aristotle, *History of Animals* 615a2–3.

<sup>viii</sup> Fragment DK B127.

leads eventually to the shocking consequence that the lewdest of the lewd are happy, and not base or wretched. Here, a surprise sentence: Callicles does not dare to say this. Instead, he rebukes Socrates for not being ashamed to mention such indecent things. To which Socrates says: “Not I am to blame, but you, since your general assertion implies this indecent consequence, whether you like it or not.” We see here, by the way, that Callicles does not agree with Dr. Kinsey,<sup>ix</sup> because certain things are simply indecent, and he is even shocked at Socrates’ mentioning them. I think this is the most important additional evidence regarding Callicles’ character, and therefore I would like to discuss first this question with special regard to this passage.

Callicles represents the unpersuadable who happens to have some good will toward philosophy and toward Socrates. He admits that young men should study philosophy, and he is somehow friendly to Socrates. If he did not fulfill these conditions, there would be no possibility for a long conversation with Socrates. The enemy of Socrates, Anytus in the *Meno*, has a very short discussion because there is no basis. We assume that Callicles represents the best case of the unpersuadable. There is another man who is also half-concerned with philosophy and turns away from philosophy, a very impressive figure: Alcibiades. Alcibiades is a higher type in the Platonic order than Callicles; he is not simply unpersuadable. The simple proof: Alcibiades loves Socrates, has a desire for Socrates. Callicles has desires for other people, but not for Socrates. Again, let us look back to Polus, the persuadable. Polus’ thesis was [that] the noble is different from the good. This was underlying that particular assertion that suffering injustice is nobler than doing injustice, whereas doing injustice is better than suffering injustice. He made a distinction between the good and the noble. What does this distinction mean? If we apply it to Polus, I would suggest this: he admits that there is such a thing which is attractive while being useless. The mere sight or hearing pleases. This is, of course, in character with an artist like him, a rhetorician. The polished phrase—this is beautiful in itself, and this he understands. This is connected with his dedication to his art. At the same time, there is this peculiar bestiality in him which, however, can be tamed and become then what I call by an atrocious English word “punitiveness”—punitiveness being the tamed version of bestiality. In the language of Plato’s psychology, he is representative of the irascible part, of anger or indignation. I regard it as possible that his apparent praise of this atrocious tyrant, Archelaus, may be a piece of calumny instigated by some indignation. Callicles, contrary to Polus, says the noble is identical with the good. There is no place for the useless, for the playful. The playful, he says emphatically, is nice for children but for grown men it has no place. He is serious, and this is expressed by the fact that he is an erotic man, a passionate man. Not the art of the orator, but the purpose which this art serves is the highest good—contrary to Gorgias, who regards the art of rhetoric as higher than the purpose which it serves, political rule or political freedom.

What is this end which the art of rhetoric serves, according to Callicles? Ruling the city, the highest honor, which cannot shine forth properly without [expending] great wealth<sup>17</sup>, helping friends and hurting enemies on the grandest scale, having all kinds of splendid and grand enjoyments—horses, elegant and costly garments, banquets, shows. An ideal

---

<sup>ix</sup> Alfred Kinsey (1894–1956) was an American biologist who produced controversial and influential research on human sexuality in the 1940s and 1950s.

which is as intelligible today as it always was. If you do not know it from yourselves, look at the pictures. This is Callicles' notion of the end of human life. This is<sup>18</sup> [presented] here as the representative of desire in the lowest sense—low, creeping desire. And, as you have observed, there is something unfair in this characterization. Socrates brings him down to the level of bodily desire alone. Callicles cannot prevent Socrates from doing this because he is no match for Socrates. But must we not take the side of Callicles, lest injustice be done to him by Socrates? I think we act in the spirit of Socrates if we do that. Would it not be much better to present the unpersuadable either in the form of the drifter or the beachcomber?

[Inaudible words] . . . .<sup>x</sup>

—[Alcibiades']<sup>xi</sup> defense is this: “I have a better right to command . . . and, at the same time, I believe myself to be worthy of it. The things for which I am abused bring fame to my ancestors and to myself, and, besides, profit to the city. The Greeks, after seeing our city ruined by the war, concluded it to be even greater than it really is, by reason of the magnificence with which I represented [it] at the Olympic games, when I sent in seven chariots, a number never before entered by any private man, and won the first prize, and was second and fourth, and took care that everything was in a style worthy of my victory. Convention regards such displays as honorable. Again, any splendor that I may have exhibited at home is, by nature, envied by my fellow citizens. It is not unfair that he who prides himself on his position should be reduced to equality with the rest, etc.”<sup>xii</sup> In other words, think of what you know either from reading Plato or Thucydides, or modern interpretations of Alcibiades, this man of the greatest splendor. This is what Callicles has in mind, and Socrates seems to be very petty, nailing him down on each of these points. “Elegant clothes: What is that?” “Big houses: Do you need them?” This is nasty. There is a wonderful image of worldliness, which is so charming and which impresses all of us to some extent at some time, I believe, and Socrates is tearing it to pieces and shows us that all the pieces are not worth it. How could this whole, which consists only of such pieces, be such a great thing? But the main point for Callicles is really the position, the honor, and not these trivial and despicable externals. They are important to him only as signs.

Let us therefore look at honor for one moment. Honor is awarded for deeds, that is to say, for service to other men. The man who is concerned with honor can be dedicated primarily to these services, to his task, or to his position. If the dedication is primarily to the task, then he is dedicated to what is common to him and his fellow citizens. If he is dedicated primarily to his position, to his aggrandizement, then he is dedicated to his private good. But the principle of privacy, of individuality, is the body. Therefore, one can express the desire of the ambitious man by describing him as dedicated to his body. This radical Platonic statement is empirically not without some confirmation. We frequently find that people who are politically ambitious desire also wealth, and not only

---

<sup>x</sup> There may have been a break in the tape here.

<sup>xi</sup> LS says “Callicles,” evidently in error.

<sup>xii</sup> LS is quoting from Thucydides 6.16.1–4. He seems to have been reading from but slightly modifying the Crawley translation.

because it is conducive to political power, but for wealth to be enjoyed. They desire conspicuous consumption. I can also state it as follows: Callicles' desire may appear to be desire for being outstanding in council and in action, that is to say, in battle, a desire for worth, for virtue—and this is the root of his splendor. But it is not genuine. On closer inspection, this desire proves to be desire for that which virtue brings about, for success, for sham. So<sup>19</sup> the desire for even moderate food and drink may appear to be the most substantial part of this mirage.

Callicles, then, is ultimately unpersuadable because he craves self-indulgence, because he is a softy. But he is unpersuadable only for Socrates, not for the common people. The problem is, therefore, whether he could not be persuaded by someone lower indeed than Socrates and higher than the *demos*, and persuaded to despise injustice and indulgence and to honor justice and self-control. These in-between people could be Gorgias or Polus, if they were properly directed, and if they would see their function in persuading people to despise injustice and not to show forth their rhetorical cleverness. But how could they possibly persuade Callicles? What is Callicles' weak spot? Why can Socrates not use this weakness for persuading Callicles? That is the problem.

I do not know whether I have a solution, but I will try. According to Callicles, Polus could be persuaded by Socrates because Polus was ashamed to say what he thought, because he was not frank, because he did not dare to speak up, because he lacked manliness. Callicles cannot be persuaded by Socrates, according to his own interpretation, because he is manly, frank, and not ashamed to say what he thinks in public. That is Callicles' own diagnosis. The question is whether this diagnosis is correct. Would Callicles dare to say in a popular assembly what he said in this private conversation about the single man and his breaking through the laws of the many? Certainly not. Which means to say that Callicles behaves in the assembly of the people as Gorgias and Polus do in that little assembly. But can one call this lack of daring<sup>20</sup> [if] Callicles does not say to the popular assembly what he really thinks about them? Can we call this lack of daring, or lack of frankness, or being ashamed to say this? Is a man who considers the prejudices of another man because he wishes to control him, or to deceive him, or not to hurt his feelings, is that first man ashamed? He may fear retaliation, he may be ashamed of the disgrace from the retaliation, but he is not ashamed simply. Callicles would only be ashamed of not speaking against the prejudices of the people<sup>21</sup> [if he agreed with] these prejudices. By saying that Gorgias and Polus were ashamed, Callicles really reveals himself. He is<sup>22</sup> impressed by the very prejudices, the conventions, which he attacks. It is he who can be ashamed. It would seem, then, that he can be persuaded if he can be brought to become ashamed. Callicles admits that there are things which are by nature noble; hence, there are things which are by nature base—the Greek word for “base,” has the same root as the Greek word for “shame.”<sup>xiii</sup> Callicles admits that there are things which are by nature shameful. He claims by implication that he would not be ashamed for doing things which are shameful by convention. Therefore, he will be ashamed to do acts of extreme lewdness, if they are by nature shameful, by nature base. Therefore, he will be, in fact, never ashamed. He can never be persuaded. Yet, no one

---

<sup>xiii</sup> The words are *aischros* (base) and *aischunē* (shame).

commits such acts in this dialogue. Socrates only speaks of them. And Callicles says that Socrates ought to be ashamed to speak of those things which are by nature disgraceful. In other words, to mention things which are by nature disgraceful is disgraceful. Yet, he himself does so, not in this particular passage, but when he speaks of what the many do: they cowardly surrender and they overcome the superior individual. So he commits a sin against natural propriety as much Socrates. Certainly, Callicles does not dare to say what he thinks. Could he be persuaded to say what he thinks? Could he be persuaded by Polus or Gorgias to say what he thinks? And under what conditions? Could Polus and Gorgias make him honest with himself? And under what conditions? But it is perhaps not the mere mentioning of things which are by nature disgraceful, but the suggestion that certain things of which Callicles *believes* that they are by nature disgraceful—sorry, this is wrong.<sup>xiv</sup> What creates Callicles' indignation about Socrates' impropriety? Not that Socrates mentions these things, but that he suggests that these disgraceful things could be by nature noble. Yet, as Socrates points out, this suggestion follows from Callicles' premise, the premise that the good is identical with the pleasant—then any pleasure is good.

What, then, is true? Callicles is not ashamed to contradict himself. If he is caught in a contradiction, he does not blush like Thrasymachus in the First Book of the *Republic*. Callicles never blushes because he never does anything which he regards as disgraceful. Thrasymachus, the artist–rhetorician, regards it as disgraceful to contradict himself. Callicles does not care whether or not he contradicts himself, for he does not regard this as by nature base. He has certain opinions, and he does not care whether or not these beliefs are clear and consistent. Therefore, Socrates cannot persuade him. These opinions are the ground for his self–respect. To act or speak against them explicitly would be by nature base. To imply them only, without being aware of it, is not disgraceful. He divorces the utterance from the thought.

In 487b, Socrates rendering Callicles' thought: because Polus is ashamed, he dares to contradict himself in front of many human beings. This, I think, fits Callicles. Callicles' respect<sup>23</sup> [for his opinions], and his certainty that he will always live up to them, makes it sure that he will never be in fact ashamed. Callicles refuses to listen to reason, which means to reflect on these opinions. If he did, to say the good is identical with the pleasant would mean that the most atrocious pleasures are good. Callicles does not say what he thinks because he cannot say what he thinks, because he does not think. In other words, he is immune to persuasion. Strange as it may sound, Callicles has something in common with an old Victorian aunt who would never say certain things. This narrow limitation to the spoken word completely divorced from the thought, which necessarily leads beyond it, is characteristic of him. What could induce Callicles to become ashamed? If he would do things which are by nature disgraceful. What is by nature disgraceful? To fail publicly. From the dialogue, he does not appear to be a conspicuous success like Alcibiades. Yet Callicles could avoid public failure by a very simple public device: commit suicide. He can be brought to be ashamed only if suicide is precluded, that is to say, if he becomes

---

<sup>xiv</sup> In the transcript, the phrase “sorry, this is wrong” is in parentheses. It is possible that the transcriber was referring to his or her own error, but the likelier explanation is that LS was aborting his formulation.

convinced of the immortality of the soul and divine judgment by just judges after death. This is, of course, what Socrates brings out in the myth at the end. Yet Callicles refuses to believe this. The question is if Gorgias and Polus, by their rhetorical power, could persuade Callicles to believe in the immortality of the soul. Then he could become ashamed, assuming that he meets with some conspicuous public failure.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** Callicles is not teachable in the narrow sense. He can never have true virtue, but only the imitation of virtue, if virtue is knowledge.

**Student:** What is the difference between that and that kind of Victorian sham he now has?

**LS:** He wants to be a tyrant, and that will show in many ways. He would become a decent citizen. If a man holds the opinions he holds, sooner or later it will show in deed. Given his notion of what is by nature disgraceful, he can only become ashamed if he is publicly disgraced, regardless of whether this disgrace is right or wrong.

**Student:** Last time you said that Callicles' benevolence to Socrates is accidental. I am not sure I understand that.

**LS:** Perhaps this needs some correction. A philosopher would be benevolent to Socrates. If there were a lack of benevolence, it would be purely accidental. If a man who has a strong sense of the noble as commonly understood, but on the highest level, would be benevolent to Socrates, it would not be accidental. [That] a man like Callicles, who is not dedicated to that but lives in that mirage, should have sympathy for Socrates is accidental. In other words, another fellow like Callicles, with the same ideal, would with equal right be anti-Socrates. Why is Callicles benevolent to Socrates? Because, contrary to Anytus, he thinks that philosophy is good up to a certain point. If Socrates had kept within that point, everything would be right, but Socrates is an older man and still philosophizes; therefore he deserves to be whipped. Anytus would say he deserves to be whipped for ever having philosophized. Does this require that I give up the term "accidental"? Perhaps you would say [that] since<sup>24</sup> [Callicles] admits the necessity of some culture of the mind, he must have some sympathy for Socrates.

**Same student:** I also wondered whether there is not a possibility of his being redeemed through this benevolence. What effect would the death of Socrates have on such a person?

**LS:** I would say that is hard to say. In the beginning, Callicles thinks<sup>25</sup> [Socrates] is by and large a nice chap. One should whip him, perhaps, but not execute him . . . . For Callicles, there is but one way of life, what I call "the mirage." What I find so sad in present-day discussions among social scientists about values is that very important fact, what I call that mirage. In comparing societies, we would have to ask whether the

importance of such mirages for societies would characterize societies. We could imagine a society in which this does not play a significant role.

[end of tape]

---

<sup>1</sup> Moved “being only one form of thinking.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “for enlightening.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “to live.”

<sup>6</sup> Moved “in a very significant passage.”

<sup>7</sup> Moved “only.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “c.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “solitary.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “to.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “His.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “being.”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “innocently.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “from.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “therefore.”

<sup>17</sup> Moved “expending.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “represented.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “unless he would agree to.”

<sup>22</sup> Deleted “being.”

<sup>23</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>24</sup> Deleted “he.”

<sup>25</sup> Deleted “he.”

## Session 10: no date

**Leo Strauss:** I remind you of the situation. Callicles had challenged Socrates' case for justice, namely, that suffering injustice is better than doing injustice. And this case for justice is at the same time a case against rhetoric, rhetoric being that prevention of suffering wrong. Callicles had challenged his case for justice and against rhetoric by appealing to what is by nature just and by nature noble: the life of the real man. The man superior in wisdom and manliness ought to rule the others and ought to have more than the others. But<sup>1</sup> [these real men] ought not to rule themselves. They ought not to exercise self-control or moderation or temperance. On the contrary, they ought to satisfy maximally their maximal desires. Only such a life, he contends, is pleasant. Socrates is thus enabled to reduce Callicles' original appeal to what is by nature right and noble to an appeal to the pleasant. Socrates is thus enabled to reduce Callicles' position to the thesis [that] the good is identical to the pleasant. First, he attacks Callicles' opinion by adducing three sayings, the last of which consists of two similes. The first of these two similes implies the suggestion of life after death, whereas the second of the two similes does not imply such a suggestion. Socrates fails to persuade Callicles by these sayings. He turns then to arguments, of which he gives three. The first of the arguments, which we have already discussed, is this: the pleasures of the lewd are base, hence the good is different from the pleasant. In this argument, a tacit identification is made of the good and the noble, and Callicles has no objection to that. This argument constitutes the refutation of Callicles: Callicles contradicts himself by saying, on the one hand, that the good is identical with the pleasant, and, on the other hand, that there are pleasures which are base. But Callicles, as we have seen, is not ashamed to contradict himself: He's only ashamed to retract what he has said, because to retract what he has said means to him to desert one's post, to act the part of a coward. A brave man sticks to his opinion. Now, here we begin again in 495e. I give you only a brief indication of what follows,

There follows, first, two other arguments which are meant to prove that the good is different from the pleasant. And then, after Socrates has established that the good is different from the pleasant, he goes over to the question of the two ways of life: the life directed towards the good and the life directed toward the pleasant. The life directed toward the good is said to be the philosophic life, the life directed toward the pleasant is said to be the political-rhetorical life. In this context, Socrates takes up the thesis developed first in the conversation with Polus, according to which rhetoric is a branch of flattery—flattery being only concerned with gratification which pleases people. But now a radical change is made. Each of the two ways of life, the good and the pleasant one, is accompanied by a rhetoric peculiar to it.<sup>2</sup> [There] is, therefore, a good or noble rhetoric, as distinguished from the base rhetoric discussed before. Now, we, of course, have noted all the time that the argument of Socrates presupposes the *possibility* of a noble rhetoric. But now this statement is made explicitly.

Now first we turn to<sup>3</sup> [494e9] The first part is 494e–497d: the second argument proving that the pleasant is different from the good. Now at the beginning, 494e–495a, although



the example[s] of the lewd people have shown sufficiently, with a view to Callicles, that the pleasant is different from the noble or good, Callicles reasserts his thesis in order not to contradict himself—more precisely, lest his speech be “unagreed,” lest he cease to agree to what he has said in his long speech. He must stick to his opinions, he must remain on his post, lest he cease to be manly. If Socrates shows him that he contradicts himself, he will turn his back on that criticism by saying that Socrates changes words, or speaks of indecent things, or something else which might occur to him.

In 495a–c, Socrates says, “Precisely by identifying the good and the pleasant, precisely by *maintaining* now, that the good is identical with the pleasant, you deny your first speeches, for there you recognize *implicitly* that the noble is something different from the pleasant. Your serious opinion will no longer be discussed if you insist on asserting that the good is simply identical with the pleasant.” Callicles declines Socrates’ twofold warning in a very silly way, in a childish way. He does not want to correct himself. He does not want to desert his opinion like a coward. This term “first speeches” which Socrates uses here may also refer to Callicles’ boast to be frank and Socrates’ approval of Callicles’ wish to be frank. But again, Callicles understands by frankness that one should *express* one’s opinions, not that one should *think* about<sup>4</sup> [those opinions]. In other words, Callicles’ position [has] something in common with the notion, the very modern notion, of intellectual honesty. That word plays a very great role in twentieth century literature, from Nietzsche on especially. And it’s something very different from the old-fashioned love of truth. It means simply: do not conceal from yourself and others your opinion—that is, honesty. But to wonder if these opinions are right and wrong, and therefore not to identify yourself with your opinion, that would be old-fashioned love of truth. That is therefore disregarded, and the reason for that modern use, of course, is that there cannot be knowledge of the truth. The utmost you can have is to commit yourself, to identify yourself<sup>5</sup> [with your] opinion. And Callicles is not an existentialist, of course, but in this respect there is some agreement.

Now then, let us see how Socrates begins the argument: 495c–e. He first states Callicles’ thesis for Callicles: knowledge is different from courage. You know, the argument is that the real man combines knowledge or wisdom plus manliness. The first point Socrates insists upon<sup>6</sup> by making this remark: knowledge is different from manliness. In order to make clear that this contains a problem, Socrates says here [that] knowledge is something different from a certain kind of manliness; secondly, [that] knowledge is different from pleasure. Certainly, manliness is different from pleasure. That is one part of Callicles’ thesis. But the second point is that the good is identical with the pleasant. From this it follows, since knowledge is different from pleasure, that knowledge is different from the good and manliness is different from the good. And you can see already a difficulty: If knowledge and manliness are different from the good, then with what right can you call the knowing and manly man a good man? But this consequence is not emphasized by Socrates. It would not be fatal to Callicles, provided he would make a distinction between the simply good and the secondary good, by which I mean this: The simply good is the pleasant, and man tries to reach that, but not all men are equally good at getting the pleasant; to get the pleasant, you must have certain qualities, and let’s assume that these qualities are knowledge and courage; then knowledge and courage would be good *for*

getting the pleasant, they would not be *intrinsically* good. In the language of Plato, they would be useful, but not simply good. Useful always means useful *for* something, not intrinsically good. By this distinction, Callicles could of course avoid the difficulty. But then he would have to prove that, in order to lead a pleasant life, you must be knowing and manly; otherwise, he would get into trouble. But, in itself, he could dispose of this difficulty by a distinction. And his inability to make such distinctions is of course a crucial part of Callicles' character.

Do you see the difficulty? The admirable man is said to consist of this: knowledge and manliness. At the same time, it is said the good or noble is identical with the pleasant. Therefore,<sup>7</sup> [knowledge and manliness] would have to be intrinsically pleasant<sup>8</sup>—this possibility is completely disregarded—or else they must be essentially necessary for getting pleasure. The difficulty raised right here is not faced at all by Callicles. And it is not the center of Socrates' own refutation, as we shall see later. One could base a criticism of hedonism on these observations, as will partly come out in Socrates' argument.

Now let us go on from here, in 495d. Here Socrates refers to Callicles' democratic appellation. He says, "Callicles the Acharnian," not "Callicles the son of this and this father." The patronymic, which is still used in Russia for example, was a common thing in the higher classes. That was the aristocratic way of calling a man, or addressing a man. But in the democratic appellation, [one] did not refer to the father but to the constituency, you could say, to the tribe: the man belonged to this administrative unit of Athens. Now that of course is meaningful in itself, this appellation by the political title, because [of] Callicles' addiction to politics. But there is something more to that. The *deme*, the political administrative unit from which Callicles comes is Acharnae, west of Athens, roughly. Now this reminds us about a play by Aristophanes, *The Acharnians*, which has been preserved, fortunately for us. Now the hero in that Athenian play is a man called "Dikaiopolis." That is a very strange name for a man: *dikaios* means<sup>9</sup> "[just]," and *polis* means "city"—in other words, a man who has the name "just city." This Dikaiopolis opposes the Peloponnesian War. He is just a land owner who detests the abominable intrusion of the Peloponnesian armies into Attica, and he opposes it. And therefore he makes a private peace with the enemy, which means of course technically, high treason. And after he made this private peace, he enjoys the pleasures of peace. The pleasures alluded to are all bodily pleasures. He is therefore persecuted by the patriarchs because the members of this *demos*, of this village, were known as particularly tough fellows who played a great role in the Battle of Marathon, and so on. Now he is persecuted by them and escapes persecution by persuading one half of his persecutors they should let him go. The other half go on, but the fact that the persecutors are split saves him. And in order to succeed in this daring venture, he has to make a speech to his persecutors while having his head on an executioner's block. In other words, he's aware of his situation. And before making this speech, which splits the audience, he puts on rags. But the rags are not ordinary rags, but the rags in which Euripides' hero[es] appear on the tragic stage. Dressed in Euripidean heroic rags, he succeeds.

Now there is some connection between these Acharnians and Socrates. First of all, the name, Dikaiopolis, “the just city,” reminds somehow of what Socrates represents in the *Gorgias*<sup>10</sup> although the [name and the] content, of course, [are] very different. Now, this problem—a man disagreeing with the democratic, imperialistic politics of Athens, which led to the Peloponnesian War, and who somehow is not a member of this community engaging in the Peloponnesian War, is persecuted and<sup>11</sup> [succeeds] in splitting the audience, which means one half is persuaded and the other half is not persuaded—here is the same situation: Socrates persuades Polus, he does not persuade Callicles. And I think the quotations from Euripides here—you remember, Callicles quotes Euripides, Socrates quotes Euripides—are very relevant to this same allusion. But this has a deeper meaning. This Dikaiopolis is a hedonist, but this hedonism does not lead to the political life. The implication, which is borne out by a lot of historical evidence since Socrates,<sup>12</sup> is that a consistent<sup>13</sup> [hedonism] does not lead to Callicles’ notion of the political life, but rather to virtue in the accepted sense, crudely speaking. You know that perhaps from Epicurus. Epicurus also accepts the ordinary virtues, so-called conventional virtues, as genuine virtues on hedonistic grounds. That is consistently hedonistic, although it is not sufficient for other reasons. That Plato was familiar with that is shown most clearly at the end of the dialogue *Protagoras*, where a moral science on [a] hedonistic basis, leading to a sensible life in the ordinary sense, is sketched. A kind of measuring of pleasures and pains<sup>14</sup>, if done with reason, would lead to the same<sup>15</sup> practical results as the non-hedonistic position<sup>16</sup> [of] Socrates, only it would not have the full content. Intelligent hedonism leads away from the political, military life.

Callicles is not consistent even here; he’s not a consistent hedonist, as he believes he is. And that appears directly from the dialogue, if you compare the thesis [that] the good is identical with the pleasant with his description of the he-man, in which the word “pleasure” did not occur, but which was only an appeal to the noble and the just. And that’s what is underlying one of the difficulties which some of you felt: how to jibe Callicles’ character as it presents itself in the first speech with that narrow thesis, the good is identical with the pleasant. Of course it does not jibe, but Callicles is inconsistent, we can say. But at the same time, [he is] completely indifferent to inconsistency on the basis of his notion of manliness. The only thing is not to retract. To contradict himself, that’s all right. Socrates goes<sup>17</sup> [on] to say, indeed, that Callicles cannot see himself correctly. He has no self-knowledge; he cannot see his ignorance. The firmness of his opinion conceals from him his ignorance. Then in [495e–496c]<sup>i</sup>—

To do well and to do badly are opposites, hence they cannot co-exist in the same subject in the same respect. And when the one of them, say, doing well, ceases to exist in a subject, the opposite enters. That is a general proposition which I will repeat later. Socrates<sup>18</sup> [illustrates] this by an example of a disease of the eye. If a man suffers from a disease of the eye, he is not healthy in regard to the eye. But as soon as he gets rid of that disease, he acquires, or reacquires, health of the eye. Generally stated: the good and bad things, the *specific* good and bad things, cannot co-exist in the same man at the same

---

<sup>i</sup> In the transcript, as in the text above, this comes at the end of a paragraph (the Stephanus number there is 496c, which has been deleted). LS may have been asking someone to read the section of text to which he refers.

time in the same respect. The moment evil enters, the good is absent, and vice versa. Happiness, being the sum total or the peak of the good, and misery, [the] peak of the evil, cannot co-exist. If misery ceases, happiness enters, and vice versa. That is developed in 495b–496c. One cannot possess a good thing and its opposite evil at the same time. And one cannot get rid of the good thing and of the opposite evil at the same time. That is the first part of the argument: regarding good and bad things, this is a fundamental relation. And now Socrates will show that regarding pleasure and pain, the opposite is true, that they necessarily coexist and necessarily disappear at the same time. And the conclusion is that the good is fundamentally different from the pleasant.

Now let us first follow the briefly sketched argument as it is developed in 496b–497a. Desire is painful, and satisfaction of desire is pleasant. Take the examples of hunger and thirst, the chief examples here. Now in this case, the pleasant satisfaction of desire, the eating, requires [the] presence of the pain, hunger, appetite. If the hunger ceases, the pleasure derived from eating ceases. Pleasure and pain are, then, possessed simultaneously, and they are also lost simultaneously. If you have eaten enough, you have no longer any appetite, you have no longer any pain, and you cannot derive any pleasure from further eating. Pleasure and pain are possessed simultaneously and lost simultaneously. Pleasure requires the co-presence of pain, but good cannot exist with evil, a specific good cannot coexist with a specific evil. Hence, the pleasant is different from the good. This is a sketch of the argument.

Before we discuss the difficulties, I would like to see whether the argument itself has been understood. If you bring up some difficulties [for] later argument, I don't mind that, although we should for the first time just try to get the stripped meaning of the Socratic contention. There are two kinds of values, as people today would say, two kinds of<sup>19</sup> [things that man wants or desires: one kind is] called the good things and its opposite, the bad, and the other is called the pleasant and its opposite, the painful. And now Socrates says that good things have an entirely different structure than the pleasant things. A good thing cannot co-exist with its opposite even at the same time, and, on the other hand, they both cannot be simultaneously lost, whereas it is of the essence of pleasure and pain to coexist in the same subject, and to exist simultaneously in the same subject and to be lost simultaneously in the same subject, as in the case of eating and drinking described. It's simple to understand that. As long as you have appetite, desire, which means something in itself painful, you enjoy the food, and so the pleasure of eating and the pain of desire must coexist. Also, in the moment the desire ceases, the pain of dissatisfaction ceases, the pleasure, too, ceases. At a certain moment of filling yourself up, you simply *detest* further food, which means it's no longer pleasant. So that is the point, that is the nerve of the argument.

**Student:** [Inaudible words]—when one decreases, the other increases. But that's not the same thing.

**LS:** Ya, that is an important point. But would that not still be true in both instances and in the intermediate stages? But is it not true [that] the moment you reach<sup>20</sup> satiety, the more the pleasure decreases? So that would confirm it, then. In other words, what you mean to

say is this: at a certain stage, and that is probably the most pleasant stage, [that] is where the pain of hunger is somewhat reduced and therefore the enjoyment is purer. But it will never be pure. I mean, there would always be a mixture of need, of desires, in order to make it a pleasure. I mean, the continuity of the transition from perfect pain to perfect satisfaction does not do away with the fact that<sup>21</sup> prior to the moment there is satisfaction, complete satisfaction, there is an element of pain. But in the moment of full satisfaction, both pleasure and pain disappear. Or would you say there can be a pleasure without hunger? I think that is a very good point. Very good, there are, then, pleasures which are not connected with desire. I think that's a serious objection to Socrates' argument. I admit that is true. But let us keep that in mind.

**Student:** How do you explain that in the fullness of pleasure, there is no pleasure?

**LS:** What Socrates says is this: once you have your fill<sup>22</sup>, you have neither pain nor pleasure.

**Student:** But in the fullness of your pleasure, are you then in pain?

**LS:** You have *need* for that. Otherwise you couldn't enjoy the food.

**Same student:** I don't see anything irrational about saying that you *have had* need, but in the fullness of your pleasure, you no longer have need.

**LS:** Ya, but if you did not have the need, the appetite . . . .

**Same student:** Yeah, but this is not the same as to say—<sup>23</sup>

**LS:** It is a modification of that. Because to say "to eat with appetite" is that not a modification of hunger but a complete annihilation of hunger? The moment you've had what you could bear, then you have no longer any appetite. Everyone reaches the point, however big [an] eater or drinker he may be, everyone reaches the point sooner or later where either the food or drink becomes distasteful to him. And in this moment both pleasure and pain with a view to that object, food or drink, have ceased.

**Same student:** Okay. Well, we all get hungry at some time. But assuming we've got an eight-hour day, and there's something very satisfying about 4:00, knowing that at 5:00 we're getting off, or getting out of class, and then we can go home and eat.

**LS:** Now, if eating is pleasant, the expectation of eating will be pleasant. That is easy.

**Same student:** Yeah, but the expectation exists at the same moment of desire.

**LS:** Sure. In other words, there is already the mixture there. The interesting thing is what Socrates suggests, that regarding these pleasures, at least, there can be unmitigated pain—a man just hungry or thirsty—but there cannot be unmitigated pleasure. That is the

point. Because even in the full satisfaction of eating or drinking, the pain must be there to make the pleasure pleasurable.

**Same student:** [Inaudible words]—suppose you’ve finished eating because you’re full, but lack the satisfaction.

**LS:** Yes, that is very good. That is another kind of pleasure, and one of the weaknesses of the argument of Socrates of which we can be sure he was aware is that he disregards that. This pleasure was called by Epicurus later on the *katastematic* pleasure, by which he means the pleasure deriving from a satisfied and normal state, where no desire is involved.<sup>ii</sup> The best example, from Epicurus’ point of view, would be the well feeling, the blessed feeling, deriving from being healthy and strong<sup>24</sup>. You know these fellows that get up in the morning at 5:00 and whistle in the bath? That does not in itself imply any desire. It’s just stemming from the condition, the state: *katastematic*.

Now then, we must think about the argument itself, wholly independent of<sup>25</sup> the details stated by Socrates here. But we must also look at the text, because Socrates himself gives some indication. Now, if you’ll turn first to 496b5, it would be on page 427, where we see “with good things and their opposites.” You see from that that the previously given examples—speed, strength, health—are not meant as examples of good things. But the strange thing is this: health, strength, and speed are the only examples used in Socrates’ induction, where he tries to prove this overall relation regarding good and bad. In other words, the thesis regarding good and bad things is merely a surface. Not even an attempt is made to prove it. And you see also that has something to do with the warning which Socrates makes shortly afterwards on the same page: “Do we admit this? Now consider very carefully before you answer.” That is a warning. And Callicles believes that he has considered sufficiently. At any rate, we have to say, first, the thesis regarding good and bad is asserted but in no way proved in the specifically Socratic way which was called induction—that is, looking at various examples of good things and then<sup>26</sup> [generalizing] from them—because whether health is good or not, it is here explicitly distinguished from the good things, just as strength and speed. Now the second point we may note is this: a good thing and its opposite cannot be lost at the same time. Under what conditions is that true? Take a simple example. Happiness and misery, a comprehensive example.<sup>27</sup> [They] cannot be lost at the same time. Under what conditions is that true?

**Student:** Well, when you die, of course.

**LS:** Exactly. So the argument disregards death, or, in other words, it presupposes immortality of the soul. Man is always either miserable or happy or in between. He never loses them together. But that is true only under this condition. Now, this unproven assumption of immortality is the basis of the proof that the pleasant is different from the good. For otherwise this distinction as made here between the pleasant and the good things could not be made.

---

<sup>ii</sup> See Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* 131–132 together with Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 10.136.1–12.

Now there is another difficulty in e, on page 429, where there is another Socratic warning toward the end of the page: “Does it not occur at once, at the same place and time? In either soul or body, if you please, for I fancy it makes no difference.” This, also, is an indication of a difficulty. No distinction is made as to whether the place of pain or pleasure is the soul or<sup>28</sup> the body, which means also a blurring of the difference between the pleasures of the body and the pleasure[s] of the soul. Now, this has something to do with the question to which you referred before, that there are pleasures which are unmixed as one might say. In 496d, you find a reference here: “‘Hunger itself is painful, is it not?’ ‘I agree.’ ‘And so too is thirst.’ ‘Quite so.’ ‘Then, am I to ask you any further questions, or do you admit that all want and desire is painful?’ ‘I admit it, don’t question me further.’” The question is too easily admitted, that all desire is painful. If all pleasure implies desire, and if all desire is painful—two premises: all pleasure implies desire, and all desire is painful—then all pleasures will be a mixture of pleasure and pain,<sup>29</sup> all pleasure will be mixed with pain, there cannot be pure pleasures, all pleasures will be mixed, whereas good and bad are not necessarily mixed. That, I think, is the nerve of the argument. Now, is this true? We have already been given some examples of unmixed pleasures.<sup>30</sup> [Yes?]

**Student:** I don’t want to interrupt you. In his discussion with Polus,<sup>31</sup> [Socrates] makes a difference between the pleasure and the painful, and he asserts they are elements, respectively, of the good and the foul. If something is pleasurable, it can be good. He measures the good in terms of its giving a certain amount of pleasure.

**LS:** No. What he does is this. You may have a point. I would not recognize it in what you say. In the Polus discussion, the question does not concern the good but the noble, and the noble is divided into two things:<sup>32</sup> the pleasant and [the] useful.

**Student:** [Inaudible words]—beneficial.

**LS:** Beneficial, which is the form of the good. Do you see any immediate connection between this distinction and the distinction made here, that this one is always mixed, and this is essentially unmixed?

**Student:** The association that I’m looking for here is an implication that pain can be associated with good.

**LS:** That is not crucial here. Why could it not be? If you would elaborate it and show that the association of the good with the pleasant would lead to consequences fatal to the argument here, I would agree, but you have not shown that.

**Student:** If you think of [the] good as something that has to be evaluated and the pleasant as something that’s immediately self-evident, that doesn’t need an evaluation, something like [the] beautiful, then it would seem that you could see how there could be a badness in both the pleasant and the good, and how in this argument, you don’t need any assumption that is really consistent.

**LS:** I really don't understand you. Do you really argue on the basis of the premise here, that there is an essential difference between the good and the pleasant? You would admit that. Then you would have to go deeper and see, since Socrates failed to do so in this argument. Give an example of what is as such good and not as such pleasant. You would have to start from that. In the case of pleasure, we have plenty: hunger [and] thirst is sufficient, eating and drink[ing]. But we don't have any examples of what is good.

**Student:** The good and [the] pleasant essentially are different here theoretically.

**LS:** Ya, but still that does not make an impression, if you do not give us at least one example of what is as such good but indifferent to pleasure [and] pain.

**Same student:** Any moral action would be as such good or bad, in relation to some value.

**LS:** Ya, but try to state it in a manner which is intelligible to Callicles.

**Same student:** Indulging in desires, say, any desire you want. You have a desire to be good or bad. You can say that was good or bad, if you *knew*—

**LS:** Ya, but the goodness of self-indulgence is constituted by pleasure, by the identification of the good and the pleasant. I suggest we try to stick to the Socratic argument for the time being, and I think these points which you have in mind will come up.

Now every one of you has heard something of the Platonic doctrine of ideas. There is an idea of justice, for example; and the general teaching of Plato, of course, is that justice is good. But there is an idea of justice, whatever that may mean. What does this imply regarding just<sup>33</sup> [men], just laws, just actions, just measures? How just are they, if there is an idea of justice? Is this question intelligible? I mean, we all speak, and quite reasonably, of just men, just actions, just laws. But Plato asserts there is such a thing called the idea of justice. But what lies forth<sup>iii</sup> on the just man, on the just law, on the just action, by the very fact that there is an idea of justice? I know it is somewhat abstractly phrased, but does someone who has not particularly devoted much time to these things know the answer to this? At the end of the *Phaedo*, Socrates is described as a wonderful man, after his death. And it is said he was very just, very noble, very moderate, and so on and so on, but with a qualification—say, that he was the justest among his contemporaries.<sup>iv</sup> Is the justest man among his contemporaries simply just? Of course not. And that must be universalized: no one is simply just, no policy is simply just.

---

<sup>iii</sup> “Lies forth” is in the transcript, but it may not be what LS said. It is worth noting that in the next sentence LS says that this remark is “somewhat abstractly phrased.”

<sup>iv</sup> The last line of the *Phaedo* reads, “This was the end, Echechrates, of our friend, a man about whom we would say that he was, among those of that time whom we encountered, the best and also the wisest and most just” (118a).



Otherwise, the idea of justice as Plato meant it wouldn't make sense. Every good thing which we have is necessarily imperfect. What this means, too: that it participates with the bad as well, and only the degree of the mixture is the point. So one can state the meaning of the Platonic doctrine as follows: that in human life, there is nothing unmixedly good. And one could perhaps even say there is nothing unmixedly evil, because all moral evil consists of the misuse of something which is really good. Good things are imperfect; [they] may be mixed with their opposite.

But what about the pleasure? Are all pleasures mixed? Plato has made a very emphatic and explicit statement about this subject, especially in a dialogue called *Philebus*. And there he distinguishes explicitly between the kind of pleasures discussed here and another kind of pleasure. Pleasures deriving from food, drink, and so on, they are necessarily related to pain, specific pain. But there are also pleasures which are not related to any previous desire; they are pure pleasures. For instance, pleasure deriving from smelling a rose.<sup>v</sup> We enjoy that, but we don't feel pain if we do not enjoy it. We must here make a distinction. Custom may create a necessity for us [always] to have<sup>34</sup> a perfume of some kind. Then, of course, what we strictly feel, or are pained by, is the absence of the custom or situation, not the thing itself.<sup>35</sup> [By contrast], the absence of food and drink, we feel independently of any custom, though it can be a bit varied by yogi practice and so on. Fundamentally,<sup>36</sup> [this] is natural. So there are pleasures which are unmixed because their absence itself is not painful. If you see a puppy inviting you to play with it on a sunlit meadow, not too hot—I find this [a] perfect pleasure, to observe that. Other people<sup>37</sup> [do too], but not all. That's perfect pleasure in itself. There are perfect pleasures. They can also be on a higher level. For example, again, a Platonic example, the pleasure from understanding a mathematical proposition with the absolute iron necessity which is in no way compulsive because you come into your own when you understand it. It is not imposed upon you: perfect pleasure.

There are perfect pleasures. But what does it mean about the human situation generally [that] there should be perfect pleasure and no perfect goods which men possess? (That doesn't deny the existence of perfect goods, but<sup>38</sup> [of those] which men can possess.) One could say that Plato indicates<sup>39</sup> [by] this difficulty the only reason which would justify, up to a point, hedonism. There is a case for hedonism, which is not sufficient but is stronger than any other case, which would start from the fact that men are capable of perfect pleasure and not of perfect pain. All so-called aesthetic things,<sup>40</sup> [as they are now called, have of course their roots here]. Now, you can see it very clearly in the case of something which was particularly important to Plato as a philosopher, namely, seeking the truth. When Plato says man cannot be wise, but only a seeker of wisdom,<sup>41</sup> [a philosopher], there he means, of course, that man can never possess the greatest good. The good is knowledge. Knowledge, as far as man can possess it, is always accompanied by the corresponding evil, ignorance. But on the other hand,<sup>42</sup> when a man reaches some clarity about a certain point of importance, this is pleasure—accompanied by pleasure, necessarily. Everyone who has tried to solve a problem, not for an examination, will know that. But that is, in a way, complete in itself. But in the moment you have *proof* about what you have understood and what it means, and come to realize that new problems arise from the basis of what you have understood, you become aware of the fact

---

<sup>v</sup> See *Philebus* 51e.

that the full good, knowledge, is not attained. But pleasure has some possibility of a perfection, of completeness, which the good as possessed by man cannot have. And there very well may be an infinity of the process of becoming more knowing or better. But pleasure has a roundness or perfection or finiteness, which can, as it were, reconcile man to the fundamentally Sisyphean character of the striving for goodness.

**Student:** Do you think it is possible that there is pain involved in the solving of an intellectual problem?

**LS:** No, the moment you have the solution, the pain of preceding confusion, and of the “I can’t solve it,” is finished.

**Student:** It seems to be that the<sup>43</sup> [exhilaration] of the solution is in terms of the intensity of the problem.

**LS:** Ya, but, on the other hand, the solution itself stops the pain completely. And there is also this peculiar continuity which you have in the case of eating. You are decreasing hunger with the increase of eating, but this in principle discontinues. It is, at a certain moment, “Ah,” or “I found it.”

**Same student:** I don’t really see that there is not also [such] a situation with the mathematician in solving a mathematical problem.

**LS:** Ya, but the solution itself is a jump from the unsolved state.

**Same student:** I don’t see that this is not also like eating. There is a certain point . . . .

**LS:** There is a process. I really believe there is a difference. Or, if that example does not convince you: if you are suddenly confronted without any previous desire for it, with a beautiful sight, that would be a case. You would have no desire for it, and yet you may be highly pleased—no mixture of pain in that sight. You may have a toothache at the same time, but that’s another matter. But this sight itself is something very perfect.

**Same student:** Take the example of the puppy. Say you were on the way to class and could not play with the puppy, there would be a certain amount of pain involved.

**LS:** Ya, sure, but that is accidental. But the main pleasure, I would say, is really not the fact that one plays with him or not, but the mere aspect of this perfectly limited beast who doesn’t know anything of death, and doesn’t know anything of the atomic threat, and even hunger, because at present he’s sufficiently satisfied—even a baby is not capable of such a perfect limitation of the horizon—and in this horizon is happy, something which is not given to us humans very frequently. And here you have presented an image of what you would like to have, and there, that [you] can’t, being there.

**Same student:** Isn’t that the result of the pain of reality, more or less?

**LS:** In other words, that would mean something else. That would mean: Can any human phenomena be ultimately understood without a complete analysis of the essential character of human life? That is what you are driving at. That may be so, but primarily given to us are things like pleasures. Let us assume there is a difference between pleasure and the good, that these things are primarily given to us and they present themselves as such: the one essentially unlimitable—no perfect knowledge, no perfect virtue, and so on—whereas the other has in itself perfection. That you say, and that may very well be true, that perhaps only a mortal being can enjoy this form of pleasure, so that the mortality or divination<sup>44</sup> [of] mortality is present even if we don't think of it. That may be so. But the point is that, while this mortality is effective, both in the quest for the good and our<sup>45</sup> [quest] for the pleasant, only [in] the case of the pleasant<sup>46</sup> would [we] get something unmixed, whereas in the other case we would never get something unmixed. Every law, however good, could be shown by a closer analysis to be not simply just. And the law, as it were, demands from us this examination in terms of<sup>47</sup> [justice] and injustice, and somewhere it fails, it is not<sup>48</sup> [simply just] . . . a scientific theory, as scientific theory, demands of us to go beyond<sup>49</sup> [it], and to be examined in the light of the simply true. But this pleasure . . . say, of the rose, does not demand in itself from you that you should go beyond it. It's satisfied.

I think what people mean frequently by “aesthetic” has something to do with this. You know that the word “aesthetic” is derived from the Greek word for sense perception<sup>vi</sup>—never forget that—and therefore that would seem to be the real home of such perfection. Take the perfection of a work of art of which one speaks. It may very well have something to do with this. Take a Platonic dialogue. As books supplying the full truth, they are manifestly and consciously defective, imperfect. But that is compatible with the possibility that they may be perfect works of art. You see, that's not *in spite* but *because* of the fact that fundamental imperfection—say, his mortality—is effective in both pursuits, in pursuit of the good as well as the pleasant. You cannot, by finding a fundamental root of<sup>50</sup> [human] needs, society, or what have you,<sup>51</sup> dispense with the problem of keeping the distinction we find on the level of the phenomena—in this case, perfect pleasure, no perfect<sup>52</sup> [good]. Do you understand that? That in all these so-called reductionist doctrines—whatever they may be, higher or lower—which reduce the human phenomena to a fundamental root, the danger exists that the massive phenomena, [the] difference[s] of which we are all aware, are not regarded as very important. Like those people, for example, in political science who speak of power. Let us assume power is a fundamental factor, not mortality—then, power you find everywhere: in a family, in a classroom, in politics, of course; in a shop, you find power. But if this leads you to disregard the fundamental difference between political power and the other forms of power, you are less wise in the end than you were before you ever thought of power. Do you see what I mean? I mean, if political power is just regarded as a kind of power like, say, husband over wife, wife over husband, or what have you—and that is regarded<sup>53</sup> [by] some people as a great insight. Maybe it is. But if it leads to the consequence that<sup>54</sup>, [in] the end, the fellow says, “It makes no sense to speak of [the] political as something

---

<sup>vi</sup> *Aisthēsis*.

fundamentally different from the non-political,” then I would say<sup>55</sup> [he] would be better off if he had never had this alleged insight.

Now let us go on in 496b–497a. You see the examples here are food and drink. Previously, in 490c–d, Callicles had violently<sup>56</sup> [protested] against this lowering or narrowing of pleasure. He said, “You, Socrates, you talk always of food and drink, shoes, and I don’t mean this kind of pleasure.” Now Callicles is reconciled to it. A certain taming of Callicles is possible for Socrates, at least with a view to the recognition of bodily pleasures. There, he can be tamed at least.

In the sequel, 497a–d: here the argument regarding [the] simultaneous ceasing of pleasures and pain begins. Callicles rebels against this discussion: first, against the attempt to prove that the good is different from the pleasant, and second, particularly, against the reference to the ceasing of desire.

[Inaudible words]<sup>vii</sup>—in a hopeless case, as he knows. The discussion is carried on, therefore, for the sake of Gorgias. Hence, the whole book is correctly called *Gorgias* and not *Callicles*. Gorgias is the chief person apart from Socrates.

In 497a, a few points. The terms used there mean any kind of mock modesty and prudery—the term chiefly applied to women. Callicles is [a] prude regarding arguing in a more or less sophisticated way, just as Anytus is in the *Meno*. In c, there we find reference to the mysteries, reference to the transphilosophic character of Callicles’ opinion, of which Callicles himself had spoken. Philosophy may be the smaller mystery which Callicles has not acquired. In d, only a little point: where Socrates says to Callicles, “You will not by any chance deny something now which you previously granted,” this is a certain way to prevent Callicles from granting it, because that would, again, be an act of deserting his post of course.<sup>57</sup> This much about the second argument. Now a few words about the third.

In 497d–499b, the argument runs as follows: good men are good by the presence of something good. Do you understand that? You must not look here for something very subtle. Very simply, if you suddenly hear, “A good man is good because there is something good in him, a presence of something good,” [you’ll reply], “But of course good men are good by the presence of something good in them.” According to Callicles, the good is identical with the pleasant. Therefore, good men are good by the presence of<sup>58</sup> pleasure in them. That means the good men, as good men, are continually pleased, because only pleasure is good, or at least the good men are more pleased throughout their lives than the bad men. Yet Callicles had also said good men are the wise and manly.

Now, if we look at the wise and manly, we see they are not more pleased than the foolish and cowardly. Socrates gives the example<sup>59</sup> especially regarding cowardice: an army approaches, and everyone is frightened somehow. Who is more frightened? The brave or the cowardly? The cowardly, of course. But what about if the enemy leaves the field of battle? The brave are less pleased, and the cowardly are greatly pleased. So the cowardly

---

<sup>vii</sup> There was a break in the tape at this point.

have greater pain, but also greater pleasure. But Callicles had admitted before, by implication, [that] to have great desire—great pain<sup>60</sup> completed by great pleasure—is the maxim of happiness. Therefore, Callicles is reduced to a position where he would have to admit that he, who is the defender of the manly, actually defends the cowardly, because they have more desire for running away, more fear also ([fear] being a form of negative desire), and more pleasure. The argument is characterized by a complete disregard of anything but bodily pains and pleasure throughout. And Socrates wants to show, even on this level, that hedonism is not possible, even on the level of bodily desires and fears. But could not one also say that, on the whole, the life of a brave man is more pleasant than the life of a coward? Because the opportunities for fear are so immense that the perfect coward, if that thing is possible, would be constantly pained; and, if momentarily relieved, he would begin to worry about some new pain, even at the moment the enemy [retreats] maybe the enemy will come back the other way.

But<sup>61</sup> [Callicles] does not understand himself at all<sup>62</sup>, [not] even in hedonism, of course, because<sup>63</sup> [a] much more intelligent hedonism [than his] is possible<sup>64</sup>. But you must not forget the main point here is not to throw light on the problem of pleasure. That's only implied and incidental. The main point is to present to us the best case of the man unpersuadable by Socrates; we must never lose sight of that. And that man is characterized. He has all kinds of advantages, he likes Socrates, he's an educated man, and so on, and so on. And I'm sure he's a decent man in the ordinary sense of the term. His basic vice is that he does not regard<sup>65</sup> self-contradiction as disgraceful. That is an unfortunate thing—not [that it is] socially disgraceful . . . but that he does not see that if he contradicts himself, he must do something about it.<sup>66</sup> [That's what] I mean, and that he doesn't see at all. His notion of manliness means sticking to your opinions once you [have] arrived at them, and that to desert them means to commit an act of cowardice. That, I think, is the deepest axiom in Callicles' mind. And his opinions happen to be somewhat more favorable to philosophy than those of Anytus, for example, for Callicles' opinion is characterized by the fact that up to twenty, you *must* study philosophy. There is more of Callicles in the world, and [in] all of us, perhaps, than we would like to admit.

And now a few more special points, and then we may discuss that. In 497d–e, Socrates knows that Callicles will never grant the consequence of this argument, namely, that the good is different from the pleasant. He stresses very strongly in 498a–c that cowards feel more pain and more pleasure than the brave, according to *Callicles*. That is emphasized. Yet, in drawing the conclusion in 498c, Socrates disregards the difference between the brave and the coward. In other words, Socrates says pleasures and pains are equally distributed among the good and bad, among the virtuous and the vicious. That is not the difference between them. Callicles makes the distinction in favor of the coward as far as pleasures are concerned, but not Socrates.

Now let us examine the argument for a moment. The good are said to be those who are pleased, who are in a state of pleasure, in a continuous state of pleasure without any qualifications regarding what the pleasures are. From this, there follows the conclusion, necessarily, that a smiling, satisfied idiot is a good man, a perfect man,<sup>67</sup> which no one in his senses would ever admit. But Callicles has two notions of the good man which he

[has] never brought together, confronted. The one is that the good men are those<sup>68</sup> [who] are unqualifiedly pleased; and the other is that good men are capable<sup>69</sup> [of getting] the greatest pleasure. And that, of course, excludes the idiot; the capacity, the virtue, is praised, not the pleasure itself. In other words, not to live in such a beautiful house, surrounded by sixty servants, but the capacity to get it, the virtue—that is praised. Now, the argument of Callicles disregards the rank of pleasures—the pleasures of the idiot, the pleasures of the coward, the pleasures of the real man—which Callicles admits. He really admires only the real man, but his general thesis that the good is identical to the pleasant compels him to disregard the difference of the rank of human beings and their corresponding pleasure or pain. The question is, therefore, this: Can the difference of *rank* be understood on a hedonistic basis? In the first argument, the argument with the lewd people,<sup>70</sup> the conclusion was, if we state in generally: on the basis of the identification of the good and the pleasant, there is no place for the *noble*. And that, I think, is a stringent argument, because what was the *reductio ad absurdum*?<sup>71</sup> [There] are disgraceful pleasures. But<sup>72</sup> [there] cannot be disgraceful pleasures on the assertion that the good is pleasant. But this conclusion—and that is not only a casual remark here, but that is characteristic in the developed hedonistic doctrine of Epicurus, probably the most famous hedonistic doctrine—that is explicitly stated: “the noble is merely convention, but we disregard that completely.” And Epicurus says only that the ordinary respect for the virtues must be understood in terms of the *useful*. For example, courage is useful for a more pleasant life. But something like intrinsic splendor, intrinsic goodness, cannot exist—that exists only in pleasure as pleasure. And the third argument refers to the other most relevant fact, that the identification of the good and pleasant does not leave room for making a distinction between the rank of pleasures. You can say, on the basis of the strict hedonistic doctrine, you cannot, of course, make a distinction between preferable and less preferable pleasures. You can say the more extensive pleasure, the more lasting pleasure, is preferable to the shorter pleasure. Or you can say the more intensive pleasure, the more violent pleasure, is preferable to the milder, gentler form of pleasure. That you can do. But you cannot introduce a consideration of *rank*. For example, the idiot and the true man—there is no place [for that distinction] here. The fact can be admitted, but the element of the preference we give to the one as compared to the other cannot be justified on this<sup>73</sup> [basis].

**Student:** But can't you handle the so-called differences of rank in terms of intensity and extent? That would seem to be the problem.

**LS:** What would that mean?

**Student:** Well, that certain kinds of goodness, say, nobility, can be explained in terms of providing men with a more intense pleasure.

**LS:** But why should this be? . . . But if you identify good and pleasant, you can only make the distinction between the good proper, the pleasant, and that which in itself is not pleasant but conducive to pleasure. For example, take bitter medicine. [It] is unpleasant, and yet it's useful for pleasure, the pleasure derived from health. That you can do. But for the noble as noble, you have no possibility, except by sophistry. In other words, you

must, then, reduce the noble, contrary to its meaning, to something it is not. You can say we understand something by a brave man, a certain line of conduct. This line of conduct can be justified on hedonistic grounds. But its being intrinsically choiceworthy cannot be justified. The “nobility” character cannot be justified on hedonistic grounds.

And may I make this remark in passing?<sup>74</sup> This issue, defined on these grounds [or] terms—good identical to pleasant or different from pleasant?—was, in premodern times, *the* fundamental moral issue. That you can see when you read Cicero, for example, and it turns up again in a somewhat modified way in the beginning of modern times. In Cicero’s book *On the Ends of Good and Evil*, for example, one of the most popular moral books of premodern times, that is the issue, just as it is in Plato’s dialogue and in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. We can only draw one negative conclusion from that regarding later modern thought: that the disappearance of this issue, in these terms, is characteristic of modern moral thought as it has developed in the last two centuries. There are very few people now, typically modern people, who would be<sup>75</sup> hedonists, strictly [speaking], and therefore there are no typically modern people who would take the anti-hedonistic position [either]. The old hedonism—even in the old, crude form—survives, of course, very powerfully. If you talk to economists, you see this most clearly when they speak about wants and how these wants have to be considered, and so on—that is to<sup>76</sup> [say], the crudest form of hedonism, which is here presupposed. So it is surely very powerful, subterraneously. But in philosophic thought, I do not think that since the eighteenth century any significant hedonist has appeared. So if one wants to understand the moral and political thought of the classics, there is no other way but to realize that this was *the fundamental* issue, and not, say, economic determinism versus its opposite, or something of this kind. This exactly was the issue, and I think we all can recognize it in our own life, that this really goes to the root. And the ambiguity<sup>77</sup> [derives] from the fact that, in most cases, we understand, as the ancients did, by a lover of pleasures, a lover of bodily pleasures—the “immediate pleasures,” as the ancients called<sup>78</sup> [them]—whereas the more intelligent hedonistic position went beyond that and took also into consideration the higher forms of pleasure, but with [the] understanding [that] only the pleasant character of something can make it truly good.

**Student:** What you said was that the noble cannot be recognized as intrinsically noble on the basis of hedonism. But in a way this is what is denied by hedonism, and they state that what you call “intrinsically noble” is that which provides us with a certain kind of very intense pleasure. I mean . . . so that the only answer, I guess, would have to be an appeal to the facts.

**LS:** But no . . . . The question is whether this argument—as [in] Mill, who would use such arguments—the question is whether this is not really purely circular. That [is], what he means, primarily, is the noble as noble, and<sup>79</sup> [then] he tries to reconcile this to his preconceived hedonism by asserting that.<sup>80</sup> [Yes?]

**Student:** So your main point is that, now, [one] could make a consistent scheme of this sort, but you simply are unjust to the phenomenon . . . Plato would say?

**LS:** Ya, I know even in the eighteenth century,<sup>81</sup> [some] people tried to make allowance for everything. But I think it really led to a blurring of the issue. Callicles does not represent<sup>82</sup> hedonism at its best. That goes without saying. He is not really a true hedonist, because he is concerned with the noble and just.<sup>83</sup> [That] is perfectly true, and the most elaborate discussion of hedonism you'll find in Plato is the one in the *Philebus*. I have tried to restate the crucial points of the classical criticism of hedonism in my study on natural right, in the chapter on<sup>84</sup> classic natural right. The main point is simply this: that the pleasures are of course in the hedonistic doctrine always meant to be human pleasures, pleasures of man, and the pleasures of men are different from those of a donkey and of other creatures. Pleasures always presuppose natural inclination as a structured *nature* of man by virtue of which these kinds of things can become pleasant or painful to man. And hedonism divorces the sensation of pleasure and pain from the basis of these very sensations, namely, the character of man, [the] nature of man. And that shows itself also in other ways. The sensible pleasures and pains, bodily pleasures and pains, are not accidentally in the first place when we think of pleasures and pain. Because there, in the body, the pleasant and pain character is more obviously predominant. For instance, [in] the other things,<sup>85</sup> [it does] not predominate . . . . We may enjoy them, the higher things, but we do not think merely of that and primarily of that. If someone says he enjoys the fact that he has acted in a certain way and has a good conscience about it,<sup>86</sup> why does he enjoy it? Why is he pleased by it? Because the action was intrinsically good. And he would prefer<sup>87</sup> to be pained by a bad conscience rather than not to have any feelings [of] it [at] all, whereas if you eat something and it tastes well to you, that settles it. It is pleasant to eat. It does not point beyond itself. And I think if one can see these hedonistic doctrines, which I have studied, one sees always that they have to force the<sup>88</sup> [phenomena] into a preconceived scheme. That's not the way we look at them when we are confronted with them. When we are confronted with a heroic action and are *pleased* by it, it somehow does not make sense to compare it to the pleasure we derive from food. Now therefore, these qualitative differences are not merely differences of pleasure. They are primarily differences of the subject matter—the heroic deed, the food—and only in the light of the essential difference can you interpret the pleasures properly. You have no key to the proper distinction between the various kinds of pleasure unless you transcend the dimension of pleasure—that's the point. That is what I think I would say to what you said before. There may be [a] qualitative and essential difference between pleasures. But this qualitative and essential difference between pleasures cannot be understood in terms of pleasure, but [only] in terms of that which is the grounds of pleasure. That, it seems to me, is the basic weakness of hedonism. And that was recognized by Socrates, Plato, [and] Aristotle, by their notion that the foundation of pleasure is the soul, the character of the soul, the structure of the soul, and this allows [one] to recognize the truth in hedonism and at the same time not to deny the phenomena which we know from our lives.

**Student:** . . . Do you really meet the grounds of the hedonist? For he defines his terms in those preconceived patterns, and you look at his approach from your position.<sup>89</sup> [Doesn't] this necessarily engage his<sup>90</sup> [position] by your premises, which are altogether



different?<sup>91</sup> [Your position] is that there's a fundamental structure that preexists the pleasure–pain calculus, and he says that there is no such structure.

**LS:** Ya, but the situation is that no one has a right simply to act like Callicles and say, “This is my opinion, sir, period.” Neither [the] hedonist nor I, for example. Surely not. So we must then come to a point where discussion is possible. Otherwise, we would say we all are bound to be radically irrational. So we must<sup>92</sup> [come] to a point where a question can be brought to a decision, and where discussion is possible.

**Student:** You think a sophisticated hedonist could have stood his ground?

**LS:** Against *these* arguments of Socrates, easily.

**Same student:** And you think, if both would have stood their grounds and not relinquished to one another in order to reach a common ground for argument—in other words, they pass over each other, they don't jibe, they don't cohere, because they're mutually exclusive of one another, intellectually, at least on their premises—

**LS:** It is incidentally a refutation of Callicles, certainly. But it is not a refutation of hedonism at its highest. One would have to go to a much higher ground, as is done in the *Philebus* or, for that matter, in Aristotle's *Ethics*. One would have to simply raise this question: Whether, say, Epicurus, who is the most famous hedonist of ancient times, or at least one of whom we know anything—who would be in modern times really significant? Perhaps Locke, which is already modified . . . [hedonism]—whether their account of what we know of human affairs, human things, is more adequate than that of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. That's the question.

**Student:** I thought that what the last question seemed to deny was that there was a fundamental identity of character in the phenomenon from which they all begin.

**LS:** Ya, but that is the question. For example, in the case in Epicurus, the premise—not based on<sup>93</sup> [the] phenomena, but on a certain cosmology, that the<sup>94</sup> [source] of all knowledge is sense perception—necessitate[s] the consequence that the source of all knowledge regarding good and bad can only be the sensing of good and bad, and that can of course be only pleasure and pain . . . . [That] you are to start from the phenomena as it presents itself is denied by Epicurus. One would have to even establish that.

**Student:** Sir, from time to time, you've implied an identification between Callicles and the *demos*.

**LS:** No. Callicles “loves the *demos*” is what Socrates says. The *demos* as *demos* would be ignorant of the existence of philosophy. You must not forget that the modern *demos* is already something which presupposes the existence of philosophy, as one could show, but the ancient *demos* did not. So they are ignorant of the existence of philosophy, and when they become aware of it—that is the general impression you get from the classics—they are hostile to it. They don't trust it. That is true, and that underlies Aristophanes'

Socratic comedy, the *Clouds*. Socrates comes there in contact with the men of the common people. But how? This fellow had become rich and marries into an aristocratic family. So he was no longer a simple man of the common people, and his son became, therefore, a good for nothing and got into debt. And since he was sophisticated and knew something of philosophy, by this, a compromise was reached that he should become a pupil of Socrates, not in order to find the truth, but in order to get out of his debt. And the whole comedy turns around this situation.<sup>viii</sup> No, Callicles is not a man of the *demos*. Therefore, he makes also a striking anti-democratic remark. You remember he is a great man. He's not after the man of [the *demos*] but a tyrant.

**Student:** I was wondering over here if the unteachability of Callicles is anything like the unteachability of the *demos*?

**LS:** If you mean it this way, that is a very worthwhile consideration. But please do not commit the unforgivable error to believe that Plato was a kind of a member of a country club or what not and shared all the<sup>95</sup> [prejudices] of his class. He takes *demos*, then, in a broader and deeper meaning in which it means the vulgar, regardless of whether they are rich or poor,<sup>96</sup> noble or common men, or what have you. The only link with the political and crude notion of the *demos* is this: that the gentle and refined people have, in fact, leisure. How they employ that leisure is open. But leisure is an essential condition for thinking. So the delusions of social distinction were seen through by Plato, as well as by any present day liberals, because no great intelligence is needed for that. Politically, the difference is this: that Plato feels that, in spite of the fact that [the] higher position of the gentlemen versus the commons is questionable—because there are many fools, many idiots, many low people among them, naturally—the distinction is nevertheless politically *inevitable*, for the simple reason that there is a necessity for private property, and therefore, given the scarcity of<sup>97</sup> common wealth, the necessity of the difference between rich and poor, which is to a certain extent arbitrary, accidental. Someone's harvest might have been spared in a given year where everyone's harvest was spoiled, and he became a rich man. It simply happened; no justice involved in that. But to change that, to change this unequal distribution, would only mean to put in its place another unequal distribution. Other individuals would become the rich here, and you would have this difference only: that, by some act of violence, the whole new scheme would be discredited to begin with, because the new dispensation would rest on the precedence of violence. It cannot be helped. That is, I think, the practical conclusion to which Plato is led.

The difficulty of discussing that, especially in such a short time,<sup>98</sup> [derives] from the fact that today there is such a strong, foolish prejudice—very powerful—according to which Plato was a fascist. You must have heard that. And there are many classes in this building in which these views are presented. And therefore anyone who tries to learn something of Plato is<sup>99</sup> in a somewhat silly position. But one must<sup>100</sup> [take] it in such a spirit here—that it is absolute nonsense to speak of fascism in this connection. And even of communism, although communism has this element of evidence: that Plato in the *Republic* seems to say that only a communist society can be just. I cannot discuss this now . . . I can only say

---

<sup>viii</sup> See Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1–125.

that what Plato suggests as<sup>101</sup> [practical] was this: an improved *polis* as it actually existed, with the division into classes, groups, somewhat more reasonable than it actually was, but certainly a definite “situation society,” in which there would be rich and old families, and they<sup>102</sup> [would be] a preponderance of society. I mean, if you say Plato was a damned reactionary, that is true. There’s no question—I mean, looking from the present day perspective. He has much more in common with John Adams than with Andrew Jackson. There is no question about that. But the question is: What was the reason for that? You see, you cannot do like Callicles and simply say, Plato has this kind of an opinion. The question is: What are the grounds of these opinions? Now in all modern discussion, we ultimately come back to this point of the availability of the necessary leisure for all members of society. Whether this availability of leisure for all members of society was always possible, this question is usually not raised. Plato took it for granted: there would never be enough wealth to go around, and not because of the insatiable character of human desires, but simply because of the limited character of the bounty of nature, you might say. Plato may have made the dogmatic assumption of that, by not visualizing the possibility of an expanding economy and everything going [with] that—also because he may have not visualized the possibility of a technologically dedicated science. That is the fundamental issue without any question.

But with these qualifications, which need longer development, one could say this: that Callicles—by the way, there is a point to what you say, you know, when Socrates says, “*You are saying what all think.*” But the crucial point is whether this dedication to opinions without any concern about the grounds of these opinions, and the perfect willingness to *contradict* oneself provided one does not *retract* these opinions, is not the characteristic of the vulgar mind. I believe here’s what you are driving at. That is a serious point. But then it would mean Callicles is selected because he has some possibility at least to talk with Socrates, which the hero of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, Strepsiades, would not have. So in other words, the fact that Callicles had some education and was interested in Gorgias’ rhetoric gave some possibility of communication, which<sup>103</sup> [is lacking] in most other cases. I think I mentioned at the beginning of the course the fact that, contrary to Xenophon’s Socrates, Plato’s Socrates is never shown in conversation with a common man.<sup>ix</sup> That is true. And Callicles of course, merely by social position, is not strictly speaking a common man. I must leave it at that. So now, where do we go from here?

Socrates has now established, we can say, by arguments which must be supplemented and defined much more closely, the position which I regard as true, namely, that the good is different from the pleasant. And now the question arises: What follows from the distinction between the good and the pleasant regarding the issue<sup>104</sup> [of controversy] between Socrates and Callicles as to the way of life? What is the good way of life, as distinguished from the way of life dedicated to pleasure? And how does it affect the issue of rhetoric? Is it true, as<sup>105</sup> [was] previously maintained, that rhetoric belongs exclusively to the way of life of pleasure? Or must we not make a distinction between two kinds of rhetoric, one belonging to the good way of life, and the other belonging to the bad way? And that answer will be in the affirmative, and therewith the point which we have always

---

<sup>ix</sup> See session 1, p. 14 above.

been laboring, namely, the desired kind of rhetoric which is not yet in existence,<sup>106</sup> comes now in the open. We'll discuss it next time.

[end of session]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted "this real man."

<sup>2</sup> Deleted "that."

<sup>3</sup> Deleted "494e10."

<sup>4</sup> Deleted "that opinion."

<sup>5</sup> Deleted "and."

<sup>6</sup> Deleted "is."

<sup>7</sup> Deleted "they."

<sup>8</sup> Moved "knowledge and manliness."

<sup>9</sup> Deleted "justice."

<sup>10</sup> Moved "the name."

<sup>11</sup> Deleted "succeeding."

<sup>12</sup> Deleted "the implication."

<sup>13</sup> Deleted "hedonist."

<sup>14</sup> Deleted "would."

<sup>15</sup> Deleted "with."

<sup>16</sup> Deleted "as."

<sup>17</sup> Deleted "along."

<sup>18</sup> Deleted "exemplifies."

<sup>19</sup> Deleted "what man wants. Desires. . . are"

<sup>20</sup> Deleted "the."

<sup>21</sup> Deleted "as long as."

<sup>22</sup> Deleted "heal your fill."

<sup>23</sup> There is an ellipsis at this point in the transcript. It is unclear whether the student's remark was interrupted or the last part of the remark was inaudible.

<sup>24</sup> Deleted "for example."

<sup>25</sup> Deleted "what."

<sup>26</sup> Deleted "generalize."

<sup>27</sup> Deleted "it."

<sup>28</sup> Deleted "of."

<sup>29</sup> Deleted "that."

<sup>30</sup> Deleted "yet."

<sup>31</sup> Deleted "he."

<sup>32</sup> Deleted "the pleasant . . . noble or kind."

<sup>33</sup> Deleted "man."

<sup>34</sup> Moved "always."

<sup>35</sup> Deleted "Whereas."

<sup>36</sup> Deleted "there."

<sup>37</sup> Deleted "also."

<sup>38</sup> Deleted "goods."

<sup>39</sup> Deleted "about."

<sup>40</sup> Deleted "as it is now called, has of course its root here."

<sup>41</sup> Deleted "philosophy."

<sup>42</sup> Deleted "there is."

<sup>43</sup> Deleted "acceleration."

<sup>44</sup> Deleted "or."

<sup>45</sup> Deleted "guest."

<sup>46</sup> Moved "we."

<sup>47</sup> Deleted "just."

<sup>48</sup> Deleted "simple terms."

---

49 Deleted “them.”  
50 Deleted “humans.”  
51 Deleted “that does not.”  
52 Deleted “food.”  
53 Deleted “as.”  
54 Deleted “is.”  
55 Deleted “you.”  
56 Deleted “protected.”  
57 Deleted “Now.”  
58 Deleted “pleasant.”  
59 Deleted “and.”  
60 Deleted “and.”  
61 Deleted “he.”  
62 Deleted “but.”  
63 Deleted “in the.”  
64 Moved “than his.”  
65 Deleted “that.”  
66 Deleted “that.”  
67 Deleted “and.”  
68 Deleted “which.”  
69 Deleted “to get.”  
70 Deleted “where.”  
71 Deleted “they.”  
72 Deleted “they.”  
73 Deleted “point.”  
74 Deleted “that.”  
75 Moved “either.”  
76 Deleted “be.”  
77 Deleted “arrives.”  
78 Deleted “it. But.”  
79 Deleted “when.”  
80 Deleted “Yah.”  
81 Deleted “same.”  
82 Deleted “the.”  
83 Deleted “what.”  
84 Deleted “the.”  
85 Deleted “do.”  
86 Deleted “that is.”  
87 Deleted “rather.”  
88 Deleted “phenomenon.”  
89 Deleted “does.”  
90 Deleted “or yours.”  
91 Deleted “Yours.”  
92 Deleted “cone.”  
93 Deleted “then.”  
94 Deleted “sources.”  
95 Deleted “privileges.”  
96 Deleted “they are.”  
97 Deleted “commonwealth, of.”  
98 Deleted “arrives.”  
99 Deleted “then.”  
100 Deleted “make.”  
101 Deleted “practically.”  
102 Deleted “begin.”  
103 Deleted “lacked.”

---

<sup>104</sup> Deleted “controversially.”

<sup>105</sup> Deleted “what’s.”

<sup>106</sup> Deleted “it.”

## Session 11: no date

**Leo Strauss:** We have been discussing the argument by which Socrates tries to establish that the good is fundamentally different from the pleasant. The central argument led us to the conclusion, which of course is not stated, that while there is no unmixed good or pure good which men can possess, there are unmixed pleasures. I would like to develop this point a bit by considering the<sup>i</sup> [implication] of this central argument in the *Gorgias* regarding the difference between pleasure and [the] good in its application to philosophy. It is said that all desire is painful. Although Socrates warns Callicles that this should be considered, it is stated simply without qualification. *Eros* is desire, philosophy itself is desire (the first sentence of the *Metaphysics*), the desire for knowledge. If all desire is painful, there would be pain inherent in philosophy, or, more broadly, in philosophy pleasure and pain would necessarily coexist. There would, then, be a certain similarity between philosophy and bodily pleasures. This is perhaps the reason why Socrates, in the beginning of the *Phaedo*, justifies the desire for life after death precisely with the view to the unsatisfactory or painful character of philosophy. And he uses there the simile, in a different context but aptly, when he shows how pleasant it is after the fetters have been removed: pain and pleasure are inexorably linked.<sup>i</sup> This may very well have something to do with philosophy itself. In philosophy, one could say, the pleasure derives from knowledge, the pain from ignorance. There is, then, in philosophy also coexistence of the good, knowledge, and of the bad, ignorance. There is even an equivalent of the outflow and inflow of food and drink in regard to knowledge, as is explained in the *Banquet*: forgetting, the outflow; recovering, the inflow.<sup>ii</sup> Philosophy is, then, because of the inevitable mixture of good and bad, knowledge and ignorance, unsatisfactory, unless philosophy is *the* way to immortality. That's one possibility. Or else if there are pure pleasures which do not require the co-presence of pain.

Before I return to the argument, that is, the section we are discussing now, I would like to remind you of the whole argument of the Callicles section. We are likely to forget what we have discussed before, and we must always keep this in mind. The subject of course is still rhetoric, primarily a criticism of vulgar rhetoric, which can be misused and which serves the purpose of bringing about acquittals or condemnations and also adoptions of policies. But all these—acquittals, condemnations, adoption of policies—must be gratifying to the *demos*; otherwise, they can never be adopted. Therefore, Socrates makes the extreme suggestion, in criticizing the vulgar rhetoric, that rhetoric is useful only for accusing oneself and one's nearest and dearest. At this moment, Callicles enters and then Socrates welcomes him. In this connection, Socrates brings up this proportion: Socrates is to Callicles as philosophy is to *demos*. Here, for the first time, then, philosophy and the *demos* become the same. Callicles, then, gives his long speech in which he makes two assertions: first, the fundamental opposition of nature and law or convention, and, second, the fundamental distinction between the life of the real man and the life of the

---

<sup>i</sup> See *Phaedo* 60b1–c7.

<sup>ii</sup> See *Symposium* 207e1–208a7.

philosopher. But Callicles does not coordinate the two ways of life which he distinguishes with the fundamental distinction, namely, between nature and law. In other words, he does not say [that] nature [is distinguished from]<sup>iii</sup> convention and, say, politics, for example. Nature [for him means] the real man; convention, the multitude.<sup>iv</sup> The life of the real man transcends these conventions. The fundamental distinction on which Callicles bases his argument, the distinction between nature and convention as he understands it, does not leave room for philosophy. This, I think, is crucial for the understanding of the sequence. Thereafter, Socrates says that the conversation with Callicles fulfills perfectly the conditions of a philosophic discussion. He then examines Callicles' thesis that the superior man ought to rule over others and have more than the others. Thereafter, he raises the question whether the superior men ought to rule, that is to say, control, themselves, and he adduces three sayings in favor of self-control or moderation.

The next step—and this is what we discussed last time—were three arguments which were meant to prove that the good is different from the pleasant; and the pleasant is understood here in the sense of bodily pleasures, the desires which are regulated by the virtue of moderation. In the section which we will discuss today, 499b–505b, which is literally the center of the section, Socrates proceeds as follows. Having established that the good is different from the pleasant, he now tries to show that from this distinction follows the distinction of two ways of life: the way of life directed toward the good and the way of life directed toward the pleasant. To begin with, we can say that the one corresponds to Socrates' way of life and the other to Callicles', and we can tentatively say that the one is the philosophic way of life and the other the political way of life. Socrates goes further and says we must make a distinction between two kinds of rhetoric: one which is directed toward the good and the other which is directed toward the pleasant. Socrates, then, does coordinate the two ways of life with the fundamental distinction which he makes and which is not the distinction between nature and convention, but the distinction between the good and the pleasant. This fundamental distinction between the good and the pleasant is meant to be *the* basis for the distinction between the philosophic way of life and that way of life which Callicles has chosen and which can provisionally [be] called the political one. We will see later on that this is not quite adequate.

One more word about Callicles. I have said before that Callicles is the best representative of the type of man who cannot be persuaded by Socrates. Callicles is pious beyond what is generally accepted. Therefore he has a certain sympathy for philosophy, and hence for Socrates. But he understands this aspiration, transcending the generally accepted, within the context of the generally accepted. Therefore he misunderstands his own aspiration: He aspires beyond the equation of the good and the pleasant, especially the pleasures of the body, but he is unable to articulate the essential difference between the good and the pleasant. Therefore he cannot offer an effective resistance to Socrates' imputing to him the simple equation of the good with the pleasant, particularly with bodily pleasure. One

---

<sup>iii</sup> LS may have been writing on the blackboard at this point.

<sup>iv</sup> In the transcript, this sentence reads: "Nature—the real man; convention—the multitude." Again, LS may have been writing on the blackboard.



can link this up with a point which was made at the end of the last meeting. Callicles wants to be a political man. This requires dependence on the *demos*. He wants to transcend the *demos* in order to rule the *demos*. But this requires gratifying the *demos*, assimilating oneself to the *demos*, and therefore to the equation of the good with bodily pleasures. Socrates attempts to prove that the good is different from the pleasant, and then he draws the conclusion from this distinction regarding the two ways of life, the philosophic and the political.

Now, if the good is identified falsely with bodily pleasure, *the* corrective, *the* virtue par excellence becomes temperance or, to use the term which is here preferred, moderation. At this point, the connection with the problem of rhetoric comes again to the surface. For, in the first place, rhetoric is here said to be required for producing moderation, or—to play now with the Greek word, the verb meaning bringing someone to his senses, that is to say, punishing<sup>v</sup>—rhetoric is required for punishing. The desired kind of rhetoric which is sought in this dialogue is punitive. But, secondly, moderation means not merely moderation regarding food and drink; it means also in a broader sense something which we might call reserve or modesty. As such, it is distinguished from indelicacy, the willingness to say everything, or indiscriminate frankness. Moderation in this sense is not the virtue governing the bodily desires but *the* virtue governing speech, producing decency of speech. This remark is not meant to convey that all rhetoric is punitive. The *Phaedrus* shows with particular clarity that there is a higher kind of rhetoric, which is called erotic rhetoric and which does not have this punitive character. But both kinds of rhetoric, the erotic, as the highest, and the punitive, as the lower, have this in common: they are public-spirited, their root is in their concern with others, as distinguished from self-preservation. But there is also a kind of legitimate rhetoric whose root is self-preservation, either of the individual—that is forensic rhetoric—or of the *polis* or society—that is deliberative rhetoric. The higher kinds of rhetoric, which are erotic and punitive rhetoric, take the place of Gorgias' display rhetoric, to which reference has been made at the beginning of the dialogue. So much as a summary and an indication of what follows.

We turn now to 499b, page 439 bottom and following. Here Socrates begins to draw the conclusion from the distinction between pleasant and good regarding rhetoric. Callicles says, "You, Socrates, behave like a child, and I am playing with you, pretending to concede something to you which I never questioned, namely, that there is a difference in the *rank* of pleasures, good and bad pleasures. You are as happy as a child with my seeming concession—as it were, like a puppy who received a bone. You have not forced me at all to abandon my position, to desert my post, to behave like a coward." Callicles believes he has won—but not quite. He does not see that Socrates forced him into playing with him. And playing, we know, becomes boys [and] impossible creatures like Socrates, but not a serious man like Callicles. Callicles cannot avoid contradicting himself either by deed or by speech. Socrates answers: "You did not argue with me at all, Callicles, but you deceived me. But, precisely by deceiving me, you contradicted your assertion that you would be frank because you are my friend. You again contradicted yourself by

---

<sup>v</sup> LS is referring to *noutheteis* at 497b1.

deed.” This is Callicles’ constant trouble; he contradicts himself either by deed or by speech. And yet, in a way he doesn’t care, the main point being to maintain his position.

In 499c–499d, Callicles grants now that there are [not only] pleasures which are<sup>2</sup> inferior to other pleasures, but pleasures which are simply bad. This, of course, could not be granted by any hedonist, for a hedonist would necessarily have to admit that there is something good in every pleasure.

In 499d–500a, the distinction is now made between good and bad pleasures. Good pleasures are those which are conducive, in the first place, to goodness or virtue of the body, for example. This implies that pleasures must be chosen, not as pleasures, but for the sake of something which is not pleasure but, say, [the] good condition of the body, for the sake of the good. This choice, in order to be reasonable, requires a skill, an art, a science.

There is one point to which I must draw your attention in 500a. Socrates says that Callicles, as a third, joins now Socrates and Polus. He does not join Gorgias. In other words, we have now a series of men which begins with Socrates, then Polus, then Callicles. This replaces the original series: Gorgias, Polus, Callicles. Socrates has somehow usurped the place of Gorgias. Socrates and Polus had agreed that one has to do everything for the sake of the good: 468c. If you were to look it up, you would see that Polus<sup>3</sup> retracted this point immediately after. Yet Polus does not protest now because he had been tamed a long time ago. In 500a, again, Socrates touches on something which he had said to Polus and Gorgias; he doesn’t say that he had reached an agreement with Polus and Gorgias. This point, that rhetoric is a branch of flattery, had, of course, never been agreed upon between Socrates, on the one hand, and Gorgias and Polus, on the other. I make this remark also to show you how carefully these words have been chosen. But Socrates does not yet speak here of rhetoric as flattery. What he is driving at is this: given that the good is fundamentally different from the pleasant, there must be two kinds of rhetoric. This had never been stated before, although we were compelled to simply observe it by thinking through the argument. Looking back, we can now say that Socrates’ victory over Polus is all the greater since he did not make this concession to Polus at all. In other words, he could have said at the end of the Polus discussion, “What I said is true of a certain kind of rhetoric, vulgar rhetoric; there is, of course, a higher one.” He never said this. Polus had to accept—he could not say a word at the<sup>4</sup> end against—the previously made assertion that rhetoric is simply bad and base. In this context, the oath occurs by the god of friendship, meaning Zeus, which is, of course, most appropriate here, because the admission that there is a noble kind of rhetoric establishes the friendship between Socrates and the rhetoricians.

In the sequel, b–d, the distinction between the good and the pleasant is first linked up with the distinction between present politics and philosophy as a way of life, which implies that there may be another kind of politics which may be connected with philosophy and, perhaps, identical with it. So the political way of life means now only the political way of life as generally known. There may be a political activity which has an entirely different character. In d, Socrates says that he tried to distinguish the two ways of

life: that of philosophy and that of politics. But where did he try to make that distinction? I think he means, by distinguishing the good and the pleasant, he tried to lay the foundation for the distinction. In d, the crucial question is raised: Are the two ways of life—the intelligent pursuit of the good and the intelligent pursuit of the pleasant—*truly* two ways of life? Are they not identical? The movement seems to be this. First, the distinction between the pleasant and the good. This leads to the distinction between the political–rhetorical way of life and the philosophic way of life, in other words, the distinction between the way of life of Callicles and that of Socrates, the way of life which remains *within* the accepted opinions and the way of life which *transcends*<sup>5</sup> [them]. But here the question is raised whether the distinction between the two ways of life, as Socrates began it, is valid: between the pursuit of the good and the pursuit of the pleasant<sup>6</sup> [as] the distinction between the good life as the philosophic life and the bad life as the rhetorical–political life. The distinction between the good and the bad way of life is needed, but, what is not clear is whether they can be identified as the philosophic life, on the one hand, and the rhetorical–political life, on the other.

In d–e: it had not been agreed upon between Socrates and Gorgias–Polus that the good is different from the pleasant, and that this leads to different kinds of pursuits. The conclusion which Socrates had suggested, ultimately, that rhetoric is a branch of flattery, had not been agreed upon by Socrates and Polus–Gorgias. It had only been Socrates’ assertion.

In e–501c, Socrates summarizes what he had said regarding rhetoric in the Polus section. This summary means, of course, a repetition, and that implies always subtle changes. If you look at it more closely in 501a you see that the skill, or art, must have investigated the nature of him [to] whom the art tends. That was not said before. In the passage to which he refers, in 465a, he had said the art must have investigated the nature of that which it applies to a man, not the nature of him<sup>7</sup> [to] whom the art tends. The sentence construction here is very complicated. It makes one expect that medicine is directed toward the good, but that is not said here. It is replaced here by [the] nature of the individual. In other words, what is good for the individual, medicine or rhetoric, depends on the individual—not on the individual’s will or whim, naturally, but you have to consider the nature of the individual in order to do good to him. This is a new consideration, which was absent in the earlier discussion. When speaking of flattery here, he makes the additional remark that flattery is not art because it does not make complete enumerations. That was not mentioned before. This is connected with the consideration of the individual, because we approach individuals via types, and the typology must be [a] complete enumeration of the types.

In 501c, Socrates presents this view in a more developed way, [this view] about the difference between flattery and art, as a view common to him and Gorgias–Polus. But he does not refer here to rhetoric as a branch of flattery. Let me make this clear. You remember the distinction between art and flattery made in the Polus section. This distinction is here repeated with some modification, important modifications, because the emphasis is now placed much more clearly on the importance of considering the individual to be treated, whether in medicine or rhetoric. Socrates says now that he and

Polus–Gorgias agree as to the fundamental distinction between art and flattery, but he does not say that they agreed as to rhetoric<sup>8</sup> being a branch of flattery. Callicles gratifies here Gorgias, and gratification is said to be characteristic of flattery, without any regard to better or worse. Callicles would prefer to stop the conversation, but he<sup>9</sup> [goes] on in order to gratify Gorgias. Here we have an example of gratifying. Is gratifying simply bad? Obviously not. Rhetoric, then, even to the extent to which it is gratification, is not necessarily bad. What you have to do in all such cases is to listen not only to the general proposition, but you have also to observe the peculiar cases occurring in the dialogue. Gratification which is completely indifferent is bad.

In 500e, Callicles simply agrees with what Socrates says in order to gratify Gorgias. Socrates<sup>10</sup> no longer object[s] to Callicles' agreeing with him only for this reason, meaning without conviction. The whole conversation is not a serious discussion, but an exhibition for the sake of Gorgias.

501d–502c: Arts which merely gratify the souls of many at the same time are now discussed. We can't help thinking of flattery in the first case as an art which gratifies the souls of many. Now, which are these arts mentioned here? There are five of them: Flute playing, harp playing, choral productions, dithyrambic poetry, and tragedy. They all are called flattery. You see, however, that in the case of harp playing and in the case of dithyrambic poetry, they are not unqualifiedly called flattery. In the case of harp playing, a qualification is made: harp playing in contests. Regarding dithyrambic poetry, a qualification is made—in the case of Cinesias, a certain poet, at any rate. Later on, these qualifications are dropped, and therefore the indictment of poetry and music becomes much more severe because no qualifications are maintained. We see also an interesting remark in this interplay about this inept poet. To gratify people without any reference to the good is bad, but not even to be able to gratify the audience is, of course, inferior<sup>11</sup> to [being] able to gratify them. Some value is necessarily implied in what Plato elsewhere calls “the poetic,” or what is called today aesthetic enjoyment. Even if [it is] worthy of disapproval on moral grounds, we can still see the difference between the poetically valuable and the poetically worthless. To mention the example which Plato gives in the Third Book of the *Republic*, the words in the *Iliad* in which Achilles insults Agamemnon by saying “You have the heart of a deer and the eyes of a dog,” Socrates says this is all the worse because it is poetic,<sup>vi</sup> the poetic character consisting in the fact [that it] is a perfect insult to say of a man, a king, that he has the eye of a dog. He does not mention the other quality that a dog after all has: a dog can bite and can get angry. But Agamemnon has the heart of a deer—the perfect description of a coward. This makes it morally worse, since it is so poetic and it is said by a subject to his ruler. There is then a poetic quality which is not identical with a moral quality. Therefore, the man who is not even capable of producing poetic perfection, to say nothing of moral perfection, is inferior to him who is capable of producing poetic perfection while still being immoral. We also see in 502b that the non-flattering rhetoric of which he speaks, and which is now admitted, is not frank. It leaves unsaid<sup>12</sup> [the] pleasant which is bad. It conceals the pleasant character of vice. Rhetoric is now put side by side with poetry, and the

---

<sup>vi</sup> *Republic* 389e12–390a5; cf. *Iliad* 1.225.

condemnation of rhetoric is now extended to poetry, particularly to tragedy. What is the consequence of that? Rhetoric up to now was presented in the explicit statements as flattery—something low, despicable. Now this indictment is extended so as to include poetry. It makes it easier to be a rhetorician. In this view, the rhetorician is not any worse than Sophocles. He may still be bad from God knows what point of view, but to be a tragedian was respectable. This is here achieved.

In c–d: All poetry is vulgar rhetoric; and therefore flattery, for the substance of poetry, if we disregard rhyme and meter, is speeches addressed to all. “To all” means to women, children, and slaves. It appears now that rhetoric is even higher than poetry, because rhetoric is never addressed to all, but only to the assembly in which neither women, nor children, [to] say nothing of slaves, are present. Now the rehabilitation of rhetoric begins. We should note, however, that in 502d it is made clear that the indictment of rhetoric applies only to poetry produced in public, in the theater. Vulgar rhetoric, however, is superior to the theater because it is at least selective regarding its audience. Rhetoric addresses only free, grown-up men. In<sup>13</sup> [502e]–503a, Socrates raises the question: “What is the character of rhetoric? Must we here make a distinction between two kinds of rhetoric?” Callicles says this is not simple, for there are orators of both kinds, the noble and the base. There are orators who merely try to gratify the citizens, and those who try to make the citizens better, rhetoric which is directed toward the good, and rhetoric which is directed toward the pleasant. But this is not what Callicles says. Rather, he says that there is a rhetoric which *cares* for the citizens, a rhetoric which is not guided merely by the selfish interest of the speaker. Socrates will then try to show that this kind of caring for the citizens, or public-spiritedness, is in fact gratification. For what does this caring mean? Is it not to satisfy the desires of the people? Socrates then goes on to say that rhetoric too is twofold, not simple. Poetry too is twofold: the vulgar and the noble poetry. Hence, there exists side by side a noble and a base rhetoric. Here we have the retraction of the previous statement that rhetoric is<sup>14</sup>, as such, flattery. The noble rhetoric will say what is best and will not say evil or wicked things. But—and now the crucial point comes in b—the noble rhetoric does not yet exist. The dialogue is meant to discover the noble rhetoric.

In b–d: all Athenian statesmen have used only the base kind of rhetoric. Here Callicles’ attitude changes. He disagrees, although he had decided always to agree in order to finish the conversation. This, however, is too serious and too important a matter for him to remain silent. Now follows the description, the delineation, of the noble rhetoric. Here, in 503b, the implication is made that men are primarily, originally, bad. The function of the orator is to make them good. This is not so surprising, because men need education. If<sup>15</sup> [a man] does not get education, he will become bad. The need for education implies that there is a primary inclination toward badness. Note that the criticism of the Athenian statesmen is universal; it refers not only to this or that, but to all. Therefore, it includes even the founder of Athens, if he was already an orator. Callicles [then] gives<sup>16</sup> four men’s names who have been, according to him, good orators. In this enumeration, he follows the chronological order in the main, but not quite. After having mentioned Cimon, he reminds himself of Cimon’s father Miltiades. This makes the son precede the father. Socrates indicates that Callicles meant from the beginning that it is the business of

the ruler not only to satisfy the ruler's desires, but to satisfy the desires of the *demos* as well. Here he mentions that the four great men mentioned by Callicles were not true statesmen. To realize the significance and the extremism of Socrates' statement, you must think of what we would say if the most respected statesman, our founding father, were called simply a bad statesman. What this means will become clearer later on.

503d–504a: What conditions would have to be fulfilled by the true statesman–orator?<sup>17</sup> [Socrates] gives here five examples from other fields. The shipbuilder is in the center. Ships played a great role in Athenian democracy, as you know, but we must not forget that we also speak of the “ship of state.” When we speak of the shipbuilder, we are not only concerned with the helmsman, but with the builder of the state, that is to say, the founder, as well. What, then, about the good orator–statesman? He will not speak at random but looking away from everything else to something. He will abstract from everything else and concentrate on something. What is that something? The idea of the good, the idea of justice. But this is not said here. I will try to follow the argument closely because that is crucial. Like all other craftsmen who look to their work—and each of them makes their selection, and applies what he has selected, with a view to their work, which means either his own work included or only the work of the other craftsmen—he does this not at random, but so that that at which he works receives a certain form (*eidos*). What does this mean? Craftsmen do not so much look away from everything else to an idea. Rather, they look to their work with a view to the thing at which they work, so that that thing should *receive* some idea, some form. They do not look away from everything else to the idea. What does that imply?

This passage has been tampered with in various ways because, I think, people did not understand this point. They think that Plato is speaking here of looking at ideas. The extreme example of this is presented in the Tenth Book of the *Republic*. If a carpenter makes a chair, what does he do? He must look at something, otherwise he cannot make the chair. This is called the “idea of the chair.” The idea of the chair, then, is the guiding<sup>18</sup> [fact] which guides him in all his operations.<sup>vii</sup> Here, the emphasis is in no way on looking at an idea, but on something else: it is on their work, so that the work will receive a form. What Plato indicates here is the very simple fact that all craftsmen, including the good rhetoricians, are not theoretical men. [To] the extent to which looking takes place, [it] is only [as] part of their activity. Philosophy proper, which from Plato's point of view can be called looking at ideas, and its complex relationship to practice, will not be discussed here at all. We have seen that, even in the Polus section, philosophy is not mentioned and appeared only in the form of the legislative art, as a kind of substitute for philosophy. As regards the craftsmen, including politics at its best, they cannot make the material on which they work receive a form by disregarding everything except the form of the chair; they have also to look at the work of the other craftsmen with whom their work must somehow be in harmony. Therefore, the emphasis here is wholly on the material and the coordination of his work with the other craftsmen, [rather] than on the ideas. A chair is necessarily a house chair or a garden chair; therefore it is necessarily related to the work of other craftsmen—the housebuilder, the gardener. Here, for the first

---

<sup>vii</sup> See *Republic* 595c6–597e5.

time, the major consideration is the nature of the individual to whom the medicine or the speech is applied. Craftsmen put everything into a certain order; they force one thing to suit and fit something else, so that the whole will have been established as a well-ordered thing. They do not merely look at the order; they establish that order, for they all are craftsmen, even the statesman. The good craftsman makes the thing at which he works a well-ordered thing. Therefore, the good orator makes the soul a well-ordered soul.<sup>19</sup> In order to work on the individual soul, [he has] to know the nature of that individual soul or of the collective of individual souls. The good orator makes the soul a well-ordered thing. By means of what does he do that? What does he make the soul into? This question is answered in 504a–d. But first, to reclarify: when Plato speaks about such matters, he usually speaks of looking away from all sensible things toward the idea; no such suggestion is made here because the emphasis is totally on the practical character of the political art, and therefore the looking act is only a part of the intellectual activity of the craftsman.

What does Plato's idea mean? For example, when he uses that example of the chair in the Tenth Book of the *Republic*, [the chair] at which the carpenter looks in making a<sup>20</sup> [chair], what does that mean? Of course, it does not mean a tangible chair. It is a model, a model which cannot be in the way in which this chair is. The human soul is distinguished from the soul of brutes by the fact that, in mythical language, the human soul has seen the ideas prior to birth. In non-mythical language, it is [that] man, prior to making any sense perception, has already<sup>21</sup> [some] understanding of these forms. Otherwise, he would not have sense perception in a human way. In present day language, one could state this, perhaps, as follows: there is never pure sense perception; sense perception is always interpreted; the categories precede the perception. Plato does not speak of categories, but of ideas. The ideas, we can say, are the natural framework in which everything is perceived. This is in the essence of man. But the philosopher would make it his explicit task to get clarity about that framework, about these categories. The philosopher is concerned with the ideas as ideas, but every human being has some understanding of the ideas. Every man has some understanding of justice, though it may be very inadequate. He may say the just man is the man who obeys laws, regardless of what the laws may be. The difficulty implied here is that, according to Aristotle, Plato did not admit ideas of artifacts.<sup>viii</sup> It seems to me that this passage here is based on this premise, that there are no ideas of artifacts, and therefore the complicated language. Plato's speaking of artifacts in the Tenth Book of the *Republic* may need special interpretation. Even the philosopher's grasp is insufficient, if philosophy is not wisdom; the difference between the philosopher and the non-philosopher would be that the philosopher makes it his task to grasp the idea, whereas the others use that grasp which belongs to man as man. There is, as it were, a light behind us which illumines what is in front of us, so that we can see. The philosopher would be the man who turns to look at the source of light, whereas what we ordinarily do is that we use that light without turning toward it. There may be physical impediments which prevent some men from grasping ideas in the way the philosopher does—for instance, some men have poor memories. Then the difficulty<sup>22</sup> [they have] in understanding is so great that not much can be expected from<sup>23</sup> [them]. The constitution of man differs from individual to individual; some are more able, others less.

---

<sup>viii</sup> *Metaphysics* 991b6–7, 1080a4–6.

We have said up to now [that] an idea is a model, and<sup>24</sup> [we have spoken of] the necessity of models for action. That is easily intelligible, as far as it goes, when we speak of an idea of justice—that is, the perfect justice. But it doesn't make sense in the case of other ideas, because there is an idea of a dog, for example. How can the dog be a model in the way in which justice is a model? To answer this question, one would have to put it on a somewhat broader basis: that "idea," or "form," or *eidos*, to begin with, means two entirely different things. The first meaning is not at all "model" or "paragon," but "class," "group"—dogs, cats, etc. It is a phenomenal fact that there is a variety of groups of things, which is there by nature. Then Plato links this up, for reasons which to begin with are not clear at all, with the notion of classes or natural groups as models. How could this be understood? The most popular notion is the notion of "model." How can a class become a model? Let us take human beings as a starting point. It makes sense to say that no human being is perfect. Let us begin at the beginning: every human being is imperfect. But we cannot possibly say that unless we have a previous grasp of human perfection. Let us call this human perfection the "idea." This idea may be subdivided into various ideas like justice, etc. Let us take Socrates, an unusually perfect man. But he still is imperfect. We can see his imperfection<sup>25</sup> in<sup>26</sup> [various] ways. For example, he is an older man; therefore, he needs the assistance of the young. Every human being, either male or female, is unable to procreate; completion requires different sexes. The old need the young; the young need the old. The unwise need the wise; but the wise also need the unwise. The human race as a whole has in itself the possibility for that completeness which no individual has. Therefore, the whole seems to have this character of completeness or perfection which individuals cannot have. I suggest tentatively that what is for the individual outside of him, transcending him as an idea, may very well be the class, or the group as a whole. That would explain the duality of the meaning of "class," on the one hand, and "idea," as we loosely say, on the other. "Goal of aspiration" and "complete class" are the two elements which are somehow reconciled in the Platonic notion of idea. I don't think we can go beyond that now.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** The passage suggests that the craftsman, including the statesman, has to look at the *eidos*, at the form, but this thought is not carried through. What is said is that they have to look at the being to which they apply their speeches, and look at the other craftsmen, too. Plato suggests here for a moment<sup>27</sup> [that the] primary task of the statesman is to look at the idea. But he immediately turns away from this suggestion to the suggestion that the statesman, and any other craftsman, has to look at the being to which he applies his activities and speeches, as well as to other craftsmen. However, the whole problem of ideas is here indicated. There is a very crude notion, suggested by Plato himself, according to which the ideas of everything exist. One can state it as follows: whenever we use a noun (not a proper name) which applies to many individuals, there is an idea of that. That would be a purely "logical" understanding of the ideas. From this point of view, it would follow that there is an idea of a garment-workers union secretary, since there are more than one. This is somehow absurd.



**Same student:** What I meant before was that a pure devotion, such as Socrates had, would be sufficient, and no rhetoric is needed. That this is not so is underlying this dialogue, since a justification of political rhetoric is made. One of the chronological reasons for that is indicated in precisely this problem. There is a matter which has to be looked at which is not completely informed, or perhaps not informed at all, by the ideas.

**LS:** Especially also the very serious problem that in every practical activity, say, in that of speaking, you have to consider not only what is intrinsically best, but also how to apply it to this or that individual. Otherwise, it would be a wholly untechnical, unskilled procedure. But the main point which is here to be noted is—well, you have all read the *Republic*: here is a man who leaves the cave and sees the ideas and, at the top, the idea of the good. This looking is the decisive thing. But what has to be done later? Then he will turn to the cave, remembering it of course. But the political activity proper would be routine activity: how to manage things in this world of shadows. This, of course, is a very misleading picture. There is a specific skill required which is not identical with having looked at any idea.

**Student:** Isn't there a double meaning in this looking back? Isn't it looking over the shoulder, as it were?

**LS:** Yes, but then you can turn around, no longer use that light for finding your way among identical things, but<sup>28</sup> [try] to see the source of light.

**Student:** In the specific instance here—rather than in the *Republic*, where the idea of justice is found in some relationship between the philosopher, the statesman, and the rhetorician—here only the problem of rhetoric is dealt with in this passage. In other words, the statesman, while he looks at his subjects with a view to their good, necessarily there is a good to which he is not looking at the moment, which is, as it were, behind him.

**LS:** He must also consider that to which he will apply it. The material is different from society to society, so that what he will enact will differ from society to society.

**Same student:** The problem in this specific instance, then, is with the application, without any specific reference to the looking back?

**LS:** Yes. This is only suggested for a moment and then covered immediately, because the emphasis here is entirely on the practical activity. We can also put it this way: while Socrates in the beginning of his conversation with Callicles says the fundamental issue is that of philosophy and the *demos*, philosophy itself is never discussed in this dialogue. The clearest expression of this fact is that the idea, the doctrine of ideas, is only alluded to and not in any way developed.

**Student:** If, when you look at the idea, this is the guide, it would follow that the only way a thing could be made is in light [of], or as a result of viewing, the model.

**LS:** But the great question is whether Plato ever admitted ideas of artifacts. This is a very doubtful point.

**Student:** What is the point of bringing up the analogy between the ship and the state?

**LS:** Maybe there is no idea of the *polis*.

**Student:** Then you have to reconsider your idea of justice too.

**LS:** Let us assume justice means, rightly understood, proportion. You would not need an idea of the *polis* for that.

**Student:** I think what he is emphasizing in this passage is not that there is not an idea of an artifact, but that the artist must have an idea.

**LS:** If you use the word “idea” in the sense in which Locke would use it, this is certainly true. In the Platonic sense, ideas of artifacts are absolutely questionable. He says a thing should receive a form, but he does not say that one must look away from everything else to the form. That expression does not occur there. I would say that the question of artifacts cannot be settled on the basis of this passage, but it certainly does not support the view that there are ideas of artifacts. We must make a distinction between human art and divine art, which corresponds to the distinction between art and nature, and then we have the same problem again.

To continue with the argument as it proceeds, 504a–b: a thing is good if it has acquired order and ornament. The word which I translate by “ornament” is *cosmos* and<sup>29</sup> [it] is also used in Greek for the universe, because of its beauty. The soul, then, is good if it has acquired order and ornament. But [it is] not the order and ornament [that] constitute the goodness; rather, it is that which is brought about by order and ornament. What does that mean in the case of the soul? Through specific orders and ornaments, men become good. More specifically, through specific orders, called by Plato “the lawful,” and ornaments, “the law,” men become just—that is, lawabiding and orderly, that is to say, moderate. What does this mean? The statement is, in the whole, an artificial statement: order, ornament; lawful, law; lawabiding, orderly; just, moderate.<sup>ix</sup> Through the lawful, men become lawabiding and, that’s to say, just. Through the law, they become orderly and, that is to say, moderate. This corresponds to the overall distinction which he made between order and ornament. He could have said it differently. What does this mean? The cosmos is more fundamental than the order; the law is the root. What men become through the law is orderly, moderate. Moderation is the fundamental thing; justice is the relative thing. [This is] a thing which occurs more than once in Plato and which can be stated as follows: if you have very moderate desires, then you have no incentive to take things away from others, no incentive to injustice. Moderation, radically understood, makes injustice impossible. From this point of view, one can say an education to moderation alone would be sufficient. Therefore, Plato in the Second and Third Books of

---

<sup>ix</sup> In the transcript, these four pairs are given in two columns, with the first term in each pair in the left column, and the second term in the right.

the *Republic*, when he speaks of the education of the guardians, has only an education to moderation and also to culture. This is sufficient. That is a very good way of stating the problem of justice. Where is justice needed in addition to this moderation of desires? Why do we need justice in addition to that moderation of desires? I only raise this question now. But only if this question is raised can we understand what the specific virtue of justice is.

The good orator makes the soul moderate by means of laws. He does not look away from everything else to the idea of moderation, but he looks at the soul of the individual which is to be made moderate and to the relation of the individual to other individuals. Originally, order is the end. Thereafter, order is a means toward the end. Order means, first, the good order of the soul and then, law. The law is secondary; but not only is it secondary, there is also a great difficulty regarding law as such as a means for making men good. This is developed at length in the *Statesman*, where it is shown that law, by virtue of its generality, might do harm to individuals.<sup>x</sup> If order is eventually only a means, we are forced to raise the further question: Are not the virtues mentioned here—justice and moderation—in their turns also means, means for a higher end? And what would be that end? This question is naturally not answered here.

504d–505e: The skilled and good orator will do everything he does with a view to his citizens acquiring justice and moderation, not to his gratifying them. This is again a very common view which can be found in the beginning of Aristotle's *Ethics*, when he speaks of the function of the good statesman.<sup>xi</sup> The legislator is to make the citizens good and doers of noble deeds. The skilled and good orator will treat the souls of his citizens in the same way in which the physicians treat the body. But here a difficulty arises: Which bodies are treated by the physicians? Sick bodies. In other words, the souls of the subjects are presumed to be sick souls. The good orator will establish a severe regiment, for—one could almost say with Machiavelli—to begin with, all men are bad. All this is to be done by the orator. But the orator now takes on a very broad meaning, and means at the same time the legislator. How can the legislator be called an orator? What does he do? He commands, and<sup>30</sup> [to command] is to speak. It is important, of course, for the commands to be not only intelligible but also effective. We must not always think of lawyers in between the public and legislators, [lawyers] who are willing to accept any language. Eventually, you have to have a language which is effective for non-lawyers. The success of the legislator is supposed to depend here on the effectiveness of his speech, which leads to a grave question: whether political power is not independent<sup>31</sup> [of] the effectiveness of speech. The orator or legislator is compared, not as he was in the *Polus* section to the gymnastic trainer, but to the physician. The orator–legislator fulfills the function which is not constitutive, but restorative or corrective. That would mean that the education discussed here is essentially punitive, corrective. How does the legislator–orator keep<sup>32</sup> the soul [away] from its desires? This is a joke, I believe: the same whiskey<sup>33</sup> [bottle], and it may be easier to keep it away from<sup>34</sup> [a man] sick in body, if he has a healthy soul. On the lowest level, education to moderation consists in punishment,

---

<sup>x</sup> *Statesman* 293e8ff.

<sup>xi</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a5–26.

in withholding from the man sick in soul, not simply his desire, but the object of his desire. The conclusion of this argument is that the activity here discussed, the activity of the orator of improving the souls, is punishment.

Absence of education is not indifferent and, in this sense, one can say man is bad, because without education he would certainly be bad. In the beginning of the *Politics*, Aristotle speaks of the necessity of the city, that man is born with weapons for good or evil. If he is not educated, trained, then he will be worse.<sup>xii</sup> Here the negative education, the way it was understood by Rousseau, for example, is absolutely inadequate. (The natural goodness of man, which in a way Plato and Aristotle also admitted, cannot be construed in this way, as [if] his goodness can be<sup>35</sup> [retained without] any interference with the desires at a very early date.) It is positive education in this sense. When Plato says virtue is knowledge, he merely throws us a bait. To know what this means in practical terms, one would have to read the *Laws*; this is the most practical book which Plato wrote. The foundation of education is habituation. These men are not children, and their education did not mean knowledge in any real sense, but habituation. When Plato says virtue is knowledge, he means, among many other things, that what we ordinarily understand by virtue are habits acquired by habituation. That is not genuine virtue, according to Plato. One could say this: what Aristotle calls the moral virtues are called by Plato the vulgar virtues. They are not genuine virtue because they are not based [on] insight; they are acquired by habituation. Perhaps the clearest statement of this is at the end of the *Republic*, in the myth, where a man who possesses virtue only through habituation is said to choose a tyrannical life, because<sup>36</sup> [his virtue] was not based on insight.<sup>xiii</sup> For genuine virtue, too, habituation is needed. How can you get the body into shape except by repetitive—in a sense, stupid—activity? This applies also to the lower part of the soul. Plato never denied that. Prudence in the Aristotelian sense is not primarily concerned with establishing the goals of life, but the means. The prudent man knows not through prudence the objectives at which he has to aim. Prudence is the virtue [of] seeking for means. If someone deliberates about money, considerations of honesty are excluded from his deliberations; that he owes to his education. The prudent [man] excludes *a priori* the dishonesty—not so the crafty man. In what way the means<sup>xiv</sup> are given in Aristotle is one of the most difficult questions. The vulgar virtues for Plato are very important, though they are very low. On the highest level, what Aristotle calls the theoretical life, that is very strangely called by Plato the life of prudence. But this prudence is no longer Aristotelian. In the *Phaedo*, he says that the philosophers all their lives aspire toward prudence.<sup>xv</sup> Prudence, then, means for Plato what Aristotle understands by wisdom—but wisdom in such a way that it includes necessarily a certain attitude toward practical things. In the *Meno*, the question of whether virtue can be taught is stated as follows: virtue is knowledge, but everything that is knowledge can be taught, hence virtue<sup>37</sup> [can] be taught. And there the argument runs as follows: but virtue<sup>38</sup> obviously [can]not be taught. This is only an amplification of that primary enigma that virtue is knowledge.

---

<sup>xii</sup> *Politics* 1253a31–39.

<sup>xiii</sup> See *Republic* 619b2–e5.

<sup>xiv</sup> LS might have said (or meant) “ends.”

<sup>xv</sup> *Phaedo* 67e–68a.

I think it is possible to express what Plato means in non-enigmatic language. But what is essential in trying to understand Plato is this: If you really want to understand, you must, of course, keep this enigmatic formula in mind, but start from what you really understand. For example, when Plato suggests that moderation prevents men from being unjust,<sup>39</sup> you might understand [that] if you look to the motives for crimes or any other injustice committed. Then we could raise the question: Is the complete control of desires and anger, while essential for justice, identical with justice? For example, if a very poor man takes something very moderate from a very rich man, is this covered by moderation? So you see the problem of lawful property is, of course, not covered by moderation. But what is that which makes the respect for lawful property an important part of human virtue? You have only entry to the problem by starting from the Platonic suggestion that moderation is the foundation of justice.<sup>40</sup> Whether it is identical with justice, that is the question. That is the fate of us human beings: we move better and more easily in the more derivative sense. It is much easier for us to see that this is an oak than to say what an oak is. Therefore, the statement that virtue is knowledge is a statement on the most comprehensive level. We might descend from it—every step is useful—and we might see that a simply stupid human being cannot be, in any higher sense of the word, virtuous. Then, of course, there are men of very high intelligence who are very mean characters. How come? Or the other difficulty which Plato discusses in the *Republic*: If virtue is knowledge, it follows that the art of the guard, the keeper, is identical with the art of the thief. In order to be a burglar, you must know exactly the same thing which the guard knows. If virtue then is identical with knowledge, you reach the conclusion that the guard is the thief and, if the guard has proved formerly to be a just man, the just man is a thief.<sup>xvi</sup> The obvious objection which you and I would make is this: that the intention of the guard is opposed to the intention of the thief. This is not considered, though Plato knows it. The question is: With what right did Plato disregard it? The intention may be what he understood by prudence, or knowledge necessarily included the right intention. But then it cannot be the kind of knowledge of the guard. Another great example of that is when we use the word “idea.” Everyone knows the Platonic doctrine of ideas, has heard of it. But what does it mean? Why does he speak of ideas? What’s the use of it? Are there any solid arguments for establishing it? If you raise these questions, you will see that you do not get an answer from Plato. The ideas are presupposed. This is what makes it so hard to understand, but at the same time so educative.

[end of tape]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “application.”

<sup>2</sup> Moved “not only.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “had.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “it.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “Ors.”

---

<sup>xvi</sup> See *Republic* 333e3–334b6.

- 
- 7 Deleted "for."
  - 8 Deleted "as."
  - 9 Deleted "does go."
  - 10 Deleted "does."
  - 11 Deleted "be."
  - 12 Deleted "said."
  - 13 Deleted "503a."
  - 14 Deleted "not."
  - 15 Deleted "he."
  - 16 Moved "then."
  - 17 Deleted "he."
  - 18 Deleted "act."
  - 19 Moved "he has."
  - 20 Deleted "bed."
  - 21 Deleted "sots."
  - 22 Deleted "he has."
  - 23 Deleted "him."
  - 24 Deleted "whether."
  - 25 Deleted "also."
  - 26 Deleted "other."
  - 27 Deleted "as a."
  - 28 Deleted "trying."
  - 29 Deleted "which."
  - 30 Deleted "commanding."
  - 31 Deleted "from."
  - 32 Moved "away."
  - 33 Deleted "bottles."
  - 34 Deleted "men."
  - 35 Deleted "resolved."
  - 36 Deleted "it."
  - 37 Deleted "cannot."
  - 38 Moved "can."
  - 39 Moved "that."
  - 40 Deleted "But."

## Session 12: February 26, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** We can now distinguish seven kinds of rhetoric, and we divide them into vulgar and noble. Vulgar rhetoric is characterized by aiming at the pleasant, as distinguished from the good, which means it attempts to achieve its goals by gratifying the uneducated, the *demos*. This consists of three parts: forensic, deliberative, and *epideictic* (display) rhetoric. These are the kinds of rhetoric which are attacked in the *Gorgias*. They are attacked in the name of the noble kind of rhetoric which aims at the good. Now, noble rhetoric in its turn can be divided into two kinds: it aims either at preservation or at improvement of the soul. The rhetoric aiming at preservation aims either at preservation of the individual—then it is forensic rhetoric—or at preservation of the city—then it is deliberative rhetoric. These kinds of noble rhetoric are not explicitly recognized in the *Gorgias*. In order to achieve this good end—preservation of the individual or preservation of the city—one must, of course, consider the opinion of the *demos*, and in this sense gratify the *demos*. Therefore, there is perhaps no fundamental difference between the noble rhetoric and the vulgar rhetoric as stated before. At any rate, the distinction becomes somewhat subtle.

Much more important is the second kind of noble rhetoric, which aims at improvement of the soul. This is the only one with which Plato is seriously concerned. Again we subdivide it as follows.<sup>1</sup> [First, that which aims] at the improvement of the soul of the individual, which means of chosen or selected individuals. How are they chosen? Because they deserve to be chosen, because they are amiable, in the deeper sense of the word. That is erotic rhetoric, the theme of the *Phaedrus*. The other kind of noble rhetoric which aims at improvement is that which aims at improvement of the *polis*, and therewith of the *demos*. This is the punitive rhetoric, which is the theme of the *Gorgias*. Now this second part of the noble rhetoric, that which aims at the improvement of the soul, either [of] the individual or [of] the *polis*, takes the place of the vulgar display rhetoric, which is noble or beautiful but not useful, helpful, or good. The view underlying the vulgar display rhetoric is expressed in Polus' distinction between the noble and the good—also<sup>2</sup> [in] the remark which Callicles makes in the beginning of the dialogue as to Gorgias' speech having been nice, but only nice (there is no real truth in it). We can also say that display rhetoric is not serious; it is a kind of elegant play. As such, it is opposed by Callicles' seriousness or his passion, his *eros*. This expresses itself in the equation between the noble or fine with the good. This much about the various kinds of rhetoric which I think one must take into consideration if one is to understand the dialogue as a whole.

The noble kind of rhetoric which is discussed in the *Gorgias* derives its necessity from the gulf between philosophy and the *demos*. The function of that rhetoric is to tame or to civilize the *demos*. The *demos* is characterized in the first place by simple, accepted opinion or<sup>3</sup> law—law in the full sense, where it means not only the rules of action but also the recommendations of such rules: common opinion. But the *demos* is characterized ultimately by the equation of the good with the pleasant, in particular, the bodily

pleasures. What do these two things characteristic of the *demos*, acceptance of authoritative opinion and identification of the good with bodily pleasure have in common? The link is the following one: society cannot exist without restraint on desires. But this restraint may be brought about by mere fear of punishment or hope for reward. The restraint on desire in that case is supplied by bodily punishment and hope for bodily reward. In other words, that which transcends desire for bodily pleasures, namely, the restraint on bodily pleasures, has itself the same character as the bodily pleasures. It is the fear of bodily punishment or hope for bodily reward. The *demos* must make a living in order to live. This means that their activity is devoted to the satisfaction of the most elementary wants, the bodily wants. They have to do this not only for themselves, but for society as a whole. If this social function of the *demos* is expressed in modern psychological terms, it means they live on the premise that the good is satisfaction of the bodily desires, and even the restraint on these desires is understood only in terms of such desires, namely, fear of bodily punishment and hope for bodily reward in this life or in the next.

Men of this kind are the prototype of those who cannot be persuaded by Socrates, but only by men like Gorgias and Polus, if Gorgias and Polus were properly directed. For Gorgias and Polus can be persuaded by Socrates. The idea is this: [there is] Socrates, standing for the philosopher, then there are such people like Gorgias and Polus, and finally, the *demos*. Socrates can act on the *demos* only through the intermediacy of them. You can also say the difference [is] between the philosopher and the intellectual, or ideologist, as a mediator between the philosopher and non-philosophers. In the *Republic*, the position of Polus and Gorgias is taken by Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus is absolutely essential to the *Republic*, though first he has to be tamed. After that, he is the mediator between Socrates and the *demos*. The unpersuadables are represented in the *Gorgias* by Callicles. But Callicles is not simply a man of the *demos*. He is not even simply an enemy of philosophy, as we have seen. Let us then make the following distinction. The *demos* itself does not become visible. The *demos* does not appear on the stage of the Platonic theatre, either in the *Gorgias* or anywhere else. All participants in the conversations, even such nasty customers as Anytus, stand out from the people as demagogues, as leaders, or whatever else. But the characteristic feature of the *Gorgias* is that not even Socrates becomes visible in what is characteristic of him: philosophy does not become visible. We have seen that philosophy was replaced by the legislative art in the Polus section, and the doctrine of ideas was only suggested in the Callicles section and in no way even stated. Philosophy does not become visible in the *Gorgias* since the dialogue considers only the lower kind of noble rhetoric, the punitive kind, not the erotic kind, not that kind which is intrinsic to philosophy. Philosophy is necessarily accompanied by the erotic rhetoric which is shown in the *Phaedrus*. The kind discussed in the *Gorgias* is extrinsic to philosophy or only ministerial. On the other hand, while philosophy and the *demos* do not come to sight in this dialogue, full light falls on Callicles, who is the representative of the unpersuadable, and, on the other hand, on Gorgias and Polus, who are representatives of the persuadable.

I would like to add here a point because we have dealt with this much too briefly: What does it mean that philosophy does not become visible? In one of these similes, the soul is



compared to a sieve. This can of course have a very good and profound meaning, namely, the soul is discerning, just as a sieve discerns between the crude and the less crude. This thought, however, is completely glossed over by the use of the simile here according to which it is a sieve for transporting water—there of course everything goes through and nothing is distinguished. The crucial point is that the ideas are not mentioned, but only alluded to. What does this doctrine mean? If we do not start from an arid textbook-like codification (which Plato never gave, of course), but start right out with that which we can understand ourselves, philosophy is an attempt for Plato, as well as for the earlier philosophers, to understand the whole. How was it understood? [How] can it be understood? And what is Plato's change in that question? To take a very simple notion, as we find it in Aristotle and certainly in all the textbooks later,<sup>4</sup> philosophy began with a man called Thales, who found the essence of everything in water.<sup>1</sup> What did he do? He was concerned with all things. What is water here? He thought that it was the ground out of which all things that are come into being and will perish again. Plato's primary concern is not that out of which things have come into being. There is an alternative approach presented by the doctrine of the four elements, which can be stated as follows: There are four elements, water, fire, earth, air, and they can be reduced to fundamental qualities like hot-cold, dry-wet, and various combinations of these opposites. For example, fire would be hot and dry. Here it is not merely a question of [that] out of which things came, but it is an analysis of everything into its constituent parts. What is the character of these constituent parts? They are sensible. Here we deal with the proposition that the whole, and each part of the whole, is characterized by heterogeneous things—not homogeneous, like water, but sensible heterogeneity. The Platonic doctrine can now be stated as follows: the whole is characterized by non-sensible, by noetic,<sup>5</sup> [heterogeneity]. This is a characteristic Platonic thesis. These noetic heterogeneous elements of which the whole consists, these are the ideas. All later thought has recognized, in one way or other, this Socratic statement. All later thought admits that the whole consists of essentially different parts. In other words, the question, "Out of what did the whole come into being?" cannot even be raised before you<sup>6</sup> know the whole as it is, just as you cannot answer the question of who made this chair before you know the chair as chair. The essence of the whole is its intrinsic structure. You have to put this together with what I said last time about the idea[s] as classes of things and<sup>7</sup> [as goals] of aspiration or as models. Then you will gradually reach a better understanding of what that means.

I would like to mention only one point in this very general discussion which is, however, important also for the *Gorgias*. The Platonic doctrine implies that there cannot be ideas of everything. I will state it in a provisional way as follows. The notion of ideas implies that there are things which are not ideas, so that we must admit a fundamental distinction between the ideas and that which is by virtue of participating in an idea. Plato's common term for that is<sup>8</sup> [*metechein*]. It is impossible to understand any individual thing as a kind of conglomeration of ideas. In every individual thing, there is something of a radically different character, a non-ideal character. To use Aristotelian terms, there is matter. Plato never used the term, but the crucial indication that there is something irreducible to ideas is as essential to Plato as it is to Aristotle. If we say, then, that this distinction ultimately goes back to the existence of something like matter, which cannot possibly be intelligible

---

<sup>1</sup> *Metaphysics* 983b20–22.

intellectually, whereas ideas are—if that is so, it follows that everything which has to do not only with matter but also with the relation between ideas and matter, cannot be, strictly speaking, ideal. The whole sphere of becoming and perishing cannot be, strictly speaking, ideal. If this is so, it is possible that such a thing as the *polis*, belonging essentially to this dimension, cannot have an idea proper. This is, I think, what Plato has in mind. This creates a peculiar problem of what the *polis* is, if there is not and cannot be an idea of the *polis*, except in a purely logical and not ultimately relevant sense. There is, after all, theoretically, the possibility that every being might be a configuration of ideas; that would mean that the whole is fully intelligible in principle. You can also say the notion that the whole is mathematizable is only one special form of this idea of the complete intelligibility of the whole, whereas according to Aristotle and Plato there is an essential unintelligibility which belongs to the whole, and its root is, to use Aristotelian language, something like matter. In other words, there is no idea of individuality, of sensible individuality, in which a thing partakes in addition to partaking in the idea of, say, chairness. The only point which I think one can understand to begin with, without running counter to the evidence of the dialogues, on the one hand, and without presenting a kind of codified Platonic doctrine which is again not borne out by Plato, would be to say something of this generality: the principle of Platonic philosophy is that the whole, the nerve of the whole, is characterized<sup>9</sup> [by] noetic heterogeneity. In other words, the whole essentially consists of parts and cannot be understood as homogeneous. Secondly, this heterogeneity has a noetic character. The essential difference between, say, plant and root, or between man and root, or between dog and cat—this cannot be understood in terms of their sensible qualities; grasping the essential difference is no longer sensible. For Plato, full knowledge is impossible. Since no idea is wholly independent of the other ideas, there is no possibility of complete knowledge of an idea without complete knowledge of the whole. You can say there is an iron wall which keeps the whole together. The fact that there is something which cannot be foreseen<sup>ii</sup> has its deepest root in the fact that there is something in the whole which is unintelligible. For example, the difficulty can also be articulated from this point of view: that there appear [to be] two kind[s] of measurements, mathematics proper<sup>10</sup> [and] what we would call morals or politics. Mathematics has something to do with this matter, as was shown in the *Timaeus*. From this point of view, the difficulty shows itself in the fact that these two branches of understanding, mathematics and the moral-political, are in fact always distinct, pointing to something common. Yet we do not have knowledge of their connection in an adequate manner. The dualism of the kinds of science is an aspect of that same ultimate dualism.

Let me return to something more easily accessible, especially in the *Gorgias*, and this concerns the two types: the persuadable and the unpersadable, the unpersadable represented by Callicles. Now let us consider once more Callicles' character. What Plato does, more or less in every dialogue, is that the character unfolds gradually. The first impression is very significant, but this is only the first impression. The root of this man [does not appear], and of no man [does it] appear, at first glance. Therefore, they have now discovered that we need in addition to questionnaires also depth psychology. If you turn to 511b,<sup>11</sup> [Socrates] says—Callicles' constant objection to Socrates is that if one lives like Socrates, one becomes the victim of every wicked fellow—Socrates says that

---

<sup>ii</sup> LS may have said “seen” here.

this would be a villain slaying a good man. And Callicles answers, “Is this not the very thing that makes one indignant?” Let us take this as the real clue to Callicles’ character, provided we do not find something better later on. The beginning of Callicles’ reasoning is perfectly intelligible. He is rightly indignant about the wrong done to noble men by ignoble men. This indignation about the power of the wicked can also be taken as the beginning of Polus’ thought. I suggested that Polus’ seemingly enthusiastic description of the tyrant Archelaus may very well be an indirect expression of what was primarily indignation about such a scoundrel. If this is so, that this righteous indignation implies that it is unmanly not to resist evil or the unjust<sup>12</sup>, it follows inevitably that one must have power to crush the evil.

But then we are led to a further step. In many cases the evil have the law on their side; therefore one must apply power by means legal or illegal, for the unjust crush the just by means of laws which they, the unjust, have made. In other words, this initial indignation, if it is thought through, leads necessarily to questioning the legitimacy of the law, or it leads to an appeal from law or convention to nature. Positively expressed, this indignation implies that the just or good man should rule, and that only such rule is according to nature. Up to this point, Socrates would agree. Two roads are open.<sup>13</sup> [The one]: The best man must rule, but this ruling is a loathsome business—*Republic*, Book 1—a loathsome business which the good man undertakes only because otherwise the crooked fellow would rule.<sup>iii</sup> Good men don’t derive enjoyment from ruling. Why? Because their heart is elsewhere. They are aware of higher things: of philosophy, science, art, pure pleasure. People who possess such awareness of higher things are in principle persuadable. The other way which opens the moment we say the better should rule is this: ruling is not a loathsome business, it becomes enjoyable. This is possible only if, while ruling, there develops within these men a love for the *demos*, Callicles’ passion. This requires the assimilation of the ruler to the *demos*—this means, theoretically expressed, to the equation of the good with the bodily pleasant. Once this process is completed, we arrive at the thesis that the better man must rule according to nature and must have more according to nature—which, of course, is not implied in the primary impulse of respectable indignation. Once this stage is reached, the man, not sufficiently aware of the higher things, takes ruling as something enjoyable in itself and this thing becomes for this man *the* truth. But he cannot help admitting that this truth is not a philosophic truth. [It is] a transphilosophic truth, as Callicles says, the truth which cannot be demonstrated but<sup>14</sup> must be firmly held. To abandon it, to desert it, is an act of cowardice—Callicles’ principle, which animates all his actions. The subjective correlative of the truth—the truth being that the better man should rule—is manliness rather than wisdom. The crime is to abandon the truth, not to contradict oneself. If wisdom were the goal, it would be infinitely worse to contradict oneself than to retract. The only way then in which Callicles could be persuaded would be failure, which for him would mean disgrace. The way in which he could escape this would be suicide. The remedy for that is the immortality of the soul, which makes suicide impossible. This is, we may say, the good solution. But there is also a bad solution. This is infinite self-deception: hatred, resentment, ultimately trying to kill Socrates. This much about Callicles’ character as it appeared up to now.

---

<sup>iii</sup> *Republic* 345e–347d.

The noble kind of rhetoric discussed in the *Gorgias*, the kind of rhetoric which civilizes the *demos*, is concerned with bringing about moderation. This is immediately intelligible, because if *the* error is the identification of the good with bodily pleasure, the remedy is that virtue which consists in controlling the desire for bodily pleasure—temperance—contrary to the teaching about rhetoric in the other dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, in which philosophy is presented as a form of madness.<sup>iv</sup> We come a bit closer to the argument by the following remark in the passage: This remedy for the inordinate love of bodily pleasures is concerned with bringing about a certain form, idea, in the souls. It is concerned with bringing about a certain order and ornament in the souls. Here Plato replaces form or idea by order or ornament. An inner order, an invisible shape, but also an outer decency, a visible shape—that characterizes moderation. It brings about through a certain order—namely, moderation<sup>v</sup>—justice. It brings about through a certain ornament—namely, the law—moderation. This implies, since the lawful necessarily presupposes the law, that justice presupposes moderation. Moderation is the basic virtue. This is very plausible if the beginning of civilization is the taming of the bodily desires. In modern language, the beginning of civilization<sup>15</sup> [lies in] taboos, taboos on the bodily desires. As such, they have a civilizing effect, whatever their content may be. The good orator produces moderation by means of laws. Does he presuppose the laws, or does he make them? Hence, if he makes them, he could also unmake them. This is not made clear here. But the good orator is compared to the physician. This implies that the good orator is above the laws, just as the good physician is above the rules of medicine and can deviate from them. Therefore, the good orator has really the status of the legislator. The analogy of the physician has another grave implication: the good physician does not establish health, but restores it. In other words, the good orator does not correspond to the gymnastic trainer who establishes health, but to the physician who restores it. The good orator has to<sup>16</sup> [deal] with sick people, with savages, which means with corrupted people. The education given by the good orator has a punitive character.

505b, the context is still the same as before: There is the fundamental distinction between the good and the pleasant, and from this it follows that there are two kinds of rhetoric, noble and base rhetoric. We are concerned exclusively with the noble rhetoric whose purpose it is to improve the souls of the citizens, to make them moderate and just. Here you see that Plato combines wisdom and moderation. He replaces manliness, courage, by piety. This indicates that there is a peculiarly close relation between manliness and piety, which can tentatively be stated as follows: true courage is piety, or manliness is a true substitute for piety in the vulgar sense of the term,<sup>17</sup> that is, superstition. For Plato, piety is not one of the cardinal virtues. The status of piety is a very grave problem. The same applies to Aristotle. It appears there when he discusses the virtue of munificence, the highest part of which is adorning temples.<sup>vi</sup> There is no place in the philosophic ethics of the classics for piety in the proper sense of the term.

---

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. *Phaedrus* 249c–e.

<sup>v</sup> The transcript has “moderation” but LS may have said or meant “the lawful.”

<sup>vi</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1122b18–35.

The good orator will keep away the soul, as long as it is bad, from the desires and thus improve the soul. This keeping away is punishment. The good orator will then punish the bad soul, just as the physician keeps away the sick in body from the object of their desire—food and drink—in order to improve their bodies. But what does this punishment of the soul mean? Does it consist merely in speeches? Does it not consist also in withholding the object of the desire? Let us consider the context. Callicles represents the best type of man who cannot be persuaded by Socrates. The clearest and simplest case of the simply unpersuadable is represented by the man who acts or lives by the principle [that] the good is identical with bodily pleasure, the brutish man who cannot be persuaded at all. How can his soul be improved? Primarily by bodily punishment—bread and water, not speeches in favor of bread and water. Punishment of the lowest type is necessarily bodily punishment. The bad soul is punished via the body, which means that the good orator cannot fulfill his function without a jailer to help him. On a higher level, the threat of bodily punishment, which means speeches, can take the place of bodily punishment proper. This section ends, then, after having begun with a notion of noble rhetoric which improves the souls of the citizens and instills virtue in them—it ends with the reduction of that noble rhetoric to punitive rhetoric, because it cannot fulfill its function without this punitive element. At this point, Callicles makes his last rebellion: 505c–506c. He rebels against the proposition that being punished is preferable to intemperance. Callicles had rebelled before, [in] 497b, when Socrates had shown that satisfaction of desire is identical with extinction of pleasure. At that time, his rebellion was put down easily and quickly by Gorgias. In the meantime, Callicles had even become seriously interested at times, when politics proper was mentioned. But now it is too much for him. He feels that Socrates is doing to him now what he is speaking about—that Socrates is administering punishment to him by speech, while discussing punishment in his argument. In other words, Socrates talks about punishment while punishing.

Callicles wishes Socrates to converse now with someone else. For, as Socrates says with amazing frankness, “Who else wishes?” meaning, “Who else wishes to undergo punishment?” But Socrates gives in when Callicles implores his mercy by saying, “Do you, Socrates, really need my cooperation?” Socrates is willing now to go it alone, provided the others will interrupt him if he says something which is not true. For, as he says, he does not know the truth; he only seeks it. But first he wishes to know whether the others think that the discussion should be completed. Gorgias seems to want it to stop, but in fact he says that Socrates should finish the *logos*. No vote is taken. Gorgias decides, but he<sup>18</sup> no longer compel[s] Callicles to participate. Gorgias wants to see Socrates make a long speech,<sup>19</sup> [to complete] the long speech.

In 506a–b, where Gorgias makes the distinction between his vote and his will, both his will and his vote are for continuing the discussion. What does this mean? It implies that men do not always vote according to their wishes. In the case of the others, however, the vote and the wish coincide as a matter of course. Gorgias is a more reflective man, able to make such a distinction. In 506a, Socrates seems to say, “if I seem to you to say not the things that are.” In fact, he says, “if I seem to you not to agree with myself, in regard to the things that are.” In other words, he says, “You must interrupt me if I am inconsistent.” But this raises the question in the context: Is consistency, by itself, truth? In 506b–c,<sup>20</sup>

[Socrates] says, “if I do not seem to you to speak<sup>21</sup> [finely].” In the Platonic dialogues, the following expressions occur: “speak well,” “speak correctly,” “speak<sup>22</sup> [finely].” These distinctions are very important. To speak nobly<sup>vii</sup> means to speak harmoniously, not contradicting oneself. A man may speak nobly in this sense, consistently, without speaking correctly. It is of some importance that these words occur in the last moments of Gorgias’ appearance.

506c–508c. This is something very strange. Socrates repeats the argument of the previous section without the assistance of Callicles. It is a monologue, but a monologue given in a dialoguish form, Socrates being the questioner and answerer at the same time. What is this about? A great change takes place. The decisive difference between the repetition and the preceding argument is this: the positive aspect of the noble rhetoric, its non-punitive aspect, is not even alluded to in this repetition. This statement about rhetoric merely restates what had been said already at the end of the Gorgias and Polus section. The accusing, punitive character of rhetoric is thus strongly emphasized, and the edifying, ennobling aspect, that which connects rhetoric with poetry, is completely dropped. This is linked up with the new doctrine of virtue which corresponds to this point of view. What Socrates is doing is this: he reveals now more clearly the character of this noble rhetoric—you can say the ignoble character of this noble rhetoric, and the understanding of virtue which is implied in this understanding of this noble rhetoric.

In 506c–507a, Socrates is now the sole speaker, but he speaks by raising questions and answering them. He has a dialogue with himself. That there is no necessity for this procedure is shown by the sequel. What is the meaning of this pseudo-dialogue? If you look at 506d, it looks as if Socrates were answering a question of Callicles, when he says, “Both we and everything else are good by the advent of some virtue? In my view, this must be so, Callicles.” So it looks as if Socrates were answering a question of Callicles. Later on, in c<sup>viii</sup>, it looks as if Socrates were answering<sup>23</sup> [on] behalf of himself and Callicles the question raised by another person, a nameless, invisible being. Is this nameless being the *logos*, the argument, which is frequently personified by Plato, or is it a god who somehow resembles Callicles? The argument, at any rate, leads up to the thesis that the good soul is the moderate soul. Here we have the beginning of this argument regarding virtue. The characteristic consequence of this understanding of noble rhetoric is that moderation is *the* leading virtue, and we must see what follows from that. [This is] contrary to the ordinary Socratic teaching that practical wisdom is the leading virtue. In [506]d, Socrates enlarges the notion of virtue, so that it can apply to all beings, not only to men. All beings are here distinguished as artifacts, bodies, souls, living beings. This distinction is not quite clear. Are there souls which are not living beings, or is a living being necessarily a composite of body and soul? This is, of course, of crucial importance for the question of life after death. Virtue is acquired in the noblest way by order, correctness, and art, which means virtue can also be acquired at random, but not in the best way. That the ornament of the soul should consist in moderation follows only from a pun, because in Greek the word *cosmos*, ornament, is a noun from which the

---

<sup>vii</sup> To “speak nobly” translates the same adverb as to “speak finely”: *kalōs*.

<sup>viii</sup> It is unclear whether LS means 506c or 507c. His remark seems better to correspond with 506c, but “later on” suggests 507c.

adjective *cosmios* is derived, and this is commonly used synonymously with “moderate.” This ornament may very well be only external decency. Here we see clearly the difference between the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, it is justice; here, moderation.<sup>24</sup> [Does] this fact, that Plato can make in different dialogues different virtues the leading virtues,<sup>25</sup> show that there is something arbitrary? There is a certain superiority of the thesis of the *Republic* to that of the *Gorgias*. What is justice according to the *Republic*? Minding one’s own business. What he means is this: doing one’s own business well. To do this means to fulfill the wants of the various parts of the soul in proportion to their inner dignity. Justice thus understood is really virtue entire. In the case of moderation, this can in no way be achieved.

507a–c: In the whole question–answer section here, there are fourteen questions and answers, but only in thirteen cases [inaudible words].<sup>ix</sup> Here<sup>26</sup> [Socrates] develops the thesis that the moderate man has as such all virtues, is perfectly good, and hence is happy and blessed. This thesis is of course impossible to discuss for a very simple reason: The question [of] what moderation is has never been raised. It could very well mean that the<sup>27</sup> [man who has] self–control regarding food and drink is a perfectly good man and hence happy and blessed, which would be a questionable assertion. Here it is made clear that moderation is conduct toward men and god[s], and therefore it consists of justice and piety. Piety means to do the pious thing, which means to comply with<sup>28</sup> ritual. Nothing is said here about speaking or thinking certain things. In 507c, the four cardinal virtues are moderation, justice, manliness, and piety. Piety has taken the place of wisdom. This means that piety is the wisdom of the people. This is in the context where moderation is represented as the leading virtue.

507c–508c: Moderation is the necessary and sufficient condition of bliss. We might say it is a moral virtue, acquired by practice as distinguished from teaching. Then we arrive at the conclusion that, if moderation is the leading virtue, including all other virtues, and if the possession of moderation is identical with bliss, and if it can be brought about by punishment, bliss can be brought about by punishment.

507e–508a: Justice and moderation are *the* condition of community and of friendship with men and gods. Courage and piety are now dropped, because the gods are of course not pious; nor are they brave, because they do not fear death, being immortal. But human virtue can be said to consist in the imitation of the gods. The ambiguity of moderation is here indicated by the distinction between moderation and orderliness, the two terms which were formerly taken as identical. Still, there is silence about wisdom. Can the cosmos be without ruling wisdom? There is silence about wisdom, just as there is silence about the ideas. Silence about philosophy is the principle of this dialogue. The sages referred to were certainly not Anaxagoras, who was the first to say that reason governs the whole. Callicles does not apply his mind to the cosmos. He neglects geometry; he therefore ignores that geometric equality. It is implied that the true cure for injustice and intemperance begins with mathematics. Distribution of honors in the community is proportionate equality, not the same to each, but everyone according to his deserts. In

---

<sup>ix</sup> In the transcript the sentence ends with “thirteen cases.” It is possible either that some words were inaudible or that LS cut off his formulation.

buying and selling, there obtains arithmetic equality; a thing is sold for what it is worth. “Eye for eye” is arithmetic equality. By appealing now to geometric equality, Socrates transcends again the sphere of punishment.

508c–e: If the foregoing is correct, namely, that moderation is the leading virtue, or that geometric equality is very powerful among men and gods, it follows that Socrates was right in what he said against Polus and Gorgias. This means that the discussion with Gorgias and Polus is entirely inadequate. What was said there is proven only if we know the status of geometric equality, which even here in the Callicles section is only asserted and not established. Socrates drops now the demand, which he had made at the end of the Polus section, that one ought to accuse one’s parents if they do wrong. He also drops the statement made at the end of the Polus section that rhetoric is rather useless for the just man. For in the meantime it had been shown that the good way of life necessarily entails a certain type of rhetoric. Noble rhetoric, as it is here understood, is linked up with a specific understanding of virtue, according to which moderation, not wisdom or justice, is the leading virtue.

508c–513d: A new section begins in which Socrates defends his way of life against Callicles’ attack on it. I would like to indicate the problem. There are two ways of life: the philosophic, represented by Socrates, and that recommended by Callicles, the political, rhetorical. This distinction was linked up with the distinction between the good and the pleasant and the corresponding distinction between art and flattery. In 500c–d, the question was raised: Is this distinction correct? Is it correct to say that the two ways of life are distinguished by the distinction between the good and the pleasant? Could it not be true that the best way of life is also the<sup>29</sup> [most pleasant]? (See Plato’s *Laws*, Book 2.) Is it true that the philosophic way of life is distinguished from the alternative way of life by not being political and not containing rhetoric? Now there is a complete change in principle: the principle is no longer that between the good and the pleasant, but only between two kinds of good. Let us call one human excellence. Is it true that the political life is guided essentially by the pursuit of pleasure? What is the root of the political as political? The answer given here is this: it is self–preservation. This as such is not pleasant. The two great alternatives to classical political philosophy—hedonism, on the one hand, and the political philosophy which bases the whole understanding of politics on self–preservation—are both seen by Socrates. The reasons for the inadequacy of self–preservation, including [the philosophy of] enlightened self–interest,<sup>30</sup> will appear in this discussion. The consequences for rhetoric are these: we have now a higher good and a lower good. The lower good is self–preservation. There are many arts which serve self–preservation. Forensic rhetoric, which intends to gain acquittals before lawcourts, serves the purpose of self–preservation. This means that forensic rhetoric is dedicated to a good thing. Second, forensic rhetoric has the same status as the art of the pilot,<sup>31</sup> the art of the swimmer, and the art of the physician. Now then, forensic rhetoric, being no longer flattery, receives its due. On the basis of this premise, the distinction between a higher and a lower good, we reach the distinction between the philosophic and the political life, and a return to the noble, the higher, rhetoric and its function.



When people say “national interest,” what does it mean? The simplest meaning is self-preservation regarding existence and freedom. Not improvement, and especially moral improvement, but preservation is the objective of politics. This makes sense. But the question is this: The distinction between good and pleasant is not the fundamental distinction justifying the political and the philosophic way of life—why is it, nevertheless, useful? Let me state this now dogmatically. Every Platonic dialogue abstracts from something essential.<sup>32</sup> [That] from which it abstracts varies from dialogue to dialogue. For example, in the *Euthyphro*, the argument is characterized by the abstraction from the soul; the phenomenon of the soul is deliberately disregarded. In the *Gorgias* that which is disregarded is philosophy. But this must be supplemented immediately by another statement: politics proper is also disregarded. As we get only an indication of philosophy, we get only an indication of politics, because it appears only in the form of either tyranny or democracy, which, from Socrates’ point of view, are not good politics. Why does Socrates abstract from both philosophy and politics in this discussion of rhetoric? The serious purpose here is the understanding of rhetoric<sup>33</sup>—not rhetoric in general, but that rhetoric which bridges the gulf between philosophy and the *demos*. This theme is external to philosophy. But why is it external to politics? If we take what Plato regards as the good political scheme, we have the philosopher, the helpers, and the *demos*. How is the problem solved in the *Republic*? The philosophers persuade the helpers, the helpers force the *demos*. In the *Republic*, the problem is the political problem. In the *Republic*, the solution is the coincidence of philosophy and political power. Whether this is feasible is another matter, but it comes close to reality because political power is something which comes close to politics. Here [in the *Gorgias*], the problem is how the philosopher via his helpers, the helpers being rhetoricians, can tame the *demos*. This, we can say, is not a political activity proper, but pre-political, forming<sup>34</sup> the people, [to begin with], so that they can become members of society. The first organizer, rather than the political problem proper, is here discussed. Only in this way does the problem of rhetoric as a civilizing rhetoric come clear. It is here discussed<sup>35</sup> [in] abstraction from the problem of political power. In every particular study, it is necessary to isolate provisionally the subject studied more thoroughly. If you leave it at the isolation, you will reach atrocious results. This is a very important part of the *Gorgias*. First, we ask: What is the theme? Then: What is the question explicitly raised? The abstraction can only be understood if you ask: What is the order primarily concerned with? In this case, it is rhetoric.

[end of tape]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “Aiming.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “to.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>4</sup> Deleted “that.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “homogeneity.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “do not.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “the goal.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “[...]”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “is.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “or.”

- 
- 11 Deleted "he."
  - 12 Deleted "if this is so."
  - 13 Deleted "(1)."
  - 14 Deleted "it."
  - 15 Deleted "are."
  - 16 Deleted "do."
  - 17 Deleted "or."
  - 18 Deleted "does."
  - 19 Deleted "completing."
  - 20 Deleted "he."
  - 21 Deleted "finally."
  - 22 Deleted "finally."
  - 23 Deleted "in."
  - 24 Deleted "Is."
  - 25 Deleted "does this."
  - 26 Deleted "he."
  - 27 Deleted "men who have."
  - 28 Deleted "the."
  - 29 Deleted "pleasantest."
  - 30 Deleted "philosophy."
  - 31 Deleted "and."
  - 32 Deleted "This."
  - 33 Deleted "but."
  - 34 Moved "to begin with."
  - 35 Deleted "as an."

### Session 13: February 28, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** Let us again look at the whole. In the Gorgias section, the character and meaning of rhetoric had not become clear at all, as was explicitly said. In the Polus section, rhetoric had been reduced to a branch of flattery and<sup>1</sup> [was] directed merely to the pleasant as distinguished from the good. And at the end, it was admitted that rhetoric is respectable only as an instrument of acquitting oneself and one's nearest and dearest. But in these sections, by reading a bit more carefully, one sees that this is not the full account of rhetoric. In other words, it's much more important and respectable than it was admitted. Now in the Callicles section, the need for rhetoric is openly admitted. There is a greater *frankness* here regarding rhetoric, and one can say that this is due to Callicles' frankness.<sup>2</sup> [But] this must be understood with some qualifications. In other words, is Socrates simply more frank in the Callicles section, or is he only more frank in certain respects? I suggest that he's only more frank in certain respects. The purpose of Callicles, with whom he converses there, is not served at all by the recognition of the noble kind of rhetoric, against which Callicles protests and rebels, nor by the admission that forensic rhetoric is an art but a very low art.<sup>3</sup> [However], these seeming concessions to rhetoric, while humiliating to Callicles, are very important and gratifying to the rhetoricians, because rhetoric is, after all, recognized as an important, if subordinate, art. Socrates deflates Gorgias and Polus with a view to *their* claim, and he deflates Callicles with a view to his claim. The admission of a certain significance of rhetoric is not so important to Callicles, who is not a rhetorician.

Now I remind you again of the steps of the argument, because if one only reads it, it's very bewildering. First, we have in the Callicles section the distinction between the good and the pleasant, from which there derives a distinction between a noble and a vulgar rhetoric. The noble rhetoric is now admitted to be an art, whereas the vulgar rhetoric still remains a part [or] branch of flattery. Now this noble rhetoric, as discussed in this section, is however not as noble as it appears at first sight. Its function is to tame or civilize the *demos*; it has a fundamentally punitive character. And it is inferior to the highest kind of rhetoric because it does not lead<sup>4</sup> those who are by nature fit for it [up] to philosophy. That is not the function of the noble rhetoric discussed in the *Gorgias*, but [of] that which is discussed in the *Phaedrus*. The noble rhetoric as discussed in the *Gorgias* contains a specific understanding of virtue: moderation, instead of wisdom, is the leading virtue. This much we have seen up to now, and now, in the sections which we discuss, or begin to discuss, today, two further steps are taken.

The first is that the distinction between the good and the pleasant is replaced by the distinction between two kinds of good: the higher and the lower. The higher good would still be human excellence in the highest sense and still be connected with the noble rhetoric. But that is not the theme. The theme is the kind of rhetoric which is based on the lower good, the lower good being self-preservation. Self-preservation justifies forensic rhetoric—that's to say, vulgar rhetoric—as an art,<sup>5</sup> [like] medicine and other arts which also serve self-preservation. But this kind of rhetoric, while now admitted to be an art,<sup>6</sup>

[is] still held up as an object of contempt. Concern with self-preservation is incompatible with real manliness, courage. The question which we must raise is this: Is this not a somewhat exaggerated notion of manliness, to be completely unconcerned with the preservation of life? In other words, is this view of self-preservation, and hence of forensic rhetoric, also incompatible with moderation? Then we come to the third step,<sup>7</sup> which is more or less the end of the work, from which the following view appears—I state it now only dogmatically and we will see how it emerges. The noble rhetoric in the sense in which it is understood in this dialogue, whose aim is taming of the multitude, and forensic rhetoric both [ultimately] have the same *end* from the point of view of the philosopher: the preservation of philosophy and hence of philosophers, the quiet[ing], the taming, of the multitude. Here, a unity is reached.

Now this final solution is a victory of the point of view of moderation, as distinguished from that of manliness isolated—manliness isolated being unconcerned with preservation. Moderation, then, comes out as the link between philosophy and the city. This theme is not developed in the *Gorgias*, but most clearly developed in the first two Books of Plato's *Laws*. A link between philosophy and the *polis* is needed because the objects of these two are essentially different, though not incompatible. Philosophy itself is not characterized by moderation. All thinking, all<sup>8</sup> [inquiry] must be cautious, that is true. But it must also be bold. Moderation is akin to caution, not to boldness. Caution, one can even say—caution in the sense in which the philosopher, the thinker, the scientist, use it—is the same as boldness, as you can all see. The really important discoveries made by men of science,<sup>9</sup> [by] philosophers, consisted in the fact that they had the courage to be cautious—to *doubt*—where other people do not have the courage to be cautious. At any rate, this combination of caution and boldness is of the essence of philosophy as Plato understands it. And he develops this theme most visibly in the dialogues *Sophist* and *Statesman*, where a mating of courage and moderation, of boldness and caution, is presented to us as [the] human problem of philosophy. A cautious man, Theaetetus, the young mathematician, and the bold young mathematician, the younger Socrates, have to be mated by a mature philosopher called<sup>10</sup> [the Eleatic] Stranger to bring about the philosophic spirit. And yet, while this moderation as such is not *the* philosophic virtue, in a certain meaning of the term, it can be said to be characteristic of Socratic-Platonic philosophy.

There are statements of Socrates,<sup>11</sup> in Plato and Xenophon, and even<sup>12</sup> [visible] through Aristotle, according to which pre-Socratic philosophy was mad. And with Socrates, there begins moderation, sobriety, common sense in philosophy.<sup>i</sup> To take a simple example, pre-Socratic philosophy said the whole is one, or they said the whole is infinite. Both are mad statements because, if the whole is one, it would mean, for example: this chair is the whole—Aristotle's argument against Parmenides.<sup>ii</sup> That doesn't make sense. The very fact that we can speak of the chair within the whole shows [that] it's wrong to say the whole is simply one. And also, if there were an infinite variety of distinctions, then no possibility of any intelligent orientation would exist. It would lead to insanity. Sanity

---

<sup>i</sup> See Plato, *Phaedo* 98b7–99d2; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.11–15; Aristotle *Metaphysics* 985a18–21.

<sup>ii</sup> See Aristotle, *Physics* 1.3.

requires a finite number of distinctions: the ideas, the noetic heterogeneity, and so on. So Socratic philosophy is emphatically commonsensical. Socrates, as Cicero said, brought down philosophy from heaven and introduced [it] into the houses and cities of men.<sup>iii</sup> It begins indeed with common sense. So from this point of view, common sense, sobriety, moderation can even be said to be characteristic of Socratic–Platonic–Aristotelian philosophy, although we must never forget that, while it begins with common sense, it *necessarily* has to transcend it. So this much now, and let’s now turn immediately to the text, 508c<sup>13</sup> on page 471.

Here in this section, 508c–513d, Socrates defends his way of life against Callicles’ attack on it. According to Callicles, Socrates’ way of life is incompatible with self–defense against all kinds of harm, and hence this way of life is disgraceful, unmanly. Socrates, on the other hand, holds that suffering harm is not in itself disgraceful. In stating his view, Socrates does not mention here, among the kinds of harm, killing [or] being killed, which is the extreme bodily harm a man can suffer. Why? Perhaps because disgrace among *men* necessarily presupposes *living* among men, and after<sup>14</sup> [you have] been killed, you can no longer feel disgrace. There is no reference in this discussion anymore to the distinction between the pleasant and the painful. The issue of [the] pleasant versus the good is now superseded by the issue [of] concern with virtue or concern with self–preservation, the higher good and the lower good. And that indicates the fact that the primary concern of Callicles was not pleasure, after all, [but] some good.

Socrates [says] in 508a–509a, the thesis<sup>15</sup> [that] suffering wrong is preferable to doing wrong has been established before, “by speeches or reasons of iron and steel, as it would seem at any rate on a *prima facie* view.”<sup>16</sup> [This] means, in plain English, it has not been certainly established, for iron reasons are not the best reasons. Which is the best matter, according to the popular view of all time, I think? Gold! And in this sense, Plato says, for example in the *Laws*, 645a, [that] the pull of the law and of reason is golden and therefore gentle, whereas the pull of the lower servants of reason is iron and harsh. Iron reasons are not the best reasons. And you see also here, in e6, a very complicated expression: it has been shown “above,” “there,” “in the first speeches.”<sup>17</sup> [This] has [a] twofold redundancy, but since “above” is sufficiently indicated by the remark “in the first speeches,” one can take this as an indication that a descent has taken place from the Gorgias and Polus section[s] to the Callicles section, which in one sense is certainly true, because Gorgias and Polus were better trained men than Callicles is, contrary to their appearance. So that is, then, a question. Polus was satisfied that Socrates had established the superiority of suffering wrong to doing wrong. In our examination of the argument, we have seen that the argument is extremely questionable. And we find now something amounting to an admission of that. Even if you don’t go into the question of what iron reasons are, you see here clearly stated, “as [it] would seem to be at any rate, [on] a *prima facie* view”—that is, not fully established.

Now this question of the character of the argument of the dialogue is taken up in the sequel, 509a. Socrates says *here* that it is his assertion, always, that he does *not* know the truth. A parallel: in 506a, he had said, “I do not know, but I am seeking together with

---

<sup>iii</sup> *Tusculan Disputations* 5.10.

you.” Now he does not any longer say that he is *seeking* together with Callicles, which at any rate would not make sense because there is no seeking. Callicles does not fulfill even the most fundamental conditions for seeking. How can Socrates seek with him? Now he says, “All my seeking together with others always leads to the same result, namely, that all the men who ever contradicted me made themselves ridiculous—they became ridiculous by contradicting themselves.” Now, if that is so, you see the difficulty. Socrates says: “I do not know.” But in every conversation, the end is that his thesis is the only one that can be maintained without self-contradiction. Does he not know then? And what does it mean that he says, “I do not know”? What does Socrates’ ignorance, altogether, mean? You remember, I began a discussion of this course with a discussion of this problem of the Socratic ignorance. Now, let us reflect [on] that for a moment.

Socrates says here that he does not know, but only seeks. If he does not know, he cannot teach. Then he cannot teach us. How can we possibly learn anything from him?<sup>18</sup> Could we learn anything from him while reading the *Gorgias*? It would be the only practical test we have here. Now, let us look at what we could have learned. The *Gorgias* section: the explicit argument is very defective. Yet this section suggests a thesis: since rhetoric can be misused, it must be regulated by a higher art, or, rhetoric cannot be the highest art. This is true and established, although not established by those reasons given by Socrates to *Gorgias*. If we turn to the *Polus* section: to do what one likes, for example, killing merely for the fun of it, is bestial. Men must act rationally. There’s something wrong with the urge to destroy, even to destroy irrational and inanimate beings. Destruction needs, therefore, a justification by being necessary for an end. Destruction of human beings is particularly grave. This is not explicitly said in this form, but [it is] suggested by the whole discussion with Callicles. Now<sup>19</sup> [these assertions make] sense to us. They are admitted by the laws and by the common sense of mankind. So Socrates seems to know. But are these things made fully explicit? Is the disapproval of destructiveness traced to its grounds, to man’s need for things, to man’s need for human beings, to the fact that man is the political or social animal? No. Hence it is not true knowledge. Socrates’ inadequate,<sup>20</sup> not to say atrocious, rhetorical arguments reflect an inadequacy of his serious statements, His serious statements, which I<sup>21</sup> [tried] to indicate,<sup>22</sup> rest on a common sense of mankind, on a use to which everyone has to appeal and to submit to sooner or later. They rest on a faith, a confidence (*pistis*), which cannot be questioned without destroying the basis of all discussion. But they are not traced, in this dialogue at any rate, to the ultimate ground. For example, such a thing as the relation of nature, [the] nature of man in particular, to [the] good. This relation would mean, as the simplest way of spelling it out,<sup>23</sup> an essentially teleological understanding of nature, so that every being is directed by nature to something; therefore, the good belongs to the very definition of every being. That is not done here. Perhaps it is nowhere done fully in any Platonic dialogue. Perhaps there is a last obscurity, an ultimate obscurity, which is reflected in all [the] obscurities of the serious argument suggested in every dialogue. The *Gorgias* in particular rests on the presupposition which is not clarified: namely, that philosophy as a quest for universal knowledge is the highest pursuit. That is really a mere assertion, a mere presupposition. If Socrates is completely ignorant, it would of course have no value whatever. But if Socrates’ ignorance is a limited one, this presupposition about philosophy must not

remain, in the dialogue, a mere presupposition; a certain degree of clarity must be reached.

Now this thesis regarding philosophy can be divided into two parts. The first: there must be one highest pursuit—there must be a hierarchy of human pursuits and, therefore, a peak. And the second part: philosophy is that highest pursuit. Now, let us take first the assertion that there must be one highest pursuit. This is taken for granted in the dialogue, in such things as the distinction between the real man and the mere human being. There are higher and lower human beings. At the lowest level, we might find the wholly useless fellow, what Homer calls “the burdens of the earth.”<sup>iv</sup> In other words, there are virtues, forms of human excellence, hence superiority of one man to another. We cannot avoid that. Even if we say<sup>24</sup> that is incompatible with equality and there should only be [the] common man, we are forced to say, with the biographer of Henry Wallace, “Henry Wallace<sup>25</sup> [was *An*] *Uncommon Man*.”<sup>v</sup> Somehow or other we come back to that admission of superiority or virtue. Everywhere among human beings, we find higher and lower—most visibly<sup>26</sup> [in] distinctions between rulers and ruled, and this always implies a reference to a certain quality particularly necessary for rulers which is called wisdom, a quality not of the body but of the soul. The dialogue does not establish this; it reminds us of it. The question of course would be to develop this coherently and clearly; whether this is ever done in any Platonic dialogue is doubtful. These things are not traced to their roots, to man’s nature. They are taken for granted as obviously true, but they require a more comprehensive reflection which is not given here.

Now, to the second point, that philosophy should be the highest pursuit.<sup>27</sup> On the crude basis [of] what we now like to call common sense distinctions, a claim is made for the highest place on behalf of rhetoric. Through rhetoric—that is the implicit claim of Gorgias—kings and magistrates rule. Rhetoric rules the rulers. This assertion is, even at first glance, very questionable. We only have to think of Hobbes’s attack on rhetoric in the *Leviathan*, where he says how bad rhetoric is for prudent deliberation.<sup>vi</sup> This claim of rhetoric makes sense only in a democracy, especially in a direct democracy, where the sovereign is necessarily swayed by speeches. Of course, there are great differences between modern and classical democracy, and therefore also the relation of rhetoric. (It just occurs to me: Have any studies been made about the necessity of rhetoric in the American democracy? Or, in more practical terms, what about the rhetorical capacity of the average senator and congressman compared with that of the ordinary citizen? How far is it still important for being elected to be outstanding as a public speaker?) At any rate, the assertion regarding rhetoric is by no means immediately evident, and only evident once you have a direct democracy. But, beyond that, we can enlarge the argument<sup>28</sup>. Rhetoric means the managing [of] the souls of man. It requires knowledge of the human soul and of the types of human souls. Therefore, rhetoric essentially depends on philosophy. Yet, on the other hand, rhetoric is a link between philosophers and non-philosophers, and thus would seem to rule philosophy by bringing philosophers and the

---

<sup>iv</sup> See *Iliad* 18.14.

<sup>v</sup> Frank Kingdon, *An Uncommon Man: Henry Wallace and 60 Million Jobs*, (New York: The Readers Press, 1945).

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. *Leviathan* 5.14.

non-philosophers together. The claim for rhetoric is successfully refuted negatively: it is shown that the highest place in human pursuits cannot be occupied by rhetoric. The positive development of what philosophy is is not given here, as we have seen. So one can say this: What is characteristic of the *Gorgias*—and this is true of all Platonic dialogues, with modifications—is [that] a certain articulation of the problem is given, a certain ascent is made. This limited ascent, which is deliberately limited here, is an image of philosophy as a whole, which is an ascent not deliberately limited. To that extent, every Platonic dialogue, however poorly understood or well understood, is an image of philosophy itself. Even the highest philosophic activity—that is the implication of that—would never be complete. But the strange fact is that, although men can never reach full understanding, full knowledge, it is possible to reach greater clarity, ever greater clarity. And that, of course, is the meaning of the Socratic statement that he knows nothing. That is true only in the most literal and strict sense of the word, and not<sup>29</sup> [simply]. Now, let us proceed in the argument: 509a–c.

**Student:** Can you make a progress in clarity without having some notion—well, don't you have to have a notion of what perfect clarity would be?

**LS:** Some notion, yes.

**Same student:** That doesn't mean having the clarity, I guess.

**LS:** Yes.

**Same student:** But you must have an idea [of] what that clarity would be?

**LS:** Ya, and you must have some knowledge, some awareness of the whole if you are to distinguish, for example, between broad and narrow questions, and comprehensive<sup>30</sup> and narrow themes, and this kind of thing. Without such vague awareness, no thinking is possible. But such awareness is implied in all thinking. Even if people are absolutely sure the whole is nothing but the visible universe—heaven and the earth below—they mean more than what they say. By saying the whole is heaven and earth and what is between them, the whole means *more* than that. There is a reflection leading from the notion of the whole to this answer. Therefore, it can be criticized. You can raise the question, “Is this a true understanding of the whole, to limit it [in] this way?” To use a Platonic figurative expression, [you must] transcend to a super-heavenly place to get the true limits of the whole. But, you see, this is true everywhere. Also in the so-called moral problems. Every tribe, however simple and primitive, makes some assertions about the good. The good is<sup>31</sup> “[this] and that.” But the good means much more; it is much broader than “this and that,” and therefore you can appeal from *this* identification of the good to what is divined by the first part of the proposition. Therefore, understanding between all human beings is, in principle, possible.

509a–c: “If acting unjustly is the greatest evil, especially if such unjust action is not followed by punishment, what kind of helplessness,” Socrates asks, “—helplessness in what respect—makes a man ridiculous, and exposes him to disgrace?” Before answering



the question, Socrates develops the question itself more fully. Now, he had referred immediately before to the fact that all his opponents have always become “ridiculous”—the same word which occurs in his questions.<sup>vii</sup> His opponents have not been able to help themselves. In what did their helplessness consist? They could not help being refuted, being shown up to be ignorant while they claimed to know. Should this be the greatest disgrace? And [in] this example, ignorance itself, believing to know while one does not know or being *publicly* shown up to be ignorant while claiming to know—obviously these are three different things: ignorance which may very well go together with awareness of one’s ignorance,<sup>32</sup> ignorance combined with a claim to know; and the third thing, to be publicly humiliated<sup>33</sup> [for] not knowing while claiming to know. Which is the greatest disgrace? Now in common opinion, the last one, I believe, is more disgraceful, [but it] is most helpful. So<sup>34</sup> it meets exactly the condition of this strange expression in b6, “the most disgraceful help.” That is exactly it. To have the fate of Polus, Gorgias, and Callicles: disgraceful, but eminently helpful.

This phenomenon,<sup>35</sup> incidentally, shows that it makes some sense to say that the good is different from the noble, as Polus did. And the same, of course, applies to all punishment if it is reasonable:<sup>36</sup> it is disgraceful and helpful. One could therefore say that Polus’ thesis, that the good is distinguished from the noble, is particularly fit for understanding punishment, and punishment was the deeper concern. It would be in agreement with the punitive character of Polus’ thought. I mention this because on a previous occasion, I had taken this assertion [that] the good is different from the noble<sup>37</sup> merely to refer, [in the mouth of Polus], to the recognition of the uselessly charming which was underlying Gorgias’ display rhetoric. But it also can be traced to the phenomenon of punishment with its two aspects: being helpful<sup>38</sup> and at the same time disgraceful. And especially, of course, we see the Socratic notion of what a true punishment means: refutation. I mean this kind of metaphorical whipping, not whipping proper, because whipping proper does not necessarily teach a man something. Ultimately, when things become serious, considerations of disgrace in the social sense are less important than considerations of real helpfulness. You find an example of that in history. Themistocles had a deliberation with a Spartan general (I have forgotten his name), and this Spartan became impatient because of Themistocles’ opposition to his plans. Then the Spartan fellow took his whip and whipped Themistocles—he was angry. And Themistocles, being a very sensible man, did not insist on a duel (if such a thing existed in<sup>39</sup> [Greece]), but said, “Whip me, but listen to me.”<sup>viii</sup> For Themistocles, the thing was too serious for him to resent whipping, and so in this case, also, a reasonable man would say, “Whip me by refuting me,” rather than “Spare my sensitivity.”

In 509c–510: there are needed at least two kinds of helps, of assistances, with a view to two kinds of evil, namely, doing wrong and suffering wrong. The distinction between the good and the pleasant, which originally led to the distinction between two kinds of rhetoric, noble and base, is now replaced by a distinction between two kinds of good things: a higher and a lower. It is legitimate to seek both good things<sup>40</sup>—[not] suffering

---

<sup>vii</sup> *Katagelastos*.

<sup>viii</sup> See Plutarch, *Themistocles* 11.2–3. The other general’s name is Eurybiades. Cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 8.59 for a slightly different account.

wrong and not doing wrong—but in proper proportion. For both purposes, one needs a special *art*. As regards not *doing* wrong, or being just, it is not sufficient merely to practice justice, as was suggested earlier. But one must also learn it. It is an art, a science.

In 509c, the remark is made that no one does wrong voluntarily. I do not know whether this was ever explicitly said, that all wrongdoing is involuntary. It is said to have been said above, but that does not necessarily mean it was explicitly said. I do not remember a passage. This understanding of wrongdoing, that all wrongdoing is involuntary, follows from the Socratic assertion that all virtue is knowledge, and therefore all vice is ignorance. But this contention that all wrongdoing is involuntary is incompatible with the vindictive punitive spirit. If what we resent is that someone, knowing what he does, does vicious things, but if he cannot know, [ultimately], what he does<sup>41</sup> if he does wrong, then we cannot, [ultimately], resent it<sup>42</sup>. So<sup>43</sup> we begin [to see] the radical difference between Socrates<sup>44</sup> [and] any spirit of vindictiveness.

510a–e: The art [of] preventing suffering wrong, on which the whole emphasis is placed in this discussion,<sup>45</sup> consists in assimilating oneself to the mighty, to the established regime. But this art of influencing people, [of] becoming powerful by assimilating oneself to the government and the governing class, is not the art which prevents one from *doing* wrong. On the contrary, the two arts are incompatible with each other. I note here two things. In the first place,<sup>46</sup> Socrates no longer maintains the paradox [that] there is no such thing as power of the unjust or foolish. He returns to the commonsense admission that of course, unfortunately, there is the possibility of the foolish and unjust having power. The second point, which is more important in the context, is this: Why should the art [of] preventing suffering wrong be the opposite of the art [of] preventing one's doing wrong? And under what condition does this make sense? The art of preventing one's suffering wrong, Socrates says, means to assimilate oneself to the established political order. But why is this incompatible with justice? Under what conditions is this incompatible with justice?

**Student:** That the political order is unjust.

**LS:** Exactly. In other words, Socrates disregards here the possibility of a correct political order. And we see here again the same thing which we have observed before: in this dialogue, Socrates abstracts from certain things. We can say he abstracts from politics proper and considers only the incorrect, the faulty, forms of political life. That is indeed the case. Now, why does he do this? That can only be understood, as explained at the last meeting, if one takes into consideration that here in this dialogue the theme is the clarification of rhetoric, and its function appears most massively and clearly if we isolate the elements in human nature leading up to rhetoric from all others, and especially from philosophy and the correct, or good, political life.

511a–b: Socrates says the man concerned with not suffering injustice will necessarily acquire the greatest evil, namely, injustice. Resistance to evil is in itself already evil. But Callicles objects: if this is true, the good and just will necessarily become the victims of the bad and unjust, and this is revolting. To which Socrates replies, 511b–512b, “You

presuppose that preserving life is *good*.” Socrates does not say that Callicles’ thesis presupposes [that] preserving life is the *greatest* good. But Socrates’ thesis is very strange. Why should preserving life not be good? Socrates understates the issue by saying “to live as long as possible.” This is not necessarily implied. For example, if a young man wishes to live [un]til he has reached full maturity of the mind, that is not such a tremendous form of clinging to life of which we could rightly disapprove. What, then, is Socrates driving at? The question in the discussion with Callicles was originally whether maximal satisfaction of maximal desires is good. This is already forgotten. Now the issue is whether mere preservation of life is good.<sup>47</sup> [Callicles] started with the maximal: maximal satisfaction of maximal desires. Now he has a bare minimum: *mere* preservation of life. Even that is questioned. Nothing is left for Callicles. No worldly good, we could say, however modest, is left for Callicles to stick to. That is the meaning of Socrates’ pedagogic activity here. Strictly speaking, Socrates does not deny that life is a good. He denies only that it is a high good. The arts concerned with the preservation of life are not very high arts. He gives some examples, but forensic rhetoric is such an art which is directed toward the preservation of life. Hence, forensic rhetoric has the status of the arts of the physician [and] the shoemaker ([the] shoemaker also protects us, of course, against bites of snakes and I don’t know what). So the funny consequence is that not Socrates but Callicles is [the] next-door neighbor of the shoemaker. Socrates turns the table on Callicles. He, Callicles, is in that undignified company. But why does Socrates overstate the case by denying all dignity to the concern with self-preservation? Ultimately, that is an attack on politics (as commonly understood) as such, addressed to a man inordinately in love with politics.

Now I mentioned last time that in the *Gorgias* Socrates delimits his understanding of [the] good, happiness, and therefore also of politics, from two alternatives. One is hedonism; and hedonism, strictly speaking, as long as it existed, was always apolitical. And the other alternative is self-preservation, and self-preservation permits, as Socrates make clear, a political doctrine. He did not develop it because he did not believe in its usefulness, but it was developed later on, as I mentioned last time, by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau: self-preservation as the basis of society. What is the difficulty of this kind of theory which builds political life on self-preservation?

**Student:** Well, as he presents it, it’s self-defeating.

**LS:** Self-defeating in what way?

**Same student:** In that you pay a price that is greater than whatever you gain.

**LS:** Ya, but could one not say against Socrates, “You assume here that the society in question is a particularly low one. But could it not be a good society? And assimilating oneself to a good society makes<sup>48</sup> [one] good.” Could one not say that? But Socrates would say this: if you make self-preservation the peg on which everything would hang, you are not interested in [the] good as a value. You cannot be, because that means self-preservation by hook or by crook. On the lowest level, you get a very external, superficial order of peace, because war is detrimental to self-preservation, war both foreign and

domestic—the Hobbean scheme, which can then be enlarged and multiplied, but which remains almost the same thing. But how can one show most simply that self-preservation cannot possibly be the real aim? Most simple: What do you respect in human beings? I believe all of us know some human beings whom we respect and admire who are dead. Now if life were the highest good,<sup>49</sup> every living being, however low, would be more respectable than some dead human being. There must be something in man which has nothing to do with that. All our orientation, everything we think and mean, becomes stirred upside-down if we say life, preservation of life, is the highest good. (I mean,<sup>50</sup> it can be the highest good in certain circumstances, where someone has a rupture of his appendix, in this sort of situation. That does not contradict<sup>51</sup> [my claim] of course, because it is only, under these circumstances, the most *necessary* thing to do; it is not good in itself.) It cannot really be maintained without getting into all kinds of trouble. And of course in the political matter, there is the special difficulty of finding a justification not only for capital punishment, but for the possibility of war. A soldier who would think only of self-preservation could not possibly be a good soldier. I mean, we should also think of self-preservation, but subordinately to fulfilling the function or mission. I think<sup>52</sup> [placing self-preservation above all else] cannot be done. But why do these people like Hobbes desire such a solution which was impossible to begin with? Because the alternative, to make the highest good, the full human good, the objective of society, leads to very severe demands on the individual and society, and the chances that you can get a truly good society become very small. [Again, Plato indicated this by his]<sup>53</sup> ruthless presentation of the problem in the *Republic*, [in] which, you know, the chances are almost zero, even in the context of the most favorable interpretation.<sup>54</sup> [People like Hobbes] wanted to be practical: “Let us have a low goal, the minimum demand on which everyone insists, then we can get a practical solution.” But it isn’t practical. It is not practical for man to be only practical. That is so, and it has all kinds of revenges in expected as well as unexpected places. But you see here that the problem, the possibility of such an orientation, making self-preservation the objective, was of course known to the classics. And how should it not be? Because one very common phenomenon in Athens was the valetudinarian—you know, one who lives with no other thought in his mind except to preserve himself, alive and healthy, and thinking of nothing else. There are such people, but in Athens—especially because of the high price of medicine, and<sup>55</sup> [because] they have a high esteem for medicine—this plays a great role. So they knew the problem—you can take the self-preservation of your body and life and your health as the highest goal—and they did not develop it because they regarded it as a hopeless and bad thing.

**Student:**<sup>56</sup> [Socrates] includes in this, the idea of saving others, the self-preservation and saving [of] others.

**LS:** He overstates the case atrociously, because it appears here as if any thought of self-preservation was disgraceful. Surely. But still the serious point is this: I think the overall<sup>57</sup> [theses] of Socrates are all seriously meant, although the arguments are never. That is the character of Platonic dialogues altogether. Of course, here self-preservation is lower compared to human excellence,<sup>58</sup> [and] he certainly means it. Then he goes into

that atrocious and extreme overstatement: preservation is an altogether contemptible point of view. Which leads to sheer nonsense, as we shall see. I [will] come to that point.

Now in 511c, you see [that] Callicles underlines here [by two oaths] his belief in the dignity of forensic rhetoric, on the one hand, and the insignificance of the art of swimming, which also is self-preservation<sup>59</sup>. [This is] an important point for him. In the sequel, Socrates does not even deign to mention the element in which swimming is needed. He says, “If we fall in such a thing . . . .” He doesn’t say in *water*. He gives Callicles a lesson in contempt. Now, water is, of course, connected with the sea, the sea with the navy, and the navy with the Athenian empire, which<sup>60</sup> [will] later on come in, and so there is a very good reason for being silent about water. In c–d, the art of the helmsman or pilot, as distinguished from the art of swimming, saves not only lives (that is not well translated there), but even their bodies. Proof: the battle of Arginusae, where the Athenian generals did not save the dead bodies,<sup>61</sup> [nor,] of course, [the] possessions<sup>62</sup> [either].<sup>ix</sup> And in e, you see a very interesting order of preference regarding salvation or preservation: oneself, one’s sons, one’s money, and one’s womenfolk. They come last. That reminded me of a German peasant’s proverb which can only poorly translate, that death of wives is no disaster, but perishing of horses is fatal. The idea being, if you lose a wife, you marry another one with a new dowry, but—prior to the insurance of horses—the perishing of a horse was a mere loss.

Now 512b–513c: The low character of the act of saving people’s lives is recognized by law or custom, according to which no honor is paid to pilots, engineers, and so on. You see, things have changed. Socrates enlarges his conventional judgment immediately in a wholly unconventional manner, so that it extends to the saving of whole cities by generals. All arts directed towards saving, preserving, of life and property are on the same low level. What Socrates says is this: “Now, if there is any truth in the contempt for the vulgar arts, felt by all gentlemen in Athens and elsewhere, the good must be something different from self-preservation. And virtue must be something different from the *ability* to preserve oneself or others.” As a matter of fact, the virtue especially dear to Callicles, manliness, consists in sacrificing life for something higher than life. To esteem manliness or courage means already to have admitted something higher than life. Hence precisely the real man, the manly man, has no reason whatsoever for assimilating himself to the established regime, and, in particular, to Athenian democracy, in order to save his life. He would prefer the lower to the higher in doing that. For<sup>63</sup> without such assimilation in its fullest form, one cannot please the democracy and hence acquire a power of preserving oneself within it. Now this full assimilation must be really fully understood. To assimilate oneself fully to democracy means, of course, for Callicles to abandon his distinction between nature and convention as he understood it, because as long as he maintains it, he cannot be a sincere, full-fledged member of a democratic society. So Callicles really contradicts himself on every point. Forensic rhetoric, we learn here, is directed toward self-preservation. It has the same status as medicine. Forensic rhetoric is, then, an art directed towards the good, and not merely a branch of flattery.

---

<sup>ix</sup> See session 5, n. vii.

Let us reconsider. I repeat<sup>64</sup> what I said before about the movement of thought in this part. First, we have the distinction between noble and base rhetoric, based on the distinction between the good and the pleasant. The noble rhetoric is the art of improving the souls of the citizens, or true statesmanship, or the legislative art. Second, the noble rhetoric is compared not to gymnastics but to medicine. It is, therefore, not constitutive, but restorative, that's to say, punitive. The third step, vulgar rhetoric, especially forensic rhetoric, which is also compared to medicine, is recognized to be directed toward the good and to be an art, but rejected as low from the point of view of manliness, of the real man.

Now let us look at some details in 512d–e. “To live any particular length of time.” In the parallel, in 511b, Socrates had said “to live the longest possible time.” You see, the extremism of Socrates increases: *any* care for self-preservation, to live *any* particular length of time, is low. In e, we see that manliness implies a certain kind of piety: not to be concerned with things which are not within man's power, [to] leave them to [the] god—trusting, not<sup>65</sup> [the] god, but<sup>66</sup> the women, not praying, that is, for continuation of one's life, but making the best of one's life while one lives. To be concerned with saving one's life, and hence with political power, is as fatal to virtue as is witchcraft. It is an attempt to control the gods, as witchcraft is. The belief that no one can escape fate is called womanly; it leads to softness. Thus Socrates indicates that he overstates the case against medicine, and hence also against forensic rhetoric, and therewith the case against politics altogether. The belief that one can escape fate can only have a certain remedial<sup>67</sup> [effect] and cannot be simply true.

**Student:** [Inaudible words] 512e. Isn't that a reference to the good life?

**LS:** Ya, surely. The whole emphasis of the thing is [on] two goods: human virtues and self-preservation—virtue as the highest, and preservation<sup>68</sup> [as] some lower thing. But this distinction between virtue and self-preservation is put in the most extreme form so that concern with virtue is presented as incompatible with concern of self-preservation. The man who's truly a man<sup>69</sup> must not love his life, but these things like length of life [he must] leave to [the] god, and [he must] trust<sup>70</sup> the women who say that no one can escape, run away from, fate, and [he must] only be concerned that<sup>71</sup> [he] lives as well as possible, whatever the length of time is. Socrates indicates the difficulty of this statement by quoting a view of women. That casts some suspicion on the truth of it. We cannot simply leave everything, even your life, to fate. It's reasonable to go to a physician, and Socrates overstates the case in order to have a certain punitive effect on Callicles. But implicitly, in this way, the significance and value of forensic rhetoric is recognized. And he states here [that] self-preservation gives rise to arts, like [that of] the shoemaker, like forensic rhetoric. But this<sup>72</sup> [admission] of the value of a forensic rhetoric is here concealed by a contempt for all arts of saving and preserving which is grossly overstated. That is, it applies not only to the saving of oneself; it applies to the saving of cities. It's, of course, justice that saves cities. So<sup>73</sup> he overstates the insignificance of all saving or preserving in order to bring out more fully the supremacy of excellence, as distinguished from saving.

In 513c–d, Socrates’ attack on rhetoric, you see, appeals to something in Callicles. That is a very moderate statement. His nobility is dissatisfied with the thought that he should devote himself entirely to pursuits which tend to nothing higher than the preservation of life. He knows that. And here it is said that Callicles may perhaps be persuaded in the future. This instinct of nobility in him may be purged<sup>74</sup> [of] its other elements. But that does not do away with the fact that he is unpersuadable now, whereas Gorgias and Polus are persuadable now.

Now at this point, 513d, the new section begins which goes to 522e, in which Socrates criticizes the Athenian statesman and presents his own pursuit as the true statesmanship. You see, the immediate pedagogic purpose is to depreciate political life, political ambition, in the eyes of Callicles. Everything serves this purpose. Politics is nothing but saving the city, but saving the city is only a modification of saving oneself, and saving oneself is something very low—an argument which, of course, does not hold water. But the significance of this section in the context of the *Gorgias* is to bring out the truth that forensic rhetoric is an art, and this, in turn, is one step in the argument elucidating the character of a noble rhetoric which does not yet exist. But, as Socrates uses it, its function is to tame or civilize the *demos*. We have now clearly admitted the necessity of such a noble rhetoric. We have an admission, however reluctant, that forensic rhetoric is not a branch of flattery, but an art. And now the problem which remains is: What is the relation of the noble rhetoric which tames the multitude and the crude vulgar rhetoric which, however, is an art of forensic rhetoric which preserves one’s own life? And that will be taken up in the next section.

Now in 513d, Socrates now turns to the distinction between the pleasant and the good, which was the basis of the distinction between base and noble statesmanship. After having admitted in the preceding section that vulgar rhetoric and hence politics is an art, he returns now to the thesis that it is merely a branch of flattery. The important point on the dramatic level is, of course, that Callicles does not become aware of this tremendous contradiction.

513d–e: Socrates omits here, as he has already done<sup>75</sup> in 500a–b, the bipartition of the two pursuits into constitutive and restorative, and refers only to the restorative, which means, in the case of the human soul, the punitive. What corresponds to gymnastics in the case of the body is completely dropped, which makes clear, again, that the emphasis has wholly shifted to the punitive, restorative rhetoric, as distinguished from the truly constructive, positive one, which is the rhetoric described in the *Phaedrus*.

513e5–514a: [The] true political art makes the citizens good. This proves now to be compatible with its procuring the lower goods. In other<sup>76</sup> [words], the opposition between the highest good and the lower good of self–preservation, which was characteristic of the preceding section, is now dropped.

514a–d: Socrates prepares now an examination of the great Athenian statesmen—Themistocles, Pericles, and so on—with a view to the question of whether they exercised the political art. Were they truly statesmen or only flatterers? He uses for this purpose the

example of a subordinate art: the art of *building* houses for the city, public buildings, the art of building public buildings, which is a constructive and edifying art. You know, of course, the word “edification” comes from the word “housebuilding.” In Greek, it’s the same word: “edify,” housebuilding—*aedificare* in Latin.<sup>77</sup> <sup>x</sup>[Now], he takes the example of medicine in d–e. There are two oaths here. The first, “by the gods,” is ascribed by Socrates to Callicles; the second, “by Zeus,” is made in Socrates’ own name.<sup>78</sup> [Now] we come to something which is easier to interpret. In the case of the first example, which was building, the following question was raised: Did the would-be public builder have good teachers? If we know that he had good teachers and<sup>79</sup> [built a] good private building, then we can recommend him to be entrusted with erecting public buildings. In the case of medicine, the questions are entirely different. Is the physician whom we want to employ as a state physician, is this physician himself healthy? And was he successful as a private practitioner? Strange questions. Must the good physician himself be healthy? Obviously not. If we don’t believe our own experience, we only have to read Plato’s *Republic*, where it is clear that the physician is even a better physician if he has been ill, and he may be ill at the moment.<sup>xi</sup> So the good physician doesn’t have to be healthy. And second, does not the physician, as well as the builder, need teachers?

We can understand this question only if we know what Socrates is driving at, what he has in mind. Socrates is thinking ahead. He thinks of the political art, the noble rhetoric, which is akin to medicine rather than to building. And this noble rhetoric is medicine of the soul.<sup>80</sup> [Now], if we apply these questions to the physician of the soul, you see immediately [that] these are the only reasonable questions. The physician of the soul must be healthy in the soul. Otherwise, he couldn’t help other people, and this is much more important, of course, than whether he has good teachers. The question of teachers<sup>81</sup> regarding the physician of the soul,<sup>82</sup> [becomes irrelevant here] perhaps for the additional reason that there are no teachers of the medicine of the soul at all. There is this little charming thing in 514d and e. I cannot read it; it would take too long. You have the text in front of you. Socrates applies the question of the physician only to himself: if he were a physician, or Callicles was a physician. But Socrates can be imagined as a physician of slaves. He cannot be imagined as a gynecologist. The question of whether Socrates was a successful physician of the soul has something to do with the question of whether he was a successful physician of the soul of Xanthippe, of his own wife, because if Socrates was such a good physician and trainer of men, he should show it first in regards to his wife and son[s]. And there he flunked completely. And that shows some relevance for the question he raised in the immediate sequel about [the] flunking of Pericles and Themistocles in trying to tame the *demos* of Athens.

In 515a–d, Socrates applies here the question<sup>83</sup> [to] Callicles as a man eager to enter a political career. You see now straight from the horse’s mouth that Callicles is fairly young and not yet engaged in politics, and [he] wants to enter it now. Socrates does not ask Callicles, as he should have done following the analogy of building and medicine,<sup>84</sup> [whether] Callicles had any teachers in the political art, nor whether Callicles is healthy of soul, but only whether Callicles has improved any individual, any individual citizens,

---

<sup>x</sup> The Greek verb is *oikodomeō*.

<sup>xi</sup> *Republic* 408d–e.



so that he can now begin to improve the whole citizen body. Because, according to the definition of the political art, it means to improve the whole citizen body. But when a man raises this claim, one can justly ask him, “What did you do before? Did you improve anyone?” Now Socrates formulates the question in a three-fold way. First, “Did you ever improve a citizen?”<sup>85</sup> [Second]—this is extremely funny—“Did you ever transform a complete scoundrel of the lowest type, foreign or Athenian, slave or freeman, into a perfect gentleman?” Third question: “Which human being did you ever improve by your intercourse?” The double meaning of the word “intercourse” is the same in Greek.<sup>xii</sup> And the word “human being,” of course, describes beings in both sexes.<sup>xiii</sup> It’s an entirely comical question. What I meant is the ironical character of the argument appears clearly from these questions, if one only reads them. Because the central question, which is always the most important one, I repeat: “Did you ever transform a complete scoundrel of the lowest type into a perfect gentleman?” If that is the condition of applying for public office, then I think no one is entitled to go into politics. Callicles, in b5 [and] following, regards the question as unfair—and not without good reason—but he does not have the cleverness and the training to point that out, you know, in detail. Although he could have licked Socrates easily, he did not do that. Socrates raised the question then, implicitly, of what kind of teachers Callicles had, by raising the question, whether the leading Athenian statesmen were statesmen, or good *hombres*, or good citizens. In other words, he doesn’t ask him the question, “Did you have any good teachers?” But the question is replaced by the question regarding the Athenian<sup>86</sup> [statesmen] in the following way: “If you have had any teachers in the political art, they would have been the great Athenian statesmen, just as Alcibiades, the great statesman, had his teacher, the well-known Pericles, also a famous Athenian statesman.” The question which is here raised regarding the Athenian statesmen must, of course, be addressed to Callicles, too, and be *understood* to be addressed to Callicles: “Are *you* a statesman? Are *you* a good *hombre*? Are *you* a good citizen?” The question is pertinent, since<sup>87</sup> [Callicles] claims, in effect, [that he is ready] to<sup>88</sup> [become] the educator of all citizens of Athens, and therefore, in particular, the educator of Socrates himself. That is nicely indicated in c, where the personal pronoun “we” occurs in two different meanings: first, “we Athenians,” and then, “we, Socrates and Callicles.”

Now, then<sup>89</sup> [Socrates] enters the examination of the great statesmen. The names are those suggested by Callicles before: Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles. That was the order in which they were given by Callicles, fundamentally in their chronological order. Now Socrates changes the order a bit by putting Pericles first and Themistocles last. Now, what does he mean by this change? You see how careful Plato is. What does he do? The little change which Socrates makes reveals something. He begins with Pericles. And what is the relation between Pericles and Socrates in comparison with the relation of Themistocles and Socrates? Very simple external fact: Pericles was a contemporary of Socrates, as is indicated somewhere in the dialogue here; Themistocles, long forgotten. Socrates, even here, begins with the known. But he leaves the strange impropriety that the son precedes the father.

---

<sup>xii</sup> The word is *sunousia*.

<sup>xiii</sup> The word is *anthrōpos*.

In 515d–516b, proof is given that Pericles was a bad statesman, and that has always been regarded as a very shocking passage in classical antiquity, and even, I think, in modern times, too. Why was Pericles a bad statesman? The Athenians became worse under his rule than they were before, and therefore he was not a true statesman. The function of the true statesman does not consist in making the cities powerful and victorious, but in making its citizens virtuous. Now, the Athenians were less virtuous when Pericles died than they were when Pericles began to rule.

Let us look at some details in 515e. Socrates [says in 515e4]—and this passage was regarded as particularly obnoxious—that the Athenians<sup>90</sup> had become cowards, talkers, and lovers of money. That is quite an indictment, and Plato has been described as very unfair by saying that. But of course Plato never said that, nor did Socrates say it. Socrates says that is what people say about Pericles. Who were these people? The oligarchs, those who looked up to Sparta as the best thing. Socrates distinguishes this verdict clearly from what he himself knew about Pericles. What did he know about Pericles, in 515e? In other words, what happened to him? What<sup>91</sup> [proves] that Pericles was a bad statesman? He was indicted. After having<sup>92</sup> [led] the *demos* for such a long time, he was indicted by the *demos* as having stolen public money. The presumption, of course, is that Pericles did not steal public money. Otherwise, it would not make sense. Obviously, that is ironic: assuming that Pericles is a good thing, he would have made the Athenians virtuous; after he had finished the educating process, they said he stole public money. Now,<sup>93</sup> [if] he did steal it,<sup>94</sup> of course, one could say he was an excellent statesman, by making them conscious of such crimes. We see now fully the irony of the passage. But, of course, the indictment of Pericles naturally means the opposite: that he did not steal, and them accusing him of embezzling public money is a sign of their moral deterioration under him. That is clear. Socrates makes the suggestion that what happened to Pericles was much worse than the fact. There seems to be no question. Could this in itself prove that Pericles was a poor statesman? I will try to develop it later. Here, only one point: Calicles, of course, protests this indictment against Pericles, and thus brings out that<sup>95</sup> [he] is really a democrat, an adherent of Athenian democracy, in spite of his long speech about the true *hombre* and his contempt for shoemakers. But on the other hand, we also see here that Socrates,<sup>96</sup> in spite of his condemnation of vulgar politics, could not help having what we call a “political tail”—namely, these lovers of Sparta, they’re somehow connected with Socrates, although Socrates himself cannot be reduced to that. That indicates the problem of politics already.

515e–516a: Calicles says now that Pericles’ inability to help himself against accusation is *irrelevant* for a judgment on Pericles. That is crucial, because that was the plan, of course, with which Calicles set out: you have to go into politics in order to be able to help yourself. And he now admits how ridiculous this point of view is. Pericles himself couldn’t help himself. And yet, is this a reason for regarding him<sup>97</sup> [as] a bad man? He himself says [that] Socrates’ statement of the great Athenian statesman has<sup>98</sup> a curative effect, and it must be understood from that effect. Political activity is not the way toward helping oneself or toward self-preservation—and this in contrast to what Calicles, in his innocence, thought. Is it not perhaps the philosophic life, which is retired life, better from

the point of view of self-preservation, if that is to be considered, than the political life? The test of the Athenian<sup>99</sup> [statesmen] is this: whether they succeeded in taming the multitude. And that, of course, is in accordance with the intention of the noble rhetoric. They were—this appears clearly—poor tamers. They themselves were attacked by the savage beasts when they tried to tame them. The effect on them [is] also indicated, in 516c7. It just becomes clear that the goal of the noble rhetoric, the taming of the multitude, is required also for the sake of self-preservation. The goal of forensic rhetoric and that of the noble rhetoric discussed in the *Gorgias* coincide. The self-preservation of philosophy and, therewith, the philosopher may be regarded as the starting-point of the whole argument, issuing in the demand for noble rhetoric, as noble rhetoric<sup>100</sup> [is] understood in the *Gorgias*. In his examination of the great statesmen, Socrates—and I think<sup>101</sup> [this] is the root of the whole thing—assumes that all men are persuadable [and] therefore that the perfect orator in the vulgar sense, like Pericles, must have been able to persuade all men. But this assumption, which may be made perhaps by the rhetorician, is certainly not made by Socrates himself. Socrates knows—and the whole *Gorgias* is meant to show—that *not* all men are persuadable. The belief that all men are persuadable, on which vulgar rhetoric ultimately rests, rests on an abstraction from nature, from the nature of men and the variety of human types, which defines the limits of persuadability.

I also call your attention to 516b–c, which contains a seemingly unnecessarily lengthy argument which brings out the importance of gentleness. The just are gentle—that is strongly emphasized. If this is so, this is bound to<sup>102</sup> [affect] the attitude of the just toward punishment. This inclination towards punishment, the executioner's element, is not compatible with true justice but may be necessary on the<sup>103</sup> [lower] level of punitive agency and agents. I will leave it at this for now.

[end of session]

---

<sup>1</sup> Deleted “as.”

<sup>2</sup> Deleted “That.”

<sup>3</sup> Deleted “Whereas.”

<sup>4</sup> Moved “up.”

<sup>5</sup> Deleted “as.”

<sup>6</sup> Deleted “it.”

<sup>7</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>8</sup> Deleted “inquiries.”

<sup>9</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>10</sup> Deleted “Elean.”

<sup>11</sup> Deleted “either.”

<sup>12</sup> Deleted “visibly.”

<sup>13</sup> Deleted “to... that is”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted “he has.”

<sup>15</sup> Deleted “of.”

<sup>16</sup> Deleted “which.”

<sup>17</sup> Deleted “It.”

<sup>18</sup> Deleted “Now.”

<sup>19</sup> Deleted “this assertion makes.”

<sup>20</sup> Deleted “and.”

<sup>21</sup> Deleted “tired.”

- 
- 22 Deleted “His serious statements.”  
23 Deleted “would mean.”  
24 Deleted “it.”  
25 Deleted “*The*.”  
26 Deleted “between.”  
27 Deleted “This.”  
28 Deleted “however,”  
29 Deleted “simple.”  
30 Deleted “theme.”  
31 Deleted “that.”  
32 Deleted “but.”  
33 Deleted “of.”  
34 Deleted “and therefore.”  
35 Deleted “which.”  
36 Deleted “that.”  
37 Moved “in the mouth of Polus.”  
38 Deleted “to be helpful.”  
39 Deleted “Greek.”  
40 Deleted “nat.”  
41 Moved “ultimately.”  
42 Moved “ultimately.”  
43 Deleted “that.”  
44 Deleted “wand.”  
45 Deleted “The art preventing suffering wrong.”  
46 Deleted “that.”  
47 Deleted “He.”  
48 Deleted “it.”  
49 Deleted “it would be.”  
50 Deleted “that.”  
51 Deleted “that.”  
52 Deleted “it.”  
53 Changed from “And which again, Plato indicated by this”  
54 Deleted “They.”  
55 Deleted “that.”  
56 Deleted “He.”  
57 Deleted “thesis.”  
58 Deleted “but.”  
59 Moved “by two oaths.”  
60 Deleted “we’ll.”  
61 Deleted “and.”  
62 Deleted “too.”  
63 Deleted “a.”  
64 Deleted “that.”  
65 Deleted “to.”  
66 Deleted “to.”  
67 Deleted “affect.”  
68 Deleted “is.”  
69 Deleted “he.”  
70 Deleted “to.”  
71 Deleted “the.”  
72 Deleted “omission.”  
73 Deleted “that.”  
74 Deleted “from.”  
75 Deleted “is.”  
76 Deleted “goods.”

- 
- 77 Deleted "How."  
78 Deleted "How."  
79 Deleted "did some."  
80 Deleted "How."  
81 Moved "becomes here."  
82 Moved "irrelevant."  
83 Deleted "of."  
84 Deleted "if."  
85 Deleted "Two."  
86 Deleted "statesman."  
87 Deleted "he."  
88 Deleted "became."  
89 Deleted "he."  
90 Deleted "had to become, in 515e4, they" and moved "in 515e4."  
91 Deleted "proof."  
92 Deleted "left."  
93 Deleted "either."  
94 Deleted "but."  
95 Deleted "Callicles."  
96 Deleted "who."  
97 Deleted "to be."  
98 Deleted "then."  
99 Deleted "statesman."  
100 Deleted "as."  
101 Deleted "that."  
102 Deleted "effect."  
103 Deleted "laver."

## Session 14: March 7, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** I would like to remind you of the general question before we begin the text. Now the *Gorgias* presupposes that philosophy is possible or necessary. And, as a matter of fact, only on the basis of that presupposition does the problem discussed in the *Gorgias* arise, because the problem is philosophy and the *demos*, and, therefore, rhetoric. But the *Gorgias* does not develop what philosophy is, although it alludes to it. For instance, Socrates says, “I do not know.” He knows that he does not know. Philosophy is knowledge of ignorance. Yet he also says that all conversations that he has had on the subject discussed always led to the same result. So he does know, after all. How can we reconcile the two contradictory assertions—first, that he does not know, and, [second], that the results are always the same? Knowledge is not [a] possession which once acquired cannot be lost, because there is oblivion of knowledge. Knowledge must always be recovered. There is inflow and outflow, similar to that of food, so that philosophy itself partakes of the Sisyphean character of the bod[il]y wants or desires. Besides, while Socrates does know—for even knowledge of ignorance is knowledge—his knowledge is incomplete, and therefore, in a way, [it is] ignorance. But the *Gorgias* develops the meaning of philosophy in the form of a search for the art which makes the soul healthy or good, for a gymnastics of the soul<sup>1</sup> [which does for the soul just] what gymnastics does for the body. Therefore, Plato can call a philosophic school a “gymnasium,” a place of gymnastic training<sup>2</sup>, [namely], gymnastic training for the benefit of the soul. Just as a good condition of the body is not possessed but requires constant recovery by training of the body, the good condition of the soul is not possessed but requires constant recovery by proper activity of the soul. Philosophy is, then, concerned with the soul and with its specific goodness, and therefore philosophy can be called the legislative art, in the broadest understanding of the term. The traditional term was, of course, “medicine of the soul,” but we have to avoid this term here because medicine has [a] somewhat<sup>3</sup> narrow meaning of merely curative or restorative and not constitutive.

But is philosophy understood as medicine of the soul not a partial pursuit? For example, it is not concerned with the body, nor with the souls of other living beings, nor with the heavens, and so on. It is suggested in the dialogue that the goodness of soul consists primarily in moderation, *sōphrosynē*, as distinguished from *akolasia*, lack of control, lack of temperance. So moderation includes discrimination between good and bad pleasures, noble and base pleasures—a limiting of desires. With a view to what is that discrimination or limitation made? Crudely and popularly, it is made with a view to self-preservation.<sup>4</sup> [You] eat not too much lest you get ill, you do not smoke too much [so] as [not] to get lung cancer, and so on. But this is manifestly insufficient, as is shown by the fact that the valetudinarian is a ridiculous figure. Not even the preservation of the city suffices, for without further definition, without further deepening, preservation of the city might simply mean collective selfishness and not more. That is only preservation enlarged, which has some moral superiority to mere self-preservation, but not a radical superiority. Therefore, we must say that [the] discrimination between good and bad pleasures is made with a view to virtue, to human excellence. Then moderation consists

in limiting desires with a view to human excellence. But it is very difficult. Moderation is human excellence, and it is said to be the leading virtue. Then we arrive at the absurd conclusion that human excellence consists in limiting desires with a view to human excellence. We must, therefore,<sup>5</sup> make a distinction between moderation and human excellence proper. But what is human excellence proper? We have seen, in 508a, moderation is said to be that which keeps the whole together: heaven and earth, gods and men. And from this point of view, one would arrive at a broader understanding of moderation, namely, moderation as assimilation to the highest principle, or, as Plato puts it elsewhere, assimilation to god. But this assimilation, according to Plato, consists in knowledge: human excellence is knowledge. Then moderation proper would only be a means for achieving knowledge. From this, it appears that philosophy as improvement of the soul is not a partial pursuit—as it would seem to be if it had been understood only as medicine of the mind—because the soul, the human soul, while being a part of the whole is, yet *in a way* the whole. “In a way”—namely, by knowing. That is what Aristotle means by his sentence that “the soul is in a way everything.”<sup>i</sup> “In a way”—namely, by knowing it. But we have access to the whole primarily from the parts. And among these parts, none is higher and at the same time more accessible to us, and more important to us, than the human soul. The human soul perfected is the virtuous soul. Therefore the political or legislative art, by being concerned with the virtuous soul, completes the true understanding of the soul, and therefore the political art is not a mere practical science, of no metaphysical relevance, as it is in Aristotle, but this political art is itself metaphysics, if we may use that term. That, of course, needs a certain qualification, because, as Plato makes clear in some later dialogues, the political art is only a part of philosophy. The other part has no specific name. We may say it’s simply theoretical philosophy, connected with mathematics proper in particular. Philosophy consists of these two parts, one of which is philosophy in a full sense, what we could call metaphysics afterwards. And the other most important part of it is the political art. To repeat the reason: the human soul is the most important part of the whole which is accessible to us, and the political art deals with the perfection of the human soul, the virtues. I’ll leave it at this point.

Now, to indicate again from a somewhat different point of view why philosophy, while explicitly not discussed and barely mentioned, is adumbrated in the dialogue: without such adumbration, an analysis of the explicit theme, rhetoric, would not be possible. Is there any point which you think would need some elaboration now about what I said about this Platonic understanding of philosophy, this strange thing which appears so clear in the traditional notion of what Socrates did, that philosophy seems to have been reduced to ethics or to politics, and yet this ethics or politics, as it is called, is meant to be the whole of philosophy and not one special branch of philosophy? Then I will turn to the text.

We are discussing the section in which the great Athenian<sup>6</sup> [statesmen], from Miltiades to Pericles, are subjected to a radical criticism. This is the section beginning in 513a and ending in 519d. I remind you of the context. Socrates had developed, in the Callicles

---

<sup>i</sup> See *On the Soul* 431b21.

section, the notion of a true or noble rhetoric, as distinguished from the base rhetoric in existence. The distinction between noble and base rhetoric is based on the distinction between the good and the pleasant. The noble rhetoric is directed toward the good, [it] improves the soul, and this means, most specifically, taming the *demos*.

Thereafter, Socrates had replaced the fundamental distinction between the good and the pleasant by the distinction of two kinds of good things: high and low—the low one being self-preservation. And in this context, he showed that forensic rhetoric, which is directed towards self-preservation and not toward the pleasant as pleasant, is a genuine art, like medicine, and not a mere flattery, as was said before. This section, in other words, amounts to a rehabilitation of forensic rhetoric as a subordinate but legitimate art. After that, Socrates had returned to the distinction between the good and the pleasant, and on this basis [he] made a distinction between the true political art and a sham political art. In the light of the distinction between the true political art, whose goal it is to make the citizens good, and the sham political art, whose goal it is to satisfy the desires of the people,<sup>7</sup> the question was raised: What was the status of the foremost Athenian<sup>8</sup> [statesmen]? The first statesman discussed was Pericles. Pericles was not a true statesman. He made the citizens not better but worse. And this showed itself in the fact that they persecuted him at the end of his political activity: they accused him of theft. [That] Pericles<sup>9</sup> [was] not a true statesman shows itself in the fact that he could not<sup>10</sup> [help] himself, that he was not good at preserving himself and his property and his position. And that leads to the following implications: that [the] true political art, which consists in making the citizens better, coincides, at least partly, with the vulgar political art, in which the statesman tries to preserve himself. By making the citizens better, gentler, you increase the probability of your self-preservation. Or, to apply this now to rhetoric, the noble rhetoric coincides at least partly with vulgar rhetoric, with forensic rhetoric. For noble<sup>11</sup> [rhetoric], as taming of the *demos*, is required for the preservation of philosophy and hence the philosophers. And noble rhetoric is superior from this point of view to forensic rhetoric, which comes too late, as is shown by the example of Socrates, but which, to a certain extent, has the same goal. At this point we left off last time.

We turn now to 516d, top of page 499. Socrates draws here the conclusion that Pericles was not a good statesman. Callicles is not pleased with the result: “This is what you say, Socrates.” A familiar turn in many conversations: when<sup>12</sup> one has<sup>13</sup> [no] way out, he simply says, “That’s just your opinion,” not entering into argument. Socrates swears that his assertion is also Callicles’ assertion on the basis of what Callicles had admitted. But, for Callicles, there is no necessary link between premises and conclusions, because he sticks to his assertion, his opinions, while refusing to move from them, on the basis of the consideration of the consequences of these assertions. Therefore, Socrates has to establish the link between Callicles’ opinion[s] and their consequences by an oath. Zeus, by whom he swears, reminds even the brave Callicles, the male Callicles, that the brave must give in sometimes, concede, because of superior power.<sup>14</sup> [Needless] to say,<sup>15</sup> the oath itself does not guarantee that Callicles has really granted the premises—because he has not granted them, as you can see in 516e and c—nor that the premises are sound, [n]or that [the] conclusions follow from the premises. We observe the following difficulties to remind you of that. The true statesman was said to make the citizens better,



and Pericles was a bad statesman because he made them worse. But [the] true statesman makes the citizens better. Hence, at the beginning of the rule, they must have been less good than at the end. Why is that so? Could the good statesman not be the man who keeps the citizens good? Why is there such a necessity of an improvement? Secondly,<sup>16</sup> a point which was discussed in class last time: the Athenians obeyed Pericles at the beginning of his rule, and at the end they accused him of theft. Perhaps he committed the theft at the end—on the basis of the evidence here, we cannot decide well—or, having been improved by Pericles' rule, their demands became greater at the end of Pericles' [rule]. These are not really demonstrative arguments. And the point which I would mention last, indicated in 516a–b: if a tame animal becomes wild, it is necessarily the fault of the herdsman—which is not necessarily true. There could be other causes, such as illness, lack of food, increased demands on it, and so on. [Now], what is the meaning of all this? Callicles is an admirer of Pericles. That for which Pericles stands, in Callicles' mind, is a most important thing for Callicles. Callicles is unable to defend it, which means he is unable to help himself in the most important respect. This is shown to him by deed, at the same time at which it is shown to him by a defective argument or *logos* that Pericles could not help himself over against the *demos*. This very ideal, incorporated in Pericles, was not a “he–man,” according to Callicles' definition. Pericles himself could not help himself; so Pericles does not deserve to be the model for Callicles, according to Callicles' own notion of what a true man is. By imitating Pericles, Callicles would become ridiculous in the large assembly of the *demos*,<sup>17</sup> [just as he has] become ridiculous in the small assembly in which this discussion takes place. He's unfit for both politics and philosophy, while claiming to be adequately fitted for both.

**Student:** [Inaudible words] It would seem to me that precisely this notion of justice is identical to the ends of rhetoric, as was stated by Gorgias—that is, to make men gentle or obedient, rather than [to] make them better. So Socrates seems to be praising justice in this passage, but he's actually praising something like persuasion or obedience.

**LS:** That is not clear to me. This reference to gentleness is very important and has the crucial implication regarding punitiveness—that I see.

**Same student:** Perhaps I can reformulate this by saying, in this passage, justice becomes identical with gentleness, which it was not in the passage linked with Polus.

**LS:** One would simply raise this question—for example, take one well known form of punishment: Is whipping a good means for making people gentle? It makes them obedient to a considerable extent, but not necessarily gentle.

**Student:** And perhaps more than that, it certainly [inaudible words]. If Pericles had actually done what he did, what he was accused of doing, then of course harshness or a punitive rhetoric would be appropriate and quite just. In this passage, something crucial is forgotten. Men are treated in comparison to animals, [to] obedient animals, to the sheep and the shepherd. The interest in this passage appears to be not so much that of justice—although the word justice is implied—but that of making a man obedient or persuaded, which is precisely<sup>18</sup> the end of the original rhetoric, as stated by Gorgias himself: make a

man obey . . . . The reason I suggested that it is presented in this way here is this: that the greatest interest in this passage is to tame Callicles, or men like Callicles, and so justice is identified with tameness.<sup>19</sup> Of course, in the passage with Polus,<sup>20</sup> [whom Socrates] was trying to make a tamer and not the tamed, harshness is praised, whereas with Callicles gentleness is praised—each of them partial views of justice.

**LS:** That means something, but it needs a much longer elaboration. That is of course what Aristotle indicates in the First Book of *Politics*, in the argument for slavery, where he attacks two notions of justice.<sup>ii</sup> Both are faulty: one which identifies justice with good naturedness, one could say, not being harsh on anyone, and the other one with just the assertion of power, the application of power. Justice is something in between: It is not as gentle as those who say no violence must ever be applied; nor is it as harsh as those who say [that it is] simply the assertion of power. But by this very fact this harsh element is recognized, just as in Plato's *Republic* where, in the First Book, it is suggested for a moment that justice means beneficence, and that is silently retracted by the description of the guardians who have to be like dogs, meaning kind to the fellow citizens, the people they know, and nasty toward strangers.<sup>iii</sup> That's Plato's way of presenting the same problem, the ingredient of harshness there. And you think that in the *Gorgias* that is split up somehow: The one is isolated in the Polus section, and the other in the Callicles section? With regard to this reference about gentleness, you may be right. But whether it is altogether justified, I do not know. It may very well be.<sup>21</sup>

[Now] let us turn then to the sequel, 516d–e. Here Socrates discusses the three other statesmen mentioned: Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles. Socrates establishes now the correct order of ascent from now to the past, namely, Pericles, Cimon, Themistocles, Miltiades. At the same time, the sequence is now one of increased severity of punishment. Do you observe that? Pericles' punishment was the mildest, and that of Miltiades was the harshest. Now that is of very great importance. That means that the Athenians were more savage two or three generations ago than they are now. Themistocles did not take over from Miltiades a gentle and hence just man, but they were much harsher, and so on. So that means that the criticism of the Athenian<sup>22</sup> [statesmen] is not valid in the terms in which it was made. Do you see that?<sup>23</sup> [See], Pericles took over relatively savage people,<sup>24</sup> who had ostracized his predecessor, [sending him] in[to] exile. And now Pericles succeeds in ruling them, and the only thing that happens to him is that he has to pay a fine, a considerable fine. So he really *improved* them. He made them gentle, and the same would apply to the predecessor. This is an indication, to repeat, that the criticism of the Athenian<sup>25</sup> [statesmen], as here made, is not valid—which does not mean that in a deeper sense it is not true, but not this way. Socrates shows here again, as he shows on many occasions, that very inadequate arguments cannot be contested by Callicles. Callicles cannot help himself. He could have used the fact, for example, that Pericles' punishment was so small compared to that inflicted on Miltiades, and this would show an increased civilization and gentleness, due to the progressive activity of these four men. But he doesn't even think of it. In e, the criticism of the Athenian<sup>26</sup> [statesmen] is apparently made on the basis of the extravagant Socratic notion of what constitutes a

---

<sup>ii</sup> See *Politics* 1.6.

<sup>iii</sup> See *Republic* 345b–e, 375e–376b.

good statesman. A good statesman, you will recall, is a man who can transform a complete scoundrel into a perfect<sup>27</sup> [gentleman]. That was the question raised. But, in fact, of course no statesman can ever live up to this much. But, in fact, the criticism of the Athenian statesmen is made on the basis of Callicles' notion of a real man who, as such, can help himself. They all could not help themselves.

Now we come to the crucial passage, 517a. The great Athenian statesmen did not use either the true rhetoric, which makes men good or virtuous,<sup>28</sup> [or] the flattering rhetoric. It is a true rhetoric which guarantees against persecution of the statesmen by their subjects. But what is the sign of success of flattering rhetoric? To escape punishment. So the high rhetoric and the low rhetoric coincide at least partially. The *telos*, the end of noble rhetoric and forensic rhetoric, is the same as far as the true statesman, namely, the philosopher, is concerned: preservation of them[selves] and of philosophy therewith. In this argument,<sup>29</sup> [it] is implied [that] to use an art, the art of rhetoric, means to succeed in producing the specific work of that art. For example, to use the art of the shoemaker means to succeed in producing a shoe, a fitting shoe. But must the artisan always succeed? Does the shoemaker cease to be a shoemaker if in a given case a shoe is not produced? Certainly not, because by accident the leather may have been poor, or his instruments may have broken down. So the whole argument presupposes here an abstraction from accident, from chance, and, moreover, an abstraction from nature, as we have seen on a former occasion. It is assumed gratuitously in this criticism that all men are persuadable. But Socrates does not commit any injustice in making this assumption, because it is really the assumption of Callicles. According to Callicles, the real man can take care of himself under all circumstances, which is preposterous, as Callicles has to admit in the given case of Pericles.

And 517a–b: Although the conversation is forced on Callicles by Gorgias, Callicles does not need any prodding if subjects which interest him come up. For example, were the statesmen of the past better than those of the present? This is of immediate interest to Callicles, a political man. At the beginning of b, Socrates calls Callicles *daimonic*. They usually translate it as “strange.” What does Callicles divine? These adjectives are not used at random. When Socrates calls Callicles a *daimonic* man, he means he divines something. What does Callicles divine? Callicles, by saying that the statesmen of the past were superior to those of the present, divines that he will not achieve anything like that achieved by Pericles. That is of some importance for his own choice of his way of life.

[517]b–518c: Socrates grants that the statesmen of the past were superior to those of the present as far as the quality of vulgar statesmanship is concerned. But he denies that the statesmen of the past were true statesmen—true statesmen meaning men who are concerned with producing the virtue of the citizens. Now, what kind is this vulgar statesmanship—that is, what we call statesmanship? A ministerial art. Socrates admits the need of such ministerial concerns—power, food, armament, and so on—and [he admits] that the concern for these things has the character of an art, and not a mere flattery. But, being a ministerial art, it must be controlled or regulated by a higher art. Just as the art of the baker, for example, which is an art, must be regulated by the art of the gymnastic trainer or of the physician. That is, then, Socrates' statement here—which is not a

solution, but a statement of the problem, [namely]: What is that art? And who are those artisans who use the statesmen as mere ministers, as mere menials, just as the physician uses the baker or the maker of pills as a menial or a minister? Still, the art of politics in the crude sense of the term—say, in the Machiavellian sense of the term (without any bad connotations)—[is] simply the art of making the city strong and prosperous and free and lawabiding. This is the ministerial art which has to be regulated by a higher art. But it is an art and not a flattery. Yet the transition here made from art to flattery is natural, because once the ministerial art refuses to obey its superior, it ceases to be an art and becomes, by virtue of this erroneous emancipation, a non-art, a flattery. The emancipated ministerial arts are flatteries. In the examples given in 517c and d, you'll find in the center, in the first place, garments, and in the second place, weaving—which is fundamentally the same thing. Vulgar politics, meaning the political art as we ordinarily understand it, is a female art like weaving. The truly male art is that highest art which we call philosophy. [This is] contrary to the popular notion according to which the male art is a political art, and especially the general's art, because the general is of course a high political figure, of highest esteem, especially in Athens. Philosophy is regarded as a female affair, because generals don't sit in the house and talk, obviously. They do not even stay in the city; they leave the city on military expeditions. But how can one turn the table[s] on that? Well,<sup>30</sup> the statesman-general and his army [still] remain within a whole, within a house, which the philosopher leaves—indicated by the simile of the cave. [The general does not leave] from this—I mean the whole world of the city and of the<sup>31</sup> [city's concerns]—and to that extent one can say that the general is a woman sitting at home, and the philosopher is the man who goes out to some extra-domestic activity.

Let us consider this comparison of the baker and the vulgar statesman. Socrates establishes here the proportions: The baker is related to the physician as the vulgar statesman is related to the true statesman—the true statesman, however, being something that does not exist yet. But the baker is obviously not subject to the physician. How can the vulgar statesman, then, be made subject to the true statesman? Or must it be left to the *individual* to consult the true statesman as to how the individual should use the products of the vulgar statesman, just as it was left to the individual to consult the physician as to how he should use the products of the baker? In other words, can the true statesman, the physician of the soul, be conceived of at all as a man legally in control of society?

In 518b–c. In answer to Socrates' question as to who the statesmen in Athens were, Callicles had named Pericles, Cimon, and Themistocles. In doing so, Socrates says Callicles had acted as if, in answer to the question as to who are the good gymnastic trainers, he had mentioned the most famous baker, the most famous cook, and the most famous cocktail mixer. Well, cocktail mixer is the Greek equivalent here. You see, there are three such substitutes for the gymnastic trainer I mentioned: the baker, the cook, and the cocktail mixer. Three. And as you see later in 519c, only three of the four Athenian statesmen are left. And we have also here three heroes of the dialogue: Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. And you see here, in the case of the cook, who is in the center, a writing is mentioned—just as a writing of Polus, the center hero of the *Gorgias*, was mentioned, whereas there is no reference to Gorgias' writing. The reference to the baker indicates a correction of the extreme statement in the Polus section. Bread, meat, and wine are

needed. The production of them is not flattery, but their production is a ministerial art. Similarly, vulgar rhetoric is an art. Forensic rhetoric [is an art], but a ministerial art. And as ministerial arts, they must be controlled by a higher art, by the true<sup>32</sup> [politics], or noble rhetoric, just as bakery is to be controlled by medicine.

In the sequel, 518c–e, Socrates completes the return from the distinction between various goods, a greater or lower good, to the distinction between good and pleasant—or, perhaps more precisely, from the characterization of politics in the ordinary sense as legitimate, but low, to simply low and flattery. The famous Athenian statesmen had fattened Athens like cooks, but did not feed her properly as<sup>33</sup> [physicians]. By fattening Athens, they made her lose her old flesh, meaning they destroyed the strength of old Athens, which she had acquired through a healthy regime. What he refers to is this. You have the old Athens prior to the Persian Wars, and then Athens becomes the rich and powerful (the Athenian empire I mentioned) and that is due to these four men. They have made Athens great. What does it mean? They have made Athens fat, and in the process they brought it about that Athens lost her *old* flesh—namely, even that degree of power and freedom and independence she possessed prior to the emergence of the Athenian empire.

**Student:** Does that mean that the state was healthy before this, at the time of Solon?

**LS:** There is the view among the conservative people, if one can use that term. In Athens, it's this: There was a thing called [the] ancestral constitution, and this, you can say, [was the] Solonic constitution with minor changes. At any rate, it was this which made possible the victory at Marathon, the land victory during the Persian War. And then came the origin of all misfortune, Themistocles, who made Athens a naval power. And<sup>34</sup> this naval power and the imperialism going with that, that is identical [to] and inseparable from the democratic development of Athens, because the Athenians simply had to give the people manning the boats full citizenship rights. In Athens—from the point of view of Plato—democracy, at least Athenian democracy, is the same as imperialism. And not only Plato, but Aristophanes had the same view. That was the conservative view. Now from this point of view, the evil starts with Themistocles; and it increased from generation to generation, and it culminates in Pericles. Pericles is viewed by them in the way in which Roosevelt was viewed by certain conservative people in this country. I think this is not a misleading comparison. Whether that's Socrates' or Plato's reasoning is another matter, but to a certain extent it's shared. We will see the qualification later. But here in this context, these were really bad statesmen. But the Athenians do not blame these three men. They make responsible for the loss—not only of the Athenian empire but<sup>35</sup> [of] the power of old Athens—not those original corruptors, but some completely innocent individuals, and they praise these older, former statesmen. What does it imply? These former statesmen were not able to use the flattering rhetoric, nor the true rhetoric; and yet, in a way, they were very successful. They got posthumously the greatest honor. So that is something [produced] in between the flattering rhetoric and the true rhetoric<sup>36</sup>.

In the sequel, 518e–519a. The preceding passage may sound as a praise of the olden times of Athens, up to and including Marathon. Note that the Miltiades' name is now dropped, Miltiades, the victor in a land battle—that was the notion, and the hoplite

army—as distinguished from the naval battle for which Themistocles was responsible. Yet Socrates calls now Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles “the old ones” in [519a1]. So what Socrates has in mind then is not a return to “the old one[s].” The solution which Socrates seeks does not lie in the past, in the ancestors, in the ancestors of the constitution. For, as we have seen before, as indicated by the sequence of punishment, this olden time, while having a certain sturdiness which is respectable, was also very harsh. [It] lacked gentleness, which has come in later on.

Now let us first see the sequel, 519a–d. This comes to an end. The conclusion of the analysis of the four great statesmen is not only that there were no true statesmen in the sense defined (which was a foregone conclusion after it was demanded that a statesman is a man who can transform a complete scoundrel into a perfect gentleman), but the conclusion is also that it is extremely foolish to enter Athenian political life now, as Callicles desires, for the people now in politics will have to pay the bill for what Pericles and the others have done. So<sup>37</sup> Socrates’ choice of the non-political life is superior to Callicles’ choice, even from the point of view of vulgar prudence. Socrates mentions here two men together: Callicles and Alcibiades. Socrates can still warn Callicles; Alcibiades is past warning. Alcibiades cannot be expected to be on his guard. Socrates prefers Alcibiades to the four earlier statesmen—a judgment which is in a way confirmed by Thucydides. He even questions whether Alcibiades can be called co-responsible. Fundamentally, he was a victim. A victim of whom? Of Pericles, who was, after all, Alcibiades’ guardian. You see that by this remark about the present statesmen—Alcibiades, who was actually a statesman at the time, and Callicles, who wants to become a statesman now—Socrates retracts the relative praise of the earlier statesmen which was made in 517b. You see, there is a kind of development here. Here you have Marathon; that was still good. Then there comes a decay; [Athens becomes] even more democratic. And there are some people who point to a way up. This is very strange . . . [the] figure, Alcibiades—Alcibiades who cannot be blamed . . . it is even doubtful that he can be called co-responsible—Alcibiades was fundamentally an anti-democratic politician. He began under a democracy and, by some coincidence of fate and chance, he was connected with a less democratic regime. Now, Alcibiades has one quality which is mentioned in the dialogue. Do you remember?

**Student:** He was the one Socrates loved.

**LS:** In other words, Alcibiades is somehow under the influence of Socrates. And then, of course, the profound irony that here we have, for the first time, a statesman in Athens who has been touched by a philosopher. And he, of course, if one takes the simple point of view, is the worst of all: this most immoderate, most irresponsible, perhaps most gifted of all Athenians. It indicates the ironical character of the whole argument, this criticism of the four. What Socrates really maintains seriously, he indicates in the Third Book of the *Laws*: Athens becoming a maritime power and, in connection with that, of course, a big economic power and a radical democracy—that is the disease of Athens.<sup>iv</sup> But that does not mean he does not see the problem in that. He knew that a return was impossible.

---

<sup>iv</sup> There is a discussion of the decline of Athens in Book 3 of the *Laws* (698a–701d), but the specific discussion of the danger of being a maritime power occurs early in Book 4 (704a–707d).

A return would simply mean, in fact, something<sup>38</sup> [like] what Critias<sup>39</sup>, also a man connected with Socrates, [did]—the tyranny of the Thirty, of which Plato himself said that when<sup>40</sup> [they] had come, the old and very disreputed democracy looked like the golden age in retrospect.<sup>v</sup> He knew, given this set of things, that nothing else but some tolerable form of democracy would be the only thing which could possibly last. That thing which was established after the Thirty meant, of course, Socrates had to be killed for that—that was the price that this democracy demanded for Alcibiades. That was certain[ly] part of the reason why Socrates fell a victim to democracy. I only mention this question: If Alcibiades is superior to Pericles, what becomes of the praise of moderation which is so characteristic of the whole dialogue? Must this not be radically reconsidered? That is done in the dialogue *Phaedrus*, which deals with a higher form of rhetoric.

Now, the end of the section, 519b–d: No statesman can complain that the governed have done him injustice or have been ungrateful to him, for by the very fact that he’s a statesman he claims to be able to improve the governed or to make them just. The case of the statesmen is the same as that of the sophist[s], who too claim to be teachers to virtue. But why is the claim of the sophist[s] unfounded? In other words, the case of the statesmen who, whether it is stated or not, claim by virtue of their office, their function, that they make the citizens good, is of the same character as the claim of the sophist[s], who explicitly say, “We can teach [people] to become good, we can teach people virtue.” Why is the claim of the sophists, to which the claim of the<sup>41</sup> [statesmen] is here reduced, unfounded?

**Student:** It’s not based on knowledge. He had set up before the opposition between sophistry and philosophy.

**LS:** Good. I will come back to that in a very short while. But let me reformulate the question. The criticism of the sophist[s] is partly made on the mere fact that they raise the claim to be able to teach virtue, wholly apart from the particular knowledge or non-knowledge which they possess. Why is the claim to teach virtue questionable? That is a very common thing in the Platonic dialogues. Well, is it not frequently suggested that virtue cannot be taught? Now, if that is so, and virtue cannot be taught—we have a proof here: Alcibiades. Socrates loved Alcibiades, as he says, and he loved virtue, but he completely failed in making Alcibiades virtuous. Now, if virtue cannot be taught, then can one reasonably expect that the statesman will teach virtue and make the citizens good? Or what is it that the statesman produces? Perhaps what he produces is not virtue proper,<sup>42</sup> but only vulgar virtue, political virtue. But if that is so, if it is impossible to produce true virtue, then this criticism of the Athenian statesmen, Themistocles and so on, because they did not produce virtue, is of course wholly unjustified. And only the limited political criticism which is here not set forth . . . namely, the criticism of imperialism and naval power—that is justified.

I would like to link this up. We have seen the following things. The argument began with the presentation of rhetoric as a mere flattery (remember that?) in the Polus section. Then in the Callicles section, it was suggested,<sup>43</sup> on the basis of [the] distinction between the

---

<sup>v</sup> *Seventh Letter* 324d.

good and the pleasant, that there is a noble rhetoric, a noble rhetoric whose function it is to make men good. And goodness was understood primarily as moderation. That meant a considerable retraction of what Socrates had said in that violent, long speech about rhetoric as mere flattery. There is the noble rhetoric which is a genuine art. He later on had then said, or admitted, that forensic rhetoric is an art, a genuine art, but a low one. It then became clear that the noble rhetoric discussed in the *Gorgias* has the same end as forensic rhetoric as far as the philosophers are concerned, namely, that it preserves philosophy and therefore the lives of philosophers. But now we see something for which we are not altogether unprepared: For what is that noble rhetoric discussed in the *Gorgias*? What does it produce? It has a peculiarly punitive character. It produces something which we call the taming of the *demos*. Is that genuine virtue? From Plato's point of view, one has to answer no. And therefore the criticism of the Athenian statesmen is made in order to make this point clear. The very overstated character of this criticism is meant to be helpful for that, [for indicating] that what can possibly be produced even by noble rhetoric, the noble rhetoric discussed in the *Gorgias* (to say nothing of what statesmen can be expected to produce) is not virtue. When we are at this point, we have the elaboration of what rhetoric means, what the noble rhetoric means. I do not know whether I made this clear.

For example, when Socrates says to Polus suffering injustice is better than doing injustice, then Socrates persuades Polus . . . . But does he prove it? A proof would mean that he established it by demonstration. But what is the character of the argument? It is extremely defective, but it is sufficient to persuade Polus. Socrates really acts the part of a rhetorician and not of a dialectician. Now Socrates, you can say, exhibits the noble rhetoric as he can use it in the dialogue in two ways: he shows it as effective in the case of Polus and almost wholly ineffective in the case of Callicles. In the case of Callicles, he succeeds in reducing him, in reducing his arrogance, however you call it, but he does not make the slightest dent on Callicles' opinion. The noble rhetoric, therefore, as exhibited *in deed* in the dialogue, as is practiced by Socrates, is not identical with the noble rhetoric as demanded, because it does not have the effect of<sup>44</sup> [taming] Callicles. Only externally. He is not brought away from his opinions as he stated them in his long speech in the beginning.

**Student:** Well, is this parallel to the passage in the *Republic*, where he shows that everybody isn't capable of the virtue of knowledge and virtue, but they find the virtue that they can have by filling their proper role in the state and by keeping their order and place in the state? I mean, this is something of the same thing here, that, while he can't inculcate virtue, strictly speaking, in the people, he can at least make them tame. So<sup>45</sup> [they can have] virtue—I mean, that<sup>46</sup> degree of virtue which is possible for them—and then those who are capable of more virtue in the strict sense have the opportunity to get it.

**LS:** But they would not get it by the use of the noble rhetoric. They would get it by the use of another rhetoric, if we call it rhetoric. That is correct. One must only add two points. In the *Republic*, these people, the simple unreflecting people, are tame. That's clear. But something more:<sup>47</sup> their functions, their duties, according to the hypothesis of



the *Republic*, are reasonable functions because the whole state is reasonable. And the man—say, there is a shoemaker or whatever he may be, a farmer—can do only reasonable things.<sup>48</sup> What does “reasonable” mean here? For example, the shoemaker[s] cannot be influenced by the considerations of money—making to make more or less shoes, or better or worse shoes, because that is above them, whereas in a non-*Republic* society, the people would be tame, but the content of their functions would still be largely irrational. That’s one. The second point is that in the *Republic* the importance of rhetoric is not so visible because power, the physical, military power, is lodged in men who can be persuaded by Socrates. Therefore, the need for this noble rhetoric in the *Gorgias* sense is at least not as obvious in the *Republic* as it is here. So one could<sup>49</sup> say that the need for the noble rhetoric in the *Gorgias* sense is proportionate to the absence of the rule of the wise. But since the absence of such effective rule is normal, the *Gorgias* is in this respect, strange as it may sound, closer to the actual life of men than the *Republic* is. The *Gorgias* and the *Republic* represent two different ways of articulating the fundamental political problem, rather than<sup>50</sup> [giving] recipes which are equally applicable.

**Student:** If the masses or the *demos*—

**LS:** Don’t say the “masses.”<sup>51</sup> I know it’s translated in many books by the “masses,” but it’s really a very misleading expression. The whole Newtonian physics is implied in the term “masses.” “Masses” is a physical concept, not a political concept. *Demos* is a political concept. If you would say “multitude,” this is closer than “masses.” You see, the very notion of masses—and of the<sup>52</sup> connotation of greater power of the larger masses<sup>53</sup> [than of] the smaller masses—was a part of that theory, that part which is today usually concealed, although it lives on in the popular phrase “to replace bullets by ballots,” because bullets, obviously the mass of bullets, the<sup>54</sup> [quantity], the number of bullets, is of some importance, especially since bullets are only a refined version of fists. So *demos* is something different from masses. But all right, go on.

**Same student:** [The] *demos* seems to guarantee or to demonstrate the virtue of the ruler. In other words, the only way that Pericles could have preserved himself better was by doing good, by guiding the *demos* properly in the ways of right conduct. So, if we assume, then, that the content of the functions of the *demos* always remain irrational, and that<sup>55</sup> [their virtue] is, as you say, a facsimile or semblance, but not actually a real virtue, then we could say that there’s never really a way of demonstrating<sup>56</sup> [that] the leader<sup>57</sup> is good, because the *demos* always remains irrational?

**LS:** If this premise is correct—and I believe, according to Plato, it is—it follows that you can never prove the goodness or the badness of a statesman by his popularity. And that makes sense. That doesn’t mean that there are no other criteria. That is a question. Maybe there are other criteria, different from popularity. For example, even if he failed, he might have sketched a policy in advance, which five years later, after it was too late, everyone saw, “we should have done that.” And<sup>58</sup> [then] one sees this man had a true grasp of the situation.

**Student:** Why does Socrates say, then, that Pericles did not do good?

**LS:** All right. That is very good. Socrates uses, deliberately, a false criterion. To mention only one point—I mentioned this before—it is a criticism which necessarily follows from Callicles' premise: the real man is the one who can help himself. "To help himself" means to rule the *demos* and never to be accused by the *demos* of all kinds of crimes. Now, taking this Callician premise and applying it also to a nobler and higher notion of statesmanship,<sup>59</sup> [Socrates] measures all the idols of Callicles by this standard. And he shows that<sup>60</sup> [Callicles'] own idols are incompatible with his ideals—another fundamental contradiction of Callicles, which impresses him as little as any other contradiction which he committed, because of his principle: it is cowardly to have to abandon one's opinions. That's the only thing of which he is certain, that he must stick [to] a certain fixed line, which he has to maintain whether the consequences or the facts contradict him or not. That would be unmanly, to give way to the enemy. He has a strictly military notion, and a very narrow military notion, of disputation: you stick to your post.

The last section I want to discuss: 519d–520e. Here the comparison of the sophists with the vulgar statesmen is continued. Here, in 519d–e, Socrates admits that he is truly a popular speaker, as Callicles had accused him of<sup>61</sup> [being] at the beginning, in 482c. Socrates *can* make long speeches, he can expound his views without having an answerer. If any one had any doubts about it, we would see it here. But he does this here, as he says, only under compulsion. The noble rhetoric, both as demanded in the *Gorgias* and as partly exhibited there, has a compulsory character. And this is the distinction between the noble rhetoric of the *Gorgias* and the higher noble rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*, which also leads to long speeches, as we see in the *Phaedrus*, but which is not compulsory, but erotic, voluntary, spontaneous. Socrates admits here, by implication, that he himself is not a successful orator as far as persuading Callicles is concerned. Callicles' remark about Socrates here refers to Socrates' rhetoric—that Socrates is a good orator—not to Socrates' substantive thesis, to which Callicles never agreed.

In the sequel, 519e–520c. Socrates has compared the statesman to the sophist[s]. He repeats now the statement on the sophist[s], and Callicles<sup>62</sup> now agrees to the criticism of the sophist[s], because Callicles is a gentleman and sophists are despicable people. Socrates says that the case of the<sup>63</sup> [statesmen] and the orators is the same as that of the sophists. There is even a superiority of the sophists to the orator[s] and<sup>64</sup> [statesmen].

Now, 520c–e: Socrates indicates now the reason why the sophists are generally despised. After having challenged the popular view that there is no greater reason to despise the sophists than to despise the<sup>65</sup> [statesmen], he goes now into the reasons why the sophists are generally despised. Although their art is higher in rank than that of the orators, the sophists are despised because they take money for educating men to virtue, and this is base. Why? In the first place, we can say, virtue cannot be taught, and therefore what the sophists do is fraud and therefore base. But also<sup>66</sup>—[this] comes out in c–e: A man might give advice to a man as to how the latter could become good, and advise him how he could best administer his household and his city. Here there is no question of claiming to be able to make men good, but merely to advise people. Such advice does not imply a claim that the other will take the advice. There is no element of fraud in that. Such advice

is not essentially fraudulent. Why is it then base to take money for such advice? Perhaps there are more sensible sophists, Socrates implies, who say, “We can only advise you; whether you take the advice or not is your business.” But why is it base to take money for such advice? We would say because it reveals a lack of humanity. But this is not what Socrates says. He says that this kind of benefiting a man necessarily leads to the desire on the part of the benefited to reciprocate the benefits. In other words, the advised man will help his advisor. But this, too, is not correct. The benefitted is *expected* to benefit the benefactor, but he does not necessarily live up to the expectations. And it may also be that he may wish to benefit the advisor by advising him. This is not the proper reward that one would expect. Are then the advisors not justified in demanding a fee? What is Socrates driving at? The case of the sophist is the same as that of the statesman. But the sophists are blamed for demanding fees or<sup>67</sup> [compensation], whereas the statesmen are not blamed for that.<sup>68</sup> [Everyone] finds it proper—[including] Socrates himself, *Republic* 347—<sup>69</sup> that the statesmen should be compensated for their troubles. There is nothing base in demanding pay or “honorarium,” [a word] which brings out the respectable character in such fees: honor. There is nothing base in demanding honorarium for advice, even of such a nature. Or, if it is base, it is base also in the case of the statesmen. Precisely on the basis of the ordinary gentleman’s notion, one cannot maintain, not only that the ruler should have more as Callicles said, but that they should have anything at all. So absurd is Callicles’ gentlemanship, if you remember: the good man should rule and have more. But in the case of the sophists, they say [that] they are base because they take money. But these statesmen themselves take money or something equivalent to it. And if they were consistent, they would say [that] the statesman should get as little as the sophist. Yet Socrates agrees somehow with the popular notion regarding the base character of taking pay for the greatest service a man can render to another—that’s a point. In other words, if you give a man advice as to how he should install an electric light, that is perfectly legitimate; that’s not the greatest service you can give another man. But if you give him advice which is meant for his good, it would be base, for, if this service is of any use—and only in this case does it deserve reward—it establishes friendship, and to take pay from friends for friendship is base and absurd.

There is, however, a subtle difficulty which Socrates—and Plato, in his honesty—did not conceal from himself. Friendship does not abolish the concern of each partner with his wants. But friendship takes care of these wants, so that they<sup>70</sup> no longer come to *sight* as wants. But the wants persist. And therefore Socrates can say in a conversation with an economist—after having defined money as anything which can be *useful* and extending it, then, very much beyond the ordinary notion of property or money—<sup>71</sup> that “friends are money, by Zeus, because friends are very useful.”<sup>vi</sup> I mean, if someone has friends, he will never starve, provided they still have something. So [there is] a kind of reasonable egoism, a reasonable concern with self-preservation, that may very well persist, but will not come to sight because of the existence of friendship. The dialogue ends then. The main argument ends with this remark which rehabilitates sophistry. Now, look, I will develop this next time more fully.

---

<sup>vi</sup> See Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 1.14.

[end of session]

- 
- 1 Deleted "just as."
  - 2 Deleted "mainly."
  - 3 Moved "a."
  - 4 Deleted "To."
  - 5 Deleted "then."
  - 6 Deleted "statesman came."
  - 7 Deleted "in light of this distinction."
  - 8 Deleted "statesman."
  - 9 Deleted "being."
  - 10 Deleted "kip."
  - 11 Deleted "rhetorics."
  - 12 Moved "no."
  - 13 Deleted "a."
  - 14 Deleted "Heedless."
  - 15 Deleted "that."
  - 16 Deleted "that is."
  - 17 Deleted "where you do."
  - 18 Deleted "what."
  - 19 Deleted "which."
  - 20 Deleted "who he."
  - 21 Deleted "Nor."
  - 22 Deleted "statesman."
  - 23 Deleted "Say."
  - 24 Deleted "and."
  - 25 Deleted "statesman."
  - 26 Deleted "statesman."
  - 27 Deleted "gentleness."
  - 28 Deleted "nor."
  - 29 Deleted "there."
  - 30 Deleted "they still..." and moved "still."
  - 31 Deleted "ciy concerned."
  - 32 Deleted "polities."
  - 33 Deleted "sufficient."
  - 34 Deleted "because."
  - 35 Deleted "for."
  - 36 Moved "produced."
  - 37 Deleted "that."
  - 38 Deleted "was."
  - 39 Moved "did."
  - 40 Deleted "he."
  - 41 Deleted "statesman."
  - 42 Deleted "Not..."
  - 43 Deleted "that."
  - 44 Deleted "training."
  - 45 Deleted "that."
  - 46 Deleted "the."
  - 47 Deleted "That."
  - 48 Moved "for example" to beginning of next sentence.
  - 49 Deleted "not."
  - 50 Deleted "to give."
  - 51 Deleted "because."
  - 52 Deleted "greater."

- 
- 53 Deleted “and.”
  - 54 Deleted “quantitative.”
  - 55 Deleted “there virtually.”
  - 56 Deleted “it is.”
  - 57 Deleted “who.”
  - 58 Deleted “when.”
  - 59 Deleted “he.”
  - 60 Deleted “his.”
  - 61 Deleted “doing.”
  - 62 Deleted “here.”
  - 63 Deleted “statesman.”
  - 64 Deleted “statesman.”
  - 65 Deleted “statesman.”
  - 66 Deleted “that.”
  - 67 Deleted “recompensation.”
  - 68 Deleted “any one.”
  - 69 Deleted “everyone finds it proper.”
  - 70 Deleted “do.”
  - 71 Deleted “the result is then reached.”

## Session 15: March 10, 1957

**Leo Strauss:** You remember we had in the Polus section . . . this proportion: the legislative art to justice equals<sup>1</sup> sophistry to rhetoric—these are arts, these are flattery. Now, rhetoric has become rehabilitated a long time ago; therefore, the basis of this whole distinction is questionable. Maybe we have to reconsider the status of sophistry too, especially since the only evidence which we have is this: it's important that sophistry, as we have it here, is more noble than rhetoric. What do we mean by that rehabilitation of sophistry? The rehabilitation of rhetoric is not shocking because we all admit that, at least within certain limits and for certain purposes, it is necessary. What can we do?<sup>2</sup> [But] sophistry appears now as a higher art than rhetoric, and rhetoric can be a reasonably high art, this noble rhetoric. Well, I will read to you a passage from a more difficult, even externally more difficult, Platonic dialogue, the *Sophist*, 231b. The problem is to *find* the sophist. Certain definitions are given, the sixth of which is: "Then let it be agreed that part of the discriminating art is purification, and a[s] part of purification let that<sup>3</sup> [which is] concerned with the soul be separated off, and as part of this, instruction, and as part of instruction, education; and let us agree that the cross-questioning of empty conceit of wisdom, which has come to light in our present discussion, is nothing else than the true-born art of Sophistry."<sup>i</sup> In other words, here in this definition, sophistry is identified with the peculiar art of Socrates. Now what is behind that? When we speak of sophistry today, we are influenced not only by Plato but by Aristotle, where there is a clear cut distinction between philosophy and sophistry, as sham philosophy.<sup>ii</sup> This notion exists not only in Plato, but probably antedates this. But what did the ordinary man understand as sophistry? He had not studied Plato's *Sophist* or Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. So what does he understand as [a] sophist?

**Student:** An educator, or one who sets himself up as an educator.

**LS:** Ya, that was one way. But there was no difficulty<sup>4</sup> [whatsoever in regarding] Socrates as a sophist. And that is of course not an accident, because you must understand philosophy itself, at least to some extent, to be able to understand the difference between philosophy and sophistry. So it is necessary to begin with that the *demos* as *demos* cannot see philosophy as what it truly is, and is bound to mistake it for sophistry. The worse thing is that the philosophers can ironically expect that and say that precisely what the philosopher is doing is sophistry. And from here, we understand the next step of the argument, which is the necessary consequence<sup>5</sup>: that Socrates, being indistinguishable by the *demos* from a sophist, will be exposed to the fate of the sophist. He will be accused, and hence he will be in need of forensic rhetoric. How<sup>6</sup> [will] Socrates solve his personal problem of forensic rhetoric when he will be accused by the *demos* of Athens? That is, then, the topic to which we will come.

---

<sup>i</sup> LS seems to have been quoting here from Fowler's 1921 translation of Plato's *Sophist*.

<sup>ii</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1004b17–26.

There is something which distinguishes both the philosopher and the sophist from the gentleman in the ordinary sense—what is indicated today by such words as “egghead.” There is an  $x$  which we do not understand; they do strange things, what the gentleman won’t do. But this  $x$  is very different, as  $x$  is from  $y$ . But from the gentleman’s perspective, they are really not distinguished, except externally. For example, if you say, “I see a man making money<sup>7</sup> [for] being together with other people and talking to them, then he is a sophist; if he does not take money, as Socrates, then he’s a gentleman.” But that is not quite sufficient. I mean, one could rightly say that the difference between Socrates, who had wealthy friends, and someone who said occasionally, “Give me some money,” is not very great.<sup>8</sup> [Each] is a way of getting paid. That is a crude social reaction.

Let us begin with the fact that the theme “philosophy” was not brought up by Callicles but by Socrates. In what I call the “welcoming speech,” Socrates defines his relationship to Callicles by saying, “You, Callicles, love the *demos*, and I love philosophy.” I would interpret it this way: from Callicles’ point of view, there is no difference between philosophy and sophistry. You can use the more honorific name, “philosophy,” and you can use the less honorific name, “sophistry”—they are the same kind of people. They are very good for youths, when they are twenty, more or less, but, beyond that, both are undesirable. Gorgias is a different thing. Being a teacher of rhetoric, [he] is therefore eminently useful to the state.

**Student:** Is Gorgias of a different sort of man than these sophists? I mean, when they call the sophist the man who professes to give men education in virtue—is this Gorgias?

**LS:** That is what Gorgias refused to do.

**Same student:** Well, he previously had said, “I will teach those who come to me virtue.”

**LS:** No, “the just things.” That can be seen in the *Meno*. Gorgias is one who ridiculed the people who say, “we can teach virtue.”<sup>iii</sup> Gorgias teaches rhetoric. The teaching of just things, to which we refer, means something much more limited. And it is very ironical what Gorgias means there. What Gorgias implies is this: “Everyone knows what the just things are—there’s nothing to teach. If someone comes to us and doesn’t know that the forgery of checks is a crime, I will tell him that it is. How could he be a trial lawyer if he didn’t know it?”

**Same student:** Isn’t justice and virtue deflated in that?

**LS:** Yes and no. For Gorgias, I believe, the real virtue is that what he possesses, his great power of persuading and of producing other persuaders. That you do not commit crimes for which you can be put into jail or other undesirable places is a matter of common prudence to which he would not attach any importance. But<sup>9</sup> people do commit crimes, and therefore there must be forensic rhetoric, and forensic rhetoric is something much more interesting for him—how to make a speech in front of a jury. Therefore, of course, the forensic orator and therefore the forensic orator’s teacher must know what is

---

<sup>iii</sup> *Meno* 95c.

forbidden and permitted. Now, what is forbidden and permitted is partly<sup>10</sup> [such] that it is the same in all countries. I mean, if you go and just kill a certain individual in the street, that is universally not permitted. Other things are different in Greece or in Persia; other things are different within Greece. This you have to learn; that is very simple. That is, penal law—that you can learn. And it was probably more simple to learn in that time than it is today. And that [is what] he means by his remark, “If someone does not happen to know what the just things are, I tell him.” One would have to take the *Meno*, where also Gorgias is the hidden hero, Meno being a pupil of Gorgias. Now Gorgias makes a statement [for] which Aristotle praises him, that there is a different virtue for different human types: A different virtue for the man, for the woman, for the child, and, say, for the ruler, for the ruled. And these things of course everyone knows, but he took the trouble of articulating<sup>11</sup> [it]. That is a part of rhetoric. When you read Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, you find there a chapter on the virtues, because the orator has to acquire a somewhat more articulate knowledge of this.<sup>iv</sup> What Gorgias did, either orally or in books, was to give the kind of rudimentary form of that chapter in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* from his point of view. He did write a book, which is based on Parmenides’ doctrine, and we will note [inaudible words] . . . if you go a step further, *complete* skepticism can emerge from that. And that is what Gorgias developed in a book of his own about<sup>12</sup> [non-being], which has not been preserved, but one knows a bit about that.<sup>v</sup> And what the connection between this extreme Eleatic philosophy of Gorgias and rhetoric is, I do not know. But I suppose there must be some connection. Plato does not even allude here to Gorgias’ philosophical background, but he does not even allude to any writing of Gorgias, whereas he does mention a writing of Polus.

**Student:** You said that Callicles doesn’t differentiate between the philosophers and the sophists. But, in the early part, when he starts to dissuade Socrates, he said that philosophy was simply something that you could forget when you are twenty or whatever it was, but he didn’t regard it as something despicable, whereas in the latter section—

**LS:** But that refers to a very special thing, to a very special aspect of the sophists which is not universally true of them, namely, that men say, “We can teach virtue for so many cents and dollars an hour.” That was ridiculous in the eyes of Gorgias, and hence also in the eyes of Callicles. And in addition, there was a gentleman’s prejudice that teaching for pay is not nice. A gentleman wouldn’t do that. [Inaudible words] . . .

Socrates speaks most extensively of his being deprived of his property. He who would deprive Socrates of his property will derive no benefit from it—one reason being there was not much property to derive benefit from. Callicles thinks that Socrates talks too lightly of danger, of these dangers which he really runs. Socrates answers to Callicles that he’s fully aware of these dangers, and that Callicles is as much exposed to them as he, Socrates, is. Yet he knows in advance that no honest man will accuse him, Socrates, and that he may well be condemned to die. He declares his willingness to explain to Callicles

---

<sup>iv</sup> See *Rhetoric* 1.9.

<sup>v</sup> Gorgias’ *On Non-Being* has not come down to us, but two ancient accounts of it have. One is found in Sextus Empiricus’ *Against the Schoolmasters*; the other is in a treatise *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias*, which some have attributed to Aristotle but others regard as spurious.



why he expects these two things: that only a dishonest man will accuse him and that he may very well be condemned to die. He gives this explanation in 521d–522e.

Why will Socrates be condemned in all probability? Because he is in the position of a physician who is accused by a confectioner before a tribunal of children. The children will not understand anything of what he can say in his defense, and they will be confirmed in their dislike by the speech of the confectioner. The confectioner accuses the physician, that [the] physician inflicts all kinds of pain on the children: He gives them nasty pills, cuts them and so on, whereas the nice things all come from the confectioner. The children will then of course condemn the physicians. In e, Socrates refers to what he had said to Polus, but to Polus he had only said that if the physician had to compete with the confectioner in front of children, the physician would die of hunger, which leads to the question: Why did Socrates not die of hunger? Because he had some property, and not all Athenians were like children. In e, we see that,<sup>13</sup> [not] the confectioner himself, but someone else makes the prosecuting speech—which is a foreshadowing of the actual trial because, not the real enemy of Socrates, Anytus, but Meletus makes the prosecution speech. In e, you also see that the charge is that Socrates corrupts the young. Since here in the simile he speaks to the children. “the young” must be modified: he corrupts the *youngest*. But the actual charge against Socrates is here meant. As Socrates says in 522a–b, he cannot say the truth to such a jury because they would be completely unable to understand him. Socrates would not mind capital punishment, provided he were not convicted of inability to help himself and others in regard to this charge that he had said or done something unjust regarding men and gods. Now I leave it at that and turn to 522e, the transition to the myth.<sup>14</sup>

Death is [not] to be feared, but to come to Hades loaded with misdeeds is the greatest of evil[s]. Hades increases the evil of injustice. In 523 to the end, we come now to the myth. Now, what is the function of that myth? In the first place, it is a solution of the difficulty in which Socrates finds himself: What is Socrates going to say when accused by the *demos*? We have seen that he cannot say the truth; they would not understand. He now indicates, in an indirect way, what he can say with a hope<sup>15</sup> [of being] understood. And, besides, this myth is a final achievement of noble rhetoric. What we actually have seen up to now was only an analysis or an intimation of the character of noble rhetoric. We have here in the myth, a work, a product of noble rhetoric. Now, what is a myth? In the ancient commentator,<sup>vi</sup> we find this remark: “A myth is an untrue speech which gives an image of the truth; it serves the purpose of concealing the true doctrine of the philosopher. But there is a difference between poetic and philosophic myths. The poetic myth, if not understood, does harm.” For example, the stories which Homer tells about the gods, are, according to this school, only myths. But if they [are] read as they are presented by Homer, without being understood, they do harm—the presentation of gods committing all kinds of crime—whereas the philosophic myths are beneficial regardless of whether they are understood or not. Now there are two other myths like that of the end of the *Gorgias*. One is at the end of the *Phaedo*, and the other is at the end of the *Republic*.<sup>vii</sup> But with this great difference: at the end of the *Phaedo* and at the end of the

---

<sup>vi</sup> Olympiodorus. See Lecture 48 of *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*.

*Republic*, the stories of the judgment on the dead are presented explicitly as myths, whereas here, as we shall see, they are not.

I would like to mention that Socrates has referred to myths on a former occasion—you remember when he gave the sayings, of Pythagorean origin probably, about [the] afterlife in 493a–d, where he compares the soul to a sieve, for example. There he spoke explicitly of myths, either myths of some other people or myths made by himself. But here in 523a, Socrates denies that he will tell a myth. The noble rhetoric demanded in the *Gorgias*, we can say, will present myths as true speeches, *logoi*. But Socrates goes on to say he believes this account is a *logos*, a true speech. Now given the character of the argument, it can at best be true opinion, because it is not proved and not knowledge. No attempt is made to prove the judgment on the dead. At the beginning, he says “listen.” Callicles, certainly, will only have knowledge from hearsay. We know also [that] later on<sup>16</sup> Homer is called upon as a witness, and we have seen that to prove things by witnesses is rhetorical proof, not<sup>17</sup> [genuine] proof. The order of rewards and punishment after death stems from Zeus, the guardian of justice. But Socrates does not simply present that order of rewards and punishment; he gives the pre–history of that order. Why does he do that? Why does he tell how Zeus established that order of rewards and punishment? Well, one can say: in order to praise it. The order established by Zeus is an improvement on the order existing prior to Zeus. So at any rate, as I say, Socrates gives the pre–history<sup>18</sup> [of] the order established by Zeus in order to praise it, but at the same time, by speaking of the order of Chronos, Socrates reminds us of the<sup>19</sup> [revolutionary] character, that is to say, the unjust character, of Zeus’s reign. There is a problem in Zeus’ guardianship of justice, because Zeus has established his order by dethroning his father. You know, here is Chronos, the father, and then he had three sons, Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto. Poseidon is the god of the sea, and Pluto of the netherworld. So Zeus is the god of land, and of course mountains too, and inhabitants. There was no need to mention Poseidon, who was dropped immediately afterwards. The god of the sea, the navy, he has nothing to do with the judgment of the dead. You see, [the] naval imperialist has not a ghost of a chance there. There are three gods, just as we have three heroes of the *Gorgias* (Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles) and also the three statesmen (Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles) and the three flatterers in 518b (the baker, the confectioner, and the cocktail mixer). Poseidon is also a tamer of horses, which is not unimportant, because Polus is a colt, a horse. The stories of the *Gorgias*, at any rate, reflect human realities—which we must remember.

In a–b: The law of Chronos “which obtains always and which obtains still now among the gods”—that implies [that] it<sup>20</sup> no longer obtain[s] among men. Now, according to that law of Chronos, good men, after their death, go to the [Isles]<sup>viii</sup> of the Blessed, and bad men go after their death to Tartarus. Are then men gods, or gods men? Do the gods die? At any rate, the status of these gods is a problem. To put it in the language of the *Timaeus*, these gods are the gods according to convention: law–made gods. Were they not deified human beings? Do they not partake of human weakness, so that some of them are just and hence worthy of reward, and others unjust and hence worthy of punishment?

---

<sup>vii</sup> See *Phaedo* 110b–114c, *Republic* 614b ff.

<sup>viii</sup> The original transcript has “islands”; “isles” will be used throughout the remainder of this edited transcript.

b–c. Originally, the living were judged by living judges, and this led to miscarriage of judgment, which, of course, has great implications regarding the previous teaching of the *Gorgias*, namely, that justice, or the art of judges, makes men better. But if these judges are not so good, and ignorant and perhaps bribed, that throws some suspicion on the value of punishment as punishment. You see here that not Zeus<sup>21</sup> but Pluto and the overseers from the Blessed Isles, [noticed the miscarriage of justice]. Pluto is a god, but what is the status of these overseers? Should only the unjust be ruled by a god in the netherworld, and not the just? Do you understand that question? The just go to the Isles of the Blessed, the unjust go to Pluto, to the netherworld. And the question which arises is this: the unjust will be ruled by a god—that’s Pluto—[but] who is going to rule<sup>22</sup> [those] on the Isles of the Blessed, the overseers or what? Now, who rules on the Isles of the Blessed according to the Greek notion, a notion that is stated by Plato somewhere? Chronos. Chronos rules the Isles of the Blessed. Socrates is silent about this. Why?<sup>23</sup> [What] did Chronos do? That is also a joke. Well, let us use a more general term about that: children are “the younger,” and he destroyed the younger. “Destroy” means in Greek the same thing as “corrupt” them.<sup>ix</sup> Chronos corrupted the young ones. He did what Socrates did, and therefore Socrates is tactfully silent about this matter. According to the manuscript reading, by the way, both Pluto and the overseers come from the Isles of the Blessed. And that makes very much sense because, if Chronos lost his reign justly (as we must presuppose if Zeus is the guardian of justice), another god will have to rule the Isles of the Blessed.

And now Zeus says in c–e [that] men are judged ill because they are judged covered, with their clothes on. From now on, the naked will judge the naked—“naked,” that is to say, deprived not only of clothes but of the bodies as well, and hence dead. In addition, men must no longer know in advance when they will die. This foresight will be taken away by Prometheus, who has already orders to this effect. Why this order to Prometheus? Perhaps Zeus was aware of the miscarriage of justice before Pluto came to him. He took away foresight of the time of death so that men cannot postpone betterment, but must await death at every moment. That’s one possibility. The other is that Zeus was not aware of the miscarriage of justice. Why, then, the order to Prometheus that from now on men should no longer know the moment of their death? Now in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus*, verses 245 following, we find this remark: Prometheus caused men to cease foreseeing death by placing in them blind hopes, and Prometheus gave men fire. He is punished by Zeus for both. Zeus wanted men to be without fire. That is to say, without arts or unwise, and to live in constant fear of death—that is to say, cowardly. Socrates’ Zeus does not punish Prometheus for causing men to cease foreseeing death, but *orders* Prometheus to cause men to cease foreseeing death, and therefore to place in them blind hopes, so that they will be just.

Now, in e Zeus claims to have been become aware of the miscarriage of justice prior to Pluto and the overseers. But how do we know? The only proof is his order to Prometheus, which was given prior to Pluto’s appearance, and that order proves only that he had an

---

<sup>ix</sup> The word is *diaphtheirō*. See, e.g., the charge against Socrates as stated in *The Apology of Socrates* 24b8–c1.

interest in making men obedient. We see also in the sequel, 523a–524a, that Zeus does not stop the miscarriage of justice immediately. The change for the better is postponed until the death of his three sons. So the grave questions arise: How will these three sons be judged? Because they still die under the old order. Are they to judge themselves? What is their qualification, if only the naked can judge the naked? The three judges are sons of Zeus, two from Asia and one from Europe. The presiding judge is an Asiatic. By the way, Minos and Rhadamanthus: their father was Zeus, and their mother was Europa. You know, Europa, which is Europe; and Zeus appeared to Europa in the form of the bull. And someone said that the later fate of Europe and all the stupidities committed in Europe can be understood by the fact that the mother was attracted by a bull. But, at any rate, one could understand it as this: Minos and Rhadamanthus were the sons of Europa, which in Greek would be expressed “from Europe,” “from the Europa.” Plato abolishes the mortal mothers here. As you will see, there are no references to the mothers because according to his teaching, of course there is no intercourse between gods and men. But then the question arises: What is the status of the sons of Zeus, if there is no intercourse possible between god and man? What is it then? The only thing we have heard is that they are sons of Zeus. But if there is no intercourse possible between gods and men, they must be gods—exactly what he had indicated before. There is a story in Greek mythology that the grave of Zeus, the tomb of Zeus, was shown somewhere. Callicles will be confronted by a court, the majority of whom are complete strangers, even barbarians. That this is so can be shown by a parallel in Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*, 41a, where Socrates adds to the three judges here—Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus—a fourth judge, Triptolemus, and Triptolemus is a half-god, a hero from Attica. Callicles will not find there anyone whom he knows and who, for family considerations, might be mild on him. In addition, Minos, the presiding judge, was an enemy of old Athens and had a very bad reputation for cruelty in Athens. You see, this dreadful enemy of Athens will be the presiding judge.

In 524a–b, it is again indicated that Callicles knows the story and can know it only from hearsay, Socrates telling it. But Socrates himself also knows it from hearsay. Why, then, is it not a myth? Answer: because Socrates draws inferences from what he has heard. In other words, [the] hearsay story becomes half of Socrates’ own account, because he draws inferences *from* the account. And since the premises determine the character of what is inferred from the premises, the mythical character is not affected, naturally.

In b–d: Death is the separation of body and soul. The corpse retains the characteristics, natural and acquired, of the living body for some time. There are three examples given of that, which is indicated by the Greek word for “again.” In the center is long hair, so if someone dies and has had such a particular haircut, that lasts for some time. That long hair stands for the ornament—*cosmos*—of which we have spoken before. But you see also the very interesting example of the stripes caused by whipping. Now, if a scoundrel is improved by whipping, his body will show traces of his punishment, but his soul, the opposite.

524d: now the same is true of the soul, namely, that the soul after death shows the<sup>24</sup> [characteristics], the natures and the acquired<sup>25</sup> [characteristics] of the soul. After that, the

soul will show without disguise its nature and the things which it acquired through its pursuits. But there is this difference: in the case of the body, the external ornaments, to a certain extent, survive. For example, the way in which a man took care of his hair and his nails, and other things, cosmetic things, can still show on the body, even without the activity of a mortician. In the case of the soul, the merely external ornament disappears immediately.

In 524e–525a, Socrates goes over to speak of what happens to the Asiatic[s] in the judgment of the dead, which is, in a way, a delicate touch. He does not want to say what is going to happen to Callicles. But Rhadamanthus looks only for justice<sup>26</sup> [and] injustice, and for moderation and its opposite—he does not look for courage and wisdom.

525b–c: The punishment for injustice are pains, for this is the only way, as Socrates says here, to get rid of injustice—meaning, insight will not do. Contrary to the fundamental Socratic teaching that the only thing which can liberate a man from injustice is knowledge or insight, the myth is based on the premise that injustice can be gotten rid of only by pains. Those who cannot get rid of injustice, who are incurable, will nevertheless suffer pain, although they cannot be improved. Why? So that they are hung up as examples for others. They suffer the most painful and the most fearful things through all time for the benefit of all newcomers to Hades, and every time there are newcomers, they must be shown those who suffer infinite pains. But there is this difficulty: Since these newcomers will be punished anyway according to their deserts, what is the use of their being tormented for all times? There is nothing said about what happens on the Isles of the Blessed. Well, but what can you infer about the Isles of the Blessed from what you hear about the opposite alternative? [Answer]:<sup>27</sup> pleasure. If there are pains there, there must be pleasures here. But this coincidence of the best with the most pleasant runs counter to the whole thesis of the whole dialogue. The *Gorgias*, we can say, abstracts from the coincidence of the best with the most pleasant, and therefore from philosophy. The *Gorgias* is based on the premise that there is simple opposition between the good and the pleasant, as we have seen.

In d, you see another reminder of the fact that Polus' account of Archelaus is not to be accepted as true without further evidence, because Polus is an orator, and he may have some personal grudge against Archelaus.

525d–526a: private citizens are better off than mighty rulers because they have less opportunities to be extremely unjust. Which implies, of course, the advice to Callicles: “Do not try to be a ruler—the chance that you will receive this terrible punishment is smaller if you remain a private man.” Yet there may be just and good rulers—it is admitted in 526a–b—in spite of the opportunities for injustice which rulers possess to<sup>28</sup> [such an] extent. An outstanding Athenian example of a just ruler is Aristides, the famous “Aristides the Just,” the enemy of Themistocles. Yet he, of course, cannot have been a true statesman in the sense defined, because he was ostracized himself. Yet Socrates makes here, apparently, a distinction between the just man and the true statesman.

In 526b, he reminds us again of the criticism of the many. What is characteristic of the myth, we can say, is the emphasis on the wickedness of the great. Thersites, this low fellow in Homer, is not as bad as certain rulers. The myth has in this sense a democratic character. In accordance with the purpose of taming the *demos*, it must somehow gratify the *demos*, by the description of the terrible punishment inflicted on the great, on the rulers.

In b–c, he still talks only of what Rhadamanthus does, which is a way of gratifying Callicles, because Rhadamanthus will be in charge of the Asiatics, not in charge of the Europeans. Rhadamanthus sends to the Isles of the Blessed the souls which have lived piously with the truth, especially those of the philosophers, who have done what was their own and not been busybodies. Socrates does not say what the blessed on the isles will do or enjoy, as I mentioned before.

In [526]c–[527]c. There only does he mention Aeacus, the judge of the Europeans. Minos presides with a golden scepter. How do we know that? Well, Odysseus tells us, and the Greek expression is “Odysseus of Homer,” which is a normal way of indicating [a] son–father relationship. Odysseus is the son of Homer. Homer produced him. Homer generated him. Odysseus, as the son of Homer, is tacitly contrasted with Aristides, son of Lysimachus, mentioned before. Socrates has been persuaded by these<sup>29</sup> [*logoi*], these speeches of Odysseus and Homer, and by his own inferences from these speeches—which is another indication of their doubtful truth. And ([526]d–527a) he tries to live accordingly, which is to say, to seek the truth. He calls all human beings, as much as he can, to the philosophic life. That is a remarkable statement. That is of course the way in which Socrates presents himself also in the *Apology of Socrates*. Here, the myth, in the most massive way, is a foreshadowing by Socrates of what he will say in the *Apology*, where he presents himself as a man who calls *all* human beings to the philosophic life. The opposite, we may say, will be non–democratic.

That is a very great difficulty in Plato. The teaching set forth in those dialogues, particularly in the *Republic*, is that the highest perfection of man—that is, philosophy—is possible only on the basis of a specific nature, specific natural gifts. And that is what empirically makes sense. For example, take<sup>30</sup> one [such] point: one must have a good memory, but not all<sup>31</sup> [men] have a good memory, and the limits to which you can improve a very poor memory by training are narrow. Now what are the consequences of that? The consequences are that the highest perfection of man is by nature denied to most men. And that may very well seem to be an injustice. Plato has discussed this in the *Timaeus* (for example, *Timaeus* 41e), that all human beings must have equality of opportunity, we could say. Otherwise there would be no justice: there would be an unmerited slight on those to whom the highest possibility is denied. We are familiar—we know this also, of course, from the Bible. The problem is fundamentally identical with the problem of election in the Bible. Is not election an unjust act? Similarly, there is a kind of election in the Platonic doctrine, too. Some people are by nature elected for that. Now Plato has also taken that up at the end of the *Republic* in the Myth of Er, where everyone is presented<sup>32</sup> [as] responsible for the nature which he possesses. That is presented there mythically as follows: everyone who has died chooses the next life, and

this choice of the next life is responsible for what nature he will possess in the next incarnation. Now the alternative is this: Either one denies that man's perfection depends on something—say, on philosophy, which admittedly depends on natural gifts<sup>33</sup>—[and one claims instead that] it depends on something of which in principle every human being is capable. Or else one has to refer to something like matter, meaning this: That the nature of man is<sup>34</sup> [such] that there cannot but be some people gifted more for this and some people more for that—that this is due to a necessity and therefore one cannot reasonably speak of injustice. In other words, this alternative means that inequality is due to *matter*, and it implies a denial of divine omnipotence, which of course is denied by Plato as well as by Aristotle. But if you follow here the argument, it follows from the Platonic thesis of the importance of nature, and the limitation in many men of the possibility of achieving perfection by nature, that the majority of men are children (as is said in 521e) and the difference between childhood and maturity is due to nature. Socrates calls on all to pursue the philosophic life. This is the thesis of the *Apology of Socrates*, and by this he takes the sting out of the popular aversion to philosophy.

The end of the *Gorgias* adumbrates then what Socrates will say to the *demos* when he will be accused by the *demos*. The previous section, 521–522, indicated his difficulty as to what he will say when he is accused. In the myth, he indicates how he will solve this difficulty. Now here in this section, 527a, he does not call Aeacus by name; he calls him “the son of Aegina.” Now Aegina was of course a woman, but it was also the name of an island not far from Athens, so one could interpret it as “Aeacus, the son of that island.” And this island was particularly hostile to Athens, and quite rightly because the Athenians had treated them abominably.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the build-up is this: You get first these Asiatic judges, which are very frightening and alien. But there is at least one from Europe, but this one from Europe reminds somehow of the strongest anti-Athenian feelings available in Europe. So Callicles has really no hope to rely on kinship of any kind, but must rely entirely upon his own doings.

527a–d: Socrates says, “You, Callicles, will despise this account of the judgment of the dead as an old woman's tale. And this is perfectly intelligible, because it really is not very reasonable. But it is the best we have.” Why? Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles could not establish the view that doing injustice is preferable to suffering injustice, and *therefore* the opposite view is unshaken. And that opposite view, namely, that suffering injustice is preferable to doing injustice, entails consequences which agree with what is said about what is useful for the other life. Do you understand that? Polus and Callicles had said . . . that doing injustice is better . . . they have not succeeded in establishing it; hence the opposite is unshaken. What do we say to this kind of argument?

**Student:** [Inaudible]<sup>x</sup>

**LS:** Ya, but you see that Socrates brings<sup>36</sup> out [here], in this remark, the very problematic character of the argument as actually given before. Of course, the fact that they could not establish a view doesn't prove anything as to the truth of it. And the inability of Gorgias

---

<sup>x</sup> No student response is indicated in the original transcript, but LS's next remark suggests that there was one.

and so on to prove the unjust view is naturally not sufficient to establish the opposite view. And this effect cannot possibly be remedied by stories taken from Homer and the famous liar Odysseus.

In b–c, Socrates corrects this statement. In so many speeches, he says, the opponents of Socrates were refuted; hence *this* account, [this] Socratic speech, alone remains unshaken, namely, that suffering injustice is preferable to doing injustice and its consequences. In this passage, however, no consequences regarding the other life are given. In c, to draw the conclusion regarding the other life is [not] to follow<sup>37</sup> *the logos*, the account, the rational account, but either to obey Socrates or to follow Callicles' *logos*. That is according to the reading of the best manuscripts: not the *logos* as a speech, but Callicles' speech. In c4–6, where he says “as *this* account declares,”<sup>38</sup> the best manuscripts have “as *your* account”—Callicles' account—“declares.” I think we [should] leave it at that.

It ends with c–d, with the concluding advice.<sup>39</sup> “Let us live and die exercising virtue—by living this way, you will be happy while you live [and] after death.” These are the two last formulations. In other words, what is the function of the myth? The myth is meant to convince Callicles. Does it convince Callicles? Nothing is stated here, so that remains ambiguous. That happens more than once in such works, that, at the end, there is no reply. We do not know what the addressee thought, and to what action he was induced. And the safest answer, of course, is to say we do not know. But what can we expect? That he will remain the same way as before. I think so. How would you . . . what argument could you advance for that? That is not so easy. Now let us first see: What is the last speech of Callicles? It is where he said, “Go on, I have been patient up to now, I will also allow you to give this speech.” But certainly, before, he made clear that he still sticks to his principle position, namely, Socrates should go into politics. But maybe the allegedly or really rational argument does not influence Callicles, and the myth does? No, the very beginning, Socrates' remark that “you will reject this as an old woman's tale,” I think expresses what is really happening. But still, if that is so . . . why did Socrates make the myth? That's the question to which we should turn now. Because, assuming that a reasonable man does nothing in vain, what did Socrates intend to do? What did Socrates mean by that, although he knew, or anticipated, that Callicles was not likely to be affected by that? I have one thing I'd like to ask first. That is, are we to understand that Socrates himself held that something like this took place after death?

**Student:** [Inaudible]<sup>xi</sup>

**LS:** Ya, but there are three statements: this myth, the myth made at the end of the *Republic*, and at the end of *Phaedo*. Now, we would have to study the other accounts too. But if we simply take this myth, this presentation, I think one can say that Socrates did not accept that as true. I mean, [in] the first place, the sources are not sources. And, in the second place, if one thinks through the notion of eternal pains, it does not make sense. There is no reference to any principle here that would justify it; it would seem to be a

---

<sup>xi</sup> No student response is indicated in the original transcript, but LS's next remarks suggests that there was one.



senseless procedure. So I think one can say that this can be regarded only as a speech which Socrates thought might have a<sup>40</sup> [salutary] effect on some, without being true.

**Student:** [Inaudible words]

**LS:** Ya, there is some evidence for that, and there is a passage where Socrates indicates that<sup>41</sup> if these conversations were to be repeated, Callicles might change. To that extent, it is true. But in this dialogue there is no trace of Socrates having made any dent on Callicles, although he had shown frequently that Callicles makes statements which are absolutely impossible. But, as I said, the explanation of Callicles' obstinance, stubbornness, is not so much his conviction of the truth of things as his notion of human nobility: human nobility consists of sticking to one's post. That is the ultimate meaning of Callicles' harping on courage, on manliness, as the real thing, as distinguished from wisdom. And therefore he can also say, "Socrates, you don't understand these things, because you must have left philosophy behind you"—meaning that after you have reached such a view, as he has, then the real thing is not to listen any more to any reasoning about it, but to stick to it.

**Student:** . . . I want to ask a question. It might sound ridiculous at this time, but I was wondering why you named this course "Plato's Political Philosophy and its Metaphysical Foundation," and we have been dealing all the time with rhetoric. Now I would like to know: What's the relation between rhetoric, Plato's political philosophy, and metaphysical foundations?

**LS:** Ya, that is all right. You need not apologize for the question. Whether I can answer it is a different matter. But it is a very good question. I give you perhaps a historical account. I gave this course originally in the form of a course on Plato's *Republic*, and there what one calls Plato's metaphysics is delineated much more in detail than here. And then I switched over to the *Laws*, and then I switched over to the *Statesman*, and then, for certain reasons, I thought, "This time I am going to read the *Gorgias*," and I left the title unchanged. You can say I should have at least dropped "The Metaphysical Foundations." . . . But still, since every Platonic dialogue, even the *Apology*, even the *Crito*, deals with the whole by implication, the title is nevertheless justified. You see, I mentioned a few times the general fact that every Platonic dialogue, however comprehensive it may be—may seem to be—abstracts from something. The *Gorgias* abstracts, as I said, from philosophy proper. Philosophy is mentioned, but its meaning is nowhere stated. The great theme of Plato's philosophy is the ideas, as he calls them. The ideas are mentioned once, and there, not in their proper meaning. The idea is<sup>42</sup>, according to the *Gorgias*, not that to which you look in doing something—say, the idea of justice, to which you look in trying to imprint justice on yourself or someone else—but the idea as mentioned in the *Gorgias* is the thing which you *imprint* without having looked at an idea. So to sum up this point: the *Gorgias* is practically silent about philosophy; it only mentions it. It is also silent about political philosophy proper, because the question of political philosophy proper is the *correct* order, the *best* order or *best* regime. The *Gorgias*' argument is based on abstraction from the possibility of a good social order; only bad regimes, tyranny and democracy, are mentioned. But still,

does this abstraction not bring [it] about that we understand some very important things about both, about philosophy, or the objects in metaphysical problems, as well as political philosophy and its object, the best social order? I think it does. Because the noble rhetoric, as delineated here, describes, we can say, the foundation of every possible society. Every possible society presupposes that people are filled with certain convictions, that they accept certain “values,” as is said today. Now, if we go back to this question—What is it which makes people have these convictions?—that means the problem of rhetoric. At the bottom of every society, there are convictions implanted in its members by some outstanding members, the orators.

How does<sup>43</sup> [this] throw light on the problem of, first, the best polity? Let us<sup>44</sup> [consider] how the problem would be if there were a good political order and not the bad political order here already presupposed. You remember what Socrates said: A man has the choice between justice *or* assimilating oneself to the regime, to the established political order. That implies there is no *just* political order, because if there were a just political order, he could of course, by assimilating himself to that order, assimilate himself to justice. So you can say he simply abstracts from the possibility of a just political order. So we learn nothing about the just political order. But do we really not? Does it not make sense to say that every political order which exists is not simply just. Does this not make sense? There is an element of injustice in every order, however good? That something of this kind is Plato’s view can be shown very simply, because Plato presented in one dialogue, in the *Republic*, the best political order.

Now one can show, in the first place, that Plato did not regard this order as possible. But if you disregard that, this order of the *Republic* certainly was never the actual order. Therefore, every<sup>45</sup> [actual] order of which we have any knowledge would, according to Plato, be a more or less unjust order. Can a *truly* just political order be expected? Is this not an important point to consider? Because in any political argument, in every political action, a reference is made to justice, and I would say in many cases, *not*, as the social scientists say, hypocritically, but honestly. But there is a great problem here. To what extent do those who are sincerely concerned with justice *know* what their demands imply? Needless to say,<sup>46</sup> the difference between rather just and grossly unjust is of the greatest practical importance. But it is also important to know whether there is not somewhere a ceiling beyond which one cannot expect political society and its justice to go. The *Gorgias* gives an indication of this problem, by stating the fundamental problem very abstractedly, but not emptily, as follows: the fundamental problem is that of philosophy and the non-philosophers, the *demos*.

As far as the “metaphysical foundation” is concerned, that is true. The *Gorgias* throws a light on the theme of philosophy, as Plato saw it, only in a very indirect way: by its not speaking about it. In other words, in this perspective in which the *Gorgias* discusses the problem of justice, the true fundamental problems of philosophy do not come to sight. What is presupposed here is only the general idea of philosophy, and not the specific philosophic questions as Plato understood<sup>47</sup> [them] in the elaborated form. That is true. So I think, at least at the moment—maybe if I were more inventive, I could give you a more

satisfactory answer—but for the time being, I would say, it might have been a good idea to drop “. . . and its metaphysical foundation.”

**Student:** Can one really apply to Plato the term “metaphysical?”

**LS:** Surely, the term “metaphysical” is of course only with some impropriety applied to Plato. You know the term “metaphysics” grew out of Aristotle. Aristotle himself does not use that term, but certain investigations by Aristotle<sup>48</sup> are called by the editors of Aristotle’s things “the books coming after the *Physics*,” which means in Greek *meta ta physica*: “after physics.” That strange and unpropitious beginning was the beginning of the term “metaphysics.” But of course that would be a little too literalistic, you know. But if we mean by “metaphysics” the problems concerning the whole, the most comprehensive problems,<sup>49</sup> [then] they certainly were the theme of Plato. Still, the name has some connotations which are not quite applicable to Plato. That is quite true. One may also say this:<sup>50</sup> for Plato, the highest questions, the metaphysical questions, as we call them, really begin by starting from such seemingly simple things as, for example: Is doing injustice better than suffering injustice? Everything really is implied, from Plato’s point of view, in that. Or stated differently, for Plato, the moral questions, what we call moral questions, are a part of the metaphysical and perhaps the most important part of it. Why that is so, that’s a very long question.

**Student:** [Inaudible question]

**LS:** That is a very complicated question which you raise. The question is: Did Callicles understand what the opposition, or distinction, of nature and convention means? . . . In one of my introductions to the reading, I tried to explain this to you, starting from the perfectly reasonable feeling that it is a terrible condition that decent and just men are unjustly condemned to death or to exile or what not—this kind of thing. Then something must be done about it. And what is the solution, what can you do about it? Answer: the good or just men should rule. They rule—that is according to nature, that they would rule. Very well. But if you say that, you have made a distinction between nature and convention. Because, in fact, [the people who rule are] not necessarily unjust<sup>51</sup>, but it is not the principle of any society that the best, as best, rule. And therefore to say the best should rule means to appeal from the established, from that which owes its virtue only to establishment, or convention, to nature. Up to this point, Socrates or Plato fully agrees with<sup>52</sup> [Callicles]. The only question is: *Who* are the best? And here he<sup>53</sup> no longer understand[s]. The best are, for him, not the wisest. This negative thing is certainly clear. What is here is probably something like a vague mixture of the people from the best families, which does play a role when<sup>54</sup> [Callicles] says, “You will never marry your daughter to a physician” (do you remember that?); so the best are those in the best families—of the physically fittest, wealthy people, and of course especially the manly people. He has a very vague but still very physical and common notion of what the best men are. And there—this transition, from the best *truly* understood to the best as he understands it—all the difficulties grow from that.

**Student:** But is not Callicles' original position more closely associated with that of Thrasymachus than these considerations which you just mentioned?

**LS:** No, I don't think so, because in Thrasymachus there is not a trace of an appeal from a merely conventional order to a natural order of society. For Thrasymachus, every social order is conventional.

**Student:** Well, my main point was that—assuming that Callicles is closely related to Thrasymachus, has some kinship—and he says that only the few are strong enough to live, as it were, according to nature and not convention. But he recognizes that he himself is not strong enough, so therefore he doesn't really contradict his position by not living up to it. But he follows the next best step: living according to the life of political honor, which is good conventionally, and, in the present situation, the only thing he can do. He's not strong enough to be a tyrant.

**LS:** But he admires the tyrant, yes, and the tyrant's life is according to nature . . . and you mean to say Socrates could have told him: "Look, you stand condemned by your own standards. You say that the tyrant alone is a real man, and, you know, you have admitted so much"—you remember, when he talked of "us"—"you admit yourself that you are wholly incapable of that." That is another form of the difficulty which you have. Why did Socrates not argue on this basis, that "You are already a failure"<sup>55</sup>—because you have admitted<sup>56</sup> in advance that you can never become a tyrant"?

**Same student:** But he wants to make up for it. He will admit his failure but disregard it and seek to attain success according to injustice, which is good enough for him anyway.

**LS:** But you see, when you look at the speech,<sup>57</sup> [that] he goes over from the distinctions proper to<sup>58</sup> [his use of] the term, "the convention of nature," the "law of nature," where he shows that he has really no understanding of what that means. I can only repeat: try to start from the underlying starting-point of everything in the dialogue, namely, that the problem is rhetoric. And<sup>59</sup> the second point, which I believe that one can assume also, is that in the Callicles section, what is to be shown is Socrates attempting to persuade someone and failing to do so. So that in understanding it, you would have to proceed along these lines: Why did Socrates present Callicles as the unpersuadable man? And on the basis of further reasoning which I cannot now reproduce, why does Callicles represent the *best* of the unpersuadable, or at least of those unpersuadable up to now? Maybe later on [he could be] persuadable. I think one has to start from that to answer this question. For Callicles, the notion of ruling for the sake of justice, or the sake of service . . . generally speaking, is of course impossible. The ruler must rule for his *own* gratification. All these difficulties which suppose that honor, glory are *the* goals of the political life of a statesman—all this must be ultimately understood from the purpose of *the dialogue*, which demanded that the unpersuadable be presented as someone who desires to rule for the sake of rule, and therefore is characterized by an erotic attitude toward the *demos*. I could not now give the link-up.

When I shall give another course on Plato, I will take a very short dialogue of fifteen or twenty pages so that one can even read it in class. I have learned something of human nature, too. Well, we must leave it at that. We have read the *Gorgias* with some care, but certainly not with sufficient care, as I hope you are aware.

[end of session]

- 
- 1 Deleted "the."
  - 2 Deleted "That."
  - 3 Deleted "be."
  - 4 Deleted "whatever to regard."
  - 5 Deleted "as follows."
  - 6 Deleted "did."
  - 7 Deleted "or."
  - 8 Deleted "Which."
  - 9 Deleted "since."
  - 10 Deleted "so."
  - 11 Deleted "its."
  - 12 Deleted "Not being."
  - 13 Deleted "nest."
  - 14 Moved "Not."
  - 15 Deleted "to be."
  - 16 Moved "that."
  - 17 Deleted "general."
  - 18 Deleted "in."
  - 19 Deleted "revolutional."
  - 20 Deleted "does."
  - 21 Moved "noticed the miscarriage of justice."
  - 22 Deleted "them."
  - 23 Deleted "Why."
  - 24 Deleted "characters."
  - 25 Deleted "characters."
  - 26 Deleted "of."
  - 27 Deleted "A."
  - 28 Deleted "such e certain."
  - 29 Deleted "logos."
  - 30 Moved "such."
  - 31 Deleted "ton can."
  - 32 Deleted "to be."
  - 33 Deleted "i.e."
  - 34 Deleted "so."
  - 35 Deleted "Now."
  - 36 Moved "here."
  - 37 Moved "not."
  - 38 Deleted "but."
  - 39 Deleted "the advice being."
  - 40 Deleted "solitary."
  - 41 Deleted "that."
  - 42 Deleted "not that."
  - 43 Deleted "it."
  - 44 Deleted "assume."
  - 45 Deleted "active."
  - 46 Deleted "that."
  - 47 Deleted "at."
  - 48 Deleted "they."
  - 49 Deleted "and."
  - 50 Deleted "That."
  - 51 Deleted "people rule."
  - 52 Deleted "him."
  - 53 Deleted "does."

- 
- <sup>54</sup> Deleted “Socrates.”
- <sup>55</sup> Deleted “you are already a failure.”
- <sup>56</sup> Deleted “it.”
- <sup>57</sup> Deleted “how.”
- <sup>58</sup> Deleted “when he uses.”
- <sup>59</sup> Deleted “that.”